

Chapter 21- Price of Healing

After the dinner, Noho dismissed his family and invited Aegon over for a walk around the palace walls.

Aegon Targaryen followed Noho along a quiet stone path that traced the edge of the island. The sound of the palace slowly faded behind them and were replaced by the soft rhythm of water lapping against the stone.

Below, the calmer water in the canals reflected the moon and bright stars shining up in the sky.

For a time, the two of them simply walked and neither of them spoke. Until Noho finally broke the silence. “How many?”

Aegon glanced at him in confusion. “How many what?”

The Sealord did not look at him. His gaze remained on the water “How many people have you sacrificed to gain that power?”

Aegon stopped walking as he registered those words. Then his eyes narrowed as something hot burned within his chest. He fully turned toward Noho and glared at the man. “None,” He spat out.

Noho didn't react to his anger. He simply turned his head to meet Aegon's gaze. "None?" he repeated.

"Not one," Aegon said, his voice, edged with something sharper. "Not ever."

Silence stretched as Noho watched him, gazing deep into his eyes to search for the truth. Aegon held the gaze until finally... Noho exhaled slowly, his shoulders easing just a fraction.

"I believe you," he said.

The tension didn't leave Aegon as he kept watching Noho, wondering if a hundred guards would suddenly emerge from the shadows to try and kill him.

He doubted it would happen, but it was hard to trust a man who just accused you of human sacrifice.

"You'll forgive the question," Noho continued, quieter now. "Most magic I have heard of... demands a price. Blood. Life. Something taken in exchange for something given."

Aegon's jaw shifted slightly, and he nodded in understanding "That's not how mine works."

“So it would seem.” Noho nodded once, more to himself than to Aegon. “Before your arrival, I spoke to many magic practitioners. Moon singers, red priests, a warlock, and even a shadowbinders.” His lips twitched faintly. “All of them agreed on one thing. If you save life... you must take it from somewhere else.”

Aegon looked back toward the water, suddenly realising the Seaboard and his wife’s sudden interest in his ability to revive people.

He knew that part, if not all their conversation in that dining table was scripted. But now he was starting to understand the deeper reasons behind it.

“I won’t say that they’re wrong. From what I’ve heard of the magic used by people, that is indeed how it works.” He said, reluctantly. “But that’s not how my ability works.”

Noho nodded and the two of them resumed walking softly after.

The path curved slightly, opening to a broader view of the canals beyond. Lights flickered in the distance, pleasure barges gliding silently through the night.

“How did you come by it?” Noho asked after a moment. “Your ability, that is.”

“I was born with it.” Aegon replied.

“As simple as that?”

“As simple as that.”

Another pause. Then—

“Have you heard what is happening in the Narrow Sea?”

Aegon’s brows furrowed at the sudden change in topic. “No,” he said. “Why? What’s happening?”

“Prince Baelon has started a one man war against the Pirates scattered across the Narrow Sea,” Noho said, almost casually. “Any pirate scum that had the misfortune of meeting him are burned to ash.”

Aegon’s expression didn’t change but his thoughts were running. He couldn’t remember any such thing happening in the canon timeline. *So why?*

The answer was obvious when he took the moment to think about it. But he still wanted a confirmation.

“Why?”

“Because of a false belief that his son, the exiled Prince Aegon Targaryen, has been captured and killed by the pirates running around in the Narrow Sea.” Noho said lightly, giving him a subtle knowing smile that all but confirmed to him that Noho knew his true identity.

Aegon didn't particularly care. If he had truly wanted to hide his identity and vanished among the people then he would've changed his facial features a long time ago. And he would've gone to further effort in hiding his name than just changing his surname.

In the end, him changing his name was only ever meant to fool the common sellswords who might think to kidnap him for ransom, as well as his subtle attempt at distancing himself from his house.

Seeing that he wasn't about to say anything more on this matter, Noho dropped that line of conversation, and silence returned between them. Until Noho broke it once again. “What do you want, Aegon?”

Aegon frowned slightly, the question coming too abruptly to ignore. “What?”

“What do you want?” Noho repeated. “Not tonight, and not from me. In general.”

Aegon studied him for a moment. “Why the sudden interest?”

Noho’s expression didn’t shift. “Because it is in Braavos’ best interest to know.”

Aegon raised an eyebrow, and Noho continued.

“Your abilities... would seen see you rise up to become an incredibly powerful, influence, and wealthy person.” Noho said. “And I believe, that should you remain in Braavos, then our city would benefit greatly in association.”

