The Dreams of a Dragon

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by ale_28

Summary

Daeron Targaryen was used to night horrors, not dreams about a pretty girl in a lilac dressed holding him in her arms. And yet the same woman had been visiting him for days now.
Aelora Targaryen was six-and-ten now, the usual age for a marriage, one that she wasn't ready for. But it was her only chance to get the silver brooch on Baelor's chest and become his Lady Hand someday.
A dreamer and a princess meet again in the capital. Will they be able to save their house from ruin?

Notes

All rights go to George R. R. Martin for writing the books and to HBO and the appropriate show runners and writers for creating the television series. I only own a few minor characters, and their storylines. Any similarities to real-life people, events, or other works are completely unintentional and coincidental.

All Valyrian translations and usages are from the page on Wiki of Westeros, valyriantranslate.com and the terms for relatives were found on a Reddit thread.
Mistakes are not intended, and if there is need of any correction, please send a message to my inbox.

Because we know very little about the characters' ages, I tried my best to figure out the dates and fit in my own plot, but I shifted some things for the good of the story.

This story will reference certain lineages and family trees that have been adapted from GRRM's work and book/show canon. Gaps such as unknown parentage, relation, marriages, etc. have been filled by me and are not canon to the ASOIAF books or the TV series but are to this story. If anyone is in need of visual family trees, let me know.

I also need to credit @Jaehaerys_Bluefyre, most of the family trees and connections come from them (and they wrote a magnificent story about Aelora and Maekar that was partially the inspiration behind this).

About the Daeron x OC tag, I've added it recently after some suggestions: we know very little about Aelora and her character was basically build from zero from my imagination, so i felt free to add it; but she still remains the canonical character regarding her family connections.

Chapter 1: prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The smell of sour wine and old hay was thick in the humid night air. Daeron was a total wreck.

His tunic was unbuttoned, and his sand hair matted with straw. As she climbed onto the wagon to haul him toward the keep, he lunged forward. Not with violence, but with a desperate, crushing feeling.

He felt so cold, while her skin burned like fire.

He buried his face in the crook of her neck, his breath hot and smelling of wine, his hands trembling as they gripped her cloak.

"You're back." He choked out, his voice thick with a sob he was trying to swallow. "I saw you... I saw the red smile across your throat. I saw the crows feasting on your eyes. I thought the dream had finally taken you, too."

He pulled back just an inch, his eyes unfocused and swimming with tears. He was seeing her. In his drunken haze, he was staring at a ghost from his visions.

"Don't leave me here with them." He whispered, clutching her face between his damp palms. "I'm just a fool drinking himself to death so I don't have to watch you die again. Promise me, promise me this isn't another dream."

He leaned his forehead against her, his weight leaning heavily onto her, waiting for a comfort he was not sure she should give.

"Daeron," her voice sounded so sweet and distant.

"Daeron," just a whisper, enough to make him snap back to reality again.

It had been a dream, *another* dream.

But his brother Egg's face was real, very real, instead.

He flinched like he'd been burned, pulling back so fast he nearly tumbled against the tree. His breath hitched, pupils wide and lost in the dim light. For a long moment, he just stared at the boy before him.

"Egg?" The name came out cracked, almost reverent. "Gods... I'm sorry." A shaky hand raked through his matted hair. "I thought...I keep seeing her die. Over and over. In fire, in shadow...by steel." He let out a slow breath that trembled at the edges.

The hollow laugh slipped out then, broken by regret.

"I used to dream of dragons ruling the world," he murmured, slumping sideways. "Now I only dream of graves with familiar faces on them."

He reached out suddenly, not to grab or cling, but just to press trembling fingers lightly against Egg's wrist.

"You're warm," he whispered, more to himself than anything. "That's good...stay warm."

"We must go, Daeron." Egg was used to his words and gave them no real meaning. As everyone else did. "Father says we're hours of ride away from King's Landing."

Daeron nodded, letting his brother's steady voice ground him. He was right.

The dreams were just dreams. For now. He hauled himself up dizzily, gripping Egg's shoulder for balance. There was still a slight slur in his tone from the wine.

"Ah, yes, the capital," he mumbled, wiping hay from his face. "A nest of vipers and fools. Our home away from home." he managed a shaky, self-deprecating smirk. "Can't say I missed the stench."

A whole day of riding, that was the distance between them and King's Landing at this point, the end of a journey that had started back at Summerhall and had taken them a fortnight.

A whole day. A whole day that Daeron would have very much preferred spending anywhere else than on the road with his father and his brother, and a wheelhouse carrying the rest of his loud family.

Rhae had thrown a tantrum at the last moment, because her doll was missing; Egg had spent most of the morning asking to get on a horse and not be secluded with his sisters; Daella had behaved at first, then had started crying and saying she missed Summerhall. Aerion, always patient, had sneered at her and terrorised Egg, as he loved to do, before dear Father intervened, shouted some commands and order was restored. Even his mad brother knew better than to disobey in front of their stern parent.

"Daeron." two little, gentle voices filled his ears. Daeron thought for a moment he was dreaming again, but then he saw two little figures running towards him. Rhae and Daella were sweet souls and didn't deserve to see him like that, haunted and dirty: he tried his best not to look drunk, or at least not more than usual.

Daeron straightened—*tried* to, anyway—as the girls approached, their silken skirts whispering through the straw. He swiped a trembling hand across his mouth, as if that alone could erase the stench of wine and sorrow.

"Ah," he said softly, forcing a wobbly smile. "The only three people in this gods forsaken bloodline who don't make me want to drink myself into a ditch."

He reached out, clumsy but gentle, tucking a loose strand of hair behind Rhae's ear, then did the same for Daella with exaggerated solemnity.

"Do I look drunk?" he asked.

Egg narrowed his eyes and nodded.

"Nonsense. I'm simply... *artistically unsteady.* A poetic condition."

"But you're not a poet." Rhae argued.

Daeron couldn't really deny it: his words were always slurry because of the alcohol and his poetic days had ended when he had been handed a harp. It had occurred only once for a reason.

"I become one every time I see your beautiful eyes." he winked nonetheless to his little sisters.

Rhae rolled her eyes and Daella giggled, both used to his act by now.

But Daeron's eyes flickered past them toward King's Landing on the horizon, the Red Keep like a dagger against the sky, and for just one breath too long his smile didn't reach them.

Then he exhaled sharply and patted both girls on their shoulders with theatrical cheer.

"Come then," he slurred slightly brighter. "Let us march bravely into courtly doom before I change my mind and vanish into another tavern."

His words were heard by the only person that *shouldn't* have heard them.

"Daeron," a strict voice sounded behind him and he didn't need to turn to know who it was: his father, Maekar. "I see you're awake, finally."

Daeron froze, just for a breath.

He didn't turn. Couldn't. The weight of that voice, the iron in it, the disappointment, pressed down like a mailed fist on his shoulders.

Slowly, he straightened. Not tall or proud. Just...smaller. Like the little kid that no one but Daeron and Maekar could remember.

"Awake?" He gave a soft, slurred chuckle that cracked at the edges. "Debatable, my prince." He turned then, slowly. His tunic still hung open, his hair wild with straw and sweat, his face hollow from the lack of sleep.

Anything but not *sleep.*

Daeron *couldn't* sleep.

But he met Maekar's eyes, once, and looked away again fast.

"I'm told I've missed half the ride and all dignity," he said lightly, swaying only a little. "But fear not, I saved *some* shame for court."

He tried to smile like it was jest. It broke in two before it reached his eyes.

"I can imagine." his father grumbled, before stepping up. He never wished to linger, to talk to him more.

He never wished to *look* at him.

"Come on, you all. Daeron, get your horse. And where in the Seven Hells is Aerion? I should have never given in to your requests and make a stop."

Daeron nodded, the hollow laugh escaping again at the mention of his brother.

Aerion. Always *Aerion.*

Father's *golden child.*

Daeron's *monster.*

He stumbled away to fetch his horse, trying to keep the bitterness in his mouth at bay. His father favored Aerion. That was no secret.

And he? He was just a drunkard.

His horse, a white gelding with a dapple-grey coat, whickered nervously at his approach. Daeron leaned in to stroke his neck with trembling fingers.

"Sorry, old boy," he muttered. "You deserve better than me."

The horse made a sound of almost approval, as Daeron scurried him back to his father.

He liked talking with his horse. His mother had gifted him to Daeron. She talked with horses as well. And cats and dogs and her children. Unlike Father. Father never talked to them.

But it was no surprise: Dyanna had been a gentle soul, like Daella, Rhae, Egg and Aemon (his brother who was studying at Oldtown).

He and Aerion instead were Maekar's mirrors: one of his failures, the other of his cruelty. No one had inherited his silence.

He walked back to the carriage, wishing he hadn't returned so soon when he saw Aerion mounting his own horse.

The sight of Aerion was like ice down his neck, bitter and biting. His brother was everything he could be. Strong, confident, a *true* Targaryen.

He wasn't haunted by dreams like Daeron was, like Daeron had been since Redgrass Field.

And even as he swallowed his bitter feelings of jealousy toward his brother, he didn't wish for him to be haunted by them.

No one deserved it.

Not even Aerion.

But Daeron did.

Was it because he had seen his mother die and hadn't saved her?

As his brother joined the group, a smirk on his face, Daeron instinctively put a hand on his horse's neck, finding more comfort in the gelding's warm hide than the thought of this ride.

"Ah, look who finally shows his regal face," he managed, his words just a bit more slurred with each syllable. "The perfect heir. Fashionably late, of course."

"How is it that you didn't fall in a ditch already?" Aerion was quick to retort, mocking him as always.

Daeron let out a soft, bitter chuckle, eyes down, fingers still tangled in the horse's mane. "Funny," he murmured, voice low and thick with wine-soaked irony. "I keep having dreams about that too. Me face-down in some ditch, crows pecking out what little sense I had left."

He lifted his head just enough to glance at Aerion—really *look* at him—for a heartbeat too long.

Then he smiled, small and sad.

"But then I wake up, still breathing, still disappointing everyone." He gave a lazy half-bow from the saddle. "Imagine the miracle."

Before Aerion could retort, Daeron turned his horse slightly, shielding Rhae and Daella with his body like an afterthought, as if even drunk and broken, some part of him still knew how to stand between them and the fire.

Aerion chuckled, noticing the gesture. "Yeah yeah, we know everything about your *mad* dreams."

Mad Daeron.

Aerion had hissed those words at him, while their mother bled to death.

It had cut deep.

Daeron's hand tensed on the horse's neck, but his tone, when he spoke, remained as flippant as ever. "Ah, yes. The dragon dreams. Those delightful whispers of doom that keep me up nights. I should really start selling tickets. They're quite the thrilling show."

A hollow laugh crept in again, more bitter than the taste of wine still lingering in his mouth. "But you'd need to be mad to understand them—*really* mad—and you've got the monopoly there, dear brother."

His brother had been a glad child once, like Egg. He had liked fishing. But then they had made a man out of him too.

Cruel, mad.

Like Daeron.

Like *Maekar.*

Aerion looked at him, his body moving forward as if threatening. Daeron still remembered how his brother claimed he was a dragon in human form.

But he wasn't little like Egg, his fantasies excusable things in the mind of a small child.

Daeron saw dragons every night. They kept him company, somehow.

He didn't flinch, not outwardly. But his breath hitched, just once, like a skipped beat in a funeral dirge.

He kept his eyes low, fingers white-knuckled on the reins. The gelding shifted beneath him, sensing the tension like smoke before flame.

"A dragon," he murmured soft, almost dreamy. "Yes. I forgot you like to pretend you're one of the great beasts." He swallowed. "Though last I checked, real dragons don't *threaten* children with hot pokers in the stables."

His voice didn't rise. It *dipped,* quieter now.

"They burn cities."

He had seen it. Silver hair, violet eyes, a dragon roaring and engulfing everything with fire.

Aerion didn't have sand hair like him. He looked like their father. He was the blood of Old Valyria.

He finally lifted his gaze then, weary-eyed and unafraid of what might come next.

"So go on then," he whispered with drunken calmness laced with quiet horror that never truly went away from his features. "Prove it."

Aerion's nostrils flared with fury.

Do it. Turn into a dragon and engulf me with your fire.

Daeron wanted to die at his brother's hand.

Rhaenyra Targaryen had been burned alive by her brother Aegon.

He had *seen* it.

A golden dragon eating her alive.

Daeron had always thought the animal looked like Aerion.

"You're all here?" his father's voice sounded from afar, before he arrived, galloping to them.

Maekar Targaryen looked every inch a warrior, every time he was on horseback.

Daeron remembered the first time he had seen him atop a horse. He had worn a black armour, that day. He had kissed his mother, embraced his sons.

"Where are you going?" Daeron had asked him. He was six.

"To war." Maekar had replied.

Daeron had giggled. For him war was a game.

But Dyanna had cried. Aerion's kisses had been to no avail: she couldn't stop crying.

Only Father's arms around her again had soothed her worry.

Aerion had smiled, too, launching himself in Maekar's arms. He was a glad child still.

Only Daeron had cried.

The *dreams.*

Always the *dreams.*

Now Rhae, Daella and Egg had walked back into the wheelhouse and both his eldest children were atop their horses.

Aerion looked as if he was about to march to Redgrass Field, even without an armour. Though he doubted that he would have embraced his family when he would return from battle, like Father had done.

Daeron didn't look like his brother, and it wasn't because of their different hair colour: he always looked like a drunken, even atop a horse. Probably even more so.

"Aerion, where were you?" Maekar turned to his second born, asking with a calmness that Daeron had never received.

Daeron winced at the familiar sight, at the difference in the way Maekar addressed him compared to his perfect brother. It had always been there, like a shadow that would never truly leave his side. Even as a child, he'd seen it.

Aerion smiled, broad and arrogant. He was confident, carefree even, as he gestured at a nearby tavern.

"Pardon, Father," he said, not an ounce of remorse in his tone. "Just needed a quick stop for some, shall we say, *refreshments* on the road."

Daeron sneered.

Whoring was something that both him and his brother enjoyed, but while he was shamed because of it, Aerion was appreciated.

He was the blood of Old Valyria, fierce and strong like a dragon. He was a god. And his seed held power within it.

Daeron had to pay them profoundly for a night of company, away from his dreams. He blamed it on his breath smelling of wine.

He bet they offered themselves freely to his brother. They fought for him, like the slums in Flea Bottom did for a piece of bread.

Daeron bet his kids would becom whores and drunkards like him.

While Aerion's children would become knights and princesses, even in their bastardy.

Daeron let out a slow breath through his nose, eyes fixed on the horizon, jaw tight beneath the wine-softened edges of his face.

"Ah," he murmured, voice barely above a whisper. "The *other* family tradition. Only one of us gets praised for it."

He didn't look at Aerion, he didn't need to. He could feel the smirk like heat from a fire.

Instead, he tugged gently at his rumpled tunic, too late to hide what he was: flawed, broken, *shameful* in every way that mattered to their father.

"But of course," he added with brittle charm, "when *I* crawl out of some stable girl's bed with tears in my eyes and wine on my breath...well..." He gave a crooked half-smile. "that's tragedy. When *he* does it? That's *king's blood being fruitful*."

Then softer, meant for no one but the wind: "Gods help the woman who thinks either of us loves her."

But he knew the truth. The gods hadn't helped her: their mother had died.

"Enough." Maekar grumbled, shooting him a look of pure disapproval. "Let's go, I've had enough of you two."

Daeron nodded, bowing his head, the gesture more to hide the bitter twist to his smile than out of any real submission. He understood his place in the world, though he hated it.

As they began the ride again, he kept half an eye on Aerion next to him. The confidence in his brother's bearing like a taunt, a reminder of all he wasn't. But he didn't speak. In truth, he had said more than he should already.

Instead, he leaned forward to pat his horse's neck, as if seeking comfort from the one creature who might not reject him entirely.

"The horse doesn't speak, you know," Aerion teased. "*Mad* Daeron." he laughed, but it wasn't the same laugh he had had as a child.

No, this was cruel.

Daeron wondered when he had started laughing like this.

He hadn't laughed like that around Dyanna.

But in truth, he had never laughed after *Dyanna*.

Daeron didn't bother to respond.

The familiar insult used to bother him, even make him bristle in the past. But over the years, he'd grown numb to it.

Like he had grown numb to the suffering, to the dreams.

Like he was growing numb to the wine now.

So instead, he simply closed his eyes for a moment, the sound of Aerion's laughter like a dagger between his ribs.

"Aye," he murmured. "Mad, broken Daeron, talking to horses instead of people. How terribly amusing it must be for you."

Aerion galloped forward to their father, walking next to him and leaving Daeron behind, trailing after them.

A metaphor of life, he thought.

The sight made him feel strangely hollow, watching his brother claim the place next to their father with ease. In a twisted way, it was fitting. Aerion was the one who *belonged* there, after all.

But sometimes his father would lay his eyes on him and look as if he were in deep thought. Daeron always wondered what he was thinking about. Was it the memory of his mother? Did his sand blonde hair remind him of her?

Or was it something else? His dreams, perhaps? His drunken state? That was the thing for which Maekar shamed him most.

Daeron rode on, hands clenching the reins a bit tighter. He felt like a ghost, trailing behind. No, not even a ghost. Something even more pathetic: a shadow, maybe.

He felt like one most of the days. A shell of his old self. He roamed with dead men more than with living ones.

But he couldn't see his mother.

She wasn't roaming the living world anymore. She had found peace in death, he knew that.

Yet he wished she hadn't.

He wished to see her one last time, smiling gently and calling him her *sweet* Daeron.

But she didn't deserve to suffer.

No, better to never see her again.

To forget her voice, her eyes, her smile, her perfume, her kisses against his temple, the way her arms held him tightly.

Daeron felt his skin itching—whether it was the sun or the memory of Dyanna, he couldn't tell.

The trip could have been bearable, if he had had his flask full of wine with him, but his father had emptied it before his very eyes after the first sip, stating that "a prince doesn't act in such a way, being drunk before midday."

At least they were about to arrive: the Red Keep was in sight.

Daeron tried to remember the last time he had visited his family, back in the capital. For the proclamation of his uncle as Hand of the King, surely, yet he couldn't remember anything about the feast or the ceremony. He had been too drunk to do anything.

Once they entered the city gates, Maekar inhaled sharply. "King's Landing," he murmured, as Daeron choked on the dirty air and almost threw up. He could see the streets displaying before them, stuffed with people; roads in pure chaos as the celebration approached and *far too many people.*

Daeron didn't like being surrounded by people.

"I didn't miss this place." the old man grumbled.

Daeron found himself agreeing with his father, for once in his life. They were there only because his cousin Valarr had had another son—who pushed them all further down the line—and a feast had been organised in his honour. His father hadn't even wanted to participate in the first place ("This is the spare." he had said), but a letter from uncle Baelor had been enough to convince him: if there was one person capable of making Maekar collaborate, that was his older brother. If only he'd give in so easily when Daeron asked for something.

"The city of dirt and whores." he stated, earning a stern look from his father.

He wondered if Maekar associated those things to him: Daeron was always passed out in some prostitute's bed, sweaty and stinky.

