

G.O Thrones 331

Chapter 331: Rhaenyra's Special Status

Rhaegar's eyes twinkled as he instructed, "Take good care of it. I've recently acquired an ancient book about dragons. I'll study it and discuss it with the maesters."

The ancient tome had been acquired by Syrio at a high price, traded by an orphan whose father had explored the Smoking Sea.

"Can you heal it?" Rhaena's eyes widened with hope as she cradled the young dragon.

Rhaegar made a thoughtful gesture and smiled, "Perhaps."

After settling the twins, Rhaegar glanced over to see Rhaenyra finishing a piece of pie and tilting her head back to gulp down some wine.

Rhaegar's heart clenched, but he forced a smile. "Well, Rhaenyra and I have something to discuss. You two take the young dragons and go play outside."

"Okay," the twins said in unison and obediently ran out the door.

Once they left, Rhaegar straightened and sighed, his frown deepening as he turned to Rhaenyra.

Rhaenyra, oblivious to his concern, selected another piece of dessert and fed it to herself, her mouth too small to accommodate the whole treat, leaving a smear of cream at the corners of her lips.

Even so, she seemed content, far from her usual demure self.

Rhaegar sat beside her, feeling a mix of frustration and concern. "Rhaenyra, Alicent asked you to entertain the guests. Would you like to get some fresh air?"

"Alicent can handle it alone," Rhaenyra replied, unmoved.

Rhaegar took a deep breath and waved to Sara, the young girl standing silently nearby. "Call Maester Orwyle, please."

Sara nodded and left the room.

Rhaenyra's behavior had changed dramatically recently. Her appetite had increased, she was listless, and her temper had become unpredictable. Although she had always enjoyed sweets and had a fiery temper, the change was now too pronounced. Her mouth was either chewing on delicacies or spewing curses.

As they spoke, Rhaenyra finished her dessert in a few bites and reached for a piece of strawberry pudding.

Rhaegar noticed the stack of five or six porcelain plates around her. Gripping her wrist gently but firmly, he said, "Rhaenyra, you've already eaten a lot of sweets. You'll make yourself sick if you continue."

She used to eat three meals a day with an occasional late-night snack, and one or two bites of sweets were enough. Now, she was consuming an alarming amount, with no regard for meals, eating what would have been a day's worth in the past.

Disturbed from her indulgence, Rhaenyra's eyes filled with irritation. She glanced at his hand on her wrist, frowning in dissatisfaction. "I'm hungry."

"You're not hungry; you're craving," Rhaegar corrected her, pointing to her small belly under the silk nightgown. "If you keep this up, you'll ruin your figure."

Once flat and smooth, her belly was beginning to show signs of excess.

"Rhaegar, you dislike me!" Rhaenyra's eyes widened, and she played dirty.

Pah!

While Rhaegar wasn't paying attention, Rhaenyra grabbed a piece of cream and slapped it onto his face, smearing it with a look of defiance.

"Rhaenyra, you're not a child anymore," Rhaegar scolded, leaning back to avoid her mischievous hand, now covered in cream.

Creak-

The door to the room opened, revealing Sara standing outside with Maester Orwyle. Rhaegar glanced over and noticed a voluptuous figure in a red robe beyond the two.

Splat

Rhaenyra, pouting, grabbed a piece of cake and slapped it onto Rhaegar's chest. Exasperated, he took a cloak from beside the bed, covered Rhaenyra, and straightened her loose nightgown.

"Come in," he said, once everything was in order.

Orwyle entered, carrying a small satchel. Rhaegar wiped the cream from his lapel and said gravely, "You know the princess's condition. Please check her thoroughly."

He suspected that Rhaenyra was either ill or had been upset in some way. Her face was flushed, her eyes misty with tears, and she bit her lower lip. "I'm not sick," she insisted, her earlier anger giving way to tears.

Feeling a pang of sympathy, Rhaegar gently embraced her. "Let the maester check you. We all want to make sure you're okay, right?"

Rhaenyra shook her head, burying her face in his arms, sobbing softly, a stark contrast to her usual bright and domineering self. She seemed like a small, aggrieved girl.

Rhaegar kissed her forehead and signaled Orwyle to proceed quickly. With Rhaegar's support, Orwyle had risen to the position of Grand Maester, sitting on the Small Council, making him a trusted ally.

Orwyle's examination was thorough and efficient. Finally, he concluded, "The princess is very healthy. It seems that insomnia and dreams may be causing her distress."

"Is that all?" Rhaegar asked, surprised.

"Not a single problem," Orwyle confirmed.

A sudden thought struck Rhaegar. "Could it be... something else?" he asked, eyeing Rhaenyra's stomach expectantly.

Orwyle shook his head. "Prince, the princess shows no signs of pregnancy right now."

With limited means of detection, the only option was to wait. Disappointed, Rhaegar sighed. "Thank you, Maester. You may retire."

Orwyle, perceptive as always, silently exited the room.

As he passed by, the red priestess standing guard outside spoke politely, "Prince, why don't you let me take a look?"

Rhaegar glanced at her and flatly refused, "Stay away from Rhaenyra or be immediately deported back to Volantis."

Despite the friendship he had built with the temple of R'hllor, he heartily loathed and rejected red priestess. He would never consent to any red priestess being near Rhaenyra at this moment.

The red priestess was not annoyed. She surveyed the siblings calmly and whispered, "A true dragon will usually draw the sustenance it needs."

"What are you muttering about?" Rhaegar snapped, narrowing his eyes.

"Nothing."

Leaning on the doorframe, the red priestess said disparagingly, "I've examined the sanctuary inside the castle. Those two priests of the Faith of the Seven are still clamoring for a bronze statue to be cast for the Holy Mother. Are you really not considering converting to the R'hllor Faith?"

"No! Never. At least not now. You can leave."

Rhaegar feigned anger and issued an expulsion order. The Faith of the Seven had been rooted in Westeros for a long time, and they had reached an agreement with him with great difficulty, so how could he arbitrarily jeopardize it unless there was a need and enough benefits?

The red priestess knew she did not have enough leverage and left resentfully.

Sara, understanding the situation, followed, closing the door behind her. For a moment, the room fell silent, leaving only the sounds of Rhaenyra's sobbing and Rhaegar's comforting words.

Rhaenyra wept silently, her head arching around in Rhaegar's arms as she tried to find a comfortable position to rest. She had been so anxious lately that she couldn't find a moment's peace.

After a while, she choked out, "Aren't you going to accompany the guests?"

Rhaegar slowly smoothed her messy hair and said seriously, "Let the guests go to hell. It's enough for me to stay with you."

He didn't understand why Rhaenyra was like this, but he knew she was upset and needed him by her side.

"You are the heir. You should go out." Rhaenyra tightened her arms around his waist, her voice firm but her grip revealing her true feelings.

Rhaegar saw through her small mind and asked softly, "Rhaenyra, what's wrong?"

Rhaenyra looked up with teary eyes, glaring at him with a grudging look before shrinking back into his arms like an ostrich.

After a few moments, Rhaegar heard her muttering, "Father favored you even before you were born, and even after you were born in a coma, you were still the center of his attention..."

Her voice trailed off as she continued, "Because you were a boy, you easily took my throne..."

She huffed again, "You're so good, smarter than me, and even I, who should hold a grudge, can't help but care for you..."

"Rhaegar, you were unfaithful to me. You owe me..."

As her voice gradually stopped, Rhaenyra fell asleep with a slightly furrowed brow against Rhaegar's chest.

After hearing her hidden complaints, Rhaegar tightened his embrace and touched his forehead to hers. At least now he knew what she was thinking.

If she felt better in her heart, Rhaegar's heart was more at ease.

After a moment of silence, Rhaegar murmured softly, "Until the tournament is over, I'll stay by your side and not go anywhere."

He gently picked her up and placed her on the bed to rest. He stared at her for a while, feeling drowsiness creep in.

At the last moment before closing his eyes, a familiar murmur reached his ears.

"I don't blame you..."

...

Unconsciously, a dream began to unfold.

The scene: a room in the Red Keep.

Rhaegar looked around, bewildered by the familiarity of the room. Where a bed should have been, there was a cradle.

Rhaegar approached the cradle and saw a sleeping baby swaddled inside.

"What are you doing?"

A familiar voice startled Rhaegar.

"Princess, it's time to feed the little prince."

"You can go. I'll handle it myself."

Rhaegar relaxed. It wasn't the people in the dream who had noticed him, but someone speaking outside the door.

Crunch

The door opened, and a delicate silver-haired girl entered, holding a bowl of warm goat's milk.

"Rhaenyra?" Rhaegar was surprised.

This Rhaenyra was around 8 or 9 years old, with a delicate and cute face, her purple eyes focused with a gaze beyond her years.

She moved closer to the cradle, a flash of disdain crossing her face as she looked down at the baby. “You took away Mother,” she muttered, reaching out hesitantly to pinch the baby’s nose.

Rhaegar watched in amazement. The baby was definitely him. Had he unknowingly been a victim of Rhaenyra’s childhood jealousy?

Unable to breathe through his nose, the baby woke up, his tiny hands groping clumsily. He couldn’t open his eyes due to congenital deficiencies and, even when he tried to cry, could only manage a faint whimper.

After struggling for a while, the baby grabbed Rhaenyra’s hand that was pinching his nose and licked it with his tiny tongue.

“Ugh!” Rhaenyra shivered in disgust and let go.

Breathing freely again, the baby gasped and clutched Rhaenyra’s hand, nibbling on it more vigorously.

Rhaenyra frowned at her helpless brother. Then, as if struck by a thought, she drew back her hand, now covered in saliva, and looked down at the baby arrogantly.

With a mischievous smile, she dipped her fingers into the goat’s milk and teased the baby by placing them near his mouth.

The baby eagerly babbled and sucked on her finger, clearly starving.

Amused, Rhaenyra continued to dip her finger into the goat’s milk and tease the baby, who sucked it down hungrily, oblivious to her antics.

In this way, the baby endured the mockery and finished the small bowl of goat’s milk. Exhausted, he fell back to sleep, snoring lightly.

Rhaenyra’s cheeks flushed as she lay by the cradle, occasionally poking the baby’s face, her earlier disdain replaced by curiosity and a hint of affection.

Rhaegar observed everything, a weight lifting from his heart.

Fortunately, he wouldn’t be murdered by his own sister.

It was also at this moment that Rhaegar coldly recalled some intimate details of his childhood.

Grinding his teeth, he muttered, “No wonder she’s always tormenting me!”

Chapter 332: The First Match of the Tourney

After three days of rest for the guests who had traveled from afar, the long-anticipated tourney was officially convened.

On the north shore of God’s Eye Lake, an oval white stone building stood. Built over several months, this martial arts arena was larger and more spacious than any other in the kingdom.

In the center of the arena was an eye-shaped open space for the knights to fight. The spectator stands on either side rose in terraced layers, reaching thirty feet in the air and holding up to thirty thousand people.

Early in the morning, nobles eager for the event left the gates of Harrenhal and rushed to the arena to secure their seats. The martial arts field quickly filled with a clamoring and vibrant crowd.

To one side of the arena was a separate, elevated area with a spacious platform that provided the best view. King Viserys, clad in black robes and wearing a golden crown, sat in the main seat.

Soon, Alicent and a group of royal advisors arrived and surrounded the king.

"This arena is impressive, quite magnificent," Viserys remarked, looking around and initiating conversation.

Otto agreed, "Indeed, it would be hard to find a better arena for fighting in all the Seven Kingdoms."

Viserys laughed, pleased with the magnificence of the arena. "You're right."

After some light conversation, Viserys looked around and asked, "Where are Rhaegar and Rhaenyra? They haven't arrived yet?"

The eldest son was the protagonist of the tournament, and being late would not look good.

"They should be here soon. I saw them in the Flowstone Yard this morning," Alicent replied hesitantly.

In a few moments, the platform was filled with people—royal advisers, lords and their families from all realms, and famous young talents from the Seven Kingdoms.

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Roar--

Abruptly, a loud and clear dragon roar resounded across the northern shore of God's Eye Lake, and a fierce wind carrying shadows enveloped the martial arts scene.

The noble ladies covered their skirts and looked up in alarm.

A huge dragon as black as charcoal soared over the turquoise-colored lake, its wings like dark clouds covering the sky, overlooking the beings below with cold indifference.

The pair of green vertical pupils as huge as copper bells, paired with the grayish, curved horns on the hideous dragon's head, was like an evil god.

Some people recognized the origin of the pitch-black dragon and let out cheers and shouts.

More nobles and knights of the kingdom had not yet seen Cannibal, and held their breath in silence.

Roar...

Another high-pitched dragon roar came, golden scales glistening and glowing in the sunlight as they soared together around the pitch-black dragon.

The two dragons slowly circled above the martial arts arena, the pitch black and golden yellow entangled with each other, like two dragons dancing together.

