Summary

Lord Stark rebels and the wolves have scattered.

That AU in which bastards stick together. Or Rhaegar Waters really has more pity than he should for Lyanna Snow.

Notes

Drabble collection. Hope you enjoy.

**Title from Shakespeare's "King Lear"
Lyanna scowled at her oldest brother, trying to reach the roses he held high up. “This is not amusing,” she said, jumping as high as her small body allowed. “You are so mean!”

“There, there, little she-wolf,” her brother cajoled. “In about ten years’ time you shall be tall enough to get your flowers.” He thought of it as a jest, but to Lyanna it was not. “Oh look, here comes mother. Why don’t you tell her of your grievances?”

“I will.” And she would have, except that Robyn Forrester did not need to be told much of what went on to understand the situation.

“Young lord Brandon, what is the meaning of this?” the woman questioned, nearing her child. She placed her arms protectively around her daughter and pulled her into the heavy folds of her skirts. “Have you taken such great a fancy to those roses?”

The young man smirked and threw the roses at their feet.

“I do not like this,” Rickard said, “there is too much danger in such a scheme. I say we face the King’s army directly. They cannot last in a Northerner winter.” Alanna Flint deferred to the judgement of her husband, but her mind was to her own son, riding in the wolfswood. “Maester Walys, find another way.”

“We could always give in to the King’s demand,” the maester said, though without conviction. Aerys Targaryen was a petty ruler. Such men would not see kindly any sort of attempt at reconciliation.

“And kill all of our people?” That won’t do.” Rickard stood to his feet. “Then it is war.” He turned to his bedridden wife, “My lady, I leave Winterfell in your capable hands and that of Maester Walys. Robyn shall help.”

“My lord,” Alanna answered curtly. “Make speed and win.”

He nodded his head. “Let us away, maester. We should not tax my poor lady wife so much.”

Carefully balancing the two cups she carried, Lyanna tried her best not to trip over the uneven floors. She certainly did not understand why it had been demanded of her to sit inside and wait upon Lady Stark, but as a bastard daughter she had little choice. Even more so when her mother made the demand. A double sentence, that.

“Lyanna Snow,” the sickly lady lying in bed addressed her, “where is my Ned off to?”

“Last I saw him he was tending Ser Patrek,” came her swift reply. It wouldn’t do to test the woman’s
Her own mother beckoned her over and took one of the cups. “Here, my lady, have a drink.”

It would forever elude her how her mother could stand their position, but it was not her place to speak. It never had been. So she kept her silence and kept hoping for better. Perhaps soon.

iv.

She snuck around the darkened hallway, careful not to make a sound. Benjen trailed behind her, sleep-filled eyes still not functioning properly. “Don’t fall, stupid,” she hissed at him, making to grab his hand. “Look, there they are.”

Lord Stark’s two true-born sons conversed quietly. Brandon was still holding onto his sword. Lyanna, using the shadows to mask both herself and the yawning Benjen from sight, crept closer to them so as to better hear what went on.

“He won’t suspect a thing if I keep away from him, Ned,” Brandon was saying. “By the time this is over he’ll be glad to have me there on the battlefield with him. I cannot stay here and hide with the woman and children.”

“Father gave his orders,” the younger one reminded the older.

“Just saddle my horse.”

Lyanna looked at Benjen. “He’ll follow our lord father into battle.”

Benjen shrugged. “I would too.”

v.

Swords clashed together in an angry rhythm, pulsing with malice and thirst for blood. There was no escaping the sharp edges or the brutal attacks. Brandon cursed his own folly at having ignored the wisdom of his elders.

He struck true through one of the enemies, but two other came to replace the fallen one. His hand was tired, his strength almost gone. He brought up his sword to parry a coming blow, but as soon as he did so, from out of nowhere, an arrow struck. His chainmail, thin as it was, could not stop it.

Brandon looked down.

Another arrow came.

He fell to his knees, the ground rough, cold and hard.

One last burst shot through him, enabling the heir of Winterfell to bring his sword up one more time.

And then he was heir no more.

The head of Brandon Stark rolled to the ground.

vi.

Tywin Lannister held the severed head out of its box. Truly, the resemblance to Lord Stark was striking. “So this was his heir?” A young boy, too young to have been called to the battlefield by his father. Well, perhaps it was better that he’d been given a death of his own choice.
“Give it to its rightful owner,” he ordered, throwing the head back in the small carved box. “Lord Stark shouldn’t leave this world without seeing his son for the last time.”

The sentinel nodded his head and obediently went to fulfil the task.

From his comfortable seat, the King looked up from his maps. “I’ve heard he has another son as it is.”

“Aye, by his second wife.” Tywin could already guess the line of thought his King was entertaining.

