

## G.O Thrones 31

### Chapter 31: Dreamfyre

As he peered into the abyss ahead, Rhaegar hesitated for a fleeting moment before posing a question, his voice low and contemplative, "Ser, do you believe I have the potential to bond with a formidable dragon?"

Erryk's demeanor shifted, his response swift and cautious, "I cannot entertain such a notion, Your Highness. Beyond this threshold lies a fully-grown dragon, a perilous prospect His Grace would never condone."

"Why?" Rhaegar's inquiry was unwavering, his gaze fixed on the knight before him. "Do you doubt my capacity to establish a connection with a dragon?"

"No, Your Highness, that's not the issue," Erryk clarified, struggling to articulate his concerns. "Forging a bond with a powerful dragon demands great skill and understanding. It's a decision not to be taken lightly."

"But it's a risk I'm willing to take, Ser."

Rhaegar's resolve strengthened as he took a step forward, his determination palpable. "My sister was already riding dragons at my age. By winter's end, I'll have reached the same milestone."

"If she could do it, there's no reason I cannot."

Unspoken lingered another thought:

With the same lineage of Blood and Fire coursing through his veins, possessing a natural resilience to flames, and bearing the ancient Valyrian heritage, Rhaegar believed he possessed the inherent qualities to win a dragon's allegiance.

"I cannot permit it, Your Highness," Erryk interjected firmly, barring Rhaegar's path. "I've sworn an oath to safeguard the king's heir, and I cannot stand idly by as you endanger yourself."

"But you've also sworn to obey my commands, regardless of danger or honor," Rhaegar countered sharply, his gaze unwavering.

Perhaps it was the culmination of haunting dreams, the burden of his legacy, or the distance from his sister—all converging to ignite a storm within him.

Rhaegar's heart swelled with a tumultuous mix of emotions—fear, frustration, perhaps even a hint of envy towards his sister.

He was Rhaegar Targaryen.

"A Targaryen knows no fear!"

Before him loomed Dreamfyre's lair, and Rhaegar was determined to tame the dragon, earning glory and admiration in the process.

Erryk's duty bound him, but Rhaegar's resolve was unyielding.

With steely determination, Rhaegar issued an order to Erryk for the first time, "As Rhaegar, eldest son of Viserys I, I command you to remain here and not to intervene!"

"Prince, you..." Erryk began, attempting to dissuade him, but Rhaegar silenced him with a firm, "Enough, Ser!"

Bound by his vow, Erryk reluctantly acquiesced, his inner turmoil evident as he stood guard, his hand clenched around the hilt of his sword.

"Very well, Kingsguard."

Rhaegar strode past Erryk, casting a glance at the impassive Maynard nearby. "Erryk will remain outside the lair to ensure our safety. You may return unless you're needed."

Upon hearing Rhaegar's declaration, Maynard, tinged with excitement, interjected, "No! I wish to accompany you. I possess knowledge of dragon behavior and can be of assistance."

Hope flickered within Maynard, a chance to prove himself and escape his unjust fate. How could he falter now?

Rhaegar regarded him with a quizzical expression, then nodded in agreement, conceding, "Very well. Should I succeed in taming Dreamfyre, you shall share in the credit."

"Yes, Your Highness!" Maynard's spirits soared at the prospect, boldly positioning himself by Rhaegar's side and leading the way into the cavern.

Without further objection, Rhaegar turned to Erryk, his tone softer, "He shows courage, Ser, a trait to be admired."

With that, Rhaegar pressed forward, disappearing into the shadows of the cave entrance, leaving Erryk to grapple with his inner conflict.

His duty was to protect the prince, yet Rhaegar's thirst for adventure was undeniable.

As they stepped into the lair, Maynard swiftly retrieved a torch from the ground and skillfully ignited it, casting warm light that banished the darkness.

The sudden brightness caused Rhaegar to shield his eyes instinctively, momentarily blinded.

Once inside, Maynard's initial enthusiasm gave way to apprehension. "Your Highness, Dreamfyre has dwelled here for many years, and its temperament is notoriously unpredictable. It would be prudent to proceed with caution."

"I will heed your counsel, Maester," Rhaegar affirmed, adjusting to the illumination.

"Do you know your way around here?" he inquired, curious about Maynard's familiarity with the lair.

Maynard's smile was self-assured. "Certainly. Maester Bass assigned me the task of inspecting the Dragon's Lair regularly. Given that most maesters recoil at the scent of dragon excrement, I've taken on the responsibility."

"Your dedication is commendable," Rhaegar remarked, impressed by Maynard's diligence.

"Your Highness, I typically accompany one or two dragon keepers who are fluent in High Valyrian and skilled in calming dragons with song," Maynard added, eager to contribute his expertise.

Pleased with Maynard's initiative, Rhaegar considered him a valuable asset.

Flushed with pride, Maynard eagerly shared his knowledge. In this moment, any doubts about the prince's intentions or the feasibility of taming Dreamfyre faded into the background.

All Maynard desired now was to prove himself and earn the prince's approval.

Observing Maynard's eager demeanor, Rhaegar mused inwardly, "The long-overlooked bastard seems unusually eager."

Yet, he reasoned, eagerness mattered little as long as it proved beneficial.

"Valyrian is my mother tongue; I can attempt it," he whispered to himself.

Since mastering Ancient Valyrian, fragments of memories from his early childhood had resurfaced.

These recollections harked back to when he was barely three years old, existing in a state of near-comatose fragility.

During those fleeting moments of semi-consciousness, though unable to open his eyes, Rhaegar's senses of hearing, touch, and smell remained intact.

In those ephemeral lapses of wakefulness, he could faintly discern soft hums resonating in his ears, their source elusive.

Occasionally, a gentle touch would caress his face, and tender kisses would grace his forehead.

Though voiceless and sightless, he remained acutely aware of these tender gestures, etched into the recesses of his mind.

However, he could still recall the voice of the song's singer, and his nose detected a faint, acrid scent.

When he regained consciousness, the lyrics of the ballad eluded him, but the scent lingered.

It was reminiscent of dragons, akin to the aroma of sulfur.

Now, he could vaguely piece together the verses of the ballad, spoken in the ancient Valyrian tongue.

Clearing his throat, Rhaegar replicated the soft melody of his childhood memories, gradually humming the tune of "Shepherd's Evening."

Suddenly, a tender, childlike voice emerged from the darkness, dispersing the lingering unease.

"Roar!"

As the song echoed through the cavern, a colossal figure stirred from the depths of the nest, its eyes blinking open in bewilderment.

The underground lair, while not expansive, provided enough room for movement compared to the narrow tunnels.

Rhaegar soon reached a more spacious chamber within the underground cavern. Illuminated by the flickering torchlight, the ground was strewn with the remains of large livestock and the pungent odor of dragon excrement filled the air.

Suddenly, a clatter echoed through the chamber, accompanied by the jarring sound of chains dragging against the ground.

"Pass me the torch, and wait here," Rhaegar commanded, his gaze fixed on the massive form slouched in the corner, recognizing it as the dragon Dreamfyre.

Nervously, Maynard handed over the torch, pressing himself against the wall. "Your Highness, please exercise caution. Retreat immediately if things turn sour."

"I will. Keep me in your prayers," Rhaegar responded tersely, disliking the ominous tone. With a calming hum, he advanced slowly towards the imposing figure in the corner.

### Chapter 32: Taming Failure

The sound of his boots crunching over a pile of dragon excrement echoed through the cavern, followed by a sharp clink as Rhaegar inadvertently kicked a skeleton marked with deep bite marks, jolting the eerie silence of the dim space.

The sudden noise sent shivers down Rhaegar's spine, his heart racing in his chest.

For a moment, his gaze darted nervously towards the shadowy figure, fearing any misstep could trigger its wrath.

As he struggled to steady his wildly thumping heart, Rhaegar couldn't shake the unsettling feeling that, given his physical condition just half a year prior, his heart might already be faltering, prone to failure at any moment.

Taking a deep breath, he attempted to quell his rising anxiety, continuing to hum the unsteady melody with less finesse.

Then, a series of clatters disrupted the stillness once more.

After a while, the clash of chains echoed once more, signaling Rhaegar's approach to Dreamfyre's lair.

As he drew nearer, the silhouette of Dreamfyre began to take shape in the dim light.

Its slender body, adorned with light blue scales and silver accents, along with its expansive wings folded neatly against its sides, created an imposing yet graceful figure.

Although the dragon's head remained obscured in the shadows, the glint of two long, slightly curved silver horns hinted at its formidable presence.

Pausing in his tracks, Rhaegar couldn't help but feel a sense of trepidation at the sight before him.

Despite appearing at rest, Rhaegar knew that Dreamfyre had been alerted to his presence by the hummed melody.

With only the silent company of the unclaimed dragon, Rhaegar couldn't deny the fear that gripped him.

The torch trembled in Rhaegar's grip, his legs weighed down as if anchored in place, and even the melody from his lips felt distant and numb.

"Move, move!" His mind screamed, fighting against the paralyzing grip of fear that held him in place.

He had embarked on this quest to tame the dragon, and abandoning it now was not an option.

As moments stretched into eternity, and Dreamfyre made no aggressive move, Rhaegar's resolve began to strengthen.

Driven by determination, he willed his legs to take another step forward, then another.

Thirty meters, twenty meters, fifteen...