Aegon folded his arms loosely. “So you want me to remain in this city. Is that it?”

“Yes. I would give you anything,” Noho went on. “Wealth, influence, protection, women, and a place within my court. You would answer to no one but me.”

Aegon made a show of considering the offer, even though he had no interest in accepting. Then, he shook his head. “No.”

Noho exhaled a breath. “May I ask why?”

“You asked me what I want, and what I want... is freedom,” Aegon said. “Freedom to go where I want, do what I want, with whom I want. I want to be the freest person in the world.”

Noho blinked and then let out a soft chuckle. “That’s asking for a lot. I don’t think there’s anyone in the entire world would be free like that. Even I, the most powerful man in Braavos, am bound by the chains of responsibilities. And if I can’t even have it for myself, then I certainly can’t give it to you.”

Aegon nodded in agreement. “I don’t think anyone in the world could give it to anyone else. It’s something we have to obtain for ourselves,” he said. “Plus, your offer is lacking in sincerity.”

Noho’s eyes widened before he controlled his expression. “How?”

“Once word of what I can do spreads, and it will spread,” Aegon said, “do you really think I’ll lack wealth? Influence?” A faint smirk touched his lips. “Or women?”

Noho grimaced slightly, then inclined his head in defeat. “Can you at least tell me how long you intend to remain in Braavos.”

“A few moons, or a few years. I’m uncertain myself.” He said. “But I do intend to establishment myself and earn a bit of gold before I eventually leave to travel the world.”

Noho sighed. “I see. I supposed it was too greedy of me to hope that you’ll settle down in Braavos.”

“I suppose. But don’t worry. If you and your family ever have need of my services, you’ll get them at half the usual price.”

Noho blinked. Once. “Half the price,” he repeated slowly. “From a man who, until today, charged nothing for his healing?”

Aegon shrugged. “Just because I have never charged before does not mean I won’t start doing so now.”

“Why?” Noho asked. “Why the change.”

“Because people in Braavos could actually pay for my services. But also because if I didn’t...” Aegon paused for a moment and then continued, “then I fear I’ll spend the rest of my life healing people.”

Noho didn’t interrupt.

“And that’s a task that’ll never end,” Aegon continued, “there will always be someone in need of my healing, and someone after that, and someone after that. And while I don’t mind healing people for a while, I don’t intend to live the rest of life my like that.”

Noho studied him carefully. “I assume the common people would not be able to afford your services then?”

Aegon met his gaze and slowly shook his head. “No. But I do intend to teach them.”

“Teach them what?”

“About body, about diseases, how to avoid them, or how to heal them.” He said, slowly. “I believe, in the long run... my writings would help far more people than if I were to focus my energy in healing them one by one.”

Noho considered his words, and then nodded slowly, “I doubt there’s single healer out there who would refuse to read the medical books written by a person who could bring others to life with a touch.”

Aegon looked into the distance. “Hopefully,” he said, thought he doubted it would truly be so easy. Humans don’t tend to change so quickly. And organisations changed at an even slower pace.

“And your price?” Noho asked finally. “How much would you charge for healing a single person.”

“One hundred thousand gold dragons.” Aegon replied. “Or its equivalent.”

Noho coughed and then glowered at him. “Do you want to heal them or kill them?”

For the second time that evening, Aegon laughed.

Chapter 22- Opportunity of lifetime

Mel sat in her pleasure barge, deep in thought, as the servants drove their poles into the dark water, each push sending the vessel gliding forward through the narrow veins of Braavos as they drew closer and closer to the *island*.

She had never come to this part of Braavos before. Mainly because there had never been a reason to.

Before... the place had once been nothing but an an empty stretch of rock. Now it was filled with life. Tents ringed the edges in tight clusters, their canvas flapping under the weight of hurried construction as a half finished mansion rose from within the centre of the island.

And before it all, was a blockade made by dozens upon dozens of barges, manned by the Sealord's own guards. And outside of the blockade... was chaos. Chaos and desperation.

Barges packed tight with the sick or injured drifted in uneven clusters outside the blockade. She saw pale faces, hollow eyes, bodies wrapped in blood soaked bandages. They all faced the island with the same look of desperation and hope.

Mel's barge slowed as it approached the blockade, then stopped entirely.

A guard captain crossed over without invitation, and at her gesture, one of the servants stepped forward, offering a sealed letter with both hands.

