The Realm's Alpha Chapter 20 (The Alpha's Roar)

The Godswood of the Red Keep lay cloaked in the hush of dusk. The heart tree loomed at its center, its gnarled branches sprawling like skeletal fingers, the carved face on its pale trunk staring down with sightless, weeping eyes.

Rhaenyra Targaryen stormed into this sacred space, her black doublet streaked with dust from the council chamber, her braid a wild tangle of platinum strands. Her violet eyes blazed with a fury that could've set the weirwood aflame, and her boots crunched the fallen leaves as she dragged Alicent Hightower behind her, her grip iron-tight on the girl's wrist.

Alicent stumbled after her, her green gown snagging on a root, her auburn hair slipping free from its silver net. Her face was a mask of defiance and tears, her cheeks flushed from the council's chaos and the shame of Viserys's announcement. "Rhaenyra, stop!" she cried, yanking against the hold, but Rhaenyra only tightened her grasp, shoving her forward until they stood beneath the heart tree's crimson canopy.

"Stop?" Rhaenyra whirled on her, releasing Alicent's wrist with a jerk that sent her staggering. Her voice cracked like a whip, raw and unrestrained. "You don't get to tell me to stop, not after that!—" She jabbed a finger at the mossy patch where they'd first tangled in passion months ago, her breath heaving. "You treacherous little snake!"

Alicent steadied herself, wiping at her tear-streaked face with a trembling hand. "I didn't plan this!" she shot back, her voice breaking but firm, a steel edge beneath the hurt. "You think I wanted it? You drove me away, Rhaenyra—your selfishness, your endless parade of lovers! Laena, Tanya, every girl who caught your eye—I was never enough for you!" She stepped closer, her green eyes flashing through the tears. "I'm securing my future because you never cared enough to fight for me. You only fight for what you can fuck!"

"Securing your future? Is that what you call spreading your legs for my father? My mother still lives and you think you have the right to be called Queen," She stopped pacing, looming over Alicent, her face inches away, her breath hot with rage and wine. "You're a power-hungry whore, Alicent—don't dress it up in pretty words. You saw a crown dangling and couldn't resist, could you? All those nights in the dark with me, and now you're clawing for his bed instead!"

Alicent's hand flew up, a sharp slap cracking across Rhaenyra's cheek. The sound rang out, startling a bird from the branches above, and Rhaenyra's head snapped to the side, her skin stinging red. For a moment, silence hung heavy, broken only by Alicent's ragged breathing. Then Rhaenyra turned back, her eyes wild, a feral glint sparking in them. She lunged, shoving Alicent against the heart tree's rough bark, pinning her there with a hand on her shoulder and another gripping her hip. Her lips hovered close, her voice a low growl. "You still hit like a girl who wants me."

Alicent struggled, her hands pushing at Rhaenyra's chest, but there was a flicker of something—memory, desire—in her eyes. "Let me go," she hissed, but her voice wavered, and

Rhaenyra's smirk widened, dark and dangerous. She crashed her lips against Alicent's, a bruising, possessive kiss that tasted of salt and fury. Alicent fought for a heartbeat, her nails digging into Rhaenyra's doublet, then melted into it, a soft moan escaping as her resistance crumbled. Rhaenyra's hand slid down, pressing against Alicent's clothed mound through her gown, her fingers working with a rough, practiced rhythm that drew another moan from Alicent's throat.

"Dripping like a whore already," Rhaenyra murmured against her lips, her voice thick with triumph and scorn. She rubbed harder, feeling the heat through the fabric, her own pulse pounding with a twisted mix of lust and spite. "Look at you—still mine, no matter whose bed you crawl into."

Alicent's eyes snapped open, shame flooding her face as she wrenched herself free, shoving Rhaenyra back with a gasp. She stumbled away from the tree, her gown askew, her hands trembling as she wiped at her mouth. "You're disgusting," she whispered, her voice shaking with self-loathing and defiance. "You think this proves anything? You're a beast, Rhaenyra—nothing more."

Rhaenyra straightened, her smirk cold and cutting, her cheek still red from the slap. She stepped closer, her voice dropping to a quiet, venomous hiss. "Think of me when he's fucking you, Alicent. Every time he grunts over you, every time you fake a smile for that pathetic crown, you'll see my face." She leaned in, her breath ghosting over Alicent's ear. "You might hold a crown over your head, but you'll never be happy—not with him, not with anyone. And one day, you'll carry *my* children, not his. I'll make sure of it."

Alicent's breath hitched, her eyes widening with a mix of lust and fury, but Rhaenyra didn't wait for a reply. She turned on her heel, her boots crunching the moss as she strode away, her voice ringing back over her shoulder. "Enjoy your pathetic life, Alicent. You've earned it."

Alicent sank to her knees beside the heart tree, her hands clutching the roots as sobs wracked her frame, the weirwood's red sap staining her fingers like blood. Rhaenyra didn't look back, her figure vanishing into the shadows of the Godswood, her fury a living thing coiled in her chest.

