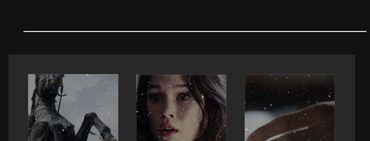
27



— ✶.☾.✶ —

THE clanging of steel resounded like deep war drums in front of the Old Gate. Lyra climbed the steps of a nearby tower to have a better vantage point over the streets. Mysaria and Sköll followed a er her closely. They observed Daemon exiting the barracks, donning the new armour and gold cloak of the City Watch.

Silver hair and violet eyes gleamed under the glow of the torches. "Commander on the floor!" an o icer announced. The drumming ceased in an instant.

Daemon stood proudly before his men. "When I took command of the Watch, you were stray mongrels," he started, "starving and undisciplined. Now, you're a pack of hounds. You're sated and honed for the hunt."

The men howled to the moon that hung low in the tenebrous sky. Daemon started forwards as he continued his address, "My brother's city has fallen into squalor. Crime of every breed has been allowed to thrive. No longer. Beginning tonight, King's Landing will learn to fear the colour gold."

They roared in arms and the gates were pushed open unto the Street of Silk. Lyra exchanged a look with Mysaria who rolled her eyes at the men's oafishness. Green eyes glimmered with amusement as Lyra smirked, "The men go to battle while the women wage the war."

They crossed a gangway to follow the gold cloaks into the city. The men marched down the streets and soon, desperate cries rang out from the deep shadows. Lyra watched steadfastly as the gold cloaks hauled men and women of ill repute into the square.

Thieves lost their hands, rapers were gelded and the murderers met the same fate as their victims. Mysaria paced with an air of gratification as justice was mete out with fiery retribution. "I have seen most of these faces and I have seen the su ering they wrought on the helpless. Preying on the weak; women and children alike. Cowards."

"Valar morghulis," Lyra said and Mysaria nodded in agreement.

A man was brought before Daemon and he looked to her from beneath his helm, hand resting atop Dark Sister at his side. Lyra continued to watch in silence as the hollow ring of Valyrian steel tore through the air. With one fell swoop, the man had been executed and Daemon tossed the head onto a cart that was piling high with dismembered body parts.

Lyra caught sight of a familiar silhouette lurking on the opposite wall of the square before slinking away, to the direction of the Red Keep. She whispered to Mysaria before leaving herself, just as the cart was led away to the gates of the city. Slipping through the shadowy caverns of Rhaenys' Hill, Lyra treaded soundlessly through the hidden passageways back into the keep.

Emerging by a hollowed wall by the entrance to the Tower of the Hand, she watched the skulking man from earlier cross the courtyard. He entered the building and a moment later, Otto Hightower emerged from his o ice bearing a dark countenance. Lyra retreated back the way she came from then changing direction towards the small council's chamber.

The members started to trickle in just as dawn rolled over the hills in a so pale light. Daemon entered too, looking around hesitantly before taking his seat. His hair was in disarray and blood was still smeared against his cheek.

"The prince cannot be allowed to act with this kind of unchecked impunity," Otto's voice echoed from the hallway outside as he strode in with Viserys. The king paused to consider his brother's disheveled appearance with a raised brow as they exchanged greetings.

"Carry on," Daemon said to Otto, "you were saying something about my impunity."

"You are to explain your doings with the City's Watch," the Hand demanded, placing his marble in its holder.

Viserys followed suit and sat down, prompting the other members to do the same. "Your new gold cloaks made quite an impression last night, didn't they?" he asked rhetorically.

"I would certainly hope so," Daemon said aloud. "I do not wish for the nobles visiting King's Landing to be mugged, raped or murdered."

"The City Watch is not a sword to be wielded at your whim," Otto reprimanded.

Daemon bit back, "If you've ever le the safety of the Red Keep, then you would know King's Landing is seen by the smallfolk as lawless and terrifying. The city should be safe for all its people."

From the other end of the table, Corlys spoke up, "We installed Prince Daemon as commander to promote law and order. The criminal element should fear the City Watch."

Daemon was quick to respond, "Thank you for your support, Lord Corlys."

"If only the prince would show the same devotion to his lady wife as he does his work, your grace," Otto interjected. "Where is the Princess Lyra? She was supposed to be here as a member of the small council but she is nowhere to be found."

Lyra deemed it was time for her to make an entrance. She slipped out from the corner of the room, walking up to them indi erently. "I have been here all along, Lord Hand."

Viserys raised his brow at her in bemusement. "Why were you hiding in the shadows, Lyra?"

"That is my forte, is it not?" She unfurled a scroll in her hand and laid it in the middle of the table before placing her marble in its holder. "A list of the criminals and their crimes that had seen the crown's law enforced upon them. With a population of five hundred thousand, I hardly think seventy-one criminals would have caused a dent to that figure, good-brother."

