

WHEN Lyra was thirteen, she had gone riding with her cousins. They went as far north of the wolfwood as they dared. Following the road on their left, Lyra remembered being able to see Deepwood Motte in the far-off distance. The seat of her maternal house atop a hill overlooking fields of oat and barley.

A bear had suddenly emerged from the thick woods of hawthorn and ash, causing Lyra's horse to throw her into the deep snows underfoot. Unarmed without her bow and arrows, she could only scramble to a stand. But the bear had circled around and faced her down with bared teeth.

She remembered being told to run but her body was frozen still. Under the pale sun, the bear had been prepared to lunge when howls sounded from the trees, feral and enraged. Five wolves jumped onto the path, jaws snapping and snouts curled. Leading the pack was a direwolf, standing as tall as the bear itself, its gleaming pelt as pure as first snow.

Their menacing growls filled the air until they pounced on one another. Lyra took the opportunity to run, making her way in the direction of the road. Their yelps and roars rang in her ears until she had rejoined her cousins.

Wolf-princess, they used to call her after the incident. No one back home believed them when they told the story and it soon faded from memory. But Lyra would sometimes remember, whenever she donned her dresses or braided her hair. There had been a time when she was young and wild, and wolf-kissed.

Now she was walking under a summer sun with a betrothed that was more serpent than man. Lyra lightly fanned herself as they strolled along the garden path overlooking the Bay. The waters shimmered brilliantly that day, the light dancing upon the noontide.

"You like it very much, don't you?" Daemon asked.

She glanced briefly to him. "Well, I've only ever seen frozen lakes."

"The Bay of Ice is not actually made of ice," he argued.

"No one willingly goes to the Frozen Shore." Lyra gave him a ludicrous expression. "The closest that I've ever been was Deepwood."

"Why didn't you take a ship from White Harbour instead?" he asked.

"It was not advised for the horses," she told him. "There was a handsome stallion that was bred from our garron with a beautiful destrier. My father intended to give it to you after the wedding."

He smiled with interest. "I would very much like to see it."

She studied him for a moment. "The North does not have much to offer other than ice and tales that would scare children from sleep."

"Well, it has you," he countered.

"I am not so easily flattered or impressed, ser," she retorted. But there was a hint of a smile on her lips.

"Then I suppose I will have to do much better than that." He took her hand in his once more, pulling her to another direction away from the gardens. They went back into the tower of the royal apartments, climbing the western walls until they reached a familiar hallway. Lyra recognised it immediately and stopped him.

She pulled her hand away while hissing. "Daemon, this is not appropriate."

He pressed a finger to his lips, reaching for her hand once more. "It's not what you think."

Slowly, Daemon pushed the door to his bedchambers open. Lyra took a so breath as he led her inside. Like thieves in the night, she made sure there was no sound when she closed the door behind her.

The drapes had been shut and shadows clung to the corners of the room like dusty cobwebs. Daemon brought her towards a wall, hand sliding against the uneven stones before applying pressure onto a loose piece. There was a crack and a sliver of an opening appeared from the floor to the ceiling. He pushed against it and there was a low rumble as a passageway revealed itself.

Daemon turned back to her, eyes dark and searching. "I give you my word that no harm will come to you."

Lyra gave him a guarded expression but nodded with acquiescence. He led her down a spiralling flight of stone steps. It grew darker the further they went and all she could hear were her own breaths echoing in her ears and the soft falls of their feet. She could feel the nervous beats of her heart against her breastbone.

"Where are we going?" she whispered.

"You'll see," he responded enigmatically.

She bit her bottom lip and continued to follow his figure. It felt like they were descending into the seven pits of hell itself. Soon, they reached even footing that branched into three separate paths. Daemon took her down on the right and she wondered how often did he use these tunnels in secret.

The following corridors were longer and darker still. It was completely empty and devoid of any life. Lyra was reminded of the crypts beneath Winterfell. But there were no statues of the dearly departed to decorate the stone pillars or arches here.

"When I was barely born a fortnight," Daemon told her, his voice sounding closer than it did, "my mother had taken me into the sky on her dragon."

