

THE hall was alive with music and laughter. Ale and wine flowed freely, a feast for gods laid out in a heavenly spread before them. Succulent pigs, tender pigeons, golden roasted potatoes and all other delectables to not leave the guests wanting.

Lyra and Daemon sat next to King Jaehaerys at the high table. It was the first time she had seen the old monarch so content as he watched the merriment unfold before him. The Lord and Lady of Winterfell sat by her side as honoured guests while Prince Baelon sat on his father's other side along with Viserys, Aemma and Rhaenyra.

It had been a successful and blissful union of their houses.

As Daemon was engaged in conversation with his grandfather, Lyra was greeted by the guests. One was a Lannister, going by his flaxen hair, and the other was most likely a Tyrell from his fay-like features.

"We would like to congratulate the Lord and Lady of Winterfell on such a joyous occasion," the Lannister said, bowing graciously.

"And of course, the bride as well," the Tyrell lordling added. "You are positively glowing, my lady, it would be the entire realm's delight to have you crowned as the queen of love and beauty at the upcoming tourney."

"Yes, there is no other fit for such a title," the Lannister also said. "The entire realm will sing praises of your beauty for years to come."

Lyra smiled at them. "Thank you, my lords."

"I do not suppose you remember me," the Lannister started, "though we had met before in the summer tourney."

She nodded dumbfoundedly. "I apologise, my lord, I cannot say that I do." She glanced at her father who was fighting to keep a laugh from his face.

"Yes, Tymond here, had fallen off his horse during the jousting," the Tyrell told her, slapping his hand lightly on the other's shoulder. "I would not blame you for forgetting, my lady."

The man named Tymond Lannister shot him an irritated glare. "Well, do not forget to mention to Lady Lyra that you had been knocked off your horse too, Matthos, then threw up on your squire."

Matthos Tyrell went quite red. "I had taken a blow to the stomach, Tymond, unlike you!"

"That is because the horse bucked me off!" Tymond argued.

Lyra felt a hand wrap around hers and she looked to her left. Daemon was now observing the two men with a frosty glint in his austere eyes.

"As I recall it, my lords," he interjected, "was it not I who knocked the both of you off your horses that day?"

Both Tymond and Matthos stopped their bickering at once and nodded silently at the prince.

"My prince, congratulations on your marriage," Tymond said in a very formal manner.

"Yes, House Tyrell offers our many congratulations to you," Matthos said.

Then the both of them promptly left while muttering, "What a lucky scoundrel he is!"

Daemon smirked in triumph before turning back to Lyra. "They had not bothered you, had they?"

"No, I found it rather entertaining," she told him. "They seemed rather close or am I wrong to assume so?"

"They have always taken pleasure in upping one another." Daemon shrugged. "A long-standing rivalry between the westerlands and the Reach, I presume."

She chuckled to herself. "How diverting."

Daemon looked at her fondly and traced a finger over her cheek.

"That will not do now. You will make me green with envy knowing that some other man has amused you so."

Lyra smiled coyly and leaned towards him. "I am not sure anyone could surpass the rogue prince in my eyes, I'm afraid."

He drew closer, violet eyes darkening like a growing storm. "Now I am of half a mind of quitting this feast early with you."

She could not help grinning at his absurdity as she protested, "But it has only just begun!"

He groaned lowly in complaint. "And it could not end any sooner."

Lyra laughed at his impatience before gazing back out at the hall. She had not seen such blithesome and grand festivities before. Of old and new faces, those that she would now call her own family and others that may prove to be faithful friends.

Suddenly, all three of her cousins with a company of fellow Northmen came forward to their table. Brandon with his brothers, Benjen and Elric, wore wolfish grins that she had come to recognise after having spent her entire life with them. She could already hear herself starting, "What mischief do you bring to me now?"

"We only have utmost love and devotion for our dearest cousin," Benjen said. There was not any doubt that they were all already drunk.

From behind his back, Brandon presented her with a wreath of beautiful and blue winter roses of the north. "A crown befitting our wolf princess, the lady of winter and summer."