Rhaenyra's mind churned as she left, the taste of Alicent still on her lips, the sting of the slap a bitter fuel. She'd lost her—lost her to Viserys, to Otto, to a crown she'd never wanted to share. But the words she'd spat—*my children*—echoed in her skull, a vow as much as a threat. She was a dragon, not a pawn, and she'd burn them all before she let them forget it.

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The tower room perched high in the Red Keep was a shadowed den of chaos. A single narrow window overlooked the dragonpit below, where faint roars rumbled through the night. A brazier flickered in the corner, casting jagged shadows across the cluttered table where Daemon Targaryen sprawled, one leg hooked over the arm of his chair, a goblet dangling lazily from his

hand. His silver hair gleamed in the firelight, his black doublet unbuttoned to reveal a glimpse of scarred chest, and a smirk played on his lips as he watched Rhaenyra barge in.

She stormed through the door. Her boots thudded against the uneven floor, kicking aside a stray goblet that clattered into the shadows. "That fucking traitor," she snarled, her voice raw and trembling as she paced the cramped space, hands clawing at the air. "Alicent—my father—she's wormed her way into his bed, his crown, and now she thinks she's won! I'll rip her throat out, Daemon, I swear it!"

Daemon took a slow sip of wine, his smirk widening as he tilted his head, watching her like a cat with a cornered mouse. "Well, well," he drawled, his voice a low, amused purr. "The little dragon's finally spitting fire. Took you long enough—thought you'd just sulk up there with your whores and your dragon while Viserys played house." He set the goblet down with a deliberate clink, leaning forward, elbows on his knees. "But let's be clear, niece—whatever brat Alicent squeezes out will be the new heir one day. Your father's got a soft heart, all tears and sentiment. He'll dote on it, crown it, and you'll be left clutching Syrax's tail."

Rhaenyra stopped pacing, her head snapping toward him, her eyes narrowing into slits. "Don't mock me," she growled, stepping closer, her fists trembling at her sides. "I'm the heir—he named me, not some sniveling Hightower spawn. How do I stop it, Uncle? Tell me, or I'll find someone who will!"

He chuckled, a dark, rolling sound that filled the room, and leaned back, stretching his arms behind his head. "Stop it? Easy enough." He plucked a dagger from the table—a wicked, curved thing with a dragon's head hilt—and twirled it idly between his fingers. "A drop of poison in the babe's milk—sweet tears, they call it. Problem gone by morning. No fuss, no heir, just a little funeral and your father weeping into his cups." His violet eyes glinted with mischief, gauging her reaction.

Rhaenyra's glare could have frozen Caraxes, her lip curling in disgust as she snatched the dagger from his hand and slammed it point-down into the table, splintering the wood. "I'm not a fucking kinslayer," she spat, her voice low and venomous. "Murdering a child? That's your answer? Give me something real, or I'll carve it out of you myself."

Daemon raised his hands in mock surrender, his grin unshaken. "Touchy, touchy. Fine—no poison, no blood on your precious hands." He stood, sauntering to a map pinned to the wall, its edges curling, marked with ink and dagger slashes. "Here's your 'real' answer, then—prove you're the worthiest ruler. The Crabfeeder's bleeding the Stepstones dry, choking trade with his pirate filth. Corlys is losing ships, the realm's losing gold, and your father's losing patience. End him—take Syrax, burn his caves to ash, and then march on the Free Cities feeding his little war. Show the realm a dragon's strength, and no one'll dare whisper about Alicent's whelp."

Rhaenyra's fury paused, her eyes flicking to the map—Lys, Tyrosh, Myr, their names scrawled in red ink, a jagged line tracing the Stepstones' chaos. She stepped closer, her voice sharp with intrigue. "The Crabfeeder? What's he to me? Father's grumbled about him, but—" She cut

herself off, her mind racing, the ember of an idea catching flame. "You're saying I lead this? I should be the one to burn his rotten flesh."

Daemon turned, leaning against the wall, his smirk softening into something almost proud. "Why not you? And me?" He tapped his chest, grinning. "I'd love to gut the bastard myself, I can help you with the ships and tell you what you need to know, but you must be the one to burn him. You are. Ride out with Syrax, torch his rabble, and plant your banner on those rocks. Conquer Lys while you're at it—let the Free Cities choke on their own pirates. The lords'll kneel, and Viserys'll have to choke down his Hightower dreams."

Rhaenyra crossed her arms, her glare softening into a calculating stare as she traced the map with a finger, lingering on the Stepstones' jagged outline. "And how bad is it out there? Tell me straight—no games."

Daemon's grin faded, his tone sharpening with a rare seriousness. "Bad enough. Craghas Drahar—he's the Crabfeeder—nails men to stakes, lets the tides rip 'em apart. Feeds the crabs with their guts. He's got Triarchy gold, ships from Myr and Tyrosh, and a chokehold on the trade lanes. Corlys lost three galleys last month—sailors are deserting, merchants are screaming. Your father's Small Council dithers, but the realm's bleeding coin and blood. It's a mess—a glorious mess for a dragon to clean up."

