

G.O Thrones 471

Chapter 471: Archmaesters of the Citadel

Rhaegar's words pierced Corben's heart like a dagger. Stumbling a few steps, his face contorted with grief and humiliation, he said, "As you wish, Prince."

He was powerless to resist.

In that moment, Corben understood why, according to historical records, the High Septon received guidance from the Seven Gods and opened Oldtown's gates to the conquerors. Faith alone could not save Oldtown.

Rhaegar's mouth curled into a smile, and he waved his hand casually. "You are not feeling well. Please go and rest. My wedding will be a grand event."

Corben's eyes filled with sorrow as he bowed his head and left, looking like a dog that had been beaten down.

This scene did not go unnoticed by the holy brothers and sisters present. They quickly bowed their heads, unable to believe their eyes. The Faith of the Seven was sacred—how could it bow to power?

Rhaegar leaned back and called out, "Lord High Septon, the new religion needs devout believers. I hope you will send some holy brothers to King's Landing to help build a temple."

Corben's body shook, and he stammered, "Building a church? Isn't it enough to recruit craftsman?"

"No!" Rhaegar replied, smiling. "The sacred temple must be infused with the faith of the faithful. It is essential that holy brothers participate in its construction and serve as an example to the people of King's Landing."

Then, with a hint of sarcasm, he added, "If you don't want to bother the holy brothers, you can set an example yourself and personally lay the bricks for the temple."

Tears welled up in Corben's eyes. Seeing his frail frame, he quickly agreed, "I will select a group of holy brothers to send to King's Landing so they can work with peace of mind."

"Very well," Rhaegar said, satisfied.

After this bit of "haggling," the High Septon fled, dragging the holy brothers and sisters with him. If he didn't leave now, who knew what outrageous demands they might make later?

Rhaegar had indeed considered demanding that King's Landing's shortfall of holy sisters be met by the Starry Sept. However, seeing Aegon drooling over the holy sisters, he dismissed the idea.

The holy brothers, eager for their benefits, would be happy to work as laborers in King's Landing to pay off their debts. They were already a bad influence on the holy sisters, and Rhaegar saw no need to exacerbate the problem.

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The Starry Sept was suddenly empty.

Rhaegar's eyes fell back on Ormund as he asked, "Where is Lord Otto? Has the High Tower received any news from Alicent?"

Alicent had been confined in a small room for half a month, with the public told she was praying for the king at the temple. While others might believe this excuse, House Hightower certainly would not.

Ormund lowered his head. "Otto returned to King's Landing a few days ago, hoping to rectify Alicent's mistake."

"He left?" Rhaegar frowned slightly. Given Otto's cunning nature, he would never have returned to King's Landing at such a sensitive time just to rescue his foolish daughter. If he truly cared for her, he wouldn't have sent Alicent to the bed of a king who had just lost his wife.

He had thrust his own daughter into a power struggle, using her position as queen to divide royal authority and bolster his and House Hightower's power.

Aemond interjected, "Grandfather left Oldtown five days ago, saying he wanted to have a good chat with my mother. Is something happening in King's Landing?"

Aegon's interest was piqued, his dead fish eyes scanning back and forth between Rhaegar and Ormund. The two brothers, being in Oldtown, had limited information.

From the few words exchanged, it wasn't difficult to surmise that something significant had happened in King's Landing, and it involved Alicent.

Facing his brothers' questions, Rhaegar showed no sign of weakness. He turned to Ormund, "Do you want to tell them, or should I?"

Ormund hesitated for a moment.

"Then I will speak," Rhaegar said calmly. "Alicent made a mistake. You'd better not ask too many questions. I'll think of a compromise."

Aegon let his arms drop and looked at him blankly, clearly confused. While his brothers fought in the war, his mother was causing trouble at home. What about my credit?

"Will it be okay?" Aemond's voice was filled with anxiety and helplessness. At only eleven years old, even after experiencing the baptism of fire, he struggled to handle sudden changes. Unlike Aegon and Helaena, he was deeply influenced by Alicent's "little family" teachings and cared deeply about his immediate family.

Seeing his brothers' reactions, Rhaegar did not scare them but offered reassurance. "Alicent is the queen; she will not be in danger."

In truth, Rhaegar felt guilty. His brothers were fighting for him, the eldest brother, while their mother faced consequences.

Hearing this, both Aegon and Aemond sighed in relief. One was relieved he hadn't lost his credit, and the other was glad his mother was safe.

"But!"

Rhaegar's sudden exclamation sent his brothers' hearts racing once again. Aegon, especially, snapped out of his lazy and depressed demeanor, now fully alert.

"What else do you want?" Aemond asked eagerly.

"Oh, I'm just teasing you." Rhaegar chuckled, then turned his gaze to Ormund, his voice chilling. "But just because Alicent is fine doesn't mean everyone else is."

Ormund's eyes twitched, and he instinctively took a step back. Behind him stood a dozen well-armed knights. Rhaegar glanced around, but his attention focused on one person. The knight's shield bore a "sharp-pointed bull skull on a blood-red background," identifying him as a member of House Bulwer of Blackcrown. Judging by his face, he was the Lord of Blackcrown, Lord Bulwer.

House Hightower has several vassal families, and House Bulwer is one of them.

Other powerful bannermen include House Beesbury in Honeyholt, House Mullendore in Uplands, House Costayne in Three Towers, and House Hightower in Sunflower Hall. These houses built castles around Oldtown to protect it, contributing to House Hightower's immense power, even surpassing House Tyrell, the lord of the fief.

Rhaegar, his eyes deep and probing, asked, "Why do I only see Lord Bulwer here? Where are the other lords?"

Ormund's forehead broke out in a cold sweat. He said awkwardly, "The bandits from Dorne are causing trouble. I didn't call my bannerman."

"Is that so?" Rhaegar smiled playfully. Except for Lord Beesbury of Honeyholt, who was in King's Landing, the other lords had sent ravens declaring their refusal to participate in the political struggle between the royal family and House Hightower.

Ormund's face grew even more unsightly, and he wished he could find a crack in the ground to crawl into. Not only had he failed to summon his bannerman, but he had also sought alliances with other families in The Reach. Over half a month, only the loyal House Bulwer had responded, leading 500 infantry and 300 archers to Oldtown.

House Bulwer's motto is "Death Before Disgrace."

Rhaegar stood up, patting the dust from his robes. "Lord Ormund, the Citadel will lead the way." The Faith of the Seven was subdued, and with the Citadel and Hightower easily taken, Ormund had no choice but to lead his group out.

Aegon and Aemond, each lost in their own thoughts, followed the group.

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The Citadel, built on a remote dock in Oldtown, seldom saw visitors in the past. Ormund led the three dragons riders to its gates.

"Roar!"

Cannibal let out a thunderous roar as it landed, sending a wave of hot air that rattled the Citadel's glass, as if igniting an invisible fire. Rhaegar sat firmly on the dragon's back, surveying the iconic structures of Westeros.

The Citadel was situated on the Honeywine River, its tower domes connected by stone arch bridges, with residential halls built on the bridges. This design facilitated communication among the Maesters and minimized the need for additional residential space.

Flanking the main entrance were tall green sphinxes, mythical creatures with the body of a lion, wings of an eagle, and tail of a serpent. Rhaegar studied them closely. One had a male face, the

other a female, reminiscent of the sphinxes in his dreams, exuding an exotic essence from the continent of Essos.

Boom!

The arched gate at the foot of the tall city wall slowly opened, and dozens of Maesters in their robes poured out. They varied in age, though most were middle-aged or older, with blank faces and shining eyes, embodying a transcendent focus on knowledge.

Leading the procession were three old Maesters, easily distinguishable by their bald heads, emaciated frames, and lifeless eyes. Rhaegar was secretly impressed; they fit the stereotype of Citadel Maesters perfectly, prioritizing the pursuit of knowledge over appearance. Vaegon the Dragonless had aged similarly, barely able to leave his bed in his old age.

The three old Maesters approached cautiously, stopping at a safe distance from the three dragons. They stared at the Cannibal with shock, as if beholding an unimaginable monster. After a moment, the dead-eyed old Maester bowed stiffly. "The Citadel is honored by the presence of the three Princes. Please, come in."

The other two Maesters, snapping back to reality, quickly lowered their heads and pretended to bow. Rhaegar looked down on them, noting their micro-expressions, and said calmly, "I have already met Archmaester Fischer, and I have long admired the other nine Archmaesters of the Conclave."

The thin old Archmaester straightened up and responded, "I can submit an application to the Maester's Chamber and arrange for you to meet them as soon as possible."

The Citadel is a place for learning, where maesters and acolytes alike spend their days in research. Meetings with the maesters required appointments due to their lecture and research schedules.

Rhaegar, understanding the intricacies, replied, "Thank you." He then nodded to Aegon and Aemond, and the three brothers dismounted from their dragons.

The dragons lay at the Citadel's entrance, each one towering over the green statues, their pupils flashing menacingly from time to time. Rhaegar led the way as the Maesters opened a path for them, with the three old Archmaesters guiding the procession.

Along the way, the thin Archmaester kept talking, introducing the customs and traditions of the Citadel. Rhaegar listened attentively, observing every detail of the Citadel. The gray stone buildings gave an impression of grandeur, with a stark emptiness at the top.

The Citadel's unique style was evident in its simplicity, yet it lacked no grandeur, and everything was designed for maximum convenience. Rhaegar nodded occasionally, inquiring about significant locations such as the library and the book depository.

Due to the dispute between Alicent and Rhaenyra, Rhaegar had rarely visited Oldtown, and had never set foot in the Citadel, which he had rejected since childhood. Now, for the first time, he felt a surge of excitement.

He remembered the two old Maesters who had once filled his mind with knowledge and the oath he had taken as a child.

Chapter 472: It's a Pity, You Shouldn't Have Moved

After about half an hour, the group finally entered the Citadel Tower after touring some of the Citadel's notable sights.

During the visit, they came across the famous Scribe's Hearth in the lobby. The Citadel prides itself on serving the people, and the Scribe's Hearth exemplifies this by offering writing services to the common folk. Positioned at the entrance, it lowers the threshold for the common people to seek assistance.

In the Citadel Tower, the old man with the straw staff kept his word, personally registering Rhaegar's presence in the Archmaester's Office and notifying the other Archmaesters of their visitor. Rhaegar observed the entire process, gaining familiarity with the internal rules of the Citadel.

Lord Lyonel had studied at the Citadel and earned six scholar's chains, each representing a different area of study. He often reminisced about how fulfilling yet exhausting his days at the Citadel had been. According to Aemond, Lord Lyonel privately complained that being Hand of the King was even more taxing than his studies at the Citadel. The thought made Rhaegar smile. Some people dream of high office for personal gain, while others find the responsibilities overwhelming.

After half an hour, the old man with the straw staff led everyone to a spacious guest room in the tower to rest. The Citadel, not being a castle, had no halls for banquets. Rhaegar noticed only neat wooden doors along the corridor, each leading to small rooms where scholars lived. There were also special wards for the sick, secured with iron bars.

Rhaegar nodded in approval of the Citadel's disciplined approach to academic research, though he found it somewhat extreme. He and his brothers took their seats at a stained oval conference table, waiting patiently. Ormund and the old man with dead fish eyes stepped outside to confer privately. A dozen knights stood guard, and only Lord Bulwer entered the reception room.

A quarter of an hour passed. Aegon grew impatient and fell asleep on the table, kicking his stool back and forth. Rhaegar looked around and started the conversation. "How long do you think it will be before the Conclave arrives?"

"Who knows? A bunch of old farts who've never tasted a woman," Aegon grumbled, rolling his eyes.

The Citadel's strict rules forbade Maesters from falling in love, ensuring their total dedication to their studies. For Aegon, it felt like a monastery.

Rhaegar smiled, ignoring his second brother's crude remarks. Aemond mused, "You killed Archmaester Fischer. The Citadel must be afraid of you."

"Why do you think that?" Rhaegar asked.

Aemond frowned. "You have dragons; the Citadel doesn't."

"That's true, but it's not everything," Rhaegar cautioned. "Don't underestimate the Citadel. These Maesters will sacrifice everything for their research, even marriage. They're not normal."

Aemond frowned even more deeply. "We have dragons," he emphasized.

Rhaegar shrugged. "The Citadel might be more interested in studying dragons up close than fearing them."

Aemond, still puzzled, played with his fingers. To him, dragons were everything. As long as Sheepstealer was around, he felt invincible. Who would dare provoke a dragon and not expect to be incinerated by its fire?

Rhaegar smiled and said nothing, knowing better than to try and change their opinions so easily.

Aegon and Aemond had had too little contact with the Citadel to know much beyond what the old Maester Mellos had taught them. Rhaegar, on the other hand, knew the Citadel very well.

If it weren't for the secret dealings of the Dragonpit Maesters when he was a child, Dreamfyre would never have been tamed by Helaena. And former Grand Maester Mellos was far from the kindly old man he pretended to be.

The structure of Westeros was deeply intertwined with the Citadel. Every notable castle and house had a Maester managing their lands. The late Borros Baratheon, a typical illiterate lord, relied entirely on his Maester to read and write letters and manage Storm's End. Such dependence was unheard of in Essos.

