

“So, we’re finally doing this?” Rhaenyra asked, staring down at her uncle’s map of the islands as the two of them and Jon stood in her solar.

“If by we, you mean Jon and I, then yes,” Daemon replied, and she scowled.

“Why did I even get armor made?” Rhaenyra muttered.

“I assumed it was so you and he could try out...” Daemon went to say.

Before Rhaenyra could yell at her uncle, Jon intervened, saying, “Nyra, the whole point of this, other than crushing the Triarchy’s forces, is to make a name for me great enough to convince your father that letting us wed would not be a problem. Infuriating him in the process, more than we’re planning to, would be counterproductive.”

“Fine,” Rhaenyra muttered, and Daemon chuckled.

“I never imagined, as you followed me around as a girl, demanding that I tell you tales of my adventures or braid your hair, that you’d someday long for battle,” he murmured.

“Dragons are, among other things, weapons, Uncle,” Rhaenyra replied. “If we refuse to let female dragonriders ride off into battle, then allowing women to ride them at all is a mistake. Visenya and Rhaenys both rode into battle countless times.”

“Rhaenys’ fate...” Daemon went to argue.

“Could have happened to Aegon, given how random it was,” Rhaenyra muttered. “If my Syrax was any bigger, I would hear no argument at all about this, and if this battle looked to be any greater than it is, I’d say that Laena should be going with you. As it stands, Caraxes and Morghul should be more than enough.”

“To burn a fleet of ships?” Daemon asked. “Certainly. The Triarchy is not without capable military minds, few as they are among the soft, perfumed cunts that rule it, and I would wager heavily that they’ve built up their forces around Myr here.”

“That would require sailing through the Stepstones, though,” Rhaenyra said, confused.

“It’s not impossible to disguise warships as merchant vessels,” Daemon replied.

“The Triarchy controls the entire stretch of Essos from the southern shore to shore of the Sea of Myrth too,” Jon pointed out. “They could have transported all their weapons and armor there and then reloaded in their own ports.”

“Precisely,” Daemon nodded. “They’d expect us to expect any attacks to come from the south, and indeed, their last assault did, but I’m willing to bet that there are at least one or two cunts among them clever enough to try something else. If they’re planning what I expect, what I would do in their place, there’s a chance that they could overwhelm the men we left behind. We’ll fly straight to Grey Gallows come dusk and lay low there while we await their attack. Once they do come, I’ll take the forces they assault us from the south with while you go for what I assume will be the bulk of their navy. Once I’ve finished off my half, I’ll come join you and burn the rest of them.”

“Are you sure that splitting up would be the best idea?” Rhaenyra asked, nervously twisting the rings on her right hand as she stared down at the map.

“He’s right, Rhaenyra; this will give us our best hope of wiping them out quickly,” Jon assured her. “Keep in mind that every other time your uncle’s forces have fought against those of the Triarchy, they’ve had only one dragon to call upon.”

“I guess,” Rhaenyra muttered. “I…”

“Princess!” Ser Harwin called out from the other side of the door. “Lord Corlys and Princess Rhaenys are here to see you.”

“I guess word has reached them of the Triarchy’s movements,” Daemon murmured.

“Let them in,” Rhaenyra commanded, and the door opened a moment later.

“Princess, I was told that Jon was…” Corlys went to say only to freeze at the sight of Daemon standing as if nothing was wrong. “Daemon.”

“Corlys,” Daemon smirked, his face falling slightly when he saw Rhaenys walk in behind him, wearing a full suit of steel and bronze armor.

She blinked at the sight of him and then snorted and shook her head. “This whole injury was a ruse, wasn’t it?”

“It was,” Rhaenyra replied before Daemon could. “We hoped to lure the Triarchy out to attack us, figuring that word of my uncle’s crippling injury would make them bold.”

“They’ve taken your bait,” Corlys said gruffly. “A fleet of at least two hundred ships is set to strike the Stepstones from all directions, according to our scouts.”

“Two hundred?” Rhaenyra asked.

“The cunts have been busy,” Daemon murmured. “No matter. Two hundred ships or two thousand, they’ll all be made of wood and burn easily.”

“That is still a lot to contend with,” Rhaenyra said. “Maybe I should…”

“No,” Daemon and Jon said in unison.

“We’ll be more than capable of handling them,” her uncle added.

“I’ll be going with you too,” Rhaenys announced, earning a cocked eyebrow from her uncle.

“I figured you planned to simply because I was apparently indisposed,” Daemon said.

“I’ve always wanted to ride Meleys into battle,” Rhaenys admitted. “I nearly did in the Fourth Dornish War, but Father forbade me, and when I learned that I was with child, the point became moot. I’m not with child now, though, nor a mother of young children in need of her, and after the year I’ve had, I could use some violence.”

“Rhaena and Baela are young, and it would be wrong for their mother to risk herself, but we hoped that with Morghul alongside us, we may yet prevail,” Corlys explained. “With the three of you, victory would be all but assured.”

“The princess could help you and Caraxes against the fleet attacking from the south,” Jon suggested.

“So you’re aware that they’ve divided up their forces?” Corlys asked.

“We are,” Daemon murmured, weighing his options. “I suppose that you could come, cousin.”

“How magnanimous of you,” Rhaenys sneered, and he chuckled.

“You will follow my lead, though,” Daemon said pointedly. “Of everyone in this room, only I have ever ridden a dragon into true battle. That horse-burning adventure of yours, Rhaenyra, doesn’t count.”

“The arrows that flew past my head counted enough,” Rhaenyra scowled, and he rolled his eyes.

“Gods, I forgot you did that unarmored,” Daemon muttered.

“I’ll yield to your experience,” Rhaenys assured him. “Recall that my Meleys is the fastest dragon of any great size that we have. Her speed could be useful, and her fires burn hot.”

“A fair point,” Daemon nodded.

“I heard that my...Mother, Father?” Laena asked, poking her head in and looking at them in surprise.

“Your mother and I will be joining Daemon and Jon on their campaign,” Corlys announced, and Laena looked at her mother in surprise.

“If you’re going, there’s no reason why I shouldn’t,” Laena replied.

“No,” Corlys replied.

When Laena went to argue, Rhaenys said, “Trust me, of all people, when I say that no battle is ever safe, even for dragon riders. Your daughters are young, and we can’t have both their parents and their grandparents risking their lives at once.”

“Vhagar is the most powerful dragon we have, though,” Laena muttered.

“Morghul is nearly her equal and a weapon that our enemies have no idea about,” Rhaenyra assured her. “They’ll have all the dragon fire that they need, I’m certain.”

“You’re sure?” Laena asked, looking imploringly at her mother, who smiled softly.

