

G.O Thrones 401

Chapter 401: Matchmaking Meeting

A few days later, a warm morning sun shone brightly over King's Landing, casting its usual sultry glow.

Today, the city was abuzz with activity as people dressed in their finest emerged from their homes. The poor flocked in groups to nondescript church buildings, while the nobles and their families headed straight for the city's few large churches. It was the annual Maiden's Day, a celebration that, though primarily for young virgins, drew countless followers of the Seven Gods in sincere prayer.

The kingdom was still basking in the victory of the Narrow Sea War after defeating the Triarchy. In a gesture of generosity, King Viserys dedicated the day to the Heir Prince's unborn twins by distributing porridge to the people in the streets and alleys. Anyone who did not have enough to eat could receive a portion of the thick gruel with white bread upon presentation of a residence permit issued by the City Watch.

Although the poor did not fully grasp the significance of the residency card, treating it as an ordinary piece of solid wood, the distribution of gruel went off without a hitch. Long lines formed in every street, and the people who received the food expressed their gratitude to the benevolent king and showered blessings on the heir prince's unborn children.

For a time, the reputation of the royal family overshadowed even the importance of the Seven Gods. After all, white porridge was better than brown soup, and white bread was tastier than suspicious meat soup.

The Red Keep

In the morning, crowds of guests from all over the realm streamed into the Red Keep, handing their daughters over to the septas who would lead them to the sanctuary at the rear of Maegor's Holdfast for baptism by the Mother and the Maiden.

The influx of guests made it difficult to find accommodations within the Red Keep. Fortunately, the morning temperature was moderate, preventing any incidents of heatstroke. The hustle and bustle continued until the sun was high and the essential rituals of the festival were completed.

Throne Hall

In the Throne Hall, hundreds of noble lords stood on the cool black stone floor, eagerly leading their sons and nephews around. Their eyes were fixed on the high Iron Throne. Viserys, dressed in solemn black coronation robes and wearing a golden crown, held the house sword, Blackfyre, with its tip resting on the floor.

At the base of the throne, the Sea Snake Corlys, his face grave, acted as the king's spokesman. After a few introductory words, the drums beat intensely, and two Kingsguard led the procession.

Rhaegar entered the hall with a composed demeanor, walking slowly with his hands raised.

"Prince"

"Prince"

As he walked down the hall's aisles, many familiar noble lords greeted him in whispers, their attitudes ten thousand times more respectful. Rhaegar nodded gently, his emotions well-controlled.

A step behind him, Helaena and Daeron flanked him on either side. Helaena, beautifully dressed with her long silver-gold hair coiled behind her head and wearing a gorgeous white gown, looked especially extravagant for the occasion.

Her headdresses, necklaces, and various trinkets were adorned with symbols from the Targaryen and the seven kingdoms' house emblems.

Despite her stunning appearance, Helaena's face showed discomfort and her violet eyes flashed with anxiety. For a girl with an introverted personality, being thrust into such a grand occasion was intimidating.

"Are you alright?" Rhaegar asked, glancing sideways and noting her mood.

Helaena hesitated for a moment before weakly replying, "I kind of want to go crazy."

Rhaegar paused, black lines forming on his forehead. "Don't worry, it's just a passing phase."

Helaena buried her head in her not-so-rich chest and murmured like a mosquito, "I'm afraid I can't control it, and I want to bring Dreamfyre."

"Never," Rhaegar said, his tone gentle but firm. "There's no need to force yourself. Rhaenyra had already started touring the continent at your age, rejecting many noblemen in the seven kingdoms."

It was hard to imagine the timid girl threatening to unleash a giant dragon in her helpless tone. Unfortunately, her introverted nature made her less calm in stressful situations, unlike Rhaenyra's strong character, who grew up as an only child.

Rhaenyra's forced marriage was infamous throughout the seven kingdoms. She had rejected many suitors, including Lannister's Jason, almost leading to a duel between brothers Tyran and Jason.

She caused the duel between Samwell Blackwood and the former Lord Bracken, causing his death, as he had been stabbed to death by Samwell, and publicly humiliated the former Lord of Blackport, who was in his sixties and had attempted to marry her.

To this day, the nobles of the Stormlands still joked about those incidents. Rhaegar admired such fighting spirit.

Rhaegar gently reassured Helaena before stepping forward to the Iron Throne. He nodded at his father, who was seated above, then moved to stand beside the Sea Snake, his arms folded. Helaena curtsied and stood on the opposite side, holding little Daeron's hand.

With everyone in place, Viserys forced a not-so-sincere smile and declared, "Let's begin!"

At his command, nobles stepped out of line, either alone or accompanied by their nephews, to pay their respects. Most of these suitors were unmarried and of suitable age, but there were also a few widowers hoping to win the princess's favor.

Helaena stood still, pursing her lips, her patience wearing thin as she scrutinized each man. They ranged from middle-aged men in their late thirties to young teens. Some were even older, in their forties and fifties, stepping forward to introduce themselves as widowed and unmarried. The sweltering heat only added to Helaena's discomfort, and she nearly broke out in a cold sweat.

Unconsciously, she let go of little Daeron's hand, her lotus-like arm turning a silver-gray bracelet on her wrist. The bracelet, though ordinary in material, was intricately carved and showed signs of age. It was also slightly tight, a testament to its inappropriate size for her slender wrist. A glance

sideways revealed that Rhaegar wore a similar bracelet on his wrist, which was clasped behind his back.

"Bear with it," Helaena admonished herself silently, trying to maintain her composure.

Just then, a middle-aged man with a naive smile and blonde hair stepped forward, greeting them sincerely, "Your Grace, House Rowan sends you their sincere greetings."

On his yellowish robe, he bore the House emblem of "a golden tree on a white background." House Rowan of Goldengrove was one of the most important noble families in the Riverlands, with a lineage tracing back to Garth Greenhand. Their fiefdom encompassed the entire northern Baylands, making them quite powerful.

Viserys looked over, his face lighting up with a smile, "Lord Thaddeus, I'm glad to see you today."

Thaddeus Rowan, a cheerful and generous nobleman, was well-liked and respected in the Riverlands. His wife had passed away a few years ago, leaving him a bachelor. Remembering Alicent's advice, Viserys steeled himself for more conversation with Thaddeus.

At the bottom of the hall, Rhaegar and Corlys stood like statues, watching silently. Corlys glanced twice at Thaddeus, his voice dull, "I bet he'll go bald in less than two years."

"Lord Thaddeus is a good man, loyal to the crown," Rhaegar reasoned, then whispered, "His eldest son would have had a chance if he hadn't married already."

Helaena was only thirteen, and Thaddeus was old enough to be her father, if not older.

Corlys, disdainful, remarked, "If I had known this day would come, I should have facilitated the marriage between Laenor and Princess Helaena."

When the marriage with Rhaenyra had first fallen through, the royal family had strongly opposed another marriage with Velaryon. Now it seemed they might have to fight for it again.

Rhaegar, displeased, taunted, "I won't marry my sister to an old man, nor will I let her be widowed."

Corlys, self-confident, blandly said, "Wait and see what kind of handsome person the queen can pick out from her planned event."

Rhaegar fell silent. He thought Alicent's actions were foolish and driven by a misguided desire for power. Despite their four children already being Dragonriders and their position seemingly unbreakable, she continued to covet more, plotting for her so-called Green Faction.

"Isn't it good to live well and be united as a family?" Rhaegar glanced at the kitten-like Helaena, shaking his head in secret dismay. Alicent's status and role as a mother had saved her, but her ambitions were tearing the family apart.

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In the Banquet Hall, a similar scene unfolds as female guests converge.

Aegon, dressed in his finery, sits slumped in a spacious seat. His face is disheveled, and he buries his head in depression. Alicent, in another corner of the hall, does not step forward to entertain the guests. Instead, Rhaenyra and Laena are invited to sit on the soft cushions on the left and right sides.

"Princess," a noble girl of the Lords of the Riverlands greets softly, then retreats again with the hem of her skirt.

"May the Maiden and Mother bless you," Rhaenyra says, stroking her stomach and smiling.

After meeting a dozen maidens in a row, it is inevitable that Rhaenyra feels a bit tired. Her beautiful eyes roll as she leans back calmly against the soft cushion, striking a comfortable pose. She had been unwilling to attend, unable to resist her father's repeated requests. It was unknown what kind of persuasion Alicent had used on him.

Laena softly inquires, "Rhaenyra, if you're not feeling well, go back and rest first."

Rhaenyra waves her hand, "It's fine, you can't do it halfway."

After saying that, she turns her head to look at Aegon, "After picking for so long, do you have a favorable match?"

There was a time when it was others who were looking for her. Finally, the tables had turned.

Aegon droops his eyelids and mutters, "I'm grieving, and even the most beautiful beauty can't catch my eye."

There were so many women of the right age who came to meet him that he was actually getting tired of picking them out. Not only did he have his eyes on a few tall girls from the western and northern realms, but he also noticed their mature and plump mothers.

If it wasn't for the wrong occasion, he would have wanted to strike up a conversation or two.

However, when he thinks of his mother's tough attitude towards him, Aegon feels a rebellious surge bubbling up inside him.

"I won't choose any of them, let's see if you have the guts to beat me to death!" Aegon thinks indignantly.

Receiving Alicent's rigid education from a young age has left a great shadow on Aegon's young mind, which aspires for freedom and rebellion. He would rather marry a commoner or a whore than a Hightower. No matter the pressure, he is determined to resist.

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In the noisy hall, the warbling of ladies mixed with the chatter of gossip.

Waiters served drinks and an abundance of ice.

As the day wore on, male guests began to appear, and the band played cheerful tunes.

Lyonel sat at a table, keeping an eye on the party.

"You really should try this plum cake. Don't be so tense all the time," said Lyman, who held a plate of pastries, tasting them slowly and methodically.

Lyonel held up his glass and smiled bitterly, "The war isn't over yet, and the banquet seems a little too grand."

"Think about it," Lyman shook his head, reminiscing about the past. "It's all for the sake of the royal bloodline."

Lyonel nodded, his heart feeling lighter as he looked around the room.

Otto was at another table, deep in conversation with Ormund Hightower.

His eldest son, Harwin, sat alone in a corner of the banquet, with a wooden board wrapped around his leg to hold it in place.

None of them had traveled to the Throne Hall, instead choosing to oversee the more chaotic banquet hall.

Harwin approached with a pout.

"You should be recuperating," Lyonel said.

"The City Watch is used to staying in the city," Harwin frowned deeply and leaned down. "Recently, Flea Bottom has been quite active. A lot of gold cloaks have resigned from their positions for no apparent reason."

Chapter 402: How to Give Someone Drugs

Flea Bottom was known far and wide as a slum.

It was a frequent site of riots, especially during the daylight hours, that rocked King's Landing.

Most of the City Watch's resources were devoted to policing Flea Bottom.

Lyonel, experienced and perceptive, immediately thought of the problem: "Just keep order. Daemon has overrun Tyrosh and he's moving his minions."

"Prince Daemon?" Harwin frowned, something in his heart resisting.

Lyonel said lightly, "Although you are the commander of the City Watch, most gold cloaks are loyal to Daemon."

Harwin was speechless and drank mulled wine.

Daemon was known as the "Prince of the Capital" and "Lord of Flea Bottom" during the king's reign. During his tenure, he recommended raising the equipment and funding for two thousand gold cloaks. Even after many years, it's normal for him to still have old subordinates he can't forget.

Lyonel patted his eldest son's shoulder and said in an enlightened manner, "Think positively. The departure of these double-minded individuals will reduce many hidden dangers."

"I will find a chance to report this to His Grace," Harwin muffled his voice.

"As you wish, but take care of your injuries," Lyonel admonished with concern.

Not far from the God's Eye Lake Competition, Harwin's injuries from being cut by a battle axe had just begun to heal, allowing him to walk again. However, even if he could no longer oversee the City Watch with the same assurance, he shouldn't rush to resume his duties.

After a few words of persuasion, Lyonel was called away by Lyman to find some old friends to drink with.

Before leaving, Lyonel warned in a low voice, "There are so many noble girls present; don't say you can't find one that catches your eye!"

After saying that, he walked away with his chest held high.

Harwin froze in his seat, his face deeply embarrassed.

Subconsciously, he looked back towards the most lively direction. Through the layers of curtains, he could only see the silhouettes of the young girls gathered around.

Cautiously glancing at it, he saw nothing clearly.

Harwin sighed deeply and disappointedly knocked on his injured leg tied with a wooden board.

Suddenly, a figure burst into view.

The House crest on his chest was three black castles on an orange background.

Behind a table laden with fruit and wine, Unwin Peake hooked up with a manservant. Unwin Peake and the manservant were carrying jugs of chilled silver wine.

With a cunning smile, Unwin shoved the jug into the manservant's hand and whispered, "The Queen's order, deliver it."

The manservant, still young and holding the wine pot with difficulty, had legs trembling slightly.

Seeing his hesitation, Unwin lost his smile and pulled out a handful of golden dragons from his pocket.

"Yes, my lord."

The manservant's spirit lifted and he set off majestically.

Not far away, Harwin watched cryptically and left his seat to follow.

As the commander of the City Watch, he had developed an eye for spotting criminals.