But he didn't have the time to think about that now. The ride up to Aegon's Hill was clumsy and tiring. Daeron felt sleepy and lightheaded, his back hurt and his father urging him to go faster only made it worse. But at least he made it to the Red Keep still atop his horse and that was a victory in itself.

"Prince Maekar and his family." Someone shouted, Daeron didn't recognise him and didn't make an effort to do so.

The courtyard still looked the same, the courtiers still looked boring and the maidens still looked at him as if he were a dashing prince and not a cursed man.

It was like a flash of colour that engulfed him all at once: the dark red of the walls, the pastel blue and pink of the gowns, feathers of hats and furs of dark cloaks. There was some white too, from the men sworn to protect the blood of the dragon.

Once he had the opportunity to get off his horse, he didn't wait for a second chance.

He had almost expected of falling into a sea of people, with hands leaning over him, trying to snatch something out of his nose.

He had witnessed a dream like this once, hands trying to grab him, to hold him, to *kill* him. He didn't shout when he woke up, he had stopped to do so a long time ago.

Instead that sea of people parted, as if compelled by some sort of magic, while a deep, warm, *wise* voice reached Daeron's ears.

"Maekar!" A tall, lean and broad-shouldered figure made his way through the crowd. Daeron thought he looked like a water wizard, that could call upon the power of the river Rhoynar. After all, the man descended from Nymeria herself: his mother was a former Dornish princess.

Wherever he walked, every head turned, everyone tried to catch his eyes, earn a glimpse of their prince.

Yet the man's eyes were fixed on Maekar.

And his father was enchanted, as if his brother had really displayed water magic.

But this was just *Baelor's* effect on people.

He could attract attention like no other, fight like a true knight, act like a honourable man, manage the realm as an efficient Hand, make litigants stop fighting, calculate how much gold the Iron Bank hid in their vaults, still make every maiden fall for him despite the fact that he was a grandfather already.

Daeron bet that whores would offer their services freely to him as well, but his uncle had never persevered in such activities.

Still he could do the impossible: make Maekar smile.

"Baelor," his father greeted him with less enthusiasm, but he was *openly* smiling. Daeron knew it was a sight so rare and that it could be originated only from true happiness upon seeing his brother.

The two didn't embrace: they were men and stood in front of the court. Yet that didn't stop the heir to the throne from placing his hand on Maekar's shoulder, squeezing with affection.

The Hammer and the Anvil, the two brothers were called, after their epic fight at the Battle of the Redgrass Field. Daeron had never cared enough to ask his father about his time of war: he had been too young to comprehend and now every mention of the name Blackfyre made his mind tremble with dark omens.

"It's good to see you." his uncle had the *perfect* smile. Yet what wasn't perfect about him?

Daeron wondered what it felt like to live constantly in one brother's shadow. In their unfairness, the gods had been merciful to Daeron: they had made him a drunken, Aerion a cruel monster, Aemon a maester and Egg a common prince. No display of greatness could be counted among Maekar's sons and that was partially the reason for his father's utter disappointment in their regards.

But the difference was even more pronounced when compared to the rest of their family. And just like him and his siblings stood no chance against their cousins, so did his father against his brothers.

Daeron looked at Maekar now: Baelor was at least a head taller than his younger brother and much more handsome, without those pox scars that had signed Maekar's face.

Daeron almost felt *pity* for him.

The king's fourth son, not as bold as Prince Baelor, nor as clever as Prince Aerys, nor as gentle as Prince Rhaegel, and now he must suffer seeing his own sons overshadowed by his brother's.

But he didn't look displeased for once, as his eyes landed on the Hand of the King.

Maekar *loved* Baelor.

But not like Daeron loved Aegon or Aemon. Or like he had loved Aerion, back in their days.

No.

Daeron loved them despite their mistakes.

But Baelor Breakspear had no imperfections. Maekar's love for his brother was unconditional.

Daeron wondered what it felt like to love a *god.*

"I guess congratulations are in order." Maekar said once Baelor let go of his shoulder.

The Hand of the King smiled and waved his hand, turning instead to his nephews and nieces. "I trust you had a pleasant journey?"

Rhae immediately dwelled into a long retelling of their journey, which couldn't possibly interest someone to the level of description she was giving, but Baelor — as polite as ever — listened (or pretended to) and nodded along. Egg would fill in once or twice to specify the exact place where something happened and which House ruled over it: he had been studying Westerosi geography and politics, he wanted to show off what he had learned.

Aerion kept looking around, searching for his next target as a dragon would with a prey (maids, married women, widows; it made no difference to him), while Daella — gentle Daella — remained silent at his side.

Daeron kept his mouth shut as well, for partially two reasons: his head ached and his father had ordered him to stay silent.

The same man whose patience now was growing thick: Daeron noticed from how his lip quivered, he was ready to give the same order he had given to him to his youngest daughter.

Thankfully, Baelor saved them all from the next fit of shouts and Rhae's tears: he interrupted his niece gently—more gently than his father ever did—and let them know that the king and queen were waiting for them in the Throne Room.

Maekar rolled his eyes but nodded, knowing he couldn't quite ignore his parents, while Daeron sighed. It was going to be a long day.



"It's so nice to have you back." King Daeron said from the top of his throne, with a kind smile adorning his face. He always smiled, something strange to witness, knowing he had given life to his own father. And Maekar could be defined by anything *but* his smile.

Daeron liked his namesake; he was probably one of the few that he *really* liked: his grandfather was wise, calm, gentle. He acted warmer to him than his father had ever been, especially after his mother's death.

The thought of Dyanna always made his throat burn with the need to cry. It was like being strangled, having no air left in your lungs. Daeron knew well that sensation: he had woken up from countless dreams with the need to shout, yet his body had been stiff and uncooperative, as if he had turned to stone.

He wished to be a rock sometimes, like a dragon shaped one that adorned Dragonstone's Keep. He had seen them when he had visited the island, many years ago, to pay a visit to his new cousin Matarys, a red faced and red haired squirming thing that had just come into the world. He had asked his mother why the baby kept crying and crying, she had explained that this way the only way for babies to express their discomfort.

He had swum in the sea with his father and Aerion, he remembered laughing with them. Then Dyanna had called them from the shore and they had began to race to see who got there first. Aerion had always been quick, so it was easy for him to win. But Maekar had slowed down for Daeron to earn his second place. He wondered if he'd do the same now. But they never raced or played or talked.

Aerion had thrown the victory in his face, reclaiming his price: a kiss from their mother. But she had been kind like always and had kissed Daeron's nose as well. And Father's lips.

Years had passed now, yet a day didn't go by where he didn't think about her.

His grandmother had smiled at him sadly when he had revealed as much, claiming that the longing would only grow with time.

They were in Summerhall, burning his mother's ashes. She had tried to comfort all of them, like a mother would.

But, even if both women came from Dorne, only one possessed those deep purple eyes that could comfort Daeron from his dreams.

He missed looking into those eyes.

Myriah's brown gaze was warm, but not *enough.*

Yet again, his grandmother had also told him to be gentle with his father, who would probably grieve for the rest of his life, but Daeron wasn't good like his namesake.

He had heard the whispers: his mother had died because of her last labour, after four pregnancies in four years. His father's cock had done this. His father's love had done this. His *father.*

He used to kiss his mother: in the courtyard, in the bedroom, at the table, on the beach. She was always gentle with him: she kissed his brow, his calloused hands, his pox scars.

Why did he have to kill her?

He said he loved her.

Could love kill a person?

Queen Myriah was smiling now, walking towards them to embrace each of her grandchildren in her arms. Egg and his sisters immediately let go to such affection, that they rarely received at home. She had proposed to Maekar many times to have Daella and Rhae live at court with her; maybe this time she would succeed.

She was a strong and intelligent woman, his grandmother. And she had been a great beauty as well, back in her days: now her black hair were filled with grey.

"Daeron," the sound of her voice brought him back to reality. She smiled gently, but he could see the pity behind her gaze.

She loved him, surely, but she didn't *understand* him, not really. Daeron feared no one did. "I find you in good shape."

Daeron could read the meaning behind someone's words, and in this case it sounded very much as a "I'm glad you're not drunk already."

"Thank you, Your Grace." he bowed and, for once, he didn't stumble over his own feet.

"I trust you'll be present at tonight's dinner?" the King asked, walking down the steps of the massive Iron Throne to reach his Queen.

Maekar's jaw tightened just imperceptibly, something that his parents wouldn't notice but that Daeron certainly saw, before he nodded at the command. "Surely."

"Very well, then." the Good King smiled again. Daeron wondered again how his serious father had come out from such smiling people. Yet he was the eldest of his siblings and remembered a time when Maekar looked adoringly at his wife. He used to kiss her back *every single time.*

He bowed again and walked behind his father, groaning internally at the prospect of an entire night in his family's company.



'An intimate dinner', that's how his grandmother had called it, but Daeron had known better and put on his best robes nonetheless.

Still, he knew how he would appear: face shallow, dark circles under his eyes, it was a miracle that his blonde hair didn't look disheveled that night.

Drunken Daeron, they called him, Daeron the Mad. Less and less Daeron the Dreamer. They didn't understand it, they feared it.

"Daeron!" Matarys sounded surprised when he sat at his assigned chair, close to his. His hair were still an excessive shade of red, but at least he didn't have a red face anymore. Hadn't for quite some time, to be honest. Though Daeron hadn't seen him crying since they were children and Aerion had beaten him with his wooden sword, so he didn't know if his entire face redded at the effort of crying so loud and attract everyone's attention anymore. He was *dressed* in red as well, Daeron thought he had never seen so much of that colour. It was starting to be nauseating, to be honest. Besides, the two different shades clashed against one another: the Targaryen-red of his robes was a bright one, while his hair were a darker hue. He had inherited that from his mother, though the colour fitted Princess Jena much more than it did her son.

It was probably a dichotomy of colours: red hair, white skin, lilac eyes. It made him look unreal.

Even more so now that he stared at Daeron in disbelief: he probably thought he would have deflected the dinner and gone whoring.

Daeron would have done so, if he had had the chance. At least the wine would have tasted better.

"You look good." his cousin complimented.

The meaning behind those words was also clear: "You look horrible."

Daeron hadn't grown up at court, yet he could easily deduce the lies behind polite words. He probably inherited that ability from his Targaryen blood.

His sweet brother Aemon, who was training at the Citadel now, had always said he had a pessimistic nature, but the truth was that he could see through people's hypocrisies. Hell, he could see the future, even if most of the time he didn't comprehend it.

People's words were an easy game in comparison.

He found himself missing Aemon more and more recently, with his kind words and his nose always buried in a book. He had agreed with his father only once, when he had opposed the decision of the King to send him to the Citadel. But the sovereign had been firm in his decision.

"Too many dragons are as dangerous as too few." he had said and that had been the end of it.

And, of course, the decision had befallen a son of Maekar.

Now Aemon wasn't there, but books that he always used to read at these sort of gatherings were still present on the table, thanks to his uncle Aerys, who excluded himself from the conversation and kept his face buried in them, while his wife Aelinor sighed at his side.

His silver hair created a curtain around his face, preventing Daeron to see much apart from his aquiline nose almost touching the parchment. His wife instead, he could see her more clearly: her big purple eyes and a seven-pointed star around her neck. Daeron had heard she went to the sept every morning, praying for a child. But prayers would fall short if his uncle spent his night in the library and not in bed.

On the other side of the table, the couple of the hour was shining among them all: his cousin Valarr, second in line to the throne, with his wife by his side, Kiera of Tyrosh.

It had been an arranged marriage, but it seemed that they had grown quite fond of each other. Two boys in two years surely proved that. They had named this one Vaelor, he had heard, another boy after Viserys, who stood third in line after his father.

Daeron still remembered their grand wedding: the tournament had lasted for a week, even though Daeron had pretended to have a heart attack once he was made to dismount his horse and procede with hand-to-hand combat against his first opponent. He had been excluded from the games soon after.

But the rest of the festivities had been quite entertaining: the Tyroshi relatives of the bride got wasted like pirates from the Summer Islands and had proved to be enjoyable drinking companions.

They danced as if the tarantula had beaten them, their colourful hair spinning on the dance floor, not at all caring about the dismay of the Westerosi nobles: after all their dresses costed more than some of those nobles' keeps. They were disgustingly rich.

Kiera's gown showed that: even though she dressed more modestly now — to either adapt to Westerosi costumes or her mother in-law dictates, Daeron didn't know — her choice of colours still resonated with her homeland, just like her hair did.

But that was the main reason why Valarr had been married to a Tyroshi woman in the first place: Brynden Rivers knew well where his half-brother Bittersteel had hid away.

Daeron had not seen lord Bloodraven for quite some years now. He hadn't come to welcome them: Maekar was just the king's *fourth* son, after all; no reason for the Master of Whispers to come to greet

them.

Nor did he wish to meet him.

Even if they were both in King's Landing now, he sincerely hoped their paths would not cross.

Daeron took his eyes off her and let them roam around the table. A few relatives were still missing: his uncle Rhaegel, for example, who Daeron wished would be present; he would whine about the wine's taste as much as him, though he hoped he would not take off his clothes in the middle of supper, like he was known doing. His wife and his two children would surely come with him.

"Why does Princess Kiera have pink hair?" his sister Rhae asked next to him. Daeron smiled at her innocence, while Egg explained to her that Tyroshi people dyed their hair as it was their culture. He wasn't as bookish as Aemon, but he followed his studies.

"I want pink hair as well!" the little girl exclaimed, grabbing Daeron's hand. "Do you think I can have pink hair, Daeron?"

He chuckled at her request. "I don't know, little one. I quite like your silver hair."

"But they're so *white!*" she protested. "I want them to be pink or another bright colour!"

Daeron smiled to appease her. "We'll see, Rhae." He knew that if she came to their father with such a request, he might die from the mere mention.

But their discussion was interrupted by the doors opening again.

Daeron held his breath as a brown haired man stood in the doorway, with his eyes closed as if contemplating.

He felt his heart skip a beat for a moment.

Was he dreaming?

Could he *understand?*

But as the man started *humming,* the sound growing louder, the seriousness of the first instant began to crumble. Daella began to chuckle, but a look of reproach from their father silenced her.

The man opened his eyes suddenly, a deep purple shade, and showed the loveliest smile. "My little brother! Maekar!" he shouted, running and basically throwing himself atop his father. Thankfully, Maekar still trained and was able to catch him, without stumbling over the table in the process.

Daeron had to turn around to maintain his composure and not die of laughter right there and then. Judging by Egg's smirk, his brother was trying to do the same.

The sight was so strange and shocking that even uncle Aerys raised his eyes from his book.

"Rhaegel, dear, *gentler.*" his grandmother's tone was stiff but hid a softness typical of mothers.

There he was: uncle Rhaegel.

Mad uncle Rhaegel.

That was probably why Daeron wished to see him.

"His wife, Lady Alys, and his children, Prince Aelor and Princess Aelora." a Kingsguard announced, but only a woman and a boy walked in, both with golden hair and beautiful blue eyes.

Daeron remembered his cousins well, after all they were just one year apart from Aerion. He remembered the warm afternoons in Summerhall, Rhaegel laughing with his father ("He's my favourite little brother." his uncle would say, while Maekar smiled indulgently and reminded him that he was his *only* younger brother), Aerion and Aelor and Daeron playing together.

But then the kids had turned into boys and his cousin had started to imitate his brother. The two greeted each other happily now, still friends despite the years that had passed. They had *always* been friends.

Thinking about it, he was probably Aerion's *only* friend. His brother had never inspired friendship, yet Aelor had been prone to be his right hand man, even if he lacked the sense of pure cruelty that Aerion possessed and the pleasure that derived from it.

But he was a formidable warrior. He had been knighted at fourteen years old, the youngest among all his cousins, something that he obviously showed off every chance he had: he was so *cocksure*, that was probably why he and Aerion got along so well. His colours were undeniably those of the Wardens of the East, yet his way of walking and acting confirmed to everyone that he was the blood of the dragon, even if lacked the look. And, at least, cream gold was much more similar to silver than Matarys' red.

His mother stood charming at his side, but she was clearly a Arryn, even if she had draped herself in black and red: Lady Alys smiled indulgently at her husband, trying to maintain her composure.

Poor woman, she was.

She had been taken away from the Vale to join the court and had been married off to a prince of the realm, only to end up with mad uncle Rhaegel.

What a different life from the one she had imagined to live at the Eyrie.

Daeron looked behind her, expecting to see her and Aelor's little copy: his cousin had a twin after all. A girl who always trailed behind her mother's skirts every time they came to visit.

She had surely grown now, because she wasn't behind her mother anymore. She wasn't *anywhere*, actually.

Alys Arryn had been brought up as a lady of the Vale, with impeccable manners. That's why she kept smiling even while she whispered something way too audible to her son: "Where is your sister?"

Daeron poured himself a cup of wine, enjoying this evening for the time being. Especially if he pretended he hadn't noticed his father's disapproving look.

He had better things to worry about, like uncle Rhaegel stealing Maekar's own cup and emptying it in a gulp, before spitting the wine out of his mouth in a fit of laughter.

Then a sound came.

A soft voice—so, *so* similar—a loud noise and then the doors opened again.

Daeron dropped his cup.

Chapter End Notes

if you enjoyed it, feel free to leave a kudos and comment, i'll try to reply as soon as i can.

all my other socials: lomlherondale on tiktokt, twitter, reddit and spotify.

this story can also be found on ao3 (ale_28 there), on wattpad and on tumblr (lomlherondale there)

as for jena, i styled her as "princess", despite being called lady canonically. i just thought it'd suit better, since she's married to the prince of dragonstone and the future queen + i took inspiration from real royalty titles and how they work (the clearest example is lady diana, called princess because married to the prince of wales).

Chapter 2: The Dragon Princess

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The screams echoed through Dragonstone, so loud and painful that they almost brought Aelora to tears. But the scene before her eyes was even worse: Kiera turning and twisting in a bed, shouting incoherent words in Valyrian.

"What is she saying?" Jena Dondarrion, the girl's mother-in-law, asked Aelora. The red haired woman was keeping her distance, pacing at the end of the room and clenching her seven pointed star.

The dragon princess—so the lords had called Aelora from time to time, back when she had been the king's only granddaughter—had mastered many languages in her lifetime, part of the reason why she had been chosen to be in Kiera's service.

The girl twisting and turning was Tyroshi, as her pink and—now damp—hair testified.

"Praying." she lied. Kiera was actually shouting very colourful curses against the Gods, but Aelora wasn't going to betray her friend's trust.

Many in her family believed that learning Valyrian was useless at that point: the dragons were dead, what was the meaning of learning a dead language? But Aelora, and a few in her family, disagreed with this view.

She had learned it by herself, refining it through uncle Baelor's help and Kiera's company. Her dear friend always wished to talk in Valyrian, saying she was already practicing her Common Tongue around her husband and the rest of the court.

Aelora knew she missed her home, in this regard she understood her. And Valyrian was the only thing that brought her back to Tyrosh, even if for an instant.

Yet, now that the pink haired girl screamed maledictions, she doubted the dragon lords had meant for their refined language to be used in such a manner.

A brutal squeeze of her hand brought her back to reality: Kiera was amidst the worst suffering, despite the fact that this was her second pregnancy.