“Our enemies expect no dragons to show up, and they’re about to get three,” Rhaenys replied.

“We’ll give them a shock like no other, I assure you, and besides, unlike me, you were never taught how to ride a dragon into battle. Your grandfather taught me back in the day, even though he never intended for me to make use of that particular education.”

“That raises a good question, actually,” Corlys murmured, looking at Jon. “Do you have any idea what you’re about to enter into?”

"I took care of that," Daemon replied, and Jon chuckled, recalling the first such lesson he'd gotten from his 'father.'

"Normally, this isn't the sort of thing we'd do at night, but with me going along with my niece's infuriating scheme, it's become necessary," Daemon muttered as he led Jon past the village and towards the dragon caves.

He was dressed in dark riding leathers, with his hair tied back behind his head and a thick cloak pulled up over his head. He didn't look inconspicuous, per se, but he didn't look like himself, and that was all he truly needed to worry about just then.

"At least we have the light of the moon," Jon murmured, looking up at the full, glowing white orb in the sky.

"We wouldn't be doing it otherwise," Daemon muttered. *"At least not the first time."*

"Caraxes' cave is amongst these ones?" Jon asked.

"It is," Daemon replied. *"The caves around this part of the island have been frequented by our dragons for generations. I know that the wild ones make their lairs further east of here."*

"Morghul's cave is quite a bit further away, though he'll probably feel that I'm out here," Jon said, reaching out to him mentally. *"He usually does."*

"Rhaenyra said that you actually visited his cave," Daemon commented, and Jon nodded.

"I did," Jon replied. *"It's as spacious as you'd expect and absolutely full of bones. I spent a few hours there once when he and I were getting to know each other."*

Daemon looked at him like he was mad but said nothing and, a moment later, signaled for him to stop.

"Wait here," he said. *"Caraxes can get a little...testy around new people."*

"Alright," Jon nodded, watching the prince head over to the cave.

The Blood Wrym's, large head poked out of the cave almost immediately, and he sniffed at Daemon, who patted his cheek affectionately. With nothing but the moon to illuminate him, he was largely obscured by shadow, and yet the sheer immensity of him became apparent quickly. The red dragon was one of the larger ones, not on the level of Vhagar, Morghul, or Vermithor, but closer to the likes of Silverwing than even Dreamfyre, who was, if Jon wasn't mistaken, older than it. He was a fierce thing, as fond of battle as his rider, and he spotted him quickly, his yellow eyes locking onto him.

"This is Jon, Caraxes," Daemon murmured in Valyrian. *"We're going to be showing him how to..."*

A sudden growl from his dragon cut Daemon off, and he whipped around as he saw him rush out of the cave and rear back warningly. Morghul landed heavily behind Jon, his green eyes the only part of him truly visible against the dark ground in the night, and snarled warningly at Caraxes.

"Peace, Morghul," Jon said, rushing over and stroking his flank. *"He's a friend."*

He forced that concept over across their bond and received only confusion in response. As Morghul regarded Caraxes, the concept of food crossed his mind, though the concept of toughness swiftly followed, and he disregarded that. Jon looked through his mind and found, unsurprisingly, that while the concept of enemy was plainly known to him, the concept of ally was not. He conflated Caraxes and himself in the ancient creature's mind, hoping that would work, and heard Daemon whip the Blood Wyrm behind him, earning an angry hiss from him.

"Don't fight him, and he won't fight you," the prince hissed right back. "Jon, whip your...where's your whip?"

"I don't have one," Jon replied, sighing in relief as Morghul finally got his message and relaxed a bit.

"What in the seven hells do you mean you don't have a whip?" Daemon asked incredulously. "That's such a basic tool I didn't even think I had to ask. Did Rhaenyra teach you nothing?"

"I've never needed one with Morghul," Jon replied. "Getting through to him can take time now and then, but he always understands what I want of him eventually."

Sure enough, the giant black dragon was looking at Caraxes curiously, confused by how another dragon could be anything other than an enemy. Jon found that strange at first, knowing that he'd introduced him to Syrax before, but eventually figured that the yellow dragon had been too small for Morghul to consider a threat, where Caraxes was anything but small.

"I don't know how you've managed to ride him at all without a whip," Daemon muttered.

"The first time he didn't even have a saddle," Jon muttered, climbing up along Morghul's flank and getting into the saddle. "That was...stressful, to put it mildly."

"Bloody madman," Daemon muttered just loud enough for him to hear as he climbed into Caraxes' saddle.

"Well, I am one of you," Jon snarked mentally.

"Follow me!" Daemon called out. "Soves."

"Soves," Jon said as Caraxes beat his wings against the air, rising up into it, and Morghul followed suit.

As they followed the red dragon northward, it occurred to Morghul that he could burn him easily from that angle, and Jon immediately shot down the idea, earning a huff from him.

"I dearly hope we get you to a place soon where I could even consider leaving you in the Dragon Pit for a few hours," he sighed, stroking his dragon's jet-black scales. "We'll be able to burn plenty of people and ships soon enough, I promise."

That idea made Morghul perk up, and Jon chuckled, hoping that the Triarchy would take the bait soon. Daemon had been stuck in bed with his apparent injury for weeks now, and there has been no sign that the Triarchy was plotting to take advantage, much to the prince's obvious annoyance. He continued to fly north for a few more minutes before descending rapidly and landing on a small islet. Morghul quickly followed, and Daemon turned to look at them.

“At this hour, we shouldn’t have to worry too much about anyone being around, and this useless little rock is seldom used for much of anything anyway,” he called out. “Flying atop a dragon and flying a dragon into battle require two dramatically different sets of skills. Any miscommunication between you and Morghul in battle could mean death or injury, more likely for you, and you will need to become far more familiar with how the other thinks and reacts to things than you are now.”

“My particular connection to him should help there,” Jon thought to himself.

“For tonight, we’ll focus on advanced maneuvering, which is why I needed to wait until the moon was full enough for you to have any hope of seeing us,” Daemon continued. “I’ll want you two to take the air in a moment but mostly just observe Caraxes and me as we fly around the way you do when you’re at risk of being hit by arrows or worse.”

“I remember well what that’s like,” Jon said. “When we attacked the Dothraki khalasar, I sat behind Rhaenyra, shielding her from harm as she commanded Syrax.”

“How I didn’t realize you two were fucking ages ago I will never know,” Daemon muttered. “Soves.”

Jon rolled his eyes at that and bade Morghul to take to the sky too, already certain that he was in for a long night.

It had been a long night, one of quite a few that followed, adding to his already busy schedule, but it had paid off in the end, he was sure, and he found himself looking forward to the battle to come more than he’d ever looked forward to any, and not just because he knew that the Triarchy needed to be dealt with.

