

“So there I was, hiding in one of the empty tombs, completely covered in flour, and the moment Robb brought the others down, I jumped out and moaned like I was rising from my grave,” Jon chuckled, walking with Laenor through the halls of Dragonstone. The two of them were speaking Valyrian, one far more proficiently than the other, so he figured that he could tell tales from his childhood without raising questions from those they passed that he couldn’t answer.

“How did they react?” Laenor asked, amused.

“Sansa screamed and ran off, Bran just clung to Robb’s leg and cried, and Arya punched me right in the gut,” Jon replied, and the two of them laughed, though his face fell after a moment. “Gods, I miss them.”

“It sounds like you were all really close,” Laenor murmured as they came to the throne room.

“We were,” Jon replied. “Lady Catelyn hated me with a passion, of course, and Sansa could be distant at times, wanting to be just like her, but the others never treated me like anything other than their brother. Did you and your sister ever get up to anything like that?”

“Laena was always the more adventurous of us,” Laenor replied. “She played little pranks now and then when we were younger, but the moment she bonded with Vhagar, the two of them became inseparable. I suppose silly jokes and games are somewhat dull compared to flying atop the most dangerous living thing in Westeros.”

“How did the two of them bond, anyway?” Jon asked as they entered the throne room.

“She’s always liked her,” Laenor replied. “I don’t recall it much, but she apparently saw Great-Uncle Baelon on the great beast once when we visited the good queen and was enthralled immediately. I’ve always found her terrifying and was less than thrilled when I learned that she’d be moving to Driftmark. When the spring prince died, Vhagar returned to Dragonstone, and Laena tried to bribe some of the men to sail her over once, though Mother happened to overhear her little plot.”

“I imagine the princess was unhappy,” Jon chuckled.

“That’s putting it mildly,” Laenor laughed. “The council had just happened then, and the three of us didn’t leave Driftmark again until after the Old King died. Once he did, though, that changed, and on a short visit here, Laena disappeared. While everyone was searching frantically, one of the men spotted Vhagar flying rather low above the ground, and there she was, one and ten, and laughing her head off as the wind whipped through her hair. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Mother so simultaneously angry and proud before, though Father was just angry at her for running off.”

“What are you two conspiring about?” Qarl Correy asked, his voice thick with false cheer and humor.

“Oh, I was just telling Jon about Laena’s first flight on Vhagar,” Laenor replied, switching to the common tongue and not seeming to notice the jealous glint in his lover’s eyes, though Jon couldn’t help but see it.

“I almost wish I could just tell him that I’m fucking Rhaenyra,” he thought to himself, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

He had done everything in his power short of outright saying it over the past few moons to make it clear to the other man that he and Laenor were simply friends, but Qarl had yet to accuse him of anything, and he had no idea how to even bring up such a thing otherwise without it seeming like he was protesting too much. He knew that Laenor had told him that there was nothing between them, but his lover either didn't believe him or did and still feared that that might change.

"I wish men of his nature could just know when they were dealing with others like them," he grumbled mentally, turning to look at Rhaenyra, who seemed to be listening to the last petition of the day.

She practically glowed these days, and he thought she looked more beautiful than ever, though she heartily disagreed. Now about six or so moons into her pregnancy, she had finally started to show, and she had grown dramatically over the past couple moons, much to her displeasure. Her morning sickness had passed a couple moons ago, though, which had helped improve her general mood a little.

"Anyway, all in all, Jon, I'd say your Valyrian is improving," Laenor murmured, turning back to him for a moment. "Your accent is still atrocious, but you're making progress."

"Thank you for helping me," Jon smiled. "Excuse me."

As he made his way over to Ser Harwin, who smiled as he spotted him, he overheard Rhaenyra speaking to the pair of angry-looking old women.

"...just won't be feasible to shut it down," Rhaenyra concluded, her tone making it very clear that she was trying to let the old women down easy.

"That den of sin and perversion is a blight upon the island, Princess," one of the old women insisted. "Marya and I fear that it reflects badly on you to have it here. You know how people gossip."

"Belina and I so hoped that it would disappear when that wretched old whoremonger died," Marya bemoaned.

"I know that people gossip," Rhaenyra replied, her eyes narrowing dangerously, "just as I know that men will be men and whores will whore no matter how we feel about it. That brothel is unsightly, I know, but it is also out of the way, and I think you'll agree that having such things contained away from the village square is better than having them out in the open there."

"Well..." Marya went to say.

"I have heard your petition, but I will not be shutting it down at this time," Rhaenyra continued. "Now, that is all the time I have today for petitions. Good day to you both."

"The gods smile on you, Princess," Belina said, scowling as Marya just nodded.

As the two of them left, he heard Harwin mutter under his breath, "Bloody old crones."

"Jon," Rhaenyra smiled as she stood up gingerly. "What brings you here so early?"

“Symon finished your suit of armor and bade me bring it here,” Jon replied. “He wants me back within the hour, but I told him I’d get your opinion on it first if you had the time. He’d have taken a moment to ensure that it fits perfectly and do any last-minute minor adjustments as needed, but...”

“But I’m not exactly in fighting shape just now,” Rhaenyra replied, resting a hand on her belly and scowling.

“You can still look at it,” Jon suggested, and she glared at him before sighing.

“The most I can do,” Rhaenyra muttered. “Where is it?”

“I took the liberty of setting it in your solar,” Jon replied, and she smiled slightly at that.

“Come, you two,” Rhaenyra commanded. As she spotted Laenor speaking with Qarl, she murmured, “I hope he remembers that Corlys and Rhaenys are coming.”

“Again?” Ser Harwin asked.

“He mentioned it just now,” Jon replied.

“They apparently bring news,” Rhaenyra replied as the three of them left the throne room. “It’s probably just word from Daemon and Laena, but it could be more substantial. At any rate, it means throwing a feast, albeit a small one, and I’m hardly in the mood for it just now.”

“Do you feel any worse?” Jon asked, concerned.

“No, but I’m still achy, irritable, and can’t seem to get enough sleep,” Rhaenyra grumbled, “not to mention that I’m apparently carrying a damn elephant in here.”