Roar-

Cannibal roared in a low voice, its huge body rotated on its flanks for a week without losing its flexibility, and a mouthful of ghostly green Dragonfire cut through the long white clouds.

Boom--

The dragonfire raised the temperature, and the Cannibal landed outside the high wall at the side of the martial arts arena, closing the black wings that could stir up the wind with a light tap.

As his feet hit the ground, the black scales that covered the dragon's spine remained above the white stone walls, revealing the silver-haired figure in the saddle.

Syrax circled alone and flew lightly to the Cannibal, its feet stepping right on the platform at the top of the high wall.

With all eyes on him, Rhaegar stepped off the dragon's back and looked over the platform at Rhaenyra on Syrax's back.

For today's match, Rhaegar was dressed in a black dragon scale armor, scarlet cloak on his shoulders, and his long silver-gold hair was naturally draped.

Rhaenyra was ably dressed, a corseted black suit with a streamlined skirt, her long hair braided into a braid that hung behind her head.

"How are you today?" Rhaegar gently hugged down Rhaenyra, asking as if flirting.

The corner of Rhaenyra's lips sketched a smile, confidently saying, "Fine."

After three days of comfort, her irritable mind was finally relieved.

The siblings walked arm in arm down the top platform, following the white steps of the audience platform straight to the observation deck where their father stood.

Ignoring the various looks from both sides, Rhaegar sniffed at Rhaenyra's hair and smiled, "It's working well."

"This stuff will give you a few good nights sleep."

Rhaenyra crossed her eyes at him, her white palms slapping the pockets of her robes.

To calm Rhaenyra's spirits, Rhaegar has contributed the long-cherished powder of the Soul Restoring Orchid.

Sprinkle a little on your pillow before bed and you're guaranteed a fragrant night's sleep.

Rhaegar's dark circles have disappeared in large part due to the support of the scented powder.

...

On the viewing platform, the crowd was already seated. Viserys sat in the main seat, with Alicent and Otto to his left and right. Several royal advisers sat behind the king, chatting with the neighboring great nobles. To the right of Viserys, representing nobility, sat the Sea Snake Corlys and Rhaenys. Two rows of chairs split into two columns further ahead accommodated some noble ladies and their small gatherings.

"Father," Rhaegar greeted with a faint smile as he descended the steps.

Viserys looked disconcerted, seemingly angered over something, his grip on the wine cup so tight that beads of blood oozed from a cut on his palm.

Alicent held her husband's hand, concern in her voice, "Viserys, don't think about what's bothering you. The tournament is about to begin."

Viserys dissipated his anger, looking at his eldest son with a forced smile, "Sit down first, it will soon be your turn in the ring."

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow and retreated to his seat without a word. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that the Master of Whisperers, Tormund, was absent, indicating something had happened.

A light footstep rang out, accompanied by a breathtakingly soft and ethereal scent. Margaery, with exquisite makeup, walked in, carrying the hem of her red dress and swaying her light red curls.

"Prince, you look really handsome in your armor. I haven't seen a man more powerful than you in the Riverlands," Margaery said, offering her compliments with a slight smile.

Rhaegar smiled politely and joked, "Thank you for the compliment. I haven't seen a man more imposing than me in the Crownlands either."

Daemon, the notable exception, had been beaten by Rhaegar.

"Hee hee, I like your witty humor."

Margaery laughed lightly, taking advantage of Rhaegar's brief distraction to step forward. Standing on tiptoe, she wrapped her arms around his neck and planted two kisses on his cheeks.

Rhaegar instantly stiffened, pushing her away gently, his voice deep, "Lady Margaery, you are too enthusiastic."

He hastily wiped the lipstick marks from his cheeks, avoiding Rhaenyra's gaze entirely.

"Sorry, I just wanted to send a blessing before you went on," Margaery curtsied apologetically, her eyes hinting at girlish shyness.

Quite a few people noticed this exchange, casting curious glances. Viserys, especially, stared at Margaery in amazement, marveling at the boldness of young girls nowadays.

Rhaegar's entire body went numb, stiffening as he wiped off the lipstick marks. He had just managed to adjust Rhaenyra's mindset and didn't want to complicate things further with Margaery's bold display.

"Don't rub it off, it's quite pretty."

A small hand grasped his wrist, and Rhaenyra's voice whispered in his ear.

Rhaegar turned in surprise to see Rhaenyra smiling serenely, her gaze calm and assessing.

"Keep it," she said, glancing around before continuing, "don't let Miss Margaery down."

"Are you sure?" Rhaegar frowned, feeling a mix of confusion, curiosity and worry.

"Of course."

Rhaenyra arched an eyebrow and turned to Margaery, whispering, "Thank you for the gift, showing me the passion of a Highgarden Rose."

"You're welcome. No one can resist the beauty of a Highgarden Rose," Margaery replied, her red lips curling into a smile. "Prince, you've rarely gone out lately, so you might not know the current situation."

She winked playfully at Rhaegar, subtly pointing with a finger hidden under her cuff.

Rhaegar followed her gaze suspiciously to the back row of seats where several familiar figures gathered. Among them were Ormund Hightower, Jason Lannister, the Lord of Swann, and the Lord of Dondarrion from Blackhaven.

Aegon sat alone in a corner, flanked by two of Old Lord Tully's wastrel sons and two bastards from House Baratheon. Aegon looked annoyed as the Tully sons babbled around him, while the Baratheon bastards were expressionless, occasionally glancing down at the four sisters with Aemond and Cassandra.

At first glance, nothing seemed amiss, but Rhaegar sensed something different.

"Thank you, Lady Margaery," he said, managing a smile.

"You're welcome. Highgarden will always be your solid support," Margaery replied with a curtsy before leaving.

Rhaenyra watched her return to her seat, then took Rhaegar's hand and sat across from the Sea Snake couple. "No wiping off the lipstick until the sun rises tomorrow," she said faintly.

Rhaegar:

...

After the brief exchange, the tournament officially commenced.

King Viserys opened with a rousing speech that ignited the audience's excitement, elevating the atmosphere to a fever pitch.

The first match was announced by an obese middle-aged referee dressed in lavish red silk. He called the competitors to the field with grandiose flair.

Two knights, clad in gleaming armor, rode in on one black and one white warhorse, greeting the cheering crowd with wooden lances held high.

The referee raised his scepter and proclaimed, "First match! Welcome Lord Cregan of House Stark from the North and the Commander of the Stepstones Islands, Ser Criston Cole!"

Rhaegar perked up, adjusting his position for a better view.

In the arena, Cregan Stark, clad in worn plate armor marked by numerous scratches, rode a pitch-black warhorse. Across from him, Ser Criston Cole, donning silver-gray plate armor, lifted his visor to reveal a confident, handsome face.

The tournament traditionally included three main events: knight duels, archery, and group battles. To kick things off, a duel between two formidable knights served as the warm-up.

The gong sounded, signaling the start of the match. The knights took their positions on either side of a wooden barrier, raising their lances in readiness.

"Phew..."

The warhorses stepped forward simultaneously, their riders poised for the charge.

Cregan leaned forward, his black eyes locked onto his opponent, his breathing steady and focused.

The warhorses thundered towards each other, closing the distance rapidly.

Halfway through the charge, black and white clashed.

Crack!

A lance splintered upon impact, wood fragments scattering through the air, accompanied by the distressed neighing of the warhorses.

Chapter 333: Rhaegar's Turn

The entire crowd gasped in surprise, their attention riveted on the action.

Cole, astride his white horse, continued his charge. His shield, an orange base dotted with black stars, shattered upon impact, and the tip of his wooden lance splintered.

Behind him, the pitch-black warhorse reared and neighed, galloping recklessly. Cregan, still on its back, fell against the isolation fence, being dragged forward by his steed. His shield, emblazoned with an Direwolfs head, remained intact, but his wooden lance was split in two, and a dent marred his shoulder armor.

Despite this, Cregan managed to stay mounted, showing he still had the strength to fight.

On the viewing platform, Rhaegar smiled, watching with keen interest. Earlier, in the clash between the two horses, the young and aggressive Cregan had aimed for Cole's abdomen, hoping for a quick victory. Cole, with his seasoned experience, focused on defense, countering by targeting Cregan's shoulder armor and nearly unseating him.

Rhaenyra glanced at Rhaegar, twisting the ring on her finger, and murmured, "Cole is in good form, as always, as valiant as ever."

Rhaegar, catching her words, raised an eyebrow. "Cole still wants to return to his position at court. You're leaving him a way back."

"Hmph," Rhaenyra huffed, picking up a dessert from the table and bringing it to her lips.

Rhaegar chuckled, reaching out to hold her hand as they continued to watch the match. Cole had once been Rhaenyra's Kingsguard, and it was no secret that she admired him when she was younger. However, since Rhaegar had become the Heir, she had grown distant from Cole.

When Harrold, the previous captain of the Kingsguard, died, Cole elected a the commander and shifted his allegiance to their father.

Still, Rhaegar didn't let jealousy cloud his judgment.

In the arena, Cregan braced himself against the railing, stabilizing his restless warhorse with a firm grip on the reins. His composure and strategy were impressive, rivaling those of the best knights.

Dangang...

The referee struck the gong again, signaling the start of the second charge.

The squires provided fresh wooden lances and shields. Cregan and Cole locked eyes, their determination palpable.

Cole maintained his strategy, shielding himself with one hand while aiming his lance at Cregan's breastplate. Cregan, his eyes cold and focused, rode low, his lance poised.

Ka-ching--

The horses thundered past each other, both knights lurching outward, their lances splintering on impact.

"What a brave young man!" Viserys, seated in the main seat, stood and applauded.

Otto, slightly affected, joined in the praise: "The Starks of the North have never lacked courage."

The entire audience had witnessed the intense clash. Cregan, aware of his lack of experience, kept his upper body close to his horse, his lance aimed squarely at Cole's shield. Cole, avoiding a direct hit, swung his lance to deflect Cregan's and prevent himself from being taken down.

Another round passed, and both knights managed to stay on horseback, their skill and bravery evident in every move.

"Phew~~"

The charge became more intense. The squire had just handed over two new lances, and the two knights, having steadied themselves, clashed again.

Ka-chow-

Different reactions, but the same result: this time, it was Cole's lance that shattered. The teenage Stark was indeed powerful, his strength just slightly surpassing Cole's.

Boom Boom Boom...

They exchanged blows several more times, both remaining undefeated at the cost of broken lances.

Rhaegar couldn't help but laugh, sharing his joy with Rhaenyra. "If they keep this up, Harrenhal's stockpile of lances will run out."

"Will the vault under the Widow's Tower be emptied?" Rhaenyra teased, nibbling on a reddish tidbit and feigning innocence.

Rhaegar's smile faltered, and he replied, somewhat irritated, "It's not empty. There's still a third left."

He had raided the renowned Rogare Bank, where the gold was enough to last for decades, even after raising three thousand Fearless. The caveat was avoiding further costly ventures like building Harrenhal, expanding the Mushroom Set Caravan, and constructing the Dragon Nest.

As they chatted, the duel in the arena neared its climax. Cregan and Cole had clashed eight times, breaking several lances and shields, making for a surprisingly fierce contest.

The audience was electrified, faces flushed with excitement as they cheered for their favored contestants.

The ninth charge commenced. Cregan, sweat dripping from his brow beneath his helmet, clamped his horse's belly and panted heavily. His youth and undeveloped physique began to show. Cole, equally sweaty, fixed his gaze on Cregan, gritting his teeth as he urged his horse forward.

Cole had no desire to remain on the desolate Bloodstone Island; he aimed to return to King's Landing through this tournament. The Small Council, with Rhaegar's approval, had decided to select a Kingsguard from the competition, a fact well known throughout the Seven Kingdoms.

Cole charged for this purpose.

Black and white horses thundered towards each other, white and black intertwining.

Bang--

Cregan, clad in old plate armor, was struck in the lower ribs and toppled from his horse, hitting the ground hard.

Cole's lance had found its mark, and he rode his white horse swiftly to the finish line.

"Well done!"

"Well played..."

The arena erupted in cheers, the atmosphere chaotic like a market in Flea Bottom.

The Unsullied, clad in black armor, rushed into the arena with squires and maesters. Confirming that Cregan's injuries were not severe, they lifted him onto a stretcher and carried him away.

Cole lifted his face armor, spreading his arms wide in exhilaration, basking in the audience's applause.

He cast a sideways glance towards the King and Rhaenyra on the high platform. Unfortunately, Viserys was too busy celebrating with Otto, grinning as if he'd won a bet.

Rhaenyra, her figure partially obscured by Rhaegar in his black armor, sipped her tea in apparent boredom.

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The preliminaries ended, and the main event began.

Rhaegar stood up, lowering his head to plant a light kiss on the back of Rhaenyra's hand. With a gentle smile, he asked, "No words of encouragement?"

Rhaenyra wrapped her arms around his neck, her eyes warm and sincere. "Come back safe, no injuries."

Rhaegar grinned, giving her a tight hug. "Someone who can hurt me hasn't been born yet."

