



**WHEN** Lyra was eight and ten, her father surprised her with a bundle of letters. He had an amused grin when he told her that they were letters from all her admirers since she had come of age. From Dorne to the Vale, she glanced over crests bearing stags and towers and all other manners of sigils.

"Do they not know that I am already betrothed?" she had asked.

"That does not stop men from attempting poetry, cousin," Brandon told her with a chuckle.

Lyra scooped with incredulity before tossing the letters aside. She had never opened them, for what was the use of such a task, and knew not what had become of them. Even at that time, she had already been resigned to her lot. Though sometimes she wondered.

If she had been allowed to choose a man for love, which among the Great Houses would have captured her heart? Would she live in eternal spring with the Tyrells or count gold upon the lofty rock of the Lannisters? If there had been a good match, she thought she fancied taking the name of Tully. The Riverlands was much closer to home after all.

A knock rapped against the side of their carriage. Lyra pulled aside the curtains and peered out at her cousin who was riding on horseback. There was dirt smeared on his face, most likely from the horse, and she handed him a handkerchief to clean himself.

"We are almost to King's Landing," Brandon informed, then pointed towards the treetops. "You can see the Red Keep already."

Lyra leaned over the window and peered upwards to the sky. True to his word, the pale red keep towered high from the east like a beacon. Her heart skipped a beat. The horses continued down the road, passing by other caravans and lonely travellers. Lyra spied golden silks and Myrish lace with intricate patterns carried by a group of rich merchants.

She suddenly felt very plain in her woollen garbs of dark blue. No doubt the ladies in court all wore only the most fashionable dresses. Lyra had not even thought to wear a hairpin despite owning several pieces. Growing up with only male cousins had made her as thoughtless as them.

Soon, they had entered the city proper and a cohort of guardsmen greeted them at the gates. The Starks were then escorted to the Red Keep on the southeastern corner of King's Landing. As the horses pulled the carriages up the sloping incline of the outer walls, Lyra could appreciate the view of Blackwater Bay that the keep overlooked.

The cohort brought them to a halt in the main courtyard of Maegor's Holdfast. Imposing stone pillars surrounded the square with winding ivy creeping along its columns and cornices. A man with courtly attire stood nearby awaiting their arrival. The pin of the King's Hand adorned the breast of his surcoat. No others were waiting with him.

Lord Rickon was the first to greet him and they spoke at length in the corner while the rest of their company unburdened the horses of their effects. Royal servants stepped forwards to usher them away to guest chambers within the tower. They had arrived a little before noon and there was still time in the day to attend the king's court.

Three maidservants took charge of Lyra to quickly freshen her up with a bath and scented oils. A silk dress had then been produced from thin air. It was a deep forest green that matched the colour of her eyes, skilfully decorated with golden threads on its hems.

"A gift from the Prince," one of the women told her.

Lyra was pleased to know that the man she was soon to be married to had made a small effort to welcome her. She would not soon forget the gesture as the servants laced her bodice. While they were combing Lyra's hair, her mother entered the chambers to accompany them.

Gilliane Glover was a woman of little words, unlike her husband. She chose instead to relay her sentiments through actions and gifts, as she did now by picking suitable jewellery for her daughter. Lyra often thought that she took on more of her father's semblance in both demeanour and appearance. Blood of the wolf ran thick in her veins and she shared the trait with Brandon, of all her kin that she cherished the most.

Her mother braided her hair with golden flowers that matched her dress. She hoped she looked beautiful enough in the Prince's eyes. Gilliane stroked her daughter's dark crown and spoke words of encouragement that Lyra barely heard. Tremors threatened to ravage her hands and legs. She wanted to flee back to Winterfell, she would run the entire distance if she had to.

"Your father and cousin are already waiting," her mother urged to depart.

Lyra took one last glance at herself in the looking glass. Her reflection was unfamiliar. She would rather trade her silk for furs, flowers for ice crystals. Clenching her hands, she pulled herself away from the vanity and they rejoined the men in the courtyard. The Hand of the King whom her father introduced as Ser Ryam Redwyne was also there to chaperone them.

"His Grace and the Prince would be pleased to see you, my lady," he greeted her amicably. "You have grown to be a fine young woman; I daresay your father made the right choice to stay your hand for a while. This has been a long-awaited day."

She thanked him with a smile and exchanged glances with Brandon. He had been uncharacteristically quiet. It was also the first time she had seen his hair so clean. He must have felt ridiculous. Ser Ryam motioned with a hand down a western corridor and they started to make their way to the Great Hall.

"His Grace was most gracious to honour the request," Rickon said, "knowing how eagerly he was for the younger Prince to marry."

Ser Ryam laughed with good humour. "Yes, His Grace is not growing any younger himself. This is most certainly a joyous occasion for all."

Brandon exchanged another look with Lyra and she knew what he would have said. She too doubted that marriage would deter a man from fucking whores. There was a reason why infidelity existed.

The doors to the Great Hall loomed all too soon at the end of the fifth corridor. Lyra felt her hands starting to slicken and she ran them down the front of her dress. Brandon brushed against her arm.

"Don't worry, you look beautiful," he assured her.

Her anxious eyes met his as she smiled back in gratitude. A squire announced their presence and Lyra passed the threshold of the hall. Hushed voices resounded all around her and she was painfully aware of every pair of eyes. Taking a breath, Lyra held her head high with pride. She was a Stark, the Wardens of the North, her nerves were tempered with ice and snow. Her gaze was fixed on the Iron Throne, its imposing sword tips standing tall like watchtowers.

King Jaehaerys observed their approach with a pleasant countenance. She curtsied as was the custom and rose upon command. Her heart throbbed in her throat. Words were exchanged between her father and the king. She smiled upon being addressed. Behind the throne, the sky was shot with crimson. Then, without warning, the king motioned to the right of the hall.

"I present to you my grandson, Prince Daemon."

The court fell into silence as everyone's attention was diverted. Only the sound of shuffling boots could be heard against the stone floor as the prince stepped forwards. Lyra turned slowly, not knowing what to expect. It had only been four years since she last saw him but it was sufficient time to change him into a man.

Daemon stood taller and sturdier than she remembered. His hair was more silver, his eyes more violet. Taken out of his heavy armour, he was also lean and slender. Lyra knew then why he was styled the Prince of the City. His profile lent him a dashing air and his piercing eyes glinted with an astute mind.

They locked gazes with one another; amethyst meeting jade.

At that moment, her fate had been sealed. Against her better judgement, Lyra drew a sharp breath that quickened her pulse. There was a heat in her chest that bloomed and bled into a feverish ache. Under the golden glow of the setting sun, she felt her heart ignite. And it burned with dragon fire.



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