She laughed at them as Brandon leaned over the table to place the wreath onto her dark hair. He then held a hand out to her. "Would you honour us with a dance, my lady?"

Lyra looked to her husband in disbelief and he grinned at her with delight. As if in cahoots, he helped move her chair back so that she could stand easily. She took her cousin's hand and followed him down from the high table and onto the space in the middle of the hall.

They joined the crowd of dancers, laughing as her kin surrounded them. Rowdy songs of the north filled the hall with ringing voices.

The other houses joined them, raising their cups of ale and wine in toast. Lyra took turns dancing with all her cousins and kinsmen until she thought her feet would fall apart.

Then to her utter surprise and delight, Prince Baelon had taken her hand for one dance. "My good-daughter," he greeted her with a sun-kissed smile. "I have never seen my son so utterly besotted and happy than when he is with you."

Her heart was elated upon hearing it. "I am glad, my prince."

"No, I am glad," he told her. "It is a joyous thing to see both my sons content with their lot. Their mother would have been so pleased."

Lyra had heard that Baelon too had loved his sister-wife dearly. "It fills me with joy, my prince, the gods have surely smiled upon me."

"I heard it had not started out so smoothly," Baelon said. "If my son were to step out of line again, you need only tell me and I will set him straight once more."

She laughed. "Aye, but I believe those days are behind us now."

"Indeed?" He took her hand again as they circled each other. "That is good then, I do hope he treats you well."

"More than I could ever have asked for," she told him earnestly. The dance was lively and energetic as he twirled her around.

"Good," he said. "As he should—"

To Lyra's utter horror, he let out a loud cry of pain. His hand fell swiftly from hers to clutch his side. Then he was collapsing to the floor with a growing sheen. She gasped and fell to her knees beside him.

The music scratched to a halt as she called out for help. A hundred eyes fell upon them in concern. The dancers on the floor backed away to allow the knights to come forward. A maester quickly attended to the prince.

Baelon writhed in pain upon the stone floor of the hall and Lyra knew not what to do. Daemon soon came to her side and picked her up with comforting words under his breath. "It's alright, my love, let the maesters see to him."

"What happened?" the king was asking from the high table as he tried to look over the commotion.

"The prince had been complaining of a bad stitch in his side since the hunt this afternoon, your grace," the maester informed him. "The dancing must have aggravated it and he will need to rest."

"A bad stitch," Daemon repeated in disbelief. "I have never heard of such a thing to fell a man." He then looked to Lyra. "Are you alright? You must have been so shocked."

She held a hand over her chest as she nodded in a daze. "Y-Yes..."

He started to guide her back to the high table. "Come and sit—"

But a hair-raising scream erupted from the back of the Great Hall. The nobles started to scatter once again and Corlys Velaryon was yelling towards the nearby knights. "It was that servant boy! Hurry to arrest him!"

The Northmen suddenly had fury within their eyes, cleansing all thoughtless revelry that had been brought by the ale. Benjen and Elric ran out of the hall first, followed by their vassals in what was clearly a manhunt.

Lyra slowly and carefully slipped out of Daemon's grasp, walking forwards into the crowd. The hall was now deathly still and all eyes watched as she flitted past. Liquid crimson was slowly blooming across the stone floor, seeping into porous holes and cracks. She saw his face, his unseeing eyes and the vibrancy of life leaving his skin.

Lyra fell onto her knees like a splintered thing, hands raking against the gaping hole of his chest. Blue petals fell like a windstorm onto lifeless lips. Lyra could not understand. He was breathing not more than a minute ago. Her body trembled, gasps tumbling from her parched throat. Colder than frost and rime, she felt a crevice split open inside of her.

