

Jon stared in horror at the man standing before him, guessing at once who he was, from how he and Rhaenyra looked at each other, though he couldn't have possibly figured that out from the picture he'd seen before. The picture of Criston Cole that Rhaenyra kept in her library showed a relatively handsome man, with sharp cheekbones, short dark hair, and piercing green eyes. The eyes remained still, but everything else had changed dramatically. His once full head of hair was gone, his scalp looking terribly burned, and a vicious and ugly diagonal gash across his lips further obscured his former looks, the cut looking so red and raw that you'd have thought it just happened days ago.

"Run!" Rhaenyra screamed, rushing right towards Cole and jumping up to kick towards his head.

He caught her foot and threw her into the compartment behind him, grinning as he looked at the others.

"Jon, alert the...ugh!" Shiera cried as he punched her in the stomach so hard she flew backward.

Acting on instinct, overtaken by anger at seeing a woman he'd come to care for attacked, Jon tried to punch him in the face, only for him to catch his fist.

"Her newest childe," Cole drawled, grabbing his throat and lifting him into the air. "How I'm going to enjoy making her watch as I tear you limb from limb."

Jon struggled desperately, feeling like the lunatic was going to crush his throat; his grip was so strong, but it was for naught. It felt like he was punching and kicking a granite bolder, though, his enhanced, vampiric strength counting for absolutely nothing in the face of his foe's insane durability.

"Jon!" Daenerys cried, and that was all the warning Jon got before he felt a splash of liquid hit the back of his head. Only part of whatever she'd thrown hit him, and just as he started to realize that it smelled a lot like alcohol, Cole screamed in pain, and his grip on his loosened.

"Get the hell out of here!" Shiera screamed, crashing right into Cole as Jon managed to get away from him.

Listening that time, he ran towards Daenerys, furrowing his brow when he saw that she'd tossed vodka, of all things, at him.

"His wounds don't heal," she explained as they ran together, "and I figured vodka in an open wound would hurt like a bitch."

They crossed another train car before daring to turn back, and Jon's eyes went wide as saucers as he watched Shiera and Rhaenyra fight the lunatic together. His sire tried to breathe fire on him, something the vodka would have made all the more effective, he was sure, but he caught it in the dome of a nearby serving platter and drew the ornate, short sword at his hip, slashing at her neck and forcing her to jump back. Shiera grabbed a nearby carving knife and stabbed towards his chest, but he sidestepped that with ease, forcing her back with a flurry of slashes she was forced to evade.

It was like watching three blurs clash with each other, their movements getting faster and faster as they went, but one thing that Jon was able to make out, to his horror, was that Cole was ever so slightly faster than Rhaenyra, who was in turn significantly faster than Shiera. Fighting them both at once was a challenge for him, but trapped as they were in a train speeding along the countryside, he didn't know if they were going to be able to put him down.

"Tell the mistress that...what the fuck?" Alyn asked, and both Daenerys and Jon glared at him.

"Did you really not hear him crash into us?" he demanded, and he winced.

"Addam and I were listening to music," he said. "Is that...oh, shit, that's Cole!"

"Why did you come here if not about him?" Daenerys asked, and he blanched.

"I...I just came to warn you that you're about to hit a bridge and it might feel rocky," Alyn replied, wincing as he saw Shiera get tossed across the compartment right at them.

Jon caught her, his mind racing at that as he continued to watch Rhaenyra and Cole try to tear each other apart, the former throwing the latter into the side of the train car so hard that he nearly went through it.

"Is it still night out?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Alyn nodded.

"Jon, whatever you're thinking, don't," Shiera muttered as she struggled to her feet, looking more than a little battered and bruised.

"Could you get him on top of the train?" Jon whispered. "We're about to go over that rather precarious bridge."

"That...alright, both of you help me," Shiera said, and Daenerys nodded as Jon grinned, having caught on to what he was planning. "Alyn, keep the train going."

Shiera ran back towards Rhaenyra and Cole, just as he managed to swipe her feet out from under her and grab her by the throat. Punching a nearby wooden shelf, he pulled half of it out and raised his hand above his head just as Shiera kicked him in the ribs, sending him flying and crashing into the broken ruins of a table, which impaled him through an old injury.

"Jon! Dany!" Rhaenyra shrieked, as furious with them for disobeying her as she was terrified that Cole was about to turn on them when she saw Daenerys jump up and open the emergency hatch on the roof and climb in.

"Rhaenyra told me about you, Cole," Jon said. "How pathetic you are, how long you've been obsessed with her, things like that, but man, she did not tell me how hideous you'd become over the centuries."

"I am going to grind your bones to powder," Cole spat as he walked forward, letting the metal pole in his chest slide out of him and hissing when he saw all three remaining vampires jump onto the roof of the train. "You think you can escape me on foot?!"

He jumped up to join them, landing on top of the train and furrowing his brow when he saw Rhaenyra, Shiera, and Daenerys had managed to cross half the length of it already, and yet the male was nowhere to be seen. Smirking at the thought that the young whelp actually thought to trap him, he ran after them, certain of his own invincibility, only to realize a moment too late that the back half of the train had become dislodged from the front half. He spotted the male, holding onto the door leading to the car from which he'd broken the connection, and growled, jumping into the air.

Rhaenyra waited for as long as she dared, knowing that if they passed into the tunnel they were speeding towards and still had Cole with them, they'd be in even more trouble than they had been, and the moment he drew close enough to land on the remaining half of their train, she jumped into the air and kicked him square in the chest. He roared in fury and tried to grab at her feet as she kicked off of him and twirled backwards towards the train, only to miss and fall, plummeting to the ground below. She knew why he'd waited in the mountains to strike at her, the elevated position giving him an easy vantage point from which to watch for her train, but the plan had come with some potential downsides as well, as he learned the hard way.