He then made his way off the high platform.

A few moments later, Rhaegar mounted a gleaming silver horse and entered the martial arts arena, holding a lance and shield.

The rotund referee struck the gong, his voice booming with excitement. "Let's celebrate the thrilling conclusion of the last duel and welcome Prince Rhaegar, Breaker of Shackles, Ruin Maker, and Heir to the Iron Throne of House Targaryen!"

Rhaegar scanned the crowd, holding his helmet in one hand and raising his lance high with the other. The audience responded with thunderous applause, noble ladies leaning over the parapet, cheering and waving garlands.

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It was customary for a knight to receive a garland from a lady upon entering the arena. If victorious, the knight would receive a crown of flowers, the crown of love and beauty, to present to his chosen lady.

As the excitement built, the referee, his face flushed, announced, "Prince Rhaegar is about to choose his first opponent!"

A line of mounted knights, clad in armor, awaited their turn. Rhaegar donned his dragon head helmet and rode along the row of knights. Unable to see their faces, he identified them by the crests on their shields.

He scanned the crests: bow hunters, roaring lions, green towers, blue, green, and red stripes...

Finally, he focused on a burly knight with a thick waist and a shield bearing the stag of House Baratheon.

The reason was simple: House Baratheon had no male heirs; this knight was likely one of their bastards. Rhaegar decided to teach him a lesson for this act of deception.

"Ahem ..."

As soon as Rhaegar raised his lance, the silver-armored knight with a tricolor-striped shield let out a muffled cough. The gray-blue eyes behind the faceplate stared coldly at him.

Rhaegar barely glanced at him before riding up to the knight. One look at the tricolor crest, and he recognized him as Harwin Strong, the eldest son of Lyonel and current commander of the City Watch.

"Breakbones" Harwin Strong.

Rhaegar pointed the tip of his lance at him and said coolly, "You want to be my opponent?"

"With honor!" Harwin's voice was solemn and cold.

Rhaegar was surprised, not understanding Harwin's hostility, but accepted readily, "So be it."

The referee cheered excitedly, "For the first round, Prince Rhaegar Targaryen has chosen Harwin 'Breakbones' Strong, the eldest son of the King's Hand!"

On the high platform, Viserys smiled and turned to Lyonel. The meaning was clear: watch how my son beats up yours.

Lyonel sat with his head bowed, his face sullen, saying nothing.

On the martial arts field, the contestants prepared themselves. Rhaegar rode around the fence to the open space below the high platform. As he passed a corner, he caught a glimpse of Tormund dressed in black and white robes. Tormund's eyes were deep, indicating something about Harwin.

Rhaegar was suspicious, speculating what might have happened.

He rode to the bottom of the high platform, looking up at Rhaenyra standing proudly. "Where is my garland?" he asked with a smile. "Quickly, bestow the blessing of invincibility in battle."

Rhaenyra gave him a playful look. "Wait, I'll fetch it."

Rhaegar waited patiently, holding his wooden lance high, waiting for the garland.

Meanwhile, in the ladies' seats, Jeyne, Margaery, and three of the Four Storms' ladies watched him intently.

"Roar ..."

A sharp dragon roar rang out, and a light blue dragon shadow appeared over the arena. Rhaegar looked up to see a young girl with silver-gold curls riding Dreamfyre.

With Cannibal and Syrax having already made their appearance, Dreamfyre did not cause too much panic. The light blue wings flapped gracefully as the dragon landed on the top platform.

Helaena was stunningly dressed, with a red lining inside a long sleeveless black coat, matching black pants, and buckskin boots. She looked more like a valiant dragon rider than a spoiled princess.

"Brother, I've come to cheer you on."

Helaena climbed off the dragon's back, carrying a white wreath of flowers, and ran to the front with gusto.

Rhaegar cocked his head, maintaining his usual kind smile. Recently, he had been spending time with Rhaenyra and hadn't seen Helaena in a while. At first glance, her new look was almost unrecognizable.

Helaena had turned thirteen, and in the last six months of continuous sword practice, her height had skyrocketed, and her figure was developing into a young woman's.

Rhaegar lifted his lance a little and politely refused, "No way, this spot is reserved for Rhaenyra."

Rhaenyra arrived just in time, holding a red wreath in her hand. She laughed softly, "Come here."

Chapter 334: Vhagar and the Blood Wym

Rhaegar raised his chin and adjusted his wooden lance, ready for the next challenge.

"Cheer for me," he said, his voice confident.

Rhaenyra smiled and sauntered down to the edge of the arena, tossing a red garland with precision. It landed perfectly on the shaft of Rhaegar's lance, sliding down to rest at its base.

Helaena, watching from the parapet, pouted and slumped with disappointment. Noticing her sister's dejection, Rhaenyra picked up a white garland and threw it out again, her voice calm and reassuring. "That's double the encouragement. Don't let us down."

Helaena's eyes widened in surprise, her gaze darting between her brother and sister, a spark of hope rekindled.

Rhaegar retrieved his lance and smiled brightly. "I will not disappoint you."

He turned his horse and rode back to the end of the quarantine fence, preparing for the duel.

Rhaenyra beamed and took Helaena's hand as they walked to the front row and took their seats. They chose seats next to Jeyne, the tension and excitement palpable.

After weeks of indulging in her temper, Rhaenyra's state of mind had changed. She felt more open, her spirit lifted by Rhaegar's presence. His unwavering support had given her strength and confidence.

...

The duel was about to begin on the martial arts field.

Danglang--

Amidst the crowd's anticipation, the obese referee struck the gong, and the two warhorses charged forward.

With the thunderous pounding of hooves, drummers around the arena matched their rhythm to the blaring trumpets, elevating the excitement to a fever pitch.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with focus. His grip on the lance was steady, his body leaned forward as his horse galloped ahead.

Harwin, clad in iron armor, his face partially obscured by his helm, radiated a menacing aura.

In the next moment, the black armor and silver armor clashed. Each knight aimed for the other's chest, thrusting their long lances.

Bang...

Rhaegar's shield shattered, the force shaking him violently, yet he maintained his balance and rode on to the finish line.

Harwin, unable to land a hit, hastily raised his shield to block Rhaegar's lance. The impact nearly unseated him. His shield splintered, and his left arm took a hit, but his armor held firm.

Danglang...

The referee struck the gong again, signaling the start of the second charge.

Rhaegar turned his horse, casually grabbing a new shield emblazoned with the three-headed red dragon's emblem from an attendant. He leveled his lance and charged.

Though he was a dragon rider, his skills in horseback riding and jousting were only just above average.

"Hyah!!!"

Harwin roared, discarding his shield, and spurred his warhorse into a rapid turn, charging with reckless abandon.

From the high platform, Viserys watched with wide eyes, glancing back at Lyonel in surprise.

Not only was this tournament a significant event for his eldest son's adulthood, but Harwin's behavior seemed off.

Lyonel's brows furrowed with concern, but he could do nothing.

Back in the arena, the clash continued.

The black and silver armors collided like two meteors. Rhaegar extended his lance, aiming for Harwin's breastplate, his shield covering his body.

"Go down!"

Harwin bellowed, leaving himself open as he jabbed his lance downward, aiming to trip Rhaegar's horse.

Startled, Rhaegar abandoned his attack, pulling on the reins.

"Phew~~"

The silver warhorse reared, its front hooves lifting sharply, narrowly avoiding the blow.

Harwin turned back, disbelief etched on his face. He hadn't expected Rhaegar to evade such a sudden attack.

As the silver warhorse slowed, Rhaegar looked back, his eyes cold.

Playing dirty tricks, are we?" Rhaegar fumed inwardly, his anger flaring.

Tripping a horse's leg was a flagrant violation of the jousting competition rules. At high speeds, such a move could cause both rider and horse to crash disastrously, leading to serious injuries.

On the high platform, Viserys' face contorted with rage as he slammed his hand down on the table. Daring to use such underhanded tactics against the Heir was bold and presumptuous.

If this fight ended badly, Harwin position as the City Watch commander would undoubtedly be in jeopardy.

In the front row, Rhaenyra stared in shock, her mouth agape. Harwin, once loyal and cautious, seemed to have lost all restraint. Why would he dare attack Rhaegar so brazenly at the tournament?

"Didn't he used to listen to you?" Helaena asked angrily, her face puffed in frustration.

"I haven't been out lately, so how would I know?" Rhaenyra replied, her voice tinged with irritation.

Nearby, Jeyne and other female spectators covered their mouths, gasping at the unfolding drama. The intensity of these two rounds surpassed the previous nine sparring matches and made hearts race.

Danglong--

The gong sounded for the third time.

"Hyah!" Rhaegar shouted, spurring his horse into a wild gallop, his lance held low.

Harwin charged simultaneously, eyes bloodshot, urging his horse on.

Within moments, the two knights were again on a collision course.

Harwin, his eyes fierce, aimed his lance at Rhaegar's chest, determined to take him down with a single blow. It was his signature move, the one that had earned him the title "Breakbones" in the past.

Rhaegar, his face cold as frost, charged straight at him.

Outside the arena, thousands of spectators watched breathlessly, hoping to see the Heir lose in the first round - an historic humiliation.

Inside the arena, black armor and white helmets clashed, and suddenly an accident occurred.

Harwin brought his lance down hard, determined to end the duel with a single blow. Unexpectedly, Rhaegar hooked his feet into the stirrups and leaned flat against his horse's back. With a deft twist, he cocked the tip of his lance.

A muffled thud echoed as a figure flew through the air.

Harwin, unable to react in time to Rhaegar's unexpected move, was struck in the left shoulder by the cocked lance, sending him flying seven or eight yards.

The crowd gasped in shock as Harwin hit the mud with a thud, his heavy armor absorbing much of the impact.

"Quickly, move forward!" someone shouted.

Squires and maesters rushed to Harwin, checking his condition and lifting him from the ground.

"Get away, I'm fine!"

Harwin shoved the guard aside and staggered to his feet, his eyes glazed over with pain. He raised his right hand and found it unharmed, but when he moved his left, a sharp pain shot through his arm.

"Hiss!"

Harwin clenched his teeth and inhaled sharply. He looked down at the deep dent in his left shoulder armor and felt as if his scapula and arm bones had cracked. When he saw Rhaegar standing tall on his horse in the distance, he shouted, "Give me a sword!"

A squire with a three-colored striped mark on his chest hurriedly handed him a hand-and-a-half sword. The obese referee struck the gong and announced, "Harwin Strong wishes to continue the contest with weapons!"

Rhaegar rode gracefully on his white horse, his gaze menacing as he looked down upon the enraged Harwin. He had shown mercy by aiming his previous blow away from Harwin's throat or head.

"Whatever the reason, this defiance must be quelled!"

Dismounting gracefully, Rhaegar removed his helm and waved to his squire. The squire quickly handed him his sword, Truefyre. Rhaegar glanced at it and then shouted, "Bring me the battleaxe!"

The Valyrian steel sword was formidable, but it couldn't easily penetrate heavy steel armor. He needed a weapon of more brute force.

The atmosphere on the high platform was tense. Lyman, squeezed into the back row, raised an eyebrow, handed a handful of gold dragons to a young servant with a roaring lion emblem, and whispered, "I'll wager fifteen gold dragons on Prince Rhaegar to win."

Viserys, overhearing the whisper, was tempted to bet on his eldest son as well, but his anger held him back.

Lyonel bowed his head and apologized, "Your Grace, Harwin he..."

"It's all right, as long as it's a fair match, everything's within reason," Viserys interrupted, trying to control his anger. His words emphasized that fairness was paramount, no dirty tricks allowed.

The arena fell silent as all eyes returned to the field.

Rhaegar dropped his shield and lance, now wielding a half-man-sized cold iron battleaxe in his right hand, the two garlands still on his left wrist.

"Ah!!!" Harwin roared, charging with his sword.

Rhaegar's lips curled into a cold smile. He deftly twirled the battle-axe, bent his knee, and slashed at Harwin's leg.

Dang!

The blade bit into Harwin's steel leg armor, drawing blood. Harwin screamed in agony, cold sweat pouring down his face. His injured leg gave way and he fell to one knee, his hand propping him up with the half-sword.

Rhaegar's eyes were icy as he yanked the battle-axe free with a harsh crack, then swung it at Harwin's exposed back armor. Though not a master of horsemanship, Rhaegar was unparalleled in close combat.

Danglang!

The axe blade struck deep again, cutting a groove in Harwin's heavy armor and scraping out shards as Rhaegar yanked it free. The impact rattled Harwin's spine, and despite his armor, he couldn't withstand the internal shock. A mouthful of blood spurted from his lips as he collapsed face-first into the dirt.

Rhaegar kicked him over and brought the cold axe blade down on Harwin's chest. "Admit defeat!" he demanded coldly.

"Bah!" Harwin spat bloody foam, his eyes filled with stubborn defiance.

"Well done," Rhaegar sneered. He raised the battle-axe and brought it down hard on Harwin's chest armor.

