

“Arianne,” Doran said, seated behind his desk in his solar. “You wished to speak with me?”

“I finally did as you’ve wanted me to all these years and tried to reconnect with Mother,” Arianne said, her voice flat as she sat down.

“That’s wonderful,” Doran smiled. “It has pained me this many years to see you so hurt by her leaving.”

“Not enough to tell me she wanted to take me with her,” Arianne spat, and his eyes widened slightly before closing as he sighed.

“She told you that?” Doran asked.

“Do you deny it?” Arianne asked.

“No, I don’t,” Doran replied. “I was just surprised that she said it.”

“It came out as we were arguing,” Arianne muttered. “She did try to convince me not to be too angry with you once she realized what she’d said, if it helps. Why did you not tell me?”

“You were a girl when she left,” Doran sighed, “a young and impressionable girl, whom I could not allow to be raised in a place as distant and different as Norvos. You’re my heir and...”

“I can understand not telling me then,” Arianne scowled. “I would have begged you to let me at least visit her if I’d known, and that would have had the potential to cause countless problems, plus traveling through Essos wasn’t exactly safe back then. I also imagine that you and Mother weren’t on the best of terms at the point where she left...”

“I didn’t keep it from you to hurt her if that’s what you’re thinking,” Doran argued.

“Why did you not tell me later?” Arianne sighed. “Why not tell me before I left for Pentos at the least?”

“By the time you were old enough that I didn’t have to fear how you’d react to that revelation, so many years had passed,” Doran replied. “I had tried so many times to get you to write back to Mellario or even read her letters rather than immediately tossing them into the nearest fire, and I figured if, by then, I tried to tell you about how she’d asked to have you fostered in Norvos, you’d think I was lying to you.”

“I...” Arianne went to say.

“I’m sorry,” Doran sighed, “both for not telling you the full truth about that and for the whole situation. I knew that Norvos was different from Dorne, radically so, and in trying to get your mother to adapt to our ways, I set all you children on a path to abandonment.”

“She told me about how life is there,” Arianne murmured. “It sounds like the eighth hell, to be honest.”

Doran laughed at that until he coughed and settled that with a sip of his Summer Islander golden wine.

“It’s not that bad, but it does seem rather like a different world,” he sighed. “Dorne is unique among the kingdoms of Westeros, and those noblemen and noblewomen who move here to become husbands and wives to the heirs of our holdfasts always need to adjust to not just our warmer weather but our ways. I imagined your mother being like Daenerys Targaryen, coming here, requiring time and attention to get used to how life is in Dorne, and then finding happiness. It just wasn’t to be, though.”

“Well, you can hardly be blamed for that,” Arianne muttered, “and I don’t truly blame her entirely either.”

“I am glad that you managed to develop some kind of relationship with her again, Arianne,” Doran smiled. “It has pained me more than I could say to know that all three of you have had to live without her.”

“Well, as my darling husband made clear to me over and over again until I was ready to tear my hair out, we can be left far more permanently separated from our mothers than my brothers and I have been,” Arianne murmured. “I am your heir, as you said, Father, and while I can mostly understand your explanation here, we can’t keep secrets of this magnitude from each other going forward...”

“Arianne...” Doran went to say.

“No,” Arianne cut him off, her eyes blazing. “I am your heir; I will be the Princess of Dorne someday, and more than that, I am a woman grown, a wife, and a mother. I need to know that I have your trust and you don’t still see me as that miserable little girl who wondered why her mother left her.”

“I don’t,” Doran assured her, leaning forward and reaching for her hand. “You’ve matured into a wonderful, capable woman, one who I know I could leave Dorne to if I dropped dead this very moment.”

“Let’s not get maudlin now,” Arianne murmured, and he chuckled.

“I am far from the strongest of men, my daughter,” Doran sighed. “The maesters don’t think I’m likely to depart this life any time soon, but I know I will not live as long as my parents did, and I’ve come to terms with that.”

“Father...” Arianne breathed, feeling her chest tighten.

“Hopefully I’ll live long enough to see Trystane wed and to meet a few more of my grandchildren,” Doran sighed, leaning back in his chair. “I do know that when I go, though, it will be with a capable successor waiting to take my place. I don’t have any secrets of that magnitude, Arianne, at least not that concern you. I swear that.”

“I believe you,” Arianne murmured.

“So you’re leaving on the morrow?” Doran asked, and she nodded.

“The lot of us,” Arianne replied. “We’ll all be out sailing when the fighting begins, as I’m sure the king already assured you.”

“He did,” Doran nodded. “I’ll be spending much of the time in prayer anyway.”

“Probably not a bad idea,” Arianne sighed, feeling a little better than she had before she sat down.

“Ah, Oldtown,” Sarella sighed next to her as they drew close to the city.

Her words started Arianne out of her reverie, and she looked over at her cousin, who was still dressed in her simple brown tunic, breeches, and cloak. She’d told them all that she would depart their ship once they reached port, change clothes in a nearby tavern whose owner she knew well, and then make her way back to the Citadel from there. It seemed like an unnecessary bit of obfuscation to Arianne, who doubted that the maesters would have people posted at the harbor looking for her, but she’d reasoned that it was hardly much of a bother and that it was more than worth it to make sure that none linked her to them.

“Still as fond of the place as ever?” she asked, and her cousin smiled.

“I love it well,” Sarella replied. “From the first time Father took me to visit it, I’ve adored it. The layout is so much better than that of King’s Landing; it smells much better, and even the basic feel of it is nice and light. Plus, the Hightower is gorgeous.”

“That, I cannot deny,” Arianne murmured, looking at the tallest structure in Westeros.

At just over seven hundred and fifty feet, it was the tallest tower in the known world and stood even taller than the Wall when it was still around. With it gone, there was nothing left on the continent that came close to it, and in truth, only Casterly Rock exceeded it in height, though given that that was essentially a well-carved mountain, it didn’t really count.

“It’s prettier than the Sandship, at least,” Tyene chuckled.

“The Sandship was not constructed for beauty, my daughter,” Oberyne smiled. “Our purely Dornish ancestors did not have nearly as great of an appreciation for such things before the Rhoynar came.”