Jon gulped at that, well aware of the fact that, if they weren’t in public, she’d have glared at him for it. Maester Gerardys had made some comments about how quickly her belly was growing but had yet to provide any actual suggestions as for why that might be. On the whole, Rhaenyra seemed perfectly healthy, and their child seemed to be developing well. It was taking its toll on her, though, not helped by the frequent news they’d gotten from the capital over the last few moons about Alicent’s own pregnancy. They reached Rhaenyra’s solar quickly enough, and as Ser Harwin threw the door open, both of them stopped and stared at what he’d laid out on the floor.

“Wow, that was some great work,” Ser Harwin commented as he looked down at the suit of armor.

“Could you pick up the helmet?” Rhaenyra asked. “Bending over isn’t advisable just now.”

“Of course,” Jon said, doing as she asked and handing it to her.

“It’s based on my uncle’s armor,” Rhaenyra smiled, ghosting her fingers over the ornate dragon wing-themed accents on either side of the black helmet. “This much I can try on, at least.”

“Here,” Jon said, moving her braid behind her so she could put the helmet on without much issue.

It fit snugly, and she took a moment to position it to her liking before turning to Jon and Ser Harwin and asking, “How does it look?”

“Like the Lord Commander’s,” Ser Harwin replied. “I thought it looked familiar.”

“As I was thinking about ideas for it on the way back from Essos, I recalled how nice he’d always looked in his armor and thought that I might describe it to Symon,” Rhaenyra smiled. “As it happened, though, I found an old sketch that Daemon must have done when he was young and used as inspiration later on because it looked a lot like his armor. I showed it to the smith, and he was able to parse out what I wanted from it.”

“How do you know he did it himself, much less that he had to have been young?” Jon asked.

“It looked like it had been done by a child, albeit one with a hint of talent for drawing,” Rhaenyra replied. “I cannot imagine him holding onto it for as long as he must have if he’d just gotten another child to do it for him, and it looked so much like his armor that it couldn’t have been anything else. Anyway, tell Symon that I’m thrilled with what I’ve seen so far and that once I’ve given birth and regained my figure, I’ll try it on and we can see if any adjustments are needed then.”

“Do you want me to move it somewhere else?” Jon asked.

“No, I’ll have the servants take care of that,” Rhaenyra replied. She was about to say something else when a loud shriek echoed through the air, and she sighed. “That’s Meleys, so I really must go. Thank you again, Jon.”

“Of course,” Jon nodded, smiling. “Good luck.”

She laughed at that and looked out the nearest window, spotting the familiar red dragon as she landed in Aegon’s Garden. It wasn’t that she didn’t like her good parents, but they’d visited or invited her and Laenor over to Driftmark repeatedly since they first learned that she was with child, and it was becoming tiring. Of course, that had less to do with them and more to do with the fact that she found most things tiring these days.

“*You’re lucky that you’re going to be cute,*” she thought to herself as she gently palmed her swollen belly and smiled tiredly.

As taxing as it was carrying the little wonder, the mere thought of him or her still brought a smile to her face. Jon was convinced that she was carrying a boy, if for no other reason than the fact that she had proven to be good at having them, and part of her hoped he was right. She wanted a girl too, but a boy would help secure her position better, especially if he came out with purple eyes and silver-gold hair. Her child would be her heir either way, but having a son would help soothe some of the more conflicted lords’ concerns, as her reign would be followed by his.

“Princess?” Ser Harwin asked, shocking her out of her reverie.

“Did you say something?” Rhaenyra asked.

“I asked if you wanted me to order the servants to move your armor to the armory while you go greet Princess Rhaenys,” Harwin repeated, and her cheeks turned slightly pink.

“Yes, thank you,” Rhaenyra replied, shaking her head.

If Rhaenys had landed, then Corlys had to be close behind, as she always gave him a slight head start when they traveled separately, and that meant that she’d be entertaining both of them soon enough. Putting her thoughts about the future out of her head, she went downstairs, hoping that Corlys had at least brought her something interesting this time.

His entire muscular body shone with sweat as Jon carefully worked the billows, heating the forge to the exact temperature he was aiming for. He'd done this often enough over the past few moons to be able to tell more or less by eye when it was hot enough for the metal. He still got it wrong occasionally, but that was becoming rarer, and it was largely because of that that he was given this test. The moment he thought that it was hot enough, he grabbed the small rod of iron with his tongs and carefully placed it inside the burning, hot fire. He watched it slowly turn orange, looking for the shade he knew it would turn when it was hot enough to be shaped.

Symon watched him in silence, his dark eyes trained on the man he'd taken on as an apprentice as a favor to the princess. Jon knew that he wouldn't step in if he made any mistakes this time, wanting to see him complete the task he'd been given to the best of his ability, succeed or fail, but he put that out of his mind. He'd fought against men who wanted to kill him before and taken part in large battles against impossible odds. Compared to that, there was no real stress to be found in working the forge. Once the iron was hot enough, he carefully removed it and brought it to the anvil before grabbing his hammer.

The metal sang with his every strike, and Jon couldn't help but smile at how much stronger he had become since he started this. His body had been altered by whatever entity hurled him through time and space, but while his greater stature had come with increased strength, it paled next to what he could boast of now.

"Donal's one good arm was stronger than almost any of ours," he thought to himself, recalling the old smith of Castle Black. *"The one-armed man who slew a giant."*

He missed the old smith, whom he'd befriended, but having died himself, he knew there were significantly less dignified ways to go out.

Again and again his hammer struck true, flattening the uppermost third of it until it was widened and square. With that done, he grabbed a chisel and set about splitting the remaining two-thirds of the rod in half, knowing that he was rapidly running out of time before he'd need to reheat the metal. It still glowed an angry orange, but that glow was fading quickly, and he knew that Symon was going to point that out when he was done. Placing the chisel in the middle of the metal, he began striking the end of it with his hammer. The metal was still hot enough that he could get through it quickly, and he had just enough time to divide it in half and stretch the metal strips out before he needed to put it back in the fire.

"Fuck," he muttered under his breath as he wiped the sweat from his brow and returned to the billows.

