

**DAEMON** had not known any other time when his breath halted in his chest, or when frost seeped deep into his veins to paralyse. He could barely remember what his betrothed had looked like all those years ago when he earned his knightly spurs. Had she always been so lovely to behold?

Seven fucking hell she thought. He could not even remember her name.

Her eyes were touched by spring blooms, her lips carved by gods. She was a dainty thing, sylphlike and delicate. Golden flowers adorned her hair of midnight and he wanted to pluck every single one until she lay tousled beneath him. He coveted her dearly and it kindled an innate desire to claim her as his own.

His grandfather spoke but Daemon paid little heed to his words. There was a stirring in his loins that had him distracted. The woman smiled encouragingly but he knew not what was supposed to be his response. Her smile froze upon her face and disappointment flashed across her green eyes.

"Perhaps my brother is too stricken by her beauty?" Viserys remarked in jest. "He looks overly delighted, does he not?"

The king chuckled and Daemon quickly twitched his lips into a smirk. "Yes, my apologies," he agreed in an attempt to rescue himself.

The woman turned away with a blush but Daemon observed her watching him from the corner of her eyes. He was sure that he was leaving a very poor impression of himself.

After a further exchange of pleasantries, the Starks were given leave to retire for the day. They had only just arrived in the morn and surely had need of some respite from their travels. The rest of the court was also dismissed.

Daemon watched as Ryam Redwyne helped his frail grandfather down the steps of the throne. It had been the king's last wish to see his youngest grandson marry. The arrangement had been long in the making and finally allowed to bear fruit.

A hand clasped his shoulder and Daemon spared a glance at his older brother.

"Did you have your tongue cut out?" he asked. "I have never seen you to be speechless."

"And I don't even know her name," Daemon lamented.

"It's Lyra Stark." Viserys shook his head in dismay. "And you're welcome. I had Aemma pick the dress in your name."

"Oh, my gratitude. I had not even noticed." He paused in thought. "It is a shame that she's a Stark."

"They are a respected House across the realm," Viserys said with a raised brow. "Would you rather have married Rhea Royce and be banished to the Vale?"

Daemon winced. "You and I both know grandfather means to shackle me with marriage. He thinks a pretty wife would cure me of wanton behaviours as he would call it."

"I can think of worse punishments than having a pretty wife, Daemon," Viserys reproached. "She seemed to have taken a liking to you, before you failed so utterly in your reception. You should show her a bit of affection, enough to satisfy her needs. I know of many men who would duel to the death for her hand if your betrothal wasn't by order of the king."

"Really, who?" Daemon asked out of curiosity.

"The entire fucking realm, you halfwit." Viserys shook his head once more, this time with disgust, before relieving himself of his brother's company.

Daemon would have had a merry time with the list of names vying for his soon-to-be wife's attention. In truth, he may have been amongst them too. Lyra Stark was a rare beauty. A true winter rose of the North.

Already, he craved to lay eyes upon her again and so he went to do just that. He made short work of the winding corridors that brought him back to Maegor's Holdfast. A path that he was well acquainted with having lived there all his life. It was almost supper and Daemon had very little time to chance upon the woman alone.

He did not dare to visit upon the guest chambers lest he met with Rickon or Brandon Stark. Instead, he chose to test his fortunes in the gardens. The gods smiled upon him as he soon spied the object of his attention nestled between the flower beds. She was a vision of exquisite beauty, all sweetness and grace. Daemon prowled forwards.

As he drew near, the woman startled when she noticed him. Green eyes widened with incredulity before narrowing with distrust. Her icy glare amused him.

"My lady," he started, mustering his best impression of earnesty. "I must apologise to you for my dreadful display of impertinence earlier."

The tenseness in her shoulders eased and her gaze softened. For the moment, she seemed placated and Daemon applauded himself in his mind.

"Though I felt slighted, I accept your apology, my prince," she said.

Her brazen temperament further piqued his interest in her and he fought to keep a straight face. Daemon wanted to close the gap between them and to sit next to her on the bench, but he restrained himself. He clasped his hands together in front of him instead and smiled uncertainly.

