

G.O Thrones 391

Chapter 391: Return to King's Landing

August, under a scorching sun.

King's Landing, River Gate.

In the sweltering heat of the afternoon, fishermen gathered their sails and huddled with their small catches at the foot of the city walls, feeling unspeakably satisfied.

Thanks to the king's benevolence, many of the city's rogues had been arrested and sent outside the city to cultivate the wasteland. As a result, the River Gate no longer reeked of urine from vagrants, replaced only by the fishy odor of fish and shrimp.

An old fisherman with a waxy face and bare feet lay on the dry, cracked mud, speaking in a thick accent, "Have you heard? The Heir Prince is returning to King's Landing after subduing the Triarchy?"

"Nonsense, such big news has spread all over the Flea Bottom. You don't need to repeat it!"

"Old Henry, you're just repeating what everyone already knows."

His statement was like a stone thrown into a calm lake, provoking teasing and ridicule from the fishermen around him.

Old Henry held up two sea fish and said eagerly, "What do you know? The prince is back, and the Triarchy Kingdom is now our territory."

"Che, this is the noble lord's territory. It doesn't have a single copper to do with you, a poor old man."

A cynical youth immediately scoffed.

"But the prince is quite good to us poor old people..."

Old Henry retorted angrily.

King's Landing had fewer hooligans lying about, the streets were cleaner, and the gangs that collected bail money had been cleaned out. The fishermen living under the city walls no longer smelled the stench of human waste, nor did they fear being captured in the city.

Another fisherman, crossing his legs, said with newfound curiosity, "But I heard the prince is really coming back soon. They might even recruit a group of soldiers."

"You want to go to war?"

"A bit. After the battle is won, there will definitely be a shortage of men."

"That's right, maybe I can even become a squad leader."

The fishermen laughed and joked, discussing their own little schemes.

Wooooo~

The sun grew hotter, and an exhilarating horn sounded far and wide. On the surface of Blackwater Bay, reflecting light, a dozen magnificent three-masted sailing ships crossed the harbor. At the head was a large flag, painted and engraved with a majestic three-headed red dragon.

"Roar--"

A dragon roar resounded like a loud bell. The pitch-black dragon spread its wings and soared, its huge body like ten thousand miles of dark clouds covering the blazing sun.

"The Prince is back!"

The fishermen rolled and crawled to their feet, tilting their heads back under the shadows. The black dragon was cold and lonely, flying leisurely into King's Landing, shielding the summer sun from the scorching light.

"Roar!"

Another dragon roar, as loud as muffled thunder, followed closely behind, carrying a strong sense of oppression. A huge green dragon cut through the sky, its massive wings creating gusty winds as imposing as a giant mountain.

The old residents of King's Landing recognized it as the previous dragon of Prince "Baelon" The Spring Prince - Vhagar.

With the help of the gusty wind created by the dragon, the ships traveled faster and smoothly entered the dock of the River Gate.

A large flag fluttered in the wind, symbolizing each ancient power that had fought on the battlefield. Seahorses, high towers, purple grapes... and even foreign flags like that of Pentos and Volantis.

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The Red Keep, the Godswood.

The two giant dragons circled the vast garden twice, each choosing a clear space to land slowly.

Boom!

As soon as their massive bodies touched down, a fierce wind whipped through the garden, sending blades of grass and petals fluttering.

"Roar..."

Rhaegar stepped off the soft ladder and leapt onto the lawn. The silver and black young dragon on his shoulder chirped excitedly, flapping its wings and flying around.

Rhaegar smoothed back his blown-out silver hair and glanced at Tyraxes, the corner of his mouth curling into a smile. The little one had been cowering in his arms all the way, finally free of the Cannibal's intimidating presence.

"Brother!"

A clear cry rang out from the direction of the castle.

Helaena was all smiles as she trotted up to him. The little girl wore a long white dress, the hem of which she lifted awkwardly as she ran.

"Helaena."

Rhaegar smiled, his gaze shifting to the figure behind her.

Rhaenyra, in a white halter dress, cradled her bulging belly in her hands and smiled warmly.

After dealing with the cheerful little girl, Rhaegar walked over to Rhaenyra and gently hugged her.

Rhaenyra responded carefully, her head resting against his chest as she whispered, "Go and get dressed, Father is waiting."

"Fine, but let me hear the sound first."

Rhaegar half-squatted, wrapped his arms around her soft waist, and pressed his ear to her large belly. As soon as his cheek was close, he felt a slight nudge.

Four months and there was already movement.

Rhaegar's eyes widened in delight and he pressed in a little closer.

Suddenly, another faint push touched his chin.

Rhaegar raised his head, eyes full of laughter, "It seems like someone gave me a punch. It's really lawless."

Rhaenyra's heart swelled with affection, and the corners of her mouth lifted into a smile, "I'm afraid this kind of arrogance is hereditary."

As she spoke, her small greenish-white hand rubbed her brother's head, her eyes brimming with tenderness.

Rhaegar closed his eyes in enjoyment, slyly saying, "I'm the most easygoing one; you're slandering me."

"You wish, get out of here."

With those words, Rhaenyra tugged at his ear, her own footsteps light and playful.

It had been more than a month since they had seen each other, and they had missed each other dearly.

The two siblings shared a few moments of warm, fond affection.

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Later that evening, a grand banquet was held in the Red Keep.

The return of the hero who had conquered the disputed lands was warmly welcomed by a gathering of princes and advisors.

Inside the great hall, sunlight filtered through the stained glass windows, filling the room with the aroma of wine. The sounds of celebration could be heard faintly from below.

A dozen figures sat around the large conference table: King Viserys, several royal advisors, and Rhaegar, seated to the right of his father, the green-patterned stone ball on a black background placed in the alcove.

Rhaenyra sat next to Rhaegar, her smile reflecting her sense of honor. Laena and Helaena, their faces calm, stood quietly behind them.

Opposite them sat the Sea Snake Corlys, his face haughty, alongside two ambassadors from Pentos and Volantis.

With the destruction of the Triarchy, the disputed lands were initially pacified, and the Iron Throne's allies eagerly awaited their share of the spoils of war.

"Viserys, drink less wine," Alicent said helplessly, pressing her husband's hand as he poured another glass.

The queen, dressed in a dignified and unobtrusive green gown, attended the council under the pretense of attending to the king.

"Ahem, I'm happy today. It's okay to drink a little more," Viserys replied, slightly embarrassed as he coughed lightly to hide it.

"Promise me, just one last drink," Alicent persuaded gently, pouring the wine for him personally.

She finished with a small reminder, "You have not been well lately, and Orwyle warned you."

Viserys forced a smile, his interest in drinking fading.

Rhaegar heard it all and gave his father two subtle glances. On the outside, Viserys looked no different - wearing the crown that symbolized his power, the solemn black robes, and maintaining the same majesty and benevolence as always.

But upon closer inspection, there were differences. His lips were bloodless, dark circles were heavy under his eyes, and his gaze was drooping with fatigue.

Rhaegar's nostrils twitched slightly, catching a faint stench of hair oil and tonics.

"The war seems to have taken its toll on Father," Rhaegar thought darkly.

Viserys was in bad shape, like an overindulged addict.

Rhaegar also wondered how the cuts on his father's body were healing and decided to take the time to help treat them once more.

Chapter 392: Otto Targets Daemon

The brief interruption passed quickly, and the meeting was officially called to order.

Corlys, full of ambition, began, "Your Grace, with the collapse of the Triarchy and the end of the war between the Kingdom and the Disputed Lands, it is time to discuss strategies such as reopening ports and trade."

The conversation had to be calm and focused.

He didn't mention the distribution of benefits directly, but politely used maritime trade as an introduction, acknowledging the primary advantage of a free-trading city-state.

Viserys looked carefully at his eldest son and smiled, "Lord Corlys and I are of the same mind. It is essential that the three city-states resume trade."

Hand of the King Lyonel replied sternly, "The three city-states have not been completely stabilized. There is still a large portion of the population opposed to the Iron Throne. Opening the ports at this time is somewhat dangerous."

"If we don't open the ports, who will take care of the food and drink of the three city-states?" countered Master of Laws Jasp, his words sharp. "Our port exports countless goods every day. Sooner or later it will drain the treasury."

Otto looked at him and nodded in agreement.

Several advisors joined the discussion, and a debate ensued about reopening trade.

Lyonel was reluctant to reopen trade, citing the uncertainty of Braavos' movements and the unfolding Dornish invasion as detrimental to trade at this time.

Jasp disagreed, citing the cost to the treasury.

Otto was secretly supportive, while Lyman, Orwyle, and Tormund remained silent.

The war was fought not only with strong soldiers and horses, but also with logistical supplies.

The Battle of the Narrow Sea began in late June and ended in early August, lasting just over a month.

However, in that month, the treasury's depleted financial resources became an astronomical figure.

On the eve of the Battle of Myr, a large number of fleets and soldiers suicidally lured the enemy, resulting in losses on both sides of Lys and Tyrosh.

One of the primary contributors to these losses was the Velaryon House, where Corlys was situated. The soldiers on the ships, with armor and weapons, were still largely a responsibility of the Iron Throne.

In the ensuing Battle of Lys Harbor, ports across the realm formed fleets and stormed the city-states with ordnance provided by the treasury.

Combined with the garrisoning of the Stepstones Islands, it was another large sum of money.

And that's not counting the cost of rebuilding the city-states of Myr and Lys, repairing the ports, and dealing with ships and merchants.

All sorts of troublesome internal issues arose.

The discussion became more and more heated. Lyonel was alone and disliked by the others, sweating profusely.

Rhaegar watched with interest, occasionally glancing at Corlys, whose face remained stoic.

Rhaenyra had a dumbfounded expression, rubbing her stomach with one hand and holding Rhaegar's hand with the other.

Viserys exuded a look of distress, frowning involuntarily at the noise.

He preferred when his advisers voted unanimously on issues. Arguments made it difficult for him to make a decision.

Most of the time, he would deal with it based on preference.

Knock, knock...

The sound echoed as Corlys, his face dark with frustration, rapped the table. "My lords, you might as well listen to the opinions of His Grace and the Prince."

"The financial resources of the treasury are quite depleted. It's better to reduce expenses," Viserys said immediately, inadvertently undermining his old ally Lyonel.

Lyonel's face fell and he sank back into his seat, visibly disappointed but hiding his anger.

Rhaegar nodded in agreement. "The port still needs to be reopened and made self-sufficient."

It was hard to fight for new land. If it couldn't generate income, wouldn't it be in vain?

When the discussion came back on track, Corlys' demeanor improved. "Then we should discuss some specifics and plan ahead."

The advisors, including the ambassadors of Pentos and Volantis, all agreed.

"Wait!" Otto suddenly interrupted, bringing up a controversial topic. "Your Grace, as far as I know, Prince Daemon has occupied Tyrosh and made it known that it is already his private territory."

"Don't mention that scoundrel to me!" Viserys' face darkened and he spoke through clenched teeth.

He was well aware of his brother's actions - invading and fighting privately, massacring the rebellious inhabitants of Tyrosh, and bypassing the Iron Throne to privatize the city-state. One disgraceful act after another, without the honor or responsibility of a knight.

Rhaegar interjected, "Father, I have spoken to Daemon, and he will guard Tyrosh for the time being."

