

Aegon's footsteps echoed throughout the room. He hated how silent the room was because he could feel the stares of the two men occupying the room. These two men were Jaehaerys Targaryen and Baelon Targaryen. He disliked them both because they were the schemers in the family and the primary source of all drama in the House of the Dragon.

However, Jaehaerys Targaryen was his grandfather and king, while Baelon Targaryen was his father and the heir to the throne. If his grandfather and father had immediately summoned him to their presence upon his arrival, then there was bound to be some official business involved. So, he didn't dally any longer.

"Your grace." Aegon fell to a knee before his grandfather.

"Stand Aegon."

"Thank you, your grace."

"How was your stay with Lord Baratheon?" Baelon asked, pinning Aegon with a scrutinising stare.

"It was eventful. Lord Baratheon was courteous, as were his family and bannermen." Aegon said curtly.

For a moment, an awkward silence lingered in the room. If the two older men thought they were trying to make him uncomfortable, they were solely wrong.

"Do you know why I allowed you to squire under Lord Baratheon?" Jaehaerys asked while neatly folding his fingers into the safety of the silver-white robes.

"To smooth over any bad feelings your former ward might hold against you for declaring my father your heir instead of Princess Rhaenys." Aegon said airily.

He could come up with more reasons, but that was the primary point of disagreement between his grandfather and Lord Baratheon.

"And?" Baelon prodded.

"Have you reversed your decision and named Princess Rhaenys your successor?" Aegon directed the question at the king, whose eyes twitched at his blatant disrespect.

But the silence that lingered in the room was his answer.

"I didn't think so. So, without addressing Lord Baratheon's core grievance, why do you expect him to change his attitude?"

"Then what've you been doing all these years in Storm's End if you knew the reasons for your presence there?" Baelon asked furiously.

"I've been squiring for Lord Baratheon and making friends with his family and bannermen. For your information father, I do not have the power to control someone's mind and make them think in a certain manner." Aegon snapped back.

"You..." Baelon glared.

"Enough!" Jaehaerys shouted. "There is enough conflict within the family. I do not wish to see more of that with my own eyes."

Aegon watched his father settle down beside the king by taking deep breaths.

“Baelon. Leave us.” Jaehaerys said eventually after looking between Aegon and Baelon.

“Father.” Baelon nodded at the king before walking out of the room.

On the way, he paused just behind Aegon and hesitantly glanced at his son. Closing his eyes, Baelon shook his head before taking his leave.

“You are so much like your mother in expressing your opinions without any care for others.” said Jaehaerys tentatively.

“Alternatively, people call it speaking the truth.” said Aegon.

“Yes, truth,” Jaehaerys muttered before his old eyes gained strength. “I’d hear it if you have more to share, Aegon.”

“As I said earlier, Lord Baratheon is not pleased with your decision to declare my father as heir over his niece. He loved his sister, Lady Jocelyn, most dearly. He holds that same love for Princess Rhaenys. He is her uncle, but most of all, her steadfast friend. No matter what you do, you won’t turn him away from supporting his niece.” Aegon said dutifully.

While he disliked acting as a spy, his grandfather was his king. There were limits to his freedom, and Aegon was aware that his freedoms ended when his grandfather became serious.

“I see. That’s unfortunate.” Jaehaerys muttered. “But you’ve struck a close friendship with Boremund’s son. Isn’t that right, Aegon?”

“Yes, your grace.” Aegon nodded.

“Good. It’ll be to your advantage to make friends with the future lord paramount of the Stormlands.” said Jaehaerys.

“I did not befriend Borros for the sake of his future position.” Aegon said with gritted teeth.

“Then Borros Baratheon is lucky to have a friend like you.” Jaehaerys smoothly said while resting his back against the pillow on his chair. “Now, tell me. Have you been practising your gift?”

“Yes, your grace.” Aegon replied testily.

“Daily?” the old king prodded.

“Yes, your grace.”

“Does anyone at Storm’s End suspect anything? Does your friend know?”

“No.” Aegon said curtly.

“Are you sure?” Jaehaerys looked suspiciously.

“Yes, your grace.”

“Good. Now, show me.” Jaehaerys ordered, taking hold of a dagger resting on the table beside him.