The more Rhaegar thought about it, the more he saw the Citadel as a grotesque institution, a tumor on the tree of nobility. The nobility's over-reliance on the Citadel had corrupted their thinking. In contrast, the culture of Essos was flourishing, with fierce competition among the powerful ensuring a constant infusion of fresh blood.

Another half hour passed. Finally, the slow, steady sound of footsteps echoed in the hallway. Rhaegar turned his chair, making a loud creaking sound as the floorboards scraped together, and looked up at the door.

Six scholars in Maester robes entered, each with a chain hanging from their necks. They varied in age: three were very old, two middle-aged with extraordinary bearing, and the last one quite young. Upon entering, they greeted the Targaryen princes with their distinctive hair. "Welcome, Princes of House Targaryen, to Oldtown. May the Seven watch over you always."

The old man with the walking stick pointed to the eldest of the six. "This is Archmaester Luwin, the most knowledgeable scholar in the Citadel."

Archmaester Luwin was short and stout, with white hair and a rosy complexion, exuding a sense of vigor and wisdom.

As the old man was about to continue, Rhaegar interrupted with a wave of his hand. "Gentlemen, let's get to the point."

Archmaester Luwin, with his hands in his sleeves, looked serious. "What brings the heir to the Targaryen throne to the Citadel?"

Unlike High Septon Corben, Luwin did not bow. The Citadel considered themselves above the politics of who sat on the throne, focusing instead on their scholarly pursuits and managing the kingdom's Maesters.

Rhaegar knew this and asked directly, "Before we proceed, I want to ask what the purpose of the Citadel is?"

Archmaester Luwin frowned slightly, then replied with conviction, "To explore unknown knowledge, cultivate useful talent, and provide learning opportunities for anyone on the continent eager for knowledge."

These three points had allowed the Citadel to endure in Westeros for many years.

"Well said!" Rhaegar praised, chuckling. "I admire the Citadel's spirit of exploration. I hope to establish a royal Citadel in King's Landing to teach literacy to the children of the nobility. I trust the Citadel will support this endeavor."

The Citadel's power stemmed from the nobility's undervaluing of knowledge, leading to a monopoly on education. To break the Citadel's influence, Rhaegar aimed to dismantle this monopoly and foster a broader dissemination of knowledge.

Archmaester Luwin pondered deeply before replying, "Establishing a new Citadel is commendable. If you wish, I will send scholars to teach there."

He saw through Rhaegar's intent and aimed to maintain the Citadel's monopoly through this offer. Masters assigned to castles already had the responsibility of educating noble children, so stationing them at a royal Citadel would make little difference. The nobles would be hesitant to entrust their children to such a place, making the teaching superficial.

Rhaegar was prepared. "There is no need to send masters specifically. I will recruit lecturers myself. What I need from the Citadel is access to its library and the transportation of books to stock the royal Citadel."

He didn't trust the Citadel's people, so he secretly recruited dozens of individuals. His plan, modeled after the Protestant Reformation, aimed to replace the Oldtown Citadel's status. It would not only serve noble children but also be open to commoners. This idea had been brewing for three years during his seclusion at Harrenhal, where the lack of educated individuals had been a glaring issue.

Now, as Regent, he had many nobles under his command and a greater selection of Masters. However, he lacked the ability to command them at will. Nobles, even as Targaryen supporters, were not as easily controlled as obedient dogs.

Rhaegar had dragons; he didn't need loyal followers, he wanted obedient servants.

Archmaester Luwin, focused on preserving the Citadel's library, replied, "The Citadel holds many rare and valuable books. We can provide ordinary books, but we cannot part with precious ones."

The old man with the cane asked, "Prince, how many books do you need?"

"Half," Rhaegar responded without hesitation.

"How many?" The old man was taken aback.

"Half!" Rhaegar reiterated.

The room fell silent before a middle-aged Archmaester, outraged, shouted, "The Citadel has millions of books. Even the royal family cannot take half of them!"

Rhaegar's mouth curled slightly as he looked at the man.

Although I am demanding it, it is rude of you to say so.

Archmaester Luwin took a deep breath, stopping the middle-aged Archmaester from speaking further. "Prince, we are representatives of the Citadel, not its owners. Your demands are too harsh. We cannot comply on behalf of thousands of maesters."

He gave his reasons, then rejected the demand, and finally applied subtle pressure.

Rhaegar, appreciating the scholarly rhetoric, knew they misunderstood his resolve. He looked at the middle-aged Archmaester and sighed lightly, "Archmaester Luwin is too old and doesn't see as clearly as you do."

I've already taken it by force, and you're still trying to reason with me. You've been too comfortable for too long and don't realize the reality you're facing.

As soon as these words were spoken, the atmosphere in the guest room shifted dramatically, and everyone could sense the underlying threat.

Aegon's eyes lit up, and he sat up from the table like a fish flipping over, watching with keen interest. Aemond, always ready, pulled out his dagger and began to play with it.

Rhaegar glanced sideways at Ormund by the door and beckoned, "Lord Ormund, please close the door."

Ormund smiled sheepishly, stepped out of the reception room, and closed the door behind him.

Now, only Rhaegar, his brothers, the Archmaesters, and Lord Bulwer, who was left to guard the door, remained in the room.

"The number is just right," Rhaegar remarked, surveying the nine Archmaesters with a smile. "Let's play a game. One, two, three, wooden man."

Archmaester Luwin frowned and said, "Prince, we cannot agree to your request. Please do not make things difficult for us."

"If you don't object, I'll take that as a yes," Rhaegar responded, standing up and extending a hand as pale as carved jade.

Archmaester Luwin and the others took a step back, their eyes wary.

Rhaegar's eyes grew cold, and the magic of fire in his blood surged, following a special course of operation.

Zila—

A sparkle of light appeared, and the flesh of his fingers glowed red. In the blink of an eye, a faint red light appeared on the second knuckle of his index finger and the center of his palm.

Rhaegar's expression remained unchanged, his body did not move an inch, and his clothes fluttered in an unseen wind.

Archmaester Luwin's pupils constricted, and he exclaimed, "This is magic!"

"That's right, the kind you've been studying for thousands of years," Rhaegar replied.

The next second, seven tiny sparks burst forth from his palm, expanding rapidly.

With a loud boom, the seven sparks broke free from his palm and instantly turned into seven fiery red balls the size of washbasins.

Rhaegar's eyes flashed, and the seven fireballs hovered around the nine Archmaesters, following a curved trajectory and emitting a searing heat.

"Prince, what are you doing!" the old man with the walking stick cried out, terrified, and fell to the ground in shock.

Rhaegar glanced at him with regret. "It's a pity, you shouldn't have moved."

With a flick of his right index finger, a fireball smashed into the old man's head like a marionette.

Pop

The skull burst open, and the flames engulfed the area above the collarbone. The fireball then scattered like a bubble of sparks, falling on the headless corpse and reducing it to ashes.

The eight remaining Archmaesters, including Luwin, were almost scared out of their wits.

Rhaegar said lightly, "A new fire magic I've been studying. It consumes a lot of energy, but it's easy to control."

He glanced at the remaining Archmaesters. "There are six fireballs left. Who would like to see it?"

Chapter 473: Rhaenyra's Hint

"Prince, you..."

A middle-aged Archmaester glared at Rhaegar and reached out to stop him.

Rhaegar's lips curled. "Sacrificing yourself for others?"

Zila-

A ball of fire floated nimbly and struck the middle-aged Archmaester in the chest, burning a hole through him.

In an instant, the room seemed to freeze completely.

Not only were the remaining Archmaesters stunned, but even Aegon and Aemond froze, their eyes nearly popping out of their sockets.

Rhaegar glanced to the side and said to his two younger brothers, "Watch carefully, I'll only teach you once."

He closed his five fingers slightly, causing seven points of red light to form an unusual seven-pointed star pattern.

This was a fire magic technique he had learned while sitting in the Starry Sept.

Using his five fingers as the foundation of the magic, he created a pentagram that could release five fireballs. The fireballs could vary in size and be controlled with the precision of moving an arm.

The seven-pointed star pattern Rhaegar used was a result of subsequent improvements.

The second knuckle of his index finger and the palm of his hand had two additional magic sources, allowing him to create seven fireballs. No more—seven was the maximum for one hand. It couldn't be less than five, or the magic transportation route of the five-pointed star would be disrupted, losing its flexibility.

"Gulp!"

Aegon swallowed a mouthful of saliva and couldn't wait to lie on the ground and watch. Aemond's one eye widened as he stared at the palm controlling the fireballs.

Rhaegar flicked his hand, and the five remaining fireballs formed a line, whirling around the seven Archmaesters.

Several Archmaesters were quick on their feet, protecting the most important one, Archmaester Luwin, in the middle.

Rhaegar glanced sideways and lightly tapped his finger. The four fireballs seemed to come to life, smelling their prey and falling on the four Archmaesters, burning them to cinders in an instant.

On the spot, only three of the nine Archmaesters remained. Well, there was also a pile of ashes.

Of the three, besides the key-protected Archmaester Luwin, there were the youngest Archmaester and a tall old man.

Rhaegar ignored them. The second finger of his index hand was the only part of the seven-pointed star still glowing red. He had already decided to kill them all when he realized he had not seen all the members of the Conclave in the Starry Sept. There were too many people at the Ten-Person Meeting, so he decided to leave two behind.

Hum

The fireball trembled slightly, stopped spinning at high speed, and hovered above the three men, emitting a scorching heat like a small sun.

Tick!

Archmaester Luwin dared not move a muscle, a drop of sweat trickling down his skin and onto the floor. The young Archmaester was filled with fear, suddenly closing his eyes with force, maintaining a stiff posture. The heat was baking, and the fear was growing, like a sword hanging above his head, ready to pierce his brain at any moment.

"Ho ho."

The last tall old man was sweating profusely, unable to hold back his fear. He stumbled and nearly fell.

Rhaegar glanced at him, and the fireball fell at great speed, engulfing him from head to toe. The tall old man did not even scream, his life ending without pain.

Rhaegar ignored him and put away his hand, causing the seven-pointed star to disappear. Fire torture was an extremely cruel punishment in Westeros. All he could do was quickly end the suffering of the victim. It was a kind of mercy.

Plop! Plop!

Archmaester Luwin and the young Archmaester fell to the ground, their bodies drained of all their strength, their cold sweat soaking through their rough Maester robes. He looked at the "remains" of his companion, his heart spasming with a mixture of intense sadness and fear.

They had imagined countless negotiation scenarios—coercion or bribery—but they had never imagined that the heir prince would kill them on the spot if they disagreed.

"Are you two rested?"

Rhaegar's voice was cold and distant. Maesters are really a very annoying group. They are arrogant and condescending, despising worldly powers and believing themselves to be in possession of the truth. But they don't consider whether the truth lies in books and pens, or in the Bronze Age of the ancestors, or in the iron of the Andals, or the dragons of the Targaryens.

Archmaester Luwin and the young Maester trembled, finally realizing what power was, and their heads, full of knowledge, gradually drooped.

...

For a long time.

Creak!

The door to the guest room opened and Rhaegar walked out with his two younger brothers, arms linked.

"Goodbye, Prince."

Lord Bulwer held the door handle with one hand and removed his horned helmet with the other, forcing a hideous, fawning smile.

Rhaegar waved his hand and said in a friendly manner, "You can stay in the Citadel and cooperate with Maester Tru."

"Yes, we will complete the task!"

Lord Bulwer stood at attention, looking extremely serious.

Ormund, standing in the hallway, was dumbfounded, as if he had just met his bannermen for the first time.

"Is this still the same reckless man?"

Just a moment ago, Bulwer had sworn he'd rather die than give in. Feeling Ormund's gaze, Lord Bulwer glared at him and passed by indifferently.

Half of the dozen knights stepped forward and left together.

"This, this..."

Ormund was so shocked he could hardly speak.

Rhaegar pressed his shoulder and said with a smile, "I'll go to the library first and visit the High Tower later."

With that, he walked out of the corridor.

Aegon and Aemond gave their uncle a sympathetic look and quickly followed Rhaegar with their necks tucked.

"Huh?"

Ormund was completely dumbfounded and suddenly noticed the open door to the reception room. The young Archmaester, with a damp patch in his pants, helped the shivering Archmaester Luwin to his feet. But where were the other Archmaesters?

Ormund looked down and saw a pile of ashes and debris.

"These piles, they look a bit like... ashes?"

Ormund shuddered at the thought, and the more he looked, the more it seemed true.

He turned his head, spun around, and ran!

...

It was night.

The Starry Sept loomed in the shadowy night as a huge creature landed in the square. Rhaegar slid off the dragon's back, caressed its hideous snout for a while, then climbed the steps into the temple.

He had spent the afternoon searching through the Citadel's precious library. The Citadel's vast collection was a testament to its cultural monopoly in Westeros, an endless ocean of books. Rhaegar even feared that a bookcase might collapse in an earthquake and bury him alive under a mountain of knowledge.

Not long after, under the guidance of a holy sister, they arrived at the inner hall where guests were accommodated. Although called an inner hall, it was actually a spacious room with a sunny view and simple, rustic decor.

As soon as he reached the door, a Valyrian nursery rhyme could be heard through the wooden door. Rhaegar stopped, gently twisted the doorknob, and opened a crack in the door, smiling as he peered through.