"For now" was a carefully chosen word, paving the way for later negotiations.

"He's a disgrace, with no sense of shame!" Viserys was indignant.

"Your Grace, Daemon is deeply mistaken, and he will follow your will," Laena added, breaking her silence. "He oppresses the rebels, so I will discuss everything on his behalf."

Viserys looked at her. After a difficult labor and the loss of her son, Laena looked extremely pale. Her deep skin was dull, her lips bloodless, and her eyes showed deep fatigue. With one hand resting on her waist and wearing only a white dress, she seemed a sickly beauty.

Viserys' eyes softened with pity. "Ask Daemon himself to speak to me if there is anything."

Then he motioned to Erryk, who was standing behind him, and said, "Ser, move a chair for Lady Laena."

"Yes, Your Grace," Erryk replied, meticulously following the order.

Laena was attending the Small Council as a spectator this time and did not have a seat.

Viserys, understanding her predicament, showed leniency.

"Take it easy," Rhaenyra said, looking back at her friend and gently assisting her.

Laena pursed her lips, grateful for the support, and allowed herself to rest.

The difficult labor had affected Laena both physically and mentally. Her uterus had been cut open, and the Maester had diagnosed a permanent injury that would make it difficult for her to conceive again.

Mentally, Laena was determined. She was determined to help her husband secure the territory he desired and to find her own salvation alongside Vhagar. Her path in life was clear: to achieve success on her own terms, rather than relying solely on her husband and family amidst internal struggles.

Otto continued to press the issue, "Your Grace, Daemon's private occupation of Tyrosh cannot go unaddressed by the Iron Throne."

Lyman frowned slightly and replied nonchalantly, "Prince Daemon's actions were indeed improper, but a stern warning should suffice."

As far as the Small Council was concerned, the three city-states were now Westerosi lands and should rightfully be incorporated into the Targaryen realm. Daemon's unauthorized seizure of any of the city-states was considered an act of treason.

Viserys stared intently and said in a deep voice, "I promised him a city-state before the war. Daemon claimed it."

"But that promise was not formalized by Your Grace. Daemon took it upon himself to occupy Tyrosh," Otto countered, his eyes burning with conviction.

No one disagreed. Even if the King had promised to grant his younger brother a city-state, it should have been done with a charter and an official decree. Daemon's actions were indeed in defiance of the Iron Throne.

Viserys held his forehead in frustration. "I will call him back to King's Landing to discuss this further. For now, let's focus on reopening trade and the port."

Rhaegar turned the stone ball in the alcove in silence, not rushing to voice his thoughts. He had privately agreed with his father not to escalate this matter just yet. With threats from Braavos and Dorne, now was not the time to stir up internal conflict.

The advisors, hearing the king's decision, retreated and refrained from pushing further.

Alicent's voice, faint but cutting, broke the silence. "How long can you continue to favor him?"

Chapter 393: New System and Distribution of Benefits

The voice wasn't loud, but it reached everyone's ears.

Viserys' face turned grim, but he could not retort.

With a heavy "humph," he changed the topic, "Lord Corlys, tell us about reopening trade. You are an expert in this area."

"No problem," Corlys agreed promptly and began speaking eloquently.

Rhaegar ignored this, his gaze implicitly sweeping over Alicent.

Alicent's face was subdued, once again remaining silent, a touch of dissatisfaction hidden in her eyes.

Otto's eyes were lowered, and out of the corner of his eye, he glanced at Helaena, who kept her mouth shut.

Rhaegar followed his gaze and landed on Helaena's lovely freckled face.

Helaena hadn't inherited Alicent's stunning beauty but instead took after her father's more modest looks. However, the young girl had a slender figure, and when she was quiet, she looked like an orchid, possessing an inexplicable intellectual beauty.

Noticing someone was watching, Helaena quietly looked up and smiled cheekily at him.

"Naughty," Rhaegar couldn't help but smile as he focused back on the council table.

There was a great deal of Targaryen territory at stake, and he had offered to call a few of his younger siblings to join him.

Aegon was guarding the Stepstones Isles, Aemond wandered the Stormlands, and little Daeron was too young.

In the end, the only ones accompanying him were Rhaenyra and Helaena.

"Your Grace, the program is roughly like this. I wonder how much you intend to set the harbor tax?" Corlys narrated with a flourish and then began to reveal his true thoughts.

Viserys had not yet realized it and patiently said, "Customs matters are supposed to be the responsibility of the Master of Ships, and since you and Lord Tyland have successively withdrawn from the Small Council, this duty was taken up by the Hand of the King and the Master of Coin as well."

Duties of the Master of Ships included taxation of the Great Ports and control of the Gullet. This office had largely been held by members of House Velaryon since the Conqueror's generation of the Small Council.

In a sense, the office was passed down as the hereditary authority of House Velaryon. The Iron Throne lost its hold on the Gullet when Corlys withdrew from the Small Council. Even Tyland's reign could not regain that power.

His only role was to collect tolls, using his experience in running Lannister Port.

This is why Viserys feared a rebellion from House Velaryon in the first place. Driftmark Island was extremely close to King's Landing, and with dragons and warships, Blackwater Bay could be breached in a single day.

Corlys hesitated and said politely, "Your Grace, the customs tax is a matter of great importance. It would be better for you to make the promotion sooner rather than later."

"Lord Corlys, I believe you are the best candidate for the post," Rhaegar smiled, expressing what was in his father's heart.

Corlys furrowed his brow and did not answer immediately.

Viserys followed up, "Lord Corlys, your handling plan for the harbor is incomparably thorough, and it is rightfully yours to serve."

Father and son exchanged a knowing glance, seeing the agreement in each other's eyes.

Rhaegar's smile widened as he increased his leverage, "Lys's Council system will be implemented, and both your daughter and son are candidates for councilors. This will prevent Lord Corlys from having to manage duties both here and there."

Corlys pondered for a moment, looked at his daughter sitting across from him, and agreed, "Since Velaryon is trusted by His Grace, I will not disappoint the King."

"Haha, welcome back to the Small Council," Viserys laughed, raising his glass in a gesture to share a drink.

Corlys nodded gently and raised his glass to drink.

Through the King and Heir Prince's words, he had already discerned the key message.

The Velaryon House would share the benefits, and the councillors of the Lys Council System would be part of this arrangement. But the councillor couldn't be Corlys himself. He was politically overqualified, and any royal family member serving as a Prince risked being overshadowed by him.

Instead, he was granted the position of Master of Ships, reserving the Councillor of Lys for one of his children. With positions in King's Landing and Lys, the Velaryon House's power had undoubtedly increased.

Rhaegar raised his glass as well, smiling without saying a word.

A wise man knows how to weigh the pros and cons.

After the Battle of the Narrow Sea, the prestige of the Targaryens had soared and no force could shake it. House Velaryon had been wounded, so it was only right to return to the embrace of the royal family.

Such is the power that influence brings.

Lyonel was surprised, "Prince, what is the Lys Council System? What are the rights of an advisor?"

Otto crossed his arms, his eyes were deep.

In just a few words, the advisors heard the prince's special arrangement and realized that he was not prepared to follow the Westerosi or local system in the three city-states.

Rhaegar was prepared and explained without delay.

The advisors, with their extraordinary wisdom, quickly understood the deeper meaning.

"Prince, who will hold the position of Prince?" Lyonel frowned slightly and asked the question on everyone's mind.

Otto saw his chance and said, "The position of prince will of course be held by the royal heirs of the royal family."

Immediately, the faces of the present advisors changed, their minds changed.

Alicent's breath caught, and as she rose to pour wine for her husband, she watched his demeanor. Being crowned prince was a treatment not even Daemon had received. With the two city-states of Myr and Lys, her child stood a good chance.

Rhaegar, noticing the room, took Rhaenyra's hand and said brightly, "A Prince can also be a Queen, and I'm going to support Rhaenyra in running Lys."

He declared that he would make Rhaenyra a Queen.

Having taken down the Triarchy, this promise deserved to be realized.

"Rhaegar."

Even though she was mentally prepared, Rhaenyra was still filled with emotion.

"Good! A very good proposal."

Viserys smiled broadly and clapped his hands in loud approval.

His eyes noticed his eldest daughter's stomach, and his smile became a little more genuine. The eldest son would inherit the Iron Throne, and the eldest daughter would manage the newly occupied Lys.

According to Grand Maester Orwyle's judgment, Rhaenyra had a high probability of being pregnant with twins. A twin birth would mean one of the brothers could inherit the throne.

Alicent's face changed slightly, but she quietly poured the wine and sat down. Viserys was oblivious and gave his wife a smiling look.

Otto's eyes narrowed, and he said in a deep voice, "According to the will left behind by King Jaehaerys, the male heir to the throne has a higher line of succession than the female heir."

Before Rhaenyra could respond, Viserys said in displeasure, "Rhaenyra was once the heir to the Iron Throne. I believe she has the ability to manage Lys."

"Your Grace, you still have many heirs," Otto said unwillingly.

Click!

The stone ball smashed heavily on the groove. Rhaegar's gaze was unkind, and his tone was forceful, "Lord Otto, the three city-states were conquered by me. It's not for you to comment on how to distribute them."

"As a royal advisor, I have the obligation to boldly and directly advise."

Otto spoke out in defense.

Rhaegar grinned, a dangerous light flashing in his eyes.

"Take it easy, I'll handle it."

Sensing her brother's defense, Rhaenyra patted the back of his hand and stood up, holding her round belly.

Rhaenyra smiled peacefully, her eyes scanning the group of advisers. "My lords, some of you once swore allegiance to me when I was still a clueless young girl."

Lyonel and Lyman nodded, not denying this. Even Corlys straightened his back, his majestic face taking on a more solemn expression.

Excluding the new Orwyle and Tormund, the advisers present vividly remembered the allegiance ceremony back then.

Rhaenyra cupped her hands around her stomach and smiled coyly, "In the blink of an eye, many years have passed. I've become a woman and will soon be a mother. My shoulders now bear another kind of duty."

"Princess, we've seen it all."

Corlys's gaze sharpened.

Several of Lyonel's men nodded in agreement.

Breeding the Targaryen bloodline and producing the rightful heir was practically as significant as conquering the disputed lands.

Receiving the ministers' approval, Rhaenyra gained more confidence and said, "The Iron Throne already has an Heir Prince, and Lys still needs a Queen."

"For the sake of my father and husband, and equally for the sake of my unborn child, I will govern with all my heart and soul."

With that, she looked tenderly at Rhaegar, meeting his gaze for a moment.

Rhaegar smiled softly and clutched her hand.

Rhaenyra smiled shyly, her eyes falling on her father.

Viserys looked at his sons and daughters with relief, and couldn't help but miss his late wife Aemma Arryn.

If Rhaenyra could be made Queen of Lys, the guilt of the original change of the Heir Prince could be wiped away.

Happening to meet Rhaenyra's eyes, Viserys froze slightly, and an encouraging look appeared in his eyes.

Chapter 394: The Concept of Class

It was hard for a group of veteran advisers who had sworn allegiance to object when words were spoken to such an extent.

