

## G.O Thrones 581

### Chapter 581: The Pale Dragon

"Roar!"

The young green dragon was seized by the neck and dragged into a deep, verdant canyon. A pale, human-like hand clutched its slender neck.

"Wake up, Uragax!" A hoarse voice echoed through the enclosed canyon.

As it was pulled forward, the canyon gradually opened up, revealing more of the surroundings.

"Roar..." The rustling of grass mingled with a rough, melodious dragon's cry, followed by a clear wail. Birds scattered, chirping as they flew away, while a hot, foul wind gusted from the depths of the valley.

"Croak."

Unnoticed by anyone, a nondescript toad emerged from the corner of a grass-covered stone wall. The dream-eating toad stared with its dead fish eyes, puffed up its cheeks, and settled on a pebble.

"Keep it down, ugly," said a gray, humanoid figure riding on the toad's back, blinking its bright purple eyes.

"Croak." The toad croaked dimwittedly and hopped forward twice. The wisdom of the runes was too weak to comprehend human speech.

Rhaegar sighed, continuing to play the role of an unknown Dreamer.

"Wake up, Uragax!"

The red-robed wizard wore a black mask, holding the newborn dragon as if it were no more than a mere chicken. The only part of the wizard's body exposed was a pair of pitch-black pupils.

"Roar~~" The young dragon let out a mournful cry, its small body trembling in fear.

The wizard remained unmoved, his grip firm and unyielding.

"Croak." The dream-eating toad trailed behind the man and the dragon, emerging cautiously from the grass.

Rhaegar's eyes were wide open, missing nothing in the canyon. His gray face gradually shifted in expression. As expected, he could only see images within his dream; the rest of his senses were lost.

'Eyes, ears, mouth, nose, body, and consciousness... The six senses make up a complete person,' he reflected. Each time he entered a dream, regaining one sense would mean losing another within the dream.

'This is the equivalent exchange for dreamwalking,' Rhaegar thought, 'and the limit for the dream eater to maintain a dream. When all six senses are restored, the dream will also collapse.'

...

Deep in the canyon, a pale wall blocked a winding stream, allowing the water to wash away the grime clinging to the roots along its base. The mournful cries of a dragon echoed through the air, yet no dragon was in sight.

The red-robed wizard hobbled forward, each step as painful as walking on pins and needles, slowly approaching the pale barrier.

"Roar!" The wizard tightened his grip around the young dragon's neck, causing it to scream in agony.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, a wave of heat and stench surged toward him, whipping the surrounding trees and plants into a frenzy.

"Uragax!" the wizard shouted, raising his hands to the sky in excited anticipation.

Rumble!

The earth began to tremble as the pale barrier shuddered, appearing ready to collapse under the violent shaking.

"Roar!"

A pale dragon wing pierced the sky, blotting out the scorching sun and casting a shadow over the active volcano like a massive, eerie umbrella. The canyon filled with the foul wind, and the once calm stream churned with waves.

The red-robed wizard's pupils trembled as he stared in awe.

Boom!

A massive dragon's head, crowned with a towering horn, emerged from the canyon. The gaping maw of the abyss split open, releasing a torrent of pale dragonfire that roared into the sky. The dragonfire, vast and unstoppable, swept over the grass like a waterfall, its destructive power rivaling that of a volcanic eruption.

"Roar..."

The ancient dragon fully revealed itself, only to fall back weakly. Its enormous head crashed against the canyon cliffs, sending gravel and debris scattering, along with fragments of its pale scales.

Rhaegar, hidden in the corner, watched in amazement. The dragon, with a back as high as the canyon, measured over 800 feet in length—no smaller than the Great Wall of the North.

Rhaegar's heart raced as he slowly reached out a hand.

Hum—

The space around him suddenly shifted, the fragrance of grass and trees vanished, and his breathing grew labored. Startled, Rhaegar felt his mouth and nose grow numb, saliva gathering between his teeth. The dream he was in began to falter.

'There's still time,' Rhaegar thought, urging the dream-eating toad to move closer. His emotions swirled as he realized he recognized this canyon—it was the same one he had stumbled into on his first visit to Sothoryos. He couldn't recall how long ago that had been. The once-active volcano had since fallen dormant, and the Pale Dragon had become a pile of bones.

He needed to determine which house the dragon and the wizard belonged to. What was the secret of this dark green wild dragon?

"Roar..."

The Pale Dragon opened its eyes halfway, its amber pupils clouded with a deathly gray, and its narrow eyes swarmed with strange flies. A mournful cry of pain escaped its mouth as it slowly began to rise.

As more of the dragon's body was revealed, Rhaegar's face changed color. It wasn't uncommon for an ancient dragon to show signs of age—loose skin, a crown of horns ready to fall off. Even Balerion the Black Dread had grown old and ugly, as the Dragonkeepers had said.

But never before had the sight of a dragon unsettled Rhaegar's mind so deeply.

At that moment, the Pale Dragon finally crawled out of the deep valley where the stream spread. Its head, as large as a small mountain, bore a faint trace of its former glory in the horn crown. Yet its jaw hung limp, its eyelids sagged like tattered rags, and its fangs pierced through its dry, cracked mouth.

Flies buzzed around, sticky drops of fluid dripped, and a heavy silence loomed overhead.

"Gulp~"

Rhaegar swallowed hard, his gaze filled with shock as he looked down. The dragon's thick neck was wider than any bridge, and its pale scales bulged like those of an overgrown carp. Its chest jutted out, while its bloated belly sagged heavily. Even as it stood, the scaled skin and flesh dragged along the ground, obstructing the stream and hiding the massive dragon claws beneath.

The dragon's droppings lined both sides of the stream, darkened with reddish blood, emitting an unmistakable stench. Though Rhaegar couldn't smell it, he could easily imagine the foul odor, causing his breath to catch in his throat.

"Why?"

Rhaegar's mind churned with turmoil as he looked at the pale dragon, stripped of all dignity. He whispered, "Why not let it die?"

A dragon of this size wasn't natural. Someone had kept it alive far beyond its time, forcing it to endure a life that should have ended.

"Roar..."

The pale dragon moaned softly, raising its head only for it to slowly droop again. Its dull gray eyes struggled to open, locking onto the purple eyes in the corner.

Rhaegar shuddered, his gray body trembling instinctively.

"Roar..."

The pale dragon ignored the red-robed wizard's shouts, focusing instead on someone else, its throat constricted, a mournful cry escaping. It seemed to be asking the same question: when would it find its release in death?

Rhaegar gasped, a heavy, suffocating weight settling on his chest.

The pale dragon attempted to take a step back, as if longing to soar through the sky one last time. But its wings were as fragile as paper, and its body as heavy as a mountain.

Boom!

The dragon managed only a single step before its massive body collapsed to the ground, scales scattering as it fell in a pitiful heap. The once-soft grass was crushed beneath it, leaving a deep furrow in the earth.

Rhaegar reached out once more, yearning to touch the dragon's body.

Hum—

The dream world shook violently, fracturing like a bubble ready to burst. Rhaegar's gray form began to revert to its original state.

"Croak."

The dream-eating toad's green eyes gleamed as it extended its tongue, licking up the gray mist and, in doing so, rolling Rhaegar onto its back.

In the final moments of the dream, Rhaegar's vision blurred. He could only hear two dragon roars—one large, one small.

"Roar!"

"Roar!"

...

Outside, in Green Hell.

"Roar!"

Rain poured down in torrents as the black dragon glided silently through the night sky, its wings scattering raindrops with each powerful stroke. Below, the vast forest was shrouded in thick black smoke.

The dark green wild dragon unleashed a massive ball of orange and green dragonfire, crashing into it with unbridled fury.

"Brother!" Daeron burst out of the valley, his eyes wide with rage.

"Roar!"

Tessarion crouched on a cliff, curled into a ball, its blackened wings smoldering under the relentless rain.

"Come on, Tessarion!" Daeron shouted, his voice nearly drowned out by the downpour. His young face was indistinguishable between the rain and his tears. As he yelled, he quickly hid a black dragon egg beneath the rubble and dashed toward the forest.

"Roar..."

A mushroom cloud of thick smoke billowed into the sky as the dark green wild dragon plummeted from above, steam rising from its scales. For a moment, its speed surged.

Daeron's eyes widened as he searched the dragon's back, desperately seeking a familiar figure.

"Quiet, Uragax!"

A clear, cold voice pierced the night, carrying an unyielding command that brooked no refusal.

"Roar!"

Upon hearing the long-forgotten name, the dark green wild dragon let out a mournful cry, dragging its severely injured wing as it fell rapidly.

Rhaegar rode the wind, his silver hair whipping wildly, his purple eyes cold and proud.

"Turn right, Uragax!"

As the ground loomed closer, Rhaegar grabbed the left-hand rope with his left hand, issuing the command in both High Valyrian and the dragon's tongue.

Uragax's pupils dilated in struggle as its massive body twisted, forcing its right wing into an almost impossible angle.

Hula!

The wind howled, and dragon blood splattered onto the ground. Uragax's body jerked, slowing its descent, then it glided sideways and took off once more. Just as it regained balance, its bloodied hind legs smashed through treetops, nearly grazing the earth.

"Roar!"

Uragax roared, using the sway of its tail to stabilize and level out its flight.

"Land!"

Rhaegar scanned the surroundings, seizing the perfect moment to give the order. The dragon beneath him turned its head, its amber eyes filled with a complex mix of emotions as it adjusted its posture for landing.

"Don't give me that look, old man," Rhaegar remarked with a grin, undaunted by the dragon's gaze. If he weren't skilled at what he did, he wouldn't dare leap off a dragon's back and switch places mid-flight. Over a decade ago, his uncle Daemon was hailed as the greatest dragon rider on the continent, a title that had been surpassed by the "Dragon Herder."

"Roar... Roar..."

Uragax roared repeatedly, its right wing flapping erratically as it struggled to stay aloft. But eventually, it lost balance and crashed to the ground with a thunderous impact, the forest overwhelmed by the force, spilling mud in all directions.

Rhaegar's body shook violently as the shattered dream world's images flooded his mind. He recalled the pale dragon's corpse, lying lifeless as maggots spawned within its decaying flesh. Though dead, it was in the process of rebirth.

The scene shifted, and the canyon transformed into a Dragonpit in ancient Valyria. A young green dragon was abandoned, left in a cold, damp pit to fend for itself. Nearby, several older young dragons hovered menacingly around it.

Chapter 583: Sunfyre's Endurance

That night in Slaver's Bay, Meereen, a drizzling rain gave way to a torrential storm, lashing the sea and drenching the entire bay. The Free Cities, still in the midst of their reconstruction, lay hidden

beneath a thick blanket of impenetrable clouds. Pyramids and arenas, large and small, glowed like bonfires of oppression.

"Roar~~"

Golden flames flickered among the ruins, and a restless dragon's roar echoed through the night. Sunfyre lay on a mound of bones—both enemies and goats—with its wings draped down. Its once-gorgeous scales had turned black, and its wet wing membranes were beginning to heal.

Crackling—

A bolt of lightning struck, splitting the sky with silver light.

“Roar!”

Sunfyre suddenly lifted its head, struggling to rise from the mud mixed with bones and ash. Its golden eyes fixed on the direction of Westeros.

...

Inside the Great Pyramid.

"Prince."

"..."

The dimly lit corridor flickered with candlelight as Daemon paced in a loose robe, ignoring the servant's greeting.

“Roar...”

A piercing dragon roar suddenly echoed through the air, carrying a warning more powerful than it seemed. Daemon's eyebrows furrowed as he walked to a window, his expression darkening. Outside, the dark clouds blended with the city, leaving only the cold curtain of rain in the darkness.

“Roar! Roar!”

A golden dragon, twisting and flailing in pain, soared unsteadily into the sky, its wings flapping desperately. Daemon's eyes narrowed, and he whispered, “The dragon is frightened.”

With that, he turned back to his room to retrieve his sword. He had a premonition that the sky over Slaver's Bay would soon grow even darker.

...

After a fierce battle and agonizing screams, the black iron gate was violently shattered.

“Hurry in!”

Grey Worm, covered in blood, had a crack in his pitch-black helmet.

“Roar!”

Caraxes' eyes gleamed with ferocity as scarlet Dragonfire gathered deep in its throat.

“Quiet!” Grey Worm shouted, his voice trembling with fear. He raised his spear and round shield in a gesture of peace, swallowing nervously. “No Dragonfire!”

He had come to rescue, not to die.

Caraxes hesitated at the familiar Valyrian commands, slowly closing its maw.

“Phew!” Grey Worm exhaled in relief, thankful for the daily dragon-feeding duties that had earned him the beast’s slight trust.