“Then shall we allow the man to see that one too? It would be too cruel otherwise.”

vii.

”My lady, I am begging you, have mercy,” Robyn cried softly. “You cannot intend to give me such a choice. I pray you wouldn’t.”

Alanna Flint fixed her with a hard stare. “Are you daft? Did you not understand my meaning? Choose now.”

The sobbing mother fell to the floor in supplication. “Don’t, don’t,” she repeated, clutching her two children, her tears falling upon both. Benjen has started bowling soon after their mother, but Lyanna bit into her lip to keep from crying. She could feel the blood trickling down, yet she kept biting.

“Very well then, I shall choose for you,” Lady Stark said, recognising that she wouldn’t be getting an answer to her question from the bastards’ mother. “Take the boy.”

Ser Patrek Glover reached out for Benjen. Robyn jumped to her feet and tried to stop him but the only thing that earned her was a shove from the man. “My lady Forrester, I have to,” he said, taking the sobbing child away.

Ned Stark followed them.

And her mother too sprinted after them once she had regained her bearings.

viii.

Robyn dragged her daughter in her wake, holding onto her hand tightly. Lyanna tried not to stare at her mother’s bruised face. It was too grotesque a sight and she had no more tears to give. Not after Benjen had been taken away.

Oh, she’d understood. She had. The reason why mother could not choose, the reason for which Lady Stark chose Benjen. She herself had no value.

“Where are we going, mother?” she questioned lightly.

“Oh, she’d understood. She had. The reason why mother could not choose, the reason for which Lady Stark chose Benjen. She herself had no value.

“Where are we going, mother?” she questioned lightly.

“Not far,” Robyn replied, her voice atremble.

It was to the crypts that she was taken. Lyanna followed her mother down into the darkness, holding onto her hand, pushing her small frame into the full skirts. It was too dark. “Come,” Lady Forrester urged, “this way, my sweet child.”

She found a safe spot behind one of the older raised graves and ushered her there. Kneeling, the mother spoke so, “Be not afraid, I shall come to you every day and when the danger is past, we shall leave this place together.”
Rickard coughed out blood, splattering it to the ground. His feverish, nearly broken mind hardly recognised his home. But it had to be Winterfell. It was too familiar.

“On your knees, traitor,” a guard growled, pushing him down. And down he went, much too weak to even fight the humiliation.

All his people had been gathered in the yard. His lady wife had been dragged out of her bed and two men supported her wane frame. Alanna Flint, however, looked as proud as ever, a defiant touch even in her last hours.

But where was Robyn? Sweet Robyn. He missed her.

He realised too late that the question had left his lips out loud. Only when Tywin raised his head up was his mistake clear to him. “Who, traitor?”

Lord Bolton stepped in. “Lady Robyn Forrester. The mother of his bastards. My men are still searching for her.”

“Find her, and her child. They should all go with the Stranger together.”

The sword pierced through flesh and sinew, laying claim to the life of the man working atop the woman. Rhaegar pulled the weapon back and dragged the soldier away from his prey. He needn’t have bothered. She was already dead.

Kneeling down, he looked at the slashed throat. The poor woman had bled out long before he ever got to her.

The sound of cloth rustling caught his attention. He stood to his feet and craned his neck to better look around. Another rustle followed.

He guided himself after the sound and neared one of the older looking stone constructions. Rhaegar bent over it.

A child stared wide-eyed at him, mouth slightly parted. Instinctively he looked at her hand, pressed to her shoulder area. Dark crimson stained it.

“Waters, are you going to stay down there forever?” he heard Arthur call out to him.

Rhaegar gazed away from the child for but a moment.

Chapter End Notes

If I'm going to be accused of writing all the L/R stories out there, I might as well do it.
Tywin Lannister threw the approaching man a hard stare. The King’s bastard met it with a fierce glare of his own, the hand not holding the child going for his sword. The Valyrian steel glinted menacingly as he drew it out a fraction.

The girl in his arms hadn’t stopped her caterwauling even as Lord Bolton named her Rickard Stark’s bastard and asked for her blood to be spilled along with her patriarch’s. “Ser Waters, hand over the child.” The Lord Hand’s demand was rewarded with an intensifying of child’s weeping and the bastard fully baring his weapon.

“If you want her, you shall have to take her yourself.” The act of defiance was witnessed by the King who seemed more amused than anything else. “Your Grace,” he addressed his father, “‘twas your promise I might take anything I wished from Winterfell.”

The courtyard broke out in whispers and murmurs.

“You do realise you’ve done yourself a great disservice, don’t you?” Arthur questioned, eyes fixed upon the child that had huddled herself in a corner of Rhaegar’s tent and was watching them back quietly. “At least she’s quiet now.”