He didn't need to add anything else to the fire at least, and in little time it was hot enough again to be of use. Picking up the still dangerously hot piece of iron with his tongs, he set it back in the fire and watched, waiting for it to become usable again. It had gone in stone cold the first time and took a few minutes to heat up. Still being quite hot this time around, it took far less time, and soon enough, he was able to retrieve it and return it to the anvil. The metal sang once more as he quickly lengthened the two thin strips out until they were the length and thinness he was looking for. With that done, he picked the slowly forming hook up with his tongs and laid the first of the thin sections across the anvil's horn as he grabbed his hammer. The last bit of work for his assignment took mere minutes as he carefully curved the hooks around the horn until it was exactly the shape he was looking for.

“Good,” Symon said gruffly as Jon dropped the hook in the quenching barrel. “You could have lengthened the rod a little faster, but you’d have still needed to reheat it. You’ve made a perfectly serviceable hook for your hammer.”

Jon smiled at that, more than used to the smith’s reluctance to give praise, and felt a swell of pride within him. Most of his time at the smithy was still spent on menial tasks, but he had learned much in the past few moons and impressed Symon enough to be given actual jobs to do. He hadn’t done anything that would be sold yet, other than nails, but he had made his own hammer the day before and now had a hook to hang it from in the workshop. These were both apparently early tasks that Symon’s old master gave to him when he was sure that he had learned enough to undertake them, and they were meant as signs of faith in an apprentice’s abilities.

“Did the princess say much about the armor?” Symon asked.

“She was thrilled, though she couldn’t try much on other than the helmet,” Jon replied.

“A good ways along then, is she?” Symon asked casually.

“The maester says likely six moons,” Jon replied.

“If she’s only six moons along, then she’s in for a real treat,” Bethany chuckled as she poked her head in.

“Something wrong, Beth?” Symon asked.

“Alan sent Mara over with a few skins of beer as thanks for the work you did for him,” Bethany replied, and Symon scoffed as he accepted the skin and handed it to Jon, who nodded gratefully.

“He thanks me with his coin,” the blacksmith muttered. “I wish that man would stop trying to kiss my ass. It’s not his fault some knobhead spilled beer or that little Calon slipped on it.”

“Symon, we have two very energetic babies at home; if the local tavernkeep wants to shower us with free beer, I’m all for it,” Bethany sighed, and Symon chuckled.

“Well, when you put it like that...” he replied.

“What did you mean before about the princess being in for a treat?” Jon asked as he finished his swig of surprisingly nice ale.

“I saw her in the market about a week ago,” Bethany replied. “She comes by occasionally to see what the traders have, always surrounded by such tall guards it’s hard to get a good look at her, but I did this time and, well, she looked a little large for six months.”

“That’s not something that I’d suggest you let her hear you say,” Jon cautioned the other woman, who just laughed.

“Oh, I don’t mean it as an insult,” Bethany clarified. “I was about the same size at that point when I was with child, and we both know how that ended.”

Jon’s eyes widened as he caught on to what she meant, and the world seemed to slip away from him for a moment.

“Twins?” he thought to himself. The idea of having a child, not that he’d ever be able to acknowledge him or her as his own, was one thing, but twins?

“Jon?” Symon asked, and Jon shook his head, wiping the sweat from his brow and hoping that he didn’t look too out of it just there.

“Just thinking about what happy news that will be for the princess and Lord Laenor,” he said.

“Anyway, I need to get back to the little ones,” Bethany smiled. “Your mother’s with them.”

“Right, I’ll see you tonight, luv,” Symon said softly, kissing her.

“Twins,” Jon muttered under his breath.

“It’ll be one way to even the score,” Symon chuckled. When Jon cocked an eyebrow at him, he clarified, saying, “Just some nonsense I heard a few men talking about near the dock the other night. They had heard that the queen was with child and were joking that the princess would need to hurry if she wanted to keep up.”

“The...state of their relationship is that well known?” Jon asked. The histories had made it seem so, but he’d always wondered if it was true.

“Women are rarely subtle when they don’t like each other, Jon,” Symon laughed. “I try to keep my nose out of noble business, but some things are unavoidable.”

“I’m back,” Dirk announced as he returned from the deliveries he’d made.

“Good,” Symon replied, “now let’s get back to work.”

That worked for Jon, who had come to actually working in the smithy.

“I wonder if they’ll be boys, girls, or one of each,” he thought to himself.

In the other timeline, Rhaenyra had managed to have five sons and lost a daughter just as everything went to shit. Her having twins this time, though, if she was, proved that nothing about the children she would have had without him was relevant to the ones they would have. He had already changed much, and he’d been there for less than a year. He smiled at the thought of what else he might change as Symon barked out instructions.

“This tourney your father’s holding sounds like it’s going to be a grand affair,” Corlys said as he smelled the rich crab stew in front of him and smiled.

“So it seems,” Rhaenyra replied as she nodded to the servant who served her her roasted chicken. Though not as fond of it as her good father, she had never minded seafood, but she had found it didn’t sit well for the past few moons, presumably due to the babe, and hadn’t touched anything of the sort in quite a while.

“We’ll both be attending,” Rhaenys added, and Laenor’s eyes widened.

“Really?” he asked, surprised.

“King’s Landing is a garbage pile full of treasonous snakes, and it smells about as good,” Rhaenys replied, “but given everything, I think it would be appropriate to accompany your father.”

The Queen Who Never Was had seldom visited the capital since her grandfather first chose Baelon over her as his heir and had only been there once since Viserys took the throne, for Rhaenyra and Laenor’s wedding.

“I’ll be discussing the canal project with your father and Lord Matthos,” Corlys clarified, looking at Rhaenyra, “but we’ll also be showing our open support for you.”

“Your support would be understood, though,” Rhaenyra puzzled.

“You are hopefully going to rule over them someday, so let me explain something about the lords of this land: they’re fools,” Rhaenys replied, and Rhaenyra’s lips twitched in amusement. “It takes big and obvious displays for anything to sink into their thick skulls, and as the conquerors proved, most of the time it takes fire too.”

“So you want Syrax, Seasmoke, and Meleys to arrive together,” Laenor surmised.