Corlys glanced vaguely at his daughter and slapped his large hand on the tabletop to indicate his approval of the proposal. With his reappointment as Master of Ships, it was better for a woman to be elected as the Prince of Lys than for the Heir Prince to manage it himself. Otherwise, it would be difficult for House Velaryon to step in and share more benefits.

Lyonel similarly agreed and moved on to the next topic, "There is no problem with the Princess managing Lys. We should discuss the selection of councillors."

Lyman pondered, "There are multiple candidates for councillors. The Iron Throne should send one or more."

"Your Grace, we should call upon the best from all over and select them fairly," Orwyle spoke up for the first time, his tone humble.

"Wait, the choice of councillors is debatable," Viserys said with a smile, thinking of the two ambassadors present.

For a while, no one cared about Otto, whose face was filled with disbelief. Only Alicent was glum, silently taking a large sip of her drink.

Father and daughter wanted to fight for the interests of the children of the Green Faction, and it dawned on them that their power in the Small Council was far from sufficient. Between the King and the Heir Prince, they had been crushed to dust.

The council went on.

Rhaegar helped Rhaenyra sit down and bluntly confessed, "The councillors are tentatively set at three, with Johanna Swann taking one slot to stay in Lys to assist the future Queen."

Viserys asked curiously, "Isn't she the daughter of House Swann who was taken captive?"

Johanna Swann's tragic encounter had been a sensation.

Rhaegar nodded, "A very capable woman. Her contributions at the Battle of Lys were noteworthy."

He held a favorable opinion of Johanna. Partly out of pity, but more because of her outstanding ability to handle many of Lys' affairs for him. Besides, the newly conquered, free-trading city-states of Tyrosh had been slow to submit to Daemon's tyranny, and Rhaenys had failed to subdue the older nobles of Myr. Only Lys, with Johanna's lobbying, rallied the remaining powerful and noble class and basically stabilized the situation.

Viserys was impressed and said with heartfelt pleasure, "With such a talented person loyal to the royal family, I believe Rhaenyra's subsequent governance will be much easier."

A sentence that sealed Johanna's status as a councilor.

Rhaegar smiled and raised his cup in a toast. He needed Johanna's effectiveness to secretly control Lys' politics. He couldn't be stupid enough to give away his power by saying he would share it.

Father and son joined in planning, and the people present looked at each other in disbelief.

Corlys' eyes were deep, glancing over the ambassadors of Pentos and Volantis, and nodding secretly. After years away from the center of politics, this king and cousin-in-law had grown quite a bit in their political skills. Probably thanks to a good heir, who gave him the courage to say "no."

After a moment's thought, Corlys raised his hand and said calmly, "According to what the Prince said earlier, the election of the second councilor goes to House Velaryon."

"Of course, Lord Corlys," Viserys agreed firmly.

At the assured answer, a hint of a smile appeared on Corlys' impassive face and he said no more. When it came to the interests of the family, there was nothing to be ashamed of. The royal family promised benefits, and he had no reason to back down.

In three words, the two spots had owners.

The ambassadors of Pentos and Volantis were no longer bashful and eagerly said, "Your Grace of the Iron Throne, our city-state deserves a councillor slot as well."

At the beginning of the war, Targaryen negotiated interests with multiple parties.

First, the distribution of taxes from the harbor. This was not difficult to achieve. The city-states of the Triarchy fell into the hands of the Iron Throne, who set the taxes.

The Magister's Council of Pentos and Volantis thought the taxes should be raised significantly and discussed a suitable tax to be divided among them. Even if the taxes of the three free trade city-states were too high, merchants would flow more into Pentos and Volantis.

Secondly, there was the land and population. Tyrosh fell into Daemon's hands, and Myr and Lys were in the hands of the Iron Throne. Pentos and Volantis agreed that at least one city-state should be given to them. At the very least, a large amount of land and slave population should be divided to repay them.

But! The Targaryens clearly had no intention of paying such a high price.

Viserys spread his hands and played innocent, "There are only so many places. I can give you the last one, and the two noble states must negotiate privately."

The Pentos envoy frowned and pursued, "In addition to the councillor quota, I also ask Your Grace to take the land and population of the Triarchy and distribute them."

"No!" Viserys shook his head and vetoed, "I will not divide the lands that belong to the Targaryens." After a pause, he insisted, "Westeros does not allow the buying and selling of slaves, in any form!"

The words were clear: don't even think about the land and the people.

The Pentos envoy's face darkened, and he said solemnly, "Without the distribution of land and population, what will the Iron Throne use to make up for the loss of its allies?"

"Harbor taxes!" Rhaegar's face was calm as he took over the topic.

The Volantis envoy's voice was dull, "With the taxes set by Lord Corlys, even if the full amount were distributed over ten years, it would not be enough to offset the deserved wealth!"

Rhaegar spun the stone ball and said generously, "Therefore, I intend to divide it for a hundred years!"

"What?"

Viserys was stunned and thought he had heard wrong. One hundred years! That was a significant commitment, considering it had only been a hundred years since the Targaryens had ruled Westeros.

"Hear me out, father." Not waiting for the advisers to object, Rhaegar said with a straight face, "In order to make up for the losses of our allies, I am willing to fairly distribute Lys's taxes to offset the land and population."

"Accordingly, House Velaryon, Pentos, and Volantis will contribute to the repair and development of the harbor and not sit on the sidelines."

Corlys frowned and said cautiously, "According to your words, how much of the proceeds can we distribute?"

Rhaegar had prepared for this and signaled Tormund to hand over a few lists. He justified, "The Iron Throne will occupy 10%, The Prince of Lys will occupy 30%, and the remaining 60% will be divided equally among the three parties."

Each of the three parties would receive 20% for a period of up to a hundred years. A fortune beyond imagination. The Prince of Lys took a small percentage and shared 10% of the profits with the Iron Throne to strengthen the bond between the two parties.

Corlys received the list and, after examining it, said in shock, "Prince, the rebuilding of Lys still requires us to pay for it?"

The list clearly stated that the development of Lys would require financial contributions from the three parties and the Iron Throne.

Rhaegar responded, "Lys suffered during the war. The Iron Throne cannot bear the financial burden alone. This is why I am offering a hundred years of tax collection."

"Our return will take a hundred years to pay off?" Corlys noted the key point.

Rhaegar replied, "A small initial investment will provide substantial income for the next hundred years."

"Allow me to think it over carefully," Corlys said solemnly.

Rhaegar smiled and gave the three parties time to consider. The value of Lys's harbor taxes was undeniable. Among the nine free trade city-states, only Braavos and Pentos were better.

Not only did each party benefit from 20%, but there was also the right to manage the port to a certain extent. It was a tempting offer.

It was a difficult decision for Rhaegar to make, but trading the land and population of the Triarchy, and using the benefits to permanently annex Pentos and Volantis, would strengthen the Targaryen foothold in Essos.

With three city-states in hand, sharing Lys's benefits would preserve Myr and potentially share Tyrosh's benefits with Daemon, minus the harbor taxes.

As the allies pondered, the council went slightly quiet.

Otto broke the silence, "Prince, with Lys adopting the council system, what are your thoughts on Myr?"

Rhaegar calmly replied, "As an inland city-state, Myr will be ruled directly by the Crown, borrowing the style of governance from King's Landing."

The royal family would rule Myr, choosing various internal advisors and creating a colony that would expand outward as a city-state. He planned to reward noble second sons and poor knights who fought bravely, and to help develop the territory with loans.

Encouraging a portion of Myr's native slave class would reinforce dominance within the city-state. In the long run, a perfect structure of villages and towns would form around the city-state.

Otto's eyes flickered as he said, "Myr needs talents. The Small Council can elect a group of young talents."

"That's right. This is something I need the advisers' help with," Rhaegar replied, his gaze sharpening.

Tormund pulled out another list and handed it over. Otto hesitantly took the list to check.

Rhaegar smiled, "The construction of the three city-states requires many craftsmen. I intend to unify the issuance of 'craftsman registration.'"

"A separate registration for craftsmen?" Otto asked, recognizing the meaning immediately.

Rhaegar nodded. Otto frowned, puzzled, "The status of craftsmen is low. Dividing them into separate registries seems superfluous."

Rhaegar explained, "It is to train craftsmen. There are many craftsmen, but the selection of certain types is relatively rare. Dividing the registers will help pass on their crafts."

For example, stonemasons would be divided into stonemason registries, and their descendants would inherit the craft, ensuring continuity.

Otto, skeptical, asked, "Even if you register the craftsmen, how will it make a difference?"

Rhaegar patiently explained, "The registers will protect the craftsmen. They built the castles, made the armor and the stirrups. They are the best servants."

Chapter 395: Alicent Plans a Marriage

It was getting late, dusk casting long shadows in the council hall. Two Kingsguard, clad in silver armor and white robes, pushed open the solid wood doors.

Led by Viserys, the meeting participants exited in turn, their expressions varied.

Viserys beamed as he addressed the ambassadors from Pentos and Volantis. "The banquet is not yet over. You two are welcome to join and enjoy the festivities."

The scene resembled allies celebrating a successful alliance. The ambassadors exchanged complicated looks but agreed to the invitation. The promise extended beyond just a meal; it included the strategic distribution of Lys's harbor tax revenue. The Iron Throne's offer of a century's worth of taxes was substantial, and they needed to relay this proposal for approval by their respective leaders.

"Your Grace, I will retire for now," Corlys said solemnly, bowing respectfully.

"Not attending the dinner?" Viserys inquired.

Corlys shook his head. "Given my responsibilities, I need to sort out the port taxes from recent years and plan the restoration of Lys's harbor."

Viserys, not particularly fond of the Sea Snake, did not press him to stay. He nodded, allowing Corlys to leave.

As the crowd moved out, Rhaegar spoke up. "Lord Otto, the matter of the craftsman registry is on the agenda. I will soon follow up in Myr."

"Prince, King's Landing has a large population. I will do my best," Otto responded, taking a deep breath.

"Good work," Rhaegar encouraged.

The rules of Westeros were well established, with limited potential for reform. Rhaegar aimed to transform Myr into a city-state with a perfect system, experimenting with several new policies. The craftsman registry was just the beginning.

In time, he planned to introduce a soldier's registry. Myr had many unproductive slaves who could be organized into soldier households, tasked with cultivating fields outside the city-state.

During farming seasons, they would work the land; in wartime, they would provide young men for battle. This approach would address the survival issues of slaves and alleviate the shortage of troops under royal jurisdiction.

The existing feudal system in Westeros was inefficient: a bannerman's bannerman was not directly loyal to the crown. The Targaryens' reliance on noble support in times of conflict was unsustainable for a dynasty bent on great unification.

Rhaegar sought to follow the example of his great-grandfather Jaehaerys, unconsciously correcting flawed systems and constantly proposing reforms.

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps echoed as a gray-robed maester hurried towards them, holding a letter.

"Stop!" Erryk stepped forward, halting the maester in front of the group.

"Kingsguard, this is a letter from Storm's End," the maester said respectfully, handing over the letter.

Viserys perked up, asking, "News from Storm's End Castle?"

The Dornish invasion of Cape Wrath had been a constant source of concern for him.

"Your Grace, one moment," Tormund and Orwyle exchanged glances before Tormund took the letter, inspecting it carefully.

Satisfied that there were no issues, Tormund smiled as he handed over the letter, "It's good news."