The first available maester had cleaned the wound she’d sported and bandaged it properly. And she had stopped crying after that. A strange stillness had come over her. “What do I care for those fools and their words?”

“Aye, you wouldn’t,” his friend snorted. “But what do you know about caring for a child? I never thought I’d see the day when you would willingly play nursemaid for a whelp. And not even one of your father’s at that.”

“Watch that tongue of yours, Dayne. Go find some camp follower to bother, won’t you?” Rhaegar looked at the child again. She hadn’t moved. Not even an inch.

Arthur laughed. “Fine. I’ll leave you be then.”

“Wise choice.”

The bowl of food flew straight out of his hand. Lyanna Snow gave him a hard stare, much too out of place of a face of such a young child, and slunk back to her corner, tears brimming in her eyes. He followed her movements for a brief period before shrugging and sitting down on a stool.

Why had he saved her? His father had asked the question as well, though not in such terms. Because he could. That had been his answer.

Before he could take more than two bites of his food the girl caught his attention again. “Don’t eat that off the ground,” he called to her. She startled and drew back. With a grimace, he beckoned her
A little hesitation marred her features, but in the end, she did as she was told. Rhaegar suspected she was hungrier than she looked. He pushed a spoonful to her lips. She downed it all. “Don’t throw this on the ground as well. I won’t get you another,” he promised, pressing the spoon into one of her hands and the bowl in another.

And Lyanna listened.

iv.

Rhaegar woke with a start, hand clutching the bone-hilt of his dagger. Eyes searched the darkness for any hidden threats. There were none. He kept stock still for what seemed an endless moment, waiting. In case anything or anyone proved foolish enough to try challenging him.

Instead, the bundle of furs lying in that same wretched corner of his tent was moving sporadically, whimper-drawing forth from the child beneath the covers. He thought of leaving it be, since it was no issue of his what manner of dreams plagued her. But the sounds truly were pitiful.

Climbing to his feet, Rhaegar discarded the knife and stalked toward her. He knelt down and peeled the furs down, just a smidge. As he was doing that, the girl moved. Skin touched skin and Rhaegar quickly pulled his hand back. She was burning.

Tentatively, he touched the back of his hand to her forehead, feeling the wet, hot skin pressed against his. Clearly she laboured under a merciless fever.

v.

She carried on in the same manner for much the rest of the road, holding onto life by the skin of her teeth. “It’s to be expected,” the maester explained, swabbing at the scar that had formed over her wound with a mixture of wine and milk of the poppy. “It would have been kinder to leave her to her fate.”

Which he didn’t do. Rhaegar dismissed the man and managed to the best of his abilities with the child.

And when the King came to see her, claiming that he’d heard it through the grapevine, he was unsure about why he consumed himself over the matter. She would live or she would die. It was that simple. “If she lives to reach King’s Landing,” the man began, “then I shall consider taking Winterfell from Bolton and giving it to her.” He’d laughed and went away.

King’s Landing was quite close by anyhow.

vi.

Rhaella Targaryen was kind. She’d always been so. Even when he’d been brought before her as proof of her husband’s infidelity, she had said naught and simply took him in her care. The very same maternal instinct pushed her towards Lyanna Snow.

“Poor child,” she whispered, brushing her fingers through sweat-slicked hair. “I’ve always known your heart was kind.” That she said to him. Rhaegar looked away. “Pretend all you wish with the world, but you cannot fool me. I raised you.”

“She has no one left,” he settled upon saying.
“So I understand.” The Queen’s attention returned to the child. “Pycelle will see her through. The wound is clean and closed. She just needs some rest.”

Not too long ago, he himself had been all alone. Wars were as such. Rest would help with the burden, but ‘twould not ease it much.

“Don’t think to disappear though. You are the one who rescued her. You are responsible for her now.” And that frightened him more than it should.

vii.

"You need to put those thoughts out of your head.” Arthur clapped a hand to his shoulder. “And I know just how.”

Arthur’s solution, it turned out, was the age tried method. Drinking. It was as good an escape as any, so they drank and drank until they had no more coin left and the host threatened to kick them out. To which Rhaegar replied with a glare and a fist to the man’s face.

What ensued was a brawl fit for songs.

“Nothing like a little bloodletting to ease the mind,” his friend had said after they were done, going out the door into the streets. “Tell me it doesn’t feel better,” came the challenge.

Rhaegar shook his head. “Better.” But that did not mean he was less worried. Even with the bruised and bloodied knuckles, sporting wounds of his own and quite exerted, his mind still hadn’t let go of the matter of Lyanna.

viii.

By the time she was coming to, Rhaegar was trying his best to ignore the painfully pulsing headache and his own annoyance at the slowness of it all. Pycelle had, as the Queen had intimated, done all he could for the child.

