From the Ashes Begin Anew
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From the Ashes Begin Anew
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Summary

Jaenyx Belaerys is the last of House Belaerys. With the survival of his people and that of Valyria at risk, he journeys to Dragonstone, where he meets the Targaryens. There, he will find friendship, love, and the will to begin anew. Set a decade before Aegon's Conquest.

- Inspired by The Might of House Belaerys by Suna-Puppet-Master
Hi! This is my first time pursuing a major story on Fanfiction and I have decided to have setting be around the time of Aegon's Conquest. Inspiration for this story partially came from THE MIGHT OF HOUSE BELAERYS by Suna-Puppet-Master, and there haven't been many ASOIAF/GOT fics that I am aware of that take place during Aegon's conquest. This is an interesting period, but we don't really have fully-fleshed out personalities besides what the legends tell us of Aegon, Visenya, Rhaenys, and Orys. I also want to explore the implications of there being another dragonlord besides the Targaryens, which I would like to take a step further into. Through the OC in this fic, I would like explore the human characteristics of the Targaryens prior to the Conquest, as legends made them more ideal than they should be.

Also, this being my first time pursuing a major story, I may not have the necessary skills to imbue the humanity that the ASOIAF/GOT canon haven't really given to these characters. Being a recent entry into GOT/ASOIAF fandom might also hinder how I write this. So, any constructive critique and suggestions for this story is welcome, but I would appreciate if y'all took it easy on me. If any of you can recommend a good Valyrian translation or someone who is, plx let me know.

With that, enjoy! :)

He gazed upon the sea below him as the air rushed on his face. The summer years brought calm and he found some peace from seeing upon the sea extending from horizon to horizon. No past, no future, and no memory could be found within the limitless water. More peace than he had found in the last few years.

He saw Cloudwynd's head turn slightly towards him, his constant companion occasionally flapping her wings to maintain their glide through the sky. He felt her concern for him, knowing when he would enter his brooding self. Dragons were passionate and took what they want, but the past few years have not been kind to him or his people, all of which Cloudwynd witnessed.

"Everything will be alright, girl," he reassured in High Valyrian as he took his hand off one of her spines and reached forward to rub her neck, her bluish-greenish scales glistening in the sunlight. He got a snort from her in response, not really satisfied with his answer but decided to accept it. His only concern right now was to fly towards his destination, to ensure his people's safe passage.

Beneath him were vessels ferrying those he was charged with towards their new destination, the last bastion for their people. Fifty ships carrying barely two thousand five hundred men, women, and children across water over four moon turns. Remnants of a great civilization long extinguished from the memory of those that now took their place. The land prowess of the Valyrian army through the Tarareons, cavalymen and explorers who could boast about expanding the Freehold's reach without the dragons. Valyria's knowledge of blood magic, healing, and other rituals preserved through the Leniars. Lastly, the Rahitheons' skill as smiths, builders, and engineers preserved the wonders of Valyrian technology. The survival of their civilization and culture rested
on all of them and one misstep could see the flame of Valyria die out for good.

And then there was himself. Barely nine and ten, Jaenyx was the last scion of the Belaerys', one of the oldest and most powerful dragonlord families in old Valyria. A family that had great figures such as Jaenara Belaerys, the famed explorer of Sothoryos, included in their ancestry. Prompted by Valyria's leaders to recolonize the Basilisk Isles, the Belaerys' settled at the edge of Sothoryosi wilderness along with three other Valyrian families, all of whom could not hope to survive the dangers of that continent by themselves. Previous attempts to colonize the Basilisk Isles, seen as a first step towards further expansion south, had ended in failure. Yet, the new colony thrived under the Belaerys' stewardship. Being in the Basilisk Isles was what saved the colonists from the Doom.

Unfortunately, despite nearly a century of inhabiting the Isles, a recent turn of events had put their people in dire circumstances and the Isles were no longer safe for them. Despairing over the coming extinction of Valyria, Jaenyx remembered that there was one other place that they could journey towards, a place where a certain dragonlord had fled to after his daughter's now prophetic warning about the destruction of the Freehold: Dragonstone.

Jaenyx could only hope that the brood of Aenar Targaryen were still alive at Dragonstone. He decided to take it upon himself to arrive at Dragonstone ahead of his people in order to prevent alarming the Targaryens. The captain of his vessel "Wave Crasher", a Tarareon, protested his decision and urged him to stay alongside the people he led.

"I understand your concern and I thank you for reminding me of my duty," Jaenyx said. "However, the Targaryens are dragonlords and seeing another dragonlord would help make our arrival at Dragonstone much smoother than if all of us were to appear over the horizon. We do not want them to see us as invaders and set their dragons upon us."

"You don't even know if the Targaryens are still there," the Tarareon responded. "Not to mention if they even have their dragons."

Jaenyx nodded in agreement. "You're right. I don't know. But it is a chance we have to take. The Basilisk Isles are not safe for us anymore and we can't go back to the Freehold or any of the colonies throughout Essos. We only have one grown dragon and barely one thousand men who could fight. We have to go to Dragonstone and I have to be the first to appear there."

The Tarareon captain let out a heavy sigh. "I hope you know what you are doing. You're our leader. If you fall, we all fall. The survival of Valyria rests on your shoulders."

Jaenyx grasped his shoulder tightly. "It rests on our shoulders, captain. No one is more important and I certainly can't ensure the continuation of our civilization without you or the Leniars or the Rahitheons. We either stand together or we shall into the abyss."

The two tightly clasped their hands together. "Just come back to us, my lord. That's all we need." Jaenyx promised with a nod.

After a few hours flying north, Jaenyx saw land ahead. Finally, Westeros. He saw sheer cliffs and the sea pounding violent against them, thick forests covering the cliff tops. From his rather scant knowledge of Westeros, he assumed that these were the lands ruled by the Durrandon Storm Kings. That meant that he had to travel further north towards a body of water called the Blackwater Bay, with Dragonstone sitting at its eastern edge towards the narrow sea.

Jaenyx had just entered the bay when he heard a familiar sound in the distance. A dragon roar, he thought. "Faster, girl! We're almost there," he urged on to Cloudwynd in High Valyrian. For the first time in years, he felt hope enter his heart.
Sensing her rider's glee, Cloudwynd beat her wings and climbed higher. Within moments, a
mountainous island came into view. Jaenyx could smell the volcanic ash from far off, a welcoming
change of scent from the sea and especially the Sothoryos wilderness.

What drew his attention, however, was the dragon that was flying above a part of the island. As he
flew closer, Jaenyx began to appreciate the size of the dragon. Larger than Cloudwynd by a wing
length, this dragon had black scales, black wings, and a huge mouth. He assumed that this dragon
had several decades to grow, more time than Cloudwynd who was born in the Basilisk Isles.

He then noticed a man atop the black dragon. The dragon turned its head towards Cloudwynd,
finally noticing the presence of another dragon. Its rider turned his head in the same direction as his
dragon, also noticing Cloudwynd and Jaenyx. The black dragon roared in greeting, which
Cloudwynd returned. The two dragons flew in a circle with each other as if to size up the other.
Jaenyx kept his eyes on the rider, their purple eyes focused on one another.

After the standoff lasted a few circles, the black dragon's rider cocked his head towards the island,
signalling Jaenyx to follow him. Jaenyx followed the rider and the black dragon to a clearing
between the island's mountains. There, he saw two more dragons resting in the clearing and two
women next to them, who were alerted to the newcomer. The black dragon, the larger and more
imposing of the now three dragons, landed next to them and its rider sliding off to stand close to
the women.

"Land, girl. Not too far from the other dragons," Jaenyx urged Cloudwynd. The blue-green dragon
complied and set down upon a patch of grass across from the other three dragons. Cloudwynd
roared at the three dragons, with them roaring back in response.

Though not as large as the black dragon, the other two dragons were still an impressive sight for
Jaenyx. One had bright orange scales mixed with gray. The other, larger than the orange one but
still smaller than the black one, had silver scales. All stared down at their blue-green guest and her
rider.

As for Jaenyx, he exchanged looks with the man and the women. The man was tall, broad-
shouldered, and muscular in appearance. His thick arms, toned midsection, and powerful legs
evident despite his rather loose red tunic and black trousers. He had a defined jawline, hair that
grew past his ears, and piercing eyes. He also had a sword belt, its simple black leather handle,
twin dragon heads on the hilt, and large ruby visible.

For the two women, Jaenyx found them to be very beautiful. One was tall, dressed in a long ring-
mail and leather dress, and her hair tied in an elaborate braid. This one possessed a rather harsh
beauty, clearly more muscled and giving off a rougher edge than the woman next to her. Like the
man, she had a sword belt, its dragon cross-guard and single ruby in the hilt glowing in the
daylight.

The other woman, just as beautiful as the sword-carrying one, was more slender and graceful.
Wearing a pair of leather trousers and shirt with a long summer dress over them, she seemed to be
more dainty and delicate than the first one and had her hair loose over her shoulders. She also
seemed to be more tense than the other two, who had their hands ready to draw their swords from
their scabbards at him.

Far from being nervous, Jaenyx was relieved from coming across these three. They had the
traditional Valyrian looks of purple eyes and silver hair. He could also sense the dragonblood in
them, as Cloudwynd was considerably less hostile with them than when she was with others. He
was not alone after all and his decision to come to Dragonstone had been a good one.
"Stay where you are, trespasser," the man ordered, taking a combat stance. "Who are you and why are you here?" Jaenyx noticed his grip on his sword became tighter, with the sword-carrying woman following suit.

_Curious. They're speaking the common tongue_, Jaenyx thought. Some of his people could speak the common tongue and while he himself could understand it, he could not speak it. He never saw the usefulness for it, until now.

Resisting the urge to grab for his own swords tucked on his left side, their black silk handles and bronze circle hilts visible for the three other dragonriders to see, Jaenyx raised his hands to indicate his peaceful intentions.

"I mean no harm, fellow dragonriders," he began while hoping that they retained understanding of High Valyrian. "I am Jaenyx Belaerys, Lord of the Basilisk Isles, Dragonlord, and rider of the dragon Cloudwynd. I come here with the hope of speaking with the Lord of Dragonstone on behalf of my people."

Jaenyx saw their eyes widen in shock. The young man withdrew from his combat stance and gave his companions a nod before relaxing and taking his hand off his sword's handle. The woman next to him also put her hand away from her sword, but not before narrowing her eyes in confusion and suspicion.

"Forgive me, my lord. We were just being cautious. I am Aegon of House Targaryen of Dragonstone, Dragonlord, and rider of the dragon Balerion," the man stepped forward and gave Jaenyx a nod, who was relieved that they at least understood High Valyrian. He turned to the two women next to him, gesturing them to introduce themselves.

The sword-carrying woman stepped forward, her hand still on the pommel. "I am Visenya of House Targaryen of Dragonstone, Dragonlord, and rider of the dragon Vhagar." She kept her piercing gaze on Jaenyx.

As for the other woman, her eyes were focused on Cloudwynd, marveling at the fine specimen before her. "I am Rhaenys of House Targaryen of Dragonstone, Dragonlord, and rider of the dragon Meraxes." She started walking towards Cloudwynd and turned to Jaenyx with a smile. "What is your dragon's name?"

Jaenyx smiled back, noticing her wonder at his dragon. "Her name is Cloudwynd, Rhaenys of House Targaryen. You could pet her if you want."

Rhaenys' smile grew before she turned back and ran her hand on Cloudwynd's snout. She gave a snort in appreciation, always basking in the attention of others, especially those with dragonblood.

Jaenyx looked back to Aegon and Visenya. "It appears Cloudwynd likes your sister, if all of you are siblings. Am I correct?"

Aegon nodded. "You are. Visenya here is the oldest, I'm our father's only son, and Rhaenys is the youngest. Now, you said that you came here on behalf of your people. Who and where are they?"

_Here it goes, Jaenyx thought. "Well, Aegon of House Targaryen, I rather save the details for when I speak to the Lord of Dragonstone, if he's still alive. But for now, all you need to know is that my people are further south and enroute to Dragonstone as we speak. I come to negotiate sanctuary for them and I believe that negotiations would be smoother if the Targaryens first saw another dragonlord."_
Aegon crossed his arms, contemplating the situation. Although these three seemed friendly enough and their dragons were not openly hostile to him, Jaenyx remained alert. He could probably subdue one in single combat, probably also take on the other. However, he and Cloudwynd were outnumbered and he didn't like his chances of coming out of a fight if it came to that. He hoped that things didn't turn out that way.

Aegon took a moment before turning to Visenya and whispering to her ear. She nodded and turned back to her dragon Vhagar, but not before giving Jaenyx another wary look. She and Vhagar flew off, away from the mountain clearing.

"I sent my sister back to our family keep to let our father know of your presence. Do not worry, my lord," Aegon stated. Jaenyx relaxed, relieved that the situation did not escalate. "Although I must admit that I'm confused by your appearance here. We believed that House Targaryen was the only dragonlord family remaining after the Doom. Why have you decided to come here now?"

"That, Aegon of House Targaryen, is a story that I would rather share before your lord father. I mean no disrespect, but I would have all of you present when I do explain my presence here."

Aegon nodded, accepting his answer. "That must be quite a story all on its own. I love stories," Rhaenys remarked as she moved back next to her brother.

Jaenyx shifted uncomfortably. "Indeed," he managed.

Noticing his discomfort, Aegon reoriented the conversation. "I'm pretty sure that my sister has informed our father already. Let's start making our way there, my lord."

Jaenyx nodded in affirmation. They all climbed on to their dragons and took to the air, Aegon and Rhaenys guiding him along the island's coast until an imposing black fortress came into view. He noticed that dragon forms covered the entire castle, from the towers to the gates, which made it look more like a nest of dragons. Black stones and dragon forms made the castle seem grim and eerie to any newcomer, but not for Jaenyx. He felt something from the castle calling to him, a familiar feeling pulling him towards its clutches. The castle, definitely built with Valyrian knowledge, felt welcoming to him.

Aegon and Rhaenys led Jaenyx to the castle's courtyard, which was large enough to hold all three dragons. Sliding down from Cloudwynd, Jaenyx rubbed her neck in assurance before hearing two massive metal doors cracking open. From the doors emerged Visenya and elderly man who Jaenyx assumed was their father and Lord of Dragonstone. Like Visenya, he had a stern face with a piercing gaze. However, unlike Visenya, he had a stern face with a piercing gaze. However, unlike Visenya, he looked surprised at seeing not only another dragon but another dragonlord.

"Welcome, Lord Belaerys of the Basilisk Isles, to Dragonstone. I am Aerion of House Targaryen, Lord of Dragonstone. On behalf of my house and from one dragonlord to another, I extend to you our hospitality," he announced in High Valyrian and with open arms. He then gestured to an older man standing next to him, who came forward to Jaenyx with a plate of bread and a bowl of salt. Jaenyx stared at the plate, unsure of what this meant. Apparently, Lord Aerion saw his confusion. "In Westeros, it is custom for noble houses to offer guest rights to visitors with bread and salt. Once that has been offered and you eat them, you cannot be harmed for as long as you stay here."

Jaenyx nodded in understanding. "Ah, I see." He looked at the plate again before tearing off a piece and dipping in salt. Seeing Lord Aerion silently confirming that he was doing it right, he put the bread in his mouth.
"Excellent," Aerion declared. "If you would follow me, my lord, so we can discuss the nature of your visit here."

"Of course, my lord," Jaenyx answered.

The hallways of Dragonstone were just like the fortresses in the Freehold that his parents described. He never actually set foot in one since he was born a century after the Doom occurred, with his family's fortress being simple in form since they couldn't afford to expend much effort in building an elaborate castle so close to the Sothoryosi wilderness. Statues of dragons and other magical creatures were carved into the black stone walls, which would have been disturbing to any common visitor. For Jaenyx, it felt like home since he could feel the presence of dragonlords within these very walls.

The hallways and the walls of the castle were decorated with tapestries, paintings, and suits of armor. Most of the tapestries depicted famous instances of dragon combat and the great events of Valyria's history. The armors were also befitting that of the dragonlords, with similar armors adorning his family's castle back in the Basilisk Isles. However, he saw that the armors were made of regular castle-forged steel instead of the Valyrian steel armors that his family's castle had. It didn't surprise him, as Valyrian steel had become rarer with the destruction of the Freehold. Well, at least to the rest of the world outside of the Isles, he thought.

Some of the paintings were of Targaryen dragonlords of the past and other events at Dragonstone. At the end of the hallway was a massive portrait of Aenar Targaryen, the man who moved his family from the Freehold to his desolate outpost. He was also the man who accidentally played a part in ensuring the survival of Valyria's dragonlords. Many dragonlords called him a fool for leaving and listening to the supposed delusions of his daughter, who he also saw a portrait of. Now look where his scoffers are, he mused.

The hallway led to a large hall, which Jaenyx guessed was where newcomers were greeted. There were two doors at opposite sides of the hall that opened to different parts of the castle and a massive metal chair at the end of the chair. It looked more like a throne to Jaenyx, as no lord's chair would be that big and have two dragons decorating the backrest. It gave off the impression that dragons were ever present to protect their lord.

Lord Aerion took his seat on the throne, with Visenya standing to his right and another large man already at his left. The man, with black hair, black eyes, and black beard that grew down to his chest, was more physically imposing than Aegon or Jaenyx. Taller, with thicker arms, broader shoulders, and long powerful legs, Jaenyx surmised that he would not win against him in a match of brawn. What drew his interest was that he could not feel as much dragonblood in this man than Lord Aerion or their children, which made him question on why he was next to the lord.

"Again, I welcome you into our home, Lord Belaerys," Lord Aerion started, switching to the common tongue. "I have to admit that I was skeptical of my daughter Visenya's words about another dragonlord appearing on our shores, but imagine my surprise and delight when I gazed upon you and your magnificent creature in the courtyard. Know that you are most welcome in our presence."

Getting a closer look at him, Jaenyx saw that the Lord of Dragonstone was thin, fragile, pale, and sickly. Although he had the silver hair and purple eyes prevalent among Valyrians, his hair was unkempt compared to his children and grew past his shoulders. He then noticed the shiny circle he wore, silvery in appearance and embedded with rubies and pearls. It added to the regal impression he gave off, which piqued Jaenyx's interest even more.

"Forgive me, my lord, but I don't have a good hold of the common tongue. My name is Jaenyx
Belaerys, son of Auryon and Maenarys Belaerys, Lord and Lady of the Basilisk Isles, dragonlord, and rider of the dragon Cloudwynd,” he introduced with a fist placed on his chest, a common form of greeting among dragonlords. However, the Targaryens of the past would have had to been more reverent when treating with Belaerys’, as the Belaerys’ were wealthier and more powerful than they were and lived in the upper crust of Valyrian society. With the change in circumstances, such differences in the past no longer mattered. He only had one concern that occupied his mind.

"Well met, son of Belaerys,” Aerion replied with a smile. "Last time I've read of the Belaerys’, they were charged with settling the Basilisk Isles years before the Doom, with aim of further settlement into Sothoryos. Am I correct to believe that the settlement lasted past the Freehold?"

"You would be, my lord," Jaenyx affirmed.

"And please don't take offense at this, but you seem pretty young to be a lord and to be representing your people coming from the south, if the words I've heard from my daughter Visenya are to believed. May I inquire as to where your lord father and lady mother are at this moment?"

Jaenyx paused. Lord Aerion didn't know that he touched upon a sensitive spot, one filled with anguish and sadness. Then again, he should have expected that a lord like Aerion to question how someone barely in manhood could be a lord himself.

"They're dead, my lord," Jaenyx managed to say.

That elicited looks of shock and sympathy from the black-haired man, the Dragonstone lord, Aegon, Rhaenys, and even the stern Visenya.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Lord Belaerys. You have my sympathies," Aerion offered. Jaenyx nodded his thanks. "May I ask how they died?"

Jaenyx hesitated. "There was an outbreak of the red death throughout the Basilisk Isles. Nine out of ten people perished, including my father. I would have died too, if it weren't for my mother. Unfortunately, what she did came at a cost to her life."

Aerion looked as if he wanted to know more, but wisely decided to stop there. "You say that your people are coming from the south. Are they also of the settlement from the Basilisk Isles?"

"Yes, my lord," Jaenyx answered. "Forty-two vessels carrying two thousand and five hundred men, women, and children. Among them the families of Tarareon, Leniar, and Rahitheons."

Aerion raised his eyebrows in surprise, knowing what those families were known for in the Freehold. "The Rahitheons are with you, as are the Leniars and the Tarareons?"

Jaenyx nodded. "They came with our family when the settlement started. It was because of them that our settlement survived past the fall of the Freehold until now."

"Father, who are these families?" Aegon asked. Judging from the looks on Aegon, Rhaenys, Visenya, and the large man, they didn't know who Jaenyx was referring to and how their father knew them.

"The Tarareons provided the best cavalrymen in Valyria's armies, able to smash into the lines of heavy infantry and feign their enemies into chasing them over weeks. The Leniars were known for producing healers and scholars of unmatched quality, their application of bloodmagic defining the wonders of the Freehold. And the Rahitheons were among the best craftsmen, smiths, and engineers to be seen in the known world, able to manipulate the land before them into true wonders of man and being the ones to perfect the process of forging Valyrian steel," their father explained.
That last part got the attention of his children, with the implications of such knowledge not lost on them.

"With the Rahitheons with you, has the knowledge of producing Valyrian steel been preserved?" Visenya asked.

"Though we lacked the materials to produce Valyrian steel in the quantities of the past, we have kept that knowledge alive," Jaenyx replied. "It is also one of the reasons our settlement in the Isles was able to survive for as long as it did past the Doom."

Aerion stood up, excitement clear on his face. "It's settled. I hereby offer sanctuary to your people on Dragonstone, although I would like to meet the heads of the families alongside yourself in more proper settings. Together, we shall reignite the flames of Valyria right here on this island and ensure the prosperity of our people." He moved down from his throne and offered his hand.

Jaenyx clasped it, surprised at how quickly Aerion agreed to grant sanctuary to his people. He wondered if he should have started with saying that his people possessed the knowledge of making Valyrian steel first. Maybe, he wouldn't have had to talk about his family and that they were gone.

"Thank you, my lord," he answered gratefully. "My people and I will never forget your kindness today."

Aerion waved it off. "Nonsense. All is not lost for Valyria and I am happy to play a part in ensuring that our people are returned to their former glory. I shall have our servants arrange proper accommodations for you in our guest quarters. You are most welcome, Lord Belaerys," Aerion began ordering the servants.

"Before you do so, my lord, I must fly out to my people first and tell them the good news. They must be worrying about me at this moment."

"Of course, Lord Belaerys," Aerion answered. "When you return, remember that you have accommodations right here in our castle."

"Again, thank you. I must take my leave, Lord Aerion. My people can't wait now." After getting his consent, Jaenyx left the hall and back towards the courtyard where Cloudfyre was.

Instead of being happy at the good news, Jaenyx cursed himself for not really leveraging his position. He thought about the ways he could have got benefits from Aerion, as Valyrian steel was rare and the knowledge of forging it supposedly lost. By bringing the Rahitheons right onto his lands, Aerion could benefit from those who had preserved the knowledge by enriching Dragonstone while putting large amounts of coin into his pockets. He should have considered not telling about the families with him, as he revealed too much and did not get very much. Hopefully that can change in the near future, he thought. He would be damned if he was going to let even a dragonlord take advantage of his people, especially after all they suffered.

Then again, Aerion pointed out that he was young for a lord. Jaenyx wished he had his father and brother here, as they were more familiar when dealing with others, and navigating the maze of dealmaking took years of experience that he lacked. I really need to be more alert now if I am to prevent another blunder like this, he pondered.

Jaenyx returned to the courtyard, Cloudwynd waiting for him. Climbing on and grabbing her spines, he urged her to fly. She roared before taking off into the sky, circling the castle before flying south of the island, towards the people awaiting their return.
Chapter End Notes

Not quite sure on how often I would update this, as that depends on the demand from my readers. Hopefully, this is a good start. Thnx for reading and have a great day!
Really encouraged the first few followers of this story, so you guys are awesome for starting this journey with me. I'm still not sure on my update schedule, which is haphazard depending on the mood. But I hope this is a good next step. Enjoy!

After the newcomer, Jaenyx, left the hall and flew off, her father ordered the maester to send ravens to their sworn lords to inform of the new arrivals. To say that the next few days at Dragonstone would be busy was an understatement, especially since their arrivals were a remnant of Valyria like their family. Their father ordered the servants to clean the guest rooms and hallways, the cooks to prepare their finest meals in a while, and sent a runner to the town and docks at the base of the Dragonmont to prepare for their guests. He gathered them all in his solar, including Orys, their bastard half-brother. Their mother, Valaena, was currently at Driftmark with her Velaryon family, but their father sent a raven there to tell her to return. After all, their guests deserved a proper introduction from both the Lord and Lady of Dragonstone.

"I am surprised at how quickly you offered them sanctuary here, father," Aegon began as they stood around their father's long table. "Dragonlord he may be, we still have not seen his people and I am not sure if Dragonstone can provide accommodations for nearly two thousand five hundred."

"We will make do," their father Aerion dismissed his concern. "Besides, if the Rahitheons are with him, then we will not have to worry about building new homes for them. We can just provide building materials for them."

"Did you really mean what you said, father, about reigniting the flame of Valyria?" Aegon knew that his father was sentimental, but he never let his emotions influence his decisions. So, for him to provide sanctuary to these newcomers just because they were Valyrian like their family was, baffled Aegon.

"Oh, don't worry, son. That might be part of the reason why I decided to give them a haven, but not the most important one."

Aegon and his siblings glanced at each other in confusion. "I suggest all of you sit down, since I am about to discuss matters of importance," their father pointed to the chairs in front of them at the table. They all complied.

Their father clasped his hands on the table. "I informed our vassals of these new arrivals. What they bring to our shores would provide many advantages for all of us. With the martial prowess of the Tarareons, we would never need to worry as much about our safety from that of the lords of Westeros. I've read stories about Tarareon horsemen going against the Rhoynish hordes and it was said that even without the dragons, they could have kept them at bay. As for the Leniars, they were not the ones who came up with the healing arts, but they spent generations perfecting them and there was no sickness or injury that they could not heal. Add that to how the Leniars provided the foundation from which bloodmagic could be mastered from and we would never have to worry about bodily afflictions ever again."
Aegon absorbed his father's knowledge. He never heard about these families before today and merely accepted that Valyria was where wonders occurred, never bothering to find out who exactly was responsible for them. He left that to Rhaenys and Visenya, who were more curious about the world than he was.

"But that's not all," their father continued. "The Rahitheons took Valyria to new heights. There was running water, irrigation, roads, heating, and other aspects because of them. Rahitheon craftsmen set the standard for the decorations, tools, clothing, and weapons that Valyria was known for producing. Most importantly and as I said in the hall, they were the ones that perfected the process of Valyrian steel, which has been lost with the Doom until now. We settle the Rahitheons here at Dragonstone, many would come from afar to request new Valyrian steel weapons. We would essentially control the supply."

Aegon pondered about that. He was gifted his Valyrian steel sword Blackfyre as a name-day present from their father, which was passed down from his father. In fact, both Blackfyre and Visenya's sword Dark Sister had been passed down within their family for nearly a century. Everyone knew how lightweight and strong Valyrian steel was in comparison to even the best castle-forged steel, which made all Valyrian steel items more valuable when the Doom occurred. To have the ones who perfected the forging process right at Dragonstone would increase their standing in not just the Blackwater Bay, but throughout the known world.

"As good as that sounds, father," Visenya spoke up. "Do you really think that he would simply allow us to benefit from what his people will bring here? He's a dragonlord and if our impressions are correct, he will not allow them to be taken advantage of. He might even fight us with his dragon should he sense ill intentions from us."

Aegon sighed, as did Rhaenys, Orys, and their father. Leave it to Visenya to bring up the uncertain parts in every good thing. Out of himself, Orys, and Rhaenys, Visenya was the more cautious and thoughtful one. There were moments when her doubting the good things of this life became irritating, but she always had good reason to and there were many times when she was right. Such as the time when Visenya warned him about making Balerion do rolls while diving through the air, as Balerion was too large and not agile enough for that. Aegon did not listen and he nearly fell off into the sea because of that.

"You are correct in assuming that, Vis," their father called her by her nickname. "And I would be remiss to believe that he would not take his people somewhere else if he feels that we're taking advantage of him. So, I've thought of a way to prevent such worries from precluding his stay here while ensuring that he would not take what he has to another, say one of our rivals in Westeros."

Aegon saw Rhaenys narrow her eyes. "How do you intend to accomplish that?"

"We have to make him connected to us, our family, if we are to assuage his worries while making certain he won't leave at the first sign of trouble. It would also send a bad message to those sworn to us if we were to offer sanctuary essentially for free."

It was Orys that picked up on their father's thoughts. "You would have him marry into one of our vassals."

Their father smiled, amused that their brother, usually focused on being the strongest man there ever was, displayed perception for once. "Exactly. However, I was not thinking about marrying him to one of the houses under us. As he's a dragonlord, having relations with a family that does not have a dragonrider might insult him."

"But mother is not a dragonrider," Rhaenys noted. "And yet you married her."
Their father snorted. "You're right, Rhae. I married your mother because I loved her, but that is irrelevant to what I am getting at. Your mother, and the Velaryons, have Valyrian blood, which combined with the dragonblood of our family allowed you, Vis, and Egg to become dragon riders. Should our new guest marry another dragonrider, the effects of our blood might amplify and the children born out of that union could be even stronger dragonriders. That union could also say to our vassals that anything coming from our family comes at a price while emphasizing that we do have standards regarding who we choose to have relations with."

Aegon's eyes widened, now understanding what their father was saying. Judging from the faces of his sisters and Orys, they understood also. "You would have him marry one of us," he managed to say.

Their father bobbed his head. Anxiety filled the room, as Aegon took in their father's words. There were only two people that were available to marry and they were his sisters. He felt his hands tightening into a fist. He always knew that he would have to marry Visenya as per Valyrian marriage customs, which could only mean that their father intended to marry Rhaenys to this newcomer. He felt his anger boil to his skin, disgusted at the possibility that his favorite sister would have to marry and have children with a stranger, even if that stranger was a dragonrider.

No, he thought. Father may make me marry Vis out of duty, but I will not allow him to sell off Rhae to this Belaerys. I will fight him and make him bleed if I have to.

Apparently, their father saw Aegon's face twist and become redder. "Aegon, calm down! It's not what you think."

Aegon stood up. "Why is it not? You always said that it was my duty to marry one of my sisters to preserve our dragonblood. I understood that, father, and I accepted it when you said it would have to be Vis. But I will not let you give Rhae away to his outsider. I don't care if he is a dragonlord!"

Their father slammed his fist against the table while standing up. Visenya, Rhaenys, and Orys slightly recoiled from the hot blood displayed between both of them. If there was one thing that Aegon inherited from his father, it was the dragon temper in its purest form. However, a son could not overcome who he inherited it from and their father had a much more potent dragon temper. Also, unlike Aegon, their father knew how to control it and only brought it out if he had a reason to.

"Sit. Back. Down," their father said through clenched teeth. "I was not finished."

Aegon's nostrils flared, the steam still emerging from his body, but he sat down.

Their father sighed as he also lowered back into his chair, with Visenya, Rhaenys, and Orys relieved that their stand-off did not escalate. "You still have a long way to go, Egg. You have to be more in control of your feelings if you are going to take my place. But that is for another time. You are right, Egg. I do intend for Lord Belaerys to marry into our family through one of your sisters, but it's not to Rhaenys."

Everyone heard a pin drop in the solar. That was not something that Aegon expected and almost immediately, he felt relief and then regret for his outburst.

It was Visenya that now protested, her eyes widening in disbelief. "You mean to marry me to this trespasser?!"

Although showing the dragon temper, their father was much more calm about it than he was with Aegon. "Oh, come now, Vis. I know that you love Egg and that he loves you, but both of you were
quite clear on how you felt when I said that you would have to marry each other. Both of you do not love each other that much, not as much as Egg loves Rhae. And I now can see quite clearly that a union between you and Egg would not end very well."

Aegon let out a breath, relieved at the prospect of not marrying his older sister but also felt guilty at not showing the joy that Visenya should have seen when their father made plans to marry them. He appreciated Visenya's seriousness and thoughtfulness, which were vindicated several times, and he acknowledged her as the smartest woman he knew. It was also one of the reasons why Aegon preferred to be around Rhaenys than Visenya. While both were very curious about the world around them, Visenya was interested in serious and intellectual pursuits such as history, Valyrian blood rituals, and different tongues in addition to learning how to fight with her sword and hands. Rhaenys was more interested in music, dancing, and poetry, inspired by the maidens in the songs while she found more joy in riding Meraxes. Essentially, Rhaenys knew how to relax, have fun, and her presence would bring smiles and laughter to those around her. Visenya did not know how to do that and she just scared people with how smart, fierce, and serious she was.

Aegon saw that Visenya could not deny their father's words either. They both loved each other, but not that much and they both lost count on the many times their conversations outside of the training yard ended in awkward silence. They just did not connect very well, and Visenya saw how close he was to Rhaenys.

Their father noticed their shared looks in admittance. "I understand your concern, Vis, but you should not be so worried. Lord Jaenyx may look lean, but he is a strapping young lad. He carries himself as a lord should and if what he says is true, then he knows what commanding others is like. That takes maturity and he has that while still blessed with youth. He is around your age from the looks of him, so there should not be much difficulty when it comes to personally connecting with one another. In addition, he has a fine looking dragon and I am confident that you'll be in good hands when you marry him."

Visenya hesitated. "That may be true, father, but he's a stranger to me. I also do not like being sold like some destrier at auction. That is why I went along with you marrying me to Aegon since at least I will be with someone I know, not some pampered lordling."

Their father leaned forward. "You're wrong, Vis, if that's what you think this. I am preventing an unhappy union from taking place since I've seen firsthand what that can do to children."

Aegon looked at the floor, sighing. He remembered the one time where their father talked about their grandfather, Lord Daemion. Their father never saw a moment of affection between Daemion and his wife and growing up as an only child meant that he had no one he could turn to when his father would ignore him and his mother. It also didn't help when Lord Daemion would beat him while his mother could not do anything. A hard man he was, no one could deny that their father Aerion loved his children and his wife.

"So what if I decided to follow through with my plans to marry you to Egg?" their father continued. "Can you guarantee that both of you will be present for your child, if you do have children with him? Somehow, I was blessed with your mother and all of you when my father arranged for me to marry her. I cannot guarantee that you will be happy with Lord Jaenyx, but I am certainly preventing one union from turning into a bad one."

Visenya calmed down, not arguing with their father's reasoning. But she was still unsure about the whole idea of marrying someone she did not know.

"Besides, if anything could be said about Lord Belaerys, it is that he is no pampered lordling. He apparently lost his parents to unnatural circumstances, which would turn any boy into a man and
teach him about the difficulties of life."

Aegon remembered how Lord Jaenyx looked when their father asked him about his father and mother. He could only imagine what losing parents would do to anyone, especially a young man like him. He did not look much older than Aegon, which would compound the effects of such an experience.

"If anything more is to be said, Vis, you turned down the offer of every single lord under us for your hand in marriage. Maybe this will be different, maybe it will not. But I ask that you give some thought to this and I doubt you will find a better option."

All the protest had now left Visenya. She did not like the idea of marrying a stranger, which was why she agreed to marry Aegon in the first place. However, she also could not deny that she would not be happily married to Aegon.

"As we're still on the topic of marriage, I will allow Egg to marry Rhae, but only after Vis marries Lord Belaerys."

Aegon allowed a small smile to show on his face. Looking back at Rhaenys, he saw her smiling also. He knew that she also enjoyed being him and he looked forward to a life together with her.

"I will not reveal this to my vassals just yet, but I will say to Lord Belaerys that the price of permanent sanctuary on our lands is marrying into our family. If he's really concerned about his people, he will accept."

Aegon, Rhaenys, Visenya, and Orys nodded, accepting their father's decision. At least he took the time to explain it to them, not like other lords who made decisions as serious as marrying their children off on a whim. He finally dismissed all of them, quietly filing out of the solar.

Aegon followed Visenya through the hallway, but not before giving Rhaenys a smile and telling her that they will talk later. Right now, he had to talk to Visenya. He could only imagine what things were going through her mind, especially with the prospect of marriage coming sooner than she thought.

"Vis, wait," Aegon called out. She didn't respond, only continuing to the outside of the castle, with Aegon continuing after her.

Soon enough, they both descended a flight of stairs on the outside of the main keep and arrived at a balcony that sat near the edge of one of the cliffs of the island. Visenya leaned forward, her arms resting on the stone railing while her gaze focused on the sea spread before them.

Aegon stood next to her, also resting on the stone railing.

"Go on," Visenya started.

"What do you mean?" Aegon asked, confused.

"Be happy. You love Rhaenys and father said you can marry her. You don't have to marry me anymore," Visenya stated while still staring out at the sea.

Aegon turned to her, incredulous. "You think that's why I am here? To gloat that I will not marry you now that father is set on marrying you to a stranger?"

Visenya looked back at him. "Well, you didn't want to marry me in the first place."
"You also," Aegon shot back.

Visenya returned to looking at the sea, annoyed at how their father knew they didn't want to marry. "As I said, the only reason why I decided to marry you was so that I will not be sold off like some broodmare. But it doesn't matter now. What's done is done."

"Oh, gods," Aegon rubbed his face. "This is not you, Vis."

"What is?"

"The Vis I know does not go sulking or brooding. While you may irritate me sometimes, you think things through and you make the most out of everything. I don't see that now."

"Father decided to marry me off and to be honest with you, I don't know what to think now," Aegon heard her voice be slightly softer.

"What do you mean?" Aegon knew when Visenya would become vulnerable and he had only seen it a few times, so he had to give his full attention.

"You know that I turned down all the offers from the heirs of our father's sworn lords. The Celtigars, the Velaryons, the Sunglasses. I still remember that last attempt from Lord Sunglass to have me married his son."

Aegon chuckled. Their father held feasts at every moon and two moons ago, the head of House Sunglass decided to switch strategy by having his son spar with Visenya. He guessed that their plan was to beat Visenya in a sparring match and show their family that only his son could protect her. Their plan didn't go as expected, as she did not spar by the rules and struck the Sunglass heir in the legs and his balls before throwing a strong right hook in his cheek. That hurt his pride and he began to slash wildly at Visenya, who would have beat him to the ground had their father not come and stop the spar. The Sunglass heir and his father received a very public dressing down and were thrown out of the castle. They didn't hear another proposal from them since.

"I met many handsome men. Hells, the Sunglass boy would have been attractive had it not been for his stuck up attitude. And I turned down all of them and did not think much of it."

"But what about Lord Belaerys?" Aegon was curious, one of the few times he was.

Visenya took a moment. "I don't know him. He may have a dragon and I won't deny he's handsome. As I said, I've turned handsome men. But for some reason… Maybe it's because Father knew of how we really felt towards each other and decided to not follow through. Maybe it's because he thought there was no other dragonlord and that by marrying us, we would preserve the dragonblood only for him to discover that there's another dragonlord in the world. Maybe it's because I knew that I didn't really want to marry you but was willing to accept it, only now for Father to say I don't have to. I was prepared to do it and now it's not there. I should be relieved, but I'm not."

Aegon listened closely. He could understand what she was going through. He had prepared to marry Visenya out of duty and knew that their father would not object to him also marrying Rhaenys. He thought about the many ways he would accommodate the both of them in their marriage, how he would not neglect Visenya despite not really loving her that much. And now, he won't have to and he could devote all of his attention to Rhaenys. He took it better, but preparing your life for something that was coming that you did not like only for that to not occur would rattle anyone. Hells, he initially felt rattled.
Aegon put his hand on Visenya's shoulder. "So it's not about Lord Belaerys? It is everything that is happening now," he stated in a matter-of-fact tone. Visenya's silence confirmed it. "I'm not going to say that everything will suddenly be alright because I know what you're feeling. It may take some time to come to terms with all of this, and I may not love you as much as Rhaenys. But I am your brother and we are dragons. We stick together."

Visenya turned back to him, her hands coming off the stone railing and standing straight. She pulled him in for a hug. "Thanks, little brother."

"Of course, big sister," Aegon returned the hug. "And listen, if Belaerys hurts you, I'll have Balerion cook him very slowly."

Visenya laughed amusingly. "That will be a sight to see, considering nothing lasts very long with Balerion's breath."

They turned back to look at the sea, only to see faint shapes of ships on the horizon. They heard Balerion and Meraxes roar before they saw them flying towards the ships.

Chapter End Notes

For those that are thinking it, Visenya being married to Jaenyx and not Aegon will have major implications for Aegon's Conquest and for the rest of the ASOIAF/GOT timeline. For example, there might not be a Maegor the Cruel or an Aenys. I am only working on what has been said about the personalities of Aegon, Rhaenys, and Visenya (not much) and filling in the blanks. Hope this has been enjoyable!
Rhaenys saw the ships on the horizon, which only meant that Lord Belaerys had arrived with his people as he said he would. She got on Meraxes, flying off towards them while Balerion followed. It would not take long for her and the dragons to reach the ships.

As she got closer, Rhaenys counted over forty ships, not large in comparison to the ships she had seen from regions such as those belonging to the Storm King and Harren the Black, and they maintained an orderly formation as they sailed towards her home. She saw Cloudwynd flying in circles over the fleet carrying a last remnant of Valyria, but Jaenyx was not riding her. Quickly looking through the ships, she spotted the lead vessel and saw the familiar shape of Lord Belaerys.

Rhaenys made Meraxes fly low above the water, using a few words to point her in the direction she wanted and used her whip to make small adjustments. She thought about jumping onto the deck of the ship while Meraxes hovered nearby, but decided not to as she never done that before and the risks were too great. She flew a little closer, hoping the deck of the ship was large enough for Meraxes to land and that the wood wouldn't collapse under her.

Rhaenys saw the ship's crew stop moving before making an opening on the deck. Apparently, their lord landed his dragon on the deck before and they knew what to do. Meraxes touched down on the deck, with the ship rocking back and forth in a struggle to keep balance. Thinking quickly, she slid off Meraxes and used her whip to make her fly off before the ship capsized.

Rhaenys let out a breath in relief, but saw the scared looks on the crew. They held onto the ship's railings and the masts, their faces frozen in fear at almost sinking into the sea. She straightened her dress and met each of their gazes.

"Maybe I should not do that again, she thought."

"Lady Rhaenys!" She looked up to see Lord Jaenyx on the quarterdeck, clearly indignant at the risk she put his ship's crew in. "What were you thinking when you decided to have your dragon land on top of this ship?!!"

Rhaenys looked at him apologetically. "My apologies, my lord. That was the first time I did that. I didn't mean to put your crew at risk."

Jaenyx exhaled, relaxing after seeing her sincerity. "Cloudwynd knows how to be careful whenever she lands and she doesn't stay for more than a few seconds. Just try not to do that unless you practiced a few times." Rhaenys dipped her head in understanding. "Now, what's your reason for coming here, Lady Rhaenys?"

"Just wanted to exchange a few words with you before you arrive in my home." While she knew how to speak High Valyrian before learning the common tongue, Rhaenys was getting uncomfortable speaking one tongue while Lord Jaenyx spoke another. Either Vis or I would have to
teach him how to speak in the common tongue, or we would have to accommodate him and speak Valyrian more often, she contemplated.

"Come to my cabin, Lady Rhaenys," Jaenyx gestured her to follow her below the quarterdeck. "We'll talk in there." He turned towards the coxswain. "Continue on course. Everyone else, back to your duties."

"Aye, my lord!" the coxswain affirmed while the rest of the crew resumed their work.

Rhaenys expected Lord Belaerys' cabin to be luxurious and befitting for a dragonlord, with valuables filling every inch of the walls and wine on top of his desk. Instead, she found the cabin bereft of those comforts. There was only a wooden frame and mattress on the right side of the cabin, a simple wooden desk near the rear of the cabin with two chairs in front of it, and two candles and two torches providing light. There was a greatsword and two slightly-curved swords of different length with black silk handles and bronze circle hilts suspended on the left wall along with a suit of strange armor. The greatsword and armor were made of Valyrian steel judging from the smoky black ripples across the metal while Rhaenys was unsure of the other two swords, having never seen such a style before. There were maps and pieces of parchment scattered all over the desk along with a quill and half-empty ink pot. He seems to be entirely focused on what he needs to do. Maybe he'll get along with Vis after all, she pondered.

Rhaenys was surprised to see a harp set against the right wall next to the mattress, or a rather larger form of a harp. It was rectangular, had thirteen strings and bridges, and had tiny legs at each corner similar to desk legs. I wonder if he can play that well. That'll be interesting and maybe something I can talk about with him.

Rhaenys took another moment to look upon the man that would be her sister's husband. Taller than Aegon by a few inches but shorter than Orys, he was not as broad-shouldered as her brothers and looked slimmer than both. However, despite the white tunic and leather vest and trousers, she could see that he had well-defined features on his midriff that included a firm chest and abdomen. His arms and legs were not as large as Aegon's or Orys', but they had a solid build and was devoid of fat. He had so much lean muscle all over his body that his garments hung loosely off him and made him look larger than he actually was. He had a well-defined jawline, clean shaven face, pale skin, silver hair that grew past his ears but remained above his neck, and amethyst eyes. There was no doubting him having the blood of Valyria from those features alone. His youth made his features look powerful and enhanced the glow that shined from his face. He might look thin compared to Egg and Orys, but he can probably take on both of them in a match for strength, Rhaenys thought. And he's quite stunning to look at. If Father didn't plan for Vis to marry him and if I didn't love Egg, I would have tried to make him mine.

However, Rhaenys took a closer look at his eyes. They were just as piercing as her father's, more than Aegon's and Orys', and she could sense that they were older than his age. She also saw hints of dark circles around his eyes, which she surmised came from the weight of a leader's responsibilities. His face carried an expression that was bereft of the innocence that defined other young men like Aegon and even Orys who was ten years older than Visenya, probably pointing to how much he had to sacrifice to ensure the well-being of those he led. Add all of that to the amount of parchment and scribbles on his desk and one could see that this was a man who knew his priorities and did not let the passions of youth lead him astray. Rhaenys became more awed by the man that would be betrothed to Visenya and grew more confident they would have a loving relationship, since Visenya always appreciated maturity and Lord Belaerys definitely had that.

Rhaenys' respect for his maturity and awe of his physical form were tempered with surprise upon
noticing another man in the cabin. This man, an Essosi by the looks of him, was considerably older than Jaenyx, probably past the age of fifty. He had raven black hair tied up in a bun, narrow brown eyes, and tan skin. He had a short beard that just covered his jawline and chin and a moustache that did not grow past his upper lip. He wore blue robes that flowed to his ankles and tied with a wide silk belt, black leather sandals, and had two swords that looked just like the ones Lord Jaenyx wore when he first came to Dragonstone on Cloudwynd. His gaze was even more piercing than Lord Jaenyx and Rhaenys could tell that this man was sizing her up.

The old man talked to Jaenyx while keeping his gaze on Rhaenys, conversing in a tongue she never heard before. There was strong emphasis on certain words he used and yet the sounds flowed smoothly out of his mouth. Jaenyx responded to the old man in the same tongue, which frustrated Rhaenys since they did not speak in High Valyrian. After a few words exchanged between them, the Essosi nodded to Jaenyx and left the cabin. He motioned for Rhaenys to sit down in one of the chairs in front of his desk, after which he also sat down.

"I am sorry. I did not know you had company," Rhaenys began after a few moments.

"Don't worry. It was nothing important. I just explained who you were to my teacher," Jaenyx waved off.

Rhaenys raised her eyebrows. "Your teacher?"

"I will explain everything to you and to your family in due time, Lady Rhaenys. Now then," Jaenyx sat straighter after rearranging his desk while also cleaning up some spilled ink when the ink pot tipped over due to Meraxes. "You said that you wanted to have a few words with me. You can, but be mindful that I have pressing matters to attend to, all of which pertain to our arrival at your family's home. So please don't waste my time."

Rhaenys was taken aback by how straight-forward he was. It reinforced her belief that he and Visenya will get along very well, as there will be no lying or deception between them.

"I merely wanted to have simple words with you, as you are going to be staying in my home. Permanently, it seems." Jaenyx nodded. "You are definitely concerned for the welfare of your people and you are clear when it comes to what you want. That's something that most people our age, including lordlings, don't have."

Jaenyx had a blank expression. "I don't see how that can be interesting to anyone. I just do what I have to do. Nothing more to it."

Oh, my. The more I talk to him, the more blunt he becomes. "Something along those lines, yes."

Jaenyx blinked, and then shrugged. "You are misinterpreting, Lady Rhaenys. It's not that I don't know how to talk to a lady. I just have a lot of worries at this moment. My people and I have been on a voyage that lasted several moons and while they are relieved at finally finding sanctuary, there are still many things that can happen. Some of those things may put them at risk."

That's reasonable. "So much worries for a young man like yourself. Do such worries don't occupy all of your time?"

"Are you asking if I partake in recreational pursuits?"

"Something along those lines, yes."

Jaenyx narrowed his eyes. "I'm not sure why you want to know about that."
"Why's he being so frustrating?" We may be a few years apart, but we're both at a similar stage in life where we can engage in similar activities. I see the harp next to your bed, so I am guessing that you like music. I like music too and I can play with our castle's musicians from time to time."

Jaenyx looked at the harp before relaxing. "First of all, that's not a harp. It's called a koto, used by many back in Yi-Ti beyond the Red Waste, but it serves a similar purpose to a harp."

That was surprising for Rhaenys. "Yi-Ti? Then, that old man who was here, is he Yi-Tish?"

Jaenyx nodded. "Yes."

"Have you ever been to Yi-Ti?" She had to know, as people in Westeros only heard about Yi-Ti in passing.

"One time, and that was when my teacher got me my name-day present."

"What's it like over there?"

"Oh, it's... just being there made me question everything I ever knew and made me realize how insignificant the rest of us are in the world."

"Can you speak the tongue there?"

"Tongues. There's more than one, and yes, I do. My teacher taught me two of their tongues."

"How does it compare to Dragonstone or even Sothoryos?"

Rhaenys saw his expression darken before he suppressed it. "There were many things I could do over there and maybe in another life, I would have liked to live in Yi-Ti."

"How are the women over there?" Rhaenys felt her eyes widen, her question leaving her lips before she knew it. Oh, gods. Why did I ask that?

Jaenyx let out a nervous laugh. "They're pretty docile on the surface but they're very resilient. They just don't show it."

"Are you a virgin?" Rhaenys felt like she had to ask since they were talking about women.

"No," Jaenyx simply answered. "All right. What is this? Why are you curious about what I do for recreation, about Yi-Ti, and now if I'm a virgin?"

I just want to know the man that will soon become Vis' husband, Rhaenys thought.

"Did your lord father send you? Get as much as you can out of me and see if he can manipulate me in some way?" He was now very suspicious.

"No, no. It's not like that," Rhaenys waved her hands and shook her head in denial. "They don't even know I'm here."

"Then why are you so curious, Lady Rhaenys? What is it all to you?"

Rhaenys sighed. Her mistake was bringing up women and she let her curiosity get the better of her. If she didn't give a sufficient explanation, she and her family will have a bad start with Lord Jaenyx.

"You do know that my father will not offer you sanctuary without conditions."
Jaenyx nodded. "I expected that. Probably will take a portion of the coin made from the sale of Valyrian steel tools and have the Leniars become his healers in exchange for us staying on his lands. Not a big issue."

"Those are not even the important conditions."

"Ahh," Jaenyx began to understand. "He wants me to marry one of his vassals so that I will have something that binds me to your family while preventing me from going elsewhere."

"Not his vassals. He wants you to marry into our family."

Jaenyx sighed as he leaned back in his chair. He looked down as he twiddled with his thumbs for a moment before looking back up. "Is it you that he wants me to marry? Is that why you're here?"

Rhaenys shook her head. "Not me."

"Lady Visenya," he stated as the final piece came. Rhaenys nodded. "Can't say I'm surprised. You are dragonlords, I'm a dragonlord. It only makes sense that dragons have relations with one another. My guess is that your sister did not take the news very well."

"She's still trying to adjust to it, because she was always expected to marry our brother Aegon. However, they don't have that kind of love for each other. I always loved Aegon and he loved me back, but she agreed to marry him because he was not a stranger."

From his expression, Rhaenys saw that he understood. "I am not going to say that I am happy about your lord father's decision and how he's leveraging the welfare of my people for his own advantage. At the same time, I don't have a lot of choices and my first concern is to get my people onto lands where they can be safe. If that is his price, I will pay."

Rhaenys offered a smile. "Don't worry so much, my lord. Before I continue, can I call you Jaenyx?"

He nodded. "Jaenyx, Visenya is a very beautiful woman. She is intelligent, she knows how to fight with a sword and with her hands, and she can be as serious as you are. If you want to get started on the right foot with her, use the training yard. She spends as much as time over there as she does in our library."

"How good is she with the sword?"

Rhaenys could tell he was genuinely curious. Now we're getting somewhere, she thought happily. "She's one of the best I've seen, and that is saying a lot. Aegon and Orys are strong, but she's quick with her feet and knows how to use your weak places." She saw Jaenyx was getting more interested, so she pressed on. "She also likes to learn tongues, so maybe you could teach her the Yi-Ti tongues that you know. But I would not recommend you play the harp, or what the Yi-Ti call it, as she gets bored with music very quickly."

"I was like that, but then my teacher taught me about Yi-Ti music and that changed my perspective. If your sister is intelligent, I think she'll also like their music."

Oh, they have some common ground now. "Well, I think it'll be best if you told her that yourself. After all, I'm not the one you're going to marry."

Before they could continue, they heard a knock at the door. Jaenyx opened the door and saw one of the crew standing there.

"My lord, we are near the shore and there are boats from the island that want to guide us to their docks."
"Let them. Prepare to disembark and inform the heads of the Rahitheons, the Tarareons, and the Leniars. I have things of importance to discuss with them before we meet the lord of Dragonstone."

"Yes, my lord." The crewman ran away from the door.

Rhaenys figured out what he was going to do. "Are you going to tell them about my father's plan?"

"Your father may have control over the situation, but that doesn't mean I will not have my own preparations. If I am to marry your sister, then so be it. But he won't be the one to get everything."

Rhaenys did not know if she should be worried about that, but decided to put those thoughts away. She followed him out of the cabin and saw the ship right about to enter Dragonstone's docks. She saw Meraxes and Cloudwynd fly around each other, two new dragons getting acquainted. She then saw Visenya and Aegon walking onto the docks to greet the new arrivals.

After they saw her with Jaenyx and noticed the worrying expression on her face, Rhaenys knew that they knew she told him about the betrothal. **I will not hear the end of it tonight.**

Chapter End Notes

I don't know about how I am going to write out Jaenyx's dialogue without italicizing his every sentence. Remember, while he may understand the common tongue, he doesn't know how to speak it and can only communicate with the Targaryens in High Valyrian. As for the Targaryen siblings and Orys, they can speak High Valyrian but they're more comfortable using the common tongue. To add authenticity, should I add actual Valyrian words and sentences and then translate them later? I don't want to be clunky because I also want to include inner thoughts. I will show him eventually being able to speak the common tongue as the story progresses.

Writing from multiple POVs is quite challenging but also very fun. Each of the characters have only a certain amount of information that they can act on and those gaps in knowledge have consequences. I'm guessing this is what GRRM experienced when he published A GAME OF THRONES, even though I'm writing fanfic and we all know his opinions on the matter. However, it's such a rich universe and I would like add my contributions alongside the many good writers on this site.

Regarding Rhaenys' actions here, she was described as curious and impulsive. This is my attempt at showing what the consequences are when she becomes too curious for her own good and suddenly blurts out words that might negatively impact those around her. However, she was also described as kindhearted and in this story, she is genuinely concerned about Visenya. Fortunately for her, she said just the right words to make Jaenyx interested in interacting with Visenya and she was able to get things going on a good start. However, her father and siblings will definitely not be happy that she revealed the planned betrothal. Here's to hoping she's allowed off the hook :)

As for the Yi-Ti character, there might be some who would see this as a anachronistic inclusion in the ASOIAF/GOT world and as an attempt to include the stereotypical old Asian mentor. But I will address them, because this character will be very important for us to understand Jaenyx's past and will act as an important force of development for our other main characters, including Visenya. Some key parts of the story will draw inspiration from THE LAST SAMURAI since that film showed how the
protagonist began to question everything he ever knew. Besides Orys, the Targaryen siblings are not even 20 at this point and are still naive, especially in comparison to Jaenyx, who is also younger than 20 but experienced crap that would force a teenager to mature very quickly. I want to have the Targaryen siblings and also Orys question everything they ever knew because hormonal teenagers cannot hope to accomplish a feat like Aegon's Conquest (I'm going to change the name to the Dragon Conquest since it's not just Aegon anymore) and the Yi-Ti character will be central in accomplishing that. For those that can guess, that character will be inspired mainly by Hiroyuki Sanada with some parts of Ken Watanabe, Pat Morita, and even Master Shifu from Kung Fu Panda. At the same time, I won't idealize or make the Yi-Ti character an overly good person, as he will also have flaws that lead to severe consequences.

To clarify the ages since the story begins ten years before the Conquest:

- Jaenyx Belaerys: 19 (born 29 BC)
- Aegon Targaryen: 17 (born 27 BC)
- Visenya Targaryen: 18 (born 28 BC)
- Rhaenys Targaryen: 16 (born 26 BC)
- Orys Baratheon: 28 (born 38 BC)
- Aerion Targaryen: 46 (born 56 BC)
- Valaena Targaryen: 42 (born 52 BC)
- Yi-Ti character, whose name I will reveal in the next chapter: 54 (born 64 BC), and that's old by medieval standards

*characters will follow

Next up, we will see things from Visenya's POV. Hope this chapter was a good read and that all of you will continue on this ride.
Visenya I

Chapter Notes

Getting a little difficult to juggle the different personalities as my workload gets heavier, but I will continue updating as often as possible. Again, really encouraged by the initial strong response. You guys are awesome!

Without further ado, here is the first Visenya POV.

Of course she would tell him. She just couldn't resist the chance to be a matchmaker. Rhaenys was the romantic out of Aegon, Orys, and Visenya. Given to flights of fancy, she had rather rosy views in regards to courting and marriage. While Rhaenys would be allowed to take the love between her and Aegon to its natural conclusion, she was oblivious to how marriages worked in real life, especially when it came to the lords of Westeros.

Fortunately for them, they had the blood of dragons and that of Valyria, meaning that they would not be married to some random lord or lady from some backwater estate in order to maintain their blood's purity. If they didn't have dragonblood, that would have been their fate. Then, discussions regarding dowries and land exchanges would take place and the production of male heirs being emphasized by both families, the last part making her skin crawl when she considered what would happen had the Sunglass lord got what he wanted.

Such was the case of marriages in Westeros. No one gave a damn about love and beauty even if the tourneys made a crown symbolizing both, to be given to the lady of the champion's choice. The cynic in Visenya told her that properties and coin made the whole world go round and marriages were just another means for families, especially lordly ones, to get more of both. Her upcoming betrothal with Lord Belaerys was no exception, even though an important factor influencing their father's decision to marry her to him was to strengthen their dragonblood by bringing in new dragonblood.

At the same time, Visenya was not completely unhappy about her coming betrothal to Lord Belaerys. Being a dragonrider already put him very highly in her eyes, as he could understand what it meant to have dragonblood flowing through their veins and the joy that could be drawn from feeling the air rushing past his face when riding a dragon through the sky. It certainly helped that he had the Valyrian features of silver hair and amethyst eyes as well as having a body that would make any lady grow wet between the legs in arousal, his form of solid muscle obvious even with his loose garments and lacking the fat that Orys had and even Aegon occasionally. Also, like their father said, she and Lord Belaerys were about the same age, so it would not be too difficult to connect with him over youthful pastimes like hunting or storytelling.

Then again, Visenya met many handsome men and turned them all down. She either found them all either uninteresting, predictable, or unwilling to accept a woman who could actual books and could beat them in swordplay. It also terrified one of her suitors when she was found with a book that talked about Valyrian bloodmagic rituals, an area she held interest in for a long time but considered largely forbidden throughout Westeros after the Doom. Men who fell into that group annoyed her the most and she had to fight the urge to have Vhagar turn them into tiny piles of
ashes. It was very possible that Lord Belaerys would not respond well to a woman who knew how to fight, so she thought about the ways she could bruise him before allowing Vhagar to engulf him in flames after she beat his dragon Cloudwynd.

Blood and benefits aside, Visenya was quite interested in who Lord Belaerys was and how rooted he and his people were in Valyrian ways. He obviously understood the common tongue, but could only speak High Valyrian. That indicated that his family was more rooted in the customs of old Valyria than even her family. She knew the language, but so did other lords in Westeros who wanted to boast about their level of education and who could not speak more than a few simple sentences. She looked forward to conversing in High Valyrian with Lord Belaerys and learn more about the mindset of those directly from Valyria.

Visenya also spoke with members of his ship's crew who could speak the common tongue, learning from them that his mother was a Leniar, who had extensive knowledge of blood magic and on how to control fire. Given what her father said about the Leniars, Lord Belaerys must have learned at least some blood rituals and maybe inherited magical capabilities from his mother. The prospect of learning blood rituals excited her, as the books she read were written by those who did not have the highest respect for such practices and even less grasp of what it actually was.

Despite the prospect of learning blood magic from a practitioners' offspring thrilled her, that was not the principal reason on why she was not fully unhappy with marrying Lord Belaerys. While she saw that he had a gaze as piercing as their father's, she used the moments greeting him on the docks to fully scrutinize his eyes. The crew on his ship held a similar gaze, a kind of gaze that had them looking like they were staring a thousand yards into the distance. She read about how some soldiers and knights after battle would seemingly focus on something far away while sitting or standing still, and no words would leave their lips for at least a few days. The maesters stated that hearing screams during battle and being exposed to parts of the body that were only revealed through forced cutting of the flesh would affect those long after the battle was fought. Whatever Lord Belaerys and his people experienced certainly affected them and it showed no signs of disappearing soon.

Rather than be repulsed by it, Visenya saw that gaze in Lord Belaerys' eyes as something that made him different than most lordlings his age. He must have known what it was like to struggle, something she understood whenever lordlings commented on her rough exterior and her pursuit of interests "unbecoming of a lady." Her devouring on anything related to the Valyrians especially blood magic unsettled even Aegon and Rhaenys, although they and their father indulged her nevertheless. Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys were more accepted among the more Westerosi noble circles, with her brothers possessing the outlook and appearance befitting of knights and Rhaenys being the proper lady who brought liveliness to a dull court. The only reason why men tried to pursue her was because they lusted after her looks and the idea of a Valyrian beauty who was resilient and intellectually-inclined, but they did not truly respect her or that kind of woman.

Visenya could care less about what others thought or felt, but not caring also brought the kind of struggle that came with choosing between being true to one's self and conforming to others' expectations, especially if one is surrounded by those who served as a constant reminder of how those differences prevented those from easily approaching you. And she doubted that she would find someone who knew what that kind of struggle is like. Maybe Lord Belaerys may not have had that same type of struggle, but it was apparently just as severe. So, a marriage with him was not entirely hopeless.

Lord Belaerys admitted losing his parents, which certainly made him a strong man. Most lordlings grew up in comfort their entire lives and would crack at the first indication of life not going the way they wanted. But that apparently did not apply to him, who was leading thousands of people at
a young age and doing well at it so far, if their voyage from Sothoryos said anything. As their father said, that took maturity and he clearly had that. Visenya always appreciated maturity in a man, which admittedly Aegon and Orys did not display a few times such as in the training yard and when doing the lordly duties their father made them do.

Visenya did not know if she was evil in seeing his maturity and experience with struggle as things that made him more attractive while also ignoring the pain that must've come with that, which included the death of his family. She was fortunate in not having to experience that yet, but she had to take care at not seeming insensitive when they engaged in the deep conversations she was sure would occur.

Back in their father's solar, Visenya, Aegon, and Orys watched as their father scolded Rhaenys. "Do you have any idea how much jeopardy you put our plans in?" He was quite indignant at Rhaenys deciding to give into her usual flights of fancy. Admittedly, Visenya also felt annoyed at her for thinking that her relationship with Lord Belaerys would be like the ones in the songs.

"I just wanted to see what kind of person he was, since he will become my good-brother," Rhaenys defended herself.

Their father dipped his head and let out a heavy sigh, his frustration evident. "There is a reason why I decided to wait until he was more settled into Dragonstone before I told him of the price of sanctuary. I wanted him to get more comfortable, more at ease with his new surroundings, which would make telling him about the marriage easier. By 'easier', I mean that he will have difficulty in leaving once many of his people are settled here and he will have no choice but to accept. Since you told him about those plans before he was settled in, he could simply go back to his ship and sail elsewhere. Had that crossed your mind when you decided to play matchmaker for your sister?"

"Father, I would not worry about him leaving. From what I've seen, he seems open to a marriage with Visenya."

That got his attention, along with Aegon, Visenya, and Orys. "What do you mean?"

"Well, when I told Jaenyx that Visenya is great at swordplay and likes to learn different tongues, he got interested. He also told me that he likes a certain sort of music that he was sure that Visenya would like," Rhaenys revealed.

Visenya internally groaned. I'll have to see about that, but Rhae said too much, again.

However, their father's frustration slowly disappeared and his hard face softened. "This makes things a little easier. If we could find more similarities between Vis and Lord Belaerys, then we could make him stay out of his own volition."

Visenya held back a sigh. I won't see the end of it. He'll probably put me in the training yard or in the library with him to stress our commonalities. On the other hand, I'm curious as to how he fights and what he knows.

Their father wasn't finished, though. "But Rhae, while your efforts bore fruit, you nearly jeopardized our plans. Try something like this again without our knowledge, I'll keep you from flying Meraxes for a month. Understood?"

Not riding Meraxes was an effective way of getting Rhaenys in line, as everyone in Dragonstone knew how much she loved to ride her dragon, spending more time than Aegon and Visenya combined. She nodded begrudgingly. Even for you, father, that's harsh, she mused.
"Also, I've noticed that you called Lord Belaerys by his first name. Why is that?"

Visenya was also interested. Being one a first name basis with anyone signalled friendship, and Rhaenys becoming fast friends was not all that surprising given how outgoing she was to anyone.

Rhaenys shrugged. "When I asked if I could call him that, he said yes. I'm guessing it's because I made accepting a marriage with Vis easier for him."

Their father was about to ask something else when they heard a knock on the door. "Come in," their father ordered.

One of the men servants entered the solar. "My lord, Lord Belaerys seeks an audience with you."

Surprise came to all of them. "Is he here right now?" The servant nodded. "Tell him to come in."

"My lord," the servant gave a look of confusion. "He wants to meet you in the courtyard, in front of your dragons, along with Lords Aegon and Orys and Ladies Visenya and Rhaenys."

Normally, one would not make such a request of a lord in his own home. But considering what had just transpired between Rhaenys and Lord Belaerys, this had to be important. "All right. Tell him we'll meet him there," the servant complied and left the room. "Let's hear what he wants to say."

Moving through the hallways and past the metal doors, Visenya and the others found Lord Belaerys in the courtyard stroking his dragon's snout. Balerion and Vhagar were also in the courtyard, with Meraxes flying somewhere else on the island. Sensing their presence, Lord Belaerys turned around and gave a slight dip with his head in greeting, which their father returned. Visenya noticed that he had a servant with him who carried a white ivory chest on his arms.

"Lord Targaryen, forgive me for calling you out here but I have matters that I must discuss with you and your family."

Visenya sensed something different from his words, different from when he introduced himself at Dragonstone just a few days ago. Whatever it was, it had an edge that was lacking from when they first met him.

"Not at all, Lord Belaerys, but couldn't we discuss them in my solar?" Visenya noticed their father speaking in High Valyrian instead of the common tongue. As they were in the courtyard, which had their servants and other members of their household bustling about, he didn't want them to be aware of their intimate discussions.

"I'm afraid that if we discussed them in your solar, you won't be able to fully comprehend my words and I want to make sure that nothing is lost on you."

What are you going to do? Visenya was honestly a little worried at the moment. He wanted to talk to them along with their dragons, meaning that something major will happen.

"All right," their father acquiesced. "What is it you want to discuss?"

"I am sure that you know that I am aware of what you want from me in exchange for you providing sanctuary for me people here at Dragonstone." Their father said nothing, as there was no point in denying it now. "I don't approve of you leveraging the safety of my people for your benefit, but I guess that's my fault since I should have expected that you would not help us out of the goodness of your heart and me being a young man limits my experience in negotiating the world's realities."

Visenya was taken aback by his honesty and bluntness, and found herself impressed. He doesn't mince words like other lordlings.
"I am sure Lady Rhaenys told all of you of how my interest was piqued by what she said about Lady Visenya, and she’s right. If that is your price for giving sanctuary to my people, I will marry her."

Visenya did not know if she should be shocked by how quickly he agreed to it or if she should be delighted since she should now see for herself if Rhaenys' words about him being open to a relationship with her were true. Nevertheless, that was one bridge crossed for her and her mind turned to the next bridge ahead, which involved actual interactions with Lord Belaerys.

"I'm pleased that you've accepted," their father replied, satisfaction spreading through his face.

"However, I asked you to meet me here because I had some discussions with the heads of the families that came with me and they made me aware of the more formal details of a betrothal between two families that are addressed before being they're joined in matrimony."

Their father was surprised, and Visenya could only guess what those "formal details" were.

"A central process that must be worked out before any betrothal can move forward is the negotiation of a dowry." He added a smirk, as if expecting their father to see him as naive youngster.

Visenya did not expect that and she saw Rhaenys, Aegon, and Orys just as surprised. Although she was aware of the great importance of dowries in marriage negotiations, it took nerve to bring that up in front of their father and in public, even though their servants and household members didn't understand what they were saying and simply continued their business.

"A dowry?" Although angered by impertinence like any other lord especially when seen in their own home, Visenya saw that her father taking it rather well and was more amused by it.

"The way I see it, Lord Targaryen, while I am in need of sanctuary, you seem to want me much more than I want you. Otherwise, why else would you want me to marry your daughter to prevent me from going elsewhere?"

The gall on this man, Visenya thought. But rather than be insulted by his impudence, she found herself more impressed since she never saw this side of him when he first came to Dragonstone.

Their father scoffed, as if trying to mask just how much he was enjoying this. "You come into my home with insolence and you think I'm going to treat one word with you on something as significant as a dowry?"

Lord Belaerys shrugged, his hands open and arms half-raised. "Why are you still talking to me then?"

Their father shook their head, but not in derision to him, and crossed his arms in an attempt to regain some control of the situation. "All right. What kind of dowry are you seeking?"

"I'm not looking for coin. My mother and father left more than enough for me to look after our people and to live comfortably for at least a few hundred years." Visenya could not tell if he was exaggerating or saying the plain truth, but he sounded confident enough to say that he essentially owned a fortune. "I seek a different kind of dowry. Lands."

"Go on," their father gestured as he gave his undivided attention. Visenya, Rhaenys, and their brothers listened with increasing interest.

"From what I saw at the first time, Dragonstone is not heavily populated, which is reasonable
given that this island was made from volcanic activity and the rest from the magic of Valyria. The dowry I seek are portions of Dragonstone large enough to accommodate nearly three thousand people. You will provide the building materials that we need to build our homes and our fields. You will also sell to us seeds for us to plant crops that we will harvest while the summer lasts. I will pay for them and you won't need to worry about how we build them. The Rahitheons can handle building homes and farms from scratch. When I marry Lady Visenya, I will not live in the guest quarters of your castle. You will provide a keep for me and for my future wife to reside in and raise our family."

Visenya watched as Lord Belaerys became more bold and assertive with each term he sought. Most lordlings either relied on their fathers or were too timid to make their demands, restricted by the rules when talking to a lord. Then again, he's not really a lord in the Westerosi sense and he has no restrictions.

"Lastly, you might be Lord of Dragonstone and have other lords sworn to you, but I will not swear fealty to you."

Oh, gods. Receiving lands from a lord and not swearing fealty was unheard of. Everyone from a knight to a lord had answered to a more powerful lord, who then answered to a king. By not swearing fealty, he was defying the lordly system of Westeros. Then again, our family has lived in Westeros for a long time while he and his people came from a colony established by Valyria.

Their father's eyes widened, also understanding what he just asked. "No man is given lands by a lord without oaths of fealty. That's how it is in Westeros."

"But I'm not of Westeros, am I? In addition, would it be proper for a dragon to be subservient to another dragon?"

Their father sighed, conceding his point. But Visenya saw he was not going to let Lord Belaerys have the final word on the matter. "What if I refuse your terms?"

Visenya knew their father wanted a betrothal between Lord Belaerys and her too much to say no because that would mean forfeiting the benefits that came with Lord Jaenyx, which included the ones that held the Rhoynish at bay centuries ago and the ones who knew how to forge Valyrian steel. But he was a dragon and he would not give in easily.

As if expecting him to ask that, Lord Belaerys turned to his servant and opened the ivory chest. From the chest he pulled out a black and gold horn that was as long as his arm and as wide as the distance between his chest and chin. The mouthpiece curved slightly upwards before the rest of the horn curved downwards and grew wider, with the bell placed horizontally. It looked ominous, more so with Lord Belaerys holding it.

Lord Belaerys steadied his grip on the horn and placed his lips on the mouthpiece. As he blew on it, a loud and piercing droning sound blew out, filling the courtyard with the noise and those on Blackwater Bay's west shores being able to hear it. The sound's pitch became a little higher while becoming slightly softer, before becoming loud again and reaching a higher pitch only for a short moment before the horn's blast dissipated.

Visenya assumed that must've been some war horn, but she then noticed Rhaenys looking towards their dragons with wide eyes. She followed her gaze and knew why she was shocked. Balerion and Vhagar stood very still, their breathing stopped and their eyes focused on something in the distance. It was as if something put them in a trance, as they were never that still. She turned towards Cloudwynd, who also stood very still.
Putting the horn back in the chest and having the servant close it, Lord Belaerys whistled. As if on cue, Balerion, Vhagar, and Cloudwynd snapped out of their gaze and looked straight at him. Their mouths were snapped shut as their eyes followed him as he walked through the courtyard. Seeing a goat walking around, he grabbed it by its horn and placed it in the middle of the courtyard. By now, their servants and household were looking at the scene with sheer terror, having never seen the dragons act like this.

Relaxing the goat and after making sure it would not leave its spot, Lord Belaerys walked back to his servant. He then pointed to the goat and shouted a Valyrian command. "DRACARYS!"

Immediately, all three dragons doused the goat in dragonfire, the combined flames of the three of them creating an inferno in the courtyard and burning so brightly that the ones without dragonblood had to cover their eyes tightly with their arms. After a few seconds, the three dragons closed their mouths and stopped the stream of dragonfire, the spot where the goat was now a small pile of ash.

Walking around the pile of ash, Lord Belaerys stared at each of the dragons straight in their eyes. Then, he gave another Valyrian command. "Sōvēs!" The dragons flew off into the air and away from the castle. He turned to see Visenya, Aegon, Rhaenys, Orys, and their father, not knowing if their wide eyes and dropped jaws expressed shock or terror at what they had just seen.

"Is that… a dragonhorn?" their father managed after a moment.

"Yes. The last true one in the world. But don't get any ideas since that horn will only sound when someone carrying Belaerys blood blows it. A gift from when Jaenara Belaerys returned in triumph from her exploration of Sothoryos, which prompted the Freehold to elevate her brood into one of the seven great dragonlord families. There were only seven horns given, and I have the only horn left when the Doom destroyed the others."

Lord Belaerys stepped closer to their father, their noses mere inches from each other and their equivalent heights masking the power difference between them. "With my horn, I can control your dragons at will and turn them against you. Your family may have been important dragonlords in Valyria, but we were far from equals. However, Valyria is gone and we're all that's left. I am willing to work with you in preserving what remains of our people and I will treat you and your children with the respect and kindness that they deserve once I become part of your family. But do not misinterpret my benevolence for weakness. Do we understand each other, Lord Targaryen?"

Visenya saw the color drain from their father's face, the confidence that he previously had extinguished with how much more powerful their new guest truly was. It was true that the Targaryens were far from the most powerful dragonlord family in Valyria, and now they saw a reminder of their previous station.

"Yes, we have an understanding," their father replied while trying very hard to hide his trembling.

Lord Belaerys let out a sigh before easing up and smiling. "Well, I think I've shown you enough today. How about we discuss further particulars in your solar?" Their father bobbed his head, simply accepting the reality of the situation. Lord Belaerys exchanged a look with Visenya before walking with their father back into the castle.

While Rhaenys, Aegon, and Orys wordlessly followed them, Visenya began reflecting on what just happened while the servants slowly returned to their duties. She was definitely frightened by Belaerys' display, but her thoughts turned to Belaerys himself. Although he had the looks and maturity that she was looking for in a man, she felt something stir inside her at the man that completely surprised her. He was no pushover and he knew how to get what he wanted, like a true...
dragon.

*If I didn't desire him before, I certainly desire him now.*

**Chapter End Notes**

I was struggling to find a way where Jaenyx will not pushed around by Lord Targaryen and I didn't want to make Jaenyx so OP with a dragonhorn. However, in the context of the universe and having already mentioned that the Belaerys' were wealthier and more powerful than the Targaryens, I feel that having a dragonhorn would make sense since a dragonhorn was a symbol of how much power a dragonlord family had over those that didn't have one. By having him use the dragonhorn and taking control of their dragons, Jaenyx showed that he was not to be messed with and warned their father against any attempt to manipulate. His meeting with the other families that came with him made him decided to show his hand. Hopefully, this is a reasonable inclusion and that all of you won't see Jaenyx as an OP character that makes the Targaryens irrelevant (they definitely won't be).

As for Visenya's attraction for Jaenyx, she definitely sees a person who won't take crap from anyone and knows how to get what he wants. Good looks aside, she appreciates someone who has maturity and can understand struggle, which she has done her entire life at that point. However, I also think that she's also attracted to power, which explains her obsession with Valyrian blood rituals and with the powerful culture that was Valyria, which arrives with Jaenyx and his people. Then, Visenya saw what true power looks like after seeing Jaenyx use the dragonhorn. Possessing assertiveness and great power is a potent mixture that can easily go wrong, but Visenya also saw that Jaenyx was level-headed and actually cared for others. In Jaenyx, she sees the perfect man and will now stop at nothing to make him hers. But don't worry, their relationship will be a loving one, eventually.

Wow, this chapter was really fun to write. I don't own anything besides Jaenyx (had to say that in case of copyrights). And I will post a picture for this story. Also, for the dragonhorn sound, it's exactly like the alien tripods in the *WAR OF THE WORLDS* (2005). It sounded so ominous and so perfect that I had to use to visualize the dragonhorn's nature. Lmk what you all think. Hope you enjoyed it and have a great day :)

Jaenyx II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jaenyx agreed upon the wedding with Lady Visenya to take place by the week's end and that the ceremony will take place within the Targaryen's castle in the presence of their vassals. While they settled upon most of the intricate details of the ceremony including the choice of wine (Arbor gold), Jaenyx had issues with two customs that the Targaryens and other Westerosi lords practiced.

"You want my ceremony to be conducted by some fat fool dressed in rich robes who preaches about some imaginary deities? Surely you jest, Lord Targaryen." Although he had little knowledge of Westeros' belief system called the Faith of the Seven, he could sense the man-made nature of it and would not tolerate having to stoop so low as to allow one of its preachers, a "septon" as they were called, oversee his wedding vows.

"I will be honest with you, Lord Belaerys. I don't really profess strong belief in the Faith, as I see the septons and septas just as greedy and hot-tempered like the lords they say they're different from. But if our family continued to express devotion to Valyria's gods from the time Aenar Targaryen came to Dragonstone, our position would have been more precarious as the Blackwater Bay is full of houses devoted to the Faith. One of our vassals, the Sunglasses as you may be aware, is one of those houses and I cannot ignore the three hundred fighting men they command."

Jaenyx could not argue with Lord Targaryen's pragmatism, which was important for Valyria's remnants in the face of a world that had tried to erase their presence from existence after the Doom. At the same time, he could not understand why the Targaryens could countenance people that saw Valyrian customs and magic as abominations, and they had dragons named after three of Valyria's gods! It was as if the Targaryens became superficial in their preservation of their Valyrian roots and adopted a way of life inimical to that of the Valyrians. As much as Jaenyx liked Rhaenys and could see both of them being friends over their appreciation of music, she and her brothers were too Westerosi for his taste and acclimatized to the ways of a society rooted in an institution that he was sure was created to squeeze more coin from regular folk. Seeing them speak the common tongue as their first tongue was disconcerting to him, as that was further proof of how they truly saw themselves.

"Furthermore, if I don't have a septon oversee your vows at the wedding, that might be a slight to the guests from the Blackwater Bay that I will invite."

Jaenyx shook his head. "I don't need a large ceremony and certainly don't need the people who will be attending to be of those who don't hold Valyrian blood in their veins."

Lord Targaryen became exasperated. "This is one of the concerns that come with being a lord. Not only do I have people under me that I am responsible for, I have external concerns that require diplomatic approaches. I am not naive to believe that the dragons will get everything I need from the rest of the Blackwater Bay, as I cannot expect to get the additional grain and livestock that cannot be grown on Dragonstone without meeting halfway with those I deal with. My wife's family, the Velaryons, and our other Valyrian vassals in the Celtigars would tolerate a ceremony devoted to Valyria's gods, but the others who come most surely won't. Also, having many guests at the ceremony will communicate to the other lords that my daughter is taken and the proposals for her hand will stop."

Again, Jaenyx could not dispute his reasonings. At the same time, he could not believe how much
the Targaryens compromised with their Valyrian roots to appease those inhabiting a backwater. He also caught how Lord Targaryen talked about being a lord, implying that he still saw him a green boy. I'm nine and ten. Of course he'll think that.

Jaenyx decided to apply his reasonings back to his face. "You're absolutely right. Even those with dragonblood have to exhibit tact with those he or she chooses to negotiate with. With that said, I have responsibilities to myself and my people. We never had much interaction with the rest of the world, getting what we needed such as livestock and timber from the shores of Sothoryos since nobody of importance inhabited that continent. Our ease in getting supplies from the Sothoryosi wilderness, made much easier with Cloudwynd, allowed us to remain rooted in the ways of Valyria and you of all people, Lord Targaryen, should know how proud Valyrians can be."

Lord Targaryen continued to listen, but kept a neutral face.

Jaenyx continued. "What do you think will happen if I allowed this septon to oversee my wedding vows? I will certainly lose the respect and affection that I have had to gain through blood and sweat from those that trusted me enough to cross the narrow sea to this island. The only reason why my people tolerate your family is because they've seen your children ride the dragons, which only those with dragonblood could do. However, having this septon at my wedding would be one step too far since they wouldn't dare stand for the beliefs of Westerosi mongrels. You'll be facing unrest from your new residents before the year is out."

Lord Targaryen absorbed his words, him not thinking through the situation from Jaenyx's eyes evident. He could see that Lord Targaryen did not like this predicament, the self accustomed with the ways of Westerosi nobility clashing against the self that longed for closeness with the Targaryens' Valyrian origins. Besides Visenya, Jaenyx could see that Lord Targaryen was the most affinitive with Valyria's history and traditions, his switching between the common tongue and High Valyrian more comfortable than with Aegon and Rhaenys. He didn't know what to think of their half-brother Orys Baratheon, as he obviously could comprehend High Valyrian but was a complete Westerosi.

"If not by a septon, who would oversee the wedding vows?"

Jaenyx relaxed, pleased that Lord Targaryen let his Valyrian self freeing him from his Westerosi ways of thinking. "The head of the Leniars is my cousin, his father being my mother's brother. Besides being well-versed in blood magic, he presided over dozens of weddings in the Valyrian tradition, with the essence of Valyrian gods present along with fire."

Lord Targaryen's eyes widened, knowing full well what he was referring to. "Are you referring to the ways of the Lord of Light, R'hillor?"

Jaenyx shook his head. "I've heard of them. While those red priests adopted the flame aspect of Valyria's gods, they removed them from their beliefs. Worshipping flames is worthless without dragons or their essence, a perversion that has apparently spread to much of Essos. My cousin will preside over the wedding, with either Cloudwynd or Vhagar being there to represent the gods, and your daughter and I will marry in a fashion befitting that of true dragonlords. That is non-negotiable, Lord Targaryen, and I will not stoop to the ways of Westerosi half-breeds!"

Jaenyx felt his dragon temper revealing itself just for a moment at that last word. Usually in control of his emotions, no one could deny he had dragonblood when he finally allowed it into the open.

Lord Targareyen also saw this, which Jaenyx saw made him more careful in his deliberation. From what he gathered, worshiping the Lord of Light was frowned upon in Westeros. Then again, anything related to the wonders of Valyria was frowned upon. No wonder this fucking continent is
a breeding ground of close-minded simpletons.

Lord Targaryen took a few moments before nodding. "Very well. I will allow your cousin to preside over the wedding, but I will have to limit the attendees to those of my vassals and your people to prevent as much slight from being felt as possible." Jaenyx gave him a look that communicated his indifference. "Also, since the wedding will not incorporate Westerosi traditions, I'm guessing you don't want a bedding ceremony to occur?"

From what he gathered about a bedding, Jaenyx was unsure if his opinion for Westerosi customs couldn't sink any lower. "I have no illusions as to how this betrothal came about, so I have no need for drunks saying otherwise. But I'll be damned if I let scoundrels and bitches touch my wife and I and tear at our clothes. As she will be my wife, I intend to make your daughter mine and mine alone, and I am sure that Lady Visenya feels the same. The most I will allow is for her brothers and Lady Rhaenys to accompany us to our chambers after the feast, so they are her family and soon, my family also. There, Lady Visenya and I will consummate our marriage in private."

Lord Targaryen knew that there was no budging him on that and decided to accept it. "I'll probably won't hear the end of it from my vassals after the wedding is done. But I accept these arrangements."

Jaenyx slapped his hand lightly on the table, satisfied that his conditions were met. "Well, I'm glad that this productive discussion led to our mutual satisfaction. I shall make the necessary preparations for the wedding and look forward to my time with your daughter from here on."

Dipping his head, he left the solar and decided to talk a walk around the castle.

Lord Targaryen is a very intelligent man, understanding that there are consequences behind every action, and certainly responsible. I can see him trying to grasp his Valyrian roots and sense the longing for him to be what his family was, but he's too set in the ways of Westeros, a land where the magic of dragons cannot hope to survive. What made him like this? Jaenyx pondered as he rode towards the portions of Dragonstone that were granted to his people. He would have to look into it more closely, as he got the impression that Lord Targaryen would not be so considerate about the thoughts of Westerosi lords unless there was an underlying reason to it.

Jaenyx had affinity for Valyria's gods and sought to be married in true Valyrian customs. Yet, despite his insistence on how the ceremony was conducted, he personally saw belief as an indulgence. The gods were appropriately nonexistent when the Red Death swept through the Basilisk Isles and made nine out of ten people die slowly, with blood coming out of their orifices and their skin shredding like parchment. He saw his own father, Auryon Belaerys, slowly decay over a month and he could still remember when he lost his voice after screaming so much. He was three and ten at the time and had already seen his older brother, Gaerys or "Gary" as he called him, die when Ghiscari pirates invaded the Isles and put an arrow through his throat before being repelled by the Tarareons and others who took up arms. Gary choking on his blood and Jaenyx trying to pull the arrow out before seeing the light leave his eyes filled his dreams in some nights.

Out of thirty thousand people who inhabited the Basilisk Isles, two thousand were killed by the Ghiscari while the Red Death took most of the rest. Jaenyx nearly died himself of the Red Death, the pain of his shredding skin and the sight of his blood oozing out of his pores still clear as day to him. However, his mother was unwilling to see her last child die and performed a blood ritual accompanied with fire. He immediately became cured of his terrible affliction, but his mother stepped into the flames and was erased from existence. "Only death can pay for life" were her final words before giving him a last smile, a smile he longed to see and burned into his memory.

The prospect of taking his own life called at his door, with Jaenyx asking why he was still alive
making suicide all the more tempting. However, his teacher, Master Konno Haru, told him something that was common among warriors in Nihon, one of the three major lands of Yi-Ti: *fumeiyo yori shi*, which meant "death before dishonor." Although he did not understand at first, Master Haru said to Jaenyx that a mother had a duty to her children and he said that his mother would have rather died than to see her last child perish before her. A hard lesson to accept, he ended thoughts about taking his life and rose up from ruin. If it was his time to die, Jaenyx would accept it. But he would not dishonor his mother's sacrifice by giving up.

As his father and brother always liked to say: "*Skoros morghot vestri? Tubī daor.*" So before death took him, he would prove himself worthy of his mother's sacrifice.

"*Lord Belaerys!*" Jaenyx heard someone call out to him. To his surprise, he found Lady Visenya walking towards him, seeing more sway in her hips than usual. She also had a grin that became more obvious as she got closer, as if happy to see him.

What does she want from me?

"*I trust that your discussion with my father went well?*" Lady Visenya was now speaking in High Valyrian instead of the common tongue, which caught Jaenyx off-guard. She also held out her right hand, expecting him to kiss it. Men even from the Basilisk Isles greeted women that way, especially those of noble blood. And yet, Jaenyx became more uneasy at how... lady-like she was in approaching him now, as he knew that she cared very little about proper etiquette.

Jaenyx took her hand and kissed it. "*Lady Visenya. I have had a productive conversation with your father. We agreed on the date of the wedding and other matters.*"

"*Is that so?*" She expressed interest. "*When are we to marry?*"

"*By the week's end, in this castle.*" Jaenyx saw no point in not telling, as she would be aware of it anyways.

"*I am pleased to hear that, as that's only four days from now. Waiting a long time for a simple ceremony to be completed can increase one's anxiousness, so it's best if we just marry as soon as possible.*" She wore a bright smile on her face, which didn't help make the conversation easier for Jaenyx. "*Where are you headed right now, Lord Belaerys?*

"*Nowhere in particular. I am just walking around the castle,*" Jaenyx admitted.

"*How about we walk to the training yard? I heard from my dear sister that you were interested in me after she told you that I am good at swordplay. I would like to show you some skills I have.*"

Jaenyx was surprised at how direct she was in asking him that. Well, that's one thing we have in common. We cut to the chase.

As they walked together to the training yard, Jaenyx saw that Visenya was more loose in walking posture and she grinned. This was not like the hard woman he first saw at the clearing, who looked ready to disembowel him while remaining calm about it. Granted, she was not grabbing at him and squeezing the life out of him like some smitten girl, but she was being too eager when she had him accompany her to the training yard.

Jaenyx saw Aegon and Orys sparring with who he assumed was the castle's master-at-arms. A large man who wore riding leathers, he took on Aegon and Orys one at a time. Jaenyx observed how the both of them fought, which was quite similar and the only difference being in strength. Aegon tried to overcome his opponent with thrusts and parries, using his strength to hammer down on his opponent's sword and push against him with his upper body. The one thing that Jaenyx saw that Aegon was doing correctly was his footwork, as he was firmly placed on the ground and
would not budge easily against the other's attacks.

As for Orys, Jaenyx saw a man whose strength only came from being tall. He reckoned him being at least six feet and five inches, easily towering Aegon and himself. His gray tunic and leather vest just barely covered his massive chest and abdomen, which wasn't purely muscle. Instead of a sword, he saw Orys fighting the master-at-arms with a wooden war hammer, an apt tool for ones seeking to use brute strength. Jaenyx only saw strike after strike with Orys. He's strong, but he's not imaginative. He started to doubt how this man came from dragonblood, since Lord Targaryen was at least intelligent and he did not see that with Orys.

Aegon and Orys strived to be knights, which made them limited in how they fought. They believed strength was the deciding factor in any battle and that the mark of a great warrior was beating their opponent using the skills they also knew. More seriously, they took these spars too lightly, with Orys grabbing the wooden sword of the master-at-arms and Aegon simply shrugging off the blows to his body. These two will get crushed if they ever fought Master Haru.

Jaenyx learned how to wield a sword from Master Konno Haru, who was a warrior back in Nihon. He stressed how a sword was to be treated as an extension of one's soul, something that personified the self. Whether in training or in battle, Master Haru taught Jaenyx to swing the sword as he would against death. That was one of the reasons why he had gifted him his katana and wakizashi on his twelfth nameday, because he now tools of his own and thus more reason to treat them like a part of himself. The seriousness that Master Haru stressed was absent in Aegon and Orys.

"What are you thinking about, Lord Belaerys?" Visenya brought him out of his stupor. "I'd like to show you some of my skills."

Jaenyx saw Visenya walk up to Aegon and Orys, her practice sword securely gripped as she took a combat stance. Smiling at their sister joining them, Aegon and Orys took her on one at a time. That was when he saw how her style and theirs were fundamentally different.

While Aegon and Orys would attempt to strike her with sheer strength, Visenya was quick with her feet and exhibited agility when avoiding their strikes. While both of her brothers would scream, she remained calm. While both would attempt to strike at her chest, she was not above using her practice sword to hit Aegon right in the leg and send him falling hard to the ground while kicking Orys in the balls and struck him in the face with the hilt. With both of her brothers on the ground and writhing in pain, Jaenyx was surprised that they did not try to tear her head off. Maybe the only reason they did not try to was because she was family and this was probably not the first time she did this. Their collective painful laughs confirmed that for him.

"Same old, same old, big sister," Aegon remarked as he stood back up with Visenya helping both of them. "The trappings of knighthood would be wasted on you."

"Don't count on it," Visenya retorted lightly. "Hey, Egg, Orys, I'm going to spar with Lord Belaerys for a bit. Can you give us some space?"

Wait, spar? Is that what she meant by showing her skills? Jaenyx thought before he mentally sighed. If there was anything he should learn quickly about his betrothed, it was that she could not resist any opportunity to learn. And he was next on her list.

Aegon handed him a practice sword. Resembling a longsword, it felt clumsy compared to the bokkens he used when practicing with Master Haru. The hilt was definitely an issue, as that limited his range of motion with the sword. However, Jaenyx saw his betrothed already at the ready, her smirk clear as day. There was no getting out of this. She wanted to know how good he was with a sword and would stop at nothing to get what she wanted.
Pondering on this other similarity he shared with her, Jaenyx got into the stance drilled into him by Master Haru: knees bent while leaning on his back leg and turning to right side. Taking a low guard, he breathed slowly and felt his thoughts empty his mind. He entered a state that Haru said was called mushin, or 'no mind' in his best interpretation. He gave Visenya a gaze of pure, implacable focus, with his breathing slowing everything down in his mind. Instinct and reflexes would influence his actions, as both began to reveal glimpses of what his betrothed would do. Swordplay in Nihon would not last more than four to six strokes, which was how long he intended for his spar to last. Visenya caught his dead calm stare, causing her to blink before going back in her stance.

Jaenyx struck first with a horizontal swing at Visenya, which she blocked. She attempted a downward slice, which Jaenyx avoided by moving to the right and allowing her sword to slide off his. Jaenyx also tried a downward slice, which Visenya blocked with blade perpendicular to his. Getting closer to each other, their swords touched before they both turned around at the same time. They slid some distance from each other before Visenya charged forward and attempted an upward slice. Moving slightly to the right, Jaenyx swung downward with all of the momentum he could muster and struck her sword, her one-handed grip giving way and the sword falling to the ground. He then brought his sword up to Visenya’s throat, the result obvious to the crowd who gathered around.

Jaenyx lowered his sword before returning it to Aegon. Both Aegon and Orys were stunned at how he fought, not expecting to see their sister’s calm and speed surpassed by their soon-to-be good-brother. They also flinched at the ice stare he carried even after the swordplay ended, not surprising due to their obliviousness of the deeper connection between sword and man.

Jaenyx exchanged glances with Visenya before turning to leave the courtyard, not noticing her eyes following him and her smile growing bigger. What he did see was Rhaenys watching from the balcony, absolutely beaming at the sight. *She's probably going to say "I told you so" to myself and her sister and brothers until after the wedding. Will it ever end?*

Chapter End Notes

Jaenyx is on a high after showing what he can do, which prompts him to demand his ceremony not including a septon and not having a bedding ceremony, right in front of Lord Targaryen. Although he doesn't believe in the Faith, Lord Targaryen shows his pragmatic side as well as what he still thinks of Jaenyx. As for Jaenyx, we see him also not believing in a divine power and can be just as pragmatic as thoughtful as Lord Targaryen. He also realizes that there is a deeper motive as to why Lord Targaryen, despite trying to cling to the ways of Valyria, has become set in the Westerosi ways of thinking. That can't be good.

Jaenyx refusing a bedding ceremony is not out of love for Visenya. While he's still wary of her and doesn't want to adopt Westerosi customs, he really begins to come around to being married to Visenya and understands that she feels the same. Therefore, while not liking how he got betrothed in the first place, like Visenya he's going to make the most out of it and will make sure to start any relationship with her on solid ground. Not having a bedding ceremony is a very good way for them to explore each other and become intimate. Their relationship will become loving after some time.

It's difficult to write fight scenes, especially ones that can communicate meaning, but I
tried my best. Hopefully, this is enough. Part of the scene was inspired by the LAST
SAMURAI, which I will continue to reference in the story.

I don't want to drag out the days preceding the wedding since I want to move on to the
parts I want to write: how Aegon's Conquest will drastically change with Belaerys'
presence. However, I also did not want to rush it and not include a meaningful
interaction between Visenya and Jaenyx since they are going to be married. I wanted to
show how the relationship will progress naturally, so hence this chapter.

This also plays into Visenya's growing attraction to Jaenyx, as she saw how similar
they were in fighting tho he surpasses in speed and being calm. She doesn't love him
yet and is merely exploring the specimen in Jaenyx that is slowly getting her full
attention. It also highlights how Rhaenys and Visenya are similar in letting their
curiosity determine their actions, tho it manifests differently in Visenya.

That aside, we learn more about Jaenyx's background, how much he lost, and how that
affects him. We also see part of what is driving him on after resisting the temptation of
suicide. However, this is not everything about his past and there will be more to reveal
as the story goes on.

There will be further interactions with Konno Haru, who is from Yi-Ti but because it's
more of a label for East Asia than an actual country, I've decided to include Japanese
and Korean culture in describing Haru. His teachings have certainly been beneficial for
Jaenyx, but we'll later see the limits and how flawed Haru is. And he's not the only one
from Yi-Ti who came with Jaenyx (don't worry, they'll be important and not a random
inclusion).

I don't know if I should include a chapter centering on Orys Baratheon. From what I
can get from canon and judging from the Baratheon brothers, he's not very interesting
and was known to be great warrior, which is not saying much considering he killed the
Storm King and married his daughter soon after he did. Granted, he may have treated
her with respect, but so did every knight in that period. He becomes more uninteresting
after he loses his hand in Dorne. What do you think?

Next, we have Rhaenys controlling all of the wedding prep and being the most
cheerful at the ceremony. Stay tuned!
Really excited about HBO announcing the prequel, which takes place 300 years before GOT canon and covers the events of the Targaryens leading up to the Dance of the Dragons, which is probably the most interesting and most destructive period in the history of Westeros. The timing of the prequel and this piece seems pretty auspicious. Hmm...

While I look forward for characters like Aegon, Rhaenys, and Visenya being brought to life, the prequel will not affect the bearing of this story as I am not retelling history. If anything, I'm changing it since we have Jaenyx in the picture.

On that note, here is the wedding we have been looking forward to. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A wince left Visenya's lips as she jerked her head to the side. "Please, Vis. It'll only take a moment," Rhaenys offered as she guided her head back into place. "I know you normally don't do this, but you'd want hair perfect for the ceremony. Isn't that right, muña?"

Their mother, Lady Valaena Targaryen, had just returned from her Velaryon siblings at Driftmark four days ago. Although overjoyed at the existence of another dragonlord, she became incensed at their father offering up her oldest daughter to this stranger without telling her first. They exchanged a few heated words, words that Rhaenys never thought would leave her mother.

"WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?! VIS IS MY DAUGHTER TOO!" Rhaenys heard her mother say through the door of their father's solar.

"I had to consider what I had to do at the moment, Val!" their father responded in defense. "We had a dragonlord come to our shores, the only one besides us that survived the Doom. Not only that, he brought three families that played a pivotal role in how Valyria rose to its zenith, one of whom preserved the knowledge of forging Valyrian steel."

"I DON'T CARE IF HE BROUGHT THE FUCKING COFFERS OF THE IRON BANK! YOU SOLD MY DAUGHTER TO THIS OUTSIDER AND I DON'T CARE IF HE HAS A FUCKING DRAGON!"

"If she was going to marry some nobody lord or even one of our Valyrian vassals, that would've been true. However, think about it, Val! Our daughter will marry a dragonlord, who is deeply rooted in the ways of Valyria and is bringing people who will be of great help to us. Moreover, she seems to like the idea of marrying Lord Belaerys, which cannot be said about when I decided to have Egg marry Vis."

There was a pause. "Is that true, Aerion?" Rhaenys heard her mother, calmer.

"Yes, Val. She didn't like it at first, but even she and Egg cannot deny that they'll be unhappy with each other. Over the last few days, she and Lord Belaerys had a spar and started to spend more time together, either in the training yard or in the library. She's even acting more like a lady around him,
which she never does."

Rhaenys still remembered that spar between Visenya and Jaenyx. Visenya was incredibly agile and fast, but Jaenyx exceeded in her both. In that spar, he held the training sword with both hands, which threw Visenya's out of her one-hand grip. For the next four days, they were seen in the training yard and their movements resembled more of a dance than sparring by how fluidly they combated each other. In addition, they spent hours in the library whenever Jaenyx wasn't helping his people settle onto the portions of Dragonstone their father granted him. She could only guess what they talked about.

"Still, Aerion. I don't like the idea of a stranger fucking my daughter after the wedding, dragons be damned. That's why I agreed to Egg marrying Vis."

"Val, he has a dragonhorn."

Rhaenys heard a gasp. Even their mother knew what that was. "Truly?"

"Yes, but it can only be used by someone carrying Belaerys blood. That means whatever children Vis has with Lord Belaerys will be able to use the horn also. Think about it. Our daughter will marry a man who possesses stronger dragonblood and our grandchildren will become stronger dragons as a result. There's everything to gain from this union."

Rhaenys fought the urge to giggle at the thought of Visenya being pregnant, the sight of her belly growing big and then seeing her water break would be a sight she would not miss for the world. The warrior dragon that is her sister brought down by the pains of childbirth. That was as golden as the thought of Rhaenys becoming an aunt. Hopefully, he's as good in bed as he is in the training yard. Otherwise, Vis might cut his throat and get Vhagar to kill Cloudwynd after finding out he put his seed in her.

"You have it all thought, haven't you?" Rhaenys knew that was more of a statement than a question.

"It won't be all bad, Val. Besides being a dragonlord, having strong dragonblood, and bringing those rooted in old Valyria here, he's handsome and he knows how to lead people despite his youth. He's only a year older than Vis and they are off to a good start. In addition, he's very audacious, a fact that I've learned a little too late when he pulled out his dragonhorn. Our daughter will be in good hands," their father tried to assuage their mother.

Silence filled the solar, but Rhaenys could still hear the breathing between them. "You better hope that this goes smoothly, or I will cut your fucking cock off and throw it in the sea for the fish to feed on." Rhaenys just avoided being seen as their mother left their father's solar in a huff.

People would assume that a proper lady would be molded by an equally proper mother, which was only partially-true for Rhaenys. Their father, being the proper lord, taught her court etiquette and how to be refined while her mother taught her the lady-like activities such as sewing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. However, with Visenya being their first child and being new to childrearing, their mother was very unrefined with how she talked to her and passed on her disdain for social conventions onto her daughter while their father indulged Visenya's inclinations towards the sword and hard learning. Their mother could be lady-like at times, but one would rue the day her ire was stoked. Valaena's father, their grandfather, captained a ship and sailors were not known for controlling their tongues, one thing she certainly gained from him. Rhaenys suspected that was one reason why their father became happy with their mother even though his father Lord Daemion arranged for their union.
Their mother saw her soon-to-be good-son some of the time in Dragonstone's hallways, but did not approach him. Rhaenys tried to rectify that by inviting Jaenyx to dine with them, but their mother ignored him and instead focused on preparing for the ceremony. She had the guest quarters cleaned, as that was where Visenya and Jaenyx would spend their first night as man and wife. She directed the cooks to prepare their finest meals, hired musicians for the wedding feast, and sent out the invitations through raven. She also spent the days leading up to the wedding relearning her High Valyrian, as she mostly spoke the common tongue. However, she remained displeased with her daughter being given away and she did not hide that.

As for Rhaenys, she prepared with much more enthusiasm. She set upon sowing Visenya's wedding gown, with red and black being the colors, as she did not want her to marry in her usual mail and leather dresses. She prepared some songs she would sing at the feast, as she was the most eager in getting Jaenyx and Visenya together. She picked out her own dress and deliberated on what she will give to Visenya after the ceremony was done.

Also, Rhaenys approached Jaenyx to have a banner designed for him. She said that it was a Westerosi tradition for noble families to have a banner and words for their house. Jaenyx flatly refused, saying he had no need for such things and that only his name was needed. Switching approach, Rhaenys said that having a banner was by no means an affront to his Valyrian roots and that it would be wise for him to have something that people can recognize before they met him. She kept pestering him and seeing that she would not give up, he relented but only after he discussed it with the families that came with him. Then, she approached the head of the Leniars, his cousin Taygor, as well as the Tarareons and the Rahitheons to design their banners. She stated that having a banner would not be compromising their Valyrian ways, as even those in Essos like the Iron Bank of Braavos had symbols, and she was merely going to design them. They consented after much effort on her part. Who knew Valyrians could be quite stubborn in their ways? Even though I come from Valyria.

Besides Visenya's wedding gown, Rhaenys and some female servants spent the next few days sewing together their guests' banners. The Tarareons chose a black-colored archer aiming to the rear while mounted on horseback in a field of tan to symbolize their prowess as horsemen and how they held the Rhoynar back centuries ago. They chose the words "Swift, Silent, Deadly".

Taygor Leniar, after deliberating with his family, chose a white-colored outstretched fist squeezing out blood red drops against a field of gray to symbolize their affinity for blood magic, which Rhaenys was sure would raise more than a few eyebrows. They adopted the words "Blood for a Life."

The Rahitheons decided upon a red and green-colored turtle against a field of dark blue. Confused by their choice, Rhaenys was surprised when they revealed that they were partially descended from water wizards taken captive after the Second Spice War, which saw Prince Garin of the Rhoynar captured and Princess Nymeria fleeing in her ten thousand ships. While the fire in their Valyrian blood had made them good builders and smiths, the water from their Rhoynish blood made them truly without equal as they could make any form with water at will. They chose the words "We Form from Fire and Water."

Rhaenys had the servants make their banners, as she focused on making a banner for Jaenyx herself. She knew that a dragon on his banner was a given, but Jaenyx hesitated on the colors and words. Their families soon to become equals, Rhaenys suggested a dragon colored after Cloudwynd, blue-green, against a field of black. The dragon faced the right side as opposed to their three-headed dragon facing the left, wings outstretched and blue fire with hints of red shooting out of its jaws. This would a banner that would be placed next to their own banner, a red three-headed dragon against a field of black, to symbolize the union of their families and how they were equal.
The words Jaenyx chose perplexed Rhaenys, as he did not deny their extremity. He chose "Death before Dishonor." In another life, he might've been a great knight, as honor is all their rage, she mused.

After completing the banners and having the servants hang them in the courtyard alongside the banners of their vassals, Rhaenys went to get her sister prepared.

"And… all done!" Rhaenys backed away before handing Visenya a mirror. She saw Visenya ran her hand against her smoothened hair, silver flowing all the way down her back. Although she preferred braids, Rhaenys saw Visenya most beautiful when she allowed her hair to flow freely. It matched her red and black gown that she saw, which ran to her ankles, the ruby-encrusted gold necklace around her neck, and the silver circlet encrusted in violets placed on her head. "A true beauty and proper lady of House Targaryen. Jaenyx will be mad with desire at the mere sight of you."

"Shut up," Visenya grumbled. But Rhaenys noticed a slight blush on Visenya's cheeks. She likes him, she thought mischievously.

"Vis," Rhaenys heard their mother speak. "Usually, mothers would be talking to you about what happens during a bedding. But as Lord Belaerys insisted on the two of you consummating your union in private, what's the point? Really just a young man and woman fucking."

While Visenya and Rhaenys wasn't shocked at their mother's strong language, Rhaenys was horrified at how she was describing what's supposed to be a magical night after the union of man and wife.

"Muña! How could you say that about your daughter's wedding night?"

Val shrugged. "It's true. Bedding ceremony or not, that's just what happens. Your kepa did that before he had Orys, and then us before we had all of you."

Visenya wasn't bothered. "Good thing I won't have a bedding ceremony. Don't need drunken scoundrels telling me how to go about my business."

"Don't you mean being able to have Jaenyx all to yourself?" Rhaenys countered. "Who knows what kind of things you'll both be doing without us taking your clothes off for you?"

Visenya shot her a glare. "Don't get any ideas, Rhae. I might not like how I got betrothed to him in the first place, but he will be my husband. He will be mine and mine alone, so keep your hands to yourself, little sister."

Rhaenys giggled, causing Visenya to lunge at her and Rhaenys to flinch. She still grinned, enjoying how possessive her sister was becoming of her soon-to-be husband. While she loved Aegon, she could not control the urge to make jests of Visenya coupling with Jaenyx.

"All right, let's stop this lewdness from getting out of control, ladies," their mother stepped in. She grasped Visenya's shoulders, staring straight into her eyes. "Whatever happens tonight, know that your family is with you. Do you know that?"

Visenya rolled her eyes, but only slightly annoyed at her worries. "Muña, I'll be fine. I can take care of myself."

They heard the door knock. "Come in," their mother called.

A servant came in the room. "My ladies, they're ready."
Letting out a collective exhale, the three women straightened their dresses and proceeded through the hallways towards the courtyard.

They found the rest of the Velaryons, the Celtigars, and the Sunglasses all gathered alongside their new guests. The Velaryon's seahorse, the Celtigar's crabs, and the Sunglass' stars hung alongside the Tarareon's mounted archer, the Leniar's squeezed fist with blood drops, and the Rahitheon's turtle. Centrally-placed and larger than the rest, the Targaryen's red dragon facing the Belaerys' blue-green dragon, banners placed at the same level to say to all that the dragons stood together.

Standing near the main gates was Taygor Leniar, Jaenyx's cousin through his mother's family, wearing black gowns and his long silver hair tied in a top bun and a pile of logs in front of him. He had piercing violet eyes, similar to Jaenyx, but was shorter than Jaenyx and possessed an average body that the gowns hid. He would be presiding over the ceremony held in Valyrian fashion. Rhaenys was perplexed at what exactly took place at a Valyrian wedding, with Taygor cryptically using her family's words, "Fire and blood."

Standing on the opposite side of the logs were their father, Aegon, and Orys. They were all dressed in black trousers with red and black tunics, with only Aegon and their father wearing the same silver circlets as Visenya, Rhaenys, and their mother. Orys was not a Targaryen since he was born out of wedlock with a Celtigar maid, but their father did not have the heart to abandon him.

Finally, standing opposite of his cousin was Jaenyx. Standing straight and looking directly at the three women, he had black trousers and a black and blue-green tunic, with a dagger tucked in his belt and his wavy silver hair straightened out. He looked exactly like a dragonlord of Valyria. Rhaenys also noticed the Yi-Ti man she saw on his ship, as well as three other men next to him, presumably also from Yi-Ti. They all wore blue robes, had their raven black hair tied in a bun, and trimmed beards. The old man held the blue-green cloak that would go over Visenya after all was done. Why are they next to Jaenyx?

Rhaenys and their mother stood back as Visenya took her place to Jaenyx. He stated that it was Valyrian custom for a man and woman to be married together, with no one giving them, as it would offend the gods to have subservience between those of the same blood. Rhaenys found that quite appealing and shared a look with Aegon, who smiled at her. It'll be my turn soon and I shall enjoy life with Egg.

"Let the ceremony begin!" Taygor Leniar announced in his attempt at the common tongue before he began to chant Valyrian prayers. It was bizarre for Rhaenys, witnessing a wedding without a septon and with their Valyrian roots now coming out in the open. And yet, it felt right for her. Like a piece that was lost finally returning to make her whole.

The Sunglasses in attendance were all in discomfort save the Velaryons and Celtigars, both of whom wished to be within Valyria's grasp again. They repeated the Valyrian prayers when prompted, although some did not understand a word they were saying.

"And now," Taygor opened his eyes as his last prayer ended. "Let us have the gods descend upon us and bring forth their blessings on this union of man and wife." He signalled to both Visenya and Jaenx, who both said a Valyrian command that caused both Vhagar and Cloudwynd to land on the castle's battlements, their heads pointing downwards at them.

"Visenya of House Targaryen, do you take this man to be your husband??" Taygor looked to Visenya.

"I take this man," Visenya declared, her smile only noticeable to her family and Jaenx.
"Jaenyx of House Belaerys, do you take this woman to be your wife?"

"I take this woman," he responded confidently.

Jaenyx drew his dagger, rolled up the sleeve on his right arm, and cut along it. Not too deep to touch the vessels, but enough for the blood to ooze out of it. Rhaenys did not expect that and so did Visenya, who kept her surprise hidden. The guests were shocked at what they were seeing.

Jaenyx handed her the dagger. Nodding her head, Visenya took the dagger, rolled her sleeve, and cut along her arm.

"Now stand before the gods to receive their blessing." Both Jaenyx and Visenya moved forward to the log pile, with Jaenyx standing next to his cousin and Visenya remaining on her side.

Pointing his head at their dragons, Jaenyx gestured Visenya to do the same. "DRACARYS!" he yelled as Cloudwynd released her flames. Visenya followed suit, Vhagar pouring her flames to join Cloudwynd's.

With the logs on fire, Jaenyx put arms over the flames, his sleeve rolled enough to not catch fire. Visenya took his arm, both clasping their forearms and their cuts over the other, as if to move their blood to and from each other. Normal arms would fry and burn over flames and even those with dragonblood were not completely protected from them. However, blood and fire released a force that would give life and protect those willing to sacrifice. Over the fire, the blood of man and wife flowed from their cuts, a part of themselves latching on to the other and uniting them as one blood. As they withdrew their arms from the flame, Jaenyx saw his cut healed and Visenya also.

Gesturing for Visenya to come round to his side, Jaenyx unclasped her Targaryen cloak and threw it around himself. Getting his new Belaerys cloak from the Yi-Ti man, he handed it to Visenya, who threw it around herself. Both now under each other's protection.

"In sight of the gods and men, I hereby bind these two souls together for eternity!" Taygor announced.

In a trance at the whole ceremony, Rhaenys beamed as Jaenyx cupped Visenya's cheek. She saw Visenya smile before she grabbed his neck, bringing his head down to hers and pulling him into a kiss that became deeper after some moments. Breaking their kiss, they both turned to the audience, all of whom cheered for the newly-weds. Or at least as best as they could.

Rhaenys threw flowers in the air, as Lord and now Lady Belaerys walked past her towards the feast in the great hall. She walked alongside Aegon, both exchanging smiles at the occasion and at thoughts of the future. Soon, Egg. It will be us soon.

