Foreboding

by BySpaceByTime

Summary

Aegon Targaryen never manages to conquer the north, and that changes everything.

This work was inspired by Nothing burns like the cold by WhimperSoldier
Chapter 1

Aegon had heard the stories, had been warned time and time again. Amongst his camp, when men whispered among themselves of the stories they heard of the northern kingdom. At Riverrun, the old Tully lord warning him of what lay beyond the swamps and bogs of the neck, of beast from legend that lurked the lands like common man. The former Queen of the Eyrie supposedly even gave Senya a subtle warning, yet the warnings were not heeded. Now he was paying the price for it.

It had been a long hard journey on dragon back just trying to breach the summer storms that surrounded the borders of the north. The sky had came to life with both thunder and lightning that threatened to blast through the membranes on the wings of Aegon and his sisters dragons. Balerion had let his presence be known, and perhaps that had been their first mistake, almost as if the dread was challenging the foreboding aurora that infiltrated their very beings.

It had seemed as if the storm would never end and they would never break through it until the skies slowly cleared and transitioned into a mild gray with light hints of sunlight. What Aegon had saw nearly stole his breath away, and he wasn't prone to being fazed by much.

A grove of trees with bark as white as snow that reached several feet tall, with grim and calloused faces carved in red sap that mirrored blood, that mirrored the leaves that crowned its tops. They spread for miles, some thicker and larger than others. The higher he and his sisters went the more the vast tree line expanded further into the land.

Visenya had been wary of them, for it spooked the dragons beyond repair. There was something ancient about the forest, something far greater and powerful than dragons and blood magic. It rained with ancient power, perhaps even more dark and twisted than the crafts practiced in Essos. Visenya had wanted to return to their camp, to gather their forces and to continue their conquest south, a place they were more familiar with before returning with more knowledge of the north at hand. If only he would have heeded that advice, but instead he commanded they continue forward, and Rhaenys followed his lead much to their older sisters chagrin.

How foolish he had been for not taking his sisters wisdom into consideration and now they were paying the price for his folly.

When they had finally found an open field, a meadow of sorts, they were greeted with large bolts of arrows. As long as a full grown man and as wide as Aegon’s hand. A bolt had flew at Rhaenys, narrowly missing her head after soaring through Meraxes wing, bringing the dragon low to the ground before a large net made of metal was draped over the duo’s beings. The dragons had began to go berserk with fear and uncontrollable rage at the invisible threat. They shrieked and moved about wildly to the point his saddle almost loosened on Balerion’s back, some of the
straps snapping in the black dragons attempt to turn back around. Visenya had flown down, discarding all common sense of how irrational it was, both in hopes of freeing their little sister and burning their invisible foe to ash, despite Aegon’s protest to her folly.

Instead of achieving either of those, burning the net proved to be futile, some magic of the sort repelling the flame and bouncing it back off toward Visenya. Had Vhagar not narrowly dodged the fire bolt, his older sister would have been burned to a crisp. When she attempted to score the woods, another net was drawn out of the trees encasing her and Vhagar within its grasp.

Another arrow had flown out, spearing Balerion’s hind leg, making Aegon brave a far drop to the seemingly empty meadow and into the hands of his invisible enemies. When the foe in question finally appeared, all breath had escaped his lungs. He had expected men, uncouth savage men to appear from the shadows of their trees, but instead he saw giants. Some reaching up to fifteen feet tall, some even dwarfing those in size.

The warnings, the legends and myths, the tales uttered from former rulers, lords, soldiers and common folk alike came back to him. Of beast thought long gone roaming the impregnable northern lands, the Children of the Forest his maester used to tell him about as a young boy, of the descendants of the Great Others and the First Men, a hybrid race descended from creatures both mythical and human. All it took was looking upon the giants clad in fur pelts and armed in large weirwood bows, a hundred strong and deep, whom brought the dragon to heel.

Torrhen Stark was a tall man, Aegon found, with broad shoulders and chest, his size increased from all his furs. His face was long and narrow, ghostly pale and nearly transparent as the creature that sat next to him. At first the girl—at least he thinks its a girl—looked to be a child, until he saw the babe she carried at her breast and the leaves, flowers and vines that served as both hair and clothing. Her eyes were a feline amber, and her nails sharp and black as obsidian attached to four small woodenly fingers. Aegon looked upon a Child of the Forest.

The room they resided in looked to be a throne room, save there was more than one throne. They were all made from weirwood, but had different design etched into the exterior. One was as large as a small boulder, with chains engraved, another was fit for a child engraved with faces and leaves sprouting out, and the one in the center held swords, akin to what he envisioned his throne would be.

A giant, a man and a child sat before him, raised high on a dias flanked with guards, men and women alike. Behind them were three banners, one of a giant breaking chains, another of a grey wolf on a white field and the last a laughing Heart Tree.
Aegon and his sister-wives, Visenya and Rhaenys, were forced to stand—no—kneel before them, chains around their wrist and their dragons captive beneath nets like prey, far from the Valyrians grasp. His rage and indignation, mirrored that of the fourteen flames of Old Valyria, readying to boil over and drown everyone within reach beneath fire and ash. By the gnarled look on Rhaenys face, and the coolly gaze Visenya leveled at the three creatures that stared down at them—them!—he could tell they felt the same. It took everything inside of him not to curse and reel against his bondages, but he was a king, even if he was caught unawares by creatures hiding in the shadows like cowards, and he’d act kingly for the pathetic excuse of court being held.

“It isn’t pathetic at all, in fact it is a very ancient practice to have three branches of power. It was enough to bring you here before us,” the little green creature broke the tense silence with her sing song voice, but it was ever mocking and cold, not cheery.

Everything in him froze for a moment, even his breathing, as Visenya and Rhaenys face morphed into confusion and frustration. Could she read his thoughts? Could this creature invade his mind? The thing smiled in response, as if to say yes, she very well could. It made him feel violated, and outside the grey keep he could hear Balerion’s roars far and wide. His dragon shared his rage and discomfort.

“You face our border, and come into our lands with the intention of erasing something older than your entire bloodline, for your own greed and gain. Have you no shame, no mercy?” a frown formed on her face, showcasing her contempt, but her voice was enough to make that evident. Her luminous amber eyes glowed fearsome.

“I warned you, kneel or die, those were the choices I offered you and the rest of Westeros,” his voice was grim, each word coming out through gritted teeth. His clothes were damp from the storms he flew through, he had a limp in his leg from his fall, and he could taste a mingle of iron and blood on his tongue. Aegon Targaryen was beyond irritated.

“What you offer is nothing but chaos and death for generations to come, long after we are gone, and our children after us. And now we give you a choice,” she looked into his eyes, deep into the vast depths of his purple eyes, reading him, searching him, skimming his thoughts and memories how a maester skims through a child’s book, and finding everything wanting. Unwanted feelings of shame caused him to shy away from her gaze, like a dog with its tail tucked between its legs. She saw what he did in her invasion of his mind, heard the screams of innocents as he filled the monstrous castle with dragon fire. At the time it had felt good, the thought of wiping out every trace of Harren. Until he had entered the castle, and not only had he seen the charred bones of soldiers, but women and children. Perhaps people who hadn’t even been related to Harren, young servant girls and old kitchen maids, thralls and salt wives being held against their will, dead for the actions of one man. Oh yes, Aegon had felt shame all on his own before he even ventured north, but now it has increased tenfold. She saw the charred bones of a woman cradling a babe, and the creature held her’s closer to her chest, as if his presence alone could turn her babe into ash. The creature reached into the depths of his mind, and the further she went the more he felt a blinding white pain engulfing his head how flames engulf dry fields. He tried to restrain himself, his grunts and moans of blank agony, even tried to push the unwanted force invading his mind away, but it
wasn't long before it boiled over and his screams filled the throne room.

In the crevices of his mind, he heard Rhaenys scream and Visenya curse at the little green creature, beads of sweat rolling down his brow from perspiration. A swell of hot and cold overtook him like a fever, one trying to win dominance over the other in the coils of his stomach. The Seven help him, it was like no feeling he’d felt before. The only way to describe the feeling was that of trepidation times ten. Visions flashed before him, not of his own, of a melinia in the past and an eon in the future, visions of ice and fire clashing together sending collisions rippling out into the masses, of light dancing with darkness, of earth consuming water and water consuming earth, of mountains rising from the ground as the world slowly took shape to its current state, of glacial monsters coming to swords with shadows made of fire, of dragons dancing in the sky tearing eachother asunder as the little tree creatures watched from afar with a laugh on their lips, drops of hot boiling blood falling from the sky like rainfall polluting the waters with its essence. The laughing grew louder, a sickly sweet laugh in the form of a child’s voice, but it was anything but.

“That is enough Leaf,” a deep accented voice sounded and just like that the pressure in his head was released, his mind flooding with relief and his soul slouching with exhaustion. Aegon felt dazed and numb, like he would collapse at any moment. Little dots now clouded his vision, and his body tingled.

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“There are things far greater than you, Aegon Targaryen, child of fire,” she whispered sweetly into the air, gently rocking the stirring babe in her arms.””Remember that after you leave here, and heed the warning well,”

The King in the North rose from his seat, his throne, speaking once more, proud and strong, his voice filling the silence of the room, “If you return here, our storms will fall on your soldiers, the giants will tear your dragons asunder, and you will feel the wrath of our power long before you feel the might of the north. There are things far worse than dragons.” he walked down the steps of the dias, sauntering his way in front of Aegon.”But if you leave us be, we will not interfere with your conquest and you will not lead your conquest north, nor will your children or your descendents after them,”

The king didn't wait for confirmation, instead he placed his hands on Aegon’s brow, thumbs pressed against his pulsating temple, before something better than relief coursed through his mind and he was slowly forced into the lulls of sleep.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

A few days after Aegon's futile attempt to conquer the north.

When Aegon wakes he is no longer north, under the hands of that creatures oppressing power, under the scornful gazes of the three strange branches of power. No, instead he is at the bank of the Trident, unbound along with his slumbering dragons and sister-wives. How had they gotten here? How did the man do that? Force him into a fitful sleep?

He quickly made his way to Balerion, the dragon’s head cocooned beneath it's massive wings. Aegon checked its leg for the wound that was landed upon his dragon, only to find it healed, a large scar spread across its leg as a reminder. In fact amidst his shock, he noticed he no longer contained a limp and his tongue tasted of mint and charcoal. None of them have the wounds they retrieved in their journey north, and a part of him wants to believe it was all a nightmare, that he’s been dreaming this whole time and they haven’t embarked on their journey yet. Though he knows it was all real. The indignation and rage, the shame and guilt, the lucid pain of haunting visions and relief. There are things greater than you, there are things far worse than dragons, their words resonated within his mind, like a never ending echo.

All of it was true, the legends and myths, the scary stories told at campfire, and that had only been the tip of the north. What else lurked in the mysterious ancient land? The thought alone elicited a shiver. The creatures had healed them, the act of kindness alone was enough to give him momentary pause. Didn't they consider him an enemy? He certainly considered them his, and amidst their presence they had not dissuaded the notion that he was theirs as well.

Aegon hadn't known what they were up against. They had went in blindly and foolishly, arrogant and unprepared. He wouldn't let the same mistake happen again. The north had served as a valuable lesson: the dragons were not always invincible, and all it took was one arrow. One large arrow. The north had mercy on him and his, though, and despite his fury he had to respect it. Would he have been as forgiving, if someone invaded his camp with the intentions to wipe out everything he built?

That alone showed many things about the northern kingdom. The north was vast, the north was unified, the north was powerful, the north was magical and most of all, it was as honorable as it was mysterious and ruthless. And he hated to admit it.

When they finally returned to camp, in their tattered clothes with sunken faces, their dragons weary and wary, Orys met him with a labyrinth of questions whilst his men had inquiring looks on their faces.
“Gods be good, what the hell happened to you three?” he was partly worried and partly amused. Visenya’s only response was to push past him, Rhaenys for the first time in moons following her lead. His dark onyx eyes widened at the angry responses from his half sisters, turning back to Aegon. “What happened over there? Is what they say about the north true?”