With each advancing step, Dreamfyre loomed larger and clearer in his vision.

The dragon, with its imposing horns and amber eyes, regarded him with a calm indifference that sent shivers down Rhaegar's spine.

The confined space seemed to suffocate him under the weight of the dragon's presence, like a looming threat waiting to strike.

"Hoo~Hoo~"

The song faltered on Rhaegar's lips as his breathing quickened, echoing loudly in the cavernous silence.

The tension coiled through his body, stiffening every muscle as Rhaegar fixed his gaze on Dreamfyre.

"Dreamfyre, join forces with me, and together we shall soar to the skies!" His voice rang out in his mind, a silent chant of determination.

With blood staining his lips from the bite, Rhaegar gritted his teeth and raised the torch high, extending his hand in a gesture of invitation.

Regardless of the risk, he was resolved to attempt to tame Dreamfyre.

"Roar..."

In response to his bold move, Dreamfyre emitted a deep, rumbling growl from its throat.

Recently awakened from slumber, Dreamfyre's demeanor remained relatively calm, lacking the aggression one might expect.

Sniffing the air, it seemed to detect some unspoken bond between them.

Instinctively, Dreamfyre recognized this connection, forged through the bloodline of its former master, Rhaena.

Dreamfyre's icy gaze bore into Rhaegar's, scrutinizing him with a keen intensity.

Undeterred, Rhaegar shouted once more, "Dreamfyre, recognize me! You don't belong in this dreary dragon's den, hidden from the sun!"

In response, Dreamfyre let out a powerful hiss, a clear assertion of its presence.

As their eyes met, an inexplicable connection seemed to form between the young prince and the ancient dragon, drawing them together.

In each other's gaze, they glimpsed their own reflections, and through this connection, Rhaegar sensed the depth of Dreamfyre's emotions.

There was a tumult of feelings within the dragon—rage, bitterness, and a profound yearning for freedom.

The weight of these emotions took Rhaegar aback.

Reflecting on Dreamfyre's plight—confined for decades in this crypt without sunlight after losing its master—Rhaegar understood the source of its turmoil.

Summoning his courage, Rhaegar took a step forward, speaking with compassion, "Dreamfyre, allow me to free you from this confinement!"

Though Dreamfyre couldn't comprehend his words, it sensed the empathy in his tone.

After years of captivity, it longed to be liberated.

With a determined movement, Dreamfyre attempted to rise, spreading its wings to display its majestic form.

But the sturdy chains that bound it were unforgiving, yanking it back before it could fully ascend, thwarting its efforts.

The struggle was palpable, as Dreamfyre yearned to rise while the chains held it back with cruel force.

With a sickening thud, Dreamfyre crashed to the ground, its slender neck nearly snapping as it collided heavily with the cave wall.

Witnessing the dragon's fall, Rhaegar's heart raced with concern and panic. "Dreamfyre, are you alright!?"

Unaware that the connection between them had snapped with Dreamfyre's fall, Rhaegar moved closer tentatively.

But as their eyes met once more, the intimacy that had existed moments before was replaced by fury and rage in Dreamfyre's gaze.

"Roar!"

Dreamfyre roared fiercely, its jaws opening wide as flames erupted from its maw, laced with orange, yellow, and sky blue hues.

"No! Calm down, Dreamfyre, we can work together!"

Rhaegar's expression shifted dramatically as he desperately tried to reason with the enraged dragon.

However, the torrent of dragonfire was already upon him.

Fueled by the instinct for survival, Rhaegar swiftly turned and sought cover among the jagged pile of skeletons.

Though the flames didn't engulf him directly, searing sparks landed on his exposed back.

The dragonfire, far hotter than any ordinary flame, consumed his clothes in an instant, scorching his pale skin.

"Ah!!!"

Agonizing pain tore through Rhaegar's nerves, eliciting a primal scream from his lips.

His body arched involuntarily, his eyes wide with shock and pain, as he felt the excruciating burn.

For a fleeting moment, he feared he might perish from the sheer intensity of the pain.

But despite the searing agony, the blood of the dragon coursing through his veins kept him alive.

"How did this happen? Why did Dreamfyre lose control!"

In the face of danger, Rhaegar's rational mind surged above his fear, commanding him to take the most prudent action.

Seizing the momentary lull in Dreamfyre's fiery assault, Rhaegar summoned every ounce of strength to scramble to his feet and flee into the darkness.

The torch had been lost in the chaos, leaving Rhaegar to navigate the gloom with stumbling steps, his progress hindered by the bone-strewn ground.

"Roar!"

Each miss by Rhaegar further stoked Dreamfyre's fury, causing the dragon to thrash against its chains, spewing flames with renewed ferocity.

The brilliant conflagration illuminated the lair, devouring stone and bone alike, occasionally singeing Rhaegar's skin as he fled.

"Curses, it was so close..."

As he raced ahead, pursued by the scorching dragonfire, Rhaegar agonized over his failure.

"Prince, watch out behind you!"

A familiar voice jolted him, but before he could react, a blur of white crashed into him.

Boom-

In the blink of an eye, the spot where Rhaegar had stood was consumed by dragonfire, leaving behind a charred crater.

Chapter 33: Running Away

Collapsed on the ground, Rhaegar's mind swirled in a haze of confusion.

Turning his head, he saw Erryk, clad in silver armor and white robes, looming over him, fiercely protective.

"Erryk, why aren't you guarding the cave entrance?" Rhaegar's thoughts struggled to catch up, his words slurred.

"Protecting you is my utmost duty!" Erryk's voice was resolute as he swiftly scooped Rhaegar into his arms and bolted away.

Rhaegar barely registered Erryk's words, his gaze fixated on the darkness behind them.

Still yearning to glimpse Dreamfyre.

He had been on the brink of taming the dragon.

Yet, in a swift turn of events, all his efforts had been in vain.

"Roar"

Erryk's strides were swift as he dashed out of the lair, navigating the tunnels with practiced ease.

Rhaegar's gaze remained fixed on Dreamfyre, witnessing the majestic beast vent its fury.

Then, something caught his eye—the chains around Dreamfyre's neck.

Dreamfyre thrashed, its formidable jaws gnawing at the thick chains, sparks flying.

"It's the chains! They disrupted Dreamfyre's bonding ritual, enraging it!" Rhaegar's realization pierced through the chaos, his voice laced with frustration as he glared at the chains that foiled his attempt to tame the dragon.

With newfound clarity, Rhaegar's anger surged.

His fury matched the frenzied state of Dreamfyre, burning with a desire to confront the one responsible for the chains.

But before he could voice his rage, Erryk whisked him away, swiftly leading him back through the tunnels.

In moments, they burst out of the lair and into the cave's familiar expanse.

Maynard rushed over anxiously, "Is your highness alright?"

Erryk brushed him aside, his tone sharp, "Silence! Pray that the prince is unharmed."

Lowering Rhaegar gently to the ground, Erryk knelt beside him, his eyes scanning for any signs of injury.

Meanwhile, Rhaegar grappled with overwhelming remorse, his heart heavy with regret.

"Almost tamed Dreamfyre," he lamented bitterly, consumed by self-reproach.

Erryk meticulously examined Rhaegar's head, ensuring there were no signs of injury before moving on to check his limbs.

"The arms and legs seem fine, and the fingers too..." Erryk's assessment was interrupted as his gaze fell upon Rhaegar's back, his expression darkening instantly.

The prince's clothes had been burned away, leaving behind a landscape of blistered skin.

"This is severe," Erryk declared grimly, his tone heavy with concern.

Maynard's reaction was immediate, his distress palpable. "Quiet, I'm not blind," snapped Erryk, his gaze flashing with disdain towards the maester who had led them into this perilous situation.

Maynard quickly regained his composure, understanding all too well the consequences of the prince's injury. The specter of the gallows loomed large in his mind, threatening to overwhelm him.

"Wait, I have knowledge of herbalism and medicine. I can treat His Highness," Maynard interjected, desperation driving him to action. He even produced a pouch containing various herbs and remedies, a last-ditch effort to prove his worth.

"Get lost. I don't trust you," Erryk retorted, his voice laced with contempt as he lifted Rhaegar, preparing to depart.

Maynard could do nothing but watch helplessly as Erryk carried the prince away, his heart heavy with dread.



During the life-threatening ordeal just moments ago, Rhaegar had been numbed to sensation. But now, as the danger receded and Erryk's movements jolted him back to reality, he sucked in a breath of cool air, fighting against the waves of pain threatening to overwhelm him.

"Ser, please, it's unbearable," Rhaegar pleaded, his entire back and neck ablaze with searing pain, the relentless torment gnawing at his nerves, pushing him towards the brink of numbness.

"It's imperative that I administer immediate treatment, Your Highness's condition is critical," Maynard interjected firmly, blocking Erryk's path with outstretched hands.

Understanding the urgency, Erryk glanced at Rhaegar, who grimaced in agreement. "Proceed with the treatment. I can't bear this any longer," Rhaegar urged.

With a nod from Erryk, a warning glare was directed at Maynard. "If I detect any foul play, you'll face severe consequences," Erryk cautioned sternly.

Maynard responded with a grunt of acknowledgment. "Rest assured. I value life more than you realize," he retorted before guiding Erryk and Rhaegar out of the tunnel.

"My dwelling is close to the Dragon's Pit, where we have access to medicinal herbs and equipment," Maynard explained as they made their way towards his residence.