Chapter End Notes

I had to take a lot of liberties with the whole ceremony. I took parts from how the red priests do it, but then I had to really get imaginative while keeping true to Valyrian tradition. Having Jaenyx and Visenya spill a little of their blood over fire, with their cuts healing, seemed right to me. I'm not sure if being unburnt is a Valyrian trait as not all the Targaryens had that, but I felt that the many blood rituals that the Valyrians were known for had to be pointed somehow and what better than Visenya and Jaenyx cutting their arms and having their blood mix with each other over fire? This is the first
time I'm writing a wedding scene, so please bear with me.

I liked the idea of Valaena Targaryen being this rather foul-mouthed lady, as the Velaryons were mainly masters at sea and sailors are not for having filtered mouths. Rhaenys' somewhat dirty thoughts seemed too perfect to pass up, as canon described her as mischievous and I felt that was one way to show that. We also see that she's becoming a little sister to Jaenyx, which will be very important in the future.

Regarding the banners for Jaenyx and the new Valyrian families, I was thinking not putting that. But Rhaenys pointing out that it would not compromise their beliefs and the fact that banners are mostly for aesthetic reasons made me decide to go along with it. We also see a very interesting fact about the Rahitheons, having partial descent from Rhoynish water wizards, and Valyria's connection with the Rhoynar from centuries past will continue in this story.

Rhaenys' thoughts on Jaenyx's words: oh how little you know, Rhae.

Next up, we see Aegon observing the feast, excited for his chance with Rhaenys, his Westerosi self clashing with his dragon self, and then escorting his sister and now good-brother for the consummation. Stay tuned.
**Aegon II**

**Chapter Notes**

Excited about the over 50 followers and the nearly 50 reviews. All of you are just awesome. Shoutout to osterreicher97, Longclaw 1-6, BornSinner01, and all the rest. All of you make writing this story all the more fulfilling for me.

One more chapter until the wedding arc is concluded. Hold tight, people!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wedding feasts being merry affairs were a given, as anyone from kings to smallfolk who were able spared no expense in making the hours after the exchange of wedding vows to be remembered vividly for those who partook. Bards, mummers, and musicians bringing out a memorable performance before the guests, laughter leaving their throats and ale pouring down them, were common features in any wedding. A lord hosting a wedding in his castle was a chance for other lordlings and whomever they brought with them to banter and become drunken rascals at their host's expense. Rhaenys also sang and played along with the band.

Aegon's mind was not dwelling on such commonalities at the moment. As the heir to Dragonstone, he was seated at the head table on their father's right, with their mother on the left. He sat next to Rhaenys, chatting away at Visenya and their good-brother after her performance was done. Orys sat the left end of the head table, talking and laughing with one of the ladies of House Sunglass. A lord would never have his bastard seated at the head table, especially at occasions like weddings. But their father was different and would rather damn himself to hells if he allowed his son, no matter the circumstances of his birth, feel mistreated. Their mother was understandably vexed at being near their father's bastard, but eventually came around and at the very least treated him with courtesy. This was also because he gave her three children of her own, a sign of his devotion to her and giving up his philandering ways.

Instead of enjoying the feast and joining with their guests in dancing, Aegon was reflecting on how so much has changed since Jaenyx arrived. At the start of the moon, he was resigned to marrying Visenya and living a life where he had to fulfill the needs of both her and Rhaenys. Their father made it clear that he would not stop him, which made his upcoming marriage with Visenya more bearable for him. He continued to be trained in a knightly fashion, looking forward to the day both he and Orys would add the title of "ser" to their names. Although not really committed to the Faith like the rest of the Blackwater Bay, Aegon had become used to the culture that the Faith influenced and grew up enamored with the heroic deeds that the bards would write of knights. Ser Aegon Targaryen, first knight to ride a dragon into battle, fighting alongside Ser Orys Baratheon, honored by his father despite being a bastard. That would be one for the songs, he mused.

Now, Aegon was attending the wedding feast held in honor of Jaenyx and Visenya Belaerys. He first felt relief at not marrying Visenya, as they both knew they would not be happy with each other, and could turn his full attention to making his marriage with Rhaenys a loving one. Then, he felt worried about the future, of what it behold for the Targaryens at Dragonstone. She might now be a Belaerys, but she's still my sister.

Over the past week since Jaenyx's arrival, everything changed down for their family. Nearly three
thousand people started to settle at the parts of Dragonstone south and east of the Dragonmont, all of whom played a part in raising Valyria to the pinnacle of its civilization and who could easily overwhelm the six hundred swords sworn to the Lord of Dragonstone himself. Their forty-two to fifty vessels that they arrived on may not have been built for war, but Aegon's Velaryon cousins would be hard-pressed to contain a fleet that equalled their own in terms of numbers. And now there were four dragons flying over Dragonstone. Six, if not counting the two wild ones inside the Dragonmont, but he doesn't know that yet.

Aegon had a feeling that Jaenyx was more than met the eye when he first arrived on his dragon Cloudwynd, a feeling that proved true when he first saw his dragonhorn. A truly menacing article of black and gold, one would not doubt its power after seeing what it did to Balerion and Vhagar. How they responded to his commands brought absolute fear to Aegon's heart, the realization of Jaenyx being a much more powerful dragonlord than his family ever could be hitting upon him. Their servants and household gave a wide berth whenever Jaenyx walked by them, them having also seen what he did.

What was equally disconcerting for Aegon was how much time Jaenyx spent with their father. It warmed his heart to see Visenya spending more time with her now husband, her initial distress at her betrothal disappearing with each moment in Jaenyx's presence. However, Jaenyx spending more time with their father in his solar was a cause for concern. He still recognized the Westorosi air that came off their father when he was doing his lordly duties, but he started to become more… Valyrian in his mannerisms. He spoke High Valyrian more often, having to switch to the common tongue after remembering that most of their servants did not understand the language. He ceased his time at the sept altogether, though he wasn't a pious man to begin with and only had that built to appease his trading partners in the Blackwater Bay, while spending more time with Jaenyx in learning more about and worshipping Valyria's gods and goddesses. He also had Dragonstone's maester, Harrion, return to the Citadel, stating he no longer needed his services. Aegon protested his father's expelling Maester Harrion, as he, Rhaenys, and Visenya knew him all their lives and much of what they knew was because of him. But it was clear that their father was beginning to cut off any connections he had with Westeros. The father I know is disappearing, or maybe he was always like this and needed someone like Jaenyx to bring his other self into the open.

Thinking back to Visenya, Aegon had always known that she had… peculiar interests beyond learning how to wield a sword. Maester Harrion tried to hide all of the books relating to Valyria's history and their more shocking rituals away from her wandering eyes, but she always found them no matter where he hid them. Aegon did not care that Visenya was an eager reader of real books, not the ones relating to the stories of love like that Jonquil and Florian, or that she was on her way to becoming a strong warrior in her own right despite both he and Orys complaining about her "cheating." Visenya was his sister and a dragon, and he would be damned before he allowed himself or others to try to turn her into something that she wasn't.

At the same time, Aegon saw glimpses of Visenya delving deeper in her learning about Valyrian blood magic, of which Jaenyx and his Leniar cousins served as direct sources. It seemed all wrong to him. The maesters and the septs all condemned Valyria's magic, seeing it as a reason of why the Doom happened. He had read about their rituals in pastime, and was content to accept what the books said at face value. He mostly devoted his efforts towards becoming a great warrior and knight while learning the duties of a lord when he would take over Dragonstone.

But after seeing what happened when Jaenyx and Visenya exchanged their vows, Aegon began to doubt what he knew. He was sure that the maesters could not explain how a fresh cut along the arm could suddenly be healed over fire, especially those from dragons, while condemning the practice altogether. He did not know what to think of the ritual, but at the same time, it felt… right to him. Maybe it was the dragonblood in his veins that made him feel less unsettled than most at
the wedding, but he was not as unsettled as others in the wedding. It was a connection that the books or the sept could not explain, a feeling that ran deeper than the earth.

"What are you thinking, Egg?" Aegon heard Rhaenys as he turned to her.

"Just thinking about how much has changed in the last week," he admitted.

Rhaenys nodded in understanding. "It has. Not only do we have more people living with us, we now have a new addition to our family. It's... very beautiful." Aegon could see a hint of tears forming in her eyes.

Aegon smiled, happy that this was one thing that remained the same. Rhaenys might have been too prone to romantic feelings, but that was what he liked about her. The pressures from being a lord and the exhaustion that came from the training yard disappeared upon seeing her sweet smile, her beautiful dancing, and her divine playing of music. It brought more joy to him knowing that they would soon be together forever.

Aegon stroked her cheek. "It is, Rhae. Vis will be in good hands and we have more one more dragon with us. And this will be us soon."

Rhaenys grabbed his hand and gave a soft kiss on it. "Yes, Egg. Can't wait for that to happen. Although Orys here has still not found a woman of his own."

Aegon's smile grew smaller in sadness of the reality of Orys' circumstances. No proper lady would ever want to marry a bastard and it pained him that his older brother would be denied the love that he and Rhaenys would share, and hopefully Visenya and Jaenyx. "Orys would be foolish to believe that he has no love in his life. He has us and he has father. I'm sure there's a woman out there that would love him no matter how he was born."

Rhaenys nodded in hopefulness. She, Aegon, and Visenya never cared about Orys being a bastard. He got the impression that Jaenyx did not care about how he was born either, although he suspected that his distant and infrequent interactions with Orys was more because he saw him as a complete Westerosi lacking in any Valyrian characteristics. "I would have to talk to him and make it clear that I will not tolerate anyone mistreating my brother."

The band finished their final tune, which got them a huge round of applause from the guests. Then, he saw Jaenyx rise from his seat next to Visenya and gestured his servant at the hall's left door, prompting the servant to open the doors for more servants, all of whom brought chests and laid them in front of the head table.

"My lords and ladies," Jaenyx began, with one of his servants translating into the common tongue for their guests to understand. "I want to thank you all for the festivities making this night a night to remember." He earned nods of approval and some cheers, but all of whom were still wary of this... upstart as Aegon heard. "To House Velaryon, your gifts of large wooden galley models will make a fine addition to the household of Belaerys and serve as a reminder of your family's mastery over the ocean, as well as who we can call on if we ever need help on the seas." He got a nod of thanks from Lord Velaryon.

"To House Celtigar, you gifted my wife and I with a horn that is said to call krakens from the sea. I look forward to putting the horn to the test and to keep it as a reminder of why the Celtigars are so valued by my good-father." Lord Celtigar nodded, smiling in appreciation to his words.

"To House Sunglass, you gifted us with a set of silver chalices with dragons engraved all over them. It was a gift truly proper for dragonlords and we shall look forward in being reminded of
who we really are every day, as well as who remains below while the dragons fly high in the sky." Aegon caught his meaning, and apparently so did Lord Sunglass. He was aware of the Sunglass' poor attempts to have Visenya join their family and he was making it clear as to why they failed. Lord Sunglass forced a smile, though the rest of the hall saw his face grow red in embarrassment.

"I shall give proper thanks to other lords and ladies present for their gifts in the days after tonight. However, it is time that I present my own gifts to my new family." He had the servants open the chests in front of the head table and Aegon did not expect to see what came from inside them.

"Lord Targaryen," Jaenyx first approached him. "You made this wedding possible and as my good-father, you deserve a gift befitting of one with dragonblood." He held his hands out, which revealed a set of rings with rubies encrusted on all of them. "These belonged to my grandfather, Lord Baesellar Belaerys of the Basilisk Isles. He lived to see ninety name days and the magic flowing from these blood rubies and the fire from the valyrian steel that made these rings allowed him to live longer than most men could, passing away only when he took them off. I hope that these rings will allow you to live for centuries, as long as the dragons."

Their father took the rings from Jaenyx's hands, looking over them in awe. He put them on all of his fingers, come around the table to stare Jaenyx square in his eyes. Although they did not yet have a loving bond with each other, Aegon knew that they respected each other. Jaenyx giving him a family heirloom meant he was fulfilling his promise to treat them all with kindness and respect, which their father returned with an embrace. "Thank you, my son," he heard him say.

There were cheers in the hall before Jaenyx continued. "Lady Targaryen," he moved towards their mother. "I might not have known you as long as your husband and children, but you deserve a gift suiting one who had raised fine dragons." He brought forth a necklace with green-colored beads and a large sapphire in its center. There were markings over the steel lining around the sapphire, markings that Aegon did not recognize as Valyrian or even that of the runes of the First Men he had studied. "This necklace was originally made in Yi-Ti, and the green color of the beads is the natural color of jade, a mineral as valuable as gold in the rest of the world. The Yi-Ti say that jade represents purity, gentleness, and love, all of which I know that you gave to your children. So let this necklace be a reminder of your success as a lady and mother."

Aegon saw Jaenyx pause when he said "mother", not forgetting that he had lost his parents. Maybe one day, he'll find out how she died. Now, she saw their mother round the table and gave him a light embrace, although it was not as strong as their father's. "Thank you," she said while more cheers followed.

"Aegon," Jaenyx turned to him. "We're brothers now and I've seen the way you handle yourself with the sword. Although I know that Blackfyre will protect you well, let this serve you where Blackfyre can't." He held out a Valyrian steel sword with a black-colored dragon crossguard, red handle, and a yellow sapphire that matched Balerion's eyes. What Aegon noticed was that unlike Blackfyre, this was a greatsword and thus allowing greater reach than with Blackfyre. Aegon took a moment to marvel at the sword.

"How did you get this?" Aegon asked, eyes still looking over the blade.

"Some of the Rahitheons had blades already made from when we were at the Basilisk Isles, but not the hilts. I had them make that one over the next few days from some of the valuables we had."

Putting the sword down next to his heat, Aegon came to Jaenyx and hugged him tightly. "Thank you, brother." Although still unsure of Jaenyx, he knew that he was more at ease with him thanks to his actions.
Jaenyx returned the hug. "Not a problem, Aegon." He moved towards Orys, which surprised everyone present. "I know we may not have the closest bond, but I saw you handle yourself with a warhammer at the training yard. And now you will have a weapon that will always serve you well, one that served the Tarareons when Valyria defeated the Rhoynar," he held out a Valyrian steel axe, with a head as large as Orys' and a shaft as long as his legs.

Orys looked over the axe, surprised that Jaenyx even considered him. However, both he and Aegon knew that he did this to avoid disrespecting their father and family and not really because he saw him as his brother. "Thank you," Orys managed. Appearances still mattered.

"I will save my wife's gift for last, for my gift to Rhaenys is not a material object. I am told that you like music, sister." She nodded, giddy at what he was going to do. "I have prepared a song that I am sure you, your family, and the hall will enjoy. And this will be a new experience for you all, for I will play a tune that is dear to the hearts of those back in Nihon, one of the three lands of Yi-Ti." He gestured to three men Aegon recognized were from Yi-Ti, all of them carrying large harp-like tables to the front of the hall.

After setting down the harp tables, which Aegon heard were called kotos, Jaenyx and two of the Yi-Ti men sat down and played. It was a tune in a style that Aegon had never heard before, all of them playing in perfect harmony and their strings giving off a sound that harps could not match. It quickened before slowing down momentarily, taking moments to focus on one note at a time. There were quick note changes in some places before the pace, playing the beginning sounds of the song, quickened and slowed down again. What Aegon noticed that harmony existed throughout the song. Although not a music lover like Rhaenys, he knew that this song was synchronous and the sounds too perfect. More importantly, there was a calming feeling that came from the song, as if his mind was taken to a state where he could focus on his inner calm and ponder about the deep questions. Hang on. Why am I feeling this way? Why do I feel so… contemplative? Something's not right.

What was more surprising to Aegon was seeing Visenya watching the whole performance. She was easily bored with music, but here she was listening carefully. And Aegon could see that she was liking the calming effect the music seemed to give off. I don't believe it. She's listening to music and not being averting her eyes.

The song finished, with a round of applause in the hall following. Rhaenys came round the table and hugged Jaenyx tightly, thanking her brother for such good music.

"And now for my wife's gift. This was the most difficult to choose, for I am sure everyone knows how much of a hard woman she is." There were murmurs of agreement, which Jaenyx absorbed before pulling out his final gift. Unlike the others, this was not a sword or jewellery. This was a blue silk dress, though not one in the normal sense.

"This is called a dragon coat, but this is not a dress in the traditional sense. As you can see, the silk is woven together with plates protecting the torso and shoulders, all of which are made of Valyrian steel. Each of the silk threads has been dipped in dragon's blood, which together with the Valyrian steel plates make this impermeable to everything up to dragonfire. This was what Jaenara Belaerys wore when she explored Sothoryos and has been passed down to every Belaerys woman since then. The silk was dipped in the blood of her own dragon, Terrax. And as a woman acknowledged as a warrior in her own right and now carrying the name Belaerys, I can think of no one better to wear this coat than you."

Visenya held out the dress, eyes in wonder at such a fine work. You crafty bastard, Aegon thought. Visenya's leather dresses with chainmail were the only dresses that she would bear to wear. Now,
Jaenyx gave her a dress that would not only made her look more beautiful, but fulfilled her need to be protected like a warrior should. On top of that, the blue silk also symbolized Visenya being a Belaerys. No matter her name, she is our sister. We are three heads of a dragon and nothing can change that.

Putting the dress on her left arm, Visenya walked to Jaenyx and pulled him in for a deep kiss. Everyone in the hall cheered, save the Sunglass'.

"And now," their father stood up. "It's time for Lord and Lady Belaerys to retire for the night. But rest assured, the feast will continue."

Getting the cue, Aegon stood up while handing his gift from Jaenyx to a servant, to be put in his room. He, Rhaenys, and Orys escorted their sister and their good-brother out of the hall to their chambers, their guests cheering for them as they walked out.

In the relative silence of the halls, Aegon could feel the nervousness coming from all of them. Rhaenys and Orys sharing his uncertainty in how their sister will fare in her wedding night, and Visenya and possibly Jaenyx unsure if their first night as man and wife would be a good one. All Aegon could hope for was Visenya being happy, for it would be truly painful to watch her growing attraction for her now husband come crashing down after what is supposed to be a memorable time for both of them.

Reaching Visenya's chambers, which they both agreed to spending their first night in, Visenya and Jaenyx turned around to see their family one last time before the plunge. Rhaenys hugged her sister and wished her a good night, which Visenya returned. Orys and Aegon also hugged her, no words exchanged but all of them knowing what they wished for her. Jaenyx hugged his good-sister, their fast friendship obvious to all, while Jaenyx embraced Aegon, respect evident to those who could see. Jaenyx looked up to Orys, clasping his hand but tension obvious. They saw Visenya walk first into their chambers before Jaenyx followed, both giving them a final look before closing the door.

Orys walked to return to the feast and the Sunglass lady he would most certainly try to seduce. As for Aegon and Rhaenys, they walked slowly through the hallways, their hands held tightly and big smiles growing on their faces. It will be their turn soon. Yes, it will be us very soon, Rhae, Aegon thought as he felt happiness spread through his body. He looked to see Rhae thinking the same thing. Before reentering the hall, Rhaenys put her arms around Aegon's neck and pulled him in for a kiss. They remained there for a few moments before returning to the feast.

Chapter End Notes

Whoooo! Almost done, guys! After the next chapter, we'll get into the juicy parts of this story, the Conquest of Westeros.

Through the gifts Jaenyx gave, I wanted to show more details of how he and his family were more powerful and wealthier than the Targaryens. I hope all of you don't see Jaenyx as this Marty Sue character, because he is incredibly damaged and flawed, a fact that I will emphasize in the later parts of this story. Having him gift the dragon coat was fitting since he was considering Visenya's warrior status. Her kissing him is her being touched, kicking their relationship off to a great start.

The tensions between Jaenyx and Orys will have dire consequences for when the Conquest happens. Jaenyx doesn't really hold Orys in high esteem, which obviously
makes Aegon angry since he will not allow others to mistreat his brother, even if they are dragonlords. That will lead to a blowup during the Conquest. As I said, Orys is a boring character and probably the reason why Robert Baratheon was such an asshole. In addition, Aegon's Westerosi upbringing clashing with his Valyrian roots will have consequences, which will also affect Rhaenys.

The song is SAKURA SAKURA, a popular folk tune that is representative of Japan.

As I said, this is my first time writing a wedding scene. So please bear with me. Next, we get to see the couple's first night play out from Visenya's POV. Almost there!
Visenya II

Chapter Notes

Had to take my time with this chapter since this was going to hit closer than anything I wrote so far and writing about something that I never wrote before. Plus, I was watching THE KING on Netflix, which talks about Henry V and is very phenomenal. But hey, this is the final chapter of the wedding arc and guess what? We're going to see the dragons conquer Westeros.

I told you all before, but your continued support makes this more worth pursuing. Without ado, here is Jaenyx and Visenya in their first night as man and wife.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Visenya looked around in her chambers, taking in the last night she'll sleep there and in the castle. Although her mother arranged for them to spend the night in the guest quarters, Visenya strongly insisted on spending her wedding night in her chambers and had to remind her that Jaenyx was now also family. At the morrow, she and fifty swords assigned by her father would move to a modest but comfortable keep in the northeast part of Dragonstone, which was previously used by her grandfather Lord Daemion as a place from which to sail across the Blackwater Bay to the Cracklaw Point, where he would indulge his love for hunting in the relative lawlessness of the Point's forests despite the Point belonging to House Hoare.

The servants had spared no effort in making her chambers as comfy as possible for the newly-weds, with a pitcher of Arbor gold, refreshments, a roaring fire, and clean red and black sheets mixed with blue. There was also a small light-green flask and two tiny cups set upon the small table next to the hearth, mostly likely prepared by the Yi-Tish men that came with Jaenyx. Visenya fought to urge to sigh when she saw flower petals all over the bed, undoubtedly put there by Rhaenys in order to add to the supposed magic of a romantic night. She can be quite grating sometimes, but it is Rhae.

Visenya turned around to see Jaenyx, now her husband. She got to know him better over the last four days, spending what time she had with him in the training yard and in the castle's library. With the sword, he had the perfect balance of strength, speed, and agility, his lean body allowing him to move faster than most men his age while hiding the power held within his form of solid muscle. What's more, he never said a word while wielding a sword, instead giving her and Aegon a cold, piercing gaze as he fought them dispassionately. Although he did well with the practice swords, nothing could compare when he would bring the bokkens, or Yi-Tish wooden swords, to the yard. When he wielded them, his speed, strength, and agility were enhanced and some of the training swords snapped under the pressure given by Jaenyx's momentum. Visenya held the bokken, immediately seeing its slenderness and feeling its lightness, easier for her to handle and requiring less strength than she needed with a longsword. She wondered if she could get a set similar to Jaenyx's Yi-Tish swords, called a katana and wakizashi, to use alongside Dark Sister.

Visenya and Jaenyx talked much in the library, although the extent of his understanding of the common tongue did not include reading. She read with him and translated many of the books that she grew up reading, such as the histories and legends related to Westeros' Age of Heroes and the rituals rooted in Valyria's blood magic. Jaenyx stopped her many times when they read about the
rituals, saying that most of what the books said was either inaccurate or an exaggeration. Along with her enjoying the long conversations they held in the library, she became more comfortable speaking High Valyrian, but she could not undo the many years she spent speaking the common tongue as her mother tongue, along with the ways of thinking that could not be understood by one speaking High Valyrian. I'll have to teach him the common tongue, or I might lose him when I say certain words that can't be explained by High Valyrian.

On the topic of tongues, Jaenys could speak two Yi-Tish tongues besides High Valyrian: nihongo and goryeomal. He learned them both from his Yi-Tish teacher, whose name Visenya learned was Konno Haru, although he had to learn goryeomal by himself since Haru did not speak it well. Nihongo sounded strong at times and there was more emphasis on certain words than others, while goryeomal had more consistent sounds and had a smoother flow than nihongo. Although she felt strong emotions from both, she felt more melancholic emotions from hearing Jaenys speak goryeomal, which he said was reflective of the sad and violent history from whence it came between the two larger lands of Yi-Ti. She had only heard about Yi-Ti in passing, with her meeting Haru and he and Jaenys speaking those Yi-Ti tongues being the first real experiences she had with Yi-Tish ways and people. Hearing his stories about his travels in Yi-Ti, which he visited only once when Haru gifted him his swords, added to her fascination of a land she hoped to see one day.

Most women would feel a sense of achievement upon marrying a man whose physical strength matched that of his familiarity with the world, which Visenya also felt to a degree. However, besides knowing that Jaenys understood struggle and had more maturity than most men his age, Visenya noticed that he never boasted or say he was better than everyone because of what he had and knew. First assuming that his sufferings quieted the ostentatiousness that was so annoyingly common in young men, she learned that Haru strongly imparted onto Jaenys the virtues of the Yi-Tish warrior, which included strict adherence to courage, politeness, benevolence, and humility. Whenever he was about to stray, Jaenys said that "Sensei Haru" would have him go on all four limbs while he struck his buttocks, back, legs, and feet with a wooden staff. Jaenys said that sometimes, Haru struck so hard that lacerations sometimes appeared on where the wooden staff made contact with his skin.

Visenya was quite confused as to why Jaenys would allow himself to be so brutalized by Haru, especially since it started when he was a boy of six. Jaenys confessed that he wanted to kill Haru at the very first chance whenever he finished beating him, coming up with many ways of how he would do it whenever Haru hit him. However, he said that Haru never took pleasure when he did so and only struck him because he believed that the world would not be so merciful should he go down a wrong path. Jaenys remembered one time when Haru actually explained why he was hitting him: "With every strike, every cut, every bruise that forms on your skin, remember what happens when you allow yourself to be led adrift in the world's darkness. There is darkness all over and the demons will leap at their chance to consume you alive." This Haru seems to have reasonable intentions, but as hard as I am, I would never bash my children like that.

And here was Jaenys standing right in front of her, his blue-green and black tunic and black trousers hiding a form she longed to dig into, a form that she would allow entry into herself.

"Quite a day, right?" Jaenys began to break the silence between them in her chambers.

"Kessa," Visenya answered to allow them both to ease into what would happen soon.

Jaenys reached for the green flask and poured its contents into the small cups nearby. Grabbing both, he handed one to Visenya. "Drink, wife?"

Visenya gave a small smile as she took the cup, happy that Jaenys was going to do his part in
making their wedding night a night to remember but somewhat frustrated that he was using drink to numb his senses before the plunge.

"What is this?" Visenya eyed the clear liquid in the cup.

"This is called arakju, from the Yi-Ti land where goryeomal is spoken. It is one drink out of many varieties in Yi-Ti and they drink this since it takes a less amount than wine to loosen your senses."

Visenya nodded her head, curious as to what this drink could do. "I see."

Jaenyx held out his cup. "Gunbae." Visenya raised her eyebrow. "It is essentially you raising your cups when someone else does it."

Visenya clinked her cup with Jaenyx's. "Gunbae," she managed before they both poured their contents down their throats. Immediately, Visenya felt a burn in her insides and coughed, with Jaenyx chuckling in amusement. "That is some strong stuff, husband. What is in that?"

"They brew it from rice, which is a long process before the arakju. It is all the rage back in Yi-Ti, as many would rather drink a small cup of that rather than large cups of wine or ale to loosen themselves."

Visenya was not bothered by the burning feeling in her insides, probably her dragonblood making her more welcome to heat than others. However, she felt a little tingle in her hands, which would not happen until after a few cups of ale. And she could handle her drink better than most men could. Maybe I should drink this more often with him.

However, while she would have liked to continue their conversation and enjoy a few drinks, Visenya was not going to let her night be further delayed. She grabbed both of their cups and set them back on the small table. Turning around, she walked slowly towards her husband, eyes focused on his own while everything slowed down for the both of them. Cupping his cheek, she tiptoed up to his face and melded her lips on his in a deep kiss. Like the kiss they had after exchanging their vows, the kiss they had in their chambers was exhilarating, warming her wonderfully. Their tongues engaging in a fierce battle for dominance, she pulled him closer and ran her hands all over his back. She felt her husband put his arms pull her closer to him, his hands feeling all over her backside while she felt his hands squeeze her ass.

Letting a moan, Visenya pulled from the kiss, staring at Jaenyx with a desire that burned brighter than when he first used his dragonhorn. She reached for his tunic, pulling it off over his head and exposing his bare torso to her. Seeing his toned midsection and strong chests, she was shocked to see him so riddled with scars. She recognized the cuts from the swords and holes where arrows pierced his skin, but the scars that got her attention were larger and made his skin look like ripped parchment.

Seeing her eyes widen, Jaenyx straightened up. "I was infected with the red death while I was in the Basilisk Isles. One of the symptoms was turning the skin as thin as parchment, making it easier to rip whenever one tried to grab it. My father died from the red death and I would have died too if it weren't for my mother."

Visenya knew that his mother was a sore subject for him. "You don't have to talk about her if you want, Jaenyx."

"Daor," Jaenyx responded. "You are my wife, so you should know." He kept his gaze on her. "Every Valyrian ritual requires a blood sacrifice, for it is said that 'only death can pay for life'. So she entered the flames and turned into ashes, but I was immediately healed. I see her smile in my
dreams, the woman who gave birth to me, the woman who sang me to sleep whenever the bats came by, the woman who made living in the jungle easier for a child like me... no longer here. Everytime I think of her, it is... you are fortunate to still have your mother, because I feel that my heart was ripped out when she walked into the flames. And I just ask myself everyday why am I alive. No matter how many people answer that question, it is... hard cannot describe the pain that I carry everyday."

Visenya listened closely, seeing the hard exterior of Jaenyx cracking. "You may think I'm strong, Visenya, and in some ways I became that because of what happened in my life. However, I am fucked up and the memories of my family leaving before their time will always be with me no matter how far I go or how much time will pass. In more simple terms, I am damaged goods and I don't think anything or anyone can change that."

Visenya continued to listen, but she felt her intense gaze softening. "We may be married, but I now you told some of the most important things about myself. If you want to continue to do what you were about to do just now, do it."

Visenya knew that the scars on Jaenyx's body and his moment of vulnerability would repulse any other woman, as they would not want to be with a man with so much external and internal damage. However, she was not most women. If anything, seeing his scars and seeing him take a chance with her, admitting his true self and offering her a choice before they proceeded, made her want him more. She did not admit this to anyone, but she was also damaged. She may have looked strong and her skill with the sword may have scared many men from approaching her, but she could not deny the loneliness and anger at people treating her bad because she was different. She loved Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys, but they could not fully understand how she felt because they were mostly accepted their entire lives. And now, she finally found someone who understood what it was to be damaged, and it was her husband.

Visenya pulled him into another deep kiss, running her hands all over him and feeling his hands doing the same. Pulling away, she turned around and offered him her back. "Help me, husband?"

Visenya felt Jaenyx untie the laces in the back of her gown. He was rather quick about it, but still kept gentle. She felt his kiss on her neck and along her back as more of it was exposed to him. With a strong yank on her dress, she was suddenly bare to the world as her gown pooled down to the floor around her feet. She always had a good opinion of her body, if the words of her father, mother, and Rhaenys were anything to go on. But to see the storm of lust in Jaenyx's eyes as he gazed up and down her body filled her with glee. Looking back at him with a look of equal intensity, she unfastened his breeches and shoved them down, her breath hitching at his now nude self.

Visenya pushed him onto the bed, the flower petals spreading out as she straddled his hips and pinned him down. She leaned down to kiss him while she guided his cock to her entrance, moaning in his mouth as she felt him go deeper inside her. She felt Jaenyx's breath hitch and she leaned back up and further impaled herself on him. Her eyes were closed tightly and she bit her lip, as ecstasy flowed through her and her husband.

Wanting more, Visenya took Jaenyx's hands and put them over her breasts, happily exhaling as she felt his hands squeeze them and seeing his eyes nearly roll in pleasure. The wet slaps of skin, heavy moans, and the creaking of the bed soon filled her chambers, newlyweds lost in each other's bodies. What felt like hours had passed and Visenya could feel herself approaching the brink. Before she went over it, she pulled Jaenyx up to her, hugging him tightly and wanting to take him with her.

Then, Visenya felt Jaenyx gush inside her with a sharp inhale, pleasure spreading throughout her
body before collapsing onto him, her silver hair spread all over his chest. Pecking his neck and lips, she slid off him before snuggling against him on his right side. She smiled when Jaenyx kissed her forehead and wrapped his arms wrapped around her tightly, hearing his sigh of happiness. Minutes passed before she had the strength to lean up to look at him.

Visenya saw Jaenyx smiling, but she also saw tears forming from his eyes. "What is the matter, Jaenyx?"

Jaenyx looked to her, his smile still on his face. "That was probably the most love I got in years and I am only remembering the last time that happened. I only wish my mother was here."

Visenya put her head on his chest. "She is here, Jaenyx. She's always here. And I am sure she's happy you have found love."

"Is that what it is between us, Visenya?"

Visenya nodded. "Kessa, and I know you said that you're damaged goods, but so am I. Let's be strong together, Jae."

Visenya saw his smile grew smaller before it returned. "Jae... can't remember the last time I heard that." He pulled her closer to him. "Yes, let's be strong together, Vis."

Visenya liked the sound of her nickname on his lips. They remained that way in each other's arms as they fell into a deep sleep, their first as man and wife.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, that was quite challenging to write. As with everything in this story (first fight, first wedding), this is the first time that I wrote an intimate scene, so please bear with me if it seems... lackluster if lacking a better term. However, I will improve on everything as the story goes on.

Here, we see Jaenyx being vulnerable to Visenya, quite a leap for him even if he got closer to Visenya in the days before the ceremony. But instead of being repulsed, she loves him more since she is also damaged like him. I see Jaenyx and Visenya being misfits and it's only fitting that the misfits end up together. So hopefully, this is adequate enough to show how deeper their relationship is going as well as how their first night turned out.

On the topic of THE KING, really recommend you watch it. Also, I have this image in my head of Lord Targaryen being this kind version of Sean Harris (great actor), where he knows what's right but knows no bounds in getting what he wants. He will play a more important role in the conquest than in canon (none since he was dead at the time) and we will see him clash with Aegon, Jaenyx, and the others.

Next time, we skip forward in time to see the first stages of the conquest. Stay tuned!
Aegon III

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, but I had to really take my time with this since I promised to get Aegon's Conquest started and I wanted to do so on the right foot. As we're now entering the important parts of the story, I will need more time to write out my chapters. Probably will update at least twice a week instead of every day. What do you think?

Without further ado, here is the next chapter and the start of the Conquest Arc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

AEGON III

Aegon struck his sword hard against the shield held by Quenten Qoherys, attempting a downward slice onto his left shoulder before Qoherys got his shield up in time. He used both hands to hold the sword, allowing him greater momentum than he would get with a one-hand grip. The master-at-arms of Dragonstone held his shield true against his strikes and attempted to reach for him with a stab before Aegon regained his footing, but Aegon side-stepped before the sword struck his torso. Circling his master-at-arms for a moment, Aegon feinted to the right before he swung to the right at the side of Qoherys’ shield with both hands on his sword, not too far to touch the torso but enough to get the shield away. Qoherys had kept his grip on the shield tight, but Aegon did not need for him to lose his grip. Acting quickly, he dropped his sword and grappled Qoherys, using his larger frame against him by charging at his waist, pulling him up at his knees, and sending him on his back. He used his forearms to pin his larger opponent to the ground, pressing both against his shoulders, while angling his hands to press below his throat. Keeping his feet dug on the group, he tightened his hold.

“Yield,” Aegon looked at Qoherys in the eyes. Qoherys conceded defeat before Aegon got off him and helped him off the group. Qoherys dusted himself giving his student a smile.

“Now you are using everything you have, Lord Aegon. Besides the sword, your body is a very effective tool in subduing your enemy and there are many ways you could kill with your hands,” Quenten pointed to his forehead, neck, and ribs. “You could pound against the skull, but that’ll take a lot of force to make a small crack. Skulls are among the strongest parts of the body, so your best hope of killing a man would the neck and the areas around the ribs. With the neck, it just takes one strong punch to crush the throat or break the neck. Also, the ribs protect the vital areas of the body, including the heart and lungs. Easy to break the ribs, meaning that one bone fragment flowing in the blood would be fatal.”
Aegon stared at him, impressed. “You seem to know a lot about a man’s weak points, Quenton.”

“I would be a shit master-at-arms if I didn’t. Your weapons are not just those you could hold with your hands. A good warrior uses everything at his disposal, everything from his hands to even a rock. A lot of damage could be done when you hit a steel helm with a rock in the right places, although it will not be pretty.”

As they were talking about the many ways to fight, Aegon had to ask. “Quenton, what do you think about how my good-brother fights?”

“Jaenyx?” Quenton saw most of the practice sessions between Aegon, Jaenyx, Visenya, and Orys. “Well, his speed and agility surpasses even Visenya’s and he knows how to keep cool in a fight. Those Yi-Tish swords may not have a lot of reach compared to a longsword, but their speed when swung complements Jaenyx’s. He also seems well-versed in unarmed combat, if his kicks are any indication.”

Aegon remembered the last time they practiced without swords. Jaenyx would strike him in quick succession, his right and left arms and legs striking his sides as Aegon tried in vain to block all of them. His kicks while jumping in the air or when sweeping him off-balance were particularly nasty, the power behind them akin to when horses kick. The way he used his legs and jumped reminded Aegon more like how monkeys moved: too fast and very annoying after a while.

“But?” Aegon could tell Quenton had more to say.

“Jaenyx’s style of fighting might work against unarmored opponents and it certainly made him more flexible and robust than most men his age, even you, Aegon.” Aegon snorted, admitting that he could never be as fast as his good-brother. “However, if he fought against knights in full plate armor and used his swords in combat, he will have a hard time.”

“How so?”

“Well, one thing you and Orys have over Jaenyx is brawn. You practiced powerful strikes with your sword and hands for most of your training, which your body adjusted to and made you very capable in matches of strength. Also, you and Orys have strong punches, which are certainly more useful in a fight than kicking. As pretty as Jaenyx’s swords are, they’re mostly good at slashing and would not do well against steel plate armor. Jaenyx could probably last very long in battle due to his body being used to strenuous activity, but you and Orys are more accustomed to the knightly ways of fighting. Therefore, you know where to strike against plate armor and how to take full advantage of your sword’s long reach. Strength is at the core of a knight’s fighting style, which
you would need in Westeros. To be honest, I would not like my chances if I had learned how to fight in a fashion similar to your good-brother should I go up against the warriors throughout Westeros.”

Aegon took this all in. Jaenyx could use his hands well enough and had a decent punch, but he used his kicks more often. In the training yard, that worked because none of them had full armor on. But Quenton’s take on his style made Aegon reevaluate it.

“Couldn’t the same be said Visenya? Like Jaenyx, she’s also fast and agile in fighting.”

Quenton shook his head. “That is true, but your sister grew up accustomed to the fighting ways of Westeros. She may not have the body that is sufficient enough for her to last in a match of strength, but she closely observed how knights and those of Westeros combat each other. She then compensated by exploiting the weak areas of a man and moving faster. So her way of fighting would work well within the confines of Westerosi combating. The same cannot be said for Jaenyx.”

Aegon nodded. “I see.” He also wondered how Jaenyx might fare if he merely kicked his through enemies.

“One other thing I will say in favor of Jaenyx is that he was strength of mind. However he trained made him less likely to crack under pressure, which is what every warrior needs in battle. Maybe if he became more accustomed to the fighting ways of Westeros, he would do well.”

“I see. Thanks, Quenton.” Aegon put down his sword and left the training yard, his session done for the day.

Walking back to the castle, Aegon moved through the halls to conduct the lordly affairs that would one day be his full responsibility. As of now, he helped their lord father sift through the many pieces of parchment that had to read and signed. He was eight and ten and his father decided to entrust him with the responsibility of working with his cousin Daemon Velaryon in directing the increased ship traffic through the Blackwater Bay, much of which came because of what Dragonstone had recently become.

One year had gone by since Jaenyx came on Cloudwynd and his people. Within a week of arriving, he had married Visenya and helped unite the last two dragonlord families into one. Two weeks after that, Aegon had married Rhaenys, in a much grander fashion than his good-brother’s. Although they both agreed to marry in Valyrian fashion after witnessing what had occurred at Visenya and Jaenyx’s wedding, Rhaenys wanted their wedding to be a splendid affair and had
asked Taygor to tone down his wedding proceedings as to avoid discomfort among their more numerous guests. As expected, Taygor refused but only relented when Jaenyx asked him to do so as a favor to Rhaenys. About one hundred guests were present at the wedding between their sister and their good-brother, while close to three hundred dined at the feast after Rhaenys and Aegon exchanged their vows.

Although they lived separately, they all still lived on Dragonstone and could see each other every day. Aegon could not help but smile at how inseparable Jaenyx and Visenya became in the days after their wedding, his sister finally finding a man who could understand her and who never tried to restrict who she was.

The Valyrian houses that came with Jaenyx all lived up to their reputation, in particular the Rahitheons. Aevon Rahitheon, head of his house, turned the lands of Dragonstone they settled on into fields that yielded more than enough to feed Dragonstone’s population. One of the challenges that faced Dragonstone and made it necessary for them to import food from the lords throughout the Blackwater Bay lay in the island’s hilly and uneven terrain, particularly the areas right next to the Dragonmont, which made it difficult to plow fields in a similar fashion to farms on flat ground. However, Aevon Rahitheon said that the volcanic ash of the island made the soil incredibly fertile and all they needed was to adapt to the lack of flat grounds accordingly.

What Aegon saw next marveled him in its simplicity. Instead of making the grounds of Dragonstone flatter for plowing, Aevon had his people dig into the hilly and uneven terrain and cut them into a series of succeeding platforms that resembled stairs. Each platform was called a lynchet, and Aegon learned that farming on lynchets was quite common back during the Freehold since the Fourteen Flames precluded farming on flat ground and thus making it necessary for early Valyria to compensate for their initial geographical limitations.

Although a sight to behold, a major obstacle had to overcome before the new lynchets could yield a harvest. Dragonstone had no sufficient source of drinking water that could be used to grow their crops and they were surrounded by the sea. However, Aegon saw the Rahitheons put their partial ancestry from Rhoynish water wizards to use in solving their water problem. Flooding the fields with seawater, the ritual they used involved a song, where they would offer their voice to the seawater in return for an amount of it becoming drinkable. After that, the water had become drinkable and allowed for them to plant their first crops on Dragonstone. But like all magic, water magic came at a price. Lacking the pure blood carried by the Rhoynish princes and princesses of old and away from the waters of the Rhoyne, the rituals would leave Aevor and his brood without their voices for at least a week. Fortunately, they recovered just soon enough to do the rituals again and being making the most out of the remaining years of summer.

Although unable to talk, Aevor Rahitheon was able to construct his first forge to making his first batch of Valyrian steel since they left the Basilisk Isles. Aegon knew that dragonfire was required to make Valyrian steel, which their dragons provided. However, what he did not know was that a drop of dragonblood, some of which were sealed in a vial by the Rahitheons, was also needed before the metal got into the mold. Taygor Leniar admitted that he did not know the full properties
of dragon’s blood since they could use one drop only once and there were too few amounts of it to fully explore what dragon’s blood could do. However, it was undeniable that a drop of their blood into Valyrian steel contained the essence of fire magic, which was then passed into the steel once the drop mixed into the molten metal. That, and dragonflame, both of which they now held exclusively.

Dragonstone’s first batch of fourteen Valyrian steel swords were completed within two weeks, with two being sold in Oldtown for an enormous sum and another two getting similar results in Pentos. Soon, people of high repute made their way to Dragonstone to purchase a Valyrian steel tool, but they had to turn away some potential patrons since they could not realistically hope to meet every demand. Still, the returns made from the Valyrian steel forging enriched Dragonstone, with a portion going towards the House Targaryen for their hosting of the forges.

One year passed by in which Dragonstone became a center for Valyrian steel forging and became self-sufficient in its agricultural needs. Traffic increased in the Blackwater Bay, making the island’s position even more important. Commissions for new Valyrian steel swords, including one from the King of the Rock himself, filled the rookery alongside the usual business of Dragonstone’s lords. Aegon’s Velaryon cousins appeared more often around Dragonstone’s waters in their ships to protect the island from unwelcome visitors, working alongside the ships provided by Jaenyx.

Besides seeing House Rahitheon work their wonders and House Leniar breathing new life to Dragonstone with their knowledge of blood healing, Aegon got glimpses of the martial prowess of House Tarareon, led by their head Ragaemor Tarareon. They did not have the horses that they built their reputation on, but Aegon was astonished by their skill with the bow, pike, and javelin. A good archer could expect to shoot ten to twelve arrows at every interval, while the Tarareons could pull off twenty at least. With increased speed came with decreased accuracy, but their point was not to shoot to kill at a distance. With their horses, they would ride close to the enemy line and inflict as much damage as possible while provoking enemy cavalry and infantry to give chase. The chase would last for several days, long enough for the enemy to exhaust themselves before the Tarareon cavalry would turn around and attack while their spear infantry would charge from hidden positions on the sides. This tactic was how the Tarareons held back the Rhoynar in their many wars against Valyria, as the Tarareons would draw out the numerically-superior Rhoynish armies from their positions and destroy their formations on more favorable ground. This strategy denied the Rhoynar the strategic initiative, delaying them long enough for Valyria to assemble their dragons and bring enough reinforcements to push the enemy back and eventually subjugate them. Aegon had learned from his studies with Quenton that executing a successful defensive strategy was far more difficult than those related to the offensive, and the Tarareons had perfected their abilities in mobile defense over centuries. Wonder how they might fare against knights charging at them in plate armor?

All in all, a good year had passed for Dragonstone. They no longer had to worry about food, they were becoming wealthier with the coin made from selling Valyrian steel, and they were no longer uneasy by how many antagonistic houses surrounded them throughout the Blackwater Bay.
Aegon arrived at his father’s door and knocked. “Come in!” he heard a heartily shout. I’ve been hearing more of that as of late.

Entering the solar and looking upon their father, Aegon remained astonished at the changes the Lord of Dragonstone underwent over the last five years. Before Jaenyx came, their father had been in poor health and Maester Harrion predicted before returning to the Citadel that he would not live to see fifty name days due to an affliction affecting his heart from the abnormal rate he felt on their father's neck. Now, here he was looking more lively than ever and in better health. Aegon suspected the rings that Jaenyx gave to their father had a part to play in restoring his health, but then wished he never asked. Jaenyx explained that his grandfather, Baesellar Belaerys of the Basilisk Isles, was too afraid of death and had coerced Taygor's grandfather to perform a blood ritual to extend his life. He then bled out Jaenyx's grandmother on her deathbed and used her blood and two drops of Cloudwynd's blood to coat the rubies on his rings, with the lifeblood of both his grandmother and Cloudwynd keeping him alive. He then lived out the rest of his wretched life, regretting his actions too late and forever damaging his relationship with his son, Jaenyx's father, before it all became too much for him and took off his rings. Aegon's first instinct was to take the rings off their father, not wanting him to live on such cursed trinkets. However, Jaenyx reassured him that unlike with his grandfather Baesellar, the full effects of the blood magic within the rings were reduced when someone not carrying Belaerys blood wore them. Thus, their father's life was not as tied to the rings as his grandfather. As Lord Targaryen had dragonblood within him, the rings' blood magic remained somewhat and allowed him to restore his health.

“Ah, Egg, glad you could make it,” their father smiled. “We have much to do today.”

“Of course, father.” Aegon sat down across, looking through pieces of parchment.

“First order of business,” their father became serious. “Report from Daemon’s patrol in the waters near the Cracklaw Point. He says that there is increased activity of Ironborn there, but is confident that the Celtigars can keep them in check for now.”

“Should we get cousin Daemon to send more ships to that area?”

“No, we cannot leave any of the waters bereft of one Velaryon vessel. We could have Maerys Tarareon use her ships to reinforce the northern waters if need be. They may not be built for war, but they could prevent the Ironborn from getting audacious on numbers alone.”

Aegon nodded, but was concerned about involving Maerys Tarareon in any sea activity alongside Daemon. The sister of Ragaemor Tarareon, she was more foul-mouthed than Daemon and even more uncompromising as a sea captain. Anyone in her crews that got out of line were beaten senselessly, stripped, and left hanging on her ship’s masts for days. Daemon may have had his moments where he needed to instill discipline among his crews, but never to that degree. Aegon
suspected that sailing across thousands of miles of sea without a strong possibility of reaching their destination warranted a personality that did not countenance failure of any kind. Maerys and Daemon frequently clashed over their methods at sea, so Jaenyx and Aegon resolved to keep them as far apart as possible.

“What of news from the rest of the Blackwater Bay?” Aegon asked.

“From what I can read, same old news. The usual unrest from Black Harren’s vanity project from the Rosbys, Darklyns, and other lords. Been thirty-one years since he went off on building that castle, ‘the biggest fortress Westeros will ever see’ as he boasted. Hopefully, he doesn’t break enough backs and put more in chains lest he dine alone in that massive hall he’s about to complete.”

Everyone in Westeros were very aware of the notoriety of Harren Hoare, otherwise known as Harren the Black. An Ironborn, his ancestors had seized the Riverlands from Storm King Arrec Dur randon and large-scale skirmishes between the Stormlanders and Ironborn were an everyday occurrence for those living in the Blackwater Bay. Upon becoming King of the Isles and the Rivers, Harren set about building a fortress that he boasted would be the biggest Westeros has ever seen, with a great hall to have thirty-five hearths. No one was very surprised at the amount of unrest in the Riverlands, as Harren the Black drained the region of its people and resources for his castle. Having that castle, which Harren would name Harrenhal, was his obsession for over thirty years and he was far from completed.

“What of news from King Argilac?”

Their father shrugged as he looked through more parchment. “Nothing that is new. He has one healthy child to his name, but no one in the Stormlands would follow a woman as a ruler. Pity, I hear that Princess Argella is as fierce as she is beautiful, just like her father in his better days. As expected, his hold on his kingdom is slipping.”

Aegon sighed. The strength of a ruler came from the strengths that a ruler brings to the table, not on whether he is a man or woman. So tiring. He could never imagine putting Rhaenys to the sidelines when he became Lord of Dragonstone and he saw how Jaenyx included Visenya in all of his decisions. It made him wonder whether there will be a time when one’s capabilities determined their fitness to rule rather than their sex.

Aegon looked through more of the parchment. There were bills of sales from each new Valyrian steel sword, shipments of produce coming to and from the island, minor disputes between Dragonstone’s original and new residents, and other duties that helped ensure Dragonstone was successfully administered. If only Orys was here to help.
Aegon’s brother Orys was currently in Claw Isle to assist the Celtigars on a minor issue and he was expected to return before the day was out. Orys was not as taken to lordly duties like Aegon, preferring to train with the Valyrian steel axe gifted to him by Jaenyx and chase women. Aegon was surprised that he didn’t father any bastards like their father with Orys given how many women he pursued. While Aegon and Orys were seen as the brawn in the family, Aegon inherited some of their father’s intelligence while Orys inherited the philanderer tendencies that so afflicted their father in his younger days.

They heard a knock. “Come in,” their father called out.

“Milord,” the servant ran up to their table, with a nervous look on his face. “Something has happened.”

“What is it?” Their father gave his full attention upon seeing the urgency in the servant’s face.

“A ship is nearing Dragonstone’s docks, with the banners belonging to House Hoare.”

Aegon and their father stood up, shock evident. “We better get to the docks quickly, father.”

“I’ll go first. Get Jaenyx, Vis, Rhae, and your mother down to the docks. We need to show a united front with whoever from House Hoare is coming.”

“Of course,” Aegon ran out the door. He knew that it was a cause for worry when an Ironborn came near someone’s home, and they were coming here! He got their mother out of her chambers and Rhaenys out of theirs before running off to the keep where Jaenyx and Visenya lived. It was on the northwest corner of Dragonstone but fortunately not far from the castle.

Aegon ran as fast as he could and soon saw the keep. Unlike Dragonstone looking like a nest of dragons, their keep looked like two dragons fighting for dominance over a stone pole. Like the castle, their keep was made of black stones. It was previously used by their grandfather Lord Daemion Targaryen in his daily fishing and hunting excursions throughout the Blackwater Bay.

Aegon knocked frantically at the door. “Vis, Jae, open up! It’s urgent!”
A servant, Lehna if Aegon remembered correctly, opened the door. “Lord Aegon. What brings you here?”

“Never mind that,” Aegon did not have time for pleasantries now. “Where’s my good-brother and sister?”

Before she could answer, they heard two dragon roars. Turning around and looking up, Aegon saw Vhagar and Cloudwynd descend from the sky. Landing near the keep, both dragons lowered themselves for their riders to slide down. Jaenyx and Visenya gave each other a deep kiss before they noticed Aegon in front of them.

“Egg! What are you doing here?” Visenya walked up to him before giving him a hug.

Aegon returned the hug. “Father said to get both of you to the docks. We have an Ironborn ship coming towards us, carrying the banners of House Hoare.”

Visenya’s eyes widened, as did Jaenyx’s. He became familiar with the intricate politics of Westeros, especially with the reputation of Harren the Black. “Why would an Ironborn come here?” In the past year, Jaenyx learned how to speak the common tongue and could switch comfortably between High Valyrian and the common tongue, though he still preferred the former whenever talking with family and especially Visenya.

“That’s what we’re going to find out. Father wants to have all of us together as a show of strength, so let’s hurry down there.”

They all ran down to the town at the base of the Dragonmont, with the docks outstretched towards the sea. Their father called together fifty of their sworn swords while sending a message to Orys to return to Dragonstone with haste. Aegon and Visenya did not have time to get either Blackfyre, the greatsword Flame Screecher that Jaenyx gifted to him, or Dark Sister, but they felt confident in making do with their regular swords. Plus, they all knew how to fight with their bare hands and had dragons to help. The ironborn reavers will not know what hit them should they decide to attack them.

They all saw an ironborn longship get closer to the docks, the banner of House Hoare flying high in the sky. There was only one ship, which was unusual since ironborn reaver moved in packs like wolves. Aegon counted about sixty men aboard, all armed with axes and some carrying bows. Dragonstone’s own archers readied to shoot, with their bows drawn. As the ship came closer, Aegon could see one man badly beaten and another tied up. The beaten man looked like one of their own, his silver hair ruffled up and one of his purple eyes swollen from what was obviously a
blunt strike to his head. *What in the hells is going on here?*

The ship docked, the crew throwing out their ropes to tie their ship with, while a small group led by a tall, imposing man escorted the badly-injured Valyrian and their prisoner. Aegon looked at the man leading them. Axes hanging off his sides, he had trimmed black hair, a dark beard, and blue eyes while wearing a leather breastplate and a loose black cloak. But there was something about his eyes that made Aegon more uneasy. Unlike other ironborn reaver who were all too eager to move upon their prey, he scanned his surroundings to figure how best to take them down. This man was acting too… patiently. *Who is this?*

The man outstretched his arms away from his axes to signal his peaceful intentions. “Which one of you is the Lord of Dragonstone?” the man asked, offering a small smile to put them at rest, which didn’t.

“That will be me,” their father stepped forward as he stood straight. “I am Aerion Targaryen, Lord of Dragonstone. And you are?”

“Oh yes. How rude of me,” the man put his hands down but made sure to have them off his axes. “I am Darvin Hoare, third son of King Harren Hoare and Prince of the Isles and Rivers. I must apologize, my lord, of my unexpected arrival at your home, but there is an urgent matter that must be resolved before… there are serious misunderstandings between our people.”

Their father narrowed his eyes. “What sort of misunderstandings are we referring to?”

Darvin Hoare gestured for his men to bring forward the Valyrian man and the bound ironborn. “Is this one of your men, my lord?” he pointed to the Valyrian.

Aegon turned to see Jaenyx’s eyes darken. “*Vaeron?”* The Valyrian nodded, but grimaced in pain while he did.

“You know him?” their father asked.

“*Vaeron Rahitheon. He’s one of Aevon’s nephews. He was supposed to deliver a few Valyrian steel swords to be sold on the market at Lannisport, but the buyers said that he never showed up and he was gone for weeks. Now I know why.”* He turned to look at Darvin Hoare straight in the eyes, his piercing gaze staring back at Hoare’s predatory one. “Did you people rob him and kidnap him? Is that why he looks like that?” he spat accusingly while his common tongue had a distinct Valyrian
“And who are you?” Darvin Hoare looked incredulously at Jaenyx.

Aegon fought the urge to decapitate him for addressing his good-brother with disrespect. However, their father spoke first. “This is my good-son, Lord Jaenyx Belaerys of the Basilisk Isles, and the liege lord of the man your people assaulted. You will address him with respect.”

Darvin Hoare took another look at Jaenyx. “My apologies, Lord Belaerys, I meant no disrespect.” Jaenyx was unconvinced of his sincerity, as was Aegon, Visenya, Rhaenys, and their father and mother. “And as you are his liege lord, I must extend my apologies for what my men did to yours. It is one of the reasons I have come to your shores this day.”

“What do you mean?” their father queried.

“My man, the one who is tied up,” Darvin Hoare tugged on the ropes binding the man. “He committed an unprovoked attack on yours, and such actions can lead to open conflict between our houses. To prevent that from happening, I offer you the satisfaction on what is to be done with him as well as return the items that he stole from yours.” Hoare signalled for his men to bring the tied men forward as well as three Valyrian steel longswords wrapped in a bundle, which he gave to the Valyrian. “You can go now,” he said to him, who walked over to his lords while Jaenyx embraced him before telling him to go back to his uncle. “Lord Belaerys, as it was your man that was wronged, what do you wish to be done with the perpetrator?”

Aegon watched as Jaenyx wordlessly walked over to the bound ironborn and pulled him towards the middle between the groups. He then saw Jaenyx draw his Yi-Tish sword, which prompted the other ironborn to grab for their axes, before he sliced through his neck. The head rolled down off the dock into the sea while the body stood there, as if not realizing that it was dead while blood oozed out of the severed vessels of the exposed neck. After a few seconds of annoying standing there, the body collapsed. Jaenyx pulled out a rag and wiped off the blood from his blade before sheathing it and walking back to his family.

Aegon blinked, not expecting Jaenyx’s frigidity while taking a man’s life, even if the man was an ironborn. Rhaenys also looked surprised while Visenya continued to stare at Hoare, as if expecting nothing less to be done by her husband. Darvin did not hide his own shock, as Jaenyx’s actions happened much too quickly for him to process them.

“That’s a nice blade you got there, Lord Belaerys,” Hoare recovered from his shock. “Where did you get it?”
“That’s not really your concern, Prince Hoare,” Jaenx answered. “You offered satisfaction for what your man did and I now have it. But that is not really the only reason why you’re here, yes?”

Hoare kept his small smile on his face. “I admit that I have wanted to come here for some months, but considering my father’s reputation, I believed that I would not have gotten a favorable reception. I thought that offering you justice was a good way to ease your worries so that we could discuss some business.”

Their father spoke up. “Does your father know you’re here, Prince Darvin?”

“I am here of my own accord, Lord Targaryen. The men that came with me are loyal, which is why I brought them here.”

Their father crossed his arms. “And why should I treat with you, Prince Darvin? Considering that it was your man who assaulted one of my good-son’s men, I have half a mind to simply tell you to turn around and never come back, as you clearly cannot control everyone under your command.”

Hoare’s smile disappeared at their father’s biting remark, but kept calm. “I believe that what I have to offer you, Lord Targaryen, would be of great benefit to both your family and myself. Although, I would prefer if we discussed in more detail in your solar.”

Their father contemplated the situation, before nodding. “All right. You can say your piece, but with all of my family present. You leave your men here at the dock. Should you or your men try anything, we will have no qualms about killing you and sending your head back to your father while feeding what’s left to our dragons, war be damned. Do you understand, Prince Darvin?”

Hoare nodded. “Fair enough. Most in the Blackwater Bay have seen your dragons and although I am unsure of their capabilities, I am not stupid enough to harm you or your kin in your home.”

Aegon and the others followed their father through the hallways of Dragonstone, with Jaenx, Visenya, and Quenton behind Hoare. Looking back at Prince Darvin, he knew that the prince was looking through the hallways and the castle like a shadowcat hunting its prey. He was too silent, too calm compared to other ironborn that he came across. Not only that, there was something about Prince Darvin that felt wrong to Aegon and he was pretty sure that his father and the others sensed it. There was a… slipperiness that was exuding from his being, which Aegon made out from how easily he gave up his man. An ironborn would never be punished for stealing, no less offer one wronged by a reaver satisfaction. What is he up to?
Reaching the solar, their father and mother sat at the center of one side of the table, with Aegon and Rhaenys sitting at their father’s right, while Jaenyx and Visenya sat on the left. Prince Darvin sat on the other side, alone.

“All right, Prince Darvin. What do you want to discuss?” their father did not try to hide his impatience in having the ironborn prince leave the castle soon.

“I understand that Dragonstone has became a center of Valyrian steel production. Word travels fast around Westeros, ever since your people put those on the market in Oldtown.”

“And what is your interest in all of this, Prince Darvin?” Jaenyx asked, also impatient.

“Well, I don’t know how you forge Valyrian steel and nor am I interested. But, as your family now controls the only place that can produce it, I believe that we can come to an understanding regarding future production.”

“And what kind of understanding do you seek?” Aegon wanted the ironborn to get to his point.

“However you forge Valyrian steel, I can guess you need steel first and if you hope to expand your client base, you need more of it. And I can help you with that.”

“Do you mean that you’ll provide the iron ores needed to increase our steel capacity?” their father had already figured the direction of Prince Darvin’s words.

“Precisely. I give you exclusive access to our iron ores, shipped directly from the Iron Islands, without anyone in the middle. You will have access to quality iron at very reasonable rates. In return——”

“You get to line your pockets with a cut from all future sales of Valyrian steel weapons? Is that right?” Jaenyx also figured out his intentions.

Prince Darvin laughed nervously. “Well, you don’t make it seem too flattering, but you will be able to increase your profits and forging capacities from this.”
His patience extinguished, their father rubbed his face and groaned, not bothering to hide how unimpressed he was. Aegon and the others also felt that, but were more restrained about it. “If we needed to get more iron, we would have done the talking, not the other way around. Plus, more Valyrian steel swords leads to more unwanted attention, the attention that this family is receiving at this moment.”

Prince Darvin did a double take. “My lord?” But he suppressed his surprise at his offer being spurned.

“We appreciate you offering my man justice for him being assaulted and kidnapped, but that does not hide the fact that you failed to stop that in the first place,” Jaenyx spoke up. “Of course, from what I learned about your people, thievery and assault are unfortunately highly-regarded for sea rats.”

They all saw Prince Darvin simmer. “I came in good faith and returned what was stolen, Lord Belaerys, and you repay me with insults?”

“You yourself stated that you wanted to speak to us for months, and you merely used my man’s predicament as an excuse to come here. So, what good faith are we referring to?” Jaenyx retorted.

“In addition,” their father stepped in. “Your offer does not hold a lot of weight since your father doesn’t know about it. In other words, we cannot trust your word, ‘in good faith.’”

“You best be careful, my lord,” Prince Darvin pointed a finger at him. “You would not want a severe misunderstanding to result from this meeting.”

“Are you threatening us, ironborn?” Visenya stood up, tempted to move across the table and start pounding on Hoare’s head.

“ENOUGH!” their father slapped his hand on the table while also standing up. “We are earning enough coin from our current forging capacity and we have no reason to increase our profits. Also, you came here without first getting your father’s blessing, meaning that there is no guarantee you’ll keep your end of the bargain. However, you made an unwise decision to issue threats in our home!”

“I never said such—”
“You implied,” their father emphasizing the last word. “That’s enough of a threat. Therefore, there is nothing more to discuss between us. Guard!” Two sworn swords entered the solar. “Escort Prince Hoare back to his boat. We’re done here.”

Prince Darvin shook his head and scoffed. “You will regret this, Targaryen. I will show you why you never cross a Prince of House Hoare, no less an ironborn.” The swords moved close to his sides. “I can get there myself, if you don’t mind.” He left the solar in a huff.

After Hoare left, their father turned to Aegon. “Get word to Daemon. Tell him to increase patrols in the north and west of the island.” He turned to Jaenyx. “Could you spare your man Tarareon and his sister in protecting both Driftmark and Claw Isle?”

“Of course, good-father,” Jaenyx nodded. “I would not expect Hoare to let our rejection of his offer go unanswered.”

“Kirimvose,” their father replied.

“You really expect Darvin Hoare to do something as rash as attacking us?” their mother asked, slightly worried.

“If there is anything to be said about ironborn in general, it is that they usually respond to slights with savagery. He may not have his father’s backing right now, but he could be in command of more men and ships than he brought here. If he’s anything like his father, he would bring harm to us because of what we did.”

“Father, should we prepare the dragons?” Rhaenys asked. “They will be of great help in making Darvin Hoare think twice before attacking us.”

“Most definitely, but we wouldn’t want to show our hand yet,” Visenya responded. “Everyone in Westeros believe our dragons to be rumors and there’s power in keeping secret their capabilities until the right moment.”

“Agreed,” their father answered. “The continent only sees us possessing three thousand men and fewer than a hundred ships, half of which were not built for war. Let them continue to think that, as overconfidence breeds severe mistakes.”
The door opened, with Orys coming in. Jaenyx just shook his hand, their relationship still tense, while everyone else hugged him. Everyone except their mother, who nodded at him.

“I saw the ironborn prince leave the docks as I arrived,” Orys said. “I trust that he didn’t get what he came for.”

“Most definitely not,” their father affirmed. “I smelled his desire from miles away. All the same, the lot of them.”

“Shouldn’t we put our people more on alert?” Orys inquired.

“Already done, brother,” Aegon replied. “We will have cousin Daemon be more vigilant in the north and west while Jaenyx will provide his Tarareon men and female captain. Along with our dragons, we should be ready.”

Orys nodded. “Good, good. We may need to hold off thousands of them, considering who the prince’s father is.”

“Hopefully, it won’t come to that,” their father spoke. “Black Harren will not do anything until his vanity project is completed, which is still a long time from now. More importantly, it is no secret that the riverlords loathe him, though that word is not sufficient enough to describe their feelings towards him. So he won’t risk pulling his troops from the riverlands to support his unruly son lest he invite revolt at the first chance.”

“Agreed,” Orys responded.

They heard a knock at the door, with their father beckoning the servant to enter. “Milord, we have a message from Storm’s End, specifically written by King Argilac himself.”

Surprise filled the room. “A message? From the Arrogant king himself?” Everyone save the stormlords referred to him by that title, as they all knew of his decreasing grip on the reality of his situation. He still fashioned himself as a great warrior, a reputation well-earned from repelling the Dornish as a boy and killing King Garse Gardener at Summerfield, but conveniently ignored his increasingly loose skin and the numbers of gray hair replacing his black hair. More importantly, he failed to produce a male heir and nobody in Westeros would follow a woman as ruler. Aegon internally sighed at that last one. If only Argella Durrandon was born a dragon, then she would
never experience disdain for being a capable woman like Rhae and Vis.

Their father snatched the message before dismissing the servant. He read through it at least four times, dismay increasing each time, before passing the message to Aegon. “Read it out loud.”

Aegon gazed at the message, slowly understanding why their father was so perturbed. “‘To Lord Aerion Targaryen of Dragonstone, I have come across information from my agents in the riverlands that would no doubt distress you. Three weeks ago, two bannerman of Prince Darvin Hoare set upon and assaulted one of your men while transporting items to be sold at Lannisport. One was killed in the attempt while the other succeeded. I have reason to believe that Prince Darvin arranged for your man to be robbed and kidnapped in order to force discussion of future dealings between you, which could only mean that his father had knowledge of such an attack on your people. As I have battled against Black Harren for years now, it would seem we have common cause against the ironborn. Therefore, I propose an alliance to be made between Storm’s End and Dragonstone, which would be sealed with the union between my maiden daughter Princess Argella and your son Lord Aegon Targaryen.’” He hesitated to read on after that offer while also catching Rhaenys’ hitched breath. “‘After we triumph against Black Harren, you shall have claim on all lands from south of the Blackwater Bay to the Bay of Crabs east of Saltpans. I beseech you to consider my offer, lest we both perish. Signed, Argillac of House Durrandon, First of His Name, Lord of Storm’s End, Storm King.’”

Silence filled the solar, Argilac’s offer hitting them colder than ice.

“How did he know that Jaenyx’s man was assaulted?” Orys broke the silence.

“He revealed it in his letter, but that’s not the important part. The timing between Prince Hoare’s arrival today and Argilac’s letter is just too much of a… coincidence.” Aerion paced back and forth in thought.

“Do you mean to say that Darvin Hoare and Argilac the Arrogant are working together?” Aegon pondered.

“No, no. Argilac will never ally with an ironborn, and the same could be said with our ironborn prince. The circumstances seem too… fortuitous.”

“Are you referring to the delay in Argilac informing us of what happened to Jae’s man?” Visenya asked.
“That’s what is bothersome about this. He had a rough idea on when the incident occurred, but chose to inform us now, after our ironborn prince came. Possibly, he’s concluded that we’re under threat from the ironborn and sees us as an ally.”

“He might see us as weak because we seemingly let the ironborn attack our people with impunity and would see us as desperate for protection.”

“We cannot accept the Arrogant king’s offer, as I have no need of a second wife and there is no reason to believe that his offer of lands is genuine,” Aegon declared.

“You can’t possibly mean that he’ll attack us,” Rhaenys contended.

“Hopefully not, Rhae. But he believes that we are weak because we couldn’t protect one of our own from being assaulted.”

“What do you suggest we do, father?” Aegon asked.

“A servant burst in to solar, the second time they were so interrupted. But their father saw the worry on the servant’s face and ignored this breach of etiquette. “What is it?”

“Milord, one of the Rahitheon men sent to sell Valyrian steel weapons at Oldtown disappeared at the Wendwater. He was supposed to meet up with a boatman at the Grassy Vale, but he never showed up.”

Their father rubbed his face, as did Aegon, Rhaenys, Orys, and their mother from enough worries and shocks today. Jaenyx and Visenya, however, were livid. From what they knew about the letter, it was very possible that the Arrogant king either knew about the Rahitheon man going missing or was involved in it to force their hand. What did we just get into?
Lot to cover in this chapter, but needed to kick things off on the right foot. Plus, a lot to cover since one year passed and time jumps in fanfiction are risky moves. To clarify, Darvin Hoare and the Storm King are not working together, but rather the kidnapping became an opportunity that both seized to take advantage of the dragons. It will not end well for them, for woe be to those who try to manipulate the dragonlords.

Regarding the magic, had to take more liberties with Valyrian magic and much more with Rhoynish magic. As I said, I'm only working on what has been released. Singing in water magic was done by the Rhoynish princes with pure blood and near the waters of the Rhoyne, so it would makes sense that it would take much more effort for the Rahitheons to accomplish even a part of their feats, and they lost their voices temporarily in the process. Hopefully, that works for all of you.

The Tarareons will kick ass during the Conquest. So, pay attention to them.

Longclaw 1-6 and osterreicher97 have helped me considerably in planning out the start and the overall arc. Thanks very much and I will look forward to more conversations for this story. I have also posted this story on Fanfiction, so please follow me there.

Next, we will see the situation further develop from Jaenyx's POV.
Jaenyx III

Chapter Notes

Will try to stick with my update schedule of at least twice a week, but all of you deserve a good read of the Conquest.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JAENYX III

Jaenyx was locked in a passionate kiss with Visenya at her chambers in Dragonstone's castle. The ironborn prince and the Arrogant king's letter both did much to make their family anxious. While they could rely on their dragons to protect them, there were still too many unknowns lurking around the island. Lord Targaryen had graciously invited his daughter and good-son to stay the night at the castle, allowing them to use Visenya's old chambers even though it was still hers since no one else slept in them. They would reconvene later that night after evening sup to further discuss their course of action regarding the ironborn prince, the Arrogant king at Storm's End, and the missing Rahitheon man. For Jaenyx, he intended to take care of a few pieces of business before the meeting after evening sup. Him being lost in his wife's body was one of them.

Their union lasted one year and their bond became unbreakable during that time. Jaenyx's revealing of how his mother died prompted Visenya to share her own secrets, some of which were related to her study of blood rituals. The biggest she shared was when she killed her first man after a dispute gone wrong while visiting the Arbor as a guest of House Redwyne. The man, a knight sworn to House Redwyne, looked at her inappropriately and he got angry when she actually confronted him about it. The knight was not pleased that a woman talked back to him, so he moved to paw at her intimate places. Before he touched her, Visenya pulled out her dagger and stabbed through the knight's lower jaw, watching him choke on his blood before she had to flee the area. Although that man was her first kill, she did not puke nor think twice like those who took a life. Instead, she felt gratified from spilling the blood of a man who tried to have his way with her. Visenya said that Lord Redwyne was very displeased at her conduct, but only told her to leave when even he couldn't deny what the knight tried to do.

Jaenyx had only been with a woman once, and that time involved too much sadness and drink for it to be a clear memory. He had never considered himself a sweet talker with the ladies, as his brother Gaerys or "Gary" was exactly that for the ladies and better suited to negotiating with other people. Sometimes he wondered what would have happened had Gary lived instead of him, as Jaenyx knew firsthand the burdens that came with being a leader and there were times when he wanted to simply pass the reins to someone more interested. Gary might have gotten more from Lord Targaryen if he had led his people to Dragonstone.

*Remember, do not dwell on what is not here anymore. Only thing that is within your power is moving forward, without worrying about the ghosts of the past,* were Master Haru's words. He could not properly mourn for his parents and brother since assuming the responsibilities as a leader, but Jaenyx knew that there were more important things at the present. And right now, he was in the loving embrace of an incredible woman, one who could take care of herself and one who entrusted her life in his hands while he entrusted his into hers.
Falling onto the bed, the one where they spent their first night as man and wife, Jaenyx felt his arms pinned above his head while Visenya gave him a rather forceful kiss. Tongues fighting for dominance, Jaenyx winced as he felt her bite his lower lip. She kissed down from his lips to necks, giving more bites along the way. Not willing to let her have all the fun, Jaenyx rolled her onto the bed and kissed her all the way down to her bosom. Satisfied with how she moaned when he put his lips on her cleavage, he leaned up and took off his tunic, exposing his chest to her lustful eyes. She reached up and ran her hands along his well-defined abdominals before pulling his face down for another kiss. While their mouths were on each other, Jaenyx hiked up her dress and tore away her underclothes, his fingers penetrating her entrance as she let out a loud gasp.

"Oh my gods, Jae! Please don't stop!" he heard her plea.

"Why would I, Vis, when I can feel you getting wetter?" Jaenyx pushed his fingers harder against the sides of her clit, the crescendoing of her moans spurring him further. Remembering something from the last time he'd been with a woman, he pulled his fingers out, moved further down the bed, and placed his head between her legs. His tongue licking the sides of her entrance earned him even louder moans from Visenya, prompting him to push further into her.

Before he could push his tongue more into her, Jaenyx felt Visenya lean up, grab him by his underarms, and pull him up to her face. Purple eyes locking with each other, Visenya undid his breeches and wrapped her legs around his hips. "Get inside me now!" she ordered. He didn't need her command as he placed a strong kiss on her lips and slid inside her.

Jaenyx slammed into her at a fiery pace, the noise of their hips smacking together filling the chambers along with their intense wails of pleasure. Visenya clawed at her husband's back, her nails scratching all over and a few whines of pain escaping Jaenyx's mouth while still locked in their kiss. Instead of easing off his back, he felt his wife dig deeper, pleased that her husband was allowing his feelings to be released in their bed in contrast to his normally icy and restrained demeanor. Jaenyx did not know if he should be worried that she took pleasure in putting him in a little bit of pain as they coupled, but she told him that it was a small price to pay if it willed him into being more expressive with her and not be so consumed with his duties as a leader.

Jaenyx learned that Visenya liked their lovemaking to have adventure and at least some pain, which she said was how real pleasure was obtained. The one time where he tried to be gentle with her the night after their wedding night, she gave him a right hook to the jaw and got him in a headlock while strongly grasping his cock. Seeing her smile at his pain startled him, but he then fought back with an equal intensity as he pinned her down. He would either pin her down or she would, but she expected both of them to give all they got. It was a process that felt… refreshing to Jaenyx, as it served as proof that nobody fucked with his wife, in the metaphorical sense. They either committed fully, or they were denied Visenya's fidelity. Jaenyx's acquiescence to his wife's wishes earned him the latter, in full.

Noticing that Visenya still had her dress on, Jaenyx ripped the top of her dress, exposing her breasts and bare torso to his ravenous mouth. He latched onto her right nipple as he thrusted harder into her.

"Jae…" he heard Visenya moan. Moving onto her left nipple, he left one of her hands grab his silver hair, pulling on them as they both reached their climax. "Fuck, Jae!" was her final shout before she felt Jaenyx spill into her. Jaenyx felt his breath hold and his body paralyzed as waves of pleasure passed through both of them. A sharp exhale left both of them as Jaenyx fell on her and both were left to catch their breath.

Her ruined dress still draping her nude form, Jaenyx ran his hand against Visenya's flat and
muscled belly, her years spent training in combat sculpting into the perfect warrior goddess. The skin on her arms and legs tightened around her lean but powerful muscles while her magnificently-defined abdominals and her blissfully-proportioned breasts would make any man drool in lust over her. It certainly did for Jaenyx, a fact that Visenya exploited constantly to make him do her bidding.

"Daijoubu desu ka?" Visenya asked with slight concern while using a little bit of the nihongo he taught her. Even though she liked putting Jaenyx in a little pain to make their lovemaking more fulfilling, she was thoughtful enough to ask afterwards.

"Daijoubu," Jaenyx responded, smiling at her concern after their lovemaking. He turned her towards him and gave her a deep kiss. "Getting better every time, Vis."

"I think that's the point of making love," Visenya rolled her eyes. "First time was great, but everytime should be better lest we start thinking we picked the wrong person."

"Not sure if we had a choice at the first time," Jaenyx pointed out. He got a playful slap to his chest.

"Admit it. You wanted to ride me the moment you saw me," she snarked.

"Only after I took off your dress." Technically true, even though Jaenyx did see her as a beautiful specimen before their wedding.

"Fuck you." Jaenyx found it amusing to see her swear at him, one thing that she got her Velaryon mother. "Still, at least you're not your unapproachable self when we're in our bed. You know just how to please me." She twirled her fingers around his pecs.

Jaenyx shrugged. "Only a dragon can please a dragon. And this is just me fulfilling my promise to make you mine and mine alone."

Jaenyx saw Visenya gaze at him lovingly, pulling into a kiss before she rolled him onto his back. She straddled his cock while she pulled down her ripped dress, the fabric falling off her shoulders and pooling around her waist to expose her bare form to her husband. "Just as I am yours, you are mine. You're not the only one who gets to rule our bed."

Jaenyx stared at the ceiling, running his hand along his wife's naked body as she slept. He didn't dare think about other matters as they engaged in their lovemaking, as Visenya would know instantly and would kneel him in the balls for being distracted. Jaenyx had yet to learn how to separate the handling of his exterior life from his personal life, but Visenya gave him a good start. After four times of writhing in pain from being kneed and allowing her to take full control while he still recovered, he became fully concentrated in their lovemaking and then cursed himself for even being slightly inattentive to his wife.

As Visenya lay snuggled against his side as she dozed off from exhaustion, something lingered in Jaenyx's mind. He could accept that Vaeron's kidnapping by the ironborn could've been a coincidence, an instance of bad luck in being robbed and assaulted by Hoare's bannermen. However, another Rahitheon going missing at the Wendwater in the Stormlands, along with the Arrogant king most certainly knowing what happened, pushed such thoughts aside. That, and the fact that he could not afford to judge every misfortune befalling his people as instances of bad luck lest he become passive in his leading and protecting them.
Jaenyx could tell that his education so far had been met with a mixed reception among the more Westerosi members of the Targaryen household. Quenton Qoherys, the castle's master-at-arms and carrying the blood of Valyria, was the most skeptical in that while he acknowledged the benefits of his training, he clearly said that Jaenyx's way of fighting would not work against those in plate armor and that his katana and wakizashi would likely fail to do damage against armored knights. Jaenyx was a strong believer in his training by Master Haru, but he was not so stubborn to ignore commentaries from an outside perspective. Master Haru taught him the importance of adaptability to one's environment, something that both he and Qoherys shared in their teachings despite their differing interpretations. He spent the last year reading how knights fought and observing closely Aegon and Orys' styles, the closest things to knights available to him.

Yet, Qoherys lacked knowledge of one area that was just as important as battles, an area that Master Haru acquired from his years as a warrior-turned operative in Yi-Ti: spying. Konno Haru saw his previous lord be executed by the Yi-Ti emperor, causing him to be a drifter and forcing him to sell his sword to survive. He then came across a band of men dressed in black cloaks and wielding daggers, all of whom were also drifters. They held no loyalty to any lord and received payment to completing tasks such as assassination, spying, and sabotage under the cover of night. Haru relished his new life, as he was able to take revenge on the lords who had disgraced his liege lord and getting satisfaction after seeing their hypocrisy in unobstructed view from the shadows. He learned much from his time there before leaving with a group and coming across Jaenyx's family.

Master Haru imparted onto him the many aspects coming from spying as well as educating him on one's basic motivations. Be it a lord or a beggar, all men and women were motivated by basic desires such as money, power, sex, and approval. In developing an agent, Master Haru stated that you started with something as innocuous as asking for directions. Then, you attempted to strike up conversations that slowly delved into more intimate topics such as family. Developing trust was key, along with intuition on how to seek the things you want from the agent. Throughout the process, you utilize what has been revealed to your advantage and put pressure on the weak points. Finally, you exploit the agent's desires to obtain what you want or need. Such was a basic framework that Haru taught Jaenyx.

Jaenyx reflected on his lessons with Master Haru as he tried to figure out who knew about where the Rahitheon traders would be. It was not a secret that they were going to sell their Valyrian steel weapons on the market, but they informed their uncle Aevor Rahitheon and Jaenyx of the exact routes they would take before departing Dragonstone. Call it a precaution, but Jaenyx wanted to ensure that they did not deviate from their course. Any deviations usually meant they ran off with their products or something happened to them on the way. For his people, they would never do the former.

So, who else knew how Vaeron was getting to Lannisport and Garaeron to Oldtown? He knew that the second time a Rahitheon got caught on the road was no coincidence, meaning that someone leaked their routes to their kidnappers. More seriously, someone tipped another that their prey was carrying Valyrian steel, possession of which was only reserved for someone with incredibly deep pockets. That meant that there was someone on Dragonstone informing their enemies of their activities on the island. Both the Hoare prince and the Arrogant king smelled blood in the air after the kidnapping and they were moving to get their share of the loot. They could not trust the Arrogant king implicating Black Harren in his son's schemes, but they could not eliminate the possibility that he had some knowledge of what had happened.

Jaenyx ran through the list of the people who might have divulged the Rahitheon men's whereabouts: servants, cooks, the Westerosi members of the household, the boatmen that took them to the mainland. What these types of people had in common was that they would not say no
to making a bit of extra coin when they had the chance. Most of those with noble blood would often ignore their servants’ presence and proceed to divulge their greatest secrets to them in the process. A lot of key information could be gained from a disgruntled servant, but that would not make a lot of sense in Lord Targaryen's household. He might have represented how Westerosi lords behaved, but Jaenyx never saw him mistreat a member of his household. The servants had good opinions of him and they would not allow thoughts of betrayal enter their minds.

The same could be said of the cooks. More popular than their lord was Lady Targaryen, whom the cooks and the rest of the household found to be refreshing. As she saw them everyday, she revealed her foul-mouthed, fiery self, which did much endear herself to all in the castle. She took her duties as Lady of Dragonstone further than was expected of other ladies, showing no hesitance in sweeping the floors, cooking, washing the sheets, and sewing up ruined clothes among other things. The cooks said that they learned how to be better at their duties because of her and they did not mind when she beat them in the head whenever they got the recipe wrong because they knew that she did not do it out of malice. So, the cooks had no reason to betray their lords, as that would mean betraying Lady Targaryen.

From what the servants said about his good-mother Lady Targaryen, Jaenyx could see where Visenya got her disdain for conventions and her unapologetic commitment to being herself. Aegon inherited the dragon's temper in its purest form from both sides, which Jaenyx caught a glimpse of while in the training yard. That instance was when he moved too fast for Aegon and did a side push kick on his chest, knocking the wind out of him and making him land hard on his ass. Jaenyx did not know what had happened earlier that day, but Aegon had found a way to vent whatever frustrations he had onto him. He fought back ferociously and both wrestled to the ground and before someone got seriously hurt, Orys pulled Aegon off of him and Visenya holding Jaenyx back.

Pulling out of his distraction, Jaenyx thought about who else would sell out the Rahitheons. Then, a realization struck him. Such realization was how he brought himself out of bed, dressed, and had a message sent to the one who last seen the Rahitheon who went to the Storm King's domains. It was while after he put his tunic back on that he felt a pair of arms grasping him from behind, one resting on his left shoulder and another going up into his tunic and tracing its fingers along the defined lines of his torso. He smiled when he felt Visenya's chin rest on his left shoulder."

"Come back to bed, Jae," Visenya whispered in his ear. "Who said we were done?"

Jaenyx chuckled. "As tempting as that sounds, Vis, I have to take care of something important."

"What could be more important than us melding together?" he felt her nibble into his ear.

Jaenyx sighed, wanting nothing more than to hold her body and make love to her under the sheets. Duty calls. "I need to talk with someone, regarding our missing Rahitheon."

Visenya's nibbling stopped, Jaenyx sensing her mood turning serious. She was just as bothered and worried about the sudden turn of events of the day. "Who do you think informed on our man?"

"That's what I'm going to find out. You can come along if you want." He almost said to her to go back to bed, but he knew better than to make her feel like he was cutting her out of important matters.

"Right after I find a dress you haven't torn apart yet, I will."

"Come now. You hate wearing those dresses and you only wore that one since the tunics and trousers you usually wear are still being cleaned."
"I really need to get more clothes that I will like and that I won't let you rip," he heard her mutter before she released him from her grip.

They helped each other dress, committing their forms deeper into their memories. Jaenyx honestly had never expected to be with a woman at all, as that was the last thing on his mind while in Sothoryos. But the past year did wonders for him that went beyond his expectations. They both talked about having children, but were more content in enjoying each other as much as they could before another dragon joined them. Lord Targaryen kept asking when his grandchild would come after seeing how deep their feelings for each other became, while Lady Targaryen was still a little lukewarm about her good-son. Who could blame her? I'm still a stranger that just happened to fuck her daughter in legitimate circumstances.

Fully dressed, Jaenyx and Visenya moved through the halls of Dragonstone before turning to Aegon's chambers. Visenya was confused as to why he would need Aegon also, but Jaenyx told him that he needed his good-brother and good-sister with him also. Nearing their chambers, they halted upon hearing loud moans and wooden creaks through the door. Sharing a bewildered look with each other, both Jaenyx and Visenya snickered at Aegon and Rhaenys' obliviousness to their eavesdropping. However, Jaenyx could not delay even though he knew that a couple making love was a precious moment. Mustering his courage, he knocked on the door.

"Egg, we need to talk to you." Jaenyx sincerely hoped that his good-brother wouldn't blow up in his face even though he learned to handle it and despite the fact that he was also a dragon.

The door opened, with Jaenyx and Visenya staring at an indignant Aegon, his bare chest and hastily-worn breeches covering his bottom half. "What are you two doing here?"

"I have a problem that needs both of you. It has something to do with our Rahitheon man going missing in Storm King's domains." Jaenyx cut straight to the point.

Aegon instantly became concerned. "Do you know who did it?"

"That's what we're going to find out," Visenya answered.

"Egg, is that Jae and Vis?" they heard Rhaenys call out.

"Yeah, it is." Aegon opened the door wider, all of them seeing Rhaenys walking up to them, a black sheet draped around her naked body but her shoulders remaining bare and her hair ruffled up. She also was still recovering from the ecstasy that gripped both her and Aegon by her somewhat unfocused eyes.

"Have fun, Rhae?" Jaenyx smiled.

Rhaenys shrugged while a lustful grin directed at Aegon grew. "You know it, Jae. Been pretty busy for the last hour or so."

"Would not have interrupted if it wasn't anything important," Jaenyx said apologetically.

"That's okay. Would not wish to do that for you two also, if the sounds from your chambers are to say anything," Rhaenys winked. That somewhat riled up Visenya.

"Stay away from our chambers, pervert!" Visenya snapped.

"The doors and the walls are thinner than you think," Rhaenys replied mischievously.

"All right, ladies," Aegon put both hands up. "Let's get back to why Jaenyx and Visenya decided to
come here." He stared at his good-brother. "You know who sold him out?"

"I have a strong idea. I need to get to the docks, though. Things might go smoother if you and Rhae came along."

Aegon nodded nonchalantly. "All right. Just give a few moments and we'll be right out."

The four young dragons walked down from Dragonstone and moved to the docks at the base of the Dragonmont. Jaenyx insisted that Aegon and Visenya bring Blackfyre and Dark Sister while he brought his Yi-Tish swords and Rhaenys would be the soft touch. Confused, they did as he asked.

Jaenyx approached a boatman sitting next to his tied boat, a man from the Westerosi mainland, Duskendale if he remembered correctly.

"Is your name Larris?" Jaenyx surprised the man.

"Milords and miladys," Larris stood up. "How could I help you?"

"Could you accompany us as we walk through the town?" That confused Visenya, Rhaenys, and Aegon.

"Sure!"

But it wasn't a simple walk. Jaenyx kept behind Larris as they walked out of the town, his body stiff as if expecting something bad to happen. Once they were out of sight of the town and onto the beach next to the cliffside, they came across a boulder.

"Sit down, Larris," Jaenyx pointed to the boulder.

"Milord?"

"My husband told you to sit down," Visenya ordered. Larris complied.

Aegon and Rhaenys kept their distance while Jaenyx and Visenya stood close to Larris. "I know that you are the last to have seen Garaeron Rahitheon since you transported him to the Wendwater and you also told him of another boatman that would meet him at the Grassy Vale who take him to Oldtown." Larris nodded at Jaenyx. "Did you know that he went missing?" Larris nodded, but he became a little nervous. "Could you think of anything that might've happened to him?"

Larris paused, but Jaenyx could see that he was taking his time with his words. "Probably bandits set upon him, milord. That's common for anyone traveling from one kingdom to another."

"Possibly," Jaenyx affirmed. "But, why him out of all the travelers in Westeros?"

There was another pause. "I don't know, milord."

"So you don't know what Garaeron was transporting to Oldtown?"

"He told me that it was some swords that Dragonstone forged."

"And do you know what those swords are made out of?"

Jaenyx saw Larris's fingers fidgeting. "Valyrian steel," he finally said.

"And I trust you know how valuable Valyrian steel is throughout the known world?"
"Yes."

Jaenyx looked back at Aegon and Rhaenys, who were both confused as to where this was going. He then gazed at Visenya, who caught on.

"Let me tell you a story, Larris." Larris was befuddled. "I was in the jungles of Sothoryos one time along with my father some of my people. Our goal was to cut down some trees there since timber in that continent is practically without cost. Now, we came across this elephant in this clearing. The poor creature had been set upon by a giant ape, its tusks shattered and its legs crushed. But its trunk and mouth miraculously remained intact, so all we heard were its cries of pain. An elephant cry is quite piercing, even more so when you know what the elephant is feeling." Jaenyx stopped to reflect on that memory before continuing. "Now, I was one and ten and my father gave me a knife. He told me, 'Put this animal out of its misery.' I never killed anything before and killing an animal was something that seemed… strange to me. But, I couldn't just let that elephant stay in that clearing while I could hear its pain. My father gave me some nudging and told me where to stab. It took me a moment, but I held that knife tightly and dug the blade deep in that elephant's eye. I got so deep that I could feel the muscles inside the eye socket," Jaenyx let out a laugh. "The elephant's cries got louder as I dug deeper, but eventually, enough blood came out of its eye that it bled out right there and the elephant went limp."

Jaenyx ignored how uncomfortable Aegon and Rhaenys became after hearing his story. They knew how to hunt and knew what it was like to kill animals, but they never heard about such an experience with such vivid details. "Do you know what the lesson of this story is, Larris?" Jaenyx continued.

Larris shook his head, but was even more uncomfortable than Aegon and Rhaenys. Visenya was indifferent, having heard it before.

"The lesson of this story is that if I have it in me to kill a breathing thing to put it out of its pain, what do you think I will do to you if you don't tell me who you told about Vaeron's and Garaeron's whereabouts?" Both Jaenyx and Visenya put their hands on their swords, ready to strike, while Aegon and Rhaenys' eyes widened at this revelation.

Larris was shaking at that moment, as there was no point in denying his actions. He stood from the boulder and went on his knees. "Please, milord, I needed to care for my children—"

"SHUT UP!" Visenya yelled as she drew Dark Sister and held the tip of the blade under Larris' chin.

"Who did you tell?" Visenya could see the fire growing in Jaenyx's eyes.

"I was approached six months ago by a man who was on the crew of Prince Hoare's ship. He offered me two sacks of silver if I told him who was coming to and from Dragonstone carrying Valyrian steel weapons. Then, another man who said he served the Storm King offered me three sacks of silver for the same thing."

"Five sacks of silver?" Jaenyx scoffed. "Raising a family would require only half a sack."

"There is much to made off of Valyrian steel and I merely got my cut since your men used my boat!" Larris spat.

Jaenyx saw Aegon approach Larris, anger also apparent. "You spied on us for six months? Who else has been doing that?!"
"Virtually every boatman you hired from around the Blackwater Bay," Larris confessed. "But what can you honestly do against Black Harren and the Storm King? You have a few thousand soldiers and not enough ships to take on the ironborn."

Aegon turned to Jaenyx. "We need to tell Father about this. He'll know what to do."

Before he knew it, Jaenyx drew his sword and slashed off Larris' right ear. He fell to the sand, grasping where his ear was in pain.

"What in the hells are you doing?" Aegon shouted.

"We'll tell Father about this, but I suggest something different than just killing him."

Aegon crossed his arms. "What do you mean?"

"He's spying on us. Let's keep it that way."

Aegon and Rhaenys narrowed their eyes while Visenya merely watched. "You want him to keep spying on us?" Aegon asked incredulously.

"Yes, but he'll tell his masters what we tell him to say." Jaenyx leaned down to Larris and stared square in the eye. "As of right now, you belong to us. We tell you what to say and tell you where to go. We say jump, you jump. We say cut yourself, you do exactly that. You say anything else or try to escape, we will find you and you die. And we'll feed your corpse and those of your family to our dragons. You understand?"

Larris kept holding where his ear was cut off, but pissed his pants as he stared at the dragonfire behind Jaenyx's eyeballs. He got him up and pushed him back to the town, silently warning him to make up how he lost his ear.

"Why did you have to threaten his family?" Rhaenys asked.

"He said he spied on us for his family. Let's see it hold true when he does exactly what we tell him to do."

Aegon turned him around. "I don't approve of your methods, Jae!" he said through clenched teeth. "Families are supposed to be untouchable among men's disputes."

"Oh, yeah? Unfortunately, the ironborn are not as considerate as you are and possibly the Arrogant king is like that also. I'm merely responding."

Aegon grabbed his shoulders. "Next time you do something like that, inform us first. We're family, so we shouldn't do things alone."

Jaenyx thought about that before nodding and putting Aegon's arms down. "All right. Let's go tell Father then." Jaenyx walked back to the castle in front of Aegon and Rhaenys, Visenya holding his hand along the way. Jaenyx was not going to apologize for his actions, but he knew Aegon to be right. Not alone anymore. I need to be more considerate.

Chapter End Notes
something from him, and here is the first thing. Will try to write more interactions between Jaenyx and the rest of the Targaryens besides Visenya. Starting to get more comfortable writing intimate scenes, as it is all a matter of letting go your inhibitions. That, and being able to compartmentalize. Is it weird that I listened to Ne-Yo's "She Got Her Own" while I wrote that?

So, we get a glimpse of the role Jaenyx will play in the Conquest. I envision Aegon as the charismatic leader, Rhaenys the sweet-talking diplomat, Orys as the staunch loyalist who you need to hammer through obstacles, Visenya as the creative and aggressive commander, and Jaenyx as the guy to call to lead sneak attacks and intelligence operations. What do you all think? And Aegon will definitely have issues with Jaenyx's methods, as he finds him too willing to resort to more "dishonorable" tactics. It'll be one conflict between them that they both have to work out.

Next, we see Rhaenys observing the first spark of the Conquest. Sit tight!
WHOOOO! 100 FOLLOWERS on Fanfiction! It occurred faster than I thought when I decided to start this story mere weeks ago. Thank you so much for all of your strong support and I can only hope to meet or exceed your expectations as this story goes on. I hope I can meet a similar response right here on Ao3.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rhaenys watched as their father, Jaenyx, and Aegon discussed the boatman. Even she knew that if the boatman’s words were true, then their home had been targeted by their enemies longer than they thought and now they were in danger. She did not agree with Jaenyx cutting off the boatman’s ear, whose name began to escape her due to his non-importance, nor his threats against his family. However, she was a dragon and she would not allow threats against her and her family to go unpunished. She was more surprised at how quick her good-brother was in resorting to violent measures. Even more than Vis, it seems.

Rhaenys and Jaenyx became very close in the past year. Her mother had taught her how to dance and how to play the lute, harp, vielle, and recorder. She had also had a very good opinion of her voice, as many told how she sung like the Maiden herself with her purity and divinity. Wonder how they know the Maiden sounds like? She knew much more about music and instruments than her good-brother, being able to bring joy and laughter to the hall. However, her good-brother’s music had more sorrow and brought more contemplation to those who could listen. His fingers gliding all over the koto and his closed eyes as he played brought out a deeper aspect of music that Rhaenys never thought about. Instead of joy and happiness, one would enter a state of mind where they would listen to the sounds around them and ponder about the many questions that concern existence when they would listen to Jaenyx’s playing of the koto.

Furthermore, Jaenyx also knew many Yi-Tish tunes alongside Valyrian ones. His voice was of a deep, rich nature, almost like the feeling one would get when bathing in a hot spring. His voice could put one to sleep, which he didn’t realize until he saw Rhaenys’ becoming drowsy. But that was not what Rhaenys noticed about his voice. He had a higher, lighter voice when he talked normally, both his Valyrian and lilted common tongue exhibiting the soft politeness and propriety expected of those with noble blood. He also possessed a hardness and commanding tone when he gave out instructions to his people. But when he sang, Rhaenys sensed gloominess and longing that ran deeper than the earth. There were moments when she saw a tear falling from his eye, a sign of him being absorbed by the music.

Rhaenys remembered when Jaenyx played this one song on the koto, one of many that he learned
from his Master Konno Haru. Jaenyx said the tune was called in nihongo “feelings of two people”, or futari no kimochi. She didn’t understand a word that was sung, but he said that he felt his family speak to him in the song despite the song not being in High Valyrian. He said that chorus went like:

- My darling, please stop your tears
- There’s no eternal farewell
- Time passes, throughout an era
- I will still protect you

Rhaenys said that sounded more like a love song, but Jaenyx said that the words ran deeper than romantic feelings, and he could hear his mother’s voice as she tried to tell him that she and his family will always watch over him. And that was before she saw his eyes become red and more tears streamed down.

Rhaenys wondered how Jaenyx dealt with losing his family before he came of age, as she could not have expected to have retained her sanity if she went through the same thing at his age. Over the past year, she began to see that he buried himself in his duties as a leader, his marriage to Visenya, and through singing Yi-Tish and Valyrian tunes. However, she could sense that he never really recovered from the pain and that his actions merely was a facade to hide his vulnerabilities. Then again, who would?

Rhaenys saw that out of her family and besides their mother, Jaenyx was closest with the women. He and Visenya were similar in many ways, one being that they were quick to draw blood from those that wronged them or those who got them angry, but he gave her the attention and respect that other men denied her. As for Rhaenys, they both saw how music could be a curing influence to the afflictions of the heart, although Rhaenys played music to bring happiness while he did it to ease the boundless pain within him. That was when Rhaenys decided to become the sister he never had, as she wanted to bring him out of the hole that he was thrown into while Visenya would provide him with the love that he needed.

However, Rhaenys did not know how to react given the current circumstances.

“We cannot just sit here and allow the lackeys of Black Harren and the Arrogant king to make a
mockery of us!” Orys yelled. She was surprised at how personal her brother took the situation, despite not being close with Jaenyx. “If they can spy on us with impunity, who knows what they will do next?”

“We are of the same mind, Orys,” their father replied. “Robbing our products, kidnapping members of one of my good-son’s vassal families, and now spying on us through the boatmen… they will only get bolder if we offer no response.”

“But what can we do, father?” Aegon asked. “We have only three to four thousand men who could wield arms and less than one hundred ships. Black Harren can call on ten times that number and twice as many ships while the Arrogant king commands some of the best soldiers on the continent, soldiers who have fought in the Dornish Marches for the past thousand years.”

“We have four dragons,” Visenya commented. “Six, if not counting the two wild ones in the Dragonmont. They can do a lot of damage against our enemies before they harm our soldiers.”

Aegon rolled his eyes. “Yes, but they never been in war and we don’t know how to ride them in battle. We could consult the histories on how Valyria used its dragons against the Ghiscari and the Rhoynish, but actual experience beats knowledge from books anyday. In addition, we do not know how to tame the wild dragons, so we can’t use them.”

“True, but do you have experience, Egg?” Visenya shot back. He didn’t answer. “Then, you’re not in a position to say we’re ready either.”

“*My first action would’ve been to increase security around Dragonstone, Driftmark, and Claw Isle, but that’s already been done,*” Jaenyx jumped in. “For now, we should cease our sale of Valyrian steel weapons and send trackers to the Storm Kingdom to find Garaeron Rahitheon.”

“We have to tread carefully with sending trackers, Jae,” Aegon said. “If they’re caught, the Storm King could escalate the situation by sending actual soldiers against us.”
“We’ll burn them with our dragons, Egg,” Visenya replied. “Like the rest of Westeros, they’ve never seen what they can do.”

Rhaenys stepped in. “We should not be rash about this, Vis. There has not been any obvious acts of aggression against us by the Storm King or Black Harren. I would suggest sending a message to Storm’s End. That way, the Arrogant king will have to reply to us. If he tries to lie to us, we’ll know. If he doesn’t respond, that’s the same as admitting that he knew what happened.”

Their father nodded. “That could work in normal circumstances, but you forget about the last letter King Argilac wrote to us. He’s expecting a response to his offering his daughter’s hand to Egg, which we cannot do. However, us saying no might give him the reason he needs to go to war with us. If there is anything that we can be sure of regarding the Arrogant king, it is that he will not respond well to anyone spurning him. He crossed the narrow sea against Volantis because the Volantenes spat at his trade offer in his presence, and he mutilated King Gardener at Summerfield after he insulted Argilac’s inability to have a son.”

“Aren’t we being too cautious about this?” Jaenyx looked genuinely confused. “I don’t mean to disrespect where you grew up, but you also forget one of my vassals is House Tarareon, the same house that held the Rhoynish horde back centuries ago. Outside Valysar on the eastern banks of the Rhoyne, six thousand Tarareon cavalymen and infantry held back seventy-two thousand Rhoynish from advancing onto Volantis. The Tarareons used their enemies’ numbers against them since a large army takes days to cross the Rhoyne without a bridge. The Rhoynish were picked apart in piecemeal since the Tarareons were able to react quickly to each party landing on the east bank and delayed them long enough for the dragons to burn the rest alive. We have one thousand men of House Tarareon able to fight, so I would say we use them. Let them do what they do best: destroy the enemy. It would not take much effort to pick apart the Westerosi armies that would march against us, from what I’ve seen so far.”

Visenya nodded in approval, not liking the passive responses from the rest of her family. But, he had one detractor. “The Second Spice War happened centuries ago,” Orys argued. “Since you bring numbers, perhaps you don’t realize that we’re heavily outnumbered. Black Harren and Argilac can amass a combined host of sixty-thousand men, with Black Harren also commanding at least two hundred ships. Your Tarareons don’t have their horses and half of our ships are not built for war.”

Rhaenys saw Jaenyx shrug. “Nothing that they can’t handle. The Celtigars bring another thousand soldiers to us, not to mention the six hundred swords that are on Dragonstone at present. In addition, both Black Harren and the Arrogant king have to wait weeks to bring their full host to
bear due to the inefficiencies of this fucking continent while we can move faster. The two hundred ships that you speak of, most of them are on the other side of Westeros and it would be at least a month before they can make it here, that is if the Gardener fleet will let them pass without a fight. We can beat them.”

Rhaenys was less confident, however. “That is assuming that we can bring together our men faster than our enemies. I would suggest getting ready while also taking Jaenyx’s suggestion to send out trackers. We can’t totally unprepared after all.”

Jaenyx nodded at her. “And if they attack our trackers, then we won’t be the aggressor in that instance.”

Their father leaned back, the weight of the situation bearing down on him. “Sometimes, I wonder if our restarting Valyrian steel forging have made us an enticing target to our enemies throughout the Blackwater Bay.”

“I disagree, father,” Visenya spoke up. “The way the many kings in Westeros act, with their constant romping with each other, we would have been drawn in their petty squabbles one way or another. They might not fully believe in what our dragons can do, but they are willing to use us to fight their battles. Valyrian steel just gave them a good excuse to do so while mocking us in the process.”

Their mother chose this moment to enter the discussion. “All of you know that I may not have the best feelings for your good-brother.” They all nodded while she stared at Jaenyx. “However, they have done many good things for us. We now have farms on Dragonstone and we became wealthier because of them. And I’ll be damned if I let some fucking ironborn or storm shits bring harm to our door.”

“All right, here’s what we’ll do,” their father stood up with firmness. “Send a message to your cousin Daemon at Driftmark, Crispian at Claw Isle, and to Sweetport Sound. We’re calling the banners.”
“Rhae, work with Jaenyx to find our most discreet people to find Garaeron Rahitheon. Also, Jaenyx, I trust you will support me in this measure with your men?”

“Of course, good-father,” Jaenyx replied while still smile. “It’s time we show these shits who they’re dealing with.”

“Absolutely. Also, we should get Balerion, Vhagar, Meraxes, and Cloudwynd together. Make sure that they are stable enough for battle.”

Rhaenys spoke. “Father, while I will support your decision, I don’t know how I will handle being in a fight. I’ve never had any training with a sword like Egg, Orys, Vis, and Jae. I have hunted before, but I never killed a man.”

Visenya put a hand on her shoulder. “Don’t worry, Rhae. You’ll do just fine on Meraxes. We’ll also keep you safe.”

“But that’s the point. By keeping me safe, you’ll also be risking yourselves. I don’t want any of you to get hurt because of me,” Rhaenys could not disguise her worries anymore.

“But you’re our sister,” Orys walked up to her. “That’s the least we could do. If you really need it, we can all show you how to defend yourself.”
“Exactly, Rhae,” Jaenyx stood next to Orys. Despite the still-ongoing tension between them, it warmed her heart to see both of them agree on something.

“Thank you,” Rhaenys managed. “Kirimvose.”

The door suddenly burst open, with Quenton Qoherys running into the solar with fear in his eyes.

“What is it?” their father asked.

“Ironborn ships! Spotted at the south and west!”

All of their eyes grew wide. *Already we have to fight?* Rhaenys fearfully thought.

“Sound the alarm!!” their father ran towards the door while the rest ran out of the solar. “Send a message to Daemon and Maerys Tarareon to get here with haste and prepare to defend the castle. Jaenyx—”

“I will send for Ragaemor to assemble the men. We should also mount our dragons.”

Aegon stopped. “But we never rode them in—”

“Now’s a good time, Egg!” Jaenyx responded. “I never rode Cloudwynd into battle either, but we don’t have a choice now.”

The household guards ran about the castle, their swords drawn, arrows at the ready, and oil boiled. Aegon and Orys dressed in their armor, a mix of scales and steel plates, while Visenya dressed in
her dragon coat that Jaenyx gifted to her on their wedding night. Jaenyx came to the courtyard clad in his Valyrian steel segmented cuirass, with his arms and legs covered with Valyrian steel plates and Valyrian steel mail covering the rest while he wore steel gloves, leather boots, and a ridge helmet. Aegon had Blackfyre strapped to his waist and Flame Screecher to his back, Visenya with Dark Sister, Orys with his Valyrian steel axe strapped to his left side, and Jaenyx with his Yi-Tish swords on his left side and a hand-and-a-half sword strapped to his back. Rhaenys did not know much about that other sword other than it was a family heirloom, made from a fallen star and infused with dragon’s blood to make it far sharper and lighter than normal Valyrian steel. She also discovered that he would use his katana and wakizashi in closer encounters, as his other sword allowed him to have greater reach.

As for Rhaenys, she never thought that she would be in battle, so she didn’t have armor. Instead, she borrowed a mail shirt and leather trousers to over her riding leathers along with steel cuisses and vambraces to protect her arms and legs. She only had two daggers strapped to each side of her waist, intending to learn the sword after tonight.

“We have flown our dragons during the day, but we’re taking them out in the night this time. The good thing is that we have a full moon now, so we’ll have moonlight to use to see each of the ironborn ship,” Aegon started. “We have four dragons, so we should approach the ironborn fleet from all four corners. If you have a chance to burn the ships, take it.”

“Also,” Jaenyx stepped in. “Our dragons may be able deflect arrows and other types of small projectile weapons, but we could still get thrown off our dragons if enough force was applied on them. So hold onto your dragons tightly and try not to do anything risky. This is our first battle as dragonriders, so your first priority is to be safe.”

“What could I do?” Orys asked.

“Brother, in case the ironborn land parties on our shores, I can trust that you will be able to repel them with your might alone. Also, protect anyone is caught out in the open.”

“Work with Ragaemor, Orys,” Jaenyx interjected. “He will be of great help to you in the fight to come.”
Orys nodded. “All right, Jaenyx.”

Jaenyx took out his dragonhorn and blew it. Rhaenys discovered that while the dragonhorn may have given him temporary control of the other dragons, the effects were akin to moths attracted to light. It would work, and then the spells wore off after a while. So the dragonhorn had its limits.

All four dragons landed in the courtyard, which could barely fit all of them. Still, that didn’t stop Aegon, Visenya, Rhaenys, and Jaenyx from mounting them. Before they did, Aegon pulled Rhaenys into a deep kiss. “Be safe, Rhae. I can’t bear the thought of losing you.”

Rhaenys cupped his cheek. “Don’t worry about me, Egg. I spend more time riding Meraxes than you and Vis ride Balerion and Vhagar. We should be fine.”

With that, the four dragons took off from the courtyard and circled above the island, with Rhaenys looking upon the ironborn ships nearing the island.

Rhaenys took her time flying above the enemy fleet, counting at least forty vessels. Aegon told her that an ironborn longboat could expect to carry one hundred warriors maximum, meaning that there were at least four thousand ironborn sailing towards them. Had this been any other castle possessing at least two thousand men, they would have been in big trouble. However, Dragonstone was an imposing fortress, meaning that any army would be pressed to assault the walls. Also, they had dragons, creatures that were known for incinerating hundreds within a span of mere moments.

However, unlike Jaenyx and Visenya being confident in their capabilities, Rhaenys was more apprehensive. She had never been in battle and had no serious training with a sword. She learned how to shoot a bow and killed a stag one time, but that was it. She wasn’t even that good of an archer, so she didn’t really practice with the bow. Aegon, Orys, Jaenyx, and Visenya could all defend themselves while she was not so sure. She did enjoy riding Meraxes more than her siblings and good-brother, so she knew how to maneuver her dragon and when not to overexert her mount.
Aegon signalled for the four of them to circle above the fleet and avoid flying directly into the moon, as that would make them easy targets for archers. The plan was to strike from the north, south, east, and west with their dragons, with all of them releasing a stream of dragonfire and moving back up before anyone could shoot back at them. While their dragons had hunted for fish and for game on land, this would be their first time in battle, so they should not push them so far.

Rhaenys got the east, directly in front of Dragonstone. Since she had more experience riding her dragon, she would dive down and release dragonfire stream right in front of the ironborn’s vanguard. They would not get too close to the sea’s surface, as that would make it easy for them to be targeted by archers while the lower altitude would make dragons less maneuverable. The dragons would release their fires above the ironborn ship’s mast while their bellies would protect their riders from any arrows shot at them.

Looking in front of her, Rhaenys saw Aegon squeeze his fist at Jaenyx, the signal for him to begin his attack run even with the moonlight making it barely visible. Jaenyx attacked the fleet to its south, Rhaenys and others seeing Cloudwynd pick up speed as she descended rapidly. Roaring at the last moment while avoiding a direct approach from the moon, Rhaenys saw Cloudwynd release her flames, the stream cutting through a dozen ships and brightening the rest of the Blackwater Bay as her fire burned a brighter blue than the sea before ascending back up.

Next, Aegon signalled Visenya to begin her attack run. She and Vhagar climbed above the circle before nosing down. Taking the west, Vhagar would burn through the rearguard and essentially cut the rest of the ironborn off from escape. Soon enough, her orange flames danced with Cloudwynd’s blue as more ships burned. Like Cloudwynd, Vhagar flew above the ships’ mast before climbing back up.

Aegon signalled to Rhaenys that he’ll attack next, striking at the ironborn’s left flank from the north and essentially boxing them in. She would deliver the killing blow at their vanguard from the east, ensuring that no ironborn would reach Dragonstone. She watched as her husband dove down on Balerion, his mount’s massive form making it seem that he dove slower. However, one would regret the moment they underestimated Balerion’s power, as his black flames mixed with Vhagar’s and Cloudwynd’s and disintegrating even more vessels into nothingness.

Such was a… beautiful sight for Rhaenys. She reveled whenever Meraxes released her yellow flames, whether at game or fish. But to see all of their dragons’ flames mixed into a concoction of many colors was something she would not forget anytime soon. It proved to her just how remarkable dragons were. Any thoughts about this being the first time she’ll take lives were willed away, as she saw Balerion ascend back into the air and urged Meraxes down.
Rhaenys held tight to Meraxes’ spines, the wind and cold of the night air blowing against her face. She dived before on Meraxes, but she never aimed at something. The flames of the three other dragons burned bright across the water, illuminating the bay with the inferno consuming the ships carrying the banners of House Hoare. She nudged Meraxes to level slightly out of the dive in order for her to see the bows of ships better.

However, Rhaenys did not notice how lower Meraxes got compared to the other dragons. She also failed to see how the dragonfire that burned on the water essentially brightened the Blackwater Bay for miles around, with those as far as Gulltown professing to have seen the flames years later. As she got closer to the ships, she saw the bows that were drawn and heard “NOCK” too late. Arrows flew at Meraxes and past her, but Meraxes’ scales held true and deflected them. But Rhaenys had to duck, as the arrows came loose towards her.

Regaining her bearing just at the right moment, Rhaenys saw the bow of the lead ship. Taking a deep breath, she yelled, “DRACARYS!” Meraxes released a stream of yellow fire from her mouth, tearing apart the lead ship as well three more behind it. But, she climbed too late, as Meraxes flew through the orange flames left by Vhagar and the smoke made her shield her eyes. She did not notice Meraxes turning to the right and back towards the ironborn fleet, or what was left of it.

At that moment, the arrow fire got thicker than the last time, as the ironborn were reacting better and used the flames to aim at their target. Rhaenys rubbed her eyes from the smoke and blinked her eyes to clear her vision. However, a stray arrow struck her arm and her thigh, two shots that were lucky to find its mark even if they failed in their intention to kill its prey. Pain shot through her, as she saw the arrows had pierced her mail sleeve and leather trousers. Rubbing her eyes had left only one arm on Meraxes’ spines, with the arrows to her free arm and thigh making her lose her hold. She just missed grabbing the other spine with her hand before she lost traction and fell off Meraxes.