The letter, written by Aemond himself, detailed how he and Laenor had used dragons to decimate the Dornish forces and relieve the harassed Crow's Nest and Griffin's Roost Castles.

Rhaegar glanced at the letter and nodded approvingly. Aemond, despite his youth, showed a depth of mind that surpassed even Aegon's. He was a promising talent.

Viserys, reading the letter, beamed with pride, "Aemond and Laenor performed admirably. The Dornish cannot withstand the dragons' Dragonfire."

"Let me see," Alicent said anxiously, taking the letter. With her sons out in the world, she worried constantly, praying to the Seven Gods every night for their safety.

Reading that Aemond had secured the road to Storm's End Fortress and was now stationed in the Rainwood, Alicent finally felt a sense of relief.

Viserys, still smiling, remarked, "Aemond led a army and became a commander at such a young age."

Alicent sighed with relief, "I just pray for his safety. He is still so young."

Compared to the adult Aegon, the ten-year-old Aemond was a greater source of anxiety for her.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with an idea, "Father, it would be best to resolve the war in the Stormlands as quickly as possible."

He proposed that the Crownlands send a large army while the fleet stationed on the Stepstones Islands attacked the Dornish forces on both sides. He and Aegon would use their dragons to help snuff out the war decisively.

Viserys, understanding the depth of his son's suggestion, expressed concern, "You've just captured the Triarchy. Don't you need to rest for a while?"

War was not child's play, and prolonged involvement could take a toll on one's mind.

Rhaegar hesitated, considering the challenges in Lys and Myr. It was true; they needed a break.

Jasper from the Stormlands spoke up, "Your Grace, with Prince Aemond supported by Storm's End Castle, it's only a matter of time before we drive the enemy back."

He had been closely monitoring the Stormlands battlefield, and Aemond's reputation was growing. With the battle-hardened Royce Caron and Laenor, victory seemed assured.

Viserys, still uncertain, weighed the decision to send additional troops.

Otto took the letter and said in a low voice, "The letter states that the army has already approached Stonehelm, and victory is assured."

Viserys, relieved, ordered, "It is better to transfer three thousand soldiers to assist and speed the conclusion of the war."

"Under the right circumstances, we can still deploy Prince Aegon to assist, and there is a garrison on the Stepstones Islands," Otto proposed, suggesting additional support through sea battles.

Rhaegar turned to Tormund, "What is the situation at the Boneway and Prince's Pass?"

The Narrow Sea War had spread over a considerable distance. Braavos had attacked only once and then focused on a trade war. Dorne, despite holding back for so long, had sent troops into the Stormlands with little success. This behavior didn't match the usual aggression of jackals and vultures. If something seemed unusual, it warranted further scrutiny.

Tormund reported honestly that the Boneway and the Prince's Pass were being guarded. Apart from a group of scattered stragglers, the Dornish had no intention of sending additional troops.

Rhaegar remained uneasy and urged Tormund to send a message to Highgarden and Blackhaven, advising them not to let their guard down. The Dornish were cunning and needed to be watched carefully.

As they discussed, the group descended the stairs from the corridor.

Alicent, walking ahead and holding her husband's hand, said seriously, "The Maiden's Day is in a few days, and I've invited wonderful girls from all over the realm. I'll call Aegon back for it as well."

The Maiden's Day, a traditional event of the Faith of the Seven Gods, was held every summer. Unmarried maidens entered the sanctuary to pray to the Seven Gods for blessings. Over time, it had become an unwritten rule among nobles, providing a sensible and reasonable opportunity for young noblewomen and noblemen to meet.

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow and glanced at Rhaenyra beside him. When he had first chosen his marriage partner, his father had intended to use the Maiden's Day as an excuse. Sensing his gaze, Rhaenyra tightened her arms around him and smiled smugly.

Viserys was in favor, "Aegon is of age; it's time for him to choose a wife."

Alicent's gaze was firm, "Not only Aegon, but many lords will bring good sons from their families so that Helaena can also choose a husband."

"Helaena?" Viserys was stunned and a bit resistant. According to old Valyrian customs, it was preferable for female members to marry within the family, ensuring the purity of the bloodline.

In his father's generation, there were more females than males, especially since Vaegon the Dragonless refused to marry. This imbalance led many of his aunts to marry outside the family line.

In Viserys' generation, his cousin Rhaenys married outside the family. Viserys himself married Aemma Arryn, with mixed Targaryen and Arryn bloodlines, and together they had two pure-blooded children.

His younger brother Daemon was less fortunate, with no cousins available to marry, leading him to wed Lady Rhea of Runestone. After Lady Rhea's death at the Black Wedding, Daemon married Laena of Targaryen blood.

Maintaining family tradition was a demanding affair, requiring careful consideration and strategic marriages.

Among Viserys' children, there were more males than females. Keeping Helaena within the family seemed far more valuable than marrying her off. Considering this, Viserys whispered, "We should ask Aegon if he is willing to marry Helaena, or wait for little Daeron to grow up a bit."

Following the marital wishes of one's children did not mean acting arbitrarily. If Aegon was unwilling to marry Helaena, there were other options.

Alicent was reluctant: "It will be years before Daeron is old enough."

"That's nothing. Didn't Rhaenyra wait years for Rhaegar?" Viserys replied casually. Given Rhaenyra and Rhaegar's previous experience, the seven-year difference between Helaena and Daeron seemed manageable.

Alicent shook her head, refusing, "No, Helaena can't wait!"

"For what reason?" Viserys said, puzzled.

Alicent glanced back at Rhaegar and gritted her teeth, "I'm doing this for the sake of the family, to avoid someone making a mistake!"

She could see that her daughter had a crush on Rhaegar. Not only did the black and green sides not get along, but Rhaegar was already married!

Viserys wasn't a fool. He glanced at his eldest son and then at his youngest daughter who had fallen behind, and absurd thoughts surfaced.

"You mean, Helaena..." Viserys was very surprised.

"That's why I wanted to end it before it was too late!" Alicent lowered her voice, trying to contain her emotions.

Viserys fell silent. That was unexpected, never in a million years would he have guessed it!

In the back, Rhaegar felt uneasy under their gaze. Intuition told him that something was wrong.

Suddenly, he sensed someone staring at him. Rhaegar turned and met a pair of clear eyes. Helaena, hands hanging at her sides, was walking down the stairs with lowered eyebrows. Every now and then, she raised her head and looked over with her light purple eyes.

Rhaegar caught her gaze just in time. Helaena looked confused for a moment, her eyes filled with emotions, and then she consciously lowered her head for two seconds. The action was very coherent, without a hint of panic that her thoughts had been discovered.

Rhaegar retracted his gaze, his heart pounding. The little girl's mood was not right; she seemed to harbor feelings she shouldn't.

In his unseen field of vision, Helaena raised her head again, staring straight ahead at her eldest sibling. Her eyes were pure, with a touch of hope and envy. She couldn't compete with her sister and could only watch silently. The young girl's mind was simple but not stupid. She was waiting for an opportunity to fit in logically.

Seeing that no one noticed her, Helaena whispered to herself, "The dragon has three heads...."

Chapter 396: Helaena's Prophecy

Seven days later.

It was midday, and the sun was shining brightly.

The hot rays poured down, adding a stifling heat to the already humid King's Landing.

Inside the Dragonpit.

"Roar"

"Roar!"

In the dim environment, two unbound young dragons soared up and down, colliding like flashes of light.

One dragon, much larger, had cobalt blue scales with orange-red scales extending from its lower jaw to its abdomen, gaudy and elegant.

The other, only half the size of its opponent, had silver-white scales and golden vertical pupils, its head majestic and fierce.

These were Tessarion and the young dragon Stormcloud, bred in the Dragonpit.

"Roar..."

Tessarion moved dexterously, flapping its blue wings to fly high, ejecting cobalt blue mixed with orange Dragonfire from its mouth.

Poof!

Stormcloud bravely faced the dragonfire head-on, his silver-white scales burning with traces of scorched black.

"Roar.."

The distance closed, and Stormcloud instantly pounced on his opponent, opening his fangs to bite.

Tessarion retaliated fiercely, strangling Stormcloud's neck with one of his dragon claws and spraying dragonfire at Stormcloud's head.

The brilliant dragonfire burned brightly and struck with force.

Stormcloud hissed in shock, its golden pupils narrowing as its head withstood the blow.

Within a few breaths, the dragon's head burned to charcoal, and a pair of gray horns turned dark.

The tangle did not stop!

"Roar..."

Stormcloud flapped his wings defiantly, aiming his dragon's maw at Tessarion's head.

Its throat surged, and a mouthful of snowflake-like streaks of silver-white Dragonfire gushed out.

Boom!

Tessarion, careless and gullible, was hit squarely by the Dragonfire, letting out a hiss of pain.

Stormcloud saw its chance and bit the back leg of its opponent's locked neck, its fangs piercing the cobalt blue scales.

The scales shattered, and Tessarion let go of its claws in pain.

Stormcloud regained his free form and quickly disengaged from the mid-air battlefield.

"Roar!"

Tessarion, now truly enraged, stabilized his stance with the intention of pursuing.

Just then, a bright and loud scream rang out.

"Stop!"

The voice seemed to contain magical power. Tessarion's movements stopped, and its anger melted away like snow.

On the black stone slab, Rhaegar tilted his head and looked out, holding an ancient sheepskin book.

"Roar..."

Tessarion glanced at him, full of reluctance, and gave up the fight, retreating back into the Dragonpit in the corner to recuperate.

Stormcloud, on the other hand, landed on the ground, stretching out its shiny silver wings to reflect its handsome appearance.

"Heh, what a ferocious nature," Rhaegar guffawed, flipping open the sheepskin book to compare its contents.

The ancient book was a cherished document from Lys, recording descriptions of the Dragonlord families, including methods for nurturing young dragons and making them fight each other.

In the Dragonpit, Tessarion had reached adolescence, at thirty feet long and comparable to a elephant.

Stormcloud, still too young, was just the size of an ordinary horse, barely able to muster some combat power.

In their fight, Tessarion had the clear advantage, fighting with ease. Stormcloud, like a defiant newborn calf, bit his opponent with unyielding vigor.

Rhaegar read the pages for a while when footsteps came to his ears.

"Roar..."

First came a shrill roar.

Tyraxes's massive dragon head fidgeted back and forth, flapping its mist-colored gray wings as it flew in midair. Shackles were placed on his slender hind feet, controlled by a mossy-faced Dragonkeeper. The young dragon had a fiery temperament and was restless. If not controlled by chains, it would fly wildly and spit Dragonfire at all living things in front of it.

Rhaegar closed the ancient book and looked at the magnificent Stormcloud and the grotesque Tyraxes in succession, the corners of his mouth unconsciously curling up.

"These are valuable family resources."

Rhaenyra was pregnant with twin children and had picked two dragon eggs in advance to prepare. However, the hatching of dragon eggs depended too much on probability and was not always certain.

Of course, with the purity of Rhaegar's bloodline at the time Rhaegar had impregnated her, the talent of the two children was bound to be exceptional. It was not unreasonable to hope they would soon hatch young dragons.

On this premise, if something happened to the children's eggs, Stormcloud and Tyraxes were the first choice to tame.

