**The Taming of the Dragon**

by **xdarksistahx**

**Summary**

Lyanna Stark is chosen by her village as a sacrifice to appease the dreaded beast that plagues their lands. There have been maidens before her, all lost. Does Lyanna have what it takes to keep the beast at bay, is she the one the creature seeks? Only time will tell.

**Notes**

Moodboard by iamsmall
Sacrificial

For those I love,
I will sacrifice.
They come for Lyanna in the dead of night.

By all rights, she should’ve known they would, for the entire day was filled with bad omens. A pack of wolves howling mournfully at daybreak, a shattered looking glass in her bedchamber, and the mess of spilled goat’s milk she made during supper.

Foolishly, she turned a blind eye to the warnings and carried out her day as she always had. She begrudgingly tended to her needlework, attended her teachings, and snuck off to the woods to spar with the butcher’s boy.

She supposes it’s a good thing they came for her before her father discovered that she often wore the clothes she’d borrowed—stolen—from her second eldest brother so that she may masquerade as a boy whenever she snuck away to the woods.

At least some good will come from this. Regretfully, it is the only good.

Her cries and screams for her father fall on deaf ears as she’s dragged through the village, in nothing but a thin, white gown that is meant for sleeping and nothing more. Her bare feet are black with mud by the time they reach the cliffs where the great boulder sits.

Only six moons ago, another maiden was chosen as a sacrifice to the beast that has plagued their lands. They believed the creature was done with them after that. They feasted and sang praises to the Old Gods while the parents of the offered maiden hung themselves. A tragic yet inevitable outcome, they were all told by the leader of their village, the High Maester.

The High Maester assured them the beast would trouble them no more. But then the beast returned, demanding a new sacrifice. If they deny it what it seeks, fire and blood shall fall upon them.

What’s a maiden or two to that of the entire village?

“Lyanna of House Stark,” the High Maester shouts over the whipping wind and mutters from the crowd, “you have been chosen to serve the will of the gods!”

If her throat wasn’t raw from all her useless screaming, she would’ve cursed the man. The Others take him, she bitterly thought. The Others take them all. Even her father who stands in the crowd, expression solemn.

Will he shed no tears for her? No, not Rickard Stark. Any tears he may shed for her will be done in private. Her brothers are nowhere in sight, and she wonders if her father made them stay away. Surely, Brandon, Ned, and Benjen would fight for her. They wouldn’t allow her to be taken by a monster.

The great boulder stands near the edge of the cliff, overlooking the jagged rocks that peek up from the sea like grasping fingers. As they’re binding her hands, she considers jumping over so that she may have free will one last time. What more can they or the beast take from her in death?

Lyanna doesn’t have it in her in the end. She is bound to the rock, bound to her fate. Her thumb is captured by the High Maester’s and he slices it with a bone blade.

When her blood falls into the fire pit, the flames turn blue and uncontained, reaching out into the sky like a beacon, before simmering down and fading back to reddish-orange. Fumes from the flames waft to Lyanna’s nostrils, and she unwillingly breathes it in.

The High Maester doesn’t mask his pleasure. “We have chosen right this time,” he says, facing the dumbstruck villagers with his arms outstretched. “The Prince of Fire seeks a bride born of Ice.
This,” he says, gesturing at Lyanna, “is his bride!”

Eyes growing heavy, the High Maester’s words become distorted, the faces in the crowd blurry and distant. As her eyes fall shut, she can hear wings flapping and a bone-chilling screech in the distance.

It has come for her.

Sometime later, Lyanna awakes to the sound of seagulls and waves pushing and pulling against the shore. Bewildered, she slowly lifts her head, taking in her surroundings. The sand beneath her is cool and black. On her pale skin, the grains look like tiny onyx crystals.

It’s early dawn by the look of it. The clouds in the sky are sparse, and the sun is rising from the sea, casting the world in tinges of pink, blue, and dusky yellow. As far as the eye can see there is nothing but water ahead of her. Yet to her back stands a grand castle so massive and majestic that the sight of it takes the breath out of her.

According to the bards, the beast that took her tends to live in caves where they protect hordes of gold and other treasures, not a castle. There are stories, as well, that speak of what those monsters do to the virgins they steal away.

Lyanna doesn’t want to think of those stories now, or ever.

With effort, she gathers herself and manages to get up. Staggering, she winces painfully. The soreness of her body makes itself known at that moment. She doubles over, clutching herself, her breaths ragged and strained.

It’s as if the beast dropped her out of the sky. Not intentionally, though. Because why would it do that when she is meant to be its prize? Perhaps that explains why she stands before a palace and not a cave. Perhaps the beast dropped her but intends to return for her soon. And she won’t be here waiting for it like some silly goose.

Lyanna ignores the ache in her bones and the unsettledness of her stomach. She runs toward the palace in hopes of finding safety. Yet no matter how hard she runs, it’s as if she hasn’t moved at all. Either the palace is further away than it appears or the sand isn’t allowing her to get far.

Just when all seems lost, she hears hooves in the sand and loud neighing. Heading straight for her is a tall rider on a black mare. The rider is in full armor; black, polished steel with a red sigil she can’t make out sitting proudly in the center.

He’s a knight, then. Meaning he’s to be trusted. That’s what the minstrel’s songs say, that’s what the tales have taught her.

“Please, Ser,” Lyanna squeaks, her voice nearly gone. “You must assist me!”

The knight is silent as his horse gallops to a sudden stop. He only smiles at her before offering his hand. A shiver travels through her but Lyanna blames it on her poorly clad body and the breeze that rolls in from the sea. She reaches for him, and he quickly draws his hand back.

Assuming he’s the teasing sort, she opens her mouth, a curse at the ready. This is not a time for jests. Suddenly, a white powder is blown in her face, taking the fight out of her.

Once again she’s rendered unconscious and left at the mercy of a vile creature.
When Lyanna awakens again, she finds herself on a chaise lounge chair inside a bedroom bigger than her family’s abode.

From wall to floor, the space is adorned in riches. Paintings and tapestries are hung and scattered rugs nearly cover every inch of the floor. At the foot of a huge bed sits a painted chest with gold trimmings. Across the room, there is a vanity, a wardrobe, and two more large chests.

Similar to the palace, the room fills Lyanna with awe and wonder. She has to bite back the urge to explore every corner of this space and discover what the chests hold. The room, though grandeur, is of no importance to her at the moment.

She doesn’t know where she is. She only knows an imposter of a knight tricked her and brought her here. How can she be certain that there are no more tricks waiting for her? Lyanna would rather not wait around to find out.

Hurriedly, she gets off the chaise chair. Notably, the soreness in her body from earlier is no more. In fact, she can’t think of the last time she felt this rested. Perhaps the knight’s powder is to thank. She doubts it, but only because she doesn’t want to have reason to be grateful to the man.

The sound of the heavy oak doors opening startle her. She looks for a place to hide. She isn’t fortunate in that regard. As big as the room is, there aren’t that many places to hide.

An older, plain-faced woman with copper hair and a hooked nose enters with folded cloth in her arms. “The Master wishes for you to accompany him for dinner,” the woman says in a tight voice. “I have drawn a bath for you. I see that it is required.”

Lyanna opens her mouth, closes it, and opens it again. She will overlook the woman’s slight. For now. “Who might you be?”

Disregarding Lyanna’s question, the woman sits the cloth on the bed and kneels in front of the chest, opening it. “You will not be late,” she says. “The Master does not care for tardiness.”

The woman’s tone and overall air of importance remind Lyanna of Septa Mordane, her tutor back in her village. Although she is fond of her septa, she is not fond of this woman.

“Who is this Master you speak of?” And why should she care about what they like or dislike? “I would like to know who is hosting me as their guest.”

The woman removes a pretty, dark red dress from the chest. Lyanna peeks inside and sees wads of silk and other dresses neatly folded inside. Something shiny in the chest catches her eye when the light touches it. When the chest closes with a loud thump, she jumps.

“The Master is the master of this castle,” the woman answers vaguely.

“A king then?”

“We have no king.” She hangs the dress on the wardrobe. Then turns to Lyanna, examining her with a critical eye. “You are more comely than the other one.” A short pause. “I suppose.”

Lyanna frowns deeply. “The other one?”

“Perhaps not as bright,” she replies. “Quickly now. We haven’t a moment to spare.”

Will none of her questions be heard? If this becomes a constant here, Lyanna would rather face the beast. Being treated like a doe-eyed dimwit infuriates her more than anything. But she must remind
herself that she is a guest here, that without their hospitality she’d be left to the creature’s mercy. A mercy she doubts exist.

The woman takes her by the arm and all but drags her out of the door into a smaller yet equally lavish room. As the woman is pulling her away, Lyanna sees a harp leaning against one of the walls. Of all the things in the room, that’s the item that draws her attention. From that room, they enter a washroom. There are red rose petals floating in the steaming water, the fragrant scent enchanting, calming.

Lyanna remembers the fumes from the flames the High Maester gave her blood to. The memory of it makes her shiver.

“A hot bath will beat the cold back,” the woman says, already making quick work of freeing Lyanna of her filthy and torn gown.

“I can undress and bathe myself,” Lyanna says stubbornly, jerking away from the woman. She hugs herself warily. “Which kingdom am I in? No king resides here, you say, but a king must rule these lands."

For there are seven kingdoms, each ruled by a different king. Collectively the kingdoms are referred to as Westeros.

“If you insist on bathing yourself, be certain to do it properly,” she says, disregarding Lyanna’s question entirely. Yet again. “I will return for you. Do not wander off.”

The woman adds a dash of oil to the water then she flitters out of the room before Lyanna can pester her with any more questions. When the door is shut, Lyanna continues staring at the wooden, carved door, her mouth slightly ajar. She’s only been here for—actually, she doesn’t know how long she’s been here—and she already dislikes this woman.

Perhaps dislike is too strong of a word. Lyanna isn’t usually this quick to pass judgment on someone but so far what she’s been given from the woman is highly unlikable. No matter, she reassures herself.

Once she figures out where she is, she can find her own way back to her village.

Sinking into the hot water, every bit of her, even her bones, sigh in relief. Lyanna doesn’t wash immediately. She just sits there, with her chin resting on her bent knees, slowly inhaling and exhaling. A tear rolls down her cheek. She watches it fall into the water and create tiny ripples. That’s the only mourning she will allow herself.

After her bath, the woman dresses her in the red dress complete with a girdle that squeezes the life out of Lyanna and pushes the little bit of breasts she has up to her bloody chin. Unlike the gowns she is accustomed to, this gown is more revealing. It has a deep cut, giving her cleavage, the fabric at the sleeves can be seen through, and far too much of her back is on display. Despite her discomfort, Lyanna says nothing. If this is how the ladies dress here, she will do the same.

It doesn’t mean she isn’t going to complain about it to herself every chance she gets.

“Now what to do with your hair,” the woman mutters to herself.

It’s a question Lyanna is often faced with herself. Her father refers to her hair as wild like her, and she doesn’t blame him. Her hair isn’t like spun silk or whatever the minstrels say in their songs. Her hair stops short of her waist, it does not lie flat but bends and curls whichever way it likes.
Everyone who knew her mother would tell her that she got her hair from the woman.

Whenever Lyanna considers hacking it all off, she thinks of her mother.

Somehow the woman manages to pull the majority of her hair up, leaving only a few curls to frame her face. Jeweled combs are added here and there. A red ribbon to match her dress is tied around her neck. Lastly, the woman has her press a rose petal between her lips to stain them.

“Now you are ready to meet the Master,” the woman says, proud of her work. And she should be because she accomplished the impossible.

Lyanna thanks the woman for everything. The woman seems surprised by her gratitude, and for once she’s rendered speechless.

Walking through the halls of the palace, Lyanna is constantly looking from left to right, even above. Like the rooms she’s seen so far, the halls are adorned in splendor. There are large, arched doorways, mounted swords and daggers, and even paintings of what appears to be the Master’s family.

Most of the people look the same. Moonlight hair, violet eyes, beautiful. There is a handful with black hair, brown eyes, and dark skin and they’re just as beautiful. One portrait has her halting her step. It is of a young boy with long silver hair and sad violet eyes. He’s holding the harp she just saw in the room.

“Come along,” the woman says. “You’ve kept them waiting long enough.”

“Them?”

Seated at the table in the grand banquet hall are two children.

There is a boy who appears to be no older than three and ten, with his long silver hair tied with a red ribbon. As for the girl, she is a small thing, with silver curls and bright purple eyes. She’s wearing a pink, age-appropriate gown. She appears to be no older than five.

When they see Lyanna enter, they quit whatever game they were playing with their hands and stare at her openly.

“Lord Viserys,” the woman introduces, “and Lady Daenerys. This is…”

“Lyanna,” she pipes up nervously. She doesn’t know why the children make her nervous. But they do. Especially the boy; he has the eyes of someone much older. “You have my thanks.”

Viserys smirks, and it reminds Lyanna of the foxes that roam their lands. “Don’t thank us yet. Please, do sit down.” He gestures to the chair directly across from him. “You may leave us, Gaia.”

The Master is a child, then? It isn’t unheard of, just unexpected.

The woman, Gaia, bows and departs without another word. Lyanna sits down and has a hell of a time doing so due to the dress’s constraints. She hopes she doesn’t look as idiotic as she feels. From the amused glint in the boy’s eyes she can tell that she does, in fact, look idiotic.

“Pretty dress!” Daenerys says loudly, pointing at Lyanna.

Lyanna smiles. The girl is the prettiest thing she’s ever seen. “Thank you, Lady Daenerys. Your dress is very pretty as well.”
Daenerys’s face lights up, and whatever nervousness Lyanna felt washes away like blood in the rain. She looks over at who Lyanna assumes is her brother. “I like her, Viserys!”

“Please, Dany,” he says under his breath, “we don’t even know how long she’ll last.”

Some of the light leaves Daenerys’s face. She lowers her head sadly. Lyanna leans forward, prepared to brighten the girl’s mood again but then a door is opened. Immediately, Viserys and Daenerys stand from their seats. Lyanna does the same even though she isn’t sure what’s going on.

The first person to enter is a tall, broad-shouldered man with dark skin, sharp, hawk-like eyes, and a comely face. When he sees her, he smiles, and she is reminded of the knight on the beach. This is that same knight. Lyanna balls her fists and frowns at the man. He notices and smiles harder. She wants to shove her fist down his throat.

Following the infuriating knight is another tall, broad-shouldered man. He is fair-skinned, lean, and elegant. His silver-white hair shrouds half of his face yet she can see how handsome he is despite this. Handsome doesn’t feel like the best word in his case, however. He looks the way fae kings are said to look. He’s an ethereal beauty.

When their eyes meet, Lyanna finds herself staring into sad, violet eyes. This is the boy from the portrait, a man grown now.

He stops in front of her, and her breath hitches, the action causing her cleavage to rise higher. The man’s eyes never leave her face. Even as he carefully takes her hand into his. His hand is strong and warm, his nails long, clean, and they look sharp. But his touch is gentle.

“Welcome, Lady Lyanna,” he says, his voice as smooth as silk. He lightly kisses her knuckles. “I am Rhaegar Targaryen, the lord of this castle.”

Lyanna swallows hard and nods. Her words are trapped inside of her, and she truly hates it. She isn’t some empty-headed maiden who is so easily moved. And yet she doesn’t think to ask him how he already knows her name.

Rhaegar releases her hand and moves away. Whatever spell that was placed on her seems to wear off. She can breathe easier and she doesn’t feel so warm all over anymore. He holds her chair for her. She sits and he pushes her up to the table. When he sits, Viserys and Daenerys sit as well.

“I see you’ve already met my younger siblings,” Rhaegar says, smiling at the children. “I hope they were polite.”

Why does she get the feeling that his concern is more so for Viserys and not Daenerys? Perhaps because it is Viserys who rolls his eyes at his brother’s comment. He seems like the troublemaker out of the two.

“They were very polite and welcoming,” Lyanna says, trying not to make eye contact with Rhaegar again. There is something about his eyes… “Would it be rude of me to ask which kingdom I am in?”

“Of course not.” Rhaegar lifts his finger for no apparent reason. His nails look like claws from she’s sitting. “Are you familiar with the Crownlands?”