The woman realised how hard she had squeezed and apologised, still in their ancestor language. Aelora wondered if she refused to talk in Common Tongue because of her insistent need to feel at home while her strength slowly left her, or because the pain was so unbearable that she had forgotten the language she had started to learn. Aelora kissed her knuckles nonetheless, caressing her temple and reassuring her at best as she could.

She had never given birth, she had never experienced such a horrific physical exertion.

Aelora had always been a master of words, "a fine politician" as the Hand of the King said, yet she didn't know what to say now to make her friend believe that she was going to be well.

Aelora didn't even know if she was actually going to survive.

"Is it normal that this is taking so long?" Aelora asked the midwives, who acted diligently around the bed. It was covered in blood, so much of it.

"The child is bigger than expected, surely a boy." one answered, with a thick accent. She came from Essos.

Kiera screamed again, abandoning curses and preferring to call out for her mother then. The princess held her hand firmly, but she couldn't lie to her and tell her she was here.

Aelora remembered Kiera's mother from her friend's wedding, a fine woman coming from the Summer Islands and married to the Archon of Tyrosh: she had such a unique accent that it would be impossible to imitate her. She remembered Baelor trying—and failing—to have a conversation with her; to see her uncle failing at something was a sight greatly unique. His wife hadn't bothered to try instead.

Like she didn't bother now to offer Kiera her comfort. She was a mother herself, she had done it twice (or some more, if only the children had lived; Aelora had never dared to ask about them, didn't matter that she spent her afternoons in Baelor's solar, helping him with paper work), she was much more fit to find words of encouragement than herself.

Kiera could have been her daughter, she was only aged 17. Yet again, if Jena had given Baelor a daughter, emissaries wouldn't have been sent to Tyrosh, Lys and Myr in search of a wife for Valarr.

Didn't matter that the realm needed a wealthy heiress, Jena would have fought for her daughter's right to marry her brother, like she had never fought before, when the King had suggested Aelora's hand in marriage.

If gossips could be believed, her aunt had fought *against* it.

"Aelora," Jena's voice startled her now.

The girl turned to look at her aunt, with her bright red curls and her purple dress. She either dressed in that colour or had something that resembled it, to honour her Dondarrion's heritage.

Had she come to take her place at Kiera's side? Aelora doubted it. She had been the one to stand at the girl's side for a day and a half, while she laboured with Viserys.

Yet she was surprised nonetheless when Jena took her by the arm and led her to one side of the room. Aelora was already starting to protest and trying to snatch her arm away—she couldn't leave a 17 year old girl alone in such a moment—but the Marcher's grip was tight.

Only when they reached the same dark corner of the room where she had been hiding, Jena spoke again. "I want you to go check on Valarr."

"What?" Aelora's disbelief had reached a new level. "With all due respect, Aunt, Kiera needs me."

"She also needs her husband," the Princess of Dragonstone stood tall. "Especially if something were to happen."

Aelora flinched at her words. "You can't mean..." she swallowed dry, trying to keep her composure.

She knew what Jena meant: if something went wrong during childbirth and both their lives were in danger, Valarr, as husband and father, was the only one who could choose who to save.

The room was full of people, women for the most part; still, Aelora's blood went cold just at the prospect.

"Me and her other ladies are here, we'll assist her." Aelora doubted it very much. The other ladies didn't like Kiera, just like Jena, though she tried to hide her feelings: they found her peculiar and over the top. She could already picture them rejoicing at the prospect of Valarr becoming a widower and marrying again—to a *Westerosi* woman, this time.

"Now go." the older woman ordered. Aelora knew it was pointless to protest again, so she turned and tried to hide her tears just at the thought of losing her friend. She didn't want for Valarr to see her in such a state and think the worst.

He was in the Chamber of the Painted Table, a long way from Kiera's own chambers. Aelora ran there, not even caring about keeping her composure: a swirl of worry and anger had gotten hold of her.

Once she walked inside the room, Valarr stopped with his pacing and Baelor looked up from his book. Even Matarys put his sword aside and looked at her expectantly.

He was handsome, her cousin, a true picture of princely beauty, to which he added a sense of duty and an undeniable loyalty to his wife. He looked exactly like his dad, dark hair and mismatched eyes, if it weren't for that silver streak that reminded people that he was still a Targaryen, despite his much more Dornish looks.

"Aelora!" Valarr's voice sounded full of relief, but, by the look on his face, she could see he was still worried. "How's she?"

"She needs you." was all she could come up with in that moment: fear had gripped her and made her stone, like the dragon statues that adorned the Keep.

Valarr's face dropped in an instant. She noticed how Baelor stood up and walked to his son, grabbing his shoulder as if he could crumble on the floor at any moment now.

"Is she..." her cousin's voice came out as a choked breath.

"No!" she clarified immediately, not desiring to think about the possibility, not even for an instant. "It's only that the birth is difficult and she's been asking about you."

That much was true: any time Kiera wasn't screaming or cursing the gods, she would ask about Valarr, with such longing that it made Aelora tearful.

Theirs had been an arranged marriage, there was no denying it. But both groom and bride had grown to care for each other. She would go as far as saying that they had fallen in love with one another.

Because those lilac eyes full of fear could only be a result of love.

Valarr didn't need to be told twice: he was already running to the birthing room, eager to be close to his wife, Aelora right behind him.



Valarr had fought to walk inside the room. The ladies—that "flock of hens", as her cousin had called them in the midst of his fury—had tried to hold him back, saying that the birthing room was no place for a man.

Valarr had gripped the halt of his sword then, asking which one of them was going to keep him outside. Jena had put a stop to the commotion, letting Valarr in and talking in a soft murmur to her son.

Aelora had no idea of what she had said to him: unlike Valarr, she had been kept out of the room and many of the ladies had soon joined her.

Not even twenty minutes later, the child was born.

Vaelor, they had called him, with black hair so similar to his father and a clear cry that had made everyone sigh in relief.

"This one is becoming a warrior." Valarr had chuckled when the boy had been placed in his arms, claiming he was so big that he could already raise a sword.

"I'd prefer he doesn't die in a stupid war." Kiera had replied, making her husband smile and kiss her. She was exhausted, it was clear, yet she had cried tears of joy when they had placed the boy on her chest.

Another boy. The Seven Kingdoms could take a sigh of relief: with two boys now, the line of succession was secured.

The next Westerosi queen—if there ever would be one—could not try to install her own blood on the throne.

Aelora had tried really hard to remain on her feet and not crumble at the joy of the news.

Kiera was well.

The boy was well.

Everything was well.

Luckily for her, Jena prevented any reaction that would be frowned upon by the court by walking over to her. "We should break the news to my husband and Matarys." the woman proposed, a rare smile on her face.

Jena *did* smile, but it was always too polite, too restrained. Her mother smiled the same way. Both women had lived through the games of the court.

Now it was a different kind of it: bright, hopeful. Especially when they walked inside the Chamber of the Painted Table again and she announced with excitement: "It is a boy!"

At the news Baelor finally gave in to a real smile, the lines of worry on his face easing back to an expression of pure happiness, and Matarys rejoiced.

"They named him Vaelor." Aelora added more quietly, making her uncle look away with emotion. The name had clearly been chosen to honour his grandfather.

"Viserys will be happy to hear he has a brother." Matarys stated, standing up from his corner beside the window.

"Yes. But I think the King will be the happiest upon hearing it's another boy." Aelora replied, stealing a chuckle from Valarr's younger brother.

With red hair like his mother and those lilac eyes, a typical Targaryen trait, Matarys was surely quite a catch for many women at court, especially Kiera's ladies, but Aelora wasn't among them.

Once it was clear that Valarr would marry a foreign woman, lady Alys had tried everything in her power to marry her off to her younger cousin. But Jena wasn't rather happy at the prospect of having her as her daughter in-law, so she had never accepted the deal and had eventually sought out a lady from another House.

For their own part, they had tried it once, back in King's Landing: it had been the first night of spring and a party had been held at court.

Aelora loved parties, everyone knew as much. But at the end of it, she had fled the scene to reach the gardens, hand in hand with Matarys. Yet, when she had kissed him, it had felt as if kissing a statue. Matarys had politely told her the next day of his disinterest and to act as if it had never happened.

He was sweet, her cousin, so she had of course accepted and now there was no embarrassment between them. Or at least she hoped so.

"Soon it will be our turn." he murmured, stealing her from her thoughts.

"What?" she asked confused, noticing how his aunt and uncle were in deep talks.

"To get married and have children. Mother plans to see me married to Daenaera Celtigar soon."

No women from Lys and Myr for him. A *Westerosi* woman, instead.

She was about to make a joke about the fact that House Celtigar had finally made it into the dragonlords family, but kept it to herself.

It was a good match, she knew it. The Celtigar had grown quite rich since the end of the Blackfyre rebellion. Daenaera Celtigar could offer him much more than what Aelora could bring to her possible future husband. Despite being the daughter of a Prince of the Realm, she had little to offer: her father was a third son and had built nothing for himself. He wasn't a warrior like uncle Maekar, or a scholar like uncle Aerys. They called him *mad* Rhaegel, a *sad* nickname and a sad *reality.*

The Princess of Dragonstone had known better: no mad genes in her descendants. She was quite astute and she had made a fine choice.

Aelora, for her part, tried to smile at the prospect of her own wedding. She had always imagined marrying her twin brother Aelor—since Matarys' rejection it had been clear, even if a proper engagement hadn't been announced—but the idea of having children with him felt repelling.

Incest wasn't a practice so common in her House anymore: king Aegon IV had married his sister-queen Naerys, lord Bloodraven's relationship with Shiera Seastar was well known at court, yet her grandfather the king and his sons had all married women that had not a single drop of Targaryen blood. Her cousins had followed in the same path, both finding matches outside the walls of the Red Keep.

"The dragons lack sisters." some sneered at court. The Targaryens had married their own siblings for centuries now.

But now everyone had made their own match. Everyone but *her.*

Yet again, her father had also been promised to her mother and, despite their differences, they were happy. They had grown to love each other, that was what her mother always said. And she knew and loved her brother already, even if he had changed over the years and had stopped pranking her every chance he had: she just had to love him in that other sense as well.

They were twins, had shared the same womb and had never known a world without the other. Her brother was a fine warrior, a good man: the picture of chivalry. But at every tournament he crowned some other lady as queen of love and beauty, not because he didn't love her, but because she was his *sister.*

Children were another matter entirely. Kiera had told her that, in order to produce heirs, one ought to take off their clothes. But they hadn't bathed together since they were ten, she dreaded the idea of having him see her naked again. Her body had changed and surely his had done the same. He had grown so strong over the years.

The first time she had gone to Dragonstone, after Valarr and Kiera's wedding, Aelor had gone with her: she was the new bride's lady in-waiting and he trained at Dragonstone with Matarys.

But then, months after, something had happened between her cousin and her brother, something that had made Aelor so furious that he had left Dragonstone in a day, taking the first ship back to King's Landing in the dead of night. Matarys had followed him down to the shore and then thrown himself into the sea, probably planning to swim to King's Landing and bring him back himself. The fishermen had whispered that the young prince had been touched by Targaryen madness and Valarr had shouted against his brother so loud that, Aelora could swear upon it, people from the North could hear him.

Aelora instead had been selected to go back to fetch her brother and make him see reason.

She still remembered Matarys' face, full of pleading hope, as he begged her to do something—*anything*—to bring him back.

But Aelor, despite his appearance that mirrored their Arryn mother, had the stubbornness of the Targaryens. He declared he would go back on one condition: Matarys wouldn't live there anymore. But Dragonstone was his brother's seat, therefore Matarys' as well, until his marriage at least. He couldn't leave and Aelor couldn't come back.

When her ship had docked back on the island, Matarys had been there waiting. But he hadn't even bother to say hello, when he noticed that her twin wasn't with her. He had just turned and ridden back to the castle.

"Not yet, for me at least." she murmured, turning to her cousin. That's what her mother had told her: *not yet.* "Tell me about your betrothed, how is she?" she proposed to him instead.

Matarys shrugged. "I haven't met her."

"Well, that's a pity." Aelora blinked at his disinterest. "Maybe we could invite her to the feast that the King will surely organise in Vaelor's honour. You two could get to know each other better." she proposed, but Matarys didn't look a bit delighted at the prospect. "I guess." he murmured, before excusing himself and saying he wanted to congratulate the couple.



That night she walked to Baelor's solar, as it was her routine. The stairs were illuminated by the lighting that shone outside the window: a storm was preparing to rage down upon them all night long. Aelora hoped it wouldn't last long: Kiera had summoned her and some other trusted friends to her rooms a hour before and spent some time with them, conversing while feeding her new boy.

"We'll go back to King's Landing soon." she had said. "I know you miss your family." she had added more quietly towards her.

Aelora had pointed out the storm incoming but Kiera was sure they would be able to travel soon.

Aelora had smiled gratefully but said nothing, looking down at a sleeping Vaelor. Matarys' words rang in her ears, even though her mother had said she was too young for marriage, at just six and ten. She felt as if something were about to happen, as soon as she went back to the capital.

Now, back in her uncle's chamber, she almost laughed at the sensation she had felt: Aelora had never been anything special, not like her cousin Daeron and his dragon dreams.

She found herself thinking about her cousin with sadness in her heart: people called him a drunken fool, but she had the fondest memories of him and their childhood together, before the nightmares stole him away.

"Is something bothering you?" the Heir to the Throne's voice brought her back to reality.

She swallowed, knowing she couldn't lie to him: he had always been perceptive and knew her well.

And he was smart, smarter than her.

She still remembered the first time she had decided to be like her uncle Baelor. Aelora had been four.

She was sitting alone on the stairs, watching her brother play with her cousins: she had been the only girl at the time, she didn't have much company. She had come into this world with a sibling, that was true, but Aelor was a boy as well, that preferred to spar with Aerion than play with her, whenever he had the chance to.

And so the dragon princess was all alone, sitting on the Red Keep's steps, while her septa kept a eye on her, until a tall figure approached her.

Mismatched eyes, brown hair, broad shoulders and fine features: uncle Baelor had noticed that she was sad, repeating her prayers until they lulled her to tears of boredom.

They had talked for a bit: she had told him she preferred other books over the Seven Pointed Star. Tales were her true love, even if her septa barely read them to her.

He had smiled kindly and promised her a new book full of stories to discover.

And he had. Baelor always maintained his word. Aelora had been fond of him since then.

Her father was good at making her laugh and the best option when she wanted cuddles, but couldn't really supply compelling tales. Her mother was wise and could navigate the ways of the court like few others, yet she only knew the same old tales from the Vale, that Aelora had listened to a dozen times before. This left her uncle, who was capable of reading languages that she, as a little girl, had never heard before: every night he would tell her about dragons, emperors of the East or adventurous pirates that crossed the sea.

Once she had grown, he had started teaching her how to read and speak those languages, so that she could read the myths for herself.

He had acted like a father toward her, in many ways where both her parents had failed, and she had grown into the most cultured woman at court: fluent in languages and aware of different cultures, an expert about history and with a mind for both political intrigues and strategic plans.

Her uncle had made her join Kiera's household, since she had married Valarr, in order to continue their training. The need to move to Dragonstone and live with Baelor's family had not been to hard a sacrifice for her: she wasn't fond of the Red Keep and the distance from her parents was actually refreshing.

But then the King had made Baelor his Hand and her uncle had moved back to the capital, while Aelora had remained on the island. Jena had risen as the undisputed lady in the castle, Valarr was always away to train or tend to the fishermen's requests, Kiera was moody because of her pregnancy and Matarys was...Matarys.

Now he was back, to be present for his grandchild's birth, and Aelora could finally let out a sigh of relief: Baelor was probably her favourite person in the whole family.

"So?" his voice broke through her thoughts again.

"Just the political matters at hand." she mumbled, keeping her gaze down. He could always read the lie in her eyes.

"We'll get it around." Baelor played by her game, but she knew that he could tell something else was bothering her. Yet she appreciated him for not pushing her. "Your notes will be helpful."

She was a bit vain, to be honest, but who wouldn't it be when Baelor complimented them? He was perfect at everything he did, so to receive recognition from him was a sign of respect. He had always believed in her capabilities.

He had wrote to her—he wrote to her so often—asking to check something in the library for her. He could have asked a Maester, but no one knew their way around Dragonstone's site of immense knowledge like her: she used to spend so many nights there, reading by candlelight.

"I only wish to help." she replied.

That had always been her purpose: she had trotted behind her uncle since she was a child, learning from him, sharing his knowledge as well as his responsibility. Baelor had always valued her and had never made her feel less for her inexperience or her sex.

"You're the smartest person I know." he had told her more than once, making her heart burst with pride.

"You have." he confirmed now, taking her hand. "I heard you were of great help to Kiera as well today."

"I think Valarr did a better job than me."

"Well, he doesn't beat you at this." he raised her notes to make a point. "There no one can."

Aelora smiled, but it was a sad one. Because Valarr was a man and would have every possibility in the world, while Aelora would be secluded to the birthing bed soon, if her mother did actually deem her old enough.

She knew that girls younger than her had already been bedded. Didn't aunt Dyanna have a child at her exact same age? And the births had killed her in the end.

"What's bothering you, child?" Baelor always called her that, probably because he always saw that little bored girl sitting on the steps, not the woman she had grown to be.

Aelora actually preferred it: she would have remained that little child forever if she had known her future.

Daeron dreamed about it, why couldn't he have told her?

She sighed, raising her gaze and meeting his eyes, one violet and the other brown, one for each parent. He was the perfect synthesis of both of them, probably the greatest monarchs that the Seven Kingdoms had ever had since the days of the Old King Jaehaerys and his Good Queen Alysanne.

Baelor was a bookish person like Daeron, but had a fierce courage like Myriah.

They called him the Hammer, after Redgrass Field.

He took her hand, as gently as that day in the gardens, when she had been excluded from the games. He had asked her then if she wished to wield a sword, but she had shaken her head. She knew now that defending the realm was more than sword fighting.

"Just the idea of returning to court, face my mother's expectations again."

She knew that Lady Alys wished to see her married. Sometimes she felt as if she—and her prospects—represented a burden much more than a daughter. She loved her, that much was undisputed, but she wasn't sure if she *understood* her. After all, she didn't value her knowledge at all.

She wasn't like Baelor, who had fed her curiosity and accepted her in his arms. He had been in favour of making her his daughter in-law formally, by giving her to one of his sons.

But his wife had spoken against it. And he had relented. That was their agreement, after all: Baelor governed the realm, Jena ruled the family.

While he made sure lords remained loyal to the Targaryens, the Princess of Dragonstone asserted their daughters features and fortunes, deciding if they'd make fine wives and mothers.

Aelora still remembered the bride show that her aunt had put up to select Valarr's wife. The King had proposed a ball, like the one organised for his grand uncle, Aegon III, after his first wife's death: it would have been less formal and more personal; her cousin would have been able to talk to the noble ladies selected, see which one of them got along well with him.

But only foreign ladies had been summoned to court and Princess Jena had thought it *improper* to have them dance.

People from the Free Cities danced with less formality and much more liberty, being true to their name and costumes. Aelora had asserted that much at Valarr and Kiera's wedding: the bride's relatives had stunned the whole Westeros reunited to celebrate and the court had talked about their peculiar behaviour for days.