When the Dragonkeeper approached, Rhaegar instructed, "Take care of the two young dragons, and keep an eye on Tessarion."

Speaking High Valyrian, he had quite the air of uttering a forbidden magic spell. The language was similar, the pronunciation similar. Since his bloodline had metamorphosed into dragonborn, some of the transcendent gestures had unconsciously changed.

"Yes Prince!" The Dragonkeeper nodded solemnly.

Apart from this aged Dragonkeeper, there were also some young Dragonkeepers of the new generation within the Dragonpit. As Rhaegar turned around, he found a familiar face in the corner.

Denys Waters.

At this time, this Dragonkeeper had cut off his silver blonde curly hair and shaved it into the uniform inch of a Dragonkeeper. His clothing became rough linen, and he held a bamboo staff with very resolute eyes.

Rhaegar asked, "How is Denys integrating?"

"Very hard working and talented," the Dragonkeeper answered truthfully.

Rhaegar nodded at his words and asked no more questions.

After the battle of Lys, Denys offered the dragon egg that hatched Tyraxes, which could be said to be a great feat. In terms of merit, he deserved to be made a knight. It seems that he didn't notice

Denys's movements and detained him in the attic for too long, irritating him. When they met again, the other man had shaved his head and swore an oath to become a Dragonkeeper of his own free will.

Dragonkeeping is not a very ancient profession. The founder was Rhaena Targaryen, the Black Bride. The first group of Dragonkeepers was formed by Rhaena after she blamed herself for the loss of three of Dreamfyre's eggs.

Not just anyone can be a Dragonkeeper, but it was basically the bastards sons of a Targaryens many generations ago.

Bastards have Valyrian blood and are good at learning the common dragon-taming language made up of the higher Valyrian languages, which reduces the dragon's bad temper. This is the reason why all of the Dragonkeepers shave their heads to hide who they once were.

Denys did this, presumably because he was afraid of being silenced and offered his loyalty completely. Rhaegar didn't care much about that. However, if there is merit, there must be reward, so Denys's daughter was picked up at the Red Keep and placed beside Helaena as a female companion.

When she grows up a bit, they will find a young and capable adult to marry her to, thus blessing the child.

...

Walking out of the Dragonpit, Rhaegar took a carriage to the River Gate.

As the Dragonpit gate closed, a few loud, sharp roars echoed through the air. Rhaegar smiled and continued to study the contents of the ancient book.

The carriage moved swiftly down Rhaenys' Hill and through the crowded Silk Street. The Maidens' Day had arrived, drawing noble lords from across the realm to King's Landing and breathing new life into the majestic city.

Rhaegar glanced out the window and noticed the hustle and bustle of the various brothels. The doorways were crowded with people, their silhouettes animated in the lively atmosphere. Whether richly dressed adults or downtrodden knights, they emptied their purses to gain entry.

"Brothels are truly a profitable business; it's a shame the taxes aren't raised," Rhaegar murmured softly, his eyes glittering with a speculative light.

The character of Lys was evident in the blossoming pleasure houses and the variety of sex workers that adorned the city. Human nature's desire for such establishments couldn't be suppressed, but it could be controlled.

Crunch...

The carriage crossed Silk Street and followed a wide, prosperous avenue straight to the River Gate. Along the way, Rhaegar occasionally looked out and observed the lives of the people of King's Landing.

The most common were three types of people: nobles spending money on pleasure, merchants running their businesses, and commoners living frugally.

"There are hardly any blacksmiths to be seen..." Rhaegar's thoughts drifted as he analyzed the various professions more closely. In a city-state, merchants and smiths were the mainstream.

Lost in thought, time passed slowly.

The carriage arrived at the River Gate, where workers were busy moving and transporting goods on the pier, and many ships were moored at sea. These were mostly nobles from all over the realm who had come for the Maiden's Day, along with some cargo ships following the reopening of the canal.

Tormund, dressed in black and white robes, stood conspicuously at the pier.

Rhaegar called him over to inquire about the arranged tasks.

Tormund replied, "Five hundred naturalized craftsmen were sent to the ships and have sailed to Lys."

"Otto is very meticulous in his work," Rhaegar acknowledged.

Lys and Myr were in dire need of all types of craftsmen, making it an opportune moment to distribute the craftsman registrations.

...

Red Keep

A large number of nobles poured into the Red Keep, bringing their families and children with them. The banquet hall, the castle courtyard, and the Godswood were all packed with people and buzzing with activity.

The weather was hot, so servants brought buckets of wine and dug up ice from the icehouse. Despite their best efforts, the nobles were still sweating profusely in the heat.

This stifling weather only encouraged the nobles to drink and sing even more enthusiastically.

Alicent was busy entertaining guests from all over the realm. Amidst the hustle and bustle, sweat soaked her back, and she reluctantly went to change, her smile strained but unwavering.

...

Queen's Bedchamber

"Green... Black... Tangled..."

The young girl's murmurs floated softly, her voice ethereal. Inside the chamber, the walls were adorned with murals of men and women, while a soft Lys felt carpet lay in the center of the room.

Three little silver and blonde-haired girls knelt in a circle on the felt, absorbed in their play. Helaena, with her head bowed, calmly manipulated two balls of thread.

Beside her, two other girls, one older and one younger, remained silent, not daring to disturb Helaena in her trance-like state.

The older girl, with milky white skin, was Layla, the bastard daughter of Volantis. The younger one, about seven or eight years old, was Jasmine, the daughter of Silver Denys.

Snap--

Suddenly, Helaena clapped her hands together, pressing the tangled threads onto the felt. Little Jasmine flinched, her fleshy face turning pale.

"Shhh!"

Helaena hushed her, eyes grave. "He wants a city, and he's going to pay for it."

Layla and Jasmine frowned in unison, puzzled by Helaena's cryptic words. Despite their brief time together, they had grown accustomed to Helaena's mysterious utterances.

Crunch--

The door to the room opened, and Alicent, her face flushed from the sun, walked in quickly.

"Your Grace, the Queen..."

The two little girls hurriedly stood and curtsied.

"It's you two."

Alicent maintained her composure, glanced at her impassive daughter, and said helplessly, "You girls go out first. I need to chat with Helaena."

"Yes, Your Grace."

The two little girls gathered their toys and obediently left the room.

Helaena remained with her head bowed, seemingly oblivious to the outside world.

Chapter 397: Aegon's Maiden's Day

Queen's Bedchamber

Bang!

The door to the room closed, and the room grew quiet.

Alicent bent down and took her daughter's hand. "There are many adults arriving today," she whispered.

Helaena turned a deaf ear and muttered, "Bears in the sea..."

The words came out dry, as if her eyes were piercing through unseen images.

"Helaena," Alicent tried to embrace her, eyes full of pity. "My daughter."

Helaena quickly turned away, coldly avoiding her mother's embrace.

Alicent looked stunned, her pupils trembling as she looked at her daughter. "I need rest," Helaena murmured, lowering her fine eyebrows. Then, as an afterthought, she added, "Mother."

She had just seen many, many unfamiliar images, a stream of visions poked into her head like a rough stick. The images penetrated her mind, blurring her memory.

Alicent dropped her hand awkwardly, ignoring the black and green spools of thread on the felt. She sighed softly, "You're a big girl now, it's time to go out and see the world."

"I'm a Targaryen. We own the world," Helaena replied calmly, looking away.

"You may have a dragon, but you can't live on its back for the rest of your life," Alicent said, trying to hold back her frustration as she pressed on convincingly.

Helaena clenched her small hands and stood up, moving away from her mother. "I don't want this."

She was no longer the little girl who cried like a toddler or babbled incoherently. She knew that she was not only a Dragonrider, but also a rare Dreamer. Her brother had told her that there was nothing in this world that she couldn't have if she wanted it.

Alicent, trying to remain patient, continued, "It is the rules of the world that you are of age to marry."

"Whose rules?" Helaena shot back, her incredulity clear.

She walked over to the wall and lowered her sword, "Long Summer". Her small hands pulled out part of the blade, revealing the cold, rippling steel that illuminated her soft face. Helaena stroked it gently, her eyes showing her affection.

It was clear that the little girl loved this sword. Dreamfyre gave her courage, and Long Summer was her will.

Seeing this, Alicent's frustration peaked. "Helaena, you are a lady. It is a woman's destiny to marry and have children. Don't play with that sword."

Alicent couldn't contain her anger, her sunburnt face now flushed with rage.

House Hightower from Oldtown was a respected and ancient noble house, and it had taught Alicent to be proud and reserved since she was young. She embraced the beliefs of the Seven Gods and learned the ways of a lady.

Her father, Otto, had convinced her to reach out to the bereaved king, using shameful tactics to put her in line for the throne. This caused her to go against her heart and betray her former friend, Rhaenyra. It stuck like a thorn in her heart.

Since then, Alicent had always remembered the family honor, abiding by sacrifice, paying the price, and adhering to the rules as a form of self-redemption.

She had suppressed her feelings for years, watching her children grow up one by one. She thought her efforts had borne fruit, only to be confronted with a rebellious reality that slapped her hard.

Click!

Long Summer slid back into its sheath as Helaena whispered softly, "Mother, I know how to wield a sword."

She looked down at her feet, glancing at her mother out of the corner of her eye. In her own way, she reminded herself that she was growing up, quietly rebelling against her mother's intense and uncomfortable affection. Except in front of Rhaegar, she was an innocent and sweet little girl.

Helaena was usually quiet and rarely spoke much. Alicent didn't care and tapped her forehead in frustration. "Grab some things, you're coming with me to meet someone in a few minutes."

"Okay," Helaena nodded briefly, not wanting to irritate her mother any further.

To outsiders, she was a girl with a troubled mind. But to her, it was her mother who seemed mentally unwell. Alicent, driven by her grandfather's ambitions and her own insecurities, had no

real sense of self. Helaena saw her mother as the poor girl forced into a role she didn't really understand or want.

Alicent sat on her knees, red-eyed and silently crying, lamenting the injustice of her fate. There was no one she could trust completely, not even her father or her husband.

"Blessed be the Seven Gods," Alicent murmured, closing her eyes and clasping her hands in prayer.

...

On the other hand, a painted white carriage returned to the Red Keep.

Banquet Hall

Rhaegar sidestepped through the crowded flow of people and ascended the stairs. The joyous news of defeating the Triarchy had spread throughout the Seven Kingdoms, causing nobles everywhere to rejoice.

The queen had decreed that a Maiden's Day Festival be held, and the nobles, smelling the signals of potential unions, all wanted to get their hands on the benefits.

"Prince..."

"Long live the prince..."

With his long, attention-grabbing silver and gold hair, Rhaegar was surrounded by nobles who greeted him enthusiastically wherever he went. He smiled and responded to each one.

Upstairs, the room opened up a bit, making it easier to move around. Most of the women were gathered here, sitting around tables in groups of three or five, chatting about all sorts of gossip and interesting things.

Rhaegar looked around and saw Little Daeron behind a beaded curtain. Little Daeron spotted him and greeted him happily, "Brother, I have a place here."

The little boy was neatly dressed, his hair neatly combed, and he had the air of a small adult. Rhaegar waved and walked over to sit with him.

