

BRANDON had brought Lyra on another foray into the city. This time he was intent on visiting the Street of Looms. He said he needed to tailor new clothes for the wedding but did not trust the royal servants to relay his particular instructions. The street, so aptly named after its trade, was teeming with people under the mid-morning sun.

Lyra had never seen such a diverse array of fabrics before in her life. Golden imperial silk from Qarth, turquoise gossamer from the Jade Sea, the highest grade of mulberry silk from the faraway lands of Yi Ti. There were too many decisions that could be made.

They had left their carriage at Cobbler's Square and went on foot along one of the connecting streets. At every empty patch of wall was a stall selling exquisite trinkets and curiosities. Lyra was tempted to purchase an ivory looking glass for herself but thought better of it. In every alleyway they passed were urchins and beggars with watchful, ravenous eyes.

Soon, they came upon a rather large establishment with silken banners hung from a deep maroon roof. It was called The Crimson Clothier and the preferred tailor of the royal house. Brandon attempted to push the door open but it was locked shut despite it being business hours.

"How strange," Brandon remarked. "Wait here while I inspect the back."

Lyra crossed her arms as she watched him round the corner and disappear from sight. A pack of dogs skulked nearby for scraps of food. Even in the better parts of the city, she could still smell shit and piss around every corner. She thought she would much rather stay in the keep the next time Brandon had errands in the city.

He was taking too long. Lyra was about to start forwards to look for him when she heard a loud crash. Of glass and wood splintering. It startled her, but she was given no time to assess the situation when Brandon came barreling back. He grabbed hold of her arm and pulled her into the throng of patrons on the street.

A few onlookers stopped curiously but Brandon and Lyra were already long gone. They traversed the alleys and back streets of the city until they finally meandered their way back to Cobbler's Square. Lyra panted and wiped the beads of perspiration from her temple.

"What in the seven hells was that?" she asked in bewilderment.

"I'm not sure but I had a bad feeling about it all," Brandon told her as he leaned against their carriage with a hand.

She frowned in consternation. "About what?"

"I don't know." He shook his head before pulling the door open. "Let us return to the keep. I do not wish to linger here."

Lyra had intended to visit the bakeries on the nearby Street of Flour but did not argue with him. She entered the carriage before him and the coachman brought them back to Maegor's Holdfast. Lyra thought that it was not in her stars to fully partake in the vibrancy of the city and its smallfolk.

Upon crossing the bridge, she noticed a gathering in the courtyard. Several knights stood around another carriage which was open and overflowing with an assortment of fine goods. Dornish wine from the Arbor, the same magnificent mulberry silks that she saw earlier, sparkling gems and pearlescent trinkets. Her mouth fell in awe.

As Lyra and Brandon dismounted from their own carriage, they heard a series of complaints on the state of the courtyard. The moat was unkempt, the ivy unruly. Curious, they approached the talkative man in greeting. Golden hair glimmered under the sun when she drew near.

Lyra was shocked to find it was Prince Baelon Targaryen. Her soon to be father by law. War hardened and brave as he was mad, he carried himself with a majestic grace that he wore like a velvet cloak. He turned to her with sharp familiar eyes before breaking out into a large warm smile. "Is that to be my new daughter?"

She hurried to curtsy clumsily. "I am honoured, Prince Baelon. My apologies, I did not know you would be returning today."

He approached her and bade her to stand, then studied her at length. "You have grown to be a beautiful young woman since the last I saw you. My son must be pleased with the match."

Lyra looked up at him with a strained smile. She knew where Daemon had inherited his easy charm and looks now. "Thank you."

He turned to her cousin who was patiently waiting behind her. "And ah, yes, you must be Brandon Stark. I heard you would be joining us in King's Landing. Come, come, have a look. I have brought plenty of gifts with me, my men say perhaps a tad too many. Choose whichever pleases you."

"You are too generous, my prince," Brandon said. "But surely they are for the wedding?"

Baelon waved a hand in the air. "Why yes, this is your tithe, for House Stark."

Lyra was almost too stunned to speak. "I am eternally grateful. It is a great honour to unite our houses."

"The honour is ours," he said. "Long has my father admired the resilience of the North since he last visited the kingdom. But come, let us retire to the more refreshing shades of the tower. The servants will sort this all out."