“These people sided with the Greens in the Dance, and that’s reason enough to want to cripple them,” he thought to himself. “That they’re slave-owning pricks as well is all the more reason.”

Neither of those was the true reason that he was looking forward to this, though. This battle would be his first opportunity to really prove himself in this time that he’d appeared in. He’d never been one to crave recognition in his first life, having grown up as a bastard who knew no one would ever see him as more than that, but here, in this life, where he was a dragonrider and the lover of the Princess of Dragonstone, he’d come to realize that he could actually seek out what he wanted in life, something that learning that he was never a bastard at all had only further convinced him of.

“Making Rhaenyra mine in truth and in the eyes of the gods means burning through their fleet, and so I will,” he thought to himself.

“My fleet has already set sail,” Corlys announced, pointing down at the map. “We will likely arrive after the fight has begun, but there’s no getting around that now. If we’d been brought into this mad little plan of yours...”

“Admittedly, I expected them to put together a smaller fleet than this,” Daemon muttered. “How did we receive no warning that they had built up this kind of force?”

“I’m not sure where all the ships came from,” Corlys admitted. “Their last battle against us resulted in heavy losses for their side, and it wasn’t all that long ago. The Dornish could have sold them

some ships, but their fleet has never been particularly extensive. My theory is that they purchased ships from Volantis.”

“Volantis?” Rhaenyra asked. “Have relations between them improved that much?”

“Not as such, but they could have worked through intermediaries,” Corlys replied. “The Braavosi aren’t fond of us, but they would never work with slave cities against us. Pentos is our ally, and there aren’t many other options out there.”

“If that’s the case, then they’ve quite possibly overextended themselves with this,” Rhaenys murmured. “If we deliver them a particularly devastating defeat, it might well rattle them enough for cracks to form in their union.”

“One can bloody hope,” Corlys muttered. “Life was much simpler before they banded together, I can tell you that.”

“They were easier to handle when they were too busy squabbling amongst themselves to bother anyone else, I’m sure,” Laena chuckled.

“They were never so bold apart as they grew together,” Corlys nodded.

“Then all that’s left is to crush them and pray it has the effect we’re hoping for,” Jon murmured, smiling at the idea. He hadn’t considered the possibility that a grave enough defeat might cause enough infighting among the three city-states to break their union apart, but if that did happen, it would remove one of the allies Otto Hightower brought to his side entirely. *“I’ll spare not a single ship if that’s a possible outcome of this.”*

“Jon and I will be flying off soon and camping out on the isle of Grey Gallows,” Daemon explained.

“Not Bloodstone?” Rhaenys asked.

“No,” Daemon replied. “I’ve sent word that I’m coming but ordered the men to feign desperation as though they think that I’m not. I want my entry into the fray to be a surprise for all our enemies. We’ll fly south across the Stormlands, cut across just southwest of Estermont, and then sneak in here. If the Triarchy’s forces are still gathered in the Sea of Myrth and just northwest of Lys as I hope, we’ll not be spotted and have the benefit of surprise.”

“Whatever works,” Rhaenys nodded. “I’m amazed you managed to bring yourself to stay in your chambers for moons on end like this.”

“I am capable of some self-control, Rhaenys,” Daemon muttered, “and besides, I did manage to get out often enough without being spotted. I’ll be quite happy to move about openly again now, though.”

“I should speak with Maester Gerardys,” Rhaenyra announced. “Send word when the battle’s over.”

“We will,” Jon nodded, and she smiled before leaving.

“If I can’t join you, I could at help you into your armor,” Laena murmured.

Daemon chuckled, saying, "I wasn't aware you had experience as a squire, darling. Helping a man in and out of his armor is a touch more complicated than helping a woman in and out of a dress."

"In that case, perhaps I'll just watch," Laena whispered, and he grinned.

"We're still in the room, Laena," Corlys remarked as Rhaenys rolled her eyes.

"Then bugger off to your ship," Daemon muttered. "I assume that it's in the harbor."

"It's with the rest of my fleet, actually," Corlys replied, "being captained at the moment by Vaemond. Rhaenys will drop me off on the way."

"That should be entertaining to watch," Daemon murmured, looking at him in surprise.

"Meleys can float, Daemon," Rhaenys chuckled. "Corlys will just lower himself down onto one of the smaller boats and then use it to the Sea Snake. We've done it before."

"I figured it was a useful thing to test out in case Rhaenys and I ever ended up going off to battle together like this," Corlys explained.

"Come back to me," Laena breathed, looking around the room, "all of you."

"Lady Laena!" Alys called out from the hallway. "Your bath has been prepared."

"I could have them draw another," Laena murmured, looking at Daemon, who kissed her softly and leaned in until his lips were right by her ear.

"As much fun as it might be to have you watch me change into my armor in theory, I'd rather not end up hard in front of my squire," he whispered, making her laugh. "Go, darling, and enjoy yourself. I'll be back before you can miss me."

"Impossible," Laena sighed, kissing him again before cocking an eyebrow at him.

Daemon just grinned and nodded, making her eyes simultaneously light up and darken, and she let him go, hugging her parents before taking off.

"I wonder what that was about," Jon thought to himself before putting it out of his mind. He needed to keep Laena alive, but that didn't entail knowing what went on between her and Daemon.

Laena barely restrained herself from hugging Alys as she spotted her, and the dark-haired woman gave her a sympathetic look.

"They said no, I take it?" she asked.

"As you figured they would," Laena muttered. "You're sure they'll be alright?"

"I've seen nothing to suggest otherwise," she replied, following Laena back to her chambers and smiling as the guards let them both in.

"I understand that battle is dangerous, but Vhagar is enormous," the noblewoman muttered. "Surely I would have been fine."

“It is hard to fathom how anything other than another dragon could hope to harm your mount, but stray arrows could harm you, my lady,” Alys replied, undoing the laces of her teal gown.

“How much rose oil did you add?” Laena asked, detecting the scent from across the room. “I’ll smell like Highgarden by the time I’m done bathing.”

“I think you smell divine as you are,” Alys purred, pressing her lips against Laena’s back, and the Valyrian beauty grinned, turning around and tossing her gown off of her shoulders, letting it pool at her feet. “A pity your husband isn’t here, or the two of us could have some real fun in that bath.”

“Proof you don’t actually know everything,” Laena grinned, cupping her breasts, heavy with milk, and smirking when Alys’ eyes went right to them. “He’s given us permission to have any sort of fun we like without him.”

“Truly?” Alys asked. “A dragon prince like that, I’d have expected to be greedier.”

“I’m sure he’ll expect adequate compensation for his generosity when he gets back but that’s nothing the two of us can’t handle,” Laena grinned, stepping into the large tub and sitting down. “Take off your clothes and join me.”