Exiting the tunnels, Maynard led the way up a set of creaky stairs and into a narrow wooden hut perched on the edge of the Dragon's Pit.

"This is where you reside?" Erryk remarked, surveying the humble surroundings with a raised eyebrow, the worn furniture and musty scent an unexpected sight for a maester's dwelling.

Without wasting a moment, Maynard swiftly made his way to the bed and knelt down, pulling a four-square wooden box from beneath it. With a quick flick, he revealed an array of bottles and jars containing powders and pills.

"Lay the prince flat on the bed while I perform a basic surface cleaning," Maynard instructed sharply, his tone betraying his urgency.

"This might sting a bit, Your Highness," Erryk cautioned as he helped Rhaegar ease onto the bed.

"Hiss! A bit late for that reminder, isn't it?" Rhaegar retorted through gritted teeth, his face contorted in pain and frustration.

"Quiet now, conserve your strength, Your Highness," Erryk advised, his focus shifting back to assisting Maynard in providing aid to the injured prince.

Maynard carefully retrieved two ceramic jars and sprinkled a layer of medicinal powder onto Rhaegar's burned back.

"Ouch, ouch, ouch ..." Rhaegar gritted his teeth, his body convulsing involuntarily with each touch.

Glancing sideways at Erryk, he groaned, "Why haven't I passed out? Normally, this level of injury would have rendered me unconscious by now."

Erryk was at a loss for words. "People usually faint from unbearable pain. The fact that you haven't suggests it's not quite as bad as it could be."

"But it feels excruciatingly painful," Rhaegar countered through clenched teeth.

He wasn't being overly talkative. If he didn't engage in conversation to distract himself, he feared he might actually lose consciousness from the agony.

"By the Seven, how did you survive such extensive burns? It's as if you've danced through the Seven Hells," Maynard remarked with a mixture of awe and relief as he applied the medicine and bandaged Rhaegar's wounds.

Considering the intensity of the dragon's flame, capable of melting steel upon contact, it was miraculous that Rhaegar had endured even a brush with it without being reduced to ashes in seconds.

Hearing Maynard's exclamation, Rhaegar inquired, "Weren't you supposed to be waiting for me by the lair? Why did Ser Erryk come to my rescue instead?"

Maynard's expression froze, and he admitted with shame, "I made a grave error in judgment and inadvertently led you into the Dreamfyre's lair."

"I regretted it the moment you entered."

"I hurriedly sought assistance from Ser Erryk, fearing you might encounter danger."

"It's beyond belief how swiftly Dreamfyre went berserk, resulting in such a grave injury to you."

Rhaegar paid him no heed and turned to Erryk.

Erryk didn't shy away from the truth. He dropped to one knee and declared solemnly, "My duty, as bestowed upon me by the king, is to ensure your safety. Allowing you to face danger alone is a grave failure on my part."

"I ... I apologize for the tarnish on my honor," he continued, his voice heavy with remorse. With a swift motion, Erryk tore off the charred remnants of his white cloak, symbolizing his remorse and the weight of his failure.

Observing the burnt white robe, Rhaegar turned his gaze to Erryk's back, his concern evident. "Are you injured, Ser?"

Erryk seemed taken aback. "Not seriously, Your Highness."

Rhaegar sighed with relief, but bitterness tinged his words. "I pray you remain unharmed. It would be my utmost shame to cause you harm in my pursuit."

"Duty beckons," Erryk replied stoically.

"No, your duty was to remain stationed," Rhaegar insisted.

He buried his face in his arm, his voice muffled. "Ser, I'm deeply grateful for your rescue, and deeply sorry for the trouble I've caused."

#### Chapter 34: Lyonel's Proposal

"You don't have to apologize; every Targaryen is obsessed with dragons, and it's not uncommon for them to make rash decisions on impulse," Erryk consoled, casting a sympathetic glance at Rhaegar, who lay on the bed enduring the pain.

At the mention of dragons, Rhaegar's eyes flared with anger. Gritting his teeth, he declared, "I was on the brink of taming Dreamfyre."

"An accident?" Erryk inquired, his brow furrowing with concern.

Rhaegar's voice dripped with frustration as he recounted, "Dreamfyre was on the verge of accepting me, but a chain restrained it, preventing it from standing."

"The bond between me and Dreamfyre was severed by that chain!" he hissed, his tone laced with venom.

His eyes burned with a fiery intensity, the crimson hue mingling with the purple of his pupils, lending them a demonic quality.

Failure was one thing, but thwarted success was far worse.

Erryk was taken aback by Rhaegar's revelation. He turned to Maynard with a fierce grip, his voice laced with accusation, "You oversee the Dragon's Pit; what happened with the chains?"

Though he had limited experience with dragons, Erryk knew well enough that the chains should never impede their movement. Rhaegar's account of Dreamfyre's plight was highly irregular.

Erryk harbored suspicions that Maynard might have played a hand in sabotaging the prince's endeavor.

Gripped by the collar and hoisted up, Maynard trembled with fear, his voice betraying panic as he protested, "It wasn't me! I'm tasked with menial chores—cleaning bones and dragon droppings. I'd never dare tamper with a dragon!"

"If not you, then who, the Dragon? Or perhaps the Bass you're talking about?" Erryk demanded, his patience wearing thin. With a swift motion, he landed two punches on Maynard's face, eliciting a sharp cry as blood trickled from his nose.

Maynard frantically pleaded his innocence amidst the chaos. "It's not me, I swear! Only the Dragon Keepers can change the dragon's chains. They're the only ones who can pacify the dragons!" he insisted, his voice reaching a crescendo in his desperation.

Rhaegar winced in annoyance, his burns throbbing with each word. "Tie him up first, and let's return to the Red Keep immediately. We must inform my father of this," he commanded, his voice strained with discomfort.

The pain clouded his thoughts, leaving only two clear objectives in his mind: to seek solace in the comforting presence of his parents and to uncover the culprit responsible for Dreamfyre's ordeal.

Erryk nodded in agreement. "Yes, Prince," he affirmed, swiftly immobilizing Maynard by restraining his hands behind his back with a belt.

With Maynard subdued, Erryk gently lifted Rhaegar and carried him out of the room. The carriage awaited them just beyond the gates of the Dragon's Pit, and Erryk wasted no time in setting a brisk pace towards the Red Keep.

Disregarding the driver's astonished expression, Erryk carefully positioned Rhaegar on the carriage's commodious seat.

With practiced efficiency, he directed the driver's attention to Maynard. "Secure him to the back of the carriage and ensure he follows us," he instructed firmly, adding a reminder, "The prince's condition requires a smooth ride. Speed is essential, but we cannot afford any jolts."

"Understood, Ser," the driver acknowledged, his eyes wide with curiosity at the unusual scene unfolding before him.

Without delay, the driver complied with Erryk's orders, binding Maynard securely to the rear of the carriage and muffling any potential protests with a rag.

With their task accomplished, the carriage set off towards the Red Keep, its wheels rolling smoothly along the cobblestone streets of King's Landing.

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In the tranquil ambiance of the Red Keep's King's Bedchamber, Viserys, wearied from the morning's tournament, retreated to his quarters, feeling the weight of exhaustion settling upon him.

"Summon Lord Lyonel at once. Inform him that the King requires his counsel," Viserys commanded, his voice echoing with authority as he leaned against the door frame.

Promptly, an attendant heeded the king's call, disappearing momentarily to fetch the esteemed Hand of the King, Lyonel Strong.

Within the span of ten minutes, Lyonel's stout figure entered the chamber, his demeanor exuding deference and readiness to serve his sovereign.

"What is your will, Your Majesty?" Lyonel inquired respectfully, his presence a reassuring presence in the dimly lit chamber.

As the attendant discreetly poured wine for both Viserys and Lyonel, Viserys dismissed him with a subtle gesture, leaving the two men alone to deliberate in privacy.

With a contemplative gaze, Viserys raised his wine glass, a solemn air enveloping him as he broached the topic weighing heavily on his mind.

"I have been inundated with suitors vying for my daughter Rhaenyra's hand in marriage," Viserys confided, his voice tinged with a hint of melancholy. "Yet, I find myself hesitant to commit to any alliance."

Lyonel's expression shifted, a somber recognition crossing his features as he interjected with a note of caution. "Your Majesty, while the matter of Rhaenyra's betrothal is of great importance, there are pressing matters that demand our attention."

Viserys regarded Lyonel with a measured gaze, acknowledging the gravity of his advisor's words.

"Oh, is there something more pressing than Rhaenyra's marriage?" Viserys inquired, a hint of amusement dancing in his eyes.

Despite the lighthearted tone, Lyonel's gaze remained fixed on the king, revealing a depth of understanding that belied his outward demeanor. Years of experience had shaped him into a man of few words, yet his perceptive eyes betrayed a keen insight into human nature.

Aware of Viserys's tendency to deflect difficult topics with humor, Lyonel met the challenge head-on. With a decisive gulp of his wine, he broached the sensitive subject.

"Your Majesty, Prince Rhaegar, as your eldest son, rightfully holds claim to the Iron Throne under Westerosi primogeniture," Lyonel asserted, his words carrying the weight of certainty.

Viserys's countenance darkened at Lyonel's assertion. "But the current heir is Rhaenyra, chosen by me personally and older than Rhaegar."