Harwin grunted, his face turning red as blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. Before the referee could intervene, Rhaegar pulled the axe free and swung it again at Harwin's already injured leg.

****Ka-ching..**

The axe bit into unprotected flesh and bone with a sickening crack, eliciting a scream from Harwin as cold sweat poured down his face.

"No, no, no, you win, prince!" the obese referee cried in panic, signaling the attendants to stop Rhaegar.

Several attendants rushed forward, but Rhaegar threw aside his bloodstained battleaxe and gasped, "No need to stop me, I know how to restrain myself."

Despite his assurance, Harwin's broken collarbone and leg would require years of healing and recovery under a maester's care.

Ignoring the squire and maester tending to the unconscious Harwin, Rhaegar mounted his white horse with the intention of riding away. Harwin's hostility seemed unnatural, and he had to consult Tormund about it.

After a tense moment, the crowd erupted in applause, cheering the victorious Heir. The sight of Rhaegar wielding his battleaxe with unstoppable power was awe-inspiring.

"Roar..."

Amid the cheers, a low dragon roar echoed from the direction of God's Eye Lake. Rhaegar frowned and looked to the sky.

A scarlet behemoth broke through the clouds and swooped down on the martial arts field with a gust of wind. It had tall horns, a slender snake-like body, and broad red wings. This was the Blood Wyrms - Caraxes.

"Caraxes, land!" A commanding voice came from the dragon's dark red scales. Caraxes stretched its neck and let out a sharp roar, descending slowly.

"Roar!"

Another dragon roar, heavy as thunder, shook the sky. The thin clouds parted to reveal a huge green dragon with cold amber eyes, scales thick as steel plates, and wings wide enough to darken the ground. It was Vhagar, one of the three first generation Targaryen dragons.

Vhagar circled the arena and descended, causing the nobles to shield their faces and skirts from the wind.

Boom!

Caraxes landed first, its hind feet touching down, followed by its broad wings supporting its weight. Daemon, clad in pitch-black dragon-printed armor with a crimson cloak, sat proudly on the dragon's back.

A month ago, Caraxes had healed from its injuries and was back in the skies with Daemon. The dragon's vertical pupils locked onto Rhaegar, who stood motionless, his silver hair catching the wind.

Rhaegar anticipated this. He pulled his scarlet cloak over his horse's head and tightened the reins to control it, remaining calm.

The roar subsided, and Caraxes' fierce eyes bore down on the unmoving Rhaegar. From the black iron saddle, Daemon's eyes narrowed as he regarded his nephew.

For a tense moment, uncle and nephew stared each other down, sparks seemingly flying between their gazes.

Chapter 335: Whose Dragon?

Suddenly.

Roar--

A deep, resonant dragon roar echoed like a bell from afar, its long tone filled with a powerful warning.

Daemon frowned, recognizing the roar as that of the wild dragon beast.

"Uncle, have you come to the tournament grounds to fight me as well?" Rhaegar spoke first, his tone calm and questioning. "Will it be on horseback or dragonback?"

Roar--

The words were barely out of his mouth when a massive, pitch-black dragon shadow sliced through the sky and landed with a thunderous crash on the eastern side of the arena. Cannibal stood rooted to the ground, its hideous dragon head peering down at Daemon and Caraxes. The dragon's massive black wings spread wide, casting a shadow across half the arena.

"Roar!!"

Another sharp roar echoed from the direction of God's Eye Lake. The sky stirred with thin clouds, revealing a light gray dragon shadow.

With the appearance of four dragons, the audience was electrified. Two behemoths threatened from the east and south, Blood Wyrms crept around the arena, and an unknown dragon lurked in the shadows. Many nobles, sweating profusely, felt the power of the Targaryens.

On the platform, Viserys glanced at Vhagar and straightened his clothes, maintaining his regal bearing. With the world's greatest dragon standing behind him, there was no room for indifference. He wondered why Vermithor hadn't come to defend his master like Cannibal had.

Laena dismounted her dragon and walked slowly, her slightly bulging belly showing. She wore a simple white dress with a red vest to show her pregnancy.

"Your Grace, Daemon and I were preparing a gift for you, which is why we are late," Laena said, curtsying with an apologetic tone.

Viserys managed a genuine smile. "Never mind, you are pregnant. Please, take a seat."

Laena touched her stomach and smiled as she took her place beside her mother, Rhaenys. Her presence eased the tension on the platform and lessened the fear of a confrontation between uncle and nephew.

Inside the martial arts arena, Daemon noted the presence of Cannibal and the hiding Grey Ghost and realized that his provocation had reached its end. Though reluctant, he knew it was inevitable. As much as he wanted to inherit his brother's throne, his brother's six children had broken his line of succession.

Rhaegar held his head up, his eyes gleaming with interest. He relished watching his uncle squirm, trapped and unable to leave the stage gracefully.

"Heh~"

Daemon, with a smug air, looked down condescendingly at his nephew, a mocking smile playing on his lips. "Rhaegar, since when did you start stepping out with makeup, are you seeking new female companions?"

Rhaegar's heart skipped a beat, fixating on the word "companions." He feared his roguish uncle was about to publicly expose him. Except for that one incident in Volantis, he had kept his interactions with the Daella sisters strictly proper. But he was clearly mistaken.

Daemon raised a hand, gesturing to both sides of his face, and continued his taunt, "The lipstick marks left before the tournament seem to have brought you good luck."

Rhaegar froze, recalling the lipstick marks Margaery had left on his cheeks.

Dang...

The obese referee appeared, banging a gong and shouting, "It seems our Prince Rhaegar is very popular with the ladies, with kisses aplenty!"

Rhaegar turned back, glaring at the red-faced man with thinly veiled irritation. This meddling fool was tarnishing his reputation.

"Hahaha~"

"....."

Daemon was the first to laugh, followed by many nobles who had heard the jest, resulting in a chorus of laughter. Rhaegar forced a smile, but his back teeth were clenched in frustration. Still, flirtation was a noble pastime, and he had nothing substantial to lose. He cast a wary glance at his uncle.

Both were Targaryen male heirs, and Daemon had indulged in far more scandals. There was an unspoken agreement to preserve each other's dignity.

However, Rhaegar noticed a mischievous glint in Daemon's eyes, sensing something amiss. Realizing the ruse, he cursed internally, "Bastard, deliberately misleading."

Daemon, pleased with himself, stood up from the saddle and climbed down the soft ladder to the dragon's back. His bond with Caraxes was strong, often forgoing the use of solid chains on the saddle. Clad in armor, he didn't bother fastening the chains this time.

Rhaegar dismounted, lifting the scarlet cloak from his horse's head and leading the white horse to the rest area. Despite the intimidating dragon roars, the horse remained steadfast, proving its worth.

As a squire took the reins, Rhaegar instructed, "Take good care of it. It won't be in the field for a while."

"Roar..."

Caraxes roared, flapping his wings and swiftly ascending, his long, snake-like scarlet body undulating gracefully. Ignoring the dragon, Rhaegar sought out Tormund.

Daemon brushed past him, heading toward the king with a triumphant smile.

...

In the Corner of the Arena

Rhaegar spread his arms wide as two Unsullied helped him remove his armor. Tormund stood behind him, his voice heavy with concern. "Prince, there have been many rumors circulating these past few days. I've found out two things, one good and one bad."

"Tell me the bad news first," Rhaegar said, his tone calm but curious as to how bad the bad news was.

"As for Storm's End, two bastards are trying to resurrect the family name and inherit House Baratheon," Tormund replied bluntly.

"Idiots," Rhaegar muttered, frowning. Restoring a family name to bastards was rare, and legitimizing them meant they had a legitimate claim to inheritance. Storm's End was currently under the control of Lady Elenda and Rhaenys, and there had been no mention of these bastards until now.

Tormund added, "These two bastards are not easy. They, or those behind them, have gained the support of many nobles in the Stormlands and even some in the Vale and the Riverlands."

"The House Dondarrion of Blackhaven and the House Swann of Stonehelm?" Rhaegar speculated.

"Those two houses are involved, but there's also an unorganized group behind them," Tormund continued. "Lord Jason of Casterly Rock has openly criticized Lady Jeyne's rule of the Vale and suggested that the king consider the bastards to inherit Storm's End."

He then named the two bastards.

"The elder one is Bronn Storm, bastard son of the late Lord Boremund, born of a dalliance with the daughter of the Lord of Dondarrion in Blackport. He served the Lord of Dondarrion, spent three years as an infantryman, and fought in the wars of the Dornish borderlands."

"The younger one is Arno Storm, bastard son of Lord Borros, born of a tryst with the nursemaid of the eldest son of Lord Swann. He apprenticed to a blacksmith before being taken as a knight's squire by Lord Swann and fought in the Second Battle of the Stepstones."

"No wonder the old men of Dondarrion and Swann support these bastards," Rhaegar sneered. "What about the good news?"

Tormund leaned in and whispered, "Larys Strong is dead."

Rhaegar was momentarily stunned, then remarked, "A month has passed; he should have died by now."

Larys had been exiled after his trial. Lyonel, worried about his second son dying prematurely, insisted on delaying the exile for two months in the Red Keep's dungeon before sending Larys, along with other prisoners, to the Night's Watch.

According to the slow travel speed of the prison wagon, they should be near the Goldroad by now. Rhaegar had anticipated that the harsh conditions of Goldroad would cause Larys to succumb to illness or an infection caused by midges.

Tormund shook his head. "Larys didn't die as we expected. He was burned to death by dragonfire."

Rhaegar looked shocked.

Tormund continued, "A few days ago, our scouts lost contact. I went to investigate and found a scorched area in the Goldroad with several charred corpses, including Larys."

"Larys was a wreck. Who would use a dragon to kill him?" Rhaegar wondered, thinking of potential culprits.

"Judging by the burn marks, the dragon was at least an adult, not one like Sunfyre, who just reached adulthood," Tormund explained. "I suspect it was the king's Vermithor."

Rhaegar fell silent, contemplating. The term "adult dragon" was broad, encompassing dragons over 60 years old, mature in both size and temperament. Among the adult dragons in the family were Dreamfyre, Sheepstealer, Blood Wyrn, and Red Queen, along with the three behemoths: Vhagar, Cannibal, and Vermithor.

After a moment, Rhaegar asked, "The other dragons are not suspicious?"

Tormund replied, "They are a little suspicious, but the king has the best reason to be the most suspicious one."

Helaena traveled daily on Dreamfyre, and Aemond often forced his fiancée to join him in riding his dragon for fun. After Caraxes was healed, Daemon and Laena rode their dragons beyond the Narrow Sea.

Initially, Viserys was fascinated with Vermithor, but after a month, he let the dragon roam freely in the Dragon's Nest on Isle of Faces, occasionally going out for a walk, one dragon at a time.

With the distance between Harrenhal and the Goldroad, Vermithor could make a round trip in half a day, stopping occasionally to unleash a puff of Dragonfire with ease.

Larys made a big mistake and caused a scandal involving the royal family. Viserys had good reason to intercept them halfway.

Rhaegar thought for a long time before cautiously asking, "Are you sure Larys is dead?"

A cunning man like Larys would rather cut off his leg than beg for his life, and Rhaegar wouldn't be sure until he saw the body.

Tormund thought for a moment and said in a low voice, "There is a charred corpse with a broken leg in the ashes, holding a golden ball in its broken hand.

Larys had a scepter that never left his side, with a golden cicada carved into the handle that melted into a golden ball.

Rhaegar's purple eyes flickered with suspicion. "But why do I feel like he's not dead?"

The more he thought about it, the stranger it seemed. He understood why Harwin had sought him out in the arena to fight for his life. Harwin probably believed that Rhaegar had lost his credibility and burned his brother, who should have lived. And Viserys was no fool; he wouldn't do something so obvious.

Tormund's eyes lowered, considering the oddity as well.

"Where do you think a sinister worm escaping death would go?" Rhaegar asked.

Tormund picked up the thread, "That depends on who rescued it."

Larys was close to Alicent, making Helaena, Aemond, and Aegon suspects. Daemon's whereabouts were uncertain, making him a suspect as well.

Rhaegar mused over several potential hiding places: Stone Hedge, the fiefdom of House Strong; Oldtown of the Hightowers; even Lord Jason's Casterly Rock, may have a hand in everything. But all these places had loopholes.

Stone Hedge was the least likely; Harwin wouldn't have gone mad and risked serious injury. The Hightowers and Lannisters would probably be protecting themselves, not harboring a criminal.

Rhaegar's eyes flickered to Tormund, and they spoke in unison, "The Red Keep!"

The most likely suspects to rescue Larys were Alicent and Otto, and the Red Keep was a logical place to hide.

After months of refinement, the Red Keep was already under Rhaegar's influence. They immediately sent men to search and arrest, ready to capture Larys.