"Fucking hells," Daenerys muttered as the three of them climbed down into the train and she sat in the first chair she came across. "I finally understand why you said I was never to engage him under any circumstances."

"An order I wish you'd followed more closely," Rhaenyra muttered, glaring at Jon as he climbed in and joined them.

"Yeah, attacking him was stupid," he sighed. "I acted without thinking when I saw him hit Shiera."

"I'm fine," the silver-haired beauty sighed, climbing into his lap. "Thanks to you."

He wrapped his arms around her, his heart still racing harder than he thought it ever had in his life.

"That was quick thinking on your part," Rhaenyra admitted. "I would have needed to turn to far more desperate measures if throwing him off the side of a mountain wasn't an option."

"I guess we're not getting the deposit back on the train," Daenerys quipped, and Rhaenyra chuckled, her relief warring with the feeling of adrenaline leaving her body.

"Probably not," she murmured. "Thankfully, we're rich."

"I can't believe I just fought for my life in the nude," Jon muttered as he finally remembered that he was.

"I'm honestly amazed Cole didn't comment on it, prudish little prick that he is," Shiera said. With a smirk, she added, "Don't feel the need to get dressed on our account."

"Or ours, sir," Addam replied, keeping his eyes up and directed at the door. "Is the threat passed, Mistress?"

"The threat is going to be licking his new wounds for quite a while, so I'd say yes," Rhaenyra grinned. "Keep the half of the train we still have at its current speed, Addam."

"Yes, mistress," Addam replied, returning to the front of the train.

Despite Shiera's words, Jon did grab a change of clothes, more than glad that most of his things hadn't been in the part of the train they abandoned, and as the other followed suit, the mood having been decidedly ruined by the attempt on their lives, he decided to ask a question he had yet to get a complete answer to.

"What exactly is Cole?" he asked. "He's not a vampire, yet he's as strong as we are, as strong as you are."

"I honestly don't know," Rhaenyra sighed. "When I turned him, I had been taking him to bed for months. We couldn't wed, given our different stations, and I thought he understood that, but...I was a fool. When Daemon returned and became a part of my life again, he quickly seduced me and then made me what I am. I tried to turn Cole in turn, thinking that I could spend eternity with the two of them as my lovers, and actually planned to turn a third man as well..."

"Did you hope to keep them on rotation, or just spend your days stuffed airtight?" Daenerys asked with a grin, and Rhaenyra swatted her arse, making her yelp and jump.

"Both, as I felt like it," she replied haughtily. "It didn't work out, of course, and for reasons I still don't know and likely never will, rather than becoming my loyal thrall, Cole became...difficult. One night, he fled, and I thought I'd heard the last of him. When I next saw him, he was able to walk in sunlight, had cured his hunger for blood, and yet retained our strength and speed, and as he'd become convinced that I was a terrible demon who'd tried to take his soul, he wanted me and the rest of our kind dead."

"The biggest downside of whatever he did to himself is that he cannot heal from wounds dealt to him," Shiera replied.

"Hence why he looks like he belongs in a low-budget horror movie, I guess," Daenerys muttered, and Rhaenyra nodded.

"That means that if you managed to cut his limbs off, he'd be unable to hurt you anymore," Jon said, and both her, and Shiera chuckled.

"I'm impressed," Rhaenyra replied. "I've tried that before, but it's never worked out. He never comes for me when I'm alone, and if I were to hunt him, I'd find him locked away with dozens of his loyal vampire hunters, so I'm either stuck defending younger vampires and unable to focus on disabling him permanently or I put myself in a position where I'll be overwhelmed. Cole's a shade stronger than me in general, on par with one of the

first-generation vampires, and while mortal hunters, even in the dozens, would normally be nothing for me...”

“Together it would be too much,” Jon replied. “What if we banded all the remaining vampires together? You said two of the founders still live.”

“They do, but neither one has any interest in helping put Cole down, given that we’ve already lost so many to him and his primary focus is me,” Rhaenyra muttered.

“You did say that there was one thing you thought might work against him once,” Daenerys piped up and Rhaenyra shook her head.

“I said that Bryndemere Tarth thought that making him from drink the Bloodstone Chalice might work, as it killed anyone who drank from it after those six already had,” Rhaenyra replied and Jon cocked an eyebrow at her.

“You didn’t mention that part,” he said.

“I did say they tried to see if they could make more vampires with it,” Rhaenyra replied. “Of course, now that wouldn’t work, since two of the clans are gone, and even if that wasn’t the case, it would just make him one of us instead, which might be even worse.”

“Joy,” Jon muttered.

“At any rate, it’s a moot point, since I doubt I’ll ever see the damn thing again,” Rhaenyra sighed, “but if it hadn’t been lost...becoming a vampire might actually have weakened Cole after a while. The fall will put him out of commission for a while...”

“Actually, if he doesn’t heal, why wouldn’t a fall like that make him a permanent cripple?” Jon asked.

“Sadly, the only injuries he seems to sustain at all are ones directly at our hands,” Rhaenyra replied. “If I stab him, which I have more than once, that becomes a new gaping wound for him, and if I removed his limbs, that would be permanent too, but anything not directly at the hands of a vampire doesn’t seem to phase him. One of the numerous annoying mysteries about him. If I knew what exactly he did to himself back in the day, perhaps I could figure out how to undo it but...”

“He’s not about to sit down for a tell-all interview,” Daenerys sighed, and Rhaenyra nodded.