“I guess much of what we think of uniquely Dornish comes from them,” Daemon reasoned.

“In terms of architecture, art, and culture, the Rhoynar introduced much to Dorne,” Oberyne nodded. “They were changed as well, of course, and our cousins in Myr and the Isle of Women are quite different from us, but Nymeria did much to change us.”

“You visited the Isle of Women?” Daemon asked.

“I can’t imagine how disappointed you were when you found there were men there,” Obara teased, earning a grin from her father.

“Nothing could be further from the truth,” Oberyne chuckled. “When Doran sought to develop greater trade ties with the Summer Isles, I couldn’t resist the opportunity to see how the descendants of those Rhoynar who remained behind there after Nymeria decided to continue on to Westeros differed from us. There were more similarities than I expected, but the people were quite different too.”

“How so?” Arianne asked, curious.

“They had intermixed with the locals, of course, and so the resemblance was nowhere near on the level of how much many from Myr look like us,” Oberyne replied. “They also worshiped the local gods, having converted to an even greater extent than our ancestors did.”

“So there weren’t any people like the Orphans of the Greenblood?” Nymeria asked.

“Not one that I found,” Oberyne replied. “Funny enough, those who spoke the common tongue of Westeros did so with a significantly different accent than that of the people I met on the other islands, one which sounded a little more like our own. Their architecture also bore distinct similarities to ours. The Summer Islanders have views of sexuality even more relaxed than our own, so I noticed little difference there. All in all, it was a most enlightening journey.”

“My prince,” Blue Fly called out as he joined them. “We will be docking soon. The king’s ship is already in the port.”

“Yes, I see it,” Daemon nodded. “See to it.”

The eunuch nodded at that and left to oversee the last stretch of their journey.

“If I’m not mistaken, there’s a sizeable welcoming party there already,” Oberyne murmured, looking out at the shore. “I wonder if Baelor’s with them.”

“What’s the history between you two again?” Daemon asked. “I remember there being a story, but I can’t for the life of me remember what it was.”

“Elia and I visited Oldtown with our mother when we were young,” Oberyne replied with a fond grin. “Mother was good friends with Joanna Lannister, Lord Tywin’s late wife, and hoped to arrange betrothals between us and the twins. We stopped here on the way, and, having brought a selection of the hot peppers that we are so fond of to give as gifts along the way, I dared him to eat one. To his credit, he managed it without too much initial difficulty beyond a reddened face and watering eyes, but it did not sit well in his system, and within a few hours he was...having issues. Being a young and, admittedly, immature young man then, I named him Baelor Breakwind, and afterward Elia couldn’t look at him without laughing.”

“Much to his absolute joy, I’m sure,” Arianne said sarcastically as her cousins giggled.

“He was less than pleased with me, though by the time we met again some years later, he’d gotten over it,” Oberyne replied. “Knocking me on my ass in the joust his father held during that visit likely helped.”

“The poor boy must have been mortified, you wicked thing,” Ellaria giggled, wrapping her arms around him and resting her head on his shoulder.

“You know all too well how wicked I am, my love,” Oberyne rumbled, grinning at her as he turned around and grasped her waist.

Daemon had been surprised to learn that Oberyne was planning to bring her, though given that the plan was, provided everything didn’t go very poorly, for him to participate in the tourney, so he supposed it made sense. The tourney happening at all largely depended on how well he and the Unsullied he’d selected for this adventure managed to contain and neutralize the threat of the firewyrms, but either way, they knew that they’d be piling everyone they cared about onto ships before the visit to the capital began, so the risk there was minimal.

Daemon looked out at the city in quiet contemplation as the Silence drew closer and closer and was so engrossed in his thoughts that Arianne had to nudge him when it was finally time to move. As he left his ship, he saw the Hightower delegation that was standing patiently there, waiting for him, and smiled. It turned out not to be led by Baelor Hightower, Lord Leyton's eldest son, who he imagined had been there to greet his father earlier, but by another of the aged lord's sons. It took him a moment to recall his name, and it was only when he recalled how much younger the man's younger sons were that he finally remembered.

"Ser Garth," he said, smiling warmly as he reached the knight.

"Prince Daemon," Ser Garth Hightower replied, bowing his head. "It is an honor."

"I believe you've met my lovely wife before," Daemon murmured, palming Arianne's lower back as she offered the knight her hand, which he quickly kissed.

"I have, though you were still a young girl then, if I recall correctly," Ser Garth replied.

"I was," Arianne replied. "My uncle came here for a tourney, and I bothered my father until he said I could accompany him."

Garth laughed at that and looked out at the rest of his party, smiling when he saw Oberyn.

"Prince Oberyn," he nodded. "Goodness, so many princes and princesses we have here. What does one call a group of princes and princesses, anyway? It's a flock of geese, a pack of wolves..."

"An indulgence?" Oberyn quipped, and he chuckled.

"Your word, not mine," Ser Garth smiled. "Welcome, all of you, to Oldtown. My father never imagined when Baelor and I talked him into holding this tourney that it would draw so much of the royal family."

"We've been in a celebratory mood for some time now, and my father thought we deserved a bit of relaxing fun," Daemon replied.

"Baelor told us all about the unexpected excitement that came during the royal wedding," Ser Garth replied.

"Your brother was there?" Daemon asked, furrowing his brow in confusion. "I fear I missed him."

"We saw your sister Lynesse with Ser Jaime," Arianne added, and he nodded.

"Father sent him to represent the family, but alas, he ate something that he contends now must have been off on the road just before he reached the capital and spent almost his entire stay there locked away recovering as his stomach was turned by it," Ser Garth replied. "He's feeling better now, of course."

"Something for which we're all glad," Daemon smiled. "I must confess that I've never actually been to Oldtown."

“Truly?” Ser Garth asked, surprised. “Well, we will simply need to give you a tour before you go. Come, and I’ll point out a few of the more noteworthy landmarks that aren’t the Citadel and my home.”

“You are most kind,” Daemon smiled, following the older knight and the rest of the welcoming party as the rest of his family filed out of the ship and joined them.

As Ser Garth launched into a rather lengthy explanation of the city’s founding, the prince noticed Sarella slipping away as planned and smiled, figuring that he’d check on her later through Brynden’s eyes and make sure that everything was set up for the next day.