Rhaenyra had changed into a red dress and was kneeling on the carpet with her back to the door. A cradle nearby gently rocked a baby inside. She held another baby in her arms, gently patting it to sleep.

Rhaegar, engrossed in the scene, opened the door wider.

"Hum hum hum~~"

Rhaenyra seemed to sense something but continued to coax the two children, humming a lullaby in a gentle voice. Rhaegar recognized it as "The Evening Glow of the Shepherd," a song she had often sung to him when he was little to help him fall asleep.

"Rhaenyra," he called softly, eyes filled with tenderness.

The lullaby stopped abruptly. Rhaenyra, still with her back turned, continued cooing to her child as if she hadn't heard him. Rhaegar was momentarily stunned, a look of confusion flashing in his eyes. He noticed two young holy sisters standing by the wall, looking down at their toes.

Rhaegar recalled the noisy speech he had heard earlier in the day and, embarrassed, cleared his throat, trying to get her attention.

"Ahem... Rhaenyra, I'm back."

He smiled, waved his hand for the two holy sisters to leave, and then crouched down next to the cradle. Rhaenyra glanced at him, handed the baby Aemon in her arms to him, and said calmly, "You hold him for a while. I'll clean up."

"Okay," Rhaegar said obediently.

Rhaenyra frowned, turned sideways, opened her dress, and gently wiped her face with a handkerchief. Rhaegar noticed that her breasts were covered with two moist, red patches of cloth, barely noticeable but telling.

"Are you lactating?" he whispered.

"Yes," Rhaenyra replied, rolling her eyes, her face turning slightly red. Her constitution was excellent, not at all like a mother who had given birth with difficulty. After giving birth to her two children, she had recovered quickly and had enough milk to breastfeed them without needing a wet nurse. Sometimes, there was so much milk it leaked, causing discomfort.

Rhaegar shifted closer and offered, "I'll make some hot water and help you apply some compresses?"

Rhaenyra: ...

There was a language called speechlessness. Rhaegar looked sideways and saw Rhaenyra's face flushed, steam practically rising from her head.

Looking around, she gently set Aemon aside and got up to fetch water. It was inconvenient being away from home, and the servants were not very handy.

Soon, Rhaegar returned with the water and began to help. Rhaenyra leaned back in the cradle and closed her eyes gently. As the hot towel was applied, the swelling gradually subsided. Rhaenyra's furrowed brows relaxed, and her mood improved.

It was late at night. In the moonlight, the two babies slept soundly in their cradles.

Rhaegar leaned over, his eyes flickering. Rhaenyra, facing away from him, rested her head on one of his arms.

"I'll take care of the children. You go to sleep first," Rhaegar offered.

"Mm-hmm," Rhaenyra murmured, already half-asleep and very tired. Soon, soft snoring filled the room.

Rhaegar sat up and blew out the candle, his eyes fixed on her sleeping face, emotions mixed. Rhaenyra must have received the information she needed from the holy sister. Otherwise, she wouldn't have been so lost in thought while coaxing the baby to sleep.

Rhaenyra didn't bring it up, so it must be taken as tacit agreement.

"You're so kind," Rhaegar whispered, burying his head in the crook of her neck. "I gave the child a surname, that's all."

Alicent's meddling had aroused his suspicions. Even if he married more women in the future, one queen in King's Landing would be enough. In ancient Valyria, polygamy was clearly defined. The wife had the same status as the husband, and the wives of annexed houses varied in status depending on their birthright. They would not normally usurp the first wife.

"The queen..." Rhaegar muttered, his thoughts drifting.

The wife of the Sealord of Braavos had no clear title, and the wife of the Prince of Pentos was apparently called the Princess. The court system of the Old Empire of Ghis was similar, with many titles being combined.

...

The next morning.

At the Citadel library, a large number of soldiers poured in, carrying bundles of books and placing them on carts to be taken away. Tru stood at the entrance to the library, his large, fat body acting as a barrier, constantly supervising the soldiers who were handling the books carelessly.

Behind him, dozens of Maesters were busy sorting out the Institute's equipment. Downstairs, hundreds of Maester's assistants were even more frantic, ransacking all the useful drawings and files, determined to empty the Citadel.

On the roof, Archmaester Luwin looked out of the window, his eyes flashing with pain. As far as he could see, the young Archmaester who had shared the hardships of the past were now joining the team of porters, leading the effort to empty the expensive utensils.

Yes, he had defected... No, he had found the truth! He was invited by the heir prince to become the second in command of the royal Citadel, leaving behind the corrupt old Citadel. From now on, the Conclave would only have Archmaester Luwin to support it.

In the library, Rhaegar sat on the floor, surrounded by a small mountain of ancient books. Compared to the previous day, his attire had changed drastically. A white undershirt and a light red vest accentuated his well-defined waistline. It was obvious that he had been well taken care of.

At this moment, Rhaegar was engrossed in a book with a dragon on the cover.

"Brother!" Aemond suddenly shouted, climbing out of a pile of books and holding up a parchment with a dragon on it. "I found another ancient book passed down by a Dragonlord family."

Rhaegar looked up and saw seven or eight similar ancient books at his feet. Nearby, Aegon lay in another pile of books, his whole body seemingly broken. His eyes were numb as he mumbled, "Rhaegar, I'll hand in a book too. Please let me out."

Chapter 474: Aurion – Biography of a Dragonlord Family

Bang!

Rhaegar casually tossed a book, hitting Aegon's head with pinpoint accuracy. "Get to work, or I'll break your legs!" he snapped, his tone brimming with irritation.

Aegon let out a soul-shattering howl, rubbing the bump on his head as he scrambled to find another book.

"Serves you right!" Aemond snorted, dutifully placing the parchment at his brother's feet.

Rhaegar's face remained impassive as he leafed through the ancient books, his eyes dark and almost watery. "What a Citadel, it's truly a secretive place," he murmured.

He picked up a yellowed ancient book and opened it, revealing the words "Aurion Family" on the first page. Rhaegar's eyes grew solemn as he carefully read the contents.

In ancient Valyria, there were forty Dragonlord families, and the Aurion family was among them. According to Qohor's history, after the Doom, a male member of the Aurion family became one of the surviving Dragonlords.

He recruited men from the Qohor colonists and declared himself the first Valyrian emperor. Riding a full-grown dragon and leading 30,000 infantrymen, he aimed to rebuild the Freehold by marching towards the ruins of Valyria. But no one ever saw Emperor Aurion or his army again.

The ancient book in Rhaegar's hands was a biography of the Aurion family, containing descriptions of the Fourteen Flames, the dragon's lair, and dragon breeding practices. There was even a short spell for binding.

"The Aurions were truly wealthy," Rhaegar thought to himself.

The combined strength of this Dragonlord family was recorded in the brief history of House Targaryen. One of the oldest and most prestigious Dragonlord families in ancient Valyria, the Aurion family was always ranked among the top ten and frequently in the top five. At its peak, they had an astonishing twenty adult dragons and often led the Freehold's external expansions.

"What a fierce house!" Rhaegar gritted his teeth in envy.

When the exiled Aenar crossed the Narrow Sea and migrated to Dragonstone, the family had five dragons. The other four died one after the other, leaving Balerion as the sole survivor. Today, the Targaryens have eighteen dragons in total, with only Vhagar, the Cannibal, and Vermithor being full-grown. This highlighted how powerful the Aurion family was, controlling twenty adult dragons. They could have silenced the Free Cities one by one.

Rhaegar took a deep breath and continued to examine other ancient books. These included the biographies of Belaerys, Aethyrys, and some of the smaller Dragonlord families.

There was even a biography of House Targaryen among the books, written by the exile Aenar himself. It recorded the location of the family's ancestral estate sold in The Lands of the Long Summer and a hidden corner of the Fourteen Flames where dragon eggs were concealed.

The house leader, fearing that the dragons would be affected by their exile on Dragonstone, had made arrangements to leave a legacy for future generations to make a comeback.

Rhaegar read it carefully, sensing a deep sense of anxiety. In some passages, it was mentioned in a veiled manner that the family was declining and that migration might be a prudent option. This ancestor seemed truly fearful of making a wrong decision that could affect the entire House Targaryen.

"Alas, who would have thought that the Targaryens would become even more prosperous after moving to Dragonstone," Rhaegar sighed, unwilling to let the ancestor down.

He compared the map of the Smoking Sea to the location of the ancestral lands. Most of the land had been reduced to ruins and had become part of the Smoking Sea. Due to their relatively weak power, the Targaryens had some of their holdings far from the core area of the Fourteen Flames, preserving them on the remaining peninsula, The Lands of the Long Summer.

As he looked closely, Rhaegar let out a "huh" and found a special piece of land on the map. It was located in the southeast of The Sea of Sighs, the only part of the Lands of the Long Summer that had been preserved relatively intact. There, House Targaryen had built a small town where they kept a large number of war slaves and mined a special ore that enhanced the power of the Spirit. This ore contained a substance that, once ground into powder and purified, was used by pyromancers to develop secret medicines.

Rhaegar's eyes flashed as he muttered, "The Soul Restoring Orchid is not enough. Father needs a medicine stone to boost his Spirit."

He wanted to explore the Smoking Sea again, but various reasons held him back. His father was not in good health, and as the heir to the throne, he could not risk going alone. Thinking of this, Rhaegar took out a pen and marked the location for future reference.

His last exploration of the Smoking Sea had given him a vague idea of the dangerous area. There were safe places, provided they were far from the original site of the Fourteen Flames and not covered by smoke.

Rhaegar continued to look through the ancient records of the Dragonlord families, each boasting of their wealth to varying degrees. These locations were not deliberately concealed and could all be traced on the map. As he leafed through the pages, he sneered, "The Citadel is truly amazing, hiding so many secrets."

The Citadel collected ancient texts openly and secretly, and the secret library was only accessible to Archmaesters. Oh, that's right. Archmaester Vaegon, the Dragonless, should not be included in the public list.

"Brother, there's a strange book here," Aemond called out, poking his head out from the sea of books.

Rhaegar put away a dozen rare copies of the Dragonlord family and approached. It was a thick leather book, so greasy that its original material was obscured. The pages depicted a dark city, and the writing was in a strange script.

Rhaegar recognized it and said in doubt, "The writing of Asshai?"

He had once killed a group of Shadowbinders while exploring the ruins of Belaerys and obtained a book written in the Asshai language. After being translated by several Maesters, the book was revealed to be a spellbook, recording many evil magical rituals involving blood sacrifice and killing. The price for this knowledge was very high, and the rewards were uncertain. Rhaegar had burned it to ashes and returned it to the Shadowbinders in Hell.

Aemond, full of curiosity, asked, "What does the book of Asshai say?" He was illiterate about this language, having suffered from a lack of education.

Rhaegar opened it and frowned. Bang! The pages closed, and flames shot out of his hands, burning the book to ashes in an instant.

"Hey, why did you burn it?" Aemond exclaimed in disappointment.

Rhaegar's face darkened, and he snapped, "It's not a good book, you can't read it." The first page was an analysis of necromancy.

Damn Citadel, they dare to study anything! Looking at Aegon, who was slacking off, Rhaegar gave him a kick and ordered, "Find me all the evil magic from Asshai and destroy it."

He was a person with double standards. The Targaryens could learn fire magic and blood magic, but no one else was allowed to touch the dark arts. No wonder Westeros banned magic—this self-serving nonsense should be thrown into the trash can of history.

"Don't kick me, I'm looking for it," Aegon grunted, moving forward reluctantly like a donkey pulling a millstone.

Rhaegar snorted and continued searching for all the useful ancient books.

...

At dusk, the sun set behind the Citadel gate, where two green sphinx statues stood guard. In front of the gate, a small hill several meters high, covered with books, fluttered in the evening wind, creating a loud rustling noise.

Many Maesters gathered at the gate, their expressions ranging from disbelief to cold indifference to profound regret. Rhaegar stood before them, casually picking up a book titled "On the Sacrifice of Alchemy."

Aegon and Aemond looked at the group of self-serving maester with cold disdain. Who would have thought that the Citadel, known for its studies of cures and astronomy, also delved into harmful theoretical knowledge?

Archmaester Luwin, his face reddening with embarrassment, stood in front of the group of Maesters, closing his eyes in pain. "The purpose of the Citadel is to find the truth, and we do not believe in magic."

Rhaegar walked up to him, snapping the book's pages against the fat old man's face. "You don't believe in it yourself, so why do you collect these books?"

Archmaester Luwin endured the humiliation, as if the veil of shame had been lifted, exposing the Citadel's dark side to the sun.

Rhaegar raised his hand and threw the book back into the pile, his voice cold and harsh. "From now on, if the Citadel produces any more books about the dead, it doesn't need to exist anymore."

Archmaester Luwin lowered his head and said bitterly, "Yes, Prince." He hadn't collected those books; they had accumulated over generations.

Rhaegar's eyes were as sharp as blades as he turned and shouted, "Dracarys!"

Cannibal, crouched at the gates of the Citadel, slowly rose to its full size at the sound of the call, its monstrous maw aimed at the mountain of books.

"Roar!" A thunderous roar echoed as the green Dragonfire spewed forth.

Boom! Thousands of books quickly turned to ash, the scattered fragments burning with green fire, flying through the air before disintegrating.