The wax bore the mark of House Valeros. One of the Keyholder families in Braavos. It was an invitation paid for by their young lord Myrio.

Her thought lingered on Myrio, the boy she'd met so many years ago. A boy with crooked legs, thanks to a disease that no healer could help with. Who knew that a momentary kindness from all those years ago would help her so much today?

She felt the faintest flicker of guilt for taking advantage of Myrio's infatuation for her like this but she crushed it immediately after. *This is necessary.*

Had she waited her turn like the rest, she would have rotted in line for half a year—perhaps longer. And by then, it would be too late.

Whispers had already started to spread across Essos. The Healing Hand. A man who could heal any disease, who could turn back time and return you to your youth, who could touch the ugliest woman in

existence, and make her the most beautiful. *A man would could return you to life.*

When the magisters of the Nine Free Cities learn the full truth, they would descend upon Braavos like carrion birds. And then? Then, even gold might not be enough to get a meeting with Healing Hand.

The captain broke the seal, scanned the contents, then folded it back with a grunt. “Wait,” he said and then stepped off her barge just as abruptly as he had come.

Mel exhaled slowly, her fingers tightening just slightly around the small book resting in her lap.

Basics of Biology.

She turned a page, eyes skimming over neat yet strange words. Words that talked about tiny invisible creatures living within them, crawling through flesh, and shaping sickness and health alike.

Words that explained the intricacies of a human body far better than all the healers in Braavos put together. Words that foretold of the basic unit in a human body, or any other biological organism: Cell. Words that claimed plants, and trees were living creatures, if of a slightly different kind their themselves.

Madness. Or so she would've thought if it had not been written by the Healing Hand himself.

Already, she had heard news of the Fregar family mobilising all their goldsmiths and glassmakers to create a device commissioned by the Healing Hand himself. A device that would allow them to see these cells, and other small living creatures, that were otherwise invisible to the naked eyes.

A shout broke her thoughts, and she watched as the blockade started to open up, just enough to allow her pleasure barge through. As soon as it passed through, the blockade closed up once again, and she heard the commoners scream and shout insults at the guards who denied them entry, cursing them for their unfairness.

She could understand their anger, their desperation but she also understood that such unfairness was the way of life.

You either got ahead in life and took advantage of the system, like the all the other elites, or you stayed behind and suffered like all the other commoners.

She heard a splash and turned in time to see a few commoners jumping into the water. Likely in a bid to reach the Island by swimming. But the Sealord's guards seemed to have anticipated this and threw nets into the water, catching the interlopers before they could make any progress.

Mel didn't look back again as her barge kept moving forward, until it finally arrived at the Island and docked near the beach.

Once the barge was steady, she rose with measured grace and climbed down, pausing to study the other barges docked nearby. All were larger than hers, and far more luxurious, draped in colours and sigils she recognised without effort. Old families. Powerful ones.

All desperate for Healing Hand's touch. Or possibly more.

Her spy network has already informed her of the families that were willing to offer Aegon Rivers a place among the Keyholder families, all in a bid for him to marry one of their daughters (maybe even all their daughters) and stay in Braavos. Permanently.

She wouldn't be surprised if some of those men even went so far as to offer their own wives to Aegon. If only in the faint hopes that they could get his seed into their family.

Her lips curved faintly. If the information she had purchased about his real identity was indeed true, then they were all wasting their time.

He would not stay.

Yet another reason why she had to hurry like this, lest she lose an opportunity of a lifetime.

Bootsteps approached and she turned as a group of guards closed in. Unlike the Sealord's professional guard, these ones were rougher around the edges. Their formation lacked cohesiveness, their grips on their weapons were too loose, and their eyes lingered too long.

Either they were not well trained, or Aegon was not very good at selecting his guards. Either way, Aegon's personal guards were lacking. And this realisation lifted her spirits.

For this showed a weakness in the Healing Hand's otherwise carefully crafted mythos. A weakness she could use to attain what she wanted. A working relationship with Healing Hand.

Any other man, and she would've preferred a partnership. But unlike some other women, she knew her place.

The guard in front spoke in a rough voice. "Name?"

Her servants answered for her "You stand before the Black Rose."

The guards exchanged confused glances with each other, likely not recognising her. It was... understandable. It's been well over a

decade since she stopped working as a courtesan in favour of starting her own business. And even her work as a courtesan had been a brief stint, done in desperation to gather funds after she was exiled from her home.