“No, no, he’s not,” she sighed.

“We survived, and that’s cause for celebration,” Shiera said softly. “Celebration and not leaving the mansion for a month at least.”

“Hear, hear,” Daenerys agreed aloud as Rhaenyra and Jon both nodded.

"We're back," Rhaenyra called out as they entered the mansion. "Gerardys..."

"I'm here, Princess," Gerardys replied as he walked in, holding a letter in his hand. "Alyn called from the train to inform me of what happened. I took the liberty of handling it the usual way."

"Thank you," Rhaenyra smiled. "What's that?"

"It's unsigned, but it came with a wax seal," Gerardys replied, and she took it from him immediately, breaking the seal with her nail and pulling out the letter.

"I take it that means vampire, huh?" Jon asked.

"Almost certainly," Shiera replied as Rhaenyra's jaw dropped. "What is it?"

"That son of a bitch," she breathed.

"Don't tell me Cole attacked another of the clans while planning to strike at us?" Daenerys asked.

"Not *that* son of a bitch," Rhaenyra muttered. "This is from Gunthor. He has reason to believe that Roose Bolton has found the chalice."

"Fucking wonderful," Shiera scowled. "What proof does he have?"

"Yeah, does he know for sure?" Daenerys asked.

"He wants to come here to explain," Rhaenyra replied. "Have his clan called and a formal invitation extended. We've all been looking for that damn chalice for years, and I'll be damned if Roose Bolton is the one who ultimately secures it."

"Already on it, ma'am," Gerardys nodded.

"In the meantime, I'm taking a long, warm bath," Rhaenyra sighed. "Alone."

Daenerys pouted at that, and Jon wrapped an arm around her waist, making her smile at him.

"Are you okay?" he asked, looking at Shiera.

"It's nothing a drop of blood won't fix," she replied, smiling as he ran into the kitchen and filled three mugs which he quickly stuffed in the microwave. "How are you feeling?"

"Today I got confirmation that I've been wrong all my life about my parentage and then was nearly murdered by an immortal psychopath," Jon replied. "Just one of those days, you know?"

Daenerys snorted at that, hugging Shiera, who returned it happily.

"Should I warm one up for Rhaenyra?" Jon asked, and she shook her head.

"No," she replied. "In fact, I'd suggest you both leave her alone until tomorrow. The last time we faced off against Cole, she kind of retreated into herself for a full night and day, and I'd expect much the same this time."

"I can't imagine being stalked by a psychotic ex for centuries," Jon sighed, opening the microwave and handing out the mugs.

"It's worse than that because not only is he obsessive and not only has he tried to kill her multiple times over the centuries, but he's only as strong as he is because of her," Shiera whispered. "Add to that the fact that he killed her uncle among other vampires she knew well and..."

"I did wonder if that was the case," Jon sighed. "Seemed like a distinct possibility."

"He's the one who fried his scalp that badly, so he did get some good hits in at least, but yeah," Shiera muttered. "If we ever find a way to put him down for good, she's going to be thrilled beyond measure."

"I just don't know how we could, though," Daenerys sighed. "Watching you and Rhaenyra fight him was one of the most disheartening things I've done since I became a vampire. I'd have no chance against him."

"I certainly didn't," Jon muttered. "Thanks for the vodka, by the way."

"Yeah, that was a good idea," Shiera smiled. "I'm strong enough to help Rhaenyra in a fight against him now, but you two are to steer clear of him at all costs."

"Right," Jon sighed, looking down at the remaining blood in his mug.

Helplessness was something he'd felt increasingly often over the past few years, first in how completely blindsided he was by his father's sudden death and the mess he had to endure with Catelyn, and things had only worsened from there. The memory of how Ramsay had captured and tortured him still burned in his mind, and he was nothing compared to Cole, who could rip the psychopath apart with ease. Thinking of him did bring one question to mind that he'd thought better than to bother Rhaenyra with just then.

"If Roose has the chalice, how far do you think Rhaenyra will be willing to go to get it from him?" he asked, and Shiera sighed.

"She'd seek to speak to him first and see if any sort of accord could be reached, but of all the vampire clans, the Boltons are the ones we least wanted to get their hands on it," she replied. "Not only could it be used to create new clans at this point, but whoever possesses it knows for certain how many vampires exist in each clan. It can't help track them down or anything, but she's feared for centuries that Cole might find it someday, and the Boltons are an even smaller clan than we are at this point."

"Roose is also a lot younger than Rhaenyra," Daenerys piped up. "Didn't she say it took Belthasar over a century to find anyone of his blood he could turn?"

"He was the last of them to manage it," Shiera nodded. "Roose is older and stronger than I am; he is younger than any of the other vampire clan leaders, something that I know has bothered him extensively since his sire was killed. I know you want revenge on Ramsay, and I'd love to tear that little prick's head off too, but Rhaenyra will not go against them without at least one other clan's support, and both the Tarths and the Estermonts have traditionally favored staying out of conflicts in general."

"They're pacifists?" Jon asked.

"They enjoy their immortality and, moreover, the fact that our most feared enemy has been focused on Rhaenyra exclusively since he killed Belthasar Bolton," Shiera replied. "Our greatest allies were the Velaryons and the Celtigars..."

"Both of whom were wiped out by Cole," Jon sighed, and she nodded.

"Neither clan likes the Boltons, though, and it is entirely possible that the idea of Roose having the chalice will be unpleasant enough to spur at least one of them into action," Shiera murmured. "The fact that Gunthor Estermont is actually deigning to seek an audience here rather than try to summon Rhaenyra to him might be proof enough that he's willing to do something."