All the Maesters stood silent, watching this book-burning ceremony. Rhaegar mounted the dragon and found Ormund in the crowd. "I will visit the High Tower tomorrow. Lord Ormund, prepare well."

Ormund's face was strained. "I will not disappoint you, Prince."

After dealing with the Faith of the Seven and the Citadel, the butcher's knife finally hovered over House Hightower. Ormund smiled servilely, but inside, he nearly cried out in despair.

"Roar!" Cannibal let out another roar, and the dust from its wings scattered across the sky, carrying its rider back to the Starry Sept.

Rhaegar looked down at Ormund, who was visibly agitated, and a deep meaning flashed in his eyes. After all this time of bluffing, the fish should be hooked.

...

The sun set in the west, and the sky grew dark.

At the Citadel's Weeping Dock, clusters of firelight moved in the dimness, and the sound of waves lapping against the pier filled the air. Ormund, holding a torch, led a black-robed man, glancing left and right cautiously.

A small boat was tied up at the dock, and several sailors bearing the emblem of the High Tower were loading supplies. Ormund sighed and said, "Alicent made a bad move. He will settle the score with you sooner or later. Leave while you still can."

The black-robed man looked out at the vast sea and replied, "I'm leaving. What about Hightower?"

"Don't worry about it. I wasn't involved. Rhaegar can't deal with me," Ormund advised.

The black-robed man responded, "I have no evidence against me, so I can stay and fight with you."

Ormund shook his head repeatedly. "Whoever gets the evidence of the Faith of the Seven and the Citadel, that Targaryen madman will kill without blinking an eye."

There were ten members of the Conclave, but only two survived the massacre, and one of them turned traitor. Think back to before. The rebellion in Dorne had only lasted a few months, but the Dragon's Wroth had slaughtered more than a thousand nobles and Knights, and thousands of civilians had been affected. It was even more ruthless than the Conqueror and even more ruthless than the cruel Maegor.

Upon hearing this, the black-robed man remained silent for a long time, then walked to the deck of the ship.

Ormund let out a sigh of relief. "I've arranged a boat to Pentos. I've already spoken to the prince."

"Good," the black-robed man agreed. He looked up at Ormund and took off his hood with both hands, revealing a middle-aged face with a luxuriant beard, meticulously combed hair, and deep, gloomy eyes.

Ormund grew anxious and shouted, "Hide your identity. Your whereabouts cannot be exposed."

Otto smiled and said, "Brother, you are always more practical than me."

"Nonsense!" Ormund lectured. "You have only known how to study since you were a child. How many times did Father lecture you about the need to gain experience in the family business? You never listened."

Otto listened carefully, a strange look flashing in his eyes. He asked in return, "Do you know why I devoted myself to studying?"

At the time, he studied hard and forgot to eat and sleep in order to get ahead. During the reign of the Old King, he was one of the most learned men in the kingdom. Otherwise, he would not have become the Hand of the King.

Ormund waved his hand, uninterested. "You should leave soon. We can talk about old times later."

Otto was unmoved and said lightly, "I'm afraid I won't have the chance later."

"What a stupid thing to say."

"Oh, I was just joking." Otto smiled sincerely and said in a deep voice, "Brother, take care."

With that, he climbed into the cabin. Ormund stood stunned, watching the ship sail out of the harbor. He scratched his head and returned to the High Tower.

Chapter 475: Burning the High Tower

Halfway through his journey, Ormund observed the night view of Oldtown and muttered to himself, "Otto must be kept away. Our house cannot be dragged down by him and Alicent."

The heir prince's blade hung over Hightower's head, and potential dangers had to be hidden. As he pondered this, the towering High Tower came into view. Ormund crossed the stone arch bridge and returned to his family's territory.

...

Back at Weeping Dock, the small boat that had sailed away not long ago returned to its original position. On the pier, in the empty night, a dozen black-robed figures stood in a row. Otto put his hood back on and stepped onto the wet dock, saying in a low voice, "Follow me."

The black-robed men followed him silently, like marionettes. The moon was bright, and a cool breeze blew. The hoods of the black robes fluttered, revealing several numb faces with yellowish skin and emaciated bodies. Some were blind in one eye, others had scars all over their faces.

They were criminals from the dungeons of King's Landing, part of the intelligence network left by Mysaria, the White Worm. Otto now controlled these puppets.

...

The night grew deeper, and dark clouds obscured the moonlight.

In the High Tower, a secret passage.

Click-click

A black-robed man crept out, emerging into the cellar where grain was stored.

"Hurry up and don't cause any unnecessary trouble," Otto ordered, his eyes cold as he located an oil barrel that had been prepared in advance.

The black-robed men carried the oil cans and immediately began their work, avoiding the guards on night watch as they poured oil in the cellar, kitchen, stables, and other strategic locations.

One of the black-robed men tried to pour oil on the main gate, but his companion punched him in the face and grabbed the oil can. "Get out of here. Don't be so clever," he said.

Otto, watching from the shadows, nodded imperceptibly. He wanted to set the High Tower on fire but not to block the escape routes.

Isn't the heir prince going to do something? Otto thought. Then I will strike first, set the High Tower ablaze, and escape any false accusations. No one would suspect him of starting the fire; they would think the heir prince had done it.

Taking one last look at the familiar towering structure, Otto turned and disappeared into the secret passage. "Light the fire," he ordered.

The men in black took out torches and ignited the oil-soaked areas. Suddenly, the fire spread throughout the High Tower.

By the time the guards and servants realized a fire had broken out, Otto had already left with his men.

"Come quickly, put out the fire!"

"The kitchen is on fire! Get some water!"

"There's a fire..."

Servants ran around in a panic, and the entire tower descended into chaos.

At that moment, another group of masked men sneaked out of the High Tower and quickly fled the scene in a boat on the lake.

Boom!

A fire erupted at the entrance to the High Tower, blocking the guards from reaching the water to extinguish the flames.

"Damn it, the fire is blocking the door!"

The fire raged, preventing anyone from getting close.

Suddenly, someone exclaimed, "There's the smell of oil! Hurry and save Lord Ormund!"

Guards shouted and rushed inside with blankets soaked in river water.

Meanwhile, in the Lord's bedroom, Ormund lay on a soft bed, wearing silk pajamas and fast asleep.

Zilala...

A fire broke out in the hallway outside, and pungent smoke seeped into the bedroom through the tiny crack in the door.

Ormund stirred, smelling the smoke. The sound of fire engines resounding through the tower woke him from his dream.

As soon as Ormund opened his eyes, the dim room was filled with thick black smoke, and the temperature was as high as an oven.

"Damn it, what's going on?" Ormund cursed, instantly wide awake, and tried to escape.

Bang!

He kicked the door, but it didn't budge. Horrified, he pounded on the door. "Damn it, who sealed the door shut!"

The fire spread throughout the corridor, burning along the walls to the ceiling. The pine wood beams of the decor became the best fuel, and the pine oil crackled and sizzled.

With every breath, Ormund inhaled thick, choking smoke. The shouts and crackling sounds he heard were like the whispering of a stranger.

The smoke grew thicker, and the fire reached the door.

"Cough, cough, cough..."

Ormund's strength waned as he pounded on the door, struggling to breathe. His coughing was so violent it felt like he might cough his lungs out.

"Someone... Help, help me..."

Ormund's eyes filled with deep despair, his throat hoarse like a broken fan, and his limbs gradually became weak and powerless.

With a thud, he fell to the ground. His eyes fixed on the door, just a wooden barrier, but it became the gap between life and death.

Boom!

The fire spread to the bedroom ceiling, and the beams could no longer hold, burning and collapsing.

Ormund's breathing almost stopped, his eyes nearly popped out of their sockets as he watched the beam fall on him.

In the last moment of his life, Ormund's eyes rolled back in his head as he screamed in terror.

"No!"

...

Weeping Dock.

Otto, who had just boarded the ship again, suddenly looked back, drawn by the sound of crackling flames. His eyes fixed on the towering High Tower, now surrounded by billowing smoke. The High Tower, standing 800 feet high, dominated the flat landscape of Oldtown, and the fire was particularly visible in the darkness.

Flames rose from the base of the High Tower, and smoke occasionally billowed from the upper floors, spewing fire through the windows.

Otto's eyes flickered with confusion. "How did the fire get so much bigger?" he muttered. He stirred the water with his hand, gauging the strength of the night wind. The breeze was gentle, not strong enough to fuel the fire to such an extent.

Otto frowned and concluded, "No matter what, we cannot stay in Oldtown for long."

He had already decided to sacrifice his brother and his family to protect his daughter, the queen, and the future of the house. Sentimentality had no place in his plans.

Turning back, he stepped onto the deck of the small boat and urged the sailors to speed up the voyage.

Splash! Splash!

The sailors rowed hard, and the waves grew stronger and stronger. Otto joined the crew, and the boat soon disappeared into the night.

Half an hour later.

The boat left the harbor and entered the mouth of Whispering Sound. Otto was distracted, his eyes unfocused on the distance.

Suddenly, a ship appeared on the horizon. The sailors panicked, stretching their necks to see what was happening. Otto, drawn by the commotion, squinted to follow their line of sight.

The two ships grew closer, and the haze gradually lifted, revealing a small, agile warship. Otto's heart skipped a beat, and his eyelids fluttered.

As the ships converged, Otto looked up and saw the figures on the deck of the warship and the long sail hanging from it. A sword and a shooting star intersected on the light purple canvas.

"House Dayne," Otto whispered, stunned and unable to believe his eyes.

At the same time, the figures on the warship were looking down at him, sneering. With a wave of his hand, one of the soldiers ordered, "Release the arrows!"

Arrows flew through the air, aimed at the sailors and the black-robed men on Otto's ship.

...

Starry Sept.

Rhaenyra was still awake, standing in front of the window in the inner hall in a long beige nightgown, gazing out.

"Ooh~" Aemon, in his baby clothes, lay in his mother's arms, humming and grunting. Rhaenyra held his little bottom with one hand and his back with the other, leaning back slightly to ensure the child didn't fall and injure his spine.

Crack!

The door opened quietly from the outside, and Rhaegar entered. He looked up to see Rhaenyra cooing to the baby in the moonlight.

Rhaegar hesitated for a moment before asking softly, "Is Baelon asleep?"

Rhaenyra turned her head and replied with resignation, "He's been asleep for a long time, except for this little rascal who won't settle down."

"Baelon is the eldest son. He knows how to make his parents feel at ease," Rhaegar smiled, walking over to take little Aemon, who was clapping his hands. The little one's purple eyes shone with excitement, and he smacked his lips as if wanting to argue with his father.

Rhaenyra snorted, rocking the cradle beside her, and looked tenderly at the sleeping baby. "Older children are usually more reassuring and take better care of their younger siblings."

Her eyes moved to Rhaegar's handsome, almost devilish face, and she smiled slightly. What a handsome young man, she thought, reflecting on how she had taken care of him.

Rhaegar laughed, nodding in approval. "That's right. Who wouldn't want a gentle and considerate sister?"

"Wow~" Little Aemon, feeling neglected, yelled in a hoarse voice and hit Rhaegar's chest with his small hand. The little one was soft and squishy, and the impact caused a bit of a rebound, with some saliva coming out.

The parents laughed and teased the poor baby.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra suddenly spoke up, breaking the warm and cozy atmosphere.

Rhaegar "mm"ed, casting a concerned glance.

Rhaenyra leaned against the window and looked out at the towering flames of the High Tower. She asked bluntly, "Did you start the fire?"

"You're so observant," Rhaegar smirked, biting Aemon's cheek. "Otto set the fire. I helped fan the flames."

"Really?" Rhaenyra's eyes narrowed slightly.

"It's the truth," Rhaegar replied, wearing a face that said, "I'm the most honest person around."

Rhaenyra rolled her eyes, worry creeping in. "House Hightower is a powerfull House and the house of Alicent. You must not do anything rash."

Westeros had laws protecting nobility. No matter the crime, as long as it wasn't a rebellion of the entire house, the king couldn't destroy a family name at will.

Since Rhaegar became heir prince, he had cut off two long-standing noble families: Bracken of the Riverlands and Uller of Dorne. Although both had committed great crimes, it was understandable to wipe out the entire family. But such moves irritated the nobles of Westeros and added to Rhaegar's reputation for cruelty.

Rhaenyra thought for a moment and suggested, "The High Tower was destroyed by fire, and House Hightower has suffered enough. Let's leave for King's Landing tomorrow."

The rebellion in Dorne had not yet ended, and the Hightowers were still needed on the battlefield. With Queen Alicent stripped of her rights and Otto in control of the Small Council, House Hightower was not to be feared. In Rhaenyra's eyes, the most important thing was to raise the children with Rhaegar and stay by her father's side.

Rhaegar raised his eyelids slightly, considered the direction of things, and made a judgment. "Well, tomorrow is when we will see the outcome."

House Hightower had deep roots and would not disappear easily. He had made several preparations, which should be enough.

...

The next morning.

The island in the middle of the lake where the High Tower stood had turned into scorched earth. The once white tower was now blackened by the fire that had burned overnight.

Rhaegar and Rhaenyra arrived on their dragons just in time to see guards sweeping the tower's entrance and carrying out charred bodies on stretchers.

"Roar..."

A shrill neighing sound drew the attention of those present as Sunfyre and the Sheepstealer arrived, carrying the two Targaryen boys who rushed over.