Rhaenys saw the dark sea grow closer as she dropped hopelessly to its depths. She did not have to wait to feel the sea’s cold embrace, as she was close enough for the archers to shoot at her. Any higher would have killed. She sank deeper into the abyss, as she struggled to go back to the surface. The arrows snapped upon impact with the sea while her flailing in the water only made the shafts tear further into her muscles.

Rhaenys knew how to swim, but she never swam at night and with two arrows stuck into her body. Eventually, her flailing abated as she saw her vision slowly go black and the light of the flames still
burning on the water fading away. The coldness of the water slowed down her blood flow while more water flowed into her airways. The blood seeping out of her wounds spread into a mist-like form around her while her body jerked from a lack of air.

Everything went to black as she felt a presence grab at her and made her spent form ascend back to the surface.

Chapter End Notes

Ooooh, boy... first blood has been spilled and there is no turning back from this. The ironborn will see know first hand the consequences of attacking the dragons, and the sheer stupidity of their attempted reaving. For the dragon attack, I had to look at videos and read up on how close air support aircraft make their runs, because that's what dragons are in this universe. I see the dragons as the ASOIAF version of the A-10 Warthog, the greatest CAS aircraft in the world (who told the Pentagon that the F-35 was a great idea, as that costed billions of dollars and little to show for it, while throwing the Warthog, proven to take so much punishment and fly its pilot back to base?)

And no, Rhaenys will not die. However, I never intended for her first battle experience to be a smooth one. As a newbie, she was likely to make serious and careless mistakes and that's probably what got her killed in Dorne. Her near-death experience will shake her to her core, but she'll be better for it as she got a taste of what battle is. And she'll be more careful from now on. Other near-death experiences will happen to our other characters. Hopefully, I wrote this one well.

For the two wild dragons at the Dragonmont, histories of the Dance of Dragons listed three, one of which was Sheepstealer (born while King Jaehaerys I lived and tamed by Nettles). The other two were Cannibal and Grey Ghost, which I will use here. Now, the histories say that Cannibal was born early in the reign of Jaehaerys I, but was considerably older than Sheepstealer. However, I decided to make this older than history recorded since it didn't know how old Cannibal was, so what the hell? These two will be the new additions to the dragonlords' arsenal, but it will be a while before they get riders. Hopefully, this works for you, as I thought about including more dragons besides the dragon eggs they will lay since their inclusion is parallel to Jaenyx's and his people's arrival.

Really appreciate the feedback I continue to receive, especially from Longclaw 1-6 and osterreicher97. It only took ten chapters, but the start of the Conquest has come.

Next, we have Visenya dealing with the aftermath of the ironborn's attack and the start of the dragons' retaliation.
Visenya III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

No, no, no! You're flying too low, Rhae!!! Visenya flew back above the burning remains of the ironborn fleet and returned to circling in the air atop Vhagar just in time to see Balerion take out more ships than Vhagar and Cloudwynd combined. She was confident that Rhaenys knew what to do and Meraxes’ flames would punch through the front of the fleet, effectively blunting the ironborn’s attack. After all, she was the most experienced dragonrider out of them all and knew how to take full advantage of Meraxes’ capabilities.

While Visenya never been in battle before like Aegon, Orys, and Rhaenys, she worried about Rhaenys more because she never received any combat training and only barely knew how to handle the bow. Like Aegon and Jaenyx, she knew better than to flew Vhagar low enough for any ironborn archers to shoot at her because her training emphasized not allowing your opponent to get close enough to strike at you. Rhaenys did not know that and she flew close enough for the arrows to fly.

Worry turned to horror as Visenya saw Rhaenys fall into the Blackwater Bay from Meraxes, her dragon roaring in distress at her rider’s plight. She knew that some of the arrows must have made her lose her grip on Meraxes and that Rhaenys never swam at night before, the darkness of the water most definitely causing panic to her sister and increasing her chances of drowning.

Visenya had Vhagar dive down to where she saw Rhaenys fall, not caring of the other ironborn ships still afloat on the Blackwater Bay. If she dies, Egg’s heart will shatter and I will never forgive myself for not protecting her. She leveled out of the dive just low enough for Vhagar’s feet to slide along the Bay’s surface.

“Girl, fly back to Dragonstone and help Balerion and Cloudwynd! I need to save my sister!” Before Vhagar could protest, Visenya let go of her spines and let the air blowing against her to slide her off her back into the waters below. The cold of the Blackwater Bay slammed against her skin and through the dragon coat, the piercing shocks of the sea able to make any mere mortal go limp after a moment. However, the dragonblood in her veins kept Visenya warm as she got her bearings in the pitch black underwater. Holding her breath and looking around, she saw a red mist to slight right, no doubt blood and where Rhaenys was sinking further into the depths.
Visenya frantically swam towards the mist, which grew thick thicker as she got closer. Then, she saw her sister’s still form, her eyes closed and arrows embedded her arm and thigh as blood flowed out of them. After what seemed like forever, she reached her sister before she could sink beyond her reach and pulled her up with all her might back to the surface.

Visenya took a deep inhale as her head broke back through the surface, her left arm around Rhaenys’ limp body as she struggled to swim back to Dragonstone’s shores with her free arm. Like the boys and Rhaenys, she knew how to swim, but she never swam at night and while trying to get someone back to shore. She t treaded water and struggled to remain afloat as she used all of the strength she could muster to inch back to their home.

_Come on, Rhae! We can make it! Don’t you fucking die on me!!!_ But her right arm was tiring even though the waters were calm that night. The loud crackles of the dragonflames and the dying screams of the ironborn added to the chaos around her and increased her panic, making Visenya swim faster but in quicker and smaller strokes. She felt her heart pumping faster and harder than before, but she felt exhaustion slowly overtake her. Eventually, her strokes got weaker and slower while they were both still a distance away from Dragonstone.

_No, no! Must... continue...._ Visenya had to keep trying to reach their home, but she felt her arms slowly give out and her legs ache from kicking in the water. She kept her left arm tight around Rhaenys, but it became much more difficult to keep her head afloat in an attempt to get her breathing again. It was becoming too much for Visenya.

_Please.... Someone.... Help...._ Were her thoughts as her treads in the water became mere glides and her grip on Rhaenys became much weaker. She couldn’t go on and they would both drown in the waters around their home. There was nothing more shameful than a dragon dying in the sea, fire being smothered by water. It was what the Rhoynish tried to do all those centuries ago and it would seem that the Blackwater Bay would succeed where they failed.

Before they both sunk into the depths, Visenya looked to her right and saw ships moving towards them, carrying the banners of House Velaryon and Tarareon. Hope flooding her being and mustering her last remaining bit of strength, she grunted as she treaded the waters of the Bay with her strained right arm. _Rhaenys, stay with me! Cousin Daemon is coming!_

The lead Velaryon ship soon reached the two sisters and several hands frantically pulled them onto the safety of the ship, with their cousin Daemon helping with Rhaenys. Instead of asking questions,
Daemon and the crew wasted no time to get Visenya and Rhaenys warm.

Catching her breath, Visenya felt herself over and was surprised to see her dragon coat dry and only her face, hands, and hair drenched in seawater. While flying over the ironborn fleet, she felt an arrow hit her side, but saw the arrowhead become blunt before the shaft fell into the fires below. Proof of the dragon coat’s protective abilities. *I’m going to fuck Jae senseless after this. I am never taking this off after tonight.*

Visenya’s thoughts shifted to Rhaenys, whose inert form was being draped by warm blankets while Daemon got a brazier next to her. She took off her blankets and crawled towards her sister. As a sailor, Daemon knew what to do whenever one of his crew members were pulled out of the water after almost drowning. He was moving quickly to prevent her from going into shock, as was common with sailors that took on too much water. Warming with the brazier, he was pushing against her abdomen in an attempt to push the water out of her, allowing the body to breathe again. He felt a weak pulse on Rhaenys’ neck, but he was acting frantically as the pulse was getting weaker by the second.

Pushing Daemon aside, Visenya remembered something that Jaemon Leniar, cousin to Taygor, taught her. One effective way to save someone before the body suffocated from drowning was to force air into the body and the only way to do that was to put mouth against mouth. She promptly put her mouth against Rhaenys’, breathing into it before she pushed against her abdomen. *If I don’t save her, Egg will never forgive me and who would blame him?*

Visenya repeated this a few times, breathing into her mouth and pushing against her abdomen. After seeing Rhaenys still unconscious, she slammed her fist into her chest. She pounded her fist against Rhaenys’ heart as hard as she could, not caring if it caused a few bruises as she did as long as she would see her sister’s eyes fly open. *Please, Rhae! Get up, Rhae!!!*

As she felt Daemon try to pull her off of Rhaenys, Visenya kept pounding. Just as she pulled off, she saw Rhaenys cough. *She’s alive!* Pushing Daemon aside, she returned to her sister’s side and grasped her left shoulder and forehead.

“Easy, Rhae. Easy,” Visenya stroked Rhaenys’ forehead as she placed her in her lap. Seeing Rhaenys cough out more water, relief flowed through her as Visenya saw her sister’s eyes flicker open. “You’re going to be alright, Rhae,” Visenya said as she broke down.
Rhaenys grunted. “Vis? Is that you?” She slowly put her arm and covered Visenya’s cheek. “Did you save me?”

Visenya nodded. “I almost lost you, Rhae.”

Although still weak from the blood loss, Rhaenys put her arm around Visenya’s neck and dug her head into her chest, reassuring her that she was alive. Trying to be careful, Visenya put her arms around her sister’s damp body as their cousin’s ship came closer to Dragonstone.

Visenya stood besides Rhaenys’ bed, looking upon Aegon as he and their mother held her hands while Jaenyx put his arms around herself. Taygor Leniar was working on getting the arrows out of her arm and thigh, a straightforward process had it not been for the snapped shafts and how deep they were embedded into her muscles.

Visenya saw Taygor Leniar take out his tools before moving towards the other sides of Rhaenys’ pierced arm and thigh. He had the decency to ask Aegon and their mother if he could pull up Rhaenys’ skit, as he knew that such a motion could easily be seen as violating her virtue. He then began to make an incision to the other sides of her arm and thigh.

“What are you doing?” Visenya asked Taygor while still being held by Jaenyx.

“The arrows are deep within her flesh, Lady Visenya,” Taygor kept his focus at Rhaenys’ wounds. “If I try to pull them out from where they entered, it would only cause more damage to the muscles. So, the only way to prevent more damage to her limbs is to bring them out from the other side.”

“Wouldn’t that cause more damage to her skin, Taygor?”
“This is the fastest way to get the arrowheads out. If I wait any longer, her wounds will get infected and there will be nothing we could do when that happens. Time is not on our side in this situation,” Taygor began making his first incision.

“Just do what you need to do to save my daughter,” their mother shook while still holding Rhaenys’ hand.

“All right, this will hurt, Lady Rhaenys,” Taygor put a rag in her mouth and had Aegon hold it. “Just hold on and everything will be fine.” As he cut into her arm, Rhaenys screamed, which was fortunately muffled by the rag. He cut slowly and steadily to prevent more damage than was inflicted. After the cut was down, he pulled his forceps from the bowl of arakju that Jaenyx poured to disinfect the metal. As the forceps entered her flesh and grabbed the arrowhead, Rhaenys’ screams through the rag became louder. “This is the hard part. Stay with me,” Taygor continued as he slowly pulled the arrowhead out from the other side. With a quick jerk, the arrowhead was taken out and dumped onto the small table next to the bed.

Taygor did the same thing with her thigh, with Rhaenys’ screams becoming even louder as the forceps had to go through more flesh than the arms. However, the arrowhead was also taken out and dumped onto the small table. Grabbing the bottle of arakju that Jaenyx provided, he poured a generous amount onto her wounds, causing her to wince and squeeze both Aegon’s and their mother’s hands tighter, before he finally sewed her wound and wrapped them up in gauze.

“She’s going to be alright,” Taygor smiled at everyone in the room. “You’re going to be alright, my lady. You are very brave.”

Sighs of relief filled the chambers. Their mother reached toward Taygor and gave him a big kiss on his cheek in thanks while Aegon and Orys gave him a strong hug. Jaenyx nodded his thanks to his cousin while Visenya kissed him on the forehead before both went towards Rhaenys.

“Thank you, Vis,” Rhaenys said softly. “You saved me.”

“You’re my sister, Rhae,” Visenya replied with a tear in her eye. “Of course I would do that.”
“What about the ironborn? Did we beat them?” Rhaenys asked.

“We did,” Aegon answered while stroking her hand. “After our dragons burned them, cousin Daemon and Maerys Tarareon cleaned up what was left. We even captured one of their captains.”

“What are we going to do with him?” Rhaenys asked, but everyone could see a rare fire emerging in her eyes.

“Fire and blood, Rhae,” Visenya assured. “We’ll show these ironborn fuckers just how much of a mistake they made in attacking us.”

“Before we do that,” their mother spoke up. “Your father wants us all to go to the hall and discuss our next action regarding the ironborn. Those fuckers will be foolish to think that we won’t respond to this.” All of them nodded in agreement while seeing the rage in their mother’s eyes.

All of them hugged Rhaenys, with Aegon promising to be back at her side, before Taygor put three drops of nightshade into her mouth. Seeing her fall into a deep sleep, the family went to the hall, where they saw their father seated on his metal throne the Lords Velaryon, Celtigar, Sunglass and the heads of the Tarareons, Leniars, and Rahitheons on the floor. Their mother took her place next to their father while Aegon and Orys stood to the right and Visenya and Jaenyx to the left. Save for their father and mother, all were dressed in battle armor.

“My lords,” their father started. “Thank you for coming on such short notice. I would begin by saying the reasons why I summoned you all here, but my messages and the burning remains of the ironborn right next to this island make it pointless. I have no doubt that you know why you’re all here. This is an unprovoked attack on us, so we must discuss our next course of action.”

Visenya would’ve groaned at her father’s usual caution, but she could sense that their father knew what to do and that the meeting was merely a formality. It better be.
“My lord,” the Sunglass lord spoke. “It is true that the ironborn launched an unprovoked attack on your home, but we must exercise caution. We have no evidence to support that Black Harren had sanctioned this assault, only that Darvin Hoare is the most likely perpetrator. I would suggest opening a line of communication with Harrenhal and request recompense from the ironborn.”

“FUCK THAT, SUNGLASS!” Daemon Velaryon shouted. “You were so willing to go after our liege’s daughter, but now when he has been attacked, you support careful action? I had no idea that you were this craven!”

The Sunglass lord drew his sword in anger, prompting their father to intervene. “That’s enough, Lord Daemon! And you, Lord Sunglass, control yourself or you will be thrown out like the last time.” The Sunglass lord stood down and sheathed his sword. “And no, I will not initiate a dialogue with Black Harren. Even if he didn’t sanction this attack, the fact that his son did either means he knew about it or cannot control his own family. Regardless, we will not communicate with him. I said ‘course of action’, and talking is not one of them.” The Sunglass lord nodded begrudgingly.

“Lord Targaryen,” Crispian Celtigar stepped forward. “If action is what you seek, then we must land our troops on Westeros. Blood must be met with blood, and I am sure that even Lady Rhaenys will not protest if we responded with force.”

“Hear, hear!” Aegon shouted, relief and anger of his sister-wife’s maiming evident on his face.

“But what can we do against thirty-thousand soldiers, Lord Celtigar?” the Sunglass lord called out. “We only have three thousand men and less ships than the ironborn can muster. We have no cavalry and we have no siege equipment.”

“We have dragons, Lord Sunglass,” Orys pointed out. Everyone could see the eagerness for battle on his face.

“And you’ve seen what they’ve done,” Visenya jumped in. “If four dragons can take out forty ships in a matter of moments, imagine what they could against an army.”
“What of the Storm King, my lord? Will you go after him also based on unsupported reports of your good-son’s man going missing there?”

Visenya wanted to draw Dark Sister and cut his throat, growing tired of his caution. “That boatman confessed to spying for the Storm King, meaning that he sees us as weak. We cannot let this go unanswered.”

“My lands, my home is next to the Storm King’s domains. We move against him, I will not be able to protect my lands and family with a mere three hundred swords. How can you protect us then?”

Their father also began to grow tired. “As our vassals, we have an obligation to protect you. Rest assured, the dragons and my troops will give you the protection you need against the Storm King.”

“With respect, my lord, that is not good enough.”

Aegon put his hand on Blackfyre, angered at the Sunglass’ insinuation. “Are you saying that you won’t support your liege in our retaliation against our enemies?”

“You have an island, Lord Aegon. The Velaryons and Celtigars can protect you, but who will protect us? This is folly!”

Their father slammed his hand down on the arm rest. “You are trying my patience, Lord Sunglass. I will ask you very clearly. Will you or will you not support us in this?”

The Sunglass lord took a moment, before shaking his head. “I cannot go with you on this, my lord. You will fight against two kings, more powerful than you, and my family will be destroyed. I will not be taken down by you dragonspawn.”
That’s it! The frustrations with the Sunglass’ boiled over, as Visenya stepped forward and struck the lord hard in his face. As he fell to the floor stunned, the guards seized his heir and the others that came with him, disarming them before they could react.

Their father’s mouth was wide open, shocked at how reckless Visenya was. But she saw Aegon, Orys, and Jaenyx less bothered by it. She then saw her father recover from his shock. As his vassal openly defied him, there was no other way to prevent what had just happened. His insult only made things worse for him.

“Lord Sunglass,” their father pointed to his heir. “You only have two choices now: you either stand with us and save your father or he dies here right now.”

“You can’t do that!” the heir shouted. “That violates guest rights.”

“Your father made an unwise decision by insulting the family of his liege. Also, if you had noticed, I did not give you bread and salt and you did not ask for it. So, no one is violating anything here.”

The heir looked around the hall for support, but only saw cold looks aimed at him. Seeing no other choice, he pushed the guard off of him and bent the knee. “I reaffirm House Sunglass’ loyalty to Dragonstone and pledge our banners to your cause, Lord Targaryen.”

“Excellent,” their father nodded, pleased with the heir acting smart for once. “Confine the former Lord Sunglass to the dungeon and the current Lord Sunglass will remain in our hall.” The guards nodded before dragging the elderly lord to the depths of Dragonstone. Visenya shot the heir a death glare before going back to her place next to Jaenyx.

“So, are all in favor of striking back against Black Harren and the Arrogant king?” He received a collective nod from those present, even the younger Lord Sunglass with reluctance. “Good. We will discuss further details on the morrow, but consult with my son and heir Aegon, my other son Orys, my daughter Visenya, and my good-son Jaenyx Belaerys.”
Visenya looked up to their father, her eyebrows raised. *What are you doing there?*

“My lords, I believe it is time to admit that the current circumstances are beyond my capabilities. War is a matter that will always remain unprecedented, but more so for my case. While I will remain Lord of Dragonstone, my children will take over all efforts from here on out until our enemies are crushed. Could I trust all of you to give your support to them as you had given to me?”

Surprise filled the hall, all not expecting their liege to delegate his responsibilities to his heir so soon after the start of a crisis. Many would have found this the action of a weak man, but all of them knew their liege lord well enough to know that he would not make such a decision lightly. They were also relieved that he would remain their lord instead of stepping down. Slowly, all nodded in support of their liege’s decision, with the Sunglass lord again nodding reluctantly. *We need to keep a closer eye on him from now on.*

“Why did you do that, father?” Aegon asked as they exited the hall.

“It was the truth, Egg,” their father shrugged. “War is not an area I’m familiar with.”

“But you’re still the Lord of Dragonstone. You have to lead us!”

Their father smiled. “No. This, I cannot be of much help. You’re my heir, Egg, and it’s time that you put all that you have learned to practice. Get out of the training yard and become the warrior you dreamed of becoming for so long. I say the same to you, Orys.” Their father turned to their older brother. “Help your brother as you have done for so many years.”

“I will, father.” While most bastard sons will be embittered at not being in line to inherit lands, Orys was loyal to a fault to their family. Despite being ten years older than Aegon, Orys deferred to him and acknowledged as the better leader of the both of them.
“Jaenyx,” their father turned to Visenya’s husband. “I trust that you will honor your alliance and help us in our present course? I can assure that you will have a position equal to Aegon in what follows.”

“I know, Father. And it was my people that were wronged. I must fight for them,” Jaenyx responded.

Their father hugged all of them before retiring with their mother. After hugging Aegon, Orys, and their mother, Visenya and Jaenyx made their way to the dungeons before they would be able to retire to their chambers. Quentin Qoherys and Arata Haru, Konno Haru’s eldest son, were overseeing the captured ironborn and were given the responsibility of interrogating them. Hands clasped with each other, they entered the lower levels of the castle and into the dark and dampness of the dungeons.

Passing by the cell where the elder Sunglass was kept, they both approached the main cell, where there was a table, chairs, and a chained ironborn captain, one named Curtass Drumm, having his head slammed against the wood by Quenton. As the only captain to have been pulled from the water alive, he was the highest ranking captive they had. To his credit, he didn’t cry in pain and kept his composure.

Arata Haru saw them approach and stood up, with Quenton stopping his bashing. “Rhaenys ha daijou desuka (Is Lady Rhaenys all right)?” he asked with concern.

“Hai, Arata-kun,” Jaenyx replied. “Kanojo ha daijou desu (She will be alright).” Visenya saw Jaenyx give a death glare to the ironborn captain. “Kono kuso kara o mi tsu ke ta (What did you find out from this piece of shit)?”

“Arera ha ouji ni ga shima ni kuru mae dea tte mo, watashitachi o kougeki shi taka tsu ta. Arera ha doragon ni shuu wa reru toha shi wa naka tsu ta. (They wanted to attack us even before the prince came to the island. They did not expect to be attacked by dragons),” Haru replied with a dark grin. “Kare ha kyou tte ru (He’s a crazy one).”
“Ironborn no su be te ga ari masu, Arata-kun ( All of the ironborn are, Arata ),” Visenya spoke in nihongo. She tried her best to learn, finding it a tongue as interesting as High Valyrian, and she had a long way to go before she could speak it well. But by this point, she could understand it thanks to Jaenyx.

“Watashitachi ha kare ni mizu o chuu gi mashouka ( Shall we pour water on him )?” Haru asked while pointing to the two buckets of water and a brown rag on the table.”

Jaenyx nodded while a wicked grin grew on his face. “Kono yarou ga dorudake mizu ga suki ka mi te miyo u. ( Let's see how much this bastard likes water ).”

Arata Haru nodded approvingly. “Ironborn bon ha oboreru no ga suki dato ki i ta. Shi ha kare ga oyu ga suki gan tte i masu. ( I heard that the ironborn like to be drowned. I hope he likes boiled water ).

“Quenton,” Visenya called out, having understood what they said. “Hold our guest down.” She saw Jaenyx go for one of the buckets, steam escaping from the water’s surface.

Jaenyx stared at the ironborn captain. “I heard you ironborn loved to be drowned, if what you worship is any indication.” The ironborn stared back in defiance while blood dripped from his forehead. “Let’s see how well you drown in warmer water.” Leaning his chair back, he put the rag on the ironborn’s face and poured the steaming water onto his face.

Visenya learned from Jaenyx that this practice was an ancient Valyrian torture tactic used to mock the Rhoynar’s affinity for water. It was first used during the War of Three Princes after Prince Yandry of Sarhoy was captured, who was a river-farer by heart. When all methods did not work, his Valyrian captors devised a way to turn his love for the water against him. After many times of him experiencing what it felt like to drown, Prince Yandry broke and was afraid of water for the rest of his life.

Visenya watched as the ironborn screamed upon the hot water burning his skin. Jaenyx poured as slowly as he could to make the pain last longer and the water to flow to the rest of the body. Finishing the bucket, Jaenyx readjusted his chair and tore off the rag. The ironborn’s face was burnt red, his skin peeling and blisters already forming. Both of his eyes were blood red and steam
coming out of his hair.

Jaenyx looked him over before sitting across him. “Had enough, ironborn?”

“What do you want?” the ironborn captain was now submissive, the hot water burning through his previous steel form.

“I will ask the most important question. Did Black Harren know you were going to attack us?” The ironborn hesitated, glancing at the other bucket of hot water. “I would choose my words very carefully. If the hot water is not enough to convince you, perhaps dragonfire can change your mind.”

The ironborn shook his head hard. “No, not that. Please.”

“Then start talking.”

The ironborn sighed. “The king didn’t know that Prince Darvin would do this. However, after he found out what he did to your man, he couldn’t do anything. Everyone knows that the riverlords hate him, especially with the construction of his massive keep. If word got out that he couldn’t control his own son, the lords under him would start to get ideas. One thought after another would lead to rebellion, so he did nothing.”

“But surely,” Visenya leaned forward. “Now, your king knows there’s no turning back from this, after his son started it.”

The ironborn captain chuckled darkly. “It doesn’t matter who started it. Ironborn blood has been spilled and there’s coin to be made off of Valyrian steel forging. I hope you’re ready to fight.”
“Oh, we will,” Visenya gave her own dark grin. “But you made a mistake after almost killing our sister. Now we will take pleasure in burning all of you until there is nothing but ashes in your wake.”

The ironborn captain straightened up in defiance. “What is dead may never die, but rises---”, but before he could finish, Arata drew his sword and decapitated him. His lifeless fell to the ground after realizing that its head was gone.

“Shi ha ano de tara me ni tsukare tei ta (I was getting tired of his bullshit),” Arata shrugged as he sheathed his sword.

Jaenyx nodded nonchalantly. “Shinpai nai. Shi hato nika ku tsui watsu ta (No worries. I was done anyway).”

Visenya watched everything, and saw Jaenyx enter his natural environment. He may have been a lord in the natural sense and knew how to command others, but she saw him become much more comfortable in these settings. He knew how to break people, knew how to get them talking, knew how to get what he wanted. Like Aegon, he was persistent and would do anything to accomplish his goals. However, that was where they diverged.

Aegon had standards and there were lines that he would not cross. He would not get squeamish at the sight of blood and had no difficulty in taking a life, but he had displayed remorse whenever he had to end a breathing thing and reflected upon it. For Jaenyx, Visenya saw him as cold, remorseless, and had no compunction to doing what was needed to get his tasks done. Him growing up without the barriers of Westerosi society only made his willingness to commit unpleasant acts know no bounds. She wondered what else he would’ve done had the ironborn not have folded so quickly.

Unlike Aegon and even Rhaenys, Visenya wasn’t bothered by his seemingly remorseless demeanor. In the past year, she knew him better and saw that he wasn’t callous just for the sake of it. He had a harsher upbringing and a teacher that painfully emphasized how merciless the world could be, which could sometimes lead to his actions being extreme. His closeness with Rhaenys and even his respectfulness towards Orys showed to Visenya that he did have warmth in his heart, but it was a long time since he had anyone to really be close with. He has me, and Rhæ, and the rest of us.
As much as she loved Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys, Visenya saw them as too restricted within the rules of the society they grew up in. Jaenyx remarked to her something that Master Haru said, “For those that made up the rules, there are no rules.” She couldn’t have agreed with that statement more, especially with how hypocritical the Faith’s septons were and she lost track of how many knights she had to kill when they wanted to force their hands on her. That was why she stuck with her husband, as he understood how the world was and had adjusted his mind accordingly, just like herself after experiencing isolation for being a strong and intelligent woman. *If only Egg, Rhae, and Orys understood what the world really was.*

Visenya walked up with Jaenyx back to their chambers, and only after the door was closed that she let out a heavy exhale that she didn’t know was there. The stresses of the night and everything that followed made her lean towards the wall, making almost disoriented. Jaenyx went to her side, concern evident his face.

“You alright, Vis?” She nodded. “We have an important day tomorrow, so we should rest now.”

Visenya shook her head. “Not yet,” her voice slightly cracked. “I almost lost Rhae tonight.”

“All of us almost did,” Jaenyx grabbed Visenya’s face in his hands. “But she’s alive, thanks to you. And Lord Velaryon. We will kill those that tried to take her from us.”

Visenya nodded in affirmation. “Kessa. We will bring fire and blood on them.”

Jaenyx gave her kiss to comfort her, which only got Visenya confused as to how short it was. “Kiss me again.” Visenya wanted more. Jaenyx gave her a deeper kiss, prompting her to pull him more against her. *I need him. I said that I would fuck him senseless.*

Pushing him away, Visenya gave him a lustful gaze before she started to undo his cuirass and rip off his tunic. “I almost lost my sister today, so make me forget and please your wife.”
“We’re both very tired from battle. Shouldn’t we rest?” Jaenyx half-heartedy asked, not going to say no to his wife wanting him.

“No, fuck that. I want you now! Make me forget my worries, my husband.” Visenya ran her hands against Jaenyx’s defined torso and pulled down his breeches, exposing his bare self to her wanting eyes. Finally getting the clue, Jaenyx turned her around and started to unlace her dragon coat. “Be gentle, Jae. I don’t want you ripping up my wedding gift just as you have done with the other dresses.”

“With how you look underneath, I don’t know if I could,” Jaenyx japed before yanking down the coat as the Valyrian steel plates clattered to the floor. Visenya turned around and jumped in his arms while giving him a deep kiss, their naked selves strongly grasping each other.

Both were led to the bed, with Jaenyx wasting no time in getting his member inside her entrance and slamming into her. Visenya’s moans filled the chambers as pleasure replaced worry and fear for her sister’s life. “Harder, Jae! Fuck me harder!” she ordered. Jaenyx complied and pushed into her with a furious pace, both of them reaching the brink. At many intense thrusts, Visenya felt her husband’s seed burst into her core before he collapsed onto her.

“Can I ask you to do something, Jae?”

“Anything, Vis ,” he muttered while still buried in her hair.

“Can you make another dragon coat for Rhae?” Jaenyx focused his eyes on her, confused by the request. “She almost died today and I don’t know… what we’ll do if she were to perish. She’s our heart, Jae. Egg would never be the same and our mother will be torn to pieces if she had died tonight. Please protect her.”

Visenya decided to repay Jaenyx’s moment of vulnerability with hers, as she felt tears leave her eyes and her voice cracking loudly. Jaenyx wiped the tears before nodding. “Of course. I will have Aevor make another coat. I can’t guarantee it’ll be like yours, as it’s one of a kind. But she’ll be safe.”
Visenya smiled and gave him a kiss before she turned and laid on her chest. “Should I get on all fours, Jae?”

Jaenyx did not need to be told again, as he squeezed her breasts and fucked her from behind. This went on for at least a good few hours before the fatigue finally overtook them and Jae fell on her back.

The next morning, Visenya and Jaenyx helped each other dress in their armor. After consulting with their bannermen some more in the hall, Jaenyx led his men on Maerys’ ships while the Celtigars and Sunglass troops who chose to fight boarded the Velaryons’. Visenya got on Vhagar after hugging their mother and father, promising to return to them alive, and flew from Dragonstone above the combined fleet. She was soon joined by Jaenyx on Clouwdwynd and Aegon on Balerion. Rhaenys would join them a few days later on Meraxes after Taygor told her to rest.

Their destination: the mouth of the Blackwater Rush. Westeros will know fire and blood, were Visenya’s final thoughts as the mainland came into view.

Chapter End Notes

And here, we see the dragons finally landing on Westeros.

Lot to cover in this chapter and I wasn’t that heartless to have Rhaenys die so early, but this was necessary for her to learn so that she’ll be careful the next time. While I will stick to the basic outline of how the Conquest occurred, I will be changing and adding events and battles in order to make the Conquest be a more... organic process. At this point, the dragons are only reacting, but the ironborn sure stirred up a storm and it doesn't matter if Harren the Black sanctioned it. The Storm King is also screwed and he'll know soon enough.

That Valyrian torture tactic... that is waterboarding, but I felt it was quite symbolic given the Rhoynish affinity to water. And this is the first time I put Japanese in this story. What do you all think? Were my translations correct or should I not include them in the future? Also, were the Sunglass’ too easily let off? I do not intend for the heir to take this lying down. What do you think?

I apologize if this feels rushed, which I will fix. But I really wanted to get the Conquest kicked off and got impatient.

Next, we see the dragons start their first real moves against Westeros.
Aegon IV

Chapter Notes

Holy cow! Over 100 people following and favoriting this story on Fanfiction? All of you guys are just... Really thanks so much guys! Hope I can get a similar response on Ao3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a busy few weeks for the dragons upon their landing at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush. Discovering that the area was filled with hills and forests that were all defensible with some rearranging, the dragons set up camp in the valley between the three highest hills at the Rush’s mouth. They then constructed wooden ramparts, twelve feet high and with twenty-foot high redoubts spaced in hundred yard intervals, that connected all three hills while Rahitheon engineers filled the northern valley between the easternmost and northernmost hills next to the Blackwater Bay with makeshift berths for the troops to be resupplied by ship from Dragonstone, Driftmark, and Claw Isle. They also dug a moat in front of the wooden ramparts ten feet wide and fifteen feet deep filled with water and a trench in front of the moat that was six feet wide and six feet deep. The trench was filled with wooden stakes to prevent a mass charge by enemy infantry while Celtigar and Tarareon archers, armed with arrows tipped with broadheads to be used against infantry and with long and narrow pyramidal bodkins to be used against their more armored opponents. They had to test the bodkins against spare armor provided by Dragonstone and Claw Isle, achieving penetration but not enough to be mortally dangerous for a knight. The archers were instructed to aim for the shoulders, neck, and head as the armor was weakest in those areas.

Aegon, Jaenyx, Orys, and Visenya put their tents on the highest of the three hills while Crispian Celtigar and Daemon Velaryon took the northernmost hill next to the Bay while Ragaemor Tarareon and Aevor Rahitheon took the westernmost hill. Their dragons rested within the ramparts, on the sides of the highest hill. Rhaenys joined them a few days later on Meraxes, having sufficiently recovered from her wounds, but carrying a harder expression on her face than before she almost drowned.

Aegon saw that Rhaenys still smiled, was pleasant with everyone, and continued to play music with Jaenyx. She had become much closer with Visenya after she saved her life, warming Aegon’s heart since his sisters were generally distant with each other due to their different personalities. However, it was her eyes that got Aegon worried. Her smiles and agreeable manners masked a distress that only came when one came within reach of death’s embrace. Aegon tried to talk to her to see how she was holding up, which she responded that she was fine. He would have accepted it had he not heard the waver in her voice, how quickly she switched the topic, and when she… disrobed in front of him when he persisted. Feeling his hands on her curves, tightening his hands around her plump ass, feeling her laugh in his mouth while he thrusted into her… Rhae certainly knows how to get me quiet.
Nevertheless, Aegon resolved to discuss the matter with Rhaenys, as he feared that she wasn’t as strong as Jaenyx when it came to moving forward from a close brush with death. *I’m going to have to say no the next time she tries to… have me enter her.*

With their landing secure and fortified, the dragons sent out foraging parties to increase the supplies coming by ship. A week after they landed at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, Rhaenys and Visenya flew north on Meraxes and Vhagar towards Rosby and Stokeworth to secure their northern approach against any response by Black Harren, along with 600 troops. Rosby surrendered without a fight to Rhaenys, no doubt due to being the pleasant one out of the group. Aegon heard that Rhaenys struck up a conversation with the Lord of Rosby and convinced him to yield after mentioning what the dragons had done to the Ironborn fleet in the Blackwater Bay. The same occurred with Stokeworth, with Visenya also mentioning the Ironborn fleet’s burning. The Rosby and Stokeworth lords arrived at their citadel and bent the knee to the dragons after the dragons reconfirmed their titles and lands, bringing their total strength up to 5,500 troops. More importantly, they had a stable agricultural base separate of Dragonstone and horses for their cavalry.

Meanwhile, Jaenyx flew on Cloudwynd across the Blackwater Bay with a detachment of Velaryon and Tarareon vessels carrying 1000 troops towards Massey’s Hook. Aegon and Jaenyx expected a serious fight from Houses Massey and Bar Emmon, both of whom were sworn to House Durrandon, and had thus taken mostly Tarareon soldiers to help him secure the peninsula. However, they too surrendered without a fight, with both lords bending the knee at their citadel and bringing another 1500 troops into their army. Within a few weeks of landing on Westeros, the dragons had secured much of the land surrounding the Blackwater Bay and greatly improved their position against Black Harren and the Arrogant king with a total army of 7000 troops.

However, a few days ago, the dragons received a distressing report from their scouts near Duskendale.

“My gods! The Duskendale and Maidenpool lords have declared for Black Harren and are marching 3000 troops along the shores of the Crackclaw Point to the Whispers, with 6000 ironborn and riverland troops joining them. They’re going to attack Claw Isle,” Aegon read the report.

Crispian Celtigar was naturally fearful. “Lord Aegon, I only have one hundred swords left at Claw Isle. We must protect them!”
“We will,” Aegon reassured. “I can fly out on Balerion and block their approach with dragonfire.”

“Egg,” Orys pointed to the map. “Using dragonfire on the Point’s forests is too risky, as we could easily start an inferno that could smoke out the families there and turning them against us. We’re already fighting two powerful adversaries, so we cannot afford to add more against us.”

“In addition,” Lord Jon of Rosby spoke, having been offered a place in their war council by Aegon for bending the knee peacefully. “We have less troops than they do. We cannot split our forces without endangering our position in the Blackwater Bay. To do so would be to invite a larger response from either Black Harren or King Argilac.”

“They’re in marching formation, along the shores of the Point,” Visenya traced her finger on the map. “They have restricted mobility and the forests will negate the numerical advantages that they have. If we were to land in front of their army, we could block them and use the narrowness of the terrain against them.”

“If we do land in front of them, it’ll have to be within a day’s march to Claw Isle,” Ragaemor Tarareon joined in while one of his servants translated to the common tongue. “Our ships cannot move fast enough to meet the threat without cutting it very close. Even then, we would have insufficient time to set up proper positions.”

Aegon looked closely at the map again, trying to figure out a solution to their first major predicament. Duskendale and Maidenpool had to be secured to safeguard their western approach against the ironborn. Despite still being incomplete after over thirty years, Black Harren’s fortress was located on the God’s Eye and within striking distance of their citadel. If Duskendale and Maidenpool remained outside of their control, their enemies could roll them up, surround their position like a neck in a noose, and drive back into the sea. They couldn’t use the dragons so close to their citadel without burning their own troops also.

Then, Aegon remembered something that Quenton Qoherys taught him: if surrounded, attack. He was confused by his words from that day, as he and three other sparring partners from their household guards circled him in the training yard. Aegon questioned on how he could attack with himself when he faced more than one opponent. Quenton explained to him that attacking when
outnumbered is something that his opponents will not expect, as the natural response to defend yourself and wait for their combined onslaught. But if you attack, you control their responses and you have surprise and momentum on your side, if temporarily. The trick was to subdue or at least improve your odds in the few fleeting moments when you do go up against many opponents.

Aegon scanned the map of the Blackwater Bay, looking for something that would allow him and the troops to preempt their enemies. His eyes then focused on a town between Maidenpool and Duskendale next to the Bay, almost where the Crackclaw Point connected with the mainland. “Lord Rosby,” he pointed to the feature. “Remind me of this town’s name?”

“My lord, that is Rook’s Rest, seat of House Staunton.” Oh, I remember them. “Why do you ask?”

“Don’t you see where this town is located?” Aegon pressed his finger down.

Jaenyx caught on. “Rook’s Rest is at a crossroads between Maidenpool, Duskendale, and the Crackclaw Point. Whoever controls that town will control all of the northern parts of the Blackwater Bay.”

“Exactly, Jae,” Aegon nodded. “The enemy army is already far in the Crackclaw Point. If we were to land over there and set up positions behind them, they’ll have to turn back. They won’t expect us to do this.”

“But they have 9,000 men, Lord Aegon,” Lord Alyn of Stokeworth pointed out. “How can we fight against them with less than 7000 men?”

“Even if we do secure the town, Egg,” Orys stared at the map. “Rook’s Rest is surrounded by hills, with the highest north of the town. We could secure them, but they would be smarter than to attack soldiers on high ground. They’ll just skirt past us and avoid a fight.”

“We make them come to us.”
“How?” Orys questioned.

Aegon was planning strategy for the first time, but he was no longer in the library or in the training yard. This was a real war and unlike the past, people would die if he made one misstep. Orys was right in that the enemy would know better than to attack a force located on the high ground and they couldn’t risk using the dragons yet. No one in the council underestimated their power, but they needed to use it at the right moment for maximum damage. If they used it too often, eventually their enemies would adapt and learn how to counteract the dragons.

“What if you don’t take the hills of Rook’s Rest?” Jaenyx kept looking at the map.

“What do you mean, Jae?” Aegon was baffled.

“It’s true that you can only take a few thousand troops, and their best chance of survival is to get them on high ground. However, as Orys pointed out, they would know better than to attack you. So don’t take the hills yet and instead remain at Rook’s Rest.” Aegon waited for more, as did the rest of the council. “I assume that this area is crawling with their spies. If word got to them that you holding position with, say 3,000 troops, and held them there long enough, the enemy will turn around and come to you while expecting an easy victory. Those kinds of expectations leads to overconfidence and leads to serious mistakes. Only after you see their mistakes do you take the hill and fight.”

Aegon absorbed it before nodding. “That could work, Jae. But we would need to move fast and we would strike hard.”

“Once you have them crowded and in the right position, unleash Balerion. They never seen a dragon act against an army, so let’s use that to our advantage.”

The council looked upon the map before they gave their consent to the plan, while Ragaemor Tarareon and Visenya looked upon Jaenyx with pride.
“What would you do, Jae, while we’re out in the field?” Aegon asked. With him marching out with the troops, he was unsure of his good-brother’s actions in the meantime.

“The enemy’s focus will be on the north of the Blackwater Bay. However, while you and Orys would lead half of our troops against the enemy, the other half will stay here at the Rush’s mouth. As for me, I’m taking Arata Haru and Ragaemor’s son Rhaedar into the riverlands.”

“What? Why would you go there?”

“We only know about the six thousand troops accompanying the Duskendale and Maidenpool lords, but that is only a portion of the ironborn’s strength. We need more information regarding the ironborn’s strength as well as the situation in the riverlands.”

“Why would we need to know?” Orys asked.

Jaenyx gave him an incredulous look before continuing. “It’s no secret that Black Harren is not loved in the Riverlands and the troops he is currently sending against us would no doubt take away from the troops that are keeping the riverlands under control. I am going there to assess the ironborn’s true strength as well as anything else that could be used against Black Harren. It is better to find something that could break the enemy without fighting them in open battle.”

Aegon shook his head, while Visenya just listened. How is she calm about this? “I can’t allow you to put yourself at risk, Jae. There’s no way of knowing just awaits you and your friends there.”

“I’m not asking for your permission, Egg. And I’m not going alone. I’ll be fine.”

Aegon was taken aback by his disregarding of his wishes, but then remembered that Jaenyx was not under his father and therefore not under him. Even their father promised him a position equal to
Aegon’s, meaning that he could not control his actions. “Then all I can ask that you be safe, Jae. Otherwise, Vis might be bash my head in if you’re hurt.” That got him chuckles from the council except Visenya, who displayed her confidence in his husband.

“I’m coming too,” Rhaenys stepped forward.

Aegon’s eyes widened. “No, Rhae! I’m not going to put my wife in danger!”

“Jae and his friends will protect me. Besides, they might need a softer touch to their mission and no one will expect a woman to infiltrate their lands.”

“Still, no,” Aegon repeated. “I am risking one of my family in this. I won’t have my wife--”

“I need to do this, Egg,” Rhaenys answered, with Aegon detecting a trace of finality in her words. “Besides, Jae might have more motivation to come back safe to Vis if he is also protecting me,” she jested. To his credit, Jaenyx did not express open disapproval to Rhaenys wanting to come, also sensing that Rhaenys had already made her decision.

Not wanting the rest of the council to see more disagreement between them, Aegon nodded his consent but resolved to talk to her afterwards. Dismissing the council, he followed Rhaenys back to the tent and found her that she was already packed and dressed for the journey ahead.

“There’s no stopping you, is there?” Aegon asked, but it was more of a statement.

“I have to do something productive--”

“You can stay here and hold the fort. You were wounded and in no condition for--”
Rhaenys tightened her fists. “Don’t you dare tell me what to do or where I can’t go! I am sick of it!”

Aegon stepped back, surprised at her outburst. He never seen her like this and she definitely didn’t have a temper, or so he thought.

“What’s wrong, Rhae?” Aegon asked calmly, walking towards her with his hand held out. “What’s going on?”

Rhaenys let out several shaky breaths while her fists also shook, but her fury dissipated with each exhale. “I’ve been in bed for days, and I carry the scars that remind me of when I almost drowned that night,” she murmured slowly. “Being in bed makes me think… too much.”

Aegon raised an eyebrow. “What about when we’re coupling?”

Rhaenys groaned. “We’re doing something, Egg. That’s what I need.”

“But you’ll be busy here holding the fort--”

“That’s not enough, Egg.”

“So, your reaction to almost dying is to get yourself into more danger?”

“Please don’t fight me on this.”
“Then help me understand, Rhae!” Aegon cried out. “Why do you want to go with Jae on what is essentially a stairway into hells?”

Rhaenys took a moment. “Because if I don’t do this… if I am stuck here instead of doing something worthwhile, I will be stuck with thinking about how the Bay nearly choked the life out of me. And I don’t know what will happen if I let those thoughts continue to occupy my mind.”

Aegon couldn’t decide what was worse: his wife willingly putting herself in danger or the fact that her near-death experience would do the same thing.


Then, Rhaenys smiled. *There it is.* She walked up to him, placed her hand on his cheek, and tiptoed to give him a kiss.

The kiss became deeper as Rhaenys put her arms around Aegon’s neck while he wrapped his arms around her waist. Their tongues wrestled with each other for control as they both moaned in their mouths.

Aegon felt Rhaenys’ arms reach up inside his tunic as she pulled it up over his head. She kissed his neck, down his torso, and further down to between his legs. His breath hitched as she undid his breeches, pulled them down, and took his length into her mouth. Looking down, he saw her purple eyes staring back at her while waves of pleasure spread through his insides. *How does she know how to shut me up?*

“Release into me, Egg,” she managed between her licks. “Shatter in my mouth.” She sucked hard and took him deep.

“Fuucckk…” Aegon slowly uttered as he felt his cock erupt while Rhaenys’ tongue swept some more between his legs. “Where did you learn to do that?”
“Muña taught me some things that she said kept kepa quiet whenever they fought,” Rhaenys scratched between his legs with her slender fingers. “She said that ‘men become so simple when a woman sucks on his cock.’”

Aegon broke into a guffaw, which was tempered at how stiff he became with her fingers still on his length. “I guess I better talk to Father more often after all of this.” He cocked his head at Rhaenys. “Do you know anything else?”

Rhaenys gave him a lusty grin. “Depends, Egg. Although I would choose wisely since it might be weeks before we see each other again.”

Aegon momentarily got out of his blissful stupor. “We will see each other again, right?”

“Count on it,” Rhaenys slowly got up and stood a few inches from Aegon’s face.

Aegon again took her in his arms, feeling his hands around her supple curves and squeezing her breasts through her dress. Spurred on by her moaning, he reached for the laces on her back and slowly undid them while keeping his eyes on hers. Slowly, he pulled down the fabric and felt his heart skipping a beat upon gazing at her form. Although not as muscled and toned as Visenya, Rhaenys was thin and graceful with breasts that fit her slim frame. She was all woman and smelled of soap and perfume. Aegon nuzzled her neck while running his hands over her bare body.

Aegon pushed Rhaenys onto the mattress in their tent, kneading her breasts while guiding his cock into her entrance. She blinked rapidly as he slid deeper inside her, looping her arms around his neck as he slammed faster into her. Rhaenys made it feel like the first time for Aegon and her moans and rolled eyes spurred him to go harder.

“Please, Egg. Fuck me harder. Take your sister,” she whispered. Them being siblings didn’t bother Aegon, as sibling unions were common in Valyria and their father planned for him to marry Visenya. Fortunately, Jaenyx showed up and became the loving husband that Visenya deserved, something that Aegon couldn’t give her. With Rhaenys, he could be the Florian to Rhaenys’
Jonquil, even though he found that tale quite annoying after hearing it too much.

Aegon felt Rhaenys’ legs wrapped around his waist, her way of telling him to go much faster and harder than he was. Their moans and grunts became louder and no doubt that the nearby tents, where Visenya, Jaenyx, and Orys were, could hear their lovemaking. Aegon was not worried about them, as they were family and all that mattered was pleasing his sister-wife.


Taking her challenge, Aegon switched their positions, with him laying on the mattress and her on top of him. Her back against his chest, he looped his arms around both of her shoulders, reinserted his cock in her, and slammed her from behind. Their hips slapping filled the tent as they neared the climax, with Aegon having to put more effort in thrusting in her while lying on his back. Feeling his core and back strain from all the thrusts, he finally went over the brink as his seed burst in Rhaenys and he saw stars twinkling in his vision. He collapsed deeper into the mattress with his arms and legs outstretched over the bed’s edges, both panting and recovering from their climax.

“I am yours forever, Egg,” Aegon felt Rhaenys’ hand reach over her shoulder and cup his cheek as she still laid on top of him, her sweat flowing down onto his body.

“And I am yours, Rhae,” Aegon caressed her belly while he buried his face in her hair and took in her glorious scent. He was about to tell her that they would talk about her… mental condition, but decided not to. Why else would she have an outburst before shutting him up with her body? Instead, he took in these moments and had his mind remember each second of it. Being here, with Rhaenys, from their first night as man and wife… nothing could replace this.

A few hours later, Aegon and Rhaenys helped dress each other before she headed out of the fort with Jaenyx, Arata Haru, and one of Ragaemor Tarareon’s nephews, Laevor. It was decided that Visenya would be in command of the fort in both Aegon’s and Jaenyx’s absences, as both Dragonstone’s bannermen and Jaenyx’s vassals would answer to her. Ragaemor would accompany Aegon and Orys to Rook’s Rest to secure the town and wait for the combined Duskendale-Maidenpool-ironborn onslaught, while Jaenyx and Rhaenys would lead their group deep into the Riverlands to scout out and infiltrate the region.
Before they left, Aegon gave Rhaenys a deep kiss and told her to be safe. He looked over and saw Visenya be much more open with her affections to Jaenyx, giving him a rather forceful kiss and squeezing his cock while he could see her whisper in his mouth. He could make out Jaenyx’s response, “Don’t worry, Vis. I’m not going to let anyone even touch Rhae.” She nodded, fully trusting in her husband, while she gave Rhaenys a smile that said, don’t do anything rash.

Rhaenys going with Jaenyx on his mission was rash in itself, but like Aegon, Visenya knew that there was no convincing her to do otherwise. However, she took it much better than he did, fully understanding that her sister needed to do this for her own peace of mind and was confident that she’ll be safe with Jaenyx and his friends. Aegon tried to catch a final glimpse as they went further from the fort, their heads covered with hoods and dressed in cloaks that concealed their weapons.

Praying to the gods of Valyria to protect them, Aegon hugged Visenya before climbing onto Balerion. He stayed as close as he could to Orys as they moved their contingent onto the Velaryons’ boats and sailed towards Rook’s Rest.

The troops moved as quietly as they could in the dead of night, forbidden to light torches and ordered to muffle their boots with rags. Spears and pikes were not to touch the ground, sword belts were removed, and everyone was to move in a uniform fashion, not one step too quick or slow. No one spoke a word as they all moved carefully into position. Nothing was left to chance as the dark of night would only offer one opportunity to mask their movements from the vigilant eyes of the enemy.

It took a day for them to sail from their fort at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush towards Rook’s Rest. To his credit. Lord Staunton saw the futility in resisting after Balerion’s shadow covered the town and bent the knee to the dragons while surrendering command of his two hundred and fifty swords.

To the north of the town was a hill that commanded the approach to the Crackclaw Point. However, Aegon resisted the urge to fortify that hill immediately, as that would prevent the enemy from attacking them. Remembering Jaenyx’s advice, he and Orys bided their time, having their men sharpen their weapons and having their archers keep their bows in good condition while preparing many contingencies should their main plan not achieve its objective.
Aegon had three thousand men with him, not including the two hundred and fifty swords from House Staunton: one thousand and five hundred men of Houses Rosby and Stokeworth, one thousand men of Houses Celtigar and Bar Emmon, and five hundred Tarareon cavalry after their new vassals provided them with horses. All of them were naturally nervous save for the Tarareons, the same ones who had fought against the Rhoynar of old. They quartered in Rook’s Rest and waited for the enemy to come to them.

Over the next four days, Aegon flew up on Balerion high in the sky on watch for the enemy’s movements. He remembered Jaenyx telling him that while dragons were good for scouting, nothing could beat information gained from the ground. “Seeing on dragonback is like looking at a map with none of the details you need” were his words. Aegon hoped that whatever information they would gain from the riverlands would help them in their struggle.

Then, Aegon spotted a column that ran for miles. Quickly counting in his head, he estimated at least 8,000 troops marching in the direction of Rook’s Rest. They’re coming. Quickly flying back to the troops and landing outside of the town, Aegon slid down off of Balerion’s back and ran to Orys.


“Let’s get ready for the fight!” Orys gleefully shouted as he pulled out the axe Jaenyx gifted him and began barking orders to the soldiers.

In full armor and in battle formation, Aegon and Orys stood with the troops as they saw their enemies marching past the north hill to face them. They both saw the banners of Hoare, Darklyn, Mooton, and the Riverland houses that joined them flying in the breeze, the two armies staring each other down in what would be their first battle. It was a moment that many knights and warriors longed for, the plunge before their moment of glory. But for Aegon, he felt nervous as he was no longer in the training yard with Qoherys. People would die very soon and Aegon did not know what to do after killing his first man in anger.

“We need to hold steady, Egg.” Orys put his hand on Aegon’s shoulders. “I’m scared too.” Aegon nodded his thanks to his brother, praying to the gods of Valyria for their success.
The staredown lasted to the afternoon, when Aegon saw the enemy move down from the hill. *There it is!* “It is as Jaenyx said. They’re getting overconfident.”

“If we outnumbered an army three-to-one, we would also.”

Aegon didn’t answer. “Let them come closer and be completely off the hill. We’ll attack in the morning.”

Orys nodded. “Yes, brother.” Despite being ten years older, Orys knew that Aegon was the leader of the two of them and did not question his orders.

The enemy had a good position upon the hill and outnumbering their army three-to-one meant that Aegon and Orys couldn’t attack them yet. They were also waiting to use Balerion at the right moment in order to inflict maximum damage, as they were not so arrogant to think that their dragons could simply charge into the fray and fight all their battles for them. There was a reason that Aegon and Visenya were taught how to fight without dragons and this was their chance to put their knowledge to the test.

Near dusk, Aegon and Orys observed the enemy’s new positions. “You see that, Orys? Look at how they’re positioned on the slopes that lead up to the hill.”

“Theyir left flank has cavalry on their far left and infantry next to them. But their cavalry is too far ahead of the infantry. Must be because the slopes are too steep for their horses.”

“And that where we’ll strike. Their center and right flank are restricted by the slopes leading up to the hill along with the trees dotting them. We focus our attack on their right flank and the rest will follow. As a final act, I’ll have Balerion finish off what’s left.”

Orys nodded, smiling at the plan. “We’ll be waiting for morning?”
“Aye. Let’s do this.”

They used the night to reposition themselves, placing the Celtigar infantry on their right flank opposite of their enemy’s left, all of them equipped with long pikes to stave off the cavalry. In the early hours of the morning, Aegon took the initiative and kicked off the attack with a volley of fire arrows raining down upon the enemy’s left flank.

“Nock!” Aegon ordered. “LOOSE!” He saw dozens of fire arrows fly through the dawn and fall onto the unsuspecting troops.

“Cavalry, charge!” Aegon shouted as the Tarareon cavalry galloped forward and slammed into the disorderly left flank. Many infantry were cut down, as the Tarareon horse archers shot arrows at them while on the run and their lances punched through their mail shirts. The Tarareon horse archers also shot at the enemy cavalry, killing many before they could mount their horses and thus throwing the enemy’s left flank into chaos.

Aegon saw a force carrying Hoare banners moving towards their disorderly left flank, no doubt to reinforce them. “Signal their withdrawal,” Aegon ordered one of his bannermen. The Tarareons withdrew back to their lines while the next phase of Aegon’s plan was in motion. “Have Crispian march his lads forward. It’s time.”

Thankfully, only three Tarareon cavalrymen were killed before they reach the safety of their lines. Pikes down, the Celtigar formation moved across the flatter slopes of the enemy’s left flank and struck them before the Hoare force could reorganize them. Many of the enemy infantry felt the sharp heads of the Celtigars’ pikes pierce their gambesons and into their flesh.

Soon, Aegon saw the enemy’s reserve cavalry wheel to their left, no doubt to support their beleaguered comrades. “Have the Tarareons regrouped?”

“Yes, brother,” Orys replied.
“So soon... they truly are masters on the horse. Have them counterattack against their cavalry.”

Aegon saw the Tarareons charge back into the fray, slamming into the Hoare cavalry while their mounted archers did more damage to them. “Orys, take the Stokeworth men. Time to finish off their left.”

Orys didn’t respond, but merely mounted his horse and charged. “Attack, men! Crush the iron hides!” With a battle cry, Orys led the Stokeworths to reinforce the Celtigars and the Tarareons. Aegon knew that the momentum gained by the Celtigar pikemen and the Tarareon cavalry needed to be maintained if the enemy’s left flank was to be completely rolled. Only after they achieved that could they have a chance of not only restricting their enemy’s movements, but to destroy them.

Aegon smiled as he saw the enemy’s left flank completely collapse under the combined pressure of Orys’ Stokeworth men, the Celtigars, and the Tarareons. With the approach to the north hill secure and their enemy stuck between them and the shore next to the Blackwater Bay, he decided it was time.

Climbing onto Balerion, Aegon shouted “Sōvēs!” Gaining altitude in the skies of dawn, Balerion took his time to climb as he was the largest of the dragons before he nosed down towards the enemy’s center and right flank.

Closer... closer.... Then, to ensure maximum damage, Aegon gave the order. “DRACARYS!!!!” Balerion let loose his black flames, the streams of pitch dragonfire coming upon the enemy and powerful enough to ground them to dust while a few others were simply set on fire. Balerion released his breath until the shore before climbing back up and turning around for Aegon to see.

Aegon was completely unprepared for what he saw. Before, he could see thousands remaining in the enemy’s center and right flank, still ready to fight back against his troops. However, what was left was deep, black trench with smoke coming out of the ground, with the soldiers seeming turned to thin air. It was as if dust collected on the floors of Dragonstone and a servant simply swept it away with a broom. Holy hells, Balerion is more powerful than I thought.
Although he knew that another stream of dragonfire was unnecessary, Aegon flew over the enemy one more time, letting Balerion’s shadow bathe them in darkness while a monstrous, ear-shattering roar broke through the chaos of the battle. Urging Aegon to land near some Celtigar pikemen, he slid off to see the remaining enemy troops surrendering and laying down their weapons.

Aegon walked up to Orys. “What’s the count?”

Orys gave him a huge smile. “Only twenty dead and sixty wounded. Meanwhile, I can only count about one thousand survivors. It’s a complete victory, Egg.”

Aegon laughed, astonished at how well their first battle went. “Maybe I should use Balerion more often.”

“Maybe,” Orys japed back. “We should see to the survivors.”

Aegon nodded before to the remains of the shattered enemy army. “Where are your commanders?!” he shouted.

“My lord,” one soldier stepped up, soot covering his entire body. “Lord Darklyn and Lord Mooton perished when you burned them. Our overall leader, Prince Riler Hoare, is also dead.”

“Where is the proof?” Aegon asked.

“Gone, when you burned them. As you can see, my lord, we have no leaders now.”

“Thank you soldier,” Aegon nodded. “To the rest of you, you’ve seen what a dragon could do. Many of your comrades have perished, their remains turned to dust! However, know that your overlords sealed their fates when they attacked my home and harming my family. As for you all,”
Aegon pointed. “I’m giving you a chance to live and return to your homes. Bend the knee and it shall be so.”

Many slowly got on their knees, while Balerion’s roar got the rest to follow suit.

Aegon looked over Orys, caked blood and dirt on his armor and blood dripping off his axe. While he rode Balerion, he hadn’t drawn his sword but was not naive to think that he wouldn’t need to do so in the future. If anyone was to really him respect as a warrior and leader, he had to get blood on his body and sword. *Hopefully, it’ll be soon. That way, I won’t worry about it anymore.*

Chapter End Notes

And here we have the first major battle of the Conquest. This battle was inspired by the Battle of Dunbar (1650), which is Oliver Cromwell’s greatest achievement as a military leader. Really interesting battle and period, so I suggest you look it up. We also see the foundations of King’s Landing, but it's not the Aegonfort for obvious reasons. And we see the real consequences of Jaenyx not being under Aegon.

This is the first time I'm wrote a major battle scene, so again, please bear with me as everything in this story is my first. The battles will only get more intense as the story progresses and I will add more stakes. So, please wait for that.

For Rhaenys, she's not going to be really okay after nearly drowning. She is acting naturally for someone who had a near death experience and I hope I got that part right. Her seducing Aegon to shut him up was too perfect of an opportunity to pass up, so I hope I did her right at that instance.

Next, we see the group doing their business in the Riverlands.
Rhaenys IV

Chapter Notes

I keep saying this, but really appreciate all of the feedback and comments I get.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Are you sure this is a good idea, Jae?”

“It’s the best chance we’ve got, Rhae. You had me informed that a harvest festival is where many lords congregate to discuss important matters. From what we’ve gathered, the first place to go would be a brothel.”

Rhaenys was uncomfortable going near a brothel. Granted, the town at the base of the Dragonmont had a brothel and she knew that such a place was where Orys was conceived. However, she remembered how long it took for their mother to treat Orys with a tolerable amount of decency and it made her skin crawl at the thought of selling her body for money.

But now, they had to enter a brothel for the sake of their struggle. After commandeering a boat and rowing up the Blackwater Rush, the group had heard that there was a harvest feast occurring at the Stoney Sept and that many of the major lords would attend. They also heard that Black Harren had officially called his banners after Aegon’s victory at Rook’s Rest, which saw Maidenpool surrendering to Aegon after he marched the troops there and Duskendale surrendering to Visenya after she flew over. In just a few weeks, the dragons had secured all of the lands surrounding the Blackwater Bay, defeated two major ironborn forces, and were now within striking distance of Black Harren’s incomplete fortress.

After docking near the Stoney Sept, the group took a room at an inn and closely observed the many lordly houses that had converged on the rather busy town. Their silver hair and amethyst eyes making them stick out like sore thumbs with the exception of Arata, they said that they were travelers from Lys. Rhaenys also began to speak more High Valyrian with Jaenyx and Rhaedar even though she knew that Lysenes didn’t speak it, but none of the Westerosi they came across knew the difference.
They saw the twin keeps of House Frey, the silver eagle of House Mallister, the red stallion of House Bracken, the ravens and white weirwood of House Blackwood, and the trout of House Tully among others. Rhaenys explained to them among the riverland houses, the Tullys and Freys were the wealthiest due to their castles being located at critical points on the major rivers in the region, but the Blackwoods and Brackens both commanded the largest forces.

After going through the market square and observing the comings and goings of all of the Westerosi lordlings that had arrived at the Stoney Sept, Jaenyx and Rhaenys saw many of them enter a brothel on the east side of the market, its sign the shape of a peach. That was when Jaenyx came up with a plan to lure one of these lordlings into something he said was called a honey trap. Essentially, it involved utilizing one of the whores at the brothel and catching the lordling while he was in the act.

It didn’t take much effort to get one of the whores in on the plot. Now, all they needed to do was to select a lordling. Sure enough, one of them made more visits to the brothel than his acquaintances and always with the same one. Jaenyx paid that whore with two sacks of silver and had her keep that lordling busy while they moved in.

Despite her discomfort with using such a questionable approach, Rhaenys had full confidence in her good-brother. However, she was only going to observe since she didn’t want to be around a lordling in his… nude form. Only one I will see bare is Egg.

Getting a signal from the whore they hired, Jaenyx and Rhaenys entered through a back door of the brothel while Rhaedar and Arata stood guard. Moving through the dimly-lit hallways and the many rooms filled with moans and the smell of discharge, they finally arrived at the room where their whore was. Rhaenys saw Jaenyx put his ear next to the door, but she also heard the loud moaning from the other side. She then saw Jaenyx open the door, fighting the urge to avert her eyes at the lordling being caught in flagrante delicto.

“You can go,” Rhaenys said to the whore as she handed her another sack of silver for her troubles before allowing her to leave. She took a moment to stare at the lordling, having short red hair and red beard, before she took a deep breath and getting a grip.

“Who the fuck are you?! Do you know who I am?!” the red-haired lordling cried out.
“Broden Tully,” Jaenyx answered. “Your uncle is Edmyn Tully, Lord of Riverrun. Am I correct?”

“So you know who I am?”

Jaenyx sighed, annoyed at how slow he was being. “Would we approach you if we didn’t?” Broden Tully stepped forward, but Jaenyx drew his sword and put it under his chin. “Really? You’re going to attack me with your cock hanging for all to see?” The Tully man gulped. “Sit back down on the bed.” To his credit, he was wise to comply before Jaenyx threw his clothes at him. “And put on your clothes, man. There’s a lady here.”

As the Tully man dressed while sitting, Rhaenys approached him. “We’re not here to hurt you, Lord Broden. We just want some words with you and your uncle.”

“You’ll forgive me, my lady, but ambushing me in a brothel is not a very good start if you want my trust.”

“We had to find a lordling to approach and you were the one that came here the most. Trying to petition any of the lords here would take time, time we do not have.”

Broden Tully narrowed his eyes. “Who are you people? What do you want?”

Rhaenys looked at Jaenyx, who gave her a nod. “You know what happened at Rook’s Rest?”

Broden Tully scoffed. “Are you being serious? Everyone in the riverlands is talking about it and pretty sure the rest of Westeros will. Black Harren lost ten thousand men in just a few weeks, and all because he couldn’t control that crazy cunt of a son. He called all of the banners just last week.”
“Yes, we know about that,” Rhaenys replied. “But your uncle is here as well as many of the riverlords. Why is that?”

“I’m not privy to that information, so if that’s what you’re after, I would ask that you let me go.” But as he tried to stand up, Jaenyx forced back down with his sword.

“If you don’t have the information we need, then perhaps you can give us an introduction to your uncle.”

Broden Tully frowned. “Before I do that, I need to know who you are.”

Rhaenys took a step forward. “I am Rhaenys of House Targaryen, wife of Lord Aegon, heir of Dragonstone. This is my good-brother, Jaenyx of House Belaerys, Lord of the Basilisk Isles.”

The Tully man’s eyes widened. “Good gods. So it was your brother that wiped out the ironborn at Rook’s Rest?” Rhaenys nodded while Broden Tully turned to Jaenyx. “So, you’re the man who controls the knowledge of Valyrian steel?” He let out a laugh. “What a coincidence in that I meet the sister and good-brother of the man who humiliated Black Harren?”

Rhaenys also had to appreciate the fortuity of their encounter. They could have got any other lordling in that room, but they ended up with one who at least seemed impressed with how their brother conducted himself.

“They see that your brother was outnumbered three to one and that a dragon as big as the Gods Eye swooped in and turned the ironborn army alongside the Duskendale and Maidenpool lords to dust. Then again, dragons are still rumors in Westeros.”

“As amusing as how our brother’s exploits are spreading far,” Jaenyx interrupted. “We would like for you to introduce us to your uncle. Can you do that?”
Broden Tully stared at him. “And why would I do that?”

“Because I think your uncle is hesitating to answer Black Harren’s call.”

“Every lord here is hesitating. It’s all because of that bastard beggaring us.”

“Can. You. Introduce. Us?” Jaenyx was losing his patience.

Rhaenys intervened. “Please forgive my good-brother, Lord Broden. He can be quite… impatient whenever he’s under time constraints.” Jaenyx glared at her. “But is it too much to ask if we could meet your uncle?”

Broden looked over Rhaenys, before nodding. “All right, my lady. Come to the sept at the top of the hill at dusk. You have my word that my uncle will be there.”

“How would we know that you will not ambush us?” To be fair, Jaenyx had good reason to be worried.

“It’s considered sacrilege if one draws weapons inside a sept. Well, at least to those who follow the Faith,” Rhaenys explained.

“Exactly,” Broden confirmed. “My uncle is a devout follower of the Faith. As long as you two are in the sept, he wouldn’t dare harm you. Although, I’m certain that he won’t harm you regardless.”

“We’ll have your word on that, Lord Broden,” Rhaenys allowed him to leave before they made their way back to the inn. “You could be a little nicer when you talk to these people.”
“Why should I be?” Jaenyx shot back. “As far as we know, we are still in enemy territory and thus still in danger of being killed.”

“That’s not the important issue here. You made very clear your feelings towards the customs of Westeros and I sympathize with that. However, we need all the help we can get and we won’t get help if we treated everyone in Westeros like filth.”

“Personally, I don’t care about these people. Whether they live or die is not my concern, but I have a responsibility to protect my people and it was Westerosi that attacked them.”

“And that’s the problem, Jae!” But Rhaenys kept it to a whisper. “You’re not in Sothoryos anymore. We have to treat them with some respect if we want their help. Furthermore, there are good people in this continent as everywhere. Would it be wise if we treated everyone with hostility before we met them?”

Rhaenys knew that this wasn’t a proper time to discuss Jaenyx’s strong reluctance to interact with Westeros’ people, but she had to let him know how things were on this continent before his condescension messed things up. He knew how to break people if the carcass of that dead ironborn captain proved anything. He certainly knew how to get information from people and knew what people were. However, while she admired that he maintained his strong connection to his Valyrian roots, he was severely lacking in terms of tact. Probably due to him living in isolation and among only Valyrians. It might have worked with the Sunglass’ and his treatment of them was justified given how craven they acted, but she needed to make clear to him that he had to show some prudence.

“At the very least, Jae, let me do the talking. To them, I am a proper lady and I am familiar with their ways. Can you do that?”

To her surprise, Jaenyx nodded. “All right.”

“That’s it? You’re not going to fight me on that?”
Jaenyx sighed. “Part of being a leader is to know when you’re lacking in certain areas. I never really learned how to exercise tact whenever I talked with others. That was probably how I almost let myself be manipulated by your father, although everything turned out for the best.” Rhaenys winced at the memory of their father essentially demanding he marry into their family. “The only reason why my people follow me was not just out of loyalty to my family. I had the courage to admit when I needed help and trust works both ways as a leader. If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t have lasted very long. I still have a long way to go in terms of tact even though I know how people are. So, while I know you trust me to keep you safe, I’ll trust you to handle the more... delicate aspects of our mission here.”

Rhaenys smiled before pecking Jaenyx on the cheek. Most men would take offense at letting women lead, but Jaenyx let her do it in a heartbeat. *My, my, Vis. You really caught yourself a good man here.*

At dusk, the group made their way towards the sept overlooking the town. Jaenyx instructed Rhaedar Tarareon and Arata Haru to lie in wait outside should something go wrong while he and Rhaenys hid Valyrian steel daggers in their cloaks. They were not going to take chances, especially so far behind enemy lines.

Walking inside the sept, Rhaenys and Jaenyx saw two older-looking men standing in front of the altar of the Father. One man had long red hair tied with a knot and a red beard while the other had short black hair, trimmed beard, and grey eyes. The red-haired man wore the trout of House Tully while the other man wore the white weirwood surrounded by ravens.

“Lord Belaerys, Lady Targaryen, welcome,” the red-haired man began. “Rest assured, no harm will come to you in this place of worship. I am Edmyn of House Tully, Lord of Riverrun. And this is my friend, Colren of House Blackwood, Lord of Raventree Hall.” He held out his hand.

Jaenyx cautiously shook both of the men’s hands while they kissed Rhaenys’. Rhaenys judged Edmyn Tully as welcoming and genial, odd considering how they treated his nephew earlier that day. She was more wary of Colren Blackwood, who just stood there and listened. From her experiences with Jaenyx, she knew that it was the quiet ones she had to watch out for.
“Thank you, my lords, for making the time to speak with us,” Rhaenys said. “I also know both of you are taking great risks in meeting with us, given the current circumstances between our family and your king.”

Edmyn Tully scoffed. “He may be a king, but all of Westeros knows that he has no love from riverlords such as ourselves. It’s a wonder that he’s not worried when we have not replied to his ravens, calling us to assemble at his unfinished keep.”

“Wouldn’t you be oathbreakers then, since you have not answered the calls of your king?” Jaenyx asked. Rhaenys glared at him. What the hell are you doing?

Thankfully, Lord Tully was not offended. “A king must handle his vassals and his people with decency, but Black Harren has done nothing but beggar us and treat us like slaves for the past thirty years. So, if I’m an oathbreaker, our king is the first to commit such a crime.”

Rhaenys sighed in relief. “I’m relieved to hear for once that rumors reflected reality, my lord.”

“Quite so, my lady,” Lord Tully nodded. “Regarding how you both treated my nephew, Broden, other lords would take offense and would punish those who did such a deed. But given his constant indiscretions and whoremongering, I would say that he got what was coming to him. So, I won’t blame you for what you did to him.”

“Thank you, my lord,” Rhaenys slightly dipped her head.

“However, you would not have taken such a risk unless you felt that you needed to. Which brings us to why you wanted to meet with us.” Rhaenys noticed that Lord Blackwood was still silent, which made her uneasy.

“I assume you heard about Rook’s Rest.”
Edmyn Tully scoffed. “That’s the reason Black Harren called the banners in the first place. However, I, Lord Blackwood, and other lords have not yet responded and have come here to Stoney Sept to discuss other options.”

“With my husband Aegon showing that Black Harren could be defeated, we would like for others who have suffered under his yoke to fight back. He attacked my good-brother’s people, which is only a taste of what he had done to you all for thirty years. In addition, the fact that you have not answered his call means that you don’t intend to support him. I believe we could help each other.”

Edmyn Tully crossed his arms. “In what way, my lady?”

“Between you and Lord Blackwood, you can raise an army that can challenge Black Harren. And that’s not including the forces that could be marshalled by the other lords that have come here. Combined with our dragons, we have more than a fighting chance against the forces of the ironborn.”

“And so you suggest we bend the knee to you?”

“You have seen the results with Rosby, Stokeworth, Massey’s Hook, and Rook’s Rest. In exchange for their fealty, we reconfirmed them in their titles and lands and they fought admirably alongside us. If you declare for our cause, we can guarantee that you will retain your current titles and lands. As a further gesture of goodwill, we will also gift you with a Valyrian steel sword of your choice.”

Rhaenys did not consult with Jaenyx on that, but she knew that adding Valyrian steel to the table would greatly increase their chances of getting new allies. Thankfully, Jaenyx did not outwardly respond.

“As tempting as that sounds, Lady Rhaenys,” Edmyn Tully said. “We cannot declare for your family at this time.”
“And why, my lord?”

“Yes, your husband won one battle and showed Westeros that Black Harren is not invincible. However, the fact remains that he fought only one battle. Black Harren still commands a large army and there’s word that he’s assembling the ironborn fleet. If we declare for you while he still commands such considerable forces, we would be in serious risk and would lose more than what we already have.”

“But would not declaring for us continue the sufferings brought upon you by Black Harren?”

“There is much to risk, my lady. But your family commands less than ten thousand troops. How can those numbers possibly fare against the forces that Black Harren can muster? We have also heard that you are also moving against King Argilac. Simultaneously fighting against the marcher lords that would respond to Argilac’s commands would be fatal, so the odds are very much against your favor.”

“We have dragons, my lord.”

“Aye, but they are still rumors to the rest of Westeros. And only have few have truly seen what they can do. So, can you understand why we wouldn’t side with you in your struggle?”

Rhaenys should’ve expected that the riverlords would not help them and they had good reason not to. They still had a small army and most of Westeros still doubted the existence of their dragons, meaning that they would not believe in their capabilities so easily.

Then, Rhaenys heard Jaenyx scoff. “As I thought, Lord Tully.”

Lord Tully blinked. “I beg your pardon?”
“You may not believe in what our dragons can do, but they were the ones that burned four thousand ironborn at the Blackwater Bay. They also burned nearly ten thousand men at Rook’s Rest and accomplished what both the Storm Kings and ironborn have failed to do for generations: control of the lands surrounding the Blackwater Bay. Aegon was outnumbered, but he still defeated the army at Rook’s Rest all the same. The dragons are capable of feats that are beyond the capacities of even the largest of armies. But you lords are more afraid of losing what you have, but are ignorant to the fact you’re already losing much under Black Harren.”

“Jaenyx!” Rhaenys scolded.

“You dare call me ignorant?” Edmyn Tully quickly became angry.

“So, I will do what I do best and appeal to your selfish nature,” Jaenyx continued. “Simply put, if you declare for our cause, then we will not only allow you to keep your lands, we will give you more than you already have. And those will be coming from the ones that our dragons will burn to ash.”

“You think it’s that simple, boy? You throw lands at us and we will be your dogs?” Edmyn Tully retorted.

“You haven’t said anything contrary to that notion,” Jaenyx shrugged. “Everyone wants something that they don’t have, and you’re no different.”

“How dare you reduce us to men driven by greed, boy!” Edmyn Tully shouted. “I have daughters and I have responsibilities to the people under me. Who’s going to protect them when I declare for you and my home invaded by the ironborn? My daughters will be raped and the village around Riverrun burned! If you had a family, you’d understand.”

Rhaenys fought back a gasp. Oh, no. Why did you say that? Fortunately, Jaenyx remained calm at his rudeness. “I do have a family, Lord Tully. So you’re wrong to think that I don’t understand what it’s like. It’s the exact reason why I’m fighting for them right now.”
“And so, you must understand why I won’t fight for you, my lord,” Edmyn Tully spat with disdain. “I believe we’re done here. The next time we cross paths, how about you show some respect to your elders?” And with that, Lord Tully turned to leave the sept in a huff. “Colren, are you coming?”

“I have some other matters to discuss with Lord Belaerys and Lady Targaryen, Edmyn. I’ll join you shortly.” Lord Tully looked as if he wanted to protest, but simply nodded and walked out.

“You must forgive my friend, Lord Belaerys. He has a tendency to be overly cautious and unwise in his choice of words.”

“And you would describe your friend in that manner so soon after he leaves, my lord?” Rhaenys asked.

“Myself and Lord Edmyn go back a long way, my lady. He is an able lord and very well-liked throughout the riverlands, but he can get very complacent, which usually happens when you’re around people who act and think like you.”

“What about yourself, Lord Blackwood?” Rhaenys inquired.

“I have the blood of the First Men in me and unlike the other riverlords, I follow the Old Gods. I only came to this blasted place for my friend.”

Rhaenys was quite familiar with the worship of the Old Gods. Even though Dragonstone didn’t have a godswood, she had studied the significance of the weirwoods among the First Men. Although the practices of the Old Gods was interesting, their condemnation of unions within families did not sit well with her since she loved Aegon. Visenya was a little more interested in the Old Gods than her, who had visited the godswood at Highgarden and found that worshipping trees made a little more sense than worshipping arbitrary deities. Nevertheless, Rhaenys, like the rest of her family, reconnected with their Valyrian spirituality and maintained a healthy distance from the spiritual traditions of Westeros.
“And the thing about being the only ones to hold fast the traditions of the First Men,” Lord Blackwood continued. “You know what it is like to sense those who would conspire against you and know what it is like to stand on your own two feet. If you are familiar with our feud with House Bracken, you would see how that developed our sense of self-reliance.”

Rhaenys nodded. “What do you wish to say, my lord?”

“Lord Edmyn may not be amenable to supporting your struggle at this moment, but give him some time. In the meantime, I will try to convince him to at least consider your offer while I will prepare my troops to fight alongside you.”

That surprised Rhaenys. “Why would you do that?” Jaenyx asked, just as surprised.

“Black Harren has been spitting on the traditions of the First Men for decades, Lord Belaerys,” they both saw anger emerge in his eyes. “He’s been cutting down weirwoods to support his vanity project near the Gods Eye. As a worshipper of the Old Gods, that is an affront that cannot go unanswered. But more importantly, my ancestor Agnes Blackwood died trying to fight the ironborn under Harwyn Hoare. I see this as my chance to do what Agnes Blackwood failed to do.”

Rhaenys exchanged a look with Jaenyx. This was their first ally that they found in the riverlands, which meant they made good progress. “How many troops can you muster?” Jaenyx asked.

“I can raise six thousand men in a fortnight, but I have to be careful as to not draw attention from Black Harren’s agents. And I can’t send all of them to you since I need to protect my lands. What I can give you is five hundred of my infantry and two hundred of my cavalry, along with some free advice. If you want the riverlands to declare for your family, you need a more decisive victory over Black Harren. By decisive, I mean that he suffers irreparable damage that he won’t be able to attack either you or us. In the meantime, I will convince Lord Edmyn to at least consider declaring for you. I am not well-loved in the riverlands, but if he does it, the other houses will follow.”

“Do we have your word on that, my lord?” Rhaenys stared him in the eye. Getting a nod from him,
Jaenyx and Rhaenys shook his hand and left the sept.

“Do you trust him, Jae?” Rhaenys asked as they talked back through the Stoney Sept back to their boat.

“Daor,” Jaenyx replied.

“He promised to raise six thousand men for us and he already given part of his army to us.”

“I believe that he has a personal reason to go against Black Harren, but I don’t think he was telling us everything.”

“What do you mean?”

“He said that Edmyn Tully is well-loved throughout the riverlands and that if he rises in rebellion against Black Harren, the others will follow. If Lord Blackwood wanted to rise against the ironborn, he would have done it himself, but he wants his friend to do that for him.”

“Well, it is as he and you said. He’s the popular one, so naturally, people would follow him.”

“True, but I’m trying to work out his plan. What does he want from us?”

“Ah… you think he’s not helping us out of the goodness of his heart?”
“Well, your father didn’t give me and my people sanctuary until I agreed to marry Vis. So, you have that to remember.” Rhaenys again winced. “But he has other, more selfish reasons to help us. I mean, that’s what lords usually are.”

“What do you think he’s after?”

“Everyone in the riverlands know about the Blackwoods fighting against the Brackens. One thing he could ask from us is help against his old enemy.”

Rhaenys nodded. “And others?”

“Well, he’s only the major worshiper of the Old Gods south of the Neck. Helping us and succeeding could be his way of asserting his dominance over those that have long isolated him.”

Rhaenys couldn’t eliminate such possibilities. “How should we proceed from here?”

“It is as Lord Blackwood said. We need something more decisive against Black Harren. Rook’s Rest was a great start, but we need to fight and break the ironborn’s back. Once we do that, he won’t have control over his vassals anymore.”

“So what now? Back to the Blackwater Rush?”

“Probably. Or yet, wait for Blackwood’s men to join us. At least he’s the first one to give us any kind of support.”

“Five hundred men and two hundred cavalry is no small support at this stage.”
“Agreed. But we need to strategize.”

As they made their way back to the docks, Rhaenys turned around and saw that they were being followed by a group of men. Giving Jaenyx and the others a glance, they made their way to the boat before turning around and drawing their weapons.

“Who the hell are you?” Jaenyx ordered.

One of the men, the leader by the looks of him, walked forward. “Pretty well-armed for travelers, aren’t you?” He then drew his axe, with the others following suit. “By order of His Grace Harren of House Hoare, first of his name, King of the Rivers and the Isles, you are hereby under arrest for spying. Drop your weapons.”

“No,” Jaenyx replied.

“I said, drop your weapons,” the ironborn got infuriated that someone defied him.

“Come and take them, you bastard,” Jaenyx shot back.

The leader laughed, his dirty hair swinging as he turned to face his men. “You hear this fucking guy?! All right, we’ll do this the hard way.” The ironborn swung his axe at Jaenyx, who avoided it by moving to his right, drawing his sword, and slicing through the gambeson. The cut was clean, as the blade passed through the gambeson and the front of the torso out the back. The ironborn leader saw his legs collapse beneath him before he fell over, body in two parts.

The other ironborn promptly attacked, with Jaenyx stabbing one in the belly with his blade and pulling it out with such force that blood and intestines spilled out of the cavity before the poor ironborn fell on his knees with his mouth wide open. Arata Haru cleanly decapitated one other while Rhaedar swung his axe down on another’s head, the skull splitting open and brain matter splattering over the dock.
The final ironborn attempted to charge at Rhaenys and swung down with his axe on Rhaenys’ left shoulder. However, all he heard was a steel clank despite the axe going through her cloak. Acting on instinct, Rhaenys drew her dagger and stabbed the final ironborn in the neck, cutting his major blood vessels and blood spraying on her face while he fell to the ground dead.

While still in a daze, Rhaenys felt someone push her to the boat as they cast off from the dock. She felt someone shaking her, turning to see it was Jaenyx.

“You all right?” she heard him ask. She removed her cloak to reveal her dragon coat. She heard that Visenya’s asked him to make one for her after she nearly drowned in the Blackwater Bay. Like Visenya’s, it was dipped in dragon’s blood, Meraxes’ blood, with the shoulders and torso covered in Valyrian steel plates. Unlike Visenya’s, it was red trimmed with black, the colors of House Targaryen. That axe would have cleaved through her shoulder had it not been for Valyrian steel plate protecting it, and Rhaenys forgot she wore it because of how light it was.

“Oh, my gods.” Everything was coming back to Rhaenys. “I just killed a man.”

“It was either you or him, Rhae. There was no getting out of that one.”

“But it was still a person.”

“No one’s going to blame you for killing someone to defend yourself. Egg definitely wouldn’t.”

In the span of a week, Rhaenys nearly drowned and had taken her first life. She was content with living the life as a proper lady of Dragonstone and never intended to partake in the rigors of war, but here she was. How am I going to go back after all of this? She learned that no person came back the same after a war and she was afraid that she was going to lose parts of herself that she was afraid of losing. She felt her breath quicken and exhaling faster than normal, the stresses of the last week and the panic of killing a man overtaking her. I… can’t breath.
Fortunately, Jaenyx saw what was happening and held her tight. “Hey, hey,” he shushed as he ran his hand down her hair and back. “You’re all right. You’re alive. That’s all that matters, Rhae.”

“*It’s getting too much, Jae.*”

“I know, I know. Just calm down, but also let it all out. Let it all out.”

For the first time since she got out of that bed, Rhaenys felt tears come down her face. Jaenys continued hugging her, his hands calming her down as she let out all of the anxieties and worries that had built up inside her. “*I’m scared, Jae.*”

“*Me too, Rhae. Me too.*”

“How do you do get past this?” Rhaenys looked up in his eyes.

“*Honestly, Rhae, you don’t. Something like killing will never leave you. Anyone who says that killing is easy is either lying or something is wrong with their mind. However, what you can do is remember and learn how to survive the next time. What would help is remembering that you have something to lose if you die. You have Egg, but what would happen to him if you died on that dock?*” Rhaenys didn’t answer, for both already knew. “*Be afraid of the things that you will lose. It may not make it easier for you to handle, but it might just give you a better chance the next time. That’s all I can say now.*”

“What about nearly dying?”

Jaenyx hesitated. “*I know what it is like to almost die. However, something prevented me from doing so because my mother died instead so that I might live.*”
Rhaenys stood straighter. Jaenyx avoided talking about his mother and even Visenya was quiet about it. “What happened?”

Jaenyx sighed. “The red death broke out in the Basilisk Isle and my father died painfully from it. I got infected and I was close to death. I still remember my skin peeling like parchment and me almost losing my breath.” Rhaenys saw his breath quiver. “She had her brother, Taygor’s father, do a blood ritual where she exchanged her life for me healing and living.” Rhaenys saw that the mention of the red death made Rhaedar Tarareon sink in slightly, the red death also a sore subject for him. “The last thing she said to me was ‘Only death can pay for life.’”

This was the first time Rhaenys had heard Jaenyx talk about his mother to her, and she now began to understand why there was so much sadness in him. Deep down, he felt… guilt because he allowed his mother to do what she did. She reached up and ran her hand across his back to comfort him.

They rowed the rest of the Blackwater Rush in silence, Rhaenys and Jaenyx both reflecting on what it was like to nearly die and what it was to kill. I just hope this ends soon, so that everything will go back to the way it was.

Chapter End Notes

And here, we are introduced to Edmyn Tully, the leader of the Riverlander rebellion against Black Harren. Writing him was kind of difficult because there was scant info on who he was as a person. However, given how Tulys are quite impulsive, I decided to model Edmyn Tully after Edmure. Wanted to show that the apple didn't fall very far from the tree in that regard. However, Lord Blackwood will have a very important role in the upcoming Conquest and Jaenyx is right to be suspicious of him. So stay tuned for that.

And here, we have Rhaenys and Jaenyx becoming even more closer due to their shared experience of nearly dying and killing. Rhaenys will understandably not take it well, but in the process, she got a chance to know Jaenyx's more intimate and painful memories. They could only get closer through their shared pain and anguish.

I accidentally wrote Argilac instead of Harren the ironborn ambushed them lol. Fixed it!

Next, we will see Visenya start to move against the Stormlands.
Visenya IV

Visenya gazed down at the map of the Blackwater Bay. Just last week, she had returned from Duskendale after having the last Darklyn heir bend the knee to the dragons. Despite the devastation of their enemies at Rook’s Rest, the Darklyns and Mootons still commanded a combined force of one thousand and five hundred troops, not enough to significantly bolster their forces but enough to ease the pressure of garrisoning the fort off of their better and loyal troops. Within a span of a few weeks, the Blackwater Bay was firmly under the banners of the dragons and thus securing a foothold on Westeros, from which they could advance against the ironborn and the Arrogant king.

Left in charge of the fort in both Aegon’s and Jaenyx’s absences, Visenya was stuck to maintain a somewhat tolerable mood for the various peoples at the fort. Lords Jon Rosby and Alyn Stokeworth were charged with leading the native Westerosi troops that had bent the knee to the dragons. Crispian Celtigar and Daemon Velaryon managed the banners sworn to Dragonstone, with Lord Sunglass placed directly underneath them for his father’s cowardice. Ragaemor and Maerys Tarareon led the armed strength that came with Jaenyx while Aevor Rahitheon oversaw the fort itself due to his experience as an engineer and smith. With the addition of the Maidenpool and Duskendale hosts, the dragons now had a near nine thousand troops at their command.

However, Visenya knew that this was no united force. Despite serving the dragons, the Valyrian houses that came with them kept their distance from the Rosbys, Stokeworths, Mootons, and Darklyns, essentially the native Westerosi since the former associated the latter with a backwater culture that worshipped arbitrary deities, celebrated various acts of knightly valor while ignoring that many of them merely killed someone else’s enemies, and were content with allowing some upjumped bastard into sleeping with another’s wife on their first night. The divisions didn’t stop there, as the Celtigar and Velaryon troops clashed with the Tarareons and Rahitheons, the latter accusing the former for forgetting their Valyrian roots in favor of being accepted by a backward people.

Keeping the peace between the Valyrian houses was not a difficult task for Visenya, as she was both a daughter of House Targaryen and Lady of House Belaerys. Crispian and Daemon had known her their entire lives and so, they would naturally defer to her and trusted her to make all of the decisions. As for Aevor Rahitheon and Ragaemor and Maerys Tarareon, they were unquestionably loyal to Jaenyx and all three had helped Jaenyx improve his negotiating position when they first arrived at Dragonstone. Her being a dragonrider and making a conscious effort to
accommodate Jaenyx’s vassals’ need for their lord to have a lady strongly rooted in Valyria, which included speaking High Valyrian only with them, went a long way to earning their loyalty.

It was a different story for Visenya regarding Jon Rosby and Alyn Stokeworth. They were wise enough to see the futility of fighting once they saw the dragons fly over their castles, but they both represented everything that she had grown to loath about Westeros. Along with the usual haughtiness of Westerosi lords, both Rosby and Stokeworth showed how uncomfortable they were with answering to a woman even though they took great care in not making their discomfort obvious. Dealing with Lord Sunglass was enough for Visenya, but she found herself rubbing her head in vexation more often when dealing with two more lords like Sunglass. If their troops didn’t fight as well as they did at Rook’s Rest, I would have taken Dark Sister to their hearts just to shut them up.

Nevertheless, Visenya knew that it was up to her to make sure that harmony was maintained between their disparate houses, which was easier said than done and something that Rhaenys would have had no trouble handling. While Aegon and Orys were managing the threat of the ironborn to the west and north of the Blackwater Bay at the same time as Jaenyx and Rhaenys were infiltrating the riverlands, she was not foolish to ignore the threat to the south. Reports from Tarareon cavalry patrols and from Daemon’s vessels all indicated movement from the Arrogant king’s domains, specifically around the lands of Bronzegate, Felwood, and Haystack Hall as well as the lands on both of the Wendwater’s banks. She flew high above those areas on Vhagar to confirm them, as she was taught by Jaenyx to cross-reference and check each report for its veracity and to avoid redundancy.

Any movement on the Wendwater was concerning for Visenya. Any direct route through the northern domains of the Storm King and towards Storm’s End would have to cross through the Wendwater, which was not an easy task in itself. The troops of House Buckler of Bronzegate, House Fell of Felwood, and House Errol of Haystack Hall were noted warriors and archers, able to safeguard the northern domains of the Durrandon kings from the shiftiness around the Blackwater Bay and especially the ironborn under House Hoare. More importantly, thick woods covered the most direct approach to Storm’s End, woods that the houses near the Wendwater knew well.

But even if they could move through those woods, Visenya knew that was only the beginning. The lands surrounding Storm’s End were filled with stony ridges, which negated the use of cavalry and presented many opportunities for ambushes by funneling an army through its few passable areas. Attacking Storm’s End from the sea was also not an option, as their approach would be alerted by House Tarth of Evenfall Hall and due to much of the coasts of Storm’s End and the Cape Wrath being mountainous. The only way to do damage was by dragonfire, but there were many unknowns and no way of knowing for certain if dragonfire could destroy a mighty fortress like Storm’s End.
And that was not including the strength of the marcher lords. Settled in the Dornish Marches, marcher lords such as the Dondarrions of Blackhaven, the Selmys of Harvest Hall, the Swanns of Stonehelm, and the Carons of Nightsong were renowned for their martial abilities and commanded bowmen that easily surpassed those from around the Wendwater. They also possessed much battle experience fighting the Dornish, many of which the Arrogant king participated in. Should Argilac Durrandon be able to bring the full might of the marcher lords to bear on the Blackwater Bay, the dragons would be in serious danger of being pushed out. In addition, the stormlords held much more loyalty to King Argilac than the riverlords to Black Harren despite his hold on his kingdom gradually slipping due to having no male heir and due to rumors that he wasn’t the great warrior that he was in his prime. In essence, the dragons would have a difficult fight ahead of them in the domains of the Storm King.

Yet, despite the overwhelming obstacles facing them, Visenya saw some good news. Earlier that week, she flew over on Vhagar in a sweep over the southern domains of the Durrandons. She got curious when Tarareon cavalry and Daemon’s patrols mentioned no banners of the marcher lords arriving near the southern parts of the Blackwater Bay. She had to fly high enough so that no one on the ground could see her, which limited to what she could see below. However, what she could make out from above was that the fields to the east of Nightsong, the farthest of the Storm King’s marcher fortresses and located north of the Red Mountains, still had men tending to them in order to get the harvests of the summer years. The same was said for the fields around Stonehelm, which was at the eastern edge of the Dornish Marches. Both facts indicated one thing: the Arrogant king had not called the banners of his marcher lords and therefore did not mobilize all of his forces.

Not mobilizing the marcher lords was a good thing in Visenya’s mind. That meant that the Storm King was more worried about the threats posed by Dorne and the Gardener kings of Highgarden, so he was keeping his best troops remaining where they were to deter them. The dragons could then focus on the threats directly south of the Blackwater Bay and how to maneuver through the thick woods extending all the way to Felwood in order to approach Storm’s End. She had consulted Aevor Rahitheon on how they could move columns of troops through the woods, who responded by saying that the troops would need a combination of felling trees, shovels, and fire. He also said that using dragonfire would be the quickest way to clear a path through a forest, but like fire, one had to be careful so as to not uncontrollably set the trees ablaze.

Additionally, the Storm King not mobilizing all of his forces together meant that provided they move fast, the dragons could punch through Bronzegate and have a clear path to Storm’s End. They might not be able to assault the fortress, but they could cut off the Durrandons and use the infamous terrain of the Storm kingdom to their own advantage by preventing reinforcements from coming through. But all of this had to wait until their numbers improved. The focus may have been on the riverlands, but Visenya had to plan when they do move against the Arrogant king.
Letting out an exhale, Visenya moved away from the maps and sat down on the mattress. Initially living in tents in anticipation of the enemy closing in on their position, their efforts in securing the lands around the Blackwater Bay and Aegon’s victory at Rook’s Rest allowed their troops to remain at the fort for the long-term. As such, Visenya had Rahitheon engineers construct more permanent structures for all of them, with a large wooden manor house built on the summit of the highest hill where she, Jaenyx, Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys would live in. She occupied the rooms in the left wing, which had a mattress, a small table, chairs, and a collection of books that she brought with her from Dragonstone on the subject of Valyria’s wars with the Rhoynar along with others detailing the conflicts between the Durrandons and the Hoares.

Visenya rubbed the mattress on the spot next to where she sat, her thoughts yearning for the one that was not there with her. Oh, Jae. I miss you already. She was not one for flights of fancy like Rhaenys, but the year she spent married to Jaenyx had deepened her feelings and longing for her husband. She did not know if it had something to do with their wedding ceremony, but she felt empty without him by her side. A part of him was within her, the half that made her whole, and she saw that Jaenyx felt the same way. And she never thought that she would stake so much of her existence on a man as well as giving her heart, but she gave both and he reciprocated.

Visenya closed her eyes and took a deep breath, trying to relax on the mattress after the day’s work. Her thoughts were of their keep back on Dragonstone, to their bed in red and blue sheets, as a fiery sensation spread through her and put in arousal. She heard her breath quicken and moans leaving her mouth as she felt a familiar feeling come upon her. Oh... fuck...

Her thoughts were of Jaenyx as he fingered her clit hard while keeping his piercing amethyst eyes focused on hers. She remained still as he sucked and bit all the way down from her neck to her entrance. He would remain licking at her cunt, getting more moans from her and spurring him on. However, their best fucking was when she would be on top of him. Feeling his abdominals and chest and biting his lip while pounding up and down on his length, pulling his hands towards her breasts and sighing in content as he squeezed them. The sensations she had from their lovemaking were things she never wanted to end, but she felt more satisfied when she was the one that ended on top. Seeing him roll his eyes but her grabbing his chin and ordering him to keep them open. Fuck me, Jae, as a dragon would to another dragon.

A knock on her chamber’s door pulled her out of her blissful stupor. Her eyes flying open, Visenya saw that she was covered in sweat, her tunic and trousers clinging to the curves of her body, and her heart pounding hard and fast.

“Milady?” Visenya heard through the door. “Lord Tarareon is asking for your presence at the south gate.”
“A moment,” she called out while she calmed herself down and wiped off the sweat from her face. She then felt her lower places feeling steaming hot and reached inside of her trousers to find her flower wet with her juices. She felt her face slightly blush, never expecting that a man would make her feel and think that way.

Visenya heard another knock. “Milady, he insists that you hurry.”

“A moment!” Visenya repeated while she changed into her dragon coat. She made sure that Aevor Rahitheon made Rhaenys’ befitting a lady of House Targaryen. Red with black trims, it was not durable as Visenya’s but it could protect her from everything up to a small moment of exposure to dragonfire. After straightening her coat, she opened the door. “Yes?”

“Lord Tarareon said that there are riders at the south gate, carrying the banner of House Durrandon,” the servant explained.

Visenya wasted no time getting to the south gate, finding Tarareon and Celtigar archers aiming their bows at a group of knights on horseback followed by a small column of infantry. Looking down from the battlement next to the south gate, she saw that all of them wore the sigil of House Durrandon, a black stag in a field of yellow with a crown around its neck. There were ten knights in two columns, with the leading two carrying the Durrandon banners and all wearing plate armor, who were supported by at least fifty infantrymen and thirty archers.

Visenya’s eyes then looked at the two lead riders in front of the knights. One of them was also a knight, but his plate armor was more elaborately-decorated, with suns and moons carved on his cuirass and a blue sash worn diagonally from his right shoulder to left side of the waist. The lead knight had his helm raised up, which revealed the hardened, weathered look of an experienced warrior, with his straw-colored hair and beard slowly fading and his eyes betraying the strain received from many battles.

The other lead rider was much more intriguing than the other. In contrast to the mail shirts of the infantry and the plate armor of the knights, this rider wore a black cloak draped over the shoulders of her olive dress. She carried no weapons, but her stance as she sat on her horse told Visenya that she didn’t need them. Her long, wavy black hair fell past her shoulders, but Visenya saw a steel
behind her blue eyes. A steel that she could recognize whenever women were thrust into authority but were not very accepted among the male-dominated circles of upper society. *Better keep an eye on this one.*

“Soldiers of the dragons, we come on behalf of his Grace, Argilac of House Durrandon, first of his name, Storm King, and Lord of Storm’s End. To whom shall we address?” the blue-sashed knight announced.

“You haven’t identified yourselves properly, ser,” Visenya answered back to the knight.

“And who are you to address a party representing King Argilac?”

Visenya held back a scoff before standing straighter. “I am Visenya of House Belaerys, Lady of the Basilisk Isles and rider of the dragon Vhagar.” As if on cue, Vhagar flew low over the Durrandon group, causing the infantry to fall to the ground and the knights to flinch at both Vhagar’s presence and her roar. It took a moment for all of them to recover their bearings. She couldn’t help but smirk. *You have not seen anything yet.* “And who are we addressing?”

The knight looked ready to respond to Visenya’s lack of decorum, but the black-haired lady held up her hand to silence him. “Lady Visenya,” she sat straight. “I am Argella of House Durrandon, Princess of the Storm Kingdom and heir to King Argilac. And this is my sworn sword and the master-at-arms of Storm’s End, Ser Bruze of House Tarth of Evenfall Hall.”

*The daughter of the Arrogant king herself?* “This is very unexpected, Princess Argella,” Visenya continued to stare at the Storm princess. “You did not inform us of your arrival here.”

“You are speaking to Princess Argella Durrandon, Lady Visenya. You will address her as ‘Your Grace,’” Ser Tarth admonished.

“Apologies, Ser Tarth,” Visenya replied. “But your king is no king of mine and my family aren’t sworn to Storm’s End. So, we have no obligation to address her as such.”
“You insolent, little--” Ser Tarth was fuming, but only Argella Durrandon putting her hand on his shoulder and scolding him while her eyes stopped him from saying anything foolish.

“Forget Ser Tarth, Lady Visenya,” Argella spoke up. “He has been loyal to my family and king for many years now and does not tolerate easily when one doesn’t use decorum in my presence. But you have stated the facts. You are not sworn to my father, so I will excuse you not addressing me by my title.”

“Thank you, Princess,” Visenya responded. This is going to get interesting.

“Also, I have come to discuss matters that are too… delicate in the open. If you would be so kind, Lady Visenya, as to allow us entry into your citadel so that we may deliberate about them.”

Visenya considered the situation. Argella Durrandon did not bring an army with her, but allowing her and her retinue into the citadel had risks. They could examine the inner workings of their fort and count how many troops were present at the moment. They might also try to provoke the men into attacking them, which would give the Arrogant king the excuse he needed to launch an all-out assault on their position. Still, Argella arriving at their citadel was a chance for Visenya to size up their adversaries and find out the measure of their resolve.

“You are allowed to have Ser Tarth accompany you inside, Princess. However, your knights and men stay outside.”

Argella stared at Visenya before turning around and nodding to her retinue. She then dismounted, with Ser Tarth by her side as she approached the south gate. “Open the gate!” Visenya ordered.

Climbing down from the battlement, Visenya approached Argella Durrandon and Ser Bruze Tarth. The knight was just like any other she had seen before, loyal to a fault, strong, and stiff. However, Visenya was more interested in sizing up Princess Argella. She could see the steel behind her piercing blue eyes more clearly. Rhaenys was the epitome of grace, with her slender form drawing eyes whenever she danced, but Argella would come at a close second with her olive dress hugging
her curves. She was slightly shorter than Visenya and not as muscular as herself, but she felt just as tall and strong.

“Lady Visenya, I don’t mean to trouble you, but myself and Ser Tarth have just completed a long journey. May we have some bread and salt, please?”

*Ah, guest rights. Of course*. In all honesty, Visenya found the whole tradition of guest rights a dumb one. It took some outrageous tale to hammer the importance of that practice lest those who violate it get punished by some imaginary gods. However, this was a great chance for the dragons to find out more about their other adversary. Obliging her request, Visenya motioned a servant forward with bread and salt, from which Argella and Ser Tarth promptly dipped and ate.

“Come to my solar, Princess Argella. We can discuss whatever you came here to discuss there.”

“Lead the way, Lady Visenya,” Argella nodded.

“But Ser Tarth stays outside the manor house.”

Ser Tarth was ready to protest, but Argella again put her hand up. “It’s all right, Ser Tarth. She wouldn’t harm us as we now have guest rights.”

The solar in the manor house was not like the one on Dragonstone, but it was sufficient for the dragonlords. Aegon and Jaenyx would usually sit in the middle two seats, with Rhaenys and Visenya sitting on opposing sides and Orys sitting on the far end. The hearth was rather modest, but they didn’t need it during the summer years. As the acting lady of their citadel, Visenya took the lord’s center seat while Princess Argella sat opposite of her.

“I must say, Princess. This is rather… unprecedented. A king or a lord would never risk their heirs on a simple parley unless it was of utmost importance.”
“You are correct, my lady,” Argella replied. “But before we start and on behalf of House Durrandon, I give congratulations to your house on your victory over the ironborn at Rook’s Rest.”

“Thank you.”

“I was told that your brother, Lord Aegon, and his other one, the bastard, turned an army three times their size to dust while also killing the Duskendale and Maidenpool lords.” Visenya winced at Argella calling Orys a bastard. You better watch your words. “And I can see that the rumors are true.”

“What rumors?” Visenya already knew what she was referring to, but she wanted her to be explicit.

“That dragons are not just alive, but just as potent as in the days of Valyria. I initially doubted them, especially when I heard that a dragon the size of Massey’s Hook swooped down and turned thousands of men into ash. But as I have already seen your dragon fly above us, there is no point in doubting anymore.”

“Quite so, Princess,” Visenya nodded in satisfaction.

“With that out of the way, let’s get to the important reasons to my presence today. I would have appreciated it if either your brother Lord Aegon or your husband, Jaenyx Belaerys if I remember correctly, were here.” Careful, Visenya growled in her thoughts. “However, from what I hear of you, you’re just as capable as your brother and your husband. So I believe that our words would flow smoothly if we dispensed with all the pleasantries and talked frankly. Would that be all right with you, Lady Visenya?”

“Of course,” Visenya forced a smile. So she would rather talk with men. Does she even know who is she talking with?
“Over a month ago, my father King Argilac Durrandon sent your father, Lord Aerion Targaryen, a message in which he sought an alliance between our houses against the ironborn. He had heard about what the ironborn did to your husband’s men through his agents in the riverlands. As the ironborn since Harwyn Hoare have afflicted my house for generations, we have common cause. Now, I was aware that your brother Lord Aegon was already married to his sister and while incest and polygamy are seen as sinful in Westeros, those do not apply to you as Valyrians.”

Visenya caught a hint of disdain from that last word. *So much like her father from what I’ve heard of him.* She saw Argella just as haughty and condescending as the Arrogant king, and she also was quite unaware of how her choice of words would affect a conversation.

“I have to admit. I was not completely on board with my father’s decisions, mostly due to the thought of being a second wife and me having to submit to Valyrian customs, all of which are inimical to how I was raised.” Visenya felt her hand clenched into a fist underneath the table. “However, given how my father failed to produce a brother before and after I was born, the survival of my house is at risk. And I am sure that with time, I would have tolerated a polygamous union with your brother and sister while ensuring the survival of my family’s name.”

Visenya wanted to groan at how ignorant Argella was. She certainly had the nerve to say the words that she was saying, but she was being very unwise at the moment. “What is your point, Princess Argella?”

“My point is that my father’s offer for an alliance between Houses Durrandon and Targaryen is still on the table. I would be more than willing to wait for Lord Aegon to return to this citadel so that I may be able to persuade him of the value of this union myself. Once the alliance is made, my father will gladly provide your family a dowry befitting of dragonlords and at least twenty thousand troops in your fight against Black Harren. There is much to be gained.”

*What does she know about what it is befitting of dragonlords? And how dare she think that Egg could be persuaded to turn away from Rhae!* Visenya crossed her arms. “What do you think, Princess Argella?”

Argella blinked. “I beg your pardon?”
“You talk of the benefits of the union, but I never heard your thoughts, not really. You seem like a very independent person. There is no way that you would have agreed to do this unless you thought that you could get something out of this proposal.” Visenya leaned forward, her arms resting on the table. “So what do you want, Princess?”

A moment passed before Argella relaxed, but Visenya saw a smirk form on her face. “And so, the truth comes out.”

Visenya blinked, astounded. “What?”

“Yes, there are things that do not sit well with me regarding you Valyrians. But it’s either I marry one of you or marry some pampered lordling from elsewhere in my father’s kingdom. Looking upon you, I can see for myself that the stories of Valyrian beauties that my father told of when he was in Volantis were true. Add that to you, your siblings, and your husband being dragonriders, I will certainly elevate myself into a higher form of existence and any children I have with either the men will carry the blood of Durran Godsgrief and of old Valyria, a potent combination. I hear both your brother and your husband are quite the stunners from what I can gather.”

Visenya felt dragonfire spread through her heart. You crazy fucking bitch! “You think my brother and my husband will even entertain the thought of marrying you, let alone taking a second wife?”

“Why not? I had to turn down many offers for my hand, because many lordlings just lusted after me and did not care who I really was. Besides, your brother and your husband seem to have very good taste in women, especially Lord Aegon since he ignored the fact that he married his sister.”

There was nothing that Visenya wanted to do more than to launch herself across the table, put her hands around her neck, rip out her tongue, and strangle her. Only through sheer force of will did it not come to pass. “You bring up my husband alongside my brother. Your father wanted an alliance specifically through a betrothal with my brother. Why also my husband?”

“To be frank, Lady Visenya, any one of them would do, although I hear that Lord Belaerys is quite the powerful man despite not having any lands because of his control over Valyrian steel.”
Visenya slammed her hand down, her patience at an end while surprising the Durrandon princess. “Then you don’t know just who you’re dealing with, Princess,” her addressing of Argella dipped with contempt. “You speak of alliances and dowries, but you forgot to mention one important detail that made us land on this continent in the first place.”

“And what is that, Lady Visenya?” Argella looked honestly confused at what she was implying.

“Garaeron Rahitheon,” Visenya still remembered the nephew of Aevor Rahitheon who went missing in the Wendwater. “Do you know him?”

“I don’t, Lady Visenya,” Argella denied.

“He was going to Oldtown to sell some Valyrian steel swords, but he went missing in the Wendwater while trying to reach a boatman in the Grassy Vale. Interestingly enough, he went missing just as soon as Prince Darvin Hoare showed up at Dragonstone with Vaeron Rahitheon, another one of our men who went to sell Valyrian steel weapons.”

“Ah, the Unshackled Ironman,” Argella said aloud in recognition.

“You know him?”

“He’s a slippery character, that one. He once arrived without his father’s knowledge to Storm’s End to discuss business with my father, only for my father to throw him out once he said a few words out of turn. He was a little too interested in the many tales of how Durran Godsgrief fought the gods in their many storms and how Storm’s End was built, which is just a little detail of his strange obsession with magic.”

Now this, Visenya did not know. It may have explained how… predatory he looked when he gazed upon the halls of Dragonstone and especially at the stone dragon carvings in the wall. “But that’s
irrelevant. His father proved unable to control him whenever he led raids in my father’s kingdom, but Black Harren could not do anything without stating to the riverlords that he couldn’t control his own son. Looks like Black Harren is now finally seeing the consequences of allowing his son essentially a free reign to do what he wanted.”

Visenya nodded in agreement, but had to keep the conversation on track. “Besides Garareon Rahitheon going missing in your father’s kingdom, we’ve discovered that several boatmen coming to and from Dragonstone were paid by your father to spy on us, particularly whenever Valyrian steel shipments left the island.”

Argella looked startled. “Do you have evidence to support that?”

“Your father knew about Vaeron Rahitheon being kidnapped by the ironborn, but he did nothing and instead used that as a pretext to propose an alliance between our houses. In addition, Garaeron Rahitheon goes missing at around the same time Darvin Hoare arrives at our home. Combined with the fact that several boatmen throughout the Blackwater Bay were paid by your father to spy on us, what makes you think we will accept your offer of an alliance?”

“Now, that is mere conjecture and the evidence is circumstantial, you have no---”

Visenya interrupted. “You said that we should be honest with each other. Are you reneging on that promise? We would not want to see our words tainted in bad faith now, would we?”

Argella scoffed, but her grin got bigger. “There is much coin to be obtained from Valyrian steel. What can you possibly do against us? You may have dragons, but my father can muster thirty thousand men in less than a month, some of whom have much battle experience from the Dornish Marches. You really think all of you have chance against both Black Harren and my father?”

“Your father provoked us by having boatmen spy on us, and your refusal to answer what happened to Garaeron Rahitheon shows that you know what happened to him. That means that your father also knows and is therefore a perpetrator.”
“Do you really want to know what happened to him, Lady Visenya?”

Visenya felt her heart sink. “Is he dead?”

Argella sighed in indignation. “I heard that he resisted and killed five men with one of the swords he brought with him. However, an archer shot him in the eye and collapsed on the ground. We made a lot of gold from taking over the deal in Oldtown.”

Visenya stood up in anger. “So you did know what happened to him, and you have the gall to come here and still speak of an alliance between us?”

“Look at your citadel, Lady Visenya. You command less than ten thousand men and your brother only won one victory. Your chances of winning against Black Harren are low enough, but it will decrease if you decide to also fight against House Durrandon. Even if you do win against Black Harren, you’ll find the stormlords a much more loyal bunch to a Durrandon king than the riverlords to an ironborn. Your family could either accept the alliance my father proposes, or we can storm your island, take all of your people, and have them work Valyrian steel for us.”

“Oh, now you’re threatening us, in our own home no less?” Visenya raised her voice. “I knew you to be arrogant, but I never thought you would also be stupid.”

“Careful, Lady Visenya,” Argella warned.

“No, you should have been more careful when you decided to move against us. And now you have blood on your hands. So there can be no alliance between us.”

“Hmmm….,” Argella shook her head. “So be it. I’ll let my father of your answer, although I doubt you speak for your whole house on this matter.”
“After they hear of what happened to Garaeron Rahitheon, they will never have peace with you. Although, his uncle is here in this citadel right now and all I need to say is how his nephew died before he decides to kill you.”

“You would allow your vassal to violate guest rights?”

“Guest rights imply that you come here without ill-intent, and yet you came here with threats and a confession of your family’s involvement in the death of one of our vassals. More importantly, his uncle is a Valyrian through and through, so he would not give a damn about the traditions of Westeros. But out of respect for your station, I will allow you and Ser Tarth to leave this citadel alive. However, you will be foolish to expect the same leniency the next time we meet.”

Argella nodded. “Understood. I do hope that you are prepared to fight my father’s armies soon.”

Visenya said nothing as she personally escorted Argella and Ser Tarth out of the citadel and to her men outside of the gates. She would refrain from revealing to Aevor Rahitheon what happened to his nephew until Jaenyx came back. The Valyrian houses might have responded to her, but she would need his advice on how to deal with the situation, since she had no idea what would happen if Aevor Rahitheon decided to go on a blood rampage against the Storm King.