“I do,” Rhaenys replied. “The gods be good, your sister will be back by then, but I wouldn’t count on it.”

“Have you heard much from them?” Rhaenyra asked. “I received one short letter penned in parts by both of them.”

The fact that they’d both clearly had a bit to drink before they put that together was proven by how long Rhaenyra had to spend deciphering their handwriting.

“They’re both enjoying themselves,” Rhaenys replied dryly. “Daemon apparently won a small fleet of ships in a game of chance.”

“Small meaning three or four ships at most, I imagine,” Corlys chuckled. “They’ve quite enjoyed Volantis but met some traders from Qarth and decided to visit it too.”

“Laena, it seems, is the most frustrating parts of both of us,” Rhaenys grumbled, and Corlys laughed.

“I doubt they’ll manage much, but if they can fill those ships with spices and get even half of them back here, they’ll make a good bit of coin off of it,” Corlys replied. “I wouldn’t have thought Daemon to be interested in anything like that.”

“He isn’t,” Rhaenys replied flatly. “He’s indulging her, I would wager. He only wanted to see Volantis because it’s the first daughter of Valyria. Qarth holds no meaning to him.”

“Qarth is the most beautiful city in the world,” Corlys sighed nostalgically.

“Is it really?” Rhaenyra asked.

“The Qartheen claim that theirs is the queen of cities,” Corlys began, taking a sip of wine to wet his throat. “They are, by and large, arrogant cunts, but I cannot deny that their city is special. The

famous three walls that surround it are wondrous, tall, and thick; they remind me in a way of Harrenhal, if it had been built by someone who understood the first thing about beauty rather than a damn ironborn. The city is perfectly positioned to benefit from trade between the east and west, being right on the Jade Gates, across from Great Moraq, and they've benefited from that for years."

"Everyone who passed through their waters pays for the privilege I take it?" Rhaenyra asked.

"And then some," Corlys grumbled. "I can't complain, though. My voyage to the Jade Sea was one of the most lucrative of them. If we build the canal linking the Blackwater to the Mander, even the third of the profits I'll be taking from it will make House Velaryon a fortune, but all the trade from the Reach will be nothing compared to what Qarth profits from. The whole city drips wealth in a way that would make the Lannisters blush, and merchant princes live in palaces more magnificent than almost all the castles in Westeros. In its day, Valyria was certainly more impressive, but not even Yin is as wealthy as Qarth today."

"Was it the greatest place you visited?" Rhaenyra asked.

"I honestly think that the Summer Isles were lovelier, but I'll remember Qarth for all my days," Corlys replied. "There's a reason why I returned there for my final voyage."

"Do you know how many lords are expected to attend your father's tourney?" Rhaenys asked. "Everyone I've spoken to has suggested that it might be more than just who attended the one that Daemon crashed, but no one's had even an estimate."

"I couldn't say," Rhaenyra replied. "I know the Northerners aren't expected, and I think someone quietly let them know that this was being done in part to help fund a sept so that they wouldn't be taken by surprise and irritated. Most of my father's most recent letters have been about his coming child."

"Another boy, given our luck," Rhaenys hissed.

"I have no doubt," Rhaenyra replied, knowing for a fact that it would be.

"Do you have a sense of what you're having?" Corlys asked. "Rhaenys correctly guessed with both Laena and Laenor."

"Given my current condition, I would wager an aurochs," Rhaenyra grumbled, and Corlys coughed, having sipped his wine at that very moment. "Sorry."

"Your condition has...progressed rapidly over the last three moons," Rhaenys commented, looking contemplative. "Has your maester said anything about it?"

"He's said that I seem perfectly healthy," Rhaenyra replied. "I asked about how I'm growing, and he said he 'needed to see more.'"

"Right," Rhaenys nodded, grabbing her cup of wine.

"By the way, Laenor, I'm sailing to Pentos in a week, and I would like to see this manse that you've said so much about," Corlys smiled.

"Of course," Laenor replied. "Are you just doing a little trading or..."

“I’ve heard rumors that the Triarchy is building up their forces again,” Corlys replied. “It seems they’ve finally realized that Daemon’s away. Now, it might end up being nothing, but it never hurts to check in on your allies if your enemies seem to be on the move. Seasmoke is no Caraxes, and though Syrax is larger...”

“I can’t fly into battle in my condition,” Rhaenyra finished for him.

“I could assist if need be,” Rhaenys sighed. “Meleys is the fastest of our dragons, and her fires burn hot.”

“Like Father says, it might come to nothing,” Laenor interjected, visibly uncomfortable at the thought of his mother going off into battle. “I’ll go with you to Pentos. I’ve developed my own contacts there during my many journeys this year, and I can show you around the manse.”

“Thank you,” Corlys nodded. “If it looks like we might actually end up fighting them, I’ll write to Daemon, though it will take some time for a letter to reach Qarth.”

Rhaenyra huffed and tapped her fingers on the table. Renewed conflict with the Triarchy was the last thing she needed right now. Deconstruction of the existing sept on Visenya’s hill had almost finished, and construction on her sept would start as soon as it was done; she’d soon have an opportunity to try to convince the lords to finish funding it, and beyond that, she was about to make her proposal for the canal project to her father and Lord Matthos. Daemon was away; she was in no condition to fight in his place and while she was sure that Meleys could devastate her share of ships if need be, she was also small enough that scorpions might be a threat to her.

“*Gods, I wish I could just admit that Jon is bonded to Morghul,*” she thought to herself as she took a sip of her water.

The giant black dragon would lay waste to any fleet Tyrosh, Myr, and Lys could throw against them with ease. The thought of Jon riding on his back, wearing armor just like hers, and commanding him to devastate their enemies was an undeniably appealing one, and she rubbed her thighs together subtly.

“*He could command Morghul mentally,*” she reasoned. It would raise questions as to why a notoriously independent and hostile dragon had wiped out their enemies for them, and this wouldn’t be something they could just pretend hadn’t happened like they had with that House Drumm ship a few moons ago, but it wouldn’t be linked to Jon. Figuring that it was an acceptable last resort, she returned to her meal and steered the conversation to lighter topics.