“I am.” She has seen it on the table map her father keeps in his chambers. To think the creature brought her this far south.
Several servants enter carrying platters of food. Dinner is roasted boar, rye bread, quail eggs, nuts, goat cheese, and something Lyanna has never seen before.

“It’s a fig,” Rhaegar says, understanding her confusion. “From Dorne.”

Dorne is another place Lyanna has only ever seen on a map. The southern kingdoms and their practices are foreign to her. The north, where she is from, is the only world she has ever known.

Surprisingly, it is Viserys who shows her how to eat the fig. He does so in a way that’s not mocking and for that she is thankful. She finds the fig quite enjoyable.

“The wine is Dornish as well,” Rhaegar says, lifting his goblet. It’s gold with encrusted rubies. A lord with this kind of wealth is unheard of. In the north, that is. But she is in the south now. Perhaps things are different here. “What do they often toast to where you’re from?”

“In the north, we toast to the old gods so that they may bless us with a short winter.”

“To the old gods then,” Rhaegar says, drinking.

Lyanna smiles and does the same. The wine is sweet. She’s never had wine so sweet. Before she can stop herself she drinks half of it.

“Forgive me,” she mutters, embarrassed.

Rhaegar chuckles warmly. “Indulgence is encouraged here.”

The others at the table seem content amongst themselves. Arthur is helping Daenerys with her food when needed, and speaking softly with the little girl and making her giggle at every other thing. Viserys appears to be lost in his own mind. Occasionally, he will answer one of Daenerys’s many inquiries. Other than that, it is only her and Rhaegar talking.

Rhaegar asks her if the food is to her liking, and he tells her that he can have something else prepared if she doesn’t like it. Lyanna assures him the food is good because it is. He asks her about her stay so far, about Gaia specifically. She doesn’t mention the woman’s rudeness and keeps her answers short and polite.

When he isn’t talking to her, he’s watching her. Not in a lecherous way.

His gaze doesn’t make her feel the way the gazes of old men and the few suitors in her village made her feel. It as if Rhaegar is trying to see what his eyes cannot. The heat of his gaze is intense, like the heat of a furnace. She only wishes for him to stop because of how it makes her body react.

As soon as the thought enters her mind, Rhaegar looks away from her. And Lyanna can breathe again. She finishes off her wine.

“My lord,” she says, finally looking at him again. “You have yet to ask me how I happened upon your shores…”

Although the others aren’t looking at them, she knows they’re listening, waiting.

“I was informed of the state you were in when Arthur found you,” Rhaegar says, not meeting her eyes. “I thought it rude to bombard you with questions so soon. If you are ready to discuss it then by all means.”

Lyanna glances at Daenerys. She doesn’t want to frighten the child. But Daenerys is in Arthur’s lap
now, nodding off against his chest. If she didn’t know any better, she would assume the man was her father.

“I was stolen from my village,” Lyanna says quietly.

“Stolen?” Rhaegar asks, raising a fine eyebrow.

Actually, she was given up like a lamb and no one tried to save her. She doesn’t want to reveal that part to Rhaegar or any of them. She has her reasons.

“Yes, by a creature,” she says. “I believe it will return here looking for me. I ask that you help me return to my village. My father will reward you handsomely.” As if her father has anything Rhaegar would want. But Rhaegar doesn’t know that.

“What kind of creature?” Viserys asks, not masking his intrigue.

“I do not know if it goes by a different name in the southern kingdoms but in the north, we call it a dragon.”

A heavy silence falls over the table. Even Daenerys, who was snoring only moments ago, is sleeping quietly now. Initially, she assumes their silence is due to disbelief. Viserys is the first to break the silence.


“No offense was taken.”

“Lady Lyanna,” Rhaegar starts, his eyes sincere, “I am sorry for any discomfort this...dragon...has caused you. I should be able to arrange your safe return to your village in the coming days.”

She hoped they could set out in the morning but she understands that preparations have to be made. “Thank you, my lord. I will never forget your kindness.”

Dinner resumes.

Pleased with the conversation’s outcome, Lyanna has more wine. She knows it is unladylike to drink excessively but it’s very good wine and no one is here to scold her. Besides, she is eight and ten now. Old enough to drink as much as she pleases.

Soon, Arthur excuses himself to put Daenerys to bed. Not too long after, Viserys excuses himself as well. Only her and Rhaegar are left at the table.

They’re the only ones left in the banquet hall.

The man appears to be the silent, observant sort. He prefers to watch, only speak when necessary, and learn everything he can about a person while guarding his own secrets. He’s mysterious. He likes to keep it that way, too.

But this is all just speculation. She doesn’t know anything about even though it feels as if they’ve met before.

“You like the wine,” Rhaegar says, knowingly.

Lyanna can feel herself blush. “You were the one who told me indulgence is encouraged here.” She isn’t sure how she gets the courage to look him in the eye as she says that, but she does just
Now that she thinks about it, this is the only man, outside of the family, that she’s ever been alone with. When suitors come for her, Septa Mordane always chaperones. Or her eldest brother, Brandon, will be present. The realization makes the wine in her stomach sour. She touches her stomach, feeling ill all of a sudden.

Rhaegar leans forward to check on her, and she quickly leans away.

“Forgive me, my lord. I believe I should retire for the evening. The day has been long…”

“Of course. Please allow me to see you to your chamber.”

Lyanna eyes him warily. He appears to be a kind and respectable man. Looks are deceiving, though. “I...I…” By the gods, is she already drunk?

“I see.” He lifts his finger again.

Moments later, Gaia enters. Rhaegar orders her to escort Lyanna to her chamber. He bids her a good night before she departs. She would’ve returned the well wish if it weren’t for the wave of nausea that takes over her. Thankfully, the contents of her stomach remain in her stomach.

Gaia helps her change into a gown and combs her hair. The woman is quiet throughout the entire affair. With the girdle no longer constricting her, Lyanna feels a thousand times better and doesn’t feel as if she’s going to shame herself by vomiting.

When she’s left alone, she doesn’t explore the room as she wants too. Instead, she gets right into bed. The moment her head touches the pillow she falls fast asleep.

“Go ahead, say it.”

“You’re a scoundrel and a coward,” Arthur says without hesitation. “What kind of game are you playing at?”

Rhaegar doesn’t take his eyes off the scroll laid out in front of him. They’re in his library. Well, they’re in what used to be his library. He spends more time here than he does anywhere else. He even sleeps in here. This might as well be his bedchamber.

“I assure you this is not a game to me. Need I remind you how long I’ve searched for her? How much misery I’ve endured in my search?”

Arthur’s expression is remorseful. “Poor choice of words on my behalf,” he says. “I only meant that you’re going about this the wrong way. When she discovers the truth—"

“Arthur, please. Yell at me some other time. For now, allow me to revel in this sweet moment longer.”

“Fine.” The man sits across from him, sighing heavily. “Dinner went well. She’s...interesting.”

Rhaegar scoffs. “Is that all you can say about her? She’s beautiful, has some level of intelligence from what I’ve gathered…” He pauses. “I should probably never say that to her, should I?”
“It could rub her the wrong way, yes,” he chuckles. “You must remember that she’s human. We are easily offended.”

“I’ve said worse to you when we first met.”

“I have thick skin.” And he knows how the Others view all of mankind. Arthur looks at the scroll Rhaegar was reading before he entered the library. It’s a scroll they’ve both read hundreds of times. “Are you certain she’s the one the prophecy speaks of?”

Rhaegar recalls the scent of Lyanna’s blood in the flames, the way it called to him, and the way his body, mind, and soul answered the call. During dinner, her blood called to him still.

“It’s her,” he says confidently.
Decadence

all you have is your fire

the dragon has found her.
That night, Lord Rhaegar visits her dreams.

Well, it isn’t him. Not really. It’s simply his dream self interacting with her dream self.

Lyanna isn’t sure how or why the man happened upon her dream but she can’t say that his presence there is unwanted. In fact, the sight of him delights her. She lifts the skirts of her sweeping gown and runs to him.

They’re in a vast, verdant meadow filled with wildflowers; poppies, dandelions, daisies, and milkmaids. Above their heads, the sun hangs high in the clear sky, casting them with its warm, golden embrace.

Rhaegar takes her by the hand, his touch delicate.

“We must leave before It arrives,” he says. His voice sounds distorted and muffled as if he were speaking to her from the other side of the meadow. “Come with me, Lyanna.”

Lyanna doesn’t know what he’s referring to but she wants to go with him, though she doesn’t understand why. As they’re leaving the meadow, she gets the sudden urge to look back.

“Don’t,” Rhaegar says.

But the warning is futile.

Lyanna looks back and sees the sunny meadow is now withered and bleak. The flowers and grass are singed, black ashes blowing in the wind. She looks back to Rhaegar but he is no longer there. A terrible screech and the flapping of large wings ring in the air.

In an instance, the world goes from day to night as the beast’s massive form covers the sky. The dragon has found her.

Waking with a start, Lyanna sits up in bed, breathing heavily and sweating. Her entire body is trembling. She pulls the sheets up to her neck as if they could protect her from anything. The dream felt so real, she can still feel the heat of the dragon on her body, under her skin.

Gradually, the beating of her heart slows and steadies, allowing her to think clearly, and recognize that the heat beneath her skin isn’t entirely due to fear, but something else, something fleshly.

Lyanna shoves the feelings down deep inside of her, refusing to recognize or accept it.

It was only a dream turned nightmare, that’s all.

She looks silly right now, cowering in bed like a child. She’s not bound to a boulder out in the open for it to easily take her. The dragon can’t reach her in this castle with its high, sturdy walls.

For now, she is safe.

A thin line of moonlight seeps through the curtains, letting her know that it is still night or early morning. No doubt Gaia will be here in a few hours to force her into another painful girdle and billowy gown so that she may waddle around the castle doing nothing of importance.
Perhaps she can see more of the castle and its grounds. Perhaps Rhaegar can show her. Surely the lord is a busy man, though. She doesn’t want to burden him any more than she already has.

It crosses her mind to have a look-see inside the chest at the foot of the bed but that dream has left its mark on her mind and body. She doesn’t think she can move from this bed anytime soon.

What does it mean to dream of another, Lyanna has always wondered.

As a girl, she would dream of her mother, sometimes her father. The dreams were more like memories rather than fabrications of the mind like so many dreams often are. She’s never dreamed of anyone outside of her family.

That isn’t true. She’s dreamt of faceless strangers before but their presence in her dreams has never been as impactful as Rhaegar’s. If only the dragon hadn’t appeared. Rhaegar told her not to look back. If she dreams of him again, she will heed his warning.

Gaia does come for her later.

The gown she is given to wear today isn’t as lavish as the gown she wore for dinner, but a girdle is still required, unfortunately. Lyanna endures, however. And the periwinkle compliments her nicely she thinks. Instead of pulling her hair up again, Gaia gives her a single braid and adorns it with pearls and tiny flowers.

If Lyanna remembers correctly one of the women in the portraits wore her hair this way as well.

“Queen Rhaenys,” Gaia answers Lyanna’s question. “The bards and minstrels adored her. The common folk, too. I figured this style would suit your hair better. Do you like it?”

The woman is nicer today, she notes. Lyanna wonders if Rhaegar had a word with her. She hopes he wasn’t too harsh. He doesn’t seem like the type of man to be cruel to his subjects, but she doesn’t know him from a pail of water.

“Yes, I like it very much. Thank you, Gaia.”

“Yes, I like it very much. Thank you, Gaia.”

“Queen Rhaenys,” Gaia answers Lyanna’s question. “The bards and minstrels adored her. The common folk, too. I figured this style would suit your hair better. Do you like it?”

The woman is nicer today, she notes. Lyanna wonders if Rhaegar had a word with her. She hopes he wasn’t too harsh. He doesn’t seem like the type of man to be cruel to his subjects, but she doesn’t know him from a pail of water.

“Yes, I like it very much. Thank you, Gaia.”

“The family usually breaks their fast at different times,” Gaia says, adding finishing touches to Lyanna’s hair. “The Master and Ser Arthur have already broken theirs. You can eat alone or join the little lord and lady if you want.”

Lyanna decides to eat with Daenerys and Viserys.

They don’t dine in the great hall again, but outside on one of the many balconies that overlook the beach. The weather is fair and the breeze gentle. For breakfast, they have a tasteful spread of poached eggs, bread, plum jam, nuts, figs, and roasted fish.

Little Daenerys is cute as a button in a purple dress and her silver ringlets adorned with white flowers while her brother is wearing a red velvet vest over his white blouse. She isn’t sure how the flowers in Daenerys’s hair stay in place with all of the child’s wiggling. Her brother looks as if he’s irritated, but Lyanna gets the feeling that’s just how he always looks.

“Did you sleep well, my lady?” Viserys asks.

For a child, he speaks eloquently and with an air of authority. Granted, he is a lord who is a descendant of royalty apparently.

“Yes, I did.” She did sleep well for the most part even though she wasn’t able to fall asleep again
after waking from her nightmare. “Thank you for asking.”

Viserys nods and eats quietly. Daenerys is a different story. She bombards Lyanna with question after question. But Lyanna doesn’t mind at all. Children are just naturally curious.

“I am from a village called Winterfell. It’s very far from here. I have two older brothers and a younger brother.”

“You’re the only girl, too?” Daenerys asks, her violet eyes bright and big. “We’re the same!” she declares cheerfully.

“Yes, we are;” Lyanna laughs. “Us only daughters have to stick together.”

Daenerys nods vigorously. She makes a face at Viserys. “Viserys won’t let me play the sword game with him because I’m a little lady.” She pouts.

“No, that isn’t true,” he says. “I won’t let you play with me because you’ll cut yourself. Our family is full of warrior women. When you’re older, you can train all you like.”

A sensible response, Lyanna thinks.

At least Daenerys has the option. Lyanna’s father forbade her from ever picking up a sword though she did anyway in secret. She thinks of encouraging Dany to do the same with a sparring sword, but it isn’t her place. Viserys doesn’t want his little sister getting hurt.

There’s nothing wrong with that.

As for the warrior women in their family, she would like to know more about that. So, she asks.

“I believe a tour is in order.”

Lyanna looks up to see Rhaegar stepping out onto the balcony. Similar to his little brother, he’s wearing a velvet vest over his blouse, but his vest is black. He’s also wearing a pair of black leather riding boots. He looks as if he’s just returned from a ride. Lyanna envies him of that. She would love to go for a ride.

“My lord,” Lyanna greets with a bow of her head.

Rhaegar goes over to Dany, leaning over to kiss the top of her head. The girl giggles happily. It’s clear that she adores her big brother.

“Would you be interested, my lady?” Rhaegar asks. He steals a berry from Viserys’s plate and ignores the boy’s annoyed grumbles. “In a tour, that is. I can tell you more about the warrior women in our family.”

There’s something about the display that makes Lyanna think of her own brothers. It speaks to Rhaegar’s closeness with his siblings as well. She finds that aspect of him charming.

“Yes. I am interested in that.”

“Please, finish your meal. I will return for you.” He leaves the balcony.

At first glance, Rhaegar comes off as the kind of lord who sends others to do his bidding; to wet their blades in his name. However, his stature says otherwise. There is a strength in his form that speaks of his physical prowess more than his pretty face does. Her eyes lower to his firm backside.
He’s very strapping indeed.

She stops herself from eyeing him further and quickly looks away. She finds Viserys smirking at her as if he read her mind. Ashamed, she keeps her eyes on her plate for the remainder of breakfast.

Humans, Rhaegar has learned over the years, are very easy to read.

Their individual desires and aspirations are as clear as the Blessed Springs his ancestor Baelor I once bathed in. Even Arthur, as unique as he is, is awfully transparent. The man is bound by honor.

He lives to serve and to shield the lives of those he’s sworn to protect. Most knights are like that. The real ones, anyway. There isn’t a greedy or wicked bone in Arthur’s body. Because of that, Rhaegar personally chose him to guard his family in this realm.

As for Lyanna, she shares a desire with only a few women in her position. She wishes for freedom, to make her own choices and live the way she wants to live. The idea of being paired off with a suitor she hardly knows frightens her. She hates the idea of being tied down, controlled. She wants to roam the world freely, untethered to the duties her family’s name has bestowed on her.