Chapter 336: I Want to Sit in The Middle

The next day, the martial arts arena buzzed with even more excitement than before. The presence of Heir Rhaegar and the Ranger Prince Daemon drew many noble sons and daughters who usually had little interest in the tournament.

Unfortunately, the long-awaited knightly encounter between uncle and nephew had yet to take place.

The grandstand was filled with the kingdom's most powerful individuals. Viserys sat at the center, flanked by Alicent and Otto, with a cluster of royal advisors behind them. To the left and right of the lower tier were Sea Snake Corlys with Rhaenys, and Daemon with Laena. These elders occupied the seats closest to Viserys.

Rhaenyra and Rhaegar arrived later, naturally claiming seats in the front row, which offered a prime view and small tables with refreshments, fruits, and vegetables.

Rhaenyra was followed by her two young foster daughters, whom she patted gently on the head before sending them off with a smile, "Go play with your mother."

"Uh-huh," the twins nodded eagerly and dashed towards Laena with delight.

As Rhaegar was still choosing his seat, he noticed the person next to him disappearing in a blink. When he turned around, he was taken aback by an unexpected sight.

Rhaenyra, walking gracefully, was greeted warmly by Jeyne, who rose to meet her. The two women embraced, much to Rhaegar's surprise.

For a moment, Rhaegar was uncertain whether to approach or not. Unbeknownst to him, a silent rivalry played out between the two women.

As they hugged, Rhaenyra whispered in Jeyne's ear, "It's been a long time, Jeyne."

"Indeed it has. Yesterday, you didn't even greet me," Jeyne retorted, poking Rhaenyra's back.

Rhaenyra, not missing a beat, replied, "Shows you know you're in the wrong."

Jeyne smiled, "Rhaenyra, do you know that Rhaegar has still been in contact with me these past three years?"

"Of course," Rhaenyra replied, pulling back to look her friend in the eye. "If it weren't for my generosity, you wouldn't even get any leftovers."

Jeyne's smile faded, her expression changing to one of anger. "What do you mean, 'leftovers'? Just because we have small gatherings every few months doesn't mean it's anything bad."

Rhaenyra blinked and lowered her voice, "You're useless. I'd like to see you pregnant with a bastard child."

"Rhaenyra, you're insane!" Jeyne's face turned pale with rage.

Rhaenyra's words had struck a nerve. Jeyne's ambition, fueled by her success in ruling the Vale, had indeed led her to consider having a bastard child to secure her position. She hoped that Rhaegar, as heir, could restore the bastard's family name, even if the child was named Arryn.

Rhaenyra regained her composure quickly and studied Jeyne's reaction closely. The discomfort and anger in Jeyne's eyes confirmed her suspicions about her intentions. Rhaenyra was not entirely heartless, but she wanted to test her former friend's resolve and ambition.

Allowing Rhaegar to meet with Jeyne in private had been a calculated move to keep an eye on her. This little provocation was meant to draw out Jeyne's true intentions.

Realizing she had been played, Jeyne felt a mixture of embarrassment and frustration. She had been on edge, dreading the day she might actually meet Rhaenyra, and this encounter only added to her anxiety.

Rhaenyra sighed and smoothed her skirt before sitting down in a chair. She began to persuade, "Jeyne, please return to the Vale obediently. I can overlook this."

They were bound by blood and had been steadfast allies in the hardest of times.

Three years flashed through Rhaenyra's mind, her fighting spirit momentarily subdued as she avoided making a scene.

Jeyne's eyes flickered, sensing an underlying meaning in Rhaenyra's words, though it may have been a mistake.

In silence, they both took their seats, legs crossed, faces turned slightly away, eyes closed in silent contemplation.

Watching from afar, Rhaegar frowned immediately.

As Rhaenyra and Jeyne spoke, the noble ladies and young women in the front row, who were close to both, tactfully vacated their seats so as not to be drawn into a conflict.

Now there was an empty seat between Rhaenyra and Jeyne, as if presenting Rhaegar with a multiple choice question.

At the high table, Viserys noticed and watched in disbelief, silently sweating for his eldest son.

He had had his share of lovers in his youth... and more recently.

His first wife, Aemma Arryn, had received a rigorous upbringing in House Arryn, known for its strength and integrity. She had been compassionate, openly chastising Daemon for disrespecting his former wife, Lady Rhea, and helping starving orphans in Flea Bottom.

However, she has also been emotionally demanding, insisting that Viserys give up his habit of visiting brothels and wielding considerable influence within the Red Keep.

Rhaenyra, their eldest daughter, had inherited her mother's strength of character to perfection.

As far as Viserys knew, Rhaegar had not been involved with another woman besides Lady Jeyne of the Vale.

Rhaegar hesitated...

Meanwhile, the sharp-eyed Laena also noticed the situation, her gaze fixed intently on Rhaegar, wondering how her cousin would handle it.

Daemon, though he had many mistresses, had a more liberal family style and she usually avoided such entanglements when they didn't surface directly.

Sensing the tension, Rhaenys looked at her daughter with a hint of disdain.

Why had she chosen Daemon as her husband?

After many years of marriage to Corlys, she hadn't heard a whisper of him seeking a mistress.

A woman incapable of recognizing such things did not deserve a good marriage.

Rhaegar slowly made his way to his seat, his eyes darting back and forth between the two women, their eyes closed in contemplation.

When he reached his seat, he hesitated for a moment before settling down.

Rhaenyra and Jeyne opened their eyes almost simultaneously, each noticing the empty seat next to them.

Turning his head, Rhaegar sat down in the empty space between them, waved an attendant over and ordered, "Bring a table and some refreshments."

The servant quickly brought a moderately sized square table with an assortment of pastries delicately arranged on it.

Rhaegar poured three cups of tea, placing them strategically on either side of the table, and took the remaining cup for himself.

He couldn't solve the tension between the two women, but he could serve as a buffer.

The tea scalded his mouth, a physical reminder of his unexpectedly bold actions today.

Jeyne's eyes softened slightly as she lifted her teacup, blowing gently over the surface before taking a sip, quietly watching the unfolding drama.

Rhaenyra narrowed her eyes at Rhaegar, picked up her own teacup, and took a measured sip. She carefully picked up a piece of pastry, savoring each bite.

"The competition downstairs is quite fierce," Rhaenyra ventured, breaking the silence.

Rhaegar grasped Rhaenyra's hand gently, showing his favor to his sister.

"It's quite engaging," he replied softly.

Rhaenyra withdrew her hand and gave him a warning look.

If he was going to hold hands, he should do it openly and honestly, not sneakily trying to appease her and Jeyne at the same time.

Rhaenyra was used to winning, and extending her hand to Jeyne was more a gesture of superiority than anything else.

...

Time passed, and the tournament began.

Following yesterday's knights' duels, today's event featured a group tournament—a melee with multiple participants.

Danglang!

The referee's gong echoed across the battlefield as fifty armored knights stepped forward.

Most of them were lesser known knights who were struggling to assemble a complete set of armor, horse, and weapons. Many were also defeated competitors from yesterday's one-on-one duels.

From his elevated position in the stands, Rhaegar watched the competitors closely.

Among them were familiar faces like the Tullys—Elmo Tully and Edmure Tully.

The Old Lord Tully had previously announced that his two sons and grandson would fight a fair duel, with the winner earning the right to inherit Riverrun.

Yesterday, the less skilled Milov Tully was knocked off his horse in the first round. Today, the still-determined Edmure and Elmo faced the formidable Daemon, known for his horsemanship, and were defeated.

Thus, the Tullys had little success on the first day of the tournament.

Undaunted, Edmure and Elmo each gathered a group of followers to participate in the current melee tournament in hopes of making a comeback.

Two other notable figures stood out on the field:

Arryk, clad in silver armor and a white cloak and Cregan Stark, hailed from Winterfell. He had chosen to compete in the team event after being defeated by Cole in an earlier match.

Arryk had been sent by his father Viserys, at Rhaegar's repeated request, to aid the Tullys.

Old Tully, favoring his grandson Elmo, had agreed to relinquish thirty percent of Riverrun's profits and an additional share of the Mushroom Set's benefits in the upcoming year to secure Arryk's assistance.

Dangang!

The obese referee's gong sounded once more, signaling the start of the melee.

Poof!

As Elmo drew his sword, a sudden strike from behind pierced through a gap in his armor, plunging into his waist and near his eye.

"There's a traitor!" his followers cried out, swiftly turning on the assailant, cutting him down and shielding the pale-faced Elmo as he retreated to safety.

Edmure chuckled wildly, leading his followers in a relentless pursuit that drove his nephew Elmo to the edge in a swift exchange.

High in the stands, Rhaegar frowned deeply.

"I never expected rough Edmure to play such a cunning game so well," he muttered to himself.

"That one is Lord Borros' bastard son, Arno Storm," Jeyne interjected from the sidelines, pointing to a heavily armored knight on the other side of the arena.

Rhaegar followed her gesture, his gaze resting on the knight wielding a war hammer with a powerful grip.

"Why is he in the group tournament?" Rhaegar wondered aloud.

"Arno lacks skill in riding, so he's using the group tournament to make a name for himself," Jeyne explained softly.

Rhaegar nodded thoughtfully.

"Elmo won't last," Rhaenyra commented between bites of pastry.

Fighting back a smile, Rhaegar wiped a bit of cream from her mouth and turned his attention back to the melee.

On the field below, Edmure pressed his attack fiercely while Arryk joined the fray, rallying Elmo's followers against the attackers.

Suddenly, Arno, the bastard knight from across the field, charged forward, smashing Arryk's longsword aside with a thunderous blow from his hammer.

"Wow!" The crowd erupted in surprise as they saw the Kingsguard member disarmed.

Arryk quickly rolled aside, retrieved his longsword, and engaged the towering, heavily armored knight in a heated duel.

The melee intensified with flying strikes and desperate defenses, creating a chaotic spectacle.

Seeing that Arryk was outnumbered, the unopposed Cregan rushed in to help, wielding his massive sword to dispatch three enemies in quick succession.

As the melee drew to a close, the sounds of battle subsided, leaving only a handful of the original fifty standing.

Among them were Cregan, Arno, Arryk, Elmo, and Edmure.

Dangang!

The referee's gong signaled the end of the team competition.

"One out of ten, as usual," someone remarked.

Elmo was carried away on a stretcher by his squire while a Maester tended to his wounds, grateful that the armor had deflected the longsword from doing more serious damage.

Edmure, reeling from his defeat, returned with a grim expression, moving slowly with a bruised face, resigned to his loss.

Suddenly, a jet of black blood erupted from Edmure's mouth and he collapsed to the ground, twitching twice before lying still.

"Guard! Guard!" the referee shouted in alarm, calling for the Fearless soldiers to intervene.

When they turned Edmure over, it was obvious that he had been poisoned, causing a commotion among the crowd.

Rhaegar shot to his feet in disbelief, stunned that anyone would dare commit murder so brazenly.

Viserys, seated above, rose as well, whispering urgently to Otto to calm the restless crowd.

Chapter 337: Larys Ambushed

The unexpected death of Edmure, one of the candidates for the succession of Riverrun, caused quite a stir.

Both Rhaegar and Otto moved swiftly to maintain order. The Unsullied soldiers quickly took control of the situation, while the maester examined the body to determine the cause of death.

The result was conclusive: Edmure had been poisoned with a lethal toxin that acted instantly. The poison had come from the dagger he used when attacking his nephew, Elmo.

Setting aside the intricate details and motivations, the incident was officially declared a case of civil unrest within the Tully House, with Edmure held responsible for his own demise.

Opinions were sharply divided, but many nobles seemed content to watch the drama unfold.

With the situation under control, the tournament continued.

...

Harrenhal, Sanctuary.

Edmure's body lay in the hall, carefully handled by two Silent Sisters. Old Tully stood nearby, his clouded eyes flashing with sadness and numbness. He had hoped to prevent his heirs from killing each other, but fate had other plans.

In the background, Viserys, Rhaegar, and several other prominent figures had gathered. Alicent and Rhaenys were absent, choosing to remain in the tourney arena.

Rhaegar stood quietly, his mind replaying the events that led to Edmure's death. Another poisoning, carried out in a disturbingly familiar manner.

"Prince," Tormund called softly as he approached.

"Have you found the true culprit?" Rhaegar asked bluntly.

Tormund nodded. "Lord Tully's second son, Milov. He didn't take part in the Group Tournament, but he gave a dagger to his follower and had him support Edmure, hoping to profit from the chaos."

Rhaegar's gaze shifted to Milov, who was whispering to two priests in the Sanctuary. After a moment's thought, Rhaegar felt that the situation was more complex.

Old Tully was mediocre and incompetent, and his heirs were hardly capable of such a cunning plot.

"Any news from King's Landing?" Rhaegar asked, glancing sideways at Tormund.

Tormund shook his head. "The raven is on its way; it's being investigated."

Rhaegar's eyes narrowed. "Search Harrenhal thoroughly. Don't leave a single rat hole unchecked."