With Corlys and Rhaenys staying the night, there were certain things that Rhaenyra and Laenor both needed to be subtler about, but thankfully for the princess, her frequent trips down the dungeons weren’t one of them. No castle was designed to have the dungeons or the entrances to them in the nicer parts of it, so she could freely make her way down towards the cells without fear of her good parents noticing and asking questions she didn’t want to answer.

There was a small rotation of her most trusted guards that she kept watching Harra’s cell, choosing men that she knew would neither question her nor gossip about her admittedly odd pastime. Ser Harwin had stopped reacting at all to it moons ago and escorted her there as he usually did before leaving her alone with the woman, who was bound to her chair as she generally was. She barely

even looked at her these days, seeming more defeated and despondent than angry as she had been for the longest time.

“I need to remind them to have her bathed,” Rhaenyra thought to herself as she rested her hand on the woman’s head, taking her usual spot behind her.

As she closed her eyes, her mind was immediately inundated by the internal map of the woman’s body. The first time she ever managed to get this far, she had followed a single drop of her blood all the way through the system of veins throughout her body. That had been exhilarating and extraordinary, and it had been only the first step. In the countless times since that she’d expanded her consciousness and reached into Harra’s body to view her, she had seen so much more.

She’d seen her every organ, viewed her every bone, and learned more about the body than she ever could have otherwise, even if she’d asked Maester Gerardys to ask her. It wasn’t that she didn’t think her maester was sufficiently learned about the body, but she had to admit that his lessons would have been lost on her. Having seen so much of it up close, though, had helped her learn quite easily. She’d still needed to check the texts on anatomy to put names to everything she was seeing, but that wasn’t difficult either.

Harra’s every organ, muscle, and bone were plainly visible to her in her mind’s eye, and she marveled at just how complex and intricate the human body was. Everything seemed to work together as a cohesive unit, which wasn’t exactly a groundbreaking discovery, but it was still really interesting to actually witness. Peering into the other woman’s body like this was something that overwhelmed her the first few times, as it was a great deal of information to take in at once, but after she got over her initial shock, she was able to pick up on certain uniquenesses as well.

“She must have greatly strained her right shoulder at some point in her life,” Rhaenyra thought to herself as she saw and tried to feel the mass of rough, harder tissue seemingly holding a muscle between her shoulder and her neck together in a knot.

It looked greatly unlike the other, smoother muscles, and she wondered what exactly had happened, not that she’d be likely to get answers about that.

“This bone in her left arm looks off slightly,” she thought to herself, wondering if it had been broken.

The scrolls she’d read through had all said that, once a student of the path of flesh mastered the ability to peer inside the body of a subject, the next task they were given was to look for anything that appeared to be off in some way, as our injuries and excesses all left their traces over time. She had discovered so far, in addition to the shoulder wound and possibly once broken arm, that Harra’s liver was in rather bad shape. It had taken some research to figure out which organ she was actually looking at, but she’d managed, and she figured that she had a good idea which was which by now.

Harra let out a low groan that sounded like a confused question just then, shocking Rhaenyra out of her reverie. It was the first time the woman had made a sound in moons and came as a surprise.

“Its research,” Rhaenyra replied simply to her silent question. “You wouldn’t understand.”

Harra just scoffed at that and went silent, allowing her to delve once more into her body. She was going to have her blood soon, Rhaenyra noticed, having witnessed the woman’s cycle up close enough times to know what her womb looked like when it was about to happen. She moved on from there, taking another visual journey through her body, looking for any other unusual signs that

she might have missed in the many times she'd done this. In order to truly know what did and didn't count as odd, she knew that she'd need to look at other test subjects, but that wasn't an option just now, and she didn't know if it would be.

"I'll just have to make do with what I have," she thought to herself, pulling back and twisting one of her rings on her finger as she contemplated what to do next. She had read one of the scrolls on this subject so many times, she knew it off by heart and recalled the section she'd reread earlier that morning.

The simplest changes one can affect are all cosmetic. All but the most inept novices can alter hair's texture, color, or appearance, and changing skin tone can also be a useful learning exercise. Altering muscle, fat, or cartilage is more difficult than this, and altering bone is much harder still. A true master of the art, however, can shape the form of another as they please, molding flesh as a potter would clay.

Absolute focus is a must to achieve any changes, as losing it for even a moment can completely ruin your work. To journey on the path of flesh is to learn how to force your will on the very bodies of others, and so your will has to be absolute too. Visualize what you want to change, focus on that image without distraction, and will it into being. Our slaves are ours to make of what we will, but no Valyrian will ever truly master another unless by the path.

One thing she'd had to grapple with as she read through those scrolls, and indeed, as she read through most of the Valyrian texts, was just how much slavery was a way of life for them. It made her own ancestors feel almost alien to her in a way, as she had been raised to believe that owning another person was a sin of the gravest proportions, but to them it was as natural as the rain. Their faith in their own absolute right to be masters of all they surveyed was as strong as that of a septon's faith in the Seven.

"It was that faith in themselves that led them to come up with anything like this magic, though," she thought to herself. It didn't justify it by any means, and she still struggled with what everyone she knew would have said if they knew what she was playing around with, but she had long since determined that it was necessary for the long-term survival of her family and tried not to give it much more thought than that. *"If the Ghiscari slavers share those sentiments, I cannot imagine what an uphill battle Daenerys would have faced trying to destroy the institution of slavery, especially with mere hatchling dragons under her command."*

She shook her head and put all thoughts out of her mind as she delved back into Harra and decided to try to affect a change in her for the first time. She knew better than to try anything particularly difficult, as she would, at best, fail, and at worst, actually harm her only viable test subject, but she figured that trying to do something with her hair might be harmless enough. Bringing her focus to the woman's right forearm, she felt the sparse, brown hairs there and examined them more closely.

She had looked at the woman's hair many times as part of her general examinations and noticed how it grew out of the skin, noting that it looked a little like an onion. As she looked over the sparse, faint hairs on Harra's arm, she focused in on a single bulb and tried to will it to close up at its base. It resisted the minor change, and she pulled back for a moment, emptying her mind again and focusing more on the task at hand. To shape another was to force your absolute will onto their body; it required focus and imperiousness, and Rhaenyra had spent moons working on the former while, as a princess, she had never lacked the latter.