How does Rhaegar know all of this? Well, it’s one of his many gifts; his intuition.

It isn’t the same as mind-reading. That requires more power than he currently has. He can only recognize a person’s whims, not the depth behind those whims or the driving force.

During the golden age of his people, they could perform all sorts of magical feats, but as their race died out, so did their magic. Even still, his kind is still considered the most powerful of the magical creatures. Without them, all of the magic in the world would be lost.

“I’ve never heard of any kings and queens of old with silver hair and violet eyes, my lord.” Lyanna admires a portrait of his ancestor, Visenya Targaryen. “Then again, I didn’t even know what a fig was.” She laughs at her ignorance.

Rhaegar doesn’t know many humans are willing to laugh at their own ignorance. Then again, he doesn’t know many humans. “The history of my ancestors was omitted from the history texts. All that remains of them reside here.”

After showing her the various drawing rooms, the ballroom, and the natural hot spring that resides in the lower part of the castle, he brought her to the display room. Here, he keeps artifacts that once belonged to his ancestors. They move from Visenya’s shrine and he shows her Rhaenyra Targaryen’s prized ruby choker; a gift from her consort and uncle.

Rhaegar omits all mentions of incest. Humans don’t take too kindly to it, he’s heard.

“Why is that?” Lyanna asks.

“IT is a subject I would rather not discuss. Forgive me, my lady.”

“No, forgive me for asking.” Something across the room catches her eye and she smiles. “Is that a bow? I’ve never seen one like that before.” She walks over to the case.

It was her who was following him from case to case but now he follows her. Lyanna reads the
nameplate to herself. Through the glass, he watches her reflection. She reads the name carefully, lightly tracing her fingers over the engraved letters.

“It’s written in both the common tongue and High Valyrian,” he tells her.


Rhaegar chuckles.

“What kind of bow is this?”

“It’s Dornish.”

“But of course. Is everything from Dorne?” she jokes.

“Seems that way, I know. Our family has strong ties to Dorne, the Martells specifically. We have been bound by marriage and blood for centuries.”

Lyanna looks at the nameplate again. “And you said it was also written in High Vah...I’m sorry.”

“Valryian,” he pronounces slowly, drawing out every syllable.

The cadence of his voice appears to have an effect on her. She shivers and a faint blush spreads across her face; he can smell the blood rise to the surface.

Humans are so responsive, he thinks amusedly.

In her defense, they are standing awfully close and he does burn hotter than an average person does. He knows she can feel the heat of him on her back, he knows how that heat can both intimidate and arouse.

Rhaegar isn’t that merciless, however. He takes a step back.

“I promised to show you the gardens, as well. Shall we?”

Lyanna blinks and nods slowly.

“I take it you have a passion for archery, my lady,” he says as they’re walking through the corridors.

“In my village, women and girls are given certain duties. None of those duties require the use of a bow or any weapons other than a small blade to gut fish.”

Which would explain why her village, much like the other human villages, are so poorly defended. If they simply taught everyone, both men and women, how to fend for themselves, their species would be harder to kill off. At the same time, Rhaegar is fortunate for their incompetence because too many of their heroes have slain his kind.

That’s how it all began. Some magical creatures believed that humans deserved the same knowledge they possessed. When that knowledge was shared, man turned it into a perversion and used it for their selfish gains.

Rhaegar shuts that part of his mind down. He doesn’t want to let that ingrained anger and hatred to cloud his opinion of Lyanna. She’s not like other humans. Like Arthur, she’s unique.
“If things were different in your village would you be interested in archery?”

“I suppose,” she says as if she wasn’t just staring at Daena’s bow the way some women stare at silver combs and diamond tiaras.

They step out into the terrace and enter through the garden’s arched hedge gate. In the garden, Rhaegar is introduced to another side of Lyanna. The same woman who fancies tales of warrior women and their beloved weapons of choice also fancies flowers. And there is an abundance of flowers here because his mother fancied them as well.


Lyanna gives him a sympathetic look. “I’m very sorry, my lord. The garden is very lovely.”

“Please do have a look around. There are more than 300 species of flowers here.”

“I’ve never seen so many.”

She’s very expressive. Every time she sees something she likes, her grey eyes brighten and her smile is blinding. He knows she either dislikes or doesn’t care for something by the way that light dims, and her eyes quickly search for another item of interest. That light never dims here in the garden. She’s all smiles and curious glances.

Rhaegar thinks he could watch her admiring the flowers for hours without fear of boredom.

“My lord, come look,” Lyanna calls to him.

He’s embarrassed by how eager he is to answer her call. All this time, he’s been keeping a safe distance, allowing her to enjoy the flowers on her own. She points to a rose bush, showing him the single blue one among the red.

“It’s a winter rose,” Lyanna says, grinning. “They grow in my village. They’re the only flowers that grow from the snow.”

“How peculiar.” Rhaegar plucks the flower, and before Lyanna can scold him—because she looks as if she’s going to—he presents it to her, bowing slightly. “For the lady.”

He’s awarded with another blush, and a bashful smile. Only seconds ago she looked as if she was going to knock him across the head. Now she’s as delicate as the rose she is now holding up to her nose.

Lyanna is a woman of many sides, he sees. He’s anxious to unravel her, piece by piece. Unfortunately, that will have to wait.

Rhaegar’s ears twitch, a tingle brushing across his neck. It’s his instincts warning him of a threat.

Something has infiltrated the barrier.

Further away from the gardens, Viserys and Dany are out in the lining woods.

The former likes to come out here from a reprieve from the castle’s suffocating walls while the latter just likes to follow her brother around everywhere. Which makes Viserys’s search for peace and quiet fruitless.

If he doesn’t let Dany come along she’ll cry, and if he makes her cry Rhaegar will make him cry
harder. In all honesty, Viserys doesn’t mind Dany joining him on his ventures into the woods. She can be talkative at times, yes, and she’s constantly tripping over everything from fallen branches, thick tree roots, and her own feet, but she understands when he needs his space.

He doubts a lot of children understand that. Perhaps it has more to do with her developing powers.

“Viserys! Look!” Daenerys shouts, running up to her brother with her new discovery held high for him to see. “I found a pretty rock!”

The “pretty rock” is nothing more than a clump of obsidian; dragon glass. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of clumps scattered around the castle’s grounds. But Daenerys looks so happy and proud of herself that he doesn’t have the heart to tell her how insignificant her discovery is.

At least not today. He’s in a relatively good mood. Catching the mortal woman openly eyeing his brother’s arse is definitely the reason.

Small delights.

“That’s great, Dany.” He takes the rock, pretending to examine it. “It looks like a jewel, doesn’t it?”

Dany nods. “You can have it. It’s my gift to you!”

Now, when she goes and does adorable shit like that, Viserys can’t help but indulge her. Kneeling in front of her, he clutches his chest.

“Thank you, Dany. I shall cherish this gift always!”

“You are most welcome.” She runs off again. “I’m going to get one for big brother!”

Viserys resumes the footwork exercises that Arthur taught him. His brother promised him to gift him with the family’s ancestral bastard sword on his fourteenth nameday if he mastered his lessons. Until then, all he has is a silver dagger that is mostly used for slicing apples.

Pivoting on his foot, he lunges forward at his invisible opponent. Behind him a twig snaps. Turning around, he sees four, hideous goblins eyeing him hungrily with depthless beady eyes. Black saliva drips from their mouths onto the ground.

“Ew,” Viserys says in disgust.

“We smell another,” the biggest goblin says. The other three are no taller than Viserys, but this one is much taller. “A tastier one.” He grins, revealing jagged, brown, rotten teeth.

Just then, Dany runs up, holding another rock in her hands. “Found it!” she exclaims.

The goblins turn their gazes on her.

“Dany,” Viserys shouts, “conceal yourself!”

Terrified, Dany drops the rock, and crouches down, closing her eyes tightly. Half a second later, she disappears.

The goblins look around frantically, trying to see where she went. Viserys attacks the one closest to him, stabbing the ugly creature with his silver dagger. It disintegrates.

That’s because silver kills most monsters.
The head goblin orders the other two to kill Viserys. He has his sights on Dany because she’s smaller. Goblins do love smaller children because they’re supposedly tastier.

Viserys takes out the rock Dany gave him from his pocket and hits one goblin in the head with it. That gives him enough time to lunge at the other goblin. He slices at it, trying to land a clean hit. All he manages to do it leave a nasty, sizzling cut on its face.

If there were only two, he’d have a better chance. But four are too many for him. Viserys doesn’t give up, however. He’ll be damned if he lets the likes of these low-level creatures harm his sister.

The goblin he cut grabs hold of him, using its brute force to overpower him.

Viserys still has another trick up his sleeve.

“Ziragon,” he utters.

It’s one of the many spells his mother taught him before she died. He’s happy to know it works. The goblin’s movement cease and its arms drop, freeing Viserys from its hold. Flipping the dagger in his hand, Viserys catches it, and stabs the goblin in the chin, killing it.

Now there are only two goblins left.

However, Viserys doesn’t get to kill them. Just as the head goblin uncovers Dany, Rhaegar appears out of thin air, literally.

He turns his violet gaze on the head goblin and says, “Dracarys.”

And the goblin erupts in flames. Rhaegar turns his narrowed gaze on the other goblin and does the same. He allows them to burn for a few seconds before outstretching both of his hands and balling them up into tight fists. Doing so causes the burning goblins to disintegrate. Eventually, the flames disappear along with their charred corpses.

“I had things under control!” Viserys shouts despite them both knowing he definitely didn’t.

Rhaegar picks up a shivering Dany. “Are you hurt?” he asks her, checking over her.

Shaking her head, Dany wraps her tiny arms around Rhaegar’s neck, hiding her face. Viserys sheaths his dagger and walks over to his siblings.

“I told her to conceal herself and she did fine for the most part,” Viserys says. "She's getting stronger.”

“You both did well.” Rhaegar looks at Viserys. “You took out two on your own and kept Dany safe. Thank you, brother.”

“Well, of course. You would’ve punished me had I let anything happen to her.”

Rhaegar cups the back of Dany’s head tenderly as he glances around the woods. “They shouldn’t have been able to slip through the barrier. Goblins are as powerless as humans are to the goddess's magic.”

“Yet they got through.”

“I will need to have the barrier reinforced.”

“That means they'll have to come. Do you think that’s a good idea with the mortal being here?”
“No. But it’s necessary.” Rhaegar turns to leave, and Viserys follows. “Don’t act as if you aren’t excited to see your dear Arianne again.”

“She’s not my ‘dear’ anything!”

Rhaegar laughs. “Sure, brother.”

Whatever required Lord Rhaegar’s immediate attention earlier must have been serious. The man, his siblings, and the imposter knight are absent during dinner. Lyanna takes her meal in her chambers. It’s a lonely yet bearable affair. She doesn’t mind the silence as it gives her time to reflect on her day.

Perhaps it is too callous of her to refer to Ser Arthur as an imposter knight. She knows nothing about the man. Although, she does suspect he, like a majority of the things in this castle, hail from the Kingdom of Dorne. She’s curious to know how he ended up here in the Crownlands.

After Rhaegar left her in the gardens, Gaia came for her and showed her to the library where she combed through several books about the Dornish people. She was deep in a story about the sorceress queen, Nymeria when the servant returned to her with the news of the others’ absence.

She was allowed to bring the book back to her room. She doubts she will see the lord again tonight so she takes her bath early and puts on the thin gown Gaia left out for her. Like the sleeves of her gown from last night, the fabric can be seen through depending on the lighting.

The next time Gaia dresses her, she’s going to just put her hair up and send her out with her tits bare. Lyanna laughs to herself. She’s overreacting, she knows. It’s just that in her village it’s too cold to wear anything like this, and if she did wear anything like this, nice things wouldn’t be said about her.

Lyanna curls up on the chaise lounge chair with the book about Queen Nymeria. To think stories like these have existed for centuries and she never heard about them until now. She’s reading about the loves of Queen Nymeria when she finds herself constantly distracted. Her thoughts are elsewhere. She can’t stop thinking about being in the gardens with the lord.

The rose he gave her sits on the table beside the bed. He’s a charmer. Men like Rhaegar probably go from village to village wooing the smallfolk. She imagines he has countless women he’s courting.

It’s a wonder he isn’t married already.

Gods, she sounds like the old crones in her village who constantly pester her about her lack of a husband.

Sighing in frustration, Lyanna slams the book closed. She doesn’t know why she’s so upset all of a sudden. She decides its best she tries to sleep. Tomorrow, she will ask Lord Rhaegar when they can begin the journey to her village. That is the only thing she should be concerned about.

Lyanna is preparing to get into bed when there’s a knock at her door.

Automatically, she assumes it’s Gaia even though the woman never knocks. She opens the door and sees Rhaegar. They stare at each other for a long second until she realizes what she’s wearing.

Eyes widening, she closes it in his face. “One moment,” she calls out, running to the wardrobe to grab a robe.
Her entire face is red. Surely he caught a glimpse of something he shouldn’t see. Damn Gaia. No, this isn’t Gaia’s fault, but her own.

Securing the robe around her, she rushes back to the door. Rhaegar is still there, thankfully.

“My lord,” she says, a little winded. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Perhaps she shouldn’t have used that word. Why is she overthinking everything? Lyanna wants to hit herself.

“Lady Lyanna, I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

“Interrupting? No, of course not.”

Rhaegar nods. “I wanted to apologize for my abrupt departure earlier as well as my absence at dinner.”

“There’s nothing to forgive, my lord. I understand you are a busy man.”

“Not for you, my lady.” Rhaegar straightens up. “What I meant is that you are my honored guest. I want to ensure that you are well taken care of during your stay.”

His sincerity is moving. Lyanna finds herself leaning against the door, wanting to be closer to him. “That’s very kind of you to say....”

Rhaegar leans closer as well.

Once again, the heat rolls off of him in waves, making goosebumps rise on her flesh; it makes her nipples erect.

What would happen if she invited him in? To talk, nothing more. Would he try to do more? The longer she stares into his eyes, the less she cares about what’s proper and ladylike. Being alone in her chambers with a man isn’t a terrible thing, is it?

Perhaps not, but this man is a stranger to her. A beautiful and alluring stranger, but a stranger nonetheless. She would have to know him better before dropping her guard any further than she already has. Besides, she will leave this place soon. What’s the point in building attachments?

Lyanna leans away. “Goodnight, my lord.”

If Rhaegar is disappointed, he doesn’t reveal it. “Goodnight.”

Later, in bed, she tosses and turns fitfully for what feels like hours. When she finally falls asleep, she dreams of Rhaegar again.

“They’re here.”

Opening his eyes, Rhaegar breaks the connection he’d made with Lyanna in her dreams. As he assumed, she will not accept his true form as easily as she accepts him as he is now. That is the point of all of this, after all.

Last time, the maiden was so frightened by him that she tried to throw herself off a cliff. Luckily, he caught her and took her to another kingdom instead of returning her to her village. Her family was not kind to her. Her father especially. Now she’s married to a baron and is carrying her first child. Rhaegar likes to check in on her to make sure he didn’t leave her with another monster.
She wasn’t the one he needed, anyway.

Arthur sighs. “Did you have to summon all of them?”

They leave his library and head for the old throne room where their visitors await.

“Where one goes, the others follow,” Rhaegar says. “You know that as well as I. Besides, I’ve missed our friends.”

The old throne room is as grand as it was in the ages of kings and queens. The only difference is that his family’s seat of power, their throne, is no longer there. It was one of the many things they lost. Standing in front of the dais are three figures donning velvet, mustard cloaks, their heads covered with heavy hoods.

“Thank you for coming,” Rhaegar says. “I see Arianne has already found Viserys.”

“She was eager to see him,” Oberyn Martell says, removing his hood. When he does so, the others follow suit. “It has been too long, old friends.”

“Not long enough,” Arthur mutters, doing his best not to meet the gaze of the woman who is staring daggers at him.

Rhaegar approaches the trio. “Ellaria,” he greets, kissing both of her cheeks. She returns the gesture happily. Then he moves to the woman who is still staring at Arthur. “Elia.” He kisses her cheeks as well. She also returns the gesture, but without much zest. “Come, I will show you the area where the intruders entered.”