“I must say, Oldtown is just like I remember,” Elia smiled later that night at the feast.

“I still remember how awed you looked when Princess Mara brought you and your brother here, my queen,” Leyton chuckled.

“It was the largest city I had ever seen up to that point,” Elia smiled. “It would be some years before I ever saw the capital, and my parents had never let me see any of the Free Cities.”

“This is exquisite,” Rhaegar murmured as he swallowed his latest bite of the odd red stew he’d been served. “What’s in it?”

“It’s primarily octopus, your Grace,” Rhea Florent, Leyton’s most recent wife, replied. “It’s cooked until tender in a spiced broth of red wine and some animal stock. We brought a cook from Tyrosh into our service some years ago, and he’s introduced us to so many fascinating dishes.”

“I’ll need to get him to share the recipe for our kitchens,” Rhaegar smiled.

Daemon watched the exchange quietly, studying Lord Leyton. The Old Man of Oldtown, as he’d heard some call him, was a figure he’d never met before. He had definitely earned the title in his long life, being older than the likes of Lord Tywin Lannister, and he had apparently become quite the recluse in his old age. Rumor had it that he hadn’t left the Hightower in over a decade, letting his sons handle any business that required more of him than he could manage in his home, and yet as he looked at the old man, he didn’t truly understand why. He walked with a slight shuffle, but not as badly as plenty of people his age that the prince had met, and his mind seemed sharp.

His wife was a pretty young thing, looking not a day older than thirty with long auburn hair and bright blue eyes. She was the old lord’s fourth wife and had given him no children, something that he imagined was more due to him than to her, though one could never truly say. Seeing her sit next to Lady Malora was quite funny, given that Lord Leyton’s eldest daughter was probably around two decades older than her, but then, she was apparently younger than all but her husband’s three youngest children.

“So, will you be participating in the tourney, your grace?” Malora asked just as Daemon thought of her, and his father chuckled.

“No, no,” Rhaegar replied. “My tourney days are behind me, I’m afraid.”

“You’re not so old yet, Your Grace,” Baelor chuckled. “I still remember how spectacular you were on a horse when you bested Ser Ar...”

He trailed off then, remembering to his horror just which tourney he was remembering, and Rhaegar quickly decided to show mercy, chuckling warmly.

“Ser Arthur will be competing,” the king said. “I, on the other hand, intend to watch.”

“As will I,” Leyton murmured, earning surprised looks from most of the royal family.

“Really?” Aegon asked. “I had thought...”

“That I don’t get out much?” Leyton asked. “Tis true, honestly, but I’ll be more than happy to make an exception for a tourney I’m throwing. I’d be a poor host if I didn’t.”

“The rest of us could handle things if we needed to,” Baelor murmured.

“I know, son, I know,” Leyton smiled. “So who all here will be participating?”

“I’ll be participating in the joust,” Aegon replied.

“I’ll be participating in the joust and the melee,” Daemon added, “as will be Ser Arthur.”

“What about you, Ser Barristan?” Leyton asked, sounding wistful.

“Like his Grace, I consider my tourney days to be behind me,” Ser Barristan replied.

“Tis a shame,” Leyton sighed. “I still remember our bout at Lord Steffen’s tourney, despite your best efforts.”

“You broke eleven lances against my shield before I managed to unhorse you, my lord,” Ser Barristan smiled. “It was a fantastic showing, as I recall.”

“I was strong then,” Leyton sighed. “So, Your Grace, while I am not honored to host so much of the royal family, I must confess a degree of curiosity about something I would beg you to indulge me on.”

“Why did we arrive a full two days early?” Rhaegar asked. “We were already in Sunspear, having gone to meet up with Daemon and Arianne before coming here, and I decided that there’s something I’d really like to do while I’m here.”

“If it is in my power, I will, of course, assist you with anything,” Leyton replied.

“As you may know, my great-uncle Aemon returned to the capital some years ago to serve as my Grand Maester,” Rhaegar replied.

“A good thing too, given how things turned out at the Wall,” Leyton murmured.

“Indeed,” Rhaegar nodded. “Hearing him speak about the Citadel has reminded me of how much I wanted to study there as a boy.”

“Truly?” Leyton asked, his bushy white eyebrows shooting towards his badly receded hairline. His curiosity turned to sympathy a moment later as he said, “I suppose that your...late father objected.”

“He did,” Rhaegar replied flatly. “I was hoping, during this trip, to be given a tour of the place.”

“Of course,” Leyton chuckled. “When the king asks for a tour of a place, he gets his way. I will dispatch someone to inform them of your desire. Would some time tomorrow morning work, do you think?”

“I think that it just might,” Rhaegar smiled. “The tourney starts in a couple days, and I imagine you’ll be spending much of tomorrow welcoming nobles here.”

“The gods give me patience,” Leyton sighed. “The archmaesters will be quite pleased to show you around. If I’m not mistaken, this hasn’t happened since Prince Baelor was given a tour.”

“I’m surprised you know that,” Rhaegar murmured, and Leyton laughed.

“Oh, my father was a great admirer of his,” the old man sighed. “I can’t tell you how many times he lamented his tragic death.”

“Ashford and the Spring Sickness later that year were a pair of tragedies for my family that wouldn’t be matched until Summerhall,” Rhaegar sighed, just barely managing to keep from scowling as he mentioned the place where Aegon V had been murdered.

“I think I learned everything publicly known about Prince Baelor from my father,” Leyton continued. “That’s actually why I named my eldest Baelor.”

“I’d have thought it was Baelor the Blessed,” Rhaenys murmured.

“No, it was for the prince,” Leyton smiled. “Congratulations again, Princess, and to you, Princess Daenerys.”

“Thank you, my lord,” they replied in unison.

“So, how have things been here, Lord Leyton?” Daemon asked as the conversation ebbed.

“Quiet for the most part,” Leyton replied. “The lack of a Wall to dispatch criminals to has taken some getting used to, but it shouldn’t be too much of a problem for a while yet.”

“At least until undesirables stop randomly disappearing so they can be used to incubate giant fire lizards,” Daemon thought to himself, seriously hoping that no one in this family knew about that.