He’d not been patient or gracious about it, assuring all present that his talents were wasted on such a low born creature – at least according to the servants. But he had feared retribution too much not to work diligently.

Turning his thoughts away from the unpleasant subject, Rhaegar touched the back of his hand to Lyanna’s forehead as if to make sure the last vestiges of fever were gone. Her temperature seemed normal, as far as he could discern.

Without a word, he helped her sit up and then pressed the rim of a cup to her lips. She took a few sips of water before pulling back.

xi.

Shaena pushed and prodded until he had little choice but to give in to her demands or lose his mind trying to ignore her. Somehow, Rhaegar decided that she couldn’t do Lyanna much harm to have someone close in age to her about.

“I’ll be good and careful,” his half-sister promised. “I won’t bother her.”

Daeron promised him the same thing, clinging to his sister’s arm. “I want to see her too.”

Lyanna welcomed them with her customary quietness. A spark of interest lit her eyes at the sight of
them, but otherwise she was much as she’d been before. Shaena tried to get her to speak, but all her questioned were answered through signs.

“Can you not talk?” the little Princess questioned, brows furrowing in concern. “Are you hurt here?” She touched her throat as if to demonstrate.

Lyanna shook her head emphatically. She touched her own throat and shrugged.

“Exhaustion,” Pyelle ruled when he was asked.

Exhaustion was much more permanent than Rhaegar would have believed. A week did nothing to quell it, nor a month, not even a year. Lyanna herself has seemed to accept the fact that she would no longer be able to produce sounds with a sort of astounded calmness he couldn’t quite credit.

“Sometimes there is nothing to be done,” Rhaella told him quietly when he asked what should be done. “She will either heal in her own time, or she won’t. That choice is out of your hands.”

She seemed well enough otherwise to be sure. Certainly, there was a sadness about her, but she ate well and played with Shaena and Daeron all day long despite that. Little Aegon was still under the strict care of an army of nursemaids, but she visited with him as well when she could.

Some matters were best left alone, Rhaegar decided. If she spoke, she spoke. If not, he would just be glad she had pulled through as it were.
Arthur caught the flash of light colour mainly because it was a bright spot in a sea of dull greys and monotonous browns. He immediately looked at Rhaegar who was busy pounding his opponent into the ground. Likely, he knew nothing outside his match at the moment.

Turning slowly towards the newest arrival, Arthur walked to the column and sat down on the first step leading to the dais. “He shan’t be pleased with you being here,” he warned. The rustle of skirts behind him alerted Arthur that the girl was moving. He felt something poke him in the back. Arthur looked over his shoulder.

She held towards him a small bow, one of those that were more a toy than a weapon. “Rhaegar will probably tan both our hides for this.” So of course he happily accepted to help her. “Let us see if we can surprise him, aye, Lady Lyanna?”

The glare his friend threw him was telling. Arthur grinned back, still very much at ease. “She’s a good shot,” he defended his actions. “Look.”

Lyanna Snow did indeed know how to wield her weapon, small as it was. The arrow leaped forth, sailing through the air until it met its target. She turned to look over her shoulder and upon seeing Rhaegar, her whole face came alive with excitement. The girl pointed to her accomplishment, beaming at the silver-haired bastard as if he might reveal to her the secret to gaining immortality.

Rhaegar looked between her and the target silently for a few moments before stepping towards her and stroking her hair with a gentleness Arthur rarely saw him exhibit. “Well done. Let us see how far you can shoot.” He turned his head from her. “Dayne, move the target further away.”

“Just the words I was waiting for.”

Since it had been a departure that lost Lyanna her voice, it seemed only just, in a poetic sort of way even, that another departure should compel the child to make use of her lungs after such a time that no one had expected it. The strange miracle was partly due to the intervention of one Shaena Targaryen. She had found Lyanna at practice with bow and rushed to her, exposing news of great importance without preamble.

“Father wants to send Rhaegar away,” the Princess had begun, catching Lyanna by the shoulder. Disbelief marred the Northerner girl’s features. She shook her head. “I do not lie,” Shaena assured her. “He truly is. Come see.”

The moment she understood the Princes spoke the truth, Lyanna had rushed headlong through the throng of people, a howl of refusal upon her lips. Her arms had locked tightly around Rhaegar’s kneeling form, her cries filling the room.

Even the King was stunned into silence mid-speech at the scene.
iv.

It took the combined efforts of the Queen, two Kingsguards, the King and Rhaegar himself to make Lyanna let her. Heart-warming as her attachment was, orders were orders. The girl had not remained silent through. “Do not go,” she begged for the hundredth time at least. “Don’t go. Don’t go. Don’t go!”

Amusement played upon the Queen’s features as he knelt down to explain why he had to, again. “I have to, Lyanna.”