Aegon was completely dumbfounded, looking around at the stone tower not far from the ruined walls. He had spent the night with Aemond in a brothel, and now his mother's family was burnt down.

Aemond was even more confused. The one-eyed boy climbed down from the dragon's back and ran toward the tower.

"Aemond, don't be rash!" Rhaegar, standing in front of the tower, reached out to stop him.

At that moment, two armored Knights of the Kingsguard, their faces marked with sadness, slowly walked out carrying a stretcher. A white cloth covered the stretcher, and a charred arm hung limply down.

Rhaegar pulled Aemond back, watching the stretcher pass by them. A lump of solidified gold hung from the thumb of the arm, encasing a green gemstone. The brothers recognized it instantly.

It was the emerald bangle that Ormund Hightower always wore.

"Brother," Aemond said in a daze.

"Yes?" Rhaegar replied, standing nearby.

"Nevermind." Aemond slumped his shoulders and shook his head, trying to process what had happened.

"Father, oh, oh..." A panicked cry, the cry of a child, pierced the air. A young boy, not yet old enough to be a knight, was crying as he left the tower.

It was Ormund's only son, Lyonel Hightower.

Chapter 476: Daemon and the Sea Snake Join Forces Again

Lyonel Hightower, a young boy who had just lost his father, was in the arms of a knight, crying so hard that he nearly fainted.

Rhaegar surveyed the scene, assessing the extent of the damage caused by the fire. Ormund had perished in the blaze, along with several unfortunate Hightower relatives who failed to escape in time. The fire, which had broken out at the entrance to the High Tower, had blocked the guards' attempts to extinguish it. Many servants had also died, either in their efforts to combat the fire or because they were trapped inside.

Lyonel Hightower, looking at the charred remains of the High Tower, wept bitterly. Rhaegar knew that House Hightower would not be able to recover for at least ten years.

"Rhaegar," Rhaenyra called, approaching with their babies in her arms. She handed the children to Rhaegar and then walked over to Lyonel, who was surrounded and comforted by his servants. As she passed Rhaegar, she shot him a fierce glare, as if to say, "Look what you've done."

Rhaegar's lips curved up slightly, and he hummed a lullaby while holding the babies. He watched as Rhaenyra sent the servants away and coaxed Lyonel to stop crying. This was likely the tacit understanding between the two, reminiscent of the relationship between King Jaehaerys I and Queen Alysanne.

Rhaenyra condescendingly went down to help Rhaegar clean up. It was almost noon when Hightower's bannerman, who were close by, arrived in Oldtown to attend Ormund's memorial service.

Rhaegar received the guests and publicly announced that Lyonel Hightower would take over the territory and title, becoming the new lord of Oldtown. The cause of the fire was officially classified as accidental.

Many people privately suspected that Rhaegar was involved in the incident. After all, he had come to Oldtown to suppress the Hightowers. However, the fire had started from inside the High Tower, and traces of oil were found. Given the High Tower's heavy guard, it was unlikely that Rhaegar could have orchestrated the arson without inside knowledge of the secret passageways.

Thus, Rhaegar was viewed not as the direct culprit but as the mastermind behind the scenes. However, no one dared to say this aloud, only whispering it within the castle.

The High Tower still stood, and House Hightower continued to reside in Oldtown, with Ormund's only son now the new Lord. Hightower's bannerman were pleased with this outcome. If they had been truly loyal, they would not have refused Ormund's call. Now that Ormund was dead, the conflict between Oldtown and the royal family was resolved, allowing everything to be rebuilt from scratch. The bannerman could remain loyal to Hightower without fear of repercussion.

It couldn't have worked out better. The truth of the situation didn't matter; what mattered was that peace had been restored.

The funeral was held quickly. Due to the young age of the new Lord, House Hightower elected a regent to arrange Ormund's burial. Rhaegar coaxed his two sons to the front of the procession with Aegon and Aemond.

Rhaenyra bent down and whispered words of comfort to the sobbing Lyonel. Her eyes were gentle, and she exuded an irresistible aura of motherhood. Rhaegar smiled, looking at her with admiration. Rhaenyra truly had the potential to become a queen, radiating warmth and inclusivity. This quality had grown with each passing day as she matured, especially after becoming a mother.

Aegon, slumping his head in boredom, asked, "Is it over?"

"Shh!" Aemond quickly silenced him, warning, "Keep your voice down. Don't say anything."

"What are you afraid of? No one is watching us," Aegon snorted, his eyes falling on a beautiful maiden in the crowd. A flash of rejection crossed his face. "Why didn't they burn her to death? Then I wouldn't have to fulfill my marriage contract."

"That's your fiancée," Aemond reminded him.

"How about I give her to you?" Aegon offered.

"I have my own fiancée."

"Maybe we can marry two." Aegon nudged Rhaegar in the shoulder and asked, "You'll marry Jeyne and extend the exception, right?"

The Rule of Exception was a critical condition established to maintain Targaryen family traditions after a compromise between King Jaehaerys I, the Faith of the Seven, and the Citadel.

The essence of the Rule is as follows:

The Targaryens were not descended from the First Men, the Andals, or the Rhoynar, but were Valyrian Dragonlords of the Freehold.

The Targaryens had a unique marriage tradition aimed at preserving the purity of their bloodline, which differed from the customs of Westeros.

The Citadel also played a role in formulating the Rule of Exception. Once the rules were established, holy brothers of the Faith of the Seven traveled across the continent, explaining the exceptions castle by castle and village by village to help the people of Westeros understand and accept the Targaryens' unique customs.

Rhaegar glanced at Aegon and, to avoid further conflict, carried the two children on his back. "Don't waste your time. The new version of the Rule of Exception applies only to the king and the heir," he stated. This was a private agreement he had made with his father.

The rule allowed the king to take additional wives for the purpose of breeding, but it was meant to prevent a scenario where younger Targaryens, like Daemon and Aegon, would marry multiple wives and start their own harems, leading to chaos.

For the first time, Aegon stood up for himself and argued, "Don't be so selfish."

Rhaegar snorted in derision, "What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing!" Aegon glared at him and then stormed out of the room.

Aemond slapped his forehead and covered his one good eye, lamenting his brother's inability to assert himself effectively. "How could he be such a brother?" he thought.

Despite the day's turmoil, the funeral concluded.

...

The next morning, early dawn.

Four dragons soared out of Oldtown, heading back to King's Landing. Rhaegar rode Cannibal, silently calculating the time difference and pondering the recent events.

The Faith of the Seven had capitulated, signing a new version of the "Law of Exceptions" and taking responsibility for promoting it across Westeros before the spread of the new religion. The Citadel fared even worse, nearly emptied of its resources. Tru led dozens of Maesters and hundreds of Maester's Assistants in inventorying the spoils of the divided institution.

House Hightower had a new Lord, and his advisers had pledged their loyalty. The Blackmont and Daynes Houses, who had been raiding the farms, had vanished. Aegon and Aemond returned to King's Landing alongside Rhaegar and Rhaenyra.

"There's still Otto left to deal with," Rhaegar thought to himself.

At this moment, Otto was probably on his way back to King's Landing. Rhaegar hadn't killed Otto directly but had left him alive, observing his actions. Otto's decision to set the High Tower on fire suggested dissatisfaction with Ormund and a desire to replace him. Otherwise, he wouldn't have resorted to such extreme measures.

Rhaegar had subtly encouraged Otto's resolve. However, the heir was Ormund's son, leaving Otto, as the second son, with no significant influence. Rhaegar thought, "If Otto is left alive, he can be used to restrain Alicent and still be useful."

The Triarchy, the Disputed Lands, and the Dorne Kingdom all required a capable person like Otto to manage them. Death wasn't the end; there was still work to be done.

...

King's Landing

Four dragons soared above the city, slowly descending into the Dragon's Lair.

"Roar..."

Syrax's mischievous neighing echoed as it refused to be directed by the dragonkeepers, carrying Rhaenyra straight to the Red Keep. Syrax had its own mind about where to go—the Dragonpit was dirty and smelly, while the Red Keep's back garden was its favorite place.

Rhaenyra departed, holding a sleeping, sweet-smelling Baelon in her arms.

Rhaegar watched and then led his two younger brothers into the Dragonpit.

"Roar..."

A shrill squeal emanated from the main hall of the Dragonpit. A light green dragon lay on the ground, its head resting on the tip of its tail, its vertical pupils glaring at them with malice.

Helaena stood nearby, holding a chain tethered to a young dragon, the size of a domestic cat, which flapped its wings and struggled.

"Sister!" Aemond exclaimed in surprise, running over excitedly.

Rhaegar was slightly surprised but did not dwell on it.

"Prince," the old Dragonkeeper greeted, leading his apprentices and directing the three dragons away.

Cannibal's pupils were cold and indifferent as it retreated to its own pit. Sunfyre growled at Dreamfyre, who growled back before returning to the pit to rest. Sheepstealer bounced around, pestering the Dragonkeeper for food before falling asleep contentedly on the spot. Of all the dragons, it was the most rebellious.

"Brother!" Helaena smiled as she saw Rhaegar and trotted over with the baby dragon in her arms.

Aemond, who had been ignored, awkwardly withdrew his hands and turned to hug Aegon.

Helaena pointed at the baby dragon and exclaimed, "The Dragonpit has hatched a new baby dragon?"

She had been expecting to see Stormcloud or Tyraxes but found this dragon with a poisonous mushroom-like color instead.

Rhaegar, avoiding the stares of Aegon and Aemond, whispered, "This is the baby dragon that hatched from the Belaerys family's dragon egg, the companion of little Aemon."

"Aemon?" Helaena was confused.

Rhaegar realized she hadn't heard about Rhaenyra's baby and explained the situation. Helaena's mouth fell open, and she stammered, "I, I have a nephew."

Her voice was light and airy, with excitement rather than regret. She then noticed the tiny baby in Rhaegar's arms. Her eyes sparkled as she gently poked the baby's face, as if petting a puppy.

Aemon, with his big, watery eyes wide open and a little drool dripping from the corner of his mouth, looked at his little aunt with a puzzled expression. Not very bright.

Rhaegar laughed and called his two younger brothers, "Let's go back to the Red Keep."

Aegon and Aemond exchanged glances, their eyes lingering on Helaena before they fell silent. Helaena's expression shifted slightly as she put away her teasing attitude toward her young nephew. She hadn't heard about Rhaenyra's child but was aware of other news.

"Roar..." The young dragon let out a squeak, breaking the momentary silence. Young Aemon was attracted by the sound, his big eyes fixed on the young dragon, his mouth watering uncontrollably.

The young dragon opened its pale red wings and tilted its head to look at the human cub, a flash of recognition passing through its pupils.

Then...

"Roar!" The young dragon flapped its wings and took off, screaming in panic and trying to escape. It remembered that when it first broke out of its shell, it had been bitten by this human cub.

"Wa wa..." Seeing the young dragon's cry, little Aemon imitated it, revealing his pink gums.

"Haha, you're still very rude," Rhaegar chuckled, wiping the drool from his son's chin. He led Helaena and the others out of the Dragonpit.

Before leaving, he instructed the dragon keeper to occasionally bring the young dragon to the Red Keep to interact with young Aemon.

...

Red Keep, Banquet Hall

Learning that his children were returning, Viserys, despite his poor health, ordered his servants to prepare a sumptuous lunch. Rhaegar changed into fresh clothes, washing off the dragon smell, and the others followed suit. After a long flight, they not only smelled of dragons but also of sweat.

At the banquet, Viserys sat on one side of the long table, looking at his children with a pale face and a smile of relief. In his arms, he cradled Baelon, who was chewing on his hand. Rhaenyra sat nearby, placing Aemon on the table and letting the little one show his teeth to his brother. Baelon glanced at him and continued to chew his hand.

Viserys was delighted. "Look at these two little ones. They will grow up to be great warriors."

Rhaegar smiled and nodded, occasionally glancing at Helaena and Aemond. Unlike Aegon, who seemed indifferent, these siblings were more sensitive, both distressed that Alicent could not attend the banquet. The prodigal son had returned home and couldn't bear to see his mother absent.

Rhaegar understood. He had been without a mother since he was a child and was used to it.

Halfway through the banquet, as the siblings had eaten almost everything, Rhaegar noticed his father hesitating to speak. He asked, "Father, is there any news from the outside world?"

This was a family feast, not a formal dinner. Lyonel and the other advisors were not present and had not received the news in time.

Viserys hesitated for a moment. "Braavos has sent envoys to offer peace terms."

"Is Ferrego so kind?" Rhaegar frowned.

Viserys shook his head. "It wasn't Ferrego. He died in a wildfire explosion. Braavos elected a new Sealord who wants peace."

"That's not a bad thing," Rhaegar thought of Braavos, far across the Narrow Sea, and asked, "Are the terms of peace proposed by the new Sealord harsh? Otherwise, why are you so hesitant?"

Viserys looked around at his children, his eyes and brows showing signs of fatigue. He said sadly, "The new Sealord's peace terms are generous, but he wants the Iron Throne to stop its invasion of Dorne and sign a truce with Prince Qyle of Sunspear."

"His hand reaches far," Rhaegar said warily.