Lyonel remained steadfast in his stance. "Prince Rhaegar, as a man and the eldest son, holds precedence under Westerosi law. A male heir is more likely to command the allegiance of the lords."

"Rhaenyra has indeed been recognized as the heir for many years," Viserys conceded, his tone still edged with frustration.

Though Lyonel recognized Viserys's similarity to Rhaenyra in their strong-willed nature, he pressed on. "Yet, Your Majesty, their recognition of Rhaenyra may stem from the absence of a better alternative. If Prince Rhaegar were to assume his rightful place, the lords would undoubtedly favor a male heir."

Through years of companionship, Lyonel had gained an intimate understanding of Viserys's character. He knew precisely how to navigate the king's emotions and convictions to sway him in the desired direction.

Viserys remained resolute, unwilling to entertain the notion of displacing Rhaenyra as the heir. "No. Rhaenyra has committed no wrongdoing. No one can strip her of her rightful place as the heir."

Lyonel, recognizing Viserys's unwavering stance, didn't press the issue further. Instead, he calmly redirected the conversation. "Prince Rhaegar was born into her position as heir. Now that he has recovered from his illness, are you suggesting we overlook such a worthy firstborn?"

"Absolutely not," Viserys asserted firmly, expressing his intentions. "Rhaegar is a fine young man; he holds love for both his father and his sister. I will ensure he receives the finest education, so he may grow into a man of honor."

"When Rhaenyra ascends to the throne, Rhaegar can serve as Hand of the King, Regent, or even Protector of the Realm," Viserys proposed.

Lyonel was taken aback by the suggestion. "My liege, do you truly believe this?"

But Lyonel's inner thoughts were far more complex, swirling with uncertainty and concern.

With the king asserting Rhaegar's status as his eldest son, one might argue that he should rightfully inherit the throne. After all, wouldn't a prince of such high caliber be more inclined to assert his claim rather than serve silently in a subordinate role?

Indeed, even among minor noble families, brothers often vie fiercely for their family's inheritance. The allure of wielding the power of a king would be irresistible to many, let alone to siblings.

Yet, Viserys remained steadfast in his decision. "I have faith in Rhaegar. He will dutifully assist his sister in governing and safeguarding the realm from threats," he declared.

Lyonel found himself at a loss for words, uncertain how to respond to the king's unwavering conviction. Pouring himself another glass of wine, he took a sip, contemplating his next move.

"Well, Your Majesty, I defer to your judgment," Lyonel conceded, acknowledging the king's authority in the matter.

Chapter 35: Keep It in the Family

After a brief moment of reflection, Lyonel set aside his concerns about the heir and reaffirmed his loyalty to the king.

He understood the potential ramifications of the King's decision for the future of the kingdom and recognized his responsibility as Hand of the King to address the issue.

Having considered possible solutions to the succession dilemma many times, Lyonel felt ready to broach the subject.

"Regarding the matter of the Princess's marriage, I have a candidate in mind," he began.

"Oh? Wasn't it Laenor, son of the sea serpent Corlys Velaryon, you mentioned last time?" Viserys inquired, his demeanor relaxed as long as the conversation did not turn to the question of heirs.

"While Ser Laenor remains a viable candidate, that proposal was made half a year ago," Lyonel replied, opting for honesty. "Your Grace, considering the interests of the realm, I suggest that the princess follow the Targaryen family tradition."

"Rhaegar?" Viserys' smile faltered, his expression becoming skeptical. "But he's only six. Rhaenyra is fourteen. By the time they're both of age, Rhaenyra will be considered too old to marry."

Lyonel remained firm. "But that is not an insurmountable obstacle. In fact, they are only eight years apart in age, and the marriage could be consummated within a decade at the most."

"Until then, we can arrange their engagement to discourage potential suitors from pursuing the princess," he suggested confidently.

A truly insightful and forthright suggestion from Lyonel, demonstrating his wisdom and unwavering devotion to the realm.

Viserys could not deny the effect Lyonel's words had on his heart.

Over the past six months, as Rhaegar regained his health, Viserys quietly pondered the matter at hand. He struggled with the dilemma of not wanting to deprive Rhaenyra of her birthright for the sake of his eldest son, fearing it would only sow resentment within his family.

His guilt over Rhaenyra's loss of her mother at a tender age weighed heavily on him. Though he knew that Rhaenyra might not be a more suitable heir than Rhaegar, he could not bring himself to change the established order, despite subtle suggestions from some of his ministers.

So he had ordered Rhaegar to remain grounded, hoping to shield him from any discussion of the succession. Perhaps by keeping Rhaegar ignorant of these matters, Viserys hoped to spare him the pain of losing his inheritance and assuage some of his own guilt.

But he couldn't fool himself forever. Eventually, Rhaegar would learn the truth, and Viserys could not limit his son's freedom or shield him from reality indefinitely.

So he paid special attention to Rhaenyra's marriage prospects. If she could form an alliance with a powerful family, it would solidify her claim to the throne in the future and make it difficult for any dissenting siblings to challenge her.

Lyonel's proposal offered a fresh perspective and a solution that could unite the family without causing further discord over the issue of the heir.

Inwardly, Viserys found himself leaning toward the idea. Without moving, he voiced his concern, "But won't both sides resist the idea of their marriage?"

"That is true. The Targaryen family has a long tradition in this matter, from ancient Valyrian times to the present day," Lyonel replied, seeing through the King's concerns with ease. "Your Highness is still young and may not fully grasp the importance of this tradition. But as long as you persuade the princess, everything will go smoothly."

Viserys, pleased with Lyonel's assurance, smiled warmly. "Lyonel, you are truly invaluable to me. I often wonder what I would do without you."

Lyonel, ever humble, adjusted his collar and replied solemnly, "As Hand of the King, I must humbly serve Your Grace to the best of my ability."

"I will present your proposal to Rhaenyra and discuss it with her later," Viserys assured, offering his support.

Compared to Lyonel Strong's unwavering devotion to duty, the actions of former Hand of the King Otto Hightower paled in comparison. Viserys couldn't help but recall Otto's many indiscretions, such as marrying his daughter to consolidate power, secretly gathering ministerial support for his grandson Aegon, and even attempting to persuade Viserys to change his heir several times.

Were it not for these transgressions and Viserys' reluctance to offend easily, Otto would not have been removed from office and sent back to the Old City to recuperate.

As the two monarchs and ministers enjoyed their fine wine and talked in agreement, a sharp knock interrupted their conversation.

Viserys frowned in annoyance. "What is it? I was discussing matters of state with the Hand of the King."

The voice of Kingsguard Captain Harrold came from the door. "Your Grace, Prince Rhaegar has just returned from the Dragon's Pit and the servants report that he is seriously injured!"

Viserys' concern grew at the news of his son's injury. He rose hastily and rushed to open the door.

Harrold's expression was grave as he continued, "The servants say Prince Rhaegar suffered severe burns, indicating a failed attempt to tame the dragon."

Viserys cursed under his breath as anger flared within him, "Those fools in the Dragon's Pit! How dare they allow Rhaegar to attempt such a dangerous feat in secret!"

Lyonel interjected, trying to calm the situation. "Your Grace, now is not the time to place blame. We must first tend to the lord's injuries."

Indeed, injuries caused by Dragon Flame were often fatal, and any misstep could lead to dire consequences.

The young prince was a vital asset to the realm, a cornerstone of the Targaryen family line. His untimely demise would be a devastating loss, especially at such a critical juncture.

Viserys panicked as he realized the gravity of the situation. "We must act quickly. Take me to Rhaegar and summon the Grand Maester at once!"

Viserys followed Harrold with shaky steps. His mind raced with worry. The urgency of the situation drove him forward, overriding all other thoughts.

Harrold led Viserys down the stairs to Rhaegar's room, ensuring the king's safety and composure along the way.

Upon reaching the door, Viserys glimpsed Rhaegar lying motionless on the bed, his injuries stark against his skin. Viserys felt a pang of pain shoot through his heart as he saw his son's suffering.

"Rhaegar!" His voice trembled with emotion as he rushed to his son's side, his heart heavy with concern for the beloved prince.

Off to the side, Grand Maester Mellos carefully unwound the bandages, his expression grave as he addressed Viserys about Rhaegar's condition. "Your Grace, it's best not to disturb the prince. His injuries are serious."

Viserys turned to Mellos, his concern evident. "How is Rhaegar?"

Mellos shook his head solemnly. "The situation is grave. He has suffered extensive burns from the dragon's flames. Recovery will be a challenge."

Viserys' heart sank at the news. "Please spare no expense in procuring the necessary medicines to heal Rhaegar."

The prospect of further loss weighed heavily on Viserys. He could not bear the thought of Rhaegar succumbing to such a tragic accident, especially after the prince's recovery from his illness.

As he contemplated the prospect of explaining Rhaegar's fate to Rhaenyra, memories of his late wife, Aemma Arryn, haunted him. He couldn't imagine the pain of facing another loss.

Mellos assured Viserys, "There is no need for rare medicines. The prince's wounds were tended to promptly by someone skilled."

As Mellos carefully tended to Rhaegar's wounds, the young prince stirred awake. Viserys' voice trembled with emotion as he pleaded with the Grand Maester. "Please, do everything in your power to save him. I can't bear to lose any more loved ones."