"It's also possible that he's heard of Cole's recent movements and feared that bringing Rhaenyra to him might draw the bastard in," Daenerys pointed out, and Shiera scowled.

"That is also a possibility," she muttered, and Jon shook his head, rinsing out his mug and setting it down.

"So we have an unkillable enemy we refuse to band together against and a potential upcoming conflict against the clan responsible for thrusting me into this world in the first place," he thought to himself. *"I swear if I get the chance, I'm killing Ramsay."*

He'd never felt the desire to kill before, not seriously, but he couldn't help but feel it now. Perhaps it was just a consequence of being what he was, or perhaps it was because he'd actually killed before, but he knew that if given a chance to end either the vampire who killed him or Cole, he'd do it without a single regret. Of course, that would be extremely difficult and impossible, respectively, given how much stronger than him both monsters were, but even knowing that he was genuinely willing to kill was rather jarring for him.

Shaking his head, he looked at Shiera, noticing that she was standing less stiffly as she set her empty mug down and said, "Feeling better?"

"Much," she replied with a smile that turned increasingly sultry as she stared at him. "I could feel even better."

"I think all three of us could," Daenerys added, tracing a finger up along his forearm. "We had one hell of a night, and I think we should celebrate surviving it."

"To survival," Jon quipped, mimicking holding up a glass, and they giggled, taking his hands and leading him upstairs.

“Just remember, Estermont is old school even compared to me,” Rhaenyra said as the four of them crowded around her favorite sitting room a couple nights later.

“Treat him like you would a very old, crabby headmaster you didn’t want to irritate, and let Rhaenyra do the talking,” Daenerys said, and her sire rolled her eyes.

“Not how I’d put it, but you’re correct,” Rhaenyra replied.

“He won’t attack you or anything, but he can be rather easily offended, and just now, we could use his help,” Shiera murmured.

“Keep my mouth shut, got it,” Jon nodded.

“Lord Gunthor has arrived, ma’am,” one of the servants said, and a moment later a middle-aged man with long, curly brown hair and sharp blue eyes walked in.

He wasn’t tall, but he was quite broad-shouldered, and he carried himself like a much larger man. It was clear at a glance that this was a man very used to commanding respect everywhere he went, and as his gaze passed over each of them, Jon felt like he was being judged harshly.

“Gunthor,” Rhaenyra smiled, rising to greet him and offer him her hand.

“Rhaenyra,” Gunthor nodded, taking her hand and pressing his lips to her knuckles. “You’re just as lovely as ever.”

“And you’re just as charming,” Rhaenyra said, taking back her hand and gesturing to the table. “Would you care for a drink?”

“Yes, thank you,” Gunthor murmured, sitting down as one of the thralls placed a glass in front of him and slit his wrist. The faintest hint of hunger flickered across the aged vampire’s gaze as he watched the warm, crimson liquid pour freely into the glass, and he held up a hand when it was a centimeter from the top. When Rhaenyra went to heal the thrall, he tutted and stabbed one of his fingers on his left canine, quickly rubbing the blood into the man’s wound. “It is a poor guest who makes his host or hostess seal such things for him. I see your clan has doubled since last we met.”

“It has,” Rhaenyra smiled, watching him pick up the glass and take a sip. “These are Daenerys and Jon, my newest childer. Dany here has been one of us for a decade while Jon is a far more recent acquisition.”

“Welcome to the endless night, young ones,” Gunthor said, raising his glass to them. Before either could respond, he turned to Rhaenyra and added, “With that out of the way, though, we need to discuss the Boltons.”

“Indeed,” Rhaenyra replied, her face falling. “Why do you think Roose Bolton has the Bloodstone Chalice?”

"Because one of my childer saw it with their own eyes," Gunthor replied, and she sighed.

"You infiltrated his fortress?" Rhaenyra asked.

"One of my youngest is a bit of a savant for this new...technology," Gunthor replied, practically spitting out that last word. "Apparently the mortals of today spend all their time documenting their every insignificant thought and blasting it out to be read by everyone else. Seems mad to me, but when Cassie came across a series of messages detailing something that seemed a lot like Unsettling in King's Landing, I grew curious. None of us have ever cared for that wretched city, even if it doesn't smell like shit anymore, and I had no idea just why a Bolton would have been there, using that irritating gift of theirs."

"We did run into a Bolton in King's Landing," Rhaenyra nodded. "Cole's men almost managed to take down Shiera and I went to stop them."

"It was Ramsay," Jon added before he could stop himself, and Gunthor looked at him keenly as Shiera glared at him.

"You say that name like it's a curse, boy," he said. "Why?"

"I am what I am because he tore open my throat," Jon replied.

"After I escaped from Cole's men, Jon here found me and helped me get away," Shiera replied. "It turned out he was one of us, something I didn't know at the time, and Ramsay came looking for me."

"He's one of the worst of us," Gunthor muttered. "You want revenge, don't you?"

"What we want is to get the chalice away from Roose," Rhaenyra said. "If Cole ever found out he had it..."

"It could end up in his hands," Gunthor nodded. "We spent so little time researching the damn thing back in the day, consumed as we were with our new powers. It seemed like we'd have eternity to figure out all there was to know of it."

"You fear there might be more that it can do?" Rhaenyra asked.

"I fear anything I don't understand, and we never fully understood that damn cup," Gunthor muttered. "The gift it bestowed upon us was extraordinary, but we didn't experiment enough with it back in the day, and if there's any chance that it could be used as a weapon against us and that monster got his hands on it, he'd figure it out."

"You should know, we faced off against Cole a couple days ago, in the mountains north of here," Rhaenyra replied, and he went still. "We prevailed and hurled him off, so he should be out of commission for a little while."