Seeing the Durrandon retinue disappear further into the distance, Visenya found herself utterly baffled by who she had just conversed with. Argella Durrandon was certainly loyal to her father, which was admirable but her way of expressing was quite foolish. She thought that being a woman in power and having many men pursue her would make Argella a little more humble and careful in how she carried herself, since men would strike down a woman with authority who also practiced indiscretion. However, such experiences must have only made her more full of herself and more bullheaded. She admired that Argella spoke her mind and was unapologetic with how she spoke, since Visenya grew tired of the many times ladies in courts apologized for their words in men’s presence. But she was so much like her father the Arrogant king. That could only lead to harder fighting against the stormlords than the ironborn, as the Durrandons would push their troops towards battle despite circumstances sometimes dictating against it.

However, that wasn’t what got Visenya so rankled. Argella expressed interest in both Jaenyx and Aegon, not caring how Rhaenys and herself would think. It was bad enough that she saw herself being married to Aegon, as Aegon was quite clear on the Arrogant king’s offer and Rhaenys would never allow another woman into their bed. But when she also mentioned Jaenyx… *Jae is mine! No
one else will touch him and I will burn anyone who tries to do so. What’s more, Argella saw both Jaenyx and Aegon as a way to become part of a powerful family despite holding disdain for Valyrians. What the fuck is she thinking?

Visenya walked over to the spaces where the dragons were. Balerion was still with Aegon, no doubt helping both him and Orys in securing their northwestern approach against Black Harren. However, Vhagar, Meraxes, and Cloudwynd were still here, resting. After rubbing the snouts of both Vhagar and Meraxes, she spent a longer time with Cloudwynd. Blue like the deep ocean and like the colors of House Belaerys, she might have been as large as Balerion, but she was agile and possessed a powerful dragonbreath. She was also surprisingly docile, showing a reluctance to go into battle but more than willing to enter it if spurred on. Taking her husband’s dragon’s snouts into her hands, she placed her forehead against it and closed her eyes, feeling Cloudwynd’s energy flow into her. Please, Jae. I know you’ll be back, but please make it soon. I want to feel you inside of me.

Visenya felt Cloudwynd snort, her red eyes staring back at her own. It was as if she knew what Visenya was thinking about and seemed quite amused. She couldn’t help but laugh while rubbing her snout some more. Dragons were connected with their riders for life, or at least as long as the riders lived, and she couldn’t help but wonder whether Jaenyx felt her thoughts through Cloudwynd. I hope so, because he better come back quick.

“My lady!” Visenya heard from behind her. The other dragons were alerted to the newcomer, but were rather calm about it. She turned around to see Ragaemor Tarareon behind her. “One of our patrols came back. There’s been movement near the Gods Eye!”

Visenya walked quickly alongside Lord Tarareon. “What is the report?”

“The ironborn have assembled another army and the last report has them crossing the Gods Eye on boats and going along its western shores. There’s no doubt that they’re trying to bypass Lord Aegon’s positions near the north shore and come straight for our citadel.”

“How many did the patrol count?”

Lord Tarareon hesitated. “They lost count after fifteen thousand.”
Shit! Their positions in the northwest was fairly secure after Maidenpool fell and they had a direct approach to both Saltpans and finally Black Harren’s fortress. Visenya figured that Black Harren had enough of being humiliated by supposed upstarts with imaginary creatures and was sending a larger force than he sent at Rook’s Rest to end the threat at the Blackwater Rush. He already had a large force in the riverlands to keep the region in line, so it was clear he was now just throwing bodies at the dragons in the hopes that his numbers would overwhelm them.

It was quite clever, in Visenya’s mind. The approaches south of the Gods Eye were relatively unprotected and the path clear to the mouth of the Blackwater Rush. If they could cross the river that flowed from the Gods Eye to the Blackwater Rush, the ironborn would be able to advance further into the lands around the Blackwater Bay and threaten Rosby, Duskendale, and Stokeworth. From there, it would not be hard to encircle their citadel.

However, the ironborn must have depended on their advance not being detected so early. If Aegon and Orys could reposition themselves further south in time, they would have a chance at blocking the enemy’s advance. She had also heard via message sent a week ago about Jaenyx’s and Rhaenys’ progress in the riverlands, specifically how they got a force of riverlanders to join their struggle. If Aegon, Orys, Jaenyx, and Rhaenys could all converge on the enemy before they crossed the river, they had a fighting chance of repelling them.

“Lord Tarareon, prepare messages to be sent to my brothers, my sister, and my husband. They must know of these developments immediately!”

“Yes, my lady,” he answered with a bow before running off to get the messages ready. In Visenya’s mind formed an outline of a strategy that could be used in the upcoming battle. She would have to trust both of her brothers, Rhaenys, and Jaenyx to fill in the details, as they would be the ones to adapt to the actual environment. I just hope that the messages would reach them in time.

Chapter End Notes

Writing the scene with Argella Durrandon took me a lot of time to think about, since I really wanted to give justice to her character compared to canon. Like Visenya, she's a beauty who is very independent, outspoken, and obviously had to deal with being a woman in a society where men would not allow the opposite gender to have much power and influence. However, unlike Visenya, she grew up accepted among her
social circles and never had to deal with being a black sheep. She is also very much her father's daughter, with her haughtiness and loose tongue almost unleashing Visenya's dragon temper. She will be humbled very soon.

I was considering writing King Argilac coming to the citadel instead of Argella, but decided on the latter since the Arrogant king would not realistically ride out to deal with a seemingly minor threat and giving character to Argella was a valuable opportunity. I hope you all like that.

And Visenya... oh, God. What a dirty mind you have. Her lust and longing for Jaenyx knows no bounds, which is very good for them. We also see Visenya also having great tactical and strategic sense, both of which will serve her very well in the next stages of the Conquest.

Next, we see Wailing Willows play out.
Jaenyx and Rhaenys rode on horses provided by Lord Colren Blackwood as they led the promised five hundred infantry and two hundred cavalry towards the Gods Eye. Tarareon and Blackwood scouts had shadowed the large ironborn and riverlander force that had marched from Harren’s fortress on the north shores of the lake to the southern shores. They had counted at least twenty-five thousand troops in total, of which over eight thousand were mounted. The mounted forces consisted of a mixture of knights from houses that declared for Black Harren, ironborn who knew how to ride horses, and ironborn riding war chariots. The last one perplexed Jaenyx, as chariots had not seen use in war for centuries. However, Chrass Rivers, a bastard son of Lord Blackwood, explained to him that the ironborn had to use chariots because they didn’t have sufficient experience as cavalrymen and that the chariot allowed to them move swiftly during land reaving while providing them a stable platform for their spearmen and archers. “After all,” Chrass Rivers explained. “It wouldn’t do the ironmen any good if their vassals were the only ones who used horses.”

The time Jaenyx and Rhaenys spent in the riverlands may not have yielded much material support for the dragons, but the information they obtained was just as valuable. The past three decades under the rule of Black Harren, who had beggared and enslaved many throughout the region, sowed unrest among many of the riverlords. News about Rook’s Rest made many in the Riverlands question whether they should support the dragons’ struggle against the ironborn, as Aegon Targaryen and Orys Baratheon both showed that he could be defeated. However, many of the riverlords were reluctant to rebel against him despite not responding to his call because he still had a large army of ironborn straight from the Iron Islands and from sons born through many of salt wives. As long as that army remained intact, no one had the courage to rise up against Black Harren.

One thing that would work in their favor was Black Harren’s ego. Already losing thousands of troops to what he viewed as upstarts, he needed to destroy this threat once and for all and soon, or he would suffer irreparable damage to his reputation. Jaenyx knew that having many of his available troops march towards the western approaches of their citadel at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush was his answer to those who hurt his pride.

Fortunately, a Tarareon cavalry patrol discovered their movements before they crossed the river that fed into the Blackwater Rush. Jaenyx and Rhaenys received a message from Visenya that
warned of the enemy’s advances while also recommending a tactical plan to act on when they do have battle. Jaenyx was… very impressed with how flexible and elaborate Visenya’s plan was. The plan overall emphasized adherence to its basic structure while allowing the commanders in the field to change and adapt certain details to fit the current battlefield conditions without seriously compromising the plan’s purpose.

Visenya’s plan fit with the apt saying: no plan survives first contact with the enemy. Many misunderstood those words as to not prepare a battle plan at all, which was foolish as they missed the point of that sentence. Battle was a very fluid situation with many unknowns and adhering to a certain strategy without adapting to changing conditions was an easy way to be defeated. No one could control how a campaign panned out and commanders throughout history ignored the wisdom of modifying their tactics and strategy to uncontrollable factors at their own peril.

Communicating with Aegon and Orys as they repositioned southwards, Jaenyx and Rhaenys knew that they had to block the ironborn advance at the river, as they had a good chance of halting them before they reached their citadel. However, they also knew that they were outnumbered. Against at least twenty-five thousand ironborn including eight thousand mounted troops, the dragons could only muster a total of eight thousand troops including the Blackwoods that had joined their struggle. They had one thousand and five hundred cavalry, a mixture of Tarareon, Blackwood, and Rosby men, supported by six thousand and five hundred infantry, a combination of Celtigar, Rahitheon, Stokeworth, Bar Emmon, Darklyn, and Mooton troops. Aegon also brought Balerion from the northwest while Meraxes and Cloudwynd had joined his main force ahead of Jaenyx and Rhaenys. A garrison of one thousand men commanded by Visenya along with Vhagar would protect the citadel and keep watch for enemy movements from the northwest and the south until they return.

One advantage of having a smaller force, as it showed at Rook’s Rest, was that they could advance faster than their larger adversaries. Jaenyx and Rhaenys rendezvoused with Aegon and Orys at a town on the southern shores of the Gods Eye, having to take a wider route around the ironborn’s advances on the western shores. They set up quarters at the town’s tower house situated on a hill to the west, which provided a commanding view of the chosen battlefield. However, they had found the town empty, no doubt depopulated to provide labor for Black Harren and they all knew that holding the town was pointless as there were no major fortifications from which they could repel an ironborn assault.

While he saw that Aegon and Rhaenys were tempted to enjoy a… steamy reunion on the top floor of the tower house, Jaenyx reminded them that they would have time for that after the battle and they needed to focus on preparing for when the ironborn arrive. They spent the next few days getting acquainted with the layout of the land around the town while modifying Visenya’s plan to the landscape.
Before a council of the commanders, Aegon gazed upon a map of the planned battlefield. “For those who fought at Rook’s Rest, remember that we’re dealing with possibly the main army of Black Harren. They brought more cavalry, archers, and infantry to the fight while also using their ships to possibly bypass our positions. The focus should be on preventing the ironborn from crossing from the west bank, but the dragons will prevent the ironborn from outflanking us from the Gods Eye. I will entrust my wife Rhaenys for this task, as you’re the best rider out of myself, Visenya, and Jaenyx.”

Jaenyx was worried about Rhaenys’ state of mind. Nearly drowning and killing for the first time almost proved too much for her, which he was a witness of. However, he trusted Rhaenys to do what she had to do and therefore said nothing. “While the dragons will prevent the ironborn’s boats from bypassing our positions, Orys will lead the center while Jaenyx and myself will take the flanks. I will be leading the Rosby and half of the Tarareon cavalry on the right flank.”

“Our goal is preventing the ironborn from bringing their larger numbers to bear on us. As they are familiar with Aegon from Rook’s Rest, they’ll be likely to focus their attack on him. Meanwhile, I will lead the left flank consisting of the Blackwood and the other half of the Tarareon cavalry to get them to cross prematurely towards us while Orys will advance with the center. Expect to shot upon by their archers, so keep your shields raised high and remain in tight formation,” Jaenyx outlined.

“Critical to the plan is to throw the ironborn off-balance, keep them from focusing on one area of the battle,” Orys traced his finger along the Gods Eye. “The only reason that they’re hugging the shores of the lake is because as long as they’re within range of water, they could either withdraw by boat or launch lightning attacks on our flanks from them. Rhaenys will use the dragons to burn the boats before they could reach us and force the ironborn to concentrate on land. They are not made for extended combat on land and the fact that they brought chariots here shows their lack of confidence fighting with competent land forces.” Everyone nodded in agreement. “Another part that is key to the plan is to have the ironborn overextend themselves on either flank. Like in Rook’s Rest, if we can weaken one of their flanks, we’ll have a chance at not only preventing their crossing, but to roll them up. After that, it’s just a matter of who can get the bigger claim on corpses.”

Aegon clasped his hands. “We all know our parts, but I will suggest something else. As soon as the ironborn arrive, we attack.”

That got everyone’s attention. “Wait, you mean, attack before they are ready?” Jon Rosby asked.
“Why not?” Orys pointed out. “If we allow them to set up formations, our chances of beating them will decrease. Plus, as we have all the smaller army, they’ll never expect us to take the initiative like at Rook’s Rest. Once we attack, we can control their movements and their reactions.”

Jaenyx nodded in approval. “I would suggest that you make yourself as visible as possible, Egg. You are the victor at Rook’s Rest, after all. The ironborn will charge at you in an irrational attempt to avenge their fallen brothers, which would allow my attack to face less resistance.”

“That’s good, Jae,” Aegon affirmed with a smile. “All right. Our scouts report that they’ll be here in a day. Get yourself more familiar with the layout and land and prepare yourself, for tomorrow will be the battle that decides whether we will triumph or fail against Black Harren. Dismissed.”

Jaenyx was left alone with Aegon, who remained gazing upon the map while Orys and Rhaenys left for their quarters on the upper levels of the tower house. “I heard that Rhae found out personally what it was like to kill,” Aegon stated.

“Kessa,” Jaenyx responded. “We were ambushed by the ironborn at the Stoney Sept and one of them tried to cleave with an axe. Fortunately, the dragon coat protected her while she was able to get a dagger in his throat.”

“How is she doing?” Jaenyx knew he was concerned.

“Frankly, I’m worried about her, Egg. First time taking a life is never easy on the soul, but she also knew what it was like to almost die. Both experiences would overwhelm anyone.”

“Will she be able to fight in the battle ahead, Jae?”

“Egg, the best thing you can do for her is to make her to do work. There will be a time for her to
really confront her distress from the past few weeks, but none of us could afford it. Making her work will distract her from the experiences, especially the memories since they will just remain in your mind no matter what you do.”

Aegon sighed. “Will she be the same Rhae that we both grew to love?”

Jaenyx moved next to him. “Egg, you have to trust that she will be able to pull through this, but what you can do is be there for her. Try to talk to her about her distresses, but don’t force it. With the right words and the right attention, she will not only be able to come out of this with her mind intact, she’ll be stronger. I did what I could to keep her calm, but you are the one she loves. So, continue to be that person and you might see her emerge whole much quicker than you’d think.” Jaenyx grasped his shoulder in support.

Jaenyx couldn’t help but briefly think about the time when his father, mother, and brother had died. He had no one to help him through those trying times except Master Haru, but he responded to his crying and despair by wrestling him to the ground and choking him with a headlock. He struggled to get out and Master Haru told him, “Yowamushi me! Doragun no chi ga iri te nai!” (You weak bastard! You’re not fit to have the blood of dragons in you) Jaenyx was still crying when he got enraged and bit down hard on Haru’s arm, releasing him from his headlock. After he stood up, Master Haru pointed to him and said, “Ikari ha zetsubou yorimo yuuyou desu.” (Anger is more useful than despair) He couldn’t cry very much after that and didn’t allow himself to think much about his sufferings, until he came to Dragonstone. Jaenyx found that loving made it easier for him to help whomever he loved through their own sufferings, something he wished he had and was now trying to be for Rhaenys.

Aegon stood straighter, smiled, and pulled Jaenyx in for a hug. “Kirimvose, Jae. Kirimvose.”

Jaenyx returned the hug. “It’s nothing, Egg. Now, let’s get ready for the battle ahead.”


Early the next morning, Jaenyx was awoken by Rhaenys, who told him that the scouts have
reported the ironborn approaching the river. Dressed in his laminar armor, steel cuisses and vambraces, and ridge helmet, he tucked in his katana and wakizashi to his left side while carrying his hand-and-half sword in his left hand and a lance in his right. This would be the first time he would really fight on the ground, as he trusted Cloudwynd to Rhaenys and Aegon did the same with Balerion. Besides, fighting with the troops would really show that their commander was willing to go through the same risks as they did. Jaenyx could still fight on Cloudwynd and his troops certainly trusted him enough to cross the sea from Sothoryos, but fighting on the ground would send a more powerful message.

Jaenyx knew what he had to do. He repeated to Aegon that he was not under him, but he was not that stubborn to ignore that Aegon was clearly adept at battle tactics and war strategy. While he himself was also trained in warfare, Jaenyx found himself more at home working from the shadows. He was also not bothered by the fact that Aegon was the more popular one due to Rook’s Rest, since Aegon had that charisma that was required of great military leaders. Everyone had a role to play in this struggle, and Jaenyx found his, so there was no reason to feel envious and he knew that his vassals would remain loyal only to him.

Jaenyx mounted his horse and rode to the center of the front row of the cavalry at the left flank. Across the river, he could see thousands of ironborn approaching the west bank. He also saw that their right flank, the one in front of his, had a high concentration of mounted forces from armored knights to chariots, the latter holding a charioteer and either a lancer or archer. He also noticed scythes mounted on each of the wheels, to be used against infantry and enemy horses. Jaenyx let out a breath to control his apprehension. *As long as we can maintain our distance, we will be fine.*

Then, a glare drew Jaenyx’s gaze to the right, at the Gods Eye. He saw Meraxes, Balerion, and Cloudwynd release their flames onto the ironborn boats, turning many into nothing and the rest on fire. Screams could be heard by those on the southern shores and the inferno was undoubtedly seen by all around the lake. He caught a glimpse at Rhaenys directing Balerion and Cloudwynd as they tore through the boats, fires blazing on the water itself in a mixture of yellow, black, and blue. Such a sight reminded Jaenyx when they first unleashed the dragons on the ironborn at Dragonstone, which was truly a wonderful sight.

Jaenyx turned slightly towards his left, seeing Aegon make his first move as he charged with his cavalry from the hill down onto the ironborn’s left flank. Caught unprepared and still out of formation, many ironborn died from the Tarareon’s horse archers and the others’ lances before Aegon withdrew ahead of the ironborn regrouping. He had made himself as visible as he could, with his distinctive black helm and dragon wings protruding from both of its sides.

*Now!* Jaenyx tightened the straps of his helmet before taking a breath. “*Cavalry, forward!*”
Initially going at a slow pace, they picked up speed as they advanced towards the ironborn’s right flank. With lancers in the center formation shaped like a wedge, Tarareon horse archers occupied the flanking positions, with their orders to form a single-file circle while shooting their bows, allowing a continuous stream of arrows to land on the enemy.

“Charge!” Jaenyx shouted as he and the others in their wedge formation lowered their lances and struck the enemy cavalry. They had designed their lances to pierce especially plate armor, but they were trained to aim for the head, neck, and shoulders so as to not lodge their lances in the cuirass. That was easier said than done when moving fast on horseback and Jaenyx had never done a cavalry charge before, but he had time to practice riding a horse and how to charge. Whenever the lance moved away from its mark, he adjusted and compensated.

Jaenyx felt his jerk backwards as his lance struck its first target, a knight’s helm. He saw blood spill from the helm’s openings, confirming that he did at least harm his first adversary. However, as they were in close contact with the enemy, they had to drop their lances and start fighting with swords while on horseback. He drew his hand-and-half sword, a family heirloom called Seablaze by its first wielder Jaenara Belaerys, and began striking at the ironborn cavalry and chariots.

The good thing about the cavalry and chariots were that they did not expect to be attacked by their opponent’s smaller cavalry force on the left, with the wedge charge shattering their front ranks while the Tarareon mounted archer circles caused chaos among the rest. So, for now, they had the initiative.

Jaenyx thrust Seablaze at a mounted ironborn’s exposed neck, seeing blood spill out of his mouth before drawing it out. He turned to his right and swung downwards on an armored knight. It merely glanced from the armor and did not major damage at first, but Jaenyx recovered by avoiding the knight’s horizontal swing and thrusting upwards into the tiny opening separating the helm and cuirass. Feeling the blade sever the spine, he pulled it out and saw the knight fall from his horse as a dead corpse before continuing on.

However, as more time passed, the enemy cavalry was regrouping and he saw the chariots wheeling around and getting into a position to charge into the fray, while also seeing ironborn infantry moving to reinforce their right flank. His purpose complete, he signalled the withdrawal as the ironborn’s front ranks were beginning to reorganize. Their return back to the east bank was delayed by the river, but they were able to reform in good order. Jaenyx saw that thirty troops did not make it back alive, but he pushed any sad feelings aside to focus on the battle.
Jaenyx recovered his bearings after feeling blood and mud on his horse and armor to see the center under Orys advance. As expected, the ironborn rained down arrows on top of them, forcing them to get into tighter formation and slowing their advance through the river. However, some arrows made through the gaps in their shields and killing dozens in each volley. The rivers soon turned red with blood while corpses began to float in the gushing waters of the river. To Orys’ credit, he maintained the formation and a steady pace towards the ironborn’s center.

Jaenyx had to reorient his attention to directly in front of him, as he now faced a combined force of mounted ironborn and knights, chariots, and infantry charging towards him.

“Archers, maintain fire on them. The rest of you, prepare for a counter-charge,” Jaenyx ordered.
“Do not let them have one inch on this bank, or we’re done for. Will we let these mongrels push us back?!”

“DAOR!!!” was the response from the Valyrians while the others yelled.

“CHARGE!”

As the ironborn infantry, cavalry, and chariots, made their way into the river, Jaenyx led the charge against them, effectively halting them in the water while the Tarareon mounted archers maintained their rate of fire on them. However, as Jaenyx was swinging Seablaze down onto the infantry, he felt his horse get run through with a pike and he splashed into the river. Feeling his helmet gone, he drew his katana with his left hand and began slashing and thrusting at the ironborn around him.

“Protect Lord Belaerys!” he heard one shout as more men rushed to support him in the river. Blood drops flew and water splashed as swords, pikes, and arrows found their marks. Ironborn archers on the chariots returned fire, with many of their arrows glancing off or bouncing off the armor while a few of Jaenyx’s men were killed at a time. Jaenyx felt his vision blur with each spray of the river’s water, recovering just soon enough to block some sword slash, an axe swing, or a pike thrust. The water reached up to their waists, greatly reducing their speed in order to attack or block another’s.

Jaenyx found to his detriment that his katana was not delivering its lethal effects as it had before.
While useful against unarmored opponents and against gaps in armored ones, he saw that the mail shirts of the ironborn and plate armor of knights and men-at-arms deflected the katana’s strikes. Only by quickly reacting and killing them with Seablaze was he able to recover and move onto the next one.

Suddenly, Jaenyx felt a pike pierce through the armor gap in his right shoulder. “Ah!” he yelled as he looked upon the ironborn responsible. He then saw two more ironborn charge at him while kicking up splashes of water and letting out their war cries. Thinking quickly, he cut off the pike at its head with his katana, spun around to get closer to the ironborn, and slashed at his throat with Seablaze. He parried the attacks of the other two ironborn, pushing them away with his swords while charging at the nearest one to his right. As both of them were relatively unarmored, he cut the one on the right where the vessels below the neck were while also spinning around to slash at the other’s legs with the katana, the blade passing through the water before emerging with an upward slice that made the ironborn fall into the river. The last saw Jaenyx saw of him was him trying in vain to remain above the surface.

Jaenyx felt a rush kick in as he felt blood come out of his shoulder wound. Reasoning became drowned out by the water splashing around him, steel clanging and horses neighing piercing his ears, and men shouting, instinct threatened took over while muscle memory yearned to determine his body’s movements. As he push-kicked an armored man-at-arms into the river and parried another’s sword, he controlled his breathing, calming his heart letting the rational parts of his mind resume control. Master Haru told him that emotions and hot blood do not belong in combat, as mistakes and recklessness occurred because of them, and it took him one instance while in the Basilisk Isles for him to realize the wisdom of his words. That was… gory to say the least, and he promised himself that he would never allow his baser emotions take over again.

As he calmed down, Jaenyx saw that they were slowly being pushed back to the west bank. Despite the Tarareon horse archers keeping the ironborn at bay, for every ironborn they killed or drowned in the river, more took his place. Ironborn archers mounted on the chariots started to inflict serious damage as the charioteers urged their horses across. Drenched in blood and water, exhaustion creeped into the faces of the Blackwood and Tarareon men with Jaenyx.

“Fall back! To the west bank!” Jaenyx ordered. He had to reform their line if they were to push back the mass that was treading across the river. Fortunately, he could also see that many of the ironborn were starting to slow down, also exhausted. Notorious for reaving and quickly getting out, they were not made for extended periods of combat and their effectiveness had decreased dramatically. Reaching the west bank, Jaenyx yelled, “Keep firing! Do not let them out of the river!”
Many ironborn were cut down, as the Tarareon archers maintained their stream of arrows and the enemy cavalry and chariots were bogged down by the river. The men systematically cut down anyone that had made it to the west bank, with Jaenyx forcing a knight off of his horse and stepping on his throat hard enough to crush his windpipe. *Aegon, whatever you’re going to do, do it now. I don’t know if we can hold much longer.*

Then, a roar pierced through the chaos. Jaenyx turned around and saw Meraxes fly towards their position. Once over the west bank, Meraxes released her dragonfire and incinerated hundreds within a few moments before climbing back up. Jaenyx turned to see that the center under Orys still fighting in close combat with the ironborn’s center line, but looked up to see Balerion release his dragonfire behind the army, effectively cutting off their retreat. Panic began to grow within the ironborn’s ranks.

Finally, Jaenyx saw the three-headed Targaryen banner rush from the right flank and behind the center. Now seeing the final move of the plan, Jaenyx tightened his grip on his swords. *“Troops, charge into the enemy. Wipe them out!”* With renewed vigor, the remnants of the left flank rushed back into the river and struck down many ironborn while pulling others off of their horses and chariots. A few were cut down by the chariots’ scythes, but the integrity of the ironborn army was compromised as Aegon and his cavalry crashed into their rear. A gap between the ironborn’s right flank and center was exploited by Aegon as he rushed with his cavalry towards Jaenyx’s positions, cutting down many in the process.

Aegon dismounted and began to take part in the fight in the river. He slashed his way through the ironborn before making it to Jaenyx. “Need help, brother?” Aegon asked as he stood next to him.

“A little earlier would have been nice,” Jaenyx calmly admitted.

“I was busy,” Aegon lightly jested.

“Let’s save the talk for after the battle.”

“Aye, let’s do that.” Jaenyx and Aegon then waded side by side through the river while cutting down their opponents. While Jaenyx used more of his speed, Aegon was all about power as he swung hard against every ironborn block and used his punches. Jaenyx also saw Aegon block an
ironborn’s axe and punch before headbutting him and running him through with Blackfyre.

But, Aegon failed to see an ironborn rushing up from behind him. Jaenyx reacted too late as the ironborn swung his axe into Aegon’s helm, causing him to fall into the river. Decapitating him in one swift motion, Jaenyx rushed towards where Aegon was and pulled him up before he drowned.

“Aegon, can you hear me? Are you all right?” Jaenyx shook him. Not getting an answer, Jaenyx pulled up his helm, fearing the worst. To his relief, Aegon’s eyes will open and moving. “Are you okay? Are you all right? You okay?” Jaenyx repeated.

“Yeah,” Aegon managed. “I think I can hear bells ringing.”

Jaenyx laughed, reassured. “Come on! We still got a fight on our hands!”

Aegon took off his helm, too damaged to wear anymore, while Jaenyx could see a cut on the back of his head. Any deeper, and you’d be done for. Rhaenys doesn’t deserve that.

With Balerion’s flame cutting off their escape and with both of their flanks either rolled or crushed, the enemy’s center collapsed. Jaenyx and Aegon emerged on the east bank of the river to see Orys meeting them. Although not as drenched in water like Jaenyx and Aegon, he was covered in blood and had arrows protruding out of his left thigh and forearm. His Valyrian steel axe, the one gifted to him by Jaenyx, had pieces of flesh still on its head. What was more, they did not say anything to each other was they surveyed the field.

They were worried about the ironborn’s chariots because of the scythes and how fast they could move. However, they saw that they had chosen their battleground well, as the river restricted their enemy’s movements and negated their advantage in cavalry and chariots. They had made the mistake of concentrating their mounted troops on their right flank opposite of Jaenyx’s, which got them to overextend their lines while the river restricted their movement. They all looked at the Gods Eye to see the burning remains of the ironborn ships, all of them facing the fire of the dragons before they could outflank them.
It was at this moment that Jaenyx began to appreciate Aegon more. He had made a good decision to attack as soon as the ironborn arrived, which caught them off guard and made them react to the dragons. The sheer audacity and willingness on Aegon’s part to fight with his troops even though he could have remained in the sky on Balerion… Jaenyx saw his good-brother in a new light.

Jaenyx also glanced at Orys. Not thinking much of him before, he began to recognize that size does matter. Easily the most physically imposing of them, he backed it up by showing bravery and steadfastness to the plan. It was because of him that the center held despite arrows raining down on them and facing stiff resistance from the ironborn’s center. Although he still did not understand how he could have came from dragonblood, at least Orys lived up to his boasts of strength and stalwartness.

They all saw Meraxes, Balerion, and Cloudwynd land at the rear of the ironborn army. All of them roared into the air, three roars fusing into one great bellow that echoed through the battlefield. Seeing no point, the ironborn dropped their weapons and surrendered as Rhaenys slid off Meraxes and moved through the new prisoners as she got closer to the three of them. Orys gave her a big hug while Rhaenys hugged Jaenyx and gave him a peck on the cheek. She then turned to Aegon, pulling him into a big kiss while ignoring the blood and water dripping from his head.

While Aegon was getting his head injury treated with Rhaenys keeping him company, Jaenyx took over in overseeing the remaining ironborn prisoners. He counted four hundred dead on their side along with three thousand wounded. As for the ironborn, out of a near twenty-five thousand troops that came to battle, four thousand cavalry were killed along with eight thousand infantry, with the rest wounded and captured.

Jaenyx stood in front of their remaining leaders, most ironborn but a few of them from the riverland houses that had sided with Black Harren. “I am Jaenyx of House Belaerys, Lord of the Basilisk Isles. What you decide to do now will determine whether or not you return home. Your king, Black Harren, has suffered three defeats at our hands. Dragonstone, Rook’s Rest, and now here. In weeks, tens of thousands of men were turned to ash. You have been beaten and are now in our custody. Personally, I don’t care whether you live or die, but if you want to go home, bend the knee right here and your wish will be granted.”

“You asking us to be oathbreakers?” an ironborn spat.
“Look around you,” Jaenyx outstretched his arms. “Not only were you beaten by a smaller army, you were beaten by real dragons. You really think you have a chance against us after today?” That silenced the ironborn. “I would ask that you make the sensible decision. Just know that if you don’t bend the knee this instant, your ashes will join the other piles. That is my guarantee.”

“So, you’re the one they call the Blue Dragon?” a riverlander asked.

“And who might you be?”

“Ser Everan of House Roote of Harroway’s Town.”

“And do they really call me the Blue Dragon, Ser Everan?”

“Aye.”

“Hmmm… well, what say you, Ser Everan? Will you bend the knee and live, or don’t and burn?”

Ser Everan Roote bent the knee promptly, as did the other riverlanders. As with the other ironborn, they all remained standing in defiance. “As I expected,” Jaenyx remarked. “And quite frankly, I wouldn’t mind if everyone of you ironborn burned. Rhaedar, take all of them to the dragons.”

Six ironborn captains were put before Balerion, Cloudwynd, and Meraxes. All of the prisoners, in chains, watched upon the sight with fear and in wonder. “To all you ironborn scum!” Jaenyx announced. “Remember what you will see, for this is the price for provoking the dragons. We didn’t start this war, but we will see it end with the ashes of House Hoare scattered upon the earth. I, Jaenyx of House Belaerys, Lord of the Basilisk Isles, sentence these ironborn captains to die.” He stood straighter. “Dracarys.”
All three dragons released their flames onto the six ironborn, their screams echoing through the dusky skies before they were revealed as tiny piles of ash.

Now, let’s see what happens after today.

Chapter End Notes

Big shoutout to Longclaw 1-6 and osterreicher97 on FF, for both really helped me steer the story in a good direction. You guys are awesome! :)

And here we have Wailing Willows, the major battle that finally shatters Black Harren’s control over the Riverlands and the one before Harrenhal. I incorporated elements of both the Battles of the Granicus River and of Issos, with the axe to Aegon's head thing being taken the former. I am getting comfortable writing major battles and this is the first chapter where it is mostly action, so I hope I did it well. As I promised, this will be no cake walk for the dragons and I hope I delivered. As of the action scenes, I took inspiration from the beach battle of Robin Hood with Russell Crowe and the Last Samurai with Tom Cruise.

As for the saying "no plan survives first contact with the enemy," that was an old Prussian saying, specifically by Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, probably one of the greatest military strategists that had ever lived and led the Prussians to defeat the Danes, the Austrians, and finally the French in 1870. I really recommend reading up on him, and he's one of the inspirations for Visenya's strategic and tactical mind.

Now, we get to see more of Jaenyx's ruthlessness. Killing is just business as usual for him, but he does show no hesitation when he burnt the ironborn captains. After all, the ironborn did start the war. However, we also see a softer side of him, as he wished there was a person that comforted him when his family died, as he tried to with Rhaenys. He also acknowledges that Aegon is more charismatic than he could be, but is not bothered by it since he already knows himself well to not let others worry him.

Next, we see more ironborn burning. FIRE! BLOOD!
**Aegon V**

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay in the updates. Been caught up with grad school, especially with all of my final deadlines coming this week. So, had to work on that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

AEGON V

“I promise to be faithful and loyal to House Targaryen of Dragonstone, to never bear arms against any of its heirs. I also promise fealty to House Belaerys, to never bear arms against any of its heirs, and to support the cause of the dragons from this day forth. May the gods help me uphold these oaths,” pledged Edmyn of House Tully, Lord of Riverrun, as he knelt before their father, who had arrived from Dragonstone two weeks ago and was more than pleased with the changed circumstances. While Aegon, Rhaenys, and Visenya did all of the work in the past few months from the time they landed at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, the fact remained that their father was still alive and still Lord of Dragonstone. So, it was only natural that the riverlords pledge fealty to the old dragon.

Despite their father stepping back to allow his children and good-son to run the campaign against Black Harren, Aegon was in some ways glad that his father had returned to assume his lordly position. The last few months made him more experienced as a warrior and commander of troops, but he knew that he was still not attuned to the political machinations that Westerosi lords regularly engaged in. There was a reason that Dragonstone remained outside of the control of the other rulers of Westeros, and that was because their father knew how to maneuver through the various plots coming from around the Blackwater Bay. It only made sense that he would be here in the riverlands, as he knew how to get the riverlords to submit peacefully to the dragons.

From what the riverlords revealed, Black Harren had forty thousand troops at his command to keep the region under control, the majority of whom were ironborn. However, Wailing Willows had eradicated the ironborn’s main army and left only five thousand men for Black Harren. But his problems did not end there. Wailing Willows also prompted the riverlords to rise up and declare for the dragons. Many of the important lords such as the Tullys of Riverrun, the Blackwoods of Raventree Hall, the Brackens of Stone Hedge, the Mallisters of Seagard, and the Freys of the Twins had gathered at the Stoney Sept to discuss their move after Black Harren called the banners. With the victory at Wailing Willows, they switched sides and arrived as one to the southern shores of the Gods Eye to declare their allegiance.
If there was one thing that their father Lord Aerion had firsthand knowledge of, it was that the lords of Westeros were an untrustworthy bunch. Values such as loyalty, honor, and some others associated with knightly chivalry were only followed if convenient. While he could not deny that the riverlords had legitimate reasons to rise against Black Harren, their father also understood that they would have done nothing against him to protect what they had, the Tullys not rising up at the first opportunity being proof of that.

However, the same could not be said about Lord Colren Blackwood. Although not contributing all of his levies to Wailing Willows, the Blackwoods were the first riverlord house to give any tangible support to the dragons and were thus very favored in their father’s eyes. He did not miss the fact that the relationship between Edmyn Tully and Colren Blackwood was strained due to the latter actually showing initiative, but also acknowledged that Edmyn Tully was the popular one out of the riverlords and was content to have him remain in charge of the river faction.

As Edmyn Tully rose from his knees after swearing his fealty, Lord Aerion grasped his hands tighter and stopped him before giving him a hard stare into his eyes. “Stay there, my lord. My good-son, Lord Jaenyx Belaerys, and my daughter, Lady Rhaenys Targaryen, offered you an opportunity to rise up against Black Harren, but you refused. While I cannot refute your reasons for not taking that chance, your friend Lord Blackwood did and he helped us win. Nevertheless, I heard you are an able lord and popular throughout the riverlands, so I hope that you will put your skills to great use while serving my house. Therefore, I welcome your pledge of fealty and accept you into our service.”

Their father turned to Orys, who stood on his right side. “Is that all, son?”

“Yes, father,” Orys nodded. They had spent half the day hearing the riverlords oaths of fealty, with the Freys of the Twins oddly being the first ones if their reputation said anything.

“Good,” their father then turned his attention to the assembly of riverlords. “My lords of the riverlands, today you have each pledged fealty to my house and House Belaerys as your new rulers. Any lands confiscated during the reign of Black Harren will be returned to you and all of you shall receive recompense for the many decades you’ve suffered under him. I applaud all of your wisdom and I look forward to the many years of service you’ll give to my house. Lord Edmyn Tully, Lord Colren Blackwood… step forward.”
The red-haired Lord of Riverrun and the black-haired and grey-eyed Lord of the Raventree Hall took one step ahead of the riverlord assembly. “Lord Blackwood, I understand that your house has a strong claim on the rulership of the riverlands. But Lord Tully organized the assembly that has come here today and proven his house’s usefulness. Therefore, neither of you can be favored in regards to the lord paramountcy of the Riverlands. Instead, my house and House Belaerys will continue to govern this region and receive its due in taxes and levies until otherwise decided. My good-son, Lord Jaenyx Belaerys,” their father pointed to Jaenyx. “He has volunteered to supervise the riverlands on behalf of the dragons and Lords Tully and Blackwood will answer to him in regards to all matters concerning the good administration to this region. If he does send out a call for war, all of you shall respond and assemble your troops, as you should’ve done when we first came.”

The riverlords winced at their father implying their cowardice. “You both will be proud to serve under us, and you will take that opportunity, if you are wise, to heal the differences between you that have arisen in these last few months. Offer your hands.” Lord Blackwood and Lord Tully were still cordial with each other despite the former upstaging the latter caused tensions between them. As they were both watched by their father, they shook their hands and exchanged a warm smile.

Their father stood up from his chair, his arms outstretched. “Now let us be what we are now… friends!” He turned his attention to the servants in the tent. “Let’s have the band play music! The rest of you, bring drinks and food for our new friends!”

And with that over, Aegon just saw their father secure the riverlords to the dragons’ cause. Visenya was still at their citadel at the mouth of the Blackwater Bay to plan their advance against the Durrandons, but had heard about the victory at Wailing Willows. Jaenyx would soon return to the citadel with four thousand rivermen reinforcements as would Aegon, Orys, Rhaenys, and their father. However, at least for today, they had to remain in the riverlands to direct the final destruction of House Hoare.

Remarkably, the riverlords were able to muster a combined army of twelve thousand troops within two weeks. Aegon mused that they must have told their levies to be ready to march as soon as they made a final decision, either for or against Black Harren. Practically overnight, the whole region south of the Neck declared for the dragons and converged on Black Harren’s vanity project at the northern shores of the Gods Eye. There were a few remaining holdouts in the eastern reaches of the riverlands, one of which was Saltpans. Aegon and Rhaenys flew over the town on Balerion and Meraxes, imploring the Lord Hawick to surrender. He initially refused, but Aegon gave him one more chance after telling him of the changing tides and having Balerion release his dragonfire directly in front of the town. Lord Hawick bent the knee soon after without further resistance.
Now with an army of eighteen thousand troops, including the veterans of Wailing Willows and Rook’s Rest, the dragons surrounded Black Harren’s fortress aptly called Harrenhal and formed a tight siege perimeter. Working against Black Harren was the fact that he envisioned his fortress to be the largest in Westeros, but did not consider how long construction would take. Therefore, the fortress looked half-complete, with only three of its five intended towers erected and only some of its walls rising to their intended heights.

Jaenyx recommended that they storm the fortress or use the dragons to smoke him out, as Black Harren had no real support or armies left to defend him anymore. However, Orys and the riverlords recommended starving him out with a prolonged siege, as they were not confident in taking a fortress of that size despite it being incomplete. Aegon knew that time was of the essence, as Black Harren had called for troops and ships to be sent from the Iron Islands. As long as the ironborn king was still alive, the ironborn threat would persist.

Their father insisted on a parley with Black Harren, which everyone advised against since they held the advantage. However, their father reassured them by saying that he merely wanted to exchange words with the Hoare king, as he fully understood that whatever approach they chose for Harrenhal, Black Harren would not leave the fortress alive. “I would like to see his face when he finds a simple lord occupying a stronger position than he does,” their father declared. “What could be more humiliating to his pride than that?”

Aegon couldn’t help but chuckle, which the rest of the riverlords and the family also did. Having enjoyed unhindered rule of his kingdom, all that would be left would be his corpse in a fortress whose resources and labor could have been put to better use elsewhere. Instead, his ego needed him to build a castle that would be his permanent mark on the landscape. It would indeed be permanent, with his ashes among the blackened stones of the fortress after the dragons were done.

Aegon, Jaenyx, Orys, and Rhaenys all stood with their father, who waited as the drawbridge to Harrenhal lowered and revealing a sizable ironborn entourage. He figured that the court of Black Harren were in the castle given how many came with him. However, his focus was on the old, grey man in black armor that was at the front of the group. This man had a slightly hunched posture, with wrinkles visible all over his face and his scalp balding. He also had one of his black eyes looking more towards the middle. With the driftwood crown placed on his head, itself barely staying on his bare scalp, Aegon knew instantly who this was.

I thought Black Harren was fearsome. He’s just a frail old man, Aegon scoffed. I could easily take him on with either Blackfyre or Flame Screecher in his heart.

Their father remained indifferent to the fact that he was face to face with Black Harren, supposedly the most fearsome man in Westeros, as he also saw how weak and frail he really was.

“Before you stands Aerion of House Targaryen, the Elder Dragon, Lord of Dragonstone and ruler of the Blackwater Bay,” Rhaenys announced. Their father let out a small grin, amused that he was called the Elder Dragon. “Standing with us is Jaenyx of House Belaerys, Lord of the Basilisk Isles and rider of the dragon Cloudwynd.”

Black Harren stared at the family before him. He might have been frail and old, but Aegon saw that the lunacy characteristic of ironborn remained in him, if his widened eyes said anything.

“Quite a host you have, Lord Targaryen,” Black Harren addressed their father. “It appears that I was right to keep the riverlords in line by having them work.”

“And look where that got you, Black Harren,” their father responded, not bothering to call him a king.

Black Harren took offense, as did his heir. “You are speaking to King Harren, dragonspawn. You will address him as ‘Your Grace.’”

“He’s no king of ours,” Aegon spat. “A sentiment that is shared among the riverlords. Your father is the king of nothing.”

“Watch your tongue, or you shall lose it,” the ironborn prince warned. However, he seemed to not expect Aegon and Jaenyx to draw their swords, Orys to ready his axe, and Rhaenys to pull out her
dagger. Only their father’s raised hand prevented them from spilling blood.

Their father shook their head in disbelief. “Do you really not see reality? You’re in no position to make threats or to demand anything of us. We have nearly twenty thousand men surrounding your castle. You have no armies nearby to help you and your fleet is too far off the coasts to be of any threat to us. The decades you spent oppressing your vassals to build this very castle has got you no allies left. More importantly, we have four dragons that can easily burn you where you stand.”

“Our castle can withstand fire, Lord Targaryen,” Black Harren attempted in vain to regain some control of the situation.

“Tell that to the ironborn you sent at Rook’s Rest and at Wailing Willows, Black Harren,” Jaenyx joined in. “Also, your son, Darvin Hoare, foolishly sent his fleet to attack us, all of whom are at the bottom of the Blackwater Bay.”

That was when they saw Black Harren’s face assume a more fearful expression. “Now, hold on a moment, Lord Belaerys. Prince Darvin was not sanctioned to attack you or your bannerman—”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Jaenyx interrupted him. “You failed to control your son and now that has cost you dearly. Speaking of which, where is Darvin Hoare? I don’t see him here, unless he away like a coward?”

Black Harren did not answer, prompting their father to steer the parley back on topic. “The way I see it, Black Harren, you have two choices. Surrender yourself and your family to our custody and we shall show you mercy. Refuse to do so, we will burn you, your sons, and your castle where you are.”

Aegon knew that their father’s offer was insincere, since there was no way that he would let Black Harren leave this place alive.

“My castle is made of stone, not wood or flesh, Lord Targaryen,” Black Harren answered.
“So, I take it you won’t surrender then?”

“Never, especially to dragonspawn.”

Their father sighed, but more in relief that Black Harren acted as expected. “So be it, Black Harren. Tonight, you and your sons will die.”

“So, are all escape routes secured and cut, Rhaedar?”

“Yes, Lord Aegon,” Rhaedar Tarareon nodded. “We have Blackwood, Rosby, and our own horsemen covering every way out of the castle alongside Celtigar and Tully infantry. The ironborn cannot leave.”

“Good.”

“I’m concerned that Darvin Hoare is not in Harrenhal, Egg,” Jaenyx stared at the castle. “After all, he’s the one that started this mess.”

“We shall deal with him in time, Jae,” Aegon responded. “We take the father and brothers, and we’ll take what’s left. With Black Harren gone, the ironborn will not be in a position to fight again for a long time.”

“I would prefer that there be nothing left of them.”
“I agree, Jae,” Rhaenys joined in. “But for now, our priority should be to secure the riverlands and prepare to move against the Arrogant king. We now have more troops and the lands west of the Blackwater Bay are secure.”

“And in all honesty,” Orys stated. “Sieges would take too long. Best just get it over with.”

Aegon nodded. “All right then.” He turned to their father. “We’re ready.”

Their father stood up from his seat and walked over to the riverlord assembly, who were still enjoying the feast and wine handed out to them. “Friends, join us! We have a spectacle.” A trumpet herald sounded followed by the beat of drums. Their father led the riverlords to within full sight of Harrenhal, just ahead of the troops camped outside the walls but far enough out of range of any archers.

Aegon could hear Lord Tully converse with Lord Blackwood behind him. “Haven’t the dragonspawn done enough damage, Colren?”

“Lord Targaryen never intended to spare Black Harren and his sons. We’re just watching the final nail of ironborn’s casket being put in,” Lord Blackwood replied.

“He probably wants to be certain we get the message that nobody provokes the dragons,” Aegon heard him sigh. This was especially concerning, as Lord Tully did not rise up against the ironborn until after Wailing Willows and he had the gall to say his thoughts aloud. *We need to keep an eye on him.*

“I understand that all of you wanted to starve him out with a siege,” their father turned around to the riverlord assembly. “However, it will only be delaying the inevitable. It will be better to end Black Harren quickly. What you will see is the power of the dragons, which not even the strongest of fortresses could withstand. Let all of you remember this day.”
Getting the cue, Aegon, Rhaenys, and Jaenyx mounted their dragons and took off into the air. Getting enough altitude, they circled above Harrenhal and their dragons gave off loud bellows. Jaenyx took the initiative, nudging Cloudwynd downward until they were both level with Harrenhal’s towers. Aegon saw blue flames leave her mouth, a continuous stream engulfing the towers while Cloudwynd kept flapping her wings to keep herself level. Then, Aegon saw the towers collapse before Cloudwynd flew back to the main camp.

Rhaenys followed, Meraxes releasing her yellow flames onto the walls of Harrenhal. Aegon saw a circle of yellow form below before Meraxes followed Cloudwynd back to camp. Aegon then nudged Balerion downward, aiming towards the main keeps and structures.

“DRACARYS!” Aegon yelled. Balerion released his black flames onto the rest of Harrenhal, consuming the rest of the structures with fire and an inferno spreading to the entire castle. He flew back to the camp, and landed near Cloudwynd and Meraxes. Walking to where Orys, Jaenyx, and their father was, he stood next to Rhaenys and put his arm around her waist, which she returned with her arm around his. They all saw Harrenhal burned like a melting candle, the vanity project of Black Harren engulfed in flames and faint screams could be heard.

Aegon looked back to the riverlords, each of them looking upon the sight in rapture and fear. Regardless of how they personally felt towards his family, they could not deny what they were seeing at that moment. Despite its incompleteness, Harrenhal was still the largest castle in Westeros and it was burning before their very eyes. With it, the rule of the ironborn was over.

Eventually, they all retired to their tents while Harrenhal still burned. Aegon escorted Rhaenys to their tent. Once alone, he pulled her into a kiss, one full of passion. Running his hands along with slender back, he grunted when he felt Rhaenys run her hands to his cock and squeezed it.

“When did you become this audacious, Rhae?” Aegon kissed her neck.

“That’s what happens when you are close to death, Egg,” Rhaenys whispered in his ear. “Makes you want the things you love more.”
“Anything else you can show me?”

Rhaenys pulled away from Aegon and offered her back. “Want to find out?”

Aegon got the hint, proceeding to untie her laces while not caring that some of them ripped. Yanking down, he paused as he stared upon the bare form of his wife. He felt amazed every time he looked at her, his sister-wife representing Valyrian gracefulness. He didn’t move as she pulled his tunic over his head, undid his breeches, and leapt into his arms.

“Fuck me,” Rhaenys purred. Aegon carried her to their bed and sheathed his cock into her entrance. Her jerking backward and hearing a moan escape her got Aegon to thrust at a fast and furious pace. Aegon sucked at her neck while he squeezed her breasts, but Rhaenys grabbed his chin and had him look into her eyes. Stormy pairs of amethysts gazed at each other, fire being seen by the other.

Aegon felt the walls around his cock tighten and his core burning, both from the pleasure that was consuming him and from how his muscles were straining from the furiousness of his thrusts. He leaned and put his mouth on Rhaenys’, their tongues wrestling with one another for dominance. He felt her arms tighten around his shoulders, trying to keep him on her but feeling they were being squeezed.

Feeling him nearing the edge, Aegon shouted, “Rhae!”

“Egg!” Rhaenys screamed in response. Feeling his seed spill into her, Aegon fell onto her limp form. The pants tapered off, as the waves of calm flowed through both of them. Sliding off of her, Rhaenys turned to him and nuzzled into his side, one arm and one leg over his body. Running her hand over her chest, she snuggled into his neck. “You make me so alive, Egg.”

Aegon pulled her closer to him. “You too. I’ve been so worried for you, Rhae.”

“Me, too,” Rhaenys looked at him. “But when I saw you fight, I realized that my worries were for naught. You really are a great warrior, Egg. Your sword and Balerion will always keep you safe.”
“And Meraxes will to you, Rhæ,” Aegon kissed her forehead. “You have me, Jaenyx, Orys, and Vis to help you stay safe also.”

Rhaenys pecked his jawline. “Egg, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“You remember the time when I killed that stag with my bow?”

“Of course I do. I couldn’t be more proud that you could hunt with us.” Aegon smiled at that memory, happy and relieved that his sister was not entirely squeamish at the sight of blood.

“Can you train me how to use it well?”

Aegon looked at her, surprised. “Why do you want to train with a bow?”

Rhaenys looked at him back. “I can never be as strong as you and Orys, or as fast as Jaenyx and Vis. The one time that I killed a man was just… I don’t want to be worried about how I would defend myself and I wouldn’t want you and the others to continually risk themselves for me all the time.”

Aegon leaned his head down to his Rhaenys’. “That’s fine, Rhæ. You’re my wife and you’re family. That’s what we should do.”

Rhaenys shook her head. “I know, but I want to lighten the load on all of you. If I could fight, then I won’t have to be afraid whenever we’re in battle.”
Aegon thought about her request. He loved how considerate she was being, but he was also worried about how the stresses of battle would weigh on her. He knew that with the right amount of time and attention, Rhaenys could become a great archer, as her killing the stag occurred only after two days on the bow. However, he was also worried that she would use every chance she had to enter battle with them. There was also the worry that she was only trying to learn the bow in order to not think so much of her near death experience and the stress that came from her first kill. However, he also remembered Jaenyx saying that the best thing for Rhaenys was to keep her mind occupied and to show support.

Taking a moment, Aegon made his decision. “If that’s you want, we can start tomorrow.”

Rhaenys smiled widely, giving him a deep kiss before she kissed his neck and all the way down his chest to his length. Aegon chuckled, pleased how his sister-wife responded. He let himself relax as he felt her tongue lick around his cock and pleasure reenter his body.

The next morning, Aegon, Jaenyx, Orys, and Rhaenys moved into the smoldering ruins of Harrenhal. Their troops had already entered and started taking possession of anything that still had value. Rhaedar Tarareon led them to the ruined great hall, where they found the charred remains of the ironborn court and what they saw was Black Harren’s blackened body on his throne, taking his last seat as a king. Orys went over and snatched the driftmark crown off of his head.

“This will be a good addition to my collection,” Orys remarked.

“The crown belongs to Dragonstone, Orys,” Aegon stated. “But you can take anything else of value here.”

Orys shrugged, honestly not caring about a now worthless crown. “So what do we do now?”
“We should collect the swords and take off their Drowned God amulets,” Aegon replied. “We’ll show all of them to anyone who doubts what happened here and as proof of what happens when you provoke the dragons.”

“I would suggest we bring Aevor Rahitheon to his fortress,” Jaenyx looked around. “Harrenhal is on good lands and with enough effort, this could be a useful castle in the future.”

“I agree,” Aegon nodded. “Harrenhal is strategically located between the Blackwater Bay and the riverlands. Together with Saltpans, Dragonstone and our citadel on the Blackwater Rush will be safe from enemy approach as long as we hold both.”

“But wouldn’t occupying this castle be a slight to the other riverlords, as this is a symbol of Black Harren’s oppression of the region?” Rhaenys asked.

In all honesty, that was a legitimate concern. They had just secured the riverlords to their cause, but they were in a crucial first stage. Any misstep on their part would undo all of the progress they made to bring down the ironborn.

“I wouldn’t worry about, Rhae,” Jaenyx answered. “They all seen the dragons burn this very castle. That should be enough for them to believe that things will be different with Black Harren gone. Besides, just as we burned this castle before, we can burn it again if we need to.”

Aegon again nodded. “What concerns me is that Darvin Hoare, the main culprit, was not here.”

“He’ll show up eventually, Egg,” Orys continued to fish for the Drowned God amulets and swords, or what was left of them. “When he does, we can choose to separate his head from his body, or burn him like we did his father and brothers.”

Jaenyx smiled. “As your family words say, fire and blood.”
“Jae, when will you move back to the citadel with the rivermen reinforcements?” Rhaenys asked.

“Today. I have to discuss certain matters with Lord Tully and Lord Blackwood. I will be taking three thousand Blackwood men and one thousand Tully men, who would be useful when we move on the Arrogant king. Vis told me that she had some words with Princess Argella, who’s quite the character from her first impression.”

Aegon scoffed, who also knew about Argella Durrandon’s visit to their citadel. “Just like her father, but she seems to have a much sounder mind than him.”

“What about you? Will you come with me?”

“After you, Jae,” Aegon replied. “We’ll fly back to Dragonstone to let our mother know we’re all right. After that, we’ll join you.”

Jaenyx nodded in satisfaction. “Understood. I’ll see you there.” With that, he left the great hall and Harrenhal. They all heard Cloudwynd roar and her wings flap.

After getting all of the amulets and swords that they could, they piled them onto carts and had Tarareon and Celtigar troops serve as escort. Aegon and Rhaenys then mounted their dragons and flew back to Dragonstone. They were able to make it back home by the day’s end, with their mother waiting there.

“My babies!” their mother exclaimed as she hugged them tightly and causing both Rhaenys and Aegon to feel a little embarrassed. Orys was still with their father in the riverlands, to later escort him to their citadel. “I take it we won?”

“Yes, muña,” Rhaenys smiled. “Black Harren is dead and the riverlands are ours.”
Their mother nodded with pride. “I was worried for a little bit there, but when I heard about Rook’s Rest and Wailing Willows, I realized that I had nothing to worry about. I’m so proud of you two. But where’s Vis?”

“She’s still at our citadel at the Blackwater Rush, muña,” Aegon said. “Now that Black Harren is dead, we can start to move against Storm’s End.”

Their mother sighed. “And after that, everything will be over, I assume?”

“Hopefully, muña. But the dragons are now feared among the riverlands.”

“As they should,” their mother smiled. “Westeros should know what happens when they think too little of them, and us.”

“Don’t forget Jaenyx, muña,” Rhaenys stated. Their mother still was a bit tense with her good-son despite softening to him after seeing how much Visenya loved him. As for Aegon, he might have understood the tension in the beginning, but couldn’t comprehend it now.

Their mother nodded. “Yes, I shouldn’t forget him. I hear that he personally led a scouting deep into the riverlands at great risk to himself and to Rhaenys. Very brave of him.”

“Muña,” Aegon looked at her. “Jaenyx has done much for us. At least show him the love that you show us.”

“Eventually, I will.” Their mother was being her honest self. “However, I have not forgotten how he married Vis in the first place--”
“Which was not his fault,” Rhaenys pointed out.

“True,” their mother admitted. “Your father is to blame for that. But, Jaenyx is not my child. I need more time before I can fully accept him.”

Aegon sighed, relieved that his mother was ready to fully love Jaenyx like a son but sad that she needed more time before she could do that. Is a year not long enough, muña?

“But, let’s put that off for now,” their mother clasped her hands. “You must be hungry. Come, I’ll have the cooks prepare some supper for you.”

Aegon and Rhaenys smiled, jumping at the chance to feel like their younger selves for a little bit. They looked forward to a day of rest and recuperation before going back to their citadel for the next part of their struggle. If the Arrogant king doesn’t see sense, we shall burn Storm’s End as we did Harrenhal.

Chapter End Notes

Didn't want to spend too much time on the Burning of Harrenhal (which was partly inspired by the 1304 Siege of Stirling Castle), but having an exchange between the Elder Dragon and Black Harren was too valuable to pass up. Regarding their father, he's still alive and technically still the Lord of Dragonstone, so the riverlords would have to swear loyalty to him. It was a nice touch since he would be the most politically experience among the dragons and I didn't want to make their father irrelevant, where their father was long dead in canon. However, don't worry, because he will not be the king. Just wait. Plus, the beginning scene was inspired by the OUTLAW KING, a great movie on Netflix that talks about Robert the Bruce.

Also, their mother still not fully accepting Jaenyx makes sense since it was an arranged betrothal in the first place, though Visenya and Jaenyx clearly love each other now. For the swords and amulets, they will be important later on. As for Darvin Hoare, we have not seen the last of him yet. The conflicts between Lord Tully and Lord Blackwood will have drastic consequences for the Conquest.

Next, we see the dragons finally moving on the Stormlands.
Visenya V

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

VISENYA V

“Oh, Jae! Please don’t stop!” Visenya was grasping at the sheets of the bed as Jaenyx pushed himself harder into her and held her waist slightly upwards to meet his upright position, his knees sunk into the mattress. He put her knees on top of his forearms to have an unbreakable grasp on her, making his powerful thrusts easier to maintain. She struggled to look at Jaenyx, her position keeping her looking at the ceiling and stars entering her vision as pleasure made her limp on the bed.

Jaenyx had arrived on Cloudwynd along with four thousand rivermen reinforcements, most of them from House Blackwood, the only house south of the Neck to still worship the Old Gods if Visenya remembered correctly. She had some words with their commander, Chrass Rivers, a bastard son of Lord Colren Blackwood. Having the black hair, grey eyes, and pale skin characteristic of the First Men, she saw him as an able leader of troops and a good fighter if what she heard of his exploits at Wailing Willows was correct. He was also very aggressive and well-versed in tactics, immediately helping her plan their advance into the Stormlands. Apparently, being a bastard forced Chrass Rivers into becoming a self-made man, as he seemed to have worked hard enough to enter his lord father’s confidence in regards to military matters and had his own keep, which was rare for bastards. Having someone from a Westerosi house who showed initiative was a welcome change of pace for Visenya, as she had a difficult time browbeating Alyn Stokeworth and the leaders of the Westerosi contingent of their army into helping her plan over the past month.

However, Visenya’s focus was on her husband. Personally scouting out the riverlands for support, gifting Rhaenys her own dragon coat and comforting her after she made her first kill, and now with Aegon and Orys telling her how he fought in battle… How is it possible that he becomes more irresistible with each passing day? My husband... my Jae is truly a wonderful man.

As soon as they were alone in their chambers, Visenya helped Jaenyx out of his armor before she gave him a strong uppercut, both out of frustration of not feeling his embrace for weeks and wanting him to be dazed long enough for her subdue him on their wooden floor. Pinning his arms over his head and straddling his waist, she gave him a forceful kiss until they both had to break it off for lack of breath. With him still lying beneath her on the floor, Visenya reached for the top of his tunic and tore it off of his torso, his firm chest and his toned muscles for her lustful eyes to enjoy and her hands to trace. She leaned down and kissed his neck before running her tongue all
along his torso, pulling down his breeches and keeping him nailed to the floor with her lips all over his length.

Visenya felt elated when Jaenyx slightly shook as she ran her tongue on his cock, knowing that he was brought back to their first time whenever they made love like herself. Their wedding night was a time for them to explore each other, see what made them feel the most pleasure and to discover what made them climax the most. Jaenyx happily obliged her need for their lovemaking to be rough and aggressive, but she decided that it was time to increase the intensity. She also was a little bit annoyed that Jaenyx tore up many of her dresses whenever they coupled, not that she cared since she preferred her blouses, trousers, and dragon coat anyway, but she felt satisfaction in returning the favor.

“*You’re so delicious, my husband,*” Visenya said seductively. “*Shatter into me, Jae.*” She squeezed her lips on his tip and pulled him deep.

Instead of cursing, Jaenyx instead felt his mouth open wide and his breathing cease, at least for a moment. *Besides being a great man, he’s mine. Mine to twist, toss, and gobble up whenever I want to.*

Not done with him yet, Visenya helped Jaenyx up before pushing on the mattress. She pulled her blouse over her head and pulled down her trousers, exposing her nude form before his lewd eyes. As a final touch, she reached for and untied her braid, shaking her hair loose and allowing it to flow past his shoulders. While her braid added to her harsh allure, she found out from her wedding that having her loose made her much more beautiful, a fact confirmed by how Jaenyx just stared at her in awe. Smiling, she walked over to the mattress, laid on her side, and brought him close to her for a deep kiss. Jaenyx finally getting out of his daze and reversing their positions is how she was feeling his powerful thrusts at that moment.

Visenya felt Jaenyx’s hand move along her belly and towards her breasts, throwing her head back into the pillows as he squeezed them. “*Kessa! Just like that!*” she moaned. She looked away from the ceiling and saw his amethyst eyes stare right back at hers, but him biting his lower lip showed that he was struggling to maintain his gaze with all of the waves of pleasure going through both of them.

Wanting to get the final move and to give her husband some rest, Visenya turned Jaenyx onto his back, straddled his cock, and slammed her hips on his while keeping his hands on her breasts. He
sat up and licked her breasts while she continued to rub his length. She could feel her juices cover it and more of her arousal on her thighs, and she pushed Jaenyx back onto the bed to let him know that she was now in control. “I want to ride my dragon,” she whispered in his ear.

Jaenyx thrust upwards to meet Visenya halfway, their pace growing even faster as the sounds of their skin slapping reverberated in their chambers. Visenya felt her back arch backwards and heard her moans growing louder, both of which she was unaware of as pleasure consumed both. Nearing the brink, Visenya screamed, “Jae!” as she peaked.

“Vis!” Jaenyx shouted back, the entire keep no doubt hearing their yells. Visenya fell on top of him before sliding off and snuggling against his left sides.

“I missed you, Jae,” Vis ran her hand on his chest.

“A month is too long from my wonderful wife,” Jaenyx kissed her forehead. “So much has happened since then.”

“Indeed,” Visenya nodded. “Black Harren has been taken down and we’re now about to move on the Durrandons. They will never know what’s coming to them.”

“And we’ve become stronger as a result, all of us,” Jaenyx gave her a knowing look.

Visenya was curious about one thing. “Is it true, Jae? Rhae wants to know about the ways of the bow?”

“Kessa. Aegon started her on her first lessons on what I assume was a while, but I think she can benefit from learning a variety of different archery practices.”
“Such as?”

“Master Haru, his son Arata, and some others from the Yi-Tish that came with me, they’re all very experienced with the bow. I know how to use a bow, although I prefer the sword. She can also learn to throw knives.”

“Can you teach her, Jae?” Visenya felt her interest piqued.

“Not me. That’s Arata’s specialty. Anything about the bow and knives, you’d go to him. I learned from Master Haru, but it’s not my preferred method of fighting.”

Visenya smiled. “I know that she’ll be in good hands, Jae. You’ve shown that when you were with her in the riverlands.”

Jaenyx shrugged. “Isn’t that what families should do? We would have failed if we allowed them to die on our watch. That’s really the only thing that will keep us going at the end of the day.”

Visenya kissed his cheek and worked her way to his left ear, proceeding to nibble at it. Then, she remembered. I can’t hold this off anymore. “Jae, I have to tell you something.” She didn’t want to end her biting, but this was more urgent.

“What is it?” Jaenyx leaned his head to her, concerned.

“When I talked with Argella Durrandon, she told me what happened to Garareon Rahitheon.”

“What?” Visenya didn’t want to burden him and she could tell that he was not going to like what came next.
“He’s dead, Jae. I’m sorry.”

Visenya saw Jaenyx freeze in shock, his widened eyes and opened mouth conveying it well. “How did he die?”

“They tried to kidnap him, but he fought back and killed five of them before they were forced to kill him. The bastards then stole the swords and took over the Oldtown deal.”

Visenya felt Jaenyx clench his fist, anger slowly flowing through him and dragonfire being visible in her eyes. “Does Aevor know what happened to his nephew?”

“Daor. That’s why I wanted to tell you first before I told him. I didn’t know what to do at the time.”

Jaenyx nodded and sighed. “It’s all right, Vis. I will tell him myself, but this makes things easier now.”

Visenya propped her head up, with her elbow on the pillow. “What do you mean?”

“I wanted him to travel to the ruins of Harrenhal and see if we could get something out of that fortress. It’s located strategically between this citadel and the riverlands, so might as well use the castle where it is now. Now, it’ll be easier for me to get him there.”

“Why would it be easy?”

“I’m not ignorant to believe that Aevor will not go on a rampage once he knows what happened to his nephew, but the thing about bloodlust is that you become less rational and therefore more
likely to make mistakes. We cannot afford mistakes at this moment, not when we need to march on
the Arrogant king.”

“So, you’ll have him go to Harrenhal and see if we could still use it as a castle?” Jaenyx nodded.
“Can we use it in the long run?”

Jaenyx shook his head. “Harrenhal is too damn large. Even if there was no war going on, the
Rahitheons can’t just conjure out of thin air the building materials needed to make Harrenhal into
a proper fortress, and we’re sure as hell can’t ask the riverlords to provide them considering the
cost already. Black Harren spent thirty years building the castle and he still wasn’t finished when
we burned it. We’ll probably give it to some random lord in the end and let whoever bear the
burden of maintaining that place.”

“But you’ll only send Aevor to Harrenhal mostly to keep him away from the Durrandons?”

“Not at first, but this is a good excuse. Fighting might not be his specialty, but he can be quite
unpredictable whenever someone harmed his family. I have to be sure that I can fully trust my
people to perform to the best of their abilities and taking Aevor with us against the Durrandons
might not be the best thing for him.”

“Will he accept it?”

Jaenyx shook his head. “Probably not, but he also knows that I have his best interests at heart, so
he’ll trust me.”

Visenya sighed, relieved that she made the right decision to wait until Jaenyx came back. Despite
being able to lead the banners in Aegon’s and Jaenyx’s absences, her relationship with the more
Valyrian houses was still tense. Ragaemor and Maerys Tarareon were easy to get along with,
especially the latter since she was just as fiery and assertive as Visenya. Aevor, his sons and
daughters, and his nephews and nieces were very eccentric and too consumed with their work, so
they were hard to approach in general.
As his cousin and thus the only blood relative left after his parents and brother died, it was easy for Visenya to get on a first-name basis with Taygor Leniar as she was now family. However, he stated very clearly, “Only after you give birth to his child will I fully embrace you as blood. I don’t care if it’s a boy or a girl, but give him children.” She shouldn’t have been shocked given that their betrothal had conditions, but to have him say that directly to her face… At the same time, Visenya wasn’t angry since Jaenyx’s cousin was concerned for the continuation of the Belaerys line and he was indifferent in regards to their child’s gender, given the Valyrians rather equalistic social views and something that she was grateful for.

Their father asked when she would be with child, their mother tentatively asking for her potential grandchild, Rhaenys, Aegon, and Orys desiring to be an aunt and uncles. She was thankful for Jaenyx because he didn’t push her and was satisfied with spending time with just her, but the others’ expectations were starting to get to her. Given how… often they were engaged in lovemaking, she couldn’t blame them for having such wishes and was touched at how happy they were for that. Yet, she didn’t like it when she felt others were pushing her. But I’m a dragon, and only other dragons can make me feel this way.

Visenya loved Jaenyx, and only recently did she begin to understand the reality of his situation. He was the only one left of House Belaerys, one of the seven most powerful dragonlord families of Valyria. If he died without producing heirs, the line will end and with it the last major remnant of a great civilization. Without heirs, the Valyrian houses that came with him would probably leave elsewhere as the only thing that tied them to Dragonstone was Jaenyx’s union with her. The past year showed to all that a united group of Valyrians can bring down kings and lords while accomplishing wonders, but if they were divided…

But besides the loss of Jaenyx’s Valyrian houses getting her apprehensive, Visenya didn’t want things to end with him. If they had sons and daughters, the wonderful man that was her husband would live on in their children and the future of the dragons would be in good hands as Jaenyx would be present for them. As he had successfully led his vassals before turning twenty, he definitely had the potential to be a great father. The thought of other dragons joining them, with both of them training all of their children how to be warriors and to be dragonriders, warmed her heart.

“Jae, I want to tell you something.” She saw Jaenyx stare at her. “I’m ready.”

“For what?”
Visenya took a moment to gather her thoughts. “I’m ready to have children with you.”

Jaenyx raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure, Vis?”

Visenya nodded. “I was fearful of having riñar since I always thought that I would be married to some random lordling, but we’re both dragons. I want to bear our dragons, Jae.”

Visenya saw Jaenyx give a sad smile. “I’m touched, Vis.”

Visenya blinked and felt frustration enter her mind. “Is that it? You’re touched?”

“I’m sorry. That came out wrong,” Jaenyx shook his head quickly while pulling her hand up to his lips and kissed it. “I’m happy that you’re ready to have a family with me.”

“But?” Visenya raised her eyebrow.

“Before I came to Dragonstone, I was alone, with only Taygor by my side. For five years, I lived without my kepa, my lēkia, and... my muña.” Visenya saw water form in his eyes, tearing at her heart since she understood that the loss of family would never leave him. “And I had to learn how to do so much without them. I’m... scared, Vis. I don’t want our riñar to grow up with memories of their parents dying in front of them, with their father--”

Visenya pulled him into a deep kiss, willing those thoughts away from his mind. “If that’s the reason why you’re afraid of having riñar, then I have to remind you of where you are now.”

“What do you mean?” Jaenyx was confused, which nearly got Visenya to become more pissed but she took a moment to calm the dragonfire in her.
“You have Egg, who sees you as the brother he always wanted to have besides Orys and will fight to protect you. You have Rhae, who we all know is the little sister that you always sought. I know you and Orys don’t have the best relationship, but when push comes to shove, I am sure that he will be there to defend you. Both my kepa and muña will protect their family no matter what. Most importantly, you have me. Just as you’ve become the love I always wanted to have and the other half of my heart, I know you feel the same for me. All of us will keep our riñar safe from harm and we will also fight hard to be there for our children until we’re old and grey. So what is there to worry about, when you have so many to fight for you and me?”

All the while, Visenya kept her hand on Jaenyx’s cheek to keep him focused on her. Dragons went after what they wanted, but Visenya knew that she had to be careful and considerate with Jaenyx because she fully understood why he was hesitant to go after things that would bring joy. It took a year after she married him to fully allow happiness into her life because she had not fully experienced it and was afraid it would be taken from her. For Jaenyx, it would take longer since he saw his family die, but she could tell that he was beginning to move forward.

Jaenyx sighed, but a small smile formed on his face. “If that’s what you want, all right. Let’s have a baby dragon.”

Visenya gave him a huge grin. “Kirimvose, Jae,” she pulled him into another deep kiss. “Shall we continue?”

“All top of me?” Jaenyx asked.

Visenya shook her head, letting out a smirk before rolling onto her chest. “Take me from behind, Jae.”

Jaenyx sat up instantly, elated at how much submissive she was being. As Visenya positioned herself on her hands and knees, she bent down and stuck her ass up in the air. She looked behind her shoulder and saw Jaenyx gaze at her ass while rubbing his length. She had to suppress a giggle, but was very amused at her husband’s reactions.
“Are you just going to stare at my ass?” Visenya jested.

“Maybe. It is a wonderful sight after all,” Jaenyx jested back. Visenya rolled her eyes playfully at him while letting out an amused laugh, but her next thoughts were interrupted as he leaned down and licked at her entrance.

“Oh, gods!” Visenya moaned and backed herself up, trying to get more of his tongue against her cunt. Before she knew it, Jaenyx pulled away. He kissed both of her buttocks before settling in behind her. He lined his cock up with her sopping wet entrance, slowly pushing it inside and making both of them release loud moans.

Jaenyx set a slow pace initially as he peppered her shoulder and back with kisses. His hands were on her hips but they occasionally roamed her body. They fondled her breasts, caressed her ass, and rubbed her clit.

“I’m not a ragged doll, Jae. Push more into me! Fuck me harder!” Visenya yelled.

Jae obeyed, thrusting into her at a faster pace. Visenya’s back arched as he continued to pleasure her with his cock and she muffled her scream by burying her face in her pillow. Her entire body shook as Jae spurted his seed deep inside of her a second time. Jae bit down on her neck to suppress his grunts as they both tumbled off the edge together.

Visenya collapsed on the bed, panting heavily. Jae rolled to his side and laid down beside her. She moved closer and rested her head on his chest and entwined their legs. Their breathing eventually evened out and calmed as they let the exhaustion from their long lovemaking take hold and push them into the waiting embrace of sleep.

“You sure this will work?” Visenya whispered.
“I’m certain of it, Vis,” Jaenyx murmured. “They’ll never expect something like this.”

“As much as I like that you’re being crafty about this, we can’t just keep tip-toeing about in the Storm kingdom,” Aegon kept his voice low as the three of them walked carefully up to the walls. “We have to meet strength with strength with the stormlords.”

“There’ll be a time for everything, Egg,” Jaenyx replied. “At least this way, we can surprise them and have them react to us.”

The last three weeks was a busy time for the dragons. After assembling their army at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, the war council debated on the best approach against the stormlords. A majority, including Jon Rosby, Alyn Stokeworth, and Ser Everan Roote advised making their way through the forests to their south and building a bridge across the Wendwater to make transportation of their troops easy. That way, they’ll have a direct route to Bronzegate and then Storm’s End. However, Visenya, Chrass Rivers, and Jaenyx pointed out that their proposed route would be an approach their enemies would most likely predict. Going around towards the Shipbreaker Bay or to Cape Wrath was strongly advised against, as they had no secure way of resupplying their troops by ship and they’d be surrounded by lords who were very loyal to a Durrandon king.

That was when Daemon Velaryon suggested that they sail down the Wendwater to a spot close to Bronzegate, where they would land troops, secure the river crossing, and construct a bridge. Most found that approach viable, but in order for that to work, they would have to take control of Haystack Hall, seat of House Errol. Haystack Hall would not be an easy castle to take, as it was situated on a hill that was covered in trees and surrounded by thick forest. The castle also held a commanding view of the southern banks of the Wendwater, meaning that any ships sailing in the river would be spotted.

To overcome this obstacle, Jaenyx proposed a sneak attack. A group of troops would launch a two-pronged attack at night on the castle, a few scaling the walls and then opening the gates for the rest to enter. Once past the gate, it would not be hard to secure the castle.

Aegon agreed to the plan, as did Visenya, Chrass Rivers, and Daemon Velaryon among others.
Orys was uncertain, as he did not like having to sneak around the stormlords when Westerosi customs dictated that combat be determined by strength against strength. Only after Aegon convinced him of the soundness of the plan did he come around.

Departing before dusk, a contingent of five hundred troops led by Aegon and Orys crossed the Wendwater by boat and moved silently through the woods towards Haystack Hall. Rhaenys would stay with their father at the citadel, partly to help him manage affairs, but mostly to continue her archery practice with Arata Haru in Aegon’s absence. Meanwhile, Jaenyx volunteered to open the gates once inside the castle. Not wanting to be separated from him again, Visenya stepped forward. Aegon had agreed to the plan mostly because he wanted to see what it was like to be involved in what was called “secret war.” Only, while they were about to take on a larger force that was more well-equipped and more martially-inclined than their own, they would be attacking instead of defending.

Meanwhile, twenty troops led by Visenya, Jaenyx, and another of Konno Haru’s sons, Kenzou, crept toward the walls. They were all dressed in black cloaks and wore masks made up of black cloth that covered everything except their eyes. Any skin that remained visible from their masks was covered black paint, as the skin could reflect from any light. They hugged the walls and after seeing a few guards on duty, Jaenyx and Kenzou Haru pulled out ropes and metal hooks, throwing them up to the battlements.

Visenya learned that this was a common tactic of the shinobi, assassins from Yi-Ti that excelled in the “secret war.” Konno Haru was a shinobi as were all of his sons since there was no future for them as drifters, but they became adept as shinobi and Konno Haru taught Jaenyx everything he knew. Once a few men climbed onto the wall, they would use stealth and speed to kill any guards who were still awake and then signal the rest to move in. They couldn’t use dragons, as they would defeat the purpose of stealth and they needed to maintain the element of surprise.

Securing the ropes, Jaenyx and Kenzou nodded to the rest and started climbing. Visenya joined after her husband, fastening her foothold on the wall and was careful to maintain her hold on the rope as she walked up the wall. The rope was secured well, as all Visenya needed to focus on was to not lose her footing or her grip. But they had to move fast since they had only a small window before a guard found the hooks.

Luckily, Jaenyx, Visenya, Kenzou, and a few others made it to the top of the walls. One of the guards spotted them and tried to yell, only for Kenzou to pull out his dagger and throw it, the blade lodging into his throat and filling his mouth with his own blood. They helped the others up on the walls and started to swiftly kill the rest of the guards on duty.
While Jaenyx and Kenzou used their Yi-Tish swords to slash at necks and decapitate, Visenya went in the other direction and slashed at a guard with Dark Sister, cutting his throat before she kicked him to the ground. Before long, all of the guards on the wall were dead and the next phase of their plan was ready. Some of the shinobi carried small crossbows, which would be useful in cutting down any who tried to enter the courtyard.

Jaenyx, Visenya, and Kenzou climbed down a flight of stairs to the courtyard and took on another few guards. Visenya used an upward slice that struck a guard’s leg, bringing him down before she lodged Dark Sister into his heart. With the courtyard still asleep, all three moved carefully towards and opened the gate. Kenzou took out his bow, used a nearby torch to light it, and let loose his arrow.

_The signal. Here it comes_, Visenya thought. Having hidden themselves in the forests around the castle, Aegon, Orys, and the troops emerged out of hiding and used the cover of darkness to charge through the gates. The troops let out a war cry, thus awakening the sleeping guards in courtyard and in the keep.

“Come on!” Orys yelled as the rest charged through the gate. Some were killed by the shinobi’s crossbow bolts shot from the walls, but others found themselves overwhelmed by the mass of soldiers coming upon them and taking them out of their slumber.

Visenya saw Orys swung his Valyrian steel axe down on one Errol guard, with a force so strong that it dug deep into his shoulder as to leave a deep and nasty cavity that no doubt cut his heart. Orys then blocked another’s sword swing with his axe, its steel shaft preventing the sword from chopping it in half and thus allowing Orys to push the sword away and stun him with a strike with the shaft against his forehead. He then used the distraction to swing the axe to his neck, nearly chopping the head off. One of the guards got too close for comfort for him, prompting Orys to switch grips and use the bottom of the shaft to hit him away while using the axe’s head to get cuts into his left arm. Once some distance away, he then caught his attacker’s sword with the axe, pulled the shaft down and thus ripping the sword from his hands before pushing the axe’s head deep into his throat.

As for Visenya, she parried an Errol guard’s spear with Dark Sister before she spun around and slashed at his neck, severing the vital blood vessels there. She almost missed seeing another swing his sword down at her, but she then remembered that the blade was not the only part of the sword. Acting quickly, she grabbed at the blade with her left hand, careful not cut herself too deeply, but
she used her right hand to push the hilt directly into the guard’s temple, stunning him. Still holding the blade, Visenya thrust Dark Sister through his exposed armpit and deep into his torso, cutting through his lung and several vessels in the process. Pulling it out, she push kicked another guard away and closed the distance fast enough for her to stick Dark Sister into his mouth, the blade coming out the back of his head.

Having quickly subdued the guards in the courtyard, the troops and shinobi moved quickly into the keep. While Jaenyx, Kenzou, and Orys moved towards the other parts of the keep, Visenya and Aegon moved towards the great hall.

“Arm yourselves! Arm yourselves!” she heard one of the guards shout to his comrades, who were still lying on the floor of the great hall. They only barely stood up when Visenya, Aegon, and others charged into the hall.

While Visenya took care of the guards, Aegon swung Blackfyre diagonally down at a barely dressed Errol guard, killing him instantly. Seeing another attempt to thrust his sword at him, Aegon jumped backwards while swinging his sword away from him. The Errol guard tried to swing downward on him, which blocked with Blackfyre while his left hand was on the blade, him not having to worry about cutting his hand since he wore a steel gauntlet. Pushing the blade away, Aegon ducked as the Errol guard tried another swing, with Aegon feinting a strike before spinning near the ground and bringing Blackfyre up and striking back with a horizontal cut to his belly, with blood splattering from the strike. Aegon then parried another Errol guard’s sword, but pushed Blackfyre down along his opponent’s blade and allowing him to slice across his neck.

Within moments, all of the Errol guards were either dead or subdued. “Stay down, dog!” Visenya kicked a guard hard in the face after he tried to reach for an axe.

Visenya and Aegon made their way to the lord’s chambers, finding more corpses and captured guards along the way. They then saw Jaenyx and Kenzou waiting outside the door. Nodding to each other, they entered the chambers and found who they assumed to Lord Errol still in his bed.

“You Lord Errol?” Visenya asked firmly. Getting a nod, she continued. “Haystack Hall is now under the control of the dragons. Most of your guards are either dead or about to put in chains. But you can get out of this alive.”
“How?” Lord Errol grasped his sheets.

“Simple,” Aegon stepped in. “Bend the knee and we’ll show you mercy. Refuse, and we kill you here right now.”

Lord Errol breathed heavily, in fear of his predicament. “You really think you have a chance against King Argilac?”


Lord Errol snorted. “Probably all of Westeros knows. But you enter the domain of the Durrandons at your own peril. We’re not ironborn and we stay loyal to our king.”

“So I take it you won’t bend the knee?” Aegon asked with concern.

Lord Errol shook his head. “You’ve taken my home and you’ve probably taken my family also. I’ll die before kneeling to dragonspawn.”

Visenya sighed in resignation. “As you wish, Lord Errol.” She turned to Kenzou and switched to nihongo. “Kare ni hayai shi o atae nasa i, Kenzou-kun (Give him a quick death, Kenzou ).”

“Hai, ojousama ( Yes, my lady ),” Kenzou bowed before he slashed his katana across Lord Errol’s neck, his head taking a few seconds to fall off.

Aegon let out a breath. “So, now that we have secured Haystack Hall, we should start building the bridge as quickly as possible.”
Visenya nodded in agreement. “Yes. Once the Arrogant king hears what happened here, he’ll send an army against us. We need to get as many troops across the Wendwater before that happens.”

“In the meantime,” Jaenyx cleaned his blades with a rag. “I’ll use this castle to send out scouts to get more information of the land and the forces we’ll be going up against. We should also bring one of our dragons here to see the enemy from the air.”

“We should bring Cloudwynd and Vhagar here then,” Aegon said. “Two dragons will be better than one. Balerion is too big and therefore will be spotted while Meraxes needs to protect the citadel.”

“Agreed,” Visenya replied.

Orys came into the chambers and saw the decapitated corpse of Lord Errol. “Oh, shit. That was quick,” he remarked.

“Had to be done, brother,” Aegon shrugged. “We gave him a chance to live and he didn’t take it. Besides, I trust you have his family in custody.” Orys nodded. “Good, we’ll hold this fortress while we send out advance parties. We need to forage as much as we can before we can begin our next move.”

Chapter End Notes

That was probably the largest chunk I’ve devoted to Visenya's and Jaenyx's lovemaking, but I hope that wasn't too distracting. Here, we see Visenya showing that she's ready to have a family with him and Jaenyx beginning to move on from his family's death. Their bond can only get stronger from there.

I was struggling to give a good start to the Stormlands campaign, but I didn't want to start off with a large battle yet. I then realized that my Yi-Tish characters were underutilized, so I decided on a ninja-like attack on Haystack Hall to really introduce them. The taking of Haystack Hall was inspired by the Battle of Stony Point (1779) under General "Mad Anthony" Wayne with a mix of the OUTLAW KING and how
ninjas would infiltrate castles. I also wanted to showcase Orys', Aegon's, and Visenya's fighting styles here, which I didn't show much before, so I hope I did it all right.

There will be more challenges to the dragons as they advance to the Stormlands. Unlike the riverlands, the stormlords are much more loyal, much better equipped, and much more experienced in battle due to the wars against the Dornish. While they have dragons, they also have to really consider the geographical obstacles of the stormlands, which is more mountainous and filled with thick forests. So, they'll be more battles and harder fighting on their part. But rest assured, the Arrogant king is on borrowed time.

Next, we have Rhaenys training to be an archer and then experiencing something else that connects her to an ancestor that brought them to Dragonstone. I'll let you guess who and what it is.
“What the fuck is that?!” Konno Haru yelled at Rhaenys in his heavily-accented High Valyrian as she ran along the circumference of the citadel with buckets filled with water. She was warned not to spill a single drop, or she would do it again. “Faster, you cunt! Faster!”

Had this been any other person, he would have had his tongue cut out for speaking in such a manner to a lady. But, as Quenton Qoherys was still at Dragonstone to protect their home and with Jaenyx and her siblings in the Storm kingdom, Rhaenys only had Konno Haru and his eldest son Arata to train her in the ways of the bow. They couldn’t speak the common tongue at all and the only other tongue they knew was High Valyrian, which she understood completely but couldn’t speak well at the same time. Seeing that and given that she also did not speak nihongo, Master Haru ordered in High Valyrian, “If you’re going to learn the ways of the archer, you will do what I say when I say it. Whenever we’re training, I expect you to give your all or you’ll just be wasting my fucking time. For now, the only words that I want to hear from you is “Hai, sensei.” Is that understood?!”

“Hai, sensei,” Rhaenys mumbled.

“Stop mumbling! Is that understood?” Konno Haru asked again, with more firmness in his voice that time.

“Hai, sensei,” Rhaenys affirmed more clearly.

“I cannot hear you, you dragon bitch! Is that understood?!” Konno Haru yelled.

Rhaenys felt dragonfire emerge in her insides and wanted to slap him hard in his face for
addressing her in that way. Nevertheless, she stood straight. “HAI, SENSEI!”

Rhaenys didn’t think much of Konno Haru when she first saw him on the ship that ferried Jaenyx to Dragonstone, and their interactions were far and few over the past year. But here, she saw Haru as a nasty bastard who clearly did not care that she was a hightorn. Despite training the boys hard, Quenton Qoherys maintained decorum whenever he talked to Aegon and Orys. Then again, as he was from Yi-Ti, he was not bound to the Westerosi manner of addressing hightorns. Moreover, Konno Haru and his son Arata were far more extreme in terms of training methods and way of thinking, with even the smallest infraction being grounds for them to cane their trainees. Fortunately, they were smart enough to not go that far with Rhaenys without getting severely reprimanded by their father, but that didn’t stop their verbal assaults on her.

Both Konno and Arata Haru said that before she could start training with the bow, Rhaenys had to improve her endurance, her arm and upper-body strength, and mental fortitude. Rhaenys remembered when she was trying to explain the time she killed a stag after only two days of training on the bow.

“I… shot… a… stag…. with… bow…. after --” Rhaenys attempted to say clearly in High Valyrian.

But Konno Haru responded with, “Uh, wha wha wha wha wha what?”

Rhaenys tried to continue, “Two… days--”

“D d d d d d d,” Konno Haru uttered while mocking her slow speech. “What of it?!!!”

Rhaenys didn’t know if she could become more angry with how Haru derided her. No one ever talked to her that way.

“What you did in the past means shit to me, dragon cunt!” Konno Haru shouted while he leaned forward close enough that their noses almost touched. “You do as I say, you will be a good archer and nothing in the past will matter. Wakari masu ka?!
Rhaenys sucked in her pride and merely responded with, “Hai, sensei!”

“Now, go run up that hill and run back down,” Konno Haru pointed to the southern hill of their citadel.

“I… no… proper --” Rhaenys tried to explain before being cut off again.

“Run now!!!” he ordered. Rhaenys was so frightened by his tone that she obeyed immediately.

Konno Haru had her run up that hill for the next half day, all the while getting confused stares from the other troops and lords as to why a lady of House Targaryen was running in the first place. Rhaenys didn’t know what he said in response, but his shouts were more than enough to dissuade them from asking further questions. By the end of it, her feet had blisters and her dress dirtied from all of the falling on the dirt as she ran down the hill.

Rhaenys’ “training” had went on uninterrupted for the past three weeks. During that time, she had heard of the taking of Haystack Hall, allowing their troops a secure crossing of the Wendwater and making possible their construction of a bridge. Vaeron Rahitheon, one of Aevor Rahitheon’s nephews and the victim of Darvin Hoare, was sent to oversee its construction. The last report she read on the advance into the Durrandon domains was that they were near Bronzegate. Even she understood that with Bronzegate secure, the road to Storm’s End would be open. It was an approach that their enemies would definitely expect, but she was confident that her good-brother and siblings would find a way to throw them off guard.

Even a few weeks into the “training,” Rhaenys still didn’t touch a bow. All the while, she endured more of Sensei Haru’s abuse. Words like “dragon cunt” and “dragon bitch” echoed in her ears the whole time, and she lost count of how many times she wanted to lunge at his throat and choke the life out of him. Wait a moment. Why do I want to do that? Why am I thinking such things?

At the end of the last lap around the citadel, Rhaenys was out of breath but carefully lowered the buckets onto the ground.
Konno Haru looked at them closely. “You dropped some water, my lady,” he observed.

Rhaenys softly groaned. “I… tried… best--”

Konno Haru clapped in front of Rhaenys’ face, wise enough to not slap it like he did with the others. His clap was so loud that it rang in her ears. “I don’t give a shit if you tried. Trying is useless if you fail to perform even the smallest task properly.”

I want to fucking kill this guy, Rhaenys thought angrily.

Konno Haru stopped mid-sentence and stared closely at her. “What are you thinking now? Why are you distracted?”

Rhaenys gulped. “Nothing,” she managed to say.

“Bullshit,” Haru retorted. “What are you thinking?” Rhaenys clenched her teeth, which he noticed. “Oh, now I understand,” he nodded in understanding. “Do you want to kill me?”

Rhaenys let out a strong exhale through her nose. “Hai, sensei.” She expected more berating from Haru, as she had just admitted her true thoughts and it was only natural for him to strike back at her for such defiance.

Instead, Haru smiled. What are you smiling about, Rhaenys thought. “And so, the truth comes out. You think this is nonsense, my lady?” he asked in mock deference at the last one. “You wanted to learn the bow, but instead, I am making you do things that only servants do and your delicate little body can’t handle it when you have to get down and dirty. Is that right?”
Rhaenys maintained her stare at Haru. She didn’t say anything that confirmed what she thought of all that Haru put her through, but she didn’t need to.

“Let me explain something to you, Lady Rhaenys, something that I hope that your soft mind could handle.” Haru stood straighter and crossed his arms. “You think growing up in a noble family and living a carefree life makes you a good person? You think that the events in the past weeks would make you a stronger woman? You believe that nearly drowning and taking your first life makes you wise as to what the world is? Well, let me say something to you, woman. All of that means shit! Especially to those that live in the real world!”

What does this have to do with training, Rhaenys pondered. However, she continued to listen.

“You want to learn how to be an archer, but to learn the way of the bow, you have to develop everything else in your body. You have to have speed, since how fast you can draw and let loose an arrow can determine life and death. You have to have endurance, since an archer must be able to continue drawing the bow until after the battle is done. Most importantly, you need strength of mind, as you may not have the luxury of distance between you and your target and how you act when your opponent comes close to cutting your head off will determine if you live to the next day. That is what you highborns don’t really think about. The details. When it all comes down to it, it won’t matter if you’re a lady. You either the better one in battle, or you can be the next corpse rotting for the flies to feed on!”

Rhaenys listened to all of this carefully. The more Haru spoke, the more everything made sense, and the more she began to realize how little she really knew about the world.

“You think that my insults to you are bad, Lady Rhaenys? Well, guess what. There are men who would look upon you and tear your clothes from your body before they hump you,” Haru continued. Rhaenys felt her eyes widen, shocked at how Haru said that men would rape her. “You think that having bleeding feet is painful? That’s nothing compared to chopped limbs and gouged-out eyeballs. I am sorry to say this, but you’re just a piece of meat and it doesn’t matter that you have the blood of dragons. The only difference between us and pigs is that we can talk and think. Other than that, both us and pigs have flesh, blood, limbs, and eyeballs.”

Rhaenys couldn’t deny that logic, which made it more difficult for her to stomach.
“You think about killing all you want, my lady. But understand that the little things add up. Once I am satisfied that you’re in a good enough shape, we will proceed with the bow.”

Rhaenys had more to say, but she was too shocked at how logical Haru’s words were to say them. She instead endured his penalty of running around the citadel, again with filled buckets.

But during that time, Rhaenys began to understand how Jaenyx became the man who arrived at Dragonstone. Konno Haru must have said similar things to him and made him go through hellish training, which would explain how he knew that Rhaenys thought about killing him. On the other hand, Jaenyx clearly trusted Konno Haru enough to endure his methods and became a very strong man as a result. Not just physically, but also mentally. She wasn’t sure about Haru using personal insults during training, but she decided to just… bear with it.

On the other hand, their father, Lord Aerion, was not obviously displeased at Haru’s methods.

“You are making her do servant’s work, Haru,” their father spat. “I thought you’re training her in how to use the bow.”

“It’s a part of the process, Lord Targaryen,” Haru replied in his heavily-accented High Valyrian. “If she can have better endurance and strength, she can be a great archer.”

Their father scoffed. “You’ve been going at this for three weeks. And now, you’re making carry buckets of water like a servant girl.”

Konno Haru cocked his head at him. “And how is that any different from how your daughter, Visenya, was trained? I hear she’s quite the swordsman.”

“She had Dragonstone’s master-at-arms to train her and all of the methods and drills she
practiced had a purpose. I don’t see that purpose in what you’re doing.”

“This is how we trained back in Nihon, Lord Targaryen. Everything we did in our daily lives carries into how we fight.”

“But we’re not in Nihon, or Yi-Ti, Haru. And quite frankly, I’m starting to lose patience with you’re treating my daughter. My good-son might trust you, but I will not tolerate anyone calling my daughter a ‘dragon cunt.’”

Haru was indifferent to their father’s remonstrance. Rather than answer back at him, he turned to Rhaenys. “Come with me,” he ordered. Rhaenys followed him to the archery targets in the citadel, with their father close by. Haru pointed to the bow. “Pick it up.”

“Sensei?” Rhaenys asked.

“I said pick it up, damn it,” Haru repeated. Rhaenys did as commanded. “Now, draw the bow.”

Rhaenys was expecting herself to struggle with pulling back and for her arms to shake. But instead, drawing the bow felt… easy for her. “Again,” Haru ordered. Rhaenys did so, and the second time was also easy. “Now, grab those arrows and let them loose against that target.” Haru pointed to the circular target in front of them. Rhaenys was confused, as they never got to that point yet. “They don’t have to hit the target. Just let them fly.”

Rhaenys pulled out three arrows from a nearby quiver and expected more struggling. It was one thing to pull back on the bow, but another to pull it back with an arrow. However, she found that her grip was… enough for her to hold the arrow without her fingers shaking. The first arrow flew and entered the ground. The second missed the circular target. However, the third landed on the edge. It was nowhere near the center, but it was enough for Haru that he walked back towards their father.

“You may not like how I train her or what I say to her, Lord Targaryen. But everything has a
purpose, and now you’ve seen the results of my methods. Can you really denounce them now?”

Their father said nothing, surprised at how Rhaenys didn’t struggle at all when pulling the bow back. Not able to argue, their father simply returned to the manor house.

As for Rhaenys, she moved her fingers around while shaking her hands. They still felt sore, but was surprised that they had any strength at all when handling the bow. Konno Haru would an abusive son of a bitch in her eyes, but she began to see why Jaenyx became the man who appeared a year ago and became Visenya’s husband.

However, Rhaenys got intrigued at Konno Haru. She walked up to him. “Why... you... low... highborn?” she managed to ask. I really need to work on my High Valyrian.

To her relief, Konno Haru understood what she was asking despite the broken bits. “That’s not a simple story to tell, Lady Rhaenys.”

“Can... you... say?”

Haru sighed. “All right. Westeros has knights. Back in Yi-Ti, I was something similar to a knight. I had a code of honor, a lord that I was sworn to, and I knew my place in the order of things. And I was content. There were five hundred others like myself that were sworn to the same lord, a number not many lords back in Yi-Ti could command. But things were not to last.” Rhaenys stood straight. “I don’t know exactly what happened, but the next thing I knew, my lord was executed by the emperor and I was forced to watch as my lord’s keep, my home,” Haru hesitated before continuing. “Burned to the ground. Adding insult to the injury, they took my lord’s wife and daughters and sold them to brothels.”

Rhaenys gasped. “I tried to fight back and demand justice,” Haru continued. “But, no lords would help me and they instead celebrated while my lord’s lands were divided amongst themselves. I became a drifter, a warrior without a lord, and I had to sell my sword just so that my wife and children wouldn’t starve. I then came across a group of shinobi, who I joined to avenge my lord and his family. I won’t get into the details, but by the end of it, every lord who profited from my lord’s death perished and I had to flee with my family along with fifty other drifters and their families away to avoid the emperor’s agents. Eventually, my path led to Auryon Belaerys, Jaenyx’s
Rhaenys nodded slowly, horrified at Haru’s revealing his past, more so because of how
unemotional he sounded as he told his tale. It was as if all the anguish and tears that was natural to
such events had died in him long ago. Then, she began to understand why Haru became extreme
with his methods and way of thinking. The society that was supposed to support him abandoned
him and he was forced to seek justice on his own. He had a code of honor, which was spat on by
the very people who created it in the first place. In essence, Haru had become a man that had lost
faith and as a result had a negative view of the world.

“But… Jaenyx…. give… purpose ?” Rhaenys had to ask.

Haru sighed. “I made it very clear that I didn’t care if you were highborn. After all, it was
highborns that gutted everything I believed in and showed me what they really were. But for
Jaenyx, it was different. After his parents and brother died, he had no one. As I was training him,
he started to lean on me more. What made me stay with him is him clenching his teeth as I threw
insult after insult at him. He could’ve given up, but he dug down and became a stronger man as a
result. In fact, he only got through his family’s deaths because of me. I became the father that he
needed when his real one died .”

Rhaenys nodded, but more in thought. “Is… he… son… to… you ?”

“He is my student ,” Haru replied. “But, yes. He is like a son to me. Just as I became a father to
him . We’ll continue with our lessons tomorrow .” With that, he and Arata turned around and went
back to their wooden house.

Rhaenys sighed. As much as she couldn’t blame Haru for his extremities due to his history, that
last sentence on him being a father to Jaenyx didn’t sit well with her. A father would show love to
who they saw as their son and so far, she didn’t see that. All she saw between them was cordiality
and deference that was expected between teacher and student, but no warmth. I don’t know if you
became a father to Jae.

Rhaenys also was bothered about Haru boasting that Jaenyx becoming stronger only because of
him. If that were true, then Jaenyx would have been just like Haru in how extreme and subdued he
was. But during the past year, she saw Jaenyx become a loving husband to Visenya and a welcome addition to their family. She also saw that he had more emotional depths than most didn’t expect of him because of the lack of expression that he showed others. Most importantly, he did care about others and showed that he was capable of showing love to not just Visenya. However you trained him, Sensei Haru, you never taught him how to love. That is something that you never taught him, so I don’t know if you can call yourself a father to him.

Rhaenys was walking through a field of tall grass, her hands gliding over its tips as she looked around the green vastness. Looking at the sky, she could tell it was near dusk. Winds were blowing through the field, making the tall grass move like waves in the ocean. As if in a trance, she continued running her hands through the grass while keeping her eyes on the darkening sky.

Ahead, Rhaenys saw a tiny tree in the distance. Curious, she walked towards the tree that stood out in the emptiness of the green pasture. As she got closer, the winds became calmer and the pasture quieter. The tree also became larger and distinguishable, but all she could make out was that it had blood red leaves.

Rhaenys didn’t know, but she felt something… drawing her to this tree. She could hear its thoughts, “They’re coming. They’re coming.” It just kept repeating in her mind. Her blood suddenly ran cold as she looked back at the pasture and saw that the tall grass had stopped moving, the winds having died down.

Feeling a presence behind her, Rhaenys turned around and saw something emerge from behind the tree. It had yellow eyes just like Meraxes and had a growl that could be confused with her dragon’s on a quiet day. As more of the thing made itself known, she saw that it was… a wolf. A big one since its height was at her waist. It was growling, but not one that meant harm.

Suddenly, Rhaenys felt grass behind her rustle. Out of the grass emerged phantoms in cloaks, their faces covered in their hoods. She counted seven of them, and they all wielded daggers. She heard them chanting, “Must kill the sin. Must kill the sin.”

Rhaenys started to move away from the phantoms that would mean her harm. But to her surprise, she felt the wolf move past her and made its growling louder at the phantoms. She heard their chants turn to whispers, all of them saying the same thing “must kill the sin” over and over. It
started to increase in her mind and she felt her breathing become faster. She stepped back fearfully as the wolf stood its ground at the seven phantoms.

Rhaenys then heard a roar, a dragon roar. She looked to her left and saw a dragon flying towards the tree. As it got closer, she saw it was Meraxes. It landed on top of the red-leaved tree and bellowed at the seven phantoms in challenge. When the phantoms didn’t stop, Meraxes released her dragonfire without Rhaenys saying “dracarys,” as if sensing her rider in danger and therefore not needing an order. Feeling its warmth, Rhaenys saw a stream of fire spread in front of her and heard the whispers ceasing. Fire spread through the pasture, consuming all and turning green to ash.

Rhaenys saw Meraxes jump down from the top of the tree and faced down the wolf. But instead of fighting or roaring, they gazed at each other, as if curious to the creature in front of them. Then unexpectedly, Meraxes and the wolf turned their heads to her, their yellow eyes piercing through her. As the fires spread further through the pasture, Rhaenys looked at the ground and saw one new grass sprouting up.

Before she could look closer, Rhaenys felt blackness form around her. She looked back at Meraxes and the wolf before she fell into the deep void.

Rhaenys launched herself up from the bed, breathing heavily. She ran her hand on her face and neck, both of which were drenched in sweat. Taking deeper and slower breaths, she calmed herself down before she laid back on the mattress.

Rhaenys had dreams before, but never like the one she had. This was… too vivid and yet not so chilly as to be a nightmare. Granted, those seven phantoms and the whisperings in her mind made her blood cold, but that was only a portion of the dream. She was happy to see Meraxes protect her in the dream from the phantoms, but she was confused as to why there was a wolf there, a large one at that.

Needing answers, Rhaenys went to her father’s chambers in the manor house. As he was still Lord of Dragonstone, he occupied the ones Aegon used before he came to the citadel. She knocked on his door, but didn’t get an answer. Knocking again, she found that the door was open and the chambers empty. Confused, she went to the solar, where she found her father talking with Taygor Leniar. What’s he doing here?
Their father noticed Rhaenys enter the solar. “Ah, Rhae. What are you doing up so late?”

“I could ask the same of you, father,” Rhaenys replied. “Taygor, this is a surprise. I didn’t expect you to be here, let alone with our father.”

“He wanted to discuss Valyrian history with me, my lady,” Taygor replied in the common tongue. Like Jaenyx, it had a unique Valyrian lilt. “Your lord father seems… quite taken with your family’s origins.”

“As should all who bear the blood of the dragon,” their father quipped. “So, Rhae, what can I do for you? You wouldn’t stay awake at this time of night if it weren’t anything important.”

After Rhaenys sat down, she explained what she dreamt. Both Taygor and her father listened closely, interrupting her only to ask for clarification. She couldn’t answer that, as she didn’t know the full meaning of her dream.

Rhaenys leaned back in her chair after she was done. For some reason, she expected them to look at her like she was out of her mind. But to her relief, they just looked… curious.

“And this is the first time you had this dream, Rhae?” their father asked. Rhaenys nodded. “I must say, I would consider anyone else having such dreams to be insane, but given our history and how we came to Dragonstone in the first place… it would be unwise to dismiss them so quickly.”

“So, how can I explain it?” Rhaenys asked.

“Not exactly a common ability even for those carrying dragonblood,” Taygor jumped in. “But… a dragon, specifically your dragon Meraxes as you saw her, appeared in this dream. That wouldn’t happen if it was a common dream.”
“And?” Rhaenys wanted to know more.

“Well, your ancestor, Daenys Targaryen, had such dreams before and that’s what motivated Aenar Targaryen to leave for Dragonstone, ultimately preserving one of two dragonlord families left when the Doom occurred. Many scoffed at his seeming foolishness, but they all perished. What’s interesting is that your family, Lady Rhaenys, is the only one recorded to have acted on such dreams.”

“This is all good, but you’re not answering my question,” Rhaenys pointed out with impatience.

“I’m getting to it. The gods can reveal things that cannot be interpreted clearly at the first time. But I can guess that a grave danger is coming and that both a dragon and a wolf can be the salvation while also clearing the way for something new.”

Rhaenys nodded, not completely satisfied with his answer but willing to accept it for now. “But why did I dream up a wolf?”

Taygor rubbed his chin. “That… I don’t know. But you said that the wolf had the same color of eyes as Meraxes. All I can think of is that the wolf is somehow connected to the dragon somehow.”

Rhaenys swallowed. “I’m worried about the grave danger part. I still hear their whispers in my mind.” Even thinking of those whispers, she felt a chill run down her spine.

Their father pondered the situation. “It seems as if you had a very… troubling dream. How about you stay in my chambers tonight, like when you were a little girl?”

Rhaenys smiled at that, jumping at the chance to relive her childhood when their father embraced
her when she had bad dreams. That night, she felt the warm comfort that her father gave as he held her close.

The next day was filled with more running around the citadel with buckets, only no one protested Haru’s methods this time. However, before they continued, Rhaenys heard Ragaemor Tarareon call out to her. “Lady Rhaenys!”

“Lord Tarareon. What is it?”

Lord Tarareon handed her a message, written in Jaenyx’s hand. As she read it, she felt more worried with each time. “Is this true, Lord Tarareon?”

“Yes, my lady. Lady Visenya saw their movements and Lord Belaerys confirmed them.”

Rhaenys nodded. The message said that Visenya saw troop movements coming from the Dornish Marches. From what she gathered, the Swanns of Stonehelm had gathered their troops had begun the march north, towards Bronzegate. From what she gathered, marcher houses as the Swanns had a fearsome reputation, gained from centuries of fighting the Dornish. Visenya also movement from Mistwood, which combined with the Swanns meant the Arrogant king was taking the threat from the dragons more seriously. *He should, considering what happened to Black Harren.*

At the same time, the Arrogant king was keeping the other marcher lords, his best troops, remaining where they were. That was good, as they didn’t have to worry about combating all of the Durrandons’ crack troops.

“How many more troops can we spare, Lord Tarareon?”

“A little over a thousand. We could call on the riverlords for reinforcement, but they would have
to get the word from Lord Belaerys.”

“Get a message to my good-brother. Tell him that we will send him one thousand reinforcements and that we will need to have him call more troops from the riverlands.”

“Yes, my lady,” Lord Tarareon bowed before walking away.

Rhaenys sighed. With the dream still on her mind and the new developments in the Storm kingdom, she knew that it was going to be a long few weeks ahead.

Chapter End Notes

Here, we have Rhaenys undergoing some very tough and abusive training under Konno Haru. I don't endorse using abusive language when in training, as that's counterproductive and will only drive the student away. However, I feel that having an interaction between Haru and Rhaenys was a good way to get insight into Jaenyx's character and as I said, there are limits to how Haru trained him. As Rhaenys pointed out, he didn't teach him how to love and is also giving himself too much credit. At the same time, no one can blame his extreme behavior given how his faith in the society he grew up in was shattered.

More importantly, Rhaenys has the dragon dreams. I had to take liberties since there was scant information on how they worked, but I knew that there was a lot of symbolism in dragon dreams from what details are available. Also, since she's the best rider out of her siblings and Jaenyx, I felt it only made sense she had the ability and it somewhat compensates for Jaenyx's repertoire. So, I'll let you all figure out what it exactly means ;) What I will say, all of it's important for the story ahead.

Next, the stormlands campaign continues.
Chapter Notes

Been delayed since I'm on winter break now, but I will try to maintain my schedule regardless. Here it is!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JAENYX V

The clanging of steel rang through the camp as Jaenyx and Visenya sparred. While Visenya thrusted Dark Sister towards her husband’s torso, he parried the blade with his dagger while attempting an upward slice to Visenya with his other sword. Unfortunately for him, she was just as fast as he was and spun around while arcing her back and slightly sticking out her core to avoid his blade. Regaining her footing, she assumed an inside left stance, bending her front right leg while straightening her back left leg. She brought Dark Sister close to her chest, the blade parallel above the ground with its short point aiming at Jaenyx. In response, he stepped back, slightly bent both of his knees, and held out the dagger in his left hand diagonally while putting his sword in a middle guard.

Jaenyx saw Visenya lunge forward, expecting her to attempt another thrust with Dark Sister that would again be parried with his dagger. However, just before the dagger touched Visenya’s blade, she pulled back and spun to her left in a full circle. He tried to pull back, but he realized too late that she had pulled a feint and had used the momentum from her spin to bring Dark Sister up before swinging it straight downwards onto the dagger. Although he could use both hands equally, the sheer power from Visenya’s downward swing was more than enough to force the dagger from his left hand and drop it to the dirt.

Jaenyx acted quickly by jumping sidewards to avoid another swing from Visenya. With his dagger gone, he assumed a hanging left stance, with his left leg in front of him and bent, right leg behind him and straightened, and sword pointed downwards. He steadied his breathing, which quickened whenever he was caught in unexpected situations in sparring. A good combatant always had a plan of attack and defense, coming up with multiple ways to strike at an opponent and avoiding the opponent’s charges. However, like all warfare, deception played an important role in ensuring victory in a spar and the one falling for another’s ruses either yielded or just steer clear away from them. When the latter happens, emotions flare as the serenity required in a good combatant is threatened to be expunged from the mind. Maintaining serenity was critical, as that allowed a combatant to not feel fear or hesitation. That left only pure, implacable focus and made possible for the warrior to rely on instinct and reflex rather than logic or emotion to counter their opponent’s movements.
Tightening his grip on his sword, Jaenyx kept his focus on Visenya, who had assumed a side stance. Feeling calm, he saw her swing Dark Sister horizontally towards his torso, causing him to spin his arms to repoint his sword up and swing to meet Dark Sister. Remembering that the blade was not the only part of the sword, he moved fast by sliding his right hand on the flat side of the blade, far enough to not cut his hands, towards a point where he could hold down to make a pivot. At the same time, he used his left hand to bring the helm up, but not to strike Visenya in the head. He used Dark Sister’s flat side to push his sword along its length and thrust downwards towards Visenya’s belly. He stopped just before the point touched her skin.

But before Jaenyx said “yield,” he felt Dark Sister in between his left shoulder and the left side of his neck. He had never attempted something like what he just did and while his move utilized his opponent’s blade against him, he also exposed his neck to the other’s blade. Had this been a real fight, he might have gotten the kill but would also die himself.

“Draw?” Jaenyx asked.

Visenya nodded. “Draw.” They then heard clapping from the group that had formed to see husband and wife engage in swordplay. All had heard about the combat prowess of Lord and Lady Belaerys, but it was another thing for them to witness it with their own eyes. Visenya was the fastest warrior among Aegon and Orys, while Jaenyx was fluid and controlled. What they both shared in common was their creativity, coming up with different ways to strike and defend against their opponents’ attacks. *Probably with some modifying, that last move could be quite effective in real combat*, thought Jaenyx.

With the spar finished, both Jaenyx and Visenya withdrew from their stances and clasped each other’s arms as would any swordsman after a friendly session. However, they were husband and wife instead of regular sparring partners, so both smashed their lips against each other to openly show their affections. This prompted more applause from the onlookers, some of whom started to make lewd comments but all pleased to see some intimacy between Lord and Lady Belaerys.

Jaenyx was practicing with his katana and Seablaze against a training dummy when Visenya interrupted him. She commented on his use of two swords as an effective way to have more reach than his adversaries, but dual usage of two long blades sacrificed speed. Visenya reminded him that his style relied heavily on speed, so there was no point in using two swords in combat when the movements became slower from their combined weight. She had him put down his katana and instead gave him a dagger. She struck at him a few times while Jaenyx was able to block her blade
with his dagger while attacking with his longer sword. However, the important thing that Jaenyx noticed was that he was able to move and react faster while using the dagger in concert with Seablaze. He was able to move very fast with the dagger in his left hand, allowing him to parry his opponent’s strikes quickly and thus giving him time to strike back. He kissed Visenya deeply for her suggestions.

On a deeper level, Jaenyx noticed similarities between using the dagger and sword in conjunction and how he was taught by Master Haru. Before becoming a shinobi, Konno Haru was a master in a technique called nitōichi, which in nihongo meant “two swords as one.” The technique called for the warrior to use both a large sword and a “companion sword”, specifically the katana and wakizashi. The idea behind nitōichi was to maximize usage of both the katana and wakizashi, with the former used in large spaces and the latter drawn for close-quarters combat but previously never at the same time. In combat, nitōichi greatly enhanced the striking and parrying capabilities of the warrior, with the wakizashi being used to ward off and neutralize the enemy’s weapons during a grappling while the katana would strike back. There were only a few warriors in Nihon who could properly apply nitōichi in combat without injuring themselves, and Konno Haru was one of them.