The feast reached its climax, with musicians playing cheerful tunes. Drummers paraded through the hall as if on parade, their drumming dense and urgent.

Maids poured into the hall, bringing all manner of rich delicacies.

Aegon's stomach growled with hunger and he pushed aside the attendants, intent on finding something to eat.

Rhaenyra and Laena looked at each other and rose without a second thought. It was noon, and they were going to take a break.

"Give me some cherry pie, and some gin!" Aegon broke away from the perfumed nest and grabbed a maid to make his request.

The maid cowered in fear, thinking that the ever-lustful prince was wolfish.

At that moment, the manservant approached with a tray in hand, holding several glasses of frosty wine.

Aegon's mouth was dry and he picked up a glass without thinking.

"Wait!"

Harwin came out of nowhere, stopping him in his tracks.

Without waiting for Aegon to respond, he grabbed the manservant by the shoulders and said in a deep voice, "What's in the wine?"

"Nothing."

The manservant arched his back and answered carefully.

Aegon froze, holding up the wine for a moment, not knowing whether to drink or not.

Something was wrong!

Harwin took a glass of wine and shoved it at the manservant, saying warily, "You drink!"

The three gathered around a table, purposely keeping their voices down and thus drawing no attention from onlookers.

Aegon's eyes widened as he looked back and forth between the wine and the manservant.

To poison him?

Gulp~~

The manservant, trembling with fear and trembling, picked up the wine and drank it in one gulp, saying with a goaded and soft voice, "It really is wine, my lord."

Since it was the Queen's intention, surely it wouldn't be poisoned.

Still unconvinced, Harwin controlled the manservant and waited for a while, and the other man remained alive and well.

Before the two could speak, Aegon could not help himself. Holding up the wine goblet and pouring a large mouthful, "Che" said: " Nonsense, the wine's not even cold."

"Prince..."

Harwin jumped in shock and tried to stop him, but it was too late.

Aegon rolled his eyes and stood back.

"Aegon, watch your image!"

Otto came from the sidelines, urging with a disconcerted look on his face.

Harwin's eyes flashed as he picked up a glass of wine and stepped back.

Otto nodded at the punch and picked up the last glass of wine and took a sip. As the wine went into his stomach, he didn't forget to open his mouth to lecture, "Drink less wine and don't face the lady drunk."

"Aye." Aegon's voice lengthened.

Otto glared at him and left with his glass of wine.

Harwin looked confused and hesitantly took a sip of wine as well.

"Commander Goldcloak, why aren't you on patrol?" Aegon looked him up and down, his tone slightly sarcastic.

He remembered the other man being nearly crippled by a few of Rhaegar's axe blows.

Harwin's face darkened, "The Golden Cloak patrols at all times, and Prince Rhaegar specifically instructed me to do so."

"There is no point in that."

Aegon yanked over a passing maid, snatched the tray of seven-gill eel pie, and sliced off a slice to feast on. To show his generosity, he also shared a piece with Harwin.

In the face of the food, Harwin hesitated for a moment or two and took it and ate it. Seven-gill eel pie was expensive, and there weren't many opportunities to savor it except in coastal cities.

Aegon frantically ate, drinking up the slightly cooled wine and continuing to scavenge for other delicacies.

Harwin, confused, spared the restrained manservant and headed toward the other end. Secretly, it was a wasted effort.

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The Queen's Bedchamber.

Alicent waits anxiously until the door to the room is pushed open from the outside. Helaena walks in silently, her brow unable to hide the color of exhaustion.

"Did you choose?" Alicent asks directly.

Helaena takes off her heavy headdress without raising her head. "You instructed me to choose my fiancé, not to buy food at the market."

"Don't treat that group of adults as green horns; you need to take it seriously," Alicent counsels patiently.

Helena kicks off her shoes and collapses limply on the felt, saying helplessly, "What's the difference? Freshness, high price, and lack of variety, both in the same condition."

Standing motionless in the Throne Hall all morning was physically and mentally exhausting. Whenever she felt like going crazy, she couldn't help but think of Rhaenyra.

It was hard to imagine how Rhaenyra had survived the half year parade of "blind dates". All she could say was that Rhaenyra was indeed a woman who could control her brother!

Listening to her daughter associate marriage with grocery shopping, Alicent almost choked with frustration. On second thought, there is some truth to that.

Alicent purses her lips, unable to help thinking of her husband as king. Back in the day, fresh was not so fresh, but it was better because of the high price and scarcity of variety. Although she didn't think it was her kind of dish, under her father's orders, she had to change her tastes.

Unable to help it, Alicent's mood calms considerably, and she looks at her daughter, whose eyes are devoid of light, with pity. She walks to the side and sits down, taking Helaena's hand, and whispers, "I do not want to force you, but you always have to marry."

"But I don't like those men. They're like worms in a jar to me," Helaena covers her eyes with one hand, sounding very disheartened.

"Who do you like?!" Alicent glances warily at the door and lowers her voice to chide, "Don't think I don't know what's on your mind, and unless I die someday, don't you dare!"

Helaena rolls over, seeming a little pleased, "I thought you never cared what I thought."

"Don't be ridiculous. You're my only daughter," Alicent gives her an exasperated swat and says seriously, "Listen to me, that's not a good choice. Rhaenyra will sell you to the lowest brothel!"

Helaena slumps to the floor, both her little legs crossed, "If I can be successful, then I won't fall to this point."

Seeing her daughter's insistence, Alicent is furious, "You should find a husband who is true to you."

"But you still chose my father," Helaena's eyes twinkle.

"It was the only choice."

"Many say that, but they continue to benefit anyway."

Alicent is at a loss for words. Gritting her back teeth, she gets up and leaves, saying, "Come back in the afternoon, don't waste the holiday."

Bang - she pushes the door open and slams it shut.

Inside the bedchamber, Helaena, who had won the argument, is left alone. The little girl is quiet for a moment, removes her messy ornaments, and rolls over again, lying on her back.

Holding both small hands high in the air, she twirls the silver and gray bracelet. Eyes drifting out of focus, she mutters, "Men without dragons are like flies in summer, plentiful and annoying."

Targaryens had their own way of dealing with the world!

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The sun was scorching in the late afternoon.

Banquet halls were still bustling with noble men and women who had yet to find a match. In the Godswood, servants built shade cloths and set up another banquet space.

Rhaenyra, too pregnant to attend in the sunlight, rested in her bedroom with Laena accompanying her. Alicent, however, took it upon herself to press the reluctant Aegon into a chair, and together they faced the noble maidens who had come for courtship.

The girls, slightly formal at the sight of the Queen, mingled briefly before excusing themselves. Alicent was not satisfied and called upon her niece, Selene Hightower, to act as a temporary lady-in-waiting, essentially reminding Aegon to make a choice soon.

Aegon, having skipped his nap and now drinking cold wine, leaned back in his chair listlessly. At this moment, it was as if he was a king was admiring a wonderful young girl, picking and smacking his lips, very much in the manner of a dim king.

Beneath the Godswood, swirling red leaves blocked the sunlight and shrouded a large patch of shade. Rhaegar leaned against the flowery white trunk and watched with interest.

Ormund Hightower staggered over to him, a wine glass in one hand. "It's a scorching hot day, wouldn't you like a cup of the Arbor's fine wine?" he said, kindly handing him a wine cup.

Rhaegar squinted and refused, "True dragons aren't afraid of heat."

Ormund froze for a moment and smacked his lips, "I forgot about that, the Targaryens are truly the bloodline of the God's Favorites."

After a moment of thought, Ormund looked over to Aegon's place and smiled, "What a fine, youthful boy." He had looked up to Aegon since he was a child and loved him more than Otto, his own grandfather.

Rhaegar frowned slightly, feeling offended, "Lord Ormund, I am the same age as him."

"Uh..." Ormund almost didn't react and smiled resentfully, "Blame your brilliance, forgive me for not being able to compare you to Aegon side by side."

The conversation turned, "You are concerned about your brother's marriage, what a good brother."

Rhaegar didn't take it that way and said breathlessly, "You're overthinking it. I'm simply curious if Aegon will embarrass himself."

If he made a fool of himself, he would have to clean up the mess.

Not wanting to bother with the chattering Ormund, Rhaegar got up and headed out, "I'm going to check on Helaena. You guys keep an eye on Aegon for me."

Compared to Aegon's nature, he was more worried about Helaena's emotional stability. He didn't want her to actually release Dreamfyre!

Chapter 403: The Strange Uncle Who Lures Little Girls

Godswood Forest, Backyard Garden.

Lush grass grew, towering pines and cypresses lined up in rows, dotted with giant dragon statues and fountains. An adjoining awning was built over the large open space. Noble men who had not yet met their match congregated in groups of three or two, discussing interesting facts.

Under the largest awning, Viserys looked around and asked, "Where did Helaena go?"

"The princess is probably still getting ready," Corlys replied curtly, gathered around a tub of ice.

Viserys frowned in displeasure, "Being late is not a good habit."

Corlys scooped up a handful of ice and crushed it with his hands, feeling the coldness fully, and said sincerely, "Your Grace, if I had let you choose a treasure from a pile of scrap, you would have come even later."

With that, he rubbed some of the ice shavings into the wine and took small sips, immersing himself in the moment.

He didn't have the Targaryen bloodline to be fearless in the searing heat. The coolness rushed to his head and Corlys took a cool breath, "There's nothing like a sip of chilled Summer Red in the height of summer!"

Viserys took a couple more looks and was rather fleshed out, "With the Dornish War on, Summer Red is really hard to buy."

"Relax, the dragons will clear the way for you," Corlys said confidently. His eldest son ran to the Stormlands battlefield, and the two dragons and the entire Stormlands force were more than enough to deal with the invading Dornish army.

The reason for the Dornish tenacity was the scorching desert environment. Within the Vulture Mountains and Dornish territory, the soldiers of several other realms in Westeros might not be able to exert their strength.

Once Dorne lost the familiar living environment since childhood, it would be like a shark coming ashore, and it would be difficult to hurt people with a just bad mouth again.

Viserys shook his head and lost his smile, "Haven't you always been cautious and valued war above all else?"

"It's the unknown war that's scary, the war that predicts the outcome is as simple as reading the weather for sailing," Corlys said with an expression of deservedness. The thought of the Triarchy's Kingdom breaking up greatly reassured Viserys, and a wave of bravado rose from his heart.

Looking around, he called his attendant and commanded, "Go get Helaena and bring her here, don't make the adults wait."

Corlys glanced away and continued to grind the ice. Seeing his lack of response, Viserys grumbled bitterly, "If only there was a time when I didn't have to worry about my children."

"His Grace Jaehaerys spent his life worrying about his children, and that is probably a Targaryen tradition as well," Corlys teased, saying meaningfully, "and the more you worry, the less likely you are to see a good outcome."

Viserys froze at his words, not knowing how to respond. As Corlys pointed out, he thought coldly of the aunts who had died. None of them seemed to have ended well.

Viserys thought in his heart and couldn't help but shout, "Get Helaena and tell her to come to her father."

He hadn't approved of holding the so-called Maiden's Day Festival in the first place. Aegon was a man, and it was sufficient to pick a great noble family to marry. Helaena was a girl and too young, so why worry so much about her marriage?

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Not far away, by a fountain in the forest, Helaena sat on the stone steps, cupping a purple flower in her hand and picking off petals.

As she moved, she chanted softly, "The mirror shines on the opposite side..."

Tap... tap...

The sound of footsteps broke the tranquil atmosphere. Helaena snapped back to her senses, turning her head to see who had disturbed her. Layla and Jasmine, her two companions, stood protectively in front of a dark-haired man.

With an embarrassed look on his face, Unwin carefully explained, "I'm here to see the Princess, no offense intended."

Tiptoeing to catch Helaena's attention, a flash of determination crossed his face.

Helaena rubbed her bare neck and whispered, "A bridge awaits you..."

Under the defense of her companions, Unwin stood ten meters away from the fountain, eagerly saying, "Princess, please allow me to chat with you for a few moments."

In the morning, the summons from the Throne Hall had not reached him. Now, finding the princess alone felt like a godsend. The best way to deal with a young girl like this, besides coercion, was to trick her.

Helaena lifted the spring water with her hand and faintly said, "Say what you want to say."

Unwin seized the opportunity, pretending to be a gentleman, "Princess, I am the Lord of the House Peake..."

He introduced himself, subtly boasting of his wealth. Helaena remained unmoved, her attention on the fish in the spring.

Feeling neglected, Unwin tried to maintain his composure. He knew that noble ladies often fell for gentlemen. Kneeling on one knee, he said, "Once I saw you in Harrenhal, I was haunted by you and traveled thousands of miles to King's Landing to see you again."

Helaena's face remained serious, "You got your wish, congratulations."

Unwin was momentarily speechless, then changed the topic, "Princess, the king and queen are worried about your marriage. I dare to propose to you, hoping to gain your favor."

Helaena sighed and said despondently, "Lord Unwin, you have poor looks and very lofty dreams."

"I am sincere," Unwin insisted, thinking he needed to offer more. Gritting his teeth, he said, "As long as you are willing to marry me, I can give you one of the three castles of my family."

The House Peake, prominent in The Reach, had daughters married to powerful nobles like Redwyne, Rowan, and Hightower. Their cunning behavior and three castles were the foundation of their family's influence.