Aegon eyed the fireplace in the far corner of the chamber filled with firewood. Pointing his right hand towards the fireplace, he willed his magic to come forth to his fingertips. He could feel a slight tingle pass from his gut all the way to his fingers, and in the next moment, there was fire in his palm.

With a slight jerk of his palm, the fire in his palm shot out and lit up the fireplace.

“Wonderful! Magnificent!” Jaehaerys said happily. “You’ve learned to control your gift better.”

“Thank you, your grace.”

“I had thought about inviting some pyromancers from abroad to develop your gift, but...”

“You feared word would spread, and I’d be targeted by the fringe elements within the Faith.” Aegon finished.

“Yes. But not just the Faith. House Targaryen have many enemies, Aegon. We’ve kept them at bay with our dragons till now. But dragons cannot be everywhere, and you’ve yet to bond with one...” Jaehaerys trailed off, looking thoughtfully into the distance.

“Your grace?” Aegon called hesitantly when his grandfather was lost in his thoughts for too long.

The faraway look on his grandfather’s face was replaced by a calculative one once he returned to reality.

“Tell me, Aegon. What are your plans now that you’ve been knighted?” Jaehaerys asked, suddenly putting Aegon on the spot.

“I suppose I could partake in tourneys and earn my spurs in the jousts. I also hoped to study medicines and higher mysteries at the Citadel. Septon Barth often spoke of the glass candles of Valyria. The maesters of the Citadel would know how to operate one, and I intend to learn from them.”

“I see. I can understand your interest in magic and the crafts of our ancestors. But why do you need to study medicine, Aegon?” Jaehaerys asked.

“I’ve learned the ways to take lives. Now, I’d like to learn how to save lives.”

“A noble thought.” Jaehaerys nodded. “I shall speak with your father and Septon Barth about your wishes. They’ll know better than myself on this matter.”

“Thank you, your grace.” Aegon bowed.

“You may leave. However, tell your friend that I’ve summoned him. It’d be remiss of me not to speak with my Baratheon nephew.”

“As you wish, your grace.”

Aegon bowed one last time before hightailing out of his grandfather’s solar. It was not every day that a meeting with the King of the Seven Kingdoms ended on amicable terms. So, he was most eager to end the conversation before something unusual happened.

He was also lucky because the moment he opened the doors of the solar to leave, he found Daemon walking down the hall straight towards the king’s room.

Closing the door behind him, he walked straight ahead.

“I see you’ve returned, brother. Did you kill the Dornish cunts, or did you run away while real men fought in your stead?” Daemon mocked with a pretentious smile.

“Daemon. How has the Vale been treating you?” Harry asked candidly, letting the insult wash away, knowing full well that Daemon would enjoy getting under his skin.

“A dreary place, the Vale. I had often wondered why Aegon didn’t make his capital in those mountains. But having seen the place, I can understand why my Bronze bitch’s lands were unappealing to the Conquerer.” said Daemon.

“I see. I’d have thought you’d find Runestone appealing. I’ve heard First Men runes keep Royce men’s armour invulnerable to time and the elements.”

“I could care less what some weak barbarians doodled on their stones in ages past. It didn’t save them when the Andals crossed the Narrow Sea with their steel.” Daemon said with a derisive snort.

“Anyway, you shouldn’t keep grandfather waiting.” Aegon tapped on Daemon’s shoulder in a friendly manner before abruptly walking away.

Dealing with Daemon was like dealing with a child. All he had to do was distract him with something else, and that was something Aegon was an expert at – distraction. But that was not all he did. He turned a corner and stopped moving and instead closed his eyes, focusing on the listening charm he sneakily slapped on his brother’s shoulder.

It was by accident that his grandmother and grandfather discovered his talent for magic. But instead of celebrating his magical powers and making a fuss about it, his grandfather and grandmother swore themselves to secrecy. Not a soul outside the king and queen knew about his powers. They didn’t even know the full scope of his powers because he kept that information close to his heart. They only knew he had an uncanny affinity for fire, which was not a rare trait as there were pyromancers in Essos with similar powers.

But his magic was far more versatile.