“As my lady commands,” Alys breathed, making short work of her much simpler black gown.

“You’ve been a great help to me these past few moons,” Laena sighed, watching as the older woman’s body was revealed to her inch by pale, beautiful inch and licking her lips when she laid eyes on the full black forest of curls hiding her cunt. “Distracting Daemon from his frustrations over Rhaenyra’s plan required a little more than I was capable of, especially while I was still recovering from the twins’ birth.”

“Some work is its own reward,” Alys purred, stepping into the tub and quickly sitting down across from Laena, “though I wouldn’t say no if you wished to reward me further.”

“Please me and I’ll give you all the *rewards* you could possibly want,” the silver-haired woman smirked, and Alys leaned in until her face was mere inches from hers.

“I live to serve, my lady,” she grinned, capturing her lips with her own.

“This charming little backwater is somehow even less impressive than Corlys described,” Rhaenys muttered in Valyrian as she looked around the small hill fort on Grey Gallows that Daemon had taken them to.

They had reached it late and slept, as best they could, in the hard, uncomfortable beds available for them. Jon and Daemon were both honestly surprised that that was the first complaint they’d gotten from the princess, who had never been out on campaign before, but even the simple, brown bread they’d been forced to break their fast with had come with little comment from her.

“My fortress on Bloodstone is a little more impressive than this, though not much,” he replied in kind. “If you’re speaking Valyrian to keep things from the boy, know that he speaks it too.”

“Truly?” Rhaenys asked. “I was thinking of the servants more, Daemon. Did he teach you, Jon?”

“No, Princess,” Jon replied, looking awkward. “Maester Gerardys did, actually. It was Laenor’s idea after the princess and I found that scroll.”

“Oh,” Rhaenys sighed, looking down. “Did he help with the lessons at all?”

“He tested my command of the language a fair few times,” Jon replied, and she smiled sadly.

“He was always so giving, my boy,” Rhaenys said.

Jon nodded, thinking, *“I hate bringing him up, but crediting everything Rhaenyra did to me to Laenor is for the best, at least until we’re wed.”*

“The Triarchy’s ships coming from Myr were closing in when I checked earlier, and I imagine that the ones coming from Lys are on the move as well,” Daemon replied. “I doubt we have enough time to rest, but we can try in the meantime.”

“You’re sure you weren’t spotted?” Rhaenys asked, having thought that his impromptu diversion while she and Jon made their way to Grey Gallows was stupid.

“Of course not,” Daemon scoffed. “It was still dark out and the clouds in the sky were thick, so if anyone did spot me, they have better eyes than anyone we’ve ever met. There were well over a hundred ships there, more than their entire fleet was composed of the last time they attacked.”

“Is it possible that Dorne has joined them formally?” Rhaenys asked.

“We’ve seen nothing to suggest it,” Daemon replied, “and if Viserys’ cripple had heard anything, he’d have written to me ages ago, warning me not to start a war with Dorne.”

“You say that like Dorne’s a threat to us,” Rhaenys scoffed.

“Viserys doesn’t want a war to interrupt his perfect little fantasy of a tranquil kingdom,” Daemon muttered. “The Stepstones he can write off as a distant annoyance, but if the Dornish marched into the Stormlands or the Reach, he’d have to actually make difficult decisions, and he hates that.”

He trailed off there, looking like he actually regretted the comment, though as Rhaenys just shook her head, he relaxed.

“Probably an old instinct from when they were on opposite sides,” Jon thought to himself. *“Now their houses are linked together and allied against the influence of the Hightowers.”*

“I really do...” Rhaenys went to say when a sudden commotion from outside drew her attention to the door.

“Prince Daemon!” one of the guards called out as he entered. “The signal fires from Torturer’s Deep and Bloodstone have both been lit. We’re under attack.”

“I know what the fires signal, fool,” Daemon muttered. “Make sure ours is lit and assemble the men for battle!”

“Yes, my prince,” the man nodded before rushing out.

“Let battle be joined,” Rhaenys said, sounding like she was trying to sound confident as she put on her helmet.

“Let’s remind these Essosi cunts why they served our ancient ancestors for so many centuries,” Daemon grinned, putting his own on as Jon reached for his. “Burn as many of them as you can while Rhaenys and I deal with the lesser half of their fleet. We’ll join you as soon as we can.”

Jon nodded at that, his heart racing in his chest as anticipation built within him. The three dragonriders rushed outside, marching towards their respective mounts, and the three dragons moved to meet them. Morghul had had less of a problem with Meleys, and the three of them seemed to have remained peaceful enough in the hours since they’d left them on the hillside, which he took to be progress. He climbed into Morghul’s saddle and strapped himself in as he felt around his armor again.

The castle-forged black steel platemail was thick and heavy with few gaps that arrows could make their way through. Keeping that in mind, he’d debated with himself extensively about whether it would be better to slip into Morghul’s mind directly, relying on the straps of the saddle to keep him in place, or command him from the saddle like a normal dragonrider. His warging ability was a unique advantage, one that no dragon lord of old would have possessed, but whether or not it would be wise to use in battle was something that he had been of two minds on for weeks now.

“Join the battle normally, and if it reaches a point where it seems like I’m in little actual danger, then I can test that out,” he finally decided as he watched Caraxes and Meleys rise up into the sky.

“Let’s go kill some people,” Jon murmured to Morghul, who let out a gleeful roar and beat his wings against the air.

Jon had flown atop him many times since they met, but only when they happened upon that ship from House Drumm had he let the dragon kill anyone. This would be the first time they flew into battle together, and as they flew northwest to meet the fleet, the feeling of excitement coming from the dragon was almost childlike, much to his rider’s amusement.

“Fuck me,” he muttered to himself as the first signs of the fleet came into view.

True to Daemon’s word, there were dozens of ships, mostly galleys, with a smattering of heavy cogs in the mix. The cloud cover was still thick, and he and Morghul remained obscured for a while, able to watch as the Triarchy’s fleet raced towards the laughably inadequate defensive force, and he quickly found the largest one by far. It was a massive thing that looked to have at least three hundred oars, and Jon thought that it would look far better on fire.

“Now, Morghul,” he commanded, signaling through their bond which one he wanted to attack. As the massive dragon dived down towards the ship, he waited until he could see it clearly and hear the screams of the men aboard it before roaring, *“Dracarys!”*

“I’m telling you, I saw the dragon plain as day last night,” Collio, one of the men aboard the Tyroshi flagship, the Archon’s Fist, muttered. “I was looking through my Myrish eye and...”

“I looked right after you and saw nothing,” Moreo, another of the men scoffed. “That Targaryen prick isn’t here, Collio; you’re just seeing things.”