As a boy he’d briefly come to hate House Hightower vehemently, having learned from reading about the Dance of Dragons that the scheming and plotting of Otto Hightower and his daughter had led directly to the extinction of dragons. He wanted to fly on a dragon, damn it, and while he could admit that the Blacks did themselves few favors throughout the entire reign of Viserys I and the war that followed it, as far as he was concerned, if Otto Hightower had never become Hand of the King, there might still be dragons, and that was reason enough to hate the lot of them. He’d matured since, though, and had actually found the family quite charming so far and really wanted to see genuine shock and horror on their faces when he told them all about the conspiracy once he’d dealt with it.

“My prince,” Yellow Worm whispered as he leaned in next to him. “Everything is in order.”

Daemon nodded at that, dismissing him silently, and turned his attention to Ser Garth, who looked at him curiously.

“I thought I had noticed some damage on my ship and had the men look it over carefully,” he lied smoothly.

“That ship, it’s one of the ones you took from the Ironborn, right?” Ser Garth asked.

“It is indeed,” Rhaegar replied before he could. “A galley would be a more appropriate vessel for a member of the royal family.”

“I’ll probably commission one at some point,” Daemon chuckled, “but the Silence serves me well, and a longship has its share of advantages too.”

“That was Euron Greyjoy’s ship, was it not?” Malora asked, her eyes, like the sky at dusk, boring into his.

“It was,” Daemon nodded. “Was he known to you?”

“We never had to contend with him directly, but he had a reputation that spread far and wide in life,” Leyton replied. “You did us all a great favor by striking down so many of those over-glorified pirates. While dragons soared through the sky, they heeded the lesson of Harrenhal, but following the Dance, they were never as peaceful, and I always feared they were going to make a greater nuisance of themselves at some point. Of course, with there being a living dragon again now, I suppose we’d have had less to fear from them either way.”

“Did you bring her?” one of the young children next to Baelor asked.

“Denys,” the man cautioned.

“But Father, his dragon is Morning, Princess Rhaena’s mount,” Denys whined. “She lived here once.”

“A very, very long time ago,” Baelor replied.

“I didn’t bring her,” Daemon chuckled. “Morning has grown very large, and I feared she’d be too much for a city to handle.”

“I thank you for your consideration,” Leyton smiled, amused by his grandson. “In truth, I wasn’t entirely sure how we’d take care of her if you decided to bring her.”

“She can gorge herself on game and amuse herself in the forest I left her in,” Daemon chuckled. “Having a living dragon around is something that we’re all still getting used to.”

“Is it true you found her on an island full of people so stupid they couldn’t write to say they had her?” a girl next to Denys asked.

“Alys!” Baelor barked as Daemon and quite a few others all laughed out loud.

“It’s what Uncle Humfrey said,” Alys replied defensively, making the youngest of Lord Leyton’s sons wince.

“From the mouths of babes,” Arianne chuckled.

“The Skagosi are a very independent people,” Daemon replied diplomatically, “and they thought they could handle her on their own. Luckily, I happened to discover her and took her off their hands.”

“They’ll all eat better now,” Malora murmured, running her fingers through her long, grey hair, which she’d worn loose.

Daemon eyed her curiously for a moment before looking away, figuring her odd demeanor was probably not worth sparing much thought to. He turned to the latest dish in front of him, a bit of rabbit cooked in what seemed to be a cream and mustard sauce, and dug in as the conversation all around him continued. The feast went on from there, being one of the more pleasant ones he’d attended.

Hosting and attending feasts was a big part of a nobleman’s life, as it was one of the ways that the hosts demonstrated their wealth and power, and while he did enjoy them for the most part, the larger, louder ones he could find rather grating after a while. Something more quiet and intimate like this, though attended by members of only a few families, he was far more comfortable with, and by the end of the night, he was positively relaxed. Aegon never seemed to mind the larger, livelier ones, of course, that being one of the ways in which he was better suited to ruling than he was, and as the feast began to wind down, and Daemon noticed his brother still speaking animatedly with Leyton’s sons, he chuckled and stood up.

“Shall we?” he asked, offering Arianne his hand, and she nodded, taking it.

Lord Leyton had already retired for the evening, as had his father and Elia, so there was no harm in heading to the chambers they’d been given, something that sounded wonderful just then. The rest of their lovers were likely already waiting for them by then, which only added to the impetus to leave, and as Dacey noticed that they were leaving and quickly joined them and Ser Barristan, who followed them without a word, they left the great hall, only to be immediately met by Malora, who smiled at them.

“Shall I escort you to your suite of rooms?” she offered. “The servants showed it to you but once.”

“Thank you,” Arianne replied before he could, happy for the escort, and soon enough they were following the older woman.

Daemon had heard rumors about Lady Malora before, how she was half-mad, how she dabbled in sorcery, and how she’d never wed. Only that last one was confirmable, and the first one seemed to be drastically overstated to say the least. She had seemed odd a few times through the feast, but not to the point of madness, and while her appearance was certainly strange for a noblewoman, dressed as she was in a dour, dark gown with her grey hair spread across her shoulders, that didn’t necessarily mean anything.

“Most of the guest suites are on the fourth floor, but we figured you would appreciate the greater privacy afforded by the chambers on the fifth floor,” Malora explained as they ascended the final flight of stairs. As they entered the fifth floor, they spotted a pair of Unsullied standing outside one of the doors and remembered at once which one was theirs. “Here we...”

Malora gasped suddenly, grasping the wall, and Daemon took her arm to steady her, saying, “Are you alright, my lady?”

“The eye,” the older woman gasped, staring into his eyes, “when the time comes, aim for the eye.”
“What?” Daemon asked, utterly confused as she twisted out of his grip and went to the stairs.

“What eye?” Dacey called out, sounding baffled as Arianne just stared in confusion.

“That was odd,” she murmured.

“That’s putting it mildly,” Ser Barristan said dryly. “I’d pay it no mind, my prince; Lady Malora has always had a bit of a reputation for being...unusual.”

“She seemed fine before that,” Arianne murmured.

“Well, we should probably head in for the night,” Daemon murmured. “Goodnight, Ser Barristan.”