The leader eventually spoke up again. "Payment?"

She gestured once, and her men moved, hauling forward a dozen trunks and opened them one by one to reveal the dull gleam of Iron marks stacked to the brim.

The guard did a rough counting and then frowned up at her. "Worth about Sixty Thousand Gold dragons. Not enough."

"I know," she stepped forward, and met the guard's gaze without hesitation. "The rest will be paid in favours."

"No." His answer came immediately. "The Healing Hand does not deal in favours."

Mel smiled slightly. "Doesn't he?"

The guard's brow furrowed.

“He healed the Sealord’s mother,” she continued, her voice calm, cutting. “And returned the Sealord and his wife to their youth. In return, he was given this island, those men who still guard his shores, as well the construction of an entire mansion.” She gestured around them. “Call it what you like but I see favours when they’re exchanged.”

The guard scratched his head and his glance shifted to the others in his group, looking uncertain about what to do, and her smile deepened.

Just as she expected, the guards were really not as well trained as they should be, as they had no idea how to deal with unusual situations. Just a few days, and she could whip them into shape, or being new ones who were much more capable.

Finally, the leader exhaled sharply. “Wait here.”

He turned and strode toward the centre of the camp, where a large tent rose above the rest.

Mel watched him go, and her heart started to beat faster as she clenched her fists. This... this was a gamble for her. An all or nothing gamble. And the wealth she’d offered was all that she could gather after selling her entire business in such short order. If she failed, she would be left with nothing.

But if she won... Immortality would be the least of her prizes. She was sure of it.

I will not fail.

Minutes passed, and her anxiety increased despite her best attempt to remain calm. Until finally, the guard returned. "The Healing Hand will see you now."

Mel hid her relief and simply inclined her head, hiding the flicker of triumph beneath a calm facade.

She then followed the guard to the large tent, her robes shifting just enough to reveal her deep cleavage as she lifted her chin and straightened her back.

She wanted to appear confident, not desperate. Prove that he needed her more than she needed him.

Finally, they arrived in front of the large tent, and she exhaled slowly, closing her eyes for a moment before she opened them, took a step forward and entered the tent.

Chapter 23- On the matter of gods

Mel stepped into the tent—and paused at the sight in front of her.

The Healing Hand, clad in an armour, stood at the center of the room. And around him, dozens of men and women of all ages sat crosslegged on the ground, their attention fixed on him as he spoke.

For a moment, she simply stared at him. For in all the many, many rumours she'd collected about him, very few described his otherworldly appearance. It was as if every single features of his was chiselled by a god until it achieved perfection.

“Despite our assumptions, blood, is not the same,” Aegon said in a calm, measured voice, either not noticing her arrival or not caring for it. “Not all blood can be given to all men. If you do so blindly, you will kill the very person you seek to save.”

A murmur rippled through the group as they scratched down his words on parchment.

“There are 8 main types of blood, depending on the presence or absence of certain proteins.” he turned slightly, picking up a small glass vial filled with dark red liquid. “Learn to identify them, and you will save lives that would otherwise be lost.”

Mel didn't move from her position, and was careful to not make any noise. Some of the 'disciples' noticed her presence but ignored her just as soon and returned to their lesson.

She took an empty cushion near the back and sat down, simply watching and observing as Aegon taught men and women who had, before his arrival, been known as the wisest of healers in Braavos. Now those same healers leaned forward as one, hanging onto every word as if it was divine gospel.

Maybe it was. There were certainly more than enough rumours out there painting Aegon Rivers as a god's avatar, a god's son, a prophet, or a god himself.

After listening in on the lecture for a while, her attention drifted as she looked around the room, and nearly recoiled when she noticed what she had sat beside.

It was a large, cylindrical container that stood taller than a man, made entirely of glass and filled with a pale, faintly glowing liquid. And inside the container... was a body, wearing only small clothes, and completely motionless.

Around it, were a dozen other similar glass containers. All holding within them men or women placed in order of young to old.

She paused as her gaze fell upon one of the containers, and her eyes narrowed as she recognised the person within.

The Patriarch of House Prestayn, looking much younger than he did the last time she saw him from a distance. Except... was he even alive in there? Could he even breathe within the pale fluid? Could anyone? She couldn't tell.

Her gaze snapped to the other containers, and slowly, she recognised a few others. The Matriarch of House Otheryrs. The Goldsmith Guild's leader.