“I could make out the red of his scales,” Collio hissed. “Captain, I think we need to get ashore as quickly as we can.”

“That is the plan, my friend,” Racalio grinned, leaning on his ship’s wheel as he looked down at the men. “Whether or not you saw Daemon’s dragon, we’ve all seen the state of the Westerosi defenses, and what are we going to do with them?”

“Wipe our fucking arses with them!” one of his men called out.

“Is that what that smell is?” another of his men japed, making the others laugh.

“Indeed we will!” Racallio grinned. “Now, it’s come to my attention that there’s a certain rumor going around that I need to address.”

“If it’s about your love of...shall we say, strong women, Captain, we all know,” Moreo chuckled.

“Same goes if it’s about your love of fine silk gowns,” another of them called out, and Racallio held up his massive hands.

“No, no, I know you know about all that,” he said. “The rumor going around that I want to address is that I volunteered for this purely because I wanted to right the wrong our people suffered when Daemon Targaryen killed Craghas Drahar and claimed the Stepstones for himself. That I want to reclaim the honor of the Triarchy and prove that his short-lived victory was nothing but a fluke. The truth is, I don’t fucking care about any of those things.”

His men chuckled at that, hanging on his every word as they wondered where he was going with this.

“I always thought Drahar was a spineless cunt with a tiny cock; I think honor is for fools, and I don’t care what any of those fat, feckless fools who have never held a sword in their hands as anything but a prop care about anything,” Racallio continued, earning a cacophonous cheer from the men. “What I want is to fight the brave men defending these islands, kill them, and take everything they’ve squirreled away as loot! Loot, which you’ll all share in, of course, for am I not a most generous captain?”

“The most generous,” Tyrio called out.

“So when we go into battle in a moment, I want each of you cunts to remember that you’re not fighting for Myr, or Lys, or even fair Tyrosh, but to get your pockets full, your cocks wet, and to live like fucking kings when we get back home!” Racallio roared, and his men’s response was deafening.

“Not a speech I’d suggest giving to the magisters when we get back,” Tyrio said.

“Of course not,” Racallio chuckled. Leaning in, he whispered, “Every speech should be geared towards it’s audience and as none of our men here are highborn, talk of honor or even revenge would have been wasted on them, but gold and cunt, those things can motivate any man, save for those who prefer gold and ass. Now, give the order; we’ve waited long enough to fight this battle.”

The other man chuckled and left to do as he said.

The Archon's Fist was his gift from Archon Alello and a chain. It was the largest warship in the Tyroshi fleet and had been the Archon's pride since it was built. He was too old to lead them into battle himself, of course, but he was more than willing to give them everything they needed to succeed, including his personal warship. Of course, that's not all that the ship represented, as it was also an implicit threat.

"Don't return unless you succeed," was the unspoken second part of the gift, for this would be the last chance Racallio was ever going to get to lead Tyrosh's forces into battle.

The Archon had been furious at their failure last time, given that Daemon and his dragon hadn't even been there and they'd simply lost to the forces he left behind, but since the Myrish and Lysene forces had crumbled first, forcing the Tyroshi to flee, he'd written it off. There would be no such excuse this time, since none of his forces were Lysene, and even most of the Myrish ships had been sent to bolster theirs and attack from the southeast.

"It's just us and our Dornish allies," he thought to himself, grinning as he saw the entire fleet begin to weigh anchor and begin to sail towards Bloodstone.

Their numbers were overwhelming, and he knew that they'd make short work of the few dozen ships that seemed to remain outside the largest and most fortified of the Stepstones. All that would change when the Sea Snake and the rest of Corlys' Velaryon's fleet arrived, but if they moved quickly, that would be potentially days after they had already taken it. The sooner they could take the key strategic positions in the small chain of islands, the sooner they'd be able to build them back up so they could handle the inevitable counterattack that would come.

"The big question will be whether or not Daemon is here," he thought to himself, grinning as he saw the Westerosi ships come into view.

He didn't need a Myrish eye to know that the men aboard those ships were going white on the fine sands of Lys at the sight of their fleet. That they were manned at all was proof that they'd gotten some forewarning, and as he drew his blade, he hoped that they'd prove to be a good challenge before they reached the shore and began the work of assaulting Daemon's fortress. Closer and closer they got, until he could actually see the men he was about to kill aboard the nearest ship. Everything seemed perfect, as though they'd managed to catch this tiny, woefully unprepared force completely off guard as the magisters had all hoped, and then one single word changed it all.

"DRAGON!" Collio shouted, and everyone else on the ship looked to where he was pointing, only to freeze in horror.

"What the fuck is that?" Tyrio asked. "I thought Daemon's dragon was red."

"Red and...half that size," another of his men stuttered. "Captain what do we."

"Dracarys!" they heard a man roar from atop the dragon, and as black and green flames began to spew from the massive creature's mouth, Racallio and the half-dozen fastest men with him did the only thing they could do and jumped into the water.

"I thought Balerion was dead!" Aryn Qorgyle cried, watching as the massive black dragon who had seemed to just spawn from the very clouds above them and start laying waste to everything in sight turned the first dozen ships that flew over to ashes in mere moments.

“He is dead!” Tyler Gargalen called out. “My great uncle saw the skull when he went with Princess Mara to observe their damn council years ago.”

“Then what the fuck is that?” Aryn asked.

“A monster,” Moran Martell replied, “and one we will slay.”

“Slay?” Tyler asked.

“Our people have done it before,” Moran replied, making his way to one of the two scorpions mounted to his ship, the Queen Nymeria’s Grace.

The third child of Prince Morion Martell, Moran had burned with a need to avenge his father for nearly thirty years. His father had been a brave and capable man, one whose own father he’d considered weak. While the second Vulture King raided the kingdoms under Targaryen rule, Prince Qyle Martell, Moran’s grandfather, had refused to help him, even when Roger Baratheon struck against him and ultimately killed him.

His father had always resented that, and when he took the throne, he decided to right the wrong by striking against the northern kingdoms himself. Due in large part to how long it took to get his men and supplies into position to begin the invasion, but also due to some sort of treachery that Moran had never managed to figure out, Jaehaerys and his sons managed to strike first, wiping out the entire Dornish fleet and killing the prince.

His sister, Mara, took over after that but she was broken by grief over the sudden deaths of not only her father but her young husband, Uthor Yronwood, as well, she’d taken to over-drinking and died within three years. Their brother, Nymor, had ruled after that for nearly twenty years and was succeeded a few years ago by his eldest child, Qoren.

Moran’s nephew had grown up listening to him and his father speak about their enduring hatred for the Targaryens and their wretched kingdoms for years and had been greatly affected by it. His first act after taking the throne at just five and ten years of age was to begin sending ships to aid the Triarchy in their attempt to retake the Stepstones, and when that failed, he decided that something bigger was needed.