However, he wished he had more memories of Harry Potter’s life. The spells he knew were few and less useful for his needs. The only spell he found more helpful was the listening charm, but he needed direct contact to apply the charm on something, and that was a disadvantage. The lack of a wand was also a problem that inhibited his growth as a wizard. Even if he wanted to create new spells, the lack of a strong foci left him in the lurch.

Aegon had some ideas on how to procure a wand, but that involved desecrating the remains of a dragon.

Suddenly, he stopped the flow of thoughts as his ears picked up on faint sounds transmitted by the listening charm.

‘I need a way to tie a listening charm permanently in the king’s room.’ Aegon thought as he listened in on their conversation.

This was the only place in the capital where Aegon could relax and not look over his shoulder all the time. It was his grandmother’s room.

“He sleeps like a baby.”

A feminine giggle followed the claim, but Aegon paid it no heed. He nuzzled into his grandmother’s lap as she sang an old Valyrian song while petting his hair.

Blessed is the Promised Prince

With the fire of fourteen upon his blade

A hero who delivers the world from darkness

The herald of a new dawn!

A red star will bleed the north sky

Darkness will gather under the lion of the night

Amidst salt and smoke, a dragon is born

In Ice and Fire, his song is sung!

His grandmother had such a beautiful voice that made it so easy to sleep when she sang. He nuzzled in and was ready to slip into sleep, but he was jerked awake when someone pinched his nose.

"Grandmother," he whined.

"Let him sleep, Gael." Alysanne chided her last remaining daughter.

"He can go to his precious sleep after he explains this game he brought for me." Gael complained stubbornly.

"Aegon. I think we both know how this is going to end." Alysanne said, looking exasperatedly at her stubborn daughter.

"I cannot catch a break in this castle." Aegon complained as he sat up lazily.

"You brought the board game, Aegon. You have the responsibility to explain the game to Gael." Alysanne admonished, flicking his ear.

Aegon eyed his grandmother reproachfully for always taking Gael's side in all things. Nonetheless, he took the wooden box with black and white squares painted on its surface from Gael's hand.

"This game's name is Chess." said Aegon while opening the box.

All the pieces he had painstakingly carved by his two hands were neatly arranged inside the box. One by one, he had the pieces taken out and explained them to Gael and his grandmother, who found some interest in the concept of the game. While his grandmother had abandoned political pursuits in the court, she was not always like that. In her prime, Queen Alysanne had her own court in parallel with King Jaehaerys. In fact, his grandmother remains the only person capable of making policy changes by directly influencing the king.

But nowadays, she imposed a self-exile from court politics after some disagreements with her husband surfaced.

"Tell me, Aegon. Why did you make the Queen the most powerful piece in this game while keeping the King powerless?" Alysanne asked after he explained the game and its rules.

"A king doesn't actively take part in the battle. He should be the one directing the strategy of his troops. The piece representing the Queen is supposed to be the general of the king's army, like Queen Visenya. Visenya won the Conqueror the Vale and smashed the Braavosi fleet. Queen Rhaenys helped secure the Stormlands for King Aegon. I wanted the power of Conqueror's wives represented in the piece." Aegon explained.

He had seriously considered naming the piece a dragon but then thought better of it. He didn't want to diminish the game from what he remembered in his dreams. It was a way of honouring an old friend he only knew in his dreams.

"Hmm. Don't let your grandfather hear you speak so highly of the late Queen Dowager." Alysanne warned.

"Why don't you mind, grandmother?" Aegon asked curiously.

"Because as a grown woman, I can understand Visenya better. What mother wouldn't want the best for their children? No matter what they had done, a mother could never turn her back on her children. That's something my stonehearted husband refuses to see or care about." said Alysanne, her eyes filled with sorrow.

Aegon didn't know whether his grandmother's sorrow was for the many children she lost or her estranged daughter Saera Targaryen.

'It's probably both.' Aegon thought.

"Mother, let's play." Gael said, hugging the queen closely. "Help me beat Aegon in his own game."

"Of course, my sweet." Alysanne smiled, pressing a kiss against Gael's curly silver hair.

"Now, tell me the rules of the game again."

"I'll have them written down so you can learn faster." Aegon said with a sigh.