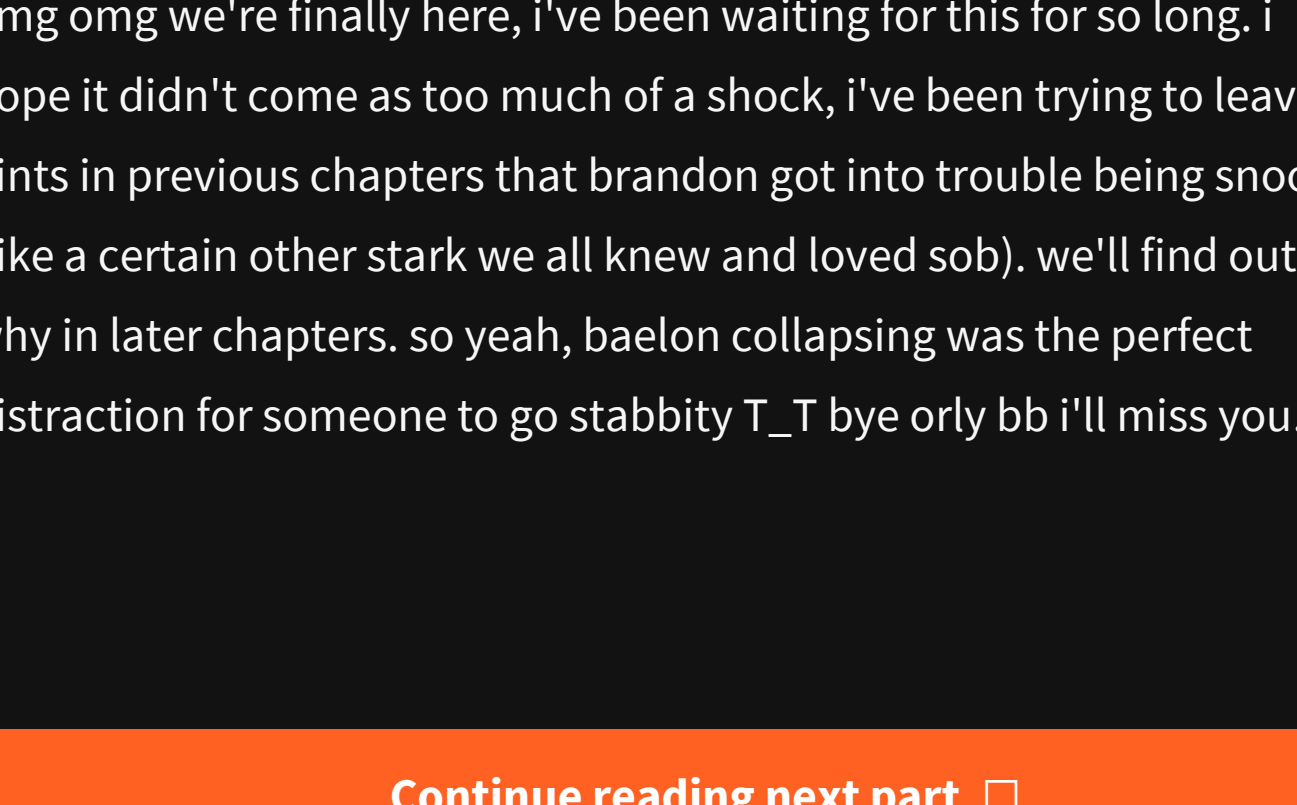
In the silence, her heart broke. Shattering. Crumbling. A thousand sharp ice crystals that could never be undone. With her forehead touching his, tears leaked from her eyes. Her blood. Her brother. She could not bear the thought that he would never walk amongst them again. Lyra screamed, a piercing wail that cut through the shivering night in a terrifying oath.

All who heard it in that moment knew. Brandon Stark was dead and not even the gods could help the person who had stolen him from the living.

Her hands shook in rage, in the blackest fury that was darker than any twilight doom. "Bring him to me," she hissed with dripping venom. "Bring the one responsible so that I may have his head!"

And when she looked up, with scorn on her face and vengeance upon her lips, violet eyes gazed back at her. As one soul, one heart. Daemon took her blood-smear hand in his.

"As you wish," he said.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

omg omg we're finally here, i've been waiting for this for so long. i hope it didn't come as too much of a shock, i've been trying to leave hints in previous chapters that Brandon got into trouble being snooty (like a certain other stark we all knew and loved sob). we'll find out why in later chapters. so yeah, baelon collapsing was the perfect distraction for someone to go stabby T_T bye only bb i'll miss you.