Helaena fluttered her eyelashes and began counting on her fingers, "One for me, one for Aemond, one for Daeron..."

"Princess, what are you talking about?" Unwin asked, his eyes widening with confusion.

Helaena shook her head, "Nothing, I was just wondering which castle truly belongs to your family."

The so-called Three Castles of the House Peake seemed glorious, but behind the scenes, there was no shortage of nastiness. Initially, the House Peake only had one castle, Starpike in the Dornish Borderlands.

About a thousand years ago, the Gardener House of the King of The Reach conquered the region and defeated the disobedient House Manderly. After the war, House Manderly was driven out of The Reach, losing their fort along the Mander River—Dunstonbury. This castle was then taken over by their nemesis, the House Peake.

Later, House Manderly went into exile in the remote North and built what is now White Harbor, modeled after Dunstonbury. This was the second castle acquired by the House Peake.

The third castle, Whitegrove, has a more obscure history. According to ancient noble tales from the Riverlands, a certain generation of the original house of Whitegrove lacked a male heir, and the title and land were inherited by a woman.

The then Lord of Starpike married into the family and used his heir's right to the title to take over Whitegrove. The trickery of the grandparents laid the foundation for the apparent glory of the House Peake.

Facing these allusions to his ancestors' shady dealings, Unwin held back his anger and said with a forced smile, "Princess, if one castle isn't enough, I can offer you both castles except Starpike."

From recent news, it was known that while the Black and Green factions were at peace, the Heir Prince and Princess Rhaenyra had ongoing friction with for time to time.

The Heir Prince, Rhaegar, had succession rights to the Iron Throne and owned Harrenhal Castle and the unfinished Prince's Palace. Princess Rhaenyra, as the heir to the Iron Throne, had Targaryen lands on Dragonstone.

With the Triarchy conquered, Myr and Lys fell into Rhaegar's hands. In contrast, on the Greens' side, only Prince Aegon owned a twin castle far away in the Stepstones Islands.

Offering two castles was a bold move, and Unwin didn't believe a little girl could remain indifferent to such an offer.

"Two castles?" Helaena said, surprised. She hadn't expected him to be so generous.

Unwin nodded eagerly, "As long as you agree to marry me, the two castles will be yours."

Pretty words spoken beautifully. If there were heirs, he could take back the castles with his family name, just as his ancestors had done.

And he would have married a true Targaryen princess. Not to mention the benefits of being a royal son-in-law and the potential of having children with Targaryen blood, who might have the talent to become dragon riders. This was something the Sea Snake Corlys had long set as a good example.

Just as Unwin was feeling smug, envisioning his scheming success, Helaena simply refused, "The castle is indeed very generous, but you do not have a dragon."

"If you marry me, Princess, our descendants will have dragons!" Unwin blurted out, not paying attention.

Helaena cocked her head and said directly, "So, your plan is to obtain dragons through me?"

Caught off guard by her bluntness, Unwin became infuriated and stood up abruptly, "Princess, the Queen needs allies. No one in all of Westeros dares to ally with you. Marrying me is the right choice."

"Why does my mother need allies?" Helaena's eyes gleamed with curiosity.

Unwin said bluntly, "Of course, it's to fight against Prince Rhaegar. Otherwise, when the king passes away, what kind of life will you have?"

"My brother," Helaena whispered to herself, slightly out of her mind. "So you all have such ridiculous ideas."

Through their conversation, she had already surmised that Unwin was acquainted with her mother. Considering Ormund Hightower's cousin Selene for Aegon, she couldn't help but suspect that Unwin was the one her mother had chosen for her own hand in marriage.

"Because of these unfounded hypotheses?" Helaena's fine eyebrows furrowed slightly.

Unwin, still trying to persuade her, said, "I work for the Queen, and she promised to give me a chance to marry you."

"I don't believe it!" Helaena screamed loudly, retorting, "Mother's vision can't be that bad."

With her chest and belly heaving up and down, Helaena set her jaw and said coldly, "You wait here. I'll be back soon."

Leaving behind her two worried female companions, she walked away with big strides.

Unwin was taken aback and tried to follow, but was stopped by Layla and Jasmine, who were glaring at him.

...

Helaena's steps were fast and furious as she returned to Maegor's Holdfast and headed straight for her bedroom.

For some reason, her mind was unusually clear. Certain that Lord Peake was up to no good and was lying about his intentions.

So...

Bang!

As soon as she pushed open the door to her room, Helaena walked straight to the balcony and took down the longsword, Long Summer, hanging on the wall.

With a swift motion, she unsheathed the sword, revealing an awe-inspiring cold light.

Helaena's expression was serious as she muttered, "If I can't call Dreamfyre, then I'll just cut him down!"

Chapter 404: The Dragon Has Three Heads!

Rhaegar found the dense garden of pines and cypresses and bumped into Helaena, who seemed to be searching for something.

"Helaena, is something wrong?" Rhaegar greeted her casually.

Helaena's face was tense and she seemed distracted. She stopped and looked over with dull eyes.

Rhaegar's gaze shifted downward and he noticed Long Summer, the sword, in her arms. "Uh huh?" he said, sensing trouble.

Helaena hesitated for a second and quickly responded, "No, brother," trying to hide the sword behind her.

Rhaegar stepped forward, gently rubbing her head, and questioned, "You're not very good at lying, are you?"

Helaena blushed and hung her head in disappointment, muttering to herself, "The guy who doesn't keep his word, he actually ran away."

Seeing her distressed, Rhaegar softened his tone, "Did someone bother you?"

The Red Keep was crowded with all kinds of people, and he had just instructed the Kingsguard to maintain order.

"No," Helaena replied, her eyes filled with timidity as she shook her head. Admitting she wanted to hack someone to death was not very ladylike and could exacerbate the conflict between her mother and brother.

Their mother had raised four children, and they couldn't betray her. Therefore, it was important to avoid a split.

"It better be," Rhaegar said, respecting her reluctance to say more. "But don't keep things to yourself. Tell someone if something happens."

Helaena nodded vigorously, her delicate hairpiece crooked.

"Going back to rest?" Rhaegar asked, glancing at the sword. It wasn't something to pull out lightly.

Helaena agreed wholeheartedly, taking her brother's hand and heading back. Bouncing along the way, she grinned, not looking like the fierce and powerful look she had been moments before.

...

Returning to her bedroom, Helaena hung the sword, Long Summer, back on the wall. She glanced at Rhaegar, who stood in the doorway, and shook her head sadly. Long Summer had yet to prove useful in her hands. She had wanted to get rid of a pest and avoid the afternoon's events.

Thinking of another afternoon of trouble, Helaena murmured regretfully, "A good sword never falls into the hands of a good swordsman."

Knock knock!

A knock sounded at the open door, and a maid arrived, sweat glistening on her forehead. Rhaegar staggered slightly and looked at Helaena.

Helaena, sensing his presence, turned to the maid and asked, "Terra, is something wrong?"

Terra, the queen's personal maid, smiled and said, "Princess, both the king and queen are looking for you."

Helaena stared straight at Rhaegar and said softly, "Please tell them that I don't want to attend the afternoon banquet."

She admitted she lacked Rhaenyra's patience. Facing that group of faceless adults again felt unbearable.

Terra's smile faltered, and she discreetly glanced at the Heir Prince, whispering, "It is the Queen's order."

Rhaegar felt helpless, caught between his sister and the queen. Though he didn't want his sister married off hastily, he lacked the authority to defy their father's and Alicent's decisions.

Helaena remained defiant, "I'm not going to follow orders. She's wasting her time."

"Princess," Terra said, startled.

Helaena turned away and looked out the window at the bustling scene below, finding it noisy and unappealing. She didn't care about finding a nominal fiancé for political reasons. Born into royalty, enjoying the honorary position of princess at the height of Targaryen's prosperity, she saw no reason to submit.

With the princess ignoring her, Terra was at a loss and looked to the Heir Prince for help. She couldn't return without a solution.

Rhaegar said, "Go back and tell Alicent that I will persuade Helaena."

"Thank you," Terra said, relieved, and hurriedly left.

Gazing at the maid's retreating figure, Rhaegar left the door of the room open and pondered. If he remembered correctly, this maid named Terra was actually a spy. Larys had investigated her background but hadn't had time to report it to Alicent. Instead, it was Tormund who benefited from the information.

Rhaegar couldn't help but smile, lamenting, "The huge Red Keep really has all kinds of snakes and rats."

After the banquet, it would be time to send Rhaenyra back to Dragonstone Island. The castle where he had grown up had long since failed to shield him from the storm, and it was far less reassuring than the ironclad security of Dragonstone Island.

...

"Brother!"

Suddenly, Helaena's sharp cry echoed through the room. Rhaegar turned his head and saw a determined little girl marching towards him.

Helaena clenched her teeth and stormed forward, slamming the door shut behind her with a bang. The door nearly hit Rhaegar in the face, causing him to step back. To avoid any suspicion, he hadn't entered the room and instead kept guarding the door.

Now, the little girl was furious.

Helaena leaned against the door and said firmly, "I refuse. You don't need to persuade me."

Her freckled face bore a seriousness Rhaegar had rarely seen, as if her expression alone conveyed the gravity of her attitude.

Sensing her strange resolve, Rhaegar took another step back. Helaena stepped forward and stared at him without a word.

Rhaegar retreated again, and she took another step forward.

After several steps back, Rhaegar's face went blank and he said softly, "I'll make it clear for you. Just use the reason of being sick."

He felt that if he retreated any further, something unexpected might happen.

"I am not sick. I just don't want to go, and I don't need a reason," Helaena insisted, stepping forward again.

"Then what do you need? I'll help as much as I can," Rhaegar said, avoiding her gaze and panicking inside. He knew he must look very embarrassed right now.

"You know what I want," Helaena replied, her expression softening slightly. She walked around him to the balcony without pushing too hard.

Just as Rhaegar breathed a sigh of relief, she added faintly, "Someone at the party asked me to marry them."

Rhaegar, mid-breath, was shocked, "What?"

Whoever had done it so quickly had crossed a line.

"It was a liar who wanted to use two castles to lure me and Dreamfyre," Helaena explained calmly.

Hearing the word "lure," Rhaegar's demeanor turned icy, "House Peake!"

The only one who could offer two castles as bait was House Peake of the Reach.

Rhaegar couldn't help but recall the tragic tale of Gael Targaryen, the simple girl lured by a lowly wandering singer, who bore an bastard child and ultimately took her own life.

"So you were carrying Long Summer just now, looking for that Peake?" Rhaegar asked, understanding the situation.

"He didn't keep his word. I thought he would wait for me where he was," Helaena replied, a bit lost.

"Deliberately meeting in private and trying to seduce a princess—this is naked treason," Rhaegar's voice grew cold as he turned to leave.

Lying to the Targaryens, what a way to taste the fury of Dragonfire.

"Wait."

Helaena's urgent voice made Rhaegar halt abruptly. He felt a tug on the corner of his coat and stopped in his tracks, his eyelids twitching slightly. A sense of foreboding told him that there would be no peaceful resolution today.

Helaena's eyes reddened, her open hand blocking the door. She pouted, "You're not Baelon."

"Grandfather?" Rhaegar was momentarily stunned, then began to ponder.

Baelon Targaryen had led an extraordinary life, accomplishing many great things. Born in the spring, he was called the "Prince of Spring." He once bravely challenged Balerion, the Black Dread, earning the nickname "Brave Baelon."

At 16, he disguised himself as a mysterious knight, won a tournament in Old Oak, and earned the title of knight.

Immediately after the dinner, he returned to King's Landing and proclaimed himself a Dragonrider, taking to the skies on Vhagar's back. He later avenged his brother's death in the Battle of the Hundred Candles by burning thousands of Tyrosh mercenaries and was elected as the heir to the Iron Throne.

However, even the greatest lives are marked by unfulfilled regrets. After his wife, Alyssa, died from puerperal fever following the birth of their third child, Baelon was left heartbroken. Despite their sibling relationship, Baelon and Alyssa were a deeply loving couple. Her death left him a lonely ghost, unable to develop feelings for any other woman.

His ambitious sister, Viserra, dissatisfied with their father's favoritism towards male heirs, intended to marry Baelon and become queen. One night, she stripped naked and entered Baelon's chambers. Instead of receiving the response she sought, she was loudly reprimanded and thrown out.

Afterward, Baelon hastily selected a fiancé for her, prompting Viserra to run away from the marriage and eventually fall off a horse, breaking her neck.

Rhaegar darkly recalled these events and wondered what Helaena meant. Was she trying to say he wasn't as faithful to marriage as their grandfather, or that he couldn't bear to see her own marriage treated as a political transaction?

Rhaegar's mind was a jumbled mess as he thought, "Rhaenyra is no Alyssa either."

Rhaenyra had the boldness of her grandmother and took care of him as Alyssa had loved Baelon since she was a child. But Rhaenyra would live a better life, and he couldn't accept the loss of a loved one.

At that, Helaena's teary-eyed, determined eyes said, "I'm not Viserra, either."

She wouldn't use that cheap tactic. Much less would she be so foolish as to ride a horse and fall to her death. She had a dragon, an adult dragon!

"Helaena, you should calm down," Rhaegar couldn't really converse and pushed the door open to head out.