“Do not speak to me of the north,” he said darkly, eyes hooded. Orys expression changed instantaneously, his good humor and cheer slipping away behind a gilded mask. A spark of guilt ignited in Aegon’s chest. “I’m sorry—it’s just, not all was well during the journey there,” he said low enough for only the both of them to hear. He began to walk toward his tent, beckoning Orys to follow along.

“So what do we do now then, Your Grace?” his brother remained guarded and formal. Gods, but did he hate when Orys got that way.

"There's no need for the titles little brother, not with you," he murmured lowly, and he could practically see the tension roll off of his brothers shoulders in waves, his visage relaxing. A ghost of a smile tinted Aegon's lips, “We head south, as far as south goes, and we conquer the lands of Dorne,” they slipped past the flaps of his tent, sauntering over to a long, broad table covered in maps and little wolf figurines. Aegon picked one up, twirling it between his index finger and thumb before tossing it back onto the surface. Aegon picked one up, twirling it between his index finger and thumb before tossing it back onto the surface. He would never shake the feelings of bitterness and defeat he felt at losing. The embarrassment and shame at having to let one of the kingdoms seep through his fingers like silk. Aegon was a greedy man at the core, he could admit that. He was a proud one as well.

“But what of the-” Orys rebounded on his words, shutting his mouth at the mention of the cursed kingdom. Aegon leveled his gaze at his Hand, with all the intensity of a determined man. Despite his fresh defeat, his conquest was far from finished.

“We leave the kingdom be for the time being, until we learn more of their history and lands and take the best course of action to...handle them,” the chance of actually attaining the north through conquest were slim to none, he knew. If an army couldn't breach the border, and a dragon couldn't instill fear and obedience upon the people, then he’d have to bring the north into the fold a different way.

Dorne, on the other hand… he would have to better prepare his dragons. Meaning armor to protect their wings, legs and chest, a helm to guard their eyes. He would not fail with Dorne where he failed with the North. That experience alone caused a wariness in both him and his sister's, as well as their dragons, eliciting more caution that'd serve them well in the wars to come.
“Dorne will not kneel,” the Yellow Toad spouted, spittle flying in the air from her moist toothless gums, landing on Aegon’s face. Slowly, with barely hidden distaste, he wiped it off. Once her guards had been amused with the forever going tirade between the two parties, but now they stood by idly in boredom, eyes still sharp and watching.

As much as the woman infuriated him to no end, he wasn’t foolish enough to underestimate her or the rest of the Dornish. She had the same fiery blazed eyes as the creature named Leaf. From that alone he knew what he was up against, even if Dorne lacked the magic the north had. Razing their castles would do no good, he didn’t need anymore hostilities nor did he want to rule a kingdom of ash. For that reason alone, Balerion and his siblings flew in the air from afar to show the old blind woman and her people he meant no harm, yet.

“You may not kneel, but you’ll bend. You see my dragons,” he began, and pushed down the shame of repeating the words he once spoke upon another arrogant ruler. The screams of thousands haunted him every night, in a way it hadn’t before until he encountered that gods be damned creature. “You see my army, larger than yours by half. And you see that most of the kingdoms have sworn themselves to my house,”

“And your point is? I can’t see a damn thing, not your army or your dragons, I’m blind,” she leaned back in her throne, a smile forming on her wrinkled face, wrinkling it more. “Most of the kingdoms huh? I see the north had you running back south with your tail between your legs. A tough lot, those northerners, but my lot are tougher. Neither Dorne or I will bend for you, and I’m too old to bend besides,”

“Pride will earn your people nothing but death,” he tried to reason, for what seemed like the thousandth time, but his patience was beginning to wan with the elderly woman.

“They’d rather choose death, over anything else you offer, even long after I am gone. I said it once and I’ll repeat myself once more, Dorne will not kneel,” she drawled out the last few words, all pronounced in her brogue.

“You would keep your titles as prince or princess, you would keep your hereditary system and your cutsums, and perhaps down the line a daughter of House Martell can marry into House Targaryen, and become Queen,” each word tasted sour in his mouth until he slithered out the sweet lies with ease. He’d be damned if some Dornish wench became Queen, and he’d make sure to pass that down to his future sons.

The princess seemed to sense it, grimacing, but made no mention, “Why would I exchange my
“Why would I exchange my kingdoms freedom for something we already have?” she spat with a mouthful of venom, eyes squinted like a viper.

They simmered in silence after, and the boiling hot sun of Dorne and his tempering rage. Verywell then. He wouldn't turn their keeps into ash or charge in his armies, at least not yet. Aegon would hit them were it hurt most instead. A smile crept onto his face, sickly sweet, and despite her blindness she seemed to sense that as well, her frown deepening and eyes furrowing. Perhaps she could hear it in his voice, “Very well then, you will have it your way princess,” he bowed a light mocking curtsy, and spun on his heel.

His men who waited outside the palace followed after him, Orys moving to his side, “Signal the flag, and send the raven”

“Are you sure about this?” his eyes were dark and uneased. When he was met with silence his Hand nodded falling behind him to send out orders.

A red flag would be hoisted into the air, a few miles away from Sunspear in one of their many desolate towers Aegon claimed for his own in the moons after coming to Dorne, large enough for Rhaenys to see atop her dragon, giving her the sign to start her mission. Aegon felt Balerion’s presence, and lured the dragon to fly near him. There are things far worse than dragons.

He climbed atop Balerion, before taking off, the dragons wings sending up gusts of sand making the surrounding duck their heads to block it. There are things far worse than dragons, the little creature said. Oh yes, there were many things he could name, especially for a barren and hot place like Dorne. There was dehydration for one, and starvation another, disease being among the top of the three. Why would I exchange my kingdoms freedom for something we already have?, until you don’t.

Visenya glided Vhagar next to him, and he gave her confirmation in a nod, and off she went to take on her own task. Orys had his own aswell, and any moment he would be boarding a ship to go inform the newly attained fleet and it’s commander of their own task.

Apart of Aegon felt guilt, but the other roared in bitter triumph.

Not much blood had spilled that day, but it was the actions that would cause the rippling effect of turmoil. Dragons sow no seeds, he thought, gods I am a monster. But there was no time to feel guilt, or better he couldn't afford to feel it. At least he wouldn't be able to see the lasting effects,
and the creature wouldn't send dreams of it to haunt him if it wasn't in his collective memory.

They had did many things, awful things, and barely had to use their dragons for half of them.

They infiltrated rivers with salted dead, so that the rotten flesh may preserve in the water. The leftover unrecognizable carcasses of the soldiers from the Field of Fire, in the river bed near Planky Town. Large nets had been made in the months after his visit to the north, mimicking the one that captured the dragons. His garrison had thrown the dead within the nets before hand, and Visenya and Vhagar carried each one away like fisherman, before dropping it in the rivers of Dorne, contaminating the water for good. How long would it take for the Dornish to realize it was poisoned? Would it take a whole town to fall under a plague? They were already infested with maggots, and burnt skin practically dripped off of the bones like fat off of a suckled pig from days of stewing in the hot sun. Some of the dead men still wore their twisted and melted armor, the ones who weren't burnt to the point of becoming charred bones but burned enough to become cooked meat. The weight of the armor would help the nets sink into the rushing depths of the Greenblood and Brimstone.

Rhaenys set fire to wells as well as small streams, the water evaporating and drying from dragon flame and the scorching Dornish sun, the wooden and brick foundation that caved in polluting the little that remained in certain wells. All the while Aegon set fire to the roads, killing every merchant and burning long lines of food trains. He set flames to large herds of goats and sheep, and any other consumable herd he found along the way. No crops or fields were safe from Balerion’s fire, and no amount of small wooden arrows the Dornish nooked, drewed and loosed on his dragons armour could stop him. There were only so many provisions they’d survive on in their castles before they began to feel the tight grasp of hunger and death. How long before mobs erupted in their small cities in the meantime before that? All the starving smallfolk mad with hunger and envy. How long before it went beyond hunger and envy, and they grew tired of seeing their loved ones drop dead from disease, their children’s swollen empty bellies covered in flies in the sweltering sun? His stomach lurched at the thought.

Orys wrought damage in other ways that didn't consist of dragons. The Velaryon fleet already surrounded the port of Planky Town beyond the shoreline, enough space as to not make the inhabitants cautious but enough to sail there in reasonable time. The trading vessels that traversed from Essos to Dorne were there as well, completely unaware of their inevitable doom. On the Sunset sea, the Redwyne fleet from the Reach sailed as well, resting in warm waters, waiting for their own signal, spread far from each other but they moved as one. There was no love lost between the Reach and Dorne, and the new Lord Tyrell and Lord Redwyne almost seemed enthusiastic about bringing havoc upon the Dornish people, eagerly joining their fleet with his.

When it neared nightfall, the sky a hazy blue, the sound of horns filled the sky over the open sea, and Orys led the attack on the port, with a fleet of hundreds, nearing a thousand, behind him. No food, or anything else for that matter would be imported or exported from Dorne, and he’d make
“You did what you needed to do,” even the construction being done couldn’t drown out Visenya’s voice. The sound of chisels and hammers sounded outside his tent, men grunting as they pulled carts of red brick to form around the wooden outpost that’d soon serve as his keep. “You gave them multiple chances, exceptions that you didn’t give other kingdoms, and they still refused to kneel. It is their fault, not yours,” her tone was stern, almost maternal. It was almost as if she was trying to convince herself of this sentiment more than him.

She sat at the table, arms folded and legs crossed even in armor, head held high. Visenya eyed him in that way she did when she found him particularly unfavorable, lips curled. Aegon’s constant pacing may have had something to do with that, but his legs refused to be stopped. He couldn't sit still when his mind weighed heavily, he had to move about lest he go insane. His stomach still flipped anxiously as the wind chimed.

“It doesn't serve well for your men to see their king so unnerved,”

He halted in his steps, deeply inhaling before taking a seat at the table alongside her. “Why does it bother you so much?,“ she lifted her eyebrow inquiringly. “You act as if this is your worst,”

“But it is,” he replied sharply, “This is different from the Field of Fire, even different from Harrenhal. This is another scale of cruelty, this is genocide Visenya,”

“This is war Aegon, and those people are our enemies. Don't think you are the first to do something like this, and don't think if the roles were reversed they wouldn't do it to us,” the north came to mind then, the moment he woke up at the bank of the Trident free from the injuries that once plagued him, injuries that he’d attained before he even journeyed north. How did they do that? Why did they do that? And why did they let him go?

“What about the north?” he questioned, voice low and defeated. She immediately bristled at the mention of their unconquered foe.

“What about the north?” she retorted sardonically with a grimace, “They’ll get what’s coming for them, sooner or later,”
“They healed us, and they healed our dragons when it would have been more convenient not to. King Torrhen didn’t have to do that, and yet he did,” silence resonated in the room, save the cackling of wood and flames in the small pit. He looked at his worn leathery hands, and wondered how much blood he had on them.

“It doesn’t matter,” it was the first time Aegon heard uncertainty in her voice, the first time he saw Visenya uncertain of anything. He leveled her with a vaguely curious gaze, but her own lilac eyes were focused on the flames, the light casting a glow and shadow on her sharp features. “I don’t know,” her voice was barely above a whisper that he almost mistaken it for the wind, until he saw the wistful look in her eyes. Visenya hated being unsure of anything. I don’t know, her words unsettled his spirit. A childish part of Aegon had once believed Senya knew everything.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

A different point of view...

Where the air once smelled of sweet and sour red oranges and sultry sand, it now smelled of rot. Not even the marble halls of Sunspear could escape it’s like, and Lynn was beginning to suffocate in its pernicious aroma. The smell itself had originated from the surrounding lands of Sunspear, in the ocean filled with ruined trading galleys and the bodies that still washed ashore. It came from Western Dorne, in the stinking rivers that smelled more of sewage and swamps than the clear refreshing waters she used to take little Deria in when it was particularly hot, even for the Dornishmen. The memory was more bitter than sweet now, not when her throat swallowed dryly and she couldn't even conjure up enough spit to moisten it. She felt as the weeks rolled by it was only a matter of time before her tongue shriveled up and rolled back to. A fantastical idea, sure, but she was not of stable mind, not since the Day of Devastation. It's what everyone called it now.  Bards will write songs of this I'm sure, she thought sourly, fools, the lot of them.