"All the more reason to make Roose see sense while we have time," Gunthor muttered. "Cole will lick his wounds for a while, and we need to make sure that when he makes his next move, it isn't an attempt to take the chalice. If that monster really is out of commission for a bit, perhaps we do something more...extensive than I'd first planned."

"What was your plan?" Rhaenyra asked.

"I tried to get the Tarths to join me in confronting him, hoping that seeing three of the remaining four clans united would be enough to get Roose to back down just in case he became belligerent, but Bryndemere was only willing to spare a single young vampire for the effort...the fool. If we don't need to worry about Cole, though, we could call a conclave."

"The last time we did that, my uncle and Corlys were still alive," Rhaenyra breathed.

"Neither Roose nor Bryndemere would dare say no if both of our clans made the call in unison," Gunthor grinned, "and with all of us under one roof, I think we could make Roose see sense."

"I'm sorry, what does 'conclave' mean in this context?" Jon asked.

"Almost what it does in the faith context," Shiera replied. "It's a meeting of all living vampires."

"Daemon and Crispian Celtigar found the idea of calling it that funny the first time that Corlys talked the others into meeting again," Rhaenyra replied. "It had been decades since they'd seen each other at that point, and the first signs that there was something out there hunting us had started to show. Where would we meet, though? We can't suggest my mansion or your castle..."

"No, that would turn the whole thing into an inevitable pissing contest," Gunthor muttered. "I think Essos would be our best bet, perhaps Tyrosh."

"If we can find a spot with a sizable underground facility we could use that could absolutely work," Rhaenyra nodded.

"So you will support me on this," Gunthor sighed. "After Bryndemere turned me down, I feared that I might have to just arrange to steal the chalice and deal with the fallout after that, but..."

"I will always be happy to do whatever it takes to secure the safety of our people, Gunthor," Rhaenyra declared, and he smiled.

"Good," Gunthor nodded. "Even Bryndemere won't be lazy enough to turn down this, and Roose wouldn't dare deny a conclave invitation from a first generation vampire, one that's supported by another clan, at least. I'll have my people reach out to yours, and we can iron out the final details in the coming nights."

"Would you like to stay the day?" Rhaenyra asked as Gunthor stood up, and he shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Thank you for your offer, but I could still get back to the Reach tonight if I left now. We'll be seeing more of each other soon enough, my dear."

"Take care," Rhaenyra smiled as he left.

"Sorry about that," Jon murmured, and she shook her head.

"It turned out to be fine in this case, which is proof enough that Gunthor was more desperate than he seemed," Rhaenyra replied.

"He really does fear the possibility of the chalice being used against us," Shiera mused. "I wouldn't have thought that likely."

"In truth he's not wrong about how little we know about it," Rhaenyra replied, "and he is deeply cautious by nature. That's the main reason why I've never tried to enlist their help against Cole. Gunthor quite likes the fact that the son of a bitch has rarely ever targeted his clan and will do nothing that could risk changing that."

"What about the Tarths?" Jon asked.

"I don't think Bryndemere has left his lair in decades," Rhaenyra replied. "The man enjoys his simple pleasures and allowed them to make him lazy ages ago. He's also proud, however, and he will not allow three of the four remaining vampire clans to meet without him. He's going to be livid when he learns what Gunthor's done."

"I don't get why we can't just band together with the Estermonts and show up at the Boltons' door," Jon muttered, and she sighed.

"If it were up to me alone, I might go that route, but Gunthor never will, and while his clan could infiltrate Roose's stronghold and steal the chalice easily, that isn't a luxury we possess," Rhaenyra replied.

"Their clan gift is invisibility," Shiera explained. "The Boltons would detect us, as Ramsay did the day we found him in your old apartment, but the Estermonts were able to get in and spy on them without issue."

"The problem with that is that if the chalice went missing, Roose would know immediately who did it and with Gunthor Estermont being so conflict-averse..." Rhaenyra added. "We can be almost certain that Roose will bring it when he comes to wherever we decide to hold the conclave, as I couldn't see him willingly letting something so precious out of his sight, so whether we talk him into letting one of the more dangerous clans take custody of it or it comes down to a fight, we should be able to secure it."

"The Boltons are the weakest clan, then?" Jon asked, and she nodded.

"They are," Rhaenyra replied. "There are only three of them, for one thing, and not only is Roose the youngest of the remaining clan heads, but his childer, Ramsay and Domic are both rather young too."

"They're half brothers that he turned within weeks of each other almost eighty years ago," Shiera said.

"So neither one is as old as you are, and Rhaenyra has a full century on Roose," Jon nodded.

"If it came to all-out war between us, we'd likely win," Daenerys said, and Rhaenyra held up her hand.

"We'd have the advantage, certainly, but clan wars are a bad idea in general," she replied. "If we had the support of the other clans, that would be one thing, but without it, it could become a protracted affair, one that would draw attention we absolutely don't want to us."

"I guess fear of Cole has, ironically, helped maintain peace between the vampire clans over the centuries," Jon mused, and she snorted.

"Criston Cole, vampire savior," Rhaenyra muttered, shaking her head. "You're not wrong, in truth, but it's a funny thing to think about, especially considering how much it would infuriate the lunatic if he knew."

"I'm going to guess that there will be a number of formal protocols I need to learn before the conclave," Jon said, and she nodded.

"We'll go over everything before we leave for Essos, something that I doubt we'll be doing for at least a month, anyway," Rhaenyra replied. "In the meantime, I think it would be a good idea to continue your training. You're ready, I think, to venture out into the world and hunt for blood that doesn't come in a bag, a luxury we cannot rely on exclusively, and we have quite a few hours of darkness left."