“Goodnight,” Ser Barristan replied, pretending not to notice when Dacey didn’t even make a point of trying to make it look like she was going to spend the night in her chambers.

“Oh, gods, oh, gods, fuck!” Nymeria moaned as they walked inside, and Arianne immediately forgot all about Malora’s strangeness at the sight that greeted them.

Their many lovers were arrayed around the room they’d been given, enjoying each other in pairs or more, either on the bed, on the floor, or, in Obara’s and Falia’s case, in a chair. The buxom beauty was bouncing on her lap, moaning and crying out in joy as Obara thrust up into her, the fake cock strapped to her waist filling her up again and again. The oldest of his lovers was watching her massive breasts bounce with her every movement, seemingly hypnotized, and Daemon chuckled at the sight, unable to blame her the slightest bit.

“You know you’ll probably need to stop this first as the child in your womb grows,” Arianne murmured, smirking at Tyene, who twisted her hand around inside her sister. She’d buried the entire thing to the wrist in Nymeria’s thoroughly soaked cunt, and as her knuckles raked across the very sensitive spot just a few inches inside her, the brunette’s back arched.

“Oh, fuck, just like that, just like...TYENE!” she wailed as she came hard.

“I still can’t believe this debauchery is just the norm for you,” Dacey sighed, already undressing.

“It took me a while to believe it too after Ari and I started bringing other women into our bed,” Daemon replied as he removed his doublet and smiled down at an exhausted-looking, twitching Elia.

“What happened to you?” he asked.

“I ate her out until she cried,” Bellegere grinned, licking her lips. “I think we both lost count of her orgasms.”

“Going to...fucking...worship you,” Elia shuddered, and Daemon chuckled.

“Worshipping you sounds wonderful just now,” he rumbled, grabbing a handful of the dark-skinned beauty’s wonderfully fat arse and pulling her in for a searing hot kiss.

He could taste Elia's cunt on her lips and groaned as his cock strained against his breeches. Arianne, who was already naked, thanks to Val and Dalla's quick work, removed his belt and licked her lips as his breeches fell, exposing his long, thick cock to the air. Kissing Bellegere passionately, he walked her back to the bed, and she fell back onto it next to Elia, gasping when she felt his cock grind against her dripping slit.

"Our prince seems to have decided who's going first," Dalla pouted.

"Luckily for us, we can entertain ourselves just as well," Val grinned, cupping one of Arianne's large, heavy breasts and earning a lusty grin from the shorter woman.

"I am so glad Daemon sent you two to me," she purred, wrapping an arm around each of them.

Val captured her lips with her own while Dalla began peppering her neck with kisses, and Arianne sighed happily as Missandei made her way over to Dacey.

"Still getting used to it?" the former slave asked.

"Was all this as strange to you when you first joined them?" Dacey asked.

"Not really," Missandei replied. "I wasn't used to everyone being so willing and happy to partake in things like this, but vast sexual games are not unheard of in Slaver's Bay. I was prized more for my mind and capabilities than my body, so I didn't get to see as much of this as some of them, but it wasn't unusual for some of the slave masters to go to bed nightly with a half dozen sex slaves."

"Such a wretched place," Dacey muttered, and Missandei nodded.

"I don't disagree, but I can't help but be happy that I ended up there," she replied. "If I hadn't been taken and brought to Astapor, I'd have never met everyone here and likely never known such happiness as I do."

"You really love them," Dacey murmured, looking over as Falia let out a wordless scream, cumming hard around Obara's fake cock.

"We love each other," Missandei replied. "It's quite beautiful, really."

"It is," Dacey replied, looking her up and down. "I can't believe you weren't prized for your body."

Missandei blushed at that and brought her arms to rest behind her back, pushing out her chest, and smirked when Dacey's eyes fell to her tits.

"Truly?" she asked coyly, and the Northern woman grinned.

"Do you think me a liar?" Dacey asked.

"I generally like proof when people make claims," Missandei purred, and Dacey kissed her hungrily, pulling her close and palming her round arse.

"So...good," Falia panted, resting her head on Obara's shoulder.

"Fuck, I love your tits," she sighed, still kneading the heavy mounds.

“They’re only going to get bigger,” Tyene grinned, brushing Falia’s long dark hair over her shoulders and kissing her back. “Your back’s going to be so sore by the time you give birth.”

“I’ll have to be...careful not to...topple over,” Falia panted, making the two sisters laugh.

“Carry her over to the bed,” Tyene grinned. “We can feast on each other in a circle.”

“Sounds good to me,” Obara grunted, standing up and holding Falia tightly as she walked her over to the bed, where Bellegere was already riding Daemon.

“Gods, I love your fucking cock!” the former courtesan cried, her hips a blur as she rolled them again and again. “I swear if you’d been the one to buy my maidenhead, I’d have never been able to take any other man to bed.”

“Are you saying I ruined you?” Daemon grinned, kneading, kissing, and nibbling on her massive breasts.

“Yes!” Bellegere cried.

“Oh gods, oh gods!” Arianne moaned, squirming under Val and Dalla as the two of them worked together to torment her.

Dalla’s face was between her legs, her tongue lazily circling her clit as she pumped three fingers in and out of her sopping wet cunt, while Val was worshiping her breasts, teasing her large, dark nipples in ways that were driving her mad. Neither one was trying to make her cum, wanting to see how slowly they could coax an orgasm out of her, and the fact that she was already sounding desperate was nothing short of hilarious.

“You were already so close,” Val teased as her teeth grazed one of her nipples, making her squeak. “Has Daemon ever tied you down and made you watch as he fucked other women?”

“Don’t give him...oh, gods, right there...any ideas!” Arianne cried.

“Too late,” Daemon grinned, rolling Bellegere onto her back next to her and pushing her legs back until she was nearly folded in half. “I think that sounds like a splendid idea.”

“We’ll have to be careful not to seat her on anything made of iron,” Missandei purred, and Daemon looked over to see her on her knees, having pushed Dacey back against a wall so she could hold her in place as she ate her out. “We wouldn’t want it to rust.”

Tyene burst out laughing at that and said, “We’ve all been delightfully bad influences on you, Missandei.”

“Hate...fuck...you all,” Arianne moaned, and Dalla giggled from between her legs.