“No!” she disagreed, shaking her head vehemently. “Stay here.” The King, who was standing in the doorway, looked as if he might challenge the child. Thankfully, his wife’s glare disabused him of such notions. “Or take me with you.”

And there he had to put his foot down. “I cannot. ‘Tis no place for a child. But I shall come back.”

A protest started emerging past her lips, but, Rhaegar shook his head. “Nay, I mean it, Lyanna. You are staying.”

Loud, shrill caterwauling followed the pronouncement. It was nearly enough to make him reconsider.

v.

It was supposed to have been a few moon turns. Rhaegar looked at the King’s order, written on the parchment. He suspected, for one brief moment, that His Grace wished to be convinced or at the very least asked to call him back. Rhaegar would not do that. Never.

“That magpie of yours shall be disappointed. I’ve no doubt she had been patiently waiting for a chance to chatter at least one of yours ears off,” had been Arthur’s unhelpful comment upon the matter. “Don’t look at me so. Did you forget she can talk now?”

And it was a truth universally acknowledged that if one allowed a female to start talking and kept at it, said creature would not stop. “Dayne, don’t say such nonsense.” Rhaegar willed it to be nonsense anyway. “I’ve other matters to think on.”

“Aye, like what to send the girl next. I still maintain that she would like a dagger.”

vi.

Lyanna Snow never prayed in the godswood. Shaena had asked her once about that with innocent curiosity. “I thought you kept with the old gods in the North,” the Princess had said.

To that Lyanna had given a nod of her head. “I prayed to them,” she’d spoken back softly, “I prayed to them to spare mother and Lady and Lord Stark. I begged them to bring Benjen and Ned back. I even asked for Brandon back.” And after she would not talk of the matter again.

Shaena, with a woman’s intuition, no doubt, had understood not to ask about the customs of the North or her family.

Instead, Lyanna visited the Sept with her. “I am not convinced they are any better,” she’d said of the Seven, eyes narrowing searchingly at the statues and altars.

“I do not think they are,” Shaena had replied. “They never answer either.” Her hand had wrapped around Lyanna’s.
She was one-and-ten when Robert Baratheon came to court with his parents at the request of the Queen. Shaena had nearly swooned at the sight of the boy. He was tall and handsome, well-mannered enough and a bit short of temper.

“He has the depth of a puddle,” Lyanna had observed in the privacy of the Princess’ bedchamber. “Besides, he’s been ogling half the court ladies.”

“Oh, hush Lyanna,” Shaena had giggled. “A man can look.”

So long as looking was all he did. Lyanna shrugged. The Princess did not need her for such decisions.

It was a discredit to her that it took another day to find out he’d brought another brother along. Stannis Baratheon’s somewhat sullen face reminded her of Ned in one of his bad moods. Lyanna liked him instantly. So she made a point to give him the space and peace he needed.

“So you like him?” Shaena had asked, obvious concern in her voice.

“Not in the manner you ask.”

When Prince Daeron was betrothed to little Arianne Martell it became an imperative necessity that the King and his court make for Dorne. Lyanna had perked up at that instantly. Rhaegar was in Dorne. The Princess had laughed at her reaction for a few moments before falling on the bed. “The way you looked when I told you, Lya.”

What did she care about that? She’d been waiting for years, and in no metaphorical sense either, to see him again. That established, Shaena did not become any less merciless. “Rhaegar is someone you might in all fairness settle upon.” That particular smart comment from the Princess’ mouth was a reminder enough of her position. “I meat no insult,” had been what followed.

“So of course,” Lyanna had accepted with a small, forced smile. She had forgotten, for one moment who and what she was.

“I really do think—“ Shaena had continued undeterred.

His magpie was hardly of the chattering kind, Rhaegar found the day he woke with an armful of Lyanna Snow slamming into him with alarming strength. For a moment he thought he might lose his footing, but regaining his bearings his not prove that much of an impossibility.

The shock of it, however, was not so easily washed away. He was not holding the small girl that had followed him around with a bright smile on her face. It was that particular discovery which made him reel back and stare at her with silent incredulity.

Colour rose to her cheeks and she looked down at her dress. Rhaegar was sure she did not mean what his mind was trying to convince him she meant.

“I thought you would be pleased to see me,” she murmured. “It seems I have been forgotten.”

He surprised even himself with the vehemence of his answer. “Never.”
He was still scowling after she’d left. Arthur gave him a knowing glance and downed his ale. He just knew too much, that one. “It’s better than it was,” his friend continued, as if unaware. “At least now they pay their taxes without us having to send soldier to take it. Say, Rhaegar, you do not seem pleased at all.”

Ignoring the jab, he took a sip of drink. “That is good. The merchants of the far east next. They might be more difficult to convince.”