Jena had not joined the dance floor, not even by her own child's request, while her husband had dance with Kiera at least twice.

"You're a grown woman now," Baelor didn't indulge in hypocrisy to reassure her; Aelora enjoyed his truthfulness, it was a rare quality to find at court. "It is time for you to find your own match."

Aelora sighed. "And what if I don't like the match made for me?"

"Aelor would permit you to remain at court, even to become my own Hand one day." Baelor replied. "Isn't that what you want?"

Aelora looked away, knowing full well he was right. Women were not permitted to join the Small Council, yet many men's appointments had been a mere formality, while their wives actually took on the job. The former Princess Elaena was an example of this: her husband Ronnel had been made Master of Coin, yet she was the one behind the calculations.

Aelor had no interest nor capacity to be the Hand, but he would prove no obstacle to her taking up the position.

If she married another Lord, she would have to transfer to his Keep, bear his children and, even if he were to be appointed as Hand of the King, he might have the desire to take up the position for himself, without having the need to listen to her counsel.

Aelor was her safest option.

"Or have you fallen for someone else?"

Aelora raised her gaze on her uncle's face. She could never lie to his face. "No."

Aelor was her *only* option.



They would stay in King's Landing for a full moon, that had been Valarr's decision, claiming that Kiera needed time to recover and couldn't face the same journey twice.

The trip back to the capital would take them two days, since the wind was in their favour; it was already set that Aelora would share her room with the other ladies belonging to Kiera's household.

Now she was on the ship's deck, holding Prince Viserys, who squirmed in her arms and tried to catch the wind.

The future king was a glad child, with surprisingly silver hair that looked almost white. Valarr had laughed when he had seen it, saying that Targaryen genes had won over and, after two black haired kings, Westeros would have another Valyrian sitting on the Throne.

Kiera, gentle soul, had pointed out that Viserys might also decide to dye his hair, like it was Tyroshi costume. No one had replied to that.

"What are you doing?" she chuckled, tickling his belly and making him laugh with delight. The baby looked otherworldly—people at court had already started calling him the God Prince—but his eyes, those came from his grandfather: just like Baelor, Viserys had one violet eye that reminded her of lilacs and a warm brown one that would win anyone over, Aelora already knew that.

"Mama!" the child protested suddenly. His first name day had been only three weeks prior, but the future king was a bright kid and knew already how to get everyone's attention, his parents' especially. Not to mention that he had recently started to stand on his two feet: Aelora could already imagine him running around and making servants go crazy.

"Mama is in bed, we can't disturb her." Aelora tried to explain to him. It was mandatory for her to keep in bed still, although two weeks had passed from the birth and she insisted more and more on standing up and resuming her old life.

She had tried to go to the sea, mere days before their departure. Aelora had tried to hold her back, but no no avail: Kiera loved the beach, she said the perfume there reminded her of Tyrosh. And Aelora, ever loyal, wouldn't leave her alone.

Valarr was there as well, taking care of some business. The moment he saw his pink haired wife, he took her back to the castle immediately, though Aelora was sure they had offered quite the spectacle to the fishermen, what with Kiera shouting against her husband and Valarr carrying her away.

Since then she had been secluded to her rooms.

"Mama!" Viserys requested again, looking at her expectingly.

Aelora sighed and tried to distract him, but the child could be as difficult as his mother when he was set on something.

Thankfully for her, another lady arrived. She turned with a smile, before her heart dropped: Joy Penrose, one of her distant cousins.

"Princess." she bowed when she reached them, her expression polite before breaking into a smile down at the toddler. "How is the little prince faring today?"

"A bit needy." Aelora answered, as the child pressed his little face against her neck. She started rubbing his back soothingly, looking at her companion.

Despite her Targaryen heritage—her mother was the former Princess Elaena and her father, Ronnel Penrose, was the son of Laena Velaryon, the eldest daughter of Lady Baela Targaryen and her lord husband, Alyn Velaryon—Joy did not possess the Valyrian beauty, looking exactly like a Penrose: brown eyes and brown hair, if it weren't for the golden streak down the middle, that reminded Aelora so much of the girl's mother, Princess Elaena.

She had also inherited her mother's intelligence, the two of them had bonded so much over that. But while Aelora had a love for the histories, Lady Joy preferred art and poetry.

They had shared a beautiful friendship, spending afternoons together in the library back in King's Landing and then travelling together to Dragonstone, to be in Kiera's service.

It only had been when Aelora had suggested for her to marry Matarys—a match made regarding her desire to continue to have Joy close—that their friendship had declined. Her cousin hadn't been most gallant towards the lady, who had taken offence and thought that her friend had tried to prank her when she had proposed to such a match.

Joy had left temporarily after that and, when she had returned, it had been announced of her betrothal to the heir of House Celtigar, Ser Ardol, the same one who's sister was now engaged to Matarys.

Now she spent less and less of her days on Dragonstone, visiting Claw Isle very often. Any other lady would have lamented about her disservice, but Kiera didn't.

"I don't care about the others. You're the only one I like." she had told Aelora more than once, with her thick but sweet accent that the dragon princess had learned to love.

Yet each time she looked at Joy, she couldn't help the pang of sadness that rose in her heart. Aelora would lie if she said she didn't actually miss her. If only she had simply said nothing or proposed another match for her: Aelor would have never acted like Matarys.

But Aelor was her *only* chance.

Their relationship was now mid, but not uncivil. They talked about the discomfort of the journey, the favourable weather, Kiera's health—no one knew about the little escapade to the beach and Aelora would

never betray her friend's trust—until they arrived to the only thing that Joy talked about with interest: her betrothed and his family.

Aelora remembered how she had been eager to talk about poetry to her all night long, that's why the change of demeanour had been shocking; Kiera had argued instead that Lady Joy had always been a silly girl, only interested in elevating her position. She had gone so far as claiming that she pretended to care so much for Ser Ardol only to rub it in both hers and Matarys' face.

Her cousin didn't care a bit about it—Aelora even doubted he knew they were soon going to be married to two siblings—yet she didn't know what to think.

"Lord Celtigar, my betrothed's father, is very generous, his mother is an amiable person and so is Lady Daenaera, Ser Ardol's sister." the young woman was saying.

Aelora smirked, hearing the name she wanted to hear. She had asked after the Celtigars with intent, not truly interested about them: she had heard about Ser Ardol and his firm grip on the axe made of Valyrian steel far too many times.

But if hearing about it once again meant learning more about Ser Ardol's sister, then she would endure it.

Her mother had often reprehended her for bluntness, claiming she was far too direct, but Aelora had been a girl then, not yet trained in the fine art of court life like Alys was.

She had learned a great deal since then.

"And what are the plans for Lady Daenaera?" she inquired, deigning ignorance.

"You'll know her shortly, princess. She'll come to court soon enough."

"Is that so?"

"Soon I'll be married." Lord Penrose's daughter explained. "She will take my place in the household and, as it is her family's wish, she may find a suitable match for herself."

"Of course."

She had heard nothing about it and she bet that Kiera didn't know anything as well. The promise of a future appointment must have come from Jena, desiring to have Matarys get closer to his future wife.

Valarr hadn't had the chance to even hear Kiera's voice before she pronounced her vows, yet his brother and his betrothed would live under the same roof.

It came to no surprise: Matarys had always been his mother's golden child, while Valarr had belonged to Baelor and the Throne.

Aelora didn't ask further, she didn't want to appear pushy. Besides, that was what she required to know.

A royal wheelhouse had been sent to recollect them, with several Kingsguards and a man on horseback waving at them. Gold hair, blue eyes, fashionable robe and jewelled fingers: Aelora recognised her twin immediately.

Once the ship docked, after having handed little Viserys to his wet nurse, she didn't wait a moment longer to run into his arms.

The dragon twins, they were called, so different and yet so similar. They had come together into this world, had known each other for nine months before that, sharing their mother's womb. Being away from him always felt painful.

"I missed you." she sighed, holding him even tighter.

"You're killing me, Aelora." he falsely choked, making her chuckle and pull back with a "sorry."

Her brother was so handsome, with his Arryn features and his body of a warrior. She had seen him fight at Dragonstone, many ladies used to spend their afternoons by the window just to steal a glimpse of him.

He looked her in the eyes now, as if asserting with his own that she was alright, before smiling at her. "How was the journey?"

"Pleasant." she answered quickly, desiring to talk about other matters than such frivolous things as voyages. "How are you? How are Mother and Father?"

"Fine, we're all fine." he chuckled again at her worries. He caressed her temples, aware of her frequent headaches caused by hours spent reading. "They're eager to embrace you again and..."

But he stopped abruptly, looking at something behind her. She knotted her eyebrows in confusion and turned, surprised to find Matarys not far behind, looking at the two of them. Once he noticed that he had been caught staring, he didn't look away but, instead, tilted his head, as a greeting gesture toward Aelor.

But her brother didn't say hello back, rather he kept throwing daggers with his eyes at their cousin.

It strangely reminded her of herself and Joy, even though their rift wasn't as big as this one.

"Aelor..." she began, but he interrupted her: "Actually, Mother and Father sent me to fetch you. They want to see you immediately."

She didn't have the time to protest, before he grabbed her hand and brought her back to her horse, helping her atop it.

Aelora knew it was a lie, but didn't question it.



"My sweet girl!" Prince Rhaegel exclaimed for the seventh or eighth time, embracing her tightly in his arms and kissing her cheek, as if she were still a little girl. Her father was always childish in his acting, but his love was ever truthful: he had a feeble mind, that much was true, but he had the gentlest heart.

"Rhaegel, I think that's enough." Lady Alys Arryn smiled indulgently at the scene.

"Not at all." her husband replied. "How I missed you." he added against his daughter's hair.

"I missed you as well." Aelora smiled at her father, pulling back to look at his violet eyes, so similar to her own.

"The capital was so boring without you, my dear." The man winked at her, stealing her a chuckle: they both shared a passion for festivities and dance.

Her father kept rambling for a while longer, Aelora only pretending to listen, before her mother interrupted: "I trust the travel was pleasant?"

"Yes, the wind was in our favour."

"It's because I prayed for it." her father intervened, showing his usual smile, the most beautiful one that could be seen at court. "I was eager to hug my girl."

Aelora knew that her father rarely prayed and, if he ever did, it wasn't to honour the Andal religion.

He knew only one god: fun.

Lady Alys paid him no heed, sitting down on an armchair. "How's the new prince? And the parents?"

"Little Vaelor is a delight, Viserys already loves him. And the parents are, of course, overjoyed." Aelora answered, her gaze moving to her brother: he hadn't said a word during their ride to the Red Keep, nor had he talked once they had reached their parents' chambers.

She and their mother continued with their small talk, which he didn't seem to listen to, until a name brought him back to reality.

"And Prince Matarys?"

"What about him?" Aelor's voice startled both his sister and his mother.

"Just wondering how he took the news that his position has been pushed further down the line." Alys replied, but Aelora could notice his hard, frustrated look.

"With absolute grace." she answered her mother. "He loves both his nephews very much."

Aelor stood up abruptly, babbling some excuse and walking out. If such a behaviour was judged strange by their parents, Aelora didn't notice it.

But once he was out of the room, they *did* talk about it, only not in the way she expected.

"Your uncle Maekar is arriving this afternoon." her mother began, standing up from her seat.

"I know, mother." Of all the invitations she had wrote and sent on Baelor's behalf for the festivities organised in Vaelor's honour, the one that reached Summerhall wasn't among them. Her uncle had written that personally, claiming he knew which words to use to convince "that grumpy dragon"—as he had called his younger brother—to come to the celebrations. It seemed it had worked in the end.

"I intend to propose a betrothal between Aelor and his daughter Daella."

That caught her off guard.

Aelora turned around, to have a real look at her mother: hair styled perfectly, dress impeccable, her back straightened. Nothing was out of place, but after all when had her mother ever appeared untidy?

Yet, even though she was the most serious woman Aelora knew, she had just said the thing that she was least expecting from her.

A joke. It must be a joke.

Aelora stood up, speechless. "What?"

Alys blinked at her, always composed. "Does this surprise you?"

She let out a chuckle, but it turned out as a huff of shock and annoyance. "Of course it does. You never mentioned that."

"I'm mentioning it now."

"Well, you could have said it in one of your letters!"

"It was a rather delicate matter, better discuss it in person. Your uncle doesn't know anything about this as well, he will hear from me later." her mother explained calmly, while Aelora turned to her father: "Did you know about this?"

Rhaegel blinked, as if just now realising where he was. "About what?"

"About Aelor marrying Daella! Besides," Aelora looked at her mother again. "isn't she too young for marriage?"

"That's why I only talked about an engagement." Alys pointed out, while Rhaegel smiled as if he was seeing his wife for the first time: "You're such an intelligent woman, my dear."

Aelora blinked again at her father's words. "So you agree with her?"

"Always," he replied. "Your mother always knows best. Besides, Maekar is my little brother, I would wish for no one but his daughter to marry my boy."

"So you would prefer her to me?" The words left her mouth before she could control herself.

Now she had really screwed over.

Didn't her uncle always tell her to not let her emotions get the better of her?

What kind of Hand of the King would she make?

She wondered now if she even had a possibility.

Not without Aelor, surely.

Alys' eyes widened, while Rhaegel made an amused sound. "So *this* was what it was about."

"No! What do you mean? You're getting the wrong idea!" Aelora protested.

Alys' eyes widened in shock and disgust—she knew that Targaryens married brothers and sisters, of course she did, but the practice had fallen in disuse—while Rhaegel chuckled again.

Then his giggles stopped abruptly and he stood up, the most grave expression on his face. He was known for his sudden changes of mood.

"My dear," her father began, taking her hand. "you want Aelor for yourself?"

"No!" Aelora's eyes widened just at the idea.

"I'm a Targaryen like you, sweet girl, I understand this kind of things. If you wish to marry your brother..."

"No!" She pulled her hand away and shook her head repeatedly. "As I said, you're getting the wrong idea."

"Then what is it?" Alys asked, a bit in disbelief.

To make her lady mother upset was a marvel in itself. She was rarely unsettled.

Aelora took a deep breath, before continuing. Her mother was right, she was acting like a child.

"I just...I believed that Aelor and I would be married one day, that is all." she murmured, taking a step back. "By that, I don't mean that I have any particular interest in him. He's my brother," she shrugged, before adding: "*not* in the Targaryen way."

Alys still looked confused and rather uncomfortable, but Rhaegel looked at her, his eyes shining with understanding. Maybe what they said was true: only a dragon could really understand another one.

"By the way, I sincerely hope you talked to Aelor about this." she clarified, but her mother's smirk made her suspicious. "Did you?"

"If I have to be truly honest—and not even you, Rhaegel dear, know this—" the former Arryn took her husband's hand. "Aelor proposed such a match to me."

Aelora sank into an armchair, a huff of surprise. She had really been away from King's Landing for too long.



Aelora had hidden away in the library afterwards. And she would have remained there all night long, if it weren't for the dinner that her grandmother had organised.

A book would always keep her company, did not matter where she was or what she was going through. She had learned to read at the age of four, studying more languages throughout her years and reading an incredible amount of books, losing herself in each world they described. And during times like this she felt as if they were her only true friends.

She didn't love Aelor—at least not romantically. But he was her brother, her twin. They had come into the world together, shared the womb even before that. People could testify they would never be seen around without the other and, even when they were apart, Aelora still felt that sense of belonging: it didn't matter where she was, her other half was always in her heart.

What had hurt about the news was the fact that it had come from *him*, Aelor had come up with the idea himself, and he hadn't talked to her about it. Such an important decision in his life and he hadn't even thought about consulting her. Maybe it was just her being silly, but she couldn't shake the feeling of being left behind.

And it wasn't only that. Maybe her mother hadn't understood it, but his father had certainly got it: only a dragon gets another one.

Prince Rhaegel was said to have been touched by Targaryen madness.

What's the saying? Every time a Targaryen is born, the gods flip a coin: one side greatness, the other madness. And her father's had landed on the latter, or so they said. Aelora loved him despite everything, she valued his infectious laugh and sweet demeanour over his odd behaviours. But she *understood* him, as he did with her.

His brother Baelor was already the picture of the perfect king: a fine politician and an incredible warrior. The latter quality was something that he shared with the youngest of the four sons of King Daeron II: her uncle Maekar. And the second of them, Aerys, despite his shy demeanour, was the greatest scholar that lived in Westeros at the time. Aelora could see why her father felt excluded from their brotherhood: the third child with his unstable mind.

That wasn't her case, clearly, and yet she felt out of place, at court and at Dragonstone both.

Every single lady of Kiera's original household had now married and gone away, Lady Joy being the last of them, making Aelora feel like a spinster. Even though she was young—she had been the youngest when she had been admitted into the household two years prior—she felt as if time was running out for her: Valarr and Kiera already rejoicing for their second son, Matarys soon marrying Daenaera Celtigar, her brother Aelor engaged to her cousin Daella.

Her brother had always been her safe option, her sure future. She could remain at court, continue to work with Baelor, pretend as if she wasn't a lady and use her knowledge to some fruition. She could become *Hand of the King.* But now even that seemed to crumble. And Aelora, despite her fierce nature, was scared of falling.

"Princess!" a woman's voice startled her, making her snap back to reality. The book laid open on her lap and she was staring out the window, but after a quick blink her head turned, finding a breathless maid looking at her.

"Yes? Is there a problem?"

"The dinner, Princess."



Aelora knew only 'fuck' as a curse word: her brother Aelor and Matarys knew many more and had proposed to teach her some, back on Dragonstone, but Princess Jena had reprehended them from doing so and she had always refused. Despite knowing many more words and languages than they did, her knowledge paled in comparison to theirs on that front.

Now, as she ran through the Red Keep's corridors with her long dress on, she wished she knew more than just 'fuck'.

Her mother would surely reprehend her (and she'd be correct), while her father would laugh about it. She could already imagine the look on the rest of her relatives' faces and her brother...

Truth be told, she hardly knew her brother anymore.

But she had little time to think about such stuff, since she was running late. And Aelora was never late.

She was just about to reach the door, when she slipped and held onto a statue at the entrance for her dear life. She faintly remembered her grandmother saying once that it had been a wedding gift from some lord for her marriage. Unfortunately for her, the statue—that seemed to be of great value and, she remembered as she crumbled, came from the far land of Asshai—landed on the floor, with her upon it, and shattered into pieces.

"Fuck!" she yelled this time, unbothered by who may hear her, but she didn't have time to hide her mishap. So she stood up, straightened her skirt, put on the falsest of smiles and opened the door.