## Chapter 36: The Curse of the Chains

"Father, I'm fine..." Rhaegar's voice was soft, his expression serene despite the discomfort in his back.

Viserys hovered uncertainly at the edge of the bed, his heart heavy with worry. "Rhaegar, my boy, did I disturb your rest?"

"No, Father, it was not a deep sleep," Rhaegar reassured him with a gentle smile, reaching out to grasp his father's hand for support. "I am blessed by the White Hart, destined to live a long life."

Viserys returned the grip, relief washing over him. "You're right, my son. You have the favor of the Seven, and no injury can defeat you."

Summoning a faint smile, Viserys broached the delicate topic. "Some say your injuries occurred while attempting to tame the dragon. Is there truth to that?"

Rhaegar's expression turned somber. "Yes, Father. I was on the verge of taming Dreamfyre."



"Seven levels of hell! How dare you secretly tame a dragon alone behind your father's back, especially Dreamfyre," Viserys exclaimed, his voice a mixture of shock and anger, his knees feeling weak beneath him.

Rhaegar, sensing his father's distress, tried to explain, "But Father, I was so close to gaining Dreamfyre's trust."

"I didn't witness any of that! All I saw was my beloved son lying on a sickbed, covered in blisters the size of beans!" Viserys lectured, his voice trembling with a mix of frustration and concern, careful not to raise it too loud to avoid startling his injured son.

Rhaegar's cheeks flushed with embarrassment and frustration. "I'm not lying, Father. I could feel Dreamfyre's recognition, its anger at being bound. It knows me!"

"But Dreamfyre nearly killed you with its flames!" Viserys retorted, his voice laced with fear and disbelief.

Rhaegar rushed to clarify, "Someone replaced Dreamfyre's chains during the recognition ceremony. The moment it felt trapped, it lashed out in anger."

"Chains?" Viserys echoed, his expression now a mixture of shock and concern. "The chains forced Dreamfyre into submission?"

Rhaegar nodded solemnly. "Yes, Father. It was an act of sabotage."

Viserys sank into deep contemplation, his mind consumed by questions of who could have tampered with Dreamfyre's chains and why. Lyonel's voice broke through his thoughts from behind, "Your Majesty, Ser Erryk is waiting outside. Shall I summon him in?"

Shaking himself from his reverie, Viserys responded irritably, "Yes, bring him in. I need to know what measures he took to safeguard my son."

As Erryk entered the room, he walked with a hint of self-consciousness, making his way to the bed where Rhaegar lay, and knelt before the king.

With a piercing gaze, Viserys addressed him in a cold tone, "Provide a thorough account of today's events, particularly how Rhaegar came to be injured. Leave no detail unspoken."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Erryk responded, meeting the king's gaze with unwavering resolve as he recounted the day's events in front of all present in the room.

In full view of those present, Erryk recounted the day's events in meticulous detail.

From the journey from the Red Keep to the smithy...

To their entrance into the Dragon's Pit and their encounters with Princess Rhaenyra and Prince Daemon...

And finally, Rhaegar's solitary attempt to tame a dragon and his narrow escape from its maw...

In just a matter of minutes, Erryk painted a vivid picture of the entire ordeal.

As Viserys listened, his expression darkened with each passing moment, his anger directed squarely at Erryk for not keeping closer watch over Rhaegar.

Seizing the opportunity to intervene, Lyonel suggested, "Your Majesty, the maester named Maynard seems suspicious. Perhaps we should begin our investigation with him."

"Where is that wretch?" Viserys demanded, his tone harsh and impatient.

Erryk responded quietly, "Maynard is currently being held in the dungeon under my watch."

"Ser Harrold, handle this matter personally," Viserys commanded, his ire still palpable as he directed the experienced knight to deal with the prisoner.

With the suspect secured, Viserys' anger began to wane slightly, his attention once again turning to Rhaegar.

The young prince hesitated before speaking, "Father, Maynard may not have had the courage to plot against me. Should we spare his life?"

Viserys emitted a cold grunt in response, his frustration evident. "Are you still concerned for others at a time like this? I sometimes wonder if you're compassionate or simply naive."

Despite his harsh words, Viserys acquiesced to his son's request, instructing Harrold to ensure Maynard remained alive.

Rhaegar turned his head towards Erryk, his voice soft as he spoke, "Ser Erryk fulfilled his duty faithfully; it was my arrogance that led to..."

"Well, I can imagine what you're going to say," Viserys interjected, impatiently pressing his hand. "I won't be punishing him, is that all?"

"Thank you, Father," Rhaegar replied, feeling a warmth spread within him as he settled back onto the bed.

For a while, father and son sat in silence, the weight of the day's events hanging heavily in the air.

Sensing the need for privacy, Lyonel gestured to Erryk and Mellos, silently indicating that they should leave the room.

Half a minute later, Viserys turned his gaze towards the evening sun outside the window, his voice hesitant as he spoke, "You... truly came close to taming Dreamfyre?"

Rhaegar nodded solemnly. "Yes, if not for that accursed chain, I believe I would have succeeded."

Once again, silence enveloped them, Viserys's eyes flickering with a mixture of pride and concern.

Dreamfyre was no ordinary dragon; it was a formidable creature, even among its kind. The thought of his son attempting to tame such a powerful beast filled Viserys with both admiration and trepidation.

Gently stroking Rhaegar's tousled hair, Viserys spoke with determination, "You did well, my son. Your father will ensure that justice is served."

Rhaegar hesitated for a moment before speaking, "Father, I recently had a dream about the Dragon's Pit, and I feel compelled to share it with you."

"Speak, my son. Your gift of prophecy is a rare and precious thing, and I will listen attentively to whatever you have to say," Viserys replied, his interest piqued at the mention of prophetic dreams.

Rhaegar employed the same rhetoric he had used when conversing with Rhaenyra, emphasizing the detrimental consequences of chaining dragons. "Dragons cannot be shackled with chains, or they will suffer a curse!"

Viserys contemplated, "Are you suggesting that the recent incident with Dreamfyre losing control is this so-called curse?"

"No, not exactly," Rhaegar replied confidently. "The majority of incidents involving dragons losing control are man-made, not true curses. This may simply serve as a warning. If chains are used to restrict dragons again, it will invite even graver consequences."

He was convinced that the accounts in ancient texts were not mere fantasies. Had Dreamfyre not been bound, he would have remained unharmed.

Viserys's expression shifted, and he made a firm decision. "The dreams will not be disregarded. I will conduct a thorough investigation of the Dragon's Pit, rooting out any hidden threats."

"But the family's dragons require a lair in King's Landing," Viserys continued, "so the Dragon's Pit will remain. However, the chains can be removed as needed."

Rhaegar agreed with his father's approach. "As long as the dragons are free from chains, the curse will have no opportunity to manifest."

As darkness enveloped the room, Viserys bid his eldest son farewell. "Rest well. I will see you tomorrow."

"Goodnight, Father," Rhaegar obediently replied, watching his father depart.

Alone in the room, Rhaegar lay on the bed, his body ravaged by pain. Despite his stoic demeanor in front of his father, the extent of his burns was severe. "The power of Dragon Flame is truly formidable. It's a miracle I survived," he murmured through gritted teeth.

Thanks to the effects of [Blood and Fire], his body had endured the burns. Otherwise, he might have been incinerated entirely.

"Thank you once again, Balerion," Rhaegar whispered, his thoughts drifting to the skull of the great dragon placed in the sanctuary. A flicker of gratitude and relief crossed his eyes as he reflected on his miraculous survival.

## Chapter 37: A Little Sneak

As Rhaegar pondered, a gentle knock interrupted his thoughts.

Furrowing his brow in confusion, he wondered who could be visiting at this hour.

"Brother, it's me..." Helaena's soft voice drifted through the door.

Recalling his promise from the previous night, Rhaegar responded, "Come in, the door's open."

With a soft crunch, the door creaked open, revealing Helaena clad in a silk nightgown, cautiously peering inside.

Assured that the coast was clear, she entered the room with practiced stealth, swiftly closing the door behind her—a display of skill akin to a seasoned thief.

Amusement twinkled in Rhaegar's eyes as he quipped, "What are you afraid of? Are there monsters lurking in my room?"

Helaena shook her head, pressing a finger to her lips. "Shhh, I snuck out; Mother's still awake."

"Is Alicent in your room?" Rhaegar inquired.

Helaena tiptoed to the bedside, replying, "She went to find Father."

A wry smile tugged at Rhaegar's lips, knowing full well that Alicent had likely been summoned by their father.

That was for the best; at least he wouldn't have to endure Alicent's feigned sympathy.

Turning his attention to Helaena, Rhaegar gestured towards the fireplace. "I brought some toys, including a leather ball. Go take a look."

"Yay!" Helaena chirped, darting excitedly towards the array of toys by the hearth.

Erryk was a stern individual, committed to executing the tasks entrusted to him by Rhaegar with utmost seriousness.

The toys procured were the latest fads from various shops, sure to delight the youngsters.

Helaena eagerly seized a vibrant leather ball and a plush dragon-shaped doll, her eyes sparkling with delight as she settled onto the carpet to explore her newfound treasures.

Rhaegar watched with a gentle smile, allowing her to revel in her playtime without interruption, before reclining on the bed, his eyes drifting shut.

He had pledged Helaena a space where she could freely indulge in play, a promise he had no intention of reneging.

