



**DAEMON** and Lyra somehow ended back in the gardens of the Keep. A light shower had suddenly fallen and they took shelter under one of the many pergolas that dotted the grounds. Ivy and rose climbed the wooden trellises, twining in unruly curls of untamed foliage. With the Bay to the east, waves churning the now dark waters, the clouds gathered overhead to dull the sun. Lyra shivered slightly.

"Come here," Daemon called so ly, beckoning with an arm to her. She peered at him with a bemused brow until he took her by the wrist, pulling her into his chest and warming her within his clasp. "Now, isn't that better?"

It did feel better but she shook her head nonetheless. "As brazen as ever," she remarked.

"But is it as brazen as this?" he asked and her chin was snared between his fingers, face turning to his. For one tantalizing moment, his lips grazed against hers. So , warm and inviting.

Lyra's eyes widened in surprise and her breath caught in her throat. She hastily turned away from him with an aggravated frown. "Stop! You are so—"

"—insurable?" he finished for her with a sly grin.

Lyra had to close her eyes to restrain herself from rolling them in pure exasperation. "I was going to say infuriating"

Without giving respite, he was pushing her gently against the trellis and she could smell the cloying scent of roses over the petrichor. It was much, much warmer now despite the raindrops trickling from their lashes. Her pulse quickened, breaths uneven.

She gazed into a lilac storm of desire, framed with silver tendrils of starlight. Her fingers reached up to brush the stray locks from his face, her warm fingertips against his cold skin. She took a trembling gasp as his hands trailed the edges of her neck, thumb caressing the bud of her lip.

Lyra narrowed her viridescent eyes. "Don't you dare," she hissed.

"We're to be wed soon anyway," he murmured. "Tell me you don't feel the same."

She turned away to hide the smile on her lips, lest it betrayed her. He was too charming for his own good and would happily drag her into the pits of hell with him.

"It's not proper," she said instead.

"Then it's a good thing that I'm not a proper man." His fingers continued to trail across the empty canvas of her skin, committing the map of her body to his memory. Sable interlaced with ivory.

Hearts trembling to the advent of a crashing crescendo.

"You'll ruin me," she whispered.

"We shall be ruined together."

Their lips met and he tasted like morning rain, so and sweet and gentle. She felt a warmth like the parting of storm clouds revealing a ray of sun. It made her want to kneel at the roots of a weirwood tree, hands wringing feverishly for deliverance. Like the Doom of Valyria, Daemon was devastation in a baptism of holy fire and she yearned for more. His face, his lips, his throat. To mark, to take, to burn

Then she woke up with a gasp.

The air was so still that she could taste its stagnancy. Lyra blinked heavily under the streak of morning sun that snuck between the drapes of her window. Her head ached painfully as she drew a hand over her face. She only had a bleak recollection of Dornish wine from the night before. A er that, oblivion.

Lyra groaned and laid helplessly under her covers. Then her mind wandered back to the dream she had before waking. Her heart fluttered and she felt a flush crept up her throat at the hazy recollections. How mortifying she was glad that nobody could pluck the thoughts from her head and read them like an open book.

The sunlight grew with intensity and soon a er, her handmaiden entered to find Lyra still lying despondently in bed. "My Lady..." the young girl called uncertainly.

Lyra sighed and bade her to enter. She washed herself and got dressed to be brought to breakfast. Brandon was there to greet her. "You look dreadful, cousin."

"I am sure it was your fault," she accused as she took a seat. Her hands quickly reached for the pitcher of water and a cup.

"On the contrary." He looked at her with an amused smirk. "You spent the night with your betrothed."

Lyra spluttered and choked. "What do you mean?!"

Brandon's smirk grew more audacious as he returned to his parchments. "I take it that the wedding will go smoothly then?"

She stared at him in horrified silence as her thoughts came to a screeching halt. "Wait, no, what?" Lyra forced a laugh before realisation finally dawned. "Did it rain yesterday?"

"I believe so, yes." He spared her a curious glance.

Her face visibly paled and Lyra remained reticent throughout her meal. Brandon le the Keep on some business in the city, abandoning her to her own devices. Lyra wandered the halls of the Keep as she thought of what to do. Perhaps she could find some comfort with Aemma and Rhaenyra. Their company always provided diversion for her, so she made her way in the direction of the nursery.

As she passed the archway into the eastern wing of the Holdfast, she could see the familiar head of the last person she wanted to see. Her handmaiden bumped into her back with a profusion of apologies but Lyra merely steered her in the opposite direction. She scurried away, glancing back only to find Daemon having caught sight of her. There was a short pause before he picked up his pace towards her.

She panicked, heart jumping to her throat, as she hastily pulled her protesting handmaiden in a roundabout route towards the nursery.

Lyra inwardly cursed at her heavy hems as she continuously looked over her shoulder. Daemon was easily gaining up to her with his longer gait. She turned the corner and nearly cried out in relief when she caught sight of the older princess and her daughter.

"Aemma!" she called.

Aemma and Rhaenyra stopped to give her a surprised look. "Oh, Lyra."

"Good morrow, Aunt Lyra!" Rhaenyra waved at her happily. "I've been so eager to see you!"

Lyra hurried over and took her smaller hand. "So have I. Have you eaten yet?"

"We were just about to have apple cake in the gardens, would you like to join us?" Aemma o ered.

"Yes, that sounds wonderful!" Lyra smiled widely, already nudging Rhaenyra towards the nearest gate.

"That doessound wonderful, may I join too?"

Lyra felt a wave of ice wash over her at the sound of his voice. Rhaenyra looked around with a jubilant grin. "Uncle! We'd be delighted for you to join us!"

Daemon walked up to them with a smug smile. "Good morrow, good sister and my soon to be lady wife. I could have sworn I saw you running away from me earlier."

Lyra fixed him with a glower. "Good morrow, soon to be husband. I am sure that you must have seen wrong."

Aemma looked between the two of them with an expression that was torn between amusement and concern. "Daemon. Rare of you to join us for cake in the gardens."

"But I love cake," he insisted.

Aemma hummed skeptically before taking Lyra by the crook of the arm. Just as she was being led away, she caught Daemon winking with a devious smile. This man was going to be the death of her.



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