“Stop! Open the gate!”

Just as relief washed over him, chaotic shouts erupted from outside. A deep, magnetic voice immediately captured the attention of both Grey Worm and the Blood Wyrn.

“Make way! Watch out for the Dragonfire!”

Daemon appeared, grim-faced, clad in leather armor with a long sword at his side. He pushed the Unsullied out of his path.

“Roar...”

Caraxes’ pupils dilated slightly at the sight of its rider, releasing a low, threatening growl.

Daemon strode up to the dragon, demanding, ‘The lights are on in Meereen. What’s going on?!’

“Prince, I just received word myself,” Grey Worm replied, wiping the blood from his face with a solemn expression. “The craftsmen, scholars, women, and children of the three slave cities have been relocated. The Good Masters, along with the holy women and priest who stayed behind, incited the restless slaves to launch this long-planned rebellion.”

Daemon’s face darkened. He wanted to berate Grey Worm for failing to guard the Free Cities, but with trouble looming, such words were useless.

“Do you still control the docks?”

Daemon’s strategic mind immediately seized on the key detail.

Grey Worm nodded vigorously. “A hundred-man unit is holding the banks of the Skahazadhan River.”

“Gather your forces and retreat with your men,” Daemon ordered coldly, then mounted the dragon that had been prepared in advance.

“What about the Free Cities?” Grey Worm hesitated, his voice uncertain. “And you...”

He struggled to find the words. The failed expedition to the Smoking Sea and the prince’s return to Meereen with his dragon had fueled countless rumors across Slaver’s Bay. Some claimed no one could survive the Smoking Sea and that the Blood Wyrn was doomed. Others whispered that the prince had fled back to Meereen in fear, his dragon bleeding and broken.

When Daemon and Caraxes had landed in the city, the scarlet dragon had indeed staggered, spilling its blood across the ground.

Daemon placed one foot on the ladder and said indifferently, “Take care of yourselves. Slaver’s Bay is no longer of value.”

“Roar...”

Caraxes and its rider moved as one. Its massive wings braced against the ground, and its serpentine body coiled in the air, disappearing into the dark rain curtain before the Unsullied army.

“Abandon the Free Cities,” Grey Worm muttered to himself, his mind replaying the moment Caraxes had risen into the sky. He had seen the truth: the dragon’s serpentine belly bore a three-foot-long serrated wound, and with every movement, fresh dragon blood seeped out.

As the commander of the Meereen garrison, Grey Worm knew all too well that the rumors were true. The Blood Wyrn was gravely injured. Otherwise, the Good Masters and the slaves would never have dared to rebel so openly.

Grey Worm’s eyes flashed with determination as he recalled the king’s final words before departing. He turned and shouted, “On my command, leave the city!”

...

Three days later.

Sothoryos, the Green Hell.

Roar!

The Cannibal’s maw dripped with blood as it circled the valley, dragging the corpses of two Wyverns in its claws.

Plop!

It glided through the ruins of the forest, dropping the broken bodies with careless indifference, as if discarding a heap of trash.

Roar!

The lush forest quaked violently as a massive green beast emerged, its body scarred and covered in weeds and fallen leaves. A nest of dead branches was tangled in the middle of its enormous dragon horns.

The beast lumbered forward, slowly gnawing on the pulp of a corpse, indifferent to the predator that had brought it down.

“Steady, Uragax!” Rhaegar commanded, sitting cross-legged on the dragon’s back, focused on carving a semi-finished stone.

“Roar...”

Uragax, still feasting, let out a growl, deliberately shaking its body to make the wounds on its chest and belly tear and bleed.

Rhaegar was deep in his task when he heard a ‘pop,’ and a puff of black smoke rose from the stone in his hand. His face instantly darkened, like charcoal.

“Uragax, I’m protecting you,” Rhaegar muttered, his eyelids twitching. He pulled out his dragon-taming whip and struck the dragon’s broad back. If it weren’t for the fact



that Uragax was a rare ancient Wyvern, he would've abandoned this godforsaken wilderness long ago.

“Roar...”

“Forget it. Do as you please,” Rhaegar sighed, rolling his eyes, too weary to argue with the lazy old dragon.

Uragax grunted in protest but returned to its original spot, lying down lazily. Experience had taught it that when wounded, it was best to lie still; the pain would eventually fade, and the wound would become just another scar among many.

“I’m leaving, old man,” Rhaegar said with a sigh, reluctant to part from the dragon’s rough scales.

Uragax glanced back at him, then continued to lie motionless.

Rhaegar’s expression remained unchanged, but inwardly he was pleased by the dragon’s small gesture. The numbness in those cloudy eyes was gone, replaced by a strong sense of disgust mixed with a hint of relief. Though the emotional response was subtle, it was a sign of life—better to have emotions than none at all.

A three-hundred-year-old dragon was worth the effort it took to restore even a flicker of vitality.

...

It was midday.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal crashed to the ground, several Wyverns piled in front of it, swarming with flies and insects.

“Uragax, recover well,” Rhaegar said, looking up as he held a dark red dragon egg encased in stone.

“Roar...”

Uragax lowered its head slowly, its eyes narrowing at the two silver-haired figures before it. Daeron, clutching a black dragon egg, hid behind his brother, his gaze fixed on the massive beast that had clearly produced the egg in his arms.

Rhaegar stepped forward, shielding his younger brother, and raised his voice. “I’ll take the egg and help you hatch it.”

“Roar!”

Uragax growled, Dragonfire gathering in its throat.

“In return, I'll give you this egg!” Rhaegar calmly tossed the fossilized red egg forward, his expression unreadable, though the action carried a weighty curse.

“Roar...”

Uragax's pupils narrowed further as it reluctantly swallowed the red dragon egg. Despite the dragon's saliva splashing, the egg vanished without a sound. After a moment's hesitation, the old dragon retreated to its original spot, twisting its neck to tuck its head beneath its wings.

A low, mournful wail soon echoed through the forest.

“Brother, what's going on?” Daeron asked, stunned.

“Roar...”

Tessarion, the pale blue dragon, peeked out from behind its rider, cautiously observing.

Rhaegar sighed, his voice tinged with sadness. “That was his brother.”

The pale dragon had laid three eggs in total—one hatched into Uragax, while the other two were left behind. One had broken into fragments after failing to hatch, and the other had fossilized. Feeding the fossilized egg to Uragax was a way to strengthen their bond.

“Let's go. We need to return to the Stepstones by tomorrow night,” Rhaegar said, not looking back as he climbed onto his dragon's back. Uragax, too injured to fly, was safer in the Green Hell, the place it had called home for two centuries, than anywhere else.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal let out a long cry, scooping up two relatively intact Wyverns before soaring into the sky. Daeron fastened the black egg to his chest and rode Tessarion in pursuit. The two dragons, one black and one blue, flew together, disappearing into the thick white clouds above Uragax.

Uragax watched them go, raising its broken left wing as it silently gnawed on the piles of Wyvern carcasses. Everything seemed as usual, time passing in its slow, familiar way.

Or so it seemed.

Roar...

After an unknown length of time, a hollow, mournful cry echoed through the forest. A burst of orange and green Dragonfire erupted, igniting the dense canopy of trees, blocking the view.

...

The next day. The weather was clear, with white clouds drifting lazily across the sky.

“Roar!”

The black dragon soared over the Summer Sea, the scattered islands of the Stepstones coming into view below. Rhaegar leaned back, his black robe draped over his face as he basked in the sun.

“Roar! Roar!”

The peaceful flight was abruptly interrupted by a series of roars. Startled, Rhaegar quickly tossed aside the robe and sat up with a jolt.

“Roar!”

A golden dragon appeared, flying low and unsteadily, dragging itself just above the ground. Its broken wing oozed dragon blood, leaving a trail of red droplets that hissed as they fell into the sea, emitting white smoke.

“Sunfyre!?”

Rhaegar’s eyes widened, his expression shifting to one of surprise and confusion.

“Roar! Roar!”

Sunfyre let out a pitiful cry as it landed on a small, green-covered island. Struggling to its feet, the dragon flapped its wings and began to hop forward, determined not to give up.

Rhaegar was dumbfounded, muttering to himself, “It hopped all the way here?”

Chapter 584: Returning Dark Sister

Volantis.

The back garden of the new Magister’s residence.

“Sssh... Roar...”

A scarlet dragon lay on the ground, stretching its neck and issuing a low, warning growl.

“Roar!”

Another scarlet dragon hovered above, weaving through the thin clouds, its piercing pupils locked onto the ground below.

...

In the attic, the servants stood nervously.

Daemon, his face slick with sweat, devoured the food on the table, oblivious to the stares of those around him. The servants kept their eyes downcast, noses nearly touching the ground, not daring to provoke the unruly Rogue Prince. An oppressive atmosphere filled the room, making it hard to breathe.

Creak!

The door suddenly opened, and Rhaenys entered, dressed in a beige tunic. “Cousin, is your dragon injured?” she exclaimed.

Daemon paused mid-chew, struggling to swallow the remnants of his meal. “Slaver’s Bay is in an uproar,” he finally said. “I’m here to stay for a couple of days.”

“I know,” Rhaenys replied, crossing her arms as she paced. “The Unsullied army is advancing down the Skahazadhan River, nearing the Smoking Sea. They’ve killed the Great Masters and Wise Masters, disposed of the false Dragonlord, and even relocated a large portion of the slave population from the Free Cities. Slaver’s Bay has

been drained of its resources and has lost its strategic importance. Whether there's a riot or not makes no difference now. The key is that the 5,000 Unsullied have withdrawn safely, and the timing of that decision was crucial."

At the mention of the "Smoking Sea," Daemon seemed to recall something unsettling and gulped down a mouthful of wine.

"What happened out there?" Rhaenys asked, her eyes narrowing with concern. "The Blood Wyrms' injuries are unusual." As someone who had lived through the heyday of the Old King, Rhaenys had seen similar wounds before. She knew her nephew Rhaegar was intent on exploring the Smoking Sea and felt it was vital to be fully informed. If there was great danger, it was not a place to enter lightly.

Daemon sighed deeply, leaning back with a restless air. "You may not believe it, but I didn't see what that thing was," he admitted in a low voice. "It appeared suddenly and attacked without warning. If the Blood Wyrms hadn't been so agile, it would have sliced him in half."

Rhaenys' face grew serious. "Tell me everything about your journey into the Smoking Sea, down to the smallest detail."

Daemon glanced at her, grabbed a piece of bread, and stuffed it into his mouth before reluctantly beginning his tale.

The story was strange and unsettling. As soon as the two ships entered the Smoking Sea, they were capsized by a massive wave. One ship wrecked on a boiling reef shortly after. Half the crew was attacked by creatures known as Pounders when they passed a landmass, turning them into living dead. Eventually, Daemon and his dragons discovered a continent with six intact ships. There were volcanoes, smoke, and reefs, but a few miles from the mainland, Daemon saw a fertile grassland untouched by smoke.

"The Lands of the Long Summer?" Rhaenys narrowed her eyes, puzzled. As a descendant of ancient Valyria, she had a natural longing for the Lands of the Long Summer and knew much about them.

"I saw a snow-capped mountain rising into the sky," Daemon said, his face softening with nostalgia. Then, with a self-deprecating laugh, he added, "Who knows where it is?" He had been unable to set foot on the continent and was swept away by a strange storm, encountering an undersea volcanic eruption. The sky filled with molten rock and black ash that seemed to bury the world. The fleet couldn't escape and was destroyed by the ash. Caraxes flew out of the eruption zone and landed on a shattered island to rest, only to be attacked by an unknown creature with tentacles, nearly killing them both.

Rhaenys listened intently, her heart pounding. "Was it a fireworm?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly. Aerea Targaryen, the third rider of Balerion the Black Dread, had died from a fireworm's parasitic attack. Could it be that Daemon and his dragon had faced the same deadly creature?

“No!” Daemon denied it decisively. “Firewyrms and dragons are natural enemies, and they can even spit fire, but they would never cause the kind of injury I saw.”

“Are you sure?” Rhaenys asked, still doubtful.

Daemon's gaze grew distant, and he replied quietly, “There’s a living Firewyrm on that island.”

“The Maesters at the Citadel exaggerate,” he continued. “It's just a long worm that spits fire. Not only could an adult dragon easily overpower it, but even an ordinary person with a sword could wound it.”

Rhaenys paused, stunned for a moment, before sighing sincerely, “You should be grateful you weren't bitten by that creature—its fire would have burned your blood from the inside out.”

The tragic story of Aerea, recorded in the annals of history, was a grim reminder of that danger.

Bang!

Daemon abruptly stood up, wiping his mouth. “Thanks for the hospitality. I'm leaving now.”