“No, you don’t,” the blonde sighed, curling her fingers up and pressing them more firmly against the sensitive spot there.

Arianne’s back arched immediately and her legs began to shake as she threw her head.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK!” she squealed, cumming so hard she gushed all over Dalla’s hand.

“Gods, you make me feel so small,” Bellegere moaned, clawing at the bedding behind her head as Daemon pounded her into the bed. “You could do...anything to me like this.”

“You love that, don’t you?” Daemon asked, still holding her feet next to her head as he fucked her with long, hard strokes. “You love how big I am, how strong. I could hold you down and fuck you until you passed out, and there’s nothing you could do about it. Maybe I will.”

“Oh gods!” Bellegere cried, feeling her insides clench at his words.

“Maybe you’re the one who should be tied down,” Daemon growled in her ear, grinning when he felt her start to flutter around his pistoning length. “I could keep you bent over, your perfect arse sticking out of a hole in the wall, and just use you whenever I feel like it. You’d be nothing but my little sex toy.”

“Oh, fuck, fuck...DAEMON!” Bellegere shrieked, cumming so hard she squirted all over him, soaking his balls and the bed beneath them.

“There’s a fantasy she might want to actually try out some time,” he thought to himself, amazed by how quickly the mental picture he’d painted for her had helped her reach her peak.

“We could all take turns fucking you through the day, Belle,” Obara whispered in her ear, and the nearly insensate woman just shuddered.

“Val, Dalla, would you care to join us?” Tyene purred, holding Falia’s head between her legs as the brunette devoured her cunt.

“I certainly wouldn’t mind more golden curls to enjoy,” she purred, as she looked over her shoulder and grinned at the sisters.

“Quiet you,” Obara chuckled, slapping her ass and making her squeal as she continued to fuck her from behind.

“Feel free,” Arianne purred, seeing Daemon roll onto his back and grin at her. “I’m going to enjoy my husband.”

“Have fun,” Val smirked, taking Dalla’s hand and leading her over to Tyene, Falia, and Obara.

“We do know how to enjoy ourselves,” Arianne sighed, sitting next to Daemon and leaning down so she could start cleaning his cock with her tongue.

“That we do,” Elia grinned, biting her lip as she saw Nymeria and Dacey both putting on leather harnesses, apparently intending to fuck Missandei together, much to her obvious delight. Leaning in next to Arianne, she wrapped her lips around one of Daemon’s large balls and sucked on it, feeling her insides clench when he let out a low moan.

“You’re both such wonderfully wicked things,” he rumbled.

“We are, aren’t we?” Arianne purred, wrapping one of her small hands around his cock. “I want his beautiful balls glistening with spit before we finish here, Elia.”

“Gladly,” Elia moaned, shivering with desire as she cupped and gently kneaded them.

Arienne took him between her lips and felt her cunt drool arousal down onto her thighs the moment she felt the weight of him on her tongue. His cock was so big that it had noticeable weight to it, and she adored the reminder of just how special her husband was. She began bobbing her head up and down on his length, caving in her cheeks and quickly taking him deep as Elia continued to worship his balls. His large hands rested on their heads, and he groaned in pleasure, feeling like an absolute god in that moment. He lived a blessed life, he knew, one that few men could ever hope to achieve. He spent his night living out the fantasy of every boy who first visited a brothel and looked around at all the women whom he could enjoy for a night if parted with some of his coin, only it was real and not a simple exchange like that.

He looked around the room, seeing Dacey buggering a moaning Missandei as Nymeria prepared to take her cunt. Belleghere had fallen asleep next to them, her face a picture of bliss, while Obara, Tyene, Falia, Val, and Dalla were all tangled together, their hands, lips, and tongues driving the others wild as they soared towards their own peaks. It was the life he'd built with his wife, the woman who had taken his cock deep into her throat as he looked around at the others, while directly telling her young cousin to suck on his balls, and it was one he wouldn't trade for anything.

"Gods, if you keep that, I'll spill," he groaned, and Arienne just looked at him, her dark blue eyes nearly black with lust.

That look was all he needed to know what she wanted, and with a groan, he let go. She pulled back, wanting his seed to pool on her tongue, and swallowed only what reached the back of her throat. Rope after thick rope of cum spilled into her hot little mouth, and only when she was sure he was finished did she pull back, letting his still-hard cock slip from her lips with an audible pop. Elia, who had stopped sucking on his balls when he came, gazed lovingly at him, and barely got any warning at all when Arienne cupped her cheeks and kissed her deeply, sharing his load.

"*Gods, I'm a lucky cunt,*" Daemon thought to himself, his cock twitching as he watched his wife and her cousin kiss passionately, exchanging his seed between their probing tongues.

Their eyes turned to him after a moment, continuing to kiss largely for his benefit, and when they pulled away, a white-tinged trail of saliva kept them connected for a moment before breaking.

"I think he enjoyed that," Arienne purred.

"Gods, you're still so hard," Elia moaned. "I still wish I'd snuck into your chambers on your wedding night and offered to help you handle him."

"He'd have torn you in two, tiny as you still were then, and I had not yet discovered the joy of sharing my husband with other women," Arienne smirked. "It all worked out in the end, though, and if you want to enjoy his cock for a while, you're free to."

"Love you, Ari," Elia sighed, kissing her cousin again before crawling over and moving into position.

As she sank down onto his length, she let out a loud, throaty moan and started riding him immediately, her tunnel so hot and slick that she was able to take him with ease.

"She's not the only one," Daemon smiled as Arienne sat next to him and started running her fingers through his hair, stroking his scalp with her nails.

“Promise me that you’re going to do everything you can to stay safe tomorrow,” she whispered, and he smiled, though it did not reach his eyes.

Taking her hand in his, he brought it to his lips and kissed her knuckles, saying, “I’ve always come back to you before. Few things are ever certain in life, but you know that I’d do anything in my power to return to you. I mean, look what I’m fighting for.”

Arianne snorted at that, seeing the joke for the attempt to calm her that it was, and she kissed him deeply. Elia’s increasingly loud, staccato cries made her insides clench, and part of her wanted to look over and watch her cousin impale herself on her husband’s cock over and over again, yet she didn’t, keeping her focus on the man she loved so dearly.