"Did you come to bond with that dragon after?" she asked.

"No ... but one quite similar in shade and temperament." He gave her a smirk that caused her to doubt their little adventure. She wondered what mischief he was bringing her into.

Finally, they reached the end of the corridors only to climb another tall flight of stone steps. Though she could see a faint light at the top of the passage. There was also a lingering scent in the air, of ash and brimstone.

Lyra gripped Daemon's hand tightly and he turned to her with a reassuring smile. But there was something else; there was excitement in his eyes. Something inside her began to stir, something that she thought she had laid to bed a long time ago.

They stepped out onto the great arena of the Dragonpit. Its domed structure towered high above them with ascending tiers of carved stone. More than half a dozen dragons rested within those walls and four dozen more dragonkeepers to tend to them all. Lyra could feel her blood quickening in her veins as she took them all in, searing them to memory.

"Come," Daemon urged, bringing her to one of the larger dragons resting in its stable. It was a handsome vermilion beast that was lean of frame and as long as it was wide.

Lyra exhaled nervously and let go of Daemon's hand. The dragon had caught her scent, a golden snakelike eye opening to scrutinise her. Daemon held his arms out, reaching to touch the dragon's gleaming maw. "Lykirí" he commanded softly. "Ziry iksos nykeā raqīros."

The dragon snorted, swaying from side to side with a low rumble in its throat. "Raqīros", Daemon repeated more sternly. "Dohaeras".

After an indignant huff, the dragon raised its head upwards and stretched. Lyra was ambushed by a sudden gust as the beast unfurled its leathery wings. Daemon reached out for her next, pulling her close just as the dragon gave a short shriek for attention.

"Lykirí" Daemon scolded as if it was an unruly child and the dragon shook its head with another shriek of disapproval. But if it intended to swallow Lyra whole, it made no show of it. Daemon turned back to her, "His name is Caraxes."

He took her hand and placed it against the warm scales of the dragon's neck. "Caraxes," she whispered, slowly drawing her gaze over the magnificent creature. The dragon stared her down defiantly but she paid no heed to it as she trusted Daemon to control his dragon's appetites.

"Follow me," he told her, demonstrating how she should climb onto its back. He placed a foot onto the joint of the wing and reached up for the saddle strap on the dragon's back. She hastened to follow suit and Daemon pulled her up into the space in front of him. His arms encircled her and grabbed hold of the front billet. He leaned in close to her ear, "Are you ready?"

Lyra nodded with the beginnings of a fevered eagerness. Her voice was breathless with verve. "Yes."

"Sövegön Caraxes." Upon Daemon's command, the dragon lurched forward to the entrance of the Dragonpit. A few dragonkeepers scurried out of the way as Caraxes ambled carelessly on all fours. Outside, the great beast stretched its wings wide and stood tall on its haunches before taking flight.

Lyra could feel her blood rushing into her ears as they soared, higher and higher, until they were touching the wispy clouds themselves. She shivered against the chill and grasped onto the billet next to Daemon's hands. There was no other sensation like it, no words to describe the utter exhilaration that was trapped in her throat. So this was what it felt like to be the greatest house in all of Westeros; dominion over the empyrean skies.