Her sweet Deria suckled at her breast as she rocked on the chair, cherishing the brief breeze that chimed in past the silken drapes on the balcony. Lynn’s daughter was way past the age of weaning, but breast milk was the only thing she could give her, the only thing that’d properly hydrate her and nourish her. They had little water and Dornish Red in their provisions, and even little food, the surplus they had all but gone, and they had to preserve every drop. Their stocks had seemingly disappeared in the months following the devastation. If one concentrated enough they could hear the groans of hunger pain outside of the Old Palace, all of the people who are past the point of starvation, ready to die. There were only so many smallfolk they could let inside after the attack on Planky Town, and the rest were left behind.

The long silk skirt that once fitted her hips snuggly now constantly slipped off, her hips more bones than flesh and her once plump face was gaunt. Deria was still a reasonable size, but how long before she became light in her mother’s arms? Little more than a sack of skin filled with bones.

Lynn had seen the devastation wrought upon her people-and they were her people now, had been for the past seven years- the mothers that wept as they buried their children, the mothers that wept as they watched their children melt away in the wake of hunger and thirst and the sweltering red sun. Their skins became baked and sagged, darker than the average complexion for most Dornish, and their small bellies swollen beyond recognition. It seemed the Dornish sun became more unbearable to the mind as well as the body when their wasn't food or water. Did they even know what was going on, those innocent children? Did they know they were being held under siege? Did they know of the war being waged for them, so they may survive it? Did they know of the Conqueror, Aegon Targaryen, the man who caused this? No, because they were only children, little more than babes, noble and lowborn alike. They couldn't possibly know what was
Another breeze kissed her sweat slicked skin, accompanied with the smell of death and tears.
“Princess Lynn,” a young serving girl entered her vision ever so slightly. She had copper skin, and hair and eyes as dark as onyx. She could have been pretty in a common way once, yet her skin constricted around her cheek bones and her eyes are sunken, a little wisp of a thing swallowed by her stale linen skirts. Faye is her name, Lynn thinks. “It is time,” she said gravely, eyes hooded in sadness.

Lynn smiled stiffly, nodding her head in thanks. Yes it was time. A funeral and a swift farewell to the departing troops. Everything had been done hastily, from the preparations to prepare Meria Martell’s body with little water for the Silent Sisters to wash her clean and the ravens her husband Prince Nymor risked sending out to his bannerman with the threat of being intercepted. The older woman couldn't withstand the pains of hunger, for all that she fought till the bitter end. Most of the elderly did. They'd never live to see Dorne happy and content, to see their people relish in freedom and victory.

Countless ravens had left Sunspear, with little to return in the following months of the Devastation. Perhaps they had been shot down by Orys Baratheon’s men, whose troops wallowed in Planky Town and outside the walls of her home and whose warships surrounded the Old Palace on three sides by the sea. Or maybe the more shifty bannerman whose loyalty had always been called into question ignored Sunspear's pleas. Lynn would probably never truly know until the war was won. The thought was daunting. There was only two ways this war could end.

These were her husbands lands, a Dornishman in truth raised by the frank and fearsome Meria Martell herself. That was Dorne’s advantage she supposed, they knew their lands better than anyone else. But clearly Aegon knew them better, her thoughts whispered darkly. Who would have known that the Conqueror was more than his dragons and brute force? Dorne had watched from the sidelines as kingdom’s fell, never truly believing that they’d become one of those kingdoms. Afterall, the north was little more than barbaric heathens who worshipped trees, yet managed to do what Dorne in the end could not.

Deria released her bud, saliva and milk dripping sloppily down her chin as she clinged to Lynn’s blouse. She looked at her mother with big golden brown eyes, Lynn’s eyes, and smiled a genuine smile, sweet and childish. I cannot lose hope yet, I can not give up on my country, I cannot give up on her, with newfound determination she fixed her blouse, sauntered her way down the corridors and into the open yard where the burial ceremony would take place. Deria was the future of Dorne, this would one day be her country to, and Lynn would be damned if she gave up on that future. Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken, Meria’s words taunted, even beyond death.

Dorne still had a few tricks up her sleeves Lynn was sure, and Lynn had her own. She was the daughter of one of the most powerful houses in Volantis, the daughter of Zaroxo Vaelerys. That had to count for something. If she could get a raven out, one that could fly to Essos and back, she
could ask for her families help. Volantis has one of the most largest fleets in Essos, and a formidable army of Unsullied. But the dragons, she halted in her steps momentarily, Deria’s weight resting on her sharp hip as Lynn pondered. And who's to say the powerful lords will agree on coming to some lords second daughters aid. The city had walls for a reason, and that was to seclude itself, to keep the world and all of its problems out of it. She continued forward, down the white brimstone steps.

When she finally arrived her husband greeted her with a kiss, lips chapped and stubble prickly against her skin. His hand found Deria’s short brown curls, placing a chaste kiss on her crown. Lynn skimmed the yard and tried not to appear crestfallen but it was apparent in her voice, “This is all we have?” she whispered, worried. Surely there has to be more than this? she bit the inside of her cheek, relaying the words. The last thing he needed was discouragement and squandered hope. But still...Aegon’s army was larger by half, all seasoned in war and healthy.

The men that filled the yard all seemed dour and weary in their armor, as if they'd collapse at any moment. Even sharpening their blades and spears seemed to daunting of a task. This is only what Sunspear has to offer not all of Dorne, she thought reassuring, and wasn't that pathetic, that she couldn't rely on her houses force alone?, but surely our bannerman’s troops won't disappoint, surely they haven't been as affected. Lynn couldn't be so sure. From what she could tell, the Devastation had wracked all of Dome. Still she couldn't be sure, for Sunspear had lacked contact with the outside world until recently. Though in truth, she didn't want to be sure.

Nymor took Deria off her hip, placing her in Faye’s arms, Lynn was too tired to protest, “Take her to the nursery,” he smiled gently in the young girls direction who bowed slightly and hurried away. “I need to speak with you, my love, privately,”

The solar was relatively warm, much to her displeasure. “What is this about?” she gripped the arm of her chair tightly.

Her husband looked to be an entirely different man in armor, but that may have been because it swallowed his figure more than it fitted. Six months of small under proportioned meals and stress could do that to someone. Lynn vaguely wondered if she looked as much of a stranger to him as he did to her. His dark mahogany eyes bore down on her, the weight unbearable on her bones. Men, they were always hiding something behind those eyes. Her stomach flipped.

“You know we do not have a chance,” his voice came out hoarsely. “I know we do not have a chance, and the men outside on that yard, preparing to die, know we do not have a chance,”
She shivered as she closed her eyes, pained at the truth his words carried. Lynn would shed no
tears, she refused. “So what do you suggest we do, my Prince,” she replied flatly. The only
answer she was afforded was a low, exhausted sigh and silence thereon after. “I say Dorne fights
to the bitter end,”

“You know that isn't wise, you know-” he tried to press own, but she'd hear no more of it. Not
when the only thing that currently filled her stomach was coiled bitterness and a thirst for
vengeance.

“Are you suggesting we kneel then?” she spat out, incredulous, “To the man who would see your
daughter starve to death? Who would see the children of Dorne starve? And on the day we put
Meria’s body to rest no less,”

“Don't you think I realize that?!” he slammed his fist onto the tabletop, “The very thought of it
kills me, Lynn. But seeing my people suffer is far worse. This isn't about pride anymore, this is
about survival,”

“What difference will it make? We are already lost,” she shrugged her shoulders, lips gnarled and
tears welling in her eyes. It surprised her, she’d thought her body was long emptied of water and
tears. “In the end we will lose, so why make it easy for him?”

“Because I’d rather give up my pride, than see my people die,” he retorted grimly, as he averted
his eyes elsewhere. Nymor at least had the grace to look ashamed. Good, it's better than him
being content with such an idea.

“I could contact my father,” he looked up at her again, and she counted the brief flicker of hope in
his eye as a victory. “He is one of the richest man in Volantis, one of the most powerful. He could
take out a loan from the Iron Bank, and buy a fleet of ships and army of Unsullied to meet the
enemies,” Dorne had little influence in the Free City, but reforms had been made between country
and city, an alliance brokered through marriage. Silks, glass, fruits and goods in exchange for
natural Dornish salt, meats, wine and red oranges. Lynn could very well be grasping at straws,
but the slim alliance Dorne had with Volantis could be their only way out of this situation.

“Would he interfere with a war being waged half a world away?” he inquired evenly. Will he
really go to war for you and risk his influence in Volantis? were left unheard. Oh, but she heard
loud and clearly, and tried not to let it bite at her.

She scoffed, putting on a self assured mask, even if she truly wasn't “Do not underestimate the
love my father has for his daughter,” second daughter with little influence in Volantis. She had
been so busy submerging herself with Dorne and its people that she'd nearly forgotten her own. A mistake she wouldn't make again.

He stood silently once more, contemplating. It seemed to draw out for hours before he finally spoke “Are you certain, Lynn?”

She nodded, “Please, for the love that you bear me, for the love you have for our daughter, do not kneel. Do not give up on Dorne,” she stood from her seat, making her way to him. He immediately clasped her small dainty hands in his palms, kissing one after the other.

“I'll think of it my love, I promise I will. But I must handle my bannermen, I must consult with them, for House Martell has lingered silently for far too long. If we wait any longer, it's only a matter of time before things truly descend into chaos, and that is exactly what Aegon Targaryen seeks,“

“How will you get to them with Aegon’s surrounding forces?” she finally asked. That had always puzzled her. They stood together for a moment, his head nuzzled against hers.

“You and Deria will do fine,” his lips brushed across her own, “I know that you will,” it was then she understood. Knew her husband marched to his death instead of his surrender, and she all but sealed his fate. If he thought there was a fighting chance he’d sacrifice himself to make it possible. Kneel or die, there are only two ways this can end. She should have kept her mouth shut, though would it have truly helped matters?

Lynn cried in his arms.

That noon, they buried Meria Martell, and everyone had gathered to watch as men carried her into the crypt beneath Sunspear. It had been quiet, in a way that the older woman wasn't in life and Lynn couldn't help but think she would have been displeased. Lynn and Deria wore their finest hot orange and yellow silks, biding her husband farewell with tears that refused to subside.

The gate had opened with a loud creak, the hinges chiming along with the sand and wind. For the first time in moons she had seen the notorious sand dunes and the ocean that smelled of death, and the hundreds of ships that littered the shoreline. Even from miles away they stood starkly on the red horizon.

Why hadn't Orys tried to take the castle? Why stop at the town? she had vaguely wondered. Though why else? To take Sunspear wouldn't have earned true submission, but to wait it out, to
let everyone inside starve until they grew to weary and could do nothing but submit would win and end the war for the Targaryens.

The future seemed bleak and obscure.
Chapter 5

The castle was in uproar, and catapults from the invading fleet shook the very foundation of it. The weak and defenceless elderly and babes cowed in the high towers and ancient courts hidden within Sunspear, but the women and children fought alongside the men. Young boys and girls no older than eleven name days, eagerly following after their brothers and sisters. They grabbed weapons: blunted swords and spears used for training, arrows laced with poisons. Barrels of oil to light on fire and drop upon the invaders who climbed the walls.

The force of the battering rams, the sound of death and chaos resonated loudly in the castle.

Faye carried the little princess in her arms, hooded beneath a dark cloak to lurk in the shadows with a dagger on her person that Princess Lynn gifted herself. *Protect my child, protect the future of Dorne.* And what of Lynn herself? What would she do? And what would Aegon’s forces do to her?

A woman with nothing but her guards who are weak and stressed with hunger. One of them being Faye’s brother. She had no doubt Adan would fight to the bitter end, along with the rest of them. But they had no real chance of fending the invaders off.

Their Prince had known that, and after yet another bloody battle near Gods Grace, the last of his forces bent the knee in surrender. Princess Lynn however refused to open the gates, the stubborn woman she was. Days and days of envoys relaying messages with the Prince commanding, begging, his wife to open the gates and bend the knee.