“Where are you going?” Rhaenys frowned, tilting her head. “You said you’d stay for a couple of days.”

She still had much to discuss with him. Laena had lost a lot of weight recently, and Daemon, as her husband, couldn’t shirk his responsibilities.

Daemon turned away, avoiding her gaze, and replied indifferently, “I’m going back to Tyrosh, my own territory.” After failing to explore the Smoking Sea and losing control of Slaver's Bay, it was the one place he still had to call his own.

“Are you sure?” Rhaenys’ frown deepened, and she spoke in a low, stern voice.

“Daemon, you're running away again, as usual.”

Her words caught him off guard, freezing him in his tracks.

Rhaenys took a deep breath, her tone unyielding. “Viserys may be weak-willed, and you always believe you're better than him—the best son of brave Baelon. But I tell you, you’re wrong!”

Clunk!

Daemon’s eyes darkened as he drew his sword, pointing it at Rhaenys’ throat. “Do you think I won’t kill you?”

Her words had struck a nerve, provoking him deeply.

“Haha, go ahead if you’ve got the guts.” Rhaenys laughed, as if mocking him. She continued without fear, “Viserys was the king, facing hundreds of problems daily. Though his solutions may not have been admirable, the kingdom thrives under his rule. He has his weaknesses, but in the face of adversity, he still upholds the Targaryen legacy.”

"I don't need you to judge my brother," Daemon hissed, pressing the sword's tip closer, his expression growing colder. He hated comparisons, whether favorable or not.

But Rhaenys didn't flinch, even as blood trickled down her neck. She held her head high. "And you, my cousin—you're a pathetic little worm who can never shoulder responsibility."

"You're talking nonsense!" Daemon retorted, his eyes cold and unyielding.

Yet Rhaenys continued to look down on him, as if she were standing above him, even though they were on equal ground.

With a calm smile, she asked, "Name one thing you've done that was responsible and meaningful. Just one!"

Was it the death of his sister-in-law in childbirth? The reckless declaration of "One day heir" while his nephew was sick? The so-called reconciliation with Viserys while secretly seducing his niece? The assassination attempt on his nephew, or the disastrous battle in Tyrosh that nearly cost his wife life? Or was it the vengeful plotting against his other nephew?

One by one, there was no honor to be found, no sense of responsibility to correct the wrongs he had caused.

Rhaenys looked at him with pity, shaking her head gently. "Daemon, I regret marrying my daughter to you. You failed to protect her. You've only survived on Viserys's charity and forgiveness. Without your brother's protection, you have no place in this world."

Each word was a sharp cut, each sentence a blow, delivered with the precision of someone who had waited for this moment, just to provoke him. But each strike hit its mark, exposing the ugliness in Daemon's heart, leaving him feeling naked in the harsh light of truth.

"Ah!"

He roared in frustration, swinging his sword with all his might.

...

Outside the door, at the corner of the corridor.

"Prince, the Princess has matters to attend to, and you haven't finished your lessons," Tyland said, his face flushed with embarrassment as he tried to dissuade the young prince.

"I can do it later," Maekar replied calmly, clutching a baby dragon doll. 'I want to see my great-uncle. His dragon is hurt.'

Tyland's expression soured, and she sighed helplessly. "Daemon is not known for his patience, especially toward your father's bloodline."

Daemon was a wandering prince, a figure who danced between light and darkness, his actions always bold and dangerous. Who could guarantee he wouldn't do something reckless?

“No, Lord Tyland.” Maekar raised his chubby face and marched toward the closed door.

Clang!

Suddenly, a loud noise echoed from the other side, followed by the sound of a sharp blade striking the floor.

“Hurry!” Maekar’s eyes widened as he dashed forward on his short legs.

“By the seven gods!” Tyland, even quicker, leaped over the little prince and kicked the door open.

“What’s going on?” he asked, his eyes darting around the room nervously.

Maekar quickly caught up, hiding behind his adviser’s legs and peeking into the hall.

At that moment, a deep gash marred the mahogany dining table, with half of a sword embedded in the wood, while the remaining blade and hilt lay on the ground, spinning in place.

Daemon sat slumped in a chair, looking dejected. His head hung low, his pride shattered as he wrestled with deep self-reflection.

There was no denying that his brother had always defended him. As the sons of the brave Baelon, the bond between the brothers was as strong as steel. But that wasn’t what Daemon truly wanted.

Covering his face with his hands, Daemon was tormented by his pride and buried desires.

“Daemon, stand up,” Rhaenys commanded firmly, kicking the broken sword aside as she reached for the blade at her waist.

“What more is there to say?” Daemon’s voice was hoarse, his eyes empty.

“You still have a chance.” Rhaenys held the sword with both hands, her tone solemn.

“Go back to your brother, to your wife, and to the king. Return with dignity.”

Daemon blinked, startled, his eyes falling on the familiar sword.

“The bloodline of brave Baelon must not be tarnished, nor should it bear a stain in the history books,” Rhaenys continued, her voice forceful despite the trace of reluctance in her eyes. “Don’t dishonor the sword that the Old King gave you!”

For a moment, the air was so still that even a pin drop would have echoed in the hall.

Daemon’s emotions churned, his vision blurring with unshed tears. His lips trembled as he whispered:

“Dark Sister...”

Chapter 585: Winter is Coming!

King's Landing, Dragonpit

"Roar..."

Sunfyre lay on the ground, one wing pinned beneath a steel plate, devouring the charred remains of wyverns. Judging by its ravenous hunger, it had clearly endured a great deal on the journey here.

"Take good care of it. Watch closely for any worsening of the wound," Rhaegar instructed the Dragonkeeper, removing his black robe with care.

"Yes, Your Grace," the Dragonkeeper responded quickly.

"That's good," Rhaegar said with a nod, feeling a sense of relief. Then, in a more casual tone, he called, "Daeron."

"Coming," Daeron replied, climbing out of the Dragonpit and tossing aside the bundle he had been carrying.

Bang!

Rhaegar caught the bundle firmly, opened it, and placed it in front of the Dragonkeeper. "A newly laid egg from Silverwing. Special care is needed," he said seriously.

The Dragonkeeper looked puzzled but chose not to question the command. He signaled to his fellow keepers, who carefully took the dragon egg and placed it in a pre-prepared incubator.

Rhaegar smiled but said nothing. In today's world, dragons were the symbol of House Targaryen. The birth of the Smoking Sea wild dragon Morghul had caused a huge stir. The wild dragon Uragax, a living fossil, had hidden itself as much as possible before finally regaining the freedom to soar once more.

"Roar..."

Sunfyre had nearly finished its meal. The dragon stretched its neck toward Rhaegar, cooing and nudging him playfully. Rhaegar hesitated for a moment, then reached out to rub the golden scales, silently apologizing to his younger brother Aegon. 'Your dragon is no longer pure,' he thought.

"Roar..."

Sunfyre's clear pupils reflected the dragon's contentment as it licked its sharp snout before curling up beside the wyvern's corpse. When it wasn't around its own kind, it behaved like a well-mannered creature.

Rhaegar noticed this and glanced at the wyvern's charred, pale pink tail. "Aegon is a fool with good fortune," he remarked admiringly, "to have a dragon that is loyal, brave, and handsome."

Among the four generations of dragons in the House, each one possessed remarkable talent. Syrax and Tessarion had yet to reveal their full potential, but they had already proven themselves in battle. Grey Ghost was a wild dragon and thus, better left unmentioned. Seasmoke and the fierce Sunfyre, both battle-hardened, were the finest of their generation.

"Sunfyre is beautiful, even with its burns," Daeron said sincerely. Tessarion was proud and striking in appearance, but its temperament was too wild.

"You're right," Rhaegar agreed, nodding as he turned to leave the Dragonpit.

If Sunfyre and Seasmoke grew strong, they would be the House's mainstay for decades, even if they never reached the status of fully mature dragons.

"Roar..."



Sunfyre opened its eyes, watching the two brothers' retreating backs. A soft sound escaped its throat, almost as if it were bidding them farewell.

...

## **Red Keep**

"Your Grace, Prince Aegon's second wedding went ahead as planned, causing quite a stir among the nobility," Lyonel reported in a low voice, his expression serious and weighted with concern.

"As expected, the Andals aren't accustomed to multiple marriages," Rhaegar remarked as he walked into the opulent Red Keep, always vigilant of the shifting attitudes among those around him.

The wedding had only recently concluded, and many nobles from across the Seven Kingdoms were still present. Rumblings had already begun among the nobility, who harbored strong opinions about the king's multiple marriages. Even Daemon, the king's uncle across the Narrow Sea, had found himself embroiled in controversy when he attempted to marry Mysaria, the White Worm. As the king's half-brother and Prince of the Stepstones, Aegon openly taking two wives was seen as a direct affront to the Seven Kingdoms' nobility.

"Your Grace, it would be wise to offer some explanation," Lyonel suggested patiently, though with a hint of exasperation. The tension between the Faith of the Seven and the Protestant faith was already straining relations with the more devout nobles. If the royal family began normalizing multiple marriages, it could easily be perceived as a provocation.

Rhaegar paused, his expression hardening. "Lord Lyonel, when does a king need to explain himself to his vassals?"

"There must be some reassurance to ease the nobles' concerns," Lyonel replied helplessly.

"They'll have to adjust," Rhaegar said, shaking his head. "Father has been too lenient with them, and they've developed bad habits as a result."

With that, he left Lyonel standing there, anxious and uneasy, and ascended the stairs.

"Your Grace..." Lyonel called after him, but his voice trailed off in frustration. The king was admirable in many ways, but his youth and impetuosity were apparent. With House Targaryen at the height of its power, commanding more than twenty dragons of various ages, the nobles of the Seven Kingdoms felt increasingly suffocated. The Targaryens and their dragons had become "gods" in the eyes of the world, their dominance unquestioned.

'Alas, Your Grace seems intent on suppressing the nobility,' Lyonel sighed deeply, his heart weighed down with unease.

...

## **Red Keep**

Rhaegar glanced at his father resting in his chambers, then took a bath before stepping out of Maegor's Holdfast. He bypassed the throne hall, slipping through a back door into the Godswood.

Under the Weirwood, the ground was blanketed in red leaves, like a soft crimson carpet. Helaena stood beneath the ancient tree, her gaze fixed on its rough, white trunk and the tortured face carved into it.

"What are you doing?" Rhaegar asked softly, careful not to startle her.

Helaena flinched slightly, turning her head just enough to acknowledge him. "The people of the North have taken the supplies to the Wall."

"I know," Rhaegar replied with a smile, thinking, 'The caravan was like a long dragon, and Lord Lyman was beside himself with frustration.' But there was nothing to be done—the promised support for the Wall couldn't be reduced by even a penny.

Helaena lowered her eyes, speaking quietly, "This is right. The Wall protects us." As she said this, her thin frame trembled slightly.

Rhaegar's smile faded as he noticed the subtle tremor. He looked her over carefully and saw that her silver hair hung loose and flowing, and she wore a light blue velvet dress, far less elaborate than her usual attire. Her posture was relaxed, almost lazy.

Taking her hand, Rhaegar gently stroked the small but noticeable bulge in her stomach. "Did you see anything?" he asked with concern. He had known since childhood that Helaena's ability to see the future was stronger than his own. Even with his enhanced dreamwalking abilities, he could only glimpse the dreams of specific people, not peer into them at will.

"I see winter," Helaena whispered, her voice trembling as she suddenly closed her eyes.

"What else?" Rhaegar asked, lightly touching his forehead, attuned to the mention of winter.

"And..." Helaena's eyes fluttered open, catching sight of her brother's serious expression. She hesitated, swallowing the words she couldn't bring herself to say. She wasn't sure if what she'd seen was real, and she couldn't tell her brother.

"Can't you tell?" Rhaegar's brow furrowed, trying to gauge the gravity of the situation.

"I'm not sure," Helaena replied nervously, quickly turning away. "But it's going to be very cold."

"Don't worry, it hasn't happened yet," Rhaegar said, pulling her close and whispering reassuringly, "Don't be afraid of things that haven't come to pass, or you'll suffer three times over when they do." Facing problems head-on was the best way to overcome them; fear solved nothing.

"Sorry, I'm just a little overwhelmed," Helaena admitted, snuggling into his arms and clinging to his shirt with a fierce grip. Rhaegar glanced down, noticing her fingers had turned white from the pressure. The tighter she held on, the more secure she seemed to feel.

Rhaegar's eyes darkened, sensing the seriousness of her vision. "I plan to explore the Smoking Sea soon to retrieve the Dragon's Horn. Do you have any suggestions?" he asked, his mind already turning to possible dangers. Daemon had ventured into the Smoking Sea and survived. If trouble was indeed brewing, he needed to act swiftly.