Lifting the beaded curtain, he saw three benches with goose feather cushions surrounding a triangular area. Little Daeron was sitting alone on one of the benches, with a half-open ancient book beside him. The twins, Baela and Rhaena, sat on the other two benches.

"Roar..."

The young dragon, Morning, lay on her back in Rhaena's arms, hissing weakly at Rhaegar. After two months, Morning had not grown much, still the size of a house cat. Compared to her previous sickly, breathless appearance, Morning was much more energetic, her vertical pupils spinning as she looked curiously at Rhaegar.

Rhaegar also looked at the little dragon a few times. With light pink scales all over her body and black, pearl-like dragon horns, her appearance was indeed rare and beautiful. But she was crippled.

Seeing his arrival, the twins greeted him in unison, "Cousin."

Their last name was Targaryen, an extension of Daemon's bloodline.

"I just came by to sit for a while. You know, walk the floor," Rhaegar said with a gentle face as he sat next to Daeron.

"Roar..."

Morning broke free of its master's embrace and flapped its magnificent wings to fly to the coffee table, freezing in place as it stared at Rhaegar. The neck stretched several times, trying to get close and then shrinking back.

Rhaegar's eyes flickered slightly. He raised his hand to stroke the young dragon's head and smiled. "Looks like she's recovering well."

Rhaena nodded repeatedly. "I've listened to you and taken Morning out often to feel the earth's fire, and her food intake has increased."

"Dragonmont is a good place, and an occasional visit to the Isle of Faces is fine," Rhaegar suggested as he scratched Morning's jaw.

Dragons were magical creatures of blood and fire, and the fire magic of volcanic landscapes was the strongest, helping to replenish the energy of young dragons with innate deficiencies.

As he spoke, Rhaegar secretly summoned his fire magic and channeled it against Morning's scales.

Morning shivered pleasantly and opened its wings, clinging to Rhaegar's arm, unwilling to let go. Rhaegar held still, channeling fire magic into the young dragon's body.

With his powerful perception, he was exceptionally sensitive to fire magic. Each dragon contained raging fire magic, much like a burning bonfire. The three adult dragons - Cannibal, Vhagar, and Vermithor - were like little volcanoes, brimming with explosive power.

Based on observation, dragons did not actively absorb fire magic, but their massive bodies could autonomously absorb it, growing stronger with age. Morning's innate weakness was her low efficiency in absorbing fire magic.

As a young dragon, if Tyraxes could absorb a large pot of fire magic, Morning could only manage a small cup. However, her condition had improved slightly with the nourishment of earth fire.

After a while, Rhaegar withdrew his arm and patted the seemingly drunken Morning, encouraging it, "Feed well and you will become a great dragon."

Rhaena hugged Morning gently and nodded vigorously, "Uh-huh! I'll take good care of her."

Rhaegar turned to see little Daeron holding an ancient book, reading intently. He reached out to snatch it, "Read a little less, you're becoming a bookworm."

It was enough for the Targaryens to have one dragonless scholar. There was no need for another.

Little Daeron obediently let out an "oh" and sat down quietly.

Rhaegar frowned slightly. Compared to his other siblings, Little Daeron's strength was learning and understanding manners, but his weakness was a lack of opinions. Without Helaena and Aemond to guide him, he was more or less idle.

"Where did Aegon go?" Rhaegar asked casually, glancing around.

The focus of the Maiden Day Festival was not the maidens, but Aegon, who wanted to marry one. He had returned to King's Landing on Sunfyre overnight.

Little Daeron raised an eyebrow, pointed his little finger behind another beaded curtain and muttered, "He's over there."

Rhaegar looked and saw several people through the beaded curtain. Aegon, with a smug look on his face, leaned back on a bench and raised his glass of wine. Several maidens of outstanding beauty surrounded him.

Among them was Margaery Tyrell of Highgarden. Dressed in a pale green gown, the little rose gazed at Aegon with a smile on her lips. Her soulful eyes twinkled as if she were watching a show. The other maidens were a bit younger than her.

Rhaegar recognized them by the house emblems on their jewelry - a tall tower, a walking hunter, and three hives in black and yellow stripes. When he saw the Honeyholt emblem, he laughed softly, "Lord Lyman is eager to marry into the royal family as well."

That was the crest of House Beesbury of Honeyholt.

Little Daeron turned and flopped on the back of his chair, staring at another blonde girl and whispering, "Look, that's the Lannister girl."

Rhaegar glanced over and said casually, "A branch of the House of much lower status."

At that moment, Aegon was completely unaware that his brothers were watching from the sidelines. He lifted the silver and gold hair that covered his forehead and gestured dramatically:

"Braavos launched a sneak attack on the Three Sisters Islands with hundreds of warships. It was up to me and Sunfyre to fight them off. We burned those mercenaries until they cried for their mothers..."

He looked genuinely heroic.

Clap...

Margaery clapped her small hands, pursed her lips, and smiled, "To the brave Prince Aegon, and to the golden Sunfyre."

She raised her wine glass and took a dainty sip. The two girls from the Lannister and Tully Houses looked at each other, seeing suspicion in each other's eyes.

They were well-informed and knew that nothing like what Prince Aegon described had happened. The girl from House Hightower, however, ignored these details and cooperatively raised her glass to drink.

Seeing this, Aegon raised his chin high, seemingly believing his own tale.

Not far away, Rhaegar and Little Daeron witnessed it with their own eyes, exchanged a heartfelt glance, and blurted out, "How humiliating!"

Chapter 398: Aemond's Thoughts

"Aegon is shameless!"

Little Daeron covered his face with both hands, feeling the embarrassment keenly. Having a brother who bragged so shamelessly was humiliating.

Rhaegar held his forehead with one hand, utterly speechless. How could Aegon boast so brazenly without fear of retribution from the people of the Three Sisters Islands? Those lawless and impoverished people might just sneak up on him during one of his brothel visits.

Rhaegar sighed, "We need to urge the gold cloaks to patrol closely."

"What happened?" the twins asked, drawn over by the commotion. They plopped down on the same bench with their refreshments to watch.

For a moment, four silver and gold heads huddled together, all staring at Aegon as he spun his wild tales. They didn't move much, but their conspicuous presence quickly drew attention.

Margaery sat demurely, looking up at Aegon with feigned surprise, doing her best to play along with the prince's exaggerated stories. Her brown eyes held a hint of hidden amusement. Despite her young age, she managed to appear as if she were humorously indulging a child.

The other girls followed suit, heaping praise on Aegon, making him glow with pride. He raised his wine bottle, ready to showcase his drinking prowess.

Suddenly, Margaery's eyes flickered, noticing the silver-gold reflections across the room. Raising her gaze, she spotted four Targaryens of varying sizes.

"Prince Rhaegar!" Margaery cried out in surprise, lifting her skirts joyfully as she approached.

Rhaegar looked stunned and frowned slightly. His intuition were sensitive, and facing Margaery's gaze, he felt an inexplicable sense of unease.

"Prince, long time no see." Margaery curtsied demurely, smiling. "I haven't had time to congratulate you on your great victory over the Triarchy. I believe the king will soon organize a special merit banquet in your honor."

Rhaegar smiled politely, "Thank you for remembering, Lady Margaery."

As they chatted, he subtly adjusted his seating position, holding the twins in front of him as a barrier. The feeling of being watched intensified as Margaery closed the distance.

The sensation wasn't like Jeyne's affection or Helaena's adoration. It was an unabashed, naked covetousness.

Suddenly being hugged, Rhaena tilted her small head, "What's wrong?"

The little girl had a delicate mind, inheriting her mother Laena's gentleness.

"Stupid! Be quiet." Baela, smarter and more perceptive, covered her sister's mouth and leaned into Rhaegar's arm.

She could see it. The milky-skinned woman across the room had eyes much like those of the women who had tried to seduce her father. Cousin was her foster mother's husband, and they had to help look after him.

Rhaena closed her little mouth in resignation and scooted over to lean on her sister's side.

Morning hissed shrilly, squeezed between the two sisters and struggling outward as hard as it could.

He smiled apologetically at Margaery, unwilling to engage in too much small talk. Margaery's eyes crossed over the twins, and she sat herself down on another bench, picking out topics that the little girls would enjoy. Within a few words, she had the twins giggling. Even Daeron, who had been covering his face, was drawn into the conversation, opening his box of toys to join in.

Rhaegar secretly shook his head, lamenting the power of foreign enemies and the unreliability of allies. He considered Margaery's presence in King's Landing and speculated that the only ones left in Highgarden were the old Lord Tyrell and the newly promoted Lady Tyrell.

"Is there a conflict with her stepmother, Is she trying to avoid being kicked out?" Rhaegar mused, pouring himself a glass of sweet fruit wine and enjoying a moment of peace amidst the hustle and bustle.

The heir to the Reach was a critical issue, but he couldn't reach that far. He prayed that old Lord Tyrell still had the ability to reproduce or wouldn't die too soon. During the Dornish Rebellion, the Reach couldn't afford to be in disarray.

The calm was short-lived. The Heir Prince, the Lord's only daughter, and a few Targaryens together quickly attracted many eyes. A group of noblewomen and noblemen coveted the Heir Prince, but he was already married. Little Daeron was too young, so they could only look and sigh.

On the contrary, Aegon's side saw a lot of action. The girls from the Lannister and Tully Houses left behind their pre-selected marriage prospects and curtsied before joining Margaery.

They did not want to disrespect Aegon. The king's second son was still a prince, and they understood that. However, the second prince's first choice for marriage was Selene of House Hightower, and they were merely attendants. When Margaery took the lead, they withdrew immediately.

...

Several beautiful girls drifted away, leaving Aegon visibly displeased. "Don't go away!" he muttered under his breath.

He hadn't finished his wine, and now most of the girls had left. Only two remained with him: Selene Hightower and Anna Beesbury.

Selene was not stunningly beautiful, but she exuded a sense of freshness, dignity, and grace reminiscent of Alicent. Anna, on the other hand, was a slightly chubby girl with a very cute smile.

Aegon glanced at them both and then slumped down with his head hanging low. He had been quite taken with Margaery and the blonde beauty from House Lannister, both of whom had plump figures that he favored.

The two girls left with him now were less to his liking. He had met Anna Beesbury once before, during his trip to the Riverlands to ask for help in the last Battle of the Stepstones. She seemed a bit naive, and he found her father, Lord Lyman, annoying.

Selene Hightower was quite pretty, with long white legs that were tempting, but Aegon felt a strong aversion. Shaking his head hastily, he thought to himself, "I won't marry a woman from House Hightower even if I die!"

...

At the same time

Stormlands, Rainwood Quarters

"Knights on patrol, make way!"

A group of a dozen or so Storm Knights, waving flags embroidered with a treasure-crowned stag, rushed to the entrance of the camp on horseback. Within moments, the fortress gate opened from the inside, and soldiers ran out to move the barriers.

The Storm Knights entered the camp.

"Roar..."

A brown, clay-colored dragon shadow cut through the sky, emerging from the lush woodlands.

On the dragon's back, a silver-haired teenager clad in light armor commanded, "Sheepstealer, put me down!"

As they reached the sky above the camp, Aemond's eyes gleamed with excitement. He slapped the dragon's scales with his hand.

"Roar..."

Sheepstealer glanced at his rider and landed slowly. The dragon reeked of blood, and its body was covered with large and small pits, evidence of numerous battles. Its wide brown wings had a hole the size of a basin.