He could marry Jeyne, but he couldn't defile Helaena. That was playing with fire, igniting the family conflict that was already like a powder keg ready to explode.

His power seemed strong, but it was built on family unity. Aegon was whacked as a child and was a good brother with no ambition. Helaena was close to him and had her own ideas. Aemond and Daeron were also aware of their eldest brother's love and responsibility and chose to uphold his authority.

With four dragon riders siblings stabilized, and the Greens without a single royal member as a leader, Alicent had been honest until now. Once Helaena was involved, Alicent wouldn't be restrained, mad at anything. Then, his relationship with his siblings would drop to a freezing point.

He's not afraid of Aegon and the others shaking him down. But it would cause a family split, Targaryen infighting. The reason Rhaegar loves his siblings is to carry on the Targaryen bloodline and unite the family. Infighting together goes against his original intention.

Helaena reached out to stop him, not giving him a chance to get away, and simply said, "Brother, the dragon have three heads."

Rhaegar was pressed against his chest and passively lowered his head. Helaena said, "You already have a Rhaenys, I'm going to be Visenya!"

Chapter 405: Make Up Your Mind!

The little girl's voice was crisp and clear, with a conviction that could not be denied.

Rhaegar was stunned, gazing at the sister he had watched grow up since childhood.

In his impression, Helaena was a tender little girl. Trapped by the Dreamer talent, she developed a withdrawn personality. A poor girl who would cry at the slightest bullying from her brother Aegon.

As the two figures overlapped, Rhaegar couldn't help but be dazed and added, "You've grown up."

"Brother, don't exclude me," Helaena said hopefully. She had grown up and had her own ideas. It was her intention to gain her brother's approval in a silent way.

But her mother pushed too hard and tried to marry her off. If she didn't make up her mind today, she would only be further away from what she wanted in the future.

Rhaegar finally came to his senses and embraced the little girl with a complex expression: "Since you boast of being Visenya, you should understand my difficulties."

"Hmm!" Helaena sniffed and nodded as she buried her head in her brother's chest.

"I'll go out first and leave the troubles outside," Rhaegar said, rubbing her long hair, his voice soft. He had a headache, unsure if he should answer or not. In principle, this was the absolute wrong thing to do. One wrong move and the family he had worked so hard to create would fall apart, giving the vultures of the outside world a chance to take advantage of the situation.

Helaena read his struggle with her sensitive mind. Tilting her head, she looked at him with determined eyes and said boldly, "Brother, are you willing to marry me to another man and have me bear children for others?"

Rhaegar's heart sank, his mind racing with thoughts. Tearing away the facade, the simple question went straight to the heart. They had been together since childhood, and their feelings were strong. Marrying Helaena to a man other than a Targaryen, out of the family's core circle, how could there be no ripples in his heart?

Whether it was weighing the pros and cons, or emotions, looking at Helaena, whose eyes were red and stubborn, Rhaegar was speechless.

Helaena had already gotten the answer and broke into a smile, "Brother, the Targaryen bloodline is destined to make us attracted to each other." The world rules could not restrict the Targaryens.

Rhaegar was silent. He held her slender waist in his embrace and raised a hand to wipe the tears from the corners of her eyes. Helaena beamed and stared straight ahead.

She had finally succeeded. She didn't need any underhanded means, just the burning blood that flowed together. From time to time, her mother had drilled the ways of Hightower's establishment into her, but she didn't recognize them.

Her! Helaena! Targaryen! Dragons have their own way of living.

After a long moment, Rhaegar pursed his lips, seeming to release something deep within himself.

Rhaegar released her and said firmly, "You stay here. I'm going out first, alright?"

"What for?" Helaena asked crisply.

"Just step aside, little brat." Rhaegar pushed the door open, gently nudging Helaena back toward the bedroom.

Moving quickly, he slipped out the door, needing a moment of silence.

Thump—

The door closed, leaving Helaena alone in the room. She cupped her face, feeling the tear tracks and the lingering warmth of Rhaegar's fingers.

"How bold," Helaena murmured, rubbing her face until it turned red. Her heart pounded as she stared at the door in confusion. Everything had seemed fine, but now he was gone. She had hoped to bask in the moment a little longer, but it had fizzled out.

"Ugh..." Helaena sighed, slightly disappointed.

Bang...

The door burst open again, and Rhaegar stormed back in.

Helaena's eyes widened, "Back?"

Rhaegar exhaled deeply and sighed, "I couldn't stay away."

Stepping out, his mind kept replaying the potential consequences, just like the Viserra matter. He couldn't leave things unresolved.

"Brother," Helaena beamed, rushing toward him.

"Stop!" Rhaegar scowled, grabbing her by the back of the neck to keep her at a distance.

With a stomp, he shut the bedroom door. He looked around, then grabbed a red blanket, wrapping Helaena tightly like a small mummy.

Except for her feet and head, she was completely swaddled.

Bending his knees, he lifted the bundled Helaena and carried her to the balcony, laying her on a recliner.

She squirmed and protested, "Brother, not like that."

Rhaegar pressed her head gently toward his shoulder and backhandedly smacked her lightly on the buttocks, "Be honest. I'm trying to protect you. Don't get ahead of yourself."

He looked out toward the Godswood, his gaze touching the white tree trunk with its bright red, blood-like leaves, and the ghastly human face etched into it, pulling a wry smile.

With a thought, black fire emerged from Rhaegar's forehead, and a pitch-black dragon scale broke through his flesh. His aura surged, purifying his emotions and radiating an indescribable, dangerous majesty.

"Brother, you've grown scales," Helaena said, her eyes wide with confusion.

Rhaegar retracted his gaze, amused by her expression. "It's a small issue. Targaryens have their quirks."

The dragon scales quietly disappeared. Rhaegar tugged gently on her cheeks and asked, "How's the bronze runes I taught you coming along?"

"I've inscribed a good chunk of them, just have a few ones left to finish," Helaena replied, leaning her head on his shoulder.

Since her last stolen kiss from her brother and a stern warning from her eldest sister, she hadn't been this close to her brother in a long time.

Rhaegar concentrated on her progress, surprised. "A good part? Very impressive."

Rhaenyra was studying the same runes and was only halfway through. Helaena, being more introverted, had devoted most of her time to inscribing runes.

Rhaegar relaxed and began to draw a larger picture for her. "Carve them well. When you're done, I'll teach you the serpent rune."

The siblings were already close, and the serpent rune, though difficult, could be taught. This method would also keep Helaena distracted.

Helaena nodded, enjoying the feeling of being trusted.

Rhaegar shared some of his experiences, then tilted his head back and closed his eyes. He had given up on the idea of being alone and quiet, not wanting to tolerate Helaena's sadness. He needed to think about the future.

The threat of the Triarchy was gone, and the three city-states were in disarray. He pondered how to stabilize Rhaenyra and how to gain the endorsement of the Faith of the Seven for his plans to marry more than one woman.

So much trouble!

Thinking of Aegon the Conqueror, Rhaegar felt a surge of determination. "All Targaryens are blood related. If I'm sitting on the Iron Throne, what's wrong with marrying two more women?"

Two hundred years ago, Valyria was allowed to marry more than one. If he could stabilize the volatile Rhaenyra and Alicent, marrying Helaena would strengthen the family.

When Aegon the Conqueror and his three dragons subdued Westeros, he forced the High Septon to crown him. Now, the Targaryens had a dozen direct members and a dozen dragons ruling the skies.

The Faith of the Seven wouldn't dare to riot.

He wanted to see how many armies the High Septon could muster against him.

As Rhaegar's thoughts drifted, a faintly fragrant breeze blew past his ears, tickling them. He shook his head and looked down.

Helaena, her cheeks puffed out, was huffing and blowing with her mouth. Seeing Rhaegar's attention, she blew even harder.

Rhaegar was bewildered and unsure of her actions.

With a soft whimper, Helaena's blowing didn't work, so she arched upwards and bit Rhaegar's ear gently.

"Let go!" Rhaegar winced, reaching up to pinch her cheeks, forcing her to release him.

Helaena's eyes filled with suspicion as she pouted her pink lips.

"What was that for?" Rhaegar asked, clearly puzzled.

Helaena's head drooped in disappointment. "I saw that you were pleased when your sister did this," she admitted, trying to please him.

Rhaegar laughed in annoyance. "Peeking is not a good habit," he said, shaking his head. "Rhaenyra can be too bold sometimes."

Unconvinced, Helaena leaned in and planted a kiss on his cheek, leaving Rhaegar stunned. She twisted her mummy-like body to move closer and continue the kiss.

"No!" Rhaegar quickly moved away, his voice lowering as he pressed Helaena's palm-sized face away. "You have to wait."

"You let me in," Helaena insisted stubbornly.

Rhaegar sighed and said solemnly, "I cannot do this while Rhaenyra is pregnant." After a pause, feeling incomplete, he added, "When you're older and a true adult."

He allowed himself certain liberties with Jeyne and the bastard lady, but those weren't for the sake of matrimony and were the occasional mistakes of a male in a noble class. However, cheating while Rhaenyra was pregnant would be a betrayal and deeply humiliating.

Rhaegar sighed and said solemnly, "I can't do this while Rhaenyra is pregnant." After a pause, feeling incomplete, he added, "When you're older and a true adult."

He allowed himself certain liberties with Jeyne, the bastard daughter, but those were for the sake of matrimony and were the occasional mistakes of a male in a noble class. However, cheating while Rhaenyra was pregnant would be a betrayal and deeply humiliating.

Not caring whether Helaena understood the deeper meaning, Rhaegar pressed her skull gently and said, "Hush! Sleep."

Reluctantly, Helaena blinked and lay back down.

Both siblings closed their eyes, quietly enjoying the sunlight and the cool breeze.

Suddenly, Helaena mentioned, "What about that Lord Peake?"

Rhaegar, still with his eyes closed, replied, "There's no rush. Having committed a crime, he's probably fled the Red Keep by now. Let him run for a while."

"Oh." Helaena adjusted herself into a comfortable position.

For a moment, the bedroom regained its peace. Sunlight bathed the room, with a handsome young man in silver hair and black clothes reclining in a chair, and a red-wrapped Helaena in his arms.

It was an intoxicatingly beautiful picture, provided one ignored the red caterpillar-like cocoon that Helaena was wrapped in.

...

At the Same Time

Upstairs, the Princess' Bedroom

Sara stood guard at the door of the quiet room. The princess was pregnant and often needed long naps.

Inside the bedroom, silk curtains draped over the floor-to-ceiling windows, blocking out the harsh sunlight. Rhaenyra, in a loose nightgown, slept quietly on her side. One hand was under her ear, the other resting on her round belly. She slept so soundly that she didn't realize she was dreaming.

In the dream:

Rhaenyra was lying in her bedroom, everything around her unchanged.

"Hmph ..." There was a strange sound in her arms, a faint whimper.

Confused, Rhaenyra looked down. Her rounded belly was gone, and her stomach was flat. In her arms were two small white babies, squeezed together, twisting and turning as they tried to roll over. After much effort, their chubby bodies wouldn't budge, their faces turning a suffocating red.

Rhaenyra recognized them immediately as her children.

"Grr..." The two little babies, tired of tossing and turning, their purple eyes darting around, nibbled at their little pink hands and arms. Rhaenyra watched silently, her heart melting.

"Roar..." Suddenly, a shrill roar echoed. There was more than one; several sounds joined together. Rhaenyra, still unaware that she was dreaming, instinctively wrapped her arms around the two babies.

"Roar..." A young bronze dragon, no larger than a house cat, flew out first, landing on the bed and spreading its wings.

"Roar..." The next moment, three more young dragons flew out from different parts of the bedroom, chirping and scurrying around. Tired of flying, each looked for a place to land. One landed on the headboard next to the bronze young dragon. Two landed at the foot of the bed, craning their necks to look back and forth.

Rhaenyra rubbed her eyes in dismay, unable to make out the appearance of the other three young dragons.

"Wahh..." One of the babies in her arms howled after exerting too much force. Crying, the baby quickly grabbed a wooden toy and threw it at the bed.

Plop--

The toy hit the bronze-colored young dragon precisely.

"Roar ..." Instantly, the four young dragons were frightened and flapped their wings to fly away.

"Hmph ..." The baby immediately stopped crying and arched into Rhaenyra's arms, searching for comfort. Looking at the scene, the baby seemed quite domineering.

Chapter 406: Bitterbridge

Time passed minute by minute, and dusk settled in.

The sultry weather passed, replaced by a fishy, salty sea breeze carrying fine raindrops.

Red Keep, the Princess' Bedroom

The sky darkened, and the rain, accompanied by a cool wind, slapped against the glazed windows, creating a dense, crackling sound.

Helaena was awakened by the sound of rain and opened her eyes, dazed. The wind and rain intensified, causing the godswood to sway brazenly.

As she moved, the binding sensation of the package disappeared. Helaena looked around in bewilderment, curled up alone on the recliner, with a red blanket covering her body.

"Where's brother?" Disentangling herself from the embrace, Helaena sat up quickly and peered toward the door.

The door was closed, and the bedroom was empty.

Feeling sleepy but instantly energized, Helaena murmured in a low voice, "Outside?"

"Ah!!!"

Suddenly, a sharp, piercing female scream echoed through half of the Red Keep, almost breaking the sound barrier with its thick panic.