“Sit on my face,” Daemon rumbled. “I want to sup from your perfect cunt until you scream my name.”

“Why stop...oh gods...there?” Elia moaned, feeling him hit a spot deep inside her, which made her see stars. “Fucking hells, you’ve ruined me; you’ve ruined us all.”

“Then I’m going to need to take very good care of you,” Daemon rumbled, smiling up at Arianne as she hooked a knee over his face and moved to straddle him.

Normally when she sat on his face, she faced away from him, both because she knew he loved her ass and because it let her kiss and caress whichever woman was riding his cock just then. This time, she chose to face him, wanting to look into his eyes as she felt his long, dexterous tongue dance through the slick pink folds of her cunt, and the moment she lowered herself onto his mouth, she cried out in pleasure. She’d never known a man who loved eating cunt like he did, and it was but one of countless things she utterly adored about him.

“I love you,” she breathed, feeling a level of adoration she never imagined she would for any man as she gazed lovingly down into his eyes, and though he couldn’t say it back just then, muffled as he was, she saw his response in his eyes anyway.

She ground herself against his face, making his beard wet with her juices, and moaned freely at the feeling of him devouring her. As she looked around at the strange but wonderful family they had built for themselves, she prayed as she hadn’t since she was a girl desiring beauty that it would stay as it was for decades to come. The gods had answered her childish prayer then, and she dearly hoped that they’d answer this one just as well.

“This was rather unexpected,” Agrivane murmured as he sat across from Theobald and Nymos.

“Lord Leyton’s explanation makes sense,” the latter murmured. “Grand Maester Aemon has been in the Red Keep again for years now, and the king was, by reputation, at least, of a rather scholarly sort in his youth. He may well have studied here if his father wasn’t as he was.”

“Knowing that old lunatic, he probably feared his son would find something he could use against him in these books,” Theobald muttered, shaking his head as he remembered how bad Pycelle’s letters made Aerys II seem.

“Do either of you find the timing here suspicious?” Agrivane asked. “The royal family regains a dragon for the first time in over a century, and then mere weeks later the king comes here?”

“What are you saying?” Theobald asked. “There’s no reason to think that anyone in the Red Keep would be at all suspicious of us.”

“We’ve been most careful about keeping the secret of our charge through the generations,” Nymos added, “and we haven’t even made our move against Aemon yet. His Grace is probably just intrigued about the Citadel as Lord Leyton’s messenger explained, and if he has any ulterior motive beyond mere curiosity, it’s probably about finding a way to hatch the remaining eggs the Targaryens have.”

“I know that you’re both right but...I just can’t shake the feeling that we’re missing something,” Agrivane muttered, “something deeply important.”

“Feelings count for naught, you know that,” Theobald muttered as he stood up. “The initiates and even our fellow archmaesters have been chattering excitedly all day about this, and I am more than happy for them to enjoy the bit of spectacle. We need to be there as well to greet him.”

“Of course,” Agrivane nodded as he and Nymos both stood up as well. “I’m sorry for bothering you both. I guess I’ve just been on edge since word came of a living dragon.”

“We’re all on edge,” Nymos muttered. “Once we find a way to deal with Morning, it will all go back to normal. To think, if Robert’s Uprising had gone differently, this never would have been a concern at all.”

“Please,” Theobald muttered. “Can you imagine a Baratheon king? Say what you will about the Targaryens, but at least they produce brilliant and capable figures alongside the odd madman. House Baratheon produces men as strong as aurochs and about as smart.”

Agrivane snorted at that and followed the older man out of the basement, spotting one of the initiates seemingly admiring the stonework of the wall outside the door to it.

“What are you doing here?” Theobald demanded, irritated by lack of sleep the previous night.

“Ah, Alleras,” Agrivane murmured as he remembered the young man’s name, “you look like you’ve just discovered something.”

“Sorry, Archmaester Theobald, Archmaester Agrivane,” Alleras replied. “I was reading through a treatise on masonry through the centuries, and I think that the maester who copied it down might have made an error in doing so. It clearly describes stonework of this sort first becoming the norm at least two full centuries after the Citadel was built, and while it’s possible the man who wrote it made a mistake, I think...”

“That’s deeply fascinating, but we need to get going,” Nymos said. “His Grace is scheduled to arrive here soon, and all the archmaesters are going to be there to greet him.”

“I imagine you’ll wish to catch a glimpse of him as well,” Agrivane smiled.

“I will, though I’m afraid I must find a privy first; excuse me,” Alleras replied.

“Every so often we get a man so hyper-focused on a subject that would put the rest of us to sleep; it’s simply astounding,” Theobald chuckled the moment he was out of earshot.

“I know the type, and they have their uses,” Nymos smiled. “As I always say, there is no such thing as bad knowledge, provided it’s correct, and who knows what secrets of masonry that one might discover if he dedicates his life to the study of it?”

“I didn’t think he was so interested in the subject,” Agrivane thought to himself. “Of course, I might just be confusing him with another initiate. I only remembered his name because we so seldom get anyone with the blood of a Summer Islander in his veins.”

He shrugged at and followed the other two to the main atrium, where they joined the rest of the archmaesters in diligently waiting for the king to arrive. As they did so, Sarella, having gotten confirmation that the basement was empty, stealthily made her way out through the seldom-used door she’d told Daemon about back in Sunspear and rushed down to the ice houses. The great thing about that particular door, aside from the fact that it was rather well-hidden, was that it was, perhaps as a consequence, often unguarded. It made it very useful for initiates who wanted to sneak out at night to a brothel, and it would make it a perfect path into it now.

The ice houses of Oldtown were located near the dock, round, domed metal structures surrounded by tall trees meant to help keep the sun off of them. They were as cool as they could be and could keep large enough blocks of ice from melting for far longer than Sarella had thought possible when she first learned of them. She quickly spotted Daemon, his stature making him stand out even with the simple, brown clothing he and the others were wearing then. Ser Barristan was off to the side, looking less like the legendary knight that he was than she’d ever seen him look before, and alongside three Unsullied, who were wearing hoods to obscure their bald heads, she noticed Edric.