"Should we come?" Daenerys asked excitedly, and Rhaenyra shook her head.

"No," she replied. "I want you and Shiera to focus on making absolutely certain that the investigators we hired to find Benjen Stark have forgotten that they ever did it. Cole likely just followed us north, but we need to be sure that there weren't any leaks."

"You don't think he could go after Benjen, do you?" Jon asked, concerned.

"It's highly unlikely," Rhaenyra replied. "Killing humans, or at least, specifically setting out to kill or endanger them is a line he seems to pride himself on not crossing. I've never known him to go after a mortal related to a vampire to get to them."

"I'm amazed he has lines he doesn't cross," Jon muttered.

"It makes sense in a way," Daenerys replied. "He justifies what he does by convincing himself and the people who follow him that they're fighting against demons, presumably to protect humanity. Going after innocent humans would be hard to justify like that."

When they all just stared at her, she huffed and added, "I do actually pay attention to you guys."

"We're usually careful about making sure that nothing we have investigated can lead back to us and the subjects of the investigations, but we'll double-check to be sure," Shiera assured them. "Happy hunting, you two."

Rhaenyra and he both smiled at that, and as they left the mansion, Jon hoped that they were right about Benjen being safe.

"The signal's coming from somewhere nearby," Garth said, staring down at his phone. The app he'd brought up on it was linked to a chip their commander had inserted into one of his many wounds years ago so that if he went missing, they'd be able to track him down.

"It's been days since we heard from him," Perros fretted.

"You needed fear," Kyle, one of the most veteran members of their order, said. "Our commander cannot die, though he might require a little assistance from us."

"He said he was going to catch their train on the way back when we failed to find out where they went from the station," Garth murmured, feeling better the closer they got to the source of the signal. "It would have passed overhead near here."

"Look!" Roy shouted, pointing towards what looked like a small sinkhole in the distance.

"Oh, gods," Garth breathed, realizing that the sinkhole seemed to be where the signal was coming from.

The four men ran forward, taking out their flashlights and pointing them into the hole.

"I was...wondering...when you'd get here," Cole panted, glaring up at them from within the hole.

It was far narrower inside than it appeared from the surface, and their commander looked as though he'd somehow landed right-side up, becoming trapped within the earth.

"Can you move any of your limbs, Commander?" Kyle asked, and Cole shook his head.

"If I could, I'd have likely climbed out of here by now," he replied. "I'm going to need to be pulled out. I hope you have a vehicle nearby."

"We do, Commander," Perros said, running off to get the off-road truck they'd brought with them.

It took him a few minutes to get it close enough and then another couple to get a rope lassoed around Cole so they could drag him up. Every scrape on the way up was agonizing, the hard, unforgiving earth scraping against his every unhealing wound, and yet he endured it in silence, his hatred for Rhaenyra and his situation more all-consuming than any pain could be. Eventually, they brought him far enough up that he was able to pull himself the rest of the way out.

"What happened, sir?" Kyle asked, and the others all looked over in shock, none of them even breathing as they waited for their commander's response.

"I moved sooner than I should have," Cole replied. "If I'd waited to enter the train until after they'd entered the tunnel up there, they'd have had nowhere to run. One lucky blow on the bitch's part was all it took to end the day in her favor once we moved atop the train. Did you lot manage to track her after she left the train?"

"We think she and the others found a way to exit the train before it reached the station," Garth replied. "We watched it come back in, but there was no one there."

"Evasive as ever," Cole scowled, raging at having suffered yet another failure. "Is there any good news? Did we manage to find exactly what the demons were after in the North?"

"No one working for the firm they hired remembers the case, each believing that they just worked for an angry, rich woman who wanted them to find proof of her husband's suspected infidelity," Qyle replied. "A way to justify the payment, of course."

"I'm surprised they'd pay at all," Perros commented, and Cole scoffed.

"I'm sure the spoiled wretch would love to force the humans to work for her for free, but they'd still have spent time and resources on something, and that sort of thing would be strange enough to draw attention she doesn't want," he replied. "Our enemies are evil, but they aren't fools."

"We do have one theory, though," Garth murmured. "You've long suspected that the Bolton clan had their home in the North."

"Their progenitor was from the region," Cole nodded, "and unlike the Tarths, Estermonts, and Targaryens, the Boltons' natural home is so large that they could go easily disappear in it."

"Well, we think we might have found the general area that their den is in," Garth continued. "It's quite a ways north of the train station that we lost the Targaryens in."

"You think she might have been going to meet with them?" Cole asked, scratching at his scarred, clean-shaven chin.

"It's not a small area that we think they might be hiding in, and our only proof before was a few incidents of humans feeling distinctly uncomfortable when they passed through the trails in a particular stretch of woodlands, but with the Targaryens having been spotted so close, I think it might be worth further investigation," Garth replied.

"I agree," Qyle nodded. "Only four of the six original clans still exist, and the Boltons are the smallest one among them. If you could crush them..."

"It would be one more group of demons removed from the world," Cole nodded. "Very well, put men on it at once. In the meantime, I'm going to return to headquarters and get my latest wounds tended to."

The men all nodded, saluting their commander as he boarded their truck, and they piled in as well, each beyond pleased to have found the greatest weapon they had against the vampires.

"That's it," Rhaenyra grinned, watching Jon drink from the thoroughly charmed woman in his arms.