Helaena's fine eyebrows furrowed slightly, sensing something was wrong.

"Better go out and see."

Murmuring to herself, she got up, threw off the red blanket and pushed open the door.

She had slept through the day and into the night; something important must have happened in the meantime.

...

Roseroad

The sky was cloudy, and a storm blew in dark clouds that blocked the setting sun.

"Hyah!"

A group of cavalymen galloped furiously west along the flat Roseroad, their horses' hooves kicking up dust.

The group was small in number, about a dozen heavily armed knights. On their armor and shields, the House emblems of the three castles were branded.

"Run faster, we're almost at the Bitterbridge!" Unwin Peake shouted sternly, his expression unusually tense.

He had confronted the princess in private, and his crude language had revealed his intentions. Given Helaena's temper at the time, there was absolutely no good outcome for him.

Coming from the harsh environment of the Dornish Borderlands, awareness of danger was a quality every member of House Peake possessed. Taking advantage of the fact that the princess hadn't yet snapped and the king didn't know about it, he immediately led his knights to run.

Avoiding blame at the first opportunity, with the king's weak character, he would not pursue a lord too much.

The sky grew darker and darker, and the heavy rain came as expected.

"Hightower's bitch, no credibility at all!" said Unwin, panting with exhaustion and cursing under his breath.

He had tried to beg the Queen's forgiveness. The queen had only sent a maid to dismiss him, as if she cared nothing for him.

"Your weak women! No wonder your four children can't defeat the Heir Prince!"

Unwin harbored resentment and couldn't help but curse. If he had stood in the position of the Queen, he would have poisoned the Heir Prince and elected his own children to the throne.

The Green Faction, backed by the Hightower House, is also just a joke.

Rumble--

Heavy rain poured down, accompanied by lightning and thunder. In the blink of an eye, it became too dark to see the road, and the rain mixed with the gusty wind stung their skin.

The road surface became muddy, and the war horses struggled to take a step.

"Damn it, what a rotten luck," Unwin cursed as he struck the flanks of the horse with a fierce blow.

Desperation set in as the situation worsened.

"My lord, there's a fire ahead!" Mervyn Flowers, running at the front, shouted in surprise.

Unwin rubbed his face, peering through the rain to see the faint light of a fire a few miles away.

The fire was elevated, covered by something, resembling a pointing top tower in a storm.

Unwin's eyes widened in relief. "Speed up, that's the Bitterbridge ahead!"

The Bitterbridge spanned a tributary of the Mander River, with House Caswell's long bridge providing the fastest route from King's Landing back to the Reach.

Instantly relieved, Unwin spurred his horse forward.

As a lord of the Riverlands, he had many dealings with Lord Caswell and saw this as an opportunity to ask for a night's rest.

Before long, a lofty castle appeared, blocking the bridge across the river. The firelight seen from afar was the bonfire on the castle wall.

Unwin led the team to the front of the castle. Before his men could shout, the castle's drawbridge slowly lowered.

Bang--

As soon as the drawbridge landed, a group of soldiers ran out in two rows, escorting a tall, thin man dressed in black finery with a bald head.

Unwin eyed the man warily. The bald man was none other than the Bitterbridge Lord, Allun Caswell.

Lord Caswell greeted him warmly, a smile on his face. "The guards said a group of cavalry had arrived. I was wondering who it was. Welcome, Lord Unwin."

Unwin, drenched and in a state of distress, replied, "Lord Caswell, my family has sent an urgent message. We need to hurry back. Could you kindly provide us shelter for the night?"

He fabricated a plausible reason to cover up his escape from King's Landing.

Lord Caswell's smile didn't waver. He generously offered, "The storm is too strong. Quickly, come inside to take shelter from the rain. I will prepare hot water and food for you."

"Thank you for your generosity," Unwin said, though he felt a vague unease at Lord Caswell's persistent smile. With the wind and rain blocking his way, he had no choice but to dismount and walk inside.

Caswell, enthusiastic and seemingly oblivious to the wet and cold, pulled Unwin along, engaging in small talk as they entered the castle.

As they passed through the castle gate, Unwin's face changed slightly as he remembered an important custom. He tugged on Lord Caswell's arm and cautiously asked, "Where is the salt and bread?"

According to the guest law of Westeros, the host was supposed to provide salt and bread as a sign of protection before the guest entered the castle.

Caswell's demeanor remained unchanged. He continued pulling Unwin towards the castle forecourt, smiling as he said, "Don't be anxious. First, I will take you to meet a guest."

House Caswell held a lord title but their castle wasn't large. One could almost see from one end to the other.

But the sky was dark, and the rain curtain obstructed visibility.

Unwin strained his eyes, barely able to make out the castle's outline.

Crack!

A thunderbolt illuminated the scene for a brief moment.

"Roar..."

Outside the towering castle, a massive dragon lay prostrate, its thick neck extending over the dozens-of-feet-high walls, its pair of green vertical pupils gazing icily at the vestibule.

Unwin's eyes widened in horror, his body stiffening as cold air crawled down his spine.

Caswell courteously raised his hand and pointed, "My lord, your guest is waiting for you."

Trembling, Unwin cast his gaze towards the castle gate.

It stood open, flanked by orange torches that cast a warm glow.

A silver-haired figure in black stood straight, like a pine tree in a rainy night.

With his hands behind his back, he turned, a kind smile on his face.

A bright laugh reached Unwin's ears. "Lord Peake, I've been waiting for you."

...

King's Landing, Red Keep.

Helaena, cloaked, trotted down the stairs, her silver hair untied and shaking in fluffy disarray.

A squire had brought urgent news: Aegon, drunk, had committed a grave mistake.

"Damn it! Look what you've done!" Lyonel's angry roar echoed through the door as Helaena reached the entrance to the Fireplace Hall.

She froze, expecting to hear her father's or mother's reprimand first.

"Princess!" Steffon and Lorent, two of the Kingsguard, guarded the door and greeted her respectfully.

Helaena nodded, signaling for the Kingsguard to open the door.

Inside the Fireplace Hall, the guests had been cleared out. The only people present were members of the royal family and royal advisers.

As soon as Helaena entered, she saw the Commander of the City Watch, Harwin Strong, kneeling on the ground, while Hand of the King Lyonel pointed at him, scolding furiously. Harwin's eyes were dull, his handsome face bruised and purple.

Not far away, a maid knelt, weeping and covering her face in fear.

The scene was enough to suggest the worst.

Helaena's eyes widened in confusion.

Turning her head, she saw her father, his face blue with rage, shaking with anger. Her mother's face was hard, standing protectively in front of a shivering Aegon.

"Helaena, my daughter!" Alicent whimpered, leaving Aegon behind and taking Helaena in her arms, her steps small and hurried. The events of the night were hard to digest, and she clung to her innocent daughter for comfort.

Helaena felt confused and overwhelmed.

Little Daeron pounded his short legs and ran to her, his brow furrowed with a touch of sadness. Hugging his sister, he whispered, "Aegon is in trouble."

For a long moment, Helaena sorted through the chaos. She had missed much by refusing to attend the afternoon feast.

As the sun set, the sky grew cloudy, casting a somber tone over the castle grounds.

The servants busily gathered up the leftovers and carried the tables, chairs, and benches back to the castle amidst a flurry of activity and commotion.

Aegon slipped out of the Godswood and returned to the attic alone. On his way, he encountered Selene Hightower, who had lost her companion. He pulled her along and tried to make out with her.

Just as he was about to lay his hands on her, another scream echoed through the air.

Harwin Strong, who had drunk too much at the banquet, had retired alone to the Hand of the King's Tower to rest. A maid cleaning the room was attacked by him, pinned to the bed against her will.

By the time the guards arrived at the sound of her screams, Harwin had already pulled up his pants and fallen into a deep sleep.

Helaena stood nearby, stunned and shaken by the story she was hearing.

Aegon molested Selene and Harwin raped a maid...

"Bastard, I told you to find a woman to marry. Instead you go and defile the honor of a maid!"

Lyonel roared, his voice echoing through the hall.

Harwin lowered his head, mumbling an apology.

Seeing this, Lyonel's anger flared even more. He stormed over and delivered a fierce kick. "Waste! You don't deserve to be my son."

The kick landed squarely on Harwin's chest, sending him sprawling to the ground.

Rhaenyra, standing hand in hand with Laena, watched the scene in disbelief.

The twins, terrified, closed their eyes and clung to their foster mother's legs.

No one would have believed that the once upright Harwin could commit such a disgraceful act.

Lyonel approached the king, bowing his head in shame. "Your Grace, it's my fault for not raising my son properly. I take full responsibility for this scandal."

Raping a maid in the Red Keep was an affront to the royal family.

Viserys glared at Aegon and spoke in a deep voice, "It's not your fault, Lyonel. Every family has its black sheep."

Despite the severity of the situation, Viserys found a small measure of relief in Harwin's actions.

Were it not for Harwin's rape of a maid and the commotion that alarmed half of the Red Keep, not only would Aegon have been a molester of a nobleman's daughter, he would have been a second rapist.

Alicent wrapped her arms around her daughter and whispered, "Viserys, this is not the time to talk about this, we have to deal with it."

"Deal with it? How? I can't wait to castrate him immediately!" Viserys was furious, pointing indignantly at Aegon.

To blatantly harass a noble lady of your own mother's house, how dare you!

Aegon shivered in fear and turned pale: "It wasn't my fault, it all happened so fast, I didn't even know what I was doing."

He wasn't lying.

At that time, he was drunk and dizzy, and all he felt was hot and wanted to go home and vent alone.

He happened to bump into Selene Hightower and lost control for a moment.

Chapter 407: The Crumbling Greens

"Silence! You are in no position to squirm after being caught in the act!" Viserys rebuked angrily.

For the prince to molest with a nobleman's daughter was nothing less than a blatant affront to the dignity of the royal family.

Aegon felt an overwhelming sense of injustice. He wanted to cry; he hadn't even dared to lay a finger on the handmaidens, let alone a nobleman's daughter.

Meanwhile, Alicent stood by, watching her son with a look of self-reproach. She nervously picked at the nail of her index finger, her plan having been simple: allow Aegon to meet the eligible maidens and choose a fiancée befitting his status.

If no suitable candidate emerged, she would create an illusion—make it appear that Aegon shared a room with Selene, and let the deception unfold naturally.

But her plan was thrown into disarray when Harwin became involved in it.

And there was Unwin Peake, that scheming man, whose drug for Aegon turned out to be not a mere stimulant, but a potent medicine from Lys, almost leading to a disastrous error.

"I didn't mean to touch Selene; she just bumped into me!" Aegon protested, his head throbbing with the urge to clear his name.

"How dare you! Now, who will you blame?" Viserys shot back, his voice laced with incredulity and anger.

He was genuinely enraged, believing his second son to be beyond redemption.

It was natural to be attracted to women, but a man should possess character, responsibility, and accountability.

While his eldest son's affair with the Lady of the Vale was beyond reproach, his second son's drunken misbehavior and harassment of a noble lady was utterly disgraceful.

Though not as heinous as Harwin's assault on a maid, it was still a matter Viserys, as a father, could suppress.

Exasperated, his chest heaving with anger, Viserys glanced at the Hightower brothers in the hall.

Otto remained stoic and calm, not uttering a word.

Ormund was sullen and fidgety, pacing back and forth.

Yet, a closer look revealed something unusual.

Otto's eyes were deep, harboring a hint of shrewdness.

Ormund seemed agitated, with a hidden touch of excitement in his eyes.

Their intention was clear: they wanted the Hightowers to continue their ties with the next generation of the royal family, strengthening their bond with the Iron Throne.

Just like the Velaryons, Baratheons, and Arryns, they sought generations of marriages with the Targaryens.

Aegon's incident with Selene, Otto's niece, was precisely what they needed.

Viserys frowned, sensing something was amiss.

Despite his suspicions, he couldn't pinpoint the exact issue.

Turning to Lyonel, he said, somewhat relieved, "Young people make mistakes. Let him go reflect for now."

Lyonel, sharp-minded, understood this as the king offering a way out for everyone involved.

Raising his head, he angrily rebuked his eldest son, "Get out of here and sober up!"

Afterward, he strode over to the kneeling and crying maid, assisting her personally. "Don't worry, I won't let this go," he assured her solemnly.

Every word and action showcased the Hand of the King's impartiality and strictness.

The maid nodded vigorously, her gratitude evident. "I won't cause trouble. I'll be obedient..."

"Don't be afraid. I will see to it that justice is done," Lyonel said with compassion, ordering the other maids to take her away. This occasion was not suitable for a mere maid.

A Kingsguard stepped forward, roughly lifting the disheveled Harwin and dragging him out the door.

Remarkably, this scandalous incident, which had caused such a stir, was deftly handled and set aside.

Lyonel secretly breathed a sigh of relief and gave a grateful look to the king.

As long as the crown did not pursue the matter further, his eldest son would be spared severe punishment.

He wouldn't be imprisoned or stripped of his status and dignity.

Alicent's eyes sparkled with determination as she pleaded, "Your Grace, Aegon didn't mean any harm."

The situation had already escalated, and it was crucial to find a way to mitigate the damage.

Viserys, still seething with anger, retorted, "His disgrace was witnessed by many. Do you still see him as a child?"