At the mention of the Smoking Sea, Helaena's timid eyes brightened, and she nodded eagerly. "You should go where the flame of your homeland still burns."

"The Lands of the Long Summer?" Rhaegar asked, pressing for clarity.

"I don't know. I can't see it," Helaena replied quickly, offering her opinion. "But a strong flame can better withstand the winter."

Rhaegar hesitated, thinking over her words. "I see," he said at last. The winter Helaena had foreseen was not yet upon them. He had time to prepare. Returning to the Lands of the Long Summer was the first crucial step.

As they discussed, the two siblings began to outline the framework of a looming disaster with their prophetic gifts. Rhaegar's thoughts drifted, and he tightened his strong arms around her. Helaena remained silent, closing her eyes and sinking deep into thought. They leaned on each other beneath the watchful eyes of the Weirwood, time passing slowly.

Suddenly, Helaena's eyes snapped open, and she spoke with certainty. "Call Aemond back. He can help you."

"Him?" Rhaegar turned to her, surprised. "I exiled him to make his name in Qohor." Truthfully, he was reluctant to contact the boy now. Qohor, an ancient Free City, had formed an alliance with Braavos and Pentos. Aemond's attack on Qohor would attract the attention of all three Free Cities and potentially bring peace to both sides of the Narrow Sea.

"You don't know, do you? Qohor has already surrendered," Helaena whispered, blinking. "You need a capable assistant to make your life easier."

"That boy is indeed capable," Rhaegar admitted, raising an eyebrow as he detected a hint of pride in Helaena's voice. It seemed Otto and House Celtigar had invested considerable effort.

"You smell of jealousy," Helaena teased, tilting her head to look up at him from his solid chest, her large, watery eyes sparkling with amusement.

"No way," Rhaegar replied with a smile. "I'm going to fly to Lys. You take care of this."

Helaena bit her lower lip, thinking for a moment before agreeing. "Okay." It was part of her duty to manage her brother's affairs.

...

Time flew by, and a few days passed in the blink of an eye.

In the vast forest to the east of the continent of Essos lay the ancient city of Qohor. Its towering walls, built into the mountains, now served as a grim display of conquest. Dead bodies dangled from the gallows, eyes wide open in eternal horror. The city's defenses had been overtaken by Dothraki warriors clad in animal skins, their cold eyes watching the terrified residents below.

"Whining..."

"My child!"

...

On the broad streets paved with red and yellow bricks, rows of old women and children knelt in anguish, their eyes fixed on the skeletal remains of their loved ones swaying in the wind. The Dothraki had promised to spare the lives of their captives if the gates were opened. But as soon as the barbaric cavalry entered, they unleashed a bloody and ruthless massacre. Any man who dared to resist, or even showed a hint of defiance, was killed without mercy.

...

In the eastern district, masked priests gathered in the temple. The statue symbolizing the Black Goat faith had been burned to the ground, collapsing into rubble. Hundreds of these priests were now bound and forced to kneel in the ruins, awaiting their punishment. Behind them loomed a majestic temple constructed entirely of wooden wedges.

"Creak, creak..."

A skinny monkey swung down from the canopy, darting away in a burst of energy. Aemond, seated in front of the temple, caught sight of the creature with its large, round eyes and stroked his chin.

"What an ugly thing. Helaena would like it," he mused. The monkey's silver fur glimmered in the sunlight, and its fist-sized purple eyes were lively and curious. This was a small lemur, known in Qohor as a "little Valyrian."

"Prince, we should kill them all," Bartimos suggested, his voice laced with malice.

"No, religion is the cultural foundation of a nation. Killing them all would provoke widespread civilian opposition."

"Who cares about those low-lives? We have a dragon!" Bartimos retorted, his tone dismissive. He and Otto glared at each other, their confrontation drawing fearful glances from the nearby nuns and female slaves draped in gauze.

Otto frowned deeply, warning once more, "Religion must not be undermined. We want a Free Cities that can be ruled, not one in chaos."

"Lord Hightower, you've spent six years shoveling manure in the countryside. Has your courage been buried in the muck as well?" Bartimos mocked, his words dripping with scorn. Noticing Aemond's distant expression, he added, "Prince, are you even listening?"

Aemond snapped out of his reverie and met Bartimos's gaze directly. "Are you done spewing nonsense?"

"Prince, you—" Bartimos stammered, taken aback by the sharp retort, his face flushing with anger as his mustache bristled.

"That's enough. I don't want to hear any more of your drivel," Aemond said dismissively as he stood to leave. 'Listen to my grandfather, you stinking crab,' he thought to himself, his patience wearing thin.

"Prince!" Bartimos called out, unwilling to let the matter drop as he moved to follow. But two Dothraki guards quickly intervened, crossing their scimitars to block his path.

Otto, adjusting his disheveled collar with a self-satisfied smirk, said, "Lord Bartimos, heed the Prince's orders."

"Hmph!" Bartimos grunted in frustration before turning on his heel and storming off.

...

Qohor, Back of the Mountain

"Roar!"

Sheepstealer lay sprawled on the ground, a large patch of scorched earth in front of it, littered with charred remains. Several similar scorched patches dotted the area, where the dragon had feasted. Among the burnt remnants of goats, a few blackened, spiked helmets lay melted and deformed.

"Baa~~"

A goat's agonized cry pierced the air as its half-chewed body lay twitching. Without hesitation, Sheepstealer unleashed another blast of Dragonfire, reducing the creature to cinders before extending its withered head to swallow the remains whole.

The dragon was absorbed in its meal when a figure appeared in the distance. Aemond's expression hardened as he approached, preparing for his usual patrol. But as he reached the top of the hill, his single eye darkened with suspicion.

A man was standing next to the ugly Mud Dragon.

"Who are you?" Aemond demanded, his voice cold as ice, while slowly drawing his Scarlet Forger from its sheath. From his vantage point, he could see the Mud Dragon—skinny, with folded wings that looked like a pair of devilish hands. Beside it stood a slender figure, dressed in a colorful gauze gown, with silver hair flowing freely.

The figure was barefoot, standing on the grass. At the sound of Aemond's voice, she slowly turned to reveal a fair, maidenly face. Aemond's heart sank at the sight, and he reluctantly sheathed his sword.

"You're in trouble," the silver-haired maiden said suddenly, her voice clear and ethereal.

Aemond's single eye flashed with cold light as his face darkened. "You're the one in trouble," he retorted, striding toward the hillside with menacing intent.

The maiden remained indifferent, her tone flat as she spoke again. "Someone will soon bring you a message—to stand against the darkness and the winter together."

"What did you say?" Aemond growled, taking another step closer, his expression growing more ominous.

"Darkness and winter, like the Doom of Old Valyria," the maiden replied, tilting her head with eerie calm. "As a descendant of Old Valyria, you should be familiar with the Doom."

Aemond paused, his wariness growing. "How much do you know about Old Valyria?" he asked cautiously. A woman with silver hair and blue eyes could very well be of Valyrian descent. But it was rare for such a descendant to hail from Qohor.

"To be honest, not much," the maiden admitted, her demeanor unruffled. "My ancestors were soldiers recruited in Qohor. All that remains are stories passed down through the generations, aside from a few pregnant prostitutes."

"Are you of the Dragonblood?" Aemond's eyes flashed with a hint of murderous intent as memories of Dragonlords in Qohor surfaced.

"Roar!" Sheepstealer responded to Aemond's unspoken command, a fiery glow simmering in its throat. The stench of burnt sheep filled the air, and the maiden's silver hair fluttered in the breeze.

Facing the fearsome man and dragon, the maiden remained composed. She pulled a stack of wooden tablets from her collar and offered calmly, "I can tell you the fortune of your journey."

## Chapter 586: Aemond's Cruelty

Across the Narrow Sea, Lys.

The sky stretched in a deep, endless blue, mirroring the vast expanse of the sea below. Suddenly, a roar pierced the tranquil air as a black dragon, its wings spanning the sky, streaked across the horizon. The beast's long tail whipped through the calm waters, sending ripples toward the majestic Free Cities perched on the cliffs.

On the streets below, hundreds of civilians paused, their gazes drawn upward in surprise. The black dragon roared again, circling the Free Cities like a predator sizing up its prey before diving toward the Dragonpit with the speed of a shooting star. As it disappeared from sight, the people below watched in a mixture of fear and admiration, their eyes following the deadly creature with a mix of dread and awe.

...

Topless Tower.

Rhaegar emerged from the Dragonpit and ascended the winch rope ladder toward the meeting hall. His purpose was clear: to mobilize the fleet and prepare for their entry into the Smoking Sea. Lys, ever the political heart of both sides of the Narrow Sea, was abuzz with the latest news.

"Daemon returned in a mess, and Slaver's Bay has fallen."

Rhaegar's face remained impassive, though a flicker of joy sparked within him. His uncle's business venture had crumbled, and he wondered if this failure might force the man to reconsider his ambitions in middle age. As for Slaver's Bay... it was a colony no longer worth its name.

Creak!

The winch chain jolted, signaling the ladder's arrival at the top of the Topless Tower. "We're here," a voice announced. Without hesitation, Rhaegar stepped off the ladder and moved steadily toward the council chamber.

...

A council meeting was in progress.

Johanna, the Red Priestess, Varys, and other prominent figures were seated around an oval table carved from Weirwood. Rhaenyra, standing at the head, raised a goblet of wine with a serious expression. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have an important announcement to make today."

Varys, his strange tattoos wriggling beneath his skin, smiled faintly. "Listen carefully," he murmured. As the steward of the Topless Tower and High Septon, he naturally obeyed the Queen's orders.

Johanna and the Red Priestess exchanged a knowing glance. Something about today's meeting felt off. The Queen was dressed in a magnificent black robe, her golden crown gleaming, and an enigmatic smile constantly played on her lips. The formal attire and confident air hinted at an unusual agenda. This was no ordinary meeting.

“Then, the meeting is officially open.” Rhaenyra smiled, bringing the goblet to her lips. After a brief sip, she whispered, “Ser, please.”

“Yes, Your Grace.” Ser Lorent, a member of the Kingsguard, solemnly drew his sword and placed it against Johanna's neck.

“Your Grace?” Johanna's face turned pale, panic overtaking her.

“Don't move, Black Swan,” Lorent's voice was cold as his blade nicked a thin line of white flesh on her neck. The sudden turn of events shattered the fragile calm in the hall.

Varys, hands in his pockets, had anticipated this. The Red Priestess stood up abruptly, her tattooed, tear-streaked face full of shock.

“Everyone, remain calm.” Rhaenyra retrieved a list from beside her and tossed it onto the table. “These are Johanna's crimes. She has broken the law.”

“Your Grace!” Johanna's eyes widened as she read the accusations. But Rhaenyra showed no mercy. “You secretly sold female slaves and boys to preserve the vested interests of the old nobility. You betrayed your conscience and committed countless crimes.”

“But I maintained order in Lys,” Johanna pleaded desperately. “As a member of the Topless Tower Council, I have always done my best to help you govern the Free Cities.”

She had sensed something was amiss with the Queen's recent coldness, but now it was all too clear.

Rhaenyra shook her head, cutting her off. “You are dismissed. Your position on the council will be filled.” She tapped her chin, signaling for Johanna to be taken away.

Ser Lorent's face darkened as he grabbed Johanna by the collar, dragging her from the hall like a disobedient child.

Bang!

The door slammed open as the Black Swan was led out by the Kingsguard. Rhaegar, who had just arrived, saw the scene and furrowed his brow in confusion.

“Your Grace,” Mysaria, the White Worm, greeted softly, her pregnant belly prominent as she walked into the meeting hall.

“What's going on?” Rhaegar stood frozen in place, stunned.

Inside the hall, Rhaenyra, still smiling, took Mysaria's hand and announced, “From now on, Lady Mysaria will assume Johanna's duties.”

As she spoke, she glanced at the other council members. Laena, another councilor, was absent due to her pregnancy. The Red Priestess had replaced the Volantis councilor, and Varys remained the steward of the tower.

“Not a bad idea,” Varys said, clapping his hands in agreement.

The Red Priestess, after her initial shock, slowly regained her composure and declared in an official tone, "Slavery is abolished, and Johanna's crimes are unforgivable."

As a priestess of the Red Temple, she still found it challenging to navigate the power struggles at court. "That's good. I believe Lys will have a better future."

Rhaenyra smiled and raised her cup once more. Just yesterday, she had quietly dismantled the old noble faction that had been smuggling female slaves and young boys, winning over the second sons of the Crownlands nobility to colonize new lands. Lys, within the Triarchy, was due for a complete overhaul.