Once she saw that Jaenyx realized the validity of her suggestions, Visenya recommended using the katana and wakizashi against unarmored opponents and in stealth attacks while using Seablaze and the dagger during heavy combat. She had also learned about and trained a bit in nitōichi from Master Haru after politely asking him. While she had a long way to go before she could fully understand the essence of Yi-Tish swordsmanship, she understood enough to allow her to apply certain principles and techniques into her own style. Seeing her mixing knowledge from Westerosi combat styles via Quenton Qoherys and Yi-Tish styles from Master Haru prompted Jaenyx to ponder and develop his own style. He remembered Master Haru’s emphasizing the importance of adapting to the environment, so that was what he intended to do in regards to his combat techniques.

Breaking from their kiss after their public sparring session, Jaenyx sheathed Seablaze and walked alongside Visenya back to the command tent while she sheathed Dark Sister. They would have liked to continue their sparring, but they had to resume planning for next advances into the Storm kingdom.

Two weeks ago, the army at Haystack Hall received one thousand more reinforcements, all of whom had crossed the bridge over the Wendwater, and bringing their total numbers to twelve thousand to face potentially thirty thousand Durrandon bannermen. Rhaenys told them that Jaenyx would have to call for more troops from the riverlands since he was officially supervising the region if they needed more. Jaenyx immediately wrote the orders and signed them with his own seal. However, it would take some time before sizable numbers arrived from the riverlands, so they would have to make do with their twelve thousand troops.
Their first instinct was to advance straight towards Bronzegate, as the capture of the fortress will open the road to Storm’s End while the villages and farms surrounding the castle would be a good base from which to advance further into the Storm kingdom. At the same time, they also understood that the enemy would expect such a move from them and would move more troops into Bronzegate’s vicinity. What was especially concerning for them was that the first of the marcher lords, the Swanns of Stonehelm, along with the Mertyns of Mistwood had assembled their banners and began marching north. If Argilac Durrandon managed to bring the weight of his crack troops to bear against them while they were advancing deeper into the forested areas of the northern reaches of his dominion, their advance would stall. Time was of the essence, as they needed to neutralize the Durrandons before Argilac assembled more of his troops. Unlike Black Harren, the houses throughout the Storm kingdom were very loyal to their king and would answer his call.

In a council at Haystack Hall, it was decided that they would split their forces. Aegon and Orys would retain the regular infantry, men-at-arms, and heavy cavalry and march towards Bronzegate. Meanwhile, Jaenyx and Visenya would take the army’s light infantry and light cavalry and bypass Bronzegate. The idea was to keep the enemy focused on Bronzegate and move their strongest forces to reinforce the castle, which would open up the rest of the Storm kingdom’s northern domains and expose their flanks. Jaenyx and Visenya would then strike at the Durrandons’ lighter forces and baggage trains, thus splitting their enemy’s focus and keeping them off-balance.

Key to the plan was hiding the dragons. The burning of Harrenhal might have achieved the intended goal of making their opponents afraid of them, but fear was a double-edged sword. Should the enemy be aware of the dragons’ presence prior to battle, they would either hesitate or withdraw from the field, thus making the goal of destroying their armies more difficult to accomplish. While they could use the dragons to burn the fortresses throughout the Storm kingdom, destroying fixed targets only worked in the short term as long as the enemy could field troops. So, Aegon, Visenya, and Jaenyx took great pains to hide their dragons so as to keep the enemy advancing towards them. Aegon made Balerion fly over the seas next to the Storm kingdom during the day and only allowing to come to him at night, as he was the biggest of the dragons and would be easy to spot even when flying in the sky. For Vhagar and Cloudwynd, they were only slightly smaller than either Balerion or Meraxes, but they were just small enough to avoid being seen by the enemy as long as they soared very high in the air. Like Balerion, they were only allowed to come back to their riders at night, not that it mattered much to them since their dragons enjoyed flying around each other and hunting together.

For the past two weeks, Jaenyx and Visenya led their light troops through the forests west of Bronzegate. They were careful to avoid the many patrols of the Durrandons throughout the wooded areas in their domain’s northern reaches alongside any villages, which they both knew would warn nearby Durrandon forces of their presence. Helping matters was the fact that they had two thousand men under their command, comprising of Tarareon horsemen, Blackwood light cavalry, and light infantry from various other houses. They also had thirty former drifters-turned shinobi to serve as their advance screen. So far, they haven’t encountered the enemy yet, which
was a good sign since that meant they were still undetected.

“*It’s been very quiet for the past two weeks, Jae,*” Visenya began as they walked with their hands entwined back to the command tent. “*Don’t you think it’s strange?*”

Jaenyx nodded. “*We’ve been careful to conceal our movements, however. If we didn’t have contact with the enemy yet, we’re doing something right.*”

“*But we don’t know these forests, Jae. The Durrandons command some very good bowmen, courtesy to the many conflicts with the Dornish. These woods are excellent for ambushes, and I know because that’s what I’d use them for.*”

“*The last report we’ve heard of the Swanns is that they were still a week away from Bronzegate. If our knowledge of this area is correct, then we would be southwest of Bronzegate and therefore bypassing the marcher force and the Mertyn bannermen. All we need to do is find either their baggage train or their weaker troops,*” Jaenyx continued.

“*Shouldn’t we be more cautious about these woods?*” Visenya brought the conversation back to the likelihood of an ambush in the forest.

“*We have men taking watch and our camp has a tight perimeter. Also, Cloudwynd and Vhagar are flying above us. Once we give them the word, they’ll fly down and help us,*” Jaenyx reassured.

They had made camp on top of a ridge covered in forest. Setting up camp anywhere along the shores of the Wendwater further inland or on level ground were easy ways to have the enemy pounce on them. While there were still risks with being encamped on a forested ridge since they couldn’t see past the trees, it was always better to have the high ground in case of any attack.

“*I’m serious, Jae. I am confident of our chances against the Arrogant king, but we need to be more careful. Fighting in the woods requires us to be exactly that.*”
In all honesty, Visenya had every right to be concerned. They had no problem with using their dragons in the riverlands and they had favorable geography at Rook’s Rest and Wailing Willows. However, both of those battles contained some amount of open ground, where there was none where they were encamped. Cloudwynd and Vhagar could save them from being attacked and overwhelmed, but the risk of their flames igniting an inferno among the trees and harming their own troops was too great. In essence, their greatest assets could not be fully brought to bear.

Jaenyx considered Visenya’s uneasiness. “Kenzou and the others should be back soon. We’ll have more information then.”

Before they entered their tent and as if on cue, they heard the bushes behind their tent rustle. On instinct, Visenya drew Dark Sister and Jaenyx drew Seablaze while they both approached the bush. Before they moved closer, three hooded figures covered in foliage and branches emerged. Upon seeing them carrying a mix of katanas, wakizashis, and ninjatō, they both relaxed as they realized that Kenzou and the others had returned. Part of the practices of the shinobi was hensōjutsu, which was their art of disguise and camouflage. Jaenyx witnessed firsthand how good they were at hiding in natural landscapes, essentially being invisible to the eye. What was scarier, however, was how well they could assume various disguises. Like theater actors, they were good at impersonating different types of people such as craftsmen, farmers, merchants, and even warriors. This meant that there was no safe place for any of their targets.

“Cho tsu to shinpai shite ku re tano ne. Houkoku ha (You had us worried for a moment. Any report)?” Jaenyx sheathed Seablaze with Visenya following suit.

“Nikui shirase ga a ru (We have bad news),” Kenzou replied. “Teki o mi tsu ke ta (We found the enemy).”

“Sono nikui nyusu ha dou desuka (How is that bad news)?” Jaenyx asked.

“Teki ha watashitachi ga shi tsu tayori mo chikai desu. Ho n no suujikan no kyori (The enemy is closer than we thought. Only a few hours away),” Kenzou answered with apprehension.
Jaenyx nodded, hiding his surprise. “Tsuteiu ma demo nai (I know you have more to say).”

Kenzou took a breath. “Arera ha wareware ga do ko ni iruka chi tte ru (They know where we are).”

Jaenyx’s eyes widened, as did Visenya’s. “Arera ha douyatte chi tte ru (How do they know)?” Visenya asked. Despite the immediate danger they were now in, Jaenyx couldn’t help but be impressed at how quickly she was picking up nihongo.

“Chiisana juumin ha wareware yorimo kono mori o yo ku chi tte i ru. Arera ha watashitachi o mi ta. (The smallfolk know these woods better than we do. They saw us).”

Jaenyx and Visenya looked at each other in concern. How did we not see them see us? That was a question for another time. Now, they had to prepare for a fight ahead.

“Wareware ha ka ni chokumen shite i ru nodesu ka (How many are we facing)?” Jaenyx wanted to put on his armor as quickly as possible, but feared that he wouldn’t have time.

“Shi ha sennin to io jin no guntai o kazoe mashi ta. Sore rano ooku ha ite dakedenaku, iku tsu kano dansei-atto-ude (I counted three thousand troops. Many of them archers and men-at-arms but also armored cavalry),” Kenzou replied.

“Ana ta ha arera no hata o mi mashi taka (Did you see their banner)?” Visenya pressed.

“Soreha shiratori no you ni mie mashi ta (It looked like a swan),” Kenzou shrugged.

Shit, cursed Jaenyx. They would have to fight a marcher lord sooner than they thought. They wouldn’t have to worry about the men-at-arms and cavalry, since they would have a difficult time
advancing on their positions on high ground, but the archers were a cause for concern. From Jaenyx gathered, their bowmen were fast at drawing their bows while being deadly accurate. The main weapon of choice for archers sworn to marcher lords was the longbow, which was comparable to the yumi bow used in Nihon in that it required years to master. However, unlike the yumi, the longbow was used by common troops and therefore could be used in larger numbers. Combined with their knowledge of the landscape, that made them deadly opponents to face.

“We need to get ready to fight,” Visenya began. “Our best chance to beat them back is to hold our positions. As long as we hold the high ground, they can’t dislodge us no matter how many arrows they let loose against us.”

“But we’re on a ridge. Wouldn’t they surround us then?” Jaenyx knew there were also risks with occupying the higher ground. If they were surrounded, they could get cut off from retreat and then destroyed.

“Just as our enemy will use the forest to their advantage, we’ll use it to ours. Take cover behind the trees and any bush and wait for them to charge at us. Once they come close enough, we’ll let loose our own arrows and stick them with our blades and spears.”

Jaenyx nodded. “Sounds like a plan. We should also get Cloudwynd and Vhagar down here also.”

“Not yet, Jae,” Visenya shook her head. “Once we hinder their advance up the ridge, we’ll call them and finish them off.”

Jaenyx sat with his back leaned against a large boulder that both he and Visenya found. After Kenzou warned them of the enemy approaching them, they had Chrass Rivers, who was accompanying them, take half of their troops and bring all of their horses to a safe distance away from the ridge. Meanwhile, Jaenyx, Visenya, Kenzou, and Rhaedar Tarareon would remain at the ridge with the other half to hold off the oncoming force. The basic plan was to blunt their charge up the ridge while using the bushes and trees as cover against their bowmen.
“Damn,” Jaenyx muttered. “Should have known that we were compromised.”

“It’s better that we’re fighting them now than later,” Visenya turned her head to Jaenyx. “If we waited for them to come to us, then we would be fighting against a much larger host and all of them probably under one commander. By fighting them now, we should be distracting them while blunting a portion of the Durrandons’ elite troops.”

Jaenyx couldn’t deny that logic. “But this is where our dragons would have some difficulty. They might not see well through the trees and therefore hurt our own troops in the process.”

Visenya put her hand on Jaenyx’s shoulder. “Let’s trust Vhagar and Cloudwynd to know friend from foe, then,” she reassured.

Just then, they saw an arrow lodge into a tree behind their boulder. Before they could react, a storm of arrows landed around their boulder while some bounced off of it. They turned to their right and saw a man, a Blackwood by the sigil on his armor, lie dead with arrows sticking into his face and neck.

“Keep your heads down!” Jaenyx shouted. “Avoid the arrows!”

“They might be trying to keep us under cover so that their infantry and cavalry could move up the ridge without resistance,” Visenya pointed out.

Taking that into consideration, Jaenyx peeked out the side of the boulder. Sure enough, he saw rows of bowmen letting loose their arrows at their positions on the ridge while the armored men-at-arms and knights began to advance towards the base of the ridge. If they were able to engage in close combat with their lighter troops, they would not stand a chance.

“Kyuuehi o junbi shi ro (Get the archers ready)!” Jaenyx shouted to Kenzou. Some of the shinobi had crossbows and all of them carried bolts that could pierce plate armor. Still, they were told to aim for the head, neck, and shoulders as the armor was usually thickest around the torso. “Get your
arrows out! Do not let loose until I give the order!” Jaenyx shouted to the rest.

Meanwhile, arrows from the Swann and Mertyn forces landed on their positions. A few were killed while the rest struggled to avoid them using any trees, bushes, or boulders that they could find. Yet, Jaenyx noticed that the arrows came in waves, meaning that the enemy bowmen used volleys. Once they proceeded to renock arrows, that was when Jaenyx and Visenya’s own bowmen would shoot back.

Soon enough, it happened. “Volley! Loose!” Visenya ordered.

A wave of armor-piercing arrows and bolts descended upon the men-at-arms and mounted knights as they struggled up the ridge. As instructed, they aimed for the head and neck and many struck true to their mark as scores of their armored adversaries fell to the ground dead. However, they had to take cover as the enemy bowmen shot back at them.

“Good start, but not enough,” Visenya peeked over the boulder. “We’ll have to be fighting them in close combat if things go on like this. We both might have a chance, but I’m not sure about the others.”

“Call the dragons?” Jaenyx suggested.

“And if the fire gets out of control?”

“We’ll worry about that later. Right now, we need to get rid of those archers.”

Visenya nodded. “I’ll call Vhagar.”

Jaenyx looked up to the sky. Cloudwynd, girl. Help us.
While their own archers shot back at the marcher bowmen, two dragon roars pierced through the chaos in the forest. A stream of orange and blue dragonfire burned through the thick treetops and a large portion of the enemy archers. Screams echoed as blue and orange fires turned flesh into ashes while igniting the easily flammable foliage and bushes around the ridge. The trees quickly caught fire and smoke filled the air above the fighting.

Jaenyx and Visenya glanced over the boulder and saw that the enemy host had descended into a frenzy. While the archers were burning, the armor of the men-at-arms and mounted knights were melting on their bodies from the very heat of the flames. Many struggled to get them off, with some being picked off by armor-piercing arrows and some others falling onto the ground as their bodies cooked inside the metal layers of the things that were supposed to protect them.

Jaenyx and Visenya saw that there were still soldiers who were unscathed, but too overwhelmed by the fires burning through the shrubs and the smoke now filling the air around them to get back into formation. Jaenyx and Visenya shared a look with each other, both seeing their chance. Drawing their swords, they emerged out from behind the boulder.

“CHARGE!” Visenya ordered. As one, Tarareons, shinobi, Blackwoods, and troops from other houses dropped their bows and rushed down the ridge, avoiding tree trunks and bushes while raising their spears, swords, and axes.

As Jaenyx ran down the hill, he jumped onto a man-at-arms that had luckily avoided the dragonfire. Remembering the exposed areas of plate armor, he drew his dagger and stabbed the man through the opening above his throat. Standing up, he saw their troops engaging the armored but disorganized marcher force. Although lighter than their adversaries, that made them more mobile and they used the weight of the plate armor against them as they went for the weak spots.

But as Jaenyx observed the fighting, he coughed as he felt his eyes sting. There was too much smoke going around and the fires were starting to get out of control as there was just too much fuel for them to burn. At the same time, they needed to eliminate this force before they could withdraw as that meant one less marcher lord to worry about.

Rubbing his eyes, Jaenyx let out another cough as he heard someone yelling from behind him. He
turned around and saw an armored knight charging at him on horseback. He ducked just in time to avoid his blade before grabbing him from behind and pulling him from his horse. He struck at the knight’s helmet with Seablaze’s hilt, stunning him long enough for Jaenyx to lift up his helm and stick his dagger into his eye.

Jaenyx stomped through the flaming bushes and trees as the troops began to really cut down on the marcher force. He saw Kenzou throttling a man-at-arms from behind before slicing through his exposed throat with his shuriken. He saw lightly-armored Blackwoods turning the heavy armor of their opponents against them, either by driving their swords and daggers through the weak spots or pushing them towards a shrub touched by dragonfire and letting its flames cook them from the inside as the metal melted. He saw Rhaedar unhorse a knight by hitting him straight with a spear’s shaft on the torso before he slammed his axe down onto his helm, splitting his head into two.

Before he moved further, Jaenyx felt something slam into him and a sharp pain on his left side as he fell to his knees. He looked to his left and found that an arrow had lodged into an exposed part of his armor, specifically between his left leg and torso. However, he sensed that it didn’t hit anything vital and seeing that he couldn’t get the arrow without help, he forced himself back up as he moved forward while careful to not snap the arrow.

Seeing that he would not be able to fight on foot with the arrow, Jaenyx mounted a horse and wheeled around the ridge. Although the smoke and fires would prevent enemy archers from accurately aiming at him, he didn’t take chances and kept himself low so as to make it more difficult for them to shoot at him. However, he found that being on horseback also made him higher in the air and thus exposing his eyes to thicker smoke. He quickly decided to use the horse to find an opponent before he would jump onto him. He didn’t have to wait long, as he found a group of archers trying to flee from the ridge.

Once he was close enough, Jaenyx jumped onto the archers, bringing two down with his weight while he slashed Seablaze through the calves of two others. He stabbed one of the archers through the side of his neck while he stood back up before plunging Seablaze into the back of the other. However, he failed to notice the last archer charging into him and bringing him back down to the ground. The archer brought his longbow to Jaenyx’s neck and attempted to throttle him.

Jaenyx struggled against the archer, as the smoke got much thicker and making breathing for him much more difficult. He looked to his side and saw his dagger just out of reach for him. Looking back at his enemy was also getting harder as the smoke was stinging in his eyes. Still, he would not let go without a fight. Keeping his gaze onto the archer, he saw that the archer had his own dagger strapped to his left side. Acting quickly, he reached for that dagger, unsheathed it, and stabbed him between the ribs. Reversing the positions, Jaenyx pinned him on the ground as he continued to stab
Jaenyx was taught self-control, but the pain searing from his leg and the smoke stinging his eyes and making it difficult for him to breath unleashed the fire in him. Everything drowned out as he cut into the archer’s flesh over and over again with his own dagger. He went for the neck, then the face, and then his eyes. However, something told him to keep going as he used the dagger’s handle to smash onto the archer’s face. He ignored the bone cracks, the squish for flesh, blood squirting on his face, and the sting in his throat as he let his savage side out into the open. He lost count of how many times he bashed the archer’s face in.

Before he went further, Jaenyx felt someone pull him from the archer. He pushed that someone off before he felt another person restrain him. He screamed before someone slapped him hard. Blinking, his eyes regained focus and his breathing became slower as he stared upon the face of Visenya. Her face was coated in blood and her braid was covered in dirt and ash while her eyes were tearing up from the smoke’s sting.

“That’s enough, Jae!” Visenya shouted.

Feeling calm return to him even while the fires spread further, Jaenyx looked towards the archer, or what was left of him. While the body remained intact, he could not see a face. All he saw was a nose, broken cheekbones, teeth spread out all over the ground, skull cracks, and brain matter spilled through them. The archer was no longer recognizable.

Despite the smoke, Jaenyx felt his eyes widen. He promised Master Haru that he would maintain control even during battle and he broke that. And now, he was reminded of why hot blood never belonged in battle. People were not supposed to lower themselves to the likes of beasts and this was what happened whenever a thinking being let the baser instincts of the self take control.

Jaenyx saw that Kenzou was holding him. Seeing that his father’s student had regained control of himself, he let go. Jaenyx nodded his thanks, which Kenzou returned.

“You’re hurt,” Visenya noticed the arrow lodged in his leg.
“It’s fine, Vis," Jaenyx tried to brush off her concerns. That only got him another slap.

“It’s not fine, Jae,” Visenya glared at him. “We’ll have one of Taygor’s men look at you right now.”

Jaenyx was about to protest, but Visenya silently warned him not to. His mind then focused on other matters. “Any prisoners?” He didn’t doubt that they won.

“A few,” Visenia replied. “But first, we’ll get that arrow out of you.”

Visenya had the troops move away from the burning areas of the forest, but like them, she had to rub her eyes as they marched away. She had Taygor’s son, Aedor, look at Jaenyx. Unlike Rhaenys, the arrow was not lodged deep in the flesh and he could pull out by grabbing onto the shaft with his forceps. Visenya held his head tight as he gritted his teeth in pain. Fortunately, it didn’t last long and he started to disinfect the wound. Unfortunately, after he was bandaged, Jaenyx walked with a limp. Aedor reassured that it was only temporary and that he would walk normally by the end of the week.

Not that Visenya cared. Helping him walk, she put his arm over her shoulders and quipped, “Now we can really lean on each other.”

“How do we do that already?” Jaenyx jested.

“Shut up. All I can think of right now is how I can comfort you while you heal,” Visenya looked at him suggestively.

Jaenyx sighed, but more in amusement. “Whatever you say, my dragon.”
They strode towards a knight that had requested an audience with them. However, considering the circumstances of their last battle, Visenya had him brought to his knees by Rhaedar.

The knight looked up at them. “I am the son of Ashton--”

“Take your helmet off while addressing us,” Jaenyx interrupted him.

The knight did so while still kneeling. Clearing his throat, he smirked. “I am the son of Ashton of House Mertyns of Mistwood.”

And? Jaenyx and Visenya stared at him while Rhaedar stood behind him with his arms crossed.

As if expecting them to know his meaning, the knight gave a look of confusion. “I am accorded the privilege of ransom,” he stated as he smirked again.

Jaenyx quietly groaned, annoyed. He didn’t limp all this way to hear a kneeling man demand that he be released just for a small lump of money. He was aware that fifty sacks of gold was the regular ransom, but this knight was foolish if he thought that they would need it.

“This is true,” Visenya replied while helping Jaenyx back to their tent. Jaenyx gave Rhaedar a nod. Rhaedar then took out his axe, stood straight behind the kneeling knight, and brought the axe down on his unprotected head, brain matter and skull bits scattering as the knight fell down on the ground dead, his eyes and mouth slightly twitching.

Chapter End Notes

Hope I wrote the dueling scene well :)
As I said, the terrain of the stormlands will present challenges for the dragons and here we see it. While Vhagar and Cloudwynd might have killed the marcher bowmen, they set the forest on fire and putting the troops at risk. Thus, Jaenyx had to fight with impaired senses and that only added to the chaos that was going around him. And now, we finally see him lose self-control and being reminded of why he has to control himself even in battle. I hope I showed that well.

Part of the battle was inspired by the Battle of King's Mountain, but with some of the forest fight from THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (2005) and THE REVENANT (2015).

Only two more chapters until the Last Storm. Stay tuned.
Rhaenys VI

Chapter Notes

Special shoutout to Longclaw 1-6, osterreicher97, and now Jonerys2019 back on FF for your awesome reviews :) All of you, and the others, propel me forward with this story despite many obstacles.

Without ado, here it goes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

RHAENYS VI

“Nock!” Rhaenys drew the bowstring back while aiming at the target. “Loose!” Rhaenys let the arrow fly, only to land just outside the black circle in the center.

Konno Haru moved next to Rhaenys, arms crossed and giving her the same disappointed look that remained on his face for the past few weeks.

“How many fucking times do we have to go over this?” Rhaenys was still not used to Haru speaking to her in that manner, but she couldn’t complain now that they were training on bows. A week after that little demonstration in front of their father, Konno Haru finally moved to teaching her how to shoot the bow, but that didn’t stop the intensity of their other exercises. In fact, Haru made her run faster around the citadel, do more strength training, and then had her swim against the current of the Blackwater Rush in her dragon coat.

“I… trying--” Rhaenys tried to explain, but that only got her the sound of a throat clearing.

“What did I say about trying?”
Rhaenys bit on her cheek. “Useless... if... failed.”

Haru nodded. “Exactly. We’ve been practicing for two weeks and you haven’t landed one fucking hit. Have you not been paying attention?!!! Huh?!!!”

Rhaenys jolted at the sudden raising of his voice. “I... pay... attention--”

“Clearly not well enough,” Haru shot bitingly. “I’ve got better things to do with my time than to watch over another highborn cunt.” Rhaenys glared at him, still offended whenever he referred her by that term. “Oh, what’s the matter, wench?” Haru asked in mock surprise. “Do you want to kill me, dragon bitch?” Rhaenys exhaled slowly before shaking her head. “If no, then you better start making my time more worthwhile. If there is anything that I hate in this world, it is anything wasted. Now, nock another arrow.”

Rhaenys did so. They had her train a small and simple wooden bow before they had her switch to a longbow and recurve bow. They discouraged her from using a crossbow, as the point of their training was to develop the skills she would need to be a great archer and crossbows would take up too much time to load, and battle never afforded the luxury of time for its participants to be ready to fight their adversaries.

Konno Haru and his son Arata mainly used a bow they called the yumi, which was made from a combination of wood, leather, and bamboo, the last one not existing in Westeros since bamboo existed in more damp regions with heavier rainfall such as Sothoryos. The yumi resembled the longbow in how tall it was and a Bowman would need several years before mastery could be achieved. However, the yumi was utilized by the warrior elite in Yi-Ti since they were expected to be well-versed in many types of weapons besides their swords. From what Rhaenys witnessed, both Konno and Arata Haru could hit their targets with the yumi while on horseback, intriguing her further.

Given her small stature, Haru had her train with a composite bow made from goat horn, wood, and sinew alongside a self-bow he fashioned from yew. He said that the composite bow carried slightly more power than a longbow and could quite maneuverable compared to most bows, but it was vulnerable to damp conditions and had to be kept dry. On the other hand, the self-bow might not possess the same power as the recurve bow but was not susceptible to wet climates and could be used in more environments. If Rhaenys had to choose, the self-bow seemed a more attractive option.
However, Rhaenys had not been able to land an arrow on what Konno Haru called the “zuboshi”, or the center of the target despite the last two weeks of instruction. One other thing that made her dislike even more was how impatient he got and how quick he was to criticize her. The man had a short temper, but Haru said to her, “Don’t get confused. I’m not your father. I’m not your friend. I am your teacher and I speak to you as how the elder addresses the younger. If you hate me, I’m doing something right because the more you do, the more you learn.” She was confused by how much emphasis he had put on this fallacy, as she thought that teachers would be more understanding towards their students. But in Haru’s mind, he didn’t care about giving any kind of understanding.

And here was Rhaenys getting another reprimand for seemingly failing to absorb Haru’s lessons. After he was finished admonishing her, Haru sighed. “It looks like we’re going to have to approach this in a different manner, wouldn’t you agree?”

Rhaenys stared at him. “What.... other.... way.... Sensei Haru ?”

“You’ll see.” Haru had Arata call one of their men to where they were standing before he went to the cells holding some ironborn prisoners. As for the man that just came, he also had pale skin, brown eyes, and long raven black hair tied in a bun. He was tall but skinny while wearing loose brown robes.

Arata grabbed one of the ironborn prisoners, his hands and ankles in chains while stripped of his mail shirt, and had him stand in front of the target. As for Haru, he shouted something to the other Yi-Ti man, who responded by getting on his hands and feet while his face was above the ground. His ass was also sticking up, confusing Rhaenys.

Suddenly, Haru pulled out a small wooden stick and smacked the man’s ass hard, causing Rhaenys to flinch. So hard that people nearby could hear the smack and the man’s suppressed grunt in pain. His ass nearly touched the ground from the stick’s impact before he stuck it back up.

“Kill him ,” Haru pointed to the ironborn prisoner.
Rhaenys turned around, her eyes widening in shock before looking back at Haru. “What?”

“I want you to kill him with your bow. He’s a bigger target, so you shouldn’t miss,” Haru explained.

Rhaenys shook her head. “What… about… targets?”

Haru scoffed. “How is killing a man any different than killing a stag? Also, from what Jaenyx told me, you know what it’s like to kill a man up close and you’ve burned hundreds at Wailing Willows. I’m not understanding why this would be difficult for you now.”

Rhaenys gestured at the ironborn prisoner. “He… in… chains.”

“So?” Haru asked dismissively. “Do you think that he’ll show you the same consideration if you were in chains? I thought you’d be more understanding of what death is after nearly drowning in the Blackwater Bay.”

Rhaenys killed a stag so that she and Egg would eat that day. She stabbed that ironborn in the neck at the Stony Sept after he tried to kill her. She might have burned hundreds at Wailing Willows, but Meraxes and the other dragons did the actual killing for her. Now, Haru was asking her to use a prisoner as target practice. Granted, the man was an ironborn, but he was in chains and therefore could not harm her. This was… killing in cold blood, something that she never had to do before.

“Why… making… me…. do?” Rhaenys hesitated.

“To be honest with you, Lady Rhaenys, I’m beginning to doubt if you have what it takes to be an archer, or a killing person in general,” Haru explain. “Hunting stags or animals is easy since they can’t talk. People, however, could not only talk, but also laugh, smile, and love.” Rhaenys briefly thought about Aegon at that last word. “A good archer remembers all of that before focusing on the fact that his adversary needs to die or the archer will die himself or herself. More importantly, the archer will always endeavor to make that one arrow released from the bow the killing arrow.”
Rhaenys listened to another of Haru’s lessons. She initially believed that being an archer was as simple as learning how to shoot the bow, but Haru said that there were deeper ways of thinking behind archery. One thing that she did remember was that the good archer would not allow its prey to undergo prolonged suffering, which was why Haru always told her to aim for the eyes, the neck, or the heart so as to ensure a quick death. The bow weapon meant for precision and anyone who ignored that fact was either not a very good archer or worse, a sadist.

Rhaenys kept looking at Haru. “If… I… don’t?” Haru smacked at the man’s ass with his stick again, this time causing a yelp. “Please… stop.”

“Consider this an incentive,” Haru replied. “Everytime you miss or your arrow doesn’t deliver a killing blow, I hit him hard. Normally, I would hit you for such infractions, but out of respect for Jaenyx, I’m not hitting you. However, that doesn’t I can’t hit others.”

Rhaenys gulped. “If... kill.... prisoner... you... stop... hitting?”

“Kill the target with one arrow, and you won’t find out,” Haru promised, but with his grip tightening on the stick.

Rhaenys exhaled before nocking another arrow. “Remember, eyes, neck, or heart. I’ll let you choose, but kill him,” Haru said.

Rhaenys drew back her yew self-bow, arrow nocked. She could see the ironborn near tears, his eyes begging for his life without saying the words, and shoulders slumped from the chains. Normally, she would be affected by such expressions and that made it difficult for her to take the next step.

While she thought that, Rhaenys heard another smack and another yelp from Haru’s stick. “I’m waiting, Lady Rhaenys. Don’t take too long,” Haru warned.
Closing her eyes, Rhaenys exhaled again, willing such thoughts of understanding for the prisoner from her mind. She didn’t know the Yi-Tish man’s name, but she wasn’t to let him get smacked again because of her. Also, the prisoner was an ironborn, the people that started the war in the first place. She adjusted her aim and let her arrow fly.

Rhaenys didn’t have to wait long until she saw the arrow pierce the man’s throat. His mouth was shaped in an “O” while blood was pouring out his mouth. He also had a shocked expression on his face and eyes widened before he fell on his knees and crashed on the ground, lifeless.

Rhaenys let out a shaky breath as she lowered her bow. She may have killed before, but this was the first time she had killed in cold blood. Haru might have pushed her by smacking that other man in the ass, but she was the one that decided to go through with it.

Haru patted her on the shoulder. “Never hesitate, my lady. You either kill your enemies quickly, or you will die. We’re done for today. On the morrow, we will be hunting for our own food.”

Rhaenys felt a weight come off her shoulders while another came on them. She no longer had to be worried about hesitating to kill, but she worried about how long she could handle killing before it became too much for her. Haru’s words still echoed in her mind and the memories of killing the ironborn prisoner still fresh. Now I know why Quenton never talked about what it was like to take a life.

Rhaenys set her bow down and made her way back to the manor house on the top of the tallest hill for refreshments with her father.

Rhaenys found herself in another green field, but she felt… cold. Unlike the last field where it felt warm, this one had cold winds coming from the north. And they blew hard. She had to wrap herself up in her arms to keep herself from shivering as she walked through the field.
But as she looked around, Rhaenys saw a forest to her left. What stood out about this forest was that instead of trees with green leaves, this forest was filled with pale white trees with blood red leaves. As she got closer to the forest, she saw faces carved on them.

“Weirwoods?” Rhaenys whispered in confusion. There were only a few places south of the Neck that even had godswoods and she never saw this many weirwoods before, as the First Men and later the Andals cut many of them down. From what Rhaenys read, they also drove the Children of the Forest, mythical people known for their abilities stemming from the supposed magic of weirwoods, to the point of near extinction. No one had laid eyes on a single child of the forest for many centuries, but some said that they could still feel their presence whenever around weirwoods.

Rhaenys felt more perplexed by why she was here. She didn’t have the blood of the First Men in her veins, but she was still dreaming of weirwoods. Remembering the last time she was here, she couldn’t understand why she saw a large wolf and why Meraxes just stared at it.

Just then, Rhaenys heard a dragon roar from behind her. Turning around, she saw Meraxes fly past her and towards the forest. “Meraxes, girl! Come back!” she shouted, but to no avail. Sighing in frustration, Rhaenys pulled up her dress and ran into the weirwood forest.

Rhaenys felt very uneasy upon seeing so many carved faces of the weirwood trees. The children of the forest and later the First Men saw these faces as representations of the old gods or even the old gods themselves, but what made her nervous was how they all just stared at her, like the eyes of their faces were following her. But she then put her nervousness aside, as she needed to find Meraxes and know why she ignored her command.

After running through a seemingly endless stretch of weirwoods, Rhaenys arrived at a clearing in the forest. But instead of being a regular clearing, she came upon a lake, a shallow one at that. In the middle of this lake was a small island, with a large weirwood surrounded by sloping grass. This weirwood was the biggest she laid her eyes upon, as this one broke through the forest’s canopy and could rival one of the towers of Harrenhal before they burned it to the ground.

But what caught her attention was Meraxes, who was curled on the ground around the trunk of this massive weirwood and being large enough to wrap itself around the tree and have her head touch
her own tail. Even more, there was a man near the edge to the lake and that same large wolf lying next to him. This man appeared to sharpening a knife with a rock while not taking notice to Rhaenys.

Adding to her confusion was how... calm Meraxes was around this stranger. As she looked closely at him, this man had long, raven black hair that grew past his shoulders and a black beard. She also saw that he had grey eyes, which only the First Men had. He seemed very lean and tall like Jaenyx while wearing leather boots, trousers, and thick fur coat. Meraxes would not dare be close to those not having dragonblood, but she was with him.

Needing to find out, Rhaenys walked into the lake. The water sloshed around as she stepped further, with the weirwood becoming bigger with each step closer to it.

But before she could step foot on the island, she heard the man say, “That’s far enough” while still focused on his dagger.

“You knew that I was here?” Rhaenys asked.

“Of course. I felt your presence from the moment you entered these woods,” the man still sharpened his dagger. “Nothing is hidden from the old gods.”

“Are you one of them?” Rhaenys was getting very fearful at that possibility.

Fortunately, this man laughed and shook his head. “No, I’m not of the old gods. If I was, I would have dreamt up a castle, not woods,” he gestured to the forest with a circular motion of his finger.

Another question entered Rhaenys’ mind. “Why can’t I go on this island?” Her feet were still in the water.
At that, the man stopped sharpening his knife and looked at Rhaenys. She was taken aback at seeing his piercing gaze, which was similar to Jaenyx’s but with grey eyes. “You don’t have the blood of the First Men or that of the Warg King. And this is sacred ground.”

More confusion entered Rhaenys’ mind. “But what about my dragon? She’s of Valyria, not of the First Men.”

The man shrugged. “True, but her presence is necessary for this,” he gestured to the air around them. “To occur. She’s quite a creature, your Meraxes.”

Rhaenys narrowed her eyes. “How do you know her name?”

“I can’t say,” this man shook his head. “It will be revealed in due time, but I can only say so much before the old gods cut the connection, which will be soon.”

Rhaenys scoffed. “You’re making me more confused. How is it possible that the old gods can communicate with those of Valyria? I am not even sure if this is really happening. I am not of the First Men and I don’t--”

This man interrupted her. “You are Rhaenys of House Targaryen, third and youngest child of Aerion Targaryen and Valeana Velaryon Targaryen and descendant of Aenar Targaryen. I know who you are, but to explain why we’re talking in this space would take too long.”

Rhaenys groaned in frustration, but she also saw that she wasn’t going to get anymore. “Can I ask your name, then?”

This man smiled. “Of course. My name is Snow. Brandon Snow, son of Harald of House Stark, first of his name, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North.”
Rhaenys’ eyes widened. “You’re… a Stark?”

Brandon shook his head. “Not exactly. I’m a bastard, with my half-brother being King in the North.”

“Torrhen Stark, is that right?”

Brandon nodded, smile widening. “You know the rulers of Westeros. Very good.”

It all started to make sense for Rhaenys. Courtesy to Maester Harrion before their father had him return to the Citadel, she had stories about the Starks’ war on the Warg King, on how some of the Starks born after his defeat also inherited the ability to warg, or skinchange. It was the only explanation as to why Brandon Snow was here in front of her.

“Are you a warg, Lord Snow?” Rhaenys had to ask.

“Impressive. You must know our history well.” Rhaenys nodded. “But no, I’m not a warg. I have something else, something that can only be used effectively in the presence of weirwoods.”

Rhaenys wanted to ask, but she also remembered the large wolf laying near Brandon Snow. “And what is that?” Rhaenys pointed to it.

“Oh, him,” Brandon turned around. “This is… Autumn.” As Rhaenys examined the wolf closer, its fur was a mix of red and brown. Then, it looked back at Rhaenys, revealing its yellow eyes. “He’s a direwolf.”

“Really?” Rhaenys had heard about direwolves, but they were mostly seen north of the Neck and even there, sightings became rarer as they were hunted down in droves. “Never seen a direwolf
“No southron has. I just happened to find her along with a few other pups in the Wolfswood one day. I couldn’t find the mother for some reason, but that’s a story for another time.”

“This is… a lot,” Rhaenys admitted. “As I said, I’m of Valyria yet here I am, speaking with one deeply rooted in the blood of the First Men. I am still confused as to why I’m here, as Dragonstone has no weirwoods, or how we can talk in the first place.”

“To be honest, Lady Rhaenys, this is perplexing also. But you’ve forgotten something. There is a weirwood where you live, just not at Dragonstone, and it’s very close to your walls. That’s why we can talk.”

“But why are we talking?” The confusion returned in full and then some.

“Everything will be revealed in time, but all I can say is that a great danger is coming and it will spring up from all around you.”

Rhaenys cocked her head. “What do you mean?”

“We may not be of the same blood, but our blood allows us to do this and other feats. Unfortunately, there will be those who will hunt us down because of it and they will wish our extinction because they don’t understand our gifts.”

“Who’d want to hunt us down?”

Before Brandon could answer, they heard a branch snap from behind them. Rhaenys turned around, to find a bush of flowers and vines had grown on the place where she stood. “That wasn’t
“It wasn’t,” Brandon confirmed while drawing his sword. Autumn the direwolf had gotten on her feet while Meraxes had awakened.

From behind the bush, a massive lion emerged before more followed. In fact, more than expected. All of them looked ready to pounce on the Stark, the Targaryen, the direwolf, and the dragon. Rhaenys looked ahead and saw two falcons flying above them, one larger than the other.

“That’s a lot of lions,” Rhaenys remarked.

“It’s all right. They’re scared of water like any other cat, so we’re both safe.”

“I could have Meraxes burn them all now,” Rhaenys offered.

“Not yet,” Brandon replied. “We can’t have the flames touch the weirwoods.”

“But, we’re not looking at actual weirwoods, aren’t we?” Rhaenys pointed out.

Brandon pondered about that, then nodded. “I see your point. If you’re going to use your dragon, try not to burn this large weirwood.”

Rhaenys smiled. “Of course.” She then looked at Meraxes before gesturing to the group of lions. “Dracarys.”

Meraxes let loose her dragonfire, the lions roaring in pain while the thorned bush burned.
looked up to the sky and saw that the falcons were nowhere to be seen.

“We’ll meet again, Lady Rhaenys,” Brandon said.

Rhaenys nodded before Brandon, Autumn, and Meraxes turned into bright white light.

Are you sure that’s who you met? You’re not confusing things?” their father pressed.

“Yes, father,” Rhaenys nodded. “Everything felt so real and I wouldn’t have been able to remember clearly what I said to him if I was mad.”

“My gods,” their father exclaimed before letting out a laugh. “Of all the people you could’ve met in your dreams, it had to be Brandon Snow, a member of House Stark. I don’t care if he’s a bastard, since he certainly showed that he has extraordinary abilities.”

“I must admit, Lord Targaryen,” Taygor Leniar joined in. They were having their daily discussions and he had also heard Rhaenys’ dream. “I am confused as to how one with dragonblood was able to communicate with one not having it, but there have been some studies in the interactions between the water magic of the old Rhoynar and the fire magic of Valyria.”

“What do you mean?” Rhaenys was curious.

“Magic manifests in many forms. Besides the fire of Valyria, you have the water of the Rhoyn and now the magic of these forest children. But one theory that my ancestors came up with was that while magic may have different forms, the foundation was the same and therefore allowing its users access to a parallel world where all can interact.”
“It’s a complicated theory and one that I myself don’t fully comprehend, but magic is a tool that can be used to alter this reality, but it also allows what my ancestors thought to be a way to enter another reality that exists alongside our own. In that reality,” Taygor used his hands to visualize for Aerion and Rhaenys Targaryen. “No matter what magic you practice, as long as you have magic, you can access and interact with other practitioners no matter the distance or location. There, the rules of the world as we know it doesn’t apply and we’re not as disconnected in that space as we are now. In essence, that space allows a coexistence of various types of magic and allowing its users to communicate with one another.”

Rhaenys felt her head hurt. “Taygor, these are very abstract concepts, but you mean to say that I may have entered that space through my dreaming?”

“Possibly. That’s the only explanation that I can offer.”

Rhaenys heard her father sigh. “So, Rhæ, you’ve made contact with the Starks before you even met them. And he said that he couldn’t explain everything yet?”

“Yes.”

Her father nodded, accepting the situation. “I might have to send some feelers to north of the Neck. I had a few dealings with Lord Manderly at White Harbour years ago, so I might contact him to see what the situation with the Starks is like. What’s troubling is the part about the lions, the thorns, and the falcons, because those represent Houses Lannister, Gardener, and Arryn. What are their roles in all of this?” their father thought aloud.

“Brandon Snow said something about people wanting to destroy us because we have connections to magic,” Rhaenys answered.
“And if those houses have something in common, they’re connected to the Faith, whose septons have not hidden their dislike of us or our Valyrian heritage. But how will they attack us? We haven’t attacked them and what’s more curious is that your dreams and Brandon Snow didn’t mention the stag, which probably means that we will subjugate the Durrandons,” their father rubbed his chin in thought.

Rhaenys nodded, not denying his reasoning. But before they could continue their conversation, a servant entered the open solar in the manor house. “Milord, pardon me for the interruption.”

“What is it?” their father asked.

“Urgent message from Lord Aegon. The messenger said something about it relating to King Argilac.”

Their father stood up, snatched the message, and dismissed the servant. After opening the message, he grew more agitated with each time he read it. He clenched his teeth in anger, surprising Rhaenys.

“Read it aloud,” their father handed the message to Rhaenys. “And clearly.”

Rhaenys cleared her throat. “Father, I have news regarding our advances against the Arrogant king. After Jae and Vis blunted the Swann force west of Bronzegate, we moved to besiege Bronzegate and began preparations for a storm on the walls. I had to return to the bridge on the Wendwater at the behest of cousin Daemon to oversee the additional reinforcements from the riverlands along with Jae and Vis, leaving Orys in charge of the siege. However, while Jae and Vis recommended using a tactic similar to the one used on Haystack Hall, Orys met with the head of House Buckler and made a deal. If Bronzegate wasn’t relieved by the next moon, then Lord Buckler would surrender the castle to us and assist in our advance on Storm’s End. If he is relieved, then the castle would remain in Durrandon hands.” Oh, no, Orys. Why did you do that?

Their father was understandably indignant. “I get that you want things done the honorable way, son, but this was very unwise,” he thought aloud. “Because of his lack of patience with sieges and his want for things done ‘the proper way’, he put us in a bind. If we don’t honor this agreement, our word will have no weight. We’re outnumbered and now, Orys went behind our back and
basically told us to wait for the enemy to come to them. This is exactly the Arrogant king’s fight!”

Rhaenys sighed, shaking her head at Orys’ ignorance. It was no secret that he didn’t like Jaenyx’s approach to war and how Aegon just went along with it, as he trained in the knightly conduct of war. She loved her brother, but he just ruined a perfectly good strategy of keeping the enemy off-balance. Now, they had to fight outnumbered in the field because of his promise and the Arrogant king will never allow this to go unanswered since he’d understand what losing Bronzegate would do.

However, Rhaenys also understood that Jaenyx would likely disregard Orys’ promise and go take Bronzegate anyway. If that occurred, there would be a huge fight between her brother and good-brother, with effects possibly leading to a permanent rift. She had to stop that before it happened.

Rhaenys stood up and left the solar. “Where are you going, Rhae?” their father called out.

“To Bronzegate. They might need all of the dragons present when we do fight against the Arrogant king.” Rhaenys was set as she dressed in her dragon coat, strapped her dagger and quiver, and placed her bow on her back before proceeding to Meraxes. She hoped that her lessons with Haru for the last few weeks would be enough as she yelled “Sōvēs!” to Meraxes and flew into the air towards the Storm kingdom.

Chapter End Notes

Lots and lots of stuff to uncover. The beginning part with Haru making Rhaenys kill that prisoner took me back to when I was training in martial arts, but under much less extreme circumstances. Still, it messed me up and I hope I portrayed that well.

And now, probably the most controversial part of the story so far: the magical communication between Rhaenys and Brandon Snow. I am going with the theory that Brandon Snow had the greensight, since how else would he gotten the idea of using weirwood arrows to kill the dragons before Torrhen Stark surrendered. Rhaenys might have the dragon dreams, but as I explained, it's a different form that greensight. That being said, I have this idea that all of the magic in Westeros might have different forms, but they have the same foundation. My main source was Brynden Rivers, who had the blood of dragons and the blood of the First Men before becoming the Three-Eyed Raven. I'm guessing that a combination of multiple forms of magic allowed for a very potent mixture and thus allowing Brynden Rivers to be this great greenseer, since
two forms of magic is more powerful than one. Also, the idea about the magic allowing access to a common space existing in a parallel reality was inspired by a lot of theories from theoretical physics and metaphysics regarding the multi-verse. But don't take my word for it, as I don't fully comprehend both since many of them just go over my head. But I hope my explanations were sufficient.

And Orys making that deal with Lord Buckler, inspired by Edward Bruce with the governor of Stirling Castle before the Battle of Bannockburn (1314). You fucked it, Orys!

Next, the Last Storm!!!!
“Do you realize what you’ve just done?!!” Orys was shocked at how livid Jaenyx was. Usually reserved most of the time and assertive when need be, he had never seen him so angry and his dragonfire rivalled their father’s and Aegon’s. *I should have made them privy to my plans, then they would understand.* Thankfully, Visenya put her arms around Jaenyx’s neck and kissed him on the cheek, which calmed him down considerably. But he still looked very incensed.

“You know we love you, Orys,” Aegon spoke while he crossed his arms. “But I have to agree with Jae here. You made a serious decision without telling us and now you put all of us in a situation where we can’t get out of. I told you to make preparations to storm Bronzegate while I went to the bridge at cousin Daemon’s request, but what do you do? You go behind our backs and essentially make us play by the Arrogant king’s rules.”

“That’s not what this is, Egg,” Orys responded.

“And what do you call this?” Visenya glared at Orys while her arms were still wrapped around Jaenyx. “We just eliminated the Swanns from the battlefield. We’re talking about a marcher lord here, Orys, not just some regular house. In addition, Jae and I were having a lot of success in attacking their weaker forces and baggage trains, denying the Arrogant king’s northern forces supplies while making them feel unsafe in their own home. The strategy that we agreed upon at Haystack Hall was working until you decided to ruin that.”

Orys knew that while Visenya loved him as a sister loved her brother, her first loyalty was to her husband and she supported Jaenyx without question. Like Aegon, Orys was happy that Visenya finally found someone who could really love and cherish her after so long, but his heart was tinged with dejection at her not understanding what he was doing.

Orys nodded. “Yes, the strategy we agreed upon was working. You and Jaenyx stopped the first of the marcher lords from mustering with the other forces of the Arrogant king while attacking his supply lines. Meanwhile, Egg and I were able to keep the main forces of the Durrrandons focused on Bronzegate while making them blind to all else. That being said and I didn’t want to say this at Haystack Hall in front of our subordinates, this strategy would only work if the Arrogant king took too long to marshal his army.”

“Dear brother, would you care to explain exactly what you’re thinking about?” Orys looked at Rhaenys. Like the others, she was very confused at Orys’ deal with Lord Buckler, but she was gracious enough to hear him out and was able to keep Aegon from getting too vexed at him. For that, he was grateful.
Orys sighed. “Sooner or later, Argilac will be able to assemble the full might of his army. We’re not dealing with Black Harren here, whose lords hesitated at his call. He may be old, but the stormlords still admire and respect him as a warrior. Vis and Jaenyx may have stopped the Swanns from joining him, but we still have other marcher lords that would answer his call such as the Selmys, the Dondarrions, and the Carons. Unlike the Swanns, they spent centuries in closer contact with the Dornish and therefore are much more battle-hardened. Not only that, we have yet to meet the Tarths, the Conningtons, the Estermonts, the Morrigens, and the Wyldes among other houses, which is a good thing. However, we won’t be fighting just a small portion of the Durrandons’ forces forever.”

“So what is your point?” Jaenyx asked impatiently.

“Before he can rally more forces against us, I thought of a way to have him come to us while giving him an opportunity that he can’t refuse. Like me and Egg, Argilac has been trained in the knightly conduct of war and understands the importance of honor. The thing about knights is that they will always attempt to win in the field with as little bloodshed as possible and honor demands that an agreement be made between two knights before combat is initiated.”

Jaenyx looked bored. Orys’ first instinct was to feel really annoyed by his lack of respect for Westerosi traditions, but was reminded that he was not of Westeros at all.

“So,” Orys continued. “By making that agreement with Lord Buckler, I ensured that Argilac will come to us. But we will have the advantage since we could choose the ground of the battle and Argilac will be so bound by honor and the need to show his potency before his sworn lords that he will not meet us with the sufficient forces.”

“What do you mean?” Rhaenys raised her eyebrows.

“I gave Argilac one moon to relieve Bronzegate before Lord Buckler surrenders the castle. We might have been in the Storm kingdom for weeks now, but a moon turn is still not enough time to assemble, supply, and train the force he needs to defeat us. Most importantly, he is under time constraints more severe than ours since we’ve been inflicting defeat after defeat upon him. If he doesn’t respond to us soon, he risks losing control of his lords. So, he’ll ride out to meet us despite not having the necessary troops.”

“Wait, how do you all know this, Orys?” Aegon asked, but he looked very impressed at Orys’ reasoning.

Orys shrugged. “It’s what I would do honestly, if I were in his boots.”

There was silence in the tent, as Orys’ explanations sunk in. Orys might not have been as sneaky as Jaenyx, as creative as Visenya, or as commanding as Aegon. However, he did understand how knights would conduct themselves in war, which extended to the lords and kings of Westeros. Orys then decided to utilize that knowledge towards making the Arrogant king march towards them.
instead of the other way around. He was not blind to the geographical obstacles of the Storm kingdom and if they had continued their advance, defeating the Durrandons would have been more difficult since they would be on the defensive. By switching their positions, Orys hoped to take away Argilac’s geographical advantages by goading him into attacking them on grounds of their choosing. They could then prepare the ground and plan out tactics to maximize their own advantages. *Hopefully, they recognize that.*

However, Jaenyx remained the detractor in the group. “*You just had to do it, huh?*”

Orys blinked. “What do you mean by that?”

Jaenyx shook his head, apparently in disapproval. “*I know that you didn’t like how we were approaching the Arrogant king. You hated all these sneaking around and tip-toeing and that got you to force this on us because of your impetuousness.*”

“Well, I have to disagree,” Orys said. “We had to fight eventually.”

“*And your response to do this behind our backs? I knew you were bullheaded, but I never thought you were foolish!*”

“Jae,” Aegon repeated, but now with his voice raised.

“Oh, I’m foolish?” Orys scoffed. “What about you? What happened to the man who fought at Wailing Willows? Was that man replaced by a craven?”

Jaenyx snorted. “*Only someone like you would confuse good sense with cowardice.*”

Orys narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean ‘someone like me?’”

Aegon stepped in. “Okay, I think that’s enough--”

“No, no, Egg. Let’s hear what he has to say to me,” Orys waved him off.

“You really want to know, Orys?” Jaenyx asked. But Orys sensed that he wasn’t going to like what he heard.

“Kessa,” Orys responded while using the few High Valyrian words he knew.
Aegon closed his eyes and shook his head, resigned to how this conversation was going. Rhaenys just stood there, anxious at the next words. Visenya obviously didn’t like the direction of the conversation, but it was clear that she would stand by Jaenyx no matter what.

“All right. I can see that you do resemble Lord Targaryen in a way, but you’re too far disconnected from the blood of Valyria. Your mannerisms, your way of speech, your posture, how you think, it’s all part of this backwater. I would think that someone of true Valyrian stock would not stoop so low to the ways of these mongrels.”

Aegon looked at Jaenyx with shock, as did Rhaenys. Visenya tightened her lips, but still held on to Jaenyx.

“You have the blood of a great people flowing inside you, Orys, but you choose to throw that away to become accepted by those who do not respect us or our way of life. If you were truly proud of your heritage, you would not have allowed yourself to be affected by those lesser than us.”

“And what about you!?” Orys shouted back. “Yes, you’re a dragonrider and what you’ve brought to our family can never be repaid no matter how hard we try. But you’re clinging onto the ways of a civilization that already had its chance. And you think that you’re so above those in Westeros that you don’t have to conform to their ways? That attitude is a sure way of getting yourself killed and nobody will support you when you need them.”

“I already have people to help me. I don’t need others,” Jaenyx responded.

“Huh!” Orys huffed. “You said to our father when you did that stunt with the dowry that we’re all that’s left of Valyria, but I don’t think you really believe that.”

“What do you mean?”

Orys pointed a finger at him. “You say you’re proud of being a Valyrian, but you practice Yi-Tish combat arts and speak their language. If you really were so stuck in the ways of Valyria, you wouldn’t have married Vis or treated Rhae and Egg with love in the first place since they’re both of Valyria and of Westeros. Also, you wouldn’t have taken the time to learn the common tongue if you truly disrespected the ways of Westeros. So the way I see it, just as I’m not strongly rooted in Valyria, the same could be said of you.”

Orys could see that a hint of doubt flash across Jaenyx’s face, which meant that he was getting to him. He felt the need to press further. “Oh, that’s right. Maybe you don’t know this. But the world is different now and I thought you’d understand the necessity to adapt like our father did before you came. The Valyria as you know it is dead, gone from the face of the earth. And it’s never coming back, just like your parents and brother.”

Rhaenys gasped. Aegon’s mouth dropped, horrified at what Orys just said. Visenya sucked in a
mouthful of air, upset that Orys would be so unwise as to bring Jaenyx’s deceased family and thus her family into this.

But nothing prepared Orys for when he looked at Jaenyx. Usually calm, his face twisted and turned while he was aggressively grinding his teeth. Every part of his body vibrated while his fists tightened into shaky balls. As for the eyes, Orys never seen such intense flames and such rage emerging from behind his sharp amethyst eyes, making him flinch. What’s more, he heard a dragon screech outside, specifically from Cloudwynd. But unlike the others, this was a cry filled with pain. Dragons were bonded to their riders and would understand instantly what their riders were feeling.

It was only then that Orys finally understood what he had just said. “Jaenyx,” he began, eyes widening as he felt horror and shame burst through him. “I didn’t… I…”

His self-control vanished, Jaenyx moved to launch himself at Orys. The only reason why he was not bashing his head in was both Visenya and Aegon moving to restrain him. Rhaenys was just too shocked by what was happening to respond.

“Jae, come on! He didn’t mean it!” Aegon tried to reason with him.

“I don’t care! He brought my family into this!”

“But he’s our brother and thus our family. I won’t let you hurt him,” Aegon responded while struggling to push him away from Orys.

Then, Visenya whispered something in his ear. Orys didn’t know what she said, but it apparently calmed him down. As for Orys, he stood there with his shoulders slumped and head downwards, mortified at what he just said.

“Everyone!” Aegon came to the middle of the group after Jaenyx was calmer. “Let’s not forget about why we’re here in the first place. What’s done is done and we have a battle to plan. Let’s just focus on winning against Argilac and we will sort this all out afterwards. Can we agree on that?”

Although ten years younger than him, Aegon was more assertive and commanding than Orys could ever hope to be. Others would have their pride hurt at being surpassed in such areas by their younger siblings, but Orys was mature enough to know when to let those able take the reins. Leave it to Aegon to reassert control over a volatile situation.

Jaenyx sighed, but still shot daggers at Orys. Before he said anything, Visenya spoke up. “We agree on that, Egg. Let’s win first,” she nodded before dragging Jaenyx out of tent.

As for Aegon, he moved to Rhaenys and put his arm around her shoulders as they also left.
Aegon shook his head. “Not now, brother. You’re in the wrong as much as Jae is. But we have more pressing matters to attend to. After we fight against Argilac, we’ll all talk together.”

Orys opened his mouth to protest, but closed it out of shame for what he said and seeing the sense in Aegon’s words. Nodding, Orys saw Aegon and Rhaenys leave the tent.

Orys collapsed onto a chair as he gazed upon a map of the Storm kingdom. *Oh, the gods. Please forgive me for my foolishness*, Orys prayed in the hopes of willing his shame away.

The last time he and Jaenyx exchanged any words still weighed on Orys’ mind. Aegon and Rhaenys still talked to him and while Visenya gave him no ill will towards him through her soft gaze, she kept her distance from him out of respect for her husband. He wanted to defend his reasoning for getting Argilac out onto the field of battle, but he instead endangered the tranquility in their family. But as Aegon said, they will sort all of this out after the battle.

They still kept a small force surrounding Bronzegate to prevent Lord Buckler and his garrison from intervening while moving the majority of their forces towards an elevated position southwest of the castle. It was far enough from Bronzegate to prevent any of its archers letting loose on them while close enough for its defenders to bear witness to the battle.

Their elevated position, which in reality included many hills with many boulders, sloped down to a field that had creeks on both sides of it. This grassy field ran from the forests that stopped just south of Bronzegate towards the various mountains that surrounded Storm’s End, and a large portion of this field was utilized as a bread basket for both Houses Buckler and Durrandon. The hills where they were positioned on ran from one creek to the next and coupled with the forests behind them and on their sides, this was a perfect defensive position.

The dragons began constructing wooden stockades to position their archers and other missile weapons and placed wooden stakes in front of them. While the hills could slow down a cavalry charge, they weren’t taking any chances and both the stakes and the stockades would blunt any charge by armored knights against their more lightly-armored troops. Like in the other battles, the archers would use armor-piercing arrows but were also told to use broadhead arrows against infantry. Although not as fast as their other arrows, broadheads were particularly nasty in that their main purpose was to cause as much damage to the flesh as possible and any attempt to pull them out would result in massive bleeding. Even if they were shot in the arm, their enemies would certainly be incapacitated enough to get them out of the fight.

As they were constructing the wooden stockades and further studying the field before them, Rhaenys and Visenya rode on Meraxes and Vhagar to scout out the enemy. When they came back,
they discovered the forces of the Durrandons marching towards Bronzegate and estimated them to be a week away. Regarding their numbers, Rhaenys and Visenya both estimated at least fifteen thousand troops were converging on their positions, an impressive host to have assembled within a moonturn. Just yesterday, scouts on the ground had returned to the position on the hills and informed them of the oncoming host while confirming that at least fifteen thousand troops were indeed approaching them, with at least eight thousand cavalry. Facing them were eleven thousand men coming from various houses such as the Tarareons, the Blackwoods, the Rosbys, and the Stokeworths alongside two thousand cavalry. But Argilac would be foolish to assume that they were green, as the core had fought from Rook’s Rest to Haystack Hall while the Blackwoods had fought with them from Wailing Willows to their fight in the woods against the Swanns. Whatever disadvantage they may have had was compensated by how battle-hardened their troops had become.

That night, Orys, Aegon, Jaenyx, Visenya, Rhaenys, Chrass Rivers, Rhaedar Tarareon, Jon Rosby, and other commanders convened at a tent in the forests between their position on the hills and Bronzegate to go over their tactical plan. The creeks and the forests would prevent Argilac’s cavalry from conducting an effective charge, which was the greatest asset available to them. They could not outflank them, as the creeks and forests would such movements and would force them to form up within the space between the creeks. So essentially, they only had one way to attack them and that was to advance towards the hills.

At the same time, they would be remiss to think that their cavalry was the only asset they had. From what Rhaenys and Visenya found out, they had scores of infantry, men-at-arms, and bowmen accompanying them. It was possible that they could begin the battle with an arrow barrage and if any of those bowmen came from the Dornish Marches, many would die. And if their infantry and men-at-arms were able to get into close contact with their own troops, they would be hard pressed to push them back. More importantly, there was a possibility that Argilac might not attack at all since he would know better than to attack an army on higher ground, in which he would elect to delay the battle until substantial forces from his bannermen came to his aid.

But their problems didn’t stop there. While atop Meraxes, Rhaenys saw storm clouds coming from the southeast over the narrow sea. They all then cursed themselves for not taking into account the possibility of rains during the summer years, given how humid the Storm kingdom was. Rain during battle could work for and against both sides, as the attackers might be slowed by mud but that meant the defenders wouldn’t be able to use their more mobile assets in the battle. The dragons could undoubtedly turn the tide of the battle, but no one had used them in rain before and they could be in serious trouble if their dragonfire was somehow affected by water.

Thus, their only option was to force Argilac to attack him. They would position most of their forces behind the stockades while placing a few forces in front of them as bait. But in order for the enemy to spring the trap, they had to put a couple of their leading commanders in order to make the bait more enticing for Argilac. Orys volunteered, with Aegon following. Rhaenys kissed him hard on the cheek before telling him to come back safe while Visenya and Jaenyx silently told them “Good luck,” but with Jaenyx avoiding eye contact with Orys.

Once the enemy got close enough to the bait, they would fight for a few moments before retreating to the stockades and within lethal range of their archers. They expected Argilac to send his cavalry forward, which would allow the archers to take out his best assets in the first moments of the
battle. Hopefully, the rain would create enough of a muddy bog to slow them down and their subsequent infantry charge before they made their own attack. Once the enemy charge had been blunted, they would move forward with an infantry advance filed with pikes, axes, and swords under the cover of arrows. They would then use the bog to their advantage against the enemy and work their way through. Meanwhile, the dragons would be used to take the archers, any reserves, and cut off any retreat.

By the morning, they had went over the plan again when they saw the enemy host emerge from the mountains and on the opposite end of the field. Orys could make out banners such as the Estermonts, the Tarths, the Penroses, and even two marcher houses in the Selmys and the Dondarrions. That was quick, Orys thought, even though he saw less forces than he would expect of marcher lords, which meant they only had the forces they could muster at short notice.

But what was intriguing about the host was who was in the front. There were twenty knights with yellow sashes over their plate armor flanking a man dressed in elaborate plate armor. Unlike the knights who wore helms, he wore a golden coronet that seemed to have been fashioned from stag antlers. Although his bushy gray beard and his fading black hair growing past his shoulders betrayed his age, this man held his head up high and looked towards his adversaries with a steel gaze. Age may have taken away any good looks he was known for in the past, but both his blue eyes and his posture told his enemies to disregard his warrior capabilities at their own peril if they thought that age made him impotent. He had what seemed to be a greatsword strapped to his left side and a yellow cape lined with black clasped to his shoulders. With this particular entourage carrying the banners of a black stag against a field of yellow and a crown around its neck, Orys had no doubt in his mind on who this was.

_The Arrogant king himself. He really came_, Orys thought with glee. His plan had succeeded in drawing him out. If they could capture or even kill him, it would be over.

Orys and Aegon both mounted their horses and led a group of pikemen and men-at-arms to the front of the stockades. Jaenyx and Visenya remained behind them to coordinate their arrow volleys and infantry advance when the time came. Like at Wailing Willows, Rhaenys would command the dragons until later and because her abilities in the bow would probably not hold up well in battle yet. Their roles confirmed, they moved into position. A strangely dead silence flooded the field as both armies got into formation and waited for the other to make the first move.

But as they both prepared to end their stand off, Orys looked up and saw grey clouds forming over the field. Then, the distinctive crack of lightning pierced through followed by a deafening thunder. The storms coming in would only make the battle more difficult to fight and there were so many things that could go wrong whenever rain came down on the fighting.

“Nervous, brother?” Orys asked to Aegon. Orys could sense that he was a little anxious, which Orys admittedly also felt.

“That’s what will keep you alive, because why else would we fight harder if we didn’t want to live?”
“Well, Egg, you have Rhae to fight for. You have someone to return to,” Orys stated.

But Aegon sensed his other meaning. “Don’t worry, Orys, you’ll find someone,” he grasped his shoulder. Orys wanted to say more, but the battle and the rain were more pressing and he just nodded his thanks.

Just then, another bolt of lightning cracked through the clouds followed by even more piercing thunder. Orys felt a raindrop splash on his face before what seemed like a drizzle turned to a heavy pour. Nodding to Aegon, they brought down their helms to keep their faces as dry as possible. The heavy rain turned to the field into a muddy bog, just as they knew it would. I pray to the gods that this works.

What they did not expect was cheering from Argilac’s host and the Arrogant king himself riding along his army. Both Orys and Aegon were able to hear his words.

“You feel this rain? You hear this thunder? I am the blood of Durran Godsgrief, who even the gods couldn’t destroy with their storms. I have fought with you all in Dorne, at Summerfield, against Black Harren, and at Volantis. For many years have I led you all against those that would take your homes and families away from you, and now the gods have decided to reward your loyalty with this storm. Those dragonspawn shits may have burned Harrenhal, but they will stand no chance against the might and valor of those who would fight under the banner of the Durrandons. This storm is only the gods giving their blessing to coat this field of battle with their blood. Will we let these foreigners take our lands?!” The soldiers of the stormlords all yelled “No!” “Will we allow them one more inch onto this field?!” Another “no.” “Will we let them burn our homes like they did to Black Harren?!” Another “no.” “Then, let us fight and show them all what true warriors are!!!” Argilac drew his greatsword to more cheering from his men.

Aegon sighed. “They really don’t understand, do they?”

“Only one way to make them understand, brother,” Orys replied. “And unfortunately, you’ll have to spill their blood.”

“Let’s get into position,” Aegon nudged his horse towards the left side while Orys went to the right. Both made sure to make themselves as visible and identifiable as possible so as to make their enemies come to them.

After Orys got onto the right, he saw a knight charging towards him, his lance lowered and his destrier galloping as hard as it could through the mud. The forces of the stormlords had grown quiet as they watched one of their own galloping onto the field ahead of them. Judging from how Argilac was watching, this knight was apparently acting against orders and the impatience of youth pushing him to ride ahead of his brothers.

Orys could tell that this knight was very young despite his lowered helm. He had a rather modest stature, which he made up for with a well-maintained set of plate armor, a longsword at his left
side, an axe on his right side, and armor on his horse. This knight’s war horse was powerful, made more evident by how fast it was moving despite the mud. As he got closer, Orys could make his sigil on his armor: three stalks of yellow wheat. If he remembered correctly, this was the sigil of House Selmy of Harvest Hall, one of the marcher lords. Judging from this knight’s age and how recklessly he was acting, he must not be directly in line to inherit any lands and was thus seeking personal glory by striking at one of his king’s enemy’s leaders.

Orys shook his head, his displeasure at killing a man who seemed to have just earned his spurs hidden behind his helm. However, it was either him or Orys, so he prepared himself for the Selmy knight, Ser whatever his name was.

Orys and his horse stood completely still, waiting as the knight galloped closer to him. He fought at a few tourneys on the mainland years ago and knew how this went, but he could tell that this knight must’ve confused jousting with a real fight from how he kept his lance steady and maintained his direction. If Orys was fighting a few years ago, he would have done the same thing, but the recent battles made him wiser on the differences between tourneys and the real thing alongside the importance of approaching battle with solemnness.

Orys stood his ground until the last moment, when the Selmy knight’s lance almost touched him. Orys then maneuvered his horse quickly to one side, stood up in his stirrups, pulled out his Valyrian steel axe, and slammed Selmy so hard that his helm was pierced through and Orys could hear bone cracking and blood spattering. Pulling out his axe, he saw that the knight’s head was split in two and he was thankful for the helm covering what was left of it as the knight’s lifeless body fell into the mud. He killed before, but Orys felt something strange for this young knight that decided to act against his king’s orders.

However, just as he sat back down on his horse, Orys heard cheers from behind him. Turning around, he saw that the troops on both sides of the stockades and thrusted their weapons high and shouting “Hurrah” for their commander. He looked upon Visenya, who smiled at him with pride. He looked at Jaenyx, who still stared at him with hostility but whose gaze slightly softened at Orys’ undeniable courage. He looked towards Aegon, who gave him a nod but Orys knew that despite the helm he was smiling.

Then, Orys heard four dragon roars pierce through the stormy skies, all of them roaring in approval. He had no doubt what Rhaenys felt as all four dragons descended upon the Argilac’s host. A mixture of blue, black, orange, and yellow dragonfire came upon the stormlords’ bowmen, consuming them and turning them all into ash before they even got a volley out. Balerion and Meraxes also shot their flames at the rear of the stormlord host, cutting off the enemy’s retreat just like at Dragonstone and at Wailing Willows. This was to force the enemy forward while taking away their bowmen. The mud and the rain would slow them down as they advanced towards the stockade.

Two wings of heavy stormlord cavalry advanced ahead of the main host before galloping into a charge, no doubt to avenge their fallen brother but also to destroy troops that seemed out of place outside of the stockades.
“Form up!” Orys ordered as the pikes got into a schiltron. Although they were also deep in the mud, they didn’t have to worry about moving as much as their mounted adversaries. As long as they held position, they could withstand the first charge. They were also out of range of their own bowmen, but that was the point as their purpose was to draw more of the enemy close before they unleashed their missiles.

“Steady!” Orys ordered as the cavalry came closer. But as they did, they were slowed by the muddy bog and only their persistence kept their horses going forward.

At last, the enemy cavalry slammed into Orys’ schiltron, but many were unhorsed as the troops stood fast and their pikes stabbed into their horses while many fell into the mud. Scores of horses and knights fell into the mud while the knights that could stand attempted to fight their way through the pikes. However, they were cut down by the pikes’ thrust and struggled to move through the many horses and knights that were struggling to wade through the bog. Orys looked to the left and saw the same result.

Orys then looked back towards the field and saw two more wings of heavy cavalry galloping towards them. Their purpose served, Orys yelled, “Withdraw, men! Withdraw!” Raising their pikes, the schiltron troops moved fast towards the creek on their right and ran along its shores to reposition behind the stockades. After seeing most of them making it, Orys himself withdrew and made it to the center stockade, where he met Aegon, Visenya, and Jaenyx.

“Good job, brothers,” Visenya said. “Now comes the next part.”

“Indeed, Vis,” Aegon nodded. The remnants of the first cavalry charge attempted to reform themselves while the second cavalry charge came closer to the stockades.

“Archers, nock!” Visenya ordered. Jaenyx also ordered the Tarareons to ready their javelins, who would throw them over the stockages while the archers would let loose their volleys over them and through its openings.

“Volley, loose!” A stream of javelins and armor-piercing arrows slammed down onto the combined knight charge, cutting many of them down while incapacitating many more. Man and beast alike were not spared as arrow and javelin buried themselves in both. The knights who by some miracle managed to remain mounted were stopped from going further by the stakes planted in front of the stockades, before they were cut down by arrows shot through the openings. All the while, the rain poured on them and thunder continued to echo in the skies.

Eventually, the combined arrow and javelin barrages and the mud slowing them down caused combined waves of Argilac’s mounted forces to break and retreat. Their enemies had attempted to outflank the stockades, but strong responses on both ends prevented them from doing so. Upon seeing that Argilac had used his mounted forces, they all got out from behind the stockades and formed up schiltrons while their own mounted forces began to gallop along the creeks.

Orys would lead the right flank while Aegon took the right and Visenya and Jaenyx took the
center. Their dragons remained behind the stockades as Rhaenys would not be able to guide them with the rain slamming against her face.

Orys then saw that the enemy infantry was advancing towards them, with Argilac and his personal entourage leading them while still on horseback. He prepared himself, fighting the urge to fight him head on and focusing on maintaining formation. The schiltron marched forward steadily, their pikes lowered while the enemy infantry suddenly broke ranks and charged at them.

“Hold, men!” Orys shouted as the enemy infantry came closer. Then, came the crash as they collided against each other, pike meeting sword and axe. However, the pikes stood true as weeks of instilling discipline into the men had paid off. As scores of the enemy infantry were cut down, the schiltron simply stepped over their corpses as they pressed forward. At the same time, their archers had formed in front of the stockades and let loose at will against the enemy, bringing more of them down.

Slowly but steadily, they pushed the enemy force towards their end of the field as bodies of both forces littered the field behind them. But it was clear who was keeping steady and who was slowly losing ground. Adding to their problems were the Tarareon mounted archers forming their customary circle and shooting into the enemy’s flanks.

Finally deciding that he had enough of waiting, Orys shouted, “Break ranks! Engage the enemy!” Bringing up his axe, he moved through the schiltron and slammed his axe down onto an enemy footman’s head. Prompted by their leader, the schiltron broke ranks, dropped their pikes and started engaging the enemy at their own will with their swords and axes. Soon, the other schiltron followed suit as thousands engaged in close combat, turning the field into a muddy brawl.

Careful not to slip on the mud, Orys buried his axe into an enemy’s chest before moving onto another. He parried another’s sword thrust by grappling onto the blade with his axe’s head, pulling on it and ripping the sword from his hand before swinging it upwards towards his left leg, chopping it off and allowing Orys to finish him with slam against his chest.

Orys waded through the mud, cutting through many other enemy infantry before he came across a knight with a yellow sash. With his longsword drawn, the knight then attempted to thrust at Orys before he slid to the right and used his shaft to strike at his face, stunning him. Orys then spun around and buried the axe against his back, making the knight yell in pain as he collapsed on the ground before Orys then threw his axe down onto his head, cutting through his helm and splitting his head in two like he did with that Selmy knight.

What Orys did not expect to see next was the Arrogant king himself. His antler crown still adorning his head, he was covered in mud, his white hair and beard drenched in rainwater, and his greatsword slashing through one of their men’s throats, a Stokeworth by the looks of him. Even in his old age, he could still kill and using a greatsword took skill and strength to handle. It wasn’t long before the Arrogant king turned around and noticed Orys.

Orys saw a fury behind his eyes as the Arrogant teeth made visible his teeth. He gripped his
greatsword tightly as he readied himself.

“You!” the Arrogant king bellowed. “You killed my nephew, my sister’s son!”

Orys knew that he was talking about the Selmy knight. “I’m sorry,” he simply offered as he readied his axe.

“No matter,” the Arrogant king shook his head. “He shall be avenged.” He charged through the mud and struck at Orys, who just managed to avoid his thrust.

Orys parried the Arrogant king’s greatsword as he swung downwards. However, he proved his warrior reputation true by bringing his helm to Orys’ face, stunning him and making him step backwards. He then thrusted again, this time stabbing him through the opening in his armor over his waist.

Yelling in pain, Orys grasped his waist as he saw blood coming out of it.

“Hurts, doesn’t it, bastard?” Argilac taunted. “Oh, I know who you are. The bastard of Dragonstone, the one who can’t even claim a woman for his own. This day will show why bastards are never meant to outlast their fathers and why no one spills the blood of Durran Godsgrief.”

“If it is your wish, King Argilac, I shall save you from the fires that have consumed Harrenhal. I will give you a soldier’s death,” Orys shot back as steadied himself and brought his axe back up.

“You can try, bastard,” Argilac said before he brought up his greatsword and charged at him with a yell.

Orys brought his axe up, but as Argilac closed the distance, he feigned striking from above and instead ducked as he avoided the greatsword’s swing before using the axe’s shaft to push him away and throwing him off-balance. Orys then swung his axe downward and struck him in the right foot, prompting a painful cry from Argilac.

Orys took out the axe before he heard, “Protect the king!” He prepared himself to fight more of Argilac’s entourage, only to see Aegon, Visenya, and Jaenyx intervene alongside Chrass Rivers, Rhaedar Tarareon, Kenzou Haru, and others. With all of them keeping his personal guard busy, Orys continued the fight.

Argilac still had powerful swings, but he couldn’t move as much with his right foot destroyed. Seeing his chance, Orys parried another of his swings before bringing the shaft up to his face, stunning the Arrogant king again and breaking his nose before he used his axe’s head to grab onto his greatsword and force it out of his hand. Orys threw a final punch at his face, knocking him to the ground and making collapse into the mud.
Orys let the moment sink in for a short moment. He had just disarmed and incapacitated Argilac Durrandon, one of the great warrior-kings of Westeros and the one who slayed Garse Gardener at Summerfield. The whole fight seemed so… dreamlike to him, as knights rarely fought and won against a king and even rarer for bastards to do so. Shaking out of his daze, Orys pulled out his dagger as the Arrogant king got up and brought it to his throat.

“Yield!” Orys yelled as loudly as he could so that the rest of the enemy army could hear and see their king on his knees. Gradually, the fighting stopped as all looked upon Orys, the bastard of Dragonstone, holding the Durrandon king at his mercy.

“Well, what do you know? The bastard of Dragonstone managing to wound a king. Would you like my crown?” Argilac dryly remarked.

“Yield, Your Grace,” Orys decided to afford him the respect he deserved. “I have no wish to kill you.”

“If you believe that I will allow myself to be taken prisoner to be ransomed, by a bastard no less, you are gravely mistaken. You promised me a soldier’s death, so give it,” Argilac asked strongly.

Orys looked at Aegon, Visenya, and Jaenyx. While Jaenyx looked as if he didn’t care what happened, both Aegon and Visenya looked at him with trust, showing that they would support his decision at that moment no matter what it was. Such was why Orys would fight and die for his family no matter what, as they treated him as their brother and not as a bastard.

Taking a breath, Orys stared back at Argilac. “For the crimes against Dragonstone and our ally House Belaerys, you are now in our custody.”

“KILL ME NOW!” Argilac shouted, now out of desperation.

“No,” Orys shook his head. “If you think me a man to kill another on his knees, you thought wrong. You will come back to Dragonstone with us and you will be valuable in negotiating an end to this pathetic war, one that you started.” Orys sheathed his dagger and turned around.

However, Orys heard Aegon yell, “Look out!” He turned around and just avoided Argilac’s dagger thrust. Pushing the dagger away, he brought up his axe and pushed the sharp edge of his axe’s head towards his chest. Flesh and bone was cut through as the axe buried itself further into Argilac’s heart. With blood coming out of his mouth, there was no doubt that Orys delivered a killing blow.

As Argilac collapsed back onto his knees, for good this time, he gave Orys a sick smile before the light left his eyes and his body hit the mud. As for Orys, he stood there, shocked that the Arrogant king would be so desperate to die in battle that he would force Orys to kill him even after the battle was over.
As Orys tried to take his axe out, he saw that the shaft was near snapping, no doubt the strike against the Selmy knight and against Argilac’s chest stressing it beyond what it could take. He would have to ask Aevor Rahitheon for another axe, or he might use this opportunity to finally get a warhammer.

Orys walked away in silence as their troops cheered for their commander and the enemies dropped their weapons and surrendered. He noticed that the rains and thunder had ceased, with calm grey clouds remaining. He didn’t know if he should be glad that his strategy paid off or disturbed by how much Argilac wanted to die after losing to him. Regardless, he would take a full day’s rest as the battle was finally over.

Chapter End Notes

Whoo, the Last Storm! And here, we have our first Orys chapter. Inspirations came from the Battle of Bannockburn (especially the duel between the Robert the Bruce and Henry de Bohun), Battle of Watling Street, and the Battle of Nagashino (thank you, Longclaw 1-6, for the suggestion). That duel between Orys Baratheon and the Selmy knight, couldn't resist thinking what would have happened had Robert Baratheon not been so merciful to Barristan Selmy.

This battle was the most difficult one so far. I could write tactics and strategies, but I was struggling to write a battle that would befit Argilac Durrandon. I didn't want to gloss over the fight between Orys and Argilac, since that will be the first major single combat in this story. So, I hope I met expectations. I also wanted to show how limited the dragons would be in the rain, so I hope I showed that well.

Regarding the argument between Jaenyx and Orys, I told you all that there will be a blowup due to Jaenyx's strong grasping of Valyria and this is one of them. Both Orys and Jaenyx are right and wrong about each other, but Orys made a huge mistake in mentioning his family. I hope I showed that well.

We have one more chapter before we wrap up the starting stages of the Conquest and move on to the major, larger part of the Conquest. Stay tuned!
Visenya VI

Chapter Notes

To all my readers, MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAVE A GREAT NEW YEAR!

Please enjoy my gift to you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

VISENYA VI

Visenya waited outside the gates of Bronzegate, now flying the three-headed red dragon banner of House Targaryen and the blue dragon banner of House Belaerys after Lord Buckler honored his agreement and surrendered his castle after seeing the battle that had killed his king. She stood beside Jaenyx, who partly remained at Bronzegate to help manage affairs but mostly to keep him separated from Orys while he and Aegon took half of their forces through the mountains southwards and towards the outskirts of Storm’s End. After that argument before the battle with the Arrogant king, Visenya and her siblings thought it best to put distance between Jaenyx and Orys so as to prevent their hot blood from precluding chances to work out their differences.

As for Visenya, she loved Jaenyx and would stand by him no matter what, but it tore her heart to see her brother and her husband come close to trading blows with each other because of how different they were. She never thought any less of Orys, as their father’s blood and the blood of dragons ran through him as it did for her, Rhaenys, and Aegon. After seeing how their mother treated him before she moved past her irrational loathing, Visenya did all she could to make him feel included in the family whether it be sparring in the training yard or taking him on a ride on Vhagar when she visited Oldtown. She didn’t think much on the whole “earning the spurs” process of knighthood, but she knew that to be knighted was a dream for Orys and she pushed his limits in their training sessions so that no one would ever dare to doubt the bastard of Dragonstone who worked for his knighthood when the time came. In return, Orys put his all in helping Visenya become the warrior dragon that all Dragonstone knew her for. The first few sessions ended miserably and in tears for Visenya, but Orys simply urged to get up and try again alongside Quenton Qoherys. Eventually, she was able to find her own way of fighting and eventually defeated both Orys and Aegon in a spar.

At the same time, one of the things that made Visenya attracted to Jaenyx was how deeply rooted he was in the ways of old Valyria. Unlike the Westerosi lordlings who were skeptical of her being skilled in the combat arms and not being the submissive lady she was expected to be, people like Taygor Leniar, Aevor Rahitheon, and Ragaemor and Maerys Tarareon never thought less of her because of that and instead allowed her to make decisions as they did for their male lords. Like
Jaenyx, the Valyrians who came with him to Dragonstone made her feel valued for the first time in her life, as people outside her family deferred to her and let her take the reins without thinking less of her because she was a woman. Ragaemor Tarareon taught her some Valyrian battle tactics she never learned before in her childhood, Maerys Tarareon proved to her through how her crew unquestionably followed her that being a woman didn’t matter as long as you were assertive, and Aevor Rahitheon taught her a few basics about blacksmithing, a trade that very few women could hope to succeed in if the strong reluctance of the male smiths said anything.

However, Visenya should have expected that Jaenyx’s stubborn clinging to Valyria would have inevitably caused conflicts with their family and that Orys wouldn’t budge in how he interacted with the world. She didn’t totally disagree with Orys, as he did have a point in regards to Valyria not coming back and how important it was to adapt. She knew that Orys would have gotten through to Jaenyx had he not mention his dead family, which included the good-father, the good-mother, and good-brother she would never meet until the afterlife. The only reason why he didn’t react badly to her talking about his dead family was because he allowed himself to be vulnerable to her and she returned the favor. They knew things about each other that not even her siblings knew about. Unfortunately, Orys didn’t have that relationship with Jaenyx and bringing up his family in the heat of the moment could only end one way for him.

Visenya hated having to choose between her brother and her husband, although she would remain at Jaenyx’s side unconditionally as a good wife should. She might not have had a good opinion on the ways of Westeros because of how the lordlings in the past treated her, but she wasn’t going to let her low opinions affect her relationship with her family.

Visenya pushed those thoughts aside, as there will be a time when she, Aegon, and Rhaenys will make Orys and Jaenyx come to terms with their differences in an amicable manner. Right now, she and Jaenyx awaited the arrival for the one that would bring an end to the war: Argella Durrandon.

Aegon and Orys were prepared to besiege Storm’s End, but their father had just arrived from their citadel on the mouth of the Blackwater Rush to Bronzegate and had them instead call for a parley with the last member of House Durrandon. Her siblings and Jaenyx all questioned his decision, as they all were aware of her meeting with Visenya and thought that she would be stubborn enough to refuse parley. However, their father stated that with Argilac dead along with a good portion of his army, her position was now insecure and she at least proved that she was smarter than her father from her last meeting with Visenya. When there was still skepticism from her siblings, their father than had Aegon and Orys go to Storm’s End with the swords and Drowned God amulets of the ironborn burned at Harrenhal along with the driftwood crown of Black Harren. By showing the possessions of their burned enemies, their father reasoned that Argilla’s situation would be more impressed upon her and that she would come to Bronzegate. In addition, their father ordered Argilac’s body to be cleaned and preserved and his greatsword to placed on his corpse out of respect.
A few days ago, Aegon and Orys sent a message to them, saying that Argella Durrandon had agreed to a parley and that they were escorting her and a few of her sworn swords to Bronzegate. _Not so like her father after all_, Visenya thought.

“Banners, over there!” called out a watchman on the wall, one of the Buckler men that had switched sides to the dragons. Visenya and Jaenyx looked closer in the distance before seeing a sizable entourage approaching the gates. Besides recognizing Aegon and Orys alongside a cavalry escort bearing the Targaryen banner, they also saw the stag sigils of House Durrandon among them. As Aegon and Orys got closer to the gates, Visenya could see Argella Durrandon more clearly, but her hard gaze softened upon seeing her.

Argella Durrandon still had the piercing blue eyes, flowing black hair, and dresses that hugged her every curve and made her look almost as graceful as Rhaenys. However, Visenya could see a hint of black circles around her eyes and a solemnness emanating from her face. She also saw that she wore a golden crown of antlers on her head, but the weight crown must have been heavy for even a strong woman like her since Visenya could tell that the past two weeks after Argilac’s death had not been kind to her. Even though she held her head high and kept a blank expression, Visenya could see right through her facade and saw that she was barely keeping it together. Her inheriting the throne of the Storm kingdom and the death of her father no matter how glorious others must’ve made it for her… _I don’t envy her position_, Visenya thought while feeling some sympathy for the Storm princess, or queen.

Aegon and Orys dismounted their horses while Argella was helped down by her sworn sword, who Visenya recognized as Ser Bruze of House Tarth from his blue sash. She saw Jaenyx giving Aegon a strong hug while giving a neutral look to Orys. At least he was smart enough to not let his feelings be known to their adversaries, which was what the Durrandons and the dragons still were. Together, she and Jaenyx turned to Argella.

“Very good to see you again, Princess Argella,” Visenya gave her a courteous smile. “Welcome to Bronzegate.”

“You are speaking to Argella Durrandon, Queen of the Storm Kingdom and Lady of Storm’s End by right, Lady Visenya,” Ser Bruze stepped in. “Address her as ‘Your Grace.’”
Here we go again, Visenya silently groaned. “Apologies, Ser Bruze. But as I said to you before, my family is not sworn to Storm’s End, so we are under no obligations to address her as such.”

Ser Bruze looked ready to bark back at Visenya’s supposed insolence, but Argella simply stared at the master-at-arms of Storm’s End and shook her head. She then looked at Visenya.

“Please forgive Ser Bruze, Lady Visenya. You remember how loyal he is to my family and the last few weeks have made him more committed to safeguarding the Durrandon name than ever. I hope you’ll excuse him for trying to order you to do something that you are not required to do,” Argella explained.

From the tone of her voice, Visenya could see more definitively that she was struggling on the inside despite trying to look the part of the royal as best as she could. It was a tone that her siblings would not be able to detect, as it was a tone only spoken by women who were independent and assertive but found both to be met with strong disapproval from men in power who preferred women to be the exact opposite. She had learned to speak in such a manner since she had to hide how much she was struggling from her family because they wouldn’t understand what it was like to have lordlings make her feel isolated because she was not what they expected her to be. She could care less about what they felt and especially so since she had a husband who would never disrespect her in a million years, but that didn’t mean that it wasn’t hard for her to cope.

“It is of no consequence, Queen Argella,” Visenya smiled while deciding to afford her the respect that came with her rightful title. Argella’s hard gaze slightly softened at her gesture. “It is not wise to let lapses in decorum affect matters of importance, especially those in regards to a peaceful resolution to our conflict, wouldn’t you agree?”

“I wholeheartedly agree, Lady Visenya,” Argella let out a small smile.

“You must be tired from your journey, along with your sworn swords. If you will all follow us into the castle so that you may receive food and wine,” Lady Visenya gestured to Bronzegate.

After settling their horses in Bronzegate’s stables, they were led into the castle’s great hall, where they were given bread and salt at their father’s behest to make Argella and her sworn swords feel more at ease. After having Bronzegate’s cooks provide meals for the Durrandon sworn swords,
their father, Visenya, Jaenyx, Aegon, and Orys let Argella Durrandon and Ser Bruze to Lord Buckler’s solar, which was occupied by Rhaenys at the moment. Their father took the lord’s chair while Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys sat on his right side and Jaenyx and Visenya on his left. Argella and Ser Bruze sat opposite of them. Their father had the servants bring two large pitchers, one filled with Arbor gold and other filled with Lys white wine, along with seven goblets.

However, Visenya noticed that Orys was looking away from Argella, not bearing to look upon the woman whose father he killed with his own hands. She looked at Rhaenys, who got the clue and had Orys look straight. She understood what Orys felt, but she wasn’t going to let her brother feel or look less than he was during their talk with Argella Durrandon.

“Thank you for coming to see us, Princess Argella,” their father began while pouring Arbor gold into his goblet before passing it on to this children and good-son. “I understand that the journey here must not have been an easy one.”

“Quite, Lord Targaryen,” Argella simply replied while ignoring him not addressing her as a queen. Ser Bruze again was about to protest, but Argella looked at him and told him not to bother.

“I’m sorry. Where are my manners? I took the liberty to have Lord Buckler break a casket of both Arbor gold and Lys white wine, both of which I understand you enjoy the most out of the other types of wine in the world. Would you like some?” their father picked up the pitcher filled with Lys white.

“You honor me, my lord, to serve me with your own hand,” Argella courteously answered. “But I must decline your offer for now. I have come to discuss matters of importance and wine is only consumed upon both sides reaching a satisfactory agreement.”

Their father nodded, impressed that she knew how such discussions went and how frank she was. “Very good, Princess Argella. But first, on behalf of Houses Targaryen and Belaerys, I extend to you our condolences on the death of King Argilac. He was a great warrior and king and he shall be remembered for all time.”

Visenya could sense some sincerity in their father’s words. Although all of Westeros knew of Argilac’s arrogance, he was courteous enough to not refer to that in front of Argilac’s daughter and
showed kindness at how positively he talked about the deceased Storm king. She also looked to Jaenyx, who nodded his seconding of their father’s words.

Argella nodded. “Thank you, my lord, for your kind words. Although, you must understand that I am skeptical of your sincerity since it was your house and your ally, House Belaerys, that were responsible for how my father met his end. The lords and smallfolk of the kingdom would not take too kindly after you killed their king.”

“Hmmm,” their father simply replied. “You’re right. But let us not go forward in our discussions with the belief that my family and our ally Lord Jaenyx Belaerys were the aggressors. Just like Black Harren bears the responsibility of starting the war against us, your father is also responsible through his usage of spies against our home. More importantly, you yourself admitted that you knew of the circumstances of the death of Garaeron Rahitheon, one of my good-son’s vassals, and you did nothing to explain your father’s actions.”

Argella sighed. “It was regrettable, how that Valyrian died. But my father offered your house an alliance to fight Black Harren when Darvin Hoare assaulted another of your good-son’s vassals. You refused, Lord Targaryen.”

“For good reasons,” their father answered. “My son that you see here, Aegon, was already married to Rhaenys, who you also see at this table. It would’ve been improper for him to take on another, as that would jeopardize relations my son would have with my daughter Lady Rhaenys. But more seriously, your father merely used the circumstances surrounding Vaeron Rahitheon’s kidnapping as a pretext to push that alliance on us. So, any alliance between our houses from that time would’ve been impossible.”

Argella blinked. “I will admit, my father was… ill-advised when he decided to send men to kidnap your good-son’s vassal and to have spies operate around your home. No one can deny that controlling the only remaining center of Valyrian steel forging would be both profitable and useful in buttressing the position of any aspiring lord or king. But, he apparently didn’t fully consider the consequences and here we are now.”

“Indeed,” their father bobbed his head. “King Argilac has died and much of forces sworn to your house are either dead or are now our prisoners. The reason I invited you here is to discuss terms of peace, since enough blood has been spilled on both sides. We are prepared to return to the sword and to dragonfire, but the outcomes of such choices are what we wish to avoid. I am sure that you
feel the same way.”

“What I don’t feel the same way as you do?” Visenya had to respect her steadfastness, but Argella should know when such traits were useful.

“Then, you are free to leave this castle and return to Storm’s End. But understand that we gave you the opportunity to spare more blood from being spilled and we will not show you mercy should we resume hostilities.”

Argella pondered the discussion. Visenya remembered that she was very much her father’s daughter, haughty to the point where she was likely to ignore good sense in the face of unfavorable circumstances. But unlike her father, she displayed intelligence from the last time they talked and was more collected than her father was. “All right, Lord Targaryen,” she finally said. “Let us discuss terms of peace. What are yours?”

Their father took a sip from his goblet. “First, House Durrandon will pay recompense for the sufferings inflicted on those sworn to House Belaerys, as it was my good-son’s vassal you killed. The price of the Valyrian steel swords your men stole in total amounts to 100 sacks of gold. House Durrandon will pay four times that number to House Belaerys and the same amount to House Targaryen as compensation for expenses incurred during our campaigning. In addition, you will give two hundred sacks of gold as part of a joint effort to reconstruct the damage from this war.”

Argella raised her eyebrows. “A thousand sacks of gold? You ask a steep prince, Lord Aerion. That amount is four years worth of Storm’s End’s taxes and revenues and I cannot provide such a sum without incurring severe financial difficulties upon my kingdom and people.”

“I understand that it is a considerable sum. I won’t change the amount that must be paid, but I will allow the sum to be made payable over the course of ten years so as to prevent as much difficulty on your part as possible. But the two hundred sacks must be provided immediately, as there is much to reconstructed.”

Visenya saw Argella slightly sulk at their father’s first term, which could only mean that he reactions will get progressively worse with the ones that came after. “And your second term?” Argella asked.
“You officially cede control of the northern reaches of the Wendwater along with its forests to our direct control. The forests in your northern reaches would be a good buffer for both of us. But allow me to disprove any notions of us taking key lands from you, as the boundaries of our control will not go past Haystack Hall, which will be the new boundary between our territories of control.”

Argella scoffed. “First, you ask me to pay an amount that will financially cripple me. Then, you’re asking me to surrender lands that by right belong to my house. Do you seek the ruin of House Durrandon?”

“Let me clarify things for you, Princess Argella,” their father leaned forward on the table. “I will not budge on the terms given to you so far. But in regards to your indemnity, I allowed very generous terms in how you can repay it. In addition, the lands comprising the northern parts of the Wendwater serve no important purpose to you other than allowing you to threaten our position in the Blackwater Bay. It’s only natural that we seek to strengthen our position on the continent against all potential adversaries.”

Visenya saw Argella sigh before getting her head back up. “And I’m guessing your third term will be the last, Lord Targaryen?”

“You are correct, Princess Argella,” their father nodded. “You must join our house in marriage.”

“What?” Visenya saw that Argella did not expect that.

“The foundations of a permanent peace between our houses can only be solved if joined in matrimony. Your father proposed an alliance between us through marriage and here, I’m merely reiterating his terms. Once we become tied, we will not have to worry about conflicts between our houses or our sworn lords for at least the duration of such a union. You will also provide a dowry, as offered by your father.”

Argella leaned back in her chair, surprise that their father would make such a suggestion. Instinctively, she glanced at Aegon and then at Jaenyx. Remembering Argella being besotted with
Valyrian beauty and how she described both Aegon and Jaenyx as “quite the stunners,” Visenya felt her fist curl up underneath the table while barely controlling her ire at the thought of Argella Durrandon even touching her husband. She looked to Rhaenys and saw that she was also barely keeping it together after hearing about Argella’s words from Rhaenys and from how she glanced at Aegon. *Tread carefully, princess*.

“And who do you suggest be the agent for such a union between our houses, Lord Targaryen?”


Visenya saw Orys look at their father, eyes widened in shock. She could sense what he was feeling. Marrying the daughter of the man he killed was unthinkable and such an instance would preclude any chance of a loving and strong marriage. It had been done before, but she knew that her brother had enough sense to understand how such a union would be near impossible to transform into a loving one in its beginning stages.

But Visenya saw that Argella was… chuckling in her seat, which turned into laughter. She knew that the princess thought the whole situation funny, but she became more annoyed at how her laughs reflected her thoughts on marrying Orys. *Understandable, but he’s still my family and I will never let anyone put them down.*

Argella eventually calmed down as her laughs slowly disappeared. “Oh, surely you jest, Lord Aerion. Not only do you want me to marry your bastard, but you want to marry the man that killed my father? I think you’ve lost your mind, my lord, if you had any to begin with.”

Before Visenya could respond, she felt Aegon pound his fists on the table and stood up from his seat, which prompted Ser Bruze to reach for his sword’s hilt. “How dare you speak to my father that way! You might be the daughter of a king, but have you forgotten how to address a lord with respect? You will apologize for that insult, princess,” Aegon addressed with disdain at that last one. It took Rhaenys to calm him down and put him back in his seat, but she shot daggers at Argella.

“Now, I understand your sentiments, Princess Argella. Lords and kings in Westeros would never allow their children to marry bastards because of the circumstances of their birth. They don’t have
Argella cocked her head straightening back and exhaling. “I retract my statement on you losing your mind, my lord.”

“Thank you, Princess,” their father nodded. “But, those are my terms for peace. An indemnity, lands, and you marrying my son. All three are non-negotiable, especially the last one, and should you agree with union, you will provide a dowry.”

Visenya looked at their father in confusion. Given the large payment imposed on House Durrandon and the lands that will be ceded to them, she was confused as to what more could she give.

“What sort of dowry, if I do agree with your marriage proposal?” Argella crossed her arms.

“In addition to the customary dowry, you will give my son the lordship of Storm’s End and transfer the loyalties of your lords to him. Once that has been done, I shall grant him the lord paramountcy of the stormlands. He will therefore set up another house to rule over the stormlords, but with you as his Lady of Storm’s End and Lady Paramount.”

Argella scoffed. “If you really think that I will just surrender my rightful crown to you and allow your family to take what had belonged in my family for thousands of years, you really don’t understand just who you’re dealing with. Plus, the stormlords will never allow an outsider to rule over them out of strong loyalty to House Durrandon and you’ll face an uprising soon, Lord Targaryen.”

Their father shrugged. “You’re correct, Princess Argella, but to an extent. I think you give the stormlords too much credit in regards to how loyal they will be to you.”
Argella narrowed her eyes. “What do you mean by that?”

“You father was no doubt one of the great warrior rulers this continent has ever seen. Everyone knows of his exploits at Volantis, Summerfield, and against the Dornish when he was just a boy. He proved himself on the field of battle several times and showed he was willing to enter the mud with his soldiers, earning him the admiration and respect of the lords and troops under his command.”

“With respect, Lord Targaryen, I know very well the accomplishments of my father. Can we get to your point?”

Visenya wanted to scold her for such rudeness. However, their father beat her to it.

“I’m about to,” their father gave her a small smile. “Your father accomplished much in his illustrious life. But what have you done, Princess Argella?”

Argella blinked. “What?”

“You are the heir to the crown of Storm kingdom by right and blood and personally, I don’t care about a woman ruling. But will the stormlords accept you as their ruler, especially when you haven’t done anything of repute to earn their loyalty? And Westeros is rarely kind to female rulers.”

Argella clenched her teeth. “Is that a threat, Lord Targaryen?”

Their father shook their head. “I merely state the facts, Princess. And I would recall history if I were you, Princess Argella. Any person worth their salt would be aware of legendary women such as Florys the Fox, Rose of Red Lake, Rowan Gold-Tree, and Agnes Blackwood. But such women were forgotten to history or were undermined by the actions of small-minded men. That is the unfortunate reality of this continent. You haven’t done anything to earn the loyalty of your father’s sworn lords and given that your house has no male heirs, your position is incredibly precarious.”
You are young and you have no accomplishments to your name, so it wouldn’t be long before an ambitious lord starts getting ideas on how to undermine your position.”

“How are you so sure of this, my lord?”

“Certainty comes with experience and age, Princess Argella. How I was able to ensure my house’s survival while surrounded by the vultures in the Blackwater Bay took trial and error, but I learned. And one valuable lesson that remained with me is that any hint of weakness will immediately be taken advantage by those with ambition. And I can guarantee to you that with your father dead, your position will become more untenable than it is.”

“And your proposal for me to marry your… natural son while giving him Storm’s End and agreeing to your terms would prevent such an eventuality from befalling me?”

Their father snorted. “Don’t be confused. I don’t care what you choice you make, but I give you my word that if you join our family in marriage, we shall give extend to you our protection from those that would wish you harm. And should you do so, you’ll remain Lady of Storm’s End and you can rule over the stormlords along with my son. With him and our house alongside you, no one will dare attempt to move against you.”

Argella took a moment to process his offer. Visenya could understand that from perspective, their father’s terms for peace were quite steep. By giving Storm’s End to Orys and having him establish his own house, Argella would be surrendering her crown and her house’s ruling over the stormlands. At the same time, it was generous considering that Argilac Durrandon was responsible for starting the war in the first place.

“I take it that I have to swear fealty first before I accept these terms, Lord Targaryen?”

Their father shrugged. “It’s a small price to pay for peace, Princess.”

Argella nodded before rising up, with their father, Visenya, Jaenyx, Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys
following suit. Orys avoided his gaze on Argella, which annoyed Visenya a bit since that was very uncharacteristic of him to stare away from a beautiful woman.

“I think we’re done here, Lord Targaryen. You displayed good sense and intelligence at this moment, but no one of royal standing has ever kneeled to a simple lord. It shall not happen, and it never will. Ser Bruze,” Argella gestured to her master-at-arms as she made her way to the door.

“I would strongly suggest you consider my offer, Princess Argella,” their father called out to her while stopping her in her tracks. “You are free to leave Bronzegate at any moment and you are safe on these grounds as we have extended guest rights to you and your men. But understand that the moment you return to Storm’s End, hostilities will resume and we will show no mercy as we have shown Black Harren because we gave you the opportunity to negotiate an end to our war. I cannot guarantee that Storm’s End will protect you from dragonfire and many have already died from fighting, your father among them. I prefer that we come to a peaceful resolution.”

Argella stood there for a moment, not turning around. “Before I go, I must ask after my father’s body.”

“No need to, Princess,” their father replied. “I have arranged for his body to be cleaned and readied for burial and I shall return to you his sword. Consider it an act of goodwill.”

“Thank you, my lord,” Argella nodded without looking back, but Visenya could hear a slight crack in her voice before she saw Argella go through the door. After she left, the tension left the solar as everyone relaxed. All except Orys, who was still processing what their father offered the Durrandon princess.

“What are you thinking, son?” their father looked at Orys.

“Why did you do that, father?” Orys asked, shock still in him.

“Are you referring to offering you in marriage to Argella?” Orys didn’t respond, but he didn’t need
“Aegon is already taken, and Jaenyx is not under us. As you’ve killed the Arrogant king, by right of conquest, you should be the new Lord of Storm’s End and the ruler over the stormlords. You should know that Westeros assents to rulers who took their claim on the field of battle and you’ve done exactly that, Orys. It should go to you.”

Orys cocked his head while raising an eyebrow. “I know there’s more behind your offer, father. You might be well-versed in how Westeros is run, but that is separate from how you treat your own children.”

Their father sighed before nodding. “You would be correct, son. I figured that it was a time you found a woman.” Save for Orys, everyone in the room looked at their father. “You are nine and twenty, and the only women that you’ve been with were the whores on Dragonstone and whatever maids you could get your hands on from Driftmark and Claw Isle. I don’t care what others say about you,” their father glanced at Jaenyx, who had heard about their argument and was not too pleased with how his good-son described Orys. “You are my son, and I will not allow one of my blood to have relations with those beneath our stations. But more than that, I became a better man because of my wife. She ended my whoring days and she put my vices in check. Whatever success I may have had as a lord and father was because of her.”

Visenya knew that while their father was not as open in his love and affection for their mother as Aegon was to Rhaenys and her to Jaenyx, they loved each other nonetheless. Lesser-minded lords would have scolded their ladies for slapping them on the upside of their heads or cursing at them whenever they fell out of line, but their father proved to be the better one and allowed her to run Dragonstone and other affairs alongside him. Thankfully, Aegon was just like their father in those regards and so was Jaenyx.

Their father came to Orys and clasped his shoulder. “If what Visenya said about Argella Durrandon was true, she would have enough sense to accept our offer. Besides that, she is young, beautiful, intelligent, and has inherited the strength that her father was known for. You’ll be in good hands once you’re married to her.”

“I’m still not sure, father,” Orys said. “Will she really be a loving wife to me, considering that I killed her father? Also, she is nine and ten and I fear that our age gap will cause difficulties.”

Their father waved it off. “There have been far larger age gaps in unions between lords and royals before, and a difference in ten years is not terribly serious. If she displayed that much intelligence
and strong will right now, imagine how much smarter and stronger she will be further down the road. She’ll be a good woman for you, son. In regards to you killing Argilac, Argella Durrandon should understand that it was war and that deaths cannot be avoided. I am sorry that I cannot help you in that area, son, because no one in this room has been in your position. But I will suggest that you display understanding to your wife, because you are right to be worried. I would ask about what I would do if I were in Argella Durrandon’s boots and make every effort to talk to her. That is probably a key reason why many unions have internal damage, because the man or woman cease talking about their concerns with one another.”

“You talk as if she already accepted your peace offer, father,” Orys replied. “Aren’t we thinking too far now?”

Their father smiled. “It may take some time, but she is smart, unlike her father. And right now, she doesn’t have any other good options for her. But like her, you shouldn’t be so worried. It will all turn out for the best.”

Visenya walked with Jaenyx towards the guest chambers of Bronzegate. She didn’t share her father’s confidence in Argella Durrandon accepting their peace offer, as she was like herself in that they wouldn’t budge easily even in unfavorable circumstances. While Argella was technically still an enemy of House Targaryen and House Belaerys, it was a rare thing to see a woman in Westeros propped up on her strength and wits and it would be a shame if such a person made a decision out of poor judgment. But beyond that, she wanted to have words with Argella since seeing a woman in a position of considerable influence was a rarity outside Dorne and this was a good opportunity for Visenya to properly size up her potential good-sister, if it came to that.

As for Jaenyx, he offered to go with her so that he could properly look upon the daughter of the man that had killed Aevor Rahitheon’s nephew. Wanting him to be at her side at all times, Visenya let him come along.

They found her chambers guarded by Ser Bruze Tarth, who noticed them as they neared the door. “Lady Visenya, Lord Belaerys. What brings you here?”

“I wish to have some words with the Storm Queen,” Visenya replied while giving her the respect she deserved. Ser Bruze softened at her gesture.
“I’m sorry, Lady Visenya, but Her Grace is resting at the moment and therefore cannot be disturbed.”

“I see,” Visenya nodded. “Well, can you say that I and my husband Lord Jaenyx wished to have words with her?”

“I will, my lady,” Ser Bruze replied. But before they left, the door behind Ser Bruze opened, revealing Argella Durrandon. Visenya could see a hint of dried tears on her face, but decided not to ask why she was crying.

“Lady Visenya, Lord Belaerys,” Argella addressed them.

“Queen Argella,” Visenya addressed her. Argella let a tiny smile grow at how she honored her.

“Did you come here on behalf of your father or of your own volition?”

“I just wanted to have some words with you, Queen Argella,” Visenya replied.

“Will Lord Belaerys be joining you?”

Visenya grasped Jaenyx’s arm tightly. “He’s my husband. Where I go, he goes.”

Argella looked at them up and down before nodding. “Come in,” she opened the door wider and allowed them entry.
Visenya and Jaenyx sat the small table in her chambers opposite of Argella. “I must thank your father for treating my father with such dignity, Lady Visenya.”

“He was a king. He deserved that much,” Visenya replied. Even she had to be impressed with how potent Argilac was even in his old age.

“Like last time, I would appreciate it if we did away with all of the pleasantries. Would that alright with you, Lady Visenya?”

Visenya offered her a small smile. “Very.”

“If you’ve come here to intercede on behalf of your brother, know that my mind is not easily swayed on such matters. And your father did offer terms that anyone with sense would be hard-pressed to accept.”

“Of course. But considering how this war is progressing, it could be much, much worse. And everything my father said is rooted in the truth.”

Argella shook her head, but not out of rejection for Visenya’s words. “And now you’re telling me that my only good option to ensure peace is to marry the man that killed my father?”

Visenya sighed, out of sympathy for her situation. “I wish it was under better circumstances, but I believe we share a desire to end the fighting between us. Nothing more can be gained other than more bloodshed and more ashes from the flames of our dragons.”

“Spare me further explanation of your dragons, Lady Visenya. I’ve seen yours and I believe what I heard from Lord Swann and from those that had fought outside the walls of this very castle. However, your father is asking me to undo thousands of years of Durrandon rule at Storm’s End and throughout the lands my house had held onto. I have the blood of Durran Godsgrief running in
veins, who defied the gods themselves despite every storm. If I just surrender now, I will go against everything my house stood for and I will bring further disgrace onto my ancestors.”

Visenya cocked her head. “You’re concerned about disgracing your ancestors and I can understand that. But like the last time we talked, I’m more interested in what you think. And I know you have thoughts that are independent of your family legacy, your house, and the others.”

“You don’t understand, Lady Visenya. That’s who I am,” Argella raised her voice. “I have struggled against the ambitions of greedy men for much of my life. The only reason why I was able to ward them off was because I followed the example set by my father and of Durran Godsgrief. I never let anything keep me down and I’ll be damned if I just give in easily.”

“Oh, believe me, I do,” Visenya answered. “My family and myself are the blood of the dragon and of old Valyria. You family words are “Ours is the Fury,” while our words are “Fire and Blood.” Dragons dominated over all and they still do, and they burned and spilled the blood of those that wished them harm while allowing new growth to occur. But I digress, as we can debate our families’ origins all day. However, there is a line between staying true to our family origins and being stubborn. It is true that Durran Godsgrief stood against the gods, but did he stand against dragons at the time? And as my father stated and despite my personal feelings, you haven’t done anything worthy of note to the stormlords. You haven’t led troops in battle or done something extraordinary. And given the martial inclinations of the stormlords, you really think they’ll follow you?”

Argella sighed. “To be honest, Lady Visenya, I don’t know. But as I said, I can’t just give up. And it’ll bring me unbearable amounts of shame for me to share the bed of your brother, who killed my father.”

Visenya nodded. “I understand. And if it means anything to you, he didn’t want to kill him and he was forced to do so after your father made him.”

Argella scoffed. “That may be so, but he still killed my father. That act can never be forgotten.”

Visenya was honestly at a loss for words. She didn’t know what else she could say to persuade Argella to accept their father’s offer or make it more bearable for her. But she wasn’t surprised, as
she was just like her in many ways. Independent, strong-willed, and smart, she would never accept anything that ran contrary to who she was. Also, she could appreciate her steadfastness, as she was like that whenever their father attempted to arrange a marriage for her. **What do I do now?**

Then, Visenya heard Jaenyx speak up. “You hate it, don’t you?”

Argella blinked. “What?”

“You hate the situation that you’re in. Your father is gone, taken from the earth, and now you’re alone, with only your family’s words and legacy to keep you from falling into the abyss. You’re clinging onto whatever you can because you don’t know what else to keep you upright. It’s not fair that your father was taken, the one source of strength that could rely on, and even more so because you weren’t in a position to do anything about it.”

“What would you know, Lord Belaerys?” Argella spat bitterly.

Jaenyx took a moment to gather his moments before exhaling. “I know, Princess Argella. I know what it is to lose a father, because I’ve seen my father die in front of me.”

That got a look of surprise from Argella, but Visenya turned to him and was even more surprised. He never revealed such personal details to people he barely knew and she only knew because they were married. **What are you doing, Jae?**

“I was born in Sothoryos, specifically the Basilisk Isles. I watched my brother die because of pirates and my father from the Red Death.” Argella’s mouth slightly dropped, as she also had heard about the effects of that plague, while Visenya noticed that he didn’t bring up his mother. **That’s the line Jae won’t cross for a stranger, not just yet.** “For the longest time, I cursed everyone why my father was taken. And I wanted to hurt anyone and anything just because of my grief, and I didn’t care about the consequences. But fortunately, I had someone teach me things that were more useful than despair, because that is what stops us from growing and from seeing the necessity of moving forward.”
Argella was silent, the shock from meeting a strong woman like herself and from Jaenyx revealing such intimate details about his past evident on her face.

“Personally, I don’t care what choice you make,” Jaenyx continued. “But I do know that clinging onto things that serve no purpose other than to feed your pride is a sure way of falling faster in the nothingness. And as my good-father said, if you return to Storm’s End without making peace here, we will show no mercy. You willing to sacrifice your people just so that you can hang onto your crown and your pride, both of which your people wouldn’t really fight for in any circumstances?”

Argella remained silent, but Visenya could see the doubt growing on her face. She might’ve been stubborn like her father, but she had sense, something which her father lacked.

“I am not going to say things about my brother in order to make you feel better such as his looks and battle prowess,” Visenya asked. “But he does care about others and he had the decency to avoid eye contact with you because of what he did. That has to count for something.”

“And what do you suggest that I do, Lady Visenya?”

“I’m saying to give Orys, and this peace offer, a chance. We can end this war right here and now and we can all go home. Just something to think about,” and with that, Visenya got up, hands hold Jaenyx’s, and left her chambers.

As they came into their chambers in the castle, Visenya turned around and hugged Jaenyx as he closed the door. “That was brave of you, Jae, to reveal what happened to your father to Argella. I’m proud of you.”

Jaenyx sighed while he returned the hug. “I don’t know. I guess something inside me told me to say something to her because we both lost fathers. It’s a rare thing, to have someone who’s been in my situation.”