There was no telling how far rumors of this royal scandal would spread.

"Your Grace, Prince Aegon is young and foolish. There are still ways to remedy this situation," Lyonel interjected at the right moment, his voice calm and measured.

As the Hand of the King, Lyonel understood the importance of salvaging the royal family's dignity. As long as Aegon hadn't ruined a noble girl's chastity, there was room to maneuver.

Viserys listened, his heart agreeing with Lyonel's logic.

Otto stepped forward with a solemn expression. "Rumors are dangerous. This concerns the dignity of the royal family and must be taken seriously."

"What do you suggest?" Viserys asked, his tone still sharp.

Otto pretended to ponder before replying, "Selene was already considered a candidate for Prince Aegon's marriage. By proceeding with the marriage, we can quash the rumors."

"Marriage again?" Viserys was taken aback.

Alicent, holding Helaena tightly, interjected, "Selene is a young girl and a victim. This marriage would preserve her reputation."

Helaena stared blankly at her mother, her large eyes filled with confusion. She had noticed a flaw in the plan. Glancing at Aegon, she bowed her head silently, knowing that speaking up might cause more trouble.

Viserys, sensing something amiss, questioned, "Is Aegon truly opposed to the girls of Hightower?"

Otto quickly added, "Aegon's reluctance stems from his unfamiliarity with the Hightowers."

Viserys narrowed his eyes, his gaze shifting between Aegon and Otto. He began to suspect there was more to the situation.

Aegon, seemingly unfazed by the idea of a Hightower bride, spoke with impatience. It was clear the girl from House Hightower had played a part in the incident, and now Otto and Alicent seemed eager for the marriage to proceed.

For a moment, Viserys felt as if he saw a trap closing around his son.

Otto coughed lightly and continued, "Your Grace, a marriage between Aegon and Selene would unite our families and cover up this scandal."

Viserys hesitated, mulling over the proposal. "It's not a bad suggestion. I will think about it carefully."

Though inwardly repelled by the idea, he couldn't deny its potential benefits.

Lyonel opened his mouth to speak but then closed it, helpless. His own son was in trouble, and he couldn't think of a better solution.

The atmosphere grew tense as events seemed to be steering toward a union between the two families.

Just as Viserys was about to agree, Aegon suddenly burst out, "No!!!"

He shouted excitedly, "I don't want to marry Selene! I didn't defile her chastity!"

He couldn't hold back any longer as he watched events spiral into the worst possible outcome.

Aegon feared his mother's domineering influence and loathed being constantly lectured by her. The thought of marrying a girl from House Hightower, so similar to his mother, was unbearable.

Alicent snapped back, chiding, "Aegon, you have no place to speak here!"

"You're discussing my marriage," Aegon retorted defiantly.

Alicent ignored his defiance and continued sternly, "If you don't marry Selene, how will you restore her reputation? What nobleman will still want to marry her?"

Suitable girls for Aegon were scarce. The nobles of Westeros were acutely aware of the rift between the Black and Green factions and recognized the Green party's vulnerability.

As the Queen's firstborn son, Aegon was inevitably seen as a representative of the Green party. None of the major nobles were willing to marry their daughters to him. Compared to minor noble daughters, a marriage with the Hightowers would better stabilize the royal family's alliances.

Aegon shook his head frantically, refusing, "I won't marry her. You can't force me."

"Aegon, this is a great opportunity. Why do you refuse?" Otto quickly stepped forward, grabbing his grandson's collar. "Unless you can find a better house to join, tell me, can you?"

Unaware of the deeper intrigue, Otto's reaction was instinctively political, aiming to avoid harm.

Aegon's eyes were filled with helplessness, unable to find a rebuttal. He only knew the whores of King's Landing.

Otto released his collar and admonished, "No candidate? Then be quiet."

Watching his second son being reprimanded, Viserys felt a deep sense of unease. He spoke in a muffled voice, "In that case, let's proceed with the engagement."

"Good. I will inform Selene. The poor girl has been crying a lot," Alicent responded quickly, a weight lifted from her heart.

The marriage was hastily finalized.

Aegon stood frozen, almost in shock. He had only had a bit too much wine. How had things gone so wrong? Why was he being forced to marry a Hightower woman, someone he despised?

His chest tightened with resentment as he struggled to comprehend his fate.

Aegon gritted his teeth and stormed out of the hall.

"Where are you going?" Alicent asked, her voice urgent.

"I'm going back to the Twin Castles, my fiefdom," Aegon snapped, his steps brisk and his tone irritated.

"You have a betrothal to attend to. You're not going anywhere," Alicent replied firmly.

Aegon pushed the door open with force, turning back with a disgruntled accusation. "You arranged the marriage, so you can handle it yourselves. No one cares what I think anyway."

With that, he left without looking back. In that moment of solitude, he felt a small sense of gratitude. At least his father had given him a fiefdom, and Rhaegar had built a castle for him. Otherwise, he'd be left to rot in a brothel.

Alicent watched her son leave in exasperation, calling his name in vain. The more she shouted, the faster he walked away.

"Mother, he's afraid of you," Helaena observed calmly from the sidelines.

"What did you say?" Alicent was stunned, thinking she had misheard.

"You have excessive expectations of him," Helaena replied, her voice steady. As an introvert with a keen mind, she had her own penetrating view of the situation.

"Mother, I won't attend the engagement banquet either," Helaena continued softly, breaking away from Alicent's embrace.

Alicent looked at her daughter, feeling a sudden unfamiliarity. "You didn't come to the party this afternoon," she said, trying to comprehend.

"I'm not of age yet. Let's wait until I turn sixteen," Helaena said, her eyes clear. She glanced at her heavily pregnant elder sister, Rhaenyra, who stood silently watching the family drama unfold.

"I'm going back to rest," Helaena added, giving a curtsy before excusing herself.

She guessed that her brother wouldn't return to King's Landing anytime soon. Planning ahead, she intended to ride Dreamfyre to Harrenhal's Castle the next morning to seek refuge, avoiding both her mother and her eldest sister.

"They are gone?" Viserys's brow furrowed deeply, and he nearly lost his balance.

"Your Grace," Erryk, standing guard, quickly stepped forward to assist the stricken king.

Rhaenyra's face tightened with concern as she moved to support her father. In Rhaegar's absence, the burden fell on her shoulders.

"I'm fine. The matter is settled. Everyone, go and rest," Viserys forced a smile, leaning on Erryk for support as he left the hall.

Rhaenyra's eyes were filled with complex emotions as she rubbed her swollen belly. She too sensed the undercurrents beneath the recent conflicts. Sighing softly, she resolved to return to Dragonstone once the matter was resolved.

Counting Rhaegar and Aemond, who were away, it seemed that of the six Targaryen children, only little Daeron had yet to consider leaving.

A good haven, but everyone seemed eager to escape.

Members of the royal family filed out of the hall, followed by the advisors.

By the end of the day, only the three Hightowers remained in the fireplace hall.

Ormund smiled, pleased with the prospect of another family marriage. Unless the Tyrells were ousted, the Hightower House would need to rely on marriage to the royal family to elevate their status.

Alicent stood frozen, disoriented by the realization that both her children had abandoned her. If she had known, perhaps she wouldn't have organized the festival or plotted this marriage alliance. Maybe it would have been better to set up Aegon and Helaena in a traditional match.

Otto sighed, stepping forward to pat his daughter's shoulder. "Don't be sad. The fledglings will grow up someday, and you'll still be their mother."

"Father, I want what's best for them," Alicent murmured.

"I know," Otto replied. "I used to think the same way. That's why you're a queen."

"Is that so?" Alicent's heart tightened, her eyes glazing over as she pondered his words.

Chapter 408: Rhaegar: Why Doesn't He Get a Break?

The next day dawned sunny with a gentle breeze.

In the basin of the Mander River, Bitterbridge stood alone on either bank, hardy as a solitary tree, fearless of wind and frost.

The long river, more than a few dozen yards wide and as deep as a house, flowed with crystal clear water. The sandy ground at the river's edge gave way to lush lawns where flowers swayed gently in the breeze. After the night's rain, the flowers and plants looked refreshed, though small animals remained hidden.

"Roar..."

Upstream, a massive dragon as black as charcoal crouched in the water, its huge body blocking the river like a black stone dam.

Cannibal shook its head, sending water splashing over its hard scales.

The entire dragon lay on its back in the river, the water barely covering its chest and belly, while its towering spine remained dry.

With a snap, its slender tail lashed violently, causing an explosion of water to spray upward before cascading down.

Cannibal's green pupils narrowed slightly as it rested its head on the riverbank, allowing the river water to wash over its body. The dragon was uncomfortable after being drenched in the rain all night.

The river, blocked by the dragon, slowed its flow, creating a serene yet imposing scene.

Plop—

A silver-haired figure broke through the water, swimming to the side of the giant dragon.

"Whew! That feels amazing," Rhaegar exclaimed, dripping wet and fully enjoying the caress of the gurgling water.

"Roar..." Cannibal glanced at him, seemingly puzzled by his rider's early morning swim.

Rhaegar squinted as he wiped away the water droplets, then spoke soothingly, "An occasional outing does wonders for the mind and body."

He shook his head, sending bead-sized droplets flying, and wrung out his damp silver hair to the side.

Man and dragon relaxed in the water, comfortable in each other's presence.

Rhaegar's form was striking, his porcelain-white skin gleaming in the sunlight, and his solid muscles sculpted like a masterpiece.

Cannibal's green pupils half-closed, lazily shaking its massive body, disturbing the fish and shrimp in the water.

When Lord Caswell of Bitterbridge arrived, he was greeted by this extraordinary sight.

Lord Caswell was momentarily mesmerized, his gaze filled with awe and reverence.

The Heir Prince had his back to him, silver hair cascading to his waist, his naked body a marvel of craftsmanship.

The river water reached up to his waist, splashing a fine mist as it crashed against his skin.

Raising his hand, Rhaegar gently rubbed the dragon's long, thick neck, the porcelain white of his skin contrasting sharply with the dragon's pitch-black scales.

"Lord Caswell, your gaze is rather presumptuous, even for a man," Rhaegar's voice cut through the air, tinged with disgust.

Startled, Lord Caswell looked up to see a slight change in the scene.

Cannibal's vertical pupils showed a hint of displeasure, and the dragon's head now hung menacingly above him.

Rhaegar faced him, his handsome features carrying an air of enchantment.

As a child, Rhaegar had been cute and fragile, with a slight aura of gloom. But as he grew, he became stronger, his features developing significant masculine traits. Now, as a dragon descendant, his body had become nearly perfect, with an added androgynous beauty.

"Mother gave me a good look," Rhaegar mused inwardly, donning a white scarf as he walked toward the riverbank.

Cannibal was the first to rise, spreading its enormous pitch-black wings and shaking off the water droplets into a fine mist.

Rhaegar stepped out of the river, a hint of red veins emerging on his porcelain-white skin as the water vapor naturally evaporated. He casually took out a set of black clothes from his space bracelet and dressed as if no one else was around.

Loosening his collar, Rhaegar asked, "Lord Caswell, I have something else to trouble you with later."

Allun Caswell, still bowing, dared not look directly at him. Sniffing, he replied, "It is my honor to serve you."

"Go on," Rhaegar said, amused, patting Allun Caswell's shoulder.

Only after Rhaegar walked a few steps away did Lord Caswell straighten his back and follow, his shiny bald head gleaming in the sunlight.

The House Caswell of Bitterbridge was indeed loyal, executing Rhaegar's orders flawlessly. Rhaegar glanced back at Bitterbridge, contemplating how best to utilize this territory.

Despite House Caswell title, their wealth and status rivaled most noble houses in the Reach. The castle's excellent location served as a crucial road leading to the king's territory.

As they walked, Rhaegar shared his ideas with Lord Caswell, who listened intently and praised him repeatedly. Although the strategies, such as craftsman registration and reclaiming wasteland, seemed challenging and ambiguous in execution, the expansion of trade into the Reach with Bitterbridge as the first stop promised economic growth and prosperity.

Within a short time, they returned to the castle where servants had prepared a sumptuous breakfast. Lord Caswell's wife, a virtuous woman, stood at the door to welcome the Heir Prince. Rhaegar greeted her with a friendly smile, enjoying the harmonious atmosphere between ruler and subject.

While eating breakfast, Rhaegar calmly sliced fresh ham with a table knife. Lord Caswell, sitting straight, invited, "Prince, why don't you stay in Bitterbridge for a few days and experience the customs of the Reach?"

As a lord eager for progress, Lord Caswell looked at the yellow centaur emblem hanging in the hall, dreaming of carrying his people forward.

Rhaegar was moved and thoughtful. He thought of another tournament at the Lake of the God's Eye, another ceremony on the island of Dragonstone, and the looming war over disputed lands that would involve both sides of the Narrow Sea. The prospect of these events was exhausting.

The Red Keep was still hosting the Maiden's Day Festival, adding to his burdens. Most of all, he longed for solitude, away from his sisters.

Thinking back to his childhood, riding Cannibal and knowing everything, he found his life at sixteen even more exhausting than that of his father, the old king.

Damn Ormund with his big nose, always saying that Aegon was young. Didn't he want a little freedom, too?