Chapter End Notes

first chapter!! we finally get aelora's pov. i love writing her and i enjoyed giving her a personality—since we know so little about her—that makes aerys' choice regarding his heir actually understandable.

we also finally meet kiera and valarr, they'll have huge roles in this story. since it's canon divergent, their sons are surviving here and I named viserys and vaelor (+ i might have made aelora have a small crush for her cousin's wife as well).

expect to see more about baelor and aelora's bond (and yes, i gave him and valarr the mismatched eyes from the show), as well as for jena (who seems unlikable now, but remember character's pov is always biased).

as for the selection of kiera as valarr's wife, i was actually inspired by the bride-show, a custom of byzantine emperors and russian tsars to choose a wife from among the most beautiful maidens of the country (+ the god prince might be a reference to the god emperor from dune, i realised it only after i wrote it).

matarys and aelor's situation seems confusing for now, but don't worry, it'll be addressed in other chapters as well (i'm just getting started).

as for both matarys and joy penrose's betrothals to the celtigars, the idea is not mine, but instead comes from the detailed genealogical tree of @Jaehaerys_Bluefyre on ao3 (go read their story, Half of a Soul, on aelora and maekar, it's one of my favourites and inspired me to write this one).

if you enjoyed it, leave a kudos and comment, i always like to reply and interact.

this story can also be found on ao3 (my username is ale_28), on wattpad and on tumblr (my username is lomlherondale).

my other socials: lomlherondale on tiktok, twitter, reddit and spotify.

Chapter 3: The Lady in Lilac

Chapter Notes

TW: mention of prostitution and suicidal thoughts

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He had dreamed of her, he dreamt of her every night: that lilac lady, comforting him from his sorrows.

He had dreamt about her for days now. Even on the street to King's Landing, he had dreamt of her.

And now she was here, before his eyes.

It was her, Daeron was sure.

She had silver hair, the most beautiful colour of silver hair. It wasn't pure blonde like her brother, or silver-white like his grandfather, his uncle or even his own father. No, hers was like a ray of sunshine just when it peeks through the curtain, meaning that Daeron has survived another night of doom.

Daeron liked the sun, it reminded him of his afternoons spent in Summerhall, playing with his mother.

He had almost thought he would forget her, with her warm arms and sweet perfume, but it all came back again as he looked into Aelora's gaze: two amethyst eyes to accompany the rays of sunshine.

She bowed gracefully, exchanging a complicit look with uncle Baelor, before sitting *right before Daeron.*

"Now that we're all gathered..." his namesake began, standing up with a cup in his hand, but Daeron couldn't tear his eyes from her.

He had seen her in his dreams. She was sweet, her hands used to caress him, like Mother's did.

And now here she was, before his eyes. With a lilac dress and silver-gold hair, with his mother's eyes and his house's scent.

He saw the king sitting down from the corner of his eye: he had probably ended his speech, which he hadn't paid attention to, but Daeron could bet it was about family, love and unity, like all of them. Daeron had stopped listening aged eight.

But she was listening, of course she was.

She didn't know that Daeron dreamed about her every night and was wondering now if her hands were really that soft.

His father's voice brought him back to reality: "Daeron will enter the lists."

Daeron's eyes blinked twice, enough to make him stop stare at her and look around confused. "What?"

"The tourney." Egg whispered at his side, knowing that Daeron used to disappear from conversations so often, his mind drifting away.

It was mostly hollow places, but now it had been a sweet one, filled with ladies dressed in lilac who comforted him.

But his father had crushed his happy memory, for once. Of course, he would offer him: the worst of all his kids with a sword. But he was the eldest and needed to do his duty, so Maekar said.

"As will I, father." Aerion spoke up from the other side of the table.

Aerion the Kind, Daeron thought with a humourless chuckle, who wanted to ingratiate himself with their father every chance he had. And his father was quick to nod proudly.

He hadn't even started eating yet and he already wanted to puke. Let him go back to his lady and her warm hands.

Valarr, of course, would attend—it was a tourney held in honour of his sons after all—as his red haired brother. But as soon as Matarys said his name, a surprising thing happened: Aelor said his own as well.

"I will enter the lists." he announced, shocking everyone, his mother especially.

Daeron remembered him training with Aerion when they came to visit: that was their definition of *fun.*

"You're too young." Alys Arryn argued.

"I'm a knight."

"You're barely one."

At that statement, her son gave her a look of admonishment. He may not have the same violet eyes as his sister, but he surely shared the Targaryens' personality.

Aelor turned to stare at his mother, almost daring her to show her opposition to his decision again.

The room felt suddenly tense, a game of blue glances over the table keeping everyone on the edge of their seats.

Daeron remembered Alys Arryn's decisive nature, even if he had met her less and less during the last few years.

"He is," Matarys broke the sudden silence that had settled above the table. "I knighted him myself." he murmured.

Aelor looked surprised at their cousin, before immediately turning his back and engaging in a conversation with Daella. The dinner resumed as if nothing had happened.

"You will behave." his father had ordered him, earlier that afternoon, when he had summoned him to his rooms.

The Red Keep was larger than Summerhall, yet their rooms were smaller than the ones they had at home. Another slight, in his father's eyes: he was only the fourth son, he didn't have lavish rooms like his brothers.

Daeron had arrived there, expecting to find his other siblings as well and receive the usual lecture, but the room had been empty, if it weren't for him and his father. His blood had ran cold.

"You won't drink like a pirate and mention whores and brothels." Maekar's voice still echoed in his ears.

Daeron had grown up tall, taller than his father, yet he still felt as if that broad warrior towered over him.

"And you will not mention your *condition.*"

Meaning: you won't mention your dreams.

Daeron couldn't shake the feeling that his father had proposed his name for the tourney as a way to punish him, to embarrass him in front of the entire realm. If he didn't wish to suffer further shame, always feeling inferior to his brothers, why had he chosen him?

He claimed he needed discipline, but that wasn't true.

He had dreamt about him, but never dared to say anything: his father was at a pyre, so similar to Dyanna's one, yet it was different.

He was different. There was guilt in his eyes, one so profound that Daeron had never seen anything of the sort in that violet gaze, the same one that now stared at him from across the table.

He offered him a nod, but his father answered only with his stern expression and turned to Baelor, continuing their conversation.

His uncle.

The only one who brought a smile to his father's face. Daeron was jealous of it sometimes. Not because he didn't have brothers who could make him happy—Aemon and Egg always made it their mission to ease his demons and his fears—but because he knew he would never be able to make his father proud. To make his father *smile* like that.

With no worries and no restraints.

Daeron wouldn't even think about challenging the heir to the throne—Baelor was perfect in everything—yet he couldn't let that slide.

Maekar rarely smiled at his children: he did sometimes to Aerion, when he proved himself in a tourney; or to Aemon and his perfect Valyrian accent; to Daella when she looked like their mother; or even to Egg and Rhae, the youngest of them all, when they behaved, even allowing them a bit of his affection.

But not to Daeron. He didn't recall the last time his father had smiled at him—even worse, the last time he had been proud of him.

Not that his mother would be so pleased with him, if she were alive. Daeron spent his nights whoring and his days drunk, when he wasn't plagued by his dreams.

Not even there would she come to visit. Maybe it was a relief, he could interpret it as a sign that she was at peace. After all, whenever he dreamt about someone, it meant they wouldn't live a peaceful life.

Daeron looked at his sister Daella, with dark hair and violet eyes so similar to their mother, and he was damn sure she didn't look like that.

She wasn't in Aerion's cruelty—she had always been gentle—or in Egg's innocence—she had been an astute woman, that was probably what had drawn his father in. She wasn't capricious like Rhae, but not even Aemon's sweet disposition could be associated with her.

Daeron sometimes wondered if he wasn't the one most haunted by her, instead of his father.

Maekar was damned to see her in his children's faces, while he was damned by the knowledge of never seeing her again.

He had been old—old enough to remember her screams of agony—yet he couldn't have saved her.

Not only her.

He looked around the table, his eyes moving on each person sitting there.

He had mourned them all already.

"Cousin?" a voice brought him back to reality and Daeron was met with deep amethyst eyes again. He believed he saw his mother for a second, but then silver-gold hair clashed against his vision.

He blinked, realising he hadn't listened to a single word. "Mhm?"

"What do you think?" his sister Daella asked, as if Daeron had been paying attention to the conversation. She was trying to act older than her years, she was wearing one of their mother's dresses.

"About what?"

"The tournament." Aelor filled in. "Your father said you'll enter the lists."

As if I want to.

But he didn't say it.

Aelora smiled at him, her eyes sparkling with something that he couldn't quite catch. "Are you a capable knight?"

Not at all.

"Of course."

"You'll need the favour of a lady." Daella pointed out, rather cocky.

"I can have yours, dear sister." Daeron smirked, but Aelor intervened.

"Actually," he began uncertain. "I wanted to ask for Daella's favour."

Daeron's eyes widened in surprise, turning from his sister to the guy next to her.

What?

Daeron sighed, trying to keep his stupid brotherly jealousy at bay. Aelor would carve him like a cake, if he challenged him to a duel. "I guess I'll ask for Kiera's favour then."

"She'll give it to Valarr."

Daeron sighed, closing his eyes and throwing his head back in a gesture of mock exasperation. "Do I really have to ask for Aerion's favour then?"

Egg and Rhae chuckled at his other side, a sound so beautiful that he opened one eye and smirked at them.

Aerion, on the other side of the table, tried desperately to be included in the conversation between his father and Baelor, but neither was actually paying him mind.

He always did that, trying to catch Maekar's attention and act accordingly in his presence.

Daeron sometimes thought that Aerion was their father's favourite son. He was striving for greatness, in his own cruel way, while Egg didn't shine in anything in particular, Aemon was sent away to serve other people someday and Daeron himself spent his days crying for 'nonsense', or so he called his son's dreams.

Daeron thought about what Aerion had done to Egg, *his* little Egg. He had beaten him bloody at the news. Maekar had separated them himself, but he hadn't looked proud.

For the first and last time in his life, Daeron had shown a spark of Targaryen temper and his father had punished him for it.

And there was another long series of mishaps that had long pointed to Aerion's cruelty: when he had killed the kittens, when he had burned Aemon's books, when he had pulled Daella by the hair or pinched Rhae's arms.

"She squints like a pig." he had laughed, before adding with rage: "Mother is dead so that stupid Rhae could live."

Their father always justified him. "He's grieving for his mother." he would say.

Aerion had been Dyanna's shadow, once, many and many years ago. She had been the only one who could ease his cruelty. He couldn't actually even remember Aerion being cruel, when their mother lived.

"My little dragon." she would call him.

Daeron had been their father's favourite at the time and didn't have others to compete for his attention: Aerion was always attached to their mother's gown and the world hadn't yet known Daella's sweetness, Aemon's affection, Egg's love or Rhae's funny temper. He loved all his siblings fiercely, he would give his life for them, yet he would also give everything away to relive just a day in the past.

Their mother snuggled in bed, Aerion sleeping in her arms, Maekar throwing Daeron high in the sky, laughing along with him. He couldn't recall the last time he or his father had laughed.

"My little prince." Maekar used to call him like that.

Then the dreams had started. And his father had been disappointed: they had told him his firstborn had been touched by the Targaryen madness.

Not even his mother understood. She loved him still, of course, but her family was known for having great warriors and great beauties, not people with prophetic dreams.

And Aerion had become their father's favourite, his bright hope. He had grown arrogant in the light of Maekar's favouritism, believing he could do whatever he pleased.

"My uncle, Aemon the Dragonknight..." the king was saying, surely telling something about his younger days as heir to the throne.

Aemon the Dragonknight, king Aegon IV's younger brother: a just man, destined to live in his brother's shadow, even in love. And then the warrior had perished and the king had kept living and doing wrong.

Daeron thought about his namesake, he couldn't have foreseen his brother betraying him and rebelling against his rule. Yet it had happened. Another brother who betrays the other.

He had seen it: his father and Baelor, Maekar clutching his brother's corpse. And the voices, those followed him everywhere: *he had meant to kill his brother.*

He wouldn't. Even Daeron, who had known Maekar's harsh treatment more than others, knew that was beyond him.

"Daeron," a voice interrupted his train of thoughts. Dark hair, like his mother, but warm brown eyes. Queen Myriah was smiling softly at her grandson. "I couldn't help but eavesdrop. You could ride with my favour, if you'd like." she proposed. "After all, the king is not entering the lists." she added with a chuckle.

Daeron looked at her for a long moment, trying to find in him the strength to smile. Riding and failing miserably would already be a shame, but doing it with the queen's favour would represent eternal scorn. And his father's rage and disappointment.

"Well..." he began.

"It's a beautiful idea!" Aelora exclaimed, while his sister Daella agreed with them.

He looked at the queen. Sometimes he could still see those brown eyes filled with tears. Past and future.

"You must be strong." she had said while his mother's corpse burned. Daeron had failed to do so.

His father had hugged Aemon and Daella, dried Aerion's tears, picked up Egg and cradled Rhae. Where was he for Daeron?

The cups had eased his pain from that day on.

He nearly choked at the idea, shaking his head.

"Why not? It would be a nice gesture." Aelora took his hand from across the table and then...

Nothing.

Black.

Falling.

Void.

And then the screams began.

Another pyre, a young silver-haired woman crumbling on her feet.

And then the screams of terror. "Please, don't!" she was shouting, crying, sobbing. "I beg you! Stop!"

Men laughing and a face: *Aelora.*

He gasped, pulling his chair back and standing up. It fell on the ground, but Daeron scarcely cared. He was actually *choking* now.

Voices shouted around him, but he didn't recognise any of them. His father wasn't among them.

Then a small, slender hand on his shoulder. "It's alright." the voice was saying, but not to him. "Daeron meant no arm." she was saying, that same voice that had been screaming. Was it blood on his hands or wine? He couldn't *see.*

It wasn't him.

He would *never*...

"Let's go get fresh air." the voice added more softly, but despite blinking rapidly, Daeron couldn't look at her.

Then the sound of a door opening, two hands on his chest and his back hitting the wall.

"Daeron!"

He felt as if he was drowning and, finally, he reached the surface. He gasped and choked on his own breath, his hands searching for something—*someone*—to grab and come back to the real world.

Two hands found his own, as his breathing slowly calmed down and his eyes began to see the world once again, leaving the wretched images behind.

"You're alright." The voice was whispering, hands squeezing his, as silver-gold hair filled his sight. Beautiful amethyst eyes, reassuring smile, soothing tone, lavender scent: *Aelora.*

She looked like a *dream.* A beautiful, sweet and haunting woman.

"There you are." she whispered, half a smile on her face, before taking a step back. His hands fell at his side, empty now.

"What...what happened?" he murmured, knowing exactly what had just occurred. Dragon dreams, they called it. He preferred curse.

"Nothing, I'm alright, don't worry." She took a step forward. Daeron would have shrunken further, if the wall hadn't prevented him from doing so.

"Let's go take some fresh air." she offered him her hand, but he didn't take it: he barely trusted his legs now.

But she didn't stop. No, she was a stubborn Targaryen through and through, Daeron should have known from the start. She got even closer and wrapped her hand around his arm, pulling him forward. And he was too weak to protest or resist.

"You have been missing from the capital for so long, you probably don't even remember the gardens." she was saying as they walked down the corridors.

Daeron followed without talking, he didn't have the strength to do much after a vision: he didn't recognise a single place, even though most of his nightmares took place in the halls of the Red Keep. He hated the castle.

Then the evening breeze hit his face and he hated everything even more.

"Should we take a stroll around?" Aelora proposed to him, but he finally found his voice once again: "No."

"Let's sit then." she led him to a bench and he couldn't refuse that.

Once he finally sat down, he let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. The gardens were beautiful, she was beautiful and he hated everything.

All the tension left his shoulders and he started trembling, his body betraying him.

"Did I hurt someone?"

"Daeron..."

"The truth." he demanded, without finding the courage to turn to look at her.

"You grabbed a knife, but Aelor was quick enough."

He exhaled once again and blinked, trying to keep the tears at bay. His eyes roamed over the dimly lit gardens before him, noticing flowers and plants.

He hated himself mostly. Why did he have to ruin the night like that? Why couldn't he be normal? Why had the gods punished him so?

"Did you have a dragon dream?" she asked, without circling the subject and going straight to the point. He appreciated that, despite everything.

He only nodded at her question, making a sound of displeasure. "I don't want to talk about it."

She nodded next to him, though Daeron couldn't bring himself to look at her. She stood up suddenly, leaving his side.

"Do you see this?" she began, entering his visual range. She was pointing to something in the bushes before them, but Daeron couldn't tell what.

"This flower." she clarified when noticing his confusion. She took a step forward and pulled the plant away from the earth, crimson petals shining in her hands under the moonlight.

"What about it?" he asked, while she walked back and sat next to him, a little smile on her face.

"This can help you sleep." she murmured, offering the flower to him.

He was hesitant about taking it, but Aelora didn't leave him much of a choice. She put it on his lap and rose to her feet once again, moving to the bushes with a certain knowledge that Daeron didn't know she possessed.

"How do you know this?"

"I like botany."

Soon she started talking about different flowers and their capacities. Daeron only pretended to listen, before he found his voice again.

"I doubt it." he raised the flower in his arms, his eyes never leaving the crimson petals.

"What?" she asked, turning to him, her eyebrows knotted in confusion.

"This...is different." he felt like choking even just by talking about it. "Dragon dreams are *different.*"

Aelora exhaled softly, walking back to him. "You're right, I'm sorry. This is magic we're talking about."

"Don't apologise." he interrupted her, once she sat back down. "I've made up my mind long ago that I will not know a peaceful night of sleep." he added with a chuckle, but it wasn't funny.

He looked away until the gentlest touch he ever received made him turn around. Her finger was caressing his hand, barely touching his skin. "Maybe I can find something more about it. There must be some books in the library regarding prophetic dreams or related to them."

Daeron looked right into her eyes, that amethyst gaze shining under the moonlight. Her screams still echoed in his ears. Was he ready to mourn her as well?

"No." he refused her help.

"Why not? I know a great deal about plants." she protested. "And I'm interested in the matter."

He shook his head, incapable of saying more.

"Trust me, I can help you." Her hand squeezed his again, but he pulled back, as if she had burned him.

"No." he repeated, more decisively now, before standing up.

"Daeron!" she exclaimed when he turned his back to her and began to walk away.

But he didn't stop. His feet started moving even faster and soon he was running away from her.

Daeron the Dreamer, they called him. They should have used Daeron the Coward.



"My prince." the whore moaned, moving atop of him. The woman had beautiful dark hair, but no violet eyes. He had forgotten her name.

"Shh." he grabbed her by the hips and brought her down on his cock, enjoying his last thrusts of pleasure.

"Yes! Yes!" she squealed in excitement as he spilled inside her, his head falling against the pillow. He wondered if she were Dornish.

"Another cup of wine, my prince?" Another woman walked in, naked as well: it was her turn now. He always paid for more than one whore, mostly because he didn't want to get asleep. He *couldn't* get asleep, especially not in a brothel.

He nodded, emptying the cup in one gulp. He had lost count, not that it mattered: now the brown haired woman was walking away from his cock and the silver-haired one started stroking his chest. He had also selected a red-haired one that slightly looked like aunt Jena, but she was nowhere to be seen. Maybe she had gone to fetch him something to eat, after all he was starving: he had not returned to the dining room.

He had left his cousin there in the garden and walked away, walked through the only Red Keep's passage he knew of and got out.

He knew his father would be furious with him in the morning. Daeron rejoiced at the thought: at least he would stop ignoring him.

Better having him shout at him than not having him at all.

He had intended to find the nearest brothel, but he had stopped at the tavern before, only to drink, and had arrived there so drunk that the matron wouldn't let him in.

"You're a peasant, we serve only noble lords here." she had stated. He surely had looked like one.