Before she could even guess what she was looking at, the lesson came to an end, and the healers rose as one bowing their heads to Aegon in genuine respect and deference before filing out in quiet order, until she and Aegon were the only ones left behind in the tent.

Her breath hitched when she noticed that Aegon was already looking at her. "Black Rose, I presume?" He asked as he took a seat behind a table at the other end of the tent.

She nodded, finding her throat a bit too dry to speak properly.

"Please, take a seat," he offered and she did just that, taking the seat opposite to him. Once she'd been seated, he spoke again. "So... I'm curious, Black Rose. Why do you have the invitation reserved for Myrio of House Valeros?"

“He gave it to me,” she replied simply, the earlier thoughts of those suspended bodies (corpses?) forgotten in favour of focusing on impressing the Healing Hand.

“...I see. As long as you haven’t stolen it, it doesn’t really matter.” Aegon said leaning back in his chair to observe her, “So... I assume you want the full package?”

“The full package?” She asked.

“Healing, restoration of youth, general improvements in the body, as well as improved strength and beauty.” Aegon said. “If you want bigger hips, or breasts, regain your virginity, or make other changes to your body, like the colour of your hair, skin, or eyes... it’ll cost you extra.”

“Oh...” Mel gasped, having been unaware of the true extent of Aegon’s abilities. But then she inwardly shook her head and brought her desires under control. *I would not settle for mere peaches, when I could have the whole tree.*

She straightened up her back, and spoke with all the confidence she could muster, “I have not come here for any such thing. I come here only to talk, and to offer a proposal.”

Aegon tilted his head to the side. “You would not be the first Braavosi courtesan to propose something to me, and definitely not the last. But you’re the first to pay such a big price for it,” he said. “Go on. I’ll listen.”

This is it. Now or never.

“I want to offer you my aid regarding certain matters that you might be struggling with,” she said, praying that she wasn’t shooting herself in the foot by being so direct. “Prince Aegon.”

Aegon’s eyebrow rose slightly at that form of address but he made no denials of it, all but confirming his identity to her. “Oh? And what do you think I’m struggling with?”

“With making connections to the right people for the right task. Despite your growing influence and wealth, you don’t have a solid powerbase and you often feel like you don’t truly belong here,” she leaned forward on her chair, giving him an eyeful of her cleavage. “Let me tell you now, from one Exiled Royalty to another. That it will not change. The feeling of ‘not-belonging’ will never truly go away. Not unless you marry one of theirs and go native.”

Aegon’s eyes glimmered curiosity. “Exiled royalty you say... Judging by your dark complexion, Summer Islands, I presume?”

“You would presume correctly my prince,” she said. “Though the status of a prince of the Seven Kingdoms is far above that of the princess of a small island, I presume that the challenge we face will be quite similar.”

“And you would help me with my presumed struggles,” Aegon asked, studying her with greater interest. “How?”

“I can see that you either don’t have the time, experience, or expertise necessary to create a power base of your own. At least when it comes to hiring a proper guard detail for yourself,” she pointed out. “I can help you with that.”

“You think I would hand over my security details to a complete stranger?” Aegon asked, looking rather amused at her presumption.

“We’ll not remain strangers for very long once we start working together,” she said in a husky voice as her foot traced his leg. To Aegon’s credit, he maintained perfect composure without showing any apparent interest in her.

“Can’t say I’m convinced. What else?” Aegon asked. “I hope that’s not the end of your expertise.”

“It certainly isn’t. I can help teach you more about Braavos’ customs, traditions, and its secret rulers,” she said. “I can serve as your diplomat and talk with all the magisters and lords whom you

have no personal interest in accommodating. I can use the immense wealth you'll eventually acquire and invest it wisely, or offer ways to turn that wealth into even more power or influence. I can do all that and more."

"And what do you want in return?" Aegon asked, before his tone took a mocking edge. "I certainly hope its not because you wish to serve a divine envoy, or some other such silly reason."

"Are you not? A divine envoy that is." She asked. Because even if she didn't truly believe the rumours she'd heard, she still wanted to be sure.

"I'm not." Aegon replied with a faint chuckle before he took on a thoughtful look. "Though, I suppose it's a matter of perspective."

"Perspective?"

"Yeah. The gods of this world of ours are all rather weak." Aegon said, his voice rather casual despite the magnitude of what he was saying. "Take the Faith of the Seven, for example. I don't think they exist anymore, if they ever existed in the first place."