Moreover, this newfound half-sister seemed to possess an uncanny intuition, making increased interaction seem prudent.

Though it was not within her purview to assist him in deciphering the laws of the Dreamer's Gift, Rhaegar couldn't shake the feeling that her unique abilities might hold significance.

A comfortable silence enveloped the room as the siblings pursued their individual pursuits.

The handsome lad lay prostrate on the bed, his countenance pallid with illness, while his rosy-cheeked sister gleefully played by the hearth.

It was a tableau of familial warmth and serenity.

Until Helaena plucked a bright silver bracelet from the assortment, holding it up inquisitively. "Brother, is this bracelet for me too?"

Rhaegar sniffed, eyeing the imitation crafted by the local blacksmith, and nonchalantly replied, "No, that's mine."

"Oh..." Helaena murmured, a hint of disappointment flickering across her features as she set the bracelet aside.

Observing her crestfallen expression, Rhaegar couldn't shake the memory of his own past rejection, a pang of empathy tightening his chest.

After a moment's hesitation, he offered a gentle smile. "It's yours now. Wear it if you like, as a gift from me to you."

He couldn't bear to see Helaena experience rejection, just as he couldn't bear to recall his own sister's rejection of him.

Brightening instantly, Helaena beamed. "Thank you, brother. I really like it."

"It's nothing. You deserve what you love," Rhaegar replied softly, a twinge of discomfort gnawing at his injured back, his brow furrowing in pain.

Noticing Rhaegar's discomfort, Helaena approached the bedside, clutching the bracelet, her expression puzzled. "Brother, why are you lying down and not moving?"

"I'm nursing an injury. I can only lie still for a while," Rhaegar explained truthfully.

"Does it hurt a lot? Aegon sometimes pinches me, and it hurts," Helaena remarked innocently, offering to assist. Climbing onto the bed, she puckered her lips. "Let me help you. Blowing on it will make the pain go away."

Rhaegar couldn't help but chuckle at her earnestness, though laughter exacerbated the ache in his back.

"Cursed chains, why couldn't they just kill me!" he cursed angrily, the pain intensifying as he vented his frustration at the treacherous restraints.

Startled by Rhaegar's outburst, Helaena shrank into a corner of the bed, fear flashing in her eyes.

"Don't be scared, I'm not angry with you. I'm just frustrated with the person who caused my injury," Rhaegar reassured her with a bitter smile, reaching out to comfort his sister.

It was a difficult moment for him—enduring his own pain while tending to his naive sister.

Though Helaena couldn't hear his heart, her actions bespoke her own unique brand of comfort.

Approaching Rhaegar cautiously, she pursed her lips and blew gently at his bandaged back.

Observing her earnest efforts, Rhaegar felt an inexplicable sense of solace wash over him.

Reaching out to stroke Helaena's silver locks, he smiled tenderly. "There, my wound doesn't hurt anymore."

Helaena ceased her blowing and gazed at him with a puzzled expression, as if silently questioning, "Really?"

Noticing the bracelet in her hand, Rhaegar offered, "Would you like me to help you put it on?"

After a moment's contemplation, Helaena nodded.

Taking the bracelet, Rhaegar gently fastened it around her wrist, finding it a perfect fit thanks to his past frailty.

"Such a chubby little girl, just right for this bracelet," Rhaegar remarked with satisfaction.

Unexpectedly, Helaena's demeanor shifted abruptly.

Her smile vanished, replaced by a pout as she withdrew from Rhaegar's touch, turning away and curling into herself.

Rhaegar's smile faltered, surprised by the sudden change. He hadn't realized that a two-year-old could be concerned about matters of weight.

Calling out to Helaena yielded no response; she remained stubbornly silent and motionless.

Helpless, Rhaegar resigned himself to silence, turning his head to prepare for sleep.

As for apologizing? Well, Targaryen men weren't known for it.

As the minutes ticked by, the night descended into darkness.

Helaena stole a glance at the sleeping Rhaegar before slipping out of bed and quietly leaving the room.

...

On the flip side, Rhaenyra had just returned from Dragonstone Island.

Upon her arrival at the Red Keep, she was promptly summoned by an attendant to meet with the king.

"Alright, wait for me while I change," Rhaenyra replied, eager to shed the chaos of the day and present herself before her father.

After freshening up and changing her attire, Rhaenyra approached the door to Viserys' chambers, poised to knock. However, before she could do so, the door swung open from within.

Alicent emerged, adorned in an exquisite gown, catching Rhaenyra's eye.

In a rare display of goodwill, Rhaenyra greeted her stepmother and former confidante with a warm smile.

Alicent, however, forced a smile of her own and cautioned in a hushed tone, "Rhaegar is injured, your father is in a foul mood. Try not to provoke him."

Though recent events had strained their once close relationship, Alicent still harbored a modicum of loyalty towards Rhaenyra, courtesy of her father Otto Hightower's influence.

As news of Rhaegar's injury reached her ears, Rhaenyra's concern spiked. "How could Rhaegar be injured? Doesn't he have Ser Erryk to protect him?"

Before Alicent could respond, Viserys' voice cut through the air, brimming with frustration.

"Rhaenyra, must you keep your king waiting any longer?"

"Forgive me, I must tend to the children," Alicent apologized with a regretful glance, swiftly passing by Rhaenyra.

Furrowing her brow, Rhaenyra entered the room, finding Viserys seated at a stone sandbox, engrossed in crafting a dragon sculpture.

## Chapter 38: Father-Daughter Dispute

Rhaenyra marched forward, her brow furrowed in concern. "Alicent mentioned Rhaegar's injury. What happened?"

Viserys responded with dissatisfaction, his tone heavy. "Rhaenyra, is this how you address your father and king?"

Momentarily taken aback, Rhaenyra replied helplessly, "I apologize, Father. I'm just worried about Rhaegar."

"Rhaegar is gravely injured, with extensive burns covering his body. The Grand Maester believes he may not survive," Viserys relayed the grim prognosis.

Yet, despite the medical assessment, Viserys harbored a flicker of hope. Rhaegar's demeanor had not suggested impending death; rather, he seemed surprisingly resilient. Viserys attributed this to divine intervention, a blessing from the Seven.

Unaware of her brother's condition, Rhaenyra stood frozen, her mind reeling with disbelief. She struggled to comprehend the news, her world thrown into disarray.

"He was fine this morning... How could this be happening?" she murmured, grappling with the harsh reality.

Refusing to accept the dire situation, she demanded, "Where is Rhaegar? I must see him!"

It took a moment for Rhaenyra to collect herself, her determination to see her brother overriding her shock.

Viserys sneered, his words laced with bitterness. "So, you still care for your brother? I thought your heart belonged to that bastard, Daemon."

Indignant, Rhaenyra countered, "What nonsense! My allegiance lies with my family. Now, where is Rhaegar? He needs me."

"He needs rest, not visitors," Viserys retorted, his tone unyielding, devoid of mercy.

He had pieced together the events unfolding in the Dragon's Pit today, including the exchanges between Rhaenyra and Daemon, both before and after.

Sharp-witted as he was, Viserys detected a hint of desire in Daemon's interactions with Rhaenyra.

The notion of his own brother scheming for power with his own daughter was utterly intolerable to Viserys.

He was determined to nip any potential mistakes in the bud.

Observing her father's stern demeanor, Rhaenyra felt uncertain and opted for a softer approach.

Worry etched across her face, she implored, "Father, as Rhaegar's sister, shouldn't I at least know what happened to him?"

Viserys didn't withhold any details, sharing the full story with her.

Rhaenyra gasped in disbelief, "Rhaegar attempted to tame Dreamfyre on his own? Is he out of his mind?"

It was common knowledge that dragons were temperamental creatures, especially those like Dreamfyre, long confined in captivity.

Rhaenyra's own experiences in dragon-taming had been cautious endeavors, aided by dragon-keepers.

Attempting to tame a solitary, adult dragon by force was tantamount to courting death.

Every year on Dragonstone Island, daring youths with Valyrian blood would clandestinely attempt to tame wild dragons, often meeting fiery ends.

The prospect of Rhaegar's being engulfed in dragon flames was unbearable to her.

Had she not refused Rhaegar's request to fly on a dragon, perhaps she could have prevented this perilous situation.

Witnessing her daughter's self-blame, Viserys' heart softened, and he decided to cease adding to her distress.

Letting out a sigh, Viserys remarked, "Rhaegar was fortunate; his injuries from the dragon's flames seem manageable. With proper care and rest, I believe he'll recover without major complications."

"Thank the gods! I'm relieved to hear that Rhaegar's life isn't in jeopardy," Rhaenyra exhaled deeply, the weight on her chest easing.

With the ice broken, Viserys transitioned to a more delicate matter, placing the killing stick on the stone statue, intending to broach the real purpose of their conversation.

"Rhaenyra, do you harbor affections for anyone? Someone you admire?" Viserys inquired, his paternal concern mingled with a hint of awkwardness.

As a father, asking such a question was a delicate dance, weighed with the future prospects of his daughter.

Caught off guard by the sudden shift in topic, Rhaenyra raised an eyebrow skeptically, "Why this sudden interest? Have the lords begun proposing marriage alliances again?"

"Ahem, no, of course not," Viserys cleared his throat, attempting to mask his discomfort. Regaining his composure, he continued, "I simply want to ensure that if there's someone you genuinely care for, you feel comfortable confiding in me about it."