Outside the door, Rhaegar, who had watched the proceedings from start to finish, shook his head. He lost interest in the meeting and turned to follow the Kingsguard, who had already departed.

...

After a long time...

The dungeon in the Topless Tower was damp and dark, with only the dim candlelight from the wall sconces faintly illuminating the floor. Rhaegar, clad in his usual black robe, approached the cell door.

"Who goes there? Stop!" A silver-haired young man called out, halting the black-robed figure's approach.

"It's me," Rhaegar replied, slowly raising his head to reveal a cold, expressionless face beneath the hood.

"Your Grace!" Addam gasped in surprise and quickly moved way to not block the man's path.

Rhaegar glanced at him and casually asked, "Are you the bastard son of the Sea Snake?" He recognized the young man who had once saved his child.

"No... no..." Addam's handsome face tensed, and he stammered out a denial.

"Don't be nervous. What does your identity have to do with me?" Rhaegar patted the young man's shoulder kindly. "You're a good lad. You'll always find a way to make yourself useful."

Addam's body stiffened, and he whispered, "It's all thanks to Lord Corlys."

Rhaegar smiled faintly, understanding the Sea Snake's intentions. With Laenor dead and Laena married, the family's main bloodline had nearly been severed, thanks to the betrayal of nephews and nieces. Raising bastards to high positions was a common strategy among the nobles of Westeros.

"Shouldn't you be at the port?" Rhaegar asked, glancing at the prison door, trying to coax more information from Addam.

Addam answered promptly, his tone solemn. "The Queen ordered the arrest of the old nobles involved in slave smuggling. I'm overseeing the transport of the prisoners."



“Oh, I see,” Rhaegar replied, the situation suddenly clear to him. As independent Free Cities under the Crownlands' control, Lys and Myr had garrisons of 1,000 Fearless and 200 Unsullied each. This was the most the royal family could muster after subduing the 5,000-strong Unsullied army. King's Landing, after all, still required a standing force. The Sea Snake had stationed Addam's fleet in Lys to supplement Rhaenyra's lack of armed forces.

“I need to go in and find someone,” Rhaegar said quietly.

Addam hesitated for a moment, then nodded seriously. “Please, go ahead.”

“Very well,” Rhaegar replied, smiling as he walked past. He recognized Addam as a smart man who knew exactly where his loyalties should lie.

...

Deep in the dungeon, the damp walls were slick with mold, and the stench of urine and decay hung thick in the air. Johanna huddled in a corner of her cell, her body trembling with fear. She couldn't believe it—the Black Swan of Lys, reduced to a prisoner.

Tap, tap, tap...

Footsteps echoed down the corridor, sending a fresh wave of dread through Johanna. She looked up, her eyes widening as Rhaegar approached the cell and removed his hood.

“It's me,” he said.

The familiar voice startled Johanna, and a flicker of hope ignited in her eyes. “Your Grace,” she whispered, her voice trembling as she grasped at this final lifeline. Desperately, she crawled toward the cell door.

Rhaegar, however, remained indifferent. “What happened to you?” he asked coolly.

“I don't know,” Johanna replied, her voice choked with tears. “I served the queen faithfully, but she trusts the White Worm more.” She couldn't comprehend how she, who had done so much for Lys and upheld the queen's dignity, had ended up here.

Rhaegar sighed, his tone carrying a hint of resignation. “I told you to be more ruthless,” he said. “You never change.”

When Lys was first conquered, he had warned her to purge the old aristocracy swiftly. Now, not only had she brought disaster upon herself, but she had also been caught selling slaves—a severe breach of trust.

“I know I made a mistake,” Johanna pleaded, clutching the bars and the fabric of Rhaegar's black robe. “Save me, Your Grace.” The thought of spending the rest of her life in this dungeon was unbearable. She knew Rhaenyra's merciless nature would not allow for forgiveness.

Rhaegar looked down at the once-proud Black Swan, now reduced to begging for mercy. His voice remained cold. “Fix your bad habits, and there won't be a next time.”

“Yes!” Johanna’s face lit up with relief, nodding fervently, like a drowning woman grasping at a lifeline.

“The ship leaves tonight to take my eldest son to Myr,” Rhaegar said, his tone darkening as he turned away. He had no patience for her feigned pitifulness. With that, he left the cell, his departure as cold and final as his words.

Johanna, overwhelmed with gratitude, thanked him repeatedly, tears of relief streaming down her face.

...

Back at the entrance to the dungeon, Addam approached quietly. “Your Grace,” he said, his voice low.

“Let her go,” Rhaegar ordered without turning back. He knew Johanna’s current predicament was due in part to his own leniency and Rhaenyra’s oversight. But one thing was certain—under Johanna’s management, Lys had indeed thrived. She had the means, but lacked the discipline.

With this harsh lesson, perhaps her temperament would change when she moved to Myr, where the rules would be different.

...

It was dusk in King's Landing.

After washing, Helaena followed her mother down the corridor to visit her father, who lay bedridden as usual. They walked side by side, each lost in their own thoughts, their faces reflecting different emotions.

“Roar!”

A sudden dragon's cry echoed from the Red Keep, startling the servants bustling up and down the stairs. Helaena quickly turned, leaning out of a nearby window to catch sight of the commotion.

“Roar!”

A brownish dragon soared leisurely overhead, descending to land in the Godswood behind the Red Keep.

“Aemond is back,” Helaena murmured, her expression unreadable.

...

After some time, Aemond arrived, weary and dust-covered, with his sword at his waist. Alicent’s face lit up with joy at the sight of her lean, handsome second son.

“Aemond, my boy!” she exclaimed, her eyes sweeping over him with a mother’s concern.

“Mother?” Aemond’s brow furrowed slightly, a flicker of doubt in his single eye. She wasn’t supposed to be here in the Red Keep.

Alicent stepped forward, arms outstretched in welcome. But Aemond abruptly sidestepped the embrace.

“No!” he said, avoiding her touch.

Alicent froze, her arms falling awkwardly to her sides. “Aemond?”

His face flushed with embarrassment, Aemond awkwardly deflected, “Since you're back, make sure to take good care of Father.” He then glanced at Helaena, who stood silently by the bed, and gently pulled her away.

He couldn't understand why his mother still treated him like a child, yearning for maternal affection he had long outgrown. 'Targaryen men...', he thought, 'didn't need such burdens.'

Chapter 587: Five Thrones

The siblings left together, leaving Alicent standing in shock. The sight of her second son's coldness and the distance between them pierced her fragile heart. Tears welled up in her eyes, and her lips trembled.

...

The Council Hall.

Helaena slowly pushed open the door, bathed in the soft light of evening. “Come in,” she whispered, stepping inside with ease. She paused, noticing the embroidery basket she had left in the corner, and settled down happily on the carpet to resume her work.

Aemond glanced around the room, curiosity in his voice as he asked, “Do you often have to deal with government affairs?” With their brother gone and Rhaenyra and Aegon each lost in their own pursuits, it seemed that only Helaena was shouldering any responsibility within the vast Red Keep.

“Yes,” Helaena replied casually, a shy smile playing on her lips. “I just sign the papers.”

“It's not easy,” Aemond muttered, leaning against the doorframe, momentarily speechless.

Helaena, focused on her embroidery, whispered softly, “You have to go to the Smoking Sea.”

“Why?” Aemond crossed his arms, puzzled.

“To help him and carry on the legacy of our homeland,” Helaena answered seriously, her face set with determination. “To ward off the darkness and cold of the future.”

Aemond's expression shifted slightly, a flicker of unease crossing his features. He was sensitive to such words—similar warnings had come from the maiden of the House of Aurion, who was rumored to be a fortune-teller. Shortly after that conversation, he had received a letter from Helaena.

After a moment of thought, he asked, “What is this thing you speak of?”

Helaena tilted her head, sensing his guardedness. Aemond shrugged, deliberately concealing his thoughts about the fortune-teller.

“Okay,” Helaena nodded slightly, though her eyes seemed distant. “I saw a disaster coming from the north.” Her voice grew quieter. “I can’t see clearly what it is... but the danger it brings is no less than that of the Doom.”

Aemond, now more concerned, pressed on, “What should I do?”

“I don’t know. What I saw was very vague.” Helaena lowered her head, her fingers moving more quickly as she focused on her embroidery.

“What else did you see?” Aemond asked, a sense of urgency creeping into his voice. With everything that had happened recently—the black goat, the descendants of Aurion, the divinations—even Helaena’s cryptic words added to the mounting pressure he felt.

“Many things,” Helaena murmured, her hand pausing as a sudden nervousness overtook her. She had intended to share these visions with her brother, but...

In Aemond’s startled and confused gaze, Helaena gently stroked her swollen belly and muttered, “He’s here, sitting on a wooden chair.”

“What?” Aemond’s single eye widened, though he struggled to remain calm. “You’re having a boy, aren’t you?”

“Maybe,” Helaena replied softly, lowering her head and tightening her grip on the tapestry she was embroidering.

Aemond glanced down at her work and saw the image of a fierce black dragon with scarlet wings. Helaena grew more anxious, her face gradually paling as she trembled.

The siblings reacted differently to the unfolding tension. Aemond, transfixed by the sight, suddenly broke into a smile.

“My little nephew,” he whispered, a hint of pride and anticipation in his voice.

...

Nightfall in Lys, at the Topless Tower.

Candlelight flickered in the dim room as Rhaegar sat at a round table in his bedroom, his mind entirely focused on the delicate task before him: the intricate carving of a necklace. The steady sound of the carving knife, swish, swish, swish, filled the air as silver-gray steel shavings fell away, the blade moving with increasingly precise strokes.

A soft creak—then the door opened, and Rhaenyra entered, swaying slightly. Her beautiful face was flushed, a drop of fragrant wine lingering on her red lips.

“Rhaegar!” she called softly, her voice slurred with the effects of the drink. She paused in the doorway, watching Rhaegar, who remained absorbed in his work. Though her head spun, she remembered not to disturb him and tiptoed forward, covering her mouth to stifle a hiccup.

Rhaegar, engrossed in his task, was oblivious to her presence. Rhaenyra edged around the table until she stood opposite him, leaning in to get a closer look at what he was crafting. Before her was a necklace of Valyrian steel, adorned with three dragon-head pendants.

It was a family heirloom, a gift from Rhaegar in the days when they had been close.

Suddenly, one of the dragon-head pendants began to glow faintly, its deep-set pupils flashing red. Rhaenyra's eyes widened in surprise, and she instinctively covered her mouth to keep from gasping aloud. The pendant, modeled after Balerion, had tiny letters engraved on its silver-gray scales, which seemed to come alive. The once-lifeless pupils now gleamed brightly.

Swish, swish, swish...

Rhaegar's face grew pale, a thin sheen of sweat forming on his forehead as he continued to carve the second pendant. With the first pendant's success, his movements became fluid, almost effortless. He inscribed the spatial runes on the pendant shaped like Meraxes, wrapping it in his Spirit and infusing it with purified fire magic, connecting the intricate threads one by one.

Hum—

The pendant glowed with a reddish light, and Meraxes's narrow pupils appeared, shimmering with a silver sheen. But the strain on Rhaegar was immense; his body stiffened, and his vision blurred as the toll of Spirit and fire magic weighed heavily on him. Despite his exhaustion, he pressed on, determined to complete the third and final pendant, based on Vhagar.

One effort, two declines, three exhaustion.

By now, his Spirit's power had waned, shrinking from five meters to a mere one. If he didn't finish now, he couldn't be sure when inspiration would strike again. His face grew paler as he channeled the last reserves of his fire magic into carving the final pendant. Each scale, each spatial rune, was painstakingly etched, the fire magic binding it all together.

Cold sweat dripped down his cheeks, and his fingers trembled uncontrollably.

Hum—

Finally, the fine inscriptions aligned, and a faint reddish glow emanated from the pendant. Vhagar had come to life, though its eyes remained closed. The pendant's surface shimmered with a bluish luster, as if the dragon teeth were vying for attention. At that moment, Rhaegar's strength gave out. His head spun, and his consciousness faded.

Bang!

He collapsed forward, his forehead striking the table with a dull thud.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra gasped, frozen in shock for a moment before rushing to catch him in her arms. Rhaegar's body was drenched in sweat, his eyes fluttering open in a daze. The first thing he saw was Rhaenyra's anxious face hovering over him.

In his hazy state, Rhaegar struggled to speak, his thoughts drifting aimlessly. 'No wonder... there's a scent of milk and wine,' he mused weakly before darkness overtook him.

"Ooh~~"

Rhaenyra's concern deepened as a soft, squeaky noise emerged from beneath the table. The curtain draped along the floor rustled, and a tiny silver-haired baby poked her head out.