Thoughts swirled in his

Rhaegar's thoughts were clear, and he was about to agree when—

"Gah gah..."

Suddenly, a piercing chirp rang out, and a raven flew through the open castle doors, landing on the table.

The guards, startled, drew their weapons to intercept it.

"Stop, this is a messenger raven," Lord Caswell quickly intervened.

Rhaegar, propping his chin on one hand, frowned as he recognized the dull-headed raven. It was Tormund's skinchanger raven, often a harbinger of bad news.

"Looks like the vacation is over before it began," Rhaegar muttered, removing the slips of paper tied to the raven's legs.

The first note detailed the previous day's events at the Red Keep, including Aegon and Helaena's departure with their dragons.

Rhaegar's frown turned to a wry smile. "Alicent is really good at self-sabotage."

In her eyes, he was always a threat. She seemed convinced that once he ascended the throne, he would imprison her and eliminate his younger siblings one by one.

Aegon, who had a promising future, was now a pawn in her misguided attempts at control. To counter this, Rhaegar would take Aegon on dragonback across the Seven Kingdoms, allowing him to marry a noble lady from any family they favored. With his prestige and Aegon's pure blood, the nobles would compete to offer their daughters.

As he read the end of the note, he saw that Helaena had gone to Harrenhal.

"Smart girl," Rhaegar chuckled. "She knows to stay away from fools."

While Aegon might be trapped, Helaena remained free. Alicent alone couldn't restrain a dragonrider without the intervention of her father and brother.

Opening the second note, Rhaegar's smile faded as he read the contents.

It was a message from Myr:

[The old powerful and noble forces have started a riot. Lower-class civilians are smashing and looting. The city-state is in chaos.]

The note ended with:

[The Magister's Palace has collapsed. A large hole has appeared underground, suspected to be the ruins of a Dragonlord family...]

Rhaegar's eyebrows shot up, and joy surged through him.

"Dragonlord ruins?" he murmured, excitement tinging his voice.

Such a find was a treasure trove, an ancient site of immense value.

Years ago, the Ancient Valyrian Freehold had conquered the lands where the nine free trade city-states now stood, creating a vast territory. Lys had been the summer sanctuary of the Dragonlord families.

Myr and Tyrosh were trading ports under the Freehold. The Doom of Valyria came suddenly, burying many Dragonlord legacies in time.

The Targaryens, having fled, had scant records of these legacies. Yet, Myr's proximity to Ancient Valyria made it plausible that remnants of the Dragonlord families' buildings still existed.

"I cannot guarantee that I will find the systematic inheritance of bloodmages and pyromancers, but uncovering knowledge of dragons, even fragments, would be invaluable," Rhaegar mused.

However, the riots in Myr seemed suspicious. The suppressed old nobles had suddenly risen up, and civilians, barely surviving before, now had weapons, using the chaos to kill a large number of Fearless soldiers on patrol.

"Braavos," Rhaegar thought, his eyes narrowing. The quieted city-state likely had a hand in this. Braavos was undeniably powerful, the foremost of the nine free trade city-states.

But no matter how large their ships or fierce their mercenaries, they couldn't withstand the dragonfire. Their strength lay in economic sanctions and trade restrictions, not direct confrontation.

"A cheap trick," Rhaegar snorted disdainfully.

To prevent the resurgence of the Triarchy's old party, he had prepared extensively. As long as his army remained within the city-state, a few skirmishes were insignificant.

This situation presented an opportunity to root out the disobedient and cleanse the corrupt system.

Folding the letters, Rhaegar addressed Lord Caswell, "Thank you for your hospitality, but I must depart soon."

Lord Caswell, respectful and understanding, replied, "You are the Heir Prince, and important matters await."

He didn't inquire further, offering unwavering support. Lord Allun Caswell, still young and childless, hadn't participated in the Maiden's Day Festival organized by King's Landing. If not for Rhaegar's unexpected visit, he might never have had this opportunity to serve the Prince.

Rhaegar smiled, gesturing towards the castle forecourt, "After I leave, please ensure Lord Peake is safely escorted to Highgarden. Lord Tyrell will handle the rest."

Lord Caswell's eyes followed Rhaegar's gesture. In the forecourt, a figure with a rope around its neck swayed on the gallows, surrounded by a dozen charred corpses.

Noting the Three Castles House emblem on the chest of the hanged man, Lord Caswell nodded vigorously, "Rest assured, he will be safely escorted."

The man had been gagged all night, but he was still alive.

Rhaegar stood and clapped his hands, ready to take his leave. After a moment of contemplation, he made his decision.

The Red Keep was cold and quiet. Returning to Myr seemed the better option.

Chapter 409: The Bear and the Maiden Fair

Stormlands.

Southern Rainwood, Mistwood.

"Roar..."

The light silver dragon roared triumphantly, swooping low and unleashing a torrent of dragonfire. Outside the lapis lazuli-piled city walls, countless Dornish soldiers scattered in all directions, their screams and wails filling the air.

"Retreat! Hide in the Rainwood!"

"Scorpion crossbows... aim at the dragon..."

The battlefield was shrouded in smoke, littered with broken wheels and charred corpses. Scorpion crossbows, crucial siege equipment, became the dragon's first target, quickly followed by stone throwers and siege vehicles.

Wooooooooo—

The stirring horn blew, signaling the light of victory. From the southwest direction of the Rainwood, a group of storm knights, numbering in the thousands, charged like a steel torrent.

With their lines collapsing, the Dornish soldiers were reduced to lambs for the slaughter. In a single round of charging, they were decimated.

"Open the city gates! Counterattack!"

On the women's wall of Mistwood, a large banner bearing a white owl was raised, signaling a counterattack amid loud shouts.

The gates slowly opened, and dozens of knights charged forward, followed by hundreds of infantrymen. Leading them was a tall, burly man with black hair and brown skin, cutting down the Dornish soldiers.

"Sea Smoke, don't let them escape!" Laenor shouted from the dragon's back, his eyes glowing with intensity.

"Roar..."

Sea Smoke hissed melodiously, deftly swooping and raining dragonfire upon the fleeing soldiers.

"Hahaha, good job..." Laenor laughed heartily, nearly choking as the wind rushed into his open mouth. Coughing violently, he steadied his shaking helmet.

Sea Smoke squinted, deliberately slowing to intercept the Dornish soldiers fleeing towards the forest.

With thousands of elite cavalry and an adult dragon, there was no doubt about the outcome of the battle.

The Dornish fled desperately, continuing until midday when they scattered from the Rainwood to hide. Even so, nearly two thousand dead littered the battlefield.

After the battle, soldiers cleaned up the area while reinforcements entered Mistwood.

The leading house of Mistwood, the House Mertyns, was led by Lord Mertyns, the burly man who had valiantly led the counterattack. He warmly welcomed the reinforcements.

"Ser Laenor, thank you for your aid with Sea Smoke!" Lord Mertyns took Laenor's hand warmly.

During the First Dornish War, the House Mertyns had been poisoned by the Dornish, losing all their family members. The hatred persisted through the years.

Laenor's dragonfire had decimated many Dornish soldiers, earning Lord Mertyns' deep admiration.

"Lord, allow me to send a message to the main force before accepting your hospitality," Laenor said, all smiles but ever mindful of the battlefield.

With the teachings of the Sea Snake, Corlys, Laenor's abilities were not to be underestimated.

Lord Mertyns quickly ordered someone to fetch a pen and paper, while servants prepared cattle, sheep, and wine to reward the army.

Laenor, with a serious expression, wrote two letters and delivered them to Lord Royce in Crow's Nest and Aemond in the Rain House.

With Mistwood successfully rescued, an encirclement was formed against the Dornish forces besieging Stonehelm. With a single order, the war could be won.

...

Time flashed by, and soon it was noon.

The raven was the first to reach Rain House, which was much closer, and the letter was handed over to Aemond.

"Roar..."

The ugly, rotten mud dragon hissed shrilly, flapping its wide brown wings and hovering over the camp. On idle days, patrolling the camp was the responsibility of Sheepstealer, strictly supervising every goat in the area.

In the clearing, Aemond stood, filled with annoyance, holding two letters. One was from King's Landing, detailing Aegon and Helaena's "Matchmaking."

Aemond frowned in displeasure. "Mother is so mean. Why does she want to marry off my sister?"

In the entire Red Keep, his sister was the only one who treated him well. She had not yet reached adulthood, and their mother was forcing her to marry out—it was truly excessive!

Scanning the letter's content about Aegon, Aemond bristled and casually tossed it aside. If it had been about Rhaegar or young Daeron, he might have read it. But Aegon? Forget it. A fellow who only whored himself out wasn't worth his time.

Opening the second letter, Aemond's expression soured instantly. Ensuring no one was watching, he muttered in disgust, "How did Laenor win the fight so quickly?"

He had been counting on the defenses of Stonehelm dragging out for a while longer. The thought of House Swann pushing their bastard son to the throne disgusted him.

Tearing the letter to pieces, Aemond sneered disdainfully. "A man who abandoned his blood relatives doesn't deserve my help."

He let the shredded paper flutter in the air, calling out to the idle Sheepstealer. Mounting his dragon, he prepared to search for the Dornishmen hiding in the Rainwood.

...

Dornish Territory.

Outside the city of Sunspire, the Water Gardens.

News of the defeat arrived continuously, casting a pall over the lavish garden adorned with carved beams and painted walls. The vibrant surroundings now seemed dark and discolored.

Inside a white stone pavilion, Prince Qoren leaned thoughtfully against a stone pillar, his gaze fixed on the garden's center.

A meandering brook gurgled, encircled by rockeries and tropical coconut and palm trees. Soldiers clad in tawny armor stood at attention, guarding the garden's corners.

"Hee hee..."

A dark-haired, dark-skinned little girl played by the stream, mischievously splashing water at her maid. Tiring of her game, she wiped the sweat from her forehead and bumped toward the pavilion.

Qoren's brows furrowed slightly as he pondered the latest developments.

"Prince, the battle in the Stormlands has ended in a decimation, and Lord Yronwood is requesting reinforcements," reported a tall young knight.

Qoren turned to face him. The young man had short light blonde hair, violet eyes, and a tall frame clad in silver armor, with a massive sword hanging from his back. The family crest of a sword crossed with a shooting star adorned his armor.

This was Davos Dayne, the current Sword of the Morning of House Dayne, a noble house renowned for their bravery and martial skill. Their fiefdom, Starfall, was famous for the legendary sword, Dawn, said to be forged from the heart of a fallen star, rivaling Valyrian steel.

Qoren glanced at the giant sword with slight admiration. "Don't worry about it. War isn't just about the number of soldiers; it's also about ravens and intelligence."

Understanding the perils of war, he had modeled a system akin to the Kingsguard, calling upon Dornish knights to form an exclusive escort. Unfortunately, only Davos Dayne, a formidable warrior, remained as his personal guard.

Davos, his violet eyes heavy with concern, said, "Prince, Stonehelm's defenses are weak. It should have fallen by now."

The young guard suspected Lord Yronwood had ulterior motives.

Qoren chuckled mysteriously. "You underestimate Lord Olyvar. The truth is, I authorized Stonehelm's continued resistance."

"Why?" Davos froze, bewildered.

The young were inexperienced and often lacked the subtlety of the old.

Qoren clasped his hands to his chest and said smugly, "The Targaryens have dragons. Even if we break through Stonehelm, we'll eventually be burned by those beasts."

"Instead of being trapped in the city, it's better to roam through the Rainwood and utilize the advantages of mountain warfare."

Davos frowned and asked, "When will we achieve victory, then?"

Relying solely on guerrilla warfare seemed like a drain on their troops.

Qoren shook his head, his eyes deep with thought. "Capturing a castle isn't the goal. What I want is for their forces to crumble internally, creating an opportunity for us."

He knew that the allied forces of the Stormlands were not as united as they seemed.

After a slight pause, he asked, "Any news from Braavos?"

Davos hurriedly replied, "The Sealord sent three supply ships, all equipped with iron and crossbows."

"Tsk, typical of a free trade city-state, overflowing with wealth," Qoren remarked, his lips curling with envy.

He pondered further. Braavos was supplying weapons to the Dornish, but they were also supporting the Triarchy. How disorganized were the three city-states? Could they hold off Targaryen's Rhaegar, Daemon, and Rhaenys?

If not, Braavos' mercenaries could attack the ports of Pentos or Westeros, creating chaos. The three adult dragonriders couldn't be everywhere, and the Iron Throne's ability to deploy dragons would be limited.

Davos, still uncertain, pressed on, "Prince, what's happening in Mistwood?"

"Don't worry about it; we'll know soon enough," Qoren replied with a cold smile. "I've sent people to Pentos specifically to deal with that Velaryon."

"Father!"

Aliandra ran over and jumped into her father's arms.

"What is it, my little princess?" Qoren's smile immediately turned from cold to warm, affectionately tipping his daughter's cheek with his chin.

"Father, I want a dragon," Aliandra pleaded playfully.

"Ahem..." Qoren nearly choked, coughing repeatedly. A dragon? His daughter dared to ask for one when he still longed for one himself.

Regaining his composure, he said, "The dragons are in the hands of the Targaryens. Martell only has lances and wisdom."

"Then catch me a Targaryen," Aliandra said, her eyes bright with excitement.