The town near their mansion was small and home to a rather tight-knit community, and one might have thought that that would make it harder to lure away unsuspecting humans, but it really didn't. What it meant was that it wasn't nearly as well-lit as the average city, the streets being older and more spread out. The girl they'd met looked to be little older than Rhaenyra herself appeared, and all Jon had needed to do was flash her a smile and claim that their car had broken down up the road and he wasn't quite sure where he was for her to come close and offer to show him a map on her phone.

"The silly twit's interest in him became so much more pronounced when she saw me and assumed we were together," Rhaenyra thought to herself. *"It's nice to know that, even as the world seems to transform every few decades, some things will never change."*

"Fuck, that's so much more intense fresh," Jon gasped as he let the girl go.

"There's a reason why I had fresh blood served to Gunthor instead of the bagged stuff," Rhaenyra replied. "Now just prick your finger and rub it into the bite marks."

Jon nodded and did as she said, watching as the small holes his teeth had left sealed up like they were never there. He wiped her neck down, making sure that no traces of the blood remained, and took a moment to admire his handiwork before staring into her eyes and reaching out to her mind.

"You met a lovely stranded couple in the street, gave them directions, and continued on home," Jon said. "Nothing out of the ordinary happened, and you had no reason at all to feel suspicious of them. It was a perfectly normal night."

"A perfectly normal night," she repeated, feeling his compulsion take hold. As he pulled back, she snapped out of it and smiled, saying, "Good luck with your car."

"Thank you; you've been a big help," Rhaenyra smiled, wrapping her arms around Jon's bicep and fighting the urge to chuckle when she saw a flash of envy in the human woman's dark eyes.

She left them alone, not thinking that there was anything odd at all about how she'd gone with them into a dark alley to show them their phone, and Jon sighed, leaning against the nearest wall.

"I honestly thought I'd feel worse about doing that when I first became what I am, but I don't," Jon said, and Rhaenyra smiled.

"It's what we need to do to survive, and it's not as though we do lasting damage to them," Rhaenyra replied. "Even the Boltons, sadistic pricks that they are, aren't stupid enough to actually hurt the humans."

"Well, I can finally say that I drank from someone other than a thrall," Jon sighed. "What's next?"

"Well, you're going to do this a few more times," Rhaenyra replied, taking his hand as they left the alley and walked together along the empty sidewalk, "and you'll have to do it on your own before I'll be satisfied that you're fully capable..."

"When do I learn dracarys?" Jon whispered, and she grinned up at him.

"I figured that was what you were asking," Rhaenyra chuckled. "That will be one of the last things I teach you. Of all the clan gifts, ours is the most difficult to master. You will give yourself major burns on your tongue the first few times before you get it right."

"Joy," Jon muttered. "At least I heal faster now."

"It's also the most useful one, in my opinion," Rhaenyra replied.

"What's the Tarths' special ability?"

"They can generate fog," Rhaenyra replied. "I've always figured it was the least useful of the abilities, but it can make escaping rather easy for them."

Jon nodded at that, wondering how exactly it worked, and as he looked down at the short, undeniably beautiful blonde whose hand he was holding, he smiled.

"What?" Rhaenyra asked as she noticed him smiling.

"You...and the others," Jon replied. "I hadn't thought that I was unhappy in my life back before we met, but...I was lonely. I had a couple friends, and I was planning to date again, but my entire life revolved around my job. I enjoyed it, really I did, but..."

"It wasn't enough?" Rhaenyra asked, and he nodded. "Of the four of us, you're the only one who ever had actual employment."

"Oh, gods, that's right," Jon chuckled as the truth of it dawned on him. "You and Shiera were both noblewomen who didn't need to, and Daenerys..."

"The less said about what she'd have been forced to do the better," Rhaenyra muttered. "I'll never not be angry about that. My own kin treating one of his own that way, it..."

"You saved her and gave her a better life than she'd have had otherwise," Jon murmured, and she smiled.

"I saved you as well," Rhaenyra whispered, coming to a halt and staring up into his eyes. "Do you think I've given you a better life too?"

"It hasn't been boring," Jon quipped and she grinned. "Despite the difficulties that have come from all this, I have really enjoyed getting to know you all. I feel like I have family again and that's something I really didn't think I'd ever feel again."

"Family with benefits, perhaps," Rhaenyra whispered, and he looked at her in surprise. "I have learned a couple things from Daenerys over the years."

"We were in the middle of exploring a few of those benefits the other day when we were so rudely interrupted," Jon whispered in her ear, and she shivered as he took her in his arms.

"Let's go home," Rhaenyra breathed.

The two of them continued walking until they were far enough away from the town limits to avoid being spotted and then ran as fast as they could, reaching the mansion in mere minutes. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her hungrily as she fiddled with the door handle, and as the two of them slipped inside, none of the thralls bothered them at all. Rushing up the stairs, they reached her room quickly, their lips never leaving the other.

"Oh, fuck," Rhaenyra gasped, quivering as he started trailing hot kisses down along her neck. "I see why Shiera and Daenerys are so taken with you. Tonight, I'm claiming you for myself, but soon, you'll have all three of us to handle."

"Claiming me, are you?" Jon asked challengingly, only to exhale forcefully as she threw him onto the bed and jumped on top of him.

"You are mine," Rhaenyra grinned, her fangs coming out as she stared down at him lustfully, and before Jon could reply, she zoomed down and sank them into his neck.

"Gah!" Jon cried, holding her to him as she drank from him. "Fucking hell, that feels so good."

"You taste good," Rhaenyra purred, pulling up and licking her lips.

He pulled her down and kissed her deeply, tasting his own blood on her lips and tongue as he unzipped her dress. She broke the kiss to pull it forward, freeing her large, incredibly perky breasts, and smirked as she saw his eyes lock onto them immediately. The two of them worked together to undress each other, and soon enough, their clothes were scattered about the room as they kissed and explored each other on the bed.