She sat in the empty chair by Corlys and exchanged sly glances with him then to Daemon. Viserys examined the parchment before him. "It is an exhaustive list," he remarked. "You were there yourself?"

"Information is my trade," she said, running a finger along curving lips. "You can say that I am everywhere at once." She caught Otto's glare and her smile only grew wider.

Viserys considered her words with deliberation. "King's Landing has been in decline since my grandmother passed. This new City Watch of yours may be a good thing." He looked up to them. "But I would prefer it if you upheld the law in a more peaceful manner."

Daemon bowed his head gracefully. "I will keep that in mind. Thank you, brother."

Otto continued to glare with dissent.

— ✶.☾.✶ —

Lord Rickon Stark had always been known as a dutiful man who loved his children. Duty was a trait weaved into their northern blood, bound by snowclad honour. Lyra adored her father, being the only child for fi een years of her life. He had taught her everything she wished to learn, read her the same old bedtime stories that she enjoyed, and brought her wherever her heart yearned to go.

It was a blessing then that Daemon was a devoted husband and father, though others may not paint him in the same light. Lyra knew it to be true when she saw how their children lit up at the very sight of him. All clamouring hands and grins of delight that warmed her heart like a summer breeze.

"Kepa, please win the tourney!" Baelor entreated. "You must crown muña as the queen of love and beauty."

"You just want the crown of blue roses for Nyra," Alyse reproached him. "You should join the tourney and win it for yourself."

"Kepa says I can only participate when I'm sixteen," Baelor complained.

"And a er you've trained harder," Vaegon added with a smirk. "You can still not best me in a sword match, brother."

"It is because you cheat, Vaegon!" Baelor retorted and they started to bicker for the third time that morning.

"Alright, that's enough," Daemon said loudly, grabbing both boys around the neck. They have almost reached his waist now. All too soon, they would be matching him in height. "Play nice now before I lock you in your chambers."

Alyse flitted over to Lyra and hung on her skirts as she always did. "Muña, can I have your crown this time if kepa wins?"

She smiled a ectionately. "Of course, my sweetling." Alyse stuck her tongue out at Baelor, who returned the gesture in kind. "Come now, we shouldn't be late for the king's tourney."

Daemon accompanied them to the grand stand before parting ways with a peck on Lyra's cheek. She corralled her children up the stairs and to their seats in the front row. Rhaenyra was noticeably late. Lyra took her place between Viserys and Corlys.

"Rhaenys." She reached over to grasp the older woman's hand with a delighted smile. "I have not seen you in a while."

"Oh, Lyra." Rhaenys patted her hand in return before Lyra drew away. "I'm glad to be back in the Crownlands. Dri mark can be quite lonely sometimes and the children were excited to see their cousins again."

"Laena, especially, was eager to see Vaegon," Corlys hinted lightheartedly.

Lyra laughed. "They would make a handsome match."

Beside her, Viserys stood to give his opening speech and the tiltyard broke out into raucous applause. Rhaenyra finally joined them and her cousins teased her for it. The Baratheons were the first to open the jousting tournament, one of them even calling upon Rhaenys with the title 'The Queen Who Never Was'.

Lyra looked to Viserys as Otto muttered to him, "You could have the Baratheon's tongue for that."

Viserys shook his head. "Tongues will not change the succession. Let them wag."

A er a decided defeat at the hands of a steward's son, the Baratheon banner was replaced by the three-headed red dragon of the Targaryens. Lyra watched as her husband rode up the tilts in black decorative armour on Dark Star. He examined the lineup of knights before him but it was obvious who his chosen would be.

"Ser Gwayne Hightower of Old Town, eldest son of the Hand of the King!" the master of revels announced to the spectators.

"Your lord husband is not one to shy away from making a point," Corlys commented beside her.

Lyra smiled in amusement, throwing a glance to her side and catching Otto's glare once again. She was aware that his daughter, Alicent, was a close friend to both Rhaenyra and Alyse though. For her sake, it seemed Gwayne Hightower had managed to escape with only a head wound from falling together with his horse.

Daemon rode over and the children went forward to congratulate him. "Now, as much as I would love to have the Lady Alicent's favour to help me win these games, it is incumbent upon me to beg for my beautiful dearest wife's favour instead."

"Muña!" The children called her over their shoulders excitedly.

Lyra exchanged glances with Rhaenys and Corlys, her husband's slight at the Hightowers once again not going unnoticed. She grabbed her laurel on the way to the balustrade. "Husband," she greeted. "I trust you are enjoying yourself."

"With the utmost pleasure." He grinned widely as she slipped her laurel down the sha of his jousting stick. Lyra hummed in response before retreating back to her seat. Viserys had disappeared but Otto's glare of disapproval continued to follow her.

The tournament went on nevertheless and soon, the knights started to turn on one another. Blood, bone and brains splattered against the ground on the tiltyard while the spectators cheered them on. "And the day grows ugly," Rhaenys commented.