Visenya drew away from the hug before she put her arms over Jaenyx’s neck. “Well, I’m glad that
others can see that you’re not such a cold bastard.”

“Careful,” Jaenyx playfully warned.

“Or what?” Visenya looked at him suggestively.

“You really want to find out?”

“Try me,” Visenya said before pulling him into a kiss.

Their kiss became deeper as their tongues danced for dominance. Visenya felt Jaenyx’s hands run over body before they found themselves on her ass. Gasping as they gave them a tight squeeze, Visenya bit on Jaenyx’s lip, causing him to grunt in pain. Pulling away from each other as they caught their breath, Visenya undid her braid while she saw Jaenyx take off his tunic to expose his bare torso to her. She turned around and offered her back to Jaenyx, who wasted no time in undoing the laces of her dragon coat and pulling it down to make her bare before her.

Visenya jumped into his arms and kissed him while Jaenyx moved to their bed. Pinning him on the mattress, Visenya kissed his neck before running more kisses on his torso towards his breeches. She undid them and pulled them off of him before she ran her tongue on his cock and sucked on it. There were no words exchanged, as they succumbed to their desires for each other’s body. She heard Jaenyx’s breath hitch as she took his cock deeper into her mouth.

“Shatter into me, Jae. I want your release,” Visenya urged. Jaenyx erupted into her mouth as he squeezed his eyes, the pleasure becoming too much for him.

Not done with him yet, Visenya climbed onto him. Straddling his waist with her legs, she made sure he kept his violet eyes on her as she grabbed his hands and guided them to her breasts. Gasping in happiness as he squeezed them, she sheathed his length into her entrance and began grinding him.
Loud moans and the slaps on skin reverberated through the chambers as Visenya rode Jaenxy. Her fingers danced on his chest while Jaenxy struggled to keep his hands on hers. Jaenxy thrusted upward, feeling himself close to the edge and wanting to take her with him.

“Scream for me, Vis. I want to hear your roar,” Jaenxy hit upward into Visenya harder.

“JAE!!” Visenya let out as she couldn’t hold herself back any longer. No doubt the entire castle could hear her, but that wasn’t her concern as the climax pounded within her and her walls tightening around Jaenxy’s cock. She felt him erupt within her, triggering more waves of pleasure to flow through them. Finally, her limp form collapsed onto his chest. Humming in satisfaction, she snuggled into his chest as her silver hair fanned over his lean muscles. She kissed his forehead as she smiled lazily and felt his arms wrapped tightly around her. A few minutes passed before Visenya was able to speak to him.

Staring into each other’s eyes, Jaenxy cupped her cheek and ran his thumb along her smooth skin. Visenya pulled into another kiss, no words needed to convey how they felt for each other.

“I hope that you show people other than us how you’re not so heartless,” Visenya said. “That way, they can really see the man I fell in love with.”

Jaenxy smiled. “One step at a time, Vis. One step.”

Visenya brought him tightly against her chest. “If you want, I can... motivate you to be a little more open to others.”

“And how do you intend to do that?”

“Want to go again?” Visenya whispered in his ear.
Jaenyx put her on her back while staring into her eyes. “Don’t mind if I do,” he replied as she felt his cock harden and lunged forth into their shared bliss.

Chapter End Notes

I was debating on whether to have Argella go through the treatment she went though in canon. But I decided not to do that. The reason why is for a couple of reasons. She's smarter than her father and she would understand the situation more after seeing the burned swords and Drowned God amulets collected from the ruins of Harrenhal. Also, I want to make it easier for Argella to marry Orys, since I highly doubt her canon fate would be a smooth start for a strong marriage between the two. But in this story, it will be strong and loving, and both will play important roles in the next stage of the conquest.

I also wanted to show how similar Visenya was to Argella, which prompted that whole discussion and how Visenya was stumped. Then, we see Jaenyx display empathy to Argella over their shared experiences of losing fathers. Both of them will make Argella coming into the family much easier and Orys can finally have someone who could end his philandering ways and make him better.

Next, we'll introduce another key character in the story. Merry Christmas and Happy New Years to you all! :)
Loren Lannister I

Chapter Notes

I hope you all had a very good Christmas, Hanukkah, and the others and that the New Years will be awesome.

And now, for something completely different.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOREN LANNISTER I

Loren Lannister tapped his fingers on the table as he sat quietly in the great hall of House Redwyne. He looked around the hall and saw his entourage interacting with those from the Arbor and throughout the Reach and those from the Vale. As expected, no one talked with the representatives from the Iron Islands, who looked indifferent to being among “greenlander lords” anyway. For Loren Lannister, he had no interest in engaging in small talk and wanted to go straight to the reason why him and some other lords from the western hills and valleys of Westeros had come to this island in the first place. Not that he complained, as he liked the Redwynes’ hospitality and always kept a casket of Arbor gold in his solar even though he preferred Lannisport’s spicy honey wine.

A month ago, Casterly Rock received a raven from Highgarden, with the message written by the King of the Reach himself, Mern Gardener. King Mern invited Loren Lannister, King of the Rock, to a summit at the Arbor to discuss “matters of kingly importance,” which was incredibly cryptic. Loren Lannister found out that Mern Gardener sent out other ravens to the Eyrie, Winterfell, Sunspear, and the Iron Islands. King in the North Torrhen Stark declined the invitation, saying that no Starks would ever concern themselves in the affairs of the south. Meria Martell, Princess of Dorne and otherwise known as the “Yellow Toad,” also declined, stating that Dorne and the Rhoynar are separate from the rest of Westeros. Not that many in the Reach complained, as marcher houses such as the Tarlys of Horn Hill and the Peakes of Starpike would not respond kindly to having to share the same space with the very people they fought with for many centuries.

Loren Lannister was most surprised when he heard about the Gardener king inviting the ironborn to the summit, with the entourage led by Darvin Hoare, otherwise known to the rest of Westeros as “the Unshackled Ironman” and who had declared himself King of the Isles and the Rivers. No one in Westeros wanted to be in the same room as an ironborn and the Redwynes were very open in
their displeasure at having to host their traditional enemies at sea. From what Loren Lannister gathered, King Mern had to pull many strings and grant them certain favors in order for the Redwynes to at least not kill the ironborn once they arrived at the Arbor. He frankly didn’t care about what King Mern did.

Deciding that there was no harm in hearing what the Gardener king had to say and wanting to see the Arbor anyway, Loren Lannister left his son Seamas in charge of Casterly Rock and took a party of his lords, who hailed from houses such as Crakehall, Lefford, Westerling, Marbrand, and Reyne, along with three hundred men-at-arms. He was hesitant to bring along Weslar Reyne, Lord of Castamere, as he headed the second-most powerful house in his kingdom and had heard from his more loyal lords of his unpredictable personality. However, he decided that it was better to keep potential rivals close to him and took him with him to the Arbor. He had also appointed his second son, Ser Bailen Reyne, as castellan of Casterly Rock as a way to keep his house under control while not giving Lord Weslar any reason to think that he has been mistreated. Politics, how tiresome, Loren thought.

After arriving at the Arbor, Loren Lannister and his entourage were given guest rights via bread and salt and were treated to the famed hospitality of House Redwyne, which Loren Lannister only experienced once. Besides the dancing, music, and the sumptuous feast provided, everyone present were allowed to consume as much of the Arbor’s famous wines to their heart’s content. Loren Lannister himself helped him to three caskets of Arbor gold, but was careful to control his drink so as to avoid any embarrassing moments of drunkenness in front of his vassals.

In addition, Loren Lannister toured the Redwyne fleet around the Arbor, which was quite an impressive sight. At two hundred warships and five times that of other vessels, the fleet easily dwarfed the other fleets of Westeros, even that of the ironborn. Casterly Rock never commanded more than fifty vessels, as the lords in the west were not known for their prowess at sea. I might have to fix that, or I might be the Rock’s equivalent of Brandon the Burner.

Besides Darvin Hoare and the ironborn that had arrived at the Arbor, Sharra Arryn, Queen Regent of the Kingdom of the Mountain and the Vale and otherwise as “the Flower of the Mountain,” came with an entourage of her own lords from houses such as Royce, Corbray, and Hunter. Many of those in attendance had wondered why Ronnel Arryn, the King of the Mountain and the Vale, had not arrived only to remember that he was merely a boy. While those in the Reach and among his lords shifted uncomfortably at having to converse on equal terms with a woman, especially after hearing of her reputation back in the Vale, Loren Lannister couldn’t care less. Sharra Arryn being a woman in power is the least of my concerns at the moment.

Loren Lannister took another look at the hall before noticing the Faith’s seven-pointed star hanging
prominently from the ceiling. Blinking, he looked at the various lords that had arrived at the Arbor and saw a connection. Besides the ironborn, everyone present were devoted or were connected in some ways to the Faith of the Seven. And given the Gardeners’ piety to the Faith… *This is getting interesting*.

While Loren Lannister didn’t care for such trivialities, he made his regular visits to the sept in order to give off the illusion that he was devoted in front of his vassals and people. But like many other kings and lords of Westeros, Loren Lannister was not pious and merely interpreted his relationship with the Faith as a mutual one. In return for a substantial contribution to the septs and doing small favors for the septons, the Faith’s representatives helped his populace under control and turned a blind eye to Loren Lannister’s more… questionable pursuits. Like any other ruler, he had vices, with his participating in gambling being one of them. Loren Lannister found the whole practice of gambling stimulating for his mind, as he could practice his abilities in reading a man’s facial expressions and knowing when a man would fold. He learned that how a man gambled reflected his personality and how he walked through life.

But more importantly, Loren Lannister that he must’ve inherited from his ancestor’s, Tyrion II Lannister, penchant for torture. Whenever prisoners or criminals came into Casterly Rock, he would just… watch his guards as they questioned and tortured their way into the victim’s mind. He would often go into Casterly Rock’s cells with much parchment and quill, so that he can record what parts of the body caused the most pain and which methods were used to inflict maximum damage with the most efficiency. He himself participated in a few of these interrogation sessions, with one of these times seeing him piercing a man with meat hooks and hanging him by his skin just to see how long he would last before he slipped into unconsciousness. Another time, he played the knife game with a robber because he wanted to see how long it would take before the man begged him to stop.

Despite his unusual curiosity in how pain was inflicted, Loren Lannister was unlike his ancestor in that he never let this curiosity go beyond acceptable limits. Such was the case for Tyrion II Lannister, as he died a wretch and no one shed a tear for his departure from the earth. But, such knowledge was key in how he was able to keep his various lords in check, as they also were aware of his knowledge and never dared to step over the boundary.

Returning to the present, Loren Lannister found that the hall had quieted as Mern IX Gardener entered, who was dressed in robes of green and white while wearing his crown of vines and flowers. Tall and lean, Mern Gardener had well-kept brown hair, blue eyes, and a clean-shaven face. Despite his age being forty, he had still retained the youthful beauty that his house was known for, but Loren knew that Mern remaining physically active even at that age also contributed to his sound health. Squired at Horn’s Hill under Lord Tarly and knighted at six and ten, Mern Gardener lived for tourneys and the knightly life. Even after ascending to the throne at Highgarden, he retained his skills in swordplay, jousting, and archery. However, Loren saw that Mern Gardener
enjoyed being a knight too much and must’ve confused skill as a knight with skill as a ruler. From his constant smiles and laughter, he was too relaxed and too vivacious, as if expecting everyone to be familiar with knightly ways. This will be a problem.

As for Sharra Arryn, she had flowing black hair, bright brown eyes, and somewhat swarthy skin while wearing an elegant blue gown. She hailed from the Dornish Marches in the Reach before she fostered in the Vale, where she caught the eye of the Arryn king and became his queen before birthing him two heirs. Despite her age, she had earned the title of “the Flower of the Mountain” as she was still thin, graceful, and charming. What was curious about her was that she was wearing the Falcon crown of House Arryn, which should have been kept in the Eyrie. Interesting...

For Darvin Hoare, he looked just like every other ironborn he’d seen besides that crazed look in his eye. I’ll just bear with it.

After dismissing the other lords from the hall, as the following discussion was meant only for the kings and queen, Mern Gardener took a seat at the front table, with Darvin Hoare and Sharra Arryn taking the side tables and Loren Lannister opposite him.

“Your Graces, thank you for coming all this way to the Arbor, especially to you, Queen Sharra. I can only imagine what a journey you’ve must have been from the Eyrie to here and it brings warmth to my heart to see that the years have been kind to a daughter of the Reach,” Mern Gardener began.

Sharra Arryn smiled. “Thank you, King Mern. The journey was of little consequence and I have longed to visit the famed seat of House Redwyne, as well as enjoy its famous wines.”

Mern Gardener chuckled. “Of course. It is one of the reasons why I decided to have our meeting in the august halls of Lord Redwyne, who has proven to be a most excellent host. The same could be said of King Hoare.”

Darvin Hoare sat wordlessly at his table, apparently ignoring Mern Gardener as he sipped his goblet filled with Arbor gold and stuffed bread and cheese in his mouth. From the demolished remains of the chicken drumsticks and thighs piled next to his plate, it was clear that he did not have much table etiquette, which every king had to have in order to demonstrate a sense of
propriety. However, propriety was hardly followed by the ironborn and Loren Lannister figured that “King” Hoare only paid attention to his food when the “greenlander” king spoke. From what Loren Lannister saw, Sharra Arryn also looked at Darvin Hoare in disgust at his lack of table manners.

“You Grace?” Mern Gardener addressed him. Like the rest of the lords of the Reach, he felt nothing but contempt for the ironborn but was much more polite and courteous about it.

Gulping down his food, Darvin Hoare looked up. “Oh, I apologize, Your Grace. I second Sharra Arryn’s words regarding Lord Redwyne’s hospitality. And I thank you for allowing myself and my people safe passage here, since the Redwynes and my people have not enjoyed the most amicable relations.”

Loren Lannister saw Mern Gardener shift uncomfortably. “Of course, Your Grace. And I must thank King Loren Lannister for coming all the way from Casterly Rock. It has been years since you’ve graced the Arbor with your presence and I must say that your conduct here reflects your reputation.”

Loren Lannister gave a smile, but had learned to not take flattery at face value. “Thank you, King Mern.”

Mern Gardener clasped his hands together and placed them on his table. “Now, with the introductions out of the way, it is time that I reveal to you the purpose of inviting this distinguished body together. The four of us in this room represent diverse peoples and lands, all of whom share a connection to Westeros. And besides our esteemed friend from the Iron Islands,” he put his hand to point at Darvin Hoare, who was still consuming his bread and cheese. “We are contributing followers of the Faith, but now we face very uncertain circumstances that have befallen us for nearly a year.”

Loren Lannister cleared his throat, getting his attention. “Your Grace, I would appreciate it if you spared us the politeness. You’re being very oblique with your intentions and I didn’t come all the way from Casterly Rock to be reminded of how knights talk.”

Mern Gardener paused, taken aback by Loren Lannister’s directness. But he quickly recovered.
“As you wish, King Loren. In a matter of months and despite having a mere three thousand troops in the beginning, House Targaryen of Dragonstone and their ally House Belaerys took down two of Westeros’ most powerful monarchs through a combination of superb battle prowess and if the rumors are to be believed, four dragons.”

Oh… now I see what this is about, Loren Lannister thought. He watched closely the progress of the Targaryens and their ally, Lord Jaenyx Belaerys, as they conducted an impressive campaign against Black Harren and Argilac Durrandon. He had heard about Rook’s Rest, Wailing Willows, the burning of Harrenhal, and the battle where King Argilac was killed by a bastard. They defied all expectations by defeating their enemies one by one, but what struck Loren Lannister about the Targaryens and Lord Belaerys was the fact that they didn’t rely on the power of their supposed dragons alone. They proved to be military commanders of a quality not seen much in Westeros and the Targaryens’ heirs in Aegon, Visenya, and Orys alongside Lord Belaerys demonstrated courage and excellent abilities as warriors. How Orys Baratheon, Dragonstone’s bastard, took down Argilac Durrandon was remarkable given how the latter was a great warrior even in his old age.

“With respect to King Hoare,” Mern Gardener while glancing at Darvin Hoare, who had finished his bread and cheese but now sipped his goblet. “Black Harren was not loved among his people and there were no tears shed when he alongside King Darvin’s brothers were burned at Harrenhal.”

“No matter, King Mern,” Darvin Hoare spoke. “My father was… a spent force. Being a king on the greenlands got to him and my ancestors forgot where they came from and instead chose to fatten themselves with bread and wine. An ironman must adhere to the Old Way or--”

“We’re not interested in your sad little tale on how your people lost their way,” Sharra Arryn interrupted him. “How about you let the adults talk, boy?”

That riled up Darvin Hoare. “What did you just call me, you greenland whore?”

“Is that really the best insult you can come up with, Your Grace?” Sharra Arryn scoffed as she mocked his kingly title. “Or is it ‘the Unshackled Ironman’?”

Darvin Hoare stood up from his table, ready to strike at Sharra Arryn for her calling him by his
nickname. However, King Mern got his attention by pounding on his own table.

“Peace, Your Graces! We share common ground here and we accomplish nothing by fighting each other. But for what it’s worth, the Targaryens did my house a favor by killing the man who killed King Garse Gardener, my great-uncle.”

Loren Lannister looked straight into King Mern’s eyes. “Can you tell us what common ground we have? You tell us what we already about a backwater lord suddenly controlling two kingdoms in Westeros. But the way I see it, they haven’t done against any of us and have no reason to come after us. Black Harren got what was coming to him and Argilac made his own choice by choosing glory in death. What is there to talk about?”

“I disagree, King Loren,” Mern Gardener replied. “I believe that the Targaryens and their ally Lord Jaenyx Belaerys represent a grave threat that everyone in this room must face together. That is what His High Holiness the High Septon concluded from my most recent visit to Oldtown.”

Of course he would listen to the babblings of that bloody fanatic, Loren Lannister silently groaned. It was no secret that the Hightowers had a lot of pull with House Gardener, due to the Gardeners bringing Oldtown into their kingdom by marriage instead of battle and because the Hightowers were very connected to the Faith of the Seven. It was a rather mutual relationship since the High Septon brought great legitimacy to the Gardeners and Highgarden provided the Starry Sept with much valuable resources. “Care to enlighten on what His High Holiness heard from the gods?” Loren Lannister almost choked from uttering those words.

“His High Holiness prayed for two weeks in the Starry Sept, not taking food or water as he called on the gods for guidance. He then called a council of the highest-ranking septons in Oldtown and heard many grievances from especially their brothers and sisters in the riverlands. For one, the Targaryens and Lord Belaerys are Valyrians, remnants of a civilization whose brought upon their own destruction by their practice of incest and delving too deep in the dark arts. Every one of their practices run contrary to the rest of Westeros and their recent conquests threaten the very fabric of our respective societies, as their speed and decisiveness against their enemies make people question as to what the gods can do about it. In addition, their endeavors send the message to the rest of the known world that the Valyrians have come back in force and we might see a rise in the practice of the dark arts as well as others that will shake our foundations.”

Loren Lannister just kept silent. While such an explanation would work on a normal audience, the
King of the Rock was not such and he knew that there were more practical reasons as to why Mern Gardener would bother them with the High Septon’s babblings in the first place.

“Second,” Mern Gardener continued. “It would seem that the Targaryens, even though they were accustomed to Westeros, have no intention of fully becoming one of us. They’ve expelled their maester and ceased going to the sept, which now indicates that they were never really pious followers of the Faith to begin with. They’ve replaced their worship of the Seven with the worship of idols, deities from old Valyria with help from a man called Taygor Leniar, who happens to be Jaenyx Belaerys’ cousin. What’s more disconcerting is that the Valyrians are collecting taxes from our faithful brothers and sisters and bringing that money into their own treasury. Through a custom of the Faith, a portion of any taxes and revenue collected by lords and kings must, by right, be given to the septons as tithes. The Valyrians have circumvented such a custom, which is an affront to the Faith as the Starry Sept is being denied resources that it can use to provide for the poor and bring the light of the Seven to those untouched by their grace.”

Loren Lannister was getting very mentally exhausted by Mern Gardener’s preachy words and basically echoing the High Septon’s words, but chose to continue listening.

“Third and final, there have been growing conflicts between the faithful and the dogs of Valyrians. It would appear that the worship of the Old Gods is quite tolerated by the Valyrians, if their favor of House Blackwood of Raventree Hall is of any indication. It is a known fact that the worshipers of the Old and New Gods have never enjoyed the smoothest relations.”

“Don’t forget those who follow the Drowned God,” Darvin Hoare cut in.

“What is of more serious note,” Mern Gardener ignored Darvin Hoare. “The High Septon has received reports from especially our brothers and sisters in the riverlands that talk of rising tensions between the faithful and those who follow the Valyrians. In one instance, a septon was preaching against the incestuous marriage between two of the Targaryen heirs, Lord Aegon and Lady Rhaenys, and how such an abominous union led to the collapse of old Valyria. That septon also condemned Lord Belaerys’ cousin for practicing unholy methods towards healing and for his deep delving into the mystical arts. The problem was that this septon was preaching in public and in view of certain Valyrian bannermen. A riot ensued in which the septon was arrested and a number of smallfolk died at the hands of the Valyrians. In another instance, they were many septs that were damaged during the reign of Black Harren but the Valyrians have done nothing to repair them. Combined with the incident with the septon in question and the Valyrians not using their resources to return a sense of normality to the people under their rule, the fate of the faithful are at risk.”
Loren Lannister sighed. “Your Grace, I’m not interested in what the High Septon had to say to you. I’m more interested in why we’re hearing it in the first place.”

“You might think that they won’t come after us since we haven’t done anything to the Tagaryens and Lord Belaerys. However, they’ve clearly demonstrated their dislike of the Faith and by extension the very fabric of Westeros. If their dragons could conquer two kingdoms in a matter of months, imagine what will happen if they do decide to take the rest of the continent for themselves. The Faith will be crushed and our society replaced by that composed of the self-centered Valyrians.”

Loren Lannister scoffed. “That’s just mere conjecture, King Mern. Now, I’ve witnessed the situation in the riverlands for a while now and I haven’t seen any indication of aggression towards my kingdom. And by the way, if you said had any truth to it, I wouldn’t be having profitable business relations with Dragonstone, as they have no ill will towards me because of my following the Faith. Just recently, their bannermen sold a collection of Valyrian steel daggers and swords at Lannisport and it was worth every sack of gold paid. So, at the moment, I have no reason to fight them.”

“But how long do you think that will last?” This time, Sharra Arryn spoke up. “The Valyrians bring foreign practices and unholy customs to our lands and our power will slowly be undone as they slowly erode away at the Faith. If the Faith is gone, then our claims to rule will be considered arbitrary as the smallfolk follow us out of a belief that were appointed by the gods themselves.”

“Exactly my thoughts, Queen Sharra,” Mern Gardener jabbed his finger on the table. “The Faith created a clear but delicate structure that created order from the chaos of the various petty kingdoms of the First Men and allowed for knighthood and chivalry to be ideals to strive for. The Valyrians threaten to undo that and would no doubt lead to the destruction of our strength. Everything goes back to the Faith, King Loren, and your own knights are also included.”

Loren Lannister shook his head. “Spare me the patronizing speeches, King Mern. I am aware of how important the Faith is, but you wouldn’t be calling us here to do something about the situation with the Targaryens and Lord Belaerys unless the High Septon is getting you to do his dirty work.”
“What did you say?” Mern Gardener asked, offended.

“The High Septon commands the Warrior’s Sons and the Poor Fellows as his armed strength, but that is not enough for him. You can call upon Westeros’ largest army and there is no kingdom on this continent that doesn’t purchase the crops of the Reach. So, I’m guessing the High Septon made a deal with you in which you provide the necessary resources he needs to combat the supposed threat from the Valyrians. I’m interested in what he offered you.”

“There is nothing that was offered, King Loren,” Mern Gardener denied. “I am a follower of the Seven and to answer the call of the gods’ instrument on the earth is—”

“Stop right there,” Loren Lannister interrupted. “If I’m going to do anything of value to your supposed call from the gods, I need your real reason as to why you would do this. And I am pretty sure that you talked with the High Septon before he had that whole ‘two weeks of prayer and council meeting’ nonsense. You want me to do something, you have to trust me first.”

There was a moment of silence in the hall. Sharra Arryn was also curious as to what the Gardener king discussed with High Septon. As for Darvin Hoare, he still sipped from his goblet, but listened closely.

The Gardener king sighed before nodding. “As you wish. He promised to put my cousin in the line of succession to the Starry Sept and agreed to more exclusive deals with the food stores of Highgarden.”

Loren Lannister scoffed. “Of course he did. So, one of your blood will ascend to become the next High Septon and the Faith will buy food more exclusively from your seat of power. I have to guess that the situation has become that desperate for the Starry Sept for the High Septon to even consider such a deal.”

“There is talk among the smallfolk, King Loren. Already, they speak of the rumors of the Valyrians’ power in the east of Westeros and they’re starting to ask questions. If history can tell us anything about such things, it is that the smallfolk must be put in check regularly so that they wouldn’t question the order of things. My deal with the High Septon would increase the power and authority of the Faith, as they would have a more reliable source of food to feed the masses and can
Loren Lannister had to admit that deal was quite cunning… for a summer knight. The Faith would be led by one from House Gardener and while the Gardener kings would gain much leverage over the Faith. However, such a deal hinged on the continuation of good harvests and maintaining the food stores when winter came. In addition, Loren Lannister couldn’t help but feel that there was something else at play.

“This is all well and good, King Mern,” Sharra Arryn spoke. “But if this deal exists, why are we here?”

“Aren’t you a devoted member of the Faith, Your Grace?” King Mern asked. “The Valyrians represent a great threat to the Faith and by extension to all of us. We must unite together if we are to ensure the survival of the Faith and our society.”

“With your blood set to become High Septon and with your deal with the Starry Sept, I don’t see why you need us,” Sharra Arryn answered back.

“I must admit that while I can call on an impressive host, I am still one kingdom. The Targaryens and Lord Baelaerys were able to achieve great success when they were able to deal with their enemies piecemeal. If all of us came together, we’ll have a chance at rolling back the Valyrian threat and to end their unholy practices, something that not even the Doom of Valyria accomplished. With the Knights of the Vale, the military prowess of House Lannister, and the naval strength of House Hoare, this could be done.”

Loren Lannister stroked his chin. *So he wants a united front against the Valyrians*. In all honesty, there was no better time than to strike at the dragonlords. Their conquests were still fresh and unsolidified. One push in the right spot could see all of their efforts undone. But a Lannister would never commit to such an action without getting something in return.

“If I agree to this alliance you speak of,” Loren Lannister started. “I expect there to be gains for my house.”
Mern Gardener smiled. “Of course, Your Grace. If you can commit your banners to the cause of the Faith, the High Septon will legitimize any land acquisitions. But such details can be saved at a later time.”

Darvin Hoare raised his hand. “Do not forget about me, King Mern. I am rightful King of the Isles and the Rivers and I would expect my lands to be returned to me.”

King Mern sighed. “That can be arranged, but only if you consented to septons spreading the light of the Seven to the Iron Islands.”

Darvin Hoare shook his head. “My people will not accept the Faith, but I won’t bother the septons in the Riverlands once I’ve retaken them.”

King Mern turned to Sharra Arryn. “Anything you seek for the Vale, Your Grace?”

Sharra Arryn stood straight. “I seek lands south of the Bay of Crabs, but as you said, the particulars can be worked out later.”

Mern Gardener slapped lightly on the table. “Excellent! Then I propose a toast.” He stood up and held out his goblet, with Loren Lannister, Sharra Arryn, and Darvin Hoare following suit. “To the destruction of Valyria. May it be permanent this time.”

Loren Lannister sat opposite of King Mern, who had assumed the solar of Lord Redwyne as his liege. The King of the Rock might have agreed to the alliance, but there were still many questions that had to be answered before he fully committed. As he did not reveal his actions to his lords yet, Loren Lannister wanted all uncertainties to be put to rest.
“I assume that you’re here to discuss the particulars of your potential acquisitions, King Loren,”
Mern Gardener began.

“Yes, and more. I must appreciate your frankness when you revealed your deal with the High
Septon. Quite smart, as you would gain more with a Gardener in the Starry Sept and allowing the
High Septon considerable resources from your house.”

“Thank you, Your Grace,” Mern Gardener smiled.

“That said, I would appreciate it if we did away with all of the niceties. I could tell that even in the
great hall, you weren’t revealing everything. I’m about to seriously commit my banners to a major
cause, so there must be no lying between us.”

“I wholeheartedly agree, King Loren,” Mern Gardener nodded.

“Did you plan this ahead of time, Your Grace? I don’t believe you when you say that your decision
came after two weeks of the High Septon praying. I have friends in the Reach and they told me that
you were gradually mobilizing your troops once word reached you of the burning of Harrenhal.
And I have heard reports from my merchants in Lannisport that there has been a slight rationing of
crops from the Reach by your orders. From those facts alone, it’s not hard for one to deduce that
you were assembling an army for a major campaign. I also am aware of increase troop movements
near the Blackwater Rush and near Nightsong, though I must commend you in your attempts to
keep them hidden. I’m guessing that the High Septon’s prayers were merely a convenience to
legitimize whatever military adventure you’ve planned.”

Mern Gardener hesitated, but Loren Lannister felt smug as he could see that he had hit the nail on
the head.

“Looks like you’ve earned your reputation as a well-informed ruler,” Mern Gardener simply said.
“There is growing discontent among the lords on both sides of the new boundaries of control. The
High Septon received grievances from the Brackens of Stone Hedge, who are not taking too kindly
to the Targaryens’ favoritism towards their traditional enemies, the Blackwoods of Raventree Hall.
Lord Bracken says a good number of other riverlords have similar feelings and will bend the knee to a ruler rooted in the Faith. At the same time, Lords Tarly and Peake have expressed concern that a number of their traditional rivals in the former Storm kingdom, mainly the Dondarrions of Blackhaven and Carons of Nightsong, have remained intact and are now serving their new overlord, this Orys Baratheon of Storm’s End, the bastard of Dragonstone and who married the former Princess Argella Durrandon. As their king, I must show that I am taking their concerns into serious consideration.”

“Hmmm,” Loren Lannister nodded. He didn’t think highly of the summer knights of the Reach, as they were too consumed with following with the chivalrous traditions of knighthood and did not think very far past the sword. But Mern Gardener was showing himself to be a proper ruler. Only time would tell if he was a knight or a king, as you can’t be both.

“There is no better time to strike, as they have not yet solidified their control over their new lands. Most importantly, they rule over two kingdoms but have not called themselves kings. A lord ruling over such vast territories will not have a kind reception and the grievances from the Brackens are just the beginning. One strong hammer strike and we’ll see Dragonstone’s control crack like an egg.”

“If I do agree to commit my banners to the High Septon’s cause, I require certain conditions to be met before my armies enter the field alongside yours and I’m sure the Arryns’ and Darvin Hoare’s.”

“Name them.”

“I seek to expand my domain to the Red Fork past Riverrun all the way to the Gods Eye. My kingdom needs more fertile land and those lands would be perfect.”

“Done, after His Holiness gives his blessing.”

“And I’m guessing that I will take a major role in underwriting the coming campaign because of the gold mine in Casterly Rock. If that is the case, I demand equal command of our combined armies. You may command the largest host of the four rulers you called here, but wars cost money and I have mountains of bullion available. In addition, my soldiers will assume the vanguard in all
“I beg your pardon?” Mern Gardener exclaimed.

“With respect, King Mern, you can call upon seventy thousand soldiers, but many of them are summer knights and green men who have not been exerted enough in war or tough conditions. Meanwhile, my own soldiers have been trained in the various hills in my kingdom and are much more conditioned to handle the stress of battle. Also, because I have fewer soldiers to worry about supplying and arming, each individual soldier are of a higher quality than your own.”

“My lords and knights will not take that kindly, as they wish for battle as much as your own. In order for that to happen, you would need to give concessions of your own.”

“How about a subsidy to cover half of any expenses you’ll incur in the upcoming campaign and to purchase the necessary food that my own soldiers would need?”

Mern Gardener grinned. “Then under that term, I accept your condition for your troops to take the vanguard.”

“One more condition. I would like concessions from the Starry Sept, specifically the financial obligations.”

Mern Gardener arched his eyebrow. “What exactly are you aiming for?”

“My financial contributions to the Faith to be lessened by a third for the twenty-five years. As I will contribute troops to the campaign, that’s the least His Holiness can offer for those that would fight for the Faith.”
Mern Gardener bobbed his head in understanding. “I will see what I can do.”

“Then, I believe that all of my conditions have been met. When are we commencing the campaign against the Valyrians?”

“His Holiness requires all those answering his call to be ready to march by the Warrior’s Day.”


“Indeed.” They clinked their goblets as a sign of their mutual agreement.

“I don’t like this, Your Grace,” Weslar Reyne crossed his arms. “You’re asking me to contribute my troops to a war that we have no reason to join.”

“I’m not asking you, Lord Reyne,” Loren Lannister replied evenly. “As your king, you are obligated to answer your king’s call to arms.”

“What exactly are the conditions for us if we join?” Lord Crakehall asked.

“I’ve asked for the riverlands along the Red Fork extending all the way to the Gods Eye. All of you can have your pick on where you can establish your house in additional keeps.”

“Are we all to be solely responsible in underwriting the future campaign?” Lord Marbrand was skeptical.
“No. The Gardeners will share in the burden of supporting the combined armies. Also, we will be in the vanguard, so we will be influential in making all of the important decisions in the field.”

“Will the Reach lords accept that?” Lord Lefford joined in.

“Mern Gardener will ensure that they are in control. After all, we’re all of the Faith and the High Septon will take one third of yearly obligations to the Starry Sept for the next twenty-five years.”

“Twenty-five years?!” Lord Westerling exclaimed. No one needed to be a genius to understand that was a serious concession from the Faith.

“This campaign will benefit us all, my lords. So, I wouldn’t worry too much,” Loren Lannister stated.

Slowly but surely, all of the lords sworn to the Rock nodded their assent. All but Lord Reyne, who was still unconvinced.

As the other lords retired, Loren Lannister stopped Weslar Reyne. “My lord, would you walk with me?”

“Of course, Your Grace,” Lord Reyne courteously answered.

Strolling along the seaside walkway of the Arbor, they had just reached the harbor before Loren Lannister turned around and punched Weslar Reyne hard in the chest. Lord Reyne collapsed as he struggled to catch his breath. Meanwhile, Loren Lannister stared down at him with the lion’s menace.
“How dare you show your dissent with me in front of the other lords,” Loren Lannister scolded. “I could have you chained to be executed once we return to Casterly Rock.”

“You have no strong reasons to contribute to that fat bastard in Oldtown,” Weslar Reyne responded as he slowly stood back up and caught his breath. “Why commit us to this fight?”

“Why?” Loren Lannister scoffed. “Because we fucking can. And if we can, we do. If we’re soft on threats while they’re still in the cradle, it’ll grow out of our control.”

“But myself and yourself have no reason to attack Dragonstone. I have business with them and that brought me much gold into my coffers.”

“Well, you’ll just have to end your business with them.”

“And if I don’t?”

“I remember your son being castellan of Casterly Rock, which is an honor. However, he is also your house’s most experienced commander of troops and you have not enjoyed good relations with the Westerlings as of late. What’s to stop me from calling the forces of the Crag to Castamere while your best commander is locked away at the Rock?”

Weslar Reyne shook his head. “Even for you, Your Grace, that’s a big risk. I command the second largest army in your kingdom after you, eight thousand men, while the Westerlings can only rely on half that number. One wrong move and my other sons will march on Casterly Rock.”

“They can try, but understand that no army has ever managed to take Casterly Rock. And should your sons do, I can attain you and your house for treason and no one would complain. I wonder who I would give Castamere and your daughters to in that case,” Loren Lannister pondered aloud.
That got a look of fury from Weslar Reyne, who quickly suppressed it upon seeing that Loren Lannister was seriously considering that possibility.

“I thought so,” Loren Lannister smugly grinned. “Call your troops once we return. I require half of them.”

Weslar Reyne sighed in resignation. “As you command, Your Grace.”

“Very good, my lord. Remember, I have your son at Casterly Rock. Should this campaign go well and your house does it part, you shall be rewarded beyond your comprehension.”

“I shall count on it, my king.”

“Do so,” and Loren Lannister left Lord Reyne on the walkway. He proceed back to Lord Redwyne’s castle, as he had many ravens to send.

Chapter End Notes

I told you that I will do something that will really make the Targaryens and Jaenyx conquer Westeros for real and this is it. Much of the High Septon’s call to arms was based on the background for the First Crusade organized by Pope Urban II and the call for the Albigensian Crusade by Pope Innocent III. As for a lot of the key parts of the story, I thank Longclaw 1-6 for making a lot of suggestions. The Crusades were a very political affair that involved a lot of conundrums and dizzying interests, but the Roman papacy pursued the Crusades out of a desire to increase their own authority over feudal Europe. I hope I showed it well in this chapter, with the High Septon calling for arms, Mern Gardener's manuevering, and Loren Lannister's thought processes.

And here, we have our first Loren Lannister POV. I intend for him to be the main antagonist POV and I hope that I did the Lannisters justice, as this was incredibly difficult to write. All I know is that, now everyone connected to the Faith is really fucked, as they fight against our dragonlords at their own peril.
I'm working on fanart for this story, but in lieu of that, I have compiled a list of actors who I think embody the characters of this story well:

Jaenyx "Jae" Belaerys: Jensen Ackles
Aegon "Egg" Targaryen: Henry Cavill (due to the Witcher)
Visenya "Vis" Targaryen Belaerys: Ellen Hollman
Rhaenys "Rhae" Targaryen: Mia Wasikowska
Orys Baratheon: Tom Hardy
Aerion Targaryen: Jason Isaacs
Valeana "Val" Velaryon Targaren: Michelle Pfeiffer
Argella Durrandon Baratheon: Jenna Coleman
Loren I Lannister: Jared Harris
Mern IX Gardener: Benedict Cumberbatch
Edmyn Tully: Jonathan Rhys Meyers
Colren Blackwood: Richard Armitage
Weslar Reyne: Tony Curran
Torrhen Stark: cross between Eric Bana and Rufus Sewell
Brandon Snow: Alexander Dreymon
Sharra Arryn: Morena Baccarin
Meria Martell: Shohreh Aghdashloo
Konno Haru: Hiroyuki Sanada
Darvin Hoare: Clive Standen (due to Vikings)

BE PREPARED!
Jaenyx VI

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in posting the chapter. Been busy with family and getting back to grad school. HAPPY NEW YEAR, everyone. I hope 2020 and the new decade will be better than the last (the 2010s will definitely go down as a decade to remember).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JAENYX VI

Jaenyx felt the air blow against his face as he held on tightly to Cloudwynd’s spines. He looked upon the waters of the Blackwater Bay, feeling the same sense of calm that was familiar to him as he sailed to Dragonstone over a year ago. He was calmed by the sea’s lack of past and future, as it was there before people walked the earth and would be there long after they were buried in the ground. But the sea also represented Jaenyx’s wistfulness that left him static for over five years. Now, he was married to a beautiful and fierce woman, had a brother in Aegon, a sister in Rhaenys, a father in Lord Aerion, and a mother in Lady Valaena, the last of whom had finally got over her irrational distancing from her good-son after seeing how deep her daughter’s love for Jaenyx had become. As for Orys… What if he’s right? What if I am hanging on to the ways of something that will never come back?

Six moons had passed since they made peace with the rest of the stormlords, with the peace consummated with the union of Orys Baratheon and Argella Durrandon, who thankfully saw sense and bent the knee to Dragonstone and House Belaerys while agreeing to the indemnity and other conditions. Orys had moved from Dragonstone to his new home at Storm’s End, where he received the stormlords’ fealty, with Lord Aerion overseeing everything and naming him Lord of Storm’s End and Lord Paramount of the Stormlands. Despite his new titles and Lord Targaryen addressing him as “Lord Baratheon” to show his acknowledgement of his son’s new station, even Orys understood that he would have to work very hard to earn the stormlords’ loyalty, as he did kill their king in battle and was an outsider.

Six moons also represented the length of time that Jaenyx and Orys were not on speaking terms. While Visenya stood by him unconditionally, she did not hide her disapproval at what what he said. She said to Jaenyx after their argument, “I don’t care what anyone says. You are my husband, but Orys is my brother and I will not allow anyone to put him down .” And that was after she slapped him hard in the face before sleeping on a separate mattress that night.
Visenya quickly got over her disappointment in Jaenyx, and so did Aegon, Rhaenys, and Lord Aerion. However, they all said that he needed to patch things up with Orys, which was easier said than done since Jaenyx was slow to forgive anyone who spoke bad of his family, even unintentionally. He didn’t care that Orys was a bastard, but he began to wonder if not looking like a true Valyrian discounted total Valyrian ancestry. And what Orys said to him about not behaving like a true Valyrian either... shook him, not because of how wrong he sounded, but how right he sounded. He learned the common tongue so that his new family would be more comfortable speaking to him even if they at least understood High Valyrian, but did that make him contrary to Valyrian habits? Ragaemor Tarareon possessed the only direct knowledge of Valyrian combat arts, but he wasn’t born in Valyria, so how could he say that what he taught was the true article? Cloudwynd was born in the Basilisk Isles, decades after Jaenyx’s ancestors settled there and the Doom, but did that make her less of a dragon because she wasn’t born while Valyria was still alive? Most disturbingly, Jaenyx might have spoken High Valyrian, but the variety spoken by him and the rest of those from the Basilisk Isles had been regarded as an ancient form long extinguished since the Doom, not many having heard it aloud in decades and only studied as part of a classical education. He didn’t know what was more disturbing, that the world had moved on so fast since the Doom of Valyria or that his people had been frozen in time for too long and were thus only discovering how antiquated their ways had become to those living in the present.

Jaenyx might’ve been stubborn in his clinging to the ways of Valyria, but given how the world regarded such ways as ancient, he wondered if the Valyria occupying his mind was merely an idea, an idea that had only remained alive because of the ones on Dragonstone. Master Haru also taught him to not be stupid to ignore whenever people said valid words, however hurtful they were, which only made him more unsure of his strong grasping of anything remotely connected to Valyria. In a way, Orys was right in that if Jaenyx was so adamant in being a true Valyrian, whatever that meant, he would not treated Aegon or Rhaenys with any kind of love since they were just as much from Westeros as they were from old Valyria. He was also would have resisted Visenya’s attempts to make him more accustomed to the ways of Westeros despite her own misgivings, as she browbeat him to learn how to properly read, write, and speak the common tongue because she wouldn’t stand for others assuming that he was illiterate and unintelligent. On top of that, she also made him dress in a more ornate manner, as she said that others wouldn’t take him seriously as a lord if he dressed in his simple robes like Master Haru but allowed him to continue holding onto his katana and wakizashi despite those who might be apprehensive of him wearing weapons outside of battle.

Jaenyx willed those thoughts away as he focused on flying through the sky with Visenya, Aegon, and Rhaenys. He saw Balerion banking to his left, his black scales glistening against the sunlight as he went on a slow and wide spiral downwards towards the sea. Meraxes was climbing upwards before she assumed her circle above Balerion. As for Cloudwynd and Vhagar, they were flying side by side as they watched the other two do their motions through the air.

Looking to his side at Visenya as she rode Vhagar, Jaenyx signaled for her to bank to her right while he went left. He intended for the both of them to pass between Meraxes and Balerion, converging on each other in a scissor-like motion before diverging in separate directions. Meraxes
fly high above Balerion, allowing a vantage point from which to dive onto whomever approached her way, while Balerion’s spiral was gradual enough from him to climb back up upon seeing another dragon come near him. He would leave Aegon to Visenya, while he would go after Rhaenys. Although Vhagar was just as agile as Cloudwynd and Meraxes, she had a slightly bigger build than the latter two and would be more useful in flying around Aegon and Balerion. Also, Jaenyx wanted to find out how good Rhaenys was a dragonrider.

“Steady, girl. Wait for it,” Jaenyx urged Cloudwynd as she went into a wide half-circle before coming head on with Vhagar. As they both completed their arcs, they were directly ahead of each other and both were fast closing the distance between them. Before they collided, Cloudwynd and Vhagar folded their wings and spun past each other as Jaenyx held onto to her spines tightly to avoid falling off. Afterwards, Cloudwynd dove towards the sea and leveled out before touching the surface. As she climbed back up, he could see that Balerion was giving chase to Vhagar while he saw Meraxes dive on top of him and began her own chase.

Cloudwynd made her climb back into sky steeper, hoping that Meraxes might tire out before giving up the chase. As Jaenyx struggled to keep his grip on Cloudwynd’s spines and felt his feet almost sliding off of her back as the climb became more steep, he looked back, or down, and saw that Meraxes had not only pursued them into their sharp ascent but was gaining on them.

Warning Cloudwynd, she roared in response before arching her neck downwards, with her body and Jaenyx following as she folded her wings again to gain as much speed as possible from their rapid descent. Jaenyx squinted his eyes and felt the air blowing very hard his hair, no doubt making them puffy when they did land back on Dragonstone. Cloudwynd again leveled out before touching the sea, but this time staying only a few feet above the surface. Her fast flying just above the waters caused waves to form and sprays to splash onto Jaenyx’s face.

Jaenyx turned around again, impressed that Meraxes had maintained her pursuit of Cloudwynd. A thought coming to his mind, he had Cloudwynd climb back up to be level with Meraxes, who was closing in on them. Then, slapping on her neck, Cloudwynd yelped as she outstretched her wings against the flow of air, causing her to go just above Meraxes and keep her mid-flight, for a short moment. Feeling his body jerk at the sudden stoppage, Jaenyx grinned as Cloudwynd resumed flying level and saw that he was now behind Meraxes. Well, now I know what move to use against Rhae the next time we fly. He had only done that move on instinct, but his trusting of his instincts paid off.

However, Jaenyx realized that he celebrated too early, as Meraxes quickly recovered from her blunder and turned into Cloudwynd. Acting quickly, he had Cloudwynd also turn into Meraxes and thus began a circle of dominance in the skies above the Blackwater Bay. While both Cloudwynd
and Meraxes were about the same size, the former had a longer neck and had more reach while the latter was more streamlined and agile. Cloudwynd used her longer neck to try to bite at Meraxes’ tail while they were still locked in the circle, but Meraxes had fast reactions and strained herself to close the circle.

Seeing that Meraxes was being persistent and knowing that Cloudwynd would not be able to close the circle before Meraxes, Jaenyx got out of the circle and banked to the right. Looking to his left, he saw Meraxes fly up next to Cloudwynd, their wing tips almost touching each other. Seeing Rhaenys gesture to Dragonstone, Jaenyx nodded before they flew back together.

Landing at the same clearing where Jaenyx met them over a year ago, he slid off Cloudwynd while Rhaenys slid off Meraxes. Rubbing Cloudwynd’s snout while telling her what a good job she did with that new move, he allowed her to fly back into the sky to soar at her leisure. He saw Rhaenys do the exact same thing, but she kissed Meraxes’ snout before also allowing her to fly above Dragonstone.

“That was a really good move there, Jae,” Rhaenys walked up to him. “Didn’t expect that.”

“Thought I’d try something I don’t think any dragonrider ever attempted before. Not even you,” Jaenyx smugly replied.

“Careful,” Rhaenys playfully warned. “Don’t want to get too boastful now.”

“Okay, okay,” Jaenyx put his hands up. “I will say that you and Meraxes move as one, like all dragonriders should. Meraxes is very agile and persistent.”

Rhaenys nodded, but Jaenyx also noticed her raising an eyebrow. “That she is. When did you start speaking the common tongue?”

Jaenyx paused before realizing what he just did. Whenever he was with Visenya or with family, he spoke High Valyrian. But the knowledge of how... archaic his habits really were caused him to be
more like his new family.

“I’ve been with you, Vis, Egg, and the others for over a year now. Might save some headaches between us if I started using the common tongue more often,” Jaenyx simply answered.

Rhaenys shook her head, not convinced. “No, I don’t think that’s it.”

“What?”

Rhaenys crossed her arms. “Come on, Jae. I’ve had over a year to know you, and I know how annoyingly stubborn you are when it comes to staying true to your Valyrian roots.” Jaenyx looked to the ground, as her words were true. “You wouldn’t just start talking in the common tongue unless something serious happened. What is it?”

“It’s not that simple, Rhae.”

Rhaenys shrugged. “We got time.”

Jaenyx told Rhaenys everything, of how his last talk with Orys shook him and made him more unsure of what believed now. He emphasized that he still saw himself as a son of Valyria, but he revealed to Rhaenys what meaning that held anymore as the world had moved on so fast after the Doom.

“Does Vis know?” Rhaenys asked after she took a moment to absorb Jaenyx’s growing doubts about his own identity. He nodded, causing Rhaenys to also nod. “Well, what do you know? The proud Valyrian suddenly having doubts,” she remarked dryly.

“I’m being serious, Rhae.”
“I know, but all I can say is that I am happy you’re thinking that way.”

Jaenyx blinked. “What do you mean?”

“To be honest with you, Jae, I was quite shocked at how you really thought about Westeros. I may be of Valyria just like you, but this is my home and it hurt me when my brother, and the man that my sister loves, spoke of it in that way. And I believe that you don’t have to reject the ways of Westeros in order to be counted as a ‘true Valyrian’, because it is as you said. What does being a true Valyrian mean anymore? We are the last of the dragonlords, but I don’t think that we should stick onto the ways of the past.”

Jaenyx sighed. The Targaryens and himself were the only ones left in the world who had the blood of dragons running through their veins. Before the Doom, there were forty dragonlord families and there was a defined order on who was more powerful and how they should all act within their stations. While the Doom might have made wiped out most of Valyria, the civilization lived on through him and his new family. At the same time, Jaenyx began to wonder if it was wise to be stuck in the old ways.

Rhaenys patted him on the shoulder. “But let’s not focus on that now. We have name-day celebrations to prepare for, and your first thoughts should be on making it the best one you could. After all, it’s Visenya’s.”

That got Jaenyx out of his stupor. “Fuck, you’re right. Damn it.”

Rhaenys giggled. “It’s fun when you curse in the common tongue. You should do it more often.”

“Shut up,” Jaenyx retorted, with slight annoyance. “Oh, that reminds me. I wanted to show you my gift to Visenya. She’s a hard woman to please, but I hope this will work.” Jaenyx took a small velvet box from his pocket and handed it to Rhaenys. Seeing that she was curious, he allowed her to open it. He saw her eyes widen at it.
“This is beautiful,” Rhaenys said in awe. “Where did you get this?”

“It was my mother’s,” Jaenyx replied.

Rhaenys closed the box and handed it back to Jaenyx. “She’ll love it. I just know it.”

Jaenyx strummed his lute in the center of the hall while Rhaenys played her fiddle. He was sitting down while she was standing up with her eyes closed, her mind fully immersed in the music. This was the final performance of the celebrations before Visenya opened her presents from the various lords under them. Besides House Targaryen’s traditional vassals in the Blackwater Bay as well as the new ones such as the Rosbys and the Stokeworths, riverlords including Colren Blackwood and stormlords such as Lord Dondarrion had arrived at Dragonstone to celebrate their overlord’s daughter’s name-day. Jaenyx alongside his new family were surprised that any stormlord would show up, but Lord Aeron knew that accepting their invitation to Visenya’s name-day was in itself a political move. House Dondarrion of Blackhaven suffered remained relatively intact during the subjugation of the stormlands and was the first house to swear fealty to Orys Baratheon as their new lord paramount, which was astonishing given that the Dondarrions were marcher lords and were quite loyal to the late King Argilac. By being the first to swear fealty and showing up at his daughter’s name-day celebrations, Lord Aeron explained that houses like the Dondarrions were seeking to advance themselves in the new order of things. Even my wife’s name-day has to be filled with politicking. How boring.

With the celebrations held in the great hall of Dragonstone, Lord Aeron and Lady Valaena spared no expense when it came to celebrating their daughter’s twentieth name-day. They had caskets of Arbor gold, Dornish red, Lys white, and even a bit of the Yi-Tish arakju served to the guests. Stags, chickens, aurochs, roasted boars, boiled crabs, fried fish, and many loaves of bread filled the bellies of many, alongside grapes, berries, apples, and other fruits. There was singing, dancing, and musical performances with the lute, fiddle, recorder, and even the kotos. It was also the first time that Visenya took to the floor and danced with Jaenyx, although both were not very good at it compared to Rhaenys and Aegon. Only Jaenyx’s and Visenya’s fluidity, attained from Master Haru’s teaching him the fast and agile combat ways of Yi-Ti and her naturally nimble fighting style, saved them both from looking too stiff and from enormous embarrassment.
However, Jaenyx and Rhaenys decided to top off the feast and dancing with a performance of their own. Remembering a song that Master Haru would sing to his beloved wife (she was long dead before he came to the Basilisk Isles), he modified it to include instruments not from Yi-Ti and went it over with Rhaenys the night before. Even though Visenya was not as taken to song as was Rhaenys, he thought it would be a song she would understand very well. As he played the lute and Rhaenys the fiddle, he began with:

“Nanimo motazu ni umareochita boku
Towa no sukima de notauchimawatteru
Akirameta mono to kashikoi mono dake ga
Shousha no jidai ni doko de iki wo suu

Shihaisha mo kami mo dokoka taningao
Dakedo hontou wa wakatteru hazu
Yuuki ya kibou ya kizuna to ka no mahou
Tsukaimichi mo naku otona wa me wo somukeru
Sore demo ano hi no kimi ga ima mo mada
Boku no zen seigi no domannaka ni iru

Sekai ga senaka wo muketemo mada nao
Tachimukau kimi ga ima mo koko ni iru

Ai ni dekiru koto wa mada aru kai
Boku ni dekiru koto wa mada aru kai

Kimi ga kureta yuuki dakara
Kimi no tame ni tsukaitain da
Kimi to wakeatta ai dakara
Kimi to janakya imi ga nain da

Ai ni dekiru koto wa mada aru kai
Boku ni dekiru koto wa mada aru kai”

Rhaenys then came with her fiddle, her fingers moving gracefully while her immersion into the music added to the power of the song. The kotos played by Arata and Kenzou Haru added texture.

“Nanimo nai bokutachi ni
Naze yume wo misaseta ka
Owari aru jinsei ni
Naze kibou wo motaseta ka
Naze kono te wo surinukeru
Mono bakari ataeta ka
Sore demo nao shigamitsuku
Bokura wa minikui kai
Soretomo kirei kai kotaete yo”

Rhaenys played faster and harder with the fiddle as Jaenyx finished the bridge, with Arata and Kenzou also adding to the texture of the crescendo before fading away.

“Ai no uta mo utawaretsukushita
Amata no eiga de katararetsukushita
Son'na kouya mo
Umareochita boku, kimi sore demo
Ai ni dekiru koto wa mada aru yo
Boku ni dekiru koto wa mada aru yo”
Jaenyx sung that last verse with only a few strums of the lute and with a lowered voice before finishing off with a glide down the strings. As soon as he finished, there were thunderous applause in the great hall as the many lords and ladies stood up clapping. They didn’t understand a word in Jaenyx’s song, “Ai ni dekiru koto wa mada aru kai”, but they felt the emotions behind the music and enjoyed it nonetheless.

As for Visenya, her understanding of nihongo had progressed to the point where she could carry on with the Harus and the other people who hailed from Yi-Ti and who were with them at the moment. She never heard the song before, but Jaenyx could tell how… moved she was. Like most of the songs in Westeros, it was a song about love. But instead of boasting about a man’s desire for a woman and all of that, the song talked about love and meditated on what exactly it was. More importantly, it talked about how love gave one the courage to push through seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Jaenyx and Rhaenys bowed in gratitude for the audience’s reception before setting down the lute and fiddle. Once he sat back down next to Visenya, she pulled his face towards her and gave him a strong kiss, prompting cheers from the hall.

Then came the time for Visenya to open her presents. Her cousin Daemon Velaryon gave her a book containing the maps of the known world, which appealed to her intellectual interests. Crispian Celtigar gave her golden bracelets melted down from what remained of the treasury at Harrenhal. Riverlords such as Lord Blackwood and Lord Tully (the latter having to come as was his responsibility as one of Jaenyx’s deputies) and stormlords such as Lord Dondarrion and Lord Tarth (the father of Ser Bruze Tarth) presented their own gifts, with one being a peacock. Jaenyx saw Visenya stifle a laugh at the peacock, as the gift was ridiculous in itself and she didn’t know what she would need such a bird for.

Then came the gifts from her family. Lord Aerion presented her with a necklace made of rubies and held together with Valyrian steel chains. Lady Valaena presented her with earrings, also made of rubies but with gold linings. Orys, still dressed in riding leathers despite now being a lord himself, presented her with a khukuri knife that he got off of one of his raids in the Stepstones. Pirates had been ravaging the shores of the stormlands since Argilac died, so Orys took it upon himself as lord paramount to deal with them personally. Jaenyx saw that Visenya was eyeing the curved but wide knife up and down, before sheathing it in her belt and giving Orys a big hug.

Rhaenys gifted her with something that Jaenyx did not expect her to have: a glass candle. Made of
Obsidian and powered by magic, the light they gave off was said to have done strange things to colors, making bright colors such as white, yellow, or red shine unusually brightly, while dark colors such as blue or black turned as dark as night. It was said that glass candles could be used to observe far away events and communicate with other glass candles over vast distances. The only other person he knew of that had a glass candle was Taygor, but his cousin merely used it as an heirloom since there were no other glass candles to talk with. Until now. When asked by Visenya as to where he got it, as the rest in the great hall was curious since the only glass candles they knew of were in the Citadel, she cryptically replied with, “Well, don’t tell the Citadel about it, or they might think that I stole it from my last visit.”

Aegon presented her with a Dornish scimitar, which he purchased during his most recent visit to Nightsong from an archer who had claimed it from a Dornishman he killed. Unsheathing the scimitar, Visenya was surprised at how… black the blade was and how light and sandy it felt in her hands. Aegon couldn’t answer her question other than that the archer told him that he got it off of some member of House Yronwood. Visenya set the scimitar down before embracing her little brother.

Visenya then turned to Jaenyx and looked at him expectedly. Wasting no time, Jaenyx pulled out the velvet box from his pocket and handed it to her with both hands. Feeling the smoothness of the box, she opened it and like Rhaenys, her eyes widened in awe.

“Where did you get this?” Visenya asked while still focused on the contents of the box.

Jaenyx offered her a small smile. “It was my mother’s. She got it from her father, who is also my and Taygor’s grandfather. She said that my grandfather’s family, the Leniars, had carried that ring for a thousand years and whoever wore it will truly be unbreakable in body and in mind. It is said that the jewel was formed from the Fourteen Flames themselves, meaning that you will have the original essence of Valyria’s fire flowing inside of you. All of us know how strong and durable you are, and so was my mother in a way.” Jaenyx paused before continuing. “Let this ring and its origins from Valyria’s volcanoes make you so strong that nothing can ever break you or ground you down.”

Visenya took the ring out of the box. Made of Valyrian steel, she and everyone was surprised that the jewel was an emerald. However, there was some red inside the green and if one looked closely, they could see the red moving, as if a blood mist was flowing back and forth. She put the ring on her right ring finger, as she was right-handed and putting a ring on that finger meant everlasting love. Smiling at Jaenyx’s gift, she gazed at him before walking up to him, putting her arms around his neck, and giving him another strong kiss, which also prompted more cheering.
“I’m not never taking this off,” Visenya whispered to him.

“I don’t expect you to,” Jaenyx replied with a smile.

Visenya grinned. “You should speak the common tongue more often. Might save us some confusion.”

Jaenyx shrugged. “Maybe, but you also know that it’s a big step for me to do so.”

“I know,” Visenya nodded her head. “But I’m glad you’re taking it. It shows that you really do care about us enough to do so and that you’re seeing that not everything of Westeros compromises with us being Valyrians.”

“Still learning on how to differentiate on what does and doesn’t work well with our Valyrian roots.”

“But I’m glad you’re making the effort regardless. It means that you’re not such a stubborn hardass after all, which is really annoying.”

“I’m happy that you think that way, Vis,” Jaenyx replied with sincerity before leaning in to kiss her again.

After the celebrations ended, their guests retired to their chambers, Aegon and Rhaenys to theirs, Lord Aerion and Lady Valaena to the lord’s chambers, Orys and Argella to his old room, and Jaenyx and Visenya to hers. As soon as the doors closed, Visenya turned around and undid her braid before pulling on a long string hanging over her right shoulder that Jaenyx did not notice before. He blinked and felt his eyes widen as her blue gown with red/black lining (which she wore more often to honor her belonging to both Houses Belaerys and Targaryen) loosened around her
shoulders, allowing her to wiggle her arms out of the sleeves and pulling it down to the floor. Stepping out of the gown that pooled at her feet, her bare form was exposed to his feasting eyes.

“ That’s… how did you learn how to untie your gown so quickly? ” Jaenyx had to ask.

“ Oh, now you’re speaking High Valyrian now? ” Visenya raised her eyebrows, as she walked closer to him until their noses almost touched. “You should speak the common tongue more often. I like your accent.”

“ You didn’t answer my question, ” Jaenyx pointed out.

“ I had Taygor come up with something for me to undress faster. Didn’t know that he knew how to make clothes.”

“ That’s one of his hobbies, ” Jaenyx nodded.

“ Sometimes, ” Visenya continued. “ I just want to feel you inside me so much that I can’t wait for you to get my dress or breeches off. ” Pulling him into a kiss, she held up the finger where Jaenyx’s mother’s ring was. “ Thank you for giving me your mother’s ring, Jae. I’m never taking this off, ever.”

Jaenyx chuckled as she stroked her hair. “ I wouldn’t expect you to, and I’m sure she would have liked it on you.”

Jaenyx saw Visenya beam before he felt himself being pulled to the ground and his wind knocked out of him as she kneed him in the gut. Falling to his knees, his face was conveniently in front of her clit, which he only stared at for a moment before he felt Visenya shove him deep into it. “ Pleasure me, Jae, ” Visenya ordered him blissfully. “ I want to feel good.”
Jaenyx felt her fingers curled into his silver locks as she urged him deeper with the determined fury and passion of a dragon, to the things he was doing with his mouth and tongue. As soon as the wet organ touched her even wetter core, he heard Visenya moaned loud enough that even the dragons who were resting just outside the castle of Dragonstone could hear. "Oh, my gods. How are you doing this to me?"

Jaenyx couldn't help but smirk, licking up a trail along her slit. While Visenya would be as likely to let him ravage her on the bed as she would in pinning him down and subduing him so that she could whatever she wanted with him, today was different. Instead of subduing and then completely dominating him, she had got him on his knees, with his clothes still on, and allowed him to do his work. Jaenyx could guess that she was so touched by him giving her something so precious as his mother’s ring that she was granting him leeway in how he pleased her.

"Unnnhhh…" His tongue parted through her folds in its mission. The heat ever present inside Visenya rose to new heights. "Don't. Stop."

"Of course, Vis," he said in his dark, husky wolf growl. She was the only person that Jaenyx took orders from, as she proved time and again how capable she was both on and off the field of battle. A man would rue the day when he showed her even a hint of disrespect for her abilities, and it was easy for Jaenyx to avoid that because true love prevented one from feeling less while finding out how that person complemented the other. Her moans spurred him forward, drove his lust and hunger. Running his hands over her ass, Jaenyx plunged his tongue as deep as he could.

Jaenyx was sure that Vhagar channeled her flames in Visenya’s entrance, as he felt heat enveloping his tongue and mouth. A scream left her lips, fingers pulling so hard on Jaenyx’s hair that he almost yelped from the sharp tug on his hair. "Kessa, Jae. Harder. More," she murmured repeatedly. His tongue doubled its pace, Jaenyx turned on from her chattering. Swiping over a particular spot inside her, the one placed that never ceased to erupt in dragonfire within her when they made love, he felt her shatter into his waiting mouth. "JAE!"

Lapping up the gush of wetness pouring out of Visenya’s core, Jae smiled in satisfaction. Nothing like making the truly unbreakable warrior dragon that was his wife limp even though she was still standing. Kissing her navel, he kissed his way up through Visenya’s torso and on her breasts before meeting her lips, feeling her body tremble from the aftershocks. "So, was that enough for you?"

Visenya blinked. "You need to ask that, Jae?" she slowly came to her senses. Before Jaenyx could
respond, he felt her grab at the top of his tunic before she ripped it in two, pressing her lips against
his neck as she bit on it and ran her hands along the lines of his muscled torso. Grunting in pain, he
continued to feel her smacks while he felt her greedy fingers undo his breeches and shoving them
down.

“Hold still, Jae,” Visenya whispered as she knelt down as she made Jaenyx. “Let your wife
pleasure you,” were her words before he felt a strong sensation around his cock.

"Vis...” The tender loving care of his warrior dragon suppressing all feeling in Jaenyx’s body, all
he could do was gasp and grab her head. His fingers weaved into her hair. Only she could reduce
him to this state, and by the smirk on her lips, he knew that she knew it. Before he knew, Visenya
sucked his tip and took him deep.

"Fuck!” Jaenyx felt his cock erupt into her mouth, Visenya’s tongue swiping over him to prolong
the pleasure. But they were not done, as she stood up quickly and gave him a sick smile before he
felt her squeeze his earlobe. “Ah, ah, ah,” Jaenyx let out as she lead his head and body towards the
bed. “Easy, Vis.”

“Daor,” Visenya shook her head before pushing Jaenyx onto the mattress. He barely got onto his
back before she went on top of him, pinned his arms above his head, and straddled his waist.

Jaenyx felt his face turn blue as Visenya began to aggressively kiss him, his air slowly leaving him.
Fortunately, she broke off the kiss before guiding his cock into her entrance. She then slapped him
hard in the face.

“ What was that for ?” Jaenyx asked incredulously.

“You’re not trying hard enough,” Visenya growled. “I want you to ride me as much as I will ride
you now.”

“ Um, how will I do that when I’m on my back ?”
“You’ll figure it out,” Visenya smirked before impaling herself on him. Feeling her squeeze on his length and the expressions on her face almost made him climax. Her eyes were shut tightly, his warrior dragon biting her lower lip as she tried to control her moans at how delightful their coupling was.

Remembering her words, Jaenyx ran his hands up to cup Visenya’s breasts, satisfied at the sighs of happiness leaving her mouth as he squeezed them. He ignored the slaps of skin on skin, the creaking of the bed, and their mutual moans that filled their chambers as he shot himself upward. Visenya wanted him to ride her, so that was what he was doing.

Feeling himself nearing the edge, Jaenyx thrusted harder into Visenya. “Look at me, Vis. Say my name and scream like a dragon,” he told her.

Visenya stared at him, their violet eyes meeting each other while seeing the dragonfire blaze behind their irises. “Jae… Jae…” At last, the climax came. “JAE!” He felt himself erupt into her, waves of pleasure reverberating through their bodies as they both froze. Finally, Visenya collapsed onto him. She slid off of his torso before snuggling close to him, with Jaenyx wrapping her with his left arm and bringing her closer.

“Thanks for the gift, Jae,” Visenya whispered in content. “Already, I feel the fire in me burning brighter than before.”

Jaenyx smiled. “That’s probably my mother giving you her essence. I just hoped that she met you.”

Visenya kissed his jawline. “I don’t have to. I know she is here,” she raised her finger that had the ring. “And I know she lives on in you. She would be proud of you, Jae.”

Jaenyx felt a tear fall down his cheek before Visenya wiped it off of him. “Thank you, Vis,” he choked.
Visenya rested her head on his shoulder. “No need to thank me, Jae. We are bound for life.”

“What do you mean you haven’t consummated the marriage?” Lord Aerion was exasperated.

“It’s the truth, father,” Orys replied.

Lord Aerion sighed, livid. “Son, do you realize what you’ve just done? You’ve put our peace with the stormlords at risk!”

Jaenyx was about to discuss some business with Lord Aerion about the riverlords when he accidentally walked in on him, Aegon, Rhaenys, and Visenya talking with Lord Baratheon in the lord’s solar. He was about to leave before Lord Targaryen stopped him, saying that the discussion they were having was for family and he counted. Jaenyx was hesitant to be in the same room as Orys, but he saw no reason to not listen in on their conversation.

What Jaenyx did not expect was Orys confessing that he had not consummated his union with Argella Durrandon, who remained a maiden. That was surprising, given how Orys must have inherited Lord Aerion’s predilection for whoring before marrying Lady Valaena.

“One of the terms of our peace with the stormlords besides making the Lord of Storm’s End is the union between you and Argella Durrandon. If we still followed the Faith, any marriage that has not been consummated does not exist. And therefore, our peace agreement is null and void. Have you ever considered that?!” Lord Aerion was very close to exploding, prompting his children and Jaenyx to move slightly away from him. “Jaenyx,” he turned to him. “If a marriage is not consummated in the eyes of the gods of Valyria, does it exist?”
“No, Lord Aerion,” Jaenyx nodded. Marriages among dragonlords were also used for political purposes and that was one of the few things that the rest of Westeros had in common with Valyria.

“I just couldn’t do it, father,” Orys simply answered.

“And why not? You’ve fucked any woman you could get your hands on so far. Surely, Lady Argella is no different.”

Orys sighed as he collected himself. “She cried, father.”

That caught his attention, as did everyone else in the room. Even Jaenyx widened his eyes in surprise.

“What do you mean by that, son?” Lord Aerion softened his gaze.

“You’re right, father. I’ve fucked every woman I could get my fingers on. And they enjoyed my time with them as much as I with them. But they smiled and laughed while I had my business with them.” Aegon and Rhaenys sighed, while Visenya and Jaenyx groaned. Lord Aerion kept listening. “I followed Lady Argella’s wishes for our ceremony to combine elements of the Faith and of Valyria, but as we were in our chambers alone, she started crying. Even though she accepts that her father was foolish in attacking us, having the man that killed her father bed her was not something she could bear. All of the past women wanted me to bed them, but I couldn’t do it when I saw her tears. So, I just slept on the bed and didn’t go past that point yet.”

For a moment, Jaenyx felt something soften in him. He never had a high opinion of Orys, as was clear from their talk six moons ago. However, to see him admit such intimate details and tell all of them of his inability to bed the daughter of the man he killed made him… stop and think. Why do I keep seeing more to him than met my gaze? He wasn’t going to admit to anyone besides Visenya and Rhaenys just yet of his doubts, but their brother was clearly more than the whoring and hard-headed fool that he initially saw him as.
Then, Lord Aerion laughed. That caused everyone else in the solar to chuckle, albeit uneasily. All except Orys, who was confused as to why his father was laughing. Wiping a tear from his eye, Lord Aerion calmed down. “Don’t misunderstand me, son. I’m not laughing at you. A beautiful and strong woman who was crying stopping you from bedding her… that’s one for the songs if word got out and everyone knew your past self.”

“I just couldn’t do it, father. I might be a whoring bastard, but I do have decency.” That shocked everyone else to see him speak so lowly of himself. Granted, they saw him feel that way, but never aloud.

“Oh, I know you do,” Lord Aerion nodded. “And while I can admire that you are being considerate for Lady Argella’s situation, you also have to understand that there are consequences to your actions. After all, we’re of noble birth and there is no such thing as no ramifications for our deeds.” Lord Aerion leaned closer to him while switching back to his serious self. “Who else knows that you haven’t bedded your wife yet?”

“Perhaps a few servants,” Orys sheepishly shrugged.

Lord Aerion lowered his head and sighed. “The gods have pity… Fortunately, there is time to rectify your mistakes, son. As you’re both on Dragonstone at the moment, you will bed your wife tonight. I will have servants hearing you through the door and the walls. If they tell me that they heard anything other than the both of you fucking, there will be hells to pay, and it won’t be just yourself that you’ll endanger by essentially making your union nonexistent. Do you understand?”

Orys looked at him with sad eyes, but Lord Aerion was not receptive.


“Yes, father,” Orys nodded, resigned.

“Good. Now, go see to your wife. Say whatever you have to say to her, but you will bed her
tonight. And I expect the both of you to make an heir. As for myself, I will see to anyone who knows of the truth,” their father pointed to him before Orys showed himself out.

“Was that necessary, father?” Aegon asked. “He was only being considerate to Lady Argella’s feelings.”

Lord Aerion exhaled. “And I am glad that he is showing to others besides us that he has a heart. But now’s not the time to let sentimentality affect our judgment. Do you realize what would happen if the stormlords found out that Orys did not consummate the union with Lady Argella?”

Aegon didn’t answer. “Not only would the peace be jeopardized, Orys’ credibility as a lord in his own right would be at risk because as much as I hate to say this, Westeros will never respect a lord that has been hindered by his lady. Orys has a long way to go before he gets the necessary experience, but this will be a good opportunity for him to understand that his feelings will sometimes have to be suppressed for his lordly duties.”

“But you said that you wanted Orys to find a woman. Shouldn’t his feelings matter in that instance?” Rhaenys pointed out.

“I stand by my words, Rhae,” Lord Aerion replied. “I want Orys to find a woman that can keep him in check and can give him love. I also want him to start acting as appropriate to his new station. He has to worry about his lordship, his sworn lords, his smallfolk, the land, and other concerns that only a lord would understand. If he doesn’t perform his role properly, everything will be undone, a little at a time.”

“But why give Orys Storm’s End if you think he doesn’t have the experience?” Visenya asked.

“Unlike him, all of you will share in the inheritance I will leave behind when I’m gone,” Lord Aerion put bluntly. “Egg and Rhae will get Dragonstone, and you and Jaenyx will have your own lands and keeps to worry about. Orys doesn’t have that, but I will not allow him to sell his sword or stoop so low as is common for bastard children. He’s thirty and to have no inheritance at that age is an embarrassment I won’t put him through. And what better way to learn about being a lord than to actually be a lord? This will be a good learning experience for him.”
Jaenyx could only feel respect for Lord Aerion showing so much consideration for his children. From his interactions with Chrass Rivers, the fact that he had a keep at all was a miracle and a testament to his abilities. For Orys, he not only had a keep to his name, but was a powerful lord underneath Dragonstone. He would have to stop thinking like a bastard, as was sadly the case for others born in his position, if he was to succeed as a lord and Lord Aerion had also found a way to erase the stain of bastardy from Orys’ mind. Clever, Lord Targaryen.

Despite being in the lord’s solar, Lord Aerion allowed Aegon, Rhaenys, Visenya, and Jaenyx to conduct their daily business there. While Aegon and Rhaenys helped their father manage the affairs of Dragonstone, Jaenyx and Visenya went through the affairs of the riverlands. Already, the peace in that region was being threatened after Black Harren perished. Despite the Blackwoods and Tullys performing to their best abilities as his deputies, there were growing concerns among the riverlords in regards to their policies in the regions. For starters, houses such as the Brackens of Stone Hedge and the Freys of the Crossing protested when Dragonstone made them cease all payments of the tithe to the Starry Sept, which was the center of the Faith of the Seven in Westeros. With himself and later House Targaryen professing no piety to the Faith, there was no point in supporting all of them supporting the rebuilding of the septs or giving money to a religion they didn’t follow. They didn’t stop the individual lords from rebuilding the septs themselves, but that meant taking more coin out of their pockets than before. This of course made some of the riverlords complain, not that Jaenyx would concern himself with their grumbling.

The riverlords that complained also seemed to forget how much damage the late Black Harren had done to the region, with the damage requiring more coin than was possible to raise with normal taxation to repair. Besides the remnants of the treasury at the ruins of Harrenhal, which was substantial, certain houses such as House Roote were fined for standing by the ironborn and alongside the revenues gained from the ceasing of the tithes, there was just enough coin to begin rebuilding the region. Fields were being restored, crops were being resown, villages were seeing their original inhabitants return, and infrastructure along the rivers was being rebuilt. It was a slow process, but Jaenyx estimated that after a few years, the riverlands would flourish and the grumbling lords silenced.

In regards to the ruins of Harrenhal, Jaenyx read the latest report from Aevor Rahitheon. The Rahitheons removed much of the stone used to build the fortress, to be transported elsewhere via ox and boat, while the walls and the remaining standing structures were maintained. However, Aevor Rahitheon recommended that they only use Harrenhal as a place to gather troops and as a supply depot, as no lord on Westeros could hope to properly utilize Black Harren’s vanity project as their own keep. Trusting his judgment, Jaenyx stamped his approval with his seal and thus making Harrenhal remain under Dragonstone’s control but with no lord over it.
But more serious to Jaenyx was the most recent dispatch from Lord Colren Blackwood, which Visenya pointed out to him. The Brackens were increasing their troop movements in their lands along the Red Fork, with some of them dangerously close to the Blackwood lands around Raventree Hall. It was no secret that Lord Bracken resented Lord Aerion and Jaenyx himself favoring House Blackwood for being the first to lend them any kind of support, and Lord Bracken was a close acquaintance of Edmyn Tully. However, Jaenyx was barely able to keep the peace between the Brackens and the Blackwoods, as any fighting between two powerful houses in the riverlands would set back any progress they made towards rebuilding the region. He tried to bribe the Lord Bracken with a portion from Black Harren’s treasury, which was still a small fortune, from doing anything rash. Apparently, bribery didn’t work and Jaenyx cursed himself for thinking that blood feuds could be solved with coin.

Fortunately, Jaenyx remembered a lesson from Master Haru in regards to spying and had set up his own network of agents that operated throughout the region. He employed servants, cooks, merchants, prostitutes and any other person that engaged in close contact with the various riverlords or anyone else deemed important. He was careful to trust merchants and whores, as they were as likely to tell their clients what they were really doing as spying on them on his behalf if it meant getting more coin. Therefore, he would pay them only after they told him information of great substance while showing he would not hesitate in punishing those that would try to double-cross him.

Such was the time when Jaenyx found out that one of the prostitutes he employed told her client, a Piper, that she was in fact trying to fish information out of him. It was easy for him to deny knowledge of his activity, as nobody trusted the word of a whore, but betrayal did not go unpunished. He went to the brothel, dragged that whore through the back door, and was prepared to cut her throat. However, Visenya had accompanied him and told him to stay his dagger, before she beat that prostitute to a bloody pulp. None of his agents knew each other, but they didn’t need to as they all heard about what his wife did and were thus kept in line.

However, Jaenyx warned his agents not to ask direct questions and instead to lead their clients on. He paid half a pound of silver to each of his agents whenever they did give him substantial information, and he and Visenya came up with an expense book to keep track of their agents and how much they were paying them. But they were wise to write the journal in a mixture of nihongo and High Valyrian, as only a few people in Westeros could even read a little of the latter and none for the former in case that journal got into the wrong hands. They had to take every precaution, as complacency breeds serious mistakes.

Another thing that was concerning for Jaenyx was the fact that an armed group of the Faith, calling themselves the Poor Fellows, were seen more frequently in the riverlands. He had studied the armed wing of the Faith, aptly called the Faith Militant or the Stars and Swords, with the Poor Fellows essentially being the rabble. However, they were more numerous than the better-armed
Warrior’s Sons and acted with infrequency, with only their red seven-pointed stars making it possible to keep track of them. He didn’t bother with the Faith’s activities in the riverlands, but they were increasing disturbances between septons preaching against the Valyrian practices of the family and the Valyrian bannermen patrolling throughout the region. After that riot in which the septon speaking against Aegon and Rhaenys’ marriage was arrested by a mix of Celtigar and Tarareon soldiers, there was a spike in Poor Fellows’ activity. He warned his bannermen to remain vigilant while also getting Lord Blackwood to send out his own men dressed in plain garments to further monitor lords and smallfolk that were getting increasingly intractable.

As Jaenyx and Visenya went through the other dispatches from the riverlands, Aegon and Rhaenys continuing their managing of Dragonstone’s affairs with their father, they heard a door knock. “Come in,” their father ordered. But instead of a regular servant, it was Ragaemor Tarareon, and he looked pale.

“What is it, Ragaemor?” Jaenyx stood up, concerned. He held up a scroll, which Jaenyx took from his hand.

“You need to read that, my lord,” Ragaemor Tarareon shakily answered.

“What is this?”

“You will see, Lord Jaenyx.”

Unrolling the scroll, Jaenyx read silently and slowly through the thick text. His eyes widened in horror and his face turned to white as he understood why Ragaemor Tarareon was so pale.

“Can you read it for us, Jaenyx?” Lord Aerion asked of him.

Collecting his thoughts, Jaenyx cleared his throat before reading the scroll aloud:
“Oh children of the Seven, although you have promised more firmly than ever to keep the
peace among yourselves and to preserve the rights of the gods, there is an important work for
you all to do. Freshly quickened by the divine correction, you must apply the strength of your
righteousness to another matter which concerns you as well as the gods. For your brethren
who live in the riverlands and the stormlands are in urgent need of your help, and you must
hasten to give them the aid which has often been promised them. For, as the most of you have
heard, the incestuous Valyrians have attacked them and have conquered territory as far east
as the Tumblestone and as far south as the Red Mountains. They have occupied more and
more of the lands of our brothers and sisters, and have overcome them in many battles. They
have killed and captured many, and have destroyed the septs and devastated their lands. If
you permit them to continue thus with impunity, the faithful will be much more widely
attacked by them. On this account I, or rather the Father, beseech you as the Seven’s heralds
to publish this everywhere and to persuade all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and
knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to the Faithful and to destroy that vile race
from the lands of our friends. I say this to those who are present, it meant also for those who
are absent. Moreover, the Warrior commands it. ‘All who die by the way, whether by land or
by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of their sins. This I
grant them through the power of the gods with which I am invested. Oh, what a disgrace if
such a despised and base race, which worships demons, should conquer a people which has
the Faith of the Mother and is made glorious with the name of the Father and the rest of the
Seven! With what reproaches will the gods overwhelm us if you do not aid those who, with us,
profess the Faith! Let those who have been accustomed unjustly to wage private warfare
against the faithful now go against the infidels and end with victory this war which should
have been begun long ago. Let those who for a long time, have been robbers, now become
knights. Let those who have been fighting against their brothers and relatives now fight in a
proper way against the barbarians. Let those who have been serving as mercenaries for small
pay now obtain the eternal reward. Let those who have been wearing themselves out in both
body and soul now work for a double honor. Behold! On this side will be the sorrowful and
poor, on that, the rich. On this side, the enemies of the gods, on that, their friends. Let those
who go not put off the journey, but rent their lands and collect money for their expenses. And
as soon as summer is over and winter comes, let them eagerly set out on the way with the
gods as their guides. Decreed by His High Holiness the High Septon, from the Starry Sept in
Oldtown. May the gods reign and the Warrior grant victory.”

Everyone’s eyes widened as Jaenyx passed them the scroll for each of them to read. The
implications of such a message was not lost on all. The High Septon was referring to their family
was the enemy and was calling on all of those following the Faith to basically wage war on them
for being Valyrian. Westeros had deemed all of their practices and culture as abominations, and
now they had an excuse to openly fight them since their holy leader gave his blessing. Jaenyx sunk
into his chair, going through the many possibilities of the coming conflict. What was for sure was
that the odds were not good, as even with their dragons, the majority of the people under them were
followers of the Faith and there will be divided loyalties among the lands they controlled. My
gods... he merely thought.
Rhaenys put her hand on her mouth, terror growing in her eyes. “No…”

Aegon shook his head. “Holy fuck…”

Visenya tightened her jaw, steeling herself for the thoughts that came after reading the Faith’s declaration of war more closely. “Oh, my gods…”

Their father, Lord Aerion, was just silent. He had only practiced the Faith out of practicality, but him not going to the sept and being open in his worship of Valyria’s gods had consequences.

Jaenyx looked at Ragaemor Tarareon, who was still standing there. “How many men could we muster?”

“How many men could we muster?”, Ragaemor Tarareon replied. “And we could raise more with the Blackwoods and the stormlords after Lord Orys gives the command.”

Jaenyx nodded. “Get a message to Raventree Hall. No doubt Lord Blackwood has also heard about this. Tell him to assemble his men and to have Chrass Rivers sent to Dragonstone.” Ragaemor Tarareon bowed before leaving the solar.

“What are you doing, Jae?” Aegon asked, coming out of his shock.

“Whatever happens, Egg, we need to be ready to fight. We’ve got a long struggle ahead of us.”

“But why would they do this? We’ve never done anything bad to the Faith!” Rhaenys cried out.
“That depends on perspective, Rhae, but it doesn’t matter now. Right now, they see us as curses and there will be bloodshed. That, I can guarantee you.”

“What is your plan then?” Lord Aerion asked.

“First, we need to get our loyal lords assembled and ready to fight, and then secure the lands of those newly loyal to us. After that, we will respond actively against the threat.”

“But aren’t we moving too fast, Jae?” Aegon stepped in. “We need time. We need to find out who besides the Velaryons, the Celtigars, your houses, the Blackwoods, and among the stormlord houses will stand with us.”

“Egg, we don’t have the luxury of time now!” Jaenyx almost shouted. “If we’re not ready to meet the threat, we’re finished.”

Just then, a servant burst in the room. Normally, she would have been punished for such rudeness. But the situation made decorum the least priority.

“What is it?” Lord Aerion asked the servant girl.

“My lord,” the servant started but was almost out of breath. “There’s news from Sweetport Sound. Lord Sunglass has declared himself no longer under your house and has risen up in rebellion.”

More shock filled the solar, but was quickly replaced with rage. Aegon, Visenya, Aerion, and even Rhaenys had the dragonfire emerge from their eyes, while Jaenyx grinded his teeth. “Knew they would do something as foolish as this,” Jaenyx remarked, having nothing but bad opinions on House Sunglass, more so after their previous lord publicly refused to help his liege.
Aegon rose up from his seat. “I’m going to Sweetport Sound, and I’m torching it with dragonfire.”

“You won’t be alone, Egg,” Visenya also stood up. “We should have wiped them out a long time ago.”

Rhaenys straightened herself, while Jaenyx nodded. “We’re with you, Egg.”

Moments later, the four dragons lifted off from the courtyard of Dragonstone towards Sweetport Sound. The night was filled with screaming, smoke, and flames that burned until the stone of House Sunglass melted. But Jaenyx knew, it has only just begun.

Chapter End Notes

That declaration was based on Pope Urban II’s declaration for the First Crusade. Our dragons being Valyrians was always going to be a problem in this story and now, they have to fight for their survival.

Following some readers’ suggestions, I am really working on humanizing Orys Baratheon. He started out as a carbon copy of Robert Baratheon, but that was before he was thrust into a role that he was not fully prepared for and his reasons in regards to not bedding Argella on their wedding night represents him maturing into a better person. I seem as a likable version of Stannis Baratheon (thanks for that, Longclaw).

On the more important point of this chapter, Jaenyx was not unaffected by Orys’ words. After all, Valyria is gone and what it means to be a Valyrian is different in the new world. This is a moment where like Orys, he will mature but he will remain true to his Valyrian roots. The declaration from the High Septon will see him clinging onto it more tightly, but he will see that he must adapt.

I hope Visenya's name-day celebrations and the dragon flight was satisfactory. The song is RADWIMPS “Is There Still Anything that Love Can Do?”
Next, we have the rest of the family reeling from the burning of the Sunglass' while we will see the return of someone familiar.
Chapter Notes

Now, I've read some of the reviews and my first reaction was that I did something right. OCs in fics can be very difficult for readers to connect with. And the fact that some of my readers were concerned that Jaenyx had become a weak character means that I succeeded in making my readers invested in him. So, yay! I did it right..

That being said, I am also getting the impression that the same readers who are concerned with Jaenyx being a weak character want Jaenyx to be like every other OC in the fic world: stepping over the main characters, being overpowered in the story universe, knowing everything bad that will happen since the author has the benefit of hindsight, etc. That is such a boring and simple course to take with an OC and removes a lot of opportunities for not only character development for the OC, but also the canon characters. One of the main reasons I embarked on this story was because I wanted to explore the humanity of legendary characters like Aegon Targaryen, his sisters Rhaenys and Visenya, and Orys Baratheon because ASOIAF history made them too idealistic. Making my OC an OP type defeats that purpose. Also, the reviewers who want Jaenyx to be an OP character miss an important aspect of his development. He had no family prior to arriving at Dragonstone, but the time spent with the Targaryens allowed him to see them as the family he lost. Besides having a loving marriage with Visenya, Aegon became his brother, Rhaenys became his sister, Aerion his father, and Valaena Targaryen his mother. Things will become at least tolerable with Orys, since he does have Targaryen blood after all. So, to all the reviewers that want an OC that walks over the Targaryens, this is not the story for you and I wish you the best. But all I ask for those who do decide to stick with me is to have patience, as we will see Jaenyx and Visenya carve out a realm of their own.

And for the people who don't like that I use Japanese or foreign languages, that's a creative decision on my part and I believe that it will add some extra layers to the story. If you don't like it, so be it. But that is my decision.

Here is the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

AEGON VI

Aegon was seated at the lord’s chair back at their citadel on the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, with Jaenyx on his left side, Visenya next to him, and Rhaenys on his right. All of the lords sworn to Dragonstone had assembled at the citadel, with some of the lords speaking for others who were unable to come. Daemon Velaryon, Crispian Celtigar, Ragaemor and Maerys Tarareon, Aevor Rahitheon, and Taygor Leniar represented the Valyrian contingent. Representing the lords of the Blackwater Bay were Jon Rosby, Alyn Stokeworth, and Triston Massey. Representing the riverlords were Colren Blackwood and his trueborn son and heir Malcolm, Edmyn Tully and his
nephew Broden, and Lord Mallister of Seagard. Representing the stormlords besides Orys and Argella as Lord and Lady Paramount were marcher lords such as Lord Dondarrion of Blackhaven and Lord Caron of Nightsong alongside Lord Tarth, Lord Estermont, and Lord Penrose. Aegon was relieved that the strength of the marcher lords remained intact, for they would be very useful in the coming fights ahead.

Like the last time, Aegon took over for their father Lord Aerion in times of battle. However, he could not hope to run a successful campaign without Rhaenys, Visenya, Jaenyx, and Orys, so they all held equal authority when it came to resolving crises such as the Faith’s call for a holy war against the Valyrians. Looks like I’ve wasted my years in the sept.

After the burning of Sweetport Sound for House Sunglass’ rebellion, Jaenyx recommended that the few survivors be executed as an example. Lord Aerion agreed, before he also attainted the properties of House Sunglass and declared them extinct. Fortunately, the Sunglass rebellion was the only one in the Blackwater Bay and their burning cowed any other like-minded lords in line.

But that was not the only worry that was on all of their minds. From Tarareon and Blackwood patrols came reports of forces from the west and from the Reach marching on their territories. Jaenyx then revealed through his network of scouts and agents that Loren Lannister, King of the Rock, had just passed through the Golden Tooth along with forty thousand troops, with Pinkmaiden and the Tumblestone being prime targets. Among the banners seen were the houses of Crakehall, Marbrand, Lefford, Westerling, and Reyne. Jaenyx had already ordered the Pipers, the Brackens, and the Darrys to assemble their troops and attempt to hold the line against the army of Loren Lannister, but they only had twelve thousand troops and they would need more reinforcements.

Rhaenys had personally ridden on Meraxes as she observed the regions bordering the Reach. From what she saw, the Reach’s marcher lords, House Tarly and House Peake, had mustered their troops and were moving through the Red Mountains towards the marcher regions in the stormlands. That alarmed especially Lord Caron and Lord Dondarrion, whose keeps were closer to the Reach than that of the other stormlords. And even though the marcher lords from both the stormlands and the Reach fought against the Dornish for centuries, they hated each other across the Red Mountains and clashes between especially the Tarlys and the Carons were common.

But more seriously, Jaenyx also told everyone present, “The High Septon has declared a holy war on the Valyrians, a people that all of your overlords belong to, and a good number of those present at the moment follow the Faith. I must ask all of you on where your loyalties lie: with us or with your religion?”
Aegon, Rhaenys, and Orys looked at him like he was insane. *What the hell are you doing, Jae?* While he can knew Jaenyx was right to ask that, to ask that question in front of the present lords was not wise. *You’re openly questioning their loyalty, and anyone present will be angered at that inquiry.*

“You think us oathbreakers, Lord Belaerys?” Jon Rosby asked, with narrowed eyes.

“I’m not going to assume that all of you present are overly pious, as we can all agree that religion is too often clouded in political ambitions,” Jaenyx said, which many nodded their agreement. “But King Loren Lannister has answered the High Septon’s call is marching his troops past the Golden Tooth into the riverlands. And it seems that at least the Tarlys and the Peakes have also answered the call to arms and is marching across the Red Mountains in the stormlands, which means that the hosts of the Gardeners cannot be far behind. However, while we’re dealing with the threats coming from the west and from the south, we already had a rebellion break out within our lands of control. Who’s to say that the Sunglass rebellion will be the last? So I ask again to all of you: is your loyalties with us, or with your religion?”

There was silence in the room, as the assembled lords merely looked upon Aegon and the rest. The Faith had a major influence on Westeros south of the Neck and no matter what lands you held dominion over, everyone worshipped the Seven and everyone paid their dues to the Starry Sept. But in times such as this, there could be no divided loyalties. They either fought together, or they died separately. There was no questioning the loyalty of the Velaryons, Celtigars, Tarareons, Rahitheons, and Leniars, as they were all Valyrians and thus had to fight. Lord Blackwood followed the Old Gods and was the first to rise in support for them, so they were very favored. Lord Dondarrion might have put in a lot of effort to get himself and his house in the good graces of Dragonstone, but the rest admittedly had to be suspect.

Unexpectedly, Lord Mallister spoke first. “My people have suffered the indignity of being enslaved by the ironborn. The memories of Black Harren pillaging my ancestral lands and abusing my people are still fresh and I myself was not spared from his mistreatment.” He rolled up his sleeve to reveal a long burn mark on his arm, which Aegon judged to be from being branded. “His son put this mark on me because he felt like it, but I couldn’t do anything. Only by siding with House Targaryen and House Belaerys was I able to free my house from the ironborn, so I will only be damning myself and my house if I were to betray the very people who gave us freedom.”

Aegon nodded. “Thank you, Lord Mallister.”
Alyn Stokeworth spoke next. “All of us present have heard of and witnessed the prowess of the dragons both in the air and on the land. They could have just flown to my family keep and burned us, but they showed mercy and allowed myself, my house, and my good friend Jon Rosby to keep our lands. Your family, Lord Aegon, and your good-brother, Lord Jaenyx, have shown yourselves to be above those who would simply use force to impose their will.”

Aegon nodded his thanks, before Lord Caron spoke. “It has only been six months since your house have taken over the Storm kingdom and killed King Argilac in battle. And I must be frank that my house, and I believe that I speak for the rest of the stormlords assembled here, still holds some resentment over you killing our king, even though your actions were justified from an objective perspective.” The other stormlords nodded their agreement while retaining their frowns. “However, we have long struggled against the Dornish and especially against the Gardener kings and to have them move against us right now in this manner shows that our survival is at risk. Besides the peace terms imposed by your families, you have not mistreated us or abused Lady Argella. We either stand with you, or we will suffer at the hands of our enemies.”

Aegon sighed, but let out a small smile. Besides their martial prowess, the marcher lords were reputed in not wasting their time with pleasantries and such was appreciated in a crisis like this. “Thank you, Lord Caron. I shall hope that your frankness will be put to continual use in the future.”

Slowly, but steadily, all of the lords assembled expressed their affirmation in their loyalty to Dragonstone and House Belaerys. However, Aegon noticed that Edmyn Tully took a moment before he also declared his loyalty. The Tullys were among the more pious of the riverlords and despite having a godswood at Riverrun, they were fully committed to the sept. Lord Edmyn also protested the decision to stop all payment of the tithes to the Starry Sept and Jaenyx refusing his request didn’t help matters, as the two were never on good terms from the moment they met at the Stoney Sept.

The rest of the day was spent strategizing what to do with the advances of Loren Lannister and the Tarlys and Peakes. Besides Jaenyx sending the twelve thousand troops of Houses Bracken, Piper, and Darry to delay the forces of the Rock, Orys recommended that the stormlords return immediately to their keeps to assemble their troops. Despite the battles of six moons ago, the stormlords could still assemble over twenty-five thousand troops and much of the strength of the marcher lords had remained intact. Lord Caron and Lord Dondarrion were given leave to return to their keeps and fortify their lands to stem the advance from the Reach, only for Jaenyx to recommend to them that they instead advance deeper into the Red Mountains and cut all possible routes into the stormlands. They can use their bowmen to pick off the Tarlys and Peakes at their leisure. Lords Caron and Dondarrion nodded their approval before departing the citadel. Orys,
Argella, and the other stormlords followed soon after, no doubt to muster their banners at Storm’s End before moving into the Dornish Marches.

As for the riverlords that came, Jaenyx predicted that the focus of the fighting would be in the riverlands, as the region had no significant natural barriers and was easily accessible from the west and from the south. He recommended that a majority of their banners should be utilized to secure both the riverlands from external advances and from potential internal rebellions. There was no doubt that some of the pious riverlords save for the Tullys would use the coming call to arms to rise up against Dragonstone.

“Are you sure it was wise to have Lord Bracken sent against Loren Lannister?” Lord Blackwood asked Jaenyx. “He’s a follower of the Faith and he was not shy in expressing his discontent in your family’s favoring my house for supporting you first.”

“I understand that your house has had long-standing rivalries with the Brackens for centuries,” Jaenyx answered. “While such a situation would be disadvantageous for rulers in regards to maintaining unity in the ranks, I have my reasons for having the Brackens lead their troops against Loren Lannister.”

“What reason would that be?” Colren Blackwood questioned. Aegon was also curious, as was Rhaenys. However, Visenya handed Jaenyx an opened dispatch.

“This,” Jaenyx held up the letter before reading it. “Was written in the hand of Lord Bracken, whose raven was intercepted by my agents in Stone Hedge. ‘To His High Holiness in the Starry Sept, I am pleased with your response to my previous letter that addresses all of my grievances with my current liege. I shall look forward to a productive and active response on the part of the Starry Sept to restore the preeminence of the Faith back to this fallen region and that I receive compensation from my rivals. Signed, Prestan of House Bracken, Lord of Stone Hedge.’”

Unsurprisingly, Lord Blackwood was the first to respond with outrage. “Those fucking horse-breeders! I should’ve known they would do something like this!”

“I understand your position, my lord,” Jaenyx put the letter down on the table. “And while this letter is evidence of Lord Bracken’s fickleness, evidence sometimes does not corroborate with
action. My decision to have Lord Bracken lead all of his troops against Loren Lannister was to see if he could remain trustworthy. If he exerts himself against the forces of the Rock, then I shall burn this letter and deem the matter as a simple instance of grumbling.”

“And what if he doesn’t?” Lord Blackwood pointedly asked.

“Should he act contrary to my orders along with Lords Piper and Darry, I trust that the soldiers of Raventree Hall can make short work of their lands in response. After all, they’ve been emptied of their armed strength as per my directive.”

Lord Blackwood smiled, seeing what Jaenyx meant. “And would I be alone if the Brackens act against your orders?”

Jaenyx shook his head. “No. I’ll have Lord Tarareon and Lord Rahitheon join you. We need all the men we can muster in the upcoming battles.”

Lord Blackwood and his heir went over the final details and sent out messages to their troops at Raventree Hall before departing back to their lands. More particulars were discussed with Lords Mallister and Tully before they too departed the citadel to return to their keeps.

That left the Valyrians in the room, those sworn to Dragonstone and those following Jaenyx.

“I must ask this of Lord Aegon and Lady Rhaenys,” Rhaedar Tarareon started. “What is our due?”

“I beg your pardon?” Aegon blinked, confused.

“We’ve served our lord, Jaenyx of House Belaerys, for over six years now, and we fully trust in his
wife Lady Visenya Targaryen Belaerys. We trusted his decision to come to Dragonstone and we trusted him when he decided to go to war against the ironborn and the Arrogant king to avenge our people. But I must issue that my protest that my Lord Jaenyx is still not in control of any lands, also us at the very least."

Aegon leaned forward from his chair. “As I understand, Lord Rhaedar, you already have lands on Dragonstone--”

“But those are your lands, not ours!” Aevor Rahitheon spat. “Your family is the Lord of Dragonstone. And even though our lord is a dragonrider, he still doesn’t have lands of his own. You didn’t give him any lands in the riverlands, even though he was very important in killing Black Harren. You didn’t give him any lands in the stormlands, even though he was important there. What’s a lord in any sense if he doesn’t have lands!”

“Aevor,” Jaenyx joined in. “I’m not here to pillage. I only did what I did because it was necessary. Your nephews were kidnapped, with one assaulted and one murdered, and I was merely fulfilling the obligations of a lord protecting his people. And if you haven’t noticed, we didn’t bend the knee to Dragonstone, so we’re equal to them.”

“That’s not enough, my lord!” Maerys Tarareon shouted. “You’re asking us to go to war again and you have no lands or significant titles to your name. Don’t misinterpret us, Lord Jaenyx. You’ve shared in our hardships at the Basilisk Isles and we’ve all seen how you picked yourself up when your brother and parents died. Any leader who can do that will have our loyalties until our dying days.” Jaenyx’s vassals shouted their agreements. “But it seems as if you’re forgetting that a lord must have possessions. We’re not in the Basilisk Isles anymore, so you have to be the lord of something.”

“If I may, Lady Maerys,” Rhaenys said. “If Jaenyx had asked for his own lands, we would have gladly--”

“I wasn’t talking to you, Lady Rhaenys,” Maerys interrupted. However, she, and Aegon, did not expect Jaenyx to grab his wine goblet, throw it on the ground, and smashing it to pieces. The glass shattering was loud enough to silence everyone in the room.
“We have history, Maerys, and your loyalty and honesty are always valued. But I will not tolerate you treating my sister with disrespect. You hear me?! ” That prompted Maerys to be quiet.

“Sister?” Aevor Rahitheon exclaimed. “She’s your good-sister, and she’s only related to you by marriage. Is that why you would not ask anything of them and become a joke of a lord?”

“Aevor, you are out of line!” Visenya snapped. “How dare you speak to your lord that way!”

“What do you mean a joke?” Jaenyx narrowed his eyes.

“Oh, you don’t know? Right, allow me to elaborate for you, Lord Jaenyx. We’re stuck on Dragonstone still farming half of the island and enriching your good-family while the very people we’ve been fighting were allowed to keep their lands and titles. We’re the reason that your good-family the Targaryens were able to become more than lords of the Blackwater Bay. But now you treat them as family and I can only see that your title of lord is a mere formality. We’re Valyrians and we’ve exerted a lot of effort in fighting already, but we have not received our dues. We don’t have any lands and the only other place where we could have made more permanent communities was given to your good-father’s bastard son. And in case you forgot, House Belaerys was one of the seven great dragonlord families in Valyria while the Targaryens were nothing compared to them!”

Aegon clenched his teeth, angered that someone had the nerve to besmirch his family name in his presence. He turned to see dragonfire forming behind Rhaenys’ eyes, and the same was said of Visenya. Even though she was the Lady of House Belaerys, she never forgot where she came from.

“There were practical considerations, Lord Aevor,” Daemon Velaryon responded while ignoring that Aevor insulted his cousins’ family. “We’re Valyrians, but we’re too few in number and we’re surrounded by those who have hostile intentions towards us. The lords who surrendered were allowed to keep their lands and titles because that would make them more loyal towards us. If we didn’t do that, our new position in Westeros would’ve been more precarious.”

“You’ve got dragons!” Aevor threw his hands up in frustration. “You can burn your enemies and no one will ever think to mess with you again. And your considering practicalities didn’t exactly
prevent us from being in this position now!"

“It’s not that simple, Lord Aevor!” Daemon shouted. “Dragons can do many things, but being political is not one of them.”

“You’re in no position to say that. You’ve got lands of your own, and so the Celtigars. What about us? In any case, we’ve done more to elevate your lord’s family than even you.”

“Lord Aevor, that’s quite enough.” This was getting too much for Aegon to handle, and he was struggling to keep the dragon temper from bursting.

“You don’t give orders to me, Lord Aegon. And you certainly didn’t lose a nephew from fighting these Westerosi maggots! So what do you know?”

Before Aegon could respond, Jaenyx walked to Aevor and slapped him so hard in the face that he almost fell to the floor from the force.

“Whatever grievances you have, you direct them to me. But I will not tolerate anyone in this room insulting my brother. Are we clear?” His vassals muttered their affirmation, which didn’t satisfy Jaenyx. “I said, are we clear?!” They were louder, but they were also put back in line. “Now, I appreciate all of you trying to have me attain lands of my own, and all of you bring up a good point. A lord must not remain landless. However, I will not use my family’s past status or what I have now to assert myself against my family, because that is what the Targaryens are now. And if you want lands, all right. But all I ask is that you put your energies to fighting the threats we have now. Too often have rulers been undermined by petty squabbles and I will not have that now! And Aevor, you’ve got your vengeance on the Arrogant king when he was killed, but if you want more, we can discuss the particulars in private. Is that acceptable?" Aevor Rahitheon nodded begrudgingly while still rubbing his cheek.

The Tarareons got out of the room first, followed by the Rahitheons, the Leniars, the Celtigars, and the Velaryons. They had their orders to muster at Harrenhal before moving to reinforce either the Brackens or the Blackwoods. If the Brackens turned coat, then they would assist the Blackwoods in taking control of the lands around Stone Hedge. Aegon hoped that the Brackens didn’t do that, as he knew how ruthless Jaenyx and the others would be, but he also saw it as necessary as betrayal
That left Aegon, Rhaenys, Visenya, and Jaenyx in the room. “Is it true, Jaenyx? You see us as family?” Aegon asked.

“Of course I do, Egg.” Jaenyx replied nonchalantly. “You’re my good-brother and Rhae is my good-sister--”

“No, no, no,” Aegon stopped him. “I mean, do you see us as family, truly?”


“Why?” Aegon had to know. It was true that Jaenyx, despite coming from better dragonlord stock, had treated him and the others with a lot of love and respect. While he was acting as a good-brother should, he deferred too easily and too often to himself and their father despite being equals.

“First time I met you all on Dragonstone, I didn’t really think much of you since you were too acclimatized to the ways of Westeros despite being dragonlords and having the blood of Valyria within you. And believe it or not, my gifts to you all when I married Vis was just me fulfilling my promise to treating all of you with respect and love. Just an obligation. But over the past year that I stayed here, I felt something that I did not feel for a long time.”

“And what would that be, Jae?” As much as they were close, Rhaenys was also curious as to why Jaenyx would not be so imposing on their family given his ancestry from the Belaerys Lords.

“Do you really need to ask that question, Rhae?” Jaenyx raised an eyebrow, but he looked a little hurt, which Aegon did not expect. “My brother is dead. My father is dead. And my mother is dead. I didn’t have a family before coming here and you have no idea how lonely... I was for so long.” Aegon saw tears forming in his eyes and heard how he paused compared to before. “Being alone and without the people you love can make you feel dead on the inside while you’re still walking,
and that’s the worst feeling in the world. But Egg became the brother that I had lost and you, Rhae, you know how I see you. ” Rhaenys nodded and smiled, her heart warmed at Jaenyx reaffirming their bond as brother and sister. “It might not seem like it, but Lord Aerion has become a father to me and I was always taught to respect my elders. And your mother finally treated me well, and that’s something I will never forget. So, do you really think that I am going to just make demands of the people who became my family?”

Aegon could feel nothing but warmth for Jaenyx at that moment. While he also saw Jaenyx as a brother, to hear him actually say that caused joy in his heart. Standing up from his chair, he walked to Jaenyx and gave him a hug, which Jaenyx returned. Rhaenys and Visenya joined them, all embracing each other as the family they had become. If only Orys was here…

They spent the next few moments in each other’s arms before they had to separate. Visenya held onto Jaenyx’s arm while giving him a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you, Jae. It means very much to us,” Aegon smiled warmly.

“You don’t have to say thanks,” Jaenyx replied.

“Would it be too much to ask if you would embrace Orys that way?” Rhaenys asked.

Jaenyx hesitated, but gave Rhaenys a soft gaze. “Not now, but maybe. But Egg, you heard all of them. I might be able to keep them following me because we went through the same hardships together, but I can’t stop their dissatisfaction for long. We at least have to give them something.”

“I agree,” Aegon responded. “How about we give them the Sweetport Sound and the woods around the Wendwater?”

“That can work,” Jaenyx bobbed his head. “But I’ll tell them that they will only enjoy those lands after they help us win.”

Before they left, Visenya spoke up. “And don’t forget Jaenyx. He needs land also.”
Quickly thinking, Aegon returned to the map. “Jae, as much as I didn’t like how your vassals addressed me and our family, they are right in that a lord must have a keep and lands of his own. You can’t just live on Dragonstone forever. These marks,” he traced his fingers along the black X’s in the riverlands, the stormlands, and the lands around the Blackwater Bay. “Represent keeps that were relieved from their previous lords. Take your pick and it’s yours.”

Jaenyx stared at the map, pondering very deeply on where House Belaerys could take new root. After a moment, he looked at an X near the Wyl. “What’s this one?”

Aegon looked at the X, surprised that he would be interested in that location. “That’s Vulture’s Roost, but it’s been abandoned for decades and it’s deep within the Red Mountains. There’s nothing valuable there.”

“I have to disagree with you there, Egg. From what I see, this keep is near the source of the Wyl. I won’t have to worry about the water supply and the location is easily defensible after some modifications.”

“Also,” Aegon continued. “That’s right on the border with Dorne. That particular area has seen much fighting between the Dornish and the marcher lords from both the stormlands and the Reach and House Wyl is seated at the mouth of the Wyl, who will not take too kindly with a newcomer controlling their water supply.”

“Leave the worrying to me, Egg,” Jaenyx simply replied. “And just because a ruined castle is worthless now doesn’t mean that it will continue that way in the future. With some construction and expansion, that castle can become quite formidable and befitting of dragonlords.”

“But why that particular location?” Rhaenys asked.

Jaenyx smiled. “While we’re fighting those of the Faith, I figured it might be time to get acquainted with the descendants of the Rhoynish. After all, the progeny of Princess Nymeria might not respond well to the remnants of Valyria fighting throughout Westeros and being a potential
threat.”

Aegon was not convinced of the Dornish thinking that way. “How do you know that?”

“Just a feeling,” Jaenyx shrugged. “But Egg, I have to ask you.”

“Anything.”

“What are we, Egg?”

“What do you mean?”

“We control two kingdoms and the entirety of the Blackwater Bay. We’re probably the most powerful lords in all of Westeros right now, and we killed two kings to accomplish that. What are we?”

Aegon was stumped. No one had ever asked that question before and it never entered his mind. But Jaenyx just pointed to a relevant issue. The riverlands were under their control, the stormlands were under their control, the Blackwater Bay. Jaenyx was supervising the riverlands while Orys was Lord Paramount, but their family was still Lord of Dragonstone. They were still simple lords, but commanded more territory than was traditionally held by someone in their station. Such a situation would have been impossible to manage had it not been for their dragons, but their resources were close to being overextended and there was only so much that they could with their current title.

“Our father is still the Lord of Dragonstone and you will be the Lord of Vulture’s Roost,” Aegon simply answered.

“True,” Jaenyx swayed his head to and fro. “But maybe it’s time to start thinking bigger.”
“What are you suggesting?” Rhaenys asked.

“Just a thought, but it’ll be much more difficult for us in the future to prevent what happened here in this room if we remained simple lords. We need something more powerful in order to retain what we have,” Jaenyx finished before leaving with Visenya at his side.

Aegon took Rhaenys to their chamber, where she surprised him with a tight hug.

“Um, okay,” Aegon awkwardly returned the hug. “What’s this for?”

“I’m just happy right now, because of Jae,” Rhaenys spoke while still buried in his chest.

“Because he said that we were his family in front of his lords?” Aegon ran his hands across her supple back.

“Mmmhmm,” Rhaenys answered. “He could have been just another entitled lord when he arrived at our shores and tried to impose his will on us, but he proved better than that. Well, besides the dowry. He became a brother to us and became another son to our father and mother. He brought nothing but joy for over a year now.”

Aegon smiled, touched at how Jaenyx defended them in front of his vassals. The memory of his wedding with Visenya, where he was gifted Flame Screecher, still ran fresh in his mind, but what was more surprising was that Jaenyx merely saw that gift as an obligation. He had over a year to see how Jaenyx would act without having to fulfill commitments and only now did Aegon see that his good-brother acted the way he did was because he saw them as his family. Aegon was thankful that he never had to experience the loss Jaenyx felt, but he was also grateful that such hardships made him be close to their family on Dragonstone. Jae really is a blessing.
While Aegon continued to feel Rhaenys’ back with his roaming hands, he felt a strong jerk around his waist as he felt her fingers undo his breeches and push down to the ground. Pulling back from their embrace, he saw her look at him with a fire he never seen before. “What’s going on, Rhae?” She didn’t respond as she reached up to his lips and kissed them before kneeling them and taking his tip into her mouth.

Aegon sucked in a breath as waves of pleasure flowed through his body at Rhaenys’ tongue. There were no words said as he enjoyed his wife pleasuring him. But this time, Aegon closed his eyes as he felt something that had never happened before in their previous coupling. While his core would warm whenever they bedded each other, he felt an inferno bursting on the inside. The desire for his wife had never been as strong as it was now and while he couldn’t understand why, he let his instincts take over so that he could enjoy this moment.

Eventually, Rhaenys took his length so deep into her mouth that Aegon felt himself shatter into her. Still in a trance, he saw Rhaenys stand back up before wrapping her arms around his neck and bringing him into another kiss. However, he decided to take control and broke off their kiss to turn her around. Untying the laces of her red and black gown, he yanked it so hard that he could hear a few tears as her arms were forced out of its sleeves and the fabric pooled around her ankles.

“Egg! Be careful with my dresses,” Rhaenys whined. “Vis might not mind when Jae does that to her, but I do when you do that to me.”

“Sorry, Rhae,” Aegon apologized before slowly turning her around. Rhaenys gasped as he kissed across her collarbone. He continued onto her left breast and sucked on her tit, which caused Rhaenys to let out a moan. While they would usually go to the bed, Aegon decided to try something different and guided her to the floor. They were still enjoying the summer years, but there was talk that winter was coming, so Aegon decided to enjoy the floor as it was still warm from the summer heat.

“I like this,” Rhaenys managed as Aegon moved to take her other teat into his lips. “We should couple on the floor more often, Egg. Makes us… try new things more often.”

“As you wish, sister,” Aegon answered while mentioning that they were siblings. He figured that the dragon roared inside her as she reached down to squeeze his cheeks and pulling his face to
hers. After kissing some more, he turned her over so she laid on her stomach against the floor. He traced her spine with his lips while his hands ran across the smooth skin of her sides. Her back was lined with new muscle and a few scars from her training sessions with Konno and Arata Haru. He took the time to commit them to memory.

“On your knees,” Aegon commanded, voice rough but filled with desire. Rhaenys complied with his command, lifting her ass in the air and spreading her legs until her center was bared to him. She was already glistening.

“Egg…” Rhaenys whispered. Her voice was husky from lust. “Fuck me please. I need it,” she begged.

Aegon grunted in delight but didn’t comply immediately, his thirst for her not yet sated. He sucked on her shoulders and her neck like a man who had found an oasis in the Dornish desert. His hands held her hips in a firm grip as she squirmed under his ministrations. He brought her close to climax by sliding his index finger into her entrance while his thumb played with her clit. Before she could peak, he pulled away from her, only to slide his length into her before she could urge him on again. They joined together in one motion, her hips snapped backwards to him to the root. Her screams were loud and obscene and he wanted to hear more of them.