Their first encounter had not only been cut short, but it had had an audience too, and this time, with them alone and not bound to the schedule of the train, they were able to take their time. He'd be hard pressed to say which of the three Targaryen women was the most beautiful, but Rhaenyra was definitely the most voluptuous, and he delighted in exploring her gorgeous form with his hands, lips, and tongue.

"Oh, gods," the silver-haired beauty moaned, holding him to her chest as he returned to her incredible breasts and sucked on one of her pebbled pink nipples.

"You're so fucking beautiful," Jon breathed, switching to the other nipple as he kneaded her supple mounds.

"So are you," Rhaenyra sighed, running her nails through his hair. "Beauty runs in our family, after all."

"In our blood, you might say," Jon grinned, and she giggled, only to gasp as he started kissing his way down along her flat belly.

"Wait, wait," Rhaenyra said. "Lie on your back. I want to taste you as you taste me."

Jon grinned at that and rolled over, licking his lips as she quickly turned around and hooked a knee over his head. He grabbed her wonderfully round arse, digging his fingers into the fleshy cheeks, and pulled her back until her already wet slit was right on her eager mouth. Gasping in delight, she took a moment to luxuriate in the feeling of his long, dexterous tongue exploring her folds before wrapping a hand around his cock.

"How terribly inadequate Cole must have felt when he crashed our little party before and saw this absolute greatsword of yours," she purred, stroking him softly. "You felt so damn good inside me, Jon, and tonight, I'm not letting anything get in my way as I enjoy every thick inch of you."

She wrapped her lips around his bulbous head, making him gasp and groan, and started bobbing her head up and down slowly, her cheeks caved in around him. The wet heat of her mouth was perfect, a heaven like few others, and when she took him deep into her tight little throat, it made his legs shake.

"Fuck me, Nyra," Jon groaned, making her giggle around his length.

Letting it slip from her lips with an audible pop, she turned around and purred, "In a moment. I want to really make you squirm first."

"Two can...ugh...play at that game," Jon grunted, leaning in and swirling the tip of his tongue around her throbbing clit before sucking into his mouth.

Rhaenyra moaned around him, the pleasure of his touch making her whole body quiver, and started bobbing her head up and down faster. The two of them remained locked together in their competitive passion, each doing their best to drive the other mad with pleasure. As she soared towards her peak, the ancient vampire started grinding her dripping slit on Jon's mouth, smearing his face with her juices, much to his delight. He pushed his tongue inside her, tasting her tangy fluids deeply, and then returned to her clit, sucking on the taut little pearl and grinning when he felt her thighs shake on either side of his head.

Suddenly pulling up, she gasped and said, "Enough! I need you inside me."

Jon gave her slit one last lick and picked up with ease, moving her next to him. She righted herself at once, getting up on her hands and knees, and arched her back, sticking her ass up in the air while nearly lying on the bed. Looking back at him, she smirked and summoned him over with a crooked finger, giggling when he crawled into position with vampiric speed.

"Exactly the sort of thing your powers are for," Rhaenyra grinned, wiggling her ass. "Fuck me, Jon, fuck me until you can't harden again."

"Have you ever seen your arse?" Jon asked incredulously as he brushed her sopping wet slit with the head of his cock. "You'll beg me to stop long before I stop getting hard for you."

"I've never begged for anything in my life," Rhaenyra said challengingly, and he grinned.

"Well, then I guess we're going to be in for a very long day," Jon rumbled, pushing inside her.

Rhaenyra gasped, feeling his incredible girth stretch her inner walls wide, and gripped the sheets in front of her hard, already certain that she was going to have torn them to shreds before they finished. He groaned at the feeling of her tight, wet heat enveloping him, continuing to push forward slowly but unceasingly, burying inch after inch of his shaft inside her.

"I'll probably never know, since I'm perfectly happy with them, but I do wonder if being a vampire really did make sex that much better than before or if they just feel better than other women because holy fuck," he thought to himself as he bottomed out inside her.

Reaching under her, he cupped her breasts and said, "I can give you a minute to adjust if you need it."

Rhaenyra looked back at him and growled, saying, "If you don't start fucking me right now, I'm tying you to the bed and riding you until the sun sets again."

Jon laughed at that, pulling most of his cock from her clinging depths, and plunged back inside, making her cry out in pleasure.

"Gods, yes!" Rhaenyra moaned. "I swear your cock is fucking perfect."

"Like I was made for you and Shiera and Dany," Jon grinned as he worked his way up to a steady pace, fucking her with long, hard strokes.

From down the hall, they heard Daenerys squeal in pleasure, and both looked at the door.

"They must have guessed that you wanted me alone tonight," Jon murmured.

"They've both been treating me with kid gloves since our run in with Cole," Rhaenyra muttered. "I'll need to speak to them about that. For the record, I really did need a few hours to myself after seeing that murderous bastard again, but I'm fine."

"I figured you were," Jon said, leaning in and kissing her cheek.

"You've treated me more normally, and I'm thankful for that," Rhaenyra smiled. "Now fuck me until I forget I had the misfortune of meeting him."

"Gladly," Jon growled, picking up his pace.

As he fucked her harder and faster, drawing pleased cries and screams from her beautiful, pouty lips, he didn't intend to stop until she was too tired to remember any of her enemies, hoping that he'd get the same benefit from it. He'd come to rather like his new

life, for numerous reasons, and while he truly hoped that they'd someday be free of the monsters who plagued them, for the moment, he was quite happy to lose himself in the stunningly beautiful woman who had made him what he was. Everything else could wait.