She raised an eyebrow, surprised by the sudden her turn in conversation, "I didn't take a Prince of the Seven Kingdoms to be so openly heretic."

“Heretic? No. I just believe I’m someone with common sense. And the way I see it, the gods of this world are not the all-powerful entities we make them out to be,” Aegon said. “Take the Many faced god for example. I suppose the face changing ability of Faceless men is good. But the reason they’re so successful as assassins is mainly because of their personal skills, as well as their years of accumulated knowledge and experience in the craft.”

“I see.” She said, unsure of what else to say to that.

“If you want other examples, then take the Fourteen Gods of Old Valyria, or Mother Rhoyme, the Chief Goddess of Rhoynar.” Aegon offered. “If they had any power, then why did they not save their worshippers? Don’t you find it curious?”

“I... can’t say I’ve given much thoughts to the matters of gods.” She said.

“If they’re gods at all.” Aegon pointed out. “The fact that many of these ‘gods’ require human sacrifice to work their miracles makes me doubtful of that claim. But... I guess you’re not here to talk about such matters...” Aegon trailed off. “Where were we again?”

“You were asking what I wanted in return for my services.”

“Ah yes. Provided your services are actually worth something and not just mere words.” Aegon pointed out. “I suppose we’ll find out once you start working for me.”

She opened her mouth to speak but then paused. “What? I mean... you’ll accept my services? Just like that?”

“For a probationary period, yes. It’s not like I’m unaware of my own shortcomings. I just hadn’t met someone who wasn’t loyal to their own family or organisation first and foremost.” Aegon said, then tilted his head. “Or unattached to Braavos, as I eventually intend to leave this place.”

She nodded. “I promise you, I’ll not let you down.”

“We shall see about that,” Aegon said. “But now we return back to the original topic. Provided you’re capable, what do you actually want?”

“I want to join your inner circle.” She said.

“I don’t have an inner circle.” Aegon replied, amused.

“We both know it’s only a matter of time.” She said as she got up and walked around the table before coming to sit on his lap. Slowly,

she traced his chiseled jawline with her finger “And I want something else.”

“What’s that?” Aegon asked, once again seeming completely impervious to her charms. *Just how is he always so composed?*

“I want to be your mistress.” She replied, taking his hand and placing it above her breasts.

“Is that so?” Aegon hummed and kneaded her breast for a moment, his fingers teasing her nipples in a way that felt just right. She let out a soft moan that suddenly rose in pitch and intensity as he pinched her *just so*.

Her core dampened and she bit her lips as she gazed at Aegon’s surprised by how good he was. She noticed him looking into her eyes and leaned down, her lips were inches away from his... until he suddenly pushed her off his lap and stood up. “Prove yourself capable, and we have a deal, Black Rose.”

She barely managed to stop herself from falling and turned to glare at him. *Well, let it not be said that I do not love a good chase.*

She offered him a sharp smile as she spoke up. “Call me Mel. Mel Medarda.”

Chapter 24- Women's battlefield

“Dracarys.” He commanded, and watched as Vhagar let out a mighty breath on yet another pirate vessel, burning it to cinders in no time.

Two moon into hunting for pirates, and now, he had lost all the initial vindication he took in the act. Now... the only reason he continued was partly as the duty of a father to deal with the murderers of his son, and partly to stay away from Kings Landing, from his manipulative father.

Once the ship had vanished beneath the waves, Baelon pulled Vhagar away and flew back.

Tarth rose from the horizon in pale blues, shimmering like the Sapphires the Isle was so aptly named after. They flew to the castle and Vhagar descended in a slow, heavy arc, her claws digging into the earth with a tremor that sent servants scrambling.

Baelon dismounted without ceremony, ordering the servant to bring another cow for Vhagar when Lord Tarth walked over, a nervous smile on his face as he tried not to glance at Vhagar's towering form.

The man bowed deeply and handed over a sealed letter “From Kings Landing, your grace.”

Baelon frowned and took the letter without a word. Usually, he would've postponed opening the letter until he was in a much better mood. Likely tomorrow morning. But the Urgent red marking on the sigil made him decide otherwise.

He broke the seal, his eyes moving quickly through the letter until his eyes came across a familiar word. *Aegon*.

His fingers tightened around the parchment as he read the letter again and again before he exhaled a sigh of relief and felt a heavy burden lift from his shoulders.