This did not sway her, nor did it sway the advisors who stood behind her. Their reasoning being that it could be anyone writing the messages, and for all the Princess knew her husband could be long dead, and that it would be more the wiser to wait for reinforcements from Volantis. The woman refused to let the war for Dorne end so easily. It was a decision Faye both respected and hated the woman for.

Didn’t she realize they had no chance? They were hungry, thirsty and tired. Their bodies filled with nothing but sorrow and hate. It was all suicide, a righteous one of course but Faye did not wish to see more of her people perish.

Like a predator he was, the dragon invader studied Dorne before striking an attack, in all those moons The Yellow Toad suffered his presence. When Faye passed the scurrying of soldiers and the clashing of steel, she saw men who were not of Dorne dressed in light armor made for the weather, so much that she could have mistaken them for Dornishman had she not seen them cut one down.
Her feet moved light and fast, eyes quick and ears sharp for every possible threat. The little princess slept soundly through all of this, due to the poppy her mother gave her shortly before sending them away.

The Old Palace lived up to its namesake, with hidden passageways that led to tunnels that would take them to the Shadow City and from there outside the palace. All Faye had to do was make it there in one piece, a trying task being that every alley way she crossed and bazaar she crept through there was a fray.

She shook her head at the thought of failing or dying. Faye couldn't afford to let fear and uncertainty cloud the senses, no matter how much her stomach twisted anxiously. She drowned out the sound of dying children who met spears with men who dwarfed them in size. The war cries of men and wails of internal pain from the women.

She turned a corner, the moment the scuffle across from her quieted down, crossing into another alleyway. When she turned it was only to be greeted by the force of a body crashing into her, knocking her and Deria into the solid ground.

The culprit quickly got back up, going into a clash with the man across from him. For a brief moment she sat there on her arse as she craddled the child in her arms, paralyzed with fear until she realized that they paid her no mind. They were to busy trying to kill each other to worry about a defenseless woman and child. Though what startled her was that both men fought with spears, in the style unique to Dorne. A vicious fervent clash of yellow and orange, copper and beige.

Hurriedly she rises, running past them with as much speed her feet could muster.

The Shadow City was a dusty old town, filled with foul smelling alleyways with decaying bodies and flies. This was where the dead had been laid, old corpses that began to stink and new corpses that followed. Some people were laid to rest here, to willingly live out the rest of their days in the dead town rather than take up any more rations that wouldn't have been of any use to them or to avoid spreading illnesses. Burning the bodies would have been to risky according to the guards, and so the bodies of friends and loved ones laid out in the open. Rats and other vermin joyfully picked at the carcasses. Where the creatures were once thin and narrow, they had grown plump and fat since the Devastation.
Faye had made sure to cover Deria’s head within her cloak before covering her own nose. The gods know how many diseases waited to manifest with the slightest inhale of air. The souls of the dead howled strongly in the wind, the strongest winds Dorne had ever seen in the years of summer.

The hovel homes were devoid of life, little more than hollow shells that had once housed the smallfolk of the Old Palace. The wind bellowed through them, making the ceilings and wooden doors creak endlessly. It made her feel empty inside, empty and hopeless.

She felt as if a thousand eyes followed her, soulless and enraged, bright with righteous fury. The Rhoynish ancestors perhaps? The thousands who suffered and died in this cold, forlorn town? Mayhaps both. The enmity between the Rhoynar and Valyria ran back long before Nymeria set sail to Dorne, and those who had been lost were her descendants, whether they be noble or common.

Dorne will never forget this. She thought tiredly. Her peoples were a proud one, to proud.

The young girl stayed near the winded walls, but continued westward, to freedom. She felt like a mice in a maze, crossing a labyrinth of walkways. She could almost smell the ocean. She would have never made it this far had she took the direct path through the Winded Walls, not when that was where the invaders ascended. The first place they would go after the battle was done, to chase down anyone who tried to escape death or imprisonment.

She was almost there, she could feel it in her bones, and the further she went the less it smelled of death.

Then she felt it, a crackling beat that echoed in the sky, and all seemed to fall silent. She could no longer hear the distant fighting, and how could she, when soon after a screech bellowed over Sunspear?

When she looked up it was to the sight of a massive beast circling around the premises. When it finally landed it was at the edge of the city, a hulking figure in plain sight. The sound of fighting and dying swiftly returned after the initial shock.

She had been so close. Suddenly she feels warmth, and she crouches down, pressing Deria into her flat chest. Faye braces herself for the heat to consume her, for the fabled flames she heard of after the war in the Reach between the Gardener kings and dragon invaders. But she only receives a brief touch of it, and the smell of charred walls and foundations infiltrate her senses. The stones become a bright yellow, black and red, like the banners that now fly over the castle. Was the battle over already?
The three heads of the red dragon on a black field and the black gates on a yellow one. The sound of gentle footsteps drew close. When had the invader dismounted?

She flinched when she felt a small hand press against her shoulder, edging her to stand up. Faye began to internally weep. This was the end, the beginning of the end. Deria began to stir in her arms, groaning in discomfort.

Faye rose slowly turning around, bracing herself to meet the eyes of a monster. She remembers her brother telling her that they were a product of generational inbreeding, constantly wedding brother to sister. They must be hideous, she had thought.

They were not. At least this woman wasn't. Perhaps the most beautiful woman Faye landed eyes on, with sweet purple eyes and a smile on her lips, silvery gold hair flowing down her back. She wore a crown, a silver band encrusted with gold, and black scale like armor that fitted her womanly physique.

“Hello little one,” she removed Faye’s hood, her smile slightly faltering before snapping back in place. Her eyes landed on a very much awake Deria. “And who might you be sweetling?”

Faye was too scared to tell the little girl not to respond, to afraid to run away less the woman hunt her down with the hulking beast not to far behind her. A silver scaled monster with bright golden eyes that appeared luminous in the dark of night.

The princess was hesitant at first, but the girl smiled at the woman’s own keen smile, at her inhuman beauty. The woman must look like a princess out of one of the fairytales Deria so loved to read. Faye wanted to weep.

“I’m a princess, who are you? Are you a princess too?” the woman’s smile became sharper, eyes brighter, as if she’d just found a gold mine. Faye wanted to collapse. Protect my child, protect the future of Dorne. She had one job, and she failed. Her people, her princess, her country, she failed them all.

She would not collapse or weep however, would not show weakness in front of the woman who helped cause her people so much pain.

“Even better, I’m a queen.” the woman responded, showing her straight white teeth.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Great things are coming, both good and bad.

Chapter Notes

Please let me know if there’s any typo’s! I’d really like to know, though I’ve edited this quite a few times before posting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Only after dawn broke did Orys enter the surrendered Sunspear with Rhaenys alongside him. She walked with a confident stride and a smile painted on her lips, ever the lady she’d been when they were growing up. Behind them are loyal guards, the Dornish lords and ladies that joined the dragons cause, a chained Prince Nymor and the lords who fought for him.

She’s been rather pleased with herself over the past several moons. For in those moons they’ve brokered deals and made alliances with House Martell’s less than loyal bannerman. House Yronwood being among those selected. Stirring old feuds had been a hard taskmistress, but after making offers of shipments of food and clean water, along with retainment of specific honorary titles in place of the Martells during the aftermath of the battle, Lord Yronwood had all but agreed. Rhaenys natural charisma and beauty also did wonders.

According to the lord, the Yronwood’s remembered a time when they were High Kings in their own right when House Martell had been little more than petty lords. The Bloodroyal, Lord Loren Yronwood had proclaimed proudly, descendants of the First Men and a true ancient house. Orys had not missed the slight directed at Rhaenys, but she had not seemed to mind it, or really cared to take notice. Afterall it was only truth that at Valyria’s prime, the Targaryen’s had not been among the forty most influential dragonlords for all that they rode dragons, but it mattered little now.

House Targaryen has styled itself a monarch and paid for it with fire and blood. Had Visenya been in Rhaenys place..., Orys shuddered to think of it.

The Dornish had been less than pleased with starving at the expense of a house they secretly opposed. House Yronwood became an ally early on, gathering their vassals before influencing other high lords to join the dragons cause. Houses Blackmont, Jordayne, Qorgyle, Wyl, Manwoody and Dayne being among most of the houses that joined the Yronwood’s to oppose Nymeria during her conquest of Dorne, and still held onto those old grudges and allegiances enough to come together again. Of course, some had been reluctant, and others even initially spat
at the offer. Until moons started to roll by, and they began to run low on food and water. Ravens had flown rapidly between the captured Planky Town and eager houses then. Hunger, Orys found, could make one contemplate.

The only houses that stayed true to House Martell were the Uller’s, Vaith’s, Allyrion’s, Fowler’s and Santagar’s. And like their lieges, they became starved and dehydrated moons after.

As cruel as Aegon’s tactics were, they worked, and now the gates of Sunspear are open to them freely. Of course, the submission was writ in blood, but the Dornishman are as stubborn as the land they inhabit. Only when Lord Loren put the blade of his sword at Princess Lynn’s throat did she bend the knee, ending the war for Dorne for good.

Prince Nymor himself had begrudgingly bent the knee after a bloody battle at Godsgrace. Where Yronwood’s forces had been strong and healthy, Nymor’s had been weak and fragile, and most of all depleted after Rhaenys set fire to the rear and flank. Both sides had fought with equal fervor, however, and it was evident when the body count of Lord Loren’s man roughly equaled the former princes.

Despite how sweet the victory, Orys couldn't help the bitter taste on his tongue. Especially now more than ever, as they enter the heart of Sunspear, and walk amongst the streets and alleyways only to be greeted by the sight of dead men, women, and children. Young boys no older than the little lordling from the Vale. They lay out on the ground, stomachs swollen from hunger and eyes bulging from their skulls, the sun plague some call it. The look of horror and pain moments before they died frozen on their faces with mock weapons in their hand was something he couldn't bring himself to come to terms with. They never stood a chance. The mothers and babes that’d come from hiding came with tear-streaked faces and red eyes as they looked for their dead daughters and sons. Aegon the Devastator, some would whisper.

Rhaenys had told him of the shadow city that stood as a resting place. It was the first time he’d ever seen her look so perturbed. She’d also told him about the little girl that she’d sworn up and down was the prince's daughter. At first, Orys had been at disbelief, but when the child was presented in front of the imprisoned prince, the shock, and worry that appeared on his face all but confirmed it. They had House Martell’s heir in their grasp.

Rhaenys was already formulating plans for the girl’s usage. Orys has no doubt she’ll serve as a ward to Dragonstone. The child will be treated well of course, but if the Martells decided to act out in the future...well, it was sad to say he wouldn't put anything past his brother anymore, for all that he loves and respects him.

Rhaenys seems smitten with the child enough though, and anything Rhaenys adores Aegon adores. Hell, if Rhae told Aegon to jump he’d ask how high before willingly hopping with a smile on his face.
Orys didn't know why he cared or why when he thought of those almond-shaped golden brown eyes something ached in his chest, but the thought of her being in at least one person's favor after living amongst so much blood and turmoil gave him solace.

The child is sweet if a little naive, but bright in a way. She was placed in Rhaenys tent, where the queen had given the girl sweet cakes and honeyed milk to feast on whilst asking the child question after question to verify her identity before presenting her to Prince Nymor. The strange servant girl was there as well, forever the girls' shadow and Rhaenys didn't seem to have the heart to send the young woman away.

Lord Loren fell to his side, a sharp cat-like smile on his freckled face and a bright glint in his green eyes. “We’ll place the prisoners in the Spear Tower for now, but what will we do with them after?”

Orys trusted the man not. “We wait for His Grace before anything else. It is then that we will judge our prisoners accordingly. In the meantime, I’ll have some of my men clean up the castle, and burn as many bodies as we can. Our king is quite fond of swords as well. Perhaps bring in a small portion of food for the smallfolk. They are innocent in all this.”

The man turned somber at that, as swiftly as they turned a corner. “Yes, that would be good. I don’t mind bringing in a few local healers among my camp, maybe even a maester for the sickly. I would take some in, these are still my people in some ways, but well...to put it bluntly, you let in outsiders and they bring all their problems with them. Plagues included.”