Aemond climbed down from the dragon's back, rubbing the dragon's neck. "Good job, we burned another team of Dornishmen," he said smugly.

"Roar..."

Sheepstealer squinted and moved lazily, its vertical pupils reflecting its visible disdain. Mounted on the dragon's back, Aemond charged wherever the fight was fiercest. Sheepstealer was not some ancient dragon that could endure endless abuse; it was a battle-scarred creature.

As the dragon moved away, Aemond scratched his head in embarrassment. He called over a nearby soldier. "Go prepare some goats for my dragon. He needs a change today."

"Yes, Prince," the soldier replied, hurrying off to fulfill the order.

Sheepstealer's ferocity was well-known, and he demanded a lot of food after each battle. Seeing the soldier's respect and fear, the corners of Aemond's mouth rose, satisfying his vanity.

He turned and walked back to his tent. Inside, Royce Caron, clad in silver and gray armor, waited. He held his helmet in one hand and pointed at a sand table with the other, speculating on the battlefield's changes.

As a Lord of the Marches, Royce had rich experience commanding battles, always maintaining control over the Stormlands' overall situation.

"Lord Royce," Aemond greeted as he entered the tent.

"Prince," Royce responded respectfully. He then turned serious. "The army has cleared the path. In a matter of days, we will strike from Crow's Nest and break the siege of Stonehelm."

Aemond frowned, pointing at the Rainwood location on the sand table. "What about the hidden Dornish detachments?"

"They're small combat units, not a significant threat," Royce explained thoughtfully, aiming to educate Aemond. "Our large army consists of 3,000 cavalry, 5,000 archers, and 20,000 infantry. With Lord Swann of Stonehelm attacking the besieged Dornish soldiers on both sides, we can resolve the battle swiftly."

He was Lady Elenda's father and Cassandra's maternal grandfather. Aemond was joined to his granddaughter by marriage, and as an elder, he felt it his duty to teach the knowledge of marching and fighting.

Upon hearing this, Aemond's frown deepened.

At that moment, the tent curtain was lifted, and a tall and handsome knight walked in.

The knight had a kind face and a gentle brow. He bowed and greeted them, "Lord Royce, Prince."

Aemond glanced at him, unimpressed.

Royce's expression grew complicated. "Cole, has Ser Laenor not arrived yet?"

This knight was not the Kingsguard stationed in the Stepstones, Christon Cole. Cole was his first name; his surname was something else.

Royce nodded, suspicion in his eyes. Laenor's sexual orientation was well known. Cole came from a common background and was knighted at the First Battle of the Stepstones.

The two had become longtime companions. Cole was the second mate; the first was Ser Joffrey, Laenor's childhood companion, who was banished from Driftmark Island by the Sea Snake after Laenor's marriage.

Laenor, unwilling to be left alone, took a liking to the gentle and handsome peasant knight Cole. Their relationship formed an underground affair that many in the barracks disapproved of, believing it to be against the faith of the Seven and the honor of knighthood.

Aemond disliked both of them.

Royce worried that the two would bring down his future grandson-in-law and vaguely disapproved of too much contact between them.

With the three of them in the tent, the tension was palpable.

Despite being accustomed to other people's stares, Cole still felt ashamed and lowered his head.

"Lord Royce, the raven crows have sent a message. The Dornish have gathered thousands to attack Mistwood."

Mistwood was located in the southern part of the Rainwood in Cape Wrath and was the domain of House Mertyns.

Royce frowned, but before he could speak, Aemond's eyes lit up. "Mistwood's defenses are weaker than Stonehelm's. We should support them first."

Chapter 399: White Worm Brothel

Royce froze at Aemond's words and responded in a deep voice, "Our primary goal is to drive Dorn's main force out of the Stormlands."

Aemond quickly pointed to the spacing between Mistwood and analyzed, "If we split a team to support Mistwood, we can block the retreat of the Dornish on three sides."

The Dornish fighting style involved hit-and-run tactics, constantly harassing their enemies. A team running from Mistwood could indeed block their retreat and prevent them from disappearing into the Rainwood like last time.

Royce involuntarily raised an eyebrow, sensing a different intention.

Cole, noticing the stalemate, spoke up, "My lord, we have two dragons; we can easily break through the Dornish line."

"You agree with the prince's strategy?" Royce asked rhetorically.

Aemond's gaze shifted to the tall Cole, scrutinizing him.

A drop of cold sweat dripped from Cole's forehead as he whispered, "We can arrange for Laenor to lead the rescue of Mistwood. He is eager to ride his dragon for battle."

As an lover, Cole had certain privileges.

Royce frowned and turned his head to look at Aemond, "What do you think?"

"Very well," Aemond agreed, "Laenor will go out to fight, and I'll stay in the Rainwood to clean up the remaining Dornishmen."

Royce reluctantly agreed, realizing it made sense. "I'll go back and organize the army. The king ordered three thousand soldiers to be sent to help in the battle. You'll stay in the camp."

He then directed his gaze at Cole, saying coldly, "Go to Ser Laenor and give the general orders."

"Yes, my lord," Cole replied hurriedly.

Royce barked a few more words to Aemond before walking out of the tent with his head lowered.

At times like this, the importance of command was emphasized. Having two dragon riders in the army greatly affected battlefield coordination.

Seeing Royce leave, Aemond's eyes were dark and calculating, contemplating how to deal with Lord Swann of Stonehelm. He was a man who held grudges.

The House Swann opposed his fiancée's inheritance of Storm's End and slandered Targaryen's reputation with their words. He intended to take out his anger ruthlessly.

Sensing the tension, Cole swallowed and hurriedly excused himself. He needed to find Laenor. The absence of his mate for the last few days had made him a little paranoid.

...

It was nighttime, and the stars shone brightly.

In King's Landing, the night wind blew gently, dispelling the day's dry heat and bringing a slight coolness.

The urban area, cluttered with buildings, had streets and alleys as tangled as tree roots, with dilapidated shacks everywhere.

As far as the eye could see, unclothed people gathered in the shacks, holding broken bowls and drinking a food called "brown soup."

Occasionally, a few children scurried about, stealing and foraging in groups.

This was Flea Bottom, the most disorganized part of the city, where even the gold cloaks were unwilling to patrol.

Crunching...

A horse-drawn carriage stopped in front of a short stone building, its wooden wheels grinding on the crumbling stone road.

The formerly intact green stone slabs, worn down by years of wear and tear, were trampled to pieces.

If it weren't for the daily cleaning of the streets, the stone slabs would be covered in foul-smelling feces and urine, making it impossible to see their true appearance.

A young man on the carriage, alert and cloaked in black robes, scanned his surroundings.

Not far away, a stone building was brightly lit, and the sounds of men and women making love echoed.

On the top floor of the short building, in a hidden attic, sat the White Worm, Mysaria. She wore a black velvet hooded robe trimmed with blood-red silk.

Her pale, beautiful face was calm as she sat with her legs crossed on the edge of the attic window, gazing through the window at the night view.

Based on her appearance and temperament, she looked more like a noblewoman who had been through a lot rather than a prostitute.

"Lady Mysaria, thank you for waiting."

A black-robed man pushed the door in, removing his hood to reveal his true face.

It was none other than Otto Hightower, who had close dealings with the White Worm.

As soon as Otto entered, he asked directly, "I heard you were planning to leave. Is your money still sufficient?"

"There's no need to worry, I've saved up quite a bit over the years."

Mysaria turned her head and glanced meaningfully at him.

"That is the payment you deserve," Otto said nonchalantly. "Since you are leaving, are you reselling some key information?"

"By inviting you here, this is exactly what I want to do."

Mysaria didn't waste words and said frankly, "I have some friends in Lys, and the disputed land is a mess right now. They need a lord like you."

She emphasized the word "lord."

In all fairness, Mysaria admired the Targaryen Heir Prince and was relieved to see what had happened to the Triarchy.

They were three city-states full of slavery, and that was where she had lost her freedom.

But the rules of the world were dirty by nature.

When the original lords of the Triarchy were purged, a new set of lords would take their place.

Otto ignored her banter and first asked about Lys's situation before saying, "Myr is quiet?"

"In the Triarchy, Myr looks quiet, but there are dark currents."

Mysaria's eyes glazed over as she said, "Lys has been stabilized by the Heir Prince, Daemon has violently suppressed Tyrosh, and only Myr is still in chaos.

The Queen Who Never Was was uncrowned in the end, not a queen.

Rhaenys had a strong character but didn't have much experience in governing a city-state.

The peace of Myr depended on the Unsullied Legion and the Knights of the Vale.

Otto nodded, wondering how he could benefit from this.

Listening to the Heir Prince's words, Myr would adopt a monarchical system similar to King's Landing.

He could use his sons, nephews, and close associates as advisors. He could also use the fleet from Old Town to lead the opening of sea trade and control the resources of Myr's ports.

Similar tactics were used by Hightower throughout.

Politics was more than war; it was also connections and wealth.

Whew!

A wisp of cool wind blew into the attic, causing the candlelight on the chandelier to sway.

Mysaria lowered her sleeves to cover her bare, pale skin and took the initiative to speak, "Braavos has gathered a group of mercenaries, and the harbor of Sunspear receives a batch of goods every three days."

"If you truly have the heart to serve your realm, you should focus on this and urge the king in the Red Keep."

Otto looked back slightly and said faintly, "I will."

Mysaria glanced at him and realized that he didn't take her words to heart. With a secret sigh, she felt a twinge of disdain.

She was a dancer by birth, then became a prostitute, and was taken in as a mistress by Daemon. She reached her current position step by step on her own, without relying on Daemon's help.

Despite her lowly background, she still had a heart of compassion. The Battle of the Narrow Sea had killed too many people, and Flea Bottom was home to many more homeless orphans. If the Dornish War started again, there would only be more refugees flooding into King's Landing.

Otto raised his eyelids, his eyes extraordinarily deep. She was just a whore, or Daemon's mistress. He wouldn't have looked twice if she didn't have some use.

If he really wanted to talk about kindness, he had rescued an unknown number of people when he was the Hand of the King. As Master of Civil Affairs at the time, he also helped clear land and plant fields to help the displaced people settle down and start their own families.

But Mysaria? She was a maggot who sold her flesh, ran brothels for profit, and bought orphans and vagabonds to gather information.

Low to the bone!

Otto stayed for a while longer before offering his farewell.

"King's Landing is crowded with people," Mysaria said, looking at her pale fingertips. "I'm leaving. Some small spiders I can't take with me, I'll leave them for you to use."

Otto paused, glancing at the calm, pale woman out of the corner of his eye. After a moment's thought, he pushed the door open. "I'll have someone send you a sum for your troubles."

Outside the door, several boys of varying heights stood waiting, all scruffily dressed orphans.

"My lord!"

The orphans greeted with low bows.

Otto's face was impassive as he nodded. "Gather information for me and I will pay you a reward."

The orphans, surprised, glanced at Mysaria in the room.

Mysaria didn't even raise her head and casually said, "This lord is very rich, you should know that."

These orphans often traveled between various "adults" and were very discerning. Hearing they were to join another master, they all bowed to Otto and ran out of the building in a puff of smoke.