“Please, Rhaegar,” Oberyn groans. “Must we get into that now? It will take a lot of energy for us to complete this task. Let us drink first.”

“But of course.” Rhaegar silently summons a servant. “Though I know you will need to do more than drink to prepare yourselves. I hear your last task took its toll on you all.”

Oberyn shrugs. “The profit was worth it in the end.”

Ellaria smiles and discreetly moves in front of Elia to block her line of sight. “Will you partake this time, Rhaegar?” she asks, hopeful.


The servant arrives with a tray of glasses all filled with burgundy wine. They each take a glass.

Oberyn steps up to Rhaegar, appraising him. “Won’t you join us for once? It would be…” He sighs dreamily. “The sweetest of pleasures.”

“I must regretfully decline,” Rhaegar says, not regretful at all. “But I will be present so that you may draw power from me.”

“I’m sorry, my love,” Oberyn says to Ellaria, pulling her into his arms. He kisses along the smooth column of her neck. “I tried.”

“One day,” Ellaria says, confidently. “We will get him one day.” She glances over at Elia then at Arthur. “But Arthur will join us, yes?”

Despite the hostility between his friend and Elia, Rhaegar already knows Arthur’s answer.
“Have I ever turned down the invitation?” Arthur asks rhetorically.

“Very good,” Oberyn says, clapping once. “We will need more people. It’s always better with more people.”

Lyanna isn’t sure what wakes her.

She isn’t even sure she’s awake. Everything feels hazy as if she were trapped inside of a fever dream. Her body moves on its own accord as if she were a marionette being controlled by some unseen, powerful force.

Low chanting, rhythmic drums, and carnal sounds fill her hears, drawing her closer like a siren’s song. She wanders through the dark corridors of the castle, the stern, proud faces of the lord’s ancestors peering down their noses at her.

If she didn’t know any better she would think their eyes were following her as she passes. She ventures further into the castle, through halls she's never ventured to before. With every step, the voices become louder and the pull stronger.

That isn’t all that changes, however.

Lyanna suddenly feels hot. It isn’t the kind of heat that a furnace gives off. No, it’s the same kind of heat she experiences whenever Rhaegar stands too close to her. Initially, it settles at the base of her spine, and her belly. But as the voices grow louder, that heat blossoms and increases.

She’s sweating by the time she reaches the large, open archway of a room she’s unfamiliar with.

Her gown is sticking to her skin, her thighs are wet but it isn’t from sweat. When the realization dawns on her of what it is that soaks her thighs, she flushes, and that makes her even hotter. The heat is smoldering now, dizzying.

Panting, she leans against the arch’s frame. Inside the room, there are people, so many people.

Men and women partially covered while others are completely nude. If that isn’t bizarre enough, then the sight of a man with olive skin kissing another man while a woman's head is between his thighs surely takes the cake.

There are women kissing women as well. Lyanna has never witnessed anything like this. It should disturb her, frighten her even. Instead, there is a throbbing between her legs, a pulsing throughout her body. She squeezes her thighs together to make it stop but that only makes it worse.

Whimpering quietly, she bites her lips. The more she fights it, the more it hurts. What if she just let go?

Several heads pop up and turn in her direction. Lyanna gasps when she sees that the people’s eyes are glowing. Then a naked woman with long, dark curls sits up and beckons Lyanna closer with a slender finger.

In a trance, Lyanna steps forward.

“No,” a deep voice says, echoing throughout the room.

The interjection ends the woman’s attempt to lure Lyanna in instantly. She returns to her various lovers without so much as another glance in Lyanna’s direction.
It was Rhaegar who made the interjection.

He’s shirtless but doesn’t appear to be a part of the group intercourse. The way her body responds to the sight of him unsettles her. He comes to her, saying nothing. His eyes are glowing as well; a deep, blood red. She gazes into those eyes and is lost in them. His heavy gaze travels all over her, from head to toe, and she can feel his desire.

It’s as strong as her own.

“My lord…” Lyanna sounds like she’s injured or afraid. She is neither. Only confused. “What is happening?”

“Do not see me,” he says softly. “Do not see…"

Lyanna’s head becomes light, the room begins to spin, and her vision blackens.

Everything fades away.

oOo

In the morning when Gaia comes for her, she informs Lyanna that they have guests who will be visiting with the lord and his family for a couple of days. She goes through her morning routine without fuss as always. Begrudgingly, though, silently, she allows the woman to put her in a ridiculous girdle, a pretty dress, and style her hair however she likes; it’s a braid the same as it was yesterday.

When she arrives in the banquet hall, everyone else is already seated. Aside from the lord, his family, and Arthur, there are four other people. Two women a man, and a young girl who appears to be the same age as Viserys. They have the same coloring as Arthur, but when the man speaks, she notices a heavy accent.

“Ah, this is the lovely Lady Lyanna, I’ve heard so much about,” the man says, popping a cherry into his mouth.

Smiling politely, Lyanna takes her seat. Across from her, a beautiful, slender woman with long dark curls and almond-shaped eyes tilts her head at her in a silent greeting.

It’s strange.

Lyanna feels as if she’s seen the woman before but she doubts it. Feeling eyes on her, she turns her head to see Rhaegar watching her curiously. When he notices that she’s noticed him, he smiles and glances away.
Goddess Nymeria

Chapter Notes

Moodboard by iamsmall
The Witch Queen Nymeria was, in fact, a goddess.
When her sacred lands of Rhoyne were conquered by the Valyrians, she sailed ten thousand ships containing the last of her people to Dorne where she found a consort in Mors Martell. From their union, a formidable alliance was forged, and the remainder of Dorne was conquered. In the years following, the queen reformed laws and customs and created a kingdom that continues to prosper to this day.

An accurate summarization of Queen Nymeria’s life and exploits can be found in the blessed library in Dorne. The library also has ancient tomes that hold the key to the goddess’s powers. Only those born of the chosen families are allowed inside the library, only they can access the goddess's gifts.

Those families are House Martell, House Uller, and House Dayne.

It is also said that one day Queen Nymeria will be reborn into one of those houses, that once again she will walk the earth.

In Dorne, hundreds of young girls, even those not born of those ancient houses, pray nightly that the goddess will bestow her favor unto them and use their bodies as her earthly home. Elia and Ellaria were once those girls. They along with Ashara, Arthur’s sister.

Some would even say that Ashara did get her wish. They would also say that among the thousands of girls in Dorne, she’s the most fortunate. But if they were to say that to Arthur, he’d probably kill them. Because to Arthur, fortune has nothing to do with what happened to Ashara. He likes to think of it as a curse.

On her seventeenth nameday, Ashara was given the goddess’s eyes; the gift of sight. Now she resides on top of the tallest mountain inside the deepest cave. Men and women come from all over to see the Oracle of Palestone. She is beloved and praised alongside the goddess.

With great reverence comes suffering, unfortunately.

Ashara is forever bound to that cave, speaking only in riddles, detached from humanity. She will never know love or true peace. Whenever Arthur treks to Palestone to see his sister, he always returns a little less of the man he was when he went.

Rhaegar has considered forbidding the visits entirely. But he knows Arthur, despite everything, enjoys seeing his sister. He likes to make sure she’s safe. Not that he needs to worry about her safety. Wicked men have made attempts to steal Ashara away, but those men never leave the cave alive.

“How do you do it?” Rhaegar asks as he and Arthur watch the sorcerers reinforce the barrier. They came out here following breakfast. He didn’t want to leave the barrier weakened any longer than he had. “How do you participate in the ritual after what happened?”

It was Elia who informed the High Priestess of Ashara’s newfound gift. Arthur, who was her betrothed at the time, begged her not too. Unfortunately, Elia is bound by blood to do the goddess’s bidding. She couldn’t keep her promise to Arthur. Despite being well aware of that, Arthur hasn’t been able to fully forgive her. There’s more to the story than Rhaegar will ever understand so he tries not to meddle in their affairs too much.

He does pry every so often, however.

“Like them I am bound to the goddess,” Arthur says.

But of course Rhaegar knows that.
House Dayne is one of the chosen families, after all. When Arthur was a boy of six and ten, the
goddess visited him one night. Although his friend never likes to go into detail of what happened
on that night, Rhaegar has an inkling because whenever Arthur thinks of it he gets a brilliant blush
on his face. And Rhaegar knows what happens between the Others and humans when night visits
are made. His ancestor, Daemon Targaryen, did sire two halflings.

“Is that the only reason why you do it?” Rhaegar glances over at Arthur. He isn’t surprised to see
the man frowning. “Do you no longer love-”

Arthur cuts in, “When do you intend to tell the lady that you have no intentions of seeing her back
to her village?”

Frowning, Rhaegar clamps his mouth shut.

Truthfully, he deserved that for his pestering. He knows that Arthur doesn’t like to talk about the
Elia situation. It’s just that, human emotions have always fascinated him. He can’t imagine
willingly fucking someone he claims to despise, and to do it so passionately…

“Damn you, Rhaegar,” Arthur curses under his breath. “After all these years, you still don’t know
shit about boundaries.”

“You have my apologies.”

Sighing, Arthur finally looks away from the sorcerers and stares at Rhaegar’s profile. “I envy your
ability to distance yourself from your emotions with nothing more than a blink of an eye.”

“It takes an awful lot more than that, I assure you.”

Suddenly, Elia, Ellaria, and Oberyn drop their joined hands and open their eyes. The energy in the
atmosphere shifts followed by the sound of faint buzzing. It’s finished. The barrier has been
reinforced.

Rhaegar thanks the sorcerers once again for their work. Before they depart, he will pay them even
though they will not accept. He’s the only person they won’t accept payment from. They’re some
of the few people who still treat him like a king.

“The barrier must have been tampered with,” Elia says, sticking the tip of her tongue out to taste
the electric air. “Were the goblins the only creatures to trespass?”

“I didn’t sense anything else.”

Oberyn touches the small of Elia’s back. “Come swim with us, sister,” he says. “We’ve done
enough work for today.” He would say that even if they hadn’t worked at all.

“Go on without me. I know you too are going to just end up fucking.”

Oberyn and Ellaria laugh but they don’t deny her claims. They extend an offer for everyone to join
them later before they leave for the beach.

What Rhaegar can appreciate about the couple is how unashamed they are in their love for
debauchery. Elia, on the other hand, is rather reserved outside of the ritual. She only drinks during
meals, prefers reading and record keeping over sparring and creating poisonous potions like her
brother Oberyn. She’s the pensive older sister and he the wild younger brother.

“The human woman,” Elia begins, stepping up to Rhaegar with a serious expression, “which
kingdom does she come from?”

“I don’t see why that is important to you, Elia.”

“Which kingdom?” she asks curtly.

Beside him, Arthur bristles. Probably because that same tone used to make his knees tremble. She still affects him. Even after everything. How interesting.

“The North,” Rhaegar says, humoring her. “She is from the village Winterfell.”

“I knew she was a Stark.” Elia says the surname as though it were poison on her tongue. “I smelled it on her. Why do you have her here? Need I remind you what her people did to the wood nymphs?”

“Must we blame others for their ancestor’s wrongdoing, Elia?”

“The children were peaceful.”

“They fought one hell of a war,” Arthur mutters. “Peaceful or not. They didn’t go out easily.”

Elia cuts her eyes at the knight.

Rhaegar understands Elia’s anger. When he first came across Winterfell, he thought of reducing it to ash. Humans are known to ruin everything they touch. They go from forest to forest, plundering, chopping down trees, and massacring the natives. They're a despicable race.

But they’re not all the same. It took Rhaegar nearly a decade to see that.

“Lady Lyanna is my guest,” Rhaegar says, his tone leaving no room for objections. “Whatever her ancestors are guilty of, I ask you not to hold her accountable. You feast with me despite my ancestors being the reason why your goddess fled her home. I believe you’re not above forgiveness, Elia.”

Elia’s nostrils flare momentarily. Then she blinks as though she were bored suddenly. “She is the one you’ve been seeking, then?” she asks knowingly.

Rhaegar nods. “You called to her last night. It was her blood, wasn’t it?” He smirks. Lyanna has no idea the power her blood holds. It’s a shock any of the Others haven’t come across her sooner.

“It was the goddess who desired her. Not I. It is known she fancies rare humans.” She glances at Arthur. “We will leave come first light. During our stay, I will ensure my brother and lawful sister behave themselves.” She bows her head then walks away.

Arthur watches her leave. No amount of denial will ever hide what everyone knows to be true. The knight and the sorceress are still in love. Rhaegar wonders if they’ll ever be together again, if they'll indulge in each other outside of the rituals.

When Elia’s slim form is out of sight, Arthur turns to Rhaegar. “Will you take flight tonight?” he asks.

“No.”

“The longer you go without doing so—”

“A few nights isn’t going to send me spiraling, Arthur.”
“Aye, you won’t spiral into madness over a couple of nights without taking flight but you will become irritable and...frustrated.” Labeling it as “frustration” is an understatement. He’ll become ravenous. “You remember what happened last time...”

“I stopped myself,” Rhaegar says defensively. “Others in my position gave in to the urge, they were weak to their flesh, but I overcame it. I will do so again.” His eyes flashes red momentarily, and his voice deepens. “Is that all?”

A weaker man would’ve flinched and made themselves scarce. They probably would've soiled themselves even. Of course, Arthur is no weak man.

“Being around her won’t make it easier on you, either,” the man says. “You’re taunting the beast. We know it doesn’t like to be taunted.”

“Our dear friends in Driftmark are expecting you today, Ser Arthur.” Rhaegar tires of the conversation. A subject change is in order. “Do not keep them waiting.”

Like the obedient knight he is, Arthur bows and takes his leave. But not without muttering, “stubborn fool” under his breath.

Only Arthur can get away with something like that. If he were his father, he would’ve burned the man alive by now.

His face darkens, sadness overtaking him.

Thank the old gods and the new that he is not his father.

“Lady Lyanna! Lady Lyanna!” Daenerys shouts, dashing across the garden, her silver ringlets bouncing. “Look!” She holds up a black, glassy rock. “I found big brother’s gift! I lost it yesterday when the…” Stopping suddenly, she glances over her shoulder to where Viserys and Arianne are. Looking back at Lyanna she smiles brightly, holding the rock higher. “Isn’t it pretty?”

Lyanna sets her book aside and takes the rock. “It’s a very lovely rock, Lady Daenerys.”

“It’s dragon glass,” Daenerys says.

The rock slips from Lyanna’s hand. “Pardon me?” she asks.

A sharp cry rings in the air followed by a mischievous laugh. Clutching her arm, Arianne stomps her foot at Viserys and shouts something in a language Lyanna is unfamiliar with. Then Arianne starts chasing Viserys down the rows of rose bushes, around the gazebo and back again.

Scooping up the rock, Daenerys runs after the older children. Their high-pitched squeals is blotted out by the thudding of Lyanna’s heart.

Dragon glass, was it? Is that what the child said? Perhaps it’s nothing more than a name. There are plenty of things that have frightful names that aren’t frightful one bit.

It’s a very fitting name, she thinks. The rock is black, blacker than night, allowing no light to pass through it. Lyanna imagines the color represents a dragon’s soul. Only a vile, unforgiving creature would have a soul darker than the darkest of abysses.

The sudden hatred she feels startles her. Lyanna has never hated anything. Not this intensely, at least. In truth, she isn’t even sure if she hates the dragon. It’s her fear that she hates. She hates how
weak and pitiful it makes her.

“Careful, Ari!” Viserys’s scream tears Lyanna out of her thoughts.

His warning is fruitless as Arianne is already tumbling to the ground, her slippers flying off. One of the roots from the weeping tree caught her foot. Lyanna rushes over as quickly as the bloody gown she’s wearing will allow.

Viserys tries to help Arianne up but she shoves him away angrily.

“Fine,” he says with a roll of his eyes. “If you’re going to be a baby about it, I don’t care!”

“You never care!” Arianne shouts back.

“There, there,” Lyanna says, kneeling down so that she may have a better look at the girl’s knee. It’s scraped and bleeding a little. “May I?” she asks.

Arianne stares back at her with watery, unblinking brown eyes. Her eyes are that of someone who’s been alive for decades, centuries even. Silently, she raises her leg for Lyanna to take. Because her dress is hiked up a bit from the fall, Lyanna can see a strange, pale marking on the girl’s inner thigh.