"I must thank you, though, for the dress," she continued. "It is beautiful."

"What?" He blinked in momentary confusion. "Oh, yes, the dress. It looks lovely on you, it complements your, uh, skin."

Daemon inwardly grimaced at himself. A light frown started to adorn Lyra's brows as she eyed him dubiously. "My skin?" she repeated calmly.

He stared back as if caught red-handed and could only muster a simple, "Yes."

Damn his own thoughtless nature. She gave him a tight-lipped smile and Daemon swore she could see right through him. The dress was forest green, of course it was chosen to match her equally virescent eyes. She must have thought him to be an utter simpleton. Though he may have deserved it, considering he did not even remember her name before.

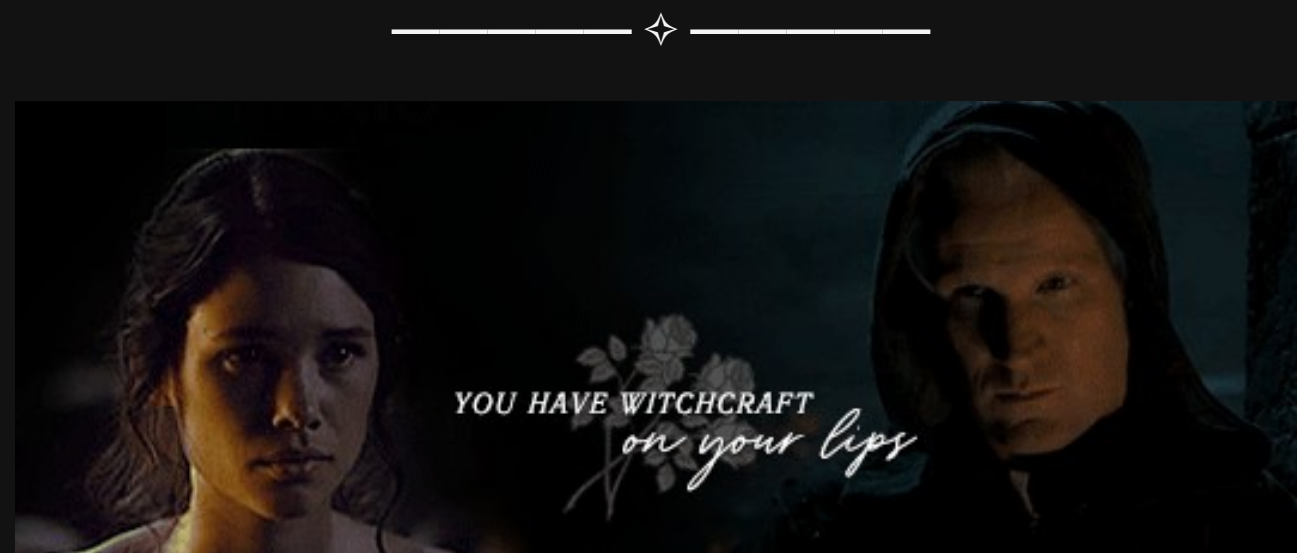
She did not give him another opportunity to redeem himself. Lyra carefully stood from her seat, running her hands down her front to smooth the folds of her dress. Then very purposefully, she nodded to him without meeting his gaze.

"Good night, my lord." She turned away and promptly vacated the gardens.

Left in the silent wake of her departure, Daemon paced restlessly. He then decided to leave the Red Keep, going on foot into the belly of the city. Twilight descended upon him as he meandered down the familiar pathways before veering right at the foot of Visenya's hill.

He continued to climb the next slope of Rhaenys until he smelled ash and charred wood from the nearby Dragonpit. Slinking onto the Street of Silk, the cloying scent of spiceflower and moss from heady Lysian perfumes started to permeate the air as he drew close to its source. The owner of his preferred pleasure house greeted him intimately at the door.

But when Daemon thrust himself deep into the unnamed whore he bought that night, all he could think of was jade and frost.



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