“The timing seemed perfect,” Moran thought to himself as he moved the scorpion into position, looking through the round glass sight affixed at the perfect spot for his eye. *“With Prince Daemon bedridden and King Viserys reportedly just as weak as my grandfather, we thought for sure that this would work. Who is this fucking dragon, and, more importantly, who’s riding him?”*

It didn’t make any sense at all. They had observed the Targaryens for years, taking careful notes of their children when they were born and which dragons they ended up riding. According to their spies, Daemon had no children, save for a pair of twin girls born mere moons ago, and Viserys had only the five, Rhaenyra and the half-Hightower ones, all of whom were too young to ride into battle. The most disturbing thing, though, was that they had never heard of any dragon matching the description of this one save for Balerion, who was dead. To have missed such a critical weapon was a terrible failing of their spy network, and one that he would investigate personally, if he survived this.

“At that thing’s size, there’d be no point in striking its chest, since those scales are likely harder than steel by now,” Moran murmured, watching as the dragon circled again and burned through

another few ships. Arrows and scorpion bolts were flying freely around him, bouncing off his scales with few exceptions, and the couple that seemed to pierce his wings seemed not to do much damage at all.

“Fools!” Moran snarled. “Aim for the eyes, or not at all.”

“Don’t loose until you see the whites of their eyes,” Aryn murmured, aiming the other scorpion.

“Do dragons’ eyes have that white part?” Tyler asked.

“Will you shut your fucking...” Aryn went to snarl when he saw the massive black dragon turning towards them. “No, no white part.”

“Steady!” Moran called out. “We’d never escape him if we tried, so we have to kill him. A bolt in each eye, Aryn; let’s kill this fucking thing.”

“Yes, my prince,” Aryn nodded, aiming higher as he saw the beast approaching.

“This is it,” Moran thought to himself as he saw the dragon getting closer. It was a terrifying thing, even for a dragon, its black horns and sharp, jagged jaw making it look particularly monstrous, and its furious green eyes glaring down with startling intelligence. His heart was pounding in his chest, his blood rushing in his ears, and yet he’d never felt more focused in his entire life. *“This is my opportunity to avenge my father and bring low one of the greatest weapons that the Valyrian pigs have at their disposal. It may cost me my life, but if I can kill this thing, it will be more than worth it. One scorpion bolt, that’s all I’ll get to loose here, so I need to make it count. I’ll see you in oblivion, you son of a whore.”*

He waited, holding steady for as long as he could, the sound of his blood in his ears drowning out everything else, and only when he saw the dragon open its mouth and the fiery death inside that gaping monstrous maw did he loose the bolt. Aryn, to his credit, waited nearly as long, loosing his only a moment earlier, and every man on that ship held their breath as they watched the bolts soar towards the massive creature, aimed true and flying right towards its eyes...

...only for it to duck its head at the last second, letting the bolts fly harmlessly past it.

“Well, fuck,” was all Moran managed to get out before the fires took him and his ship.

“I think I really underestimated just how dangerous Morghul really is,” Jon thought to himself as the dragon soared through the air, leaving at least a dozen burning ships in his wake.

The smell of burning wood and flesh and the screams of the dying filled the air, and yet he didn’t even slow for a moment, nudging his dragon to the right and willing him to loose a torrent of flames down on another row of ships. The arrows and scorpion bolts flying up from them reminded Jon eerily of the descriptions he’d read of the Battle of Redgrass Field, though luckily for him, he had something that Daemon Blackfyre hadn’t: a very large dragon.

As old as he was, Morghul’s scales were harder than Jon’s platemail, meaning that the arrows and even the bolts bounced off him like they were nothing. The men, seemingly convinced that their sheer numbers would win them the day, continued to loose everything they had at him, and even the arrows that didn’t bounce off the great black dragon’s scales just soared past him harmlessly. Syrax

was small enough that, seated on her back, it was possible for an arrow to miss her and hit her rider, as he and Rhaenyra had nearly learned the hard way more than once against the Dothraki, but Morghul was more than twice her size, and with Jon sitting securely on his back, it was like riding into battle on a giant, impenetrable shield.

“Even calling this a battle is probably overstating things,” Jon thought to himself, reaching out to his dragon through their bond and convincing him to start circling the massive fleet so he could make sure that those ships at the center were encased in a ring of fire by the time their sense won out and they decided to flee.

Morghul’s flames continued to rain endlessly down on the fleet, engulfing ship after ship. Fire hot enough to melt stone turned wood to ash in seconds, and those men who weren’t incinerated instantly ended up in the water, doomed to drown or else wash up on shore to be met by men more than eager to kill them. Their men, who had only taken to their ships to give Racallio’s fleet something to attack first, had quickly disembarked the moment he began wiping out their foes and were waiting in place, hoping to see some action in what was turning into a complete slaughter for their enemies.

“I think I finally understand why the ancient dragonlords all came across as such arrogant arseholes in their writing,” Jon thought to himself as he watched the carnage.

He had fought for his life countless times during his previous life and had led men into battle more than once. Never before had he felt such power as he did there, not even close. It felt like he could take on entire armies as he commanded Morghul, as though no force of men could hope to stand against him, and that was as exhilarating as it was terrifying.

“No wonder the Valyrians felt like they were gods,” he thought to himself. *“Flying through the air was enough of a rush, but this...it’s a wonder they didn’t conquer the entire world before they destroyed themselves.”*

Of course, he knew that he and even Morghul weren’t invincible, for while killing a dragon of his size was incredibly difficult, it had happened throughout history. Caraxes had managed to slay Vhagar, though it was at the cost of his own life, and the Dornish had managed to slay Meraxes, something that, as he peered out at the ships at the center of the inferno he’d set, he was immediately reminded of. The bright orange sails were what drew his attention first, and as he looked through his Myrish eye, he spotted the red sun pierced by a golden spear and grinned.

“I hadn’t thought that the Martells would join the fight personally,” he thought to himself, considering the implications of that for a moment. *“I doubt it’s Prince Qoren himself, though if it is, Princess Aliandra would have been born already, and that could still suit our purposes. Wiping out the Dornish ships alone would have sufficed, but this...this could absolutely work.”*

As he was pondering that, he spotted two men rushing towards what he knew to be scorpions and cocked an eyebrow in surprise.

“Can’t say they lack bravery,” he thought.

He knew that the likelihood of either bolt managing to do much damage to Morghul was minimal, but the Dornish had managed it once, and even that minor possibility was more than he was willing to risk. No arrow or bolt fired so far had managed to come close to him, and he was wearing full plate at any rate, so he felt safe enough to slip into his dragon’s mind. Morghul’s eyes were sharper

than his own, and when he saw that the man wearing a surcoat bearing the Martells' colors looked older, he grinned, something that looked truly unsettling on the face of the dragon.

