

**LYRA** examined herself in the looking glass, donning a regal dress of black and red. She had never worn the colours before but it now suited her. Sable hair hung over her shoulder in a simple loose braid. When she was ready, her handmaidens escorted her down the hallway.

The door to her husband's cabinet was opened for her and she stepped inside. Green eyes swept over the dishevelled tabletops before resting on Daemon's face. Beside him sat Corlys Velaryon, the fabled Sea Snake and Lord of the Tides.

"My lady," he greeted her. "Thank you for meeting me."

"My lord," she responded in kind. She went to her husband's side who stood from his chair. He sat her down on it instead while he leaned against its side. Lyra addressed Corlys, "To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"Allow me to begin by offering my heartfelt condolences," Corlys said. "Brandon Stark was a good man."

She perceived him with sharp eyes before nodding curtly. "Thank you, my lord."

"I find it ... incumbent upon myself to perhaps shed some light on the manner of his passing," he told them delicately. "He approached me upon my return to King's Landing, with a noteworthy suspicion that the both of us could not ignore."

His eyes flickered between their stoic faces. "He believed the servant boy had been stealing shipping routes and manifests from the king's small council. Selling them to members of the Triarchy."

Daemon stirred uneasily. "The Triarchy have been growing ever troublesome, I heard."

"Indeed," Corlys agreed. "They were the reason I had to leave King's Landing in the first place. The timing of it all could not have been mere coincidence."

"But how could the boy have managed such a task?" Lyra questioned.

"Copies are also kept with the master of coin within the keep," he answered. "For consolidation purposes, I imagine, trade with the Free Cities has always been lucrative. Whether from my private chambers or Beesbury's, the boy seemed successful in the endeavour."

Lyra pressed a hand to her lips in thought. She remembered where it had all started from. "The tailor ... that's how they smuggle the information out of the keep."

"Brandon had thought so too," Corlys confirmed.

"The Crimson Clothier has been supplying the Red Keep for generations," Daemon said. "No one would have batted an eye at their comings and goings."

"Apparently, it had changed ownership not too long ago," Corlys told them. "Bought by a Tyroshi captain who goes by the name of Caaro Noqane."

Lyra stood from her seat in a bout of restless ire. She paced in front of the window before turning back to Corlys. "They should be arrested for treason, all who work there. The ships in the harbour embargoed until we find this Tyroshi captain."

"Has the king been made aware of all this?" Daemon asked.

"I will be informing him at the small council meeting this morning," Corlys told them, standing up to leave. "As for your suggestions, my lady, I wholeheartedly agree and will seek his grace's blessings. You will hear from me soon."

True to his word, Corlys returned to inform them of the small council's decision to apprehend the traitors. That afternoon, Daemon rode with him to The Crimson Clothier in a raid. They seized proof of the stolen artefacts and arrested everyone that they found inside. However tried as they might, even after searching the whole of King's Landing, they could not produce the Tyroshi captain for Lyra.

Fled, she hazarded, suspecting that word of the arrest had somehow leaked out. But before they could set a new plan in motion, ill news had spread throughout the keep that concerned them further.

For not more than five days later, Prince Baelon too had passed from a burst stomach. The king and the entire realm grieved over the loss. Another soul taken from them far too soon. Lyra wished she could have known her good-father a little longer.

On the same day, Lyra watched her family and vassal houses depart King's Landing with winter thorns pricking her heart. Brandon lay within his casket, never to ride with them again. Under the mourning veil, she felt fresh tears stain her cheeks with salt and grief. She bade her parents farewell one last time, already pining for their presence by her side.

But within the month, King Jaehaerys had called a Great Council of all the lords in Westeros to determine the line of succession. No less than fourteen claimants great and small were presented that day as they all stood within the dim assembly of Harrenhal. Beneath its twisting, scarred stone, Lyra knew whom The North would choose to be the next heir.