For a moment Arthur said nothing. Rhaegar looked up expectantly. His friend shook his head with a mumbled, “Never you mind.” Then he shook his head. “We’ve worked on harder cases before. Besides, is there anything the sharp edge of a sword hasn’t been able to win before?”

Quite a few things, Rhaegar thought to himself. “This is the last assignment, according to His Grace.”

It rankled, Rhaegar decided, that he was more used to seeing her shoot arrows than he was to seeing her dance. “Be at ease,” Elia murmured, laughter still in her voice. “My brother’s preference runs to experience. Anyone with eyes can see she’d just a girl.”

Rhaegar looked down at Elia solemnly. She raised one eyebrow at him questioningly. “You are too serious by half. Where there is a will, there is a way,” she reminded him helpfully before disengaging to catch onto her next partner.

When he turned, Lyanna stood before him. “You dance well,” he found himself telling her.

“I like it. But I like shooting better.” She looked up into his face expectantly. “I haven’t had the time to since arriving,” Lyanna added.

It had to be a conspiracy. “On the morrow then, let us go together.”

She beamed at him, nodding her head empathically. “I should like that.”

He did not know how to react to the strange rhythm his heart adopted at that.
“I’ve missed you,” she said. It was the manner in which she said it though that pierced his heart. They were simple words. She hadn’t been trying to pass on any other message through it. It was just that she had missed him and she wanted him to know.

But as good things did not last an eternity the moment was over much too quickly.

And then she drifted into an entirely different conversation. “Shaena won’t go shooting with me anymore. She says Robert Baratheon prefers ladies to half-tame creatures. Though I cannot understand why that should matter to me. And how exactly does shooting arrows impede one from being ladylike?”

It occurred to him that she was trying to get him to talk to Shaena. Women and their plots. “Shaena is the only one who can decide how much she wishes to compromise upon.” He won’t be dragged into some else’s courtship.

At least once she had a bow safely in hands, Rhaegar could concentrate on something else than her eyes. The added benefit was that he could in an almost logical manner. There were, certainly, some residual curious notions which he did his best to swipe away.

“Higher,” he advised, analysing her stance. She moved her arms slightly. “Not so high.” He knew she knew how to shoot an arrow properly and that he should upbraid her for trying to provoke him, but instead of giving her a set down, he ended up standing behind her, one hand on her shoulder, the other on her outstretched arm.

She did not turn to look at him. Which was just as well, because he might have lost what little semblance of control he had and actually ask what her aims were.

Later, he would blame it on the hot Dornish sun and Lyanna’s youth and impressionability.

Youth and impressionability had very little to do with it, of course. Lyanna did not operate on such notions. Instead, she had come up with a plan. If only she could get Rhaegar to comply; that stubborn man would drive her insane. Which proved a little less than easy. It seemed he was wilfully ignoring the signs of interest thrown his way with expert practice.

“Men,” Elia told her with a small indulgent smile, “are most comfortable when hunting. You are not the one who has to work for his attention.”

Lyanna’s dejection was almost palpable. “Then what should I do?”

The Dornishwoman looked positively thrilled to have been asked. Lyanna suspected that Elia Martell liked little better than to solve the problems of others. “That is quite simple. Rhaegar is not as daft as he would have you believe. Pretend defeat.” At the look of Lyanna’s face, she laughed. “A woman has to be sly at times, Lyanna Snow. We live by our wit and beauty.”
Wit proved a dangerous enough weapon to be playing with.

Oberyn Martell gave the two of them an incredulous look. “Women,” he muttered as if that should produce some contrition. “Why do I get the distinct impression that refusing won’t deter you any?”

“Because it won’t,” Elia assured him. “So be a good brother and share.”

He sneered at that. “Fine. But not for long.” Nodding towards the youth, he barely had time to think on the absurdity of it all before Elia was talking, instructing the young Dornishman.

He glanced at the Northerner girl. Waters sure knew how to pick them. A few years more and he would be fighting other away. But of course women lacked the necessary patience for anything.

“Stop staring at her,” Elia admonished, slapping a hand to his arm. “And don’t scowl. Your face might get stuck like that.”

“I should think it an improvement,” Lyanna piped in, the ungrateful wretch.

“Snow, don’t push your luck.”

Arthur was quite certain pity should have been the feeling summoned in favour of his friend when he saw Lyanna and Oberyn’s paramour becoming quite close. Instead, he was prevailed upon by some perverse pleasure to be rather amused at the whole incident.

If he knew women, and he did – at least better than Rhaegar, anyhow – then Lyanna Snow had not so much found a new interest, as she’d discovered a way to needle his friend to the point where it became apparent. Amusing as it was, there came a point where Arthur just could not sit back any longer.