"Go on," he thought to himself as he neared the ship. *"Loose your bolts."*

He waited, realizing that they were showing remarkable restraint in their attempts to aim for his eyes, and opened his fiery maw, letting the faint green glow among the pitch-black flames be revealed to them. The two men let loose their bolts a mere moment apart, and Jon pivoted away, letting them race past him before responding. His flames engulfed the ship in seconds, killing everyone aboard and securing the second part of his and Rhaenyra's plan.

What followed was carnage unlike anything he'd ever known. Commanding Morghul from his saddle during the battle had been one thing, but doing it while in his mind was something else entirely. The ancient dragon's instincts bled into his own, and for the next half hour, he became death itself. The men captaining the other ships seemed to eventually realize that even for all their numbers, they had no hope against such a monster as he, and plenty started to flee, but navigating around the burning wrecks surrounding them was challenging in itself, much less trying to do so as fiery death continued to fly around, picking them off one by one.

A single ship bearing sails depicting the coat of arms of House Yronwood he allowed to leave, wanting them to take word back to Sunspear, but the rest he slew without exception. Better to slay his enemies here than to give them a chance to rebuild and strike again, especially those belonging to the forces of the Triarchy. Breaking them would benefit them all down the line, and while he wasn't willing to try conquering them outright, knowing that it would be exceedingly difficult and cause untold problems down the line, he was more than happy to deliver them the most crushing defeat that he could.

"Their people are too unlike ours to ever be brought into the fold," he thought to himself as he finished off the final few cogs, having already wiped out the galleys. *"They speak a different language, have different traditions, and worship entirely different gods. Better to keep them at bay than anything else."*

"Jon!" he heard Daemon roar, and, managing to spot Caraxes and Meleys next to him through the thick, dark smoke, barely restrained the urge to attack them before returning to his own body.

As he did so, Morghul's instincts fled him, and he looked down at the carnage through his own eyes, feeling a chill go down his spine as he did.

"Fucking hells," he thought to himself. In the rush of battle it had been easy to lose himself to it, especially once he slipped into Morghul's mind, but now, looking down at all he'd done, he was reminded just what terrible power he had just wielded.

"Land at Bloodstone!" Daemon barked, tugging Caraxes' reins until the blood wyrm turned around and landed by the shore of the largest of the Stepstones other than Tyrosh.

Meleys followed swiftly, and Jon shrugged, urging Morghul onward. The massive dragon landed heavily, tired from the long slaughter, and his rider patted his scales as he unhooked himself from the saddle.

"You did well," Jon murmured before sliding down along his wing and stretching his legs the moment he hit the ground.

“Jon!” Daemon called out, rushing towards him with Rhaenys right behind him. “Tell me, it’s important, did you see a ship with the coat of arms of House Martell among the fleet back there?”

“I did,” Jon nodded.

“What happened to it?” Rhaenys asked. “Meleys managed to pluck one of the commanders of this fleet from his burning ship as he attempted to jump into the water, and he’s been most...forthcoming.”

“The man claims that Prince Moran Martell, uncle to their current ruling prince, is here,” Daemon grinned. “He would make a most valuable prisoner.”

“I’m afraid he’s rather overcooked fish food at the moment,” Jon replied, and both Targaryens looked at him in surprise.

“You’re sure?” Daemon asked.

“I wiped out the entire fleet,” Jon lied. “None escaped.”

“Ah,” Daemon nodded as Rhaenys pinched the bridge of her nose. “Impressive.”

“That might complicate things a bit, but it won’t be anything we can’t handle,” the princess muttered. “You actually took out the entire bulk of their forces? Daemon and I together took nearly as long to burn far fewer ships.”

“Morghul’s likely exhausted, but he managed it, Princess,” Jon replied. “Did the Triarchy manage to land anyone on the shore?”

“A couple ships got past us and landed on Grey Gallows, but their men were swiftly dealt with,” Daemon replied. “This makes their previous attempt look successful.”

“Prince Daemon!” a tall, broad-shouldered man in worn-looking platemail called out.

“Ah, Gerren,” Daemon chuckled, recognizing the man at once. “How fares my keep?”

“It’s in the same sad state you left it in, my prince,” Gerren grinned, earning a laugh from the prince. The man looked to Jon then just as he removed his helmet and furrowed his brow. “This is your son, Prince Daemon?”

“He is,” Daemon replied, looking at him. “Jon might lack my coloring, but he commands that flying fortress back there as well as any Targaryen could.”

“I think he’s actually warmed to the idea of the ruse,” Jon thought to himself. “Well met, Ser...”

“No Ser,” Gerren replied.

“Gerren here served under me on the City Watch, and when I left to join Corlys in assaulting the Stepstones, he came with me,” Daemon explained. “When I decided to return to King’s Landing, I left him in charge of the place.”

“Does this interruption serve some purpose?” Rhaenys asked pointedly.

“Apologies, Princess,” Gerren nodded. “Some of the survivors have started washing up on shore and one of them, Prince Daemon, I thought you might want to see.”

“You don’t mean...” Daemon went to ask, grinning, and Gerren chuckled.

“Racallio Ryndoon,” he smirked. “I’d have shipped the perfumed pansy’s head to you last time he attacked us, but he fled with his tail between his legs.”

“Bring me to him,” Daemon commanded. “Treasure from these wrecks will wash up on shore here for years to come, and you lot are welcome to keep whatever you find.”

“You’re most generous, my prince,” Gerren grinned, leading him on.

The bound man was instantly recognizable, standing so tall that even on his knees he reached the height of the shortest men guarding him, with a full head of long hair and a beard, both dyed purple. He looked exhausted, understandable given that he had needed to swim to shore after Morghul had set his ship aflame, and yet as he spotted them, his dark eyes lit up.

“I will never for the life of me understand the Essosi urge to color one’s hair,” Rhaenys sniffed.

“Trust me, cousin, there are plenty of things I could tell you about this man that you’d understand even less,” Daemon chuckled. “Racallio.”

“Prince Daemon, as I yet live and breathe,” Racallio chuckled. “I’d curtsy but your men decided I should kneel.”

Rhaenys opened her mouth to question that but then closed it, deciding that she really didn’t want to know.

“I had heard about your peculiar nature,” Daemon sneered. “You should have stuck to wearing dresses and selling your arse, Ryndoon; you might have lived longer.”

“Alright, I’m going to go see if I can find Corlys and let him know to turn around,” Rhaenys muttered, having had enough of her cousin for one day.