Tormund was taken aback for a moment, but then understood Rhaegar's suspicion. Edmure's death bore the mark of Larys' handiwork, leading Rhaegar to suspect that Larys might be hiding in Harrenhal, taking advantage of the chaos of the tournament.

"I'll have the message delivered before dark," Tormund assured, then exited the sanctuary.

Suddenly, an angry cry echoed through the sanctuary. "Get out! Get out of here at once!" It was Old Tully, pointing a shaking finger at Milov and the two priests behind him. Milov, cursed and humiliated, retreated into the crowd, while the priests, faces pale, retreated in embarrassment.

Rhaegar stepped forward.

"What are you doing?" Rhaenyra asked quietly, tugging at his cloak.

"Checking on Old Tully," Rhaegar replied, moving through the crowd.

Most of the people were there out of respect for the Lord of Riverrun. Old Tully, exhausted and distraught, slumped to the ground.

Rhaegar approached, crouched down, and said quietly, "Old Tully, you must know who the murderer is."

Old Tully's head hung, overwhelmed with grief.

Rhaegar squeezed his shoulder and gave Milov a meaningful look. "This situation has outside interference. If you can't handle it, I'll handle it for you."

Milov huddled next to Aegon, trembling and unable to meet anyone's eyes. Behind them stood Ormund Hightower, watching with a playful expression.

Old Tully's eyes flickered between his second son, Milov, and the priests. Finally he spoke in a hard voice, "Prince, the payment I promised you remains unchanged."

The priests had just approached Old Tully and suggested that Milov inherit Riverrun City. They cited Edmure as an example, claiming that his fate was a result of his fearlessness in battle.

It was clear that the plan to kill Edmure and his potential heirs was Milov's idea.

Seeing that Old Tully was still coherent, Rhaegar patted his shoulder in silent comfort. Milov's involvement in Larys's murder was just another piece of the puzzle.

...

Not long after, the congregation left the sanctuary.

Most returned to the Kingspyre Tower to rest, while others wandered the gardens.

Rhaegar walked in silence, pondering which dragon had rescued Larys. His first suspicion fell on Daemon. Larys had been tortured for information during his imprisonment in the King's Landing dungeon. The murder of Borros seemed aimed at pulling Daemon into the fold. Given Daemon's chaotic nature, it was likely he had orchestrated Larys's escape.

With this in mind, Rhaegar approached the disinterested Daemon and said directly, "Uncle, Larys is missing."

Their relationship was too complex for subtleties; straightforwardness was best.

Daemon turned, his eyes first surprised, then contemptuous, proving his innocence with his expression. Had he been guilty, he would have displayed smugness.

Unable to stand Daemon's blank stare, Rhaegar nodded apologetically and prepared to move away.

"Wait," Daemon spoke faintly.

Rhaegar took a deep breath, summoning his patience.

Daemon looked him up and down and sneered, "Let me tell you something it was a thief."

Rhaegar was stunned for a moment. He glanced through the crowd, noting the different expressions on their faces.

"A thief..." Rhaegar murmured, beginning to see something.

Aegon was being pestered by Milov. Ormund Hightower was traveling with them, seemingly discussing something. Helaena hung behind her father, her head drooping distractedly. Aemond, who had fallen behind the group, was flashing his face at Cassandra, making his fiancée tremble with anger.

None of his younger siblings seemed normal.

Moments later, the arrogant Jason Lannister approached Aegon, accompanied by the bastard Bronn Storm. Rhaegar's eyes narrowed.

He called, "Aegon, come here."

It was clear that Ormund had meddled with the Tullys, and Jason had the Baratheons in mind. Both were flirting with Aegon, trying to draw him into their plans.

At Rhaegar's call, Ormund and Jason glanced over and then quickly looked away. Aegon sulked, glanced at Milov in disgust, and reluctantly walked over to his older brother. He hated the Tully more than Rhaegar at that moment.

Facing each other, Aegon muttered, "Milov turned to the Faith of the Seven for help, and the Faith has ties to Ormund Hightower. That's all I know."

Rhaegar laughed, gave him a reassuring pat on the shoulder, and said, "Not a bad idea to stay away from them."

Aegon's hint helped Rhaegar piece things together. Ormund Hightower was likely behind the plot, and had joined forces with the Faith of the Seven and Milov to kill Edmure and Elmo. Elmo had survived and was now trying to gain more support by bringing Aegon into their fold.

Rhaegar's eyes shifted to Jason and the bastard Bronn. Jason was a self-righteous schemer; perhaps he too was trying to draw Aegon in.

...

As the night wore on, the sky grew cooler as dark clouds gathered, bringing a torrential downpour.

Inside the Kingspire Tower, in the Hall of a Hundred Hearths, the nobles gathered as usual for a festive dinner. The brutality of the tourney was of no concern to them; they only cared about the intensity of the fighting and the spectacle of bloodshed.

Outside, the rain poured relentlessly, turning the night into a scene of near-total darkness. Lightning flashed, illuminating the legions of Fearless soldiers surrounding Harrenhal Castle for a brief moment.

A bridge connected the Kingspyre Tower to the Widow's Tower, where hundreds of black-armored Unsullied stood guard, undeterred by the rain.

Crunch-

The door of the Kingspyre Tower opened, and a black-robed figure stepped out, bracing against the wind and rain.

“Prince!” Gray Worm stepped out of the queue, speaking in a deep voice.

The black-robed figure turned slightly, revealing Rhaegar’s grim face under the hood.

Together, master and servant crossed the bridge, their figures soon swallowed by the entrance to the Widow’s Tower.

Crackle!

Another bolt of lightning struck, making Harrenhal’s eerie darkness even more foreboding. The storm’s low-pressure atmosphere hinted at brewing chaos.

Rhaegar descended the spiral staircase of the Widow’s Tower. The dim corridor was lit by flickering candles, swaying in the occasional draft.

After a short descent, they reached the depths of the Widow’s Tower. Initially built as a dungeon by the sinister Harren the Black, the underground structure held many secrets.

Rhaegar searched around the dungeon until he found a hidden mechanism on an old wall.

Click.

The mechanism moved, and the wall slowly turned, revealing a deep tunnel.

“Follow me, open the way ahead,” Rhaegar commanded.

Gray Worm led the way, followed by two Unsullied. Rhaegar carried a torch, his eyes cold and focused.

The tunnel twisted and turned, leading to an old, weathered wooden door at the end.

Bang...

Gray Worm kicked the door open powerfully.

Escorted by the Unsullied, Rhaegar stepped forward.

Before them lay a small, dimly lit room. The layout was modest, with tables, chairs, and benches, and walls adorned with carvings and frescoes. A faint smell of mold lingered in the air.

Inside, an old acquaintance revealed himself: Larys, with curly brown hair, dressed in a dark green tunic. His usual sophistication was gone, replaced by a bearded face and forlorn eyes. His left pant leg hung limply.

Larys sat on a chair, carving a scepter with a knife. Wood shavings covered the tabletop.

Surprised by the sudden intrusion, Larys turned, his gray-blue eyes flickering.

Swish-

Rhaegar unsheathed Truefyre, the pitch-black sword reflecting an ebony light. He gazed icily at Larys, his expression unyielding.

“Larys, we meet again,” Rhaegar said, his voice cold.

Chapter 338: There’s a Dragon Baby!

Larys' face turned sharp, and the scepter in his hand clattered to the ground.

He had expected to be discovered eventually, but not this soon.

Rhaegar raised his sword to Larys' throat, his eyes cold and unyielding. "You would be wise to name the person who used you," he demanded in a deep voice.

"Prince, I can serve you," Larys begged, leaning back and trying to struggle free.

The tip of the sword thrust forward, piercing his flesh and drawing a thin trickle of blood.

Rhaegar's patience was limited. He sneered, "You know I don't trust people with treacherous minds."

Larys exhaled shakily and admitted, "It's Otto and Ormund Hightower."

He decided that honesty was his best chance.

"Otto saw my usefulness and orchestrated a staged death to save me and take me under his wing. Ormund Hightower was the one who carried it out. Instead of turning me over to Otto, he kept me hidden, planning to use me to eliminate the Tully heirs. He allied himself with the Faith of the Seven to support Edmure's rise to power, hoping to bind the Hightowers and the Tullys together."

Ormund had promised Larys a ship and enough gold to live comfortably in Braavos once his task was complete.

"You're willing to spend the rest of your life cowering in Braavos?" Rhaegar half asked.

Larys lowered his head in despair. "My identity in Westeros is tarnished. Braavos is my only option."

Rhaegar considered this, then asked the crucial question, "Which dragon saved you?"

If Otto and Ormund had orchestrated the rescue, it implicated several of Alicent's children.

"One?" Larys grinned, "It was two. Princess Helena's Dreamfyre and Prince Aemond's Sheepstealer."

An exiled cripple was worth two dragons?

Rhaegar remained silent, his gaze cold and piercing.

"I'd rather believe it was Daemon or Aegon," he thought.

Larys, feeling the need to elaborate, continued, "Dreamfyre killed everyone, and Sheepstealer took me to Ormund Hightower. We met at the Crossroads Inn; your means can confirm that."

A flash of suspicion crossed Rhaegar's eyes, sensing a trap in Larys' words.

"Enough. What are your final words?" Rhaegar's patience was wearing thin.

"There are no last words," Larys replied, clutching his staff. His eyes bored into Rhaegar's as he delivered a final warning, "You should watch the movements of Braavos. The last Sea Lord died in mysterious circumstances."

Pfft...

The tip of the sword pierced Larys' throat, the blade slicing with deadly precision.

Larys' body froze, his eyes glazing over. Blood spurted from his jugular, staining his dark green tunic.

Plop...

Rhaegar pulled Truefyre back, and Larys' body crumpled to the ground.

Even in death, Larys clung to his scepter.

Rhaegar looked down at the fallen man, the tip of Truefyre touching the ground. His hands gripped the hilt of the sword, the octagonal, fiery red heart at the end of the hilt glowing with a fierce aura.

Boom...

Flames erupted from the sword and quickly engulfed the corpse. The fire crackled and burned, reducing everything to ash and debris in a matter of moments.

...

Hall of a Hundred Hearths

Rhaegar walked through the rain, shedding his drenched black robes and changing into a set of black robes.

Harrenhal was his fiefdom and he had to appear at every banquet.

Step by step, Rhaegar descended the stairs as Ser Steffon of the Kingsguard announced his arrival.

"Welcome Prince Rhaegar of House Targaryen, Breaker of Shackles, Ruin Maker, and Heir to the Iron Throne."

Accompanied by a fine drumbeat, the nobles who had gathered saluted the late-arriving Heir Prince.

The Hall of One Hundred Hearths was immense. The distance from the floor to the ceiling alone was tens of feet, and thirteen large chandeliers each held dozens of tallow candles.

Despite the grandeur of the hall, with more than thirty fireplaces burning incense, the vast space felt empty even with thousands of people gathered there.

Viserys sat in the center of the hall, a wide table in front of him filled with delicious delicacies. He greeted Rhaegar warmly, "Rhaegar, share a drink with your father."

Beside him, Alicent served patiently, while several royal advisors accompanied him as he drank.

Passing through the grandly arranged scene, Rhaegar casually took a cup of sweet fruit wine from a servant's tray.

When he reached the front of the room, Rhaegar pulled Grand Maester Orwyle aside and asked, "How is Father's health these days?"

"His Grace's health is stable, with no signs of inflammation in the wounds," Orwyle replied solemnly.

Rhaegar nodded, understanding the meaning. His father's wounds could not be healed, but at least they were not getting worse. It might have something to do with the taming of Vermithor or the medicine Orwyle had changed.

Rhaegar patted Orwyle on the shoulder and took his seat.

He raised his glass and sipped his wine, keeping an eye on his surroundings.

Rhaenyra was not in the hall; the maid said she was not feeling well and had gone to bed.

Alicent played the role of a dutiful wife and mother, diligently tending to her ailing husband.

Lyonel and Otto sat at another table, both looking distracted. One worried that his eldest son had insulted the crown prince, the other angry that his own brother had gone too far.

Ormund Hightower sat next to Aegon, his arm around his nephew, laughing and sipping wine.

Rhaegar scanned the room, finally focusing on Helaena and Aemond.

Helaena had made some new friends: Margaery, the Rose of Highgarden, and Maris, second in line to the Four Storms. The three girls, of similar ages, were gathered together, enjoying refreshments and chatting happily.

As for Aemond...

"Rhaegar, I'll sit with you."

Leaving his fiancée Cassandra behind, Aemond squeezed in next to his big brother.

Rhaegar put his arm around Aemond's shoulder and whispered, "You don't like Cassandra?"

"She's a self-righteous fool," Aemond bristled, not hiding his contempt.

Rhaegar admonished, "You're already engaged. Cassandra hasn't inherited Storm's End yet, so you should be a little more tolerant."

"I know," Aemond waved his hand, not wanting to discuss it any further.

"You'd better," Rhaegar murmured, looking at his brother for a moment.