She pushed again and again, undeterred or even distracted by her failures, wanting to take the next step in her training and being unwilling to give up so soon. Gradually, she felt something in the hair

start to shift, to weaken under her repeated assaults, until eventually, the tissue around it started to squeeze, pushing the entire thing up. Rhaenyra knew that if she allowed herself to celebrate that, it would probably break her focus and ruin it, so, with practiced control, she kept her mind blank and focused on the task at hand. Bit by bit, she drove the entire hair up out of Harra's body, not just the shaft that lay beyond the skin, but the entire thing, all while forcing her body to close the gap it would create, altering it in a way that would ensure that it would not grow back.

"That worked," she thought to herself once it was done, pulling back just long enough to grin in triumphant glee before returning to Harra's arm.

With each hair, it grew easier, as she got better at pushing her will onto the woman's form, until she was able to drive one out with a single thought. When they were all taken care of, she pulled back and let her go before brushing her hairs off of her forearm, leaving smooth skin in her wake. Harra looked down in shock, her eyes widening, and she started to struggle against her bindings in confusion as Rhaenyra let her go.

"I'm finished," she announced, more than happy with the progress she'd made that day.

Her first alteration was a minor one, but it was still the largest step she'd taken yet, and it thrilled her utterly. Of course, in a week she'd be leaving for the tourney, so she'd only get to practice a few more times before then, and then it would likely be a while before she got to do anything else. She would make sure to have Maester Gerardys, who she'd be leaving in charge in her absence, write to her if Harra's condition worsened in any way. If it didn't, then she'd have proof that it was possible to use fleshshaping magic on people without it causing them unexpected harm, and that would help set her mind at ease.

"If it doesn't hurt her in any way, then I am absolutely doing that to myself," she thought with a slight grin, imagining how Jon would react to seeing her cunt completely bare.

He'd had to pick her hairs out of his teeth a few times, and while he didn't mind, she always found it mortifying, so she figured if she could do away with the thatch of silver curls that covered her sex, it would be well worth it.

"I could just get rid of every hair below my head while I'm at it," she mused, liking the idea very much.

Jon returned to the Red Keep a little earlier than normal that night, as Symon had less to do than normal, and, after grabbing something to eat from the kitchens, returned to his chambers, noticing a servant on her hands and knees, mopping up water outside Rhaenyra's door with a towel. He grinned, knowing what that meant, and quickly let himself into the hidden tunnel connecting their rooms. Pressing his ear against the false wall that separated the tunnel from her room, he heard nothing and carefully opened it a crack to make sure that she was alone.

"Come in," Rhaenyra sighed, noticing him at once, and he did so without hesitating, smiling down at the sight that greeted him.

Rhaenyra was completely naked and lying in a tub, enjoying a warm bath, something that she'd been doing more lately to help her aching body. He knew that she didn't care for the changes that her body had undergone, but he couldn't bring himself to agree with her. Her breasts, which had

already been magnificently large, had grown well, and her hips had widened beautifully, as had her round arse. Her belly had grown, filled with his child.

“*Or children,*” he thought to himself.

“Beautiful,” he murmured, smiling at her, and she returned the look.

“I don’t quite feel like it these days,” Rhaenyra grumbled, sitting up in the tub. “You’re back early.”

“Symon sent me home,” Jon replied.

“He does know about the tourney, yes?” Rhaenyra asked.

“Oh, yes, I told him weeks ago,” Jon chuckled. “How did things go with Corlys and Rhaenys?”

“Pretty well,” Rhaenyra replied. “There are whispers that the Triarchy is set to cause trouble again, though it could turn out to be false.”

“The timing could be better,” Jon grumbled. “I know that your uncle’s fortunes turned slightly there just before he returned here, but his forces maintained a strong presence on the islands until the Dance.”

“He didn’t mention much about that,” Rhaenyra said, looking at him with interest.

“My recollection of that part of history is foggy at best, but I know that Dorne allied with the Triarchy and started causing trouble,” Jon replied. “I think Daemon drove them back but not to the line that they had been held to before. Some kind of basic peace must be achieved around this time because nothing seems to really change there for more than a decade.”

“Hmm, so this might be nothing,” Rhaenyra mused. “At any rate, Laenor and Corlys will be going to Pentos tomorrow while my cousin flies back to Driftmark. I made progress with Harra, by the way.”

“Really?” Jon asked, kneeling by the foot of the tub and picking up one of her dainty little feet as she lay back and sighed happily.

“I managed to force the hairs on her right forearm to be pushed out of her,” Rhaenyra replied. “If they don’t grow back, which I tried to prevent them from doing, then I’ll have affected my first real change in someone.”

“If you could do that in reverse, there are many men out there who would beggar themselves for the service,” Jon chuckled, and she snorted.

“I’m not using ancient Valyrian flesh magic to cause bald, old men’s hair to grow back,” Rhaenyra laughed. “I only picked that as a relatively easy exercise. Could you rub them, my love? They’re killing me.”

“Happily,” Jon smiled, kneading the soft skin of her sole. As Rhaenyra let out a soft, breathy moan that he swore he felt in his cock, he tried to gently get into something that he felt he needed to talk to her about. “Symon’s wife stopped by the smithy earlier.”

“Oh?” Rhaenyra asked, not bothering to open her eyes.

“She was just dropping something off for him, but she got to talking about her particular experiences when she was carrying her children, and it made me wonder,” Jon replied.

“We really need to work on your courtly double-speak, darling,” Rhaenyra chuckled, opening her eyes. “What are you getting at?”

“We’re more direct in the North,” Jon replied. “The way she described things sounded more similar to your case than anything I witnessed when Lady Catelyn was carrying my sib...cousins and it made me wonder if you might be carrying twins.”

“I...” Rhaenyra trailed off, her eyes going wide.

She’d been rather self-conscious about her appearance for the past couple moons and he’d hoped to ease his way into that question better, but she wasn’t wrong about him being terrible at that.