It appears to be a mark of birth shaped like a star.

“Is she going to be okay?” Daenerys asks in a small voice. “Viserys is always mean to Ari.”

“I am not!” Viserys huffs.

Lyanna examines Arianne’s leg further, finding nothing of concern. “Lady Arianne is fine.” She smiles at the girl. “She’s a tough one. Isn’t that right?”

A smile breaks out across Arianne’s pudgy face. Nodding, she quickly gets up. “A princess can’t be defeated by something as insignificant as that,” she declares boldly.

Viserys snorts.

“Are you mocking Princess Arianne?” Lyanna asks in a playful voice. She kicks off her shoes. “That is treason!” She chases after Viserys with the little girls following behind her, cheering her on.

The last time Lyanna ran around barefoot like this was when she was a girl, no older than Daenerys. Her eldest brother, Brandon, used to chase them around the yard, pretending to be a direwolf. Whenever he caught one of them he’d act like he was gobbling them up. After her mother passed away, Brandon stopped chasing them around the yard. He no longer found joy in it. Now the only thing that brings her brother joy is the taverns and brothels.

Viserys is an agile, quick-footed thing. She can tell that he’s enjoying the chase. He likes that someone can actually keep up with him. Soon he starts to taunt her.

All in good nature, of course.

“Are people from Winter’s Tale always slow like this?” Viserys asks.

“Winterfell,” Lyanna corrects hotly. If it weren’t for this damn girdle she would’ve caught him by now.
Viserys laughs while Arianne and Daenerys continue to cheer for her.

Because she can’t let the little ones down—and because she doesn’t like to lose—Lyanna lifts the skirts of her dress and stretches her legs to their limits. Brandon used to call her a she-wolf because of how fast she ran. By the looks of it, she hasn’t lost the wolf inside of her.

Seeing the gnarled root that previously caught Arianne’s foot, she jumps over it. The jump allows her to close the distance between her and Viserys. She catches the boy by his vest. He looks at her with wide violet eyes as if he were genuinely surprised that she would catch him. The girls share a similar expression as Viserys.

“She caught Viserys,” Arianne mumbles.

Daenerys beams. “Lady Lyanna won!”

The girls clap their hands excitedly. Surprisingly, Viserys doesn’t appear to be upset. She assumed that, like her, he would be cross if he lost. Instead, he looks at her with concern.

“You don’t look too well, my lady.”

And she doesn’t feel well at all.

Lyanna touches her sweaty forehead with the back of her hand. “I’m fine,” she says faintly. “Excuse me. I will return shortly.” She touches her stomach and hurriedly heads to her chamber.

Why in seven hells would any woman want to wear anything that squeezes their waist like this? Lyanna curses whoever created such a worrisome thing. Not only is she sweating, but her breaths are ragged, and her head feels light all because of this damn girdle. The next time Gaia tries to force her into this thing she's going to put her foot down. Or perhaps she'll put it up the woman's arse.

Reaching her chamber, she barely has the door closed behind her and she’s already undressing. Getting out of her gown is simple enough, but she has to face her back to the looking glass and watch herself over her shoulder as she tries to untie the complicated fixtures.

Lyanna is half-way done when she sees it; a big red snake slithering across the floor toward the door. It isn’t the first snake she’s seen. No, not at all. But none of the harmless garden and river snakes are anything compared to this.

She screams.

Rhaegar is at the castle’s main gate watching Arthur disappear through the barrier when he hears Lyanna’s scream. Without a second thought, he blinks himself to her. The proper term is ‘teleportation’ but he’s able to do so, within his realm, in the time it takes for him to blink. Hence the name he prefers to use.

He’s extra careful to appear outside her door rather than inside her chamber. Knocking once, he doesn’t wait for her to beckon him in, assuming she’s in a dire situation. When he enters, the first thing he notices is the red viper that’s trying to slither out of the door. Nostrils flaring, Rhaegar picks the snake up by the neck with a tight grip.

Then he sees Lyanna. And he almost drops the snake.

Lyanna is down to her undergarments, and her girdle is partially undone, the top of her breasts
spilling out. Her hair is no longer confined in a braid, either. It’s framing her face wildly. In her hand, she’s holding a golden fire poker as though it were a sword. And it’s that stance that captures Rhaegar’s attention most of all.

Feeling the snake squirm in his grasp, Rhaegar eases his grip. He doesn’t want to kill his friend. Yet.

At the sight of Rhaegar, Lyanna sighs in relief. She lowers the fire poker. “My lord,” she says, winded, face flushed and chest heaving. “Do you often come across snakes like that in the Crownlands?”

“Rarely,” he says. Remembering himself, he turns his head. “My lady…”

The little gasp Lyanna makes tells him that she doesn’t need further explanation from him. She mutters several apologies as she moves across the room to find something to cover herself with. Rhaegar sees her out of his peripheral, but he forces himself not to look. He makes sure the snake can’t see either.

“It’s okay now,” Lyanna says.

Rhaegar faces her again. She’s wearing a silk robe now. “My apologies for barging in. I heard your scream from down the hall.” The lie falls easily from his tongue. “I will get rid of it immediately.”

“Please, don’t kill it. It only gave me a fright, that’s all.”

That coming from the woman who looked as if she was prepared to cut the snake up into a hundred pieces only moments ago. Oh, Lyanna.

“I will simply set it free. You have my word.”

Rhaegar doesn’t set the snake free. He doesn’t kill it either. He takes it to his chamber and sets it down on the floor, and he waits.

Despite how many times he’s watched the transformation, it’s still a fascinating sight to see the snake expand and it’s skin to change. Seconds ago, it was a red viper with black spots and a thorny head. Now it’s a naked, smirking Oberyn lounging on the floor, his head propped up.

“This human of yours is very intriguing, very ripe” he says shamelessly.

“So, you were peeking at her?” Rhaegar’s claws sharpen.

“Do I ever peek? I only go where I am wanted, you know that. I only went into the wrong room. You have my word.”

Walking over to his wardrobe, Rhaegar takes out a pair of trousers. “I warned you not to be careless. She isn’t some village simpleton.” He walks over to Oberyn who is now standing and tosses the trousers at him.

“She doesn’t suspect you, however,” Oberyn muses as he dresses. “What do you think she will do when she discovers what you and your family are?”

“Well, she won’t be delighted, that’s for certain.” But he doesn’t like to think about that. For once, a human outside of Arthur doesn’t cower in his presence because of his true nature or his family’s name. “What is it about Lyanna that entices the goddess so?”
“I was trying to see so myself.”

Rhaegar narrows his eyes. “Wrong room, you said? But of course you were spying for your goddess.” He bares his fangs at the man. “Tell Nymeria that this is one human she cannot claim!”

Unmoved by the blatant threat, Oberyn lays down on Rhaegar’s bed, making himself comfortable. “Goddess, I can smell the tension in your sheets. Tell me, beautiful Rhaegar, when was the last time you had a good fuck?”

The question invokes memories of his last time. It wasn’t a conquest he made willingly. His father wanted to be certain that his seed would bear fruit. Instead of allowing things to occur naturally in their own time, his father had a woman brought to the castle. She was eager to do as she was bid as it was an honor to be summoned by the king. And during that time, Rhaegar was desired by every woman and even some men in their kingdom.

Like the diligent, obedient son, he did as he was told. His father was delighted to know that his first born was healthy in that regard, and for a short time so was Rhaegar. That was until the woman was…

No, that wasn’t the last time he was with someone. There was a time after that, a better time. It was shortly after his father’s demise. He needed something to overpower his grief, if only for a short time. It was nothing more than that.

“That long ago?” Oberyn asks, smirking. “How long do you think you can go before you sink your teeth into her?”

“Get out of my bed. I would like to sleep tonight without your scent disturbing me.”

“Always so prickly.” He rolls off the bed effortlessly, landing on his feet quietly. “Relieving some of that tension will do you well.”

How many times will his guests get under his skin in one day? First Elia with her bigotry then Oberyn with his bawdiness. Even Lyanna is guilty of unsettling him, though, in a wholly good way. She should never keep her hair contained and he thinks swordplay would suit her better than needlework.

Rhaegar wants to put a sword in her hand to see what she’d do...

“Care to spar?” he asks Oberyn. He needs to get a handle on himself.

“Have I ever turned down a challenge?”

The children were no longer in the gardens when Lyanna returned so she headed back to her chambers in hopes that she would be able to lie down for a little while. On her way there, she crossed paths with Elia and Ellaria who extended an invitation to the hot springs.

While Lyanna would have loved to rest after the morning she had, her father raised her to think it rude to turn down friendly invitations. She assumed there would be something for her to change into here but she understands now it was a silly thought. Elia and Ellaria undress without shame of their bodies or any hints of bashfulness. If anything they appear proud. Their bony, dusky shoulders are squared and their elegant heads are held high.

Ellaria’s hips are wide, her waist small like a woman who has never birthed a child. But apparently she does have a daughter. Her breasts are the only thing that speak to that truth. Even still, they
don’t look like the breasts of the mother’s she’s seen.

As for Elia, she’s slender with gentle curves and sharp hips. She reminds Lyanna of the maidens the bards spend their time pining over. Lyanna catches herself staring at their brown nipples for far too long.

She turns her back to them and fiddles with the front strings of her dress. Both of the women sigh loudly when they sink into the water. They make it sound as if they’re doing a bed sport. The thought makes Lyanna blush harder than she already is.

As a distraction, she sweeps her eyes around the space. The walls are slate, jagged rocks but the floors are marble like the columns that circle the spring. On the ceiling there is a damaged painting that she can't make out.

“Do you require assistance, my lady?” Ellaria asks.

“No, I am fine on my own.”

Lyanna gets her dress undone and slips out of it quickly. Her hair falls down her back, but she wishes it was long enough to cover her backside the way Elia’s covers hers. No point in her hoping for things she doesn’t have, however. After laying her dress on a stone bench, she covers her privates and walks over to the spring.

Elia and Ellaria are smiling at her. She had a feeling that they would be.

“We have the same parts as you,” Ellaria laughs. “But if you don’t want us to look we won’t.” She closes her eyes.

And Elia does the same.

Lyanna is grateful to them because there was no way she was going to be able to get in with both hands occupied. She wastes no time getting in and squatting down so that only her head is visible. The women laugh at her when they open their eyes.

“Have you never bathed with anyone before?” Elia asks, laying her head back and sighing. The action causes her breast to rise from the water but she clearly doesn’t mind.

“With my mother as a girl. Sometimes with the girls in my villages.” But they were modest like her, and to be caught staring would stir up the sorts of rumors she’d prefer to avoid. “The water is very hot,” she says lamely.

Laughing, Ellaria stands and wades toward her, water dripping down her skin. “Hot springs are typically hot,” she teases, her accent strong.

As the woman approaches, Lyanna tenses and lowers herself further into the water to the tip of her nose. That makes both women laugh harder. She knows she seems ridiculous right now but if they keep laughing at her she’s going to have words with them.

“There is no need for that, Lady Lyanna,” Ellaria says. She stands in front of her, the billowing steam shrouding her face. “We find your behavior endearing, I assure you.”

Lyanna’s eyes widen. Did Ellaria read her mind? Impossible.

Before she can ponder on the oddity, her mind blanks when the woman moves closer and cups her face, gently raising her out of the water. This close up, she can see the gold specks in Ellaria’s
green eyes. The specks are moving or at least they appear to be.

A calmness falls over Lyanna as she stares at the dancing gold.

“There we go,” Ellaria whispers, petting Lyanna’s face tenderly. “Look at these grey eyes, high cheekbones, and full lips you have. A northern beauty indeed. Do not hide your beauty, Lady Lyanna. It is something you should wear with pride.”

“I’m beautiful?” Lyanna hears herself ask. She doesn’t understand why she would ask such a thing. She’s never cared before. “Truly?”

“Do you hear that Elia? The child doesn’t realize that she is beautiful.” Ellaria sounds truly saddened. “I blame men.”

Elia laughs from across the spring. “You blame everything on men. Only Oberyn is your exception.”

“Oberyn isn’t a man. He’s a god...”

Lyanna remains relaxed even when Ellaria’s touch is gone and the woman moves away from her. She doesn’t sink low in the water again, either. Whatever insecurity or shame she previously felt feels like a distant memory.

“...out of all the men and women, Oberyn is the only one I truly crave,” Ellaria is saying in a sultry voice. She touches her neck and smiles as though she were having a fond memory. “I pray day and night that my love and I can live forever so that we may fuck forever.”

Elia makes a face. “People usually pray for their health, the health of their family. Of course someone like you would pray for something like that.”

“If you were ever fucked by Oberyn, you’d know why I say this. You should try it.”

“But...Oberyn and Ellaria are brother and sister, are they not?” Lyanna asks, visibly disturbed.

The women look at her as if she’s the one who’s spouting nonsense. She expects for them to laugh at her again since they’ve done it so often, but they do no such thing. They simply stare at her, expressionless.

“Fret not, my lady,” Elia says. “I could never be intimate with my brother. Tell me, is that sort of thing taboo in your village?”

“I imagine it’d be taboo anywhere.”

“I see.”

They leave it at that.

For a time, they don’t talk at all. It’s an amiable silence, however. One she enjoys greatly despite the strangeness of it all.

Not much is known about the Dornish and their customs outside of the songs. She wonders if they’re all like the peculiar trio. As a girl, she wished to see the Kingdom of Dorne one day, to set her gaze on the vast desert, the Shadow City, and the docks where Queen Nymeria burned her ships to prevent cowards from fleeing.

Lyanna figures she could just ask the women what the kingdom is really like. So, she does.
"The sun is merciless in Dorne," Elia says, massaging her shoulders and neck. "It is as if the sun hangs directly over the entire kingdom. We have no winters but the nights are chilly. People visit Dorne for the intrigue they’re too afraid to seek in the Free Cities. Dorne is safer, I suppose."

"The Free Cities are a real place?" Lyanna asks, embarrassed that she even had to ask at all.

"Yes. We were just in Qarth." Before Lyanna can inquire about their time there, Elia asks, "Is this your first time being so far away from home?"

"It is."

"I imagine it must be difficult being brought up so...sheltered."

Lyanna’s eyebrows pinch. "Sheltered?" she repeats tersely.

Elia smiles but her eyes are sharp. "I meant no offense, my lady. It’s just that you seem…” She shrugs her fine shoulders. "Do not mind me. I shouldn’t speak on things I don’t know about."

"No, you shouldn’t."

Perhaps she’s only imagining it, but it seems as if Elia is trying to provoke her. She felt the same way when they broke their fast earlier that day. Several times throughout the conversation, Elia made comments about “outsiders” and “the ignorant” that honestly rubbed her the wrong way. She considers asking the woman if she has something she would like to say.

But what good would it do? Neither of them will be here for long and they’ll never see each other again.

"Disregard, Elia," Ellaria says touching Lyanna’s shoulder. "She’s can be a cunt sometimes but she means well."

Lyanna flushes at the word and covers her mouth to hold her laughter in. She fails. Ellaria laughs with her and Elia calls them both a colorful name then she’s laughing along with them. Just like that, the thickness that was in the air dissipates.

"We have to get out of here," Ellaria says after some time has passed. "This water is arousing me. I need to find Oberyn."

"It is doing the same to me but sadly I will have to take care of it myself."

"Well, Arthur is here..."

Elia cuts her eyes at Ellaria. "Is that supposed to mean something to me?" She glances at Lyanna who is staring between the women like a dumbstruck goose. "Which is it? Me pleasuring myself or the mention of Arthur?" she asks.

Both, honestly. However, it’s the former more than the latter. Lyanna figured there was something going on between Elia and Arthur considering they kept making eyes across the table. Lyanna should just keep her mouth shut and continue on as the naïve lamb. Yes, that’s what she should do. Doesn’t mean it’s what she’s going to do. She’s genuinely curious, after all.

"How would you do that?" Lyanna asks. "How would you take care of it yourself?"

"You’ve never pleasured yourself?"