He thought about what Larys had said. Helaena and Aemond's involvement with this was a potential crack in the family's unity.

On the other side

Jason straightened his disheveled blond hair and led the two Baratheon bastards with confident strides.

Viserys took a sip of wine and looked at the illogical trio in surprise.

"Your Grace," Jason nodded in a respectful greeting.

Viserys set down his wine, his gaze sweeping over the two bastards. He hesitated, "Lord Jason, those two behind you?"

He recognized them - the bastards driven from the Stormlands - but they should not be in his presence.

Jason waved, "Your Grace, the death of Lord Borros was heartbreaking, and Storm's End has lost its male heir."

"These two beside me have some Baratheon blood in their veins, and they hope to win your favor by winning the tournament."

The two bastards stepped forward and knelt respectfully on one knee.

Viserys' face darkened with displeasure, "Though Lord Borros is gone, his bloodline is still in the world, and there is no need for bastards to play the hero."

Pointing at the two bastards, he sneered, "Not to mention that they are no heroes either."

"Your Grace, they still have some martial arts skills. Perhaps they can be selected for the Kingsguard."

Jason was clearly prepared, his words rounded with fullness.

Viserys frowned, "Then let them compete fairly and win the approval of the Small Council."

His mental preference for the Kingsguard was Criston Cole. Loyal, brave and indomitable.

Jason pressed on, grinning, "Of course, every honor must be earned."

The two bastards had no room for honor and retreated in disgrace.

Instead, more nobles from the Stormlands, the Riverlands, and the Vale stepped forward to question the qualifications of a female heir.

With a turn of his head, Rhaegar surveyed the scene at the banquet.

Jeyne, in a long, slender gown, had joined Helena's small group at some point, chatting happily with Margaery and Maris.

What these noble forces were questioning was not only Cassandra's inheritance, but the legitimacy of female inheritance.

If Cassandra's inheritance of Storm's End was denied, there would be those who would use it to deny Jeyne's rule of the Vale.

Duke Tyrell of Highgarden had lost his heir, and Margaery's situation was similar to Cassandra's.

That's why some of the nobles of the Riverlands joined forces with the nobles of the Stormlands to oppose the female heir.

The nobles of the continent of Westeros were archaic and opposed women in positions of power.

"Che, two bastards, how dare they presume to be heirs," Aemond scorned.

Rhaegar stood up and rationalized, "They are testing Father's bottom line."

Viserys reacted well; no matter what the nobles said, it was all superficial.

That was good - not taking a stand was the attitude.

Rhaegar left silently and walked up the stairs.

He had also promised something to Old Tully and had to send someone to keep an eye on it.

...

The Lord's Bedroom, Top Floor of the Tower

Creak—

The door to the room swung open and Rhaegar stepped inside, pushing back the darkness. Outside, the rain pelted down, its monotonous sound serving as a natural lullaby.

By the faint light of the fireplace, the outline of a delicate figure was visible beneath a thin quilt on the bed. Rhaenyra lay on her side, her long silver-golden hair cascading loosely over her pillow, her cheeks slightly flushed from drinking, and she snored softly.

Rhaegar approached quietly and lifted a lock of hair from her face.

"Rhaegar, stop it, you're so cold~"

Rhaenyra murmured softly, tucking her pale neck further under the blanket, showing no signs of waking.

Rhaegar smiled in amusement. She could eat and sleep without a care; no wonder the maesters couldn't find anything wrong with her.

He fetched a blanket and lay down by the fire, slowly closing his eyes. The chill in the room seemed to vanish with the warmth of the fire.

...

A dream came unexpectedly.

It was the same familiar room, the same familiar bed, the same familiar fireplace...

Rhaegar opened his eyes, still wrapped in the blanket he had used before going to bed. The sound of rain continued outside the window, the glass panes rattling under its force.

He rose and walked to the bed.

Rhaenyra remained in her side sleeping position, peacefully undisturbed. But this time Rhaegar noticed something different: in her arms lay two sleeping babies.

His eyes widened as he realized the significance.

The babies were small, their faces pale and cherubic, nestled face to face in Rhaenyra's embrace. He couldn't make out their individual features, but both had a faint stubble of silver-gold hair.

Rhaegar's heart raced and his fingers trembled as he gently touched one of the babies' cheeks. The skin was soft and smooth.

"Bark~"

The baby's pink mouth wriggled, a tiny leg kicking up awkwardly before the infant rolled over and burrowed deeper into Rhaenyra's arms.

In that moment, as the baby moved, Rhaegar saw a small birthmark.

"Thank you very much Balerion," he whispered, half kneeling beside the bed, not wanting to miss a moment of this vision.

He had never believed in the gift of prophetic dreams more than he did at that moment.

Chapter 339: House Targaryen Intimidation

The Next Morning

The sun had barely risen when Rhaegar, still sound asleep, was abruptly awakened by a soft goose feather pillow hitting his body. Groggily, he turned to look in the direction of the bed.

Rhaenyra was sitting up, her silk nightgown clinging to her form, her long hair disheveled and cascading over her smooth shoulders.

The sight jolted Rhaegar's memory and he instantly recalled the dream from the night before. Sleepiness vanished as excitement took its place.

Rhaenyra moved to the edge of the bed, her eyes bright and curious. Rhaegar could not resist asking, "Rhaenyra, do you feel... different?"

He needed to know if the dream had been a premonition.

Rhaenyra's eyes, still slightly red from sleep, showed a mixture of irritation and helplessness. Her delicate face, pale as porcelain, looked almost tearful.

"Are you unwell?" Rhaegar asked, concern in his voice.

"I'm just so hungry!" Rhaenyra murmured, her voice small. Tears welled up in her eyes, reflecting her frustration with the limited meals.

Rhaegar had limited her to three full meals a day, but after indulging in extra pastries the night before, she had woken up in the middle of the night starving.

"You're hungry?" Rhaegar's eyes widened in recognition.

He rose quickly and opened the door to her room. Kingsguard Lorent and the maid Sara stood guard outside.

"Prepare breakfast," he ordered, a broad smile spreading across his face. "Make enough for five."

Rhaegar believed he had found the cause of Rhaenyra's mood swings and insatiable hunger—two little ones growing inside her.

Sara moved quickly, and soon a large tray of delicious food was brought in.

Rhaegar took the tray and set it before Rhaenyra, his voice full of affection, "Eat up, eat up."

Rhaenyra eyed him suspiciously, but tentatively took a piece of cream cake. No one stopped her as she began to eat, and she quickly realized that it was safe to indulge.

Delighted, she grabbed various pies and pastries, stuffing her cheeks like a hamster.

Rhaegar watched her with a mixture of delight and concern, holding her gently as she ate.

Her violet eyes sparkled as she raised a large glass of milk to her lips.

"Eat slowly," Rhaegar advised, smoothing the ends of her hair. "There's plenty of time."

Despite the rush, today was the third day of the tournament, and a great feast awaited - a feast that only dragons could truly appreciate.

It was a subtle warning to those who might stir up trouble.

...

On the north shore of God's Eye Lake: The Martial Arts Field

After a night of relentless rain, the morning dawned surprisingly clear, with white clouds dotting the sky and a fresh breeze invigorating the air. A carriage rolled through the rain-soaked, muddy roadway and came to a stop at the open-air horse gallery by the lake.

Inside the martial arts arena, nobles of various ranks arrived as expected, gathering in small groups to discuss the latest rumors—chief among them the Tully family infighting and the question of Storm's End Castle's heir.

Those with keen interest cast glances toward the grand platform, hoping to catch a glimpse of the king's demeanor. Her Grace the Queen and a group of advisers were present, but no Targaryens were in sight.

Jason, searching the platform, approached the Sea Snake Corlys and inquired, "Lord Corlys, why aren't His Grace and Princess Rhaenys here?"

"They will be here soon," Corlys replied haughtily, his tone dismissive.

Jason, feeling slighted, withdrew with a sour expression. Corlys, indifferent, continued to rub the armrests of his chair, his eyes deep and contemplative. The Second Battle of the Stone Steps Islands had cost House Velaryon dearly, but their wealth and legacy remained intact. In the Seven Kingdoms, the Velaryons of Driftmark were still second only to House Targaryen.

Time passed, and the tournament's start was imminent. As the royal family members were late, the nobles grew restless. They were particularly eager to witness the duel between Rhaegar, the heir to the Iron Throne, and Prince Daemon the Rogue Prince. The previous day, the sight of Cannibal and Blood Wyrms Caraxes had left everyone in awe, and they eagerly anticipated the competition between the dragonriders.

Dang!

The obese referee, clad in a big red robe, excitedly shouted, "Your honorable Grace will be here soon. Let us welcome the arrival of the dragons!"

The nobles muttered and complained, eager to see the promised spectacle.

"Roar!!!"

A piercing dragon roar suddenly echoed through the sky, causing the crowd to look up. A massive bronze dragon soared into view, its wide brown wings beating the air, and its fierce dragon head roaring angrily.

"Roar--"

"Roar--"

Several more dragon roars followed, reverberating across the north shore of God's Eye Lake. A pitch-black dragon soared over the turquoise lake, diving into the clouds, its enormous wings casting a shadow like nightfall. From a few miles away, the sound of another dragon, as loud as muffled thunder, reached the audience.

Vhagar, running bipedally in the air, loomed like a small mountain, its passage marked by a whirlwind. At the same time, three huge adult dragons appeared above the martial arts arena.

"Roar--"

Cannibal roared and swooped low, its athletic figure and fierce aura captivating the nobles.

"Dracarys!"

The command, crisp and arrogant, rang out in High Valyrian. Cannibal's vertical pupils flashed cunningly. The dragon reared back, flapping its wings, and unleashed a stream of green dragonfire into the sky.

Amidst the flames, a silver-blond figure could be seen on the back of the pitch-black dragon. Clad in black dragon scale armor, with a scarlet cloak billowing behind him and shoulder-length hair flowing freely, Rhaegar sat in his saddle. Unchained at the waist, he smiled broadly and opened his arms, welcoming the baptism of dragonfire.

Boom—

Cannibal rose into the clouds, the ghostly green dragonfire scattering the thin white clouds in a blinding explosion, like green fireworks exploding in the sky. Rhaegar leapt from the saddle, clutching the pitch-black scales of his dragon's back, his scarlet cloak flickering with star-green flames.

"Roar..."

"Roar..."

Several dragon roars echoed, first from Harrenhal and then from the Isle of Faces. Light blue Dreamfyre, brown Sheepstealer, light gray Grey Ghost, cobalt blue Tesseract - these dragons appeared from different directions.

Golden Syrax and Sunfyre flew in tandem, darting out from the Flowstone Yard to circle around Vermithor.

"Roar..."

Two scarlet dragon shadows emerged in opposition. Meleys, the fastest, soared above the martial arts arena, unleashing a torrent of crimson dragonfire that dispersed Cannibal's remaining breath. Rhaenys, her silver hair braided and clad in bright silver armor on a red background, pursued Cannibal through the clouds, displaying the grace of the Queen Who Never Was and Master of Dragons.

"Roar..."

Sharp roars filled the air as Caraxes swooped low over the turquoise lake, its wide scarlet wings flapping, its slender tail stirring ripples. Daemon grinned, maneuvering his dragon closer to the hovering Vhagar. Caraxes rose swiftly, its neck twisting as it spewed scarlet dragonfire.

Gong! Gong!

Inside the arena, the obese referee struck the gong repeatedly, shouting like a madman, "The dragons! These are the Targaryen dragons!"

The God's Eye Lake Tourney, a spectacle destined for history, could not be without this wild dance of dragons.

"Roar..."

A total of eleven dragons appeared, each bearing a Targaryen rider. From the era of Aegon the Conqueror's three dragons, the dragons of Westeros now exceeded two dozen.

The sky was filled with dragon shadows, and their roars echoed constantly. Vhagar, Cannibal, and Vermithor broke through the clouds, gathering above the martial arts arena, maintaining a parallel and staggered flight, circling slowly. Their bronze bell-like pupils showed hostility, driven by their masters.

Each dragon's size occupied half the arena. With three giant dragons soaring together, the arena was shrouded in twilight, blocking out the sun.

"Roar..."

Blood Wyrms, Meleys, Syrax, and the others circled the martial arts field, surrounding the three giants, their necks stretched and roaring repeatedly. The arena seemed to transform into a new dragon's nest, the dragons dancing wildly, embodying blood and fire from the same source.

"Land!"

The command rang out. Vermithor, wings outstretched, was the first to move. A muffled sound followed as Vermithor landed slowly in the open space on the south side of the arena, revealing King Viserys perched high on his back.

"Roar..."

Cannibal and Vhagar descended as well, landing one to the north and one to the west, surrounding the white-stoned tournament arena on three sides.

"Roar..."

The other dragonriders shouted their commands, and the swarm of dragons quickly descended through the clouds.