“Princess,” Jon murmured. “I know it’s not my place, but would Meleys not benefit from a little more rest before you fly back to Driftmark?”

“You’re right, it isn’t,” Rhaenys replied before softening slightly. “You’re not incorrect, though. Is there anything worth eating or drinking in this place?”

“One of the ships that landed had some Tyroshi pear brandy on it, Princess,” Gerren replied. “That shi...stuff is too sweet for any of the men here, but if you’d like it...”

“That sounds lovely,” Rhaenys replied. “Come.”

“All I’m saying is that I’d like to fight you before I die, my prince,” Racallio replied. “You weren’t here last time, and I ended up facing that monster this time.”

“You look like you can barely stand,” Daemon scoffed.

“I do my best work on my knees,” Racallio grinned. “You’re going to kill me anyway, so why not let me die with a sword in my hand?”

“I’m bored as it is, so why not?” Daemon murmured, putting on his helmet and drawing Dark Sister. “Untie him and let him fight me if he’s so desperate.”

Rhaenys rolled her eyes and turned to Jon, saying, “Come.”

“Yes, Princess,” Jon replied, following the armored woman inside.

“Show the princess to the Tyroshi swill,” Gerren commanded, “and force a glug of it down one of the prisoners’ throats first to make sure it’s not poisoned.”

“Yes, captain,” one of the others replied, gesturing for Rhaenys to follow.

“Surprisingly courteous for a man barely a step above a pirate,” she murmured to Jon in Valyrian.

“He did say that he served under Pri...my father in King’s Landing,” Jon replied. “That lot seem to almost worship him.”

“He gave purpose and pride to men who had never known either,” Rhaenys replied. “I’ve found fault with almost everything your father’s ever done but his work with the City Watch; that I could not help but admire. Grandmother wouldn’t have approved of his methods, but she also would have been horrified to learn how bad the city got in the last years of Jaehaerys’ reign and the first few of Viserys’.”

“The difference in how she refers to those two couldn’t make her feelings about them any clearer,” Jon thought to himself.

The guard led them to an empty room and said, “I’ll give the prisoner we use as a taste tester a few minutes to die before we bring you the brandy, Princess. We have some bread and cheese as well, if you’re hungry.”

“That will suffice,” Rhaenys sighed, “and bring two cups with the brandy.”

“Yes, Princess,” he nodded before leaving.

She sat down, and Jon stood by the door, unsure what exactly she wanted of him. Rhaenys seemed content to sit in silence, moving her tight shoulders around after having spent so long in the saddle, and only when the man arrived a few minutes later with their food and drink did she even open her mouth.

“Leave us,” she commanded the moment one of the servants finished filling two cups. “You did well today.”

“Thank you, Princess,” Jon replied, sitting when she gestured for him to. He took the cup, smelling the sweet contents, and sipped it, noting that it seemed rather stronger than wine. “That’s something to drink in moderation.”

“Corlys gave me a taste of the stuff when he first started courting me,” Rhaenys murmured, smiling slightly at the taste. “It’s harder to come by now, for obvious reasons, but it is nice. Which is more than I can say for this rough bread.”

“I’m surprised they have a mill capable of getting the grain into this state,” Jon chuckled, eyeing the dense, brown loaf and hoping it was as free of weevils as what they’d eaten the night before.

“This scheme of Rhaenyra’s, what was its purpose?” Rhaenys asked.

“The princess had heard that the Triarchy was plotting and, knowing that my father...” Jon went to say, when she scowled at him.

“Lying to a prince or princess of the blood is rarely wise,” Rhaenys said harshly. “Rhaenyra’s never cared at all about the Stepstones, and she stands to gain nothing from this, unlike her Dothraki adventure last year. She convinced my perpetual child of a cousin to pretend to be greatly injured for moons, something that not even the prospect of bloodshed would be enough for. The man’s dueling a prisoner right now because he didn’t get to kill anyone by hand in this battle, and that irks him, and I’m to believe he willingly stayed locked away just on the vague hope that the Triarchy would attack? There was more to it than that, and I think it involves you. He’s never had a son before, and that’s the only thing I can think of that would change him so.”

“You have the right of it,” Jon sighed, figuring he could tell her half the truth. “The princess figured that giving me a prominent role in this battle might suffice to get to her father to agree to legitimize me, something that my father...”

“She wants to wed you, doesn’t she?” Rhaenys asked, and he froze. “Her mourning period is nearly over, and once it does, she’ll be inundated by fools seeking her hand, something that I know threatened to drive her mad the last time around.”

“Princess...” Jon went to say, and Rhaenys stood up.

“Whoever Rhaenyra weds will be...have great influence over my grandsons,” she said. “She’ll try to mitigate that influence, but while boys need their mothers, young men...young men need fathers.”

“Laenor will always be their father,” Jon breathed, and she turned to look at him, her eyes misty.

“And yet, they will never know him,” Rhaenys whispered, not trusting her voice. “I don’t want my grandsons to end up pawns of some Lannister or Tully, or worse, some even lesser house. Rhaenyra will wed again; she’s too young and fertile not to, but I will be damned if I let that become a problem for my family.”

“Princess, why are you bringing this up?” Jon asked.

“Wedding you would simplify things for Rhaenyra immensely, and it would also, I think, be good for Aegon and Aemon,” Rhaenys replied. “Laenor trusted you, which means more to me than you can imagine, and you also don’t belong to a family of scheming lords who would seek to use my blood for their own purposes. Boremund is already wed and the other Velaryons are...not great options. You are a bastard, yes, and that is not ideal, but in an ideal world my son would still draw breath, and this is something I never would have needed to even consider.”

“On that, we are agreed, Princess Rhaenys,” Jon murmured, his heart clenching as his guilt over Laenor’s death crept up again. “I am honored by your trust...”

“As I said, Laenor trusted you; Laena has made that clear,” Rhaenys sighed. “So tell me, what exactly is your plan? Because you showing valor in a battle that took place in a land Viserys

actively tries not to think about won't do much for him, and Rhaenyra has proven that she isn't foolish enough to think otherwise."

"I lied earlier, Princess," Jon replied, figuring that the older princess could be trusted with a little more of their plan. "One ship did escape Morghul's flames, one belonging to House Yronwood."

"You killed a prince of Sunspear's ruling house and then sent a Dornish ship off to tell Prince Qoren?" Rhaenys asked. "Why?"

"Because we want him to know," Jon replied. "You're right that this battle will mean little to the king or the lords, save for those directly affected by the Triarchy, but Dorne is another matter entirely."

Rhaenys gestured for him to go on, and so he did, and by the time Daemon joined them a while later, soaked in the blood of his fallen foe, she looked more impressed with him than he'd ever seen her before.