"Visenya?" Rhaenyra's mouth twitched with surprise. She hesitated, torn between laying Rhaegar down and scooping up her daughter. Ultimately, she reached out to pick up the little one.

"Ooh~~"

Visenya, full of energy, waved her tiny arms adorned with white silk, her two small teeth flashing as she let out another squeal. Rhaenyra sighed helplessly, cradling her daughter in her arms. As she did, her eyes caught something odd—a small footprint on the back of Visenya's white velvet dress.

"Hmm?" Rhaenyra's eyebrows arched as she glanced at Rhaegar's boots, making a quick comparison.

Rhaegar, still slumped over the table in a post-traumatic daze, was barely able to move. Yet he remained conscious, aware that he had unintentionally stepped on his daughter. It wasn't entirely his fault—Visenya had been restless, crawling all around the bedroom. At some point, she had dozed off under the darkened table.

"Rhaegar, you're really something!" Rhaenyra couldn't help but laugh, amused that he, as a father, had managed to do such a thing.

"Ooh, ooh, ooh~~" Visenya, unfazed, squirmed in her mother's arms, searching for her bowl. She had been squished under the table for half an hour and was now hungry.

Rhaenyra chuckled, giving Rhaegar a playful kick. "I'll let you off this time," she teased before carrying her hungry daughter back to the bed. With a practiced motion, she unhooked the back of her dress. Soon, the quiet sound of Visenya nursing filled the room as time slipped by.

The night deepened, and Visenya eventually drifted into a peaceful sleep, curled up into a tiny ball.

"Shh!" Rhaegar gasped as he sat up, clutching his head in pain. His temples throbbed, each pulse feeling like an impending explosion.

"You're awake," Rhaenyra observed, approaching him with a cup of warm water, her dress still unfastened. The earlier chaos had sobered her somewhat, but Rhaegar remained groggy, his mind clouded.

"It's nothing. First, take a look at these," Rhaegar muttered, shaking his head as he pushed the Valyrian necklace aside, revealing a dragon-taming whip beneath it.

"Drink the water. It's good for you," Rhaenyra insisted, picking up the necklace. She noticed how it had undergone a complete transformation, both inside and out. Summoning a thread of fire magic from within her blood, she expertly channeled it into one of the pendants.

Hum...

A flicker of consciousness surged through Rhaenyra as she sensed a cramped space, no larger than three feet square.

Rhaegar gulped down the water and exhaled deeply. "Look closely," he said, his voice weary but tinged with pride. "This might be the best work I'll produce for years."

His Spirit, once powerful enough to project several feet around him, was now depleted. The strain of his recent efforts had taken its toll, and his recovery felt as slow as a snail's crawl.

Rhaenyra shot him a concerned glance before turning her attention back to the necklace. She explored the remaining two pendants in turn. The Meraxes pendant revealed a storage space of three feet square, while the final pendant, modeled after Vhagar, radiated a faint hum as she cautiously infused it with a wisp of fire magic.

Hum...

Her vision expanded, revealing a storage space three times larger than the others—a full three meters square.

"Rhaegar, this pendant..." Rhaenyra's voice was filled with awe. She hadn't expected such a dramatic difference in capacity.

Rhaegar smiled, clearly proud, though he attempted to downplay his achievement. "It's probably comparable to Helaena's space bracelet. I doubt I could make it any bigger."

"Can I use it?" Rhaenyra asked, her excitement tempered by a hint of worry. The recent conflict with her brother before leaving King's Landing weighed on her mind.

"Of course," Rhaegar replied, leaning back in his chair. He glanced at her meaningfully. "I noticed you haven't been wearing the old necklace lately."

Rhaenyra sensed an underlying message in his words but chose not to address it directly. Silently, she removed her current necklace and replaced it with the new dragon pendant. "How does it look?" she asked.

"It's beautiful," Rhaegar said, momentarily lost in thought. Then, with a more serious expression, he pushed the dragon whip across the table toward her.

Rhaenyra eyed the whip with skepticism, giving Rhaegar a questioning look.

"I'm leaving this with you," Rhaegar said, sitting up straighter as he regained his composure. "I'm heading to the Smoking Sea, and I need to ensure you and Baelon have something to protect you. Whether it's this dragon necklace or the whip for taming dragons, I want you to be safe if something happens to me or if trouble arises in my absence."

Rhaenyra hesitated, shaking her head. "I have the necklace. That's enough." She knew she couldn't dissuade Rhaegar from his perilous journey, but she also couldn't accept the dragon whip. He needed it more than she did.

“No,” Rhaegar insisted firmly. “The dragon whip has limited use for me. Don’t refuse it.”

Even if he didn’t leave it with Rhaenyra and Baelon, the dragon-taming tool needed to remain within the House. After the “Dragon Claw” incident, he wasn’t willing to lose another invaluable treasure.

Rhaenyra, torn between her emotions, finally took the dragon whip with a resolute expression. Rhaegar’s words had been so tinged with foreboding that she felt compelled to prepare for the worst.

Chapter 588: Your Mother Must Have Been a Beauty

“What did you discover on your trip to Sothoryos?” Rhaenyra asked, lowering her gaze and shifting the conversation.

“Fortunately, we encountered an old dragon,” Rhaegar replied, catching her intent and smiling. “If the opportunity arises, the children could try to tame it.”

The 300-year-old Uragax, a wild dragon without a rider, had honed its skills in both combat and survival over centuries. Capturing it had been no small feat; only the Cannibal’s superior abilities had made it possible.

“There really is a wild dragon?” Rhaenyra’s eyes reddened, her voice thick with emotion. But as a mother, her thoughts immediately turned to her eldest son, Baelon, who had long desired an adult dragon of his own.

“Mm-hmm,” Rhaegar said, his chin lifting with pride. Adding an adult dragon to the House, one with the potential for a long life, felt even more significant than conquering a new territory.

Rhaenyra couldn’t help but laugh at his proud expression.

“Ooh~~”

Visenya stirred, shifting her position in her sleep. Rhaenyra glanced at her daughter and chuckled. “She doesn’t look like a dragon at all—more like a little piglet.”

“You’ll have to deal with that later,” Rhaegar said with a grin, propping his chin on one hand as he watched his daughter sleep. She had inherited her mother’s grace. He remembered how, as a child, he had nearly been smothered beneath those long, supple legs.

Rhaenyra sat down beside him, the dragon-taming whip still in her hands. After a moment of contemplation, she spoke abruptly. “If you’re planning to leave, you should call Baelon back.”

“Why?” Rhaegar frowned slightly.

Rhaenyra’s expression was serious. “He’s your eldest son. With you away, it’s only right that I take care of him.”



She had been opposed to Baelon's departure for Myr from the start, and now seemed like the perfect time to bring him home.

"No," Rhaegar replied firmly.

Rhaenyra looked puzzled, not understanding his refusal.

Rhaegar shook his head before explaining, "He's better off in Myr than in King's Landing or Lys."

Baelon was growing up, and it was time for him to learn and mature away from home, whether he ended up with a dragon or not. Maekar was thriving in Volantis, as Tyland, his adviser, had reported. Baelon, as his eldest son and heir to the Iron Throne, needed to set an example—especially since his siblings all had dragons, and he did not. Proving himself elsewhere would strengthen his authority and earn the respect of his siblings.

Rhaenyra, less strategic in her thinking, countered, "He could learn from me."

"No!" Rhaegar's tone was unyielding. He had known Rhaenyra since childhood and understood her well. While she could raise a good son, she might not be able to nurture a strong heir.

He had already made arrangements: Jeyne would oversee Myr, with Baelon and his sister Daenerys under her care. With Jeyne's iron-fisted rule over the Vale, there was no one better suited to guide and serve as a role model for the children.

"Why?" Rhaenyra demanded, her voice tinged with indignation.

Rhaegar remained silent. He couldn't tell her that he doubted her abilities or that he was entrusting their eldest son to Jeyne's care instead. If he did, there would be no peace between them.

"Rhaegar, you're always so high and mighty," Rhaenyra muttered, her fingers absently stroking the pendant around her neck as she struggled to suppress her rising temper. The discussion about the children had shattered the fragile harmony between them.

Rhaenyra bit her lower lip and sat down beside him. Rhaegar remained motionless, his gaze fixed on the ceiling.

Rhaenyra closed her eyes, gently leaning her head against his chest, trying to find a comfortable position to snuggle in. They hadn't seen each other for a long time and would soon part again. She wanted to bridge the growing distance between them.

But Rhaegar felt uneasy, as if ants were crawling all over his skin. He leaned back slightly, but Rhaenyra stopped him with a gentle hand.

"Rhaegar~~" she murmured, deliberately softening her tone as she rested her forehead against his neck.

"Ahem!" Rhaegar's face flushed with discomfort, and he abruptly stood up. Rhaenyra, caught off guard, blinked in surprise.

“You should rest. I’ll head down to the harbor and check on things. The Sea Snake should be arriving soon,” Rhaegar said, taking a deep breath before turning to leave.

He didn’t fully understand why he felt this way—whether it was his exhaustion, the lingering tension from their last argument, or something else. But with Rhaenyra so close, he couldn’t relax. He didn’t want to continue this delicate dance of closeness and distance.

Bang!

The door closed behind him, and Rhaenyra was left in stunned silence. Tears welled up in her eyes as she clutched the pendant in her hand, her mind racing. She had never been treated like this before. For the first time, she felt a deep, chilling loneliness.

...

It was early in the morning.

"Woof, woof~~"

Rhaegar was abruptly awakened by a wet, slobbery sensation on his face.

“What in the—?” he mumbled, groggy and half-asleep, as he opened his eyes to find a small black dog playfully jumping around him. Rhaegar sat up, disoriented, realizing he was covered in thick hay. He glanced around and saw that he was in a relatively clean stable.

“Sshhhh...”

Rhaegar took a moment to gather his thoughts, trying to remember how he ended up here. Then it hit him—he, the king of a great kingdom, had fallen asleep in a stable.

“Shame on you,” he muttered to himself, rubbing his forehead as he staggered out of the low-ceilinged room.

As soon as he stepped outside, a familiar figure came into view. Before Rhaegar could speak, the other person beat him to it.

Aemond leaned casually against a horse post, a playful smile on his face. “I didn’t expect your tastes to change so quickly.”

Rhaegar shot him a cold look, his expression a mix of irritation and embarrassment. “If you have something to say, say it. If not, get out of here.”

Aemond’s grin widened, his words dripping with mockery. “I heard that someone got kicked out of the palace and had to sleep on the streets for days when they first arrived.”

Rhaegar’s glare intensified, but he remained silent, refusing to dignify the taunt with a response.

Aemond, emboldened by Rhaegar’s silence, continued, “But honestly, I don’t blame you. If it were me, I’d rather sleep with an animal than that stupid woman.”

Bang!

Before he could finish, Rhaegar's fist crashed into Aemond's face like a hammer. With a dark expression, Rhaegar grabbed Aemond by the back of the head and slammed him against the horse post. "If you talk nonsense again, I'll rip out your tongue," he warned, his voice deadly serious.

Aemond winced in pain, blood trickling from his mouth. The blow had stunned him, reminding him of Rhaegar's formidable strength.

Rhaegar released him, letting him fall into the hay. "You're here, so don't make things difficult," he growled.

"Yes, Your Grace," Aemond replied, the fight knocked out of him. He struggled to his feet, sighing in resignation. "When do we leave?"

"You're not going," Rhaegar said flatly, not even bothering to look up as he scooped water from a nearby sink to drink.

"Helaena told me to go with you to explore the Smoking Sea," Aemond insisted, his tone shifting to seriousness.

Rhaegar splashed some water on his face, then reached out to pat Aemond's shoulder. "You stay. The House needs a Warden," he said, his voice firm.

Aemond watched as Rhaegar wiped his wet hand on his shoulder, then sighed, "I should go with you to the Smoking Sea."

Rhaegar withdrew his hand and asked pointedly, "If I go, how many dragons does the House have left?"

Aemond frowned, about to respond, but then paused, realizing the implications. There were many dragon riders in the family, but not enough to leave their holdings unprotected. Laena and Helaena were pregnant, their dragons temporarily grounded. Sunfyre was seriously injured, and Aegon had gone to Harrenhal for his honeymoon. Syrax and Tessarion were hardly worth mentioning in battle. If Rhaegar and Aemond both left, only Daemon and Rhaenys would remain to defend their territories.

Reading Aemond's thoughts, Rhaegar added, "Aunt Rhaenys has sent word that Daemon will join us."

That would leave only Meleys, the sole remaining adult dragon.

