

LYRA did not join her family for supper that night. Her tongue felt coated in ash and she could only swallow bitter regret. She withdrew to her room for solace while telling the maidservants to leave her alone. Then she proceeded to rip the laces of the bodice that bound her. Lyra tore her dress and flung it into the darkest corner of her chambers.

Heated pants escaped her lips as she felt a blackness spread from her chest, leaving her hollow and desolate. Daemon Targaryen was insurmountable. Did he think her so simple-minded? It was plain as day that he was not the one who guided the dress, nor gave two shits about it.

Lyra had fooled herself into thinking that Daemon would make a good husband. She should have known better. Yet it did nothing to ease the wound in her heart or her pride. He had almost disgraced her in court when the king asked if he was delighted to see her. She could not believe how uncaring he was to not utter even a single word in front of everyone until too late.

Her head ached from her exertions and so she went to lay in bed. Moonlight spilled through the windows and lit the chambers in a pale glow. The day had not been kind to her and she closed her eyes in exhaustion. But her sleep was plagued with dreams of silver hair and violet eyes.

When Lyra awoke the next morning, it was to the sound of knocking on her chamber doors. The three handmaidens that had been allotted to her entered before she could say anything. She remained reticent as they washed and robed her, then brought her to the refectory for breakfast.

Brandon was there to greet her. "Good morrow. Did you sleep well, cousin?"

Lyra pursed her lips as she reached for a loaf of bread. "Quite."

"Were you displeased by yesterday's events?" he asked knowingly.

"How could I not?" She sighed with vexation. "Did you not see the way he was looking at me? As if I were some common whore from Flea Bottom."

The corner of his lips twisted into a smirk. "The only woman he knows is from there." Lyra vehemently tore her bread in half with a glare. "Maybe he really wastaken aback by your beauty. You should ask him."

"I spoke to him," she disclosed stily, "after the court. He apologised but it did not seem sincere. He is as indifferent to me as one may be to a rock."

Brandon considered her with sympathy. "Do you want to visit the city with me? It will take your mind off things here."

Lyra deliberated on the suggestion before agreeing. After she had finished her meal, they took a carriage from the keep into the city. Gazing upon the view of Blackwater Bay was quickly becoming one of her favourite pastimes.

They stopped at a square in front of a large drinking fountain and Brandon wished to admire it up close. They said it had been installed upon the late Queen Alysanne's behest that the smallfolk had ample supply of clean drinking water. The people had then called them 'the queen's fountains' to remember her good will.

Brandon turned his gaze north-west then, down the Street of Sisters to the Dragonpit in the distance. "How I would love to catch sight of one of them," he said wistfully. "I cannot imagine such magnificent beasts chained below ground."

"It is definitely a pity," Lyra responded, turning herself to look at the domed structure upon Rhaenys' Hill.

But her face fell when she caught sight of something else. Or rather, someone. Daemon was striding up the street on foot, his gleaming hair tousled about his shoulders. She did not need to know the layout of the city to guess where he was returning from.

Even in the day, the brothel girls can be seen loitering the streets and throwing simpering smiles to the Prince. To his merit, Daemon stopped in his tracks when he saw her. Violet eyes were taken aback. Brandon gently touched her elbow.

"You do not need to suffer this here," he said quietly.

Lyra turned to follow him and they rode the carriage back up the hill. She caught a last glimpse of Daemon on the street, his fair face in want of expression, and she felt her heart plunge into her belly. Her fingers trembled against her will and she clenched them into the folds of her dress.

They arrived back in the courtyard of Maegor's Holdfast and Lyra threw herself against the door of the carriage. Her feet hit the stone ground without reserve before she was storming away. Brandon quickly followed after her but soon stopped short when she did not wait for him.

"Where are you going?" he called.

"Leave me be!" she bristled.

Lyra was blinded by rage. She did not pay heed to her foot falls as they brought her deep into the gardens once more. Past the flower beds of rose and hydrangeas, through the lily ponds. She climbed stone stairs guarded by weeping statues until she reached the cliffsides overlooking the Bay.

The tempest inside her grew to a standstill upon laying eyes on the glassy sea below. A breeze blew from the east, sultry and stained with salt. It made her skin itch. Lyra watched the fishing vessels below with their billowing sails and wondered if they could bring her away from there.

She stood by the fringe of the gardens until the sun neared its zenith in the azure sky. Footsteps soon approached her position and Lyra turned sharply to look on the intruder. Once again, silver hair and violet eyes haunted her even in the light of day. She took a step back without deliberation and felt her heel slip precariously against the edge of the cliffside.