Corlys shook his head with chagrin. "So this is how we celebrate the birth of our future king — with wanton violence."

"One could argue that the birthing bed is a battlefield of its own," Lyra said.

"Then us women have seen more war than any of these knights of summer grass," Rhaenys responded, prompting chuckles from them both.

The match between the last two contenders of the jousting tournamet was soon to begin and Viserys was yet to return. Lyra watched in surprise as Daemon was knocked o his horse, then yelling for his sword.

"Oh, dear, he does not take losing very well," Rhaenys commented.

"No, he does not," Lyra responded wryly.

They watched as both men swung their weapons with unrivaled ferocity and it seemed Daemon would be the reigning champion once again. But while he was rejoicing his premature victory with the spectators, the knight rose from the ground and swung his morning star at Daemon's back. In the end, Daemon was forced to yield.

"Ser Criston Cole, was it?" Lyra asked as she watched the knight remove his helm. His dark countenance and Dornish heritage was revealed as he moved to the grand stand for Rhaenyra's favour.

Corlys chuckled lowly. "Daemon is no doubt displeased."

During the thrill of the match, Otto had walked away from the stands but he returned and whispered quietly to Corlys. The Sea Snake frowned, looking to Lyra then to his wife. He leaned over to whisper in their ears, "The Queen has passed."

A wave of bitter frost washed over Lyra, soaking her in icy disbelief. Rhaenys touched her hand sympathetically before moving to gather the children. Lyra could not move at first, frozen as she was, then a storm started to rage inside her. She rose silently from the chair and hurried towards the birthing chamber.

A trail of grieving servants and mournful lords loitered in the corridors. Lyra jostled her way through the throng of condolers outside the doors. Her feet stopped at the threshold as her eyes took in the grisly scene before her. Blood everywhere. She staggered back slightly from the shock. Viserys looked up with tears staining his face and Lyra stared back with a cold horror congealing in her belly.

Her lips trembled, a gasp held in her throat. She moved forwards, her voice a ghostly whisper, "This is a lie. Viserys . . . this cannot be."

Viserys turned away with a shuddering breath, bowing his head back into his wife's unmoving hand. Lyra knelt on the opposite side of the bed, grasping Aemma's other hand that was stained crimson. The smell of iron stung her nose. The last vestiges of warmth clung to rigid fingertips and Lyra shook her head.

"No . . . no, she was hale when I saw her last," she muttered, heart wringing itself in agony. "I can help her. I just need . . ." She looked up, easily spotting a candle on the mantle. With frenzied movements, her desperate hands picked it up before searching for a fire striker.

"Lyra . . ." Viserys called her feebly, watching her vain attempts in a deep despair.

She returned to the bedside and swallowed the scant flame, before breathing it down Aemma's throat. Her hands curled around the bloodsoaked gown as she waited. But there was no spark of life, no breath renewed. Tears started to stream down her cheeks. It was a simple rite, it should have worked.

"Aemma, please, wake up," she pleaded the older woman's lifeless visage, lips paling with every passing second. She shook her shoulders in earnest. "Please! Why is it not working?"

Lyra repeated the rite once more, feeling the scorch of the flames against her flesh this time. The smell of burnt skin and hair permeated the air. Forlorn prayers fell from her lips with a feverish ache. Viserys clutched her arm. "There is nothing you can do, Lyra. Fire will not bring her back."

"Yes, it can!" she wailed, angrily pushing his hand away. "It did for me! Aemma, please wake up! Please!" A forlorn sob ripped escaped her throat. "Please, please . . ."

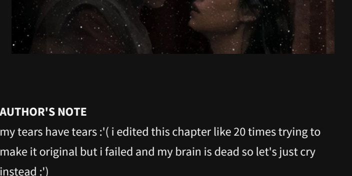
Her voice grew more distraught and frantic. Hurried footsteps entered the chamber and Lyra felt a pair of arms wrap around her waist, pulling her away from the bed. She fell to her knees on the floor, weeping bitterly, her mouth filled with ash. Daemon held her in a vice as she struggled to return to Aemma.

"It worked for me, why won't it work for her?!" she screamed furiously, salt staining her lips. "Aemma! Why not her? Why?!"

Lyra clutched her chest, anguish blazing within. A nail hammered through her heart, opening a black ugly chasm that ran deep into the root of her soul. Her body continued to tremble, as if it would fall apart in an instant. Fingers clawed against the soiled sheets, nails tearing through the cloth. Lyra cursed the gods, loathing herself and her inability.

The world grew dark, the sun paling before their eyes. She would have traded a hundred souls to return Aemma to the living. Her heart blackened. Stained with fire and blood.

— ✶.☾.✶ —



AUTHOR'S NOTE

my tears have tears :'(i edited this chapter like 20 times trying to make it original but i failed and my brain is dead so let's just cry instead :')

To be Continued...
WINTER'S SONG • daemon targaryen
Last updated: a day ago