“Aye.” Orys could agree with that if only a little.

“Tis was a cruel thing your king did, a well-calculated move, but cruel. My people were affected as well for a short while. I had to put children and babes to rest because of him.” his voice held a venomous tint to it.

“And then you made a choice that saved your people by bending the knee to His Grace. You put the priority of the people under your care before your pride. It takes a strong man to do that. His Grace’s past conquest have demonstrated that there aren’t many.”

“Hm, true enough.”
They continued onward in silence, ignoring the wails that bounced of the walls in the distance. Rhaenys would use the Sun Tower as a court for when Aegon and his retinue arrived, while Orys would keep a watch on their supporters in the Sandship.

Sunspear had been a beautiful castle once, that he could tell. The Rhoynish style towers were magnificent, the doms a bright gold that reflected the heat of the sun. Now the towers were in ruin, the foundations cracked and the walls are broken. The heart of Dorne itself.

Aegon sat in the quiet blackened halls of Harrenhal at a small rounded table from his camp. Across from him sat Visenya, regal and cold. They’ve sitten idly in the Riverlands for moons, going over futile plans that they easily discarded due to the horrible outcomes for each scenario. All of which ends with them and their dragons being slaughtered.

It was impossible to conquer the north, and he could feel his animosity toward it grow day by day. Aegon had a nic for delving into the most complex problems before solving them with an eased mastery. It was how he conquered most of the Seven Kingdoms and it is why the stubborn Dornish are now under his command. Soon he’ll have their absolute fealty. All he had to do was fly to Dorne, where his Rhaenys waited for him with the Dornish in the palm of her soft dainty hands.

But this, the north, it was impossible. Everything about it destroyed logic and reason, dashing out all strategic mind and military tactics. The swamps and bogs slowed any invading army and left it exposed to guerrilla attacks, the summer storms plagued the border and the seas surrounding it making it both difficult to sail and take flight through. And even if one managed to make it that far, they’d have to deal with the beast that lurked in a forest of weirwoods. The same beast that took down three fully grown dragons. The gods only know what laid beyond that. Balerion had been so shaken with fear from the magic the place wrought that he hadn’t even thought to cast down his flame.

“What did you find?” he finally spoke after a long moment of thought. His sister had left a sennight ago, in her quest to retrieve more text on the north. So far they’ve only gotten scraps from long-lost tombs written in an old tongue from the Vale and the basic tales from the Citadel that their Septa once told them as children to frighten them into a stupor.

She lightly grits her teeth before speaking. “Nothing, the same old tales we’ve heard a thousand times before.”
He scoffed before coming to an abrupt stand. He sauntered to one of the windows, at least seven feet wide, giving him a view of the fogy Gods Eye, the same one that’s haunted his dreams ever since his defeat. “The realm’s need to be officially united. I can’t sit around dreaming of having the north when there is no feasible way of attaining it. I should cut my losses now. We leave for Old Town on the morrow with a host of men. If it comes to battle with the Faith then so be it. From there we go to Dorne where Orys and Rhaenys await us, then back to Aegonfort.”

“You give up that easily?” her voice was stern but soft. “Aegon look at me when I speak to you.”

He begrudgingly followed her command. It was as if they were children again, in the practice yard at Dragonstone. All the times he’d fall and bruise during their bouts, his pride constantly stung from losing at the hands of his older sister. She’d make him stand up, force him to keep his head high and eyes forward. Failure does not befit you, don’t accept it so easily little brother.

“What would you have me do? This is the only way ‘Senya. If I fail yet again, the former rulers won’t hesitate to think they might have a chance at facing the dragon as well.”

She pondered on his words for a brief moment, seemingly conflicted about something unknown to him. Finally, after a deep sigh, she spoke in smooth High Valyrian.

“Yes, this is the only way, the smartest decision. But only for us.” he was confused but he let her continue before inquiring on what she meant. “It doesn’t have to be this way for our children or our children’s children and generations after that. Sit, I have to tell you something, but you will speak no word of it to anyone. Not even Orys and especially not our little sister.”

Quickly he went back to his seat, leaning forward on the table.

“It’s about father. Well, in truth it’s more about our legacy or what could have been our future had the Doom not struck, and father told me of it before he-” she took a deep breath. “Before he died. I was the eldest and he trusted it more with me than you or Rhaenys, I think he believed the two of you were too young at the time. He was on his deathbed then. You remember when he called us into the room one by one, telling us all of what he felt we needed to know? Soothing words for Rhaenys, words of optimism and prophecy for you, but for me...it was the raw truth. That I was the eldest and it was my duty to protect you and Rhaenys, and it was my duty to carry the future of House Targaryen and pass down the great fortune of knowledge of things yet foreseen. Maybe he knew of your kindred spirit, the need and yearning for something more than our small island, and knew that someday the seeds of Valyria would once again take fruition. I know you want to let the past go, little brother, but think of the advantage this could give our descendants? We wouldn’t have to rely solely on our dragons, not with this type of power.”
It was rare to see Visenya like this, and Aegon found himself entranced with every word, anticipating for the next to spill forth her mouth. She had always been into the dark arts, the strange and the queer of their ancestors. For once he would indulge her.

“There are tomes locked away in Dragonstone in a hidden chamber that mother showed me herself. Plan’s dating back decades before the Doom, filled with things I hadn’t seen before, things I hadn’t known could exist or come to be. Mostly because they had not. Each volume had the same name ‘Envisions of the New Freehold’. Maybe our ancestor Aenar had managed to swindle them from Valyria before going into exile or maybe they were given to him, and he would have had a part to play in such grand designs had everything went as planned. But we can still use them, it will be hard, and we will fail many a time before succeeding, but we will succeed. Then we will pass it down to our children, me, you and Rhaenys’s children. We’ll start with the little designs first, and Harrenhal is a good place as any to start. In three hundred years, at the least, our family will have leverage against everyone, the north included.”

By the end of it, she was out of breath and he found he’d been holding his breath for the entirety of it, letting out a deep shaky breath of his own. It was insane, and he couldn’t believe in these grand designs she spoke of until he saw them himself. But once the idea was there it stuck.

“At Dragonstone you say?” he finally spoke, throat dry and raspy. She nodded in confirmation and he nodded back. “Alright. But only after we settle Dorne and Oldtown. Then and only then.”

The future felt rich and promising.

Chapter End Notes

Here be magic and technology. Sometimes a twisted combination of both. I’m looking forward to writing some ice magic as well as fire magic, not to mention that good ole blood magic and warging and whatnot. I also plan to add a little Mother Rhoyne in the future chapters, but that's for something far from this point in the story now.
Oldtown had been compliant enough. The High Septon had been eager to open up the gates and discard the arms of the sparrows and poor fellows. Amidst the Starry Sept Aegon was hailed once again as Lord Protector of the Realm, High King of the Andals, Rhoynar and the First Men. He’d try not to let the last one sting at his pride as the High Septon anointed him before the Seven Gods.

My family will have the north soon enough. He remembered the prophecy his father told him as the man laid on his deathbed. Aerion had spoken of the role their family would have to play in the wars to come. What war would they be fighting? For whom and against who? A coming darkness. Aegon knew not of what that meant, he never had the chance to know before his father’s heart stop. But he did know it depended upon himself to unite the Seven Kingdoms for the wars to come. His conquest was proof enough that whilst separated each kingdom was weak, and because of that weakness each one fell after the other like tumbling blocks. I would have had the north to if it weren’t for their sorcery. But had every kingdom stood as one with each other and combined their minds to work together, they might have had the chance to fend him off. It would be useless to rule over a pile of ashes, and he would have had to rely on the force of a few thousand mercenaries than his dragons.

Aegon will show them now, however, will utilize this newly founded strength to become a powerful nation Westeros has the potential to be. A great dynasty united under one banner. Nothing like the world has ever seen. His family would bring the realms of men into another golden age, and the rest of the world would follow suit. Ever since he and Visenya left Harrenhal the wheels in his mind have been spinning with schemes, plans, and power moves, anticipating for their return to Dragonstone.

Envisions of the New Freehold, Visenya called these mysterious tomes. Envisions that he could put to use in Westeros if everything went as planned.

He had to deal with Dorne first, however.

The high seats stood behind him, one inlaid with a spear of gold into it’s back and the other bearing a blazing sun. The ancient seats of House Martell, and with it drapes of hot orange and red carpets lined with gold. Pots had been aligned near the wall, filled with boiled apples and cinnamon to overpower the smell of death. The Devastation they called it, the stench of the plague it wrought still lingered in the castle and shadow city.

The court was dome-shaped and housed at least one hundred and fifty people if not more. Soldiers from the reach stood baking in their heavy steel armor and dornishman comfortably stood about in their lightweight armor and bright cloth. There were some guards from Dragonstone as well whom were loyal to his father and are now loyal to him, and sided with them
are Orys men from Storm's End. Visenya and Rhaenys stood beside him, the former dominant in the way she carried herself and the latter alluring with her easy smile.

In the center of the room stood the Prince Nymor and his wife, Princess Lynn. *Lady Lynn now.* The woman looked absolutely livid, so much that it was more noticeable than her gaunt face and nimble limbs. Her husband was the very embodiment of tired, Aegon could see it in the way his shoulders slouched and his eyes weren't quite directed at Aegon. It was as if he was in a daze, trying to place himself somewhere else other than where he actually was.

Aegon could almost feel pity until the Volantene spat at his feet. Rhaenys smile quickly became strained and Visenya’s frown only deepened.

“You have not seen the last of Dorne yet. You think this is the ending but it is only beginning. Children lie dead in the streets still, and mother’s weep for their sons. You are not a king, you are a monster, and Dorne will not kneel for the likes of you. *You,* a man who is perfectly fine with thousands of children going hungry and thirsty every night, the same children you wish to claim.”

“I gave your people terms of fealty, terms I wouldn't have given any other former monarch. I warned Princess Meria of what Dorne would face if it chose opposition instead of submission and yet Dorne still refused. Do you know what she told me on that fateful day? ‘Why would I exchange my kingdoms freedom for something we already have?’ She was willing to let all of you die if it meant she’d keep her pride. And so I took. Pragmatism I find is a hard taskmistress, my lady. And when I took, instead of placing down arms you took them up, and remained hidden in Sunspear whilst your people starved. You didn't have to live through such calamity, there are lords and ladies here among you who put the survival of their people before their pride. But you lot cared more for your pride than you did your people, so much that even after your lord husband bent the knee you refused to open the gates of Sunspear costing more lives of the children whom you speak of. Were you so desperate my lady, to preserve your pride, that you would put children no older than eleven name days on the front lines with mock weapons against fully armored, trained and seasoned men twice their size?”

“They did upon their own volition!” her fist was clenched tightly, so tight drops of blood dripped from her palms. He could see tears welling in her eyes, bright and angry. “They’d rather fight and die than serve the man who made them watch as their own siblings starved to death!”

“But you allowed it. Instead of opening the gates and bending the knee. You had been the sole voice of power! Had you commanded them to throw down their arms they would have had to listen, wouldn't they have? You are in just as much fault, my lady.”

“It matters not anymore, what’s done is done. But my word still stands true.”
“And what word is that my lady?” Rhaenys said, her voice sweet and sly. She gestured for Orys, who passed her a scroll. Between two fingers she held it in the air, clear for all to see. “This one? The one where you consult with your lord father about using the smallfolk to ‘hold the dragon’s forces off?’” that causes a light stir in the crowds of lords and ladies, along with the few commoners who were allowed entry. He could see brief panic seep into the princess expression, before unashamed resolve. The woman was dead set in her ways and opinion. “The one were you speak of using them as bait so that sweet Princess Deria could escape the besieged castle in peace? Not to mention some foolish ploy to get a few unsullied and ships. One of our men shot the raven down. Lord Nymor, would you be so kind as to check for your ladies script? Perhaps you can recognize her penmanship better than she can yours?” she handed it back to Orys who steadily brought the parchment to the prince's face.

It seemed the man finally snapped back into reality, his eyes focused on something other than the stained glass. The blank look on his face slowly transitioned into a deep frown as his eyes skimmed over the unknown words, and his hands began to quiver in the chains. He nodded rigidly as if it physically pained him to do so. “Aye, that is her script,” he said hoarsely.