“I propose the radical solution of talking to her,” Arthur advised. At Rhaegar’s glare he chuckled. “You can play ignorant, if you will, so long as are aware of what you are losing.”

“I cannot wait for the day some wench decides to teach you a lesson, Dayne.” Well, at least he’d been spurred into action.

The boy at her side looked slightly panicky. “Are you certain he doesn’t mean to murder the both of us?” Lyanna gave a dubious look towards Rhaegar. Naturally, she knew he was strong enough to, if he so wished. But she very much doubted she was in any sort of danger.

“You I cannot vouch for, but I am out of harm’s way.” That did not seem to please her companion. “You are truly frightened, aren’t you?” He nodded, giving her a forced smile. She sighed. “He truly isn’t this frightening usually.”

“Which gladdens my hearty for you, m’lady, but truly do not wish to have an early funeral.” Well, she supposed he had a point. “The Prince was quite right. Women are absurd.”

“You had best be off,” Lyanna advised in an offhanded manner. That had been all the youth was waiting for to abandon her to the, she hoped, tender mercies of one appropriately disgruntled looking Rhaegar.
vii.

Rhaegar had always been a man of few words. Lyanna hadn’t even counted on receiving an explanation when he caught her gently by the wrist and pulled her away, leading her through some narrow streets to she could not guess where but neither did she care as her objective had been achieved.

Lyanna hoped that people weren’t staring at them or they might wonder at the wide grin on her face, and subsequently about her sanity. Not that she was worried about her sanity anymore.

“Find this amusing, do you?” Rhaegar questioned, turning his head slightly towards her. She started to shake her head in the negative but quickly changed the motion into a nod. “Lyanna Snow, there had better be an explanation for this.”

“I think you already know.” He, needless to say, did not seem to appreciate the audacity. It made no matter, he would be glad for it later, she told herself.

viii.

Rhaella took a sip of her drink, fanning herself with her hand. “I do think this is our most brilliant idea yet,” she told her husband who, for some reason, looked doubtful at her. “Come, Aerys, you knew the moment he drew his sword at Tywin Lannister that this would either end in blood or with a wedding.”

“Aye, but I was hoping for the blood,” he groused. “Weddings are no sport.” At the glare his wife threw him he heaved a sigh. “Must you meddle? He is old enough to find a woman on his own.”

“You men,” Rhaella laughed. “I’ve given him until now to find one and he has turned up empty-handed. I say ‘tis high time someone took the situation in hand.”

“Why don’t you just have me write them an order to proceed with that blasted wedding?” Only too late did he realise his mistake.

“That is actually a capital notion.”

ix.

The explanation she ended up giving to him was some fantastical mixture of feminine reasoning and practicality that had his head spinning. Of course, it was in that way that he knew she was trying to muddle his thoughts beyond repair.

“Well played,” he was forced to admit by the end of it. “Now for the real reason. And no lying.” He shot her a stern glance.

She blushed prettily and offered a smile. “I want you.” There were a few ways to damn a man and she had found one of the more effective ones.

“Nay, you think you want me.” There had to be some way to convey to her that this idea of hers could not possibly end well.

“I know my own mind,” she argued.

“You are four-and-ten,” he shot back.

“Five-and-ten in a less than a moon’s turn,” Lyanna returned with a glare. “And I know what I
"You, my friend, have no escape," Arthur told him, clapping a hand to his shoulder in congratulations. “I suggest you man up and accept that she’s bested you this time.” He took Rhaegar’s drink away. “This won’t help. In my experience, women are more receptive to a sober confession than a drunken one.”

“Dayne, bugger off,” was the dignified reply he was given. “And give me my drink back.” he glowered when Arthur drank it himself instead. “What can I do to make you leave?”

“Go to your Lyanna.” Refusal met his request. “Why do you insist upon torturing us all with this? Do you want the whole realm to beg you?” Rhaegar offered a helpless stare.

“She is–,” he began but was swiftly cut off by his friend.

“Mayhap she is, Waters,” Arthur allowed. “But you should be smart about it, fool. Wed her before she wakes up and realises she could do any better. Then you can spend your entire lifetime making it up to her.”

“Gods, I hope you suffer the same someday soon.”
"Hush," the voice whispered. "If you are silent, I'll let go." Lyanna nodded her head. There was something about that voice which sounded awfully familiar and despite sharper instincts; she wanted to see who it was.

Turning around she came face to face with a face much like her own, long, narrow, serious. He heart beat loudly, covering both the sound of her surprise and the other’s of slight concern when she lunged forth. “Ned!” Lyanna cried, wrapping her arms around the figure. “How did you ever make it in?”

“Sister dearest, these Dornish couldn’t guard their own shadow.” He laughed pushing her away gently. “You do not seem surprised.”

“I suppose I just always knew you were alive.” Her shrug felt entirely natural.