He then turned to his dragon and gave it an apologetic smile. “I know you're tired... but... this cannot wait.”

Vhagar let out a rumble but then got down, gesturing for him to climb on its back. Baelon didn't wait.

The sky had turned dark by the time Vhagar arrived at Kings Landing. Baelon did not even bother to take Vhagar to the Dragonpit, landing it directly on Red Keep's courtyard.

Servants and nobles alike scrambled out of his way as he stormed through the hall until finally, he slammed the door to his father's solar open.

Inside, his father was sitting behind his table. The *same place* he'd sat at when he exiled Aegon. He was in a deep conversation with Septon Barth that abruptly halted with the opening of the door.

The Kingsguard in the room, who had already been reaching for the hilt of their sword abruptly paused but Baelon ignored them as he marched into the room. "Explain." His voice filled the room.

King Jaehaerys I Targaryen looked up from his seat, irritation flashing through his eyes before settling into something calmer.

"Is that how you say thank you for finding my son?" His father asked dryly.

Baelon continued to glare at his father. "The letter. Explain."

A pause, then his father exhaled softly. "Close the door."

Baelon didn't. He had no interest in playing his father's games, so he stood there, and continued to glare at his father, waiting for the answer.

Barth coughed into his sleeve, the sound wet and lingering. “Let him be, Your Grace. I suspect subtlety would be wasted tonight.”

His father studied him for a long moment, then nodded. “Very well. This is what we know of your son so far,” he said, handing over small parchment that Baelon quickly read through.

“Aegon Rivers. Healing Hand? What is all this?” He asked, feeling even more confused than before.

“A young man has recently surfaced in Braavos, and he goes by the name of Aegon Rivers. And we have good reason to suspect that he’s Prince Aegon.” Septon Barth explained before handing him another parchment. “This is an likeness drawn by one of our agents in Braavos at great risk.”

Baelon looked at the portrait and... it was indeed Aegon. His son. *Their son.* Though his dyed hair had grown much longer in the past few moons since he departed from Kings Landing.

“I see...” His shoulders slumping in relief as he leaned back and slumped on a chair. Then, his gaze went to the earlier parchment. “But what’s this nonsense about Healing Hand.”

As prodigious as Aegon had been in his studies, he couldn't remember Aegon ever showing any interest in the Healing Arts. So what was this all about?

His father gave a *look* to Septon Barth who folded his hands and spoke up, "Well, here's what I know."

Over the next five minutes, Baelon remained completely silent and listened to Septon Barth paint a rather impossible picture.

"So... you're telling me that in the past few moons since he's departed from the Red Keep, my son has somehow become the second coming of Garth Greenhand?" He asked, not even bothering to hide incredulity in his voice.

Septon Barth opened his mouth, and then closed it. "I... feel foolish. Forgive me, your grace, for I failed to notice the similarities up until you pointed it out."

"What similarities?" His father asked, though he suspected that his father already had some ideas and merely wanted confirmation.

"Garth Greenhand was said to make barren women fruitful with a touch, and... did the same to crones who no longer got their moon blood." Septon Barth offered. "Though, it can't be said to be a complete likeness, as Garth Greenhand's mere presence sprouted entire orchids and forests. Or so the legends said."

“Nor has has made a thousand women heavy with strong sons.”
His father said with a snort.

“That we know of,” he added with some humour, or what little humour he could find in this bizarre situation.

“That we know of.” Septon Barth nodded in agreement and Baelon’s smiled died on his lips, the joke no longer seeming as funny. The last thing he wanted was for his son to produce a thousand bastards in Essos.

For a moment, silence fell in the chamber. One that father finally broke.

“This is a dangerous reputation Aegon has acquired.”

Baelon’s eyes narrowed, and then narrowed even further as Septon Barth spoke up.

“Indeed, your grace. I would not be surprised if the Faith names him a heretic once word of his abilities spread.”

“Heretic? For healing people?” He asked, though he understood the matter was far from so simple.

“Heretic for having magic.” Septon Barth corrected. “According to the Faith, all magic is unnatural, forbidden, or the work of demons.”

“Then how come they haven’t declared the Reach Houses heretic?” He asked. “After all, over half of them are said to have descended from Garth Greenhand.” Then, he suddenly thought of something and paused. “Wait. You said Aegon could reverse old age. Then, mother... could he help he—”

“No.” His father spoke up, looking saddened. “No.” He repeated. “I already sent a letter, asking it of her. And she refused.”