"Dorne has already submitted," Viserys explained. "The new Sealord wants to stop the Dragon's Wroth. He will persuade the Dorne rebels to put aside their prejudices and return to peace. The messenger also said that the new Sealord wants to reopen the trade routes to the Disputed Lands and restore the right to trade for both sides."

Rhaegar thought about this for a moment. He understood. He had killed too many people in Dorne, and the new Sealord sought to soften the conflict. In keeping with the Free Cities' tradition, the two sides would sign a peace treaty, and everyone would make money together.

But why did his father look so troubled? Rhaegar's mind flashed with a figure.

Viserys sighed and said bluntly, "The emissaries from Braavos not only visited King's Landing but also Driftmark, the Stepstones, and Sunspear. Daemon and the Sea Snake allied themselves and cut off the messenger's genitals as a way of refusing to stop the war."

Corlys Velaryon, known as the Sea Snake, was so outraged that he had once threatened to cut off the envoy's to pieces and send it back to Braavos in a box. He had lost his heir and would not rest until he had taken his revenge.

Chapter 477: Recall All Targaryens

Rhaegar immediately understood.

The Sea Snake had lost his son, and his hatred for Dorne had reached its peak. He had not yet vented his anger.

Rhaegar's knife and fork touched lightly as he thought deeply, muttering, "If the Sea Snake disagrees, how long can House Velaryon hold out?"

On the eve of the Battle of Myr, House Velaryon lost half of its warships. In the subsequent battles of Tyrosh and Lys, the remaining fleet was further diminished by 30%. Currently, the blockade of the Stepstones and the control of the Greenblood River are barely maintained by House Velaryon's fleet carrying the army of the Crownlands.

Despite the losses, House Velaryon reaped many benefits during the months of war. They looted wealthy merchants of Lys and Tyrosh, intercepted cargo ships at the Stepstones, and annexed the private property of Planky Town and Sunspear. These actions allowed them to recover most of their losses.

Moreover, the Triarchy would lower port taxes for House Velaryon in the future and even share some of the rights of Lys. However, the joy of these gains vanished when Laenor was killed, nullifying the benefits.

The Sea Snake lost his most important political asset, the only male heir who could ride a dragon. Now over 60 years old, his time was running out. Once the war ended, House Velaryon would face an immediate struggle for succession.

Viserys listened in silence, pondering the Sea Snake's predicament. Without an heir, the threat only increased.

Rhaegar weighed the situation and said thoughtfully, "A peace treaty is necessary. It's good that the realm will be at peace soon, but it depends on whether all parties can obtain satisfactory conditions."

Internally, Daemon occupied Tyrosh and the Sea Snake shared Lys's rights. These were almost certain. Externally, the new Sealord was sincere in restoring maritime trade in the Triarchy and uniting with Prince Qyle to quash the rebels' ambitions.

But things were not so simple. Daemon might not be honest, and the Sea Snake would definitely stir up trouble over succession. Even within the Targaryen family, with Alicent and Otto in custody, appeasing the younger siblings would be a major challenge. Not to mention Braavos, where merchants never did business at a loss.

Viserys filtered out the difficulties and a gleam of joy appeared in his eyes. "You agree to sign the peace terms?"

The Narrow Sea War was the beginning of everything. Now, the Disputed Lands, including the lower half of the Narrow Sea, were incorporated into the Iron Throne's territory. The rebellion in Dorne had faced two rounds of Dragon's Wroth, causing countless noble casualties and pushing them to recuperate.

As a king with deteriorating health, Viserys sincerely hoped the war would end soon. The credit and glory would be recorded in the family's history, giving a wise and honorable name to future generations.

Rhaegar nodded. "Of course, Dorne is not worth the time. The Disputed Lands have large tracts of fertile land waiting to be developed."

"That's good. During your absence from King's Landing, many nobles and commoners have secretly complained about the harm of war."

Viserys felt relieved, a smile of relief appearing on his lips. With continuous wars, nobles and commoners were exhausted and unwilling. Peace was essential for smooth governance.

After a moment of thought, Viserys suggested, "Rhaenys has sent a letter supporting peace, but the attitudes of Daemon and the Sea Snake remain problematic. I plan to summon them back to King's Landing for a family banquet."

They could sit at the same table and talk things over face to face.

"No problem," Rhaegar agreed. The war was basically over, and no major changes were expected. The Crownlands troops were stationed in the Riverlands, and the Sea Snake's nephews commanded troops in Sunspear. There was no fear of rebellion. With the speed of a dragon, any rebellion could be quickly resolved.

It was time to hold a family meeting and tear the fragile veil of secrecy. They would talk openly and discuss an outcome that everyone could accept.

Viserys's smile grew brighter as he kissed Baelon repeatedly, devouring a plate of roasted lamb and half a bottle of golden wine. The father and son were in high spirits, and the atmosphere at the luncheon reached a climax.

Aegon stood with one foot on the floor and the other on a chair, holding a bottle of wine and pouring it down his throat. Viserys clapped and laughed, saying Aegon had the same style he did back then.

Rhaenyra looked helpless, rushing between her father and the children, missing the days when she had to take care of Alicent. At least her father didn't need her to look after him.

Rhaegar leaned back in his chair, a smile playing on his lips as he watched the scene unfold.

Baelon wriggled free from his grandfather's arms and snuggled into his mother's embrace, cooing and rooting for milk. Rhaenyra had no choice but to wave the guards away and retreat to a corner to nurse him.

Meanwhile, little Aemon was left at the table. With a determined wiggle of his bottom, he managed to get close to the roast pig, which was bigger than he was.

"Little one, let me hold you," Helaena said, her eyes sparkling as she reached out to her nephew.

Rhaegar glanced over, the corner of his mouth lifting in amusement. Helaena, still childlike in her innocence, knelt on a chair with one leg, her whole body leaning over the table, the other leg sticking out.

Her pure mind and gift for divination had spared her from the rigid lady's education Alicent had received.

"Wow!" Aemon's eyes widened as he tried to bite the pig's snout, only to drool copiously due to his lack of teeth. Helaena tilted her head, resting her cheek on her hands, and watched her nephew's struggle with delight.

"This is much more fun than teasing the baby dragon," she thought. "He will be able to talk later."

Rhaegar sipped his sweet wine, admiring the two children, one big and one small. Suddenly, he realized he had forgotten someone. He glanced sideways.

Aemond sat upright, his single eye filled with an inexplicable emotion as he watched Helaena interact with little Aemon.

"What are you thinking?" Rhaegar asked.

Aemond was momentarily taken aback but quickly composed himself. Turning to face his brother, he asked, "Will you give me Stonehelm?"

"So eager to get a castle?" Rhaegar asked with a smile, swirling his wine cup. His younger brother was becoming more sophisticated and sensible, though not yet fully restrained.

Aemond nodded slightly and replied bluntly, "I need a fiefdom to stand on my own without relying on others."

After several wars, Aemond's mind had become more enlightened. He found House Hightower, his mother, and Aegon unreliable. Helaena was a girl, and little Daeron was still too young to be a male heir. In the large House Targaryen, conflicts were inevitable, and Rhaegar couldn't protect everyone.

Aemond saw himself as a Targaryen man with a backbone, ready to protect his mother and Aegon.

Rhaegar stared at Aemond for a moment, his expression gradually becoming more serious. He sat up straight, meeting Aemond's confident and ambitious gaze.

"You've grown up," Rhaegar said, a hint of relief and melancholy in his voice. The once-tiny baby had grown into a man who could stand tall and straight.

Aemond, not complacent, lowered his head and thought deeply. "With my military achievements, I probably won't be able to take a castle. I can go patrol Dorne and continue to make achievements."

His merits and faults were balanced, but his military achievements didn't match those of Aegon and Helaena. He couldn't afford to be complacent.

"No need!" Rhaegar said, slapping Aemond on the shoulder with a smile. "House Swann has only a few distant relatives left. Stonehelm is yours."

"Really?" Aemond's expression changed.

"The Targaryens always keep their word," Rhaegar said, pounding his chest. "Study hard and train in the martial arts. Otherwise, when Lord Lyonel retires, I can't promise you will be the Hand of the King."

"Mmm-hmm!" Aemond's single eye glowed, and he nodded eagerly.

Hand of the King! Even his uncle Daemon, was never on the Small Council, had never even come close to that position.

The conversation between the brothers was not concealed, and everyone heard it clearly.

Aegon's face flushed with anger. He snorted in disdain and shoved a piece of beef onto his fork, chewing it forcefully.

Viserys, pleased, watched his two sons, seeing a young version of himself and Daemon. Since Aemond had sacrificed himself to save his father, Viserys had paid much more attention to this son.

Helaena was still lying on the table, her hands gripping Aemon's little legs. She was dragging Aemon, who was dragging the roast pig, which in turn was dragging the dinner plate. The two children, with equal brains, were having a great time.

...

Time flies, and the half-month passes quickly.

King's Landing, Mud Gate.

Commoners gather on the dock, their eyes fixed on the vast expanse of Blackwater Bay. According to the latest rumors circulating in Flea Bottom, today is the day the Queen Who Never Was, Rhaenys and Prince Daemon return to court. Delegates from House Velaryon of Driftmark, emissaries of Sunspear, and guests from Braavos are expected to be there.

Many vendors push their carts, braving the hot sun to sell fresh fruit and oysters. This rare event is a golden opportunity for them to make a profit.

"Roar!"

Suddenly, a thunderous dragon roar echoes, and a scarlet dragon shadow flashes across the clouds above Blackwater Bay. Before the people can catch a clear glimpse, the white clouds swirl into a tumultuous mass, leaving only a gentle breeze behind.

"Roar..."

Another shrill, piercing scream fills the air, exuding a strong sense of intimidation.

Whoosh.

A huge, serpentine scarlet dragon swoops over the Mud Gate, its fiery breath searing the wind, its dark red wings flapping as it heads towards Rhaenys's hill. Two dragons appear in succession, thrilling the onlookers.

On Blackwater Bay, a dozen ships slowly sail in, half of them flying House Velaryon's green-and-white seahorse flag. Corlys, the Sea Snake, stands alone on the deck, his hands gripping the ship's railing tightly. He glances at the large ships trailing the fleet, adorned with purple shells and spears, his eyes cold and steely.

"Damn Braavos, damn Martell!" he mutters, his voice low, knuckles white as he gazes at the magnificent Red Keep, built along the coast. "Family meeting? Let's see what kind of tricks they can play."

...

Red Keep, main gate of the Sept.

Rhaegar sits on the edge of the flower bed, looking up at the two red dragons hovering above.

"This is so annoying!" Aegon exclaims, suddenly emerging from the Sept, scratching his head and cursing.

Rhaegar glances over and asks, "What did Alicent say?"

Chapter 478: Daemon's Sigh

Aegon's eyes flashed with irritation. "What else can I say? It's the same old thing over and over again," he grumbled.

He had just met with Alicent and had been bombarded with talk about fighting back. It was overwhelming, and he felt the need for a drink to calm his nerves.

Rhaegar noticed his mood and waved his hand dismissively. "Get lost."

"Okay!" Aegon brightened up immediately and ran off.

Rhaegar covered his head and sighed deeply. Thank goodness this kid has a dragon that can go into battle, otherwise there'd be nothing to count on him for. Who can drink faster, or who can bed more women?

Reflecting on the day's events, Rhaegar tried to adjust his state of mind and force himself to be more spirited. The family meeting, with Alicent in attendance as queen, was crucial.

But first, he had to compose himself. Alicent had asked to see her children, and Rhaegar had obliged. Aegon had come out first, while Helaena and Aemond were still in the tower.

...

The chapel, at the top of the tower.

The air smelled faintly of mold in the dim light.

Helaena and Aemond huddled in the corridor, speaking to Alicent through the door. Compared to a month ago, the tower's environment had improved. The cobwebs were gone, the wooden floors were spotless, and a new window let light into the once-dark room.

Alicent sat on a hard board bed covered with a wool blanket, crying about her situation.

"I'm going crazy. Where is your grandfather... Is Rhaegar giving you trouble? What about Viserys?"

Helaena looked downcast, her head resting against the wall as she listened in silence. Aemond watched his mother with a complex expression, his one eye full of concern. When he heard about his brother and grandfather, he felt a mixture of grief and resentment.

Rhaegar had not mistreated them. On the contrary, their grandfather, who was supposed to return to King's Landing to report on his work, had disappeared, unseen in Highgarden or Bitterbridge.

Alicent's voice grew hoarse, her eyes red from crying. "You... take care of yourselves, especially little Daeron."

The three older children had grown up and had their own opinions. Only six-year-old Daeron remained, a child who studied hard and always listened to others.

Aemond turned his head and whispered, "Little Daeron is fine. He plays with the Baela and Rhaena sisters every day and no one bullies him."

Alicent was slightly relieved. She reached through the space in the door to stroke Aemond's eye patch, choking back tears. "My poor child, you're still so young and you've lost an eye."

"I was protecting my father," Aemond replied, letting his mother stroke his cheek, his voice strong and determined.

"Viserys is no father!" Alicent's face darkened as she admonished, "You have a father who is partial. Learn from Aegon's acquisition of his fiefdom so you won't be driven out of King's Landing like Daemon."

"Mother!" Aemond cried out, unwilling to hear such words. He had heard enough from Aegon just now.

Alicent was stunned by the outburst, staring at her second son in disbelief. Aemond realized he had spoken out of turn, his eyes troubled and guilty.