Lyanna shakes her head. "I was told by my septa that women can only...achieve pleasure with a
man, that without them we are incapable of doing that…”

“Oh goddess,” Ellaria mutters, looking devastated. “Whoever told you that should be ashamed of themselves. You don’t need a man for that. I’m sure they probably told you that you’re to be obedient and do as your husband and father command.”

It is true. That is what she was taught, but she’s never much cared for that. Her father told her to never pick up a sword and she disobeyed, and whoever he gives her hand in marriage to, she’s certain she’ll disobey them too.

“Is there anyone you desire?” Elia asks. She quickly adds, “You don’t have to tell us. Just think of them whenever you touch yourself. It’ll make it more enjoyable.”

Lyanna laughs nervously. “I’m not going to do that. I desire no one.” Even as she says that someone does come to mind.

"But of course."

She doesn't miss the look that's shared between Elia and Ellaria. She only chooses not to comment on it.

Eventually, they leave the lower level of the castle, skin red and hair still damp, their gowns sticking to their skin. In comparison to where they just were the corridors are cool and welcome. To get to their chambers, they have to pass through a smaller courtyard lined by stone columns.

In the distance, Lyanna can hear the familiar sounds of steel clashing. They seek out the cause of the commotion and find Rhaegar and Oberyn, shirtless and sweating, engaged in a heated duel.

Oberyn fights with a long spear, Rhaegar a longsword with a ruby pommel and steel that’s so polished it looks silver. Immediately, she recognizes them both as formidable. Their movements are fast and powerful yet contained. It looks as if they’re engaged in a waltz rather than a duel. She has trouble following them for the most part, and she isn’t sure who’s dominating who.

Then again, her attention is solely on Rhaegar so it’s difficult for her to draw a comparison between the two. She knew that he was a fighter. A person doesn’t have his kind of build if they’re sitting on their arse while others fight for them. She knew he was a fighter, yes, but she didn’t think he’d be this brilliant.

“Oberyn’s overconfidence will be his downfall one day,” Elia whispers.

As soon as she says that, Oberyn gets too close to Rhaegar and raises his spear high for a final blow. He leaves himself wide open in the process, and his opponent makes him regret it. If this were a real fight, Rhaegar probably would’ve gutted the man from ballsack to scalp. Instead he evades the attack and disarms Oberyn.

“Yield,” Rhaegar says smugly.

The way the sunlight catches his hair and eyes makes Lyanna’s heart act strangely and her skin tingle. She wants to fight him, she decides. She wants to fight Rhaegar. Getting him to actually fight her will be hard, however. It took her weeks to convince the butcher’s boy to spar with her.

Would Rhaegar even take her seriously if she asked? Men seldom take her seriously when she mentions anything deemed unlady-like.

There was one suitor who’d traveled a great distance to meet with her. Robert Baratheon, he was
called. He was handsome and robust like the heroes in the tales. Lyanna believed she could confide in him about her enjoyment of riding and swords. Initially, he entertained her, and made her think he supported her. Then she overheard him making japes about her to the men that traveled with him about how he quite enjoyed, “breaking wild mares” and how Lyanna would “change her tune once he broke her in too.”

Lyanna shuts the memory out of her mind yet the feelings linger.

No, she won’t mention sparring to Rhaegar. She knows better now. Men only see women as things to mount.

Ellaria goes over to Oberyn, peppering his face with kisses and praising him as though he were the victor. Feeling heat on her face, Lyanna glances over to see Rhaegar watching her. When their eyes meet he smiles at her, his eyes hopeful. But the memory of Robert’s harsh words rest bitterly on her mind.

Lyanna bows her head in acknowledgement then she thanks Elia for her invite to the springs. She leaves for her chambers without another glance at Rhaegar.

She feels his eyes on her back even when she’s far out of sight.

“...and the silver princess and her sworn knight rode off into the majestic sunset, never to be seen again,” Rhaegar reads quietly, petting the top of Daenerys’s head gently. “The end.” He closes the book.

“Again,” Daenerys says, rubbing her tired eyes with her fists. She pops her head up and stares up at him. “Read it again, please.”

Every single night, it’s the same story and when he’s finished, she wants to hear it again. Rhaegar isn’t sure why Dany enjoys this particular story so much out of the dozens in this book. He supposes it’s natural for children to be awed by stories of brave men and fair princesses. Well, most children. Viserys preferred stories about dark sorcerers and wicked curses when he was her age. Now the boy secretly reads stories like these, though, he will fiercely deny it.

Perhaps when Dany is older she will set aside these tales of heroism and true love, and favor the darker truth. Rhaegar would prefer it if she didn’t. Their family has suffered under strife and misery for decades. He wants his sister to never know what that is like. Even if it’s only a story.

“Not tonight, Dany. You must sleep.” Rhaegar knows a protest is coming so he acts quickly. “I have something for you.”

Rhaegar takes out the dragon glass Dany gave to him just earlier that day. To the unseeing eye, they’re nothing more than rocks. In truth, the glass has magical properties. He holds the rock in his fist and whispers an incantation. Moments later, he opens his hand and presents his sister with a necklace with a dragon glass pendant.

“I infused it with my love,” he says as clasps it around her neck. “No matter how far we are from one another, I will always be with you, Dany.”

Dany touches the pendant delicately. “It’s so pretty.” She turns it over in her hand, examining closely. Then she declares, “I will never take it off!”

He chuckles. “That would make me very happy.” Because it contains a protection spell. The incident with the goblins although contained, reminded him of how their safety is never
“Does Viserys have one?” she asks after she’s tucked in. “Viserys needs one too.” As always, Dany never just thinks about herself.

“I’ve already given Viserys his. Do not worry.” He kisses her temple.

“Is Miss Lyanna okay? She wasn’t at dinner?”

Apparently the lady’s absence was greatly missed. Elia and Ellaria inquired about her, as well. Even though Rhaegar was certain that they were the reason behind her decision to dine by herself. When Gaia told him of Lyanna’s request, he was very disappointed but he didn’t press the matter.

“Lady Lyanna is fine.” He doesn’t want his sister to worry. “Sleep well, Dany.”

After leaving her room, he crosses the hall to Viserys’s room. Unsurprisingly, Arianne is in there. Her and Viserys are fast asleep on the floor with books and maps scattered around them. They both have a fascination with exploring. He puts them both in the bed. If he were to take Arianne to her room, she’d simply find her way back to Viserys so he doesn’t bother.

Their fates are bound to one another, though, it’s uncertain where their paths will take them. Especially considering there is a very high chance that Arianne is Queen Nymeria’s chosen vessel. She bears the mark, after all. That is why she travels with her aunt and uncle as it is unsafe for her in Dorne.

Sometimes people do unspeakable things in the name of devotion. That is the only thought Rhaegar will give on that matter.

He’s battling with himself on rather he should go to Lyanna or just retire for the night when he’s drawn to the gardens. Under the pale moonlight and the sea of stars, the flowers seem to glow. But their brilliance is nothing in comparison to Lyanna. She looks whimsical and ethereal sitting under the weeping tree reading a book. He almost doesn’t want to disturb her. At the same time, he’s drawn to her by an unseen force that he’s powerless to. His feet carries him to her.

Looking up from her book, Lyanna is startled to see him. “My lord.” She closes the book and moves to stand.

“No, please. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

Lyanna remains seated. “I’m having a terrible time at staying focused anyway. Do you visit the gardens at night often?”

Honestly, he never really comes here. Every flower holds a memory of his mother, and he can’t inhale their fragrant scent without thinking of the woman. For Lyanna, he endures. He tells her that he was in need of fresh air. Perhaps one day he will be able to tell her only truths and not lies.

Lyanna stares up at him with open eyes, exposing the curve of her smooth neck, her eyelashes fluttering. “Won’t you sit with me, my lord?” she asks.

Wordlessly, Rhaegar sits beside her, their arms nearly touching yet she feels the heat from his body all the same as if he were pressed against her. A visible shiver travels through her. Pitying her, he puts more space between them.

The things he could make her feel and do just by simply being next to her is astounding. If Rhaegar were that kind of person, which he most certainly is not, he could’ve claimed Lyanna already and it
would’ve been something she wanted. But only in body, not heart, mind, and soul.

He doesn’t see any enjoyment in that. He doesn’t want what his parents had. And he’ll never have what they had because he would never treat Lyanna or anyone the way his father treated his mother.

“You have such sad eyes,” Lyanna says, leaning closer. “Has anyone ever told you that?”

“No, never.” How did he never notice the scatter of light freckles on her nose? He counts them. “Is that a bad thing?” She has seven freckles.

“That depends, I suppose.”

“On?”

“Are you sad?”

“Not at the moment. I’m in pleasant company.”

The corners of her mouth turn upward, and he thinks he’s going to be graced with one of her stunning smiles. Yet the smile never fully forms. Lyanna’s gaze lowers to his mouth then back to his eyes. It happened so quickly he might’ve missed if it weren’t for his heightened senses.

“My lord,” she starts, and Rhaegar is prepared to give her anything she wants, “I must return home.”

Well, anything except that.

The disappointment must show clearly on his face because Lyanna offers her apologies and tells him how she understands that he must see his guest off first and preparations must be made. She’s flustered and even a little afraid that she’s offended him after he’s been such a gracious host to her. Every time she speaks on the matter, the guilt weighs heavily on his heart. Some people think dragons don’t have hearts but that isn’t true at all.

“There’s nothing to forgive, my lady. I will do all that I can to ensure you are returned home safely,” Rhaegar wonders if he’s the worst being there ever was. Considering the atrocities humans commit to one another on a daily, he thinks he’s at the bottom of the list. But he’s still on that list. “If the weather is kind, we can leave the day after tomorrow.”

“You intend to take me?” she asks, pleasantly surprised. “I thought you would have Arthur and more of your men accompany me. Although, I never see any guards walking the grounds…”

There are no other men to send. During the war, they either died or fled. Only Arthur was left. Of course, he doesn’t mention this to her. He doesn’t mention the absence of guards at all.

“Since tomorrow will be your last day here with us, I would like to take you riding with me in the morning. That is, if you care for that sort of thing.”

Lyanna’s eyes light up the way Dany’s eyes light up whenever he allows her to take flight with him. Yes, she definitely cares for that sort of thing just as he suspected. Whenever she talks of the mundane tasks the women are assigned in her village she gives off an air of indifference. But when it came to Visenya and Daena, she was obviously interested.

“I… I would love to go riding with you, my lord.” Lyanna clasps her trembling hands to still them. She’s brimming with excitement. “Are you sure it’s alright?”
“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“You’re not worried I’ll slow you down?”

“Slow me down?” Rhaegar wonders if anyone has ever said that to her. It’s such a strange thing to ask, after all. “No, I don’t believe you would. But if you prefer to take your time, I am a patient man, my lady.”

Lyanna is giving him that look again, and he has a feeling she’s no longer thinking about riding horses. Her heartbeat quickens. He can hear it thudding, can see the vein in her neck pulsing. If he were to lean over, just a fraction, he could probably smell her arousal.

Last night, when she walked in on the ritual, the scent was intoxicating enough to entice the goddess herself. Rhaegar had to carry Lyanna back to her bed, and it wasn’t without difficulty. It’s as Arthur says, the longer he goes without taking flight, the more unstable he becomes. It isn’t like that for all dragons, however. This is unique to Rhaegar’s specific curse. When Viserys and Dany come of age, they’ll have their own restrictions to adhere to.

“I should retire,” Lyanna says, clearing her throat. She’s blushing furiously now. “I look forward to— riding with you in the morning!” She stands abruptly, clutching the book tightly in her hand, and hurries off.

Rhaegar is left sitting there trying to figure out what exactly happened during the time he was momentarily lost in thought. He decides it’s the least of his concern right now.

He goes to find Elia.

Unsurprisingly, Arthur is pacing outside the woman’s door, muttering to himself. When he sees Rhaegar approaching, he tries to act as if he were merely admiring a painting on the wall. As if.

“Please, Arthur,” Rhaegar says, dismissively. He knocks on the door. “Elia, I know you’re in there laughing at my poor friend. Open up. I need to ask something of you.”

Moments later, a smirking Elia opens the door. “Only Rhaegar may enter.” She looks to Arthur and says, “I will leave you to your pacing, Ser.”

Whatever retort Arthur might’ve had is muffled by the door that is closed in his face. Elia only did that because someone else is around. She probably intended to make Arthur suffer for a few more minutes before she invited him in. They’re not fooling anyone.

Elia returns to her vanity and combs her long hair. She’s dressed in a thin, purple gown with a long cut down the middle. “What do you need, Rhaegar?” she asks, looking at him through the mirror. “I know this visit isn’t for pleasure.”

“I need a way to keep Lyanna here longer.”

“You wish to make her your prisoner? A woman like that, she will despise you.”

“I know but you also know why I must keep her here. She is the key to restoring my family.”

Elia sets her comb aside. “Do you truly believe she’s the one? What if you misinterpreted the text? Prophecies are tricky things.”
“I know it’s her Elia.” Even though parts of him, the jaded parts, still have doubts, there is a larger part of him that knows in his heart that Lyanna is the one who will bring the dawn. “You’ve spent time with her yourself. Tell me she isn’t a remarkable human, that her very blood isn’t captivating.”

“Fine,” Elia says, getting up. She crosses the floor to where he’s standing. “I will need your essence.”

Rhaegar pricks his thumb with his fang and offers it to Elia who takes it into her mouth. She only takes what she needs.

“How will you do it?” Rhaegar asks. The small wound has already healed itself. “I don’t want anything that will cause her great suffering or pain.”

Elia walks over to the basin by her bed. With a wave of her hand, the basin fills with water. She sits it in the center of the room, making sure the moonlight from the window is touching it. Then she spits his blood into the water.

“You will see,” she says.

In the basin, the blood tinted water swirls like a cyclone, and in the distance Rhaegar can hear a loud clap of thunder.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
A grief-stricken and withering Rickard Karstark sends his eldest sons to seek out the Oracle to
learn the fate of his beloved daughter. He must know what happened to her before death comes for him or he will never know peace.

From the moment she was taken up into the sky to disappear beyond the clouds with the beast’s claws wrapped around her small body, happiness has not come to him. His days have been long, his nights even longer. If he could’ve denied the High Maester’s order he would’ve. But he, like the rest of his line, is to bear the sins of their forefathers.

He tried to quicken Lyanna’s marriage to Robert Baratheon, believing that if she were a maiden no more, the reaping wouldn’t occur.

Blood on the maiden’s thighs...

Strong winds, strong tides...

It was those lines of the text that led him to believe that his daughter would be safe with the Lord of Storm’s End. The man is a renowned warrior, feared and respected; by common folk and whores alike. There’s also the man’s bloodline to consider.

He should’ve had them wed immediately, but he wanted Lyanna to at least know the man before sending her away. Robert would’ve treated her well, though, he would’ve stayed from her bed as most men do. But he would’ve loved her and that was all a father could hope for.

What’s done is done, however.

He didn’t tell any of this to his sons on the morrow of their departure. Telling them the truth of their family’s dark, bloody history would do no good now. The pact between Ice and Fire has been fulfilled and after his death, his sons will be free of the curse.

That, at least, is enough.

“No,” she answers quickly. She looks out at the stables, noting the few horses that are grazing on the lush pastures. “I do enjoy it when I’m permitted.”

What an odd reaction to an innocent question, he thinks.

Rhaegar wishes he could peer inside her mind better for more insight. Last night he tried to dreamwalk but something inside of Lyanna blocked him out. He’s never had trouble entering her dreams before. The first time, he simply closed his eyes and he was there. He will just have to get to know her the traditional way, not that he minds it.

“Which one is yours?” Lyanna asks when they reach the stables.

“Silverwing,” he says pointing at the pale white stallion with a silver mane. Beside his horse was Viserys’s mount, Vermithor, a buckskin mare that was quite manageable, unlike its master. He intended for Lyanna to ride her.

But another horse catches Lyanna’s eye. “What a magnificent creature,” she mutters in awe as she slowly approaches the black mare.

“My lady, that is Arthur’s mount, Syrax. She is a stubborn, hot-tempered horse.” She’s also one of the gifts the goddess bestowed on Arthur the night she visited him. “I’m afraid she will only allow
him to ride her.”