And so it had been decided that Rhaenyra, eldest grandchild of the king would be passed over along with her firstborn son. Despite her blood ties as a Targaryen and Baratheon, both noble houses of the realm, as well as her title to Lady of Drimark by her lord husband, Corlys Velaryon.

In favour of Viserys, the eldest grand son Lyra clapped together with the majority of the great hall that day. She had no doubt that Viserys would prove to be a good king who would rule as his father would have. Him and Aemma would make a fine King and Queen. Her dearest niece Rhaenyra was to be the crown's little princess.

But Lyra was no fool. Should anything happen to Viserys, the line of succession would then fall upon Daemon. Her own husband, who seemed more pleased by the decision than the king himself.

A beleaguering curse hung upon the Red Keep like a haunting spectre. Not long after, King Jaehaerys found his strength and wits failing him. He was old but there had been much heartbreak for any man to withstand in such a short period of time, so the maesters whispered. Another wind of change ushered a changing of the small council. The king had called back a previous Hand, Ser Otto Hightower, to oversee matters of the realm in his stead.

A seed of discord had been sown unwittingly, Lyra thought in her heart as she watched Ser Otto usher his young daughter into the tower. It was widely known that he was a disagreeable man and she wondered if it was true. His stern, calculating eyes met hers briefly and she shuddered inwardly. He nodded politely to her in acknowledgement of her status before entering the keep himself.

Lyra turned away from the overhead bridge and went back inside the tower of the royal apartments. She was on her way to meet Daemon in his cabinet when she saw the door to the king's chambers had been left open. Wondering who was so careless to do such a thing, she went forwards to close it.

To her surprise, King Jaehaerys was sitting upright in his bed. Their eyes met, though it seemed to Lyra that he was seeing through her instead of at her. His eyes were glassy, of fading lilac petals.

"Your grace," she greeted him. "I apologise for disturbing you, would you like me to close the door?"

He blinked slowly, as if in a daze, then called her name with some difficulty. A bony hand reached out to her and she quickly went to kneel by his side. She took his gnarled hand in her own, peering up at a wizened face etched in deep lines of senescence.

"Your grace," she called to him, urging him to speak.

His breathing was coarse, rasping. "Your son..." he started, "must marry ... Rhaenyra. You must do ... this."

Lyra stared at him speechlessly. "Your grace?"

"It was ... a promise." His voice was a deathly whisper. "From a dream long ago."

"I do not understand," she confessed. "Your grace, I am not yet with child."

King Jaehaerys exhaled slowly, eyes fluttering closed. "He will be the one to bear ... the song of songs."

A frown now adorned Lyra's brows as she continued to peer up at the king. His breathing evened at last, easing into a peaceful slumber. Lyra slipped her hand free from his and quietly walked away, closing the door behind her. With disquiet in her chest, she left in the opposite direction of the apartments, descending the tower.

She walked across the courtyard, into the Red Keep and past the Great Hall. Entering the library, she called for one of the maesters to examine her. The man took her pulse and measure of her recent habits, probing her with delicate questions until finally he reached a verdict.

Perhaps the gods pitied them or perhaps fate had a cruel sense of humour.

Lyra returned to the royal apartments and her awaiting husband. He stood upon seeing her, worry creasing his brows. "Where have you been? Are you alright?"

She gazed up at him endearingly, fingertips ghosting the edges of his face. Her lips wore a small smile of expectation. Hope blooming in her eyes with a bittersweet embrace.

"Daemon..." she started.