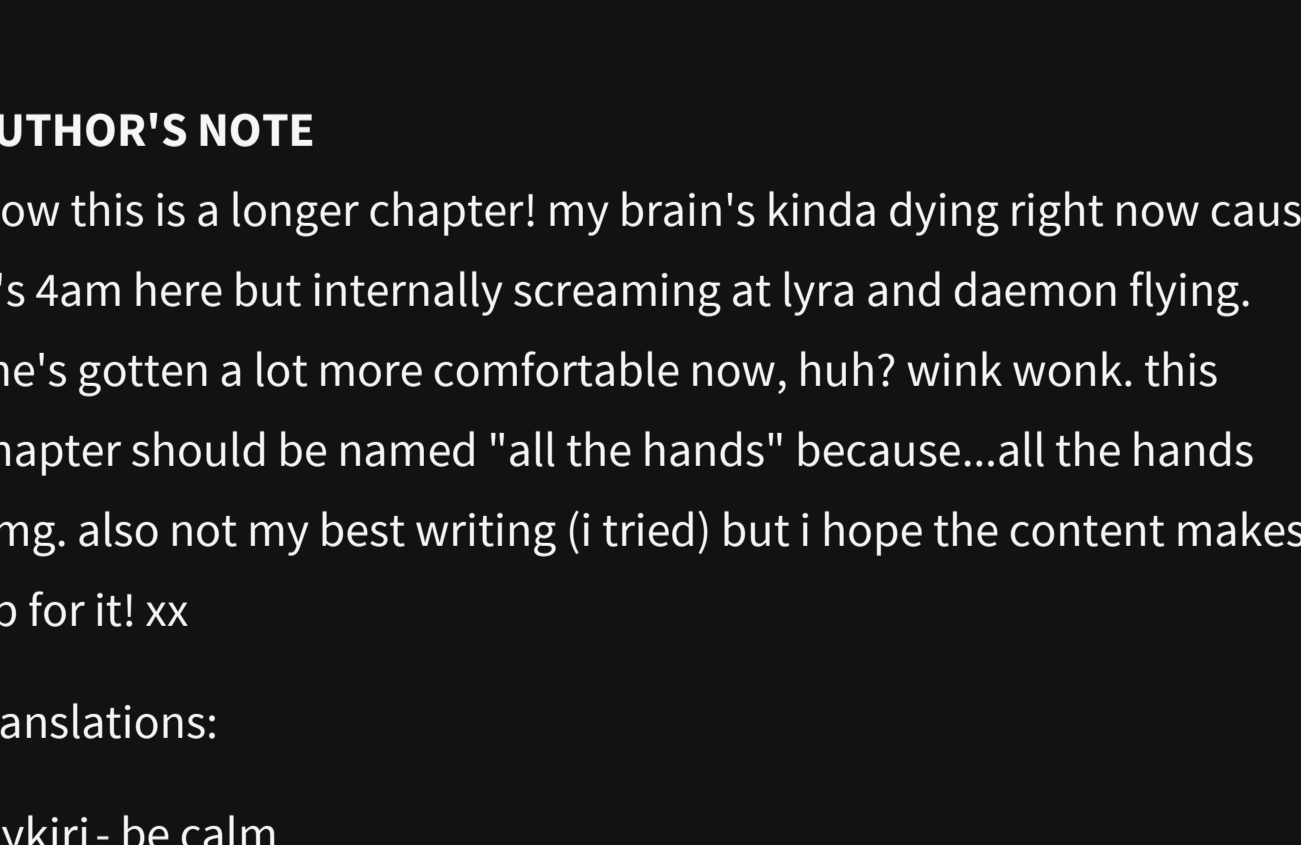
They emerged from the cotton mist and Caraxes stopped his ascent. The dragon started to glide evenly over the shimmering Bay with a retinue of gulls flying overhead to accompany them. The sun casted a halo of light over the never-ending azure plains. Lyra laughed with exuberance and warmth, enjoying the wind in her hair and upon her face.

Daemon's voice was low and endearing in her ear. "That is what I was looking for. I knew there was wildfire in you."

Lyra turned to look at him over her shoulder, a vision of summer storms and star fire. His eyes were blazing amethysts that pulled at her every heart string. Perhaps it was the sight of him that took her breath away the most, all roguish charm and unrestrained abandon. This must be why Targaryens were said to be closer to gods than to men.

"So..." Daemon continued, "have I impressed upon you yet, my lady?"

She tried to resist the wide smile on her face, to utter futility. "For the moment, yes."



#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

Wow this is a longer chapter! my brain's kinda dying right now cause it's 4am here but internally screaming at Lyra and Daemon flying. she's gotten a lot more comfortable now, huh? wink wonk. this chapter should be named "all the hands" because...all the hands omg. also not my best writing (I tried) but I hope the content makes up for it! xx

translations:

Lykirí- be calm

Ziry iksos nykeā raqīros- she is a friend

Raqīros- friend

Dohaeras- obey

Sövegön- fly

Continue reading next part