“I’ve heard you are to wed,” Ned said.

“So the plan goes.” Her lips pursed slightly.

“I object. This plan has just been changed.” He grabbed her by the wrist. “Come now, Benjen is waiting for us.”

“This is not a minor crisis,” Arthur hisses. “It’s a fucking tragedy.” He paled a few shades at the sound of approaching footsteps. Shaking his head, he looked over the slip of paper again. One could but hope he would manage to explain everything to his friend before ending up in the grave. Elia gave him an apologetic smile as if that would help.

“Dayne, what in the name of the Seven is so important that it couldn’t wait?” Rhaegar asked, entering the room.

It took Arthur about one heartbeat and a half to shove the note in his hands and make himself scarce, with a hurried, “The Princess will explain.”

“My brothers assure me that the only way a man may prove himself worthy of a woman is to steal her away. I shall patiently await your arrival. – Yours, Lyanna

The King nearly choked on his drink. “What do you mean Lyanna Snow has been stolen away?” He
did not look particularly pleased. “Good gods, Martell! That might have been my daughter. What sort of guards do you employ.”

“The not-enough-to-do-a-proper-job kind, it would seem,” Robert Baratheon quipped. “Though I cannot understand why anyone would bother with stealing Snow away.” He grimaced as if the thought was vile.

“Robert!” Shaena slapped his arm, scandalised. “Father, this cannot be left thus. Lyanna must be brought back.”

The King considered the matter for a few moments. “Aye. I do believe so.” Rhaella came into the hall, her countenance calm and collected. “What have you done now?” her husband groused.

“I, nothing,” she assured him. “By the by, your oldest son has left in search for his bride. I’ve taken the liberty of allowing him to do so.”

The ensuing ruckus may be left to the reader’s imagination.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! Well, I hoped this smacked you out of nowhere and that you are still rubbing the headache away.
i.

Arthur blinked, trying not to provoke a reaction from his clearly unenthusiastic travelling companion. He tried to put himself in the other’s stead. Truly. And he supposed he was partly successful. As for the rest of him, the fact he did not know whether to laugh or cry should have explained it all.

“Dayne, I can hear you all the way over here,” the King’s bastard ground out.

“I did not say a thing,” Arthur found himself protesting.

“You were thinking it,” Rhaegar accused.

Best not to test the man who had just found his betrothed was in possession of a wicked sense of humour. If one could call her abrupt departure that. “Very well, I was.” The admission did not seem to faze the other knight. As though he’d not done precisely as Rhaegar wished. A little acknowledgement would be most appreciated.

Arthur waited. And waited. And then he waited some more. “Aren’t you going to speak?”

“Do you long for the Stranger?”

“Point taken.”

ii.

Her husband was smiling. Rhaella was not a sharp creature. She never had been tart-tongued or even witty in the manner of the Dornish court her brother enjoyed so much. But she had her own knowledge, which was judiciously applied to the fact that Aerys was smiling.

“What are you considering with such a look upon your face?” She’d thought him angered at the danger to his daughter.

“I was thinking about the bloodbath.” Suspicion suffused her instantly.

“Do you not mean the wedding?” He insisted upon calling it a bloodbath and had offered to take all heads off the Dornish guards as a present to his natural son. She’d managed, just barely, to convince him it would not make an appropriate wedding gift.

“Hush, woman. He’ll bring back prey of his own, and you cannot fault me for punishing those who would steal from my home.”

Rhaella shook her head. “He won’t.”

Aerys rolled his eyes. “When you are a man, I shall ask you how you figured that. Until that time, pray refrain.”

iii.
Nearly choking on the tough meat, Lyanna pulled a face. It lacked any sort of taste. “What is this?” she questioned, holding back the thick chunk to take a better look.

Ned plopped himself down next to her. “Elk. It’s good.” Might be, if one hadn’t a tongue and teeth, or a mouth in the whole to taste it with. “When did you become so fussy?”

“When I was given actual food,” she answered, trying to scrape her tongue clean. It did not work. Since the taste would not go away, she took another bite. “And you’ve been living on this for years?”

“Nay, indeed,” Benjen cut in, stealing the meat from her hand to take a bite as well. “Occasionally there is fish.”

“Fish. Now that I’d give my kingdom up for.” She despised fish.

“You’ll have to catch it yourself though,” her youngest brother replied, oblivious to her deeply-entrenched disdain. “Water’s freezing.” Lyanna didn’t know about the thin rivers, but she bet Rhaegar was freezing.

Good. That ought to make him move fast for once in his life. She now hated both elk and fish. Gods forbid that she find a deep-sated distaste for rabbit or fowl.

Chapter End Notes

I’m making an hourglass. Yes, hourglasses are the best.

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