Aegon’s hand twisted in Rhaenys’ silver locks, pulling it so that her neck and back arched in response. she increased the tempo of her hips and their chamber filled with the sounds of the slaps of his hips against her ass. She was trying to loosen him first, as she knew what taking her in this way did to him. He abandoned his grip on her hair and pressed her upper body further against the floor.

Rhaenys dropped to one of her elbows, her fingers reaching behind and briefly played with his sack before they rubbed the nub above her center. He slowed his thrusts, letting her focus on both tempos. She didn’t last long, crying out as she neared the edge.

Aegon took his cock out of her entrance, rolled her hips, and got Rhaenys on her back. The floor might have made their coupling a little more difficult to do, but such was the desire for each other that they ignored such a minor inconvenience. Even the bed would have done little to muffle their cries and he knew that anyone outside of their door had in all likelihood heard their screams.
Rhaenys pulled her knee up, the other leg straight, her torso twisted as she stared at him. Aegon growled at the sight of her, and the feel of her was too much. He couldn’t decide where to put his hands. Her breasts looked enticing, swaying in response to their motions, but he couldn’t maintain his balance if he grabbed them. Her ass looked incredible too but he settled for a slap that turned it pink. One hand gripped her hips and the other pulled on her shoulder while he re-sheathed into her entrance. He continued the fast and intense pace before he changed their positions. Her whining encouraged him onward.

“Cum in me, Egg,” Rhaenys’ voice was loud, breathless and wanton. Sweat made her back glisten as they both plunged over the edge.

“Fuck!” Aegon exclaimed, burying himself into her until he could feel the end of her cunt. His seed shot out with such intensity that there were black spots in his vision. Freezing momentarily from their peak, he collapsed onto her before lying next to her against the warm floor.

Both took a few moments to process their lovemaking, which was outstanding compared to the other times. Aegon could Rhaenys’ shallow breathing while he felt his eyes stop blinking, his mind in a haze as the pleasure surged through him.

“How was that?” Aegon asked, getting to his senses.

“Amazing, Egg,” Rhaenys answered. “That was much better than the other times, and that’s saying a lot since every time felt like the first.”

Aegon chuckled. “I’m glad I could still make you feel like that after over a year. But you know that I’m holding back, right?”

“Are you japing me?” Rhaenys asked in mock surprise.
“Well, kepa said that lovemaking should only get better as we age. That way, once we’re old, we become incredibly powerful in our thrusts and we can… pass on while we’re coupling,” Aegon explained. That got him a hard slap on the shoulder from Rhaenys. “Ow.”

“Can we not talk about the time we will become old, Egg?” Rhaenys groaned in slight annoyance. “That’s too far into the future and I’d rather we enjoy ourselves now.”

“All right,” Aegon quickly agreed, their conversation touching upon a heavy subject and he wanted to not ponder on such thoughts at the moment. Getting up from the floor, he picked up Rhaenys in his arms and gently placed her on the mattress before joining her. He covered them both in the sheets before they both passed into the warm embrace of sleep.

“Hurry up. Hurry. Up. Hurry up,” Arata Haru said in his heavily-accented common tongue from atop his horse while Rhaenys ran on Dragonstone’s sandy shores in her loose white tunic and leather trousers. Such was a regular occurrence since six moons ago, as the Harus had Rhaenys begin with a morning run before proceeding with her archery practice. While her feet bled the first time she did, she was much more conditioned and she got firmer and muscled. The very sight of her caused Aegon’s length to harden, but he willed such feelings away as he saw her approach the end of her run.

However, for some reason, Arata didn’t think Rhaenys was running hard enough and had his horse gallop beside her. Compared to his father, Arata Haru was much less abusive and instead used light ridiculing to motivate her. He also took the time to learn the common tongue and never raised his voice, but his jesting was enough to rile Rhaenys into putting more effort into her training. But like Rhaenys, Aegon didn’t complain since his methods were much more preferable than the hard hammering from Konno Haru.

“Huuuurrpy up, don’t fall back. Huuuurrpy up, don’t fall back. Huuuurrpy up, don’t fall back. Huuuurrpy up, catch the pack,” Arata Haru repeated from horseback while sounding a little bored. “If you’re going to fall down from exhaustion, my lady, fall down on your face.”

“Yes, sensei,” Rhaenys breathed out.
Out of nowhere, Arata pulled out a bronze pan and started banging on it with a wooden stick while his feet were firm in the stirrups. The sounds were so sharp and loud that it rang even in Aegon’s ears, who was sitting on a boulder a good distance from where they were. He just kept banging on the bronze pan, to the point where Aegon was getting very annoyed at his hammering away. But from how Rhaenys looked, Aegon could see that she was more than irritated and ran at a faster pace.

Eventually, Rhaenys reached the boulder and took a moment to catch her breath. However, Arata Haru still banged at his bronze pan as he got off of his horse. Having enough, Aegon snatched the pan and wooden stick from his hands. “That’s enough, Arata.”

“Ah, you don’t like it, don’t you?” Arata grinned. “Consider it motivation, Lord Aegon.”

“Piss off,” Aegon spat. However, Arata merely laughed.

“You’re annoyed. That’s good, because that is the same feeling your wife has and the only way for her to not have that feeling is to put in more effort.”

“I’m putting in my best effort,” Rhaenys protested.

“Maybe,” Arata shrugged. “But that doesn’t mean that I can increase the pressure on you. A fighter must never relax or settle, lest they become weak from complacency.”

“You’re an asshole,” Rhaenys grumbled, with Aegon surprised that she used such language. However, Arata took in stride and let out another laugh.

“Come on, your ladyship. Let’s move onto the bow,” Arata clapped on her shoulder before moving back up to Dragonstone.
“Well, at least he does have a sense of humor, unlike his father,” Rhaenys confessed. “I rather the shit from training come from him than Konno Haru.”

Aegon snorted. “Who wouldn’t?”

After returning to the walls of Dragonstone, Rhaenys picked up her yew bow and let loose her arrows against the target. Aegon was surprised at how much she progressed on the bow, as all of her arrows hit the black mark against the white background. How her arm muscles tightened as she drew, how she kept her legs in place as she released the arrow, how her slender fingers held tightly on the bowstring… Why is she becoming more desirable with each passing day?

But what drew Aegon’s attention was how… focused Rhaenys was when she held her bow. She picked an arrow from the quiver, placed the arrow against the bow, drew back, released, and kept her eyes on the target until the arrow hit its mark. There was no talking, no struggling on the string, no hesitation. Just her doing the motions as if they were second nature. He had some words with Konno Haru over him making her kill a prisoner, but looking at how she conducted herself as an archer, he wondered if Haru’s harsh methods had some merit.

But beside her focus while handling the bow, Rhaenys became more used to getting her hands dirty from Arata Haru taking her on daily hunting excursions that would last half a day. He would merely watch as Rhaenys stalked her prey, with Arata only giving her a few tips, and killing it with a single shot. But from what he saw, Rhaenys had become quite efficient in field dressing the prey. For example, she didn’t squirm as she cut open a wild boar’s torso to remove its guts and skinned it in front of the other people of the citadel. Whenever she did field-dress her prey after bringing it back to the citadel, she used a dagger finely made of Valyrian steel and with a smooth dragonbone hilt, which was given to her by Jaenyx after he had Aevor Rahitheon make it from a dragonbone from the Basilisk Isles. Then, Arata had her cook the prey’s flesh and consume it, thus completing the hunting excursion.

Aegon was thankful for Rhaenys retaining her smile and brightness even after everything that had happened. Innocence was lost whenever one properly hunted down a prey and after killing a living person, but Rhaenys did not crack. In fact, he saw that she had become more durable and was less likely to hesitate whenever she needed to do what had to be done. More importantly, Aegon was there for her whenever she needed to lean on him and when she wanted to be lost in him. It was as Jaenyx said. She became stronger with Aegon by her side.
While still watching Rhaenys refine her bowmanship, Aegon heard Daemon running towards him. “Aegon!”

Aegon stood up from his stool, while Rhaenys stopped her practice and looked at their cousin. “What is it, Daemon?” Aegon asked, concern rising as he looked at his cousin’s worried face.

“Message from Lord Blackwood. It’s urgent.”

Aegon snatched the letter from his cousin and read it, alarm filling his mind as he read it again.

“What’s going on?” Rhaenys asked with concern.

“Fucking hells! The Brackens have switched sides, as did the Pipers. But the Darrys fell back without a fight, because it was their two thousand men against an army many times their size. They’re advancing on Riverrun as we speak!”

Rhaenys eyes widened in alarm. She understood that if Riverrun fell, then the Red Fork would be open and thus endangering the Blackwood Vale, the one major region in the Riverlands that was loyal to their family. “What about Jae and Vis?”

“They’re already taking control of the Brackens’ land. There is no garrison at Stone Hedge, so it shouldn’t be too difficult for them to take. However, they need all the troops available to reinforce their positions. We need to fly out as soon as possible.”

Aegon dressed in his body armor and strapped Blackfyre to his left side and Flame Screecher on his back. He turned to see Rhaenys emerge from the manor house, dressed in her red and black dragon coat, her bow and quiver of arrows strapped to her back, and Valyrian steel dagger on her left side. She looked every inch the dragon archer she was destined to become, briefly
mesmerizing Aegon.

“You all right, Egg?” Rhaenys asked with a grin.

“Yeah,” Aegon answered before mounting on Balerion. He saw Rhaenys climb onto Meraxes, but she collapsed on the ground before she could also mount her. Sliding down from Balerion and ignoring Meraxes’ whimpers of concern, he saw that her eyes were completely shut, but her body was hot as an oven.

“Rhae! Rhae!” Aegon shook her, trying to get her to her senses. He felt another presence come beside him, and saw Taygor Leniar kneeling besides Rhaenys and rubbing her forehead.

“She’s having it again,” Taygor stated.

“What?”

“The dragon dreams.”

Rhaenys had talked about her ability to have dragon dreams like their ancestor Daenys Targaryen, and the last time she did was when she met Brandon Snow, the bastard brother of Torrhen Stark, King in the North. Aegon didn’t doubt that she had dragon dreams, but it was another thing to see it up close.

“How long will this last?” Aegon demanded.

“Not sure. It depends on how long the connection will be. But whenever she’s around Meraxes, it’s very likely to happen.”
“So, you mean to say that she can’t ride without having the dreams?”

“No, she can. But dragon dreams need dragons and something reached out to her. We have to let it run its course.”

Aegon continued to hold Rhaenys tight while still kneeling on the ground, but reassured that she was going to be alright. Jae and Vis need us. What are you dreaming about now, Rhae?

Chapter End Notes

Rhaenys is having another dragon dream! What else can be happening there?

I hope I covered well when Jaenyx finally declaring in public that the Targaryens are his family. And things might patch between him and Orys. To placate some of the readers, I hope you like where I decided to have him establish his keep. I figured it was time that the story start to focus on Dorne. I also hope that I showed the contrast between the hard-assery of Konno Haru and the trolling of his son Arata. That was golden when I wrote it.

And the Brackens have betrayed our beloved dragons. It will not end of them, and woe to those who decide to defect.

Next, we have Orys fighting with his stormlanders and a deeper look into his union with Argella.
Orys II

Chapter Notes

Well, my direction for Jaenyx has met them some... mixed reception. For all those that have supported my decisions, thank you so much! For those that have voiced their dissent... thank you also! fanfiction is like democracy in a way, where people have a right to voice their opinions and as a writer, I can't shut them out without violating freedom of expression. As the writer, this is my story and I'll take it where I want it to go, but I welcome those with contrary views, as that reminds me that not everyone agrees and it is a good way to remember that life is sometimes like that.

But to those who believe Jaenyx is being subservient, I'll bring up an example of subservience in GOT: Reek. And I'll ask you this: is Jaenyx Reek? Food for thought.

Here is the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ORYS II

Orys sat against the rocky slopes as he and five bannermen of House Caron peaked over the boulder that concealed their position in the pass. The ridge that they were all on offered an excellent position from which to observe anyone advancing through the narrow path towards Nightsong, the westernmost castle of the stormlands and smack next to the Gardener kingdom of the Reach. There were no roads that ran from one side of the Red Mountains to the other besides beaten dirt paths and the few traversable passes that the marcher lords on both sides knew about, so Orys and the Caron bannermen were surveying the most logical route into the former Storm kingdom.

Orys was thankful for Rhaenys’ discovering the Tarlys and the Peakes, the Reach’s marcher houses. House Tarly of Horn Hill had an especially brutal reputation, with their bowmen being able to land their arrows into the hearts of many Dornishmen at great distances and their men-at-arms displaying ruthlessness in killing off any prisoners deemed unfit for ransom or labor. They indeed were living up to their descending from Harlon the Hunter and their house’s words, “First into Battle,” as their eight thousand bannermen alongside the fourteen thousand troops of House Peake, another house descending from Florys the Fox and with three castles to their name, were leading the charge into the stormlands ahead of the main Gardener host. Orys only had some reports of additional Gardener troops assembling near the Red Mountains, but he knew that he and his family were facing tens of thousands more Reachmen. Numbers may not be enough to win battles, but they surely in wearing down the enemy’s strength, and Orys wasn’t sure how long before his own troops were exhausted despite dragons.
No matter which dirt path or pass was taken, no army could hope to penetrate the stormlands without first taking Nightsong, as all of them passed by the mountain fortress. If Nightsong fell, then the Reachmen could simply bypass Blackhaven and move further into the relatively accessible parts of the stormlands. They could not allow the Tarlys and the Peakes to besiege the castle either, as they could simply wait it out until more of the houses sworn to the Gardener king arrived and then they could seize the castle by storm. The only viable option was to establish positions a good distance away from Nightsong, where they could halt their advance into the narrow passes that led to the castle.

Orys and Lords Caron and Dondarrion had determined that the only logical route towards Nightsong ran through a small valley that broke between the highest points of the Red Mountains and contained a tributary that flowed into the Torrentine. Besides the route through the tributary being the most direct to Nightsong, the valley also represented a good place to reform the marching formations from a tiresome trek through the mountains before continuing on. Horses and pack animals could graze and water there while soldiers could get a well-needed breather before reentering combat.

There were also dangers for an army staying in that valley, as history showed. During the reign of King Argilac, Houses Swann and Selmy had encamped in that same valley while marching with their king southwards towards the Wyl. However, they spent too much time there and thus allowing the Dornishmen to surround and attack them from all sides under the cover of night. The mountains offered excellent positions for decently-skilled bowmen and no army could hope to dislodge another in an uphill battle. Anyone well-versed in war would understand the necessity of avoiding potentially enticing landscapes from which to encamp and entrench, since it was very likely that the enemy also knew the benefits and disadvantages. Like a band of hunters encamping inside a grouping of trees in the middle of a flat grassland but failing to see that another band was eyeing the same spot and would fight for control. Yet, Orys also knew that his troops had to make a stand at the valley despite the risk of the enemy knowing the valley, as the valley led into three divergent paths that all led to Nightsong.

Orys had mustered all of the troops he could obtain from the houses east of the Dornish Marches such as the Tarths, Estermonts, Bucklers, Morrigens, and Staedmons. They first assembled at Stonehelm, where he was able to get the one thousand remaining troops of House Swann after coming to an understanding with the lord. They then marched to Blackhaven and then to Nightsong, bypassing Harvest Hall along the way since he was unsure if any man of House Selmy would even join him considering that he did kill a Selmy knight, the nephew of King Argilac. To his surprise, two thousand men from Harvest Hall showed up, citing their reason being that they hated the Gardeners more than they could ever hate Orys for killing their king and his nephew. After three days at Nightsong, they marched further westward.
However, Orys wasn’t blind to the reality of the situation in the army. Most of the houses save for the Dondarrions had answered his call out of hatred for the Gardeners, as they clashed with the Reach several times over the centuries and their conflicts culminated in King Argilac killing King Garse Gardener at Summerfield, and not out of loyalty to him. And he couldn’t blame them. In the eyes of the stormlords, he was an upjumped bastard who only got a claim to the lordship of Storm’s End after killing their king. Part of the terms of the peace stipulated Orys being sworn to his father the Lord of Dragonstone despite him being the Lord of Storm’s End and Lord Paramount. This understandably caused more than a few grumblings among the stormlords, as they now had to answer to a lord of a tiny island in the middle of the Blackwater Bay despite them having dragons. His father also had him establish his own house, but history showed that at least three generations had to pass before any house could be fully cemented as ruler of their lands. It was fair to describe Orys’ first six moons as Lord of Storm’s End as uncertain given the recent founding of his house, the stormlords not having a high opinion of him personally, and them having to answer to what they viewed as a backwater keep.

Orys found it strange that Jaenyx didn’t take Storm’s End or any of the castles in the riverlands for himself despite playing a central role in subjugating both. A dragonlord more rooted in Valyria than himself or his trueborn family would have jumped at the chance of planting his or her roots into new lands, and Jaenyx just let Orys have Storm’s End despite being trueborn. At first, Orys thought it might have been weakness on his part since he said nothing when his father Lord Aerion handed the stormlands and Argella’s hand in marriage to him. He might have seen Jaenyx treating his trueborn family as his own and was convinced that was why he treated his father with respect, as the young always treated the elder with deference no matter where in the world and no matter the standing. It was also strange for Orys that Jaenyx, despite technically being equal to his father in regards to their stations, would allow him and Aegon to have sway in the major decisions and not seriously contest them.

In addition, Orys had heard about what happened at the citadel, with Jaenyx slapping Aevor Rahitheon before defending his siblings as his own. From what his father taught him, a lord’s strength lies in the strength of his vassals, who swear allegiance in exchange for the lord protecting their interests. And the lord has to reckon with these interests if he wants to remain in control. Slapping a vassal in the face was not a way to maintain control and could signal that the lord no longer wants to protect their interests while making it so that they no longer disturb him. Normally, such a person would find themselves in a precarious position as a lord, made even more so if they also lacked a keep and lands. It could be said that had the vassals had not raised the question of Jaenyx not having his own estates, then his trueborn family would not have thought about it. And if word got out about how Aegon handled the situation, it would have been interpreted as throwing a bone to a dog. Despite being equals to House Targaryen and coming from better dragonlord stock, Jaenyx chose to have a keep right next to Dorne and not near any of the good lands already known to Westeros. Under normal circumstances, one might have seen Jaenyx as a weak man and thus not worthy of mention since he allowed others to seemingly walk all over him. Many would have also protested his decisions so far, which combined with his seemingly bad temper would undermine his credibility and thus make people question on whether he was worthy of being a lord in the first place.
However, Orys remembered that looks can be deceiving, which he had to keep in mind constantly from his first months at Storm’s End whenever he met with petitioners throughout the stormlands since they all had their own agendas when meeting with him. From the few instances he did interact with Jaenyx and despite having the occasional bouts of the dragon temper, Jaenyx had a good mind for war and a better one when it came to people. He knew how to detect one’s weaknesses and how to get inside one’s head. It didn’t take long for him to crack that boatman who was spying on Dragonstone and he didn’t exert a lot of effort when he tortured that ironborn captain. He knew what vices or things would tempt a person, which allowed him to manipulate those unfortunate to enter his line of sight into getting them to do his bidding. He was evidently brave, as he was willing to venture deep inside enemy territory to gain a reading of the riverlords’ situation with Black Harren without using his dragon. He was also tough, as it took a certain personality to cross thousands of miles of sea and leading thousands of people towards an island that could potentially be hostile. His clinging onto the ways of Valyria demonstrated a certain stubbornness, as he still regarded the people of Westeros with contempt. Those who would see Jaenyx as weak for his constant silence on important matters would ignore that his master, Konno Haru, was exactly like that. Just because someone was quiet doesn’t mean they had nothing to say.

Jaenyx’s undemonstrative demeanor made Orys… anxious many times. From what he remembered, Konno Haru was an assassin, shinobi being the exact term, meaning that in a world of cloaks and daggers, silence was the greatest weapon one had and one that Jaenyx kept close. He remembered from the last time he spoke with Haru was that he taught Jaenyx to allow those more able to take charge and to be selective in how he pushed his authority, as trying to push your will all the time was a quick way of getting too much attention and becoming a target. Him being quiet during councils and allowing Aegon to take the center despite being equal to their father did not mean he was impotent or letting others walk over him. If Aegon made a mistake in their planning or in the field, he would take the blame and Jaenyx could simply deny his involvement. Eventually, if Aegon or their father made enough mistakes, Jaenyx could swoop in and take charge by making himself the better option since he had no part in both of their blunders. Undermining potential rivals without raising a finger was something Orys was sure Jaenyx knew how to do. Besides that, Jaenyx might have known more than a dozen ways to eliminate threats either with the blade, dagger, or any of the subtle tricks taught by Konno Haru. He certainly was capable of all of that, if Orys’ observations of his skill with his hand-and-half sword Seablaze and dagger, his Yi-Tish swords, and his frightening infiltration techniques at Haystack Hall said anything.

Jaenyx’s seemingly detached attitude during councils might have been seen as more weakness on his part, but Orys saw his eyes during those meetings. Slightly narrowed and violet irises moving left and right, those eyes resembled that of a predator and a predator would not be able to hunt its prey if it made a lot of noise. His eyes were noticing small details, mannerisms unique to whoever he was closely observing, and catching the meaning behind certain words spoken among other things. He then remembered all of those aspects for the next time, which he would use to either bolster his position or to undermine those who he deemed as a target. Such was the case when he had Broden Tully brought before him at Harrenhal for his whoring. While the nephew of the Lord of Riverrun thought that Jaenyx had a problem against brothels, he was proved wrong when Jaenyx revealed that he knew that Broden Tully was revealing confidential information to his whores while drunk and in ecstasy. Thankfully, what Broden Tully divulged by accident was not severely damaging, but Jaenyx made it clear that he no longer trusted him with key tasks related to the administration of the riverlands and thereby had him go back to Riverrun. Jaenyx knew about
Broden Tully’s predilection for whoring after observing him at the Stoney Sept and therefore was able to use it against him twice, first to arrange a meeting with his lord uncle and the second to make him understand that he was removed from his confidence. Orys bet Aegon one silver piece that Jaenyx deliberately divulged that piece of information, which was a minor detail regarding taxes, to Broden Tully in order for him to mess up and have an excuse to dismiss him from his service after seeing his whoring becoming a problem.

In light of all of this, Orys knew that Jaenyx was by no means weak or ineffective. He simply wasn’t as loud as others would have wanted him to be and knew that his silence was what made him unpredictable and dangerous, his mind sharpened and shaped by an assassin and making him see the world as how a spy would. He could only assume that if he knew this, then the Tarareons, Leniars, and Rahitheons had a much better understanding of his abilities and his way of thinking from their time with him. That meant that his slapping Aevor Rahitheon was not him having a temper, but could also mean that he did so because such a move was within acceptable limits of his personality and how others viewed him, thus explaining why his vassals simply took it and moved on. His choice of selecting Vulture’s Roost as his own keep could only mean that he had particular designs on the place, which may have allowed him to see past the ruins and the fact that it was so close to the Dornish border, not to mention that the location of the castle ruins sat right on the source of the Wyl and would thus bring conflict with House Wyl. Such designs could only have far-reaching consequences, further than Orys’ mind dared to go. He could only be thankful that Jaenyx saw his trueborn family as his own and that he really loved and respected Visenya, meaning that whatever stratagems he had in mind but kept hidden behind a meek and docile face will never be aimed at his family. Him maintaining a low profile and only stepping in when he deemed necessary was not subservience, but a clear example of an astute mind. Glad he’s on our side and not against us.

Orys would never admit any of this to Jaenyx, especially since they did not talk since six moons ago. However, he respected his abilities and his heart could only warm at how the newcomer from over a year ago became so integrated with their family, bringing nothing but new joy and blessings upon them. He just wished that Jaenyx would not be so uncompromising and held so much contempt for anything not of Valyria, as Orys himself didn’t have the traditional Valyrian traits, and wanted a chance to really talk to him. Why did I bring his family up at that time?

Getting back to the situation at hand, Orys knew that he had much to do if he was to gain the loyalty of the stormlords and solidify his house at Storm’s End. While becoming a lord in his own right was something that he never seriously contemplated, he most certainly wasn’t going to beg for the stormlords to follow him. If there was any lesson to be taken from the various histories of Westeros, it was that both lordlings and smallfolk respected leaders who personally took charge in the field. Such a truth motivated Orys to personally deal with the traditional threats of the stormlords, starting with the various corsairs from the Stepstones that had raided the southern shores of Cape Wrath and Shipbreaker’s Bay for centuries in a manner akin to the ironborn. Commissioning Vaeron Rahitheon to reforge his nearly-snapped Valyrian steel axe into a warhammer, he saw himself wielding it as he would lead an expedition to raid a major corsair den and deal a blow to the Stepstones. Only problem was… he had no ships to speak of or any
experience at sea. When he proposed such a venture in front of the stormlords, many were understandably skeptical, as they were not a seafaring people.

Orys consulted with Daemon Velaryon on how to build a fleet of seaworthy vessels from scratch. Daemon said that the stormlands had plenty of timber from which to construct ships and suitable locations from where to build them such as Evenfall Hall and Greenstone, but while he would be more than willing to help his cousin oversee their assembly, he couldn’t spare any of his house’s men as they were already stretched to their limits in their duties and there were no suitable stormanders to recruit. To rectify this problem and despite the risks it entailed, Orys approached any ironborn still imprisoned in either the riverlands or Dragonstone and made them a deal: if they constructed a fleet able to participate in sea combat and served as crewmen aboard his ships, he would grant them their freedom. Understandably, many of the stormlords protested his decision to have ironborn work on their lands, but Orys managed to placate them by saying that he didn’t make them land offers, which even he knew would have been too much for his new vassals to handle. He also made a deal with Lord Swann and proposed that the majority of the ironborn coming to construct his ships could earn their right to stay in the stormlands by serving as labor and footmen in the lands around Stonehelm, thus replacing the losses in manpower House Swann incurred during the previous war. Lord Swann readily agreed, as he didn’t have to wait the many years it took to repair the damage his house suffered.

It took three moons to construct of fleet of 50 seaworthy vessels, during which Orys took the time to become acquainted to warfare on the seas as best he could thanks to Daemon Velaryon. He recruited five thousand men from houses such as Estermont, Tarth, Dondarrion, and Fowler to embark on his expedition to the Stepstones, promising them a large share of the booty. He had also made it clear to the ironborn that should they have any ideas that would endanger them in the Stepstones, he would have no compunction in crushing them with his warhammer while allowing his new bannermen to release centuries of anger towards their people onto them. A normal lord would have delegate the expedition to a subordinate, but Orys was not like most lords and knew that his very survival as Lord of Storm’s End depended on him taking charge against the stormlords’ traditional enemies.

Not surprisingly, Orys’ fleet met stiff resistance on their approach to the Stepstones, with his fifty vessels meeting sixty vessels. But the thing about corsairs was that they never fought under a single commander, with each corsair having a say in how strategy and tactics were implemented. While such an approach was rooted in pirate tradition, it was very inefficient against a unified force. Such was reflected in the pirate fleet’s formation, which was loose and spread out. Meanwhile, Orys employed a crescent formation, with his flagship in the center and the heavier ships at the horns of the formation, in order to turn their flanks. Once the fleets were close enough, they exchanged missiles, ranging from flammable projectiles launched from the ship’s catapults to arrows and javelins. The aim was not to sink ships, but to deplete the ranks of the opposing crews before close combat commenced, which decided the outcome of battles on the high seas. Once the enemy strength was judged to have been reduced sufficiently, the fleets closed in, the ships grappled each other, and the marines and upper deck oarsmen boarded the enemy vessel and engaged in hand-to-hand combat. All of which Orys took to heart, and the pirates employing a
loose formation was what allowed his own fleet to pick each of their vessels off a few at a time.

Once his own flagship was engaged, Orys took the initiative and held his Valyrian steel warhammer up high as he jumped onto the what seemed to the corsair flagship. Fighting his way through the enemy crewmembers while crushing skulls and ribs with his warhammer, he finally confronted the corsair captain. He avoided the captain’s swing with his sword before bringing his hammer down onto the blade, forcing it on the deck of the ship before it snapped in two under the hammer’s weight. Before the captain could defend himself, Orys struck the captain in his jaw, undoubtedly crushing it before he fell onto the deck. Orys finished him with a strike against his skull, brains splattering and bone cracking against the wood. He then borrowed one of his men’s axes to decapitate the captain and showed the rest of the corsairs what he had done, prompting them to surrender. He tasked Ser Bruze Tarth, who he retained as Storm’s End master-at-arms and took with him on the expedition, with escorting the prisoners with half of his ships before moving onto the Stepstones with the other half.

Surprisingly, the stormlander fleet only encountered five hundred defenders when they landed on the biggest island of the Stepstones, but Orys still took it upon himself to lead the charge. Landing on the first boat, he defended himself with his shield from arrows let loose against him while he led over two thousand men to overwhelm the island. They made short work of the corsair remnants, but they discovered that the island was cavernous and contained more gold and valuables than they had initially believed, with items such as diamond-encrusted swords, petty crowns, bags of gold and jewels, and even a dozen emerald hourglasses. As promised, Orys allowed his men to lay claim to most of the booty found, with himself taking a set of steel horse armor along with some valuables. He and the other stormlanders returned in triumph, but Orys was not naive to believe that the stormlords were fully loyal to him yet. Lord Dondarrion told him out of goodwill, “Your expedition to the Stepstones was a success, but you merely did what was required of someone in your position. If you really want their loyalty, you’ll have to do more than just lead them against our traditional enemies.”

Orys took the words of the Lord of Blackhaven to heart, which motivated him to personally lead a party of men to scout ahead, observing the pass that led to the valley before Nightsong. The rest of his troops were positioned on the mountains east of the valley, but he needed them to see him showing initiative and that he was willing to put himself at great risk to defend them. They still love Argilac and keep his memory alive in their hearts. I must follow his example by having them see that I am just as willing to share in their difficulties in battle as the Arrogant king did.

“Milord,” one of the Caron bannerman spoke. “You sure this is the pass the Tarlys and the Peakes will take towards the valley?”
Orys turned around. “This is the shortest pass that they can take in order to get to the valley. There are other passes to use, but all of them lead straight to the tributary and would take more time. The Tarlys and Peakes need to move fast to secure the route through Nightsong, as a larger Gardener host would move too slowly through the mountains if it was still not secured.”

“Can we move fast enough to return to camp, milord?”

“We should,” Orys nodded. “We only have light weapons with us and we had more time to get ourselves familiar with the terrain. We can make it.”

As Orys turned back around to the pass, he saw a glint in the distance. Narrowing his eyes to get a clearer view, he saw banners steadily moving towards them through the pass. He made the huntsman banner of House Tarly and the three castles banner of House Peake. But what got his attention was the two other banners that were mixed with the marcher lords’. One was a red seven-pointed star against a white background, and the other was a rainbow sword against a black field. There were knights in plate armor carrying the former banner, while plainly-clothed but more numerous men held the latter. If he recounted correctly, these were the Warrior’s Sons and the Poor Fellows, both belonging to the Faith Militant. They were rarely seen on the field of battle, only sent in force if the High Septon ordered it. It shouldn’t have surprised Orys that they would be involved given that the High Septon did declare a holy war on the Valyrians, but he didn’t expect to fight them now. Things just got interesting.

Orys and his Caron bannermen quickly fell back once they sighted the enemy, quickly but carefully moving down the steep and rocky slopes of their position to their horses. Once they mounted, they returned to their position with all possible haste and Orys called together his commanders to inform them of the situation. Some were hesitant in fighting against the Faith since they all spent some time in the sept, but most were eager to fight against their Tarly and Peake rivals. Rivalries across the Red Mountains never ended and the majority of the stormlords who did support battle saw this as a chance to see who were the true rulers of the Dornish Marches.

Orys’ troops took up defensive positions at the pass leading to Nightsong. He had the marcher lords’ infantry take the center and the troops from places such as Cape Wrath and the Wendwater take the flanks. The bannermen of Houses Tarth, Connington, and Estermont formed the reserve, as they were the most militarily-experienced houses under Orys besides the marcher lords. Missile troops such as bowmen and javelin throwers took up positions behind the infantry lines and on lower mountains, while Orys personally took charge of the cavalry. While the valley was suitable for mounted combat, he intended to save his armored horsemen and reserve infantry for a decisive blow. Once the enemy had exhausted themselves on their assault on his positions, that was when he would unleash them. He had to tread carefully, as all of the four dragons were busy elsewhere.
and he had to do this himself. *Might work out in the end.*

As he made sure everything was set, Orys looked to the western edge of the valley and saw the enemy emerge from the pass. The banners of Tarly, Peake, the Poor Fellows, and the Warrior’s Sons flew in the wind of the Red Mountains as their enemy assumed battle formations. To Orys’ surprise, the forces of the Faith Militant assumed the vanguard while the Tarlys took up positions against his right and the Peakes against his left, with footmen from both houses taking the center alongside the Warrior’s Sons. But what he noticed was that instead of clear distinctions between the infantry and cavalry formations, half of the cavalry seemed attached to the right flank and the other to the left. From his lessons with Quenton Qoherys, Orys saw that the enemy was trying to make its formations more mobile and more flexible than in normal battles. Their armies were roughly equal in number, so the enemy was trying to get an advantage in mobility over Orys.

“Archers ready!” Orys ordered as he tightened his grasp on his horse’s reins as the archers obeyed. His warhammer was strapped to his right side, with himself and his horse covered in the castle-forged steel armor. He was tempted to request a Valyrian steel one, but there was no time for it to be made before the battle.

Orys kept his focus on the vanguard, which was made up of the Poor Fellows with their red stars and the Warrior’s Sons with the rainbow swords painted on their armor. The latter was armed as any other knight was, with a sword sheathed on their left and lance or spear in their right hand. He saw that the Poor Fellows were armed with a mixture of spears and axes, but had no armor and only wore tunics. But Orys quickly caught on what their purpose was. The Poor Fellows and the small contingent of the Warrior’s Sons outnumbered both the Tarlys and the Peakes. Any sensible commander would focus on the more numerous threats by using their missiles and the energies of their troops. Once the troops were grounded down and exhausted, the other components of the enemy’s army would then move in and have an easier time to fight. He would not fall to such a trick, but he had to keep his eyes open. *What are you going to do?*

Suddenly, a wave of arrows came flying towards Orys and his troops. “Shields up!” he heard someone in the center yell, with his troops able to avoid getting pierced by the arrows of the Tarlys and Peakes. Well, at least most of them. Orys himself had narrowly missed an arrow after getting off his horse, as did the rest of the cavalry. The arrows kept coming while Orys struggled to maintain his view on the field.

To his surprise, the enemy on his right was advancing quite rapidly towards his positions while the center and the ones on his left were moving slower. That’s when Orys realized that the enemy’s focus on the center and his left flank. But first, throngs of Poor Fellows rushed forward to his infantry.
“Volley, loose!” Orys shouted. His bowmen let loose their arrows against the charging Poor Fellows, who unsurprisingly fell by the hundreds and their flesh tearing from the broadheads that stuck into them. Javelins were also thrown, cutting down hundreds more and even piercing through a couple corpses. But Orys had to conserve his arrows, as he knew that the real threat didn’t come from the Poor Fellows.

As the center closed in, Orys ordered, “Lower spears!” to the schiltrons. Before long, men of the stormlords and Reachmen engaged in fierce close combat. While the spears held the enemy back at a distance, their enemies merely pushed forward and screamed with such vigor that one might have thought all attachment to the physical world was cast aside towards a desire to kill their opponents. This was especially true of the ones that had the rainbow sword on their armors, which Orys interpreted as zealousness towards the gods. However, the schiltron held true as they held the enemy back.

However, Orys saw that the Peakes’s footmen were advancing on his left flank while their cavalry was moving further left. Seeing that they were attempting to stretch his left flank thin where it would significantly weaken, Orys rearranged his left schiltrons to be more reactive to quick movements while getting his reserve infantry ready.

As his left flank finally clashed with the Peake footmen, Orys had the Selmys and Carons drop their pikes and engage with their swords and axes. While they would be engaged in close combat, Orys hoped to keep the enemy on his left flank occupied and hold them long enough for more of the enemy to come and break through the left. Meanwhile, the Peake’s cavalry were close to bypassing his troops on the left flank, with mounted Warrior’s Sons joining them. Recognizing the threat, he formed up his cavalry ranks and moved in front of his formation.

Orys took a moment to look upon the very men he fought against six moons ago. Mounted with him were armored knights from House Selmy, Swann, Dondarrion, Caron, Tarth, Estermont, and Mertyns’ among others. He couldn’t make out their expressions through their closed helms, but he could feel that they were just as eager to fight as he was. He counted on their hatred for their Reachmen rivals to carry them through the day.

“I have fought on the opposite side against you just six moons ago. While I may not seem like the best choice to be your leader, I will be damned before I see true warriors be beaten back those who are loyal to blossoms. Will we let these flower lovers beat us back today?!” To his relief, Orys heard a collective, “NO!” “Then, let’s show these green men and zealots what is to really feel steel
in their hearts.” Closing his helm, Orys galloped forward and heard the rest of the cavalry charge after him.

Raising his Valyrian steel warhammer up high, Orys closed the distance with the first horseman before swinging it against his cuirass, easily crushing both it and his chest and causing him to fall off of his horse, dead. He struggled to maintain seated on his horse, feet dug into his stirrups and his left hand tightly clutching on the reins as he swung his hammer to and fro against various enemy horsemen. He brought his hammer down on a knight’s head before using its pointed end to pierce the armor around another’s neck. He narrowly avoided one’s lance before grabbing onto its shaft, tugging on it, and bringing the knight close enough for him to swing to the left side of his helm.

While a portion of his cavalry remained engaged, Orys saw that the left flank was still occupied with their swords and axes in hand. Seeing another opportunity, Orys charged with another portion of his cavalry into the rear of the enemy troops attacking the left flank. He swung downwards, upwards, and side-to-side as he engaged enemy footmen on all sides of his mount. Eventually, after hard fighting, the enemy’s attack on the left flank collapsed and the Peake footmen did a disorderly withdrawal back towards the western edge of the valley and the pass from where they came from.

Orys turned to see that the Peake cavalry was still holding, but he saw that the center was still engaged. Catching his breath, Orys reformed the line of the cavalry that came with him and repeated the charge into the enemy rear. The results came quicker than expected as the Poor Fellows proved their uselessness in heavy combat and retreated in a messy manner against the pressure of both Orys’ center and cavalry charge at the rear, prompting the Peake and Tarly footmen that were also in the center to follow suit.

But before Orys could wheel back around to support the cavalry on his left flank, he found the Tarly cavalry charging towards him, with their remaining footmen still engaged with the right flank. He looked to the rest of the cavalry accompanying and saw that they were exhausted. However, there was no turning back and Orys had to stop the Reachmen from moving through the valley towards Nightsong. Preparing himself, Orys charged one more time and held his warhammer tight as he closed the distance and found his mark into the breastplate of a Tarly knight.

However, Orys found that at least half of the Tarly cavalry also had the rainbow sword on the cuirasses and they were swinging their swords more wildly at him. Despite the center and left flank attacks collapsing, the Warrior’s Sons were living up to their name as the Faith’s armed fanatics and moved forward even when battlefield conditions told them otherwise. Orys parried one Warrior’s Son sword before puncturing his armor with the sharp end of his hammer. He then
shattered another’s blade before stunning him with a strike against his helm and swinging it to his right cheek. He also avoided a thrust of a Warrior’s Son’s sword before circling around and striking him in the unprotected rear part of his neck. He then saw an ornately decorated knight charging towards him, golden sash around his chest and the rainbow sword on his shield. He was yelling loudly, as if believing that the mere sound of his voice was touched by the gods and making his enemy tremble in fear of the divine justice about to strike him down. Remembering what he did outside of Bronzegate, Orys held his ground before the knight came close enough, after which he got his horse to the right of the knight, stood in his stirrups, and swung downwards with his hammer onto the top of his helm, crushing it and forcing his head deep into his armor. The blood spray and the sound of his neck being crushed under the weight made it obvious to Orys how exactly his head would be pushed into the body.

What Orys didn’t expect was the Warrior’s Sons retreating back into the western pass while the Tarlys, seeing that there was no hope in continuing the battle, withdrew in a more organized manner. Surveying the dead on the field, stormlanders and Reachmen lying side by side on the blood-soaked grass and the streams of blood flowing into the tributary, Orys dismounted his horse and walked towards his army.

Stopping just short of the first stormlander, Orys kept his hammer up close as he opened his helm. He looked upon the men who were hesitant to fight with him just a few days ago, but saw nothing but respect and pride in their eyes. He had demonstrated bravery in the field and tenacity in his charges against the enemy rear despite not having all of his cavalry with him. What was more, Orys had beat back the enemy without dragons, thus confirming in their eyes that the bastard of Dragonstone was fully capable as a commander and warrior all on his own, living up to the example set by King Argilac.

Orys thrusted his warhammer high in the air, prompting many cheers from the troops. Under his leadership, the stormlanders had won their first major battle in the war and they now had proof that Orys Baratheon, Lord of Storm’s End and Lord Paramount of the Stormlands, was a worthy ruler to follow

Orys returned to Nightsong, but while he might have left the castle in silence, he returned to loud cheers of triumph. They had lost two thousand men and suffered three thousand wounded, but had killed five thousand of the enemy and captured three thousand. Some were members of Houses Peake and Tarly, but not high enough to obtain large ransoms. Of the Warrior’s Sons and Poor Fellows captured… Orys was unsure what to do with them even though they were of the religion that was seeking his family’s destruction. Instead, he had them put to work burying the dead and as labor for House Caron and Dondarrion.
Orys held a meeting in Nightsong’s great hall, not as large as the one at Storm’s End but large enough to accommodate his lords. They all lauded their praises on him, calling him a true lord of Storm’s End and a worthy warrior to continue the line of Durran Godsgrief while bringing in new Valyrian blood. Orys humbly accepted their plaudits and proceeded to celebrate with a feast in the great hall. However, before he could enjoy the festivities, he was surprised to see Argella enter the hall. There were many murmerings from the stormlords present towards the last of Durran Godsgrief’s progeny, but they all gave her the respect she deserved as their lady.

However, Orys noticed that Argella was walking with more sway to her hips and her black hair flowing down to her waist. She had a loose posture despite standing straight and was… smiling at him. The hard gaze that previously occupied her piercing blue eyes replaced with warmth. What’s going on?

“Apologies, husband,” Argella stood before Orys. “I have missed the battle.”

Orys shook his head, hiding the surprise that she called him that instead of “my lord.” “Not at all, dear wife,” Orys simply answered. “The war has only just begun, but we’re off to a great start.” The stormlords shouted their agreement.

Argella smiled widely. “That’s good. The blood of Durran Godsgrief must stand with her people against their enemies and I wouldn’t be a good wife if I let my husband be alone in war.”

Orys tried to hide his shock, though one had to look closer to see that his eyes widen. *What the hell are you doing?* “Well, I’m glad you made it, dear wife.” He gestured to the seat on his right, which Argella gladly took.

Orys continued hearing the recommendations of the stormlords. Some wanted to pursue the enemy and beside the Starpike and Horn Hill, as their numbers have been depleted. Others suggested calling for reinforcements from Dragonstone and at least two dragons before they could advance further. Orys shook his head at those. “My lords, our objective was to defend Nightsong from enemy attack and we have done so. But to advance on our enemies back to their keeps so deep in the Reach is folly. We have no idea how many thousands of other Reachmen will be coming our way and we were able to win largely due to the terrain.”
“But Lord Orys,” Lord Estermont spoke. “We’ve smashed the Peakes. We’ve smashed the Tarlys. You killed a master of the Warrior’s Sons.” Even Orys was surprised at who killed with the neck-crushing blow of his warhammer. “There is no better time than to press our advantage.”

“But what you’re suggesting is moving into the Reach. The Red Mountains worked to our advantage, but we cannot hope to fight in the open fields of the Gardeners’ kingdom on our own. We have neither the men nor the time needed to successfully storm Horn Hill and Starpike before the Gardeners muster tens of thousands of troops. All of us are aware of the host that can be raised by Highgarden and while numbers do not win battles, they surely help in war.”

“Lord Baratheon,” Lord Mertyns stepped forward. “We cannot just wait here for the Gardeners to come to Nightsong again. We may not have the same success gained today.”

“I agree,” Orys replied. “Therefore, I shall have the passes on the west bank of the tributary fortified to prevent our enemies from advancing on us again. Just like today, we can use the mountains against them and deny the advantage from their numbers. I want stockades to be brought up and pits to be dug to hamper the Gardeners and a sizable force to man them in case the Gardeners do try to break through again. Meanwhile, I will lead our troops north to the riverlands to reinforce my brother, my good-brother, and my sisters against the threat from the west.”

“You’re referring to the armies of Loren Lannister?” Lord Swann asked.

“Yes. The Brackens have defected, as did the Pipers. From the last dispatch from the Blackwater Rush, they will be within striking distance of Riverrun, which controls the Red Fork. We have to support the riverlands if we are to stop the Lannisters from advancing further and threatening the Blackwater Bay.”

The stormlords nodded, but Orys saw that they were unsure about meeting the Lannisters. They’ve never fought against the men of the Rock since Arlan III Durrandon, and much has changed since then. While the Lannisters did not field a host as large as the Gardeners, they were much better equipped and trained for heavy combat. The lords of the Rock were just as inclined to martial traditions as were the stormlords, so there was a little apprehension from them.
“What news from the Vale, my lord?” Lord Dondarrion asked before Orys dismissed them. “The Arryns have declared for the Faith, but they’ve been quiet so far while the Gardeners and Lannisters are making their moves against us.”

Orys couldn’t answer that. The Vale was also filled with pious followers of the Faith and Sharra Arryn had made the decision to involve the Eyrie in the High Septon’s declaration. However, there were no troop movements spotted or naval activities from Gulltown to report on. Or was there?

“No news so far, Lord Dondarrion,” Orys replied. “However, we must be wary of the men from the Mountain while we move on the riverlands. I’ll leave Houses Caron and Selmy in charge of the defenses while the rest will march north.”

With the council adjourned, Orys walked to the lord’s solar, which was graciously given by Lord Caron. Over a year ago, he wouldn’t have imagined himself going to a solar out of his volition, but being a lord has a way of making one adjust his habits to the duties brought onto him. What was more, he felt Argella follow him and merely allowed her to enter first before closing the door behind them.

Orys took in a few moments to stare at his lady wife. She had on the olive gowns she usually wore, but he noticed that there were red-black trimmings, the colors of his father’s house. She was not as graceful as Rhaenys or muscled as Visenya, but she came in a close second and was stunning to look at like the first time he saw her. Her flowing black hair that reached her waist, her well-defined jawline, and her clear and pale skin… Orys remained unsure at how he was able to have such a woman by his side.

Beyond her looks, Orys saw that she was every bit her father’s daughter. She was strong-willed, she was not afraid to speak her mind, and she had a tendency to make unveiled threats. However, unlike her father, she was intelligent, familiar to the ways of a court, and could handle Storm’s End on her own. He also noticed that Argella had a bit of a temper, which he assumed was formed from the moment her father made her his heir, which brought up protests from the stormlords over having to answer to a woman. Just like Visenya in that regard.

But what threw off Orys was how she seemed… happy to see him. He never forgot how she cried on their wedding night, when they dispensed with the bedding ceremony and were expected to
consummate their marriage in private. He hesitated to remove her dress, and stopped completely when he saw her tears. He couldn’t blame her, as she was afraid of having relations with the man that killed her father. He slept on the far side of the bed that night and kept his distance from her for six moons, only meeting with her to discuss Storm’s End’s business such as the indemnity payments and dealing with the Stepstones’ corsairs. Even when their father told him to bed Argella that night at Dragonstone, he attempted to bribe the servants into telling his father that they did because he still couldn’t do it, only for them to refuse out of loyalty to their lord. To his surprise, the servants eventually agreed to keep his secret as a favor to their lord’s son and because he treated them well. Her smiling and being loose with him was a complete change in her previous attitude towards him.

“What are you doing here?” Orys asked as nicely as he could.

Argella blinked. “Are you not happy to see me?”

Orys cursed himself, since his words still came out wrong. “I’m sorry. Um, how did you get here from Storm’s End so quickly?”

Argella grinned, satisfied with how he worded it that time. “Well, I had Ser Bruze get a fast ship and I sailed to Stonehelm. I heard that there was a battle on the way and I wanted to show my support to my husband. Is there a problem?”

“No, no,” Orys shook his head. “On the contrary. I just--”

“You didn’t expect me to be here at all?”

“Not just that,” Orys admitted.

“Ah,” Argella understood. “You think I still hate you for killing my father and taking my home and lands. Is that right?”
Orys nodded, not able to deny it.

Argella sighed. “I gave them up when I bent the knee, but your father was gracious to allow me to keep my home and lands. No lord or king in his right mind would do that, but then again, your father is not like my lords.” Orys beamed at her praising his father. “And to be honest, I can’t forget that you killed my father. But as the moons passed by, I began asking myself this: how can a man who is eager for battle feel remorse for killing another? Most men in your position would have taken their way with me by right of conquest, but you didn’t. And that’s when I realized that you saw a part of yourself in my father before he died.”

One could hear a pin drop in the solar. How did she know that?

“My mother was a Penrose, but she was the only one from that house to really impress my father with her wits and book knowledge. When she died from the shivers…” Argella hesitated before continuing. “My father blamed himself for her death because he wasn’t there to comfort her in those last days, instead choosing to fight the Dornish near the Wyl. That’s why he didn’t want to take a wife, since he reflected too much on my mother and I saw him bury his grief in his sparring and his constant warring.”

Orys was surprised that Argella would reveal such intimate details of her life to him. Like Jaenyx, when one revealed details about especially their mothers, that was a sign of trust or a leap of faith to make the relationship stronger. Is that what she wants?

“My father had his faults, but in a way, he regretted choosing the sword over his own wife. You regretted killing him because you saw that you were in some ways the same as him. Both of you are not one for books or for dealing with the tedious minutiae of courtly life. And you especially are not one to shy away from battle, leading from the front like my father did. So, you’re not like most men. You proved that by showing me the respect that I deserve as your wife.”

“But this is an arranged union,” Orys stated. “I may be the Lord of Storm’s End, but I only got it as part of the dowry and I let you run it because it’s your home more than it is mine.”
"Would most men do or think that?" Argella asked. "At first, I balked at the idea of being with a bastard, but I think you having to live with your bastard status made you humble. Made you more... capable of feeling things that most people wouldn't understand. You told me the origins of your last name, which can only indicate that you are good."

In the only time they really talked in the six moons they were married, Orys revealed where "Baratheon" came from. His mother was a Westerosi maid of House Celtigar, herself a bastard daughter of the Lord of Claw Isle. When he was born after his father bedded that maid one night, his father took him in but Lord Daemion Targaryen angrily refused to allow Orys to have the Targaryen name. Instead, his father took a name from old Valyria that had been lost with the Doom but one that was named after a place from the Targaryens' former holdings in the Lands of the Long Summer, Baratyon. Baratyon, which came from a town in the northern part of the Valyrian Peninsula that was the birthplace of the first Targaryen, was also the name for the Targaryens' original keep, which they established after taming their first dragon while they were sheep farmers. While the Targaryens got other lands in the Freehold and the Lands of the Long Summer before moving to Dragonstone, they never let go of Baratyon because they wanted to remind themselves of where they came from despite the land not being worth much compared to their other possessions. His father then adapted it to Westerosi fashion, Baratheon.

Orys felt himself relax at Argella's words, touched at her sincerity. "I would never think less of you."

"I know that," Argella replied.

"And I know that me killing your father will always be a fact that lives with us."

"Yes, it will be."

"And I hope you know that I will never take you against your will."

"You've proved that even now."
Orys sighed. “If it means anything, I am sorry that I killed him. I can only imagine what it is to lose a father, even being near the man who did the deed.” He felt a tear drop from his eye. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” Orys managed to say but found it difficult to keep it together.

Argella took in his words, flustered at his apology. “He was foolish, but he died as a warrior, how he always wanted. You gave him a chance to live and he didn’t take it, so you had no control over what happened next. You don’t need to apologize, since I’ve begun to move on from that and dwelling on the past, no matter how much pain there is, never helps anyone. But if it means anything, I accept your apology.”

Orys smiled, thankful that Argella did. Just then, he remembered. “I have something to show you, if you’ll allow me.”

“Of course.”

Orys walked over to a chest on the other side of the solar, taking out a rolled piece of cloth. He designed it himself, with help from Rhaenys, as a way to make peace with Argella. Hopefully, she doesn’t react badly.

“I’ve had a banner made. I did establish my own house at Storm’s End, but I had no banner and I couldn’t use the previous banner. So, I came up with something that I hope will be a good start for our house.”

“All right,” Argella nodded. “What is it?”

Orys didn’t answer, only focusing on unrolling the banner and placing it on the wall.

The banner had the Durrandon colors and the reared-up stag, with the words being “Ours is the Fury.” However, Orys added his own addition to the banner with Rhaenys’ advice, with dragon wigs on the back of the stag and fire coming out of its mouth. Rhaenys said that it was a banner to recognize the union of the blood of the dragon and the blood of Durran Godsgrief, with House
Baratheon staying true to its origins from Valyria and its adopted ones from the Age of Heroes. Argilac may have been unwise, but he was a warrior to the end and Orys would be damned before he gave him any disrespect.

What made Orys happy was how Argella was… mesmerized by it. Not only was her husband honoring her house in such a way, but she was also looking at a banner that included elements of old Valyria, whose culture and people she greatly admired. She didn’t have any issue with marrying either Aegon or Jaenyx, calling them “stunners”, and her house now could have Valyrian blood in its veins.

“Do you like it, my lady?” Orys asked hesitantly.

“It’s so… lovely,” Argella said. “You’re staying true to your Valyrian roots, but you’ve adopted my house’s sigil and words. No man would ever think to do this.”

Orys shrugged. “As you said, I’m not most men.”

Without warning, Argella walked up to him, tip-toed to his face, and pecked him on the lips. “Thank you, husband. I will never forget today.”

“Nor will I,” Orys managed after overcoming the shock from her kiss.

“We’ll talk tomorrow, then?”

“Aye. I would like that,” Orys smiled.

Argella exited the solar, but smiled at her husband one last time. “Good night, Orys,” were her final words before closing the door.
“Good night… Argella.”

Chapter End Notes

The battle is based on Kennesaw Mountain (1864), with a different outcome.

Like I said, I have bigger plans for Jaenyx and Orys understands that he is not someone to be trifled with, but he's also thankful that he is part of the family. I hope that lays rest to the doubts about Jaenyx. If not, nothing more I can do.

Lots to cover in this chapter, but Orys is becoming more than just someone who could wield a hammer. He wasn't one of Aegon's top commanders in canon for nothing, and I hope that I showcased well his diversifying his battle expertise.

Coming up with Argella's background and the origin of "Baratheon" was fun. And because Orys was showing her a lot of respect, combine that with the banner and she'll definitely fall for him. I hope I showed that well.
Rhaenys VII

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

RHAENYS VII

Rhaenys was there again, in the middle of the weirwoods where she first saw Brandon Snow, the bastard brother of Torrhen Stark, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North. However, she wasn't as confused as the last time because she was fully aware that she was having the dragon dreams. The moment she touched Meraxes, she found herself falling high from the sky into the sea of red-leafed weirwoods, but she merely stood back up and started searching for her dragon and her Stark acquaintance.

As she moved deeper into the weirwoods, Rhaenys was surprised when the weirwood forest transitioned into a normal forest, but the evergreens were incredibly tall and there were still weirwoods here and there. She didn't know where exactly she was, but the eerie calm that existed amongst the weirwoods extended to the towering evergreens. She was off-putted by this change, as it felt more normal to be amongst everyday types of trees rather than the ones that had become near extinct south of the Neck.

Rhaenys finally came across a stream that ran below the evergreens and noticed wolf tracks on her bank. Following the tracks, she smiled as she saw Brandon Snow sitting on a boulder next to his direwolf Autumn and Meraxes drinking from the stream. She ignored Brandon as she walked past him and patted Meraxes' snout, who snorted her appreciation but kept drinking.

"Glad you could make it, Lady Rhaenys," Brandon Snow began.

"Good to see you, my lord," Rhaenys replied as she turned around to see him.

"Please, my lady. I'm not a lord. I'm just a bastard," Brandon stated sheepishly.

"Who can connect with people in dreams," Rhaenys responded.

"Well, admittedly, my particular abilities are of a dying sort," Brandon explained. "Greensight has not been as common as it once was ever since the Andals stormed through the south. The magic of the First Men and the children have faded to near nonexistence over thousands of years."

"Evidently, not all of it," Rhaenys pointed. "The Andals failed to cross the Neck and the magic must've survived."

"There might be a chance to bring it all back," Brandon stood up from the boulder while Autumn lifted his head off the ground.

"What do you mean?" Rhaenys asked.

"I'll be straight with you, Lady Rhaenys. The magic that flows in your blood doesn't match well with the magic that flows through mine and fire is rarely helpful for those worshipping what people see as magical trees. But sometimes, fire is needed to burn out a forest when it grows out of control and to make room for new growth. It's like using scissors to cut your hair, as you can hurt yourself using them but they're necessary to prevent your hair from growing too much and making it easier for the lice to infect you."
"You're not being straight, Lord Snow," Rhaenys chuckled. "I don’t know why I'm hearing you say what I already know about keeping decent health."

"We have common cause, Lady Rhaenys. I know that the Starry Sept has declared a holy war on you and the Valyrian people in general, seeing you, your dragons, and your practices as abominations. But, the same arguments that they use against you apply to the First Men and the North. If they had their way, the Faith would have burned every weirwood they saw, and I fear that their actions against you would only spur them towards extreme measures against anything they deem as hostile to their religious practices."

"First time I read that declaration, I was... shocked to say the least," Rhaenys went back to when Jaenyx read that message aloud in their father's solar. "I never did follow the Faith, so did the rest of my family. But I liked the septon and septas on Dragonstone before my father told them to return to Oldtown, as I didn't have anything against them. Now, I don't want anything to do with the Faith anymore."

"Only been to a sept once at White Harbour, and never saw the appeal that one time. But getting back on point, you and the other Valyrians are greatly threatened. If you and your family are wiped out, what's to stop the rest of the south from marching north again and finishing what their ancestors failed to do?"

"Well," Rhaenys shrugged. "If I remember correctly, Theon Stark had many things to say about the Andals invading his home, if the spiked heads on his shores explain anything."

Brandon Snow nodded, impressed. "Very good. But, there has only been one Theon Stark in thousands of years and there’s no guarantee that the North will withstand the Andals the next time they invade."

"So, what are you suggesting?" Rhaenys crossed her arms.

"Your family commands an able host, but you’re spread thin and you can’t fully trust the lords under you, except for a select few like the Blackwoods. The North might have driven them out of the Wolfswood thousands of years ago, but we still keep in contact with them as they still follow the Old Gods. Even with your dragons, you'll be hard pressed to fight the lords of the Rock and the Reach to the west and south and the Knights of the Vale to the east. The riverlands are divided and unprotected, while the former Storm kingdom cannot withstand the Gardeners forever despite your half-brother's victory there."

"How do you know about that?"

"Having what I have makes me aware of events before they occur, but Winterfell has kept a close eye on the developments south of the Neck for some time now. It's the reason why my brother King Torrhen proceeded to assemble his personal banners the moment he heard about Harrenhal and then reading the Starry Sept's declaration. He will call the other northern lords soon."

Rhaenys was surprised. Calling the banners was never a move to be taken lightly, and hearing about the Starks putting together their banners could only mean that the rest of the North would follow. "Why would your king do that? He has no obvious stake in our conflicts with the Faith."

"I told him some things that... persuaded him to begin preparations. Unlike the rest of the south, bringing the full strength of the North to Moat Cailin takes time given the distances between the various houses, but once mustered fully, an army of northmen can triumph against an army of summer knights. Theon Stark certainly accomplished that thousands of years ago."
"But why assemble the army in the first place?" Rhaenys asked.

Brandon Snow paused. "There are those that... doubt my abilities. While Theon Stark might have stopped the Andals from getting a foothold, he didn't stop Andal blood from entering the north over many generations. While the Andal lords might have brought practical power and quality steel amongst other things to the north, the blood of the First Men that was so prominent north of the Neck slowly became diluted. The Manderlys for starters, then the Flints, and so on. But the Starks cannot forget its First Men heritage and the fact that we were descended from both the Warg King and Brandon the Builder, so we took great pains to ensure that whatever abilities our blood carried remained alive. I grew up with King Torrhen and he saw my abilities personally, so he has no reason to doubt what I had to say about the threat from the Faith in the south. That's one of the reasons why he didn't go to the Arbor when King Mern of the Reach invited him."

"What?" Rhaenys' eyes widened, not knowing what he was talking about.

"I told him that I saw King Mern Gardener, Queen Regent Sharra Arryn, Darvin Hoare, and King Loren Lannister convene at the Arbor to discuss what their High Septon prayed about. I don't know the full details, but they sought to use the Faith to further their own ends towards Westeros. Loren Lannister wants the riverlands up to the Gods Eye, Mern Gardener wants the stormlands, Queen Sharra wants the Blackwater Bay, and Darvin Hoare wants the riverlands again. I'm surprised that they would invite the ironborn in the first place, given that they attacked you at Dragonstone and started the whole mess and not following the Faith."

"Hold on a moment," Rhaenys stopped him. "You mean to say that this was prearranged? And that this isn't about the Faith at all?"

"Oh, no. Don't get me wrong," Brandon shook his head. "The Faith has a central role in this, but the other rulers of Westeros that are fighting against you simply use the Faith to further their own ambitions. Sharra Arryn has particular designs towards your home area and the Vale has been silent. But I would keep my eyes open for them."

Rhaenys took this all in. The Faith declaring a holy war on the Valyrians was not just an act of pure religious fanaticism but also a political stratagem by ambitious rulers. She felt especially irritated against the Arryns, as they had the guts to think about taking their home from them. But thinking about the whole picture, she realized that the deaths of Black Harren and the Arrogant king had opened an opportunity for the rulers going against them, as Loren Lannister wouldn't have to worry about fighting against the ironborn from both land and sea, and the Gardeners believed the stormlands to be impotent with Argilac dead. But something still bothered Rhaenys.

"Did you know this was going to happen?"

That made Brandon Snow hesitate before he became resolute. "Yes, I did."

"Then why didn't you tell us?!" Rhaenys cried.

"Would you have believed me if I did, my lady?" Brandon Snow shot back. "The Faith had never done something like this and I only got the knowledge just recently. However, it doesn't matter since it is happening and we need each other."

"How?"

"If the Faith succeed, their power would grow unprecedented and I don't know if the North could withstand waves of Faith fanatics even with Moat Cailin. As a northerner, I cannot allow this threat to grow unchecked, but I also know that the northerners cannot do this by themselves. That's
"Me?"

"There will be an envoy coming from White Harbour to Dragonstone, specifically the heir to Lord Manderly. He will carry documents containing King Torrhen's personal seal, which allows him great leeway to act on behalf of House Stark, but his main mission is to see whether a partnership could be established between the north and the Valyrians of the Blackwater Bay."

"You haven't told me what I would do."

"Your father has faith in your abilities, and so does the rest of your family. You need to make them aware of what we just discussed so that the discussions will run faster and smoother. Time is not on our side, Lady Rhaenys, and we need to know each other's terms before the full might of the Faith can overcome you."

"We have dragons, Lord Snow."

"So did the Valyrians against the Ghiscari and the Rhoynish," Brandon commented. "Granted, the people of Westeros are not them, but don't expect the dragons to easily overcome your enemies. The Rhoynish found ways to fight the dragons, so what's to stop those of the Faith from finding their own ways to combat yours?"

Rhaenys nodded, slowly understanding. "When should we expect this envoy to arrive?"

"Not long," Brandon replied as he scratched Autumn's head. "As for both of us, we will meet in person soon. The details will come from Lord Manderly when he arrives."

"I look forward to meeting you in person, Lord Snow, and your direwolf," Rhaenys smiled.

"And I you, your husband, your sister and good-brother, and the rest of your family. But just a word of warning for what's to come: you're not going to win every fight."

"What do you mean?" Rhaenys was confused.

"The only way that anyone can adapt and improve is through being set back, and that will happen very soon," Brandon said cryptically.

"Can't you tell me more about that?"

Brandon shook his head. "I don't know how it will happen, but it will. Just be prepared when it does."

Rhaenys sighed, but accepted his answer as she saw everything around her turn into white light. "All right. I hope we meet soon, Lord Snow."

"We will," Brandon simply answered before the dream ended with bright whiteness.

Rhaenys stood on the docks of Dragonstone alongside her mother and Aegon as they waited for the Manderly vessel to arrive. It was easy to convince her mother of her abilities, but telling her everything that Brandon Snow said was overwhelming for her, but they had to concentrate on
dealing with their northern envoy.

After awakening at their citadel on the Blackwater Rush, Rhaenys told Aegon and their father and mother of her recent conversation with Brandon Snow. Their father had to remain behind to oversee the citadel and the progress in both the riverlands and stormlands, but gave their mother, Aegon, and herself leave to act on his behalf when the Manderly vessel arrived at Dragonstone. He had previously sent envoys to House Cerwyn of Cerwyn and to White Harbour, the houses of the North that had the most contact with the Starks of Winterfell, to assess the situation in the Northern kingdom but withheld Rhaenys having the dragon dreams since that would have led the northmen not taking his envoys seriously. But it might change if Brandon Snow with his greensight was able to convince his king brother to send an envoy to their home.

Rhaenys and Aegon flew back to Dragonstone on Meraxes and Balerion, where they spent the next whole day preparing the castle for their new arrivals. They didn't expect their envoy to spend the whole day there and Darvin Hoare wasn't coming, so their lady mother was determined to continue being the hostess that she was known for.

Aegon stood straight in his armor and Blackfyre on his left side and Flame Screecher on his back, which Rhaenys didn't object to even though they were not expecting a fight. Her husband looked powerful and befitting of a dragonlord and appearances still mattered, as the sight of Balerion and Meraxes would deter Lord Manderly's son from overreaching himself during the negotiations. As for Rhaenys, she was dressed in her regular red and black gown while their mother wore an aquamarine dress that paid homage to her Velaryon ancestry, but the jeweled and Valyrian steel crown that she wore on her head made clear to all who her true allegiances were, as only those of House Targaryen could wear those crowns and she would choose her family over her nephew Daemon all the time. "Hopefully, it won't have to come to that."

"This will be something to remember," their mother remarked. "A northerner has come to the south and only because of people with magical dreams."

"Come now, muna," Aegon replied. "The Manderlys are quite good at navigating through the intricacies of the south. Then again, doesn't exactly say much as they were expelled by the Gardeners thousands of years ago."

"But I worry, Egg," their mother admitted. "They converted to the Faith after the Andals came and northmen might be a loyal bunch, but who knows what kind of effect the High Septon's declaration had on the Manderlys?"

"As you said, muna, they are a loyal bunch," Aegon pointed out. "House Stark gave them shelter when the Gardeners kicked them out of the Reach, so they should have no thoughts of treachery against Winterfell. If they did anything that went against Torrhen Stark's orders, they would be in great danger from the other houses of the North that would vie for control over White Harbour."

Their mother nodded. "Let's hope their sense of loyalty runs stronger than that of the Brackens'. I heard that Jaenyx and Vis tore down the walls of Stone Hedge and burned what the standing structures with Vhagar and Cloudwynd before their troops troops carried off the food and gold from there. Is that right?"

"Kessa, muna," Aegon confirmed.

"Good," their mother said with approval. "Let's hope the Pipers get theirs and that the rest of the riverlords understand the price of disloyalty, the Brackens' conflicts with the Blackwoods be damned."
Rhaenys nodded her agreement. She had to admit that Jaenyx's orders to have the Brackens muster all of their available troops to fight against the King of the Rock was smart, as that left their lands undefended and easy to take should they prove treacherous. Now, House Bracken no longer had a home and their lands were now forfeit. She hoped that the next lord who took over their lands would be far more loyal than their last owners.

In the distance, the three saw a ship's silhouette emerge. As it got closer, the sails were decorated with the unmistakable merman sigil of House Manderly. Their mother gestured for their bannermen and Quenton Qoherys to ready themselves, as while they did not expect an attack, they had to be alert.

Finally, the Manderly ship docked and a plank was lowered as a contingent of Manderly bannermen disembarked from the vessel and Dragonstone men were tying their ship down. The Manderly bannermen were dressed in a mixture of mail and plate armor and were all well-armed with swords, axes, and pikes along with their shields painted with the Manderly sigil. Seven of them escorted a man who wore a thick fur cloak, leather gambeson, sword on his left, and the merman hanging his neck. He stopped just a few feet from Rhaenys, Aegon, and their mother.

"I presume you are of House Targaryen?" the man addressed them in his northern brogue.

"Yes," their mother answered. "I am Valaena Targaryen, Lady of Dragonstone. And these are my children. Lord Aegon, heir to Dragonstone, and his wife, Rhaenys. Who might you be, my lord?"

"Lady Valaena," the Manderly man bowed slightly in respect. "I am Warrick Manderly, heir to Lord Manderly of White Harbour. I have come to Dragonstone on behalf of His Grace Torrhen Stark, First of his Name, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North."

"Well met, Lord Warrick," Aegon shook his hand. "I am glad you have made the journey here to our home. However, before you venture further on Dragonstone, I must insist that you leave your weapons at your boat. You have nothing to fear from us, my lord."

Suddenly, Balerion and Meraxes flew over the Manderly boat, roaring loudly and causing Warrick Manderly and his entourage to fall on the deck in fear. Aegon and Rhaenys smirked, thankful for their dragons for showing their northern guests a glimpse of what they were capable of.

After a moment, Warrick and his men stood back up. "So, the rumors are true," Warrick Manderly said as he dusted himself. "You do have dragons."

"Yes," Rhaenys confirmed. "But you have nothing to fear from them, as long as you don't try to harm us."

"With respect, my lady," Warrick Manderly straightened his cloak. "Before I walk further into your home, I humbly request bread and salt to be given."

"Of course, my lord," their mother gestured one of their servants who carried a bowl of salt and a loaf of bread. Rhaenys knew better than to spit on the tradition of guest rights, but it was getting quite annoying for her, as if the lords believe eating bread would save them from trouble. However, such thoughts were put aside as Warrick Manderly ate the bread and salt and was now at ease. Then, he gave his sword belt to a ship's crewmen, prompting his escorts to also leave their weapons at the boat.

"If you would follow us, my lord," Aegon turned around before their mother and Rhaenys followed suit.
As the Targaryen at Dragonstone, their mother took their father's seat while Aegon sat on her right and Rhaenys on her left. Due to their father allowing her to run Dragonstone's affairs alongside him, she was very attuned in how lords would behave and converse with one another and was more than capable of taking over whenever their father was absent. Rhaenys expected Warrick Manderly to shift uncomfortably at talking to a woman on an equal level, but she was surprised to see him indifferent. Then, she remembered that the First Men allowed women to have their voices heard on matters of importance and could have equal influence in key decisions. The North had a history of women who acted as ladies in their own right, such as the crannogmen of the Neck and even Bear Island to very north.

"Thank you for coming all this way, my lord," Rhaenys started. "I trust that your journey to Dragonstone has been uneventful?"

"Quite," Warrick Manderly nodded. "The waters around the Vale have been awfully devoid of activity and the Arryns know better than to provoke one of the key bannermen of the North."

"Let us dispense with the pleasantries, Lord Warrick," their mother cut in. "You were sent here by your king, who himself was convinced of sending an envoy by his brother Brandon Snow, correct?"

Rather than be surprised at their mother getting straight to business, Warrick Manderly looked relieved. "Yes, my lady. It's about time I met one of a southern house who doesn't care for useless banter."

Aegon smiled in good nature. "As much as I appreciate you agreeing with my mother, I must caution against you speaking with too much familiarity with us. Just as things are different in the North, things are different in the south. Etiquette must be followed, my lord."

Warrick Manderly nodded in understanding. "Of course, Lord Aegon. That aside, I have been granted much authority by my king to discuss terms of a possible partnership between our people against the threat of the Starry Sept. My king has closely followed your family's progress against the ironborn and King Argilac and even with dragons, your success against two of Westeros' formidable rulers is just remarkable."

"Thank you, my lord," Aegon replied.

"That being said, your family is in a serious situation. You have the Lannisters from the west, the Gardeners from the south, and the Arryns from the east who have strangely not made any moves yet, but the Knights of the Vale can't be trifled with during battle. You might have marcher lords on your side along with a decent host from House Blackwood and the riverlords who are still loyal to your house, but it'll be difficult to fight all three threats simultaneously. The Lannisters are the main underwriters of the Faith's Holy War while the Gardeners contribute the most troops. Plus, I have received intelligences that indicate that Loren Lannister has been in contact with the Iron Bank of Braavos."

That shocked Rhaenys, as it did Aegon and their mother. Quenton Qoherys, who was standing near the door, was stunned. The Iron Bank had a fearsome reputation of loaning to rulers all over the known world and eliminating their debtors whenever they failed to pay their loans back. If Loren Lannister got the Iron Bank involved in the Holy War, that showed how serious their enemies were in wiping them out and were willing to get more resources from one of the wealthiest institutions in the world if it meant their aims would be achieved.

"By contact, do you mean that the Lannisters got a loan from the Iron Bank?" Aegon asked.
"The Iron Bank wouldn't have sent a representative to his court if they didn't show serious interest in helping Loren Lannister in his cause. I assume that the gold underneath Casterly Rock is not enough for the Faith to accomplish their objectives."

"How do you know all of this?" their mother asked.

"My father has a few friends in Braavos. Plus, any Braavosi ship has to dock either at White Harbour or Gulltown before moving further south in the narrow sea, so the Iron Bank has no reason to hide their plans from us, yet."

"Yet?" Aegon raised an eyebrow.

"The North recognizes the threat from the Starry Sept and my king has no interest in seeing the Faith become more powerful than it already is. Should they succeed, who knows what else they'll do, especially in regards to its ambitious followers?"

"What about you? Don't you follow the Faith?" Rhaenys pointed out.

Warrick Manderly was stumped. Rhaenys couldn't tell if he was pious or not, but the fact remained that at least some in White Harbour would be tempted to answer the call from the Starry Sept.

"Why are you hesitating, my lord?" their mother asked. "My daughter asked you a question."

Warrick Manderly ran a hand through his hair, unsure of what he would say next. "I will… admit. There have been some in my family who felt compelled to march south and fight alongside our brothers and sisters of the Faith against you Valyrians." Be careful, Rhaenys warned in her mind. "Myself included."

Quenton Qoherys looked ready to draw his sword, recognizing the potential threat from their guest. "Then why didn't you?" Aegon asked.

"My house might be followers of the Faith," Warrick Manderly admitted. "But we are of the North despite our origins from the Reach. And the thing about northmen is that we have long memories. It took all of my house a moment before we remembered that the Gardeners expelled us from the south. The only house that took us in was the Starks of Winterfell, who gave us land and titles in exchange for us being their loyal subjects. If we marched with the Faith in the south, we would be breaking our oaths with the North and they would never forget that. In addition, the Faith as a whole did nothing while our homes and lands were seized, so us having a sept in White Harbour is merely for sentimental purposes. Still, there are those are still stubbornly committed to the Faith, so my views might not held by other members of my house."

"Then why should we trust you as an envoy for the King in the North?" their mother questioned. "If what you say is true, then your house and one of the North's most powerful bannermen is close to dividing."

"Because we have more experience in dealing with the south in comparison to the other northern lords," Warrick Manderly answered. "And at the end of the day, the northmen will always stand by other northmen."

"So, what are the terms of the North?" Aegon refocused the discussion.

"The North is prepared to contribute men, ships, and supplies to fight alongside your armies against the Faith. We won't officially join your war yet, but the King in the North recognizes that the First Men and the Valyrians have common cause against the Starry Sept."
"In exchange for what?" Rhaenys clasped her hands on the table.

"For now, I am only authorized to ask that the North gain new territories and that your family recognize our claims in perpetuity."

"What territories did you have in mind?" their mother was taken aback.

"Specifically, the Twins and the Three Sisters."

Aegon shook his head. "I don't know if we can agree to those terms. We might not have the highest opinion of the Freys, but they control the Twins and they haven't acted against us. And the Three Sisters are not ours to give, as those islands are under the Vale and therefore, we don't control them."

"You are right in not looking at them favorably, but I wouldn't be so sure of House Frey if I were you, Lord Aegon," Warrick Manderly replied. "Also, as the Vale is at war with your family, it wouldn't be long before your troops move on the Arryn king. The north merely asks that you do not interfere while we stake our claim on the Three Sisters."

"Why those two territories, my lord?" Rhaenys leaned back in her chair.

"The strategic position of the Twins would be of great benefit to the North, as well as the castles' incomes. Besides Moat Cailin, control of the Twins would ensure that no hostile army from the south could ever hope to cross the Neck. In regards to the Three Sisters, we cannot have potentially hostile islands so close to the only viable port in the North. Theon Stark was right to conquer them, but his successors failed to hold them."

"We won't stop you from taking the Three Sisters, but giving the Twins to the north might cause problems for our family," Aegon stated. "We might control two kingdoms, but we cannot give land to outsiders without causing discontent amongst the lords sworn to us."

As if expecting his answer, Warrick Manderly pulled out a note from his pocket and opened it. "Lord Brandon Snow expected you to say that, Lord Aegon. So, he gave me a note as a response."

"Brandon Snow?" their mother's eyes widened in surprise. She only heard of him through Rhaenys' dreams, but now she was being introduced to him in the real world.

Warrick Manderly held up the note as he squinted his eyes at the evidently small handwriting and read from it. "I personally have no care for territories, but the northern lords would expect concessions if they were to be involved in the affairs of the south. What Lord Warrick Manderly offered in the terms is relatively inconsequential to what you will hold a few years from now. You might give away lands you think is important, but consider it an investment in the future, a future where your family will not just hold two kingdoms, but all seven kingdoms of Westeros and more. Two bloodlines will emerge from Dragonstone, one that will continue House Targaryen and another from the one that travelled from Sothoryos, but both will be elevated to greatness. For this to occur, an alliance between the First Men and the Valyrians must be made, similar to the Pact between the First Men and the Children of the Forest. A pact of ice and fire, to be used against those who seek the ruin of the old and to end the unnatural order that is threatening to overcome and weaken the world. On behalf of House Stark, I strongly suggest both Houses Targaryen and Belaerys to consider the terms offered today. Your family will experience a setback and once that happens, I invite your family to convene with the northern lords at Widow's Watch to follow up on our terms. Only together can we survive. Signed, Brandon Snow, Castellan of Winterfell."

Aegon and their mother sat there, more confused than ever. Rhaenys knew what they were
thinking. Greatness? All Seven Kingdoms of Westeros? Pact? Ice and fire? What's going on here? But for some reason, she was not as puzzled as they were, as Brandon Snow already warned that they would experience a setback. She might have been baffled at Brandon Snow's words on their family controlling all of Westeros' seven kingdoms, but at the same time, she had abilities that were comparable to Brandon Snow's, so it should not be too much of a stretch.

"Why didn't you start with reading that note?" Rhaenys finally asked. "It could have saved us time."

"Lord Snow asked me to not read it until after I gave the terms, because if I began by reading it, it would have lacked context and therefore adding more confusion."

"Let me get this right," Aegon leaned forward on the right. "Brandon Snow sees us ruling all of the kingdoms of Westeros? Our family and Jaenyx becoming rulers in our own right?"

Warrick Manderly put up his hands to show his confusion. "Lord Aegon, I am just a messenger, so I'm not the best person to ask on what he has to say on the matter."

"Rhae," Aegon turned to her. "Is this the first time you're hearing of this?"

"Yes," Rhaenys admitted. "But, at the same time, I'm not ready to disbelieve it. I have the dragon dreams and Lord Snow has the greensight. The only question is, how will that happen?"

Aegon looked like he wanted to say more, but decided otherwise. "What about your father, Lord Warrick? Has House Manderly assembled their banners?" he turned to Manderly.

"House Manderly and House Reed have answered King Torrhen's call to arms and will assemble at Moat Cailin. The other northern lords will arrive there over time."

"How many troops can your king assemble?"

"Forty-five thousand, but he can't send them all, so I could only hope that he can bring together forty thousand troops if he gives the northern mountain clans and other distant houses more time."

"Lord Warrick," their mother stood up. "I invite you and your men to stay the night at Dragonstone. It's a long journey back to White Harbour and it'll be rude of me and my house to have you simply go back on your ship after just arriving on our shores today. You will have the full hospitality of my household at your disposal."

"I thank you, my lady," Lord Warrick replied courteously. "But I must be returning home."

"It's only one night, my lord," their mother smiled, although both Rhaenys and Aegon knew that there was no refusing her. "Enjoy the warm southern climate for at least a day. And your men could enjoy good food and wine in the meantime. Also, you've seen our dragons, but really observe them and look upon the creatures that burned Harrenhal and helped us triumph in many battles."

Warrick Manderly froze, afraid when their mother mentioned the dragons. Recognizing that further refusal would not get him anywhere, he acquiesced. "Thank you, Lady Targaryen."

"Wonderful. I'll have the servants prepare the guest quarters and you shall dine in the halls tonight."
Rhaenys stood with Aegon as they leaned on the walls of Dragonstone overlooking the Blackwater Bay. While their mother was busy accommodating their northern guests, both reflected on what Brandon Snow said in his message. They never had any aspirations to rule more than what they started with, with Aegon content with becoming the next Lord of Dragonstone and Rhaenys being his Lady. But the last six moons have seen their family control two kingdoms, more than what a lord could reasonably have. And they were already seeing the limitations of their current status, as they were near overstretched struggling to hold on to their lands even with dragons. Orys was a lord paramount and Jaenyx oversaw the riverlands, but they were still Lord of Dragonstone. Such was unprecedented and already bothered some of the lords under them, and yet they lived in unprecedented times as well, as the world saw dragons in action once again.

"What do you think, Rhae?" Aegon asked as he still stared at the sea and watched as Balerion and Meraxes flew around each other. Rhaenys noticed that this was one of the few times that her husband brooded, and he looked all the better for it.

"What?" Rhaenys responded while taking in her husband's new brooding.

"About your friend's words, about us ruling all of Westeros?"

"As I said, I'm not ready to disbelieve it, but I'm not quite sure how we'll achieve that. We have dragons, but even they have their limits."

Aegon sighed. "I never thought our family being rulers of more than the Blackwater Bay, and yet here we are. We don't have a crown, but we're responsible for many lives. We're fighting against two kings, a queen, and an ironborn shit, but we're barely holding on. I wonder if other kings in Westeros dreamt about controlling the entire continent, only for them to fail. Before we fought, all of the kingdoms fought each other and it will continue long after we're done fighting. What's the point in ruling such a shit place?"

Rhaenys looked at him in surprise. "What are you talking about?"

"What if Jae is right? Westeros is our home, but I've done some thinking recently and I only began to realize just how messed up our home really is. These people will never accept us no matter how hard we try and now, they want to kill us. And it won't stop with us just going to Dragonstone, because the people here want to wipe us out."

"Egg," Rhaenys put her hand on his shoulder. "This is not you. I might like you brooding, but you never let such thoughts darken your mind or make you passive. You act, and right now, we need action."

"How should I act, Rhae?" Egg turned to her.

"You're right. This is a shit place to live in, and Westeros may never accept us. But do we just sit back and let them hate us? You say that the fighting will never end long after we are done fighting, and I agree with that. But does that mean we have to just accept it as it is? We're dragons, and we come from a great civilization. Our ancestors didn't build Valyria because they accepted the way things were. They took action and look what happened. Only the Doom ended their work, but now, we can pick up where they left off."

"What are you suggesting?"

"They hate us for being Valyrian, so let's make them see that we're not abominations. The Faith
want our lands and us to be gone, so let's stop them. Westeros will continue fighting each other, so let's end it. Jae might not have the best opinion of Westeros, but let's rise above such low thoughts and show we're better. And Brandon Snow said our family will rule the seven kingdoms. So let's do it."

Aegon turned fully to her. "You want our family to be rulers of Westeros?"

Rhaenys shrugged. "Why not? We control two kingdoms and three kingdoms march against us, with one being a potential partner. We have all the reasons we need to take them down and burn them to ash. Besides, we can't just go back to the way things were. Things are different and like Jae said, we have to think big."

Rhaenys saw Aegon absorbing all of her words, which took a while as the implications of her words started to weigh on him. "So, you would have us be kings?"

"Just think about it. Our father, Aerion Targaryen, King of Westeros, and our mother the Queen. You'll be Prince Aegon."

Aegon chuckled. "And you'd be Princess Rhaenys of House Targaryen. What about Jae and Vis?"

"They're our family, so why not also not make them royalty? Prince Jaenyx and Princess Visenya of House Belaerys."

"That does have a good ring to it," Aegon admitted.

"But it won't reflect reality, my children," they both heard their mother walk up to them.

"Muna," Rhaenys was startled. "Did you hear everything we said?"

"I did," their mother bobbed her head. "And everything you said makes sense. We can't just remain in the Blackwater Bay, because our enemies will not stop until we're dead. And I am still skeptical as to the words of your friend Brandon Snow about our family ruling all of Westeros, but as I reflected more on them, I guess as Valyrians, we're the only ones who could accomplish such a feat. Valyria might not have been built in a day, but it was built to last and our ancestors achieved wonders, so who's to say that we can't do the same thing with Westeros."

"But I don't think your father will want to be king."

Aegon blinked. "Why not?"

"Come, Egg. He lived forty-seven name-days and he might be skilled politically, but he's hardly the most inspiring man in the world. Whatever energy he possessed when he took over Dragonstone is now gone, replaced with the cold wisdom of age. That's why he left you to command our forces alongside your sisters, Orys, and Jae, because you're still young and full of energy. You are a great warrior and men will follow you, but you also understand that winning battles is not the same as ruling over others, which is why you allow capable people to assume responsibilities you can't assume yourself. You're off to a great start, Egg, which is why when the time comes, you should be king."

Aegon's mouth was agape. "Muna, I- I- I- I," he stammered.

"But what about Jae and Orys?" Rhaenys asked. "If Egg becomes king, what about them?"

"Well, your friend Brandon Snow said that House Belaerys will also be rulers. And while your good-brother is standing alongside us for now, I think you and Egg can come up with an appropriate title for him and Vis. As for Orys, he already has his own keep and lands. But we're
thinking too far ahead. Right now, our priority should be to maintain what we already have and defeat our enemies."

"Agreed," Aegon recovered from his stuttering, which surprised both Rhaenys and their mother, as he always strived to be confident in his speech.

All three were walking back to the castle when one of their servants ran up to them. "Miladies, milord," she bowed.

"What is it?" their mother asked.

"Message, from the Red Fork," the servant held out a rolled parchment.

Aegon snatched it from her hand and Rhaenys saw his eyes widen as he reread it. "Oh, gods. We need to go back to the riverlands as soon as possible, Rhae."

"What is it?"

"We're about to have a battle on our hands. Jae and Vis have linked up with Orys and his stormlanders and they're marching towards Riverrun. But Jae discovered that Broden Tully, Lord Edmyn's nephew and who you met, was double-dealing with the Poor Fellows and was found supplying them with food and weapons. As a result, Jae and Vis had him arrested and they're camped outside Riverrun along with Orys, but with the Lannisters closing in, they'll need all the dragons now."

"Of course," Rhaenys nodded before she kissed her mother's cheek. "I'm sorry we have to leave so soon, muna."

"Go, my children," their mother understood. "Go be with the family. I'll hold the fort here."

Rhaenys and Aegon spent the next half day flying on Meraxes and Balerion from Dragonstone to the outskirts of Riverrun. But unlike six moons ago, she was ready to fight and to spill blood. Fire and blood will come to the Lannisters.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

And there we have it. Another riverlord has been proven to be disloyal and untrustworthy, this time the Tullys. They will not be the Lord Paramount of the Riverlands and they will not last for their double-dealing. The next chapter will have the first battle between the dragons and the Lannisters. We also have the first meeting between the North and Dragonstone, as well as seeing a greater extent of Brandon Snow's greensight.

Aegon and Rhaenys grappling with Brandon Snow's words of them ruling Westeros was a bit difficult to write, but we're now also seeing that the Targaryens have to think big if they want to survive. And that's just it. If they allow the Faith to wipe them out, it's over for them. So the only way for them to live is to take it all. And Jaenyx and Visenya are also prophesied to have their own rule.

As for those who still question Jaenyx, let me outline his situation for you: he saw his
older brother Gaerys die from Ghiscari pirates when they raided the Basilisk Isles, he
saw his father die from the red, and his mother sacrificed herself in a blood ritual so
that he wouldn't die from the plague himself (the last one affecting him the most
because he watched his mother disappear into ashes). Out of an original 30,000
colonists, 2000 were killed by the Ghiscari raid and nine of ten of the survivors
perished with the red death, leaving only 2,800 left. Jaenyx is the only dragonrider
besides the Targaryens, he only has one dragon and barely 1000 people who could to
fight as the rest are noncombatants. The only other place that he knew for sure would
not kill him and his people was Dragonstone, so he took a chance and it paid off.
However, if he just came in and pressed his will against the Targaryens while being
unfamiliar with the ways of Westeros and not speaking the common tongue, he would
have made a lot of enemies and his people would not have survived. The same thing
would have applied if he ever went to Essos, as his small force and one dragon is not
enough to take on the massive armies that places like Volantis and those of the
Slaver's Bay could assemble. He needs the Targaryens, as they helped him settle in,
they gave his people shelter, they made him familiar with the ways of Westeros, and
they gave him a strong and beautiful wife. And now, he was every reason to support
and fight alongside his family, as the Faith wants to wipe out all of the Valyrians and
he won't be able to rule anything if he's dead. So, he has to support the Targaryens, as
his survival depends on their survival. Plus, the Targaryens became the family he lost
and he would never betray them. But rest assured, he and Visenya will get their own
crowns, just don't expect them to fight their siblings for them as that will run against
everything they hold dear (we don't want another S8 disaster where Dany was written
to be willing to kill Jon to eliminate a threat and go Mad Queen out of nowhere, which
is a load of horseshit from Dumb and Dumber because they were so desperate to make
Dany a villain when all her life, she wanted her family back, and that's what the
Targaryens and Jaenyx also hold very dear to their hearts and they will kill themselves
before they have their dragons burn who they love).

Next, we have Loren Lannister leading his armies at Riverrun, but with a twist.
Loren Lannister II

Chapter Notes

Hope I still got it and that this will be a nice change of pace. This was a bit difficult to write. Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOREN LANNISTER II

Loren Lannister sat at the head of the table, eyeing all of his generals as well as the newly-defected riverlords. As the vanguard of the alliance, the lords of the Rock took the lead in the High Septon’s call for the holy war and were able to muster their banners, forty thousand men from houses such as Crakehall, Marbrand, Westerling, Lefford, and Reyne, in just one moon. Passing through the Golden Tooth, their troops soon came into contact with a riverman army comprised of twelve thousand troops from Houses Bracken, Piper, and Darry. Before a battle could commence, however, an envoy from Lord Prestan Bracken of Stone Hedge approached Loren Lannister’s tent and stated that the troops of House Bracken would switch sides to a king rooted in the Faith. He didn’t say anything about his lack of strong piety, but he welcomed Lord Bracken supplementing his army with his six thousand men. House Piper also switched sides, but the two thousand men of House Darry wisely chose to fall back and scouts reported that they were moving along the Red Fork towards Riverrun. He spent

Loren Lannister convened his generals, both from the Rock and from the Brackens and Pipers, on how next to proceed when his scouts brought back reports on the troops sworn to Dragonstone. The reports read that ten thousand men from the riverlands, four thousand men comprising both Valyrians and those from around the Blackwater Bay, and ten thousand from the stormlords were converging on the Red Fork and marching to meet them before they got to Riverrun. While he commanded the larger host, Loren Lannister kept in mind that the Valyrians defeated armies many times their size because of their prowess in battle and their dragons. Unlike Black Harren, he wasn’t going to throw his troops against them and would rely on strategy to bring down the Valyrians. He also had to be mindful of the dragons, as Rook’s Rest and Wailing Willows showed that the dragons could wipe out entire formations of troops in a blink of an eye and he thus had to find ways to limit their usage against his troops.

But first, Loren Lannister had to get some understanding of who he was dealing with. The problem with most men of martial inclinations was that they simply charged into battle without first getting a sense of who their opponents were. For that purpose, he sent a raven to the Citadel and had a face-to-face meeting with Maester Harrion, who was the maester at Dragonstone before Lord Aerion Targaryen sent him away. He knew the Targaryen brood since they were children, so he
was the best source on who they were.

Maester Harrion described Aegon Targaryen, the heir to Dragonstone, as an enigma, who never really talked with many people besides his bastard brother Orys Baratheon. However, Harrion had good things to say about Aegon, describing him with a strong sense of duty, respectful, and kind to all. He also took his lordly duties seriously, as he never hesitated to learn from his more experienced father in how to run a keep, how to deal with vassals, and so on. He was also very good with a blade, wielding a Valyrian steel sword named Blackfyre, and Maester Harrion observed from his sparring sessions with Dragonstone’s master-at-arms Quenton Qoherys that he had the potential to be one of the most renowned warriors on the continent, only needing to participate in tourneys and get knighted. The past campaigns had seen him mature into a hardened battle commander who could command respect and admiration from his troops, if Rook’s Rest and Wailing Willows indicated anything. Maybe Lord Aegon sees the futility of tourneys and that knighthood doesn’t really mean much other than killing the right person at the right time, and both don’t determine if one becomes a great warrior and leader.

Maester Harrion went on to Rhaenys Targaryen, sister and currently wife to Aegon. He thought her as a precocious girl, taking a lot of interest in their lessons and was especially enthralled by his tales of the Kings of Winter. Maester Harrion had come from the North himself, the Barrowlands to be precise, and was very familiar with the Starks. While Loren could see that he doubted some of the tales he told about the North, he continued to tell such stories if it meant that Rhaenys continued to be engaged. She also partook in many of the pastimes befitting of a noble lady such as dancing, singing, poetry, and playing instruments, showing incredible skill with the fiddle, recorder, and harp among others. He also mentioned that Rhaenys knew how to handle a bow, but was not quite good at it and only killed a stag one time. Lord Aegon chose his wife well, even if it was his sister, as a warrior should be tempered by one skilled at song.

Orys Baratheon was described by Maester Harrion as a whoremonger, bull-headed, and insecure given his bastard status. However, he also described Orys Baratheon as a fierce warrior, able to handle an axe, warhammer, spear, and sword equally well while demonstrating great strength. He was also the tallest of the Targaryen brood even if he didn’t carry his father’s name, but being a bastard did little to prevent his entry into manhood. While Orys relied on strength, Aegon was a little faster and more nimble, which allowed them to have draws in their sparring sessions. Like his trueborn brother, Orys Baratheon also seemed to take his lordly duties seriously, learning from his father on how to run his own keep and keep his vassals under control, lessons he must’ve applied well if his leading the stormlords indicated anything. However, he was not ready to take Maester Harrion’s words on Orys Baratheon at face value, as it took a certain type of person to kill King Argilac on the field of battle and rule over his domains without a rebellion breaking out, which it didn’t for the past six moons. He must be better at being a lord than even the maester expected.

As for the oldest of the Targaryen brood, the one thing that Visenya Targaryen shared with her
younger sister was that they were both curious about the world around them. However, from there they divulged. She was not as strong as her brothers, but she was the fastest amongst them and was not above discarding the rules in their sparring sessions. Wielding a Valyrian steel blade named Dark Sister, Maester Harrion described as a fierce warriress who could also fight with her bare hands and unbound by the conventions surrounding a lady. What’s more, she was very interested in the tales of old Valyria and voraciously read every book available that talked about blood magic rituals, which Maester Harrion tried to hide but she was able to find them anyway. She was also quite creative, as she tinkered with the many ways she could thrust and parry with Dark Sister and was not afraid of going outside conventional norms of combat. He also studied her deeds in the former Storm kingdom, which show that she was just as able of a commander as her brothers and her husband. *Quite a woman, this Visenya Targaryen. But she would not survive the schemes of the south with her attitude and inclinations.*

Loren Lannister needed information on Jaenyx Belaerys, which Maester Harrion couldn’t provide as he barely knew him. He then turned to the other riverlords such as the Brackens, who weren’t very helpful due to their anger at his and House Targaryen’s favoring to their traditional rivals, the Blackwoods. He could not allow man’s prejudice to distort how one viewed an opponent, as an imbalance in views results in key traits being left out and thus causing uncertainty when dealing with the person in question. What the riverlords and Maester Harrion did provide was Jaenyx Belaerys being rather… aloof. He said little and only dealt with most people from a distance, dealing most of the riverlords on tax matters and other mundane affairs but nothing else. Like his good-brothers and wife, he was very good with a blade and a competent commander, performing admirably at Wailing Willows and against King Argilac. But what made him stand out to Loren was his actions at Haystack Hall, where he was able to infiltrate the castle and open the gates with little to no casualties. Combined with his abilities to get information from the most unlikely sources, he saw Jaenyx Belaerys as one who was most comfortably operating in the shadows, meaning that he was more unpredictable and thus more likely to do the unexpected. *I’ll need to keep an eye on him.*

Not much could be said of Aerion and Valaena Targaryen, Lord and Lady of Dragonstone, other than the former being politically experienced enough to prevent his tiny demesne from being overtaken by those around the Blackwater Bay and the former being a proper lady despite having a strong fire within her. Maester Harrion was also able to provide Loren Lannister with information on the dragons, at least the three dragons of House Targaryen. Balerion was the oldest and the only one to have been born while Valyria was still alive, but was the biggest and most powerful, his dragonbreath being enough to wipe out the ironborn at Rook’s Rest. No more information could be gained of the other two dragons, Vhagar and Meraxes as they were called, other than Rhaenys Targaryen enjoying riding on her dragon more than her siblings. As for the last dragon, Cloudwynd as it was called, Maester Harrion knew nothing.

Moving back to current events, Loren Lannister found out that the seat of House Bracken was slighted and burned by dragonfire after their defection, their error being that they followed Jaenyx’s orders and emptied their lands of all of their troops. *If you were going to defect, why follow his orders?* Apparently, it didn’t cross their minds that there would be repercussions to their
actions and they didn’t expect their former overlords in reacting so swiftly and ruthlessly. *One thing the Valyrians are doing right: they don’t show mercy to traitors*. Regardless of the recent occurings, Loren Lannister decided to use the Brackens’ angers against the Valyrians to his advantage by making them the first wave of attack in the upcoming battle. The Pipers were much more controlled and Loren held them back, as he would need them should the Brackens act too rashly.

At the same time, Loren Lannister kept a connection with the Poor Fellows via his septon, who he made in giving him the names of all of the Poor Fellows operating in the riverlands. Information was key and he would be damned before he let a holy man control how he got it. But the reports were quite… troubling. Broden Tully, nephew of Edmyn Tully, Lord of Riverrun, had been supplying the Poor Fellows with weapons and food, citing his reason being that Dragonstone did not do enough to help the Faith in the riverlands and was doing what his lord uncle was too cowardly to do. While Loren Lannister welcomed dissent among the ranks of his adversaries, he couldn’t deny that Broden Tully acted stupidly. *Did he honestly think his scheme would work when he had no strong source of help?* The Poor Fellows reported that Broden Tully was captured Jaenyx Belaerys’ agents and taken as a hostage against Edmyn Tully, who they now distrusted as he failed to control his nephew. Their army was encamped around Riverrun, both to intimidate House Tully and to prepare for the inevitable battle against the armies of the Rock.

Loren Lannister would never admit it to his other generals, but he was… a little nervous about the upcoming battle. All four dragons had been spotted and he knew that his army would have no chance in a battle. However, that’s when it hit him! All of the battles involving dragons occurred with some daylight, with the battle that killed King Argilac being an exception since the dragons killed his missile troops but let the ground troops of Dragonstone take care of the rest. *I wonder, what happens if I decide to fight them at night?* So, he slowed his army’s march, quickening their pace only during the dusk and using the night to mask his troops. Black Harren didn’t notice and died. King Argilac had luck, but he died also.

Loren Lannister also had a representative from Braavos consult him. He had sent a raven to the Iron Bank requesting a loan, prompting them to send a representative to Lannisport, along with a specialist that was said to have knowledge on how to counter dragons. The Iron Bank representative, Sallos Paenel, stated that the bank was prepared to offer an initial loan that would be enough to supplement the campaign for three moons. While the Iron Bank had confidence in Loren Lannister’s abilities as a king and commander, they were not prepared to give him the amount he needed to avoid strain on his own treasury, as the war was just beginning. They also requested a complete cancellation of all trade duties for goods coming from Braavos to Lannisport for a period of ten years, but Loren Lannister managed to negotiate a partial cancellation for twenty-five years, as the merchants in Lannisport would be in an uproar. Kings who neglected the merchants risked financial ruin, as nobles only knew a few ways to make money while merchants were gifted with a wealth of knowledge on how to make coin from various sources outside of land.
In return, Braavos turned over thirty of its ships to House Lannister and had contacted a specialist from Slaver’s Bay, a Ghiscari sellsword named Shaqnal zo Rhola. A veteran of the many conflicts in the Disputed Lands and a native from Yunkai, he was one of the more well-read sellswords Loren Lannister met. He had studied the wars between Ghiscar and Valyria, of which not much could be gleaned due to the lack of significant texts pertaining to that period. However, having little knowledge of dragons was better than having none, so Loren Lannister put Shaqnal on a retainer and secured permission from the Citadel for him to go through their historical texts.

Shaqnal quickly found a solution, which he got from reading of the Rhoynish wars with Valyria, of which there were many texts. A common tactic that the Rhoynish employed was to hug the Valyrian troops on the ground as closely as they could, more exactly “to grab them by the belt buckle.” The dragons were devastating on the field of battle, but the dragonriders wouldn’t risk burning their adversaries if it meant burning their own troops as well. At the same time, getting as close to the Valyrian troops as possible was easier said than done, as the dragons had excellent line of sight during daylight and would be able to tell friend from foe. So Shaqnal zo Rhola recommended that they attack the enemy army at night, as the dragons wouldn’t be able to see as well without daylight and the dragonriders might withhold their dragons for fear of hurting their own troops.

Such was the reason why Loren Lannister had his troops wear bright red tunics at night, as they couldn’t risk being seen by one of their dragons if they used torches and having them train to fight during twilight hours. He chose twilight because his troops would have enough light to engage in close combat, but he gambled that it wouldn’t be enough for the dragons to cause serious damage.

Of course, having the army march during the dying light of the day had its own difficulties. Using an advance guard to guide the way without torches despite wearing the brightest red sashes available did nothing to prevent confusion among the ranks and Loren Lannister had to personally get involved in keeping them in line. At the same time, he was doing something that none of the other rulers who fought against the dragons had done before and it was never going to go smoothly. Still, he was thankful that at least most of his troops were able to remain on the march before the advance guard came upon the Dragonstone encampment. Just as expected, there were banners from the stormlords, riverlords who remained loyal, and those from around the Blackwater Bay. But strangely, none of the four dragons were seen. What are they up to?

Knowing that attacking the Dragonstone forces even while they were encamped Riverrun was folly, Loren Lannister decided to make them come to him. North of Riverrun was the Blackwood Vale, which he would send part of the riverlander force following him as well as his light infantry and cavalry. To the south of the fortress lay thick forests, which he would use to disguise his primary infantry and cavalry. The goal was to encircle the Dragonstone banners, getting them distracted in the north while he would strike from the south. No army was able to take Riverrun without suffering heavy casualties, but that didn’t stop the dragons from burning Black Harren and
most of his sons alive at his vanity project. He could only guess that Edmyn Tully, Lord of
Riverrun, had no knowledge of his nephew’s actions and thus Lord Belaerys and his Targaryen
family had surrounded the fortress in order to force an explanation from him. He relied on
Riverrun acting as an anchor for his adversaries, as they wouldn’t be able to maneuver freely
around the deep moat of the castle and once they were close enough, their dragons wouldn’t be
able to strike due to a lack of sufficient daylight and to avoid burning their own troops.

Loren Lannister went over his plan with his generals, most of whom accepted. Except for Weslar
Reyne. “Any doubts you have, Lord Reyne?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” the Lord of Castamere affirmed. “We’ll be fighting under the cover of night.
While that may offer protection against the dragons, there is a possibility they may be entrenched
enough to resist our advances. What if they don’t fall for the attack from the north? What if they
realize that our real attack will originate from the forests of the south?”

“As much as I disagree with Lord Reyne on many matters, I have to voice the same concerns, my
king,” Lord Lefford joined in. “Aegon Targaryen, Orys Baratheon, Jaenx Belaerys, and their
women have proven to be very competent commanders in the field. They would not have been able
to defeat forces three times their size if they were able to fall so easily to feints.”

“Not to mention that we haven’t seen their dragons in flight. Even with night, they could still cause
heavy casualties among our troops with their dragonfire,” Lord Marbrand added.

“I would suggest that we halt our advance and wait for them to come to us. If that happens, we can
control what field we meet them on,” Lord Emory Lannister of Lannisport suggested.

“No,” Loren Lannister shook his head. “We will not halt our advance, Emory. And we shall follow
the plan I formed. But remember that I had the assistance of a Ghiscari sellsword, one who is well-
versed in how dragons were used in the days of old Valyria. While more solutions are being
developed, the only viable one that could be applied is to use the cover of night to attack the
Valyrians and their other vassals. That way, we can get close enough to their troops so as to prevent
their dragons from causing too much damage.”

“But Your Grace,” Lord Reyne looked at him straight. “Many of our troops will die at least,
because even if we do get close enough, not all of our troops will have the same protection and there’ll be nothing to stop them from turning into ashes.”

“You’re correct, my lord,” Lore Lannister nodded. “But would you have the possibility of a victory at the cost of thousands, or risk it by not fighting and thus endangering all of us? We are not the Rhoynish or the Ghiscari, and even they eventually fell to the dragons. Besides, any losses we suffer can easily be replaced by men from the riverlands who follow the Faith and merely need to see that the dragons could be beat. Already, they’ve turned against the Tullys, who are still wavering. If we can show them that we could win, then we would have the Red Fork secured and other riverlords will follow.”

“I would not be so sure of the riverlords’ loyalty, Your Grace,” Lord Lefford stated. “They were sworn to Black Harren, but once his army was defeated at Wailing Willows, many of them rose up, including the Brackens.” He stared hard at the defectors, which earned him a hard scowl from Prestan Bracken. “This is a very shifty region and while that may be advantageous for us at the moment, it may not be so in the future.”

“How dare you, Lord Lefford!” bellowed Prestan Bracken. “We follow the Faith and as fellow brothers of the Seven, we chose to side with the ones who would reinvigorate the Faith in this fallen region and to drive foreigners away from this continent.”

“Then why didn’t you do that when the Hoares, worshipers of the Drowned God, took your region over?”

Prestan Bracken’s face reddened, as his house’s betrayal of Agnes Blackwood was well-known and he couldn’t claim to have a strong sense of loyalty given his and the region’s tendency to switch allegiances. “We had… practical considerations--”

“Oh, you mean Dragonstone favoring your traditional rivals the Blackwoods for being the first to rise up against Black Harren?” Lord Reyne asked biting. “I would choose a Blackwood man over a Bracken, as at least the Blackwoods could be trusted to fight for their beliefs instead of self-serving horse-breeders like yourself.”

Prestan Bracken reached for his sword at Lord Reyne’s insult to his house, only for him to be
stopped by Loren Lannister slamming hard on the table. “ENOUGH! This petty squabble is getting us nowhere. Thank you for making your opinions known, my lords, but understand this: I am in command, but I never make decisions without getting the best advice available. I will not countenance dissent amongst my ranks, for I will send the heads of the loudest ones back to their families for being oathbreakers. All of your loyalties are to House Lannister, and therefore you owe your allegiance to me. We shall have attack at twilight. Understood?” All of the lords gradually nodded their assent. “Then let us prepare. We have a battle on our hands.”

Loren Lannister and his personal guard took up positions in the forests south of Riverrun. While he was past his prime and could not wield his sword as ably as before, appearances mattered and his troops wouldn’t really respect him if he didn’t show himself being ready to take the same risks as his soldiers. Clad in red armor with lion-faced shoulder pads, a red sash over his torso, and a golden helm that also had a crown on top, he clutched the longsword on his left side tightly, the one made from Valyrian steel that he purchased from a Dragonstone bannerman in Lannisport. He knew that it was a tradition for great houses to own a Valyrian steel weapon and after Tommen Lannister lost Brightroar on his ill-advised trip to Valyria, House Lannister was bereft of their heirloom. It was no Brightroar, but Liontooth was a proper heirloom of the King of the Rock with its golden pommel and lion’s head pommel.

Loren Lannister carefully kept his main troops hidden in the forest while he made the troops from the northern approach as visible as he could. He changed his mind on having the Brackens being the vanguard, as he realized that their anger in losing their home to Dragonstone would be better utilized in the thick of the fight. He had Piper bannerman alongside those from Houses Moreland, Lefford Payne, and Banefort comprise the troops coming from the north alongside a large continent of Poor Fellows that were hastily-armed with swords, spears, and axes. He expected the Poor Fellows to suffer heavy casualties, but promised compensation to Lords Moreland, Lefford Payne, and Banefort should they suffer heavy casualties. He gambled on the Dragonstone forces to turn their attention northwards, thus leaving their southern approach relatively open.

While the attack from the north would comprise of a total of ten thousand men, Loren Lannister led the main forces comprised of troops from House Reyne, Marbrand, Westerling, Crakehall, alongside those from House Bracken and a mounted contingent of Warrior’s Sons, totalling thirty thousand men. He would start the attack from the south with a missile barrage and a cavalry charge, allowing the Warrior’s Sons to take the lead while following up with formations from the other houses of the Rock. Once they’ve done enough damage to the enemy lines, they would proceed with an attack comprising of infantry. Eventually, the cavalry would regroup and attempt to extend their lines to eventually encircle the enemy towards the Red Fork, thus cutting them off from retreat and destroying their main army. It should’ve been simple enough.
As Loren Lannister waited in the treeline, he felt the distinctive rumble of troops marching to their positions and knew for certain that the attack from the north had begun. He exhaled, trying to control his nervousness as he never fought against dragons. But the lack of proper daylight should work to his advantage, as dusk left both armies at the mercy of the night.

Suddenly, the King of the Rock hear battle cries and louder rumbling as troops from the northern approach charged against the enemy lines. But before they could close the distance, he heard screeches pierce the air and the loud flaps of what he suspected were dragon wings. Looking to the sky, he could make four black shapes descending towards the north bank of the Red Fork. Then, streams of dragonfire pierced through the darkness of the night, a concoction of blue, black, yellow, and orange pouring down on the troops and turning many into ash while those unlucky to have not died in the initial fire were left screaming into the dirt.

However unfortunate those losses were, those troops had fulfilled their intended purpose in distracting the enemy to the north. Loren Lannister raised his right hand before pointing towards the enemy lines on the south. “Cavalry, forward!” Lord Crakehall yelled as the mounted knights of the Rock and the Warrior’s Sons galloped steadily towards the enemy.

“Archers ready,” Loren Lannister ordered.

“Archers, nock!” Lord Marbrand shouted as three thousand bowmen lighted their arrows with fire and drew back on their bows. With a nod from the King of the Rock, Lord Marbrand yelled, “Loose!”

Thousands of lit arrows hurled through the night sky as they descended upon the enemy and many finding their marks. However, Loren Lannister noticed that there wasn’t a lot of screams of pain coming from their lines, which he found… odd. He quickly shook it off, as he ordered the archers to ready one more volley before the cavalry double-timed their charge towards the enemy line. Two thousand cavalry cried out as their lances lowered and shouts such as “For the Seven!” echoed across the darkened field.

What Loren Lannister did not expect was several cries of pain following the charge. Squinting his eyes, he saw many of the cavalry being run through by pikes and many others being unhorsed and finished off by the enemy infantry. That’s when he realized it. They must’ve expected us to at least attack with cavalry from the south. However, he knew that the plan must continue despite the cavalry charge not producing the expected results and acted quickly.
“Prepare the infantry for combat!” Loren Lannister ordered. “And get word to Lord Westerling. Time to extend the lines.”

“Yes, Your Grace,” Lord Marbrand affirmed before galloping off.

“Archers, cover the advance,” Loren Lannister commanded as he drew Liontooth. “Infantry, forward!” While the cavalry charge did not go as planned, the enemy focusing on them should keep them occupied long enough to bring up his fresh infantry formations. He only had to get his troops close enough to the enemy lines, as that would prevent them from suffering the same fate as their comrades in the northern approach.

A rider approached Loren as the infantry closed the distance with the enemy, with the close combat turning more fierce. “Your Grace,” the rider bowed. “They’re slowly pushing our cavalry back. But they’re proceeding with a counterattack against our advancing infantry.”

That should keep them pinned. “Get word to Lord Westerling. Tell him to continue extending the lines until they reach the southern bank of the river. Once that happens, tell him to punch through the enemy’s left flank.”

“Yes, Your Grace!” the rider galloped off.

“You,” Loren Lannister turned to a rider on his left. “Inform Lord Marbrand. Tell him to have the infantry slowly walk backwards while keeping the enemy engaged. I’ll have archers let loose another volley.”

“But, Your Grace. Wouldn’t we kill our own men that way?” the rider questioned.

“Either that, or we all die by dragonfire. Just follow the fucking order and we’ll live!” Loren
Lannister barked. The rider did not hesitate and rode off. “Archers, nock!” he shouted. He wanted to let off one more volley before involving them and himself into the fray, as he gathered that he and the archers would be targets for the dragons if they remained in one place for too long.

Another rider approached, this one bearing the colors of House Marbrand. “Your Grace, we’re keeping them engaged but we’re getting closer to your position. Lord Marbrand is merely awaiting your volley.”

“Good,” Loren Lannister nodded and turned to the bowmen. He couldn’t see well in the darkening twilight, but he could wear the clash of swords and thumps against shields get closer to his position. Then, he saw the backs of the rear rank of his infantry formations. “Volley, loose!” Flaming arrows pierced through the night as like the last volley, many found their marks. However, his attention was diverted by the screech of dragons. Hearing the flaps of their wings, he guessed that the dragons found out his position and now was the time to join the fray.

“Archers, engage! Do not let the dragons burn you!” Loren Lannister commanded as he urged his horse forward and Liontooth in hand. While some bowmen were quick enough, many others were too late and the King of the Rock felt a very intense heat on his back as dragonfire burned his archers to ash. He had only just avoided them.

Squinting his eyes, Loren Lannister looked to his right and made out the distinctive seashells of House Westerling. He had guessed correctly that the enemy was distracted in the south and north, but didn’t have the troops to cover their left flank. Him using the men of the Crag to punch through their relatively undermanned flank had paid off, as the enemy troops fighting on the south bank was in danger of being encircled. *All that is needed now is to close the loop* .

But before he could send in troops to reinforce Lord Westerling, Loren Lannister heard another dragon roar and a stream of blue fire burned through a part of the Westerling advance and his right flank. This was followed by a stream of black flame going the opposite direction, preventing the men of the Rock from advancing further. Scanning the field, he saw the enemy moving between the streams of fire and saw what they were doing. *They’re withdrawing. They’re close to being encircled and we’re too close to their troops for their dragons to do enough damage, so they’re falling back*. He found Lord Marbrand. “My lord, take a contingent of cavalry with you and pursue the enemy. Cut off their escape.”