His little sister cheerfully clasped her hands together. “Ah, so it is true then. I’ll have you know you failed on both accounts, my lady. Volantis has opted out of the war and has further decided to stay neutral in the conflicts of the Seven Kingdoms. There will be no fleet or unsullied.” she looked to the prince then, and her smile was almost kind. “Where bloodshed could have been avoided your lady wife vouched for it instead, and in turn put both your people and only child at risk. I hope you see fit to judge her accordingly my lord.”

“The war for Dorne is over.” Visenya’s calm and collected voice resonated loudly in the hall. “Your forces are depleted, you have no allies, and Sunspear is a ruin. Bend the knee to his grace, Aegon Targaryen the first of his name, and your people will have no more bloodshed. They are innocent in all of this, and it is not our wish to repeat the devastation that was wrought upon Dorne.”

Lynn could feel them all staring at her, judging her for having a mother’s heart. Tears fell down her cheek unabashedly. There was no shame in sorrow or anger, no shame in feeling shame. She could feel all the respect her people once had for her fly gently out the window like a cool breeze. In those moments everything changed between her and her husband. The line of connection she had felt at the brief graze of fingers he gave her before they entered the hall, it was dead and cold.

She doesn’t have the courage to look at him. Had that not been what he had wanted? To continue the fight for Dorne, to continue Meria’s legacy? You and Deria will do fine, he said. But never had he mentioned bending the knee. Had he truly meant for her to bend the knee though? Lynn would not accept that. He’d been allowed his flights of glory, had shrugged off both her and
Deria and chose the path of death the moment the opportunity presented itself. He had meant to die that day, and leave her and their child behind, so she could bend the knee?

So he could fight and die with honor and pride still intact and leave her with the burden of betraying her people? Shame and sorrow turned into anger once again, a boiling hatred toward the inbred monsters that stood before her and lividness with the man who she thought had been her husband beside her.

“A ruler who is not willing to put their people before themselves is not competent to be a ruler.” the cold bitches voice brought her out of reverie. An austere beauty, with sharp features and luminous violet eyes. These people have no right to look beautiful when they are so ugly on the inside. When Lynn’s own beauty has left her, and she is nothing but a broken shell of a woman, hungry tired and depraved. Lynn wanted to scream bloody murder until her throat went hoarse and she tasted iron on her tongue. Her palms were wet with blood, twitching two snatch a spear or blade from one of the guards beside her, to thrust it into that smug little silver headed whore who smiled like a venomous snake. Who had her daughter, her own mirror image.

“Do you agree to give up your titles as Prince and Princess of Dorne, do you agree to give the mantle of sovereign rule of Dorne to House Yronwood, where they will rule as Lord or Lady Paramount of the Dornish, Lord Nymor? Will you continue to uphold the oath you made after the Battle of Godsgrace? Think of your daughter Lady Deria Martell as you come to terms with your final decision.”

Unbowed Unbent Unbroken, her mind chanted hoping he would hear those same words thrumming in his own head.

He bowed down his head the craven, the coward, the traitor. “Yes, for my daughter. For my people,” he spoke solemnly. Damn the people, hang the people. Lynn could honestly care less now. All she cared for was her baby girl and her future slowly being stripped from her and placed into enemies hands. Some of the people she’d wanted to fight for stood right beside the dragons, waiting to tear at the Martell’s for some old grudge like the vultures they are. Divided we fall, united we stand. She thinks she heard those words before. They were of the North, she realized, the mysterious hidden North who managed to withhold both Andal and dragonspawn from their borders.

“Bend the knee before me then,” the devastator spoke. “Both Martell and Yronwood, and every lord and lady gathered with us today. Swear your allegiance by the Old Gods and the Seven Who Are One, place your swords at your feet, and may the gods themselves strike you down where you stand if you break this solemn oath.”

For a brief moment, she has hope as she watches her husbands conflicted spirit. Then the bastard bends, down on one knee, and all follow. Everyone save her own self and the spawn before her.
The clash between sword and marble floor was loud, beating against her eardrum, louder than the thud of her heart. *You should all be taking up your arms not placing them down!* Fools the lot of them.

“I swear it, by the old gods and the new.” the words rose in the air like a tidal wave, uttered from traitorous lips and foes alike. Then a deafening silence save the rapid beat of her enraged heart.

“I’ll remind you that Lady Deria Martell is within our custody.” the whore said suddenly, her gaze boring down on Lynn fiercely. “A sweet child that one. She will remain in our custody, as a ward to the Crown until further notice. She will be safe and cared for, and as long as everyone abides by the rules, there will be no need to worry. Are you insinuating in your silent protest that you’re willing to go down that road? If not, I advise you to bend the knee my lady, and keep the peace.”

“You wouldn’t,” she said shakily. The demon only smiled in response. *She’s just a child! Barely four name days!* she wanted to scream but it would mean little now. So many children have perished already that it felt commonplace. Broken. Only when broken would Lynn bow and bend, and so she did.

“I accept your oaths of fealty.” the devastator smiled a wolfish smile, one that screamed triumph. And why shouldn’t he feel triumph? The ever proud Dornish kneeling at his very feet, begging for his mercy and sanction like he’s some god. Would they beg for food and water next? Stones to rebuild their homes and seeds to relinquish their fields? He could do none of that, no amount of seed or stone or barrels of water could mend the wounds he sowed.

“For the rest of the prisoners,” the ice queen placed her hand on the hilt of her smoky blade, the crimson ruby gleaming menacingly as if it thirsted for blood. “All the lords who refused to bend will be executed. Every single one of them. Prior to this meeting, we offered them terms of fealty and they refused. Examples must be made. That is all.”

That was all. That was the end. *Bend the knee or die.* She remembers the raven that had reached Sunspear that day. *Dark wings, dark words.* Meria had laughed as she held the scroll in her hand. *The fools they are. I can’t see.*

No, you couldn’t could you? Lynn thought bitterly. *You couldn't have foreseen something on the scale of this, and you died hungry and thirsty and drained of will to live.* All she wanted was her daughter, to hold her in her arms one last time before they took her away. *She’s mine, mine. The only thing left to me. By what right do they take my child, my child, away from me?*

Her knees began to ache on the hard floor, and the blood in her palms are dried and crusted.
Everyone in this room had blood on their hands, some still wet and fresh.

She’d taken a light bird bath, tempted to drink from the basin that was given her. Gods she was so thirsty and the gaolers had barely spared any water to the prisoners while she was locked away. Those days had seemed endless when her only company was the flickering flame of a nearby torchlight and the darkness that surrounded and consumed her.

A bottomless numb feeling settled at the pit of her stomach. *His grace will see you now.* A timid little serving girl had come to her with the summon, just a few hours ago. Dragon screeches shook the core of Sunspear but Lynn had long grown used to them. She would not get up, whether the girl had referred to her husband or the dragonspawn. Would people still refer to them as a prince or princess? Or would they conform to the new titles bestowed upon them? Lord Nymor Martell and his Lady Lynn of Volantis. *We aren’t even the lord and lady paramount.* That honor went to the traitorous Yronwoods. The fools they were for counting on them, thinking they could finally band together to counter the common enemy. Instead, the Bloodroyal’s sided with the enemy, eager to take back what they believed was stolen from them. And that *disgusting* Loren Yronwood. God’s how she hated him.

A knock sounded on her door once again, but she gave no allowance for entry or response to the muffled inquires.

“My lady his grace wishes to see you, it is urgent.”

These chambers were not her own. It belonged more to a servant or guest than a lady or princess, but she realized she found more comfort on the simple bed. She could spend days in here if she wanted to, years even without ever leaving this room until her daughter returned to Dorne. Her baby was Dorne’s future, and deep down she knew Deria was Dorne’s last hope for salvation.

Would they even let her girl return home? Or would they marry her off to some spineless reach ponce or stormlord? Perhaps they’d ship her off to the new paramount of the Riverlands. What were they called again? The Tevans or the Tullards? Lynn cared not. None of them deserved her little girl, her precious little girl marked by the gods themselves.

“My lady please open the door! His grace is very insistent!” was the little wench even apart of Martell’s household or did she come with one of the dragon whores?

Another voice sounded behind the wooden door before it opened up. “Lynn.” she froze at the
sound of her husband's voice. She shifted on the bed, forcing herself to look at him despite the shame she held for herself and the disgust she held for him.

“What do you want? Do you wish to speak to me about how you traded away our daughter, our kingdom, and our people for the sake of your pride?”

Even in the dark room, she could see the incredulous look on his face. “I traded...? You have no one to blame but yourself woman! I bent the knee to save our daughter, to save our people and you refused my order and command to open the gates!” he edged closer to the bed. “Tell me, look me in the eye and tell me why you did it, Lynn? You didn't see what I saw as I entered the gates of our home in chains! Little boys and girls dead on the streets by your own command! Why! All I want to know is why!”

“I was afraid!” her sudden burst of tears made his harsh breathing go still. “And I was alone because you left me and when those men started to pour over our walls, raping and killing everything in sight I didn't know what else to do but protect my child! Do you truly fault me for having a mother’s heart?”

His eyes softened. “No. I don’t, but look where that heart has gotten us.” he sat at the edge of the bed, the mattress dipping beneath his weight. He donned the same armor he wore to battle, but it was polished and had a shine to it. No longer did stubble cover his jaw and cheeks. His cloak was a bright orange, lined with gold and red. He almost looked like the shadow of the man she married. “Queen Rhaenys wishes for us to say our farewells to Deria before they leave.”

At that Lynn stood up without a moment's hesitation.

The ruined towers loomed above them all, but none were as intimidating as the beast that hulked above her. Surely they didn't mean for Deria to mount one of those beasts? The black one was more monstrous than all of them combined together, eyes gleaming with an intelligence that unnerved her. The beasts almost looked as if they were smiling, mirroring their owner's attitudes. No animal should stare at the goings of men with such keen interest, as if it understood what was happening.

The silver whore held a smile on her lips as she walked toward them. Deria’s hand clasped in her own. By the gods, Lynn wanted to do nothing more than snatch the woman’s claws away from her daughter, but the nails have already taken root. She could tell by the way there was no panic or fear in her daughter’s eye. Her sweet Deria trusted the snake. So innocent and naive. It was a
relief when her daughter unconsciously shook the woman’s hand away, running into her mother’s arms.

Lynn had never held anyone so tightly, had never cherished the sight, smell and feel of someone as much as she did at that moment. Oh, she could have wept in both sorrow and joy but refused to let the dragons see her shed any more tears. *They will get what’s coming to them.* Lynn would make sure of it.

Lynn pulled away, trying to stain every detail into memory. Would it be so bad if she whisked her child away and ran like the wind?

“Why did you send me away mama?" Lynn could feel her hurt breaking into a thousand pieces.

*I will not cry.* She had to stay strong. *It would not do well for the last memory of her mother to be a broken weeping woman.* “I did it to protect you. Bad people were coming to take you away.” her eyes narrowed at the dragon whore, who had the audacity to look down upon Lynn with something akin to pity.

She could feel Nymor crouch beside her. Deria didn't hesitate to fall into her father's arms, and Nymor pulled them both in, much to her surprise. *He wants to cherish this moment. The last moment we will be together as a family.*

“Can we go home now?” Deria looked upon her earnestly, eyes hopeful. *If only my sweet.*

She tried to ignore the feeling of four pairs of violet eyes watching them.

They pulled away, leaving her baby girl’s sweet face puzzled. Nymor speaks this time. “You are going to go away for awhile, my sweet,” each word was guarded and pained*“With Queen Rhaenys. She is kind to you is she not? You will be her lady, like the ladies your mother used to have.”* he clenched his jaw, closing his eyes before opening them again with a newfound determination that nearly startled Lynn. Quickly he pulls Deria back into a hug, his lips near her ear. “Remember everything I taught you and it will serve you well.” he grabbed her arm, turning her palm skywards to reveal uncanny dark green veins in the sunlight. “It’s all in the blood.”

“It is time to go now, I’m afraid!” the cold queen called out from afar, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“My sister is quite right. We have a busy day ahead of us, my little princess. Come now.”
“But…” she could see tears welling in her baby’s eyes.