He was better off speaking to a tree because his words appear lost on Lyanna. Her eyes never leave the mare and in turn, Syrax stares the woman down with its depthless, coal-black eyes. Most horses have a glitter in their eyes, a hint of wisdom and emotion. Syrax is not like most horses.

Rhaegar stays close to Lyanna in case he has to stand between her and the mare. Once during Arthur’s journey back from visiting with Ashara, someone tried to ride off on Syrax while the knight slept. That didn’t end so well for the would-be thief, and it wasn’t Arthur who put an end to him.

Lyanna lifts her hand hesitantly. “May I pet her?”

“I wouldn’t advise it.”

“Will she bite me?” she chuckles. But she lowers her hand. “Is it strange that I...I can feel her heart beating?”

“Feel it?”

“Yes, the calm thudding…” Lyanna blinks hard and chuckles again. “What am I talking about? I’m sure you must think me mad.”

“No, not at all. Is it just with Syrax or animals in general?”

Lyanna chews her bottom lip and casts him an uneasy glance. She’s nervous about sharing more on the matter with him out of fear that he’ll react negatively. If he were a simple-minded villager perhaps he would react that way and treat her differently.

“When I was a boy I preferred to sleep beneath the stars,” he says. He can’t expect her to open up to him if he can’t open up to her. Since he can’t tell her the truth about his true nature just yet, he will share what he can. “My family used to have a royal residence in the Stormlands. Summerhall has been in ruins since I was born. I used to spend a lot of time there.”

“Doing what?” Lyanna asks, intrigued.

“I wrote songs for the most part.”

“I was curious about the harp I saw in one of the rooms. Do you still play?”

“I haven’t played in some time, but if you’re interested, I will play for you, my lady.”

Lyanna graces him with a charming smile. “I would like that very much.” She averts her gaze from him to look at Syrax again. “Whenever I’m around animals, mainly wolves, it’s as if I can hear them. Syrax is the only horse I’ve had that connection with. I only say ‘connection’ because it’s the only way I can think to describe it.”

*She who shares skin with wolves.*

It’s one of Lyanna’s titles in the prophecy. Rhaegar discovers new reasons daily that confirm what he already knows to be true.

“I think ‘connection’ is a fine word,” he says. “There are stories about people who are closer to animals than others. Are you familiar with stories like that?”

“There was a woods witch who frequented my village. She would tell stories of people like that.”
“Do you think those stories hold true?”

Lyanna doesn’t think about it for more than a second. “Yes.”

“As do I.” Rhaegar offers his hand and she takes it. “Now, shall we be off?”

He intended to help her mount Vermithor, but Lyanna doesn’t need his assistance in that matter. She’s strong; he can tell by the way she effortlessly climbs on the horse. The skirts of her dress do nothing to hinder her, either. She straddles the horse comfortably, her pale thighs exposed to him. Her hair flows freely down her back free of ornaments and her grey eyes twinkle with delight.

This is Lyanna. His wilful and wild Lyanna.

Although it’s strange to stake his claim on her so soon. The stars may say that she is his but she is not his, not truly. He must work for it.

Rhaegar mounts Silverwing and trots up beside Lyanna and Vermithor.

“You don’t appear to be a novice, my lady.”

Lyanna pats the mare’s neck gently. “I never said I was a novice.”

“Then you wouldn’t be opposed to a friendly race around the castle?”

Her interest in such a thing couldn’t have been more apparent. “What do I get if I win?” she asks, raising an eyebrow.

“You think you’ll win? Very arrogant of you.”

“You think I’ll lose? Very presumptuous of you.”

Gone is the blushing, fiddling woman, he notes. Lyanna is in her element now.

Rhaegar takes up the reins, giving them a tug. “I suppose we’ll see, my lady.” He gives Silverwing and Vermithor a command in Valyrian and then they’re off.

The rain came before a winner could be decided, though, if anyone were to ask Lyanna she’d say that she was set to win. That isn’t to say Rhaegar isn’t a great rider; he’s a phenomenal rider. It’s just that she was in the lead—by a hair—when the sky fell on their heads.

By the time they reach the castle, they’re drenched. As much as she dislikes being wet like this, she thinks it was worth it. Riding with Rhaegar was the most fun she’s had in some time. They exchanged taunts and he made quite the effort to get ahead of her.

Lyanna likes that he didn’t try to let her win. She would’ve been angry with him if he had. He treated her like a competitor; an equal.

“We should get you out of these clothes,” Rhaegar says, touching her shivering shoulders. His hands slip down her arms and he rubs her in an attempt to fight the cold back. “I don’t want you to get sick.”

He should be worried about himself. He’s just as soaked as her, his silver hair his clinging to the sides of his face and his blouse is sticking to his skin. She can see his nipples poking through. It occurs to her that if she can see him then he can see her too.
She thinks of covering herself, of pulling away and requesting that he send for Gaia. But she doesn’t do or say anything. She wants him to see her. Admitting that to herself is liberating in a way.

Lyanna stares up at him, noticing how he’s watching her intently. Everything about him is intense; his gaze, his scent, his aura.

The hands on her arms slow in rhythm but the touch hardens, becoming more purposeful. His touch is so warm. She can already feel the shivers leaving her in place of heat. The ride made her blood hot, she reasons. This feeling has nothing to do with having Rhaegar’s hands on her bare arms. However, if he were to stop touching her she would be most displeased.

“We should,” she hears herself say. “Get me out of these clothes, that is. I don’t want to get sick.”

Rhaegar’s hand still. His eyes darken and for a moment they look indigo rather than violet. “I-”

“I assumed you both would need warm towels, my lord!” Gaia says as she approaches with folded towels. She seems oblivious to the moment she just interrupted. “I’ve prepared a bath for you both as well. Separately, of course.” She smiles.

Lyanna sees the flash of anger in Rhaegar’s eyes but she could’ve been mistaken because the look is gone in an instant. He thanks the woman for her consideration.

“I will allow you to retire to your bath, my lady,” Rhaegar says, not meeting her eyes. “Thank you for accompanying me this morning.” He accepts the towel from Gaia and leaves.

“Come now, my lady,” Gaia chides, taking Lyanna by the arm. “The longer you stay in those wet clothes, the higher your chances of the sniffles will be.”

As always, Lyanna bathes herself while Gaia is off doing whatever it is the woman does when she isn’t ruining things. She’s quick to reprimand herself for that. She shouldn’t be upset with Gaia for her being thoughtful. Besides, was she really prepared to go through with what she and Rhaegar were dancing around?

Lyanna flushes. She can’t believe she was bold enough to suggest he undress her. Even worse is her blunder from last night.


When he asked her if she rode often she couldn’t help but return to the scandalous thoughts she had while they were sitting in the garden. Rhaegar is too handsome for his own good. How is it that he’s handsome, strapping, and kind? He even sings for fuck’s sake.

“Stupid, perfect cunt,” she mutters.

Lyanna returns her hands to the water where they float above her stomach.

She blames Elia and Ellaria for this. Because of them, she can’t stop thinking about self-pleasure and allowing Rhaegar to do the sorts of things Nymeria’s lovers did to her in the stories. There was one passage she read thrice over. The first time, she slammed the book shut and hid her face in her hands when she read about one of the lovers kissing Nymeria’s flower and using his fingers to make her blossom. She then had to search for the page so that she could read it again.

What would it be like to have someone do that to her? No, not someone. Rhaegar. What would it
be like to have Rhaegar do that to her?

Lyanna’s hands sink further into the water, resting on top of her stomach. Lightly, she drags her nails across her flesh. Her eyes close and she tries to imagine it, tries to imagine Rhaegar kissing her on her mouth first then on her breasts and her inner thigh. He would do it sweetly at first, drawing out the moment, savoring the taste of her skin. He will kiss her more fervently between her legs, though. Or at least that is what she wants him to do.

As the fantasy expands, she touches herself shyly, dragging a finger up her slit until she bumps her pearl and the sensation makes her gasp. She presses her finger to it again, searching for that feeling. While doing so she thinks of Rhaegar’s large hands caressing her and his deep voice in her ear as he bids her to open for him.

She bites her lip to quiet her moans. She’s found that sensation again, but it feels different, more potent than it did before. More. She wants—needs more of it. More of that delicious heat that settles in her belly and blossoms up her spine like a wildfire searing everything in its path.

Lyanna’s mind is a flurry of scattered images, thoughts, and words all centered around Rhaegar. It doesn’t end at having his mouth on her. She’s in the middle of trying to picture him moving inside of her when the coil snaps.

A little blood fills her mouth; she bit down too hard when she reached her pleasure. Once the room stops spinning and her heartbeat quiets, she stares up at the vaulted ceiling, feeling both ashamed and restless.

Ellaria’s words were true. She doesn’t need a man to experience pleasure. But Lyanna would like for Rhaegar to give her pleasure nonetheless. She leaves the tub eventually and lies down for a nap. The ride and her little exploration have left her exhausted.

Although she only plans to sleep for an hour or so, she sinks into a deep slumber.

Rhaegar barely makes it to his room before he starts undressing haphazardly. He’s hard, full to bursting, aching painfully. Desire grips him and he begins to tremble in his need to alleviate that pain.

Unable to reach the bed, he falls to his knees, staring at his fisted hands. He curses, surprised to find his own hand gripping his erection. His hips rise jerkily, body demanding release even as his mind resists. He squeezes himself reflexively, the memory of Lyanna’s lust-filled eyes flashing through his mind. Low grunts and the occasional whine of frustration fills the room.

It’s over quickly, increasing his shame tenfold.

A simple stare and implication shouldn’t have him this way. Rhaegar isn’t an impulsive whelp. He’s a seasoned dragon who has resisted greater temptations than this. But he almost took her. He almost took her right there in the foyer. He realizes that now as he breathes heavily, unable to move as the aftershocks of pleasure grips and releases him. He wanted her, he still wants her.

That can’t be. Not this soon. If he acts carelessly, he’ll ruin everything. There’ll be enough to deal with when he finally gathers the courage to tell her the truth.

Sighing heavily, he stumbles to his feet. He falls on his bed, his body spent. If he doesn’t take flight soon, his restraint will abandon him and that would be a nightmare, a tragedy.

Rhaegar forces himself to sleep. It’s the only way to get his mind and body to settle. The one time
he doesn’t try to enter Lyanna’s dream, he finds himself there with ease.

Lyanna missed this; the freedom and exhilaration of a night run.

There’s nothing like the wind in her hair and on her skin as the world passes her by in a blur.

She feels powerful and unstoppable when she leaps over a fallen branch, and for a brief moment, it’s as if she’s flying. When her feet and hands strike the earth again, she feels cold mud, broken twigs, and damp leaves beneath her.

When was the last time she ran like this, without fear or inhibition, without restraint or forethought? She can’t remember. She can’t remember ever running like this and yet she misses it.

How can that be? How can she miss something that she never took part in? Lyanna doesn’t know. At this moment, she doesn’t really care either because the scent of pine and stream water are overpowered by the piquant scent of something savory.

She takes a sharp turn, heading toward the direction of the scent.

Soon, her ears perk at the sound of an animal. The pounding of her heart increases with her pace. She stretches her legs to their limits, feeling the strength and power in her muscular calves.

The deer hears her before it sees her, but Lyanna is quick and nimble. She descends upon it, tearing into its hide savagely. Its cries are swallowed up by her growls and the sound of her feast. She eats her fill and a little more than that.

Basking in the triumph of her hunt, she pads over to the stream for a drink. She lowers her mouth to the water, but halts. Staring back at her is a large, white and grey wolf with a blood-stained snout. She tilts her head from side to side and the wolf does the same.

“Lyanna.”

Lifting her head, she turns to see Rhaegar approaching with soft, hesitant steps. Unbiddenly, a low whimper escapes her and she lowers her head, submitting to him.

Rhaegar comes closer and it’s then that she catches a whiff of his scent. Salt, smoke, ash, and fire.

A deep growl erupts in her throat. Recoiling, she bares her fangs in a warning. He heeds that warning and stops in his tracks. Her instincts tell her to run so she does.

“Lyanna!” he shouts after her. But she doesn’t look back.

“She’s a warg,” Rhaegar says as he enters Arthur’s room without knocking. “I knew it.”

Without looking up from the parchment he’s scribbling on, Arthur snorts. “You didn’t know that.”

“Well, I suspected as much. All of the clues pointed to such. She’s a descendant of the First Men and we know whose power they absorbed.” He walks over to the man’s desk, peeking at the letter he’s writing. “Sending your sincerest apologies to Elia for not seeing her off?”

Frowning, Arthur covers the letter with his arm. “How did you come to the conclusion that she’s a warg?”
Ah, so he is writing a letter to Elia. Rhaegar silently celebrates the small victory. He quite enjoys it when he’s right. There’s also the fact that the letter is addressed to ‘my dearest Elia’ so that may have been a giveaway.

“Do you want the long version where I lay out all of my observations and regale you-”

Arthur yawns loudly. “Abridged version, please.”

“Where’s the joy in that?”

“Will you just get on with it? I was occupied before you stormed in here half-naked.”

Rhaegar almost stormed in here fully naked but he was sensible enough to put on a pair of trousers first. His excitement hindered him from doing more than that.

“She warged in her sleep just now but she thought she was simply dreaming.”

Even though Arthur pretends to be disinterested, he doesn’t fool Rhaegar. “I thought the Starks lost that ability.”

“No, not lost. It’s only hidden from them.”

Just like the truth of their history is hidden from them.

Targaryens aren’t the only great family with a curse hanging over their heads. The Starks are suffering as well for the sins of their ancestors. Of course, his destined mate would come from such a house. Two plagued houses on opposite sides of the realm bound by their sins.

The gods love their cruel jokes.

“She’s able to warg because of you,” Arthur says, no longer feigning disinterest. Rhaegar knew he wouldn’t last long. “Dragons are the source of all magic. It makes sense that dormant magic is awakened around you.”

“Can you imagine it, Arthur? The power we will have once we’re bonded?”

The power their child will have. The prince that was promised and the silver dragon who mounts the world. He thinks of his little sister, so small and unknowing. All he’s doing is planting seeds for them.

“You’re getting ahead of yourself.”

Rhaegar smiles bashfully. “You’re right. But I am closer than I ever was to making that a reality.”

“Is that all she is to you?” Arthur always asks the hard questions. “A means to an end.”

“I thought she would be.” There are no secrets between him and his knight. Their bond is one of blood and tears. “In truth, I grow fonder of her every day. I want our union to be one of love.”

Arthur nods, his look contemplative. “Then you must tell her the truth. Do not let her uncover it on her own.”

“I will tell her. Soon,” he promises.

It comes as no surprise to Lyanna that the journey to Winterfell has to be postponed due to the
sudden change in weather. What she assumed would be a passing downpour turns out to be a devastat

On the first day in, Daenerys and Viserys put on a play for the adults in the main drawing-room. Although it’s nothing more than Viserys dramatically reciting macabre poetry while Daenerys runs around waving a small wooden sword and declaring herself as, “Queen Visenya!”

Even still, the children receive a standing ovation in the end.

Most of their shared time is spent in the drawing-room reading, sometimes Arthur will paint and she’ll watch over his shoulder despite how uncomfortable it makes him. She can’t help herself. Arthur is a very skilled painter.

One afternoon, Rhaegar teaches her how to play a game called cyvasse; a two-player, strategy board game. She becomes obsessed with beating him after she learns that no one in the castle has ever done so. Not even Viserys who is said to be a master at chess. But cyvasse isn’t quite the same.

She and Rhaegar play well into the evening, up until supper, and she never wins.

“One day,” he tells her. “You’ll beat me one day, my lady.”

Lyanna doubts that. He has played all of his life. It will take years for her to beat him and she won’t be here that long. However, the more time she spends with them, the less she thinks about home or even the dragon.

She feels safe here. Each day makes her feel as if she belongs right here and nowhere else. Still, that pull to Winterfell is there, though, it isn’t as strong.

Why would she even want to go back? They gave her away—her own family gave her away. No matter how many times she tries to push the narrative that she was stolen, she knows the truth. She knows that no one fought for her that night, not even her own father. Lyanna just didn't want to face that truth because the thought of it filled her with great anguish and anger. She didn't want to think ill of her father. She didn't want to hate him.