"No, most of the men I've encountered are insufferable, and the few decent ones are far too arrogant," Rhaenyra retorted, her disdain evident as she spoke of the men who paraded their supposed superiority.

Viserys sighed, feeling the weight of his daughter's frustration, and tentatively broached the delicate subject, "What if I were to select a suitor for you, someone who meets all the necessary criteria for an advantageous match?"

"Father, we agreed not to discuss this until after the tournament," Rhaenyra responded, visibly recoiling at the prospect of an arranged marriage.

Viserys persisted, "Consider meeting the potential suitors; you may find one who surprises you."

"Very well, but I doubt any of them will be to my liking," Rhaenyra conceded begrudgingly, her frustration evident as she turned away, unwilling to entertain the notion of marriage any further.

As Rhaenyra's gaze hardened, Viserys felt the weight of his daughter's resistance. With a hint of frustration, he broached the delicate topic, "What are your thoughts on upholding our family traditions?"

Rhaenyra's expression shifted to one of skepticism as she reluctantly turned back to face her father. "Family traditions?" she repeated, already anticipating what he might suggest.



Annoyance flashed across her features as she continued, "You would sacrifice my happiness for the sake of the Iron Throne and entangle others in your schemes?"

Viserys bristled at her accusation, his voice rising in frustration. "Sacrifice your happiness? As a princess of the realm, it is your duty to enter into a suitable marriage," he retorted, his tone tinged with exasperation. "It's a responsibility that even I, as king, cannot evade!"

Rhaenyra remained unconvinced, her resolve unyielding. "If you're so eager for a royal match, find one for yourself. I refuse to entertain the advances of those vultures, and I won't be swayed by any ideas involving Rhaegar!" she declared defiantly.

"Rhaenyra! Do you realize the foolishness of your words?" Viserys shot back, his anger palpable. "You are the princess and heir to the Iron Throne, enjoying all the privileges and prestige that come with it, and yet you refuse to fulfill your duty!"

"But instead of embracing your responsibilities, you only care about your own desires, refusing to make any sacrifices for your position!" he continued, his gaze piercing. "Is this the sense of duty expected of the heir to the Iron Throne?"

Rhaenyra's jaw tightened, her resolve unshaken. "Power is earned, not given. I won't compromise my principles for the sake of appeasing others," she countered firmly.

"What have you fought for? What accomplishments do you have to your name, besides your birthright as heir?" Viserys snapped, his frustration boiling over.

A bitter smile tugged at Rhaenyra's lips as she responded coolly, "Is that what you've been wanting to say all along? That I'm not worthy of being your heir?"

"You have sons now—Aegon, Aemond," she continued, her voice tinged with bitterness.

"Especially Rhaegar, who is now in good health. You no longer need a daughter as your heir."

Viserys immediately shook his head in denial. "No! While I may have had doubts at times, I still recognize you as my rightful heir," he insisted earnestly.

"A female heir may be unconventional, but if you don't choose a strong partner from a powerful house, you'll struggle to maintain your position on the Iron Throne," he reasoned, his tone softening slightly. "He is innocent and has Targaryen blood. His status will help solidify your rule."

### Chapter 39: Conflict Intensifies

Viserys spoke earnestly, baring his soul to his daughter.

His words hung in the air, laden with hope, as he looked at her with anticipation.

He prayed silently that his words would touch her heart, guiding her back to her true self.

But Rhaenyra's eyes welled up with tears, her gaze meeting her father's with a mix of sorrow and determination.

It was evident that she was wrestling with her inner turmoil, her emotions in turmoil.

Finally, in a choked voice, she confessed, "I never considered it. All I want is someone who will protect me and love me sincerely."

For the first time, she laid bare her true feelings, albeit in a veiled manner.

Ever since her mother's passing, Rhaenyra had been haunted by a sense of emptiness and fear.

She dreaded the idea of marrying someone she didn't love, becoming nothing more than a tool for bearing children.

She couldn't forget the day her father, out of love for her mother, had chosen to save her brother at the cost of her mother's life.

The memory of commanding Syrax to cremate her mother's remains with dragonfire still haunted her.

Rhaenyra feared that she would meet the same fate, trapped in a loveless marriage and subjected to the same tragic end.

In her mind, the ideal husband was a tall, gentle man who would cherish her with every fiber of his being.

It was this elusive dream that had led her to harbor a faint affection for the ever-gentle Cole.

Unaware of the depth of his daughter's emotions, Viserys responded with surface-level reassurance.

Thinking he had understood her concerns, he suggested, "Perhaps you can take some time to get to know each other first. There's no rush to marry; you're both still young and have plenty of time to develop feelings for each other."

But Rhaenyra was resolute, shaking her head vigorously. "No! You don't understand. We can't dictate his future for him."

As she spoke, Rhaenyra couldn't help but feel a pang of sorrow for herself, her words also reflecting her concerns for Rhaegar's fate.

Undeterred, Viserys attempted to continue persuading her, but Rhaenyra couldn't bear to listen any longer. She covered her ears and fled from the room, unable to bear any more of her father's attempts to sway her.

She couldn't stand the way he always seemed to force her into submission.

As he watched his daughter's retreating figure, Viserys felt a surge of frustration. He slammed his cup down heavily, feeling indignant and unappreciated.

Despite his efforts, everything he did seemed to be met with ingratitude, even though it was all for the sake of his daughter's future.

...

Time flew by, and three days later, the martial arts competition site was bustling with activity.

Viserys sat in the main seat, a smile playing on his lips as he listened to Hand of the King Lyonel's report.

"Your Majesty, the Dragon's Pit has been thoroughly investigated and cleaned up. Through the testimony of an elderly dragon keeper, it was confirmed that Maester Bass of Oldtown took the initiative to replace Dreamfyre's chains."

"The reasoning provided was that Dreamfyre's short temper often led to aggressive behavior when the other dragons brought livestock. Thus, shorter chains were installed to restrict her movements and ensure the safety of the keepers."

Viserys raised an eyebrow at Lyonel's report. "Do you truly believe such a simplistic explanation?"

Lyonel shook his head. "I do not, Your Majesty. The explanation seems rather contrived."

"And what of the illegitimate child imprisoned in the dungeon? Could he be involved in this matter?" Viserys inquired, recalling Maynard, whom Rhaegar had pleaded to spare.

"At present, there is no evidence linking the man to Prince Rhaegar's attempted murder. Maester Bass has stated that he harbors disdain for his own birth," Lyonel replied honestly.

After a moment of consideration, Viserys waved his hand dismissively. "Since it seems inconsequential, let us leave it be."

"Prince Rhaegar's injuries were promptly treated by that lad, otherwise they would not have healed so swiftly," Lyonel remarked with a gentle smile. "The prince's resilience is truly remarkable, a testament to the blessings of the Seven."

However, his tone turned grave as he added in a hushed tone, "Maester Bass's involvement remains suspicious. I am unsure of how to proceed."

A cold glint flashed in Viserys's eyes as he responded, "The maesters of Oldtown are meant to serve the people. When a servant oversteps their bounds, what is the appropriate punishment?"

"Is severing his hands sufficient?" Lyonel asked, his voice matching Viserys's severity.

"It shall be so. And if he desires to take the black and join the Night's Watch, do not hinder him," Viserys decreed.

Lyonel bowed respectfully and took his leave, his mind already occupied with the political matters that awaited him.

Once the Hand of the King departed, only Daemon and Rhaenyra remained by Viserys' side. Today marked the final day of the tournament, and most members of the royal family were expected to attend.

Rhaenyra, who had been listening in from the sidelines, turned back and voiced her discontent.

"That deceitful maester nearly cost Rhaegar his life, and you're just going to forgive him so easily?"

Viserys furrowed his brow. "Maesters are answerable to Oldtown, and we cannot pass judgment on them arbitrarily. Severing their hands or consigning them to the Night's Watch is no trifling punishment."

"But Rhaegar nearly died because of him. He deserves to pay with his life," Rhaenyra insisted, her resolve unwavering.

"You cannot let your emotions dictate justice. Power is not a weapon to wield recklessly; a king's duty is to uphold justice," Viserys replied, quelling any further argument from Rhaenyra with a stern look.

"Hmph," Rhaenyra huffed in frustration, her suggestions once again brushed aside as she shifted her position.

Meanwhile, Daemon observed the father-daughter dispute in silence, a smug, disdainful smirk playing at the corners of his mouth. He had long been acquainted with his brother's weak disposition and indecisive nature.

Viserys remained oblivious to his brother's disdain, fully absorbed in the proceedings below. In his mind, he saw nothing amiss in his handling of the situation. A king, he believed, must exercise restraint and refrain from indulging in selfish desires or bending the law to suit his whims.

...

The battles within the tournament arena raged on fiercely, with various contests like charges, melees, and mounted archery already concluded, leaving only the pivotal dueling event to determine the champion. With thousands of eager spectators watching intently, the two final contestants stepped into the dueling arena for their ultimate showdown.

On one side stood a towering warrior hailing from Casterly Rock, clad in imposing heavy armor and brandishing a broadsword. Opposite him stood the unexpected underdog of the tournament, the Water Dancer - Syrio Friar.

Syrio's swordsmanship was nothing short of exceptional, his lithe body moving with the fluidity of a snake and the agility of a rabbit. With each graceful strike, he deftly dodged his opponent's attacks, aiming precisely for the weak points in his adversary's armor and drawing forth splashes of vibrant blood.