Rhaenyra's lips twitched, a smirk of her own creeping in as she imagined Syrax's flames roaring over those caves, the Crabfeeder's screams swallowed by the sea. "Glory, huh?" she mused, her voice low, almost reverent. "Burn them out, take their cities... show them all I'm no pawn to be pushed aside." She turned to Daemon, her eyes blazing anew, but with purpose now, not just rage. "And Father—he'd have to see it. No soft-hearted heir could outshine that."

"Exactly," Daemon said, stepping closer, his voice a conspiratorial whisper. "Viserys loves his peace, but he can't ignore a victory like that. The realm'll sing your name—Rhaenyra, the Dragon Queen, not some mewling babe in Alicent's arms. Otto'll shit himself, and Corlys might even kiss your boots for saving his precious fleet." He clapped her shoulder, his grip firm. "You've got the fire, niece. Use it."

Rhaenyra nodded slowly, her mind alight with visions—flames, blood, banners flapping in a conquered wind. "The Stepstones," she murmured, tasting the words. "Crabfeeder's head on a spike, Lys bending the knee... I could do it. I *will* do it." She met Daemon's gaze, her smirk mirroring his. "Let them try to steal my throne then."

Daemon raised his goblet in a mock toast, his eyes glinting with dark delight. "That's my girl. Go burn the bastards, and let the realm remember what a Targaryen really is."

She turned to the window, staring out at the dragonpit where Syrax slept, her golden scales a faint glimmer in the dark. The fury from Alicent's betrayal still simmered, but now it had a target, a purpose. Daemon's words were a spark, and she'd make them a blaze. The tower room fell quiet, save for the crackle of the brazier and the distant growl of dragons below, as Rhaenyra's resolve took root.

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The dragonpit loomed like a hollow skull against the night sky, its vast dome of blackened stone swallowing the moonlight that spilled over King's Landing. Torches sputtered along the cavernous walls, their orange glow flickering across jagged arches and the pitted floor, casting shadows that danced like restless spirits. The air was thick with the musk of dragon—smoke, ash, and a primal heat that clung to the lungs.

Rhaenyra Targaryen walked out of her carriage and strode towards her dragon, where the Dragonkeepers were leading her outside.

The sting of Alicent's slap still burned her cheek, a red welt pulsing beneath her skin, and Daemon's words echoed in her skull—*prove you're the worthiest ruler, burn the Crabfeeder, take the Free Cities*. Her hands flexed at her sides, nails digging into her palms as she approached Syrax.

"There you are," Rhaenyra murmured, her voice softening for a moment as she reached out, running a hand along Syrax's flank. The scales were warm, almost searing, and she felt the beast's steady breath beneath her touch, a rhythm that steadied her own racing pulse. She traced the ridges of Syrax's spine, her fingers lingering on the rough texture, and the dragon shifted, a sinuous ripple of muscle. "My beauty, my fire. Did you feel me raging up there? Did you feel my rage?"

Syrax huffed, a plume of smoke curling from her nostrils, and Rhaenyra's lips twitched into a half-smile, though it didn't reach her eyes. She circled to stand before the dragon's head, meeting those amber slits with her own fierce gaze. "They think me weak," she muttered, her voice hardening as she leaned closer, her breath mingling with Syrax's smoky exhales. "Alicent—slut—slapping me like I'm some tavern wench, crawling into Father's bed to spit out his heirs. And him, naming me heir one day, then tossing me aside for her the next. Rhaenys, that bitter old hag, laughing at me. They all think I'll just sit here, whining, while they carve up my throne."

She stepped back, her hands balling into fists as she began to pace before Syrax, the dragon's head tracking her with lazy interest. "Daemon's right, though—fuck him for it, but he's right. They'll crown her brat over me, some mewling Hightower spawn, unless I make them see." Her voice rose, sharp and defiant, echoing off the pit's walls. "I'll burn their doubts to ash, Syrax. The Crabfeeder—some masked freak nailing men to rocks—he's bleeding the realm dry, and I'll end him. Stepstones ablaze, his pirates screaming, his head on a spike. And then—then the Free Cities, Lys, Tyrosh, Myr—they'll bow to me, not Father, not Alicent, not her fucking child."

Syrax rumbled, a deep, resonant sound that vibrated through Rhaenyra's bones, and she stopped pacing, her chest heaving as she turned to face her dragon fully. "You hear that, girl?" she said, her tone fierce now, a vow carved in the air. "We'll ride out—me and you, fire and blood. No more skulking in brothels or sulking in chambers. I'll lead this war myself, show them

what a dragonrider can do. Let them try to shove me aside when the realm's singing my name—Rhaenyra Targaryen, the Alpha, the queen they can't ignore."