Qoren felt a mix of helplessness and amusement. Setting his daughter down, he indulged her briefly before sending her off with a pat on the back.

Turning back to the unblinking Davos, Qoren's demeanor grew serious. "Inform Lord Uller that the Vulture Mountains are ready for a general attack."

Winning the war would require more than just one battlefield, especially not just Cape Wrath. The Prince's Pass and the Boneway were crucial. The Reach had been rich since ancient times, and Qoren had coveted it for a long time.

"Yes, Prince," Davos replied, retreating to find the maester and release the raven.

...

Stormlands.

That night.

In gratitude for the reinforcements that rescued him, Lord Mertyns hosted a celebratory feast at Mistwood Castle. Except for the standing army units guarding the gates, the castle was alive with chaos and merriment.

"Roar..."

Sea Smoke crept into the back garden, enjoying a goat brought by the attendants. Accompanying the dragon was Cole, searching for his lover.

Laenor had left the party alone midway through, and was now nowhere to be found.

Cole circled the light silver Sea Smoke but saw no sign of Laenor.

"That guy, where did he go again?" Cole sighed deeply, annoyed at his lover's evasiveness.

Since the battlefield had shifted from the disputed lands to the Stormlands, Cole found it increasingly difficult to catch Laenor. Those unaware might think he had been abandoned.

Casually tugging on a squire, he inquired, "Have you seen Ser Laenor?"

The squire trembled and pointed in a direction.

Without a word, Cole looked where the squire indicated. There, an artificial lake was surrounded by a lawn and several wigwams.

From a distance, a familiar singing voice reached his ears.

"A bear there was, a bear, a bear! All black and brown, and covered with hair. The bear! The bear!"

It was a song widely popular among both nobles and commoners, "The Bear and the Maiden Fair."

Cole blushed, recognizing Laenor's voice.

He had taken only two steps before stopping again, hearing another familiar voice.

Besides Laenor, another man was singing with him. Cole's eyes flickered as he cautiously approached, parting the flowers to peer behind the wigwam.

To his dismay, Laenor, flushed and shirtless, held a bottle of wine. A handsome blond man, also bare-chested, wrapped his arms tightly around Laenor's waist. The two men were intimate, acting as if they had been friends for years.

Cole's face darkened instantly, as black as the bottom of a pot. He recognized the blond man.

Laenor, drunk and joyous, called out, "Joffrey, to celebrate your return to my side."

The blond man's pale hands began to move uncontrollably over Laenor. Soothed by the touch, Laenor continued singing, "Oh come they said, oh come to the fair! The fair? Said he, but I'm a bear! All black and brown, and covered with hair!"

Chapter 410: Aethyr's Dragonlord Family

Narrow Sea.

"Roar—"

A pitch-black dragon soared past, its wide wings brushing against stretches of white clouds.

The giant dragon flew over the disputed lands and entered the waters governed by Myr.

"Cannibal, slow down," Rhaegar commanded, his gaze fixed on the distant Free City.

Myr, built along the coast, was engulfed in rolling smoke, the smell of scorching reaching several nautical miles.

"Roar..."

Cannibal's green vertical pupils were icy cold as it plunged into the cool clouds, its huge body gliding low against the waves.

The dragon's chest cut through the surface of the sea, stirring up large splashes. Rhaegar's eyes never left the nearing Myr. Upon receiving news of the riot, he had rushed back immediately.

The discovery of a large hole, possibly the ruins of a Dragonlord's abode, was a windfall. He needed more theoretical knowledge and experience from the Dragonlord family, even the systematic tomes of Blood Sorcery and Pyromancy. At the very least, he sought a deeper understanding of the Ancient Valyrian Dragonlord bloodline.

His recent transformation into a Dragonborn had brought many subtle changes. Rhaegar urgently needed the appropriate knowledge to lay a solid foundation.

Rhaegar Targaryen

Talent: Dreamer (Gold)

Bloodline: Dragonborn (54%)

Rune: Bronze (Green), Serpent (Blue)

Blood Sorcery: Dragonstone (Blue), Enchantment Spell (Blue)...

Relics: Blood and Fire, Dreamscape...

Evaluation: "Transcendent, an indictment of a new age".

Silently calling up the Explorer System Panel, Rhaegar reviewed his status and couldn't help but feel a surge of expectation. His bloodline was constantly being purified, gradually transforming him into a Dragonborn.

During the ancient Valyrian period, had the topranked Dragonlord families tapped into this and cultivated Dragonborn warriors? The Valyrians had been masters of blood and fire magic, after all.

Cannibal's speed was exceptional, and they approached Myr in no time.

"Roar..."

A loud and clear dragon roar echoed through the city-state, filled with anger and warning. Rhaegar looked up at the sound.

A scarlet dragon hovered over the city-state, its wide wings sweeping the wind as it frequently swooped to unleash Dragonfire. Wherever the Dragonfire landed, the ragged locals fled in disarray.

"The riot is still going on," Rhaegar observed, formulating a plan.

Meleys circled an area in the center of Myr where the Magister's Palace was located.

"Cannibal," Rhaegar patted the dragon's back, conveying his intent.

"Roar—"

Cannibal instantly understood, roaring as it ascended above Myr. The ghostly green Dragonfire it breathed out covered the previously blue sky.

The entire city of Myr buzzed with excitement.

Civilians and slaves alike kneeled devoutly, bowing to the deity of their faith.

There was no special reason for this, just one overwhelming fact: a pair of pitch-black wings that seemed to have emerged from the depths of hell, embodying the essence of death.

Cannibal did not linger long, circling the entire city before landing in the central area.

Boom—

As the dragon touched down, the hearts of countless Myrmen leapt into their throats.

"Roar—"

Cannibal let out a deafening roar, its scorching breath dispersing the disorganized crowd who hadn't found cover in time. Instantly, the entire city-state fell silent, gripped by inexplicable fear.

Cannibal's green vertical pupils glared disdainfully as the dragon's feet stepped on the edge of the ruins. It lowered its head for Rhaegar to dismount.

Rhaegar, clad in black robes and with Truefyre at his waist, surveyed the devastated city center. The disorganized people cowered in the corners, burying their heads and not daring to move. The dragon did not need to breathe Dragonfire to instill terror; its mere presence was enough.

The moment Cannibal appeared, the chaotic populace finally grasped the reality of their situation.

Rhaegar didn't mind helping them remember the horrors of the Deathwing.

"Roar..."

Meleys roared roughly, flapping its wings as it landed violently. In the stirred-up dust, Rhaenys, clad in red armor, wore a stony expression.

With the two dragons grounded, the previous chaos fell into complete silence.

Swish swish...

A disciplined running sound followed, as hundreds of Fearless clad in black armor blocked the city's exits.

Rhaegar, still astride Cannibal, noted that the former Magister's Palace was now rubble, revealing a wide and deep underground pit. The chaotic citizens seemed drawn to it.

Dismounting, Rhaegar approached Rhaenys and asked, "Aunt, what's going on here?"

Rhaenys's brows knitted together as she replied indignantly, "Someone spread a rumor that the Dragonlord's treasure is hidden in that pit."

She quickly recounted the events: The old noble class had incited a riot, and someone had supplied the rioters with weapons. They had taken advantage of the night to kill the patrolling Fearless

squad, stolen stone throwers and artillery meant for city defense, and attempted to destroy the Magister's Palace.

Under indiscriminate bombardment, the palace had collapsed, exposing a deep underground pit. Rebels spread rumors that the pit contained the treasure of the ancient Valyrian Dragonlord, promising untold riches and the power to tame a magic dragon to whoever found it.

Rhaegar's gaze was unkind as he scanned the hundreds of disorganized people kneeling by the ruins. It was obvious, even without deep thought, that the remnants of the Triarchy had a hand in this citywide uprising.

And the only ally capable of supplying such a large number of weapons was Braavos, halfway across the Narrow Sea.

"Our sea power is still too weak," Rhaegar muttered, unhappy with their firepower.

The only fleets that had become formidable forces in Westeros were House Velaryon, House Redwyne, House Manderly, and a few others.

After the Battle of the Narrow Sea, the Velaryon fleet had suffered significant damage but was still capable of garrisoning Lys. The fleets of House Hightower, Lannister, and Celtigar could barely defend the Stepstones. Overall, they had enough to defend but not enough to advance.

Rhaegar sighed softly. "What's the situation in the deep pit? Has anyone gone in?"

"Yes," Rhaenys replied, her face flushed with anger. "Many disorganized people rushed into the deep pit, and..."

Her words trailed off, unable to continue. Anger clouded her features, but she seemed unable to express it.

Rhaegar frowned slightly, intending to inspect the pit himself.

"Roar..."

Cannibal's green vertical pupils were alert. The dragon's tail swung in front of Rhaegar, preventing him from moving forward.

A second later, a sharp roar echoed from deep within the pit, reverberating like lazy water waves.

Rumble—

Amidst the chaotic noise, the bloodthirsty Blood Wyrn with a scarlet body and a long neck like a snake crawled out of the deep pit. Rhaegar raised an eyebrow, not expecting to see Caraxes there.

Caraxes's vertical pupils were cruel. The dragon's jaws tore at bloody flesh, and his wide wings released choking smoke.

Through the dust, a black-clothed silhouette slowly emerged. Rhaegar watched silently, his eyes glowing with a hint of coolness. No wonder Rhaenys had difficulty speaking—Daemon had taken the opportunity to slip in.

It seemed the pain of losing his son had driven Daemon to show his presence again.

Rhaegar beckoned to the nearest Fearless, who handed him a spear.

"Uncle, a little gift for you," Rhaegar called out warmly, a grin curling the corners of his mouth.

With a powerful throw, the spear shot like a meteor, aimed precisely at the figure in the dust. Whether or not it would kill him, only the Stranger would decide.

Tyrosh wasn't sable enough for Daemon to dare enter his territory and cause havoc without facing consequences.

Bang—

The spear shot forward with lightning speed, piercing the dust cloud.

"Roar..."

Caraxes was the first to sense the danger, letting out an ear-piercing screech. The black-robed figure dodged, the spear grazing his head with a close, narrow cut.

The tip of the spear embedded itself in the rubble with a thud, the wooden shaft splintering from the force.

"Quite a cheap life you have," Rhaegar murmured coldly, watching intently.

Clap, clap, clap...

A round of applause rang out from the dust, and the figure gradually came into view.

Daemon stepped out with a steady pace, laughing nonchalantly. "Nephew, you nearly took your uncle's life."

A large gash marred the left side of his face, oozing blood. If not for his quick reflexes, the spear would have impaled him.

With a disappointed expression, Rhaegar sighed. "Uncle, it's a shame you're still alive."

Daemon was a perpetual troublemaker; wherever there was chaos, he was in the middle of it. How had he not been pinned by the spear in the ruins?

As they exchanged words, Rhaegar noticed something in Daemon's hands. Two heavy books were clutched under his left arm, and his right hand dragged a dragon egg.

Rhaegar's gaze sharpened.

The books were plain, their covers depicting a red dragon wearing a crown. The dragon egg was scarlet, its shell fossilized and covered with a layer of stone slag.

Noticing his nephew's interest, Daemon weighed the fossilized dragon egg twice and said indifferently, "Like it? There are plenty in the deep pit, all carried by the chaotic people."

"Is there really a Dragonlord's ruin underground?" Rhaegar asked, ignoring the teasing tone in Daemon's voice. He was only interested in the facts.

Daemon nodded. "That's right. A Dragonlord family named 'Aethyrys' once owned half the land in Myr."

As he spoke, he walked over to Caraxes's side.

Swish...

The Fearless moved swiftly, encircling Daemon with spears in hand. Daemon's expression remained unchanged, completely disregarding the dozens of armed men.

"Roar!"

Caraxes stretched his neck and hissed at the tiny figures that dared to approach within ten feet. The Fearless, as if confronting an enemy, forced themselves to hold their ground, suppressing their fear.

Daemon glanced at them and remarked, "Not bad."

Man and dragon stood together, radiating an intimidating presence.

"Stand back," Rhaegar commanded, waving his hand.

Daemon's face remained impassive as he said, "This ruin is one of the shelters left behind by the Aethyrys family. Unfortunately, it wasn't used, but there are still plenty of valuable items inside."

"Would you really let me have it?" Rhaegar asked skeptically.

Daemon smiled. "Think what you want. I've got what I came for."

With that, he nimbly climbed onto Caraxes and tucked the two precious books into his armor.

Rhaegar's gaze was sharp, fixed on his uncle's chest. Experience had taught him that knowledge was wealth, and Daemon had certainly found something valuable.

"Roar..."

Cannibal let out a low growl, its green vertical pupils locked onto Caraxes, radiating a terrifying aura.

Rhaegar smiled, a hint of danger lurking beneath. Taking something and leaving so easily? What did Daemon think he was?

Caraxes, vigilant, lowered its neck and growled a warning, always on guard against Cannibal.

The air around them seemed to drop to freezing as the two dragons squared off.

In the end, it was Daemon who relented first, casually tossing the fossilized dragon egg to his nephew. "Consider the books borrowed. I'll return them after reading."

Rhaegar caught the fossilized dragon egg with ease, his dangerous smile fading.

Waving his hand as if chasing flies, he added, "Be careful with the knowledge in those books and return them within seven days!"