Baelon frowned. “Why?”

Barth answered this time, voice softer. “The Good Queen has buried too many children. She does not wish to bury the rest.”

Baelon leaned back slightly, closing his eyes. That... sounded like her. Too much like her.

The room fell quiet, then he opened his eyes and looked at his father. “What about you?”

His father looked into the distance and sighed heavily. “I have not made up my mind yet.” He said, and then raised a hand to forestall any arguments. “Let’s not speak of this matter anymore.”

Baelon was silent for a moment and then nodded. “I’ll go speak to Viserys and Daemon.”

While he had no idea how Daemon would respond to the news of Aegon’s survival, no... Daemon would definitely react negatively. But they were both Aegon’s elder brothers and deserved to know.

His father nodded and he left his solar, striding through the corridors. Along the way, his thoughts remained on Aegon.

How did Aegon get his hands on such an ability? Did he always have that ability and merely hid it? Or is there to some truth to the Faith’s words and Aegon had consorted with some demon. If so, then what was he supposed to do?

His thoughts continued to spiral till he reached Viserys’ chambers... and stopped outside. Before he could knock on the door, the door nearby creaked open, and Gael stepped out.

She looked wrong. Her face as too pale, and her legs were unsteady.

Baelon's eyes dropped low, and he saw water pooling at her feet.

For a heartbeat, he didn't understand. Then—

“Guards!” he barked. “Fetch the Grand Maester. Midwives. Now!”

Gael swayed and Baelon caught her before she could fall. “It's alright,” he said, though he knew it wasn't. A birthing bed was a woman's battlefield, one where his own Alysanne had lost. And compared to her, Gael looked far too ill-prepared.

“Viserys!” he snapped, and the door opened as his boy appeared, looking startled as he noticed Gael's condition. “Find Daemon. Now.”

Viserys hesitated. “He—he's not in the—”

“I don't care where he is. Find him. And bring him back.”

Viserys ran, and Baelon picked Gael, gently carrying her back to her bed. The Grandmaester and midwives appeared not too long after. And then, the screams begin.

The night dragged, on, as Baelon sat outside, listening to the sister's pained screams, and living the same nightmare of Alysanne's death over and over again, his fist clenched behind his back as he

once again felt the utter helplessness of nothing being able to offer any help. Just like back then.

His thoughts then suddenly went back to Aegon. *Could he?* No. Even if Aegon could, Braavos was too far away, and Vhagar was already exhausted. The only dragon riders in the family capable of making the journey were Rhaenys and Daemon. Rhaenys was too far away now and Daemon... who knows what Daemon would do if he met Aegon right now.

In the end, he could do nothing but sit helplessly, counting the hours until finally... dawn came. And with it—

A silence that made his stomach curdle.

The Grand Maester stepped out first, his eyes downcast, and Baelon felt as if his entire body been dumped into ice water. *No. Not again.*

“It was a stillbirth, my prince.”

The words struck harder than any blade. And having expected something like this did not lighten the pain in the least.

Baelon swayed in his feet and had to rest against the wall to remain steady. He glanced at the Grandmaester, and formed the words with great difficulty. “And Gael?”

“She’ll live, your grace. But...”

No. Not again. “But what?” The words were meant to be harsh, stern but when they left his lips, they did as a mere whisper.

“Princess Gael will live, your grace. But... her womb is damage. She’ll not give birth again.”

Baelon felt as if the world had swept from under his feet. Aemma had already suffered quite a few stillbirths before Rhaenyra was born... and this now. Had the gods truly cursed his family?

Behind him, the sound of boots rang out and he turned in time to see Daemon walked through the corridor. His gait unsteady, his hair disheveled, his clothes crumpled, and when he came near enough, Baelon was able to pick up the stench of wine and cheap perfume.

It didn’t take a genius to guess where Deamon had gone last night, or what he had been doing while his wife was facing a life and death battle.

Alyssa... what kind of son have I raised?

Daemon came to stop in front of him and blinked, as if suddenly realising what he was. “What—”

For a moment, Baelon was overcome with the urge to visit the same violence upon Daemon that his son Aegon had. But then he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

No, as much as he disliked his father these days, his words were correct. As the heir of the Iron Throne, he could not act however he pleased. Though for a moment, he seriously weighed keeping his title as an heir against being able to punch Daemon.

The answer, much to his dissatisfaction, was that it wasn't worth it.

Baelon turned and strode past his son.