Rhaenyra ran a hand through her hair as her mind raced at that possibility, coming to rest on her neck, and she paused at the thought that she could actually look. It would be simple, and after the past few moons of practice, easy for her to do so. Just a small peek inside her womb could tell her all that she wanted to know.

“Jon, Harra hasn’t been hurt by anything that I’ve done to her so far,” she murmured.

“I know,” Jon replied, his brow furrowing in confusion. “We’ll see if that stays the case with you actually changing something in her now.”

“What I mean to say is that examining her as I have hasn’t done her any harm, and I could actually look at our babe or babes if I wanted to,” Rhaenyra clarified, watching his eyes widen. “I could tell if we’re having twins or not and might even be able to tell their sexes at this point.”

“I hadn’t even thought...” Jon trailed off, his lips twitching. “It hasn’t harmed Harra at all.”

Rhaenyra squealed in delight at his acceptance and settled back into the tub.

“Do I need to stop massaging you for it to work?” Jon asked.

“Don’t you dare,” Rhaenyra grinned before closing her eyes and resting a hand on her belly.

She had done this enough that minor distractions weren’t a problem anymore, and as wonderful as Jon’s talented hands felt on her, she knew it wouldn’t be an issue. Quieting her mind, she looked inside someone other than Harra for the first time and sighed happily as she felt quickly mapped, out her body in her mind’s eye. At once she knew that there were significant differences between her and the other woman, and she knew that she’d examine them in detail at some point, but she had only one goal in mind just then, and nothing was going to distract her from it. The moment she looked inside her womb, she felt her eyes fill with tears of joy.

“Rhaenyra?” Jon asked in concern, letting her foot go and cupping her cheek as he saw tears stream down her cheeks.

“They’re perfect,” Rhaenyra wept, smiling widely. “Our sons are perfect.”

“Sons,” Jon thought to himself, feeling a mix of elation and pride the likes of which he’d never known, and before he realized what he was doing, he had captured her lips with his.

The two of them held each other’s heads tenderly, expressing with their lips and tongues what each was too emotional to get out in words.

“I love you,” Rhaenyra whispered as she broke the kiss for air, not trusting her voice not to break.

“I love you too,” Jon replied, feeling his eyes grow misty as he stared down at the goddess before him. “Of course our children are perfect, my love; they take after their mother.”

“Oh, I’m perfect, am I?” Rhaenyra asked, her voice tinged with amusement.

“Utterly,” Jon replied, “from your head to your toes.”

“Speaking of toes, I was quite enjoying what you were doing before,” Rhaenyra grinned.

“Is this that subtle court speak you mentioned before?” Jon chuckled.

“No, this is a command from your princess,” Rhaenyra replied with feigned seriousness. “Massage my feet.”

“As my perfect princess commands,” Jon grinned, returning to her feet and picking them both up.

They were small, befitting her stature, and smooth, with not a callus to be seen. Like her hands, they spoke to her upbringing and how little physical adversity she’d faced in life. Of course, he knew well that just because someone didn’t have to struggle to feed themselves, that didn’t mean that they lacked challenges, some of them truly dire. As if she could read his mind, Rhaenyra chose that moment to speak up.

“My mother practically lived in baths like this towards the end,” she said sadly. “I didn’t understand why at the time, though now I think they were hoping that the warmth would induce birth.”

“You never speak of her,” Jon murmured, taking hold of the foot he hadn’t massaged before and digging his thumbs into her gently.

“It still hurts,” Rhaenyra sighed. “She’s been out of my life for longer than she was in it now, but sometimes it still feels like yesterday.”

“You were so young,” Jon murmured.

“So was she,” Rhaenyra muttered. “If we had still possessed fleshshaping magic, if we had managed to bring over more from Valyria than just dragons and a couple bloody swords, she could have lived.”

“We’ll make sure our descendants learn what we’ve uncovered,” Jon promised her.

“If I can master this properly and teach it to our children, perhaps no Targaryen will ever have to suffer her fate again,” Rhaenyra mused. “To be honest, I still feel like I’ve only scratched the surface of what this discipline can do.”

“Well, we had only so long to sort through the scrolls before I got too busy to help,” Jon pointed out.

“And I’m too tired at the end of the day to do much these days,” Rhaenyra huffed.

“The babes will come soon enough,” Jon assured her. “I never imagined how happy I would be to be a father. It was something I vowed never to even attempt.”

“They won’t grow up being scorned for what they are like you were or feeling replaced like I did,” Rhaenyra promised him. “Between us and Laenor, they will be loved and adored and want for nothing at all.”

“They can never know that they’re mine,” Jon felt the need to point out.

“No,” Rhaenyra agreed, her eyes dimming slightly, “but they will know that you are a dear friend of their parents, whom they can turn to for anything.”

Jon smiled sadly at that, but he knew that there was no alternative. He would love them anyway and do all in his power to protect them, even if they never knew why he was so protective.

“*Was this what the Kingslayer went through?*” he wondered to himself, not pleased by the comparison even as he made it, particularly since Rhaenyra planned to make him her Lord Commander of Queensguard too. “*At least she isn’t a miserable cunt like Cersei Lannister.*”

“You’re so good at that,” Rhaenyra sighed happily. “They’ve been so sore these past few weeks.”

“Considering that I put you in this state, the least I can do is rub your sore feet,” Jon said. “Perhaps the Valyrians were right about them being the most beautiful people in the world because I swear even your feet are pretty.”

“If they’re pretty, then you won’t mind kissing them, will you?” Rhaenyra asked playfully, raising the foot he was holding higher.

Considering that they were freshly washed, he didn’t mind in the slightest, and he smirked as a thought occurred to him that would go further. He licked up along her sole from her heel to her toes, smiling as she squealed in laughter.

“You’re lucky that I’m not ticklish, or I might have marred that handsome face of yours,” Rhaenyra giggled. “You’re really not shy about using that lovely mouth of yours, are you?”

“There isn’t an inch of you I wouldn’t happily lick,” Jon replied, wrapping his lips around her big toe and bathing it with his tongue.

“You’ve made that rather clea...oh,” Rhaenyra moaned softly. “Oh, that actually feels rather nice.”