In less than a quarter of an hour, the duel reached its conclusion, with Syrio emerging victorious in a display of unparalleled skill and finesse. As the cheers of nobles and commoners alike filled the arena, the moment arrived for the king to bestow the rewards.

One by one, the top finishers received their prizes and accolades from the king until it was Syrio's turn. Kneeling before Viserys, Syrio received a genuine smile from the monarch.

"I remember you," Viserys remarked warmly. "You spoke of decimating the champion, and it seems you were not merely boasting."

With all due respect, Syrio replied, "Your Honorable Majesty, Syrio does not dare to boast before the kingdom."

Viserys nodded in approval. "Very well, as I promised, you may make your request known."

Without hesitation, Syrio expressed his desire, "I hail from distant Braavos, with no family, no honor to my name... I humbly request to remain at the Red Keep and serve, perhaps as a dance teacher."

Viserys arched a curious brow. "Why stay at the Red Keep when you could pursue knighthood?"

Syrio's response was swift and unwavering. "For your eldest son, Prince Rhaegar."

"Rhaegar?" Viserys echoed, taken aback by the unexpected mention.

"Prince Rhaegar embodies both virtue and wisdom," Syrio continued earnestly. "It is a blessing for the realm to have such a prince. I wish to remain at the Red Keep and impart my knowledge of swordsmanship to him, ensuring he becomes a peerless warrior and valiant knight in his adulthood."

Chapter 40: Abolishing the Chains

Syrio's proclamation echoed throughout the martial arts arena, commanding the attention of all those gathered.

It was a rare sight indeed, to witness someone openly declare their allegiance to the king's eldest son, drawing curious glances from every corner of the arena.

In response to Syrio's bold declaration, Viserys listened intently, his expression a mixture of contemplation and receptiveness.

"Swordsman, I comprehend your intentions," he began, his voice laden with consideration. "But should you truly aspire to serve my son, your dedication must be unwavering, and your intentions pure."

With a solemn flourish, Syrio hoisted his iron sword aloft, solemnly pledging his allegiance to young Rhaegar Targaryen until the time of his ascension to manhood, vowing to safeguard his honor and authority.

This scene unfolded under the watchful gaze of those eager to discern Princess Rhaenyra's reaction from her elevated vantage point.

Rhaenyra maintained her poised demeanor, her smile unwavering as she occupied her seat with grace.

To the spectators, it appeared as though she genuinely rejoiced for her brother, displaying no outward signs of concern.

Yet unbeknownst to the crowd, Rhaenyra discreetly pinched the root of her thigh beneath her sleeve, a subtle indication of her inner conflict.

Meanwhile, Viserys discreetly observed his daughter's response, silently acknowledging her composure with a nod of approval.

Taking Syrio's iron sword and draping it across his shoulder, Viserys spoke with authority, his voice resonating throughout the arena, "In acknowledgment of your loyalty, I hereby name you royal dance instructor and bestow upon you the title of Ser. May you fulfill your oath with unwavering fidelity."

"Your Majesty's generosity knows no bounds," Syrio replied with profound respect.

With the conclusion of this momentous event, the tournament marking the fifth anniversary of the king and queen's reign drew to a close.

As nobles and knights alike began to make their way out of the arena, they followed the king's lead back to the Red Keep, where a sumptuous banquet awaited them.

Among the departing throng, Rhaenyra moved with poise, her countenance composed yet betraying a hint of inner conflict.

Daemon trailed behind her, observing his niece closely, a flicker of satisfaction dancing in his eyes at the subtle signs of her discomfort.

...

As the soft melodies of music and the gentle rhythm of dancing filled the halls of the Red Keep, signaling the onset of night, Rhaenyra found herself disinterested in the festivities, opting instead

for an early retirement. Her steps led her down familiar corridors until she stood before her brother's door.

Pausing, she realized the familiar routine of her nightly pilgrimage to check on Rhaegar since his injury. The weight of her father's recent proposal lingered heavily on her mind, the idea of forging an alliance with her brother far more appealing than a marriage to a stranger.

Her hand hesitated over the door, but the tinkling laughter of a young girl from within spurred her forward. Without conscious thought, Rhaenyra pushed the door open.

Stepping into the room, she found her brother and Helaena sprawled on the bed with a chessboard between them.

"Rhaenyra, you've come?" Rhaegar greeted warmly, inviting her to join them in their game.

Closing the door behind her, Rhaenyra crossed the room to sit beside Helaena, gently stroking her sister's head. "Since when have you two become so close?" she wondered aloud.

Helaena responded with a silent but affectionate smile, her innocent eyes meeting Rhaenyra's gaze.

Returning the smile, Rhaenyra felt a sense of warmth towards her sister, finding solace in her simplicity compared to her brother's complexities.

Rhaegar, noticing her presence, explained, "Helaena seeks refuge from Aegon's bullying, so I've allowed her to join me and play with her toys whenever she likes." He gestured towards a pile of toys nearby, indicating their purpose.

Surprised by the revelation, Rhaenyra nodded, having previously mistaken the toys as Rhaegar's own possessions.

As the evening unfolded, Rhaenyra chose not to dwell on her father's offer, instead focusing on guiding Helaena through their chess game.

Turning to her brother, she inquired about his well-being. Rhaegar's response was positive, his mood buoyant as he reassured her about his healing wound.

"The Grand Maester mentioned something intriguing," Rhaegar continued, excitement creeping into his tone. "He believes I possess a unique physique, one that could potentially make me a formidable warrior in the future."

Rhaenyra listened intently, her thoughts drifting briefly to the events of the day.

Silently pondering her father's encounter with Syrio, she opted not to broach the subject with her brother, allowing him the freedom to form his own opinions about the enigmatic swordsman.

Their conversation then shifted to the recent incident at the Dragon's Pit.

Rhaegar: "Has there been any progress regarding the Dragon's Pit?"

Rhaenyra: "Yes, Maester Bass, the one who secretly switched the shackles, was apprehended. Father sentenced him to either have his hands severed or don the black robes and head to the Wall."

Rhaegar: "There are indeed rotten apples among the maesters from Oldtown. Such individuals deserve a public execution; such punishment is far too lenient."

"I proposed harsher punishment to father, but he dismissed it," Rhaenyra said with a helpless shrug.

Rhaegar gave her a sympathetic look and said no more.

He understood that his sister's life was not without its difficulties, despite her noble status as the heir. Her suggestions often fell on deaf ears.

Rhaegar's thoughts then turned to Dreamfyre, the light blue dragon, and he asked earnestly, "How is Dreamfyre faring? Have the chains been removed?"

"Don't worry, father ordered the removal of all chains within the Dragon's Pit, creating separate areas to allow the dragons more freedom of movement," Rhaenyra assured him.

She shared his sentiment, not wanting any of the dragons to suffer in captivity. Creating separate spaces for them seemed like the right decision.

Rhaegar breathed a sigh of relief, "Dreamfyre has endured captivity for decades. I sincerely hope it finds a new rider soon and takes to the skies once more."

After witnessing his eldest son's recent recklessness, Viserys made the decision to retreat with his family to Dragonstone Island for a period of respite. The Small Council reached a consensus that it was time to select newborn dragons for Rhaegar and Aegon to bond with.

On Dragonstone Island, two suitable young dragons awaited, perfectly suited for each of the brothers to form a connection with.

With this plan set in motion, Rhaegar relinquished the idea of taming Dreamfyre and eagerly anticipated the adventures that awaited them on Dragonstone.

Observing her sentimental brother, Rhaenyra smiled knowingly, her tone cool as she remarked, "Should father decide to arrange a marriage for you, what will you do?"

Rhaegar's hand, paused mid-play on the chessboard, furrowed his brow in contemplation. "If it becomes necessary, I am prepared to shoulder my fair share of responsibility."

Though still young, much of his understanding came from the pages of books. Throughout the annals of Targaryen history, both men and women had been bound by marriage, save for a few rare exceptions.

Aegon the Conqueror himself had taken two wives: Visenya out of duty, and Rhaenys out of desire.

Subsequent monarchs had either wed daughters of influential houses or kept to the family line through intermarriage.

Even his own father, Viserys, and uncle Daemon were wed to noblewomen from the Vale to ensure loyalty among supporters of the crown.

Given this tradition, Rhaegar saw little chance of evading the fate of marriage. His only hope was to wed a woman of pleasing appearance and gentle demeanor within the confines of propriety; to aspire for more would be folly.

Hearing her brother's response, Rhaenyra lowered her gaze, lapsing into silence.

She understood all too well that Rhaegar spoke truth.

Perhaps, she mused, she had been too whimsical, and now must bear the weight of responsibility upon her own shoulders.

After a prolonged moment, Rhaenyra smiled once more. After exchanging a few more words with Rhaegar, she bid him farewell and departed.

Alone in the room, Rhaegar stared at the closed door, rendered speechless by his sister's visit.

He surmised the reason for Rhaenyra's nocturnal visit—it was likely prompted by their father's insistence on her betrothal, seeking solace in his company.

But Rhaegar could not offer Rhaenyra the reassurance she sought.

To speak hollow words simply to placate her desires would lead to consequences beyond measure.

Wearing a crown was not about asserting dominance; it was about shining brightly under its weight for all to see.