Alicent slumped to the floor, leaning against the dilapidated wooden door. She muttered to herself, "You all hate me, even my own children," as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Aegon's abrupt departure was expected, given his usual behavior, but Aemond's shout was a hammer blow to her heart.

"Sorry, I didn't mean it," Aemond stamped his feet in frustration. "I'll beg my father and brother to forgive you."

Then he covered his head and ran down the stairs, leaving the tower with only a saddened Alicent and a withdrawn Helaena.

Alicent remained still, listening to her daughter's heartbeat through the wooden door. Helaena was her favorite, and even without words, her presence was comforting.

"Mother, being alone will make you lose your mind," Helaena said suddenly, sitting down beside her.

Alicent couldn't help but recall the lovely sight of Helaena as a child, her heart growing even sadder.

"You can't stay locked up in that dark room anymore. I'm taking you out," Helaena said firmly.

"They won't let me off lightly," Alicent replied, almost to herself.

Helaena shook her head. "I'm going to take you out." She stood up and walked out, muttering, "I have to think of a way."

Alicent lay back against the wooden door, watching her daughter's retreating figure and listening to her muttering. It felt as if a huge stone had been placed on her chest, making it hard to breathe.

...

Red Keep.

The carriage of House Velaryon arrived at the city gates, bringing with it guests from afar. The simple procession was divided into small groups, and they soon entered the council chamber.

Lyonel led Aegon and Aemond as the hosts, his head held high and his chest puffed out.

Corlys glanced at the two Targaryen boys and said indifferently, "How is His Grace's health? Why is the heir prince not here?"

Aegon shrugged. "If you prefer Rhaegar, I'll fetch him for you," he offered, clearly uninterested in his duties.

"Prince Aegon!" Lyonel snapped, then added, "Lord Corlys is a great man, and we must treat him with respect."

"Yes~" Aegon replied weakly, sounding as though he had exerted himself too much the night before.

Corlys' face darkened, his patience waning. Too lazy to argue with this insolent youth, he snorted and entered the hall, his sleeves flapping.

Rhaenys and Daemon followed, watching the scene with different expressions. Rhaenys forced a smile, saying helplessly, "Corlys is in a bad mood. I'll try to appease him."

She understood the underlying tension of this gathering, which was supposed to be a family dinner. Her husband's staunch opposition to the peace talks and his extreme dissatisfaction were at the heart of the issue.

"Heh heh," Daemon chuckled, arms crossed, amused by the spectacle.

Lyonel suggested, "Prince Daemon, if you are concerned about His Grace's health, you may visit the palace first."

"Oh?" Daemon responded playfully. "When did my brother ever care about me? Or is this my good nephew's gesture?"

This was unlike Viserys' usual behavior.

Lyonel did not answer directly. "You can go and see for yourself. You'll understand then."

He then called Rhaenys and the guests to enter the hall together. Daemon, watching coldly, sneered, "Playing smart."

He turned around and headed for the king's chambers.

...

The King's Bedroom.

Viserys lay pale on his bed, gasping for breath, his pupils unfocused and dilated.

"Father, try to adjust your breathing," Rhaegar urged gently, sitting by the bed and holding his father's hands. He channeled the magic of fire to stimulate blood flow.

After half a month, the Soul Restoring Orchid powder was used up, and Viserys often had nightmares.

"Ho ho..." Viserys muttered weakly, a fishy odor emanating from his mouth. "No more... no more..."

Rhaegar, worried, tried to communicate, "Father, what don't you want?"

"No more," Viserys repeated, staring at the ceiling, his head shaking slightly. "I'm sorry, my dear..."

Rhaegar was silent for a moment. Did his father mean his late mother, Aemma Arryn, when he said "dear"? Did "no more" mean he regretted urging her to conceive again? Or was he referring to Alicent?

"Wa wa wa..." The sound of a baby crying came from the inner room outside the bedroom, followed by Rhaenyra's soothing lullaby.

Rhaegar sighed softly, took the Soul Restoring Orchid's powder box, and sprinkled the remaining powder on his father's pillow. Viserys's eyes closed, his muttering ceased, and his breathing gradually returned to normal.

Rhaegar smiled wryly. He hadn't expected his father to become so dependent on drugs after being forbidden to use poppy milk. "There's not much powder left," he muttered, rubbing his face. "Syrio is stationed in Lys, and it will take time to send someone to the Smoking Sea to find more Soul Restoring Orchid."

The Soul Restoring Orchid only grows in the Smoking Sea, so offering a reward for its recovery seemed the best option.

Creak.

The door opened, and Daemon entered with a sour expression. He had wanted to vent his anger in the council hall with the Sea Snake.

"Daemon?" Rhaenyra, holding a baby in each arm, looked at him in surprise.

Daemon was even more surprised than his niece, his eyes falling on the two pink baby faces.

"Congratulations, you have twins," he said with a complex expression.

"Laena also gave birth to twins for you," Rhaenyra cooed to the children.

Daemon shook his head and sighed, "It's unlikely she'll be able to give me another pair."

On the surface, Corlys had lost his eldest son and Driftmark its heir. In truth, Daemon was in a similar position, lacking a son.

Rhaenyra didn't dwell on the topic, pointing to the bedroom. "Rhaegar is inside."

Daemon gave the two baby boys a fond look before turning to enter the bedroom.

At first glance, Viserys was sound asleep, with his good nephew keeping him company.

"No wonder you didn't show up," Daemon remarked, leaning against the doorframe, his face expressionless, his eyes fixed on Viserys's pale face.

Rhaegar, in no mood for small talk, spoke frankly, "Father is in a very bad state. The Maester says it's a problem with his spirit."

"Spirit or nerves?" Daemon's eyes deepened, delving into the question. During his travels with Laena through the Free Cities, he had spent much time in the libraries of Pentos, collecting biographies of the Dragonlord family and enriching his knowledge in all aspects.

Rhaegar stroked his father's furrowed brow and said cautiously, "You heard me right. You can also understand it as the soul."

The records of the fire mage's heritage suggest that the human body is an independent energy field. The soul strengthens the body, the body strengthens the soul, and the soul guides the body's actions. The weak will inevitably have weak souls, and those with lacking souls will mostly lack energy. The Citadel has confirmed this.

Daemon's face grew solemn. "The soul is damaged, and ordinary healers cannot cure it." He had been skeptical about this, but after obtaining the binding spell of the Aethyrys family, he had glimpsed another dimension of the world.

Taking Viserys's wrist and peering into his eyes, Daemon said nothing, his expression grave. "What are you going to do about my brother's condition?"

Chapter 479: Otto's Misfortune

"We need peace!" Rhaegar's tone was resolute. "The time for conquest is over. The kingdom needs to rest and recuperate."

Daemon frowned, unconvinced. "There are still many rebels in Dorne, and Braavos is only pretending to be reconciled."

"This is my father's wish," Rhaegar replied, his determination evident.

The new Sealord of Braavos had offered favorable peace terms, willing to settle the rebellion in Dorne and maintain trade in the Disputed Lands. The Targaryens had no reason to refuse.

Daemon saw it differently, perceiving his nephew's words as a threat. "As long as Viserys is willing, we can blockade the seas of Dorne and eliminate the Sand Snakes sooner or later. Braavos, on the edge of the Shivering Sea, could be reduced to ruins within a month if a few dragons flew over it."

Rhaegar shook his head and laughed. Instead of praising his uncle's strategy, he asked, "Have the ruins of Tyrosh been rebuilt?"

"Hmm?" Daemon narrowed his eyes.

Rhaegar glanced at his sleeping father and continued, "Even now, Lys and Myr have not been rebuilt. More than 100,000 people struggle to survive every day. We can't just occupy a city in ashes."

After months of occupation in the Triarchy, true governance had yet to be established. With House Martell of Dorne's declaration of submission, the lands reduced to ashes by the Dragon's Wroth would be included in the Iron Throne's territory. But occupying and ruling are two different things.

Rhaegar smiled. "It's funny, I haven't yet appointed any Grand Masters to Lys and Myr."

Daemon's eyes flashed with a dangerous light as he warned, "If we don't seize this opportunity now, it will be difficult to find such a favorable situation again in the future."

He acknowledged the problem his nephew had pointed out. The Targaryens had the power to conquer Dorne and the Free Cities, but not the ability to govern them. The most crucial point was that Tyrosh still used the magisters from before the conquest, and while Daemon was away from the Free Cities, Mysaria managed everything. The reasons for not ending the war were pride and a desire to be recognized.

Rhaegar, understanding his uncle's thoughts, said, "You can't get fat by eating too much at once; you'll choke."

After conquering the Triarchy and Dorne, the territory would include the Stepstones, the Sea of Dorne, and the Summer Sea. Governing and garrisoning such a large area would be a significant challenge. The cost of maintaining the territory would be astronomical.

Given his father's condition, Rhaegar had only one thought for the time being: stop the war, recover the income from the new territories, and accumulate wealth for the next conflict.

Daemon thought deeply, considering the wealth and prestige gained from this war and the grand cause planned. He asked coldly, "What do you want me to do?"

"Support me and my father, and don't side with the Sea Snake and help outsiders," Rhaegar said straightforwardly.

"The Sea Snake is only seeking revenge for his son."

"Do you believe that yourself?" Rhaegar retorted, lifting the veil of pretense. "The Sea Snake has lost his heir. He just wants to use the war to drag everyone down and satisfy his own selfish desires."

House Velaryon was not limited to the Sea Snake. The late Vaemon Velaryon had five sons, not to mention other branches of the family. The Sea Snake's persistence was due to his desire to keep Driftmark, which he had elevated, out of outsiders' hands and to fight for his own chance.

"If you see so clearly, you should know that I am on his side," Daemon said, aligning himself with his father-in-law and best ally.

Rhaegar glanced sideways and said, "I will appoint you as the Prince of Tyrosh. Tyrosh will be your family's territory."

Daemon smiled seductively. "Deal."

It was better to be given it openly than to occupy it privately. That was what he wanted: a fiefdom and recognition.

...

It was late afternoon, and the sun was setting.

After receiving the envoys from Braavos and Dorne, Lyonel led them to the throne room. The hall was filled with people.

Rhaegar sat on the Iron Throne, holding Blackfyre in his hand, looking down at the assembled crowd. Daemon was the first to sit at the foot of the Iron Throne, a sly smile playing on his lips.

"Prince, the ambassadors are here," Lyonel announced, standing opposite Daemon as he respectfully introduced the two ambassadors.

The man from Braavos was thin with brown curly hair, a gold watch hanging from his chest, exuding an air of refinement and rigor. The Dorne representative was a tall young man with platinum hair and blue eyes, clad in heavy plate armor.

The thin man bowed and spoke first. "The honorable Breaker of Shackles, I am Baelus of Braavos, sends his greetings. May you inherit the greatness and wisdom of the conqueror."

"Please rise," Rhaegar replied.

The tall youth stepped forward, placing one hand on his chest, and said respectfully, "Dorys of House Dayne, on behalf of Prince Qyle of Sunspear, sends his greetings."

Rhaegar scrutinized him and asked, "Who is Davos Dayne of Dorne to you?"

Dorys replied without hesitation, "He is my cousin, the strongest Knight in Starfall, the late Sword of the Dawn."

Rhaegar nodded in understanding and got straight to the point. "The offer from the Sealord of Braavos is tempting. The Iron Throne longs for peace and is truly forced to ignite the flames of war."

Baelus smiled. "Sealord Sparda also favors peace, and he has sent me to bring you a gift."

He clapped his hands, and several attendants brought in a box. When opened, it revealed various gold and silver jewelry, along with precious antique porcelain.

Rhaegar barely glanced at the treasures and said casually, "I have received the Sealord's sincerity."

Baelus waved his hand to dismiss his men and proposed, "The Sealord also mentioned that the money borrowed from the Myr Bank will be settled at the best exchange rate to support the renovation of the Free Cities."

Rhaegar's mouth twitched, recognizing the subtle reminder not to default on the loan. Yet, he didn't want to appear ungrateful. He smiled and said, "Thank the Sealord for me. The Iron Bank has a long-standing reputation, and we will continue to borrow from it in the future."

Whether repayment would occur was another matter, but borrowing was certain. Ideally, repayment could be delayed for decades, possibly using a future war to seize Braavos, thus avoiding repayment altogether.

Baelus's eyelids twitched slightly, silently cursing. The Iron Throne's continued borrowing raised doubts about repayment.

Rhaegar shifted his gaze to Dorys, leaving thoughts of debt behind.

He opened his mouth slightly, preparing to ask a question.

Suddenly, a burst of footsteps echoed outside the hall, and a figure stormed in.

Corlys, face dark with anger, walked up to him. "Prince, the rebellion in Dorne is still ongoing. The soldiers on the front line are fighting bravely against the enemy. How can you negotiate peace on your own?"

"Silence!" Lyonel interjected before Rhaegar could respond, his voice filled with indignation. "Lord Corlys, you are in the presence of the Regent and Heir Prince. You are only a adviser of the Crown. Remember your place and manners!"

Corlys clenched his jaw, his expression angry. "Sorry! I was only asking a reasonable question as the Master of Ships."