The first few games were decisive victories for Aegon, but the longer he played, the more difficult his opponents became. They played games throughout the day until lunch, which they had in the same room. The game then went on to the evening, with Gael showing no less enthusiasm to defeat him despite the string of defeats she suffered.

Then, surprising Aegon and his grandmother, the king visited them in the chamber. When grandfather learned about the game from an excitable Gael, who suffered from the inability to read the room, he decided to join.

"This game of yours is fascinating, Aegon. It rewards logic and punishes moves made on instincts. A game fit for developing a strategic mind." Jaehaerys praised.

But Aegon saw the praise as an indirect jab at his grandmother. There was a cold distance between his grandmother and grandfather. Ever since his aunt Maegelle's passing, it was his grandmother's wish to have his other aunt Saera brought back from her exile. But that was something his grandfather opposed vehemently. It was a request his grandfather would never accept because Saera was the third most hated person in his grandfather's books after Maegor and Visenya.

He could understand why his grandfather passionately hated his exiled aunt. She had disgraced the Targaryen name by turning into a whore in Lys.

The last he had heard of Saera Targaryen was that she was in Volantis and amassed a great fortune and political power running pleasure houses inside the Black Wall. To this day, the matter of Saera remains a contentious issue between his grandparents.

Knowing his grandparents and their penchant for double speak, Aegon carefully navigated the rest of the time spent with his family. The only one least bothered by such inane worries was Gael, who was loved fiercely by the king and queen. Nothing could ever go wrong with Gael, but he was not equal to that stature.

“That’s enough for today, Gael. Why don’t you introduce this game to Viserys and Aemma? I’m sure they’ll appreciate some respite from their duties and caring for Rhaenyra.” Jaehaerys suggested softly.

“Oh, okay, father.” Gael smiled brightly.

She jumped to her feet and kissed the king’s cheeks before doing the same to the queen.

“Come, Aegon. Let’s go and play with Aemma and Viserys.”

“We have something to say with Aegon, my sweet daughter. You go ahead. I’ll have Aegon sent after you in a minute.” said Jaehaerys.

For a moment, Aegon thought Gael would protest, but she smiled brightly at everyone.

“Okay. But don’t keep Aegon for too much time.” said Gael.

“We won’t.” said Jaehaerys. “Ser Ryam, escort my daughter to Viserys and Aemma.”

The door closed behind Gael with a small thud, and Aegon looked between his grandparents. It was his grandfather who spoke first.

“I’ve spoken of your interests in studying at the Citadel with Grand Maester Allar and Septon Barth. Allar has agreed to check with his colleagues in Oldtown while Septon Barth presented me with a unique suggestion.”

“Oh.” Aegon muttered, looking curiously at his grandfather.

“Septon Barth suggested that you take up some duties in Dragonstone while tutors can be arranged for your studies and have them teach you at our ancestral home. I think it is also time for you to claim a dragon.” said Jaehaerys.

Aegon opened his mouth to protest but then thought better of it. Having a dragon companion was not something he could easily protest. He had no intention of becoming a dragonless Targaryen like his uncle Vaegon. Some time spent in Dragonstone was also a good idea. The ancient castle built by the Freehold held many secrets, and he was sure there were ancient scrolls in the secret vaults of the castle that were accessible only to Targaryens. Most of the scrolls that contained knowledge from the Valyrian Freehold were kept behind vaults with keys guarded by his father, Baelon Targaryen. He was present when his father was given the keys to the vaults by King Jaehaerys after his father was declared the Prince of Dragonstone.

The Prince of Dragonstone was supposed to be the guardian of several artefacts and knowledge from the Freehold and also the protector of the Dragonmont.

The dragon keepers of Dragonstone were supposedly the best in their work, and if he wanted to find the right dragon, he needed their services. An extended stay in Dragonstone would help him amass

some knowledge of Valyrian magic if he could access those vaults. If he could learn medicine from a master in Dragonstone at his leisure, it would be even better.

“I think I can agree to spend some time in Dragonstone and complete my studies there. But I’d like to have access to the vaults.” said Aegon.

His grandfather took a long look at him but, in the end, agreed with his request.