“It’s alright Deria.” she smiled reassuringly. “We will be together again, someday. I promise it, I swear it. Remember our words, unbowed unbent unbroken.” it took everything in her to nudge her girl forward, toward the beast that’d sooner devour her than protect her.

To her imminent relief, the Baratheon came with a light retinue of guards, and among them, she saw Faye astride a horse. Her chest blossomed with comfort and relief. Her daughter wouldn’t be completely alone, she’d have someone there, someone who’d make sure she remembered.

Before she knew it her daughter was gone, though not alone. Faye is with her, Faye will protect her. The great silver beast flew above the retinue, the other two beside it, casting their shadows above her daughter.

It felt like hours drifted by before they were lost on the horizon, in the sand dunes of Dorne.

I just had her in my arms, and now it feels as if she wasn't even there. Like I will go back into that damned castle, and she will be there waiting for me, instead of a thousand miles away. Almost as if this entire day, this entire year never happened. Lynn wished it were all a horrible dream. Perhaps in another reality, but not this one.

“She is lost to us now.” her husband finally spoke. They had both stood there, watching silently as their child was stolen from them. “She is gone.”

“Yes she is,” she said as sharp as steel. “And so am I. I leave on the morrow, to return home. Where I belong. I will not stay any longer than I have to in this kingdom with those people. Where I failed the first time, dearest husband, I will not fail again. Our daughter will return to us, and when she does I will be ready.”

She spun on her heel, walking through the winded gates, and into the place she once considered home. This place holds nothing but dreaded memories now.
Chapter 8

All one could see was the thick smog of a thousand clouds, and looming discreetly beneath its cover were jagged rocks surrounding a forlorn fortress. Gargoyles and grotesques line the crenellations. The demons and monsters that lurked in the dark of night, in the shadows and pits of hell in the fairytales. It was something out of a nightmare, so unlike the bright golden towers of Sunspear, with shiny dome tops. The red sand, the blood oranges and sweetened lemons, the great Greenblood river she used to play in. It all seemed so long ago, a distant dream she tried to grasp onto in her lonely stupor.

Would she ever see mama or baba again?

She could see the dragons flying overhead in the distance, but she couldn't see their masters. Every now and then the pretty queen would fly near the ship and wave down at her, but that was the most she saw of any of them.

For nigh on a fortnight and half a sennight, she has slept in her small cabin beneath the deck, on the cot with Faye standing vigil. The young woman rarely slept anymore, and her gaunt face has started to form bags from her restless nights, but all Deria could do was sleep. Sleep and cry and wonder about her family. About the parting words, her father had given her, glaring at the dark green veins beneath her flesh. About her mother's watery eyes. About the horrors that could not be unseen amidst wake and dream. People mourning and crying, her playmates fading away all until there were none left. From hearty little things like herself they became skeletal, a thick must wafting from their beings. She remembers suckling on her mother's breast, the first time she cherished the sweet milk when her throat had started to become dry. Now she was afforded fish meals with lemons bitter instead of sweet, and water.

When was the last time she'd drunken so much water? She could have drowned in gallons of it if it weren't for the tall man with the black eyes. You can get water poisoning if you drink too much. And that wouldn't do well for anyone, he'd chuckle. She desperately wanted to tell him that water ran strongly in her blood, that she could not be poisoned from what she was made of.

Water. The substance has always been a constant in her life. Early memories were of playing in the Greenblood, with the orphans. Could an orphan still be an orphan when they were full and grown? They'd show her tricks, making the air sprinkle in the heat of summer from the shapes they molded. Where were they now she wondered.

The tall man gave out shouts and commands as they neared the port, while burly men moved to and fro. She and Faye stayed out of the way, for the most part, she herself leaning over the railing with the assistance of Faye. Her tight curls were in plaits, and she wore the same linen and silk of orange, gold, and red. She stood out amongst these people, in their dark and dull wear and pale
skin, paler than her own. Even Faye was lighter than she.

A lady for the queen, this is what she was to be. And the castle, dark and dreary, with its menacing towers and black sand, was to be her home. She bit her lip, trying not to weep for the home she lost.

“This is to be your room little one,” the dark lord whispered gently. The chamber was spacious, though not large, and cold. A bed with dull covers and empty vanity, the room showing little to no signs of usage. Faye would make sure to put her skills to work, would make it comfortable if not home for her princess.

The little girl waddled in, uncertain and curious, and the young woman followed after her.

“Supper will be sent up, along with a bath to clean yourselves. It’s been a long journey after all,” he smiled. The man was trying to be kind, had been so ever since the young queen interrogated Deria in that tent, but Faye still mistrusts him. For all that he was kind, he was loyal to his king, anyone could see that. The princess smiled up at him, giving her her thanks but Faye kept her lips sealed, settling for a curt nod.

Soon after the door shut behind him, and the two were alone.

The hours drifted by slowly. After checking the room for spiders- because the girl was terrified of them- she found a stray rag to wipe the dressers and vanity of dust. Straightened out the sheets and beat the curtains before opening the window. The sight of rocks and ocean were all they were afforded, the smells of salt and sulfur heavy in the breeze. They couldn't even see the sunset, not with all the heavy smoke and clouds. Even the halls are eerie and uninviting as if they are not wanted here by virtue of their blood. Faye remembers all those tales grandma used to tell her, of the water wizards against the thousand army dragonlords astride their great beast.

“Do you think the queen will come and see me?” the girl asked suddenly, she seemed anxious, eyes swirling with trepidation. Faye felt much the same, but she chose her words carefully. Anyone could be listening, and the last thing she needed was being sent away, yet again failing her people.

“The queen might be very busy. She may not have the time,” gods be willing. “Mayhaps on the morrow.”
And that was the end of it. The supper came, and they ate in silence, lost in thought. She thought of home, her family who are most likely dead, old stories she’d listen to at her grandma’s lap, and with each scoop, she felt more and more hopeless. What did the princess think of?

“Do you miss home, princess?” she couldn't bare the silence or her thoughts a moment longer. The girl nodded, taking a slice of bread from the tray. “What do you miss about it?”

“The food.” To her great surprise, she chuckled, a light wispy thing but a chuckle nonetheless.

“Yes, well, I suppose the venison could use a little more spice.” she quieted for a moment. “I miss my family, but even if I were to return home I wouldn’t find any left to me.” The child smiled knowingly, sadly.

Queen Rhaenys was the kinder of the sisters it seemed, for she always smiled and looked upon Deria warmly, but the Queen Visenya wore a mask of indifference, eyes as sharp and watchful as a hawk. But the pretty queen told her not to pay her sister any mind, and so she tried not to. The days were rather slow and lonely. She’d grow to miss all her friends until she remembered they were in an eternal rest and miss home until she remembered the ruin it was left in. Faye was always there to help her remember the good times though when it was the height of summer and the blood oranges had been ripe for picking.

The pretty queen had told her she’d be the first of her ladies, and wherever the queen went the princess followed. Now was not one of those times.

“Oh, but don’t you want to try it? Even a little?” Queen Rhaenys stood near a cliff, the wind blowing in her hair as Meraxes loomed behind her. The dragon seemed to smile with earnest.

Deria thought about how it might be to ride a dragon, to be so high in the air with the gods. To fly over the seas and the lands, to be so close to the heat of the sun. The thought made her nervous, and she backed away, tripping over a rock.

“Careful little one,” Rhaenys hands were gentle, and soft, as she helped the child up. At the moment she didn't look like a queen, for she lacked the silver crown and all the wears of royalty.
Her silver braid was in a fray, a sign that she’d been riding moments prior. Her creamy cheeks were flushed red. She wore riding breeches with black boots and a simple black surcoat over a red tunic, instead of a pretty gown or flashy armor. She almost looked like her older sister if only softer.

“Well it seems you won’t be riding a dragon anytime soon, but maybe you can learn to ride a pony. You can’t stay locked up in that room forever.”

Deria remembers the fast steed her father had gifted her mother, how free and unwinded mama had seemed when upon it.

She smiled with uncertainty. “Thank you, Your Grace.” that was the name she was to address her as, instead of the pretty queen or silver lady. Rhaenys smiled down at her, pleased.

“I’ll make a lady out of you yet.” I used to be a princess, she thought mournfully, I still am, aren’t I? She dare not ask, dare not say how she truly feels. “It would be proper to get you a septa, but what can an old ninny teach you that I can’t?” She threw her head back in laughter, a pretty thing, so unlike Deria’s own childish giggles and her mother’s wry snorting.

Deria used to have a septa to, Septa Seuz. She remembers how frail and sickly she’d been in the end, how the rest of her brown hairs turned a pure white, more silver than Rhaenys own hair.

“Oh I jest sweetling.” the woman gently soothed the girls’ curls. Deria’s braid had quickly come undone. “Such pretty hair and bright eyes against dark skin is quite striking. They’re almost golden in the sunlight.” the woman studied her further, then smiled. “You’ll bloom into a pretty girl once flowered, and many will seek for your hand. I’ll make sure of it.”

The young girl knew not of what the queen meant, but smiled and nodded anyway. “Thank you, Your Grace.”

No longer did she see the tall man anymore. Lord Orys had departed a fortnight ago, back to Storm’s End with his lady wife. He’d visited her in the garden she liked to play in, telling her to stay strong, to stay happy, to never change. Rhaenys told her that Orys’s lady wife used to be a princess too.
Queen Visenya and King Aegon had dispatched as well, flying west to the mainland. If Rhaenys seemed bothered at being left behind she didn't show it, and instead focused all her attention on riding, running the castle, and instructing Deria on how to run a keep whilst doing so.

At nightfall, Faye was sent to the serving quarters, and Deria had never felt more lonely than when it was the night. Her imagination was vivid and had a habit of twisting the shadows on her bedroom floor. The vanity became one of the serpentine creatures scattered about the halls, the wind became whispering demons. She'd try to think of the ocean instead, but in lieu of comfort, it brought her unrest. Images of large bodies of water swallowing the island whole was a clear picture in her mind, as clear as the crisp blue sky. Only at night, with a sharp clarity, did she realize she was on an island, surrounded by nothing but miles and miles of black depthful ocean. It shouldn't scare her, not when water ran strong in her blood, but it did.

And when she slept, she dreamt of sorrowful things, before a mournful being would bestow a kiss upon her lips, filling her mouth with ash and blood, as her skin turned hard and grey. The taste would still be sharp on her tongue when she woke.

Every night it visited her and every morning she woke up drenched in sweat. Rhaenys blamed it on the heat and smoke that wafted from the volcano, but Faye knew she was terrified of something.

When the sun was out, and Rhaenys finished her daily rides, she’d take Deria beneath her wing. Teaching her how to sew and write eloquently, how to sit and talk properly, how to dance and sing. Rhaenys loved poetry, and never hesitated to read Deria some. Her voice was rich and smooth when she spoke High Valyrian, so unlike the rough-edged common tongue, and despite herself, she desperately wished to emulate the woman. From the way she dressed and did her hair, the way she walked and talked. Even wanted her purple eyes and silver hair, Valyrian beauty, but there was no feasible way Deria could attain that. It was all captivating and ethereal, and she wanted it. Rhaenys made her want without even knowing.

Of course, she feels guilty and remembers to have Faye braid her hair how her mother used to, in the extravagant styles of the Volantene and Rhoynish. Deria’s hair was her mother’s prize, long and coiled but softer than silk, dark like the night. Her skin is dusky as roasted almonds, eyes like liquid gold. A Dornish gem, her mother used to call her.

“Someday, my sweet, you’ll be a lady paramount,” she and Rhaenys sat in the Chamber of the painted table. Faye stood nearby, at the ready with a tray of tea and sweet cakes. “Though to whom has yet to be discerned. You might return home someday, to rule in Dorne or you might marry and rule somewhere further north. The point is, is that you must learn your houses, and the history behind those houses, and the land that surrounds those houses. This information can be very vital because someday you might be its neighbor or its lady.”
Deria rested a hand upon the wide table, running over every intricate detail that was embedded into its hard surface. Rivers and mountains, all labeled with figureheads. Dragons surrounded by falcons, roses, lions, trouts the list went on and on. But only one figurehead stood on its own, a wolf she thinks, on the other edge. There is nothing there on that side, just snow, the land mysterious and unknown.