Only the dagger with the three-headed dragon had convinced her of his identity and she had sucked his cock for free as an apology.

Not that Daeron cared enough to get offended. He had come to the point that alcohol and sex had become pointless, as anything else had before that. He couldn't escape his curse, no matter how much he tried to.

His mother was the only one able to soothe him, even if temporarily. He wondered if the only way to stop this torture would be to join her.

He missed her. He missed her warm embrace and her gentle voice, which would put him to sleep. He longed for those dreamless nights, spent in his mother's arms.

"Mom." he choked, as the other woman started working on his cock.

"My prince?" the dark-haired woman asked, confused to hear such words leaving his lips. She had stopped on the doorway to put her dress on: lavender, like his mother's dress that Daella had worn that night.

"I want my mom." he started sobbing, while the silver-haired girl stopped with her ministrations.

The last whore joined them in the room and looked at him with the same bewilderment, as he drowned another cup of wine, praying that the alcohol would numb the feeling.

"My prince, you should stop." The dark-haired woman stepped forward, snatching the bottle away, but he pushed her aside.

"Stop, mom!" he shouted, standing up from the bed and reaching for his robes. "I'm going now."

They all looked concerned, despite the fact he had just paid them to fuck him. He was such a low creature that even whores felt bad for him. He turned to look at the three of them.

Three, he thought with bitterness. *A dragon must always have three heads.*

"My prince, you're in no condition to..." the woman from Lys began, she was still naked and was silver-haired everywhere.

He ignored her and pushed his pants upward, until she made the wrong decision: her hand landed on his arm and his ran to his dagger.

The red-haired one shouted in horror as he pushed her friend against the wall, the blade pressing against her throat.

"STOP IT!" he shouted against the unarmed whore. "YOU MUST STOP IT, AELORA!"

The words left his mouth before he could stop himself. The dagger fell on the ground and he crumbled soon after.

Two hands caressed his cheek, but Daeron didn't dare move. He was enjoying some dreamless sleep, finally, and hoped to fall into it once again.

"Poor Daeron." a small voice whispered, sounding sad: Rhae, he recognised her immediately.

"Let him be." an older voice sounded and Daeron almost pulled up instantly: *father.*

He wanted to stand up, to open his eyes, to look at his father.

"Let's go, Rhae." A sweeter voice came: Daella. His gentle, gentle sister. Aerion had been so harsh with her, pulling her hair. Maekar had been angry with him, for once. Said that no knight hurts a lady, even if she happens to be his little sister who annoys him to no end.

"Will you call us when he wakes up?" Egg's preoccupied tone reached his ear. He had worried his little brother. He wanted to throw up, or maybe it was the alcohol in his system.

No response came, though soon the sound of a door creaking open reached his ear and then silence.

Daeron didn't know if he had fallen asleep again, he only knew that, when he found the courage to open his eyes, a warmer voice could be heard.

"You must look after him, brother."

A warm, wise voice: Baelor.

"I've been trying to do so!" his father hissed, maintaining a low tone despite his anger. Daeron knew he was restraining himself.

"I know you've been trying to do your best." Baelor's voice always sounded reassuring. Was that why his father loved him so? "I wish I knew how to help you."

Not even the perfect heir knew what to do; this was unfortunate.

"I'm surprised that a man like you is incapable of finding a solution." Maekar put into words Daeron's thoughts.

There was a moment of silence, before Baelor spoke again: "I don't know about the solution, but everyone can clearly see the cause."

He heard the sound of a chair rattling against the floor, before his father's voice rang again, tense now: "You don't need to tell me the cause. I'm already doomed to see her every day when my eyes land on my children."

There was the rush of another chair being pulled back. Daeron opened his eyes, but the moment he did he wanted to close them again.

He really wanted to, but he couldn't tear his eyes off that scene: his father sobbing on Baelor's shoulder.

He felt his heart beating so fast, his breath itching. He felt like choking. Like dying. He wanted to die.

I should have killed myself, he thought. *I wouldn't have witnessed this.*

His father had made him cry countless times, with his indifference, his stern looks, his harsh tone. Yet now he wanted for nothing more than to wrap his arms around his father, like Dyanna did.

Let me die, please. He was praying. *Let me die in his arms like mother.*

Would Maekar mourn him? Would he call him his 'first boy', like he did when he was little? If he had stabbed himself in that brothel, would have his father felt it? Would he have felt his heart breaking while Daeron's bled? Would he have come running, searching for him desperately, clutching his body while Daeron let out his last breath?

After all, his father had held him when he took his first one, cradling him like he did Baelor's head now.

Daeron felt an unexpected feeling of rage.

He wanted to be in Baelor's place, to comfort his father like he was doing. What right had Baelor? He didn't know about their constant fights back in Summerhall, his father's hands around him when he found Daeron passed out right outside the castle.

He always made it back home, didn't matter where he was or how much he had drank. He always made it back to his father.

But he wasn't *perfect* Baelor. His uncle was always more capable, even at comforting. His hands were gentle around Maekar, they didn't strike him like Daeron had done in a fit of madness, sheets dump with sweat and throat raw from screaming while his father woke him up.

Maekar's sobs were *heartbreaking.* Daeron had heard people scream in horror while fire engulfed everything and this was still *worse.*

His father, his strong father. He was a warrior, he had come back from Redgrass Field and embraced Daeron. Said that he had promised him to come back and he had kept his word.

Daeron wanted to cry like him. To sob louder, to make him hear, to make him *understand.*

Cry for me, father. Mourn me, like you did mother. Bury me, like you did mother.

He was sobbing, clutching his uncle's shoulder. Did he care for him?

Maekar's eyes opened then, lilac meeting lilac. Daeron sealed his eyes shut, desiring that a dragon dream reached him now and made him scream in agony: it would hurt less.

And always, the gods heard him only when he wished for the worst.



He dreamt of fire and dead dragons. He cried and tossed around the covers, while the maesters tried to tend to him. He didn't even know where he was staying: it looked like a room, it might be his, but the Red Keep wasn't his home.

He only knew that, once he settled against the pillows with his eyes wide open in horror, his uncle Baelor was there and Queen Myriah's hands tried to soothe him: something that his father should have been doing.

"You're alright, Daeron." his grandmother calmed him down, when he woke up gasping for air.

"The fire." he croaked out, sweating like a pig.

"Should we put out the fire?" the queen asked, confused by his rambling, while her first son stopped with his pacing and stared right into Daeron's face.

He groaned, knowing that a lecture was due. But Baelor's eyes were gleaming with something different from the rage he was usually met with by his father.

"Do you remember what happened?" the heir to the throne asked calmly. Somehow, he preferred Maekar's shouting voice to his composed tone.

He wanted his father.

Daeron wished to answer honestly, but words failed him. He was barely capable of shaking his head, before Baelor interrupted him.

"You don't?" he raised his eyebrows. Daeron knew that he expected such an answer. "A *whore* brought you back to the Red Keep."

"Baelor!" the queen hissed at her son for such language.

"Forgive me, mother, but one can only say the truth in this case." he replied, his tone becoming harsher.

Daeron thought about his father. The two brothers looked nothing alike: one was gentle and pitiful, preferring calm strategies to decisions taken in haste; the other was a hard man who couldn't rule his temper.

He wondered how Maekar reacted when a whore brought him news of his son, how ashamed he must have felt. His brothers' children would have never shamed their fathers as he had done.

Daeron the Disappointment.

He tried to hold back his laugh. He didn't know why he felt the need to laugh.

"Does this amuse you?" Baelor noticed his grin.

"Which one?"

"Excuse me?"

"Which one of the three ladies risked everything to bring me back to the castle?" he clarified, his amusement clear now.

Baelor's face was stone cold as he replied: *"Dyanna."*

Daeron bursted out laughing, so loud now that he almost choked on his own saliva.

He turned his gaze to his grandmother, who was assuring him that everything was alright. She always tended to him, despite everything.

The Hand of the King walked outside the door without another look at him.

"Do you think that Father will let me dance at the feast?" Daella asked him, looking up at him from her position on the floor, right in front of the fireplace.

"I don't know, love." he murmured on the armchair, his hand absentmindedly stroking Rhae's head. She was sleeping on his shoulder and he didn't want to break Daella's heart by telling her that she was deemed too young.

He had deflected to their shared room the moment he was left alone, seizing the opportunity.

He was rather used to their company, they always hid in his room, because of Aerion's temper. Not that he could actually protect them: he was drunk almost every night, passed out on his bed, yet his younger brother never dared to step foot into his room, aware that Daeron, despite his drunken state and haunted eyes, was still a Targaryen.

And he *raged* like one.

"Aerion said we'll go away before the tournament starts." Egg said what Daeron had been trying to hide from his younger siblings. "He was angry when he said that."

We're going away because of me.

He wanted to prove his worth and I prevented that with my actions.

It's all my fault.

"But Prince Aelor had asked for my favour!" Daella exclaimed, heartbroken at the idea that such a thing would not occur. "We can't go back home already!" she raised her violet eyes on him, full of tears.

Daeron felt his heart breaking.

"I'll talk with father." he choked out. He would sooner face a real dragon than him, but there was nothing he wouldn't do for his siblings.

"Will you? Really?" Even Egg was impressed by his statement. Daeron felt his bile rising in his throat.

"Yeah."

Daella gifted him with the sweetest of kisses, while Egg hugged him tightly. Even Rhae, unaware of the situation, snuggled closer to him. That was enough to master his courage.



Maekar sneered in his face.

He had woken up early—or at least, earlier than usual by his standards—shaved and cleaned, all just to be presentable to his father's eyes.

Daella had looked at him with pleading eyes, the message inside them clear: *please, convince our father.* Egg had hugged him tightly again, whispering "good luck" in his ear, and Rhae had gifted him flowers.

Even Aerion had not been a monster for once and gave him a rather uninterested glance. He had expected him to shout, curse him for the fact that he was losing his chance to spark in the tournament because of him.

Instead, *nothing.*

As always, Daeron would prefer anger over indifference.

Just like with his father.

Aerion was Maekar's copy and Daeron was terrorised by it. He was terrified because he *loved* them.

He had prepared a strong argument and had tried not to let hope slip inside his heart, yet it had reached him anyway.

All for it to be shattered by his father.

Sneering.

"You're bold, I'll give you that."

He didn't have to ask if that meant no, he already knew.

"Did you think you would impress me, coming here clean and shaved, smelling of lavender and using great words?"

Lavender. Mother's perfume.

Daeron missed her. Did his father miss her as well?

He had said he was haunted by her, could see her every day in his children's faces. Could he see her in Daeron? In his hollow eyes, his slumbered expression?

He was the most similar to her. Was that why his father had taken his distance? Why he didn't cradle him anymore and call him 'his first boy'?

His siblings all resembled Maekar in some ways, but, unlike them, he hadn't inherited the Targaryens' stubbornness. He slumped his shoulders and took a step back, ready to return to his chambers and drown in a bottle of wine.

"You give up so easily." Maekar's voice sounded behind his back. "You're not my son."

Daeron deemed himself untouched by words and judgments. After all, he had heard whispers about his madness his entire life. And living tormented by prophetic dreams meant to learn to be unbothered, at least if one hoped to keep his sanity.

Yet nothing could hurt him as much as his father's words.

Daeron had given him his first breath. He wanted to give him his last one as well.

He swallowed, his eyes stinging with the need to cry. He didn't answer, he didn't even know what to say, really.

"I..."

"You?"

Daeron turned, taking a deep breath in. "I came here on my siblings' behalf."

Maekar's face remained composed, his violet eyes fixed on him.

His boy.

His *first* boy.

Therefore, his first disappointment.

"They should know that their brother prevented them from attending the tournament." his father stood up from his chair, turning around to look at the view of King's Landing from his balcony.

"Do you want them to hate me?" The words escaped his mouth before he could stop himself.

Like you hate me.

Now Maekar turned to look at him, but Daeron didn't dare to raise his eyes.

Daeron the Disappointment.

Daeron the Coward.

His father's glance found his face before Daeron could take a step back and turn his head away. That look hurt more than a slap.

His father never raised his hands on him, despite the many headaches that Daeron had caused him, letting servants do the work. Maekar was strong, he probably thought he would kill him.

What a blessing that would be, to die by his father's hand.

"You put me and our entire family to shame. I will not risk it again and leave you here, in a city full of wine and brothels, so that the rest of the court can make me the laughingstock."

Daeron's hand went to his throat, as if he could feel his father's grip around it.

"I came here on my siblings' behalf." he repeated.

He had said he gave up too easily, marked him as his personal disappointment.

He raised his gaze now, his violet eyes burning in Maekar's lilac ones.

He faced dragon dreams every night, he wasn't a coward as his father claimed.

"Punish me, but don't take this from them."

If only he had known that he would seal his death warrant with that, he would have stayed silent.

Chapter End Notes

finally back with a new chapter!! sorry for the delay, but i was on a trip with my parents up until last week.

we're back with daeron's pov as well and the protagonists finally meet! i know there's little aelora in this chapter, but it wouldn't make sense for them to interact that much already (though i promise, more is coming in the next chapters).

i know that daeron's thoughts may sometimes appear repetitive or disconnected, but i exactly wanted for them to appear so (it's always a traumatised boy with deep issues we're talking about). also, i hope i made his mother and father's issues clear.

so for now enjoy the family's angsts!!

as always, if you enjoyed, feel free to leave a kudos and comment, i'm always happy to reply and interact.

this story is also on wattpad and tumblr (lomlherondale) and ao3 (ale_28)

you can also find me on tiktok (where i post edits about the fic), twitter and reddit (lomlherondale)

Chapter 4: The Things We Cannot Understand

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Such disrespect is unacceptable." Kiera was pacing back and forth, clearly having forgotten about the Maester's advice of taking rest.

Her hair was a mess of unruly pink curls, yet again Kiera had never adapted to Westerosi fashion. She found it boring, while they found her excessive: she laughed too loudly, she sighed too profoundly.

Vaelor stirred in Aelora's arms, but she gently rocked him and tried to put him to sleep again.

Viserys trolled behind his mother's skirts, trying to follow her footsteps but failing miserably. He had just started to move his first steps, after all.

"Kiera," Valarr reprehended her gently, kneeling down to offer a hand to his firstborn son. "You should rest instead of pacing around."

"I can't stay still." Kiera argued back, before turning to Aelora. "Such disrespect is unacceptable!" she repeated, while Valarr swirled Viserys up in his arms.

"My love, please..." his free hand found her elbow, trying to make her sit at least, but Kiera pulled it away. She was a very tall woman, another detail that she regained from her Tyroshi origins and that set her aside from the rest, but Valarr had inherited his father's height: he stood a feet taller than his wife.

"He's *such* a brat!" the pink haired woman exclaimed once again, as if she hadn't expressed the same thought over and over again since Aelora had set foot in the room.

The princess huffed in amusement at her friend's language, while Valarr rolled his eyes. "Kiera, Daeron is my cousin." he defended.

"Well, I believe Aelora is as well," Kiera replied, moving closer to her lady in-waiting. "Yet I haven't heard you taking her side."

The prince second in line to the throne sighed, knowing better than trying to argue with his wife. He just sat back on the bed, with Viserys on his lap.

"I was only trying to help him." Aelora repeated again.

At that point, Kiera knelt in front of her, taking her hand in hers. "I know, my dear. But as I said, he doesn't deserve your help."

"I agree!" Valarr stood up abruptly, putting Viserys down to the carpet to play. "Now can we stop talking about this?"

"Not at all." Kiera shot him a look, before standing up. "Daeron is your cousin, you said it yourself. You should teach him how one should act towards a princess such as Aelora."

Valarr huffed in annoyance, but didn't reply. He knew it was the right thing to do, if it weren't for the fact that...

"They can't find him." he replied.

"What?" Aelora asked in disbelief. He had left her alone in the gardens late that evening, now it was broad morning. "What do you mean?"

"He left yesterday night and they still can't find him." Valarr clarified.

Aelora felt her stomach twist.

"It serves him right." Kiera didn't seem affected at all.

"That's quite enough, wife." Valarr took a step forward now, but Kiera wasn't afraid of the dragon's rage. She got closer as well and asserted him a look of far superiority.

Kiera was beautiful, so beautiful. Even in her uniqueness, there was something otherworldly about her.

"Aelora deserves an apology." she stated firmly. "Otherwise the man is no prince at all."

Valarr wasn't obvious to her beauty either, that was why he relented: "Alright," he sighed. "I'll try to find him."



Daella was crying aloud in their grandmother's chambers, wetting her purple dress. It was similar to the one she had worn the night before, but less striking. Anyone could notice it had belonged to an older woman and she was now forced into it: she was a child, yet everyone tried to make her act older than her age.

"Stop with this nonsense at once." her brother Aerion ordered her, receiving a glance of admonishment from Myriah.

Aerion could be quite cruel, when he wanted to. He had never been particularly interested in Aelora—not as much as to pick her as one of his victims—but he always insisted on not letting her play with him and Aelor. And her twin, despite his much gentler nature, did everything his older and cooler cousin told him and didn't want to be embarrassed on the playfield by his own sister.

They had always been friends, sparring together and pranking maids. It was no surprise that, when they all reunited in the queen's chambers for dinner after her kind invitation, Aelor sat by his side with the intention to listen to the stories from Aerion's time at Summerhall.

But the children of Maekar had no plan of indulging in conversations that night: Daella kept crying, Aerion kept cursing his older brother for having screwed his chances at the tournament, Egg kept defending Daeron and Rhae kept repeating that the queen might convince their father on remaining.

Myriah had expressively told her that she wouldn't question Maekar's parental authority: if he thought it best to return to Summerhall, then so be it; but Rhae kept begging her for intercession anyway.

"Daella dear, stop crying." the queen pushed a plate of honeycakes in front of her, but the girl shook her head.

Aelora slightly remembered visiting Summerhall when she was younger and Daella telling her that the honeycakes made with their lemons were the best treat in the world. Her brothers had seemed to agree

with her.

She must have been really sad now, if even her favourite dessert couldn't raise her spirits.

She was crying because she couldn't give her favour to Aelor anymore. Her brother, for his part, didn't look as upset as she was.

"Please, grandma, can't you just try?"

"Rhae, I already told you."

"It's all Daeron's fault."

"Stop blaming him!"

"He's always been mad. What was he thinking? Leaving the table to seek out whores!"

That much was true: Valarr had left the Red Keep that morning and joined Maekar in his search, to no avail. Kiera had sighed loudly and Aelora's worry had grown: she had been the last one to see him before his disappearance.

But then Daeron had returned—or rather, had been brought up—to the Red Keep by a prostitute, who was demanding to be paid for her services and those of her colleagues.

Aelora hadn't seen her uncle's expression, but could imagine his rage.

The truth was humiliating: Daeron had left her and sought out *whores.*

Aelor's laugh rang in her ears now.

"But please, grandma!"

"Rhae, do not insist on this matter."

"Why don't you ask your precious brother to go ask Father?"

"Daeron is still in the Maester's rooms."

Aelora swung uncomfortably on her chair: Daella's sobs were oppressing, just like Aerion's complaints and Egg's little acutes when he defended Daeron. Aelor seemed to enjoy himself, while Rhae was basically fighting against their grandmother. Kiera had not joined her, preferring the peace of her chambers, and Aelora didn't blame her now.