“Is this everyone?” she asked, drawing Daemon’s attention immediately.

“Yes,” the prince replied. “I figure half a dozen men should be enough to handle whatever we’re going to find down there without drawing too much attention to ourselves. You saw the three of them leave?”

“Yes, all the archmaesters have gathered together to greet His Grace,” Sarella replied.

“The king is going to be a little late,” Ser Barristan murmured, sounding amused. “We should have more than enough time to get inside the basement if we leave now.”

“I guess this sack is full of chipped ice?” Sarella asked, pointing to a tightly woven sack slung over the shoulder of one of the Unsullied. “Is that truly going to be enough for...”

“Don’t touch it!” Daemon exclaimed, slapping her hand away, and she looked up at him in confusion, only noticing then that every single one of them was wearing unusually thick gloves for the warm day.

“What’s going on?” she asked, and he sighed, deciding it best to just explain.

“So, we’re just going to chip away at this, fill these sacks with as much ice as we can, and hope we can move quickly enough not to have it all melt?” Ser Barristan asked.

“I know it doesn’t sound like a great plan, but it’s the only weapon we can use against them,” Daemon replied. “They must be keeping the things docile, and that should hopefully mean that we’ll just have to dump ice over them to kill them. Otherwise...”

“Prince Daemon,” Bloodraven’s tired voice echoed through his head.

“Bloodraven?” Daemon replied mentally, pointing to his head when Ser Barristan furrowed his brow in confusion. “I didn’t know if I’d hear from you again. Have you recovered?”

“I’ve regained some of my strength,” Bloodraven replied, “not enough to let me do much, but enough for this.”

“You have a warning to give, I suppose?” Daemon asked.

“Not so much...a warning as aid,” Bloodraven replied, stumbling over his words. “Look to the sky.”

Daemon looked up, turning around as he hoped to see just what the ancient man was talking about, and his eyes widened when he saw a great raven flying from the north, carrying what appeared to be a small coin purse in its talons.

“The Children of the Forest have explored the ruins of the Cold One’s citadel and found small shards of unmeltable ice, which seem to be all that remains of his body,” Bloodraven explained. “If you handle them without thick gloves, you will lose your hand, but if you can thrust one into that block of ice you commissioned, you should be able to pull out a weapon capable of felling the firewyrms.”

“An ice blade like those wielded by the others?” Daemon asked, watching as the raven landed and dropped off the purse. “Is that safe?”

“Without the Cold One’s power to sustain the blades, they will melt in time, and I strongly suspect that when they do, these ice chips will go with them,” Bloodraven replied. “So long as you don’t touch them by hand, they should be safe to use. I cannot guide you as I did against the Cold One, but I wished to help all the same. Once you finish off these monsters, all that remains of R’hilor’s terrible power will be the remnants of the Doom itself, which will, in time, diminish.”

“And which won’t serve as an immediate threat to Westeros,” Daemon thought, carefully opening up the pouch and pouring the ice chips onto his leather riding glove. Even through the hide, they felt uncomfortably cold, and he imagined that, as he’d been warned, attempting to touch one of them unprotected would make his flesh go black in seconds.

“My prince, what are those?” Ser Barristan asked as he carefully put them back in the pouch.

“Weapons that might make this mission easier,” Daemon replied, “though quite dangerous ones too. No one is to handle these without gloves, do you understand?”

As they all nodded, he took one of the chips and, making sure that no one was looking, pressed it against the ice block. It slipped in like a hot knife through butter, and Daemon’s eyes went wide as saucers when, a moment later, a hilt made of ice slipped out of it. He grabbed it with his gloved hand, ignoring how insanely cold it was, and pulled it out to reveal a full longsword. A thick white mist began to pour from it, the heat of the sun affecting it somewhat, yet its shape did not change, and as he turned it over in his hand, he swore that he’d never seen a keener edge before.

“So these are swords of unmelting ice?” Sarella asked, eyeing the long sack curiously and noticing the sheer cold emanating from it.

“They’ll melt in time, but it will take them longer than normal,” Daemon replied. “That sack there is full of chipped ice as we originally planned, just in case, but we’ll be relying on these blades initially.”

“Have you heard anything more from Bloodraven?” Edric asked.

“No, and I don’t expect to,” Daemon replied. “He strained himself helping me put down the threat of the Others and probably should have rested more than he did before trying this. He’d helped enough, and now it falls to us.”

“The way should still be clear,” Sarella murmured. “Come.”

The prince nodded and followed her back to the Citadel. Dressed as they were, they didn’t look at all out of place, and no one gave much thought to an initiate leading what looked like a group of laborers along. Such things happened all the time, when the ancient fortress needed work done, and with so much focus on the king’s party, which was just approaching them just then, no one paid them much heed at all. Slipping past the statues of Urrigon and Peremore Hightower, she let them in through the well-observed door and closed it behind them.

The Citadel was quiet, even more so than normal, as presumably most, if not all, of the men there had gone to see the king, and the path from that door to the one none of them were allowed through was short, so soon enough they were standing before it, looking around as inconspicuously as they could to make sure that no one would spot them.

“This will be simple enough,” Ser Barristan whispered as he looked over the door’s lock and pulled out his lockpicks.

“How did you learn to pick locks, Ser?” Edric asked quietly, making him chuckle wistfully.

“The knight I squired under, Ser Manfred Swann, was his father’s third son,” Ser Barristan replied as he quickly picked the lock. “He was not expected to inherit the lands he eventually would when his brothers died in the War of the Ninepenny Kings and took interest in a few things not truly becoming of a young lord. When he learned of my ambition to join the Kingsguard, he decided to teach me this particular skill, arguing that there may well be a day when I would need to pick a lock to save one of my future charges. He was proven right many years later, though he’d already died beforehand, so I never got to write to him. We’re in.”

“Quickly then,” Sarella breathed, watching him open the door and ferry everyone in.

“Stay out here and delay anyone who tries to enter,” Daemon commanded softly. “You’ve been a great help to me and to the royal family at large.”

“Our families are too well connected for me not to,” Sarella smiled. “Good luck, Prince Daemon.”

He nodded at that and entered the basement, knowing that possibly his greatest test had just begun.