And does she want to return just to be the target of rumors and judgmental stares? What is even left for her there? Her mother is dead, her father is distant, Brandon is drunk, Ned is sullen and self-righteous, and Benjen...she misses Benjen most of all. But perhaps without her, he will spread his wings and leave the nest.

Why does she want to go back when everyone believes she is dead? Lyanna is better off here. She feels guilty for thinking that. This is not her home, though, she wants it to be. Here she doesn't have to clean up after every one or fill in the role her mother's death vacated. Here she is just Lyanna. She'd rather wear a girdle than go back home just to suffocate under the weight of her responsibilities. At least when the girdle is crushing her, it makes her look good.

Still, she asks Gaia if she can go without it and the woman allows it without fuss. Days of suffering when all she had to do was just ask. She's just gotten so used to biting her tongue. Everything was a potential burden on the family back in Winterfell. She couldn't be against something without it being seen as an insult, she couldn't speak her mind without having to be reminded of her mother and what the woman would've wanted for her.

The more Lyanna thinks about it, the happier she is for the storm. She almost wishes it will never
stop raining so that she may stay.

The only time she truly misses home is when she watches Rhaegar interact with his siblings.

She’s struggling through a dull read when she overhears him teaching Daenerys Valyrian as he reads her a story. It’s a beautiful language or perhaps the way Rhaegar speaks it is beautiful. She’s beginning to find everything he does attractive in some way.

Viserys eventually joins his siblings on the sofa, frustrated with his failed attempts at translating a book. The younger Targaryens end up falling asleep during the story, trapping Rhaegar on both sides.

“It would appear I am stuck here,” he says, chuckling quietly.

Lyanna wants to kiss him.

It’s a strange thing to think during an endearing moment like this, but it’s true. She really wants to kiss him.

He allows the children to sleep for a little while longer. Then with her help, they carry them to their room. She carries Daenerys and he carries Viserys. For a moment, it feels as if they’re parents taking their children to bed. It isn’t a terrible thought. Having children with him.

“My lord, may I ask you an intrusive question?” she asks as they’re returning to the drawing-room.

“You may ask me anything.”

“You are unwed.”

“I am.”

“Then are you betrothed?”

“I am not.”

Lyanna searches his face for a hint of deceit. She finds none. “How can that be?” she asks. “A man like you…” A pause. “You are a young lord with no wife nor children. I assumed you would at least be promised to someone.”

“I assumed the same of you.”

“How do you know that I’m not?”

Rhaegar’s look is knowing. “Are you?”

She walked right into that. “No. There are some suitors but I haven’t accepted any.”

“I imagine there are suitors. I must admit that I envy them.”

Him envying the likes of a belligerent womanizer, a spinless gambler, and a simpleton who probably still sucks at his mother teats? Those are Lyanna’s suitors. They pale in comparison to Rhaegar.
“If you knew them you wouldn’t think that,” Lyanna says, rolling her eyes at the very thought of them.

“They have a chance with you, my lady. That is worthy of my envy.”

Lyanna is left speechless and wanting.

She should’ve kissed him right then and there but for all of her fierceness and boldness, she is craven when it comes to matters of the heart.

On the seventh day, she and Rhaegar have a picnic in the enclosed terrace that overlooks Rhaella’s gardens. Gaia provided them with a spread of cheese, almonds, salted meat, bread, and cut pomegranates. They eat mostly in comfortable silence, watching the rain slap violently against the glass.

She worries that the flowers will be blown away by the howling wind.

“The garden has withstood worse,” Rhaegar assures her. He offers her a piece of pomegranate. “Here in the Crownlands, the fruit is exceptionally sweet.”

“Fruit is sweet regardless of the kingdom.” She takes a bite, immediately noting how sweet the fruit is; much sweeter than any pomegranate she’s had. And very plump. Juice trickles down the side of her mouth.

Rhaegar swipes it away with his thumb. Then he brings his thumb up to his mouth, licking away the juice. “I couldn’t resist,” he says. “I love pomegranates.”

The corner of her mouth stills tingle from his touch. “Are they your favorite fruit?”

“No.” He picks up another slice and bites into it without spilling a drop. The action shouldn’t stir her the way it does. “Actually, I prefer peaches.”

Lyanna is glad they’re sitting across from each other as she doubts the pounding of her heart would go unnoticed if he were closer. “I can’t say that I like peaches. The skin tickles.”

“I’ve never minded the fuzz. But to each his own.”

There’s a hint of something in his eyes that she can’t place a finger on. She only knows that when he looks at her this way, she feels like she’s back in the hot springs with Elia and Ellaria; back in the tub with her hand between her legs.

“Which fruit do you prefer?” he asks.

“Apples. I haven’t had one in years.”

“I will see what I can do.”

“About?”

“You getting your apples.” He doesn’t leave room for protest. “In the meantime, please have another slice. I’m afraid I will devour the entire bowl.”

Lyanna laughs. “Weren’t you the one who told me indulgence was encouraged here?”
“I did.” Rhaegar eats another slice. This time he’s a little messy but he licks the red juice away quickly. “Is there anything you would like to indulge in, my lady?” He’s giving her that look again.

She squeezes her thighs together.

Yes, there is quite a bit she would like to indulge in. But she can’t find the courage to say any of those things.

It’s so strange how she always envisions herself boldly approaching him and demanding that he make passionate love to her whenever she’s touching herself under the sheets at night when the other occupants of the castle are sleeping. She has done so every night since the first time and finds herself looking forward to laying down for the night more than she’s ever had.

Now all she can do is shake her head like a timid child and stare at her lap.

“Nothing I can think of at the moment, my lord.”

“Well, there is something I would like for you to indulge me in.” The moment he says that Lyanna sees herself laid out on the floor with his head under her skirts and his strong hands squeezing her thighs. “Actually, you would be indulge Daenerys.” All of her salacious thoughts abandon her. “My sister wishes for me to throw a ball for the sake of throwing one.”

Lyanna remembers Daenerys being fascinated by a masquerade ball that was in the story Rhaegar read her. “I’ve never been to a ball.”

“I’ve been to more than I can stomach but this one will be rather small.” He smiles at his own joke. Gods, she wants to punch him. Only to stop herself from wanting to kiss him so much. “And I would like for you to accompany me.”

“Are you asking me because you have no one else to ask?” She teases.

“I could take Arthur instead if you have no interest.”

“You chose me over the dashing knight? I’m honored, my lord.” Her smile is all teeth and if she could, she’d wipe it from her face but she can’t deny that she’s enjoying herself. “I hope Arthur won’t be scorned.”

Rhaegar laughs. And like everything else about him, she finds it attractive. “No need to worry. Daenerys has already informed Arthur that he is to escort her to the ball.”

Lyanna can never tell who that girl loves more, her brothers or Arthur.

“I was her first choice.” He boasts. “However, she knew that I wanted to take you. So, what say you, Lady Lyanna?”

Her answer is obvious. They both know it. Still, she decides to tease him further.

“I will need time to think about it. A woman should never make a decision without giving it full thought. Surely you understand.”

“Of course. I only ask that you don’t keep me waiting too long.” Rhaegar smiles sheepishly. “Because the ball will be held tonight…."

“Then I will give you my answer in an hour.”
“I see.” Rhaegar moves to his knees, leaning his long, lean frame over the spread. “Perhaps this will assist you in your contemplation.” He cups her chin delicately and kisses her. Sweetly, just as she always imagined he would. But there’s something else, something prurient under the surface. Sadly, he doesn’t give her time to dissect the kiss or his taste or the feel of his lips against hers. “An hour.” He breathes the words against her parted lips then he pulls away.

Rhaegar leaves her there, red-faced, lightheaded, and uncomfortably wet. All over a peck on the lips.

Perhaps that is what she gets for stoking the flame.

The journey from Winterfell to the caves of Palestone takes less than a fortnight. Knowing their father’s time is short, they only make camp when necessary and when they do they spend no more than a few hours eating and resting.

Ned only had to turn Brandon away from two brothels during the entire journey. That’s a show to the man’s determination to fulfill their father’s dying wish, he thinks.

Before learning of their father’s crumbling health, Brandon was seconds from ending the man for Lyanna’s sake. On the night of the reaping, they were off hunting with other young men from their village. Winter was coming. To prepare for what the maesters predict as the longest, harshest winter yet, they’ve set off once a week, hunting for meat to keep in the salt houses.

When they returned home and their sister wasn’t there, Ned assumed she was somewhere wearing his clothes and sparring. Their father soon shattered that thought.

Poor Benjen stayed behind as he was too young—too weak—for the hunt. They used to make japes about how the boy could sleep through the sky falling to the earth, but the dragon’s screech woke him that night. His brother said he saw the dragon carry their sister away.

“She looked dead,” Benjen told them as he cried. “It killed her!”

Brandon was justifiably enraged after hearing that. Ned, always the level-headed one of the two, was angry as well but he couldn’t stand by while his brother beat their father to death.

“Is that it?” Brandon asks, pulling Ned out of his thoughts. He points up to a white mountain up ahead. “It doesn’t look tall at all. Didn’t they say it was the tallest mountain?”

“They did. But they never said it was the tallest mountain in the realm.” Because it was hardly that. “The climb should take a couple of hours if that. Bless the gods.”

Brandon spits on the ground. “The gods,” he says snidely.

Ned has always been careful not to insult the gods but even he must admit they’ve never been the gods’ favorites. Tragedy seems to befall them at every turn. From his mother and their miscarried siblings to Lyanna, and now their father.

The ascent is shorter than expected, not easy but not difficult either. Admittedly, Ned thought it would be more of a challenge. This is why they didn’t bring Benjen along even though he begged them. If he wasn’t strong enough for the hunt surely this journey would’ve been too much for him. Perhaps they were wrong.

“You’d think they’d do a better job of protecting their precious Oracle,” Brandon says. They’ve just reached the top and are taking a moment to gather themselves. “Where are her warriors? Is
there even a courier here?”

They stand at the mouth of the white cave. Ned has never seen white rock quite like this. Palestone is a fitting name indeed. It is said that at night, the mountain glows like the moon, a star rather.

Ned unbuckles his sword belt.

“What are you doing?” Brandon asks.

“We’re not allowed to take weapons inside,” he says, removing the belt. He sets it against the outside of the cave. Before his brother can respond with some hotheaded retort, he says, “Brandon, we are here to seek answers not fight. Please, brother.”

Begrudgingly, Brandon removes his belt as well and takes the concealed knife from his boot. Ned has never seen anyone do such a simple task with so much ire. Then again, Brandon has always been a different breed entirely. Out of all of them, his older brother has the most of the wolf’s blood.

Second to him was Lyanna. Is Lyanna, he corrects himself. He shouldn’t think of her as dead until he knew for certain.

“Do we just walk in?” Brandon asks.

From the cave, a passionless voice answers, “You may enter, Kings of Winter.”

The brothers share a startled look.

Kings of Winter? Ned doesn’t understand why that title would be used for the likes of them. They are Starks, not Boltons. They are minor lords, if they could even be called that. Not king’s blood.

But no one else was there and the longer they hesitate the more time they waste. They enter the cave.

Although from the outside it looks pitch black, the cave shines blue. The walls and floors are smooth stone, not the jagged rock he imagined. It is said the Oracle resides in the deepest depths of the cave but that is untrue. The Oracle sits in the middle of the cave, eyes shrouded by a white cloth. Her dress is white silk, and her long, dark hair is entwined with small bells that chime when she turns her head to face them.

Beside him, Brandon’s breath hitches. Of course, his brother has noticed the same thing as Ned. The woman is beautiful.

“Closer,” the Oracle beckons, her voice soft yet far-reaching.

Brandon doesn’t waste a second. He approaches her, his stride long and confident. He approaches her the way he does women in pubs and brothels but this is no ordinary woman.

Unlike his brother, Ned walks up with caution and awareness of their surroundings.

At the Oracle’s back sits a small pool with steam billowing from the surface. Either his mind is playing tricks on him or something is moving beneath the water. In front of the Oracle, there are two kneeling pillows and a silver basin. Had only one of them came would there be one pillow instead? She probably saw them journey up the mountain, she probably noticed them the moment they entered her domain.
Or is her power also an exaggeration?

“You wish to know your sister’s fate,” the Oracle says as though she were challenging Ned’s doubt.

Flustered, Ned looks away from her. “Yes, my lady?” He isn’t sure how to address her but he knows she is deserving of respect. “We have traveled long and far to seek your counsel.”

To his surprise, Brandon isn’t the one leading the conversation as he so often is. It would appear his brother has finally met someone capable of knocking him off his feet. How cruel is it that it is a woman that he cannot have? An Oracle’s body must remain pure, untouched. They belong to the gods they serve, not man.

Ned has to remind himself of that as he stares at her lips. They’re so full, so red...

He puts an end to the thought. He is to be wed to a fine lady soon. He should only think of her in this way.

The Oracle’s bells chime, indicating that she’s turned her head. “Or do you wish to know your own fate?” she asks him.

She’s testing them.

They are only allowed to ask one thing of her at a time. To inquire about Lyanna as well as their own fates, they would have to go down the mountain and travel up again for each question. Those are the rules.

“We only wish to know about our sister,” Brandon says. “Please, tell us what has become of our dear Lyanna.”

Ned would’ve been surprised by his brother’s sincerity if it weren’t for the fact that Brandon, though quick to anger and slow to forgive, adored his family.

“First, you each must give a gift to the goddess.”

They were prepared for this. In the last town they stopped in, they purchased oil of myrrh and gooseberries. Ned offers it to the Oracle on their behalf. She instructs him to place the items in the basin. When he does, the oil and ribs catch flame and burn purple. The Oracle inhales the smoke, breathing deeply.

Then she speaks in a deeper, haunting voice, “Child of Ice, Bride of Fire, she who shares skin with wolves, lives on. In the hidden place, she resides. In the hidden place, scales cover her eyes. The fates have decided she is to be his and together they will bring the dawn. Alas, their union is doomed. In their ashes, the Silver Queen shall rise. Seek the stag in the storm, be wary of lions, roses, and bleeding men. Now leave, leave my sanctum!”

Ned and Brandon respond with protest but before they can utter a full word they’re spirited away from the cave and returned to the base of the mountain along with their weapons. It all occurred in a blink of an eye.

“What in seven hells was that?” Brandon asks angrily. He glares up at the mountain. “She just threw us out without explanation or clarity!”

Well, she didn’t throw them out. The wind carried them softly, though, swiftly, and they are unharmed. Still, the abrupt dismissal was unexpected. He almost believes she saw something that
angered her or perhaps she does that to everyone once she reads for them. Ned isn’t sure. No one really talks about what happens after a reading.

That is hardly important, however. They have the answer they wanted.

“Do you remember what she said?” Ned asks.

Brandon blinks. “I...I do. Every word of it.”

The Oracle’s doing, surely. She somehow etched the prophecy into their minds so that they would not forget her words.

“Then we can put our heads together and sort it out,” Ned says, already returning his sword belt to his waist. They walk toward where they left their horses. “We need to find a raven and send word to father. The rest of it was a jumble but one thing’s certain.”

“Lyanna’s alive!” Brandon smiles brightly. He looks better this way. “Let’s go save our sister. Let’s find this hidden place and this stag in the storm.”

Stag in the storm. Could that be…

Ned thinks of his good friend, of how the man looked forward to wedding his sister. They sent word to him before they departed of Lyanna’s situation. Surely the man has responded by now. Knowing Robert, he was already in Winterfell.

Perhaps all is not lost.

As they’re riding out of Palestone, the sun begins to set. Ned looks back to see if the stories are true. Sure enough, the mountain is already beginning to glow like a star.

How sad, he thinks, for her to be all alone up there.

Chapter End Notes

Yay the story is finally beginning to unfold. As for Rhaegar dreamwalking while Lyanna is warging, he isn't actually there with the wolf she warged into to. (Noticeably it isn't storming where this wolf is but there are signs that a storm has passed through). The wolf sniffing him and rejecting him is symbolic of Lyanna's mind trying to alert her to the things that she's ignorant to. Just wanted to clear that up. As I've said before these first few chapters are setting the groundwork for the remainder of the story. Things that will happen are tagged.

Thanks for reading please let me know what your fave parts were if there are any!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!