“Maester Wilbert will help you with your sums and letters, and so on and so forth.” the queen smiled her usual smile. “Septa Hades will teach you of the Seven.”

Deria looked up, painting a smile on her lips, but it did not reach her eyes. The sorrowful being in her dreams had reprimanded her and her people for forgetting their ways, for forgetting their true gods in exchange for the false ones. *The ruin of Dorne is your atonement,* it said.

*We have forgotten them, and so they have forgotten us and left us to our demise.* Mayhaps someday they’ll remember them, and never forget again.

The air was crisp and biting, slipping beneath his furs and biting at his face. The howling of wolves was as strong as the wind. The beast ran through the forest in packs, following after their masters.

Chiefs from the mountains clans descended from their jagged trails out into the open fields. Giants trekked through the woods, their steps shaking the forest floor around them to the point crows and ravens burst from treetops around their enormous heads. The mammoths walked beside them, carrying supplies sent from the vassal houses and men seeking to be recruited.

Few lords traveled this far north, most choosing to see the ritual take place at the southern border but the smallfolk were most devoted to seeing the ritual be performed at the Wall, for beyond that is where the true threats lie. The Free clans would be there as well, a people who were descendants of the wildings from the last failed invasion, who chose to bend the knee rather than be forced back north of the Wall. They were closest to the Wall, and would most likely be holding feast and festivities for those to join in.

Excited youths who sought to take the black followed along as well, filled with the hum of excitement and unrest. The ritual was only performed every coming winter, and what a time to take oaths. It would mean more when winter came.
For weeks on end they have been traveling, a host of hundreds, bordering on thousands following behind the Stark host. Little Rickard bounced in excitement as guards regaled him with tales from past rituals, while Prince Jon was the picture of somber and calmness, the very mirror of his kingly father. His elder brothers travel south with their father, but he and uncle Brandon have always been close. Brandon was father's half-brother, with dark curly hair and flint blue eyes, a wild brass smile.

They held camp, a days ride away near the skirts of the forest. A large fire sat in the center, while men set up tents and pavilions, covering the ground with leather and spare furs to sit upon. There was plenty of game, serving for the big pot of stew the woods witch was cooking up. No one knew where the Children were, perhaps resting in the trees or hollow hills. Perhaps they were already at the Wall. But the Children's companions, the Green Man, sat among them, garbed in green with antlers sprouting from their skulls.

The prisoners sat near the far edge of the camp, under the eye of a few giants. They would be essential to the ritual as well. They sat warily and cold, shaken to the core. Jon almost felt sorry for them, until he remembered that one was a raper and the other a murderer and thief. It was the most crime the Wintercity had had in five years. Other lords had sent criminals as well, and the nearby clans had some aplenty. However, some people were selected by the Children for sacrifice, whether they were guilty of any crimes or not. Mayhaps it was for some foreseeable future others couldn't see, perhaps those were the people whose blood the gods thirsted for. And who were they to question the gods?

He wishes he could feel the same when it came to his babe sister. Mother had not even gone cold in her birthing bed before Leaf took his sister from her limp arms, and every since the creature has not left Lyarra’s side. She grows bigger every day, closer and closer to being taken away into the sacred forest where all things ancient live. It's because she has the gift like no other, strong with the gifts from both gods and demons. She’d already received her markings, had woken up the entire castle with her screams of agony, her veins turning a deep blue. The cursed blood ran strongly in some Stark’s-their one and true bane- while the warging and green dreams were stronger with others. But it was a rare thing for a Stark to be powerful in both. They could attain both, but only one gift could be dominant than the other.

Who knows what life she’ll lead, so far away from men, isolated and elusive.

* Tis for her own good Jon, father tells him more oft than not, and ours is the old way. The Stark’s have always given the Children a babe, staying true to an age-old pact. It just so happened that out of all of them that babe was Lyarra. One of the chosen ones. In exchange the North receives a hearty harvest, replenishing the lands for the coming winter.

It isn’t fair but it’s what the gods want.
“What ails you, Jon?” Brandon plopped down next to him on the log, handing him a bowl of rabbit stew. “You look more sullen than usual.”

“Tis nothing nuncle,” he smiled reassuringly, lightly sipping the hot brew. He was a man grown now, just turning five and ten, and he was a Stark and Northman besides. It would not do to be weak of heart or mind. “Just thinking of the events to come.”

“Ah, it’s the ritual that ails you then. Not to worry, I was quite a bit unnerved as well when your grandfather first took me and your father to see, and your brothers were much the same. Little Rickon here is an exception, however,” he nudged his head at Jon’s little brother, who was pestering the woods witch for some gingersnap. Nuncle chuckled at his nephews' antics. “Don’t worry too much about it my prince, it’s all that the gods intended. Besides, a harvest feast will be held at Winterfell after, to celebrate our good omens.”

And they were good omens indeed. While the other kingdoms were ravaged from the war against the dragons, the North’s lands were safe and sound, they still had their king and country intact, and beyond that, they were prepared for the coming winter. All need be done now was strengthening their borders to the north and south.

A giant direwolf padded from the bushes, men moving out of his way as he came to Brandon’s side, resting its head on his lap tiredly.

“Looks like someone just came from a hunt,” the wolf’s muzzle was covered in dried blood. Snowstorm was its name. Its fur was a swirl of grey and white, with blue eyes.

“I wonder where Frostfyre is,” Jon hadn't seen his direwolf in three days. It wasn't so long ago when she was just a pup. He remembers holding her for the first time, fur was white and auburn, almost fox-like, with amber eyes.

“Mayhaps you should sleep mine nephew, perhaps in dream, you will see her.”

Jon tried not to cringe at that. All of his brother's wolves were older and by extension, they’d been warging for years, could even warg when they were awake, some strong enough to warg into other animals their souls were not bonded with, but Jon’s third eye was just now opened from Frostfyre’s recent birth. It would be a long while before he could slip into his wolf's skin awake.
Though it was no matter now, he was tired besides and they had a long day ahead of them.

“Aye, perhaps you’re right nuncle.”

But when he slept, he dreamt of sorrowful things. Of hot oppressive heat and mournful cries, and the air smelled of decay.

The host was on the move long before dawn broke, and he rode on his destrier while his brother Rickon was astride his pony. Uncle Brandon rode ahead of them all. The Green Men chose to ride on the mammoths with prisoners, forever silent and in thought. The green men were known throughout the north as wise men, a great enigma that has yet to be discerned. Lords high and minor sought their counsel when in a great peril, and when someone fell greatly sick with something even a woods witch couldn't heal it was the green men they sought out.

Jon remembers the nursery tales his old nan used to tell him, of the pacts that were made on a lone isle in the south, how sometimes the wise men slip past the border to visit their brethren in the God's Eye, journeying through the labyrinth of roots and tunnels beneath the planetos. Some whispered of the green men being as immortal as the Children, a crossed hybrid of men and Child, though Jon thought that highly unlikely. Anyone can be a wise man, as long as they have a gift.

The Wall came into view, stretching for miles and greater than any giant. It was the first time his eyes ever landed upon it, taken with awe. He could feel the magic humming in the air, could feel his blood singing in response. The only thing he wanted at that moment was to be on top of it, and he knows his little brother feels much the same with the way he bounces on his pony. The descended further into the clearing. The scouts spotted many villages that belonged to the chiefs they could stop it. Jon had never traveled this far north. His brothers had said it was a melting pot of northern culture, filled with markets and villages that thousands inhabited. People still speak and sing in the old tongue this far north and Jon sought to learn it himself. He wondered how his brothers could choose rain-soaked grounds and hazardous storms over this.

Jon and nuncle Brandon stood on top of the Wall, along with a few watchmen, overlooking everything beneath them.

The villages were more visible, stretching along the Wall for miles. He could see the great
pavilions in the center of them made from the carcasses of mammoths. It served as a marketplace, where folks from all around sold crops and meats and did trades. Jon had never seen so many people or so many lights from the fires that were lit. The light from the setting sun bounced off the igloos, smoothed and carved to perfection from abrasive over the past centuries. They served as homes for the small folks, some delving deep into the ground. It was rumored that some igloos led to underground cities. Some igloos were as large as castles, looming above the smaller ones like giants for the chiefs and chieftains who owned them. The stone keeps and fortresses beyond the villages were reserved for brothers of the watch, some of the structure quite literally built into the Wall.

It might be safe to say that the bulk of the north's population came from the Gift, and it grew populous every year.

Jon could see the magic, the power, the energy all around them, though those without a gift themselves couldn't see it. He could see vibrant auras that mirrored that of the northern lights in the sky above them, conveying the powerful emotions of those around him. Not just the people, but every source of life. It all melded together creating colors unknown to men. The happiness, the peace, the calm, the love and eternal serenity, it was a great force that nearly consumed him. He could see the dark ones too, from those who are more somber about the rituals that are about to take place. Not all thought to keenly about it, but it was an age-old tradition that the North refused to let go. Ours is the old way, Jon thought, and the old way is sacrificing in all things. He thought of his babe sister and could understand those emotions, even if he didn't quite agree.

The Wall lightly vibrated, as if the old spells woven into its being was waking up. The recruits have sworn their oaths. Soon he and nuncle Brandon will have to descend from the Wall.

“Tis beautiful isn't it?” nuncle’s eyes were wistful. “You know I would have taken the black to had your father not stopped me. Told me I wasn't meant for vows, wasn't made to be tied down. He was right of course, your father has a habit of being that. But, I would've done anything to see this every day.”

“It does have its charms,” he bit his lip, looking down at his feet bashfully. He felt like a boy of five instead of a man of five and ten. “But I'm glad you stayed at Winterfell nuncle, it’s where you belong.”

Brandon started at that, eyes wide in surprise. In this light, they looked ethereally blue, inhumanly so. Like his own, like Lyarra’s. An Other blue. “I’m glad I stayed too. I wouldn’t miss seeing you lot grow up for anything.” he mussed Jon’s hair. “Let’s head down, hm?”

Others would travel to the Shadow Terror and go to the woods near there to perform their rituals. But the Stark’s host was not too far from Eastwatch, and they would head to the forest not too far from it, filled to the brim with weirwoods and heart trees. The Old Gods. It would only take a few
hours, and then all would be ready. The Brothers had their dragonglass daggers, and so did the Children and the green men and the woods witches from the sisters of the woods. Those not apart of the sacrifice could offer up their own blood for good fortune, Jon thinks he would like to do that.

It’s not what he expected, and in truth, he truly didn’t know what he thought he was going to see. But it wasn't this.

All had gathered in the woods during nightfall. The lords with their retinues and chiefs with their clans, the smallfolk and the newly recruited members of the watch. The practitioners gathered in the center with only the moon and northern lights to illuminate their surroundings. Few brought torches but he had seen everything. The moon had been particularly bright that night.

The wind had howled with power as chants rang up in the air, carrying the smell of blood and screams into the night air. The sacrificed pleaded and begged, screaming bloody murder right before a Child or woodswitch opened their throat. The Wall was loud, almost alive, and the ground quaked because of it. The green men chants had grown so loud to the point it was deafening. He’d uttered words he’d never heard of, almost as if he’d been overcome with another being that possed him to do so. The Giants had roared in the distance, in response to the wind and chanting. They felt it too.

The feelings were overwhelming, bordering on maddening. So many had been sacrificed, even children and the heart trees drank from the bloody soil, fresh sap tears-or bloody tears?- cascading down its white grim face.

The bellies of the sacrificed had been cut open and their guts nailed to the roots of the heart trees. The roots had come alive after, moving and twisting about like worms and snakes. If he wasn’t sure of the gods’ presence before, he was sure now. How could he not believe after what he’d seen? The roots had moved! Moved!

“The northern border is strengthened because of it Jon. No outside force will be able to breach it. At least not easily.” was uncle Brandon’s reasoning during the aftermath, but nothing could acquiesce Jon of the uneasy feeling the entire situation has given him.

Ours is the old way, he tried to remind himself. And the old way is sacrificing in all things.
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