Otto did not care, put on his hood, and followed them downstairs.

When silence returned to the attic, Mysaria turned back to the night view of King's Landing, which she had long since grown tired of seeing. It was hard to not get attached after being in one place for so long.

Unfortunately, it was also a dirty, stinking cesspool.

Full of worms, she thought.

...

Red Keep

The banquet hall was alive with the sound of drums and music, filled with countless nobles dancing and celebrating. The news of the Triarchy's collapse had spread throughout the Seven Kingdoms, carried by royal ravens.

Taking advantage of the Maiden's Day festivities, it was a grand celebration. Viserys sat in the main seat, laughing and drinking wine. If the hall wasn't so crowded, he might have joined the dance floor himself.

Halfway through his drink, he looked around and noticed none of his children, including Rhaegar, were present, as if by some unspoken agreement.

Viserys felt a twinge of discouragement. The seat beside him, meant for Queen Alicent, was also empty. She had cited ill health and left the table early.

Chapter 400: Swans Don't Mate With Frogs

Viserys sighed, the golden wine in his mouth suddenly unappetizing.

Fortunately, a few old advisers were seated nearby, sharing wine and conversation.

...

The dinner went on all night.

At this point, Rhaenyra had long been sleepy and yawning, using Rhaegar as a pillow and dozing off.

There was no way around it—her stomach was growing bigger by the day, and she often felt sleepy after eating and drinking.

Rhaegar was happy and looking forward to the birth of their twin children.

Through the cool evening breeze, the two embraced each other and slept.

...

As the night deepened, dark clouds spread, covering the moon.

In the Queen's bedchamber, Arryk, dressed in silver armor and white robes, stood dutifully on night duty.

Through the door, the sound of a heated argument came out.

"She's a good girl; she will make an excellent wife!"

"On what grounds? I don't like that girl."

"....."

Snap!

The argument over marriage had just begun when a crisp slap suddenly rang out.

The retort was abruptly silenced, as if grabbed by the throat.

Arryk's face remained expressionless; he had long grown accustomed to this.

A long moment passed.

The door to the room slammed open, and Alicent stormed out, her green dress swaying.

When she looked back, Aegon was sitting on the floor in a disheveled heap, a red, swollen slap mark on the side of his face.

Apparently, mother and son had had a "good-natured" talk.

"Aegon, when are you going to grow up!"

Alicent gritted her teeth, full of anger.

Her husband was traditionally biased and neglected their children.

Aegon, who had started with so much promise, had settled for the status quo and indulged in idleness all day long.

In the long run, their downfall would only worsen.

Listening to his mother's reprimand, Aegon froze in place, feeling incomprehensible.

Alicent grew more furious, and coldly said, "Think about it, will you accept my proposal, or will you just arrange for a minor noble's daughter?"

Aegon reddened and stared at the floor for a moment, lost in thought.

He was contemplating whether his mother's words were right or wrong.

Alicent rolled her eyes in exasperation and extreme disappointment, "You are so unlike my son!"

Turning on her heel, she strode towards the hallway beyond.

Arryk stayed quiet the entire time, lifting his foot with the intention of following.

With a wave of her hand, Alicent shrugged without looking back, "No need, Ser. I'll take a walk alone."

"Yes, my lady."

Arryk's face was expressionless, standing straight in place.

Alicent sighed deeply, pressing her chest to calm her anger, and walked away.

Taking advantage of the lull, Arryk glanced slightly into the room.

Aegon was pale and clutching his long hair jitterily.

One didn't have to listen specifically to hear the muttering tinged with misery.

"How dare I marry a Hightower woman if all Hightowers are like this?" The voice held fear, as if he were about to be forced into drinking poisoned wine.

Arryk retracted his gaze, secretly poking and prodding.

On duty for the Queen's service, there was no avoiding hearing a lot of news.

Ever since the God's Eye Lake tournament, Lord Otto had been at loggerheads with Ormund Hightower, and the two brothers had argued several times.

In order to gain further assistance from her family, the Queen agreed to marry Prince Aegon to solidify their relationship.

Although the marriage partner was only a cousin, she had been adopted by Lord Ormund, who had scarce heirs.

It was indeed more honorable than marrying the daughters of some second-tier nobles.

Alicent walked up the stairs alone, her frustration simmering like oil on fire.

The Narrow Sea War had ended, and the kingdom now had three more overseas city-states.

The Hightower House had sacrificed much for this battle, and several of her children had each defended one side.

Yet, in the end, nothing good had come of it.

Aegon's twin castles hadn't materialized, which should have strengthened the roots of the outward-bound princes.

The more powerful Rhaegar became, the more uneasy she felt.

While her husband still sat on the Iron Throne, she needed to hold on to the benefits that were rightfully hers.

The marriage of Aemond to the Lady of Storm's End was no longer a concern for her.

As long as Aegon's marriage to Helaena was properly arranged, she would be able to pull in powerful allies and strengthen her side's power.

At that time, even if the position of the Iron Throne changed hands, she could secure her status with the identity of the Queen and the influence of her children, distancing herself from Rhaenyra.

Alicent rubbed her face and murmured to herself for emphasis, "Everything I do is for my family!"

Muttering to herself as she walked, she climbed the stairs to a particular attic.

At the entrance of the attic, a lean knight clad in leather armor stood guard, his gaze grim and sharp.

Beside him, her personal maid, Terra, waited attentively.

Seeing her arrival, Terra stepped forward and introduced in a low voice, "This is Ser Mervyn Flowers."

Flowers was a bastard surname of the The Reach.

Alicent adjusted her appearance and looked him up and down with cold eyes.

He was a young man with long, athletic limbs and calluses on his hands from holding a sword and drawing a bow.

On the collar of his leather armor was a coat of arms in the style of "Three Black Castles on an Orange Background."

It was from an ancient and long-established House of the Reach, known as the "Three Castles" of House Peake.

Mervyn lowered his head and respectfully greeted, "Your Grace the Queen."

"Uh-huh."

Alicent responded coolly and walked into the attic with Terra pushing the door.

She had been invited to this meeting.

Since they were both nobles of The Reach, they had humbly consented to summon her.

Inside the attic, the familiar decorations were in place, and the evening breeze blew through the open screened windows.

A young man, dressed in fancy clothes, with dark brown curly hair and a fine beard, was waiting for her.

Alicent looked at him and frowned slightly.

His complexion was yellowish, with a pair of inverted triangular eyes, and the arrogance in his eyes and his extravagant clothing emphasized his extravagance.

"Sincere greetings from Unwin of House Peake, My Queen!"

The young lord who called himself Unwin bowed deeply, his gesture well-rehearsed.

Alicent raised her hand to stop Terra from closing the door, taking a dim view of the invitation from someone who appeared to be a burgeoning rich man.

"What is your business in seeking an audience with me, Lord Peake?"

Alicent put up a front, exuding nothing but pride.

Unwin's eyes gleamed with a dark cunning, though his demeanor remained sincere. "I heard that Your Grace is troubled, and I am more than willing to serve."

Alicent's eyes narrowed slightly; she wasn't receiving a direct answer. "House Peake is powerful. How much sincerity do you offer?"

She needed allies, but not just anyone would be suitable.

Unwin smiled, self-assured. "My house has three castles, with a very rich annual output."

He paused, adding with a hint of pride, "As a warrior houses with a long history, I command one hundred knights and nine hundred infantrymen. If needed, I could recruit several times that number."

While the number of infantrymen was not particularly impressive, the focus was on the one hundred knights. Knights were elite, specially trained to mount horses, bend bows, and lead soldiers effectively. A single knight could lead a hundred ordinary soldiers and easily form a substantial force.

Alicent found his arrogance off-putting and said impatiently, "You have many castles, but how many times can castles and soldiers withstand Dragonfire?"

House Peake was once a top powerhouse in the Riverlands, but times had changed. Even with three wealthy castles, they were still only second-tier nobles, far inferior to House Hightower.

Unwin, annoyed by her dismissal, momentarily lost his temper. He wanted to retort with something vulgar but caught himself in time, seeing the queen's icy gaze. He took a deep breath and forced a conciliatory smile. "Your Grace, as long as you are willing, HousePeake is ready to go through fire and water for you."

"State your purpose. I don't have time to waste," Alicent said coolly, crossing her arms. "My husband needs my care, and angering him could see you hanged."

Unwin suppressed his irritation and fawned, "I understand you wish to facilitate Prince Aegon's marriage. I have a way to help."

"Who told you that?" Alicent's eyes narrowed.

"With all due respect, your intentions are as clear as an ox pulling a millstone," Unwin replied bluntly.

Alicent signaled him to continue without further comment.

Unwin chuckled, "My father used to say that a disobedient child needs a lesson, and proper means must be applied."

Alicent looked skeptical.

Unwin coughed lightly and adopted a more sophisticated tone. "Your Grace, I have recently made a new friend in Volantis who has acquired potions from Lys's Pleasure Houses."

The mention of such harsh methods instantly chilled Alicent's expression. She felt offended by the implication and looked at Unwin with renewed disdain.

"Hold your horses," Unwin hastily explained. "Prince Aegon may be immature, but he still has feelings for that girl. He just needs a little push."

"A push?" Alicent queried.

"Exactly!" Unwin pressed on. "If the girl is willing, leave this matter to me. I will ensure a satisfactory outcome."

Alicent pondered deeply. Since it was a marriage proposal, she assumed her niece would be compliant. However, she suspected the methods proposed by Unwin would be less than honorable.

Seeing Alicent's hesitation, Unwin added, "Lord Tyrell of Highgarden is loyal to the Heir Prince. Half the nobles of the Reach follow his lead. There's no better marriage partner."

Alicent couldn't help but fidget, picking at her nails in thought. Unwin's argument held weight. Rhaegar's prestige was immense, with loyalty from the Crownlands, the Riverlands, the Vale, and the Reach. After the Narrow Sea War, his influence would only grow.

Even the House Beesbury of Honeyholt, direct bannermen to House Hightower, were leaning towards Rhaegar.

Alicent considered this carefully before asking, "What do you want after this is accomplished?"

She assumed House Peake were opportunists, seeking to align with the Green Faction. House Peake's key castle, Starpike, was in the Dornish borderlands. Her son, Aemond, could be a significant help in the ongoing Dornish Rebellion.

Unexpectedly, Unwin shook his head, revealing his true intentions. "My wife died last year, and I heard that Princess Helaena is not yet engaged...."

He trailed off, but the implication was clear.

Alicent's eyes snapped open in surprise. Helaena was her heart. The idea of her marrying a man like Unwin, with his rural manners and cunning schemes, filled her with discomfort.

Without hesitation, she spoke firmly, "Helaena will choose a husband she is satisfied with. I will not force my daughter."

"I am sincere in my desire to marry the princess. Please give me a chance to prove my loyalty," Unwin pleaded.

Alicent, full of resistance, turned away. "I will organize a banquet on Maiden's Day. You can attend and participate."

The so-called exhibition banquet was actually a matchmaking event for Aegon and Helaena. Nobles would present their children of the right age to meet the prince and princess separately.

Unwin might stand a chance in a crowd of young suitors, but Alicent was firm. "Terra, let's go," she said, signaling to her maid.

As she exited, Unwin's face was filled with frustration and urgency.