Lyra and Brandon exchanged glances seeking aid before they followed the Prince of Dragonstone. To their relief, her father had already caught wind of Baelon's return to the keep. The Lord of Winterfell was waiting within the halls of the Holdfast and Baelon gave Rickon Stark a pleasant greeting. Like a hurricane, they were already flurrying away to a withdrawing chamber for what sounded like some wine sampling.

"I'm out of breath already," Brandon remarked.

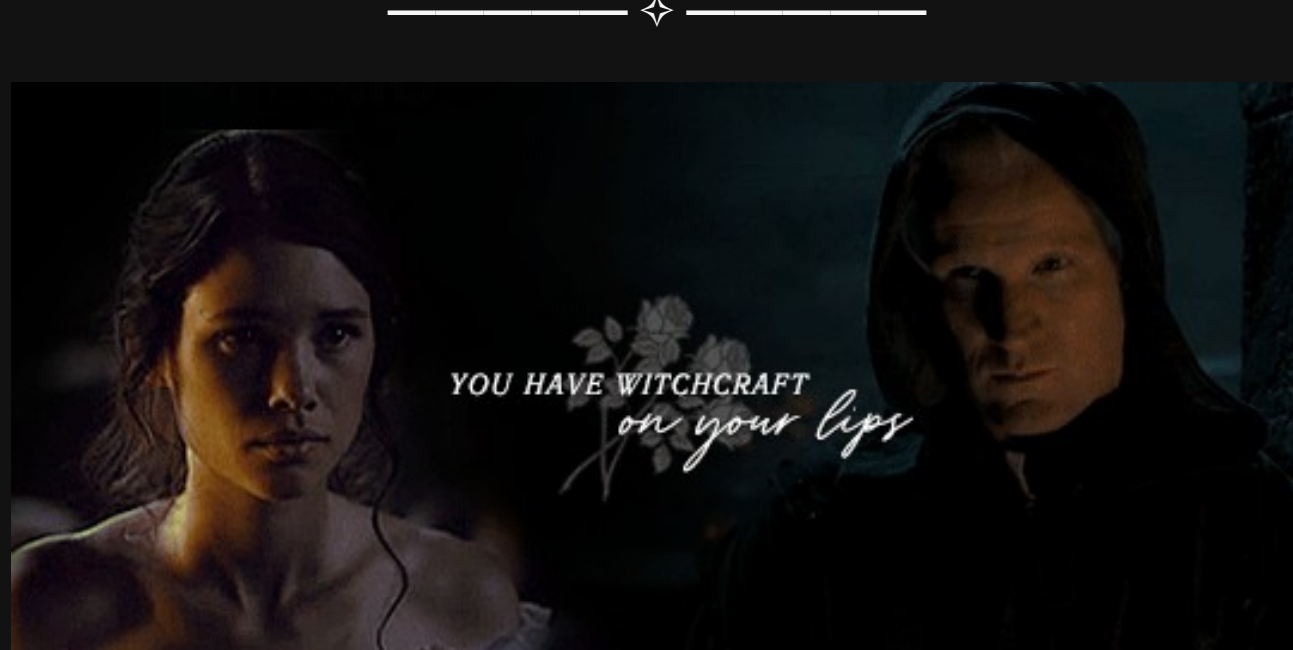
"So am I." Lyra watched as the two men disappeared around the corner of the corridor. "Now I wonder what Daemon's late mother had been like. He is the very spitting image of his father though."

An amused voice asked from behind, "Am I now?"

Lyra startled and turned around to find a smirking Daemon. Brandon hurriedly made some excuses and scurried away, abandoning her alone with the fiend himself. Traitorous as she rebuked him inwardly.

Daemon gazed down the hallway. "I seem to be too late. He is with the Lord Stark, is he not?" Lyra nodded mutely with assent. "What am I supposed to do now? Would you care to take the airs with me, my lady? I will regale you with tales of my late beloved mother as much as it pleases you."

Before she could respond, he had taken her hand in his and pulled her away in the direction of the colonnades. The larks sang overhead as the sun started to descend from its peak in the sky. Lyra felt her heart shiver as it descended, a curious familiarity sweeping over her. As if her fingers had been sculpted to fit his.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

ok but daemon and lyra are having me deceased right now. why does daemon have to steal every scene he's in even in my imagination. this is a pretty blah chapter but i needed to set some things up.

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