Daemon hastily reached out to pull her back to even ground. Her skin and insides burned upon contact with his. She stumbled, breath catching in her throat, then wrenched her arm free of his grasp. Her heart fluttered tremulously in the confines of her breast.

Daemon perceived her unrest, his eyes studying her lack of composure. "You're angry," he said gently. "I apologise."

Lyra fixed him with a contemptuous scowl. "Really? Because you seem to take pleasure in humiliating me over and over again. Was the sting in court not enough?"

He frowned. "When did I—" Realisation seemed to dawn on him then before he entreated, "Believe me, it was never my intention to do so."

"If not then, is it your intention now? Even after your cold reception in court, you chose to sleep with your whores right after," she rebuked. "With the entire keep watching."

He waved a hand in the air. "No one cares whether I spend the night in the city or not," he told her.

"They care now, my prince." Her eyes were frigid. "I am here now. The slight is not on you but upon me."

Daemon blinked before averting his gaze. "I am sorry ... it was thoughtless of me."

"If you do not want me as your wife, say it," she retorted. "Better to draw our lines now than later."

"I assure you that is not the case," he said.

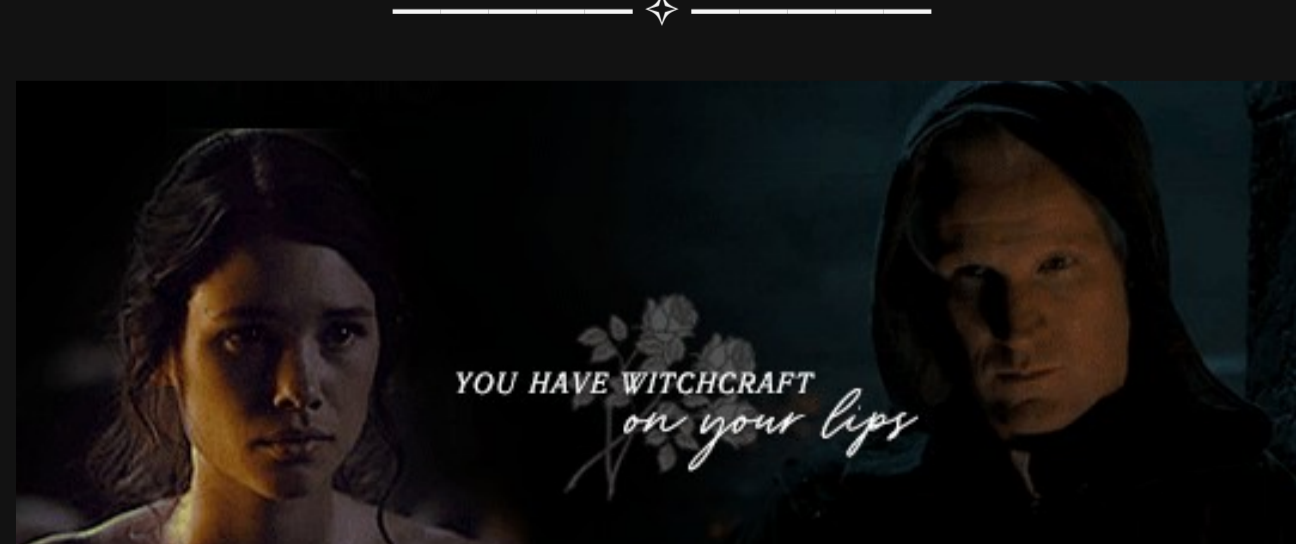
Lyra pursed her lips; she was not so easily persuaded. "Yet there is no love between us, is that not so?"

She waited for a response which Daemon seemed hesitant to provide. Instead, he bridged the gap between them until she could feel his breath on her face. To her surprise, she did not find it unpleasant. A sweet scent lingered on his lips, perhaps from some wine or other. His fingers trailed her shoulder, leaving goose flesh in their wake, and he twirled a stray lock of her hair.

Violet eyes brewed with a fervor intensity as he leaned close to her ear. "And how do you know that?"

Daemon Targaryen was a dangerous man; all wit and charm that he wielded like a poisonous knife. A rogue smile painted his lips and Lyra felt her heart still but for a moment. She knew that if she did not flee now then she would be devoured body and soul.

Yet she remained there unmoving under the spell of his touch.



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