Aemond's expression darkened, the weight of responsibility settling heavily on him. He realized that the Targaryen holdings on both sides of the Narrow Sea needed at least two full-grown dragons to ensure their safety.

"Aemond, the House needs a Warden for now," Rhaegar said, his voice firm as he slammed his fist into Aemond's chest. "I want you to swear that you will serve my eldest son, now and in the future."

Rhaegar knew that, despite his confidence, anything could happen on the Smoking Sea. He couldn't afford to leave things to chance.

Aemond remained silent, the gravity of the situation sinking in.

Rhaegar's gaze was deep and unwavering. "Swear your loyalty to Baelon. If you break this oath, your fire will be extinguished in the darkness."

"I swear..." Aemond's single eye, dark and inscrutable, met Rhaegar's. "If I break my oath, my fire will go out in the darkness."

"Very well." Rhaegar smiled, then reached into his robe and withdrew a stone tablet, placing it in Aemond's hands. Aemond looked down at it, noting several lines of High Valyrian script. The first two words translated to "Bronze."

A spark of interest lit in Aemond's eye as he carefully studied the tablet.

"You're already proficient in binding spells," Rhaegar remarked, his tone light but encouraging. "You'll master the rune system quickly."

Among their siblings, after Rhaenyra and Helaena, Daeron had been the third to learn the "Bronze" rune. But with the shifting circumstances, it was now time to teach Aegon and Aemond as well.

"Thank you," Aemond murmured, turning his head to express his gratitude.

Suddenly, a deafening roar echoed across Lys, reverberating for miles.

"Roar..."

A massive, scarlet, snake-like creature soared through the clouds, hovering above the city. Caraxes, the Blood Wurm.

Rhaegar's words faltered as he looked up, his eyes narrowing at the sight.

"Land, Caraxes!" A figure atop the dragon commanded with a sardonic smile, his arms outstretched to the wind.

"Roar!"

Caraxes unleashed a torrent of Dragonfire, descending with a dramatic flare. With a loud pop, the dragon landed before the people of Lys, flames still licking around it. From within the scarlet blaze, a man and his dragon emerged, striding forward with ostentatious confidence.

Only Rhaegar saw what lay beneath the display. Daemon's spirit had transformed, brimming with renewed vitality.

"Dark Sister!" Aemond's eye blazed with intensity as he noticed the sword strapped to Daemon's back—the legendary blade of their House.

Rhaegar followed Aemond's gaze, realizing for the first time that Daemon was indeed carrying the Dark Sister, the ancestral sword of House Targaryen.

...

The Harbor

The massive fleet of House Velaryon was docked, its sails furled and hulls creaking softly against the piers.

“Hurry up, and be careful with the crates,” Addam commanded, his brow furrowed as he directed the sailors unloading the cargo.

“Roar!”

A scarlet dragon suddenly swooped overhead, its roar piercing the air as its claws scraped against the solid stone floor of the harbor. The sailors glanced up in alarm, then collectively exhaled in relief.

Addam echoed their sentiments, muttering to himself, “Meleys...”

Bang!

Rhaenys, clad in black armor, dismounted from the dragon’s back with practiced ease. She removed her leather gloves and strode purposefully toward the young man who was watching her with a mix of admiration and awe.

“Princess!” Addam quickly bowed, not daring to meet her gaze.

Rhaenys waved a hand dismissively, her tone calm but commanding. “Look up. Let me take a good look at you.”

“Yes, Princess.” Addam hesitated briefly before lifting his head, revealing a young and handsome face.

Rhaenys paused, slightly taken aback by the resemblance to her husband. She reached out and gently touched his face, her expression softening with mixed emotions. “You have a distinctive face. Your mother must have been a beauty.”

Startled by her gesture, Addam quickly stepped back, careful not to overstep his bounds.

“Rhaenys!”

A deep voice called out from above. Sea Snake descended from the deck, his gaze briefly settling on Addam before turning to his wife. His expression was stern as he asked, “Have you finished your work?”

“Not yet, my lord.” Addam, sensing the shift in atmosphere, wisely withdrew from the scene.

The Sea Snake’s demeanor remained composed as he approached Rhaenys, his usual calmness masking whatever thoughts lay beneath.

Chapter 589: The Sea Snake’s Sigh

It was a bright morning. Rhaegar was making his usual rounds of the harbor, where the sailors were as busy as bees.

"Your Grace."

As he approached, the Sea Snake descended from a large ship, greeting him respectfully.

"How are the provisions coming along, Lord Corlys?" Rhaegar asked, noticing a herd of goats being driven onto the ship.

The Sea Snake, confident and assured, replied, "Don't worry, there's enough to feed three dragons for a month."

"That's good," Rhaegar responded, continuing to survey the harbor. He had a hunch that the Sea Snake had something on his mind.

"Your Grace, I have something to report." Sure enough, the Sea Snake leaned in slightly, taking the initiative.

Rhaegar withdrew his gaze and smiled faintly. "Tell me," he thought, curious about what the old Sea Snake wanted.

"Recently, the pirates around the Stepstones have become more rampant, seriously affecting maritime transportation," the Sea Snake reported gravely. "In my opinion, since Prince Aegon's Sunfyre has been injured, we should send a reliable fleet to deal with it decisively."

"Oh, which fleet should we send?" Rhaegar asked, feigning surprise as he glanced at the large ships in the harbor, all flying the Seahorse banners.

"As you can see, I have mobilized the entire fleet of House Velaryon," the Sea Snake said proudly. "The Smoking Sea is dangerous, but you don't need all the ships to go. Leave half of them to deal with the bandits."

Rhaegar chuckled. "That's a good suggestion." Looking at the dozens of large ships in the harbor, he realized that the Sea Snake had almost exhausted House Velaryon's resources. Leaving half of them to clear out the pirates was as much a political maneuver as anything else.

"It's all for the sake of our respective houses," he thought. "There's nothing more to say."

"I thank you on behalf of the sailors, Your Grace," the Sea Snake said sincerely, fully aware of the significance of his actions.

Rhaegar waved his hand and asked, "Before we set off, is there anything else you need?" The Smoking Sea is fraught with danger, and less than 10 out of 100 survivors make it back.

The Sea Snake, a mere mortal, couldn't afford to be too lenient when it came to the fleet's confrontation with the Smoking Sea and its perils. Hearing the king's question, the Sea Snake had a sudden inspiration and decisively said, "Your Grace, I have a first mate who once saved Prince Maekar and me. He is an upright and loyal young man."

"I know. Addam, right?" Rhaegar's eyes narrowed slightly, sensing a shift in the conversation.

"Yes, that's him," the Sea Snake admitted readily but struggled to find the right words. "If you will allow me to accompany you to the Smoking Sea, he will command the fleet of House Velaryon. I believe he is more reliable than a young girl like Rhaena."

Rhaegar's smile faded, sensing something amiss. The Sea Snake's large hands clenched, and he hesitated before adding, "Rhaena is still too young to command the unruly naval forces. She is more suitable for a position in the palace."

Rhaegar frowned, scrutinizing the man before him. The hesitation in Corlys's words was telling.

Rhaegar's tone hardened. "Lord Corlys, Rhaena is your chosen heir. I don't think the Lord of Driftmark needs to be proficient in sailing."

"Of course not," the Sea Snake conceded, taking a deep breath before making a final plea. "But a young girl who gets seasick before she even boards a ship is hardly the person to lead House Velaryon in the service of the realm."

The longer Corlys spent with House Targaryen, the more he saw through their intricate schemes. Compared to his granddaughter, who was only distantly related by blood, he favored his bastard, who was also of the salt and the sea.

Rhaegar caught the underlying message and responded, displeased, "Lord Corlys, Rhaena is the daughter of Laena, a dragon with blood and fire."

"That's just a little dragon that won't grow up!" the Sea Snake retorted, his voice rising unnecessarily.

Rhaegar's expression turned icy, his gaze cold. 'What a joke!' he thought. 'He had begged and pleaded to adopt Rhaena as his own so that she could inherit Driftmark after Laenor's death. Now that he had raised a capable bastard, he wanted to discard her like a worn-out shoe. What does the Targaryen bloodline mean to him?'

Rhaegar sneered, about to reprimand him, when a sudden voice cut through the tension.

"Corlys!"

Rhaenys's deep voice interrupted the conversation. Rhaegar raised an eyebrow, glancing out over the deck. Rhaenys had appeared out of nowhere, her elbows resting on the railing, staring at her husband and nephew.

"Aunt," Rhaegar greeted her, frowning inwardly. His mind was exhausted, and his guard was down. He hadn't even noticed her approach.

"Your Grace." Rhaenys nodded slightly, her gaze shifting to her silent husband.

"Corlys, we haven't finished discussing what happened earlier."

"Your Grace, I still have some ships to inspect," Corlys replied, bowing before departing, feeling lost.

Rhaegar didn't stop him and looked up at his aunt, who seemed preoccupied. Rhaenys, feigning strength, changed the subject. "Daemon is back."

"I saw that," Rhaegar replied with a nod, adding, "He's very proud, not at all like someone who's suffered a setback."

Rhaenys considered this for a moment before revealing the truth: "I gave him Dark Sister back."

"I saw that too," Rhaegar responded, his eyes widening in surprise, waiting for more.

Rhaenys didn't hesitate. "Daemon is an integral part of the family. It would be good for him, and for the family, if he were to become a capable Prince of the Targaryens."

At fifty, Daemon was the most insightful among them. What he had pursued all his life was nothing more than the word "recognition." Returning Dark Sister to him and taking on the responsibilities of the Prince of the Targaryens was the only way to bind the Rogue Prince to an unbreakable yoke.

Rhaegar was quiet, lowering his head in deep thought. He had never considered making Daemon a Prince of the Targaryens. Deep down, he believed a good uncle was an unreliable presence.

Rhaenys remained silent, waiting patiently for her nephew to decide.

The waves gently lapped the shore, and the salty sea breeze blew. Rhaegar's thoughts surged, a thousand words buried in his heart, but he only said, "Give him a chance to prove himself on the Smoking Sea."

With that, he turned and left the harbor.

...

At noon, everything was ready, and the fleet set sail from the harbor.

"Roar..."

A scarlet dragon, serpentine and fierce, glided past, roaring as it leaped across the vast sea.

Whoo-hoo-hoo!

The horn sounded, and the flag of the seahorse fluttered in the wind. The Sea Snake, clad in silver-gray armor, stood solemnly at the front of the deck. The ships moved forward, forming a medium-sized fleet.

"May the Merman King bless us," the Sea Snake whispered, glancing back at the ships still anchored in the harbor. Half of the fleet had set sail, heading toward the Stepstones.

On the lead ship, a figure with silver hair and dark skin stood tall. The Sea Snake watched in awe, silently praying, 'I hope I've made the right choice and will return safely.'

"Roar!"

Suddenly, a young black dragon flew overhead, its scarlet wings flapping furiously, making the sails creak in the wind. The Sea Snake's body swayed, his gaze locked on the dragon, his emotions a turbulent mix.

Once upon a time, his eldest son had tamed Seasmoke as a child and sailed with him on the back of his dragon.

...

Topless Tower, the Queen's Chambers

"Look, Grandpa's off!"

The children were noisy and boisterous as Rhaena leaned out of the window to watch the fleet of ships departing in a flurry.

"The Blood Wyrn is so cool," Aemon said, holding Baela's hand as they both gazed up at the scarlet dragon soaring overhead.

"Okay, go play," Rhaenyra said wearily, leaning against the headboard as she sent the children off. The estrangement between the siblings was exhausting.

"Oh~" The children, sensing her fatigue, left together.

Rhaenyra sighed and struggled to her feet.



Roar!

The sound of a dragon's roar reverberated for miles, shaking the tables and chairs in the tower. Rhaenyra stuck her head out of the window, peering at the cliffs that stretched across the coast.

Hoo!

A massive black dragon stepped forward, crushing rocks beneath its sharp claws before spreading its wings and soaring into the sky. The dragon's shadow swept past, shaking the fleet below as if it were a curtain blocking out the sun. The first two dragons ahead of it were smaller and more agile.

Rhaenyra was transfixed, her eyes fixed on the tall, dark figure riding the dragon.

Knock, knock!

The door opened, and the voice of her companion, Elinda, came through. "Your Grace, shall I wash you?" Without waiting for a response, Elinda, dressed as a maid, entered, carrying a basin in her hands.

Rhaenyra leaned against the window frame, allowing her companion to comb her silver hair into a delicate braid.

"Are you all right?" Elinda asked, her eyes filled with worry.

Rhaenyra, momentarily distracted, turned to see the family sword, "The Realm's Delight," hanging on the wall. By now, the fleet had turned into tiny black dots on the sea, and the three dragon shadows had disappeared, leaving no trace behind.