But her mind wandered from the oppressing scene to the reason behind it: *Daeron*, his name would fall from his siblings' lips with affection, anger and sadness.

He had looked so haunted, back in the garden. And handsome, achingly so. Even if he had offended her, Aelora had to be honest to herself: Daeron had looked otherworldly beneath the moonlight.

He was the closest to the gods, after all: he had been blessed by them with the capacity of seeing the future. Aelora wished for such a gift, to know certainly what would await her, instead of the uncertainty that taunted her now.

Perhaps she should ask him, talk to him. She had tried to, but he had ran away.

Yet Aelora had never been one to give up after the first try.



She was mildly aware of looking like a ghost, her complexion paler than usual (and she had inherited most of the Targaryens features, pale skin among them). But that was what one would expect after spending the entire night in the library and skipping breakfast, walking out only to reach Baelor's apartments. The solar was quiet in a way the rest of the Red Keep never was: thick walls swallowing the noise of morning noises, leaving only the low crackle of the fire and the faint echo of distant voices.

"This will simply not work." Aelora scoffed, pushing the parchment aside. The numbers were not making sense.

"Yeah, I thought so, but I wanted for you to have a look." Baelor smiled at her: it was always that small, subtle raise of lips at just one corner, one that spoke of recognition in her abilities.

"Princess Elaena has gone to take care of her pregnant daughter and has left us with her incompetent husband." she groaned, while Baelor shot her a look of reprieve: despite the situation, he never let his mask of polite prince slip.

Aelora returned the same glance. "You know it's true."

"He's still the Master of Coin."

"He barely knows how to count to ten."

"Aelora."

"Baelor."

She was smirking now: she liked when they bantered in this way.

But Baelor's sigh made her understand it was a serious matter: "You can't let your anger fall upon him..."

"I'm not angry—" she began.

"...only because of Aelor."

That words made her stiff in her seat. "So you know?"

"Your mother made it clear and an announcement will follow soon. Apparently she wanted to talk to Maekar before he left the capital."

That, instead, left her speechless. "Leave the capital?"

"Because of Daeron." Baelor replied calmly.

Aelora knew, of course she did.

She had heard the maids in the corridors talking about it. Since yesterday's afternoon, it was all anyone talked about.

"The prince has been found."

"Passed out in a brothel."

"A whore brought him here."

"How did a wench get past the guards?"

"Maekar was furious."

"Poor Aelora, left in favour of prostitutes."

That had been one of Baelor's first lessons: to always hear what others said, even people who seemed invisible.

Monarchy stands on the basis of the population, their opinion is as vital for the crown as any other petty lord that demands too much and knows too little.

She had even heard some of them suggesting that the woman knocking at the Red Keep's door could actually be already pregnant with Daeron's child. Aelora found it hard to believe.

That had been Baelor's other lesson: always discern the truth from the lies.

Aelora stood up now, her mind swirling and her feet guiding her toward the window, hands clasped too tightly before her, gaze fixed somewhere beyond the city she could not see.

"You heard." said Baelor Breakspear quietly.

He did not ask. He never did.

Aelora inclined her head, precise and composed as a true lady. "Then there is little use in repeating it."

"A prince found insensible," Baelor went on, as if she had not spoken, "returned at midday by a whore, after making a spectacle of himself at table." A pause, during which Aelora could imagine him swallowing, even if she didn't see him—years spent working together and the knowledge that Daeron's act shocked even someone as Baelor made it obvious. "And before that: him leaving you alone in the garden."

Her fingers tightened.

"Rumor travels quickly." he added.

"Rumor," Aelora said, turning at last, "is rarely concerned with truth."

Hadn't that been his lesson? Discern truth from lies.

"No," Baelor agreed. "But it is often concerned with damage."

Silence stretched between them. He studied her—not unkindly, but too closely.

"You went to him?" he asked. "Did you see him after..." he left the phrase unspoken.

"I did not." she replied, a fraction too quickly.

Baelor's brow lifted, not in challenge but in recognition. "You wished to."

Aelora held his gaze this time. "Would that be so strange?"

"Yes." he said simply. That, more than anything, unsettled her. "He is not a man one seeks out," Baelor continued. "Not now anyway."

"He is a prince," she argued back. "And, whatever else is said, he is not without... interest."

"Interest," Baelor repeated. "Is that what you call it?"

Aelora's chin lifted, just slightly. "I call it a situation that could be understood."

Baelor moved then, slow and deliberate, until he stood a few paces from her. "You mistake him," he said. "You think him a puzzle."

"And he is not?"

"No." Baelor's voice did not rise, but it hardened. "He is a man who sees things that are not there. A man who drinks to escape his own mind. A man his father cannot control."

Aelora said nothing.

"If even half the whispers are true," Baelor went on, "then he is not merely unstable. He is dangerous."

"To whom?" she asked.

"To himself," Baelor said. "To those near him. To any who think they can guide him."

Something flickered across her face, quick and sharp. "Guide," she repeated. "Is that what you think I intend?"

"I think," Baelor said carefully, "that you have spent your life believing that disorder can be corrected. That every misstep has a cause, and every cause a solution."

"You've done the same."

"I've never tried to control people."

"What about your brothers, then? You were the first to manipulate Maekar into coming here for Vaelor's celebrations."

Baelor didn't reply to that.

"And you taught me that."

"I taught you," he said, "that men can be reasoned with. That power can be shaped. That the realm can be improved." He stepped closer. "I did not teach you that you could mend what is already broken beyond your reach."

The words landed cleanly. For a moment, Aelora said nothing. Then, she tried very softly: "You think him beyond reach."

"I think him beyond yours." Baelor said.

"But within *your* reach?"

"Within *no one's* reach!"

That did it.

Not the warning, nor the concern.

That.

Aelora drew in a slow breath, steadying herself. When she spoke again, her voice was calm, almost too calm.

"He spoke to me," she said. "In the garden."

Baelor's eyes widened but he waited.

"He looked at me as though..." she faltered, just for a heartbeat. "As though I were something to fear. And then he left."

Baelor's expression did not change, but his gaze sharpened. "And you would follow a man who recoils from you?"

"I would understand *why* he did."

"And if the answer is madness?"

"Then it is still an answer."

Baelor was silent for a long moment. "You have been wronged," he said at last. "By him, perhaps. By others, certainly." His voice softened, just slightly. "That is not a reason to entangle yourself further."

Aelora almost smiled. "Is it not?" she asked.

He studied her again, more intently now. "This is pride." he said.

"This is clarity."

"This is wounded pride," Baelor corrected. "And wounded pride makes for poor judgment."

Aelora turned away from him then, back toward the window, though there was nothing to see. "Everything I have built," she said, her voice low, controlled, "rests on the assumption that I understand the pieces before me."

Baelor did not interrupt.

"I knew my place, my future, my alliances." she took a deep breath then. "My brother."

"And now?" Baelor asked.

"Now," she said, "things move without reason, without pattern." Her fingers curled slightly at her sides. "I will not accept that."

Baelor's voice, when it came, was quiet. "Then you will be disappointed."

"Or I will be right."

Baelor took a step of retreat, hands clasped behind his back. He pondered in silence for a moment, until: "If you go to him, you do so without my counsel."

Aelora inclined her head. "I would expect nothing else."

"Aelora—"

She turned back, and for a moment the composure slipped, just enough to reveal something sharper beneath. "I will not be made a fool of." she said.

Baelor held her gaze. "No one has said you were."

"I will see for myself what he is," she went on. "Madman, prophet, or something in between. And if there is reason in him—any reason—then I will find it."

"And if there is not?"

Aelora's expression stilled. "Then at least I will know," she said, "that the fault does not lie with me."

Baelor exhaled slowly, the faintest trace of resignation in the sound. "You are very certain." he said.

"No," Aelora replied. "I am not."

She had lost all her certainties, in a couple of days.

She moved toward the door, pausing only briefly. "That," she added, without turning, "is precisely the problem."

And then she was gone.



Maekar's apartments were on the far end of the Red Keep's lodgings, something that didn't surprise Aelora, knowing his position and his rare visits to the capital.

She had actually tried Daeron's own quarters first but found no trace of him, then she had tried Egg's—the boy seemed so affectionate to his older brother, he surely would know where he was—but ended up with the same conclusion.

She had had much more luck when visiting Daella and Rhae's rooms: the two girls were there, finishing breakfast with their youngest brother. They had been so kind, offering her to join them and then telling her where Daeron actually was.

Apparently he had gone to his father's apartments to speak on his siblings' behalf, in order for them to remain until the tourney. Aelora had been surprised when hearing that, but actually pleased. She was mildly certain by then that what had occurred between her and him was nothing but a mere incident.

That's why she walked up to Maekar's rooms with a sense of relief, only for that sense of peace to be shattered when she would step outside, minutes later.

"Princess Aelora." the guard standing at the door announced her when walking in: she had a big smile on her face and two honeycakes in her hands, which almost fell from her grasp when she noticed a third person in the room.

Not a *person.*

Not really.

There was probably one other person close to the gods like Daeron and it was the man right before her eyes.

Even Aelora's complexion would look vigorous compared to his skin, only a red birthmark adding colour to that otherwise white face. That and his shimmering red eye, the only one he had left after his half-brother had taken the other out. That eye looked at her intensely now, as if it could see *past* her. Aelora had always had the sensation that her grandfather's bastard brother could see more than the sight that one remaining eye could offer.

After all, there was even a riddle about it.

How many eyes does Bloodraven have?

A thousand and one.

"Niece." Maekar greeted her. His voice made her eyes snap back to him, taking in the rest of the room. Her uncle stood tall next to Bloodraven, who had always one hand on the hilt of Dark Sister. Maekar's tone was cold and harsh, like a man made of stone. Aelora thought about the statues back in Dragonstone, those dragons which wings would never move.

Her eyes roamed from the two men to the boy sitting there with them: Daeron held the arms of the armchair with a tight grip, his red rimmed eyes staring at her from the moment she had walked in.

He looked...*scared.*

"Princess." the Master of Whispers followed in his greeting, his voice raspy. It wasn't soft like uncle Baelor's, sweet like her father's, or harsh like Maekar's.

"I..." Aelora looked back to her arms now, feeling completely stupid for going there. What had she hoped to achieve?

It reminded her vividly of her childhood, whenever Aelor would let her play with him and their cousins. They purposely gave her the heaviest wood sword to fight, letting her make a fool of herself. Her twin and Aerion would start laughing and she would giggle along, before understanding that they were laughing *at* her and not *with* her.

Then she would started crying and go to complain to her mother. She would sigh and tell her that their cousins had just lost their mother and she ought to be patient with them.

Hadn't that been the reason why Daeron kept hiding under the covers, instead of joining them in the courtyard?

She was about to turn around and run away like she had done when she was little, all the decorum that she had learned going to hell, when two hands gently took the pies from her hands.

Aelora's head snapped up, ready to mutter an excuse and snatch the sweet treats away: she didn't want to be asked questions and be put to total shame.

But she stopped when those red rimmed eyes met hers. *Again.*

"Honeycakes." Daeron's voice murmured, recognising the smell once he got closer.

It wasn't a question, it was his favourite dessert after all.

"Yes." Aelora whispered, her gaze roaming down in total shame. Really, what was she thinking?

A beat passed, embarrassing silence stretching between them. Aelora mentally cursed herself again.

"Are they for me?" his voice was still unsure, but it didn't sound lost like it had done in the garden.

"I heard you were feeling unwell." Aelora lied. She had at least mastered that, during her years at court.

"I'm better now." he lied back.

A moment of silence passed between them, both too ashamed to look at each other.

"How kind." Maekar wasn't strange to the ways of court as well, even if he always performed in his stiff way.

Daeron wallowed over to the table to put them down and then turned around to offer her a kind smile.

He didn't look scared, like mere seconds before.

Either he was a good actor or he'd gone completely mad.

Maekar cleared his throat once and then Aelora's hand was surprisingly gripped by Daeron's one. Daeron's hold tightened just slightly, as if he feared she might slip away if he let go.

"I-" he began, then stopped, swallowing hard. "I owe you an apology."

Aelora blinked, caught off guard by the suddenness of it.

"My behavior yesterday was..." His mouth twitched, like he could not find a word that would not damn him further. "Unworthy. Of you. Of my house."

That sounded rehearsed: something learned, something expected.

Aelora's eyes moved to Maekar for just a second: he was staring at them, looking the scene unfold with precise attention.

But then Daeron's fingers shifted around hers, less steady. "I should not have left you." he added, more quietly.

That was not rehearsed, Aelora could tell.

"I should not have..." His voice faltered, and for a moment his gaze flickered: not to her, but past her, as if recalling something only he could see. "...done what they did."

Aelora felt her breath catch. There it was again, that same unease from the garden.

"I frightened you." he said. It was not a question.

Aelora found her voice, though it came out softer than intended. "You did."

Daeron swallowed, looking directly at her. "I am sorry."

He didn't look drunk, nor did he reek of alcohol. A sweet smell of lavender filled her nostrils instead.

"It's alright, cousin, I forgive you." she smiled, squeezing his hand back. "I understood that you were not yourself."

Daeron's eyes moved away the moment she met his gaze, as if afraid to look at her for too long.

Aelora was about to pull her hand away from his grasp, when he tightened his grip, suddenly interested in her skin. A gasp escaped her as he caressed her palm, stretching her fingers as if some secret was hidden there.

Aelora felt unease rise in her belly.

"Do you...do you like my rings?" she tried to offer an explanation to his strange behaviour.

Aelora's eyes moved behind his back, noticing Bloodraven's red gaze fixed on them. He looked deeply interested by whatever was happening.

Aelora had no idea of what was happening.

Daeron's caress was soft, as if she was on the verge of disappearing.

"That will suffice," Maekar said sharply. "You forget yourself."

And just like that, Daeron snapped out of it.

He took a step back, shaking his head as if to stir off whatever thought had made him act in such a way.

"I...yes, thank you, princess. I'm..." his voice was shaking, just like his hands at his side. "I'm grateful for your forgiveness."

Aelora tried to smile, but she just couldn't. So she only nodded and set her gaze down.

Her hands were equally shaking, but she closed her eyes and took a deep breath to steady herself.

What was happening?

When she opened them again, the sight of her hands—clutched together so that no one could notice their trembling—reminded her of who she was.

She was a Princess of the Realm, there was no reason to be so afraid, not in a room filled with familiar faces anyway.

Her fingers moved before her mind could think clearly, taking off a red ring and putting it on her palm, presenting it as an offer to Daeron.

His father had gifted it to her, when she was still a small girl more interested in dolls than books. It felt like a lifetime ago.

And now...

"As a symbol of our reaffirmed friendship." she smiled. Small, posed, like she had been taught to do.

Daeron looked at her for a long moment, surprise and *something else* etched on his face.

Then his trembling fingers moved on her skin again to take it, while Aelora held her breath.

"Thank you." he whispered. "I'll treasure this gift and our friendship."

His words sounded sincere. It was at least something.

The rest was a swift of formal questions between her and uncle Maekar, with Daeron standing in a corner and turning the ring in his fingers, his gaze on the shining piece of jewellery as if he still couldn't believe

she had gifted it to him.

Aelora was out of the room not even two minutes later, feeling her heart pounding in her chest and her head spinning.

She had lied, acting like the proper princess used to court life.

But in truth Daeron hadn't seemed well.

He had looked even *worse.*



"But are you certain?" Aelora whispered for the third time, squeezing Kiera's hand in hers.

Her friend didn't even look up, keeping her eyes on Vaelor, latching onto her breast.

Kiera had refused wet nurses from the first moment Viserys was born, claiming that women fed their children personally in Tyrosh. And the court, surprisingly, had relented. Most of the time, they tried to eradicate whatever Tyroshi costume or heritage she upheld.

"The Maesters said so." Kiera replied quietly. She was rarely quiet: it meant she was upset.

"But we could hear other opinions."

"I *can't* have any more children!" Kiera interrupted her, raising her voice. She looked at the dragon princess for half a second, before sighing and looking back at her kid again.

Something in her tone, so raw and honest, made Aelora's heart break.

"Does Valarr know?" the silver haired woman asked in a whisper.

Kiera only shook her head, refusing to meet her gaze still.

"He must know, sooner or later." Aelora murmured.

"His mother probably already told him."

Aelora heart dropped. "Jena knows?"

"Jena *was there.*" Kiera spat out. "She was the one to suggest to have me checked over by that *disgusting* old man."

"Kiera..."

"And you should have seen her *smug* expression. She almost looked glad at the news. She's happy that I failed just like her. And yet she'll make a tragedy out of it in front of my husband, like she always does." she was talking so fast, because of fury, that her accent was even more pronounced.

Aelora swallowed dry at the words. "You gave Valarr a heir and a spare, just like she did."

"He wanted a daughter. Daughters make good alliances." Kiera argued.

"Kiera," Aelora grabbed her hand now, unable to watch her friend break and do nothing. This wasn't the Kiera she was used to. "Look at me."

Reluctantly, the pink haired woman raised her gaze, revealing red rimmed eyes full of fresh tears. It reminded her of Daeron.

"It's not your fault."

"But it is." her voice was a soft murmur now, almost a sob.

"No, it's not." Aelora placed a kiss on her knuckle, like Valarr did with his wife all the time. Kiera had beautiful, slender hands, adorned with rings.

The one that Aelora had gifted her, after Viserys birth, shined brightly on her index, pink just like her hair.

Vaelor had fallen asleep on his mother's chest and Aelora was quick to take him from Kiera's arms, obliging her to lay back down and rest a bit.

But her friend was restless, fidgeting with the jewels on her hands.

"Did you go to talk to Daeron?"

"I did."

"And?"

"We're friends."

Kiera looked away, toward the ceiling. "I hate him." Aelora saw the tears on her face and knew she didn't mean it. It was her pain and desperation talking. "I hate everyone in this family."

"Even me?"

"No." her voice croaked out, while her body shook with sobs. "Not you."



Late night reading had always been her favourite activity. Yes, she enjoyed dedicating her mind to complex calculations or important matters of state during the day, but by the end of the day she craved what had sparkled her imagination at the start: stories.

She had grown up reading Andal ones, coming from each region where her uncle would travel and come back with a book just for her: typical stories depicting the Vale's high mountains, the Reach green gardens or the river shore of the Riverlands.

The Westerlands preferred fables with tricky riddles and the Dornish stories—that aunt Daenerys was kind enough to send after Baelor's request—always depicted strong female women that had been Aelora's

inspiration growing up.

Once she had learned the various Valyrian dialects, she had read for herself the legends based on Rhyonar water magic and the millions of different tales that arrived from Essos.

The stories from the North still remained mostly unknown to her, because fewer people nowadays learned the Old Tongue.

Yet her favourites were the one composed in High Valyrian, last shrewd of a civilisation that had been the cradle of her own family and reminded her of a time when Targaryens used to be closer to the gods.

So while the Andals depicted feeble princesses and the Dornish narrated about strong leaders, the Valyrian's chanted of magical beasts that soared the sky: *dragons*.

Aelora was re-reading the Flying Adventurous of Jaenara Belaerys, the Valyrian dragon rider that had followed a dream sent to her by the gods and started her mission of discovering the southern continent.