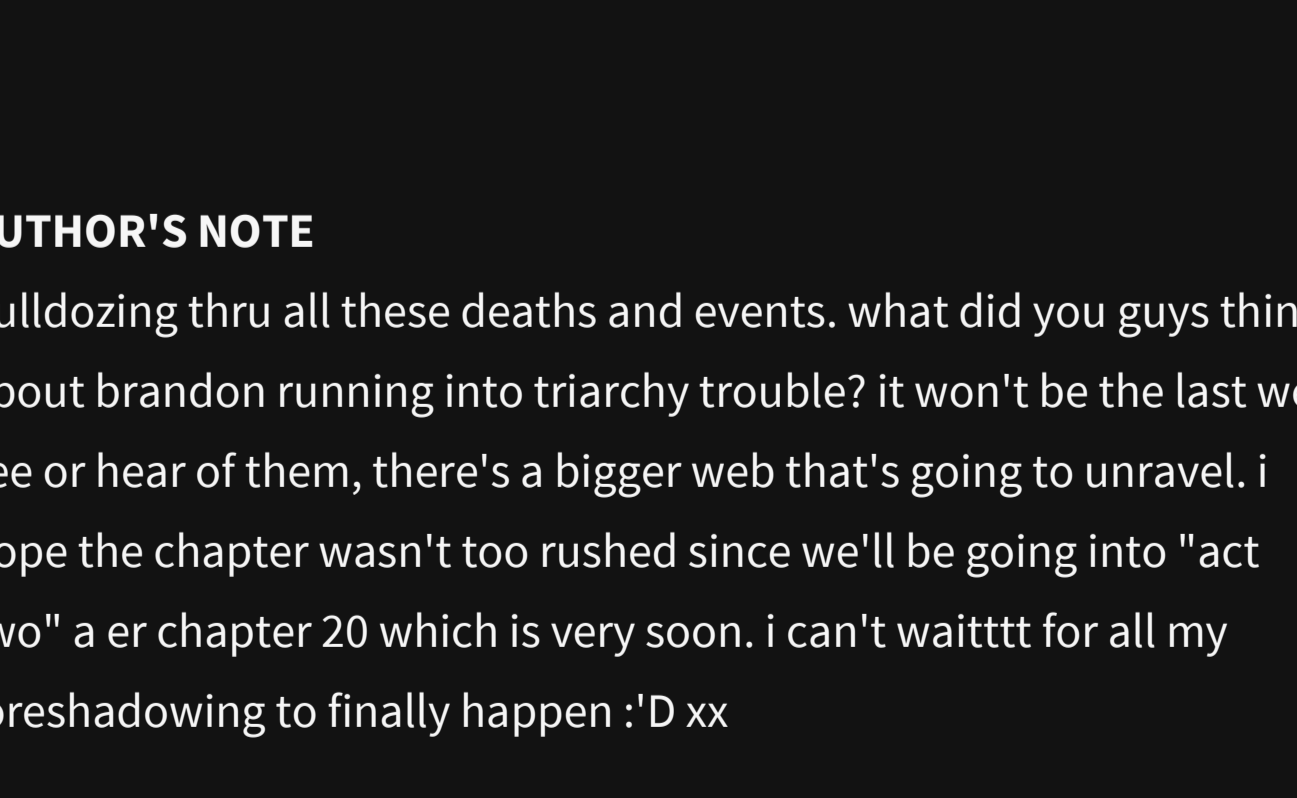
"What has happened?" he asked, smoothing her hair back fretfully.

"I am with child," she said the words slowly, carefully. Watching as his lips parted slightly, violet eyes searching her face for clarity.

Then a smile, exultant and tumultuous like the rising of dawn. He took her in his arms in a tight embrace, husky laughter pouring over her like the splendour of far flung firelight. He kissed her over and over until she too was convulsed with laughter.

"*Óíos hen ñuha ábraf,* he whispered. "I have never been happier."

She held him in joy and bliss, with the radiance of a solitary star seeking solace in the moon. As her heart nestled within a sigh of daylight dreams. Like waves breaking upon a frozen shore under misty rains. In a silent prayer, she beseeched the heavens and seas for mercy. For love and life, kindled anew.



#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

bulldozing thru all these deaths and events. what did you guys think about brandon running into triarchy trouble? it won't be the last we see or hear of them, there's a bigger web that's going to unravel. i hope the chapter wasn't too rushed since we'll be going into "act two" after chapter 20 which is very soon. i can't waittttt for all my foreshadowing to finally happen :D xx

Translations:

"*Óíos hen ñuha ábraf.* - Light of my life.