“Yes, my king,” Lord Marbrand complied.
To their credit, the enemy held off his infantry and cavalry just long enough for their comrades to escape between the flames and withdraw themselves. Lord Marbrand returned quicker than he expected. “Why aren’t you going after the enemy?”

“Heavy resistance, Your Grace,” Lord Marbrand breathed out. “They have mounted archers, which they used to take out many of the cavalry before we were forced to pull back.”

“How many did you think withdrew successfully?”

“I estimate nineteen thousand men, Your Grace.”

Damn it! They still have an army, meaning they will fight another day. Loren Lannister calmed himself, as he was still able to accomplish something by driving the enemy back.

Just then, Lord Westerling, his armor covered in black soot, came up to him. “My Lord Westerling,” Loren Lannister addressed him.

“Your Grace, I am sorry. I failed to make an effective breach on their left flank,” he answered with contrition.

Loren Lannister normally would have punished failure, but he also understood that he performed to his best given the circumstances, so he willed thoughts of punishment away from him. “You’ve done well, my lord. House Westerling’s valor will be remembered today.”

Lord Westerling bowed. “Thank you, Your Grace.”
Another rider approached, this time being Emory Lannister of Lannisport. “My king,” he bowed. “We’ve got a prisoner with us.”

“So?”

“I think you should see for yourself, Your Grace.”

Curious, Loren Lannister followed Emory Lannister towards the southern bank of the Red Fork. There, he saw an armored man with a red and yellow sash over his torso and blood over his face on his knees and his hands tied. He had black hair and black eyes, but was unafraid and instead was very calm. He looked back at Loren not with defiance but with a hard stare.

“Who is he?” Loren asked Emory Lannister.

“This,” Emory Lannister walked to the kneeling man and grabbed his hair to jerk his head back. “Is the bastard of Dragonstone, upjumped to Lord of Storm’s End. Orys Baratheon.”

“How did you find him?” Bastard or not, he was a valuable prisoner and Loren Lannister wanted to get him into his own custody quickly.

“He killed ten of our men when he tried to escape between the flames before one of our knights collided with his horse and got him to the ground. He then punched another in the teeth, knocking out some from his mouth, before our men were able to secure him.”

“How do you know it’s Orys Baratheon?”

“He had this with him,” Emory Lannister handed to Loren a large warhammer made of Valyrian steel. If he remembered correctly, Orys Baratheon wielded a weapon like that in his expedition to
“Thank you, Emory. I shall reward you and the others at Lannisport accordingly.” Emory Lannister nodded his thanks before Loren Lannister walked up to Orys and squatted in front of him. “Good to meet you, Lord Orys.”

“You must be the King of the Rock,” Orys Baratheon stated evenly.

“That’s ‘Your Grace’ to you, bastard,” Lord Marbrand scolded before he spat at his face.

“There, there, my lord,” Loren Lannister stopped him. “He’s a prisoner and bastard, so we must move past it when he has lapses in decorum.” He turned back to Orys. “Looks like you don’t have much loyalty amongst the stormlords. They left you to be captured by us.”

Orys sighed, but more out of annoyance. “If you’re going to kill me or ransom me, let us go through that quickly. Don’t waste your breath with talk.”

“You are speaking to--” Lord Emory stepped forward before Loren Lannister held up a hand to stop him.

“I have other things planned for you, Lord Orys,” Loren Lannister smiled. “You’re more useful as my captive and I’m not sure if your family can pay your ransom, for it is not gold I seek.”

“What is it, then?” Orys asked.

“More than what your family can give, I presume,” Loren cryptically replied before turning to his personal guard. “Take him away.” As Orys Baratheon was led off the field, the men of the Rock cheered for their first victory against the dragons.
Loren Lannister opened negotiations with Lord Edmyn Tully and allowed him to keep his castle and titles if he bent the knee to House Lannister in perpetuity. Still fearful for his nephew’s life, he was reluctant to make a decision that would put him and his house in jeopardy should the dragons return. However, Loren Lannister promised to get his nephew back but warned him that he had thousands of troops surrounding Riverrun, all of whom were fresh from battle and would not hesitate in fighting again. With some hesitation, Edmyn Tully bent the knee to his house and thus securing the Red Fork.

Loren Lannister received reports from throughout the riverlands over the next two weeks. While there were some riverlords who would remain loyal to Dragonstone because they liberated the region from the rule of Black Harren, key houses such as the Freys of the Twins, both branches of House Vance, and the Rootes came in person to bend the knee to House Lannister. Two houses remained defiant to his incoming advance, the Mallisters of Seagard and the Blackwoods of Raventree Hall. While he was confident that he could have the Mallisters switch sides, the Blackwoods holding out was a cause for concern, as they were among the most powerful of the riverland houses. He had Prestan Bracken lead the force to ravage the Blackwood Vale, but he lacked confidence that they could actually storm their keep. He would send reinforcements later, but not now.

For now, Loren Lannister occupied himself with his valuable prisoner, Orys Baratheon, who he had locked in the dungeons of Riverrun. The dungeons of the great castle were windowless and damp, and their doors heavy and made of wood and iron, which was lacking in comparison to the dungeons at Casterly Rock. But it would do.

Accompanying Loren Lannister was his kennelmaster, who he relied on many trips and who always kept three black dogs with him. He needed his muscle for what he intended to do Orys Baratheon. He had his shirt ripped off and his hands tied to the wooden plank in front of him. Rolling his sleeves, he approached the Lord of Storm’s End with a pair of tongs in his hand.

“My lord,” Loren Lannister addressed him, “What do you know about the torture methods used by the Good Masters of Astapor on incorrigible slaves? Hmmm? What’s your guess on the first method?”
“What are you on about?” Orys asked with some confusion. That prompted the kennelmaster to backhand him hard across the face, which he recovered from with a grunt.

“The first method is the water dungeon, which works by having drops of water impact on the forehead, which would make the slave go insane over an extended period but we don’t have time for that. The second method? That involves twisting the arm and putting the slave’s face in their own shit, which I can imagine would not be very pleasant for any sane man.” Loren Lannister looked at Orys, who still looked at him with confusion. “I thought so. You’re a warrior and you’re dealt with actual shit before, so that wouldn’t really work. But what about the third method? Now, that is called ‘pulling nails from fingers’. What do you think, my lord? Does that sound preferable to you?” Loren Lannister twirled the tongs around, but he saw Orys’ eyes widen. Whether it was from fear or shock was irrelevant at the moment. “The purpose of these methods was to get the slaves or whoever dared to strike against the masters to become more obedient, as scars are very effective reminders. What if I had to get you to become obedient? That would be pretty difficult, wouldn’t it? You are the blood of old Valyria after all, even if it’s diluted.” He saw Orys clench his teeth. “But what if I gave you an option, where we wouldn’t have to resort the third method?”

“And what would that be?” Orys asked.

Loren Lannister pulled out a scroll from his pocket. “I will make you a deal. These are documents concerning a marriage annulment. I understand that your wedding ceremony to Argella Durrandon involved aspects of the Faith, which makes your union under the jurisdiction of the Starry Sept. I want you to sign the documents declaring your union to Argella Durrandon void. Whether it was consummated or not does not matter at this point.”

Orys perched an eyebrow. “What do you have to gain from me annulling my marriage to Argella?”

Loren Lannister caught how he used her first name, but put it aside. “It won’t be me that’ll benefit, but my ally, King Mern Gardener. He never forgot Argilac killing his uncle, Garse Gardener, at Summerfield and he sees his family ruling his former kingdom as the ultimate vengeance. He wants his son and heir, Edmund, to marry Argella, thus uniting the Storm and Reach kingdoms by marriage. I’m doing this as a favor to him.”
“All right,” Orys nodded. “You said you have a deal with me. You said what you wanted. What do I get?”

“One way or another, the dragons will be defeated, as the Rock, the Reach, and the Vale can command armies many times their size. But you still can get something out of it. If you sign these documents, I will persuade Queen Sharra Arryn to legitimize you and make you Orys Targaryen, Lord of Dragonstone. You will swear fealty to the Arryns as the new overlords over the Blackwater Bay and she will find you a suitable wife to marry. It’s a generous deal, my lord, and one I would seriously—” But he was interrupted when Orys spit in his face.

Orys scoffed. “I thought lions were supposed to be smart, but I never saw a more thickheaded move than today. I might be a bastard, but they are my family and I will burn myself in hells before I betray them.”

Wiping off his spit from his cheek, Loren Lannister suddenly felt rage surge through him. Dropping the tongs, he pulled out his dagger. “Forget the nails! You will sign those documents even if I have to spill every drop of blood from you and break your bones!” He then took his dagger and cut through each digit in Orys’ pinky, causing him to grunt in pain, but barely.

Calming himself after Loren Lannister cut off the second digit of his pinky, Orys spat at him again. “Come, King Loren! I know that you’re not doing this because of the Faith. You don’t look like one of those Seven-Pointed Star thumpers.”

“Shut up,” Loren Lannister responded. “Will you sign those documents now?”

“Fuck you!” Orys defiantly shouted. That cost him what was left of his pinky and Loren Lannister proceeded to his ring finger. Three more times Loren Lannister tried to make him sign the documents and at the end of thee times, Orys also had his ring finger chopped off gradually. To keep him conscious, Loren Lannister got a handful of salt and rubbed against where his fingers once were, causing even louder grunts of pain.

Getting tired, Loren Lannister turned to his kennelmaster, who merely used his hands for such events. He proceeded to punch Orys Baratheon savagely and repeatedly in the face. “You fucking fuck, fucking fuck, stupid fuck, what the fuck, this is a war! Fuck, YOU’RE A PRISONER of
FUCKING WAR! Give him the signature!” He then backhanded Orys hard, causing him and the chair to tip over to the floor, and blood to drip from the many punctures on his face that resulted from the punches. Wiping off sweat from his brow, he went to one of the knives in his belt. “I'm cutting his fucking head off, Your Grace.”

“You’ll do no such thing,” Loren Lannister calmly said as he wiped off his hands with a rag. “I’ll take him to Casterly Rock, where I can continue my conversation with him.” With that, he exited the dungeon to resume his meetings with the lords of the Rock.

Chapter End Notes

The battle was based on the battle of Sedan (1870), but if the French had dragons, they would've been able to break out the Prussian encirclement and live to fight another day. And I hope that I showcased the limitations of the dragons well, a strategy that was based on the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War, "grab them by the belt buckle", in order to negate American air power by getting so close to their troops that they wouldn't attack without causing blue-on-blue. And the addition of the Ghiscari sellsword is important, since he was the one that recommended attacking during the night since the dragons wouldn't have much sunlight to use, and we see Maester Harrion turning on his former lords.

That torture scene was inspired by SYRIANA (2005), which I saw for the first time when I was eleven. That scene was... disturbing first time I watched it. But Orys getting captured and tortured is essential to the plot, as Jaenyx and the Targaryens will understand that there can be no negotiation, as one of their family was harmed. And better Orys lose some of his fingers than his hand.

Next, we see chaos amongst the ranks of Dragonstone.
Visenya VII

Chapter Notes

To all the readers, thank you so much for your patience and support! I’ve been busy over the weekend with academics and thus explaining the slight delay, but I also want to take more time in producing quality chapters. You guys deserve only the best I can.

With ado, here is the next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“They have our brother,” Visenya heard Aegon mutter with his back turned to the council. Their army was nearly encircled at Riverrun and would have been destroyed had it not been for Cloudwynd and Balerion clearing a path for their troops to withdraw. Still, they had suffered five thousand casualties, stormlanders rivermen who remained loyal comprising the majority and the Valyrians the minority. Among them was Orys, who had been captured after he attempted to withdraw with his men, and the enemy had sent them a raven that demanded a parley after making them aware that they had him.

“They do, my lord.” The messenger’s voice was dulled by exhaustion. On the breast of his torn surcoat, the silver eagle of Seagard was half-obscured by dried blood.

They better not hurt Orys, or there will be fire and blood raining down upon them, Visenya thought. She took a sip of wine and did not say a word, thinking of Orys. Pain shot through her elbow when she readjusted Dark Sister on her waist, reminding her of how close they were to a decisive defeat. Acting on behalf of their lord father, Aegon assembled their captains and leading bannermen, all of whom had fallen silent as the courier told his tale of how the Lord of Storm’s End, their brother, had managed to kill ten men before he was forced to the ground by Lannister bannermen. The only sound was the crackle and hiss of the log burning in the hearth at the end of the long, drafty common room within Saltpans’ keep.

And more bad news had reached them from Riverrun days ago. Edmyn Tully had bent the knee to King Loren, thus securing the Red Fork for the Lannisters. Does he not understand that we have his nephew and thus kill him for his uncle breaking his oaths? Visenya thought darkly.
“How could this happen?” Lord Rosby moaned. “How? Your house secured the entirety of Blackwater Bay with dragons and you killed Black Harren at Harrenhal with dragons. We killed the forces of King Argilac with dragons … how could your house be defeated by those who do not command such beasts?”

“Watch yourself, my lord,” Rhaenys warned. “You are referring to the house you’re sworn to. And do not call our dragons ‘beasts.’”

More than what can be said of you, you craven, Visenya silently responded to Jon Rosby. They might have suffered a defeat at Riverrun, but it angered her to hear her house be insulted by pissants like Jon Rosby, who didn’t even draw any of his blades when the dragons flew over.

“You forget, Lord Rosby,” Jaenyx responded, a good deal more calmly than Visenya might have but also showing contempt with his address to Jon Rosby. “We still have an intact army and all of our dragons remain in perfect condition. King Loren might have driven us back at Riverrun, but he lost thousands more than we did and my agents report that some of his key houses like the Leffords and the Paynes have been crippled and therefore unable to participate in further campaigning. So, with his forces dealt a blow like that despite us having to withdraw, can it really be counted as a victory?”

“Lord Belaerys speaks truly, my lords,” the courier said. “I was able to infiltrate the burial grounds for the Lannister host and counted at least fifteen thousand corpses be buried. Among them was Lord Lefford himself, whose body had been so blackened by fire that even his heir had trouble identifying him. In addition, the Poor Fellows were dealt a blow at Riverrun, so they will not be able to operate at full capacity for a time.”

“But that’s not counting the riverland houses that have defected to the Lannisters,” Crispian Celtigar pointed out. Indeed, while the battle at Riverrun might not have been a crushing defeat, it might as well have been given the number of houses in the region that switched sides. The most concerning were the Freys of the Twins and the Harroways, both of whom controlled the two of most important locations in the Trident. Fortunately, they acted quickly for the latter, with Visenya riding atop Vhagar to Harroway and prompting the townfolk to turn on their lord, thus securing the town.
“With the addition of the forces of the riverland houses that have now defected, King Loren can easily supplement his numbers and continue the campaign,” Crispian continued.

Lord Dondarrion shook his head. “That’s easier said than done. Even he can reinforce his army with those houses, there are two houses besides the Darrys that have remained: the Blackwoods and the Mallisters.” The Mallister courier nodded his thanks to the marcher lord of Blackhaven. “The Mallisters will never side with King Loren as long as he is aligned with the ironborn, and the same could be said of the Blackwoods in regards to the Brackens. That leaves two important locations that King Loren will have to secure before he can turn his attention fully onto us.”

Aegon turned his face to study Lord Dondarrion. Visenya saw a glimmer as the light reflected off her brother’s irises, but she caught how Aegon lips curved slightly upward. Visenya couldn’t help but copy his gesture, as it showed that their brother had at least one lord who remained loyal to him. And Lord Dondarrion spoke the truth. Both the Blackwood Vale and Seagard would be very difficult to take and secure, thus delaying King Loren from advancing further against them.

Aegon was oft quiet in council, preferring to listen before he spoke, a habit that he shared with Jaenyx. Yet this silence was uncharacteristic even for him, and his wine was untouched, not that he was quick to drink but that made the rest of their bannermen nervous.

“Well, now we know that dragons have limitations at night,” Alyn Stokeworth prompted.

Visenya narrowed her eyes. “What are you insinuating, my lord?”

That surprised him, as the Lord of Stokeworth shook his head. “I wasn’t insinuating anything, my lady. I am just pointing out that our greatest assets might have caused a lot of damage even at night, but our army had to retreat. It won’t take long for the enemy to figure out that the dragons cannot be used to their full potential at night.”
“That’s hardly the most important detail, Lord Alyn,” Daemon Velaryon spoke up. “It appears that we may have… underestimated the skill and resolve of King Loren and his bannermen. He must’ve figured that we would have struck at the north bank of the Red Fork first given the larger enemy presence, thus distracting us from the southern approach and his more well equipped troops. Even still, our schiltron’s on the southern banks were able to hold them long enough before we could withdraw in good order.”

Visenya saw that Lord Dondarrion was growing impatient. “We could discuss our current situation all day long, but I think we’re forgetting the most important fact right now. Lord Baratheon is now a prisoner of King Loren. As the Lord of Storm’s End and one of the most able commanders that we have, it is imperative that we get him back by any means necessary.”

Visenya nodded her approval. While she remained distrustful of his intentions when he first arrived at her name-day celebrations, Lord Dondarrion was showing himself to be very loyal to their brother. It proved that Orys had used his time as a lord well.

“Lord Orys taken, Riverrun lost to the enemy as well as other key areas in the region … this is a catastrophe!” Lord Darry exclaimed. “I am sure we are all grateful to you for pointing out the obvious, Lord Dondarrion. The question is, what shall we do about it?”

“What can we do?” Jon Rosby posed. “While our own host is intact, we are outnumbered in the region and our key allies besieged. I don’t have a lot of confidence in the Blackwoods and the Mallisters holding out indefinitely.” The Mallister courier scowled at the Rosby lord’s disrespect to his liege. “Our lines have been reduced to this small town and Black Harren’s vanity project. The Lannisters can strike at us in this town and at Harrenhal and we wouldn’t be able to stop even with dragons. And that’s not including the Valemen and the Gardeners who have finally made serious advances against us. They can march on the Blackwater Bay if they want to. My lords, we are beaten. We must sue for peace.”

“Peace?!!” Visenya felt so much rage for Jon Rosby, who she had to browbeat constantly to get him to contribute and now he was suggesting an action that would make them look weak, a suggestion that finally made her explode by picking up her wine glass and hurling it at the Rosby lord, who ducted just in time to avoid the glass pieces shattering onto him, but everyone was afraid
of the dragon that had made itself known.

“There’s your fucking peace, Lord Jon! The High Septon declared a holy war on Valyrians, a people that your liege is a part of. You’ll have an easier time drinking wine from that cup compared to persuading those of the Faith, particularly the rulers who have declared for them, to not kill us. Plus, they have our brother and who knows what they’re doing to him?”

“In addition,” Jaenyx insisted. “The Lannisters, and by extension the Faith, have only won one battle. And while our lines might have shrunk, that makes it easier for our forces to hold and our allies at Raventree Hall and Seagard are keeping the enemy from going forward. We are far from lost.”

“Perhaps they would consent to a truce, and allow us to trade our prisoners for theirs,” offered Lord Darry.

“And who do you suggest we offer up?” Visenya asked acidly. “And what are we to offer for my brother?”

“For starters, you have Broden Tully under your control,” Lord Darry said hopefully. “If we were to offer Edmyn Tully his nephew back, we might be in a position where—”

A hand slammed down on the table, this time from Rhaenys, who was also getting increasingly infuriated at some of their lords folding easily to setbacks. “If you really think that returning Broden Tully to his uncle would get Riverrun back in our fold, you’re a bigger fool than I thought you were. Edmyn Tully has bent the knee to King Loren and thus broke our oaths to our house. Do you need reminding on what happens to oathbreakers in Westeros?”

Lord Darry became quiet out of fear for Rhaenys’ fury, which surprised most as they didn’t expect
that from their young sister due to her being the epitome of grace and charm. *They really don’t understand that she is a dragon, just like the rest of us,* mused Visenya.

Daemon snorted disdainfully at Lord Darry’s suggestions. “I would also remind you that Edmyn Tully is now sworn to the Lannisters and therefore cannot conduct independent action without leave from his new king. Besides, King Loren would have to be an utter ass to trade the Lord of Storm’s End for the life of a buffoon trout.”

“Then we must ransom Lord Baratheon, whatever it costs,” Lord Stokeworth said. Visenya rolled her eyes, as did Lord Dondarrion. Even though he wanted his liege returned safely, he knew that ransoming a major lord like Orys would have sent a very bad message to their enemies and his other vassals.

“I would caution against any notion of ransoming, Lord Alyn,” Crispian warned. “Orys is the Lord Paramount of the Stormlands. There’s no guarantee that the Lannisters would even agree to ransom him, as he is among our ablest commanders and thus a threat to his Gardener and Arryn allies alongside the ironborn. Even if they do, we might be hard-pressed to meet the terms of the ransom, as they would hold advantage and thus be in a position to demand crushing terms for his release.”

“If we ask for a truce, they will think us weak;” Arata Haru argued, with the Harus finally being allowed into their councils with Jaenyx’s and Visenya’s urging despite the other lords bristling at having to share a space with a foreigner. “We need to strike back at our enemies to bring the momentum back to us.”

“With what troops, Lord Haru?” Jon Rosby questioned. “Our forces are over-extended. Besides the situation here, there were only a few thousand men to guard against the Gardeners in the Red Mountains, but they had to retreat when Prince Edmund Gardener arrived in force.”

“Plus, there is word that the knights of the Vale have now joined the fight, crossing the Green Fork at the Twins and atop pontoon bridges across the river,” Lord Alyn added. “We don’t have the strength left to hold off both the Lannisters and the Arryns from the east and north and the
Gardeners from the south. We need a truce with the Faith alliance before we become overwhelmed.”

“Surely, the dragons could be flown to the Green Fork and burn the Valemen before they could reinforce the Lannisters, my lords,” said the Mallister courier.

“It won’t be that simple the next time, man,” Daemon said. “Our enemies will certainly utilize the same strategy employed by King Loren at Riverrun. We might not have the same success that we have enjoyed before from here on out.”

“And that’s not including that we’re facing an expert tactician and strategist in King Loren,” Crispian added.

“As I said, we can always negotiate with King Loren,” Jon Rosby reentered the discussion. “We all know that the King Loren is not the most pious to the Faith and that this holy war is driven by political ambitions. Maybe we should accept this parley from King Loren and see what he wants.”

“If his terms are acceptable,” Alyn Stokeworth stated. “I would suggest we strongly consider them. The same action could be done with King Mern and Queen Regent Sharra. Regarding the ironborn, piss on them.”

Visenya held back a chuckle, as even cravens like Alyn Stokeworth and Jon Rosby knew better than to treat with an ironborn. However, she did not find the rest of their suggestions as amusing.

That was when Jaenyx’s Valyrian vassals, specifically Ragaemor Tarareon, entered. “Do you really think that negotiations would ensure our survival, Lord Alyn?” he asked through his translator. “I was the first one to read the High Septon’s declaration. There can be no peace with those that follow the Faith, for it will mean our destruction.”
“You mean your destruction, Lord Tarareon,” Jon Rosby answered. “You are Valyrians and we’re not. The same could be said of the rest of the lords under your lieges and I can speak for everyone not of Valyria that our stakes in this war is not as high as your own.”

Ragaemor’s sister Maerys scoffed. “You really believe that? You surrendered to Valyrians. Do you think that these Faith scum would care that you bent the knee so that you wouldn’t get burned? In their eyes, you’re an apostate for following those of Valyrian blood and therefore could be subject to extreme punishment.”

“No,” Alyn Stokeworth shook his head, but Visenya could see a hint of doubt growing across his face. “But regardless of what the Faith will decide for us, I doubt that my house and my men will be willing to die for a culture that is endangered already.”

Visenya balled her right hand into a fist, enraged at Stokeworth’s essentially saying that he would follow his oaths to their house to the fullest. Unfortunately, before she could say anything, Jaenyx beat her to the punch.

“Oh, now your truly colors are showing, Lord Alyn,” Jaenyx remarked calmly, but everyone could see that he was just as enraged as his wife by seeing a fire grow behind his eyes. “We’ve had a setback and you’re already looking for a way out. Is that right?”

“My friend Alyn,” Jon Rosby stepped in. “Is merely suggesting that you consider peace. There is nothing that can be gained from further fighting, especially when the odds are against us.”

“As expected of you Andal dogs!” Aevor Rahitheon bellowed. “Someone strikes you hard enough and you’ll lick their assholes!” That prompted chuckles from Jaenyx’s other Valyrian vassals, even from Daemon and Crispian. Visenya saw Jaenyx and Rhaenys smile, as she also did. However, Jon Rosby and Alyn Stokeworth’s faces turned red, but from anger.
“Of course you would confuse good sense with cowardice, Lord Aevor,” Jon Rosby shot back. “Considering that you come from a civilization that is long dead.”

“Which is more than what could be said of you, Rosby!” Aevor shouted. “You Westerosi slime care so much about staying true to your oaths, but when your liege is a moment of need, you seek to abandon him. I for one always saw you lot as hypocritical cretins.”

“Ancient cunt!” Rosby barked.

“Half-breed bastard!” Aevor Rahitheon roared. The last one being too much for Jon Rosby to handle, he struck hard across Aevor’s face. However, the Valyrian engineer quickly recovered and lunged for his throat, bringing both of them down.

Alyn Stokeworth moved in to defend his friend as he struggled against Aevor, but the Tarareon siblings pushed him away and pinned him to the ground. Soon, the rest of Jaenyx’s Valyrian vassals clashed with those hailing from the Blackwater Bay. Rhaedar Tarareon kneed a Rosby man in the chest while a Stokeworth man headbutted another Vaeron. After her brother secured Lord Stokeworth, Maerys kicked a Mooton man in his balls before tackling him to the floor.

Daemon and Crispian tried to prevent the brawl from going further and pulled some of them from each other. But given the tempers running high in the room and that Daemon and Crispian possessed the Valyrian silver hair and violet eyes, some of the Blackwater Bay men also struck at them, prompting them to fight back also. Crispian did a hard uppercut on a Darklyn man while Daemon demonstrated his salty sailor side by throwing fast but hard jabs against a Mooton man’s face and chest.

Visenya stepped forward to intervene, but Jaenyx grabbed her wrist and shook his head. She was about to protest, but she looked into his eyes and saw what he was thinking. Out of everyone in the
room, she, Jaenyx, and Aegon were the deadliest fighters. If they got involved in the fighting, someone could get seriously hurt and really escalate the situation. Even Rhaenys would be able to deal some lethal blows thanks to her training by Arata Haru, who also was not getting involved. As the brawl occurred because of hot tempers, escalation was the last thing they needed.

Also, for their lieges to be physically involved in this vulgar scuffle would be unbecoming of their stations. Hells, it was unbecoming for the lords to act in such a manner, but they were doing it anyway. However, they were dragonlords and they would act above the current squabble. Visenya calmed herself down, but then reached out to Vhagar. *Girl, need some help here*, she said to her dragon.

Expecting only Vhagar to roar loudly, Visenya was surprised to hear four dragon roars coalescing into one large bellow. She looked at Jaenyx, Aegon, and Rhaenys, all of whom gave her knowing gazes. It seemed as if they read her mind on using her dragon to end the brawl rather than add to the fighting. Immediately, the fighting stopped.

Aegon straightened himself. “If all of you are done acting like brutes…” He gave a disappointing glance at Daemon and Crispian, expecting more of them, a glance that Jaenyx gave to the Tarareons and Rahitheons. “They have my brother,” he said once more, in a voice that cut through the babble like a hot knife through butter. “And I shall discuss what to do with family only. Leave us.” Everyone obeyed while rubbing their bruises and cuts, and Jaenyx also ordered the Tarareons and Rahitheons out while Arata and Konno Haru left without a word.

Visenya eased herself back onto the bench, anxious on what they were about to discuss, while Jaenyx sat next to her and Rhaenys remained standing.

Jaenyx stretched out his hand, seeming going for the jug containing the Dornish red, but Visenya shook her head. However, she had thought wrong when he went for the water and poured himself a glass. “Water, anyone?”

“Here,” Aegon offered him his cup, which Jaenyx poured water into. Rhaenys also gave him her
cup. When Jaenyx looked at Visenya, she shook her head. “I’m fine, Jae.” He shrugged before he set down the jug and drank from his glass.

Aegon seated himself. “Lord Dondarrion is right. We have to get Orys back, but we cannot resort to ransom as the first option. That’ll make look us weak.”

“He’s our brother,” Rhaenys pointed out. “I highly doubt that King Loren would be so unwise as to seriously harm a valuable prisoner.” Aegon gave her a sharp look, as did Visenya. “However, you’re right. We have to get him back.” She sipped at her cup.

“In addition to Orys’ capture, our position is worse than most would imagine,” Aegon went on. “We barely have enough men to hold onto the lands we have and even with the new lines making the task easier to accomplish, we cannot afford inaction.”

Jaenyx nodded. “Agreed. But as we are in no position launch an offensive, we need to tighten our hold on the keeps and lands that still remain in our control.”

The faintest flicker of worry played across Aegon thin lips. “The situation is changing too rapidly for us to establish proper defenses. Reports from the marcher lords told of a great Gardener host, forty thousand strong under the command of Prince Edmund Gardener, that have breached the defenses Orys established in the Red Mountains and thus forcing back the stormlords near the marches.”

“Those are grave tidings,” Rhaenys pointed out. “But Lord Dondarrion told me before the council that Lady Argella acted in Orys’ stead and had the stormlords withdraw east of the Slayne before having them set up defenses on its eastern banks, in the rainwood and Cape Wrath.”

Aegon nodded approvingly, as did Jaenyx and Visenya. East of the Slayne were lands that had
formidable natural barriers from thick forests to stony mountains. Those obstacles would halt any advance through the Dornish Marches.

“It appears that Argella Durrandon is more acquainted with war strategy than I anticipated,” Visenya thought aloud, but also in approval. *Orys found an extraordinary woman after all, even it was just an arranged marriage.*

Aegon bobbed his head. “Until Orys returns, I have decreed to the stormlords that Lady Argella would serve as Lady Paramount and thus has command over their forces.”

“How is she taking the news?” Rhaenys asked with some concern. She confided in Visenya that she saw her and Orys act more… intimately just a few days ago, but they did not engage in coupling. *Rhae, Rhae, Rhae… always expecting the best in everything,* Visenya quietly mused. On the other hand, having her young sister remain that way after everything comforted her heart.

“She was calm about it,” Aegon said. “But I could see that she was worried about her husband, which was more than I had expected.”

“And what did you expect, Egg?” Rhaenys asked.

“At worse, she was happy that the man who killed her father was imprisoned by the enemy. At best, she saw an opportunity to usurp him,” Aegon shrugged. “However, it appears that my presumptions about her were wrong. She does care about our brother at least.”

Visenya frowned over the map, her hands rubbing her forehead as her attention drifted to other matters. “King Loren advances along the Red Fork while besieging the Blackwood Vale, the knights of the Vale crossing the Green Fork and helping to besiege Seagard while sending a force southwards, and the Gardeners marching through the stormlands… Egg, if we remain here, I fear we might be caught between three armies.”
“I have no intention of remaining here. We must consolidate our forces today at Saltpans and Harrenhal to secure western and northern flanks. I will have cousin Daemon patrol the Bay of Crabs with his ships. Jae, can you spare Maerys Tarareon?” Jae nodded. “Thank you. She must patrol the eastern shores of the Vale. On the morrow, we make for Duskendale. Jae, I need Ragaemor Tarareon’s cavalry to screen our movements. I’ll give him as many men as he requires, and send them out in groups of four. We must have no gaps in our defenses.”

“Of course Egg, but why Duskendale? That’s a good distance away from here and we won’t be able to project our fighting power as effectively from the Blackwater Bay.”

“Duskendale is a good place from which to coordinate our defenses in the north,” Aegon explained. “Unlike our citadel on the Blackwater Rush, Duskendale has a good port and proper defenses from which to safeguard our command. We can still use our citadel to coordinate our defenses in the south. However, we need to keep the Blackwater Bay in line, as Jon Rosby and Alyn Stokeworth are slowly cracking under the pressure, and Duskendale is close enough to both of their keeps.”

“And if they act out of line again, it’ll only be a short ride by dragon,” Jaenyx finished.

“Exactly,” Aegon replied, rising. “I shall the necessary preparations for our move back to the Blackwater Bay.”

“Before we go, Egg,” Rhaenys stopped him. “Shouldn’t we send a message to Winterfell? To Brandon Snow?”

Visenya did not expect that. She had heard about Rhaenys gaining the dragon dreams and about the letter this Brandon Snow wrote to their family, which was sent personally by Lord Warrick Manderly. “Why should we contact your Stark friend, Rhae?” Aegon asked with a raised eyebrow.
Brandon told me that his half-brother, Torrhen Stark, had assembled his banners at Moat Cailin, which is within striking distance of the Twins. We don’t have the men to carry out an offensive even with dragons and with our key allies in the riverlands under siege, we need something fast.”

“So what are you suggesting, Rhae?” Visenya asked.

Brandon Snow talked about a pact between us, ‘a pact of ice and fire’ as he called it. And he said that we’d suffer a setback, which this is. He also said that once that happens, we should meet him, King Torrhen, and the northern lords at Widow’s Watch. I think it’s time we meet with the Starks, as they’re the only ones that are in a position to help us.”

“I don’t know about that, Rhae,” Visenya responded. “I imagine King Torrhen would ask for steep terms before he sends any of his bannermen to fight on our behalf.”

“For now, all they want is the Twins and the Three Sisters,” Rhaenys said.

In all honesty… those were acceptable terms in Visenya’s mind. The Twins belonged to the traitorous house and the Three Sisters belonged to the Vale enemies. “Is that it?”

“As I said, for now. However, we have to arrange for the meeting at Widow’s Watch. We need the northmen, as they’re the only army in Westeros that has not been affected and not on the side of our enemies,” Rhaenys reasoned.

Visenya trusted that Rhaenys wasn’t pulling a mummer’s act with the dragon dreams, but she was
not sure on whether to trust the Starks or the northerners. If what she said on the abilities of Brandon Snow was true, they had to be wary of those that claiming to see into the future, as the future might not hold positive outcomes.

Aegon sighed before nodding his head. “Very well. We’ll send a message to Winterfell. We’ll them that House Targaryen and House Belaerys shall see House Stark and the other northern houses at Widow’s Watch in a moon. We’ll all go there with our dragons and bring an escort on board Daemon’s ships.”

“Agreed,” Visenya assented. She looked to Jaenyx, who looked surprisingly accepting of the prospect of meeting with the Starks. Like herself, he had a good opinion of the First Men thanks to House Blackwood and was curious to see how the last region of pure First Men would be like.

Visenya and Jaenyx retired to their chambers after the meeting was concluded. However, the effects of Orys’ capture had not fully set upon her until after Jaenyx closed the door. Once the latch was fastened, she collapsed with her knees against the floor and started crying. The stresses and worries of the last week, Orys capture notwithstanding, along with something that she couldn’t fully explain had become too much for her. She was worried about Orys being safe, she was worried about their family being safe, she was worried about the threats that now surrounded them, and so much more.

Jaenyx got onto the floor with her and pulled her into a powerful embrace, his arms wrapping tightly around her while she bawled into his neck.

“Shhhh… shhhh…” Jaenyx shushed her while rubbing his hand on her bank. “It’s okay, Vis. Let it all out.”

“I don’t know what they’re doing to Orys, Jae,” Visenya cried. “They could be hurting him and we’re not there to protect him. He’s our brother and we should be there for him.”
“I know, I know,” Jaenyx whispered in her ear before kissing it.

“And now, we can’t trust our own allies to fight for us,” Visenya continued. “Rosby can’t be trusted. Stokeworth can’t be trusted. All the while, our enemies seek our destruction and are closing in on us and I don’t know if we can hold them back and—”

“Hey,” Jaenyx drew back from his embrace to stare at Visenya directly in the eyes while holding her face in his hands. “What’s there to worry about? You have me and you have Egg and Rhae here.”

“But not Orys,” Visenya continued to shed tears, which Jaenyx wiped with his thumbs.

“He’s a hard man, Orys. He killed a king, so you can count on him being able to survive whatever a king can throw at him. However, I don’t think he would want us to be weak because of him.”

“What?”

Jaenyx sighed. “He’s your brother and he loves you. I’m pretty sure that if he were here now, he would want you, Egg, and Rhae to stay strong for him. Continue the fight, kill the bastards that dare seek to destroy us, and survive. That’s the most you can do for him now.”

Visenya sniffed. “But how will we get him back?”
“Come on,” Jaenyx snorted. “We were able to take Haystack Hall without losing a single man. I’m sure we’ll come up with something.”

Visenya perched her eyebrow. “‘We?’”

Jaenyx nodded. “No matter my feelings for Orys, he is your family. And you care for him every much, so I should be concerned when someone hurts the family of the one I love. Just as you will do everything in your power to get him back, I will also do that.”

“You’ll do that for him, Jae?” Visenya asked, with hope.

Jaenyx shrugged. “How would I be able to care for my family if I won’t go the distance for those they care about?”

Visenya grinned, elated that Jaenyx was willing to help Orys despite their spat from six moons ago. She pulled him into a kiss and pressed her arms tightly against his back, with the kiss becoming deeper with each dance of the tongue. When she pulled away from the kiss, she saw what she wanted Jaenyx to feel for her at the moment: lust and desire.

Visenya pulled him close to her again and kissed him roughly. There was zero hesitation whatsoever as Jaenyx kissed her back. She moaned into his mouth as her hands rested on his shoulders. If his willingness to help our family by saving Orys is not proof of his love for me, I don’t know what is, Visenya thought.

With both still kneeling on the floor, Jaenyx guided Visenya to one of the walls without breaking the kiss. He placed his hand under one of her thighs and lifted it, hooking it around his waist. He grounded his bulging breeches against her core, causing her to moan in pleasure. Visenya rocked her hips against Jaenyx, increasing the friction and pleasure she was experiencing.
‘You… too many… clothes… get them off… now!’ Visenya ordered between kisses to Jaenyx’s jaw and neck. He quickly removed his black leather vest and blue shirt, leaving his chest and abs exposed to Visenya. Her mouth watered as she took in the sight of her beloved husband. She bit down roughly on his neck causing him to gasp and her to smirk before she licked the spot and soothed it. She kissed every part of him that was exposed to her whilst stroking his hard cock through his breeches. His moans were loud and it was the most delightful sound in the world to Visenya.

Before she could get too far, Jaenyx grabbed both of Visenya’s wrists and held them above her head. With his free hand, he stroked her cheek, which caused Visenya to shiver in anticipation. He kissed her slowly, gradually increasing his urgency.

Their kiss became sloppy and wild. Jaenyx slid his hand around her and squeezed her ass, which she rewarded him with a throaty moan. She then felt Jaenyx slide his hand into trousers and felt his fingers rub hard against her clit, prompting more moans to come out of her mouth. *How do his fingers know how to work wonders on me?*

Jaenyx pressed his fingers more rapidly against her entrance, feeling her juices while keeping his focus on kissing Visenya. Before she could explode, she felt him let go of her wrists. But before she could put them down, both of his hands reached for the hem of her blouse. She kept her arms up as he pulled it over her head and exposing her bare chest for his feasting eyes. She always felt her heart flutter whenever he stared at her breasts with lust and always saw stars in her eyes when he leaned down to suck on them.

Both of their eyes were dilated as Visenya pulled her trousers down. With Visenya’s perfect round ass fully exposed, nothing could keep him from grabbing her hips and bringing her against the bulge in his breeches. She yelped when she felt his hands on her hips as she wasn’t expecting it but moaned when her ass came into contact with his cock. “You don’t have small clothes on?” he whispered into her ear.

“How do his fingers know how to work wonders on me?
returned to running his lips over her breasts. She rarely swore unless they were about to couple or were in the middle of it. Growing impatient, she grabbed onto his breeches. “Get your cock out,” she ordered.

Jaenyx quickly disposed of his breeches and small clothes while Visenya remembered that her boots were still on, which she quickly took off. Finally, they were both completely naked. She made the first move by jumping into his arms.

“You’re such a little minx,” Visenya commanded.

Both of Jaenyx’s hands went to Visenya’s ass, keeping her up. She wrapped her legs around him tightly as he impaled her with his cock in a hard thrust. “Oh FUCK!” she screamed as Jaenyx plunged deeper into her wet cunt. Oh, how he makes me so wet. He pushed her up against the wall where her back met the cold stone. He fucked her cunt relentlessly with Visenya thrusting her hips back at him with just as much vigor. “Jae… Jae… Jae!” she panted as she got closer to her climax. His mouth was on her neck when he thrust deep inside of her before holding his position. She screamed his name when she felt how deep he was but frowned when he didn’t move. “Don’t you dare fucking stop,” Visenya said between heavy breaths.

“Or what?” Jaenyx asked as he began to fuck Visenya again. She didn’t reply as the sensations that Jaenyx was giving her made it difficult for her to even think coherently. And then he fucking pulled out of her, to her great frustration.

Visenya immediately dropped to her knees and took his cock in her mouth. Two can play at that game, she thought mischievously. He groaned and his knees nearly buckled. Internally, she smirked at what she could do to her dragon. She took as much of his cock as she could until it hit the back of her throat. She loved being on her knees for Jaenyx, sucking his cock. He was the only one she had ever done this with, now and forever. Visenya enjoyed it whenever she sucked off Jaenyx. She was his and he was hers. No one else’s. He’s mine. Now and forever. But her love for Jaenyx didn’t distract her from the reason she was sucking his cock in this exact moment. Get him close and then do what he did to me and pull away. Let him know how it feels to be seconds away from his release only for it to be snatched away from him.
With one hand curled around the base of his cock, Visenya sucked on it hard and fast as Jaenyx made incoherent sounds. Her tongue swirled the tip of his cock and he instantly jerked his hips forward, pushing more of his cock down her throat. She hummed in approval before licking the sides of his cock.

“Fuck Vis,” Jaenyx groaned. Her cheeks hollowed as she bobbed up and down his cock in a steady rhythm. He pushed some of her hair that had fallen out of her braid and was covering her face out of the way. Her amethyst orbs stared up at him lovingly before transforming into something else. A challenge? A split second later, she saw that Jaenyx had made up his mind. He thrust his hips towards Visenya and began to fuck her mouth. Her eyes widened but she didn’t object. He felt himself get closer to his release and Visenya knew it also, so she pulled her mouth off of his cock. He looked down at her with an irritated expression but she just smirked back at him. She slowly stroked his now wet cock with both of her hands, reveling in the small whimpers he was making.

Jaenyx lifted her up and she instinctively wrapped her legs around him again. He brought her down to the stone floor just on the side of their bed. As soon as her back touched the cold stone, he was sheathed inside her tight cunt and she let out a loud moan. “Jae,” she moaned hoarsely. “Fuck me faster!”

And he did. Jaenyx pounded into her hard and fast. She fucked him back just as fast which added to the pleasure both were experiencing. It was passion and almost animalistic. Like how dragons should be. The sound of their sweaty skin slapping together echoed throughout the room along with the sounds each of them made while they fucked. She spread her legs wider for him and it allowed him to get even deeper inside of her. Her nails dug into his back as she held onto him tightly. Visenya would’ve felt guilty that she drew blood from him, but she was lost in the pleasure that he was giving her.

Jaenyx squeezed one of Visenya’s breasts as he ravaged the other. There was a dark purple spot appearing on the side of her neck and undoubtedly her breasts would have the same mark soon. Her breathing quickened and all of the signs that she was about to reach the edge were there. With his free hand, Jaenyx reached to where their bodies joined and rubbed her clit. Visenya arched her back and wailed as she reached her peak. Her nails dug into his back even harder and it caused Jaenyx to wince slightly but he ignored it as he continued to fuck her.

Visenya’s liquids covered her cunt and her inner thighs as well as Jaenyx’s cock. Her walls tightening around it was too much for him and Jaenyx spilled his seed inside of her. He grunted before kissing her deeply, which she reciprocated eagerly. When they pulled apart, both were
panting heavily but there was an naughty glint in her eyes.

“We’re not done,” Visenya said in her lady-like voice. *Jae is the only one who I will act as a lady to.*

“Good, because I had no intention of finishing this just yet,” Jaenyx replied. He pulled out of her, which resulted in a small whine escaping Visenya’s lips. He placed his hands underneath her and lifted her up effortlessly. Her arms and legs wrapped around his neck and waist respectively.

Visenya was biting, licking and kissing his neck, making sure she marked him just as he had marked her. He was gently carrying her to the bed, but Visenya made it clear to him that she wanted him sitting up and not on his back. Their eyes locked together and it was a battle to see who would make the first move. Jaenyx decided to by slapping her ass, which resulted in a surprise squeal by Visenya. Liking the sound that escaped her lips, he slapped it again.

“Harder,” Visenya huffed as she stroked Jaenyx’s cock back to its full length. He obliged and slapped her ass cheeks harder, leaving a light red mark on her fair skin.

“Inside of me. Now!” Visenya lifted herself up and Jaenyx positioned his cock so that when she came down, his cock would be inside of her. They both groaned in unison as she lowered herself on him. Initially, Visenya rode him slowly but that quickly changed and they fucked hard and fast again on the mattress. She rocked her hips against his, causing him to gasp as the change of angle increased his pleasure.

Jaenyx kisses her, moving up her body from her breasts to her neck, cheek, and finally her mouth. The lips collided, with his tongue immediately entering her mouth. He held her hips as he pistoned upwards quickly over and over again. Visenya moaned into his mouth before forcing him to loosen his hold on her hips as she wanted to ride him at the same time that as he was thrusting into her.
Jaenyx leaned back and Visenya saw him stare into her eyes. She knew that he wanted to see her lose control and he had quickly got her to the point where she was close. He applied just the right amount of pressure on her clit with his thumb, sending Visenya over the edge. Her whole body was shaking as she came. She cried out his name while she spasmed in his arms. Her eyes were shut tightly as wave after wave of pleasure jolted through her body. Jaenyx followed her quickly, filling her with his seed.

Visenya laid her head on Jaenyx’s sculpted chest and he kissed the top of her head. It was a blissful embrace after their rough coupling, which Visenya further enjoyed as she felt a mixture of his seed and her juices flowing on her thighs. She felt thoroughly… ravaged and she suspected that she would share many of Jaenyx’s reddish-purple love bites. “How is it that you make it feel like the first time every time?” Visenya looked up at him.

“I know just how to please my wife,” Jaenyx reverted to High Valyrian. “Plus, I felt like you needed it now.”

“Because of Orys?”

Jaenyx sighed, but he offered a comforting smile. “He’s your brother and I would be a shit husband if I didn’t care about your family. And I promised that I would treat all of you with love and respect.”

“I know about your promises,” Visenya replied. “But what about your feelings?”

“I had to do a lot of thinking, as you know. And maybe… I was wrong about him. Valyrian blood flows through his veins just as it does mine and I would be a hypocrite if I just simply dismissed him. Also, I’ve seen how you, Egg, and Rhae treated him. You’re my wife, Vis, and Egg and Rhae have become my family. Maybe it’s time I embrace the last one as my own.”
Visenya smiled widely and kissed him deeply. “I’m glad you feel that way, Jae. So… about the parley with the Lannister king—”

Jaenyx shook his head. “I’m tired, Vis, and we just fucked each other’s brains out. Can it wait tomorrow?”

Visenya nodded. “Sure,” she said before laying her head on Jaenyx’s shoulders and falling into the waiting hold of sleep.

Visenya waited alongside Jaenyx, their father, their mother, Aegon, and Rhaenys as they sat in a tent outside of Harrenhal. Their mother insisted on participating in the war effort despite the need for her to remain at Dragonstone, so their father appointed Quenton as its castellan until she returned.

After relocating to Duskendale, the captains and bannermen sworn to Dragonstone reinforced the defenses of the town while Jaenyx directed Aevor Rahitheon to construct a road between the port and their citadel on the Blackwater Rush. They also kept a sizable force at Saltpans, Harrenhal, and south of the Gods Eye, with the last one being the most worrisome since patrols from both sides clashed for control over the Blackwater Rush. It was imperative the forces of Dragonstone maintain control over the eastern banks of the Rush, as it was the only natural barrier that barred the Lannisters and the Gardeners from advancing into the Blackwater Bay.

They had also received reports from Storm’s End, written in the hand of Lady Argella herself. The stormlords took all of the crops, livestock, and valuables while burning the rest and slighting their own castles to prevent the enemy from using them. Many of the stormlords protested against destroying their own keeps, but Jaenyx promised compensation once the war was done and reasoned that if the enemy couldn’t use their castles against them, their hold on the land would be severely crippled. More importantly, they had successfully held off the enemy at the Slayne, the rainwood, and Cape Wrath.

By now and despite the reinforcements from the Vale, the lines had stabilized in both the
Their father had recommended to Aegon that they needed to have boys as young as ten serve in their forces, thus freeing up thousands of older boys to reinforce their infantry. Jaenyx and Aegon made their training rigorous, as they needed to understand that their enemy would inflict severe pain upon them even if they did surrender and they needed to fight to the best of their abilities. Progress was slow, but steady, and they added four thousand more to supplement their ranks.

Even though the situation had improved, they were still not in a strong enough position to mount a counteroffensive. Such was the reason why they agreed to a parley with King Lannister outside Harrenhal, their westernmost possession in the riverlands.

“Do you think he will bring up the ransom for Orys, father?” Aegon asked.

“Well, that was the motivation for King Loren to call this parley,” their father answered.

“We’re not going to pay it, are we?” Rhaenys was worried.

“It depends, Rhae. If it’s just gold, I will pay it. Anything more will make us look weak.”

“If he demands lands, father, will we give it?” Aegon asked.

Their father shook his head. “As I said, paying anything more than gold will make us look weak. And land exchanges only occur when both sides seek a cessation to hostilities, which is not the intention of this parley.”
“How do you know, father?”

“Because we’re not done fighting, Egg,” Jaenyx spoke. “And our position is more secure than it was weeks ago.”

“If the Lannister tries anything, I’ll burn him to a crisp,” Visenya declared.

“And we won’t stop you, Vis,” their mother replied with approval. “But it won’t hurt to see what King Loren wants.”

“Didn’t know you care that much for Orys,” Visenya thought aloud. However, everyone heard, prompting a heavy sigh from their mother.

“Orys might not have come from my womb, but you all see him as your brother and nothing less. And as you all know, I value my family above all else. I would be a fucking hypocrite if I showed no concern for your brother,” their mother simply said. Visenya snorted in amusement, which got her a cross look from their mother.

One of their bannermen, another Mallister, entered the tent and dipped his head to their father. “Lord Aerion, King Loren has arrived.”

“Send him in,” their father ordered. He rose from his seat, prompting all of them to do so, as the King of the Rock and his ranking bannermen entered through the tent flap and took their seats in the table opposite of theirs.
Visenya took in the five men that had accompanied King Loren. They were all dressed in ornate robes and all had well-maintained beards, but all had hair colors ranging from copper to dirty blonde. She saw their sigils on their surcoats, from which she identified the burning tree of House Marbrand, the bridled boar of House Crakehall, the seashells of House Westerling, the golden lion and anchor of the House Lannister of Lannisport, and the red lion of House Reyne. *Five of the most powerful houses sworn to Casterly Rock,* Visenya thought.

Then, Visenya turned her attention to King Loren himself. He had golden blonde hair and green eyes, with a beard that covered his jawline and chin but did not grow past the middle point of his neck. In addition to the surcoat sporting the golden lion against a red background of the main House Lannister, he also wore a crown that was made of gold and had a roaring lion on the front of its band. He also wore velvet robes and had a golden necklace around his neck.

However, Visenya saw past King Loren’s dress and looked into his eyes. His blue irises moved to and fro, looking at their family closely. Like Darvin Hoare when he first came to Dragonstone, his eyes resembled that of a predator as it scrutinized its prey, looking for any spots to take advantage of and thinking of ways to bring its prey down. But unlike “King” Hoare, there was a… calm collectiveness behind those searching eyes. Whereas Darvin Hoare would have jumped quickly onto the first chance to kill his prey, King Loren seemed to take his time and looked as if he waited only when he could catch his quarry in the most efficient manner possible.

Not only that, King Loren had a small grin on his face, as if he was happy to be talking to their family. *What are you happy about it?*

Their father sat down, prompting Visenya, Jaenyx, and their family to sit. King Loren and Lords Marbrand, Crakehall, Westerling, and Reyne followed suit.

“Thank you for agreeing to this parley, Lord Aerion,” King Loren started. Their father didn’t answer. “I would have understood if you allowed your heir and your good-son to be involved in our discussion, but why bring your whole family?”
Their father blinked. “My wife has been an important contributor for many years, as are my daughters. After all, it’s not every day that a simple lord like myself can speak to a king on equal terms, so I require my entire family before making the next move.”

“I see…” King Loren nodded, but Visenya could tell that despite his hesitation to engaged with women, at the same time, it was much more subdued than the other men she had to deal with and it looked as if he didn’t care. *Interesting*…

“You say that you have come to discuss terms of a ransom for my brother, Lord Orys Baratheon,” Aegon said. “We’re interested in hearing the cost of his safe return.”

The Lannister from Lannisport scoffed. “Only they would elevate a bastard to a lord,” he whispered to Lord Crakehall, who sat next to him.

“What did you say?” Visenya was angered at their insulting their brother.

Before the Lannisport Lannister could respond, King Loren gave him a scolding look, which silenced him. “Please excuse my cousin, my lady. He has a rather… delicate constitution onshore whenever he’s not sailing his boat and him speaking out of turn is just one aspect of that.”

Visenya gave him a look that communicated her being unconvinced, which King Loren ignored. He then turned to Aegon. “You must Lord Aegon,” King Loren addressed her brother. “I’ve heard much about you and your exploits, and I must say you are off to a great start if you wish to take your father’s place when he dies.”

Visenya clenched his teeth. *Oh, already he’s talking of our father’s death?* She turned and saw that her father was also irritated, but he suppressed it.
As for Aegon, he wasn’t one for flattery and Visenya saw that he already knew that King Loren’s words were empty. “Thank you, King Loren,” he replied courteously.

“Respectfully, King Loren,” their mother jumped in. “We’re not here to comment on the events of the moons past. We came to discuss the ransom of Lord Baratheon.”

King Loren looked at their mother. “Valaena Velaryon. Well, I must say that the tales of your beauty fall short of the real article and that your lord husband chose well, as Westeros would tolerate relations between cousins as opposed to those between siblings.”

Visenya’s breath flared through her nostrils. *You’ve got some fucking nerve to insult Egg and Rhae in their presence!* She could Aegon and Rhaenys doing the same.

King Loren turned his attention to Rhaenys. “And it appears that you have inherited your lady mother’s beauty, Lady Rhaenys. I must say that you match well with Lord Aegon, as one inclined for battle must be tempered by one inclined to song, even though you are married to your brother.”

Lords Marbrand, Westerling, Crakehall, and Lannister all chuckled derisively, except for Lord Reyne, which Visenya found curious. She was aware that House Reyne traded energetically with their family, paying them for their goods and a red-colored Valyrian steel sword Lord Reyne called “Red Rain” in silver and gold bullion instead of sacks of gold and silver pieces like their other business partners in Westeros. Until the Faith’s holy war put a stop to their trade. She could tell that being here was the last thing that he wanted and that he wasn’t on good terms with his king. *What’s going on over there?*

Whatever his thoughts, their father was obviously insulted at their derision. “Are we here to discuss the ransom, or are you just wasting our time, King Loren?”
“We are here to discuss the terms of the ransom, but Lord Baratheon is your natural-born son, so naturally, I must discuss your family, which brings me to you, Lady Visenya,” King Loren gazed at her. “If only you were born a man, then every knight in Westeros would have sought to spar with you and every aspiring knight would have wanted to be you squire, for I heard nothing but good things about your battle prowess. But alas, you’re a woman and such predispositions for war does not suit a lady well.”

Visenya’s first thought was to draw Dark Sister, run over to King Loren, and decapitate him for his insults. However, such an action belonged to a self that existed before she married Jaenyx, who never belittled her for not being a traditional lady and instead encouraged her to become a better warrior, offering her tips and having Arata and Konno Harus push her to her limits during their spars. She found a man that made her feel whole, and her family didn’t stop her from mastering combat, so she felt no need to be insulted by lesser men. *Anyone else who thinks lowly of me can go fuck themselves.*

Visenya calmed herself before speaking. “How boring your life must be if you only know one type of lady, King Loren. I do hope that your cock hasn’t gone feeble from fucking daffodils and whores who only spread their legs because you’re a king.”

Now it was their family’s turn to chuckle at King Loren’s expense, keeping a neutral face but she could see that he was bothered, meaning that she hit a nerve. She felt Jaenyx squeeze her hand under the table, giving her a big smile and she saw that he was struggling to keep himself from guffawing like a fool.

As for the lords of the Rock, the smiles on their faces disappeared, shocked that a lady had the gall to insult their king directly in his presence. All except Lord Reyne, who looked rather amused at Visenya’s intrepidity. *The situation with House Reyne is getting more intriguing.*

“You will retract your words to King Loren, Lady Visenya!” Lord Marbrand bellowed.
Their father shrugged. “Why should she? You laughed at our expense when it came to my son and heir and my daughter. Consider us even, my lord.”

“A lord daring to insult a king, who outranks in every manner?!” Lord Westerling exclaimed. “It baffles me how your tiny island was able to survive with your brazenness.”

“Enough!” King Loren barked, causing his lords to stand down. “All right. The terms of Lord Baratheon’s return are a thousand sacks of gold pieces and the return of Broden Tully to Riverrun. Once that has occurred, the Faith is ready to call for a truce along the current lines of control.”

“Do you speak for the Starry Sept?” their father asked.

“The High Septon has bestowed upon me the title ‘Marshal of the Faith,’ so in all matters concerning war and diplomacy, I do speak for the Faith.”

Their father sighed, fighting the headache that was creeping on him from the ridiculousness of King Loren’s new title. “Do we have your word on that, King Loren? In exchange for the thousand sacks of gold pieces and Broden Tully, we will have Lord Baratheon returned in good condition?”

“Yes.”

Visenya looked at their father in shock. Are you really doing this? She wanted Orys back, but he seemed to be folding too easily.
“But I’m guessing that’s not all of your terms,” their father stated.

“Indeed,” King Loren confirmed. “Enough blood has been shed and there is a possibility for peace between our peoples.”

“And what would they be?”

King Loren leaned back in his chair. “First, you must order all of your bannermen and captains to stand down and cease all fighting.”

Visenya narrowed her eyes. *What the hells?*

“Second, you must withdraw your forces back to your tiny island and stay there while the forces of the Faith move in to secure the lands not directly under our control. The Gardeners will take the stormlands and Storm’s End, I will take over the riverlands, and the Arryns will take Blackwater Bay. You must sign a document that confirms the new boundaries of control and stamp your seal confirming the dissolution of the union between Orys Baratheon and Argella Durrandon.”

Their father scoffed at the ridiculousness of his terms, but wanted to see how far it will go. “And I assume you have a final term?”

“Take your dragons, take your vassals, leave Westeros, and never come back. We don’t need your incestuous practices or your foreign religion infecting the minds of our people. We’re fine on our own and Westeros will benefit from having its traditions and customs remain uninterrupted.”
Their father scoffed and shook his head. “Come now, King Loren. You don’t care about Westeros, and your designs are as clear as day. You want the riverlands for the simple reason of enlarging your kingdom.”

“Whatever my feelings, Lord Aerion, I have a duty to the Faith and these terms have been endorsed by the High Septon. No one else has to die.”

Visenya wanted to laugh at such bullshit coming from King Loren’s mouth, as she knew that no one apart from simple-minded people would put any stock in the Faith.

It was then that Jaenyx spoke. “You ask such steep terms, King Loren. What makes you think that we will accept them without a fight?”

“Oh, the Blue Dragon finally graces us with his presence,” quipped King Loren. “I hear you are quite the bigot, from what little your Maester Harrion told me.”

Now, that was unexpected for Visenya and the family. “You’ve met Maester Harrion?” Rhaenys asked.

“Yes,” King Loren replied. “And he had many things to say about you and your family. This is how I do things. I never launch myself against my adversaries without prior knowledge.”

_The next time I see Harrion, I will kill him_, Visenya thought darkly.

“You didn’t answer the question,” Jaenyx pointed out.
“That’s ‘Your Grace’ to you, dragon cunt,” Lord Marbrand blurted out.

Unlike Haru, no one called their family by that name and Visenya was about to yell before King Loren spoke up. “Whatever our feelings for each other, my lord Marbrand, even I have to admit that was too far.”

“No need for him to apologize, King Loren,” Jaenyx said. “If he does, it’ll be the biggest horseshit that I would have heard today.”

Visenya snorted, as did Aegon, Rhaenys, and their parents.

“But going back to the central issue, what makes you think we will accept such preposterous terms?” Jaenyx questioned.

As if expecting that, King Loren pulled out a sack and gestured to one of the Targaryen household guards. Getting the nod from their father, he took the sack and placed it in front of his liege. He opened the sack and poured its contents, which were six digits of fingers, the ring finger and pinky from what Visenya could see. They also gave a horrid smell, as the flesh had rotted.

“What is this?” their father asked in indignation.

“There were no terms regarding Lord Baratheon’s constitution prior to this parley, but even I knew that he had to kept alive for us to come to terms.”
Visenya could see Aegon’s face become red, which Rhaenys and Visenya also did. “You harmed our brother?” he barely controlled his rage.

“He may be a lord in your eyes, but he’s a bastard to the rest of us,” the Lannisport Lannister said acidly. “There is nothing that condemns pain inflicted upon bastards.”

Visenya wanted nothing more than to call Vhagar and have her burn the lords that dared to spite their family. *That does it! I will not give them a second thought when I feed them to Vhagar!!!!*

Their father sat up from the table, pure rage evident in his face as his eyes bared dragonfire to Loren. “We’re done here,” he simply said before he stormed out of the tent. Visenya and the rest followed him out, the evidence of the harm done to Orys ending any more discussion with the Lannisters.

Their father flied into a fury as they walked back to their dragons outside the walls of Harrenhal, “I want to get this fuck where he stands! I want to ride into Casterly Rock and to Riverrun and burn everything to the ground! I want that bastard Loren Lannister DEAD! I want his house DEAD! I want his castle burned to the GROUND! I want to have the dragons burn his body and I want to PISS ON HIS ASHES! And I want the same for everyone that dared to fight against us! They will never, EVER know a world without fire EVER AGAIN!!!”

Their mother grabbed the back of his neck and kissed him deeply, ceasing his vitriol and calming him down. But from what Visenya observed, she was also enraged at King Loren daring to harm their brother. *Now, there shall be no quarter given to those that stand against us.*

Visenya was relieved to see Jaenyx incensed at the audacity of the King Loren, but he was much more calm about it because he knew what it was like to see your family hurt. “*Good-father, I understand how you feel. And believe me, I want to see our enemies disappear into the nothingness. But before we could act, we need to get Orys back first. We have exhausted the peaceful approach, so let’s get him back ourselves.*”
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“First, we need to find out exactly where he is. I still have agents in action in the Riverlands, so they’ll tell me what we need to know. Then, we mount a rescue.”

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“You need to ask that question, Jae? I would do anything for our brother and I can’t just sit around while he languishes in their chains.” Visenya asserted.

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Visenya kissed him on the cheek, happy that he just accepted and that he knew that arguing against her involvement would lead nowhere.
Before they mounted their dragons, with their father riding with Aegon and their mother with Rhaenys, Daemon ran towards them. “Lord Aerion,” he caught his breath.

“What is it?” their father called from atop Balerion.

“We have a response to the message sent to Winterfell. King Torrhen Stark and the northern lords have agreed to the meeting at Widow’s Watch. They’ll be expecting you in two weeks.”

Visenya was surprised that the Starks would respond so quickly. But if what Rhaenys said was true, they needed the northmen to join the war on their side.

Their father nodded. “All right. Send a message to Winterfell and prepare some ships. We’re going north.” As soon as Daemon nodded, he stepped back as all four dragons rose into the air. They first would need to stop at Dragonstone before sailing north.

_I hope this works._

Chapter End Notes

A lot of cover in this chapter, and now there are divisions among the ranks of the Valyrians. But they will all need to stay united if they wish to win and survive. And Jaenyx is finally burying the hatchet with Orys, as he sees how much the Targaryens care for him and he would not be really loving his family if he doesn't love one of them.

And now, the Lannisters have really pissed off the dragons with how they harmed Orys. They would be unwise to think that the dragons will ever let them go after that. On another note, the dragons have finally reached out to the Starks and received a response. The northmen will be important from here on out.
Next, we will finally meet Brandon and the northern lords in their rough and wild glory.
Brandon sat in the solar of Lord Flint of Widow’s Watch, which had been granted to him and his brother Torrhen for the duration of their stay in the great keep on cliffs next to the Shivering Sea. But while most lords and kings would just sit in their chairs, he sat with his hands behind his head and his legs rested on the table. Some would have scolded him for being so relaxed, as it was inappropriate for most lords to act that way in front of others. Then again, this was the North and such behaviors were not so emphasized like that of the south.

More importantly, all three branches of House Flint were very loyal to House Stark, especially the more powerful ones at Widow’s Watch. In fact, Lord Flint went out of his way to provide the best hospitality he could to Torrhen whenever he went on this royal progresses throughout the North and having the King in the North visit his keep twice that year was a great honor. So they were undeniably safe within the walls of Widow’s Watch.

That morning, Brandon arose early and rode his mare along the sides of the cliff as he took in the calm of the Shivering Sea. There indeed existed a reassurance that came from the sea, as it went on and on in all directions and no one and nothing cared for who you were. In another life, I would have been happy being a captain of my own ship and sailing all over the world.

Brandon patted the reddish-brown fur of his direwolf, Autumn. Although he usually spent the day hunting in the wilderness, Brandon reached to his direwolf and told Autumn that he needed him by
his side. “You’re a good boy, you know that?” he scratched Autumn’s head, which earned a lick on his hand from the direwolf.

The sound of the solar’s door opening brought Brandon out of his daze, but he relaxed when he saw his brother Torrhen enter. While most lords would have risen when a king entered, he remained sitting, as they were close enough for them to dispense with all propriety with each other.

Torrhen was dressed in a linen tunic and had a belt of heavy silver links, which held his dagger, and had left his longsword in his chambers and House Stark’s Valyrian steel sword Ice at Winterfell. He wore a surcoat made of fine white velvet, which had the grey direwolf against a white background sigil of House Stark the his left side over his chest. Brandon could see that Torrhen also wore cloaks made from black wool that also had a hint of grey with white. To top it all off, he had a black cloak lined with heavy furs, which he usually wore while he rode his destrier.

Torrhen was hardly concerned with being well kept, as the northern houses put little stock in appearances and was only concerned with one’s actions.

“All hail Torrhen Stark!” Brandon called out like a herald. “First of His Name, king of the savages, ruler of the ice, and mage of the snow.” He saw Torrhen roll his eyes, spurring him forward. “The people are curious as to what he will do today. Will he conjure up grumpkins from across the Wall? Will he witness someone pissing through a wolf? Or will he unleash a blizzard through his many ass-spraying mayhems?”

“Shut up, Bran,” Torrhen groaned in annoyance, which prompted a chortle from Brandon.

“Oh, forgive me, Your Grace,” Brandon replied in mock deference. “Perhaps, a sharp thrust from behind with Ice would be needed to silence me.”
Torrhen frowned. “Don’t even joke about that, Bran.”

“I’d always wondered what the difference was between blades and cocks, since manhood is measured by both,” Brandon continued aloud, but intentionally.

“For love of the gods, Bran,” Torrhen grumbled.

“Come on, Torry,” Brandon called the King in the North by his childhood nickname. “You know I’m no buggerer. I’m just japing with you.”

“How many times do I have to tell you?” Torrhen poured himself a cup of ale while keeping his annoyed look on his face. “There are times to do that and times not to. This is one of them.”

“Laughing is healing for the mind, Torry,” Brandon shrugged. “Not laughing at my jests leads to more wrinkles on your face from your many instances of frowning and brooding. Pretty soon, you’ll end up like poor old Black Harren who must’ve scowled so much he aged a hundred years before his time.”

Torrhen took a swig from his cup of ale. “Just thinking about him makes me worried about his brother being here. I for one don’t intend to roast within these walls like Black Harren did.”

“We have the blood of the Starks within us, Torry,” Brandon pointed out. “We know the Watch better than anyone and the black brothers take their vows seriously. They also know the consequences of deserting or breaking their vows.”
“Nonetheless,” Torrhen interrupted. “I made it clear to you that bringing Maron Hoare to Widow’s Watch was a bad idea, considering that our incoming guests burnt most of his family to a crisp. It won’t matter that he’s the Lord Commander.”

“The Targaryens are also aware of the Watch and understand that bringing harm to any of its members would thoroughly damage their house’s standing throughout Westeros,” Brandon reasoned. “Besides, I heard that Lord Hoare went to the Wall because he didn’t want to be around his own people.”

“Whatever personal feelings we have, having him in the same room as the Targaryens would jeopardize our meeting with them.”

“They won’t kill us,” Brandon assured Torrhen.

“Why? Because your sight told you so?” Torrhen trusted Brandon’s abilities, but he had a tendency to put practicality above fantastical abilities several times. Such was understandable, given that he was a king.

“That, and I’ve talked with Rhaenys Targaryen through the sight. They would never do something as stupid as kill the Lord Commander of the Watch.”

Torrhen sighed. “Well, I’ll have you know that bringing Maron Hoare is the least of my concerns at the moment. Did you know that Houses Umber, Karstark, and Glover were the ones most opposed to our meeting with the dragons? They said that the Starks and by extension the North must never get involved in the affairs of the south.”

Brandon groaned. “I appreciate their loyalty, Torry, but they’re not seeing the larger picture.”
“Oh, I trust you, Bran,” Torrhen answered. “But they’re not like you. The first time I heard you talk about ‘a pact of ice and fire,’ I thought you were mad until you explained it more to me. However, the only reason I was convinced was because I’ve seen your sight in action. The rest of the lords will be harder to convince, especially Lord Umber as you well know.”

“Marlon Umber disbelieves anything connected to magic since he views everything north of the Wall as connected to wildlings, who constantly deals with.”

“That’s irrelevant, Bran,” Torrhen stated. “You might have convinced me, you might have convinced Lord Manderly to negotiate with Dragonstone, and you might have persuaded the Targaryens enough to have them come here, but the other lords won’t. It’s best if you don’t talk about your sight at this meeting yet.”

“I disagree, Torry,” Brandon replied. “The Targaryens have dragons, all of which are magical by themselves. Plus, they have preserved certain wonders of old Valyria, all of which are based on magic. It won’t be hard to persuade them.”

“This is not about persuading the Targaryens, Bran,” Torrhen pointed out. “This is about ensuring that all of the northern houses throw their support for this pact. Having them believe that this meeting occurred because of your sight would make them take it less seriously.”

“Not the biggest concern you dealt with,” Brandon shrugged.

“How about… we save all of our energies until the meeting begins, eh?” Torrhen suggested, but Brandon could see that he was not in the mood to further debate the issue. “I just want to enjoy a nice morning breaking my fast and enjoying this cup of ale. Is that too much to ask?”
Brandon nodded, respecting his brother’s wishes. “Of course, Torry.” He inhaled and picked up a strong scent. “I sense a large animal entering the room.”

Torrhen raised an eyebrow before the door to the solar opened, servants entering with plates of salted bacon and setting them before the two brothers while placing two pork legs in front of Autumn. He rolled his eyes and sighed. “Must you jest before I eat?”

“Well, I do hope that the hog was quiet when the butcher came, because we wouldn’t want to have our meal’s last memory be one of agony?”

Torrhen looked as if he wanted to say something, but he just shook his head and began chewing on the bacon. As for Brandon, he just grinned while he joined his brother in breaking their fast. “May I have some ale, Torry?”

“Get it yourself,” Torrhen muttered.

Brandon gasped mockingly. “You would be so cruel as to have your brother get up from his comfortable chair and to reduce him to pouring drinks like a servant?”

“That chair isn’t comfortable,” Torrhen said. “And I must be a servant then, since I poured myself a drink.”

Brandon chuckled, amused that his brother was finally being loose, before he got up, poured himself a drink, and clinked his ale cup with Torrhen’s. But before they could begin eating their bacon, the door to the solar opened again, this time with the Queen in the North entering, Jocelyn, who wore a grey gown lined with green and a woolen cloak that was similarly colored.
“Well, if it isn’t the green-eyed wildling,” Jocelyn remarked as her short stature and wavy black hair did nothing to hold the tongue that made many cross. Fortunately, Brandon knew her well enough to know that her runny mouth was her way of showing affection.

Brandon did another mock gasp. “What is this? More rubbish this morning?”

“Hey, with respect, Bran, you didn’t let me finish. If it isn’t the green-eyed wildling getting fatter in his chair like some penned-up wolf… cunt. Now, I’m finished,” Jocelyn jabbed at Brandon’s origins from the mountain clans and to him having the greensight.

“And if it isn’t the undersized swamp rat, coming to grace us with her presence after another night of getting humped as a wolf takes its bitch,” Brandon poked back at Jocelyn being the daughter of Lord Ethan Reed, the overlord of the crannogmen and of the Neck. He also saw that her hair was a bit disheveled, pointing to what she and Torrhen were doing the night before.

“I may be small, but I know how to stay afloat in water, which is more than what you could do, Bran,” Jocelyn prodded at Brandon’s swimming struggles.

“If you can count swamps as real water,” Brandon pointed out. “Plus, why would I need to swim if I can just walk on water on land?”

“What?” Jocelyn asked with confusion.

“You know, snow is water, and we see a lot of it near the Wall. There, I can walk on it,” Brandon
Jocelyn snickered. As for Torrhen, he rubbed his temples, not in the mood for his brother’s and his wife’s antics in the morning. "Perhaps you should have married him, Jos."

"I think not, then I might have actually lost an argument," Jocelyn moved toward Torrhen and kissed him lightly on the lips. “How’s your morning been, my king?”

“Great, before you two decided to start a jesting match,” Torrhen said before he resumed eating his bacon.

“Come now, Torry,” Brandon called out. “You’re the only one who could handle our japes without sticking Ice up our asses.”

Torrhen set down his fork and knife while giving Brandon his irritated face. “Bran, I’m not in the mood for your ass jokes. I could decree it to the northern houses that words such as ‘ass’ or ‘asshole’ can no longer be said, and I would really have an excuse to stick you with Ice.”

“But you won’t, because then, Winterfell would become really boring without me and Jos adding some absurdity to the seriousness of the North.”

“Maybe, but Bran, can you not jest with people’s asses just for today? We’re about to have a summit that could forever change the North, and I don’t need our guests to see you as a laughingstock.”
“I wouldn’t worry about that, Torry. As I’ve said, I’ve talked with Rhaenys Targaryen. I know that she knows me enough to tolerate my japing tendency,” Brandon reassured him with confidence.

“Fine, fine. Now, would it be too much to ask if I could break my fast in peace? I heard enough jests for one day,” Torrhen took a swig from his ale cup while the servants brought another plate of bacon for Jocelyn. Respecting his wishes, Brandon poured Jocelyn a cup of ale before they ate their morning meal in silence. As for Autumn, he enjoyed his pig feet so much that he began to grind his teeth on the bones.

Once they were finished with their bacon, Brandon, Torrhen, and Jocelyn walked outside the solar and entered Widow’s Watch great hall. It wasn’t as large as the one in Winterfell, but it was large enough to accommodate all of the northern houses that had arrived to meet with the last major remnant of old Valyria. While some houses came personally, some others acted on behalf of the more minor houses, like the Flints of Widow’s Watch speaking for all of House Flint and House Dustin representing the barrowlands. It was a body that was to represent the North in a momentous event in their history since the campaign in the Three Sisters.

Brandon also had Autumn strode with him, his brother, and his good-sister. It sent a strong message to the northern houses that the Starks were still going strong, and having a live direwolf be with them served as a symbol of their house’s continued strength.

The first to greet Torrhen and Jocelyn was Joseth Glover, Master of Deepwood Motte. “Your Graces,” he dipped his head to Torrhen.

“Thank you for coming, Lord Joseth,” Torrhen shook his hand. “It must’ve been grueling for you and your house to have traveled all the way here.”

“Not at all, Your Grace,” Joseth Glover shook his head. “I am happy to be of service to House Stark in whatever way possible.”
“We’re glad to hear it,” Jocelyn nodded before they both moved onto Marlon Umber. “Always a pleasure to see you, Lord Marlon. I trust the climate here is tolerable compared to Last Hearth?”

“Nonsense, my queen,” Marlon Umber spoke loudly. “Everything may be warmer here, but we Umbers enjoy the cold near the Wall, since we could all brush closely against each other against the fire and in our beds, if you know what I mean?”

King Torrhen chuckled, having grown accustomed with the Umbers’ proclivity for lewdness and trusted in his wife’s fidelity to allow her to engage in such banter. “Of course, Marlon. Hopefully, you won’t be so inclined to being too warm, considering who’s coming?” Marlon smiled, almost hiding the fact that he was hesitant to treat with the dragons, before Torrhen moved on to Larence Karstark, Lord of Karhold. “How have you been, old friend?”

“Very good, Your Grace,” L Clarence Karstark bowed his head. “I just received a raven from Karhold this morning. It appears that my son Kyle has been handling the duties of the keep well since I departed. It made me happy to have a son that I can trust to keep our house in good order when I’m gone.”

Jocelyn grinned, as did Torrhen. “That’s very good to hear, Larence. Although I hope your passing doesn’t come for many years. We will need your friendship further down the road.” Lord Karstark nodded his thanks before Torrhen and Jocelyn moved on, but Brandon could see that they wished he spent more time with Larence after seeing who it was next.

“Thank you for coming, Lord Rogar,” Torrhen shook his hand, with a little hesitation. “I trust your journey here wasn’t too strenuous?”

Rogar Bolton smiled, but Brandon knew that he detected his brother’s reluctance. “It’s of little consequence, Your Grace. After all, it isn’t everyday that one would lay eyes on living dragons.”
“I wouldn’t be too excited, Lord Bolton,” Brandon spoke. “Dragons are intelligent creatures, but they can be vicious to those with ill-intent. That’s an occurrence that we wouldn’t want happening, would we?”

Rogar Bolton blinked, evidently offended at being addressed in that manner by a bastard and especially when Brandon gave him a warning. Even though bastardy status was not as deplored as in the kingdoms south of the Neck, the stain of bastardy was still very prevalent and it was only because of someone very vivacious at Winterfell that allowed him to grow up without it tainting his mind. It also didn’t help that Autumn was eyeing him up and down, in a manner akin to a wolf examining its game.

Before Lord Bolton could respond, Jocelyn intervened. “There, there, Brandon. He’s merely being curious, aren’t you, my lord?”

“Indeed, my queen.” Rogar Bolton bobbed his head as the three moved on to greet Lord Dorren Manderly.

Rogar Bolton was one of those lords who one could never really be sure of, which was made more complicated given the bloody history between the Red Kings and the Kings of Winter. While Rogar Bolton never stepped out of line and paid his dues in taxes and in levies, the latter being accomplished with the four thousand troops sent to Moat Cailin, Brandon and Torrhen had also heard some disturbing reports from the Dreadfort, with Lord Bolton being said to illegally engage in flaying his prisoners and forcing himself on lowborn women. Thankfully, no bastards were born from his latter activities as far as they both knew and both of them hoped that his son and heir, Gage Bolton, would take over the Dreadfort soon, as he had heard nothing but good things of Lord Gage from Lord Manderly, with whom he fostered at White Harbour.

Moving back to Torrhen and Jocelyn greeting Dorren Manderly, Brandon observed the Lord of White Harbour engaged in deep conversation with the King in the North. “Thank you for coming, Dorren,” Torrhen greeted him.
“Not at all, Your Grace,” Dorren Manderly grinned as he straightened his silk cloak lined with heavy furs. Brandon fought the urge to laugh at the ostentatious display by Lord Dorren, as they acted like souther lords in showing off their wealth. However, the Manderlys were reliable and the heir to White Harbour, Warrick, had done House Stark a great service by treating with the Targaryens at Dragonstone. It was from that meeting where Torrhen and the northern lords were able to gain a basic understanding of the last dragonlords of Valyria.

“I trust the gifts to our guests are in good order?” Torrhen asked.

“They are, King Torrhen,” Dorren affirmed. “This is not the south, but I was able to procure luxuries that are hard to come by for even the Gardeners.”

“And I hope your knowledge of High Valyrian has been brushed up, my lord, in order to make our guests be more at ease with each other,” Jocelyn joined in.

Dorren nervously chuckled. “I only know a few words, my queen, but I shall my best.”

“We know you will,” Torrhen finished before moving on. But like with Rogar Bolton, Brandon saw his brother and good-sister becoming awkward with their next guest.

Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch Maron Hoare was dressed in raven black leathers and cloaks, as customary of his fellow black brothers. Brandon had heard of his exploits at the Wall, rising through the ranks to become Lord Steward before being elected its commander. And yet despite being able to achieve his wishes of being away from his own family and people, the years had not been kind to the brother of Black Harren. His black hair and beard had turned to white and wrinkles had formed all over his face even he had seen forty name-days. He also had a distinctive hunch, which indicated that he viewed himself lowly.
Torrhen shook Maron Hoare’s hand, and Brandon could see that Black Harren’s brother didn’t hold a very good strong grip, reminding him of why the ironborn hadn’t served with the Watch’s rangers and the reason why he left his home in the first place.

“I trust that the Wall is in capable hands while you’re here, Lord Hoare,” Torrhen addressed him.

“Yes, King Torrhen,” Maron Hoare replied. “My First Ranger and Lord Steward are more than able to handle the affairs of the Wall in my absence.”

“I’ll be frank with you, Lord Hoare,” Torrhen went straight to the issue. “I was against allowing you to come here because of who your brother was and what your people are, but my wife and my brother persuaded me otherwise. And then, I realized that it would not send a good message if my house allowed personal considerations to affect the North’s relationship with the Watch. But I must ask you something, my lord.”

“Anything, King Torrhen.”

“We’re about to meet the very people who killed your former king and wiped out most of your house. Not just responsible, but personally dealt the killing blow against your brother and many of your nephews at Harrenhal, and they may not be receptive to treating with an ironborn in this hall. With that being said, will your family ties jeopardize this summit? If so, you are free to return to Castle Black and I shall act on your behalf in regards to the affairs on the Wall.”

Brandon and Jocelyn eyed the ironborn black brother nervously, as did the rest of the northern lords and ladies. As Lord Commander, Maron Hoare had ten thousand swords at his fingertips and could march them all southwards in support of his nephew Darvin.
Eyeing Torrhen straight, Maron Hoare exhaled before standing resolutely. “We're all human, King Torrhen. It is easy for us all to do our duty when there's no cost to it. Honor comes easy then. Yet sooner or later in our lives, there comes a day when honor does not come easy, a day when we must choose. The gods were cruel when they saw fit to test my vows. They waited till my vitality was spent. What could I do when the ravens brought news from the south? My brother ruining my house, dragons killing most of my family, and my mad-dog nephew ensuring that the Hoare name will die a slow death? I was helpless and confined to the cold when I heard it all.”

An ironborn taking his vows seriously... you don't see that everyday, Brandon silently remarked.

“But that’s in the past, and I shall live with my decision for the rest of my days. I’m a watcher on the Wall and my first loyalty is to my fellow brothers in black. You have my word that my previous family ties shall not interfere with my duties to the Wall, which I have come to conduct on this day,” Maron Hoare promised.

Unfortunately for him, most of the northern houses scoffed at the ironborn’s promises. As for Brandon, he was confident that the Watch would remain neutral, but it didn’t hurt to be extra cautious.

“I hope we can take your word on that, my lord,” Jocelyn cautioned him before Torrhen moved on to continue welcoming the other lords and ladies.

After saying his greetings to Lords Dustin, Cerwyn, Poole, and Hornwood, Brandon beamed when Torrhen lastly came to the Mormont sisters, Bethany and Lyanara. While Bethany was older and thus the Lady of Bear Island, Lyanara was just as influential as she was when it came to matters in their house. Lyanara was the tallest of the Mormont sisters and preferred a mace to a sword, while Bethany was the most willful and quick of them. However, none in the North doubted their combat prowess, having made their names by emerging as champions of various melees before the untimely passing of their father and even beating Marlon Umber one time. Also, many in the north vied for their hands, for they represented the essence of the wild beauty of the north, being as elegant and graceful in dance, song, and dresses as they were comfortable with arms and mail.
“Your Grace,” Bethany greeted Torrhen while she and Lyanara curtseyed.

Torrhen snorted while outstretching his arms. “Come now, Beth. That’s no way to greet your cousin.”

Bethany obliged and pulled the King in the North in for a strong hug befitting a bear. “Good to see you, Torry,” she called Torrhen by his childhood nickname. The Mormonts were family, so they were allowed to be so familiar with their king.

Torrhen enthusiastically returned the hug. “Great to see you, Beth. Been a year since I’ve last saw you.”

“How’s Ben?” Bethany asked after Torrhen’s eldest son and heir.

“Very good. He seems to be looking forward to the day he is allowed to enter a melee.”

“I hope it’s soon. Want to see him test his steel against Longclaw,” Bethany smirked.

“Be careful what you wish for, Beth,” Jocelyn lightly warned. “He’s part-bear, so he might be as fierce as you are.”

“Looking forward to seeing how those in the swamp fight, considering Ben is also of the Neck,” Lyanara jested with Jocelyn.
Such times with the Mormonts were what made Brandon feel so grateful to those from Bear Island. He didn’t qualify as a proper lord given his bastard status. Fortunately, he wasn’t irrationally scolded for that and was raised as a Stark by his father, King Harald, and his wife and queen, Gilliane Mormont Stark. In fact, Queen Gilliane was more of a mother than Brandon’s birthmother ever was, pushing him to be the best warrior he could be and having him be fostered at Last Hearth to get some experience fighting with wildlings. She even gifted him with a top-quality sword as a present for thirteenth name-day. It was because of her that Brandon became confident in himself despite the rather sordid circumstances of his birth.

“My lords and ladies of the North,” King Torrhen addressed to all in the great hall. “Thank you all for arriving here to Widow’s Watch. First off, I’d like to thank Lord Flint for agreeing to host his noble body in his very home.” The northern lords and ladies cheered their approval for Lord Flint, who humbled accepted the praise. “This day is a very exceptional occasion for it will the first time that the First Men will treat with the remnants of old Valyria. Now, I understand that some of you have voiced your grievances in meeting the last dragonlords in the world given what has happened at Harrenhal and to Argilac Durrandon.”

The northern lords murmured, all understandably nervous with how the summit with the dragons would progress. As for Brandon, he already knew the outcome of the summit but he had to let the current events run their course.

“However,” Torrhen continued. “I’m sure that the happenings in the south have concerned us all, with the Faith managing to rally the Lannisters, the Gardeners, and the Arryns in order to eradicate the Valyrians. While the Valyrians are not one of us and my predecessors would not concern themselves with southern affairs, my brother, Brandon Snow,” Torrhen pointed to Brandon. “Has warned of the threat posed by the Faith’s holy war. Now, all of you are aware of my brother Brandon and what he is capable of, all I can ask is that you trust his words on the results of our meeting with the dragons.”

“While no one would dare question your brother in your presence, my king,” Rogar Bolton spoke up. “I am curious as to what he thinks will be the results of our treating with the Valyrians.”

“All will be explained in due time, my lord,” Jocelyn spoke for Torrhen. “For now, let us prepare
for our esteemed guests and to speak with open minds.”

Rogar Bolton respectfully bowed to Queen Jocelyn. “Of course, Your Grace.”

The heads and representatives of the northern houses took their seats, with the Mormonts seated closed to the king’s table on their left. Brandon set to the left of Torrhen, a seat that was usually reserved for Bennard Stark, heir to Winterfell and the Crown of Winter. However, Torrhen left Bennard in charge of Winterfell until they returned from Widow’s Watch. Also, having Brandon sit right next to the King in the North emphasized to the northern houses and hopefully to their guests of the esteem he had to the Starks.

Just as ale and wine was served, everyone in the great hall heard dragon roars pierce through their small conversations. Naturally, all stopped drinking and looked around the hall in fear, the tales of the dragons’ deeds against Black Harren greatly affecting their impressions of the dragons. But having already conversed with Rhaenys Targaryen, Brandon wasn’t worried and merely set down his cup.

“Seems like our guests have finally arrived,” Brandon remarked.

“So it would seem,” Torrhen replied. “My lords and ladies, please calm down! No harm will come to us.”

“How do you know that, my king?” Rogar Bolton asked.

“If the dragons wanted to harm us, we would be roasting alive by now,” Brandon pointed out. “Torry, I’ll go outside and see our guests in. It will help if at least one of them saw a familiar face.”
“Go ahead, Bran,” Torrhen pointed to the door. “But be careful.”

“Hey, it’s me. Come on, boy,” Brandon spoke with confidence before walking out of the great hall with Autumn. If he had to guess, the courtyard was too big for all of the four dragons, so the only logical place for them to land was outside the walls of Widow’s Watch.

Walking through the raised portcullis, Brandon scanned the skies while Autumn sat down on his hind legs. Hearing wing flaps, he turned around and saw four large shapes fly past the towers of Widow’s Watch and past him before turning around. He was able to see their riders, all of their violet eyes staring back at his grey eyes and their silver hair waving against the air, as the dragons opened their wings and landed hard on the ground.

The black dragon got Brandon’s attention first, as it was the largest of the four. That must be Balerion, he thought. He then looked over the other dragons and recognized each one by their colors. the dragon with orange scales mixed with gray was Vhagar, the blue-green one was called Cloudwynd, and he knew the last one was called Meraxes. How he knew was because he had met Meraxes before, but in a dream. Nice to finally meet the actual Meraxes.

Brandon turned to his right and saw Autumn get on all four of his legs and move towards the dragons as they also stomped their way towards him. Just before they closed the distance, all of the dragons roared, their bellows combining into one as they directed them to the him and Autumn. However, he remained calm and stood his ground as the dragons stopped thundering. As for Autumn, he also stood still but kept growling as the dragons neared their heads towards the direwolf.

The dragons puffed their hot breaths towards the direwolf, but Autumn just stared back at them and was in a position where he could pounce. Most would laugh at a wolf trying to take on a dragon, but a direwolf was connected to an essence that ran deeper than that before the First Men and would not be intimidated by other creatures.
Brandon saw the dragons slightly become calm, sensing that Autumn was not going to be frightened by their growls and the possibility of their breaths turning into flames. He looked up and saw the riders watching the whole display, most of them confused at what was happening. All except the rider on the silvery dragon, who had an older woman holding on to her from behind. *We meet at last, Rhaenys Targaryen,* Brandon recognized.

Balerion and Meraxes lowered themselves to the ground, allowing their riders, which included an older man, to move onto the ground while the other two riders merely slid off theirs. Once they saw that their riders were safely on the ground, the four dragons lifted themselves up and launched into the air, roaring as they flew in circles.

Brandon took in all of the riders as they approached him and Autumn. “My lords and ladies, on behalf of House Stark and of the northern houses, I welcome you to Widow’s Watch.”

“And who might you be, my lord?” one of the younger male dragonriders asked.

“You’re Lord Snow, aren’t you?” Rhaenys looked at Brandon up and down.

Brandon smiled. “Good to finally meet you in person, Lady Rhaenys.”

“Likewise,” Rhaenys held out her hand, which Brandon kissed courteously. She turned to the direwolf. “And this is Autumn?”

“Yes, it is,” confirmed Brandon. “And you can pet her if you want. She doesn’t bite.”
Rhaenys wasted no time to reach for Autumn’s head. While his direwolf was hesitant to have strangers touch him, he sensed Brandon’s ease with their guests and relaxed. After she ran his head through his fur, Autumn extended his tongue and took in her soft touch.

“He likes you, Lady Rhaenys,” Brandon remarked. Rhaenys ignored him as she continued to pet the direwolf.

“Looks more like an overgrown lump of fur, if you ask me,” the other younger male dragonriders said in High Valyrian to who he assumed was Visenya Targaryen Belaerys. Although Brandon knew the language, he kept that to himself until the most opportune time.

“Very nice to meet you, Lord Snow,” one of the younger male dragonriders extended his hand. “I am Aegon Targaryen, son of Aerion and Valaena Targaryen, heir to Dragonstone, and husband to Rhaenys.”

Brandon shook his hand. “Likewise, Lord Aegon. I’ve heard much about you and your exploits, as have the rest of the north.”

“Thank you, my lord. I’m flattered,” Aegon replied with humility. *He isn’t pretentious, which is one of the things Westeros needs now.*

“And you must be Lady Visenya,” Brandon turned to the warrior dragon. “Your reputation precedes you, my lady.”

“And yours also, Lord Brandon,” Visenya answered as Brandon kissed her hand in greeting. “I’ve heard much about from my sister and my parents.”
“I am sure,” Brandon smirked. “Ah, Jaenyx Belaerys. From what I hear, I can’t choose whether to like you or to abhor you. No one questions your prowess in the field, but I heard talk that you’re quite callous to anyone who you think wronged you.”

Visenya blinked, taking an affront to Brandon already trying to rile up her husband. Rhaenys and Aegon looked at the two nervously, anxious to how their good-brother would react.

Fortunately, Jaenyx remained calm. “People choose what they want to believe, Lord Brandon,” he answered with a distinct Valyrian lilt. “Their minds… cannot comprehend complex truths and if you try to please everyone, you please no one at all.”

Brandon’s eyelids flicked, taking in Jaenyx’s words, before chuckling and therefore putting the rest at ease. “No truer words have I heard, Lord Jaenyx. You must have a lot of experience with people, don’t you?”

Jaenyx let out a small grin. “Both on the inside and the outside, my lord,” he cryptically replied. Brandon smiled back, because he knew exactly what he was talking about. Better not show that yet.

“My lords and ladies, if you would. The northern houses and the King in the North are expecting you in the great hall,” Brandon gestured them to follow him.

“You mean your brother?” Rhaenys pointed out.

“Brother he may be, he is still my king. Propriety must be followed,” Brandon said sheepishly.
“You have no idea how refreshing it is for a naturally-born son to not be so uncertain of himself,” Rhaenys said.

Brandon appreciated her politeness. “Right, you have a brother like that also, Orys Baratheon if I recall his name.” The mention of his name made her and the rest shift uncomfortably. “Oh, I apologize. I know of his current circumstances and I can only imagine what you all must be feeling.”

“Thank you, Lord Brandon,” Aerion said.

“You’re welcome. Right, to the hall.”

Brandon had a servant provide the Targaryens and Jaenyx Belaerys with bread and salt, which they took but he could see how they rolled their eyes at the custom. The Targaryens still respect the tradition, but I’m more worried about Lord Belaerys. He better not step on too many toes with his bigotry.

The doors of the great hall opened, to reveal the large body of northern houses gathered under the roof of Widow’s Watch. With Autumn at his side, Brandon led the dragonlords through the hall, which was adorned with the banners of houses such as the Mormonts, Karstarks, Glovers, Manderlys, Umbers, Reeds, Hornwoods, Pooles, and Boltons. Every northern lord and lady eyed the Valyrian party with caution, unsure what to think of the last people in the world who could control dragons.

Brandon stopped just in front of the table where Torrhen and Jocelyn sat. “Your Grace,” he projected while respectfully addressing his brother in front of their guests. “May I present House Targaryen of Dragonstone and their ally, House Belaerys of the Basilisk Isles?” He stepped aside to allow the dragonlords to say their own introductions.

“King Torrhen,” Valaena curtseyed in deference to Brandon’s brother. “I am Valaena of House Targaryen, second daughter of Lucaerys Velaryon, Master of Driftmark and Lord of the Tides, and Lady of Dragonstone.”

Aegon gave a slight bow with his head. “I am Aegon of House Targaryen, Your Grace. Heir to Dragonstone and rider of the dragon Balerion.”

Like their mother, Rhaenys and Visenya also curtseyed. “I am Rhaenys of House Targaryen, King Torrhen. Wife of Aegon Targaryen and rider of the dragon Meraxes.”


Brandon anxiously waited for how Jaenyx Belaerys would respond. While he trusted that Jaenyx was not dumb enough to disrespectfully address a king, his previous history of prejudice would not help matters. *Please don’t fuck this up, Lord Jaenyx.*

Thankfully, Jaenyx dipped his head like Aegon. “King Torrhen, I am Jaenyx of House Belaerys, Lord of the Vulture’s Roost in the Red Mountains and rider of the dragon Cloudwynd.”

Brandon exhaled in relief.
“Never have I met a more unclean bunch in my life,” Jaenyx snorted to Visenya, who laughed.

Unfortunately for Jaenyx, Brandon understood and laughed.

“What’s so funny, Bran?” Torrhen asked with curiosity.

“Well, it appears that Lord Jaenyx does not have a very good opinion on our cleanliness, Your Grace.” That prompted scoffs among the northern houses, all of who did not follow the southern standards that Jaenyx had grown accustomed to.

Jaenyx was surprised. “You speak High Valyrian, Lord Snow?”

“I do,” Brandon nodded. “It is wise to study the ways of one’s adversaries, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Is that you think we are, my lord?”

Brandon smirked. “Of course not. Then again, it’s always useful to know when someone upsets you in another tongue, something you know very well, my lord.”

“Huh,” Jaenyx managed, but was more amused with Brandon than he was angry with him. Then, he gave Brandon a respectful nod. I look forward to our next conversation, Lord Jaenyx of House
“You and I wish the same, Your Grace,” Aerion spoke.

“Indeed. Lady Rhaenys,” Torrhen turned his attention to the youngest Targaryen. “Am I correct in understanding that you have met my brother before, Brandon Snow?”

Rhaenys swallowed down her throat, as if thinking how to say the next words. “You are, Your Grace.” This made many of the northern lords and ladies curious as to how a dragonlord met their king’s bastard brother.

“Would you be so kind as to explain how you know him?” Torrhen asked.

Rhaenys looked to Brandon for answers. *She doesn’t want to be seen as crazy, which I understand. But her words are necessary.* He nodded and Rhaenys prepared herself. Her parents and her siblings also eyed anxiously.

“I met him twice, Your Grace, through a spiritual connection.” That raised some eyebrows among the northmen gathered.
“Can you please elaborate, my lady?” Torrhen pressed. However, Brandon knew that this was more for the northern houses, as he already knew of the communication they both shared.

Rhaenys spent a good part of the hour explaining to the northern body the connection shared between both her and Brandon. While a few like Bethany and Lyanara Mormont and Ethan Reed had seen Brandon’s greensight firsthand and some like Dorren Manderly trusted what she had to say, others like Marlon Umber and Larence Karstark were quick to skepticism. However, they had the decency to let her finish her account, especially since they saw their king listen with intent.

After Rhaenys finished, Rogar Bolton was unsurprisingly the first to question her story. “Your Grace, no disrespect intended to our esteemed guests, but I find it hard to believe that a dragonspawn with no connection to us First Men would be able to communicate with one of ours.”

Brandon saw Jaenyx and the Targaryens take offense before Marlon Umber stepped in. “It cannot be true!” bellowed the Lord of Last Hearth. “Magic has not been seen in the north for many centuries. And now we have to believe the mad tales of a dragonspawn claiming to be able to talk through dreams?”

“Lord Umber speaks for all of us,” Larence Karstark expressed. “These people are foreigners! They had no connection with the North or any part of Westeros until a century ago, and they just lied about on their tiny island. The question we should be asking is, why is this happening now and why should we believe it?”

“You’re wrong on that count, Lord Larence,” Bethany Mormont responded. “I have seen personally the abilities of Brandon Snow, the brother of my king and cousin. Any doubts I had of his abilities were cast aside when I saw him bond with his direwolf, who only those carrying the blood of the Warg King could do. Is it really hard to believe that he can communicate through dreams?”

“Lady Bethany speaks the truth, my lord,” Ethan Reed made his presence known. “I have seen many things in the swamps of the Neck, things that made me question what I thought was real.
And Brandon Snow had told me things that only those gifted with foresight could say. So, I trust what Lady Rhaenys had spoke of just now.”

“Respectfully, Lord Ethan,” Joseth Glover said. “The Mormonts and the Reeds are related to House Stark, either by marriage or by blood. It’s only natural that family would defend the deeds among its members, no matter how outrageous they seem.”

“I must disagree with you there, Lord Glover,” Warrick Manderly stepped in. “I am the only one here besides Lord Snow to have seen the lords and ladies of Dragonstone. If what Lady Rhaenys said were untrue, they wouldn’t have welcomed me or gave me hospitality when my party and myself arrived. They also wouldn’t have recognized Lord Snow’s name if they exchanged no words prior to my arrival.”

That temporarily quieted the doubters. House Manderly practiced the Faith and had every reason to disparage the very people the Starry Sept condemned as infidels.

“I must add, my lords,” Torrhen spoke. “If any of you doubted the reasoning I provided when I had you all send your banners to Moat Cailin, you wouldn’t have answered my call.”

“Yes, Your Grace. We all remember you saying that Lord Snow foresaw the Faith declaring a holy war on the Valyrians and that such an act was a threat against us as believers of the Old Gods,” Larence Karstark agreed. “While we will fiercely protect the old ways against all those that seek their end, what is the role of the Valyrians? Why do we treat with the dragons, who are as likely to burn us like they did the ironborn?”

Brandon saw the Targaryens and Jaenyx listen silently to the exchanges between the northern lords. He knew that they were all merely absorbing the atmosphere in the great hall amongst the northern houses and were waiting to see where it all went. That was when he decided to step in again.
“Lord Karstark,” Brandon spoke. “I sent a letter to Dragonstone, which was delivered personally by Lord Warrick. I spoke a pact similar to the one made between the First Men and the Children of the Forest, which was necessary to safeguard our people against the Long Night. I spoke of a pact of ice and fire, where we must fight to protect everything we hold dear against the unnatural forces that seek to destroy them. With the Faith declaring a holy war against the Valyrians, how long do you think it will be before the followers of the new gods decided to turn on those following the old gods?”

Murmurs broke out in the great hall, all of the northern houses, except the Mormonts, the Reeds, and some among the Manderlys remaining quiet but trusting of Brandon’s words.

“No one can deny your loyalty to your house and to the North, Lord Snow,” Joseth Glover called out. “However, none of us were made privy to the details of this ‘pact of ice and fire’ as you call it. I believe I speak for all of us in that we might be more amenable if you care to elaborate what this pact entails.”

Several “ayes” were heard in the great hall. Brandon looked to Torrhen, who was unsure of what to say next. However, he was the only one besides Warrick Manderly and Jocelyn who knew of the particulars of the pact. Brandon gave him a nod while mouthing to him, “Best to pull the arrow out before it festers.”

Torrhen stood up from his chair, with Jocelyn rising with him. “To start, I ask Houses Targaryen and Belaerys on behalf of the North to assent to our annexation of the Twins and the Three Sisters in exchange for our help in the struggle against the Faith.”

Brandon saw Rhaenys, Aegon, and Lady Valaena talk to their father, Visenya, and Jaenyx on the terms offered by Warrick Manderly. After a short moment, their father nodded in agreement. “That can be arranged, Your Grace. I have no objection to giving the Twins to the North, as House Frey has broken faith with our house and therefore will need a new overlord. As for the Three Sisters, they belong to an enemy of ours, but we shall not object to you taking them.”
“I’m glad that you agree to our terms, Lord Aerion,” Torrhen grinned. The northmen also nodded, seeing the terms as acceptable.

“But Your Grace,” Marlon Umber voiced out. "While we agree to the terms given, I fear that there is more to this pact, from how you and Lord Snow described it." The northern lords and ladies were also eager to know what else the pact included.

As for Brandon, he looked at his brother and gave him a look that said, “What are you doing? Why are you delaying?” He might have understood if Torrhen wanted to ease the northern houses into the more important part of the summit, but time was of the essence.

Seeing Brandon’s growing impatience, Torrhen exhaled, preparing himself for the incoming shitstorm that would strike with his next words. He might not have liked what Brandon revealed to him, but he trusted Brandon enough to take the next major step in their summit. “My lords and ladies, for the pact of ice and fire to be fully consummated, I must forthwith declare on this day and for all days and years to come to surrender my crown and swear fealty to the dragons on behalf of House Stark and all of the north.”

Silence swept through the great hall, the northern lords stupefied by what their king just said. Brandon looked at the dragonlords and saw nothing but complete surprise from them, all except Aegon, Rhaenys, and Valaena, which didn’t say much. He had revealed to those three how he saw their family rule all of the seven kingdoms of Westeros and more, so at least they were not as shocked as Lord Aerion, Lady Visenya, and Lord Jaenyx.

After what seemed like minutes, the entire hall was in an uproar, the northern lords yelling at the top of their voices, as arguments began to break out over what their king had said. Many called him a coward, a fool, and delusional, some called him a disgrace to the north and House Stark, and others shouted that they should kick out the dragonlords at once. At least, that’s what Brandon thought they were yelling.
“TRAITOR!” one of the lords bellowed. “You spit on your ancestors!”

“Hold your tongue, my lord, or you shall lose it,” Jocelyn warned.

“A king kneeling before a lord?!!!” Larence Karstark shouted with disdain. “Such a thing has never happened before and I will be damned before I see the King of Winter bow before dragonspawn.”

“You forget who you’re speaking to, my lord!” Bethany Mormont defended her cousin. Despite also somewhat disbelieving what Torrhen had just said, she would stand by her family no matter what.

“My lords, my lords!” Ethan Reed stepped in the middle of the hall, the crannogman lord mangning to get everyone’s attention and thus getting them all quiet. “I believe it is time that we heard exactly what Lord Snow has to say about this pact of ice and fire. Wouldn’t it make sense to throw your insults after you heard all of the facts?”

None of the lords could deny that logic, but they begrudgingly turned their attention to Brandon. Taking a breath and exhaling, Brandon knew it was time to reveal at least the important details.

“My lords, the winds of change are in the air. The north will change. Westeros will change. The lives of our grandchildren and their grandchildren shall be determined within the moons ahead. However, how they shall change will be determined by our actions today. In the south is a grave threat against us as First Men and as worshippers of the Old Gods. Should the Faith succeed in wiping out the Valyrians, they shall turn their attention and finish what their ancestors failed to do. King Theon Stark might have beaten them off thousands of years ago, but there is no guarantee that we could hold them off again.

“The engine through which Westeros will change will not be of the North. The strength of the First
Men in the south is too damaged and we cannot hope to safeguard our people and our traditions by our own strength alone. The only way that we can protect ourselves is standing right here in front of us,” Brandon pointed to the dragonlords. “Despite the Doom, the fires of Valyria still burn strong and their dragons have already accomplished feats that has never been seen before in Westeros. Their cause against the Faith is our cause, for it was their followers that overturned the natural order of Westeros and disrupted the balance put in place by the First Men.”

“And so,” Torrhen joined with Brandon. “Through the Valyrians, we shall restore the natural order that stabilized Westeros after the Long Night and end the unnatural forces that have threatened to uproot it completely.”

“How do you intend to accomplish that, my king?” Joseth Glover asked while still addressing him with his royal title.

“Brandon told me that the Valyrians will rule all of Westeros and beyond,” Torrhen walked nearer to the dragonlords. “The north and the First Men shall become wealthier and more powerful than ever before, with our mark on the world being more permanent than that of King Theon Stark. The old ways and the worship of the old gods shall return to all of Westeros, while those of Valyria shall rise atop the ruins of the Faith. The ways of the First Men and of Valyria will coexist to remake the world where there shall be no place for unnatural forces. All of this will be accomplished, but only after I swear my house’s and the North’s fealty.”

Brandon could see Aegon and Rhaenys gulp. Although they had Brandon’s foreknowledge, to see it actually unfold in front of them was overwhelming. Then again, the great forces of change in history are never easy to handle.

“If that is the case,” Rogar Bolton said. “It will be awkward for a king to fealty to a lord.”

Brandon glared at the Lord of the Dreadfort. He could see how pleased he was at the whole situation, with the scheming already starting in his mind. As for the dragonlords, they gave Lord Bolton hard stares, obviously not appreciating the Boltons adding to the complications. They better
“I, for one, don’t care for power and riches!” Marlon Umber shouted. “The Umbers followed a king named Stark for a thousand years and I will be damned before I see a king of mine kneel before upstarts.” To Brandon’s consternation, a few shouted their agreement with the Lord of Last Hearth, so he had to intervene.

“The Targaryens and Belaerys’ are not upstarts, Lord Umber,” Brandon corrected. “The Targaryens have resided in the Blackwater Bay for over a hundred years, and the Belaerys’ were one of the most powerful dragonlord families in Valyria, so both houses have an understanding of what power is. And you’re right, Lord Bolton,” he stared at the Lord of the Dreadfort. “It will be awkward for a king to kneel before a lord. That’s why I ask either Aerion or Aegon Targaryen to assume the title of king, King of Westeros.”

Silence again swept through the great hall. However, there were no shouts of protest against Torrhen bending the knee to the dragonlords, as many in the hall came around to Brandon’s words and were at least open to the idea of forming an alliance with the Valyrians. As for Aerion and Aegon, they were also shocked, but not so much for Aegon, as Brandon already told him, Rhaenys, and their mother.

“And how do you intend for the pact to be fully consummated?” Larence Karstark asked Brandon.

“Simple,” Brandon answered. “The dragonlords will promise a future betrothal between a future daughter of House Stark and a future heir of House Targaryen?”

Now that, Rhaenys, Aegon, and their mother did not expect. Rhaenys looked to Aegon, confusion in their faces.
“And with the marriage between the future heir of House Targaryen and the daughter of House Stark, the blood of the First Men shall rule Westeros,” Brandon explained.

The northern lords murmured amongst themselves, but were now more amenable to the idea of a ruler of Westeros carrying First Men blood.

“Why do you ask me, Lord Snow?” Aegon asked. “My good-brother Jaenyx Belaerys is older and has led men longer than I have. You should ask him if he wants to be king. Also, I’m not sure if it was wise to bring up a betrothal when I don’t have children yet.”

“Jaenyx Belaerys shall be a king over his own domains, Lord Aegon,” Brandon replied. “But, he is only a recent arrival to Westeros and therefore has no connection to this land. You and your house, on the other hand, have been here long enough to know what Westeros is. If there is anyone that has already proven to bring profound change to this land, it will be your family. However, the choice is now between either you or your father, Lord Aegon. And your first child will come soon, and our houses will connected in the future.”

Aegon became more shocked, but he was brought out of his stupor by Aerion.


“My lord,” Torrhen addressed him. “I would suggest that you take a moment before making such a momentous decision. Today was undoubtedly trying for you and your family, so I extend to you the North’s hospitality while all of you can discuss the matter at hand.”

“We don’t have time,” Lord Aerion shook his head. “We need the strength of the North to fight alongside us today, but I will not waste another day by discussing the matter. I am too old and
much of my strength has diminished over the years, and I cannot produce heirs anymore. So, I will be a shit king if I decide to pursue it.” The northern lords chuckled, amused that a southern lord would be so unfiltered with his words. “Therefore, my son Aegon should be king.”

“Father—” Aegon tried to say but he was cut off.

“But we will accept your hospitality and I will spend no more than a day trying to convince my son why this is the best course of action for us,” Aerion said.

Torrhen nodded. “Of course, my lord. You and your family shall know the fabled hospitality of the north.” He then addressed to the rest of the great hall. “My lords and ladies, that’ll be all for today. We shall reconvene on the morrow to discuss our next action.” With that, the northern houses were dismissed for the day.

Brandon led the dragonlords to the guest quarters of Widow’s Watch, with Autumn at his side. He had no doubt that the Valyrians had many questions, but all of them would have to wait until later.

Brandon felt Rhaenys walk up beside him. “Is this what you meant by us being the rulers of the Seven Kingdoms?”

“Yes,” Brandon simply answered. “And this is the first step, my lady. As your good-brother Lord Jaenyx said, all of you must think bigger and the war with the Faith merely shows you how important it is to do just that.”

“I’m not sure that—”
“My lady,” Brandon stopped to look at Rhaenys. “I can’t give you all the answers, because to do so would only add to your and your family’s confusion. Take the day to let this all sink in and we can discuss it fully on the morrow. But like your father said, you need to make a decision quickly, as the war in the south still rages on.”

Rhaenys exhaled through her nose. “I do thank you for letting us know beforehand, although I wish you could’ve gave us more details.”

“It had to be done in this way,” Brandon answered. “And… seeing your faces when my brother told you of the pact did light up my day.” He imitated their shocked faces.

Rhaenys scoffed. “See you on the morrow, Lord Snow. Hopefully, you don’t do any brooding that’ll give you wrinkles,” she parted with her imitating a brooding face and giving a last pat to Autumn, who appreciated her touch. Brandon chuckled in amusement as he eyed each of the dragonlords. Aegon and Valaena nodded to him and Aerion and Visenya were unsure what to think of him.

However, Brandon needed to speak with Jaenyx a final time before they separated for the day. “If you can spare a moment, Lord Belaerys?”

Jaenyx gave Visenya a kiss before turning to Brandon. “What do you want, Lord Snow?”

“I told the great hall that you will be a king over your own lands, and I have spoken the truth. But you will not rule Westeros in your lifetime.”

“I don’t really care, Lord Snow,” Jaenyx answered. “But you say that I will be a king. Why will that
“All of us have a purpose as dictated by the gods, whichever ones we choose to follow. For you, all I can say is that you will be important in restoring the ways of Valyria back to relevance, and your reign shall see Valyria emerged in a new and better form. You and your future queen, Visenya.”

“Hmmm…” Jaenyx managed to say. “How do you know High Valyrian?”

“Every noble in Westeros receives an education in that tongue. I spent some time in White Harbour, where a Volantene tutored me. Brutal man he was, I was able to speak it during my time with him.”

“Interesting life you must’ve had, Lord Snow.”

“Indeed. Well,” Brandon turned to leave Jaenyx to catch up with his wife and her family. “I look forward to our next conversation, Lord Jaenyx.”

“Likewise, Lord Brandon,” Jaenyx bobbed his head before proceeding into the guest chambers.

Brandon exited the castle and after being informed helped the crew from the twenty vessels of House Velaryon dock near the castle and find suitable quarters for them. It has begun.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:
There was much to cover in this chapter and I hope did all of the northerners justice. I like the idea of Brandon Snow as a troll, since he is fully confident in his skin because he never was mistreated for being a bastard. Also, Torrhen's wife being a Reed was kind of fitting, given the Reeds' close relationship with the Starks in canon, and a Mormont being Torrhen's mother also seemed appropriate, as that would mean that Brandon had a encouraging mother figure who didn't care about him being a bastard, unlike a certain trout.

I'm not very good at writing humor (had to watch Monty Python and IN THE LOOP (2010) to get ideas), so I hope I did that well. Also, I hope I did the moment between the direwolf and the dragons well.

As for Torrhen declaring to swear fealty to the dragonlords, remember that in canon, he bent the knee after seeing the fight as unwinnable. However, given the changed circumstances, he's going to do that because he trusts Brandon's words. By declaring his fealty, he will not only preserve the ways of the First Men and the Old Gods in the north, he will play a crucial part in restoring the First Men and the Old Gods to the rest of Westeros while destroying the Faith, with the Valyrian gods and customs taking their place. Also, the north will become enriched and more powerful than ever before, since they would have a played a major part in the conquest of Westeros. More importantly, the pact of ice and fire will ensure that a king with the blood of the First Men shall rule Westeros, which should be enough to appease the northern lords.

I hope I handled all of the big character introductions and moments well, as this is probably the major turning point for the story. As I said, the northerners will be very important from this point on.

Next, we will see the dragonlords discuss the pact among themselves, and then the Battle of Gulltown.

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