Syrax and Sunfyre, still relatively small, landed directly on the top platform of the martial arts arena. Dreamfyre and Meleys, being much larger, searched for suitable landing sites nearby.

Daemon and Caraxes, with its slender build, easily landed on the top platform, Caraxes shrieking at the spectators below.

Soon the dragonriders dismounted. Vhagar, Cannibal, and Vermithor lay prostrate on the ground, their towering spikes looming over the arena like mountains. Most of the other dragons, such as Dreamfyre and Sheepstealer, flew away.

Syrax and Grey Ghost stood on the top platform, approaching the steadily breathing Cannibal. Blood Wyrms roared at them, joining Vhagar in showing hostility toward the opposing dragons.

In the midst of this tension, the internal conflicts within House Targaryen became apparent. The spectators below covered their ears as they watched the scene unfold. The Targaryen dragons, numbering over a dozen, symbolized a power that no noble house or realm could challenge.

The dragonriders gathered on the broad platform. Viserys stood at the head, resplendent in pitch-black robes with a golden crown on his head. Behind him were all of his kin. Rhaegar stood to his left, flanked by Rhaenyra and Helaena, while Daemon stood to his right, surrounded by Laena and the twins.

Alicent and Rhaenys stood by Viserys' side, with Aegon and his brothers, Sea Snake Corlys, and their wives close by.

In one swift motion, Viserys drew Blackfyre, the symbol of kingship, and raised it high above his head. Looking down at his subjects, he could not contain his excitement as he proclaimed, "My Lords, forget the misfortunes of the past and welcome the dawn of a new era of Dragonlords!"

As he spoke, several swords were drawn beside him. Rhaegar and Daemon, clad in armor, drew their blades, defending their father and brother. Rhaenys displayed the Dark Sister sword with pride. Aegon, as a grown male heir, rightly drew his longsword and raised it high.

Targaryen power was on full display.

"Long live the Targaryens!"

The first cheer ignited the crowd. The martial arts arena erupted in fervent applause and chants of "Long live the King! Long live the Dragonlords!"

"Roar!!!"

The three giant dragons outside the arena roared, their heads held high. Syrax, Blood Wyrms, Dreamfyre, and the other dragons sensed their riders' emotions and joined in, raising their heads and spitting dragonfire. Under the dragonfire, all creatures were equal.

The nobles grew more frenzied, eager to join a world war with a dozen dragons on their side. Viserys basked in the warm applause and cheers, glancing back at his relatives, excitement written all over his face.

"Father, say something," Rhaegar reminded him with a smile.

"Yes!"

Viserys nodded vigorously and slammed Blackfyre to the ground. He took the hands of his eldest son and younger brother and raised them high as he faced the nobles.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this year's God's Eye Lake Tournament will feature a long-awaited duel between knights!" He announced, raising the arms of Rhaegar and Daemon. "Rhaegar Targaryen, Daemon Targaryen, my heir and sibling, they will pick off all contestants for the final showdown!"

His words were powerful, confident, even arrogant. He had already decided that the champion would be one of them.

"Roar--"

Cannibal craned his neck and roared, unleashing a torrent of green dragonfire. Caraxes roared defiantly, spewing scarlet dragonfire across the sky above the tournament. The dragons reflected the hearts of their riders.

Rhaegar turned suddenly to meet Daemon's eyes. Uncle and nephew exchanged smiles, their desire to fight boiling within them.

The martial arts arena erupted in applause and cheers, more intense than ever.

Chapter 340: House Targaryen Intimidates the Weak

The passionate proclamation ended and the tournament officially began.

Following tradition, the opening event was the preliminary archery competition.

On the high stage, the royal family members found their designated positions. Viserys sat in the main seat, with his wife Alicent and their young son Daren on his left, and Otto on his right.

On the lower right were Sea Snake Corlys and Rhaenys, next to Daemon and Laena. Across from them, on the left, sat Rhaegar and Rhaenyra. Jeyne of the Eyrie and Lady Elenda of Storm's End were seated in the second row, strategically placing the day's important figures.

Aegon, Helaena, and Aemond stood behind Rhaegar, signifying the importance of the oldest and youngest siblings. Laenor, his wife and the Four Storms stood behind their respective elders, looking more like spectators than participants.

Viserys opened the event with a stirring speech of encouragement. Rhaegar, leaning back in his chair, glanced at Grey Worm and asked, "Who's on the field?"

"Robb Blackwood," Grey Worm answered in a low voice.

Rhaegar chuckled, "With Robb in the field, there's no doubt about the winner."

In archery, Robb was unrivaled in Rhaegar's eyes; his arrows were almost magical in their precision.

After Robb became commander of the Royal Guard, Samwell suggested restoring Robb's family name and establishing him as a branch of the Blackwoods of Raventree Hall, known as Blackwood of Stone Mill. Robb readily agreed and ordered a special family crest: an arrow piercing three bleeding crows. This symbolized their remembrance of their origins and their loyalty to Rhaegar.

Viserys finished his speech and raised his wine in a toast. The seated members of the royal family raised their glasses in celebration.

After a sip, Viserys rubbed a touch of fatigue from his brow and addressed Lady Elenda, "Lady Elenda, thank you for arranging your daughter's marriage to the royal family. I believe our two families will support each other for a long time to come."

"My pleasure, Your Grace," Lady Elenda replied with a graceful nod.

Viserys smiled and, feigning skepticism, continued, "The marriage between our houses is a momentous occasion, thanks to you and Princess Rhaenys. However, I still have some crucial doubts."

"Please, speak," Elenda replied calmly.

Viserys gestured to Aemond and Cassandra and said earnestly, "My third son is still young, five years out of wedlock, but sooner or later the two children will be united. What will your child's family name be?"

Aemond, being a boy, would traditionally have his offspring bear the Targaryen name. However, with Cassandra's inheritance of Storm's End, their child would be the legal heir of House Baratheon, and the Baratheons would resist being replaced by Targaryens.

Aemond and Cassandra exchanged glances, their mutual dislike obvious. Aemond's eyes flickered as he prepared to speak, but Rhaegar, seemingly nonchalant, subtly instructed him to remain silent with a "Careful" look.

Aemond, intimidated, swallowed his words and bowed his head. Rhaegar took a sip of his wine, knowing that this was not the time for them to speak their minds.

The subtle exchange was not lost on the sharp eyes of Viserys and Lady Elenda. Both adults, with their delicate sensibilities, focused on the merits rather than the so-called feelings, understanding that alliances were built on pragmatism rather than emotion.

After a cordial discussion, a resolution was reached.

Viserys smiled warmly and declared, "The children will marry in five years. The first heir will bear the Targaryen name, and when there is an heir to inherit Storm's End, the surname will change to Baratheon."

This compromise was fair, preserving Baratheon dignity while ensuring Targaryen influence. The child would grow up with Targaryen loyalties despite the eventual change of family name, ensuring Targaryen interests in the Stormlands for generations to come.

Lady Elenda folded her hands and smiled, "A generous idea, Your Grace."

She was more concerned with her daughter's inheritance of Storm's End and the continuation of the Baratheon line than with political maneuvering. The agreement was mutually satisfactory.

Viserys turned to Jason Lannister and suggested, "Lord Jason, as Wardens of the Realm, it would be fitting for you and Lady Jenny to witness this union. Would you agree?"

Jason, trying to remain unnoticed amidst the dragon spectacle, stood awkwardly and replied, "No problem, Your Grace."

Jeyne then stepped forward, took Cassandra's hand, and said quietly, "You will follow in your father's footsteps and become the first Lady of the Stormlands."

Cassandra, looking formal and slightly nervous, gathered her courage and said, "I will do my best to rule the Stormlands and uphold the honor of our family."

The public endorsement of Cassandra as the successor to Storm's End was clear.

"A splendid declaration for the future Lady of Storm's End!" Viserys exclaimed, leading the applause.

Rhaegar was the second to clap, laughing, "To the marriage of our houses and the prosperity of the realm."

Rhaenys, Daemon, Otto, and others followed. Even Jason, despite his opposition to female heirs, joined in with a stiff smile.

The Stormlands nobles who supported other claimants, such as Lord Dondarrion and Lord Swann, stood sullenly on the sidelines, understanding that the Targaryens' show of force was also a warning not to challenge the royal family.

A gong sounded, signaling the end of the archery contest. Viserys put down his wine and said, "Rhaegar, Daemon, it's time for your duel. The nobles of the realm await your performance!"

"No problem, let me show my nephew how to duel," Daemon said, raising an eyebrow and grinning as he stood, his dragonscale armor gleaming in the sunlight.

Rhaegar replied amusedly, "Uncle, the tournament has only just begun."

"Heh, I'll go warm up first," Daemon said, throwing off his crimson cloak and stepping down from the stage.

Caraxes spread his wings and soared into the air, its scarlet form hovering over the arena as he let out a sharp roar.

The spectators, recognizing the signal, anticipated the arrival of the Rogue Prince. Before the Second Battle of the Stepstones, Daemon was the most renowned figure on the continent, a leading Targaryen.

Even now, many noble second sons, unproductive knights, and downtrodden rangers admired and were willing to serve him.

"Roar--"

A thunderous roar echoed through the martial arts arena, reverberating like a cascade of bells. The Cannibal raised its head, green pupils gleaming with cruelty and disdain. Its black wings spread wide before folding back, as if trying to contain the primal urge to hunt.

The crowd watched in awe, overwhelmed by the sight. The massive black dragon stood tall, its breath hot and torrential, like the oppressive darkness before a storm, leaving the spectators breathless.

Rhaegar sat calmly, a slight smile playing at the corner of his mouth. As he reached for the table beside him, his hand found nothing. He turned, surprised to see the table, once laden with pastries, fruits, and vegetables, now empty.

Rhaenyra, nibbling on a piece of honeydew melon with innocent purple eyes, caught his gaze. She had chosen a black strapless dress, her long hair elegantly pulled back, exuding dignity and nobility. Today, Rhaenyra had eaten her fill and was in a very good mood.

Rhaegar chuckled, "Is it enough? Do you want some more?"

"Shhh~ Don't be loud," Rhaenyra whispered, glancing at Daemon's empty seat. "I'll go to Laena in a while and eat her pastries."

Rhaegar held his forehead with one hand, amused. "You're unbelievable."

With a mindset that indulging in good food was a blessing, he agreed. As the match was about to begin, Rhaegar rose to prepare.

Before stepping down from the stage, he approached Otto and Lyonel, who sat close, one in the main seat and the other behind.

"Prince," Lyonel greeted, forcing a smile, his fatigue evident.

"Lord Lyonel, I have something to show you," Rhaegar said, extending his hand to reveal a tiny golden cicada carving.

Lyonel's eyes widened. "This is..."

He recognized it immediately—the gold ornament from his second son Larys's scepter. Lyonel had bribed a prisoner to monitor Larys during his journey to the Wall, only to lose contact and later learn Larys had been incinerated by Dragonfire.

Otto, too, recognized the golden cicada. Rhaegar held it up, saying, "I found this last night in the secret room under the Widow's Tower. Its owner was killed, but not by Dragonfire."

Lyonel's mind raced, piecing together the implications in an instant. Rhaegar dropped the cicada into Otto's wine goblet with a soft clink and whispered, "Lord Otto, what you couldn't obtain, I have secured for you."

Rhaegar patted Otto on the shoulder and walked away with a meaningful look.

Larys's death could not be attributed to him, Larys's death itself was not important, but he cannot be known as a man who does not keep his promises.

With Lyonel's wisdom and understanding of his son, this golden cicada carving clarified the situation.

Lyonel looked at Otto, shock and anger in his eyes. He understood Rhaegar's hint. Otto's expression was complicated, and he silently tipped over his wine goblet, refraining from argument, as if distancing himself from the situation.

...

Stepping down from the high platform, Rhaegar's eyes were filled with deep thought.

Lara's escape was undoubtedly connected to Otto, but Rhaegar remained uncertain about Otto's exact role in the affair.

He pored over the records of various dragon lairs and questioned scouts from Storm's End Castle. In the days surrounding the Goldroad Dragonfire incident, three dragons-Dreamfyre, Sheepstealer, and Sunfyre-had traveled on the same day.

Sunfyre had carried Aegon back to King's Landing from Harrenhal, where Aegon spent the night in a brothel. Dreamfyre and Sheepstealer had both left their respective dragon nests at the Isle of Faces and Storm's End, one in the morning and the other around noon. Dreamfyre returned to the Dragon's Nest that night, while Sheepstealer returned to Storm's End Keep two nights later.

As Larys had claimed, both dragons had the time and opportunity to intercept. But why use two dragons? A single dragon traveling stealthily to kill the night watchman and the prisoner would have sufficed without drawing much attention.

Additionally, Otto's reaction to seeing the Golden Cicada carving earlier had been peculiar. His composure remained stable, without the slightest hint of panic that might indicate the plot had been uncovered.

Larys hadn't told the whole truth.

Rhaegar pondered, "I need to find a time to ask Helaena. That little girl won't lie."