As if in a trance, Rhaenyra walked over to the wall and took down "The Realm's Delight." She unsheathed the sword, its blade cold and sharp, humming as it cut through the air. She held the sword sideways, as if seeking solace in it. Gradually, her dazed mood began to lift.

'I am The Realm's Delight,' she thought, 'the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms and the Queen of Dragons. My goal is to become Queen of Visenya. In Rhaegar's absence, I will be the one to keep peace in the Seven Kingdoms.'

"Your Grace," Elinda said, terrified and too scared to approach "The Realm's Delight."

Rhaenyra glanced back at her, her voice surprisingly firm. "I'm fine."

...

The Roofless Dragonpit

"Aren't you going to see him off?"

Mysaria stood a little further away, cradling a curly-haired puppy in her arms. Laena shook her head gently, replying calmly, "Daemon is not a sentimental person, and neither am I."

"That's true. He's always gone after making a promise," Mysaria said, shaking her head with a laugh tinged with disappointment and self-deprecation.

"This time is different." Laena's voice was soft, yet there was an inexplicable confidence in her words. She lifted her pale, emaciated face, a quiet determination emanating from her.

Daemon had seen her before he left, and the two had shared a tender moment. He had made no promises, but his determination to capture a young dragon and bring it back was unmistakable.

Mysaria frowned deeply, hesitating for a moment before murmuring, "Maybe..."

...

Myr, the Magister's Palace

"Roar..." A light gray dragon shadow flashed across the sky, darting into the lush garden before curling up its massive body.

"Where is it?" Nettles, dressed in a rough hemp robe and holding a bamboo staff, emerged from the palace. She was clad in the attire of a Dragonkeeper. As she ran out, Baelon and Dany followed close behind.

With a scarred, crooked nose, Nettles shouted loudly, "Come out, you cowardly little dragon!"

"Stop shouting, you don't have to do that," Baelon said, embarrassed as he tried to stop her.

"It's okay!" Nettles raised her chin defiantly and patted the barren hillock. "We'll play hide-and-seek, and I'll chase it back to Dragonstone."

"Prince!" At that moment, Syrio appeared, walking lightly, his fluffy brown curls slightly oily.

Baelon turned around, his expression shifting to one of unease. Syrio bent down and whispered in his ear.

"What!?" Baelon's eyes widened in alarm as he exclaimed, "Braavos has sent a fleet to Pentos?"

Chapter 590: The Return of the Blacks and Greens

Time flies, and it was already mid-July. The fleet had set out early in the morning, crossing the Narrow Sea, the Volantis Sea, and finally arriving at the fog-shrouded Smoking Sea.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal let out a fierce roar, its gaze sweeping warily over the Smoking Sea, vividly recalling the last time they had ventured into these treacherous waters.

"Don't be afraid, old friend," Rhaegar said solemnly, holding a map in his hand. "This time, we're not going in blindly."

"Roar..."

Cannibal's green eyes gleamed with hostility as it stared at the smoky barrier ahead. The wild dragon's instincts warned of the dangers lurking within the land of smoke and sea.

A sudden roar cut through the air.

Daemon turned abruptly and, with a proud tone, commanded, "Follow me!"

Rhaegar, momentarily taken aback, patted the Cannibal's broad back. "Don't lose!"

"Roar!"

Cannibal's green pupils narrowed, and it surged forward, crashing into the thick, sulfurous fog, charging ahead to catch up.

"Roar!"

Iragaxys hesitated briefly before following, not wanting to be left behind.

Below, on the sea, the Sea Snake gazed solemnly at the Smoking Sea. His lips, cracked from the harsh sea air, parted as he gave the command, "Let's go!"

Whoo-hoo-hoo!

The fleet echoed with the mournful sound of horns as the sailors sailed into the Smoking Sea, as if they were marching to their deaths.

...

For several days, they sailed on. The sky remained misty, the sea deathly quiet, and everything was eerily calm.

Hoo-hoo!

The Cannibal's green pupils narrowed slightly as it soared through the thick fog.

"Roar!"

Iragaxys whinnied in panic, following closely behind, afraid of getting lost.

"Slow down, old friend," Rhaegar urged, glancing around as he lit a glass candle in his hand.

Hum...

The wick caught fire, illuminating the scene for miles around. The sky and sea were cloaked in a dense mist, and the water lapped gently against unseen rocks.

After confirming that the route was clear of danger, Rhaegar pulled out a weathered stone disk covered in cracks, using fire magic to move the pointer.

"Roar!"

Iragaxys startled and instinctively moved away from the compass. Rhaegar gave the dragon a reassuring glance before retrieving a small, dark dragon scale from his cloak.

There were two main objectives for entering the Smoking Sea this time: to find the dragon horn buried underground and to capture the blue young dragon left behind. Iragaxys and the blue dragon were siblings, and the scale provided guidance for the dragon compass. The little one had been brought along to help lure out the young dragon.

Hum...

The dragon-finding compass glowed dimly as the pointer spun in circles. Rhaegar licked his lips, carefully tucking the compass away. The compass indicated that they were still far from the young dragon, and the power of a single scale was limited.

A sudden roar cut through the air as Caraxes broke through the fog, revealing its full form after a long glide.

"What's ahead?" Rhaegar shouted, using his binding magic to communicate.

Daemon gripped the saddle tightly, his voice solemn. "There's nothing ahead. It's roughly the same path I took before." He had once ventured to a lost continent—likely a major landmass in the Lands of the Long Summer, which included a certain fire peak. Exploring that continent promised great rewards.

"Then let's go." Rhaegar replaced the glass candle, casting its light forward to guide their way. With so many skills at his disposal, this journey would be far different from the last.

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Lys, the Council Chamber.

Tap, tap, tap...

The sound of orderly footsteps echoed through the corridor as Rhaenyra, clad in black dragon-riding clothes, strode in.

"Your Grace," Erryk and Lorent, the Kingsguard, stood guard at the door.

Rhaenyra gave a faint "hmm" in acknowledgment and pushed the door open.

Bang!

Inside, Aemond sat at the head of the table, his legs casually propped up on the desk—a posture dripping with arrogance.

Rhaenyra frowned slightly and warned, "That's not the position you should be in."

"Is that so?" Aemond leaned back in his chair, a smirk playing on his lips. "It's quite comfortable."

"Aemond, stop it," Daeron, standing across from him, interjected with a stern look. Without Rhaegar present, Aemond was getting too comfortable, neglecting the gravity of their situation.

"Tsk, fine." Aemond rolled his eyes, swinging his legs off the table and adjusting his posture.

Rhaenyra narrowed her eyes, anger simmering beneath the surface at his provocation. Taking a deep breath, she reminded herself to remain patient. "Let's get down to business."

She shook her head and sat down, her gaze sweeping across the room. Apart from the three siblings, only Mysaria, the White Worm, and Varys, the steward of the Topleless Tower, were present. Varys, as always, maintained a placid smile, staying out of matters beyond the Topleless Tower's walls. Rhaenyra hadn't expected him to contribute, and instead turned her attention to Mysaria, the new steward of Lys.

"Your Grace," Mysaria, her pregnancy evident, spoke with a solemn tone. "The pirates of the Stepstones have grown bolder, but thanks to Addam's efforts, peace has been restored."

"He is a true warrior," Rhaenyra nodded approvingly, satisfied with the Sea Snake's choice of fleet commander.

Aemond interrupted, "What else?"

Rhaegar had been gone for two months, and much had transpired on both sides of the Narrow Sea.

Mysaria shot him a glance, frowning slightly. "Princess Rhaenys reports that Braavos and Pentos have formed an alliance against Qohor and are sending their fleets to stir up trouble near The Gullet."

Aemond's face darkened. Qohor was his domain, and Braavos and Pentos were acting as if they could drive him out with impunity.

Rhaenyra seized the moment to sneer, "Your rashness and impulsiveness have given the enemy an excuse for revenge."

Braavos and Pentos, usually sworn enemies, now shared a common threat: House Targaryen. If the two Free Cities truly intended to help the people of Qohor regain their city, they would have recruited sellswords to attack, not sent their fleets to hover menacingly near The Gullet. They were testing the Iron Throne's defenses, aware that Rhaegar, Daemon, and the Sea Snake had gone to the Smoking Sea, and believing this to be the Iron Throne's most vulnerable moment. Their goal was clear—revenge and the suppression of Targaryen rule.

Aemond, ever sensitive to mockery, retorted coldly, "Vultures are vultures. They only crave flesh and blood." In other words, he believed that even if he hadn't taken Qohor, the revenge would have come regardless.

Rhaenyra snorted in disgust, choosing not to argue further.

Daeron looked around, attempting to diffuse the tension. "The fleet is probing The Gullet's defenses. They probably won't attack, right?"

"They dare!" Aemond snarled, drawing his one-eyed dagger and slamming it down on the table.

Mysaria met his outburst with a cold stare, analyzing the situation with calculated calm. "My suggestion is that we send Addam's fleet back to Driftmark to keep the enemy out of the city."

The royal fleet had only one squadron stationed on Dragonstone, which couldn't be easily mobilized. The Stepstones, along with the Free Cities of Myr and Lys, had not yet developed a strong fleet. Facing the elite navies of Braavos and Pentos, the only viable option was to recall the fleet of House Velaryon.

Rhaenyra nodded in agreement and instructed the tower master, "Send a message to Addam later."

"Yes, Your Grace," Varys replied, his hands tucked into his pockets, his demeanor obedient.

Mysaria coughed lightly and suggested, "Addam has done an excellent job eliminating the pirates. To demonstrate the Queen's wisdom, perhaps he should be knighted."

Rhaenyra considered this for a moment and agreed, "Granted."

'If you want a horse to run, you have to feed it,' she thought, knowing that the Sea Snake had entrusted Addam to her with the expectation of earning military honors.

"Damn it, when will this boring council meeting end?" Aemond grumbled, clearly losing patience with the proceedings.

"If you find it boring, you're free to leave," Rhaenyra responded, her expression unchanged, no longer willing to tolerate his rudeness.

Aemond sneered. "Are you ordering me?"

Bang! Rhaenyra slammed her hand on the table, pointing directly at him. "I am the Queen, the Queen of Lys, and you are in my territory now."

"Queen?" Aemond retorted with a mocking smile. He leaned over the table, taunting, "Rhaegar didn't even bother to touch you."

Aemond's sharp eyes caught the movement, and he too reached for the black hilt of his sword, his expression darkening.

The tension between them grew as they inched closer, on the brink of a violent clash.

Sensing the danger, Daeron quickly intervened, pulling Aemond away from the table. "Lady Mysaria, if you have something to say, say it quickly," he urged. "If you don't speak now, you might not get another chance. Our brother has only been gone for two months—we can't afford to turn on each other."

"Hmph!" Aemond snorted, shaking off Daeron's grip and returning to his seat, though his demeanor remained tense.

Rhaenyra's cold gaze didn't waver, her hand still sweaty from gripping her sword's hilt.

"We need a dragon," Mysaria interjected, her voice sharp and urgent. "Princess Rhaenys can't patrol The Gullet and the upper Narrow Sea alone. She needs a dragon rider."

"Who will go?" Aemond asked, dropping his sword onto the table, showing no inclination to volunteer.

According to Rhaegar's plan, Aemond was tasked with overseeing Dorne and the Stepstones, including the lower Narrow Sea and Volantis. He had no time for additional duties.

Rhaenyra narrowed her eyes, realizing she was the only adult dragon rider in the House who could be spared. But she hesitated, wondering how Aemond might behave if she left Lys.

"I'll go," Daeron offered unexpectedly.

Rhaenyra blinked in surprise. "Your dragon is still young," she said, concerned.

"It's fine," Daeron replied, scratching his head with a smile. Compared to staying in Lys and dealing with the escalating tension, patrolling The Gullet and the upper Narrow Sea seemed a far more appealing option. Aemond's sudden shift to arrogance and hostility was unsettling, and Daeron preferred to avoid further conflict.

Rhaenyra considered it carefully, then nodded. Tessarion was nearly fully grown, after all. "Go, but promise not to start a war. Your first priority is your own safety."

"I promise," Daeron said, nodding vigorously, puffing out his chest with a mix of determination and youthful eagerness.

"Be careful when you encounter the enemy, and don't panic," Aemond advised, idly twirling his one-eyed dagger as he offered his hard-won experience.

Daeron accepted the advice humbly and walked out of the chamber. Mysaria and Varys exchanged glances before silently following him.

In the now-emptied council hall, Aemond sat upright, defiance burning in his one eye. Rhaenyra stared at him for a long moment before stepping back and exiting the room.