At that moment, Rhaenys hurried over, her eyes and brows showing a hint of fatigue. She nodded respectfully to Rhaegar, then stood next to Corlys and whispered in his ear, "Look at Daemon's position."

Corlys, taken aback, finally noticed Daemon standing at the foot of the Iron Throne, a smile on his face. "Damn it, this treacherous petty man," Corlys gritted his teeth in hatred.

Rhaenys, sensing her husband's thoughts, said matter-of-factly, "Daemon only works hard for himself."

She never trusted her son-in-law and cousin, Daemon. After saving Pentos, she had asked him to stay in the Disputed Lands to defend it, but Daemon had rushed to Dorne without a care.

Lyonel interrupted their whispering, his voice loud and clear: "Lord Corlys, this is not Driftmark, where you can do as you please."

Corlys' face turned even darker. "The matter of peace is too important to be decided by Your Grace and the heir prince alone. It should be decided by the Small Council."

Lyonel was about to retort when Rhaegar waved his hand to interrupt. He knew that leaving Lyonel alone to deal with Corlys's questioning wouldn't achieve the desired result.

Corlys looked at Rhaegar, waiting for his response.

Rhaegar tapped the Blackfyre, his expression stern. "Lord Corlys, the peace negotiations are inevitable. You have no right to object."

"I am the Master of Ships and, in times of war, the Admiral of the Navy," Corlys emphasized, pointing to himself.

"House Velaryon has contributed the most to the Narrow Sea War and the Dorne War. We have always been at the forefront of the battlefield."

Rhaegar's eyes flashed. "I know your sacrifices have been great. If there are any questions or difficulties, we will hold a family dinner later to solve them together."

Corlys frowned, clearly reluctant.

Rhaenys pulled him by the arm and smiled. "We're looking forward to the family dinner."

She paused, her words full of meaning. "Just like hoping for victory on the Iron Throne, even if it means giving everything up." Her eyes fixed on her nephew, conveying her belief that he would understand.

Rhaegar understood perfectly. "Don't worry, everyone will enjoy the dinner."

"Good," Rhaenys said, her smile widening. She clapped her hands. "Please excuse us while we prepare for the dinner."

"Isn't that right, Corlys?"

Corlys glanced sideways at his wife, who gave him a warning look. Reluctantly, he nodded. "Yes, Prince."

One must bow one's head when under the same roof. The Targaryens were no longer the Targaryens of old, and Velaryon was no longer the Velaryon of old.

Rhaegar smiled. "Very well, dinner awaits you both."

He breathed a sigh of relief, grateful for his aunt Rhaenys's thoughtfulness. Despite everything, Corlys had achieved great military feats and even sacrificed his only child, almost cutting off his bloodline.

Rhaenys nodded to Daemon and Lyonel before leading Corlys away from the place of trouble.

With the interruption over, Rhaegar's eyes fell on Dorys once more.

Dorys, who had been waiting for this moment, stepped forward and said, "Prince, I encountered a suspicious person in the Summer Sea and took him into custody on my own initiative."

He beckoned, and two knights in armor bearing the House Dayne crest entered with a man under their control.

Thick curly hair, green-striped clothes with a black background, a face that was so familiar it was almost too familiar.

Otto was in a terrible state, his left leg hanging limply as he was led by the arm of the two knights.

Bang! The two knights pushed Otto hard, and he fell heavily to the ground, emitting a muffled groan of pain.

Chapter 480: The Greatest and Most Complex Family Dinner Ever

"Otto!"

Seeing Otto lying on the ground and moaning in agony, everyone present reacted with shock and alarm.

Lyonel's face changed slightly, his eyes flickering between Otto and Dorys, and a visible anger began to form. As an adviser to the king, he could not stand by and watch his colleague be humiliated.

Dorys had already prepared an explanation. "This lord was caught trying to sneak out of the Narrow Sea by boat."

In fact, that was more or less the truth. But it wasn't his idea; he was just following orders.

Rhaegar looked down at Otto's pitiful state and frowned imperceptibly. He had been waiting for this moment.

Otto let out a gasp, and with all his strength, he pushed himself up, revealing a pale face that hardly seemed alive. Rhaegar glanced sideways, noticing his left leg, which was covered in dried blood. Otto also looked up, his numb eyes staring at the heir prince high above him, and a chill ran down his spine. It was unimaginable how much suffering he had endured at the hands of the Dornish people over the past two weeks.

Dorys grabbed him by the collar and said in a low voice, "There was an accident during the arrest. A stray arrow hit his leg, and he didn't have time to be treated." He then looked very apologetic.

Lyonel was furious, his fists clenched so hard they creaked, and he wanted to smash the Dornishman's head in with a single blow. If he hadn't realized Otto was in trouble, he would have taken it as a blatant provocation.

Daemon crossed his arms and smiled. "A missing leg shouldn't be a problem for a blood-sucking leech."

"Prince Daemon, you're as mean as ever," Otto laughed bitterly, reaching for his unconscious left leg and sitting up with Dorys's help.

Daemon smiled mockingly and watched the spectacle with pleasure. He was happy when Otto suffered. A man's happiness could be so simple.

Rhaegar's mouth twitched slightly, thinking to himself, My good uncle really isn't hiding anything. He's not showing any emotion on his face. "Do you have any solid evidence, Ser Dorys?"

"Of course, Prince," Dorys replied, calm and collected as if he had rehearsed it hundreds of times. He took a letter from his breast pocket and said, "This is a letter from the Lord and Prince of Pentos."

Otto's expression froze, and his breathing became labored.

Dorys didn't even look at him and continued, "I also captured some sailors and mercenaries, who can also make an identification."

The words were spoken calmly, showing extraordinary confidence.

Lyonel's eyes widened in surprise. He never imagined that Otto would dare to do so many "big things."

Lyman and the others in the hall stared at Otto in shock, their expressions full of mixed emotions. The queen had just been imprisoned, and instead of helping his daughter, Otto had set the High Tower on fire and fled?

"Clap, clap, clap."

Rhaegar clapped his hands, fixing his gaze on Otto. "Lord Otto, I have only one question. Did you set the High Tower on fire?"

"Cough, cough..." Otto coughed angrily, his teeth clenched. "Prince, what is the point of discussing this now?"

Of course he had set the fire, but it was never meant to kill his brother Ormund. Someone must have interfered.

Rhaegar pressed on, "As the royal adviser, why did you run away to Pentos instead of serving the kingdom?"

"My brother asked me to visit the Prince of Pentos to promote trade between our family and the Iron Throne," Otto weakly argued.

Rhaegar shook his head. "That's not a good enough reason. Dorys has produced overwhelming evidence that you murdered your brother and fled with the money."

Otto's lips moved, but he couldn't refute the accusation. The fact was, he had set the fire, and Ormund had let him go to Pentos to hide out.

Rhaegar announced, "You are guilty, Otto Hightower."

Otto looked at him deeply and then closed his eyes in resignation. He was innocent! 'I know you're innocent,' Rhaegar thought to himself. But what does it matter?

Rhaegar's lips curled slightly as he said, "Ser Dorys, thank you for returning Otto Hightower."

Dorys bowed. "It is my honor to serve the Iron Throne."

Their eyes met for a moment, and they both saw a satisfied smile in each other's eyes.

Rhaegar looked at Lyonel. "Otto has made a grave mistake. He should be imprisoned in the dungeons of the Red Keep and await judgment."

"Yes, Prince," Lyonel replied, though slightly confused, he followed the order.

The guards at the entrance of the hall entered and dragged the disheveled Otto out. Otto looked up at the sky, his pale face showing a deathly stillness. He had no thoughts of resistance; he was powerless.

The council continued for a while, ending in a harmonious discussion between the three parties.

Rhaegar stepped down from the Iron Throne and passed by Erryk, giving him a knowing look. Erryk understood immediately and followed him out of the throne room.

Finding a secluded corner, Rhaegar asked, "Where are Laena and her two daughters?"

Erryk recalled and replied, "The Princess is with Laena, and Baela and Rhaena are studying with Prince Daeron."

Rhaegar's eyes darkened, and he ordered, "Keep an eye on Lord Corlys' movements at all times. Don't cause trouble before or after the banquet."

Erryk paused for a moment, trying to grasp the meaning behind the command.

Rhaegar winked.

"Yes, I'll get right on it," Erryk responded, calling a group of guards before leaving.

...

A guest room in the Red Keep.

The two heads of House Velaryon were in the midst of a heated argument.

Corlys was furious. "Look at the mess you've made! The peace talks have been concluded, and now we're in a passive position."

"Corlys, are you letting your anger cloud your judgment?" Rhaenys responded calmly. "The realm needs peace. War isn't the only solution."

Corlys, his mind racing, retorted, "But it was our sacrifices that gave us the upper hand!"

House Velaryon had sacrificed so much—Laenor was killed, two of his "nephews" were lost, and half of the fleet was gone. Without an heir, they risked losing Driftmark entirely. Who would resolve his dilemma?

Rhaenys closed her eyes, silent tears welling up. Mentioning Laenor tore at her heart. He was the son she had carried for ten months. Laenor was killed, but who could understand a mother's pain?

Seeing his wife's tears, Corlys felt compassion and gradually calmed down. The couple sat on either side of the table, neither speaking.

After a long silence, Rhaenys regained her composure, wiped her tears, and said sternly, "Daemon must have been promised a reward for his betrayal."

"Nonsense! That uncle and nephew never do anything for free," Corlys fumed.

When Tyrosh was first conquered, it was agreed they would work together to divide the Disputed Lands with Pentos and Volantis, sharing the spoils. But Daemon had been too impatient. He occupied Tyrosh, drove out all Iron Throne forces, and claimed the land for himself. As a result, Pentos and Volantis distanced themselves from the Iron Throne, and House Velaryon missed out on territory beyond the Narrow Sea.

"Let's not dwell on that. Everyone has their own agenda," Rhaenys interrupted, catching an important detail. "Rhaegar's willingness to make peace with Daemon, despite their past differences, shows he's wary of House Velaryon and will make concessions to appease you."

House Velaryon had done a great deal. It made no sense to court Daemon and suppress the war heroes.

Corlys realized this and saw the clues. "This dinner is a negotiation."

"Exactly," Rhaenys nodded. "Instead of worrying about yourself, think about what's best for us."

"Hmph!" Corlys snorted. "No amount of tempting conditions can bring Laenor back."

If he could, he would give up everything to have his eldest son back. This put him in a dilemma.

After some thought, Corlys stood up. "I'll go talk to Daemon. He might have something to say."

He couldn't secure enough benefits alone; he had to ally with someone important.

Rhaenys, unconcerned, took a sip from her wine glass. "You could try leaving before the dinner."

"What do you mean?" Corlys frowned and quickly walked to the door, opening it a crack.

In the hallway, Erryk was leading a team of guards. Noticing Corlys's gaze, Erryk said respectfully, "There are guests at the Red Keep. I've been ordered to protect Princess Rhaenys and the Lord."

Corlys turned away, slamming the door shut. Rhaenys sneered, "Rhaegar won't give you and Daemon a chance to conspire. His duty is to maintain peace, not settle disputes all day."

Corlys's face turned completely black.

...

Soon, night fell.

The Red Keep was illuminated brilliantly, and servants bustled about, preparing for the grandest banquet the royal family had hosted in years.

In the banquet hall, two long tables were joined together, and people gathered around them.

At one end of the table, Aegon, holding a flagon of wine, chatted with Aemond, boasting about his exploits in the burning of Sunspear.

"You've had enough to drink," Aemond said, disgusted, subtly displaying his one-eyed dagger.

Helaena sat next to her brothers, half-lying on the table, laughing heartily. Across from her, young Aemon sat, his wide purple eyes giving her a warning look.

On the other side of the long table, Rhaena watched as little Daeron wrestled with her sister Baela. Daeron was losing.

Daemon and Laena stood nearby, watching the three children while discussing Tyrosh's renovation plans.

"I'll start by building a palace for the prince, modeled after Lys's perfume garden," Daemon said.

"You don't seem to have that kind of money..." Laena replied.

In the middle of the table, at the heart of the banquet, Rhaenys sat a seat away from Rhaenyra, who was playing with little Baelon. The aunt and niece exchanged glances now and then, only to look away again—a Queen Who Never Was and a former heir to the Iron Throne. Two women who had missed out on the throne, their interactions marked by an inexplicable awkwardness.

Corlys sat on Rhaenys' right, his face dark with displeasure, watching Helaena play with her nephew.

Everyone chatted casually, the tension of the long war gradually loosening. Servants moved through the hall, setting out the dishes.

Aegon slurped his drink impatiently. "Why hasn't the banquet started yet? Drinking alone isn't any fun."

Aemond was about to retort when Corlys intervened seriously, "I don't see any important people here yet. Just wait patiently."

"Tsk!" Aegon turned away. An old Velaryon riffraff. Do you really think the Red Keep is your home?

Creak!

The door suddenly opened, drawing everyone's attention.

Rhaegar entered, his face expressionless, his long silver-blond hair flowing down his shoulders, dressed in a solemn black robe. He was slightly bowed, supporting another person.

Seeing this, Corlys's expression changed slightly. He pushed his chair back and stood up.

"Welcome to this family dinner, everyone," Rhaegar announced.

Viserys walked slowly, leaning on his eldest son for support, his pale face breaking into a heartfelt smile. The family was finally gathered together.