Jon was surprised by that, but he was more than happy to continue if she liked it. He snaked his tongue between her long, narrow toes, keeping his eyes locked onto her to see how she reacted. Her face was flushed to start with, a consequence of the warm bath, but seemed to turn pinker as he worked, and he wondered if she was actually growing wet. Switching to the other foot, he repeated his worship of her and dipped a finger into her bathwater to check the temperature.

“I know this is cooler than you like it,” Jon grinned. “If you get out of the tub, I’ll be able to worship you properly.”

“I’m too tired to fuck, but I’ll suck your cock,” Rhaenyra offered, and he captured her lips with his.

“Right now, all I want is to sup from your sweet cunt until you’re a quivering, mindless wreck,” Jon whispered in her ear, making her shiver.

“Help me up,” Rhaenyra grinned, offering him her arms.

He carefully helped her rise and climb out of the tub before drying her thoroughly with the nearest towel.

“Gods, you’re gorgeous,” Jon groaned as he palmed her wonderfully round arse. “I swear I’m going to fill you with more of my babes as soon as I can.

“Jon,” Rhaenyra whimpered, grabbing his tunic and pulling him to her so she could kiss him again.

He carefully walked her towards their bed, treating her like she was the most precious thing in the world, and the second she sat down on its edge, he descended to his knees before her. As he gazed at her belly, he felt like his heart was going to burst. A family he’d never allowed himself to want was right in front of him, his beloved princess and the sons growing inside her. He pressed his lips against her soft skin, only to jerk back and laugh.

“Did he kick you?” Rhaenyra asked, giggling as Jon nodded. “Well, one of us did, anyway.”

“Such a violent woman I fell in love with,” Jon smiled, spreading her thighs with his hands.

Her silvery curls were damp, and not just, he suspected, because of the bath, and he parted them with his fingers, exposing her pink folds to his sight. Leaning in, she gave her a long, slow lick, and she sighed breathily, snaking her fingers into his dark locks. Digging his fingers into her hips, he devoured her hungrily, drinking from her like she was his last meal, and her sighs turned to moans of pleasure.

“It doesn't matter how many times you...oh gods...do this, I will never get used to it,” Rhaenyra moaned.

“A woman like you deserves to be kissed often, well, and in all manner of places,” Jon rumbled, wrapping his lips around her taut nub and sucking gently.

“Ahh, fuck!” Rhaenyra cried, clapping a hand. “Oh, don’t stop.”

“As if I would,” Jon thought to himself.

They had passed the point in her pregnancy where, she was willing to even attempt to sit on his face a while ago, and he knew that eventually most things they’d gotten so used to doing in bed would be ill-advised, but he swore he would make her scream with his tongue right up to the end. Maester Gerardys had warned that stress was bad for women with child, and he knew that nothing relaxed Rhaenyra quite like making her cum, so really, he was just being a good father.

“Yes!” Rhaenyra cried as he pushed two of his thick fingers inside her and curled them inward. “Oh gods, yes!”

“You’re practically gushing already, my love,” Jon grinned. “Have I been neglectful?”

“No, I’ve just been fucking ravenous,” Rhaenyra groaned. “Too tired and achy to do half of what I want to, and yet I’ve been as hot and wet as ever; it’s infuriating.”

“You know I’m happy to take care of you, love,” Jon whispered, swirling his tongue around her clit and making her whole body jolt. “Now, cum for me.”

He brushed the pads of his fingers against the rough patch inside her as he sucked on her clit again, and she clapped a hand over her mouth to muffle her scream as she came. Writhing in pleasure, she fell backward onto the soft mattress as it thundered through her body in waves. Leaving her clit alone, Jon continued to pump his fingers in and out of her quivering cunt as he sat down next to her. Her orgasmic shaking made her enlarged breasts jiggle beautifully, and he felt his cock throb at the sight. Capturing one of her pebbled peaks with his lips, he wondered when she’d start producing milk.

“I wish I could...just stay like this...all day,” Rhaenyra sighed happily as he pulled his fingers from her cunt and brought them to his lips.

“I wouldn’t object,” Jon smiled, kissing her forehead. “Say, did Maester Gerardys say when your milk might come?”

“Why? Do you want a taste?” Rhaenyra asked jokingly, only for his wince to give away that he did. “I won’t mind, my love, especially since it will probably start a little before they come anyway. I was planning to employ a wet nurse, and since we’re having twins, I definitely will be. It isn’t as though I don’t love feeling your lips on me.”

“I thought you might think it odd,” Jon admitted, settling on his side next to her and gently cupping one of her massive breasts.

“Not at all, Jon,” Rhaenyra sighed happily, cupping his cheek and smiling at him. She kissed him softly and then grinned as she pulled back, saying, “There’s something I promised you that I’ve yet fulfill.”

“And here I was thinking you’d forgotten,” Jon chuckled.

“It’s kind of hard to forget with a reminder this big just standing here,” Rhaenyra purred, wrapping a hand around his shaft and leaning in to give the head a warm, wet kiss.

Jon groaned in pleasure and traced a hand down along her body as she started bobbing her head up and down on his cock. It would never stop amazing him that he’d gone from being a random bastard and member of the Night’s Watch, to a man who got his cock sucked by a princess regularly. His hand drifted to her belly and he palmed it like it the most fragile thing in the world. His sons were growing in there and he didn’t know if it was possible to feel any more love than he did for her and them.

The tourney was in a week and he would be participating. Despite everything, he had found time to train and he was far more confident in his abilities than he was a few moons ago. Given who she was, it wouldn’t be surprising for anyone who won the joust to crown Rhaenyra the Queen of Love and Beauty and he wanted to desperately, especially since doing so would likely involve going through Criston Cole. It wouldn’t be like the situation with his parents, not least of which because

Laenor would cheer happily if he managed it. It was a gift he could give and one that he swore he would do all that he could to.

“Gods, I love you,” Jon groaned and Rhaenyra giggled, making him moan louder. “*There’s nothing I wouldn’t give you, Nyra.*”

He continued to gently stroke her gorgeous, curvaceous form, eager to hold her in his arms and drift off to sleep as soon as he finished.