Sothoryos had been a thorn in the side for some time now, with corsairs carrying off captives from there and selling the preys off to flesh markets in Essos; but they had gone as far as trying to sell them off in Westeros, even if the practice of slavery had been outlawed in their country. There had been rumors of Lords taking part in such filthy activities, so the Small Council had started an inquiry.

Aelora had found herself rather lacking of good information that could provide a solution to end the problems, so she had decided to combine business with pleasure and learn more about the continent and its people.

That had been her plan, but she couldn't have forgone the first pages, where Jaenara's life was depicted in details and her green and purple dragon Terrax was described.

Baelor had been so kind to find an illustrated version for her, when emissaries from the Free Cities had come to visit the capital. Aelora still remembered sitting on his knees in the courtyard and listen to his warm, wise voice reading her the story, while her male cousins played with swords.

The little girl had been completely in awe at the drawing and had touched the outline of Jaenara's slender figure with the tip of her finger, asking him if she could get her own dragon someday and fly off to adventures. Her uncle had smiled to her and told her that he had no doubt she could do everything she set her mind to.

Aelora found herself doing the same now: brush lightly her fingertips on the drawing and imagine a life as a dragon rider.

When a *sound* caught her attention.

It had been just a soft creak on a broken tile on the floor, but Aelora had spent so many years in the library to known that it meant someone was approaching.

If it weren't only for the fact that, fifteen seconds after—that was the time necessary to cover the distance from the tile to the window where she was sitting, with her book on her lap and a lit candle beside her—no one arrived.

Then it meant that this person wasn't seeking her out.

Rather, this person was *hiding* from her. Or *spying* her.

"Who's there?" she called out. The other person was aware of her presence in her room, so she thought it pointless to remain silent and act just as secretly.

She heard the footsteps now: quick and growing distant.

She should have taken a sigh of relief: whoever had been spying her was now leaving. This meant she was safe.

But Aelora had always been curious, maybe *too* curious.

"One day, your curiosity will get you in trouble." the Hand of the King had told her.

And so she stood up and ran after the intruder.

Chapter End Notes

i'm back with a new chapter!! sorry for the delay. we also finally get aelora's pov again, i can't wait until they'll get more political and you'll finally see her in her true element.

i don't know if it's clear by her interactions with kiera that she used to have a small crush on her, though her mind is now occupied by a certain drunken. but apart from that, aelora cares for her a great deal, just like kiera does for her (as you can tell by their second scene together).

we got just a glimpse of the maekarlings and they're already terrorising everyone.

baelor might be onto something, but then again let's remember the kind of marriage he's in. i love how he and aelora discuss things, i think that most of the targaryens gravely lack communication skills, so it's refreshing to write a pair that actually talks.

WE FINALLY MEET BLOODRAVEN! I have so many things in mind for him and daeron (the two magical people in this family), so expect a lot. and we also have daeron and aelora finally interacting again, from here on you can expect seeing them together in almost every chapter.

guess who the intruder is.

once again, if you liked leave a kudos and a comment, i love to reply and interact with my readers.

you can find this story on wattpad and tumblr (lomlherondale on there as well) and ao3 (ale_28)

all my other socials: lomlherondale on tiktok (where i post edits regarding the fic), twitter, spotify and reddit

Chapter 5: The Language of Dreams

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The library was never empty. Daeron knew that better than most. Even in the deepest hours of the night, when the Red Keep fell into that uneasy silence between revelry and dawn, there were always remnants: half-burnt candles, abandoned scrolls, the lingering presence of men who believed knowledge could be ordered and contained.

He had come there to escape it. Or to hide from it. He wasn't entirely sure anymore.

He did not remember deciding to come here, *that* had been happening more often. He only knew that his feet had carried him through corridors he could not later recall, past doors and guards and torchlight, until the smell of parchment and dust settled something restless in his chest.

His steps were quieter than usual, not from caution—he had long since stopped caring who saw him wandering where he ought not—but from something closer to instinct. A pressure at the back of his skull, the same one that came before a dream, urging him to slow, to listen.

He had had to escape.

Cups were prohibited to him. That had been father's first rule: if he wished to appease his siblings and let them all stay in the capital for the tourney, he wouldn't get drunk anymore and indulge in shameful behaviours like his last one.

Father's second rule: Bloodraven would analyse his *peculiar* dreams—Maekar probably wished that the sorcerer told him they were caused by alcohol more than powers.

Brynden Rivers had ordered guards to clear his rooms of any flask they could find that contained or might contain alcohol.

He had told him to come to him when the headaches would start. Daeron hadn't mentioned any of those, but he wasn't surprised by the fact that Bloodraven would just know.

The drunken prince would have rather cut his own cock.

So he had started to wander with no end: his focus always dimmed when a dream was approaching, up to the point where he would look steadier in a drunken state, in comparison.

But the library was a safe choice. There were no dreams here, not yet.

That was when he saw a dim light.

Daeron stilled.

He wished for no one to see him in this state. They would believe he was drunk and report him back to his father.

Daeron was almost sure that that cunt of the Grand Maester hated him and would wish for nothing more than see him shipped back to Summerhall.

He took a deep breath and got closer to the shelves, his back against the wood that housed so much knowledge, in order to peek without being caught.

And that he saw her.

Aelora Targaryen.

He would have known that hair anywhere now.

He should have turned back then. Instead, he moved closer.

Slowly, quietly; one step, then another, until the shelves thinned enough for him to see her.

She sat alone at one window, a pool of candlelight gathered around her like she were the Goddess of Light. A giant book laid open before her, a thin parchment on the edge of the windowsill instead. One side was held down by a small weight, while the other had slipped loose, curling slightly at the edge, but she paid it no mind.

She was wearing a thin light blue dress, that made her hair look more golden than silver, especially in the shadows of the room.

Daeron wondered if she felt cold. Surely drafts came from the window and hit her back. He had not worn his cloak—he rarely did—but he wished now he had, if only to put it on her shoulders and shield her from the chill.

She was speaking. Not to anyone, to herself. "...symbols," she murmured, tracing a line of text with one finger. "They must be symbols. Otherwise there would be no—"

She stopped, frowning slightly, and shifted to another line.

"Dreams are the language of dragons..."

The words hit him like a blow. Daeron's hand tightened against the shelf beside him.

She continued, softer now, the High Valyrian rolling off her tongue with an ease that made something in him twist.

He should not be hearing this. He should not be here.

And yet...

"...not meant to be read as they are written," she went on, almost to herself. "But as they are... arranged?"

Daeron closed his eyes. That was too close. Too close.

He stepped back. The movement was small, but the world felt suddenly too narrow, the air too thin. If he stayed another moment, she would...

He took another step back, but landed on a broken tile, that cracked beneath his feet.

He saw her raising her head from the corner of his eye.

"Who's there?" she called out, her head moving around to look around herself.

That's when he turned and nearly ran. His steps quickened the moment he reached the first row of shelves, then the next. He did not look back. He did not think. Only distance mattered: distance from her

voice, from the words she had spoken, from the shape of something forming that he did not understand and did not want to.

He heard soft but quick footsteps behind him: she was *following* him.

Fuck.

If he had been clear minded, he would have been able to slip out of the library without her even catching him. But the headaches were making it difficult for him to even see properly.

"Aelor?" she tried, her voice uncertain.

No.

Wrong name.

"Daeron!"

He stopped. For a heartbeat, he considered continuing anyway, pretending he had not heard and that he was already gone.

But her steps were already behind him: light, quick, determined like she was. So damn determined.

He exhaled once, sharply, and turned just as she came around the corner of the shelf.

Aelora halted a pace away, breath slightly uneven from the short run, one hand still half-raised as if she had meant to reach for him.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Up close, the candlelight followed her poorly, leaving her half in shadow. It made her look less certain than before.

Or perhaps that was only his eyesight completely failing him.

Pity he couldn't see her clearly: she really was a beauty.

"You were listening." she said suddenly, making him snap back to reality and hold back a breath. Her tone wasn't accusing, but rather certain.

Daeron forced his expression into something neutral, something empty. "I was leaving."

"You were running."

"That would imply urgency," he replied.

"It did not seem lacking."

Her eyes searched his face, sharper now, more focused than they had been that morning. Whatever embarrassment had lingered from before was gone. Replaced by something else, something that Daeron didn't want to acknowledge.

"You were spying me." she said.

"I just happened to be in this place."

"Do not be clever with me." the words were quiet, but they landed cleanly.

Daeron's mouth twitched, not quite a smile. "I would not dare."

Everyone knew she was a smart girl, trained by Baelor himself. She really must possess incredible qualities, for their perfect uncle to select her.

Pity she wasn't the heir.

Aelora took a step closer, not enough to crowd him but enough to stop him from leaving without brushing past her.

"You knew the text," she said. "Is that why you were listening?"

"I know fragments."

"You knew it."

"Just partially." Daeron looked past her, toward the darker stretch of corridor beyond. Freedom, if he chose to take it.

He did not move.

"You should return to your chambers, Princess," he said. "It is late."

"So you may continue spying from the shadows?" she asked.

That made him look at her, really look this time. There was no mockery in her expression, only intent.

"I was not spying." he said.

"You see things." she went on, quieter now.

He blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

"Not as others do." she added.

"No." he said. It came too quickly.

Go away, Daeron.

Aelora's gaze did not waver. "You run from them," she said instead. "From what you see, from what you understand."

Something in his chest tightened. Perhaps she would have worked better as Bloodraven assistant. "You presume much."

"Then correct me."

"I have neither the time nor the inclination. And certainly I lack the mental capacity."

He moved then, intending to step past her.

Aelora caught his sleeve, firmly enough that he stopped.

The contact *burned.*

Daeron tried to snatch it back, but to no avail. He lacked every ounce of strength that he normally possessed.

He braced himself for the worst, another vision of her screaming beneath cruel men.

But it didn't arrive.

When he blinked his eyes open, he was surprised to notice that his sight had improved. When she spoke again, it didn't sound as if she was underwater and his ears didn't ring.

"Do not lie to me." she said. It was not a plea, it was not even a demand. It was expectation.

No one expected anything from Daeron since he were twelve and used to ditch his studied to drown in his cups.

He looked down at her hand on his sleeve, then back at her face.

"I lie to everyone," he said quietly. "It makes things simpler."

"I am not everyone."

That was the problem.

"No," he said. "You are not."

Aelora did not release him. "Then do not be simple." she said.

A strange, almost humorless sound escaped him. "You do not know what you are asking."

"Then tell me."

"I cannot." He shook his head once. "You should not want to understand this."

"I do not care what I should want."

Of course she didn't, of course.

Daeron closed his eyes briefly. He could leave, he still could. He could pull away, walk past her, let this end here before it began.

It would be easier, it would be safer.

For her.

For him.

For them both.

He had done it countless times: when Aerion expected him to join him in the training yard, when Egg asked him to take care of the cats with him, when Daella wished for him to help her braid her hair, when Aemon thought he could talk about books with him, when Rhae desired to play in the gardens with him.

Daeron had always deflected, running away from expectations and hiding in his sorrow.

But she had dressed lilac in his dreams, just like his mother. And Daeron missed his mother terribly.

When he opened his eyes again, she was there. Dyanna wasn't there anymore, but she still was. Still watching him, still waiting.

The two women even had the same *smell.*

Did she love him like his mother did?

Daeron wished she *didn't*, not like that anyway. Not in a familiar sense of the word.

But she didn't love him, how could she after what he had done?

She should hate him instead.

Hate me, Aelora.

Hate me, hate me, hate me.

Run away from me.

"What did you mean," she asked, softer now, "about the text?"

He exhaled slowly. "You do not read it as it is written," he said at last. "You take parts, pieces. Not all of it."

Aelora's grip loosened slightly, but she did not let go. "According to what?"

He hesitated. "According to what fits."

You do not fit in this family, Daeron.

Her fingers slipped from his sleeve, not in retreat but in thought. She looked like uncle Baelor, always trying to be polite, always trying to *understand.*

And she was equally perfect. Daeron almost wished she would be the Baelor to his Maekar, the perfection to his disappointment. He wanted for her to wrap her arms around him and console him, like his uncle had done with his father.

Instead Aelora stepped back half a pace, creating space between them—but not distance.

"Then come back." she said. Not as a request or an order, it sounded like an inevitability: he had to take a step in her direction to be understood.

Daeron glanced once more toward the corridor behind her, then past her, then nowhere at all.

"This is unwise." he muttered.

But she turned, already moving back toward the table, as if certain he would follow. As if the decision had already been made.

Daeron stood there a heartbeat longer. Then, despite himself, he followed her.



She was incredibly cultured, Daeron was sure he had never met someone like her. Maybe only Baelor could compare, but yet again when had him and his uncle ever had a serious conversation?

He had provided her with a clear translation—apparently he knew Valyrian better than her, a side effect of his dreams—and she had asked him about the exact meaning behind Jaenara's words.

The Valyrian adventurer had started her trip on discovering Sothoryos on the base of a dream, a dragon dream in which she had seen deep forests and different species, all of them bowing to a real dragon, who sat on a high throne.

"Maybe only a dreamer can understand a dreamer." Aelora had said, when he had given her his own explanation to Jaenara's words. Daeron wished that was true.

"I thought the saying was different." he chuckled humourlessly. "*Only a dragon can truly understand a dragon.*"

"Yet dreams made us kings."

"Three dragons gave us the throne." he argued softly.

"But Daenys dreamt about the Doom." she replied. Daeron liked talking to her. "She understood what she saw and acted accordingly."

Daeron swallowed dry. "It was different then." he murmured, keeping his eyes to the page. He didn't want to see her amethyst eyes, he was sure he would forget his own words.

"How so?"

"They knew about magic. I mean, look at them." his fingers traced the draw of the dragon. "Valyrians knew about this sort of things. They believed in what they saw."

Aelora held silent for a long moment, before her hand grasped his.

Daeron held back his breath, noticing how his eyesight only improved whenever she touched him.

"Do you not believe in what you see?" she asked softly. Daeron was sure she was pitying him.

He hated to be pitied. His siblings pitied him. His grandparents did it. Surely his mother as well, before her passing.

Yet he wanted hers.

He had been in pain for so long, let him be comforted for once.

He would get anything she gave him.

"I see nothing." he whispered so low that, if it hadn't been only them in the room, she wouldn't have heard of him. "I'm just mad."

His father had told him so. Right after Dyanna's passing, he had told him he had foreseen it. And his father had told him he was *mad.*

Mad Daeron, Aerion sneered at him when he felt in the mood for cruelty.

"Did you ever dream of me?" she asked in a soft murmur. Her voice was musically familiar, like she had lulled him to sleep several times, back when he didn't dream.

Daeron had learned how to lie a long time ago. "No."

She didn't say anything for a long time. He didn't have the courage to raise his head and meet her pitiful gaze.

Daeron the Coward.

"Maybe we could find something, some books that can explain how to interpret them, how to ease the horrors."

Here she was again, trying to *fix* him.

Everyone was set on this mission, nowadays: Baelor, Bloodraven, his father.

She had a pragmatic approach to everything. She believed she could bend anything to her control.

Daeron knew she had the best intentions at heart, but this was not his case. He was sick of feeling like a burden, a problem to solve, a puzzle to put together.

He just wanted to be *understood.*

But Aelora couldn't understand him.

No one could.

He had been stupid enough to think otherwise.

"Maybe you could take the tea from that flower I was telling you about the other night. Or find something else that may help you fall into a dreamless sleep." she continued rambling. Daeron wanted for her to shut up, to shut up forever. She had already held him awake with her screams, she didn't need to add those hopeful words to that.

"No." he choked out. "Please, stop insisting. There's no cure to this curse. Trust me, if there had been I would know."

Surprisingly she didn't speak further.

Silence stretched between them. It was tense, filled with too many words let unsaid. But Daeron didn't want to hear them.

His ears rang, his eyesight failing him once again. A dream was approaching, he could feel it pressing against the back of his head. But he refused to fall asleep.

He had been drunk all week long, now his father had taken alcohol away from him. He didn't understand that wine eliminated dreams, made him lose his consciousness and pass out on his bed.

Now dreams would start haunting him every night. It was like they were ready to explode.

"Daeron?" her voice sounded muffled. She was underwater again.

She didn't know how to swim.

Daeron remembered a day of many and many years ago, when they had all gone to Dragonstone. Rhaegel's family was there as well.

His uncle had seemed happy, his eyes dry; he was rarely happy. Aelor had been Aerion's shadow, the two of them sparring together on the shore.

Aelora had tried to swim, unaware of how dangerous the sea could be when one didn't know how to stay afloat. Lady Alys had shouted when her daughter's golden head had disappeared beneath the surface, but Maekar had been swift enough and grabbed her before she could drown.

Daeron wanted to save her now, to be as brave as his father.

"What?" her voice came again, even more distant. "Your father?"

He tried to shake his head, pressing his eyes shut. He imagined her underwater, so little and scared.

And then beneath those laughing men, again so little and scared.

Why could he never save her?

Why could he never save anybody?

"Do you want me to go get your father?"

Gods, no.

His father was the last person that could help him now.

"Or should we go to his chambers?"

He tried to grab her hands, to stop her. She only took his as an agreement instead, squeezing his hands and guiding him up from his seat.

He felt weightless, as if he was floating. Maybe he was flying, atop of his dragon. He wondered if Jaenara and his ancestors felt the same.

"It's alright, it's alright." he tried to hold on to the sound of her voice. She sounded closer. His hands grabbed silk, red silk. It turned into blood quickly.

He felt his feet moving, which was strange because he was sure to be atop of a dragon.

Dreams were strange.

He dreamt of dragons dying, but they were all dead already.

He wanted to ask Aelora if she had a dragon. He imagined her flying in the skies of King's Landing, so fierce and beautiful. She would certainly race him to go back and forth to Dragonstone.

He wondered how long it would take him to fly back to Summerhall, to make his mother join him on dragon back. Many were afraid of dragons, but Dyanna was certainly not. She was brave like Aelora.

He had been a kid when he had asked his mother if he could marry her. The woman had laughed and told him she already belonged to his father.

He had despised his father, he always took everything away from him. He had taken Dyanna away from him twice: first in marriage, then in death.

Daeron had watched both his mother and his father die that day: he had gone from having loving parents to being utterly alone.

And he was still alone. He feared he would always be.

Aelora seemed to be alone as well. Aelor was her twin, yet he always stuck with Aerion or Matarys. Kiera was her friend, but she had Valarr and the babies. Daella was too small to be of company, same for Egg and Rhae, Aemon in Oldtown.

No one was worthy enough of her in their family. No one was as beautiful or as intelligent.

Baelor, maybe, but he was married. No High Septon would let him have two wives, like Aegon did.

Daeron was no match to her either. But he had no one, plenty enough space in his heart for her.

He could have not married his mother, but he could marry Aelora.

And then they could fly together.

"We're almost there." she sounded reassuring.

Where?

The sept?

Were they about to get married?

Or maybe it wasn't a joyful event, maybe it was a funeral. Otherwise why was he crying?

He wondered who had died now. Surely someone he had already seen dying soon.

He wondered if she would die as well, leaving him alone again. If she would make him happy, like his mother had done with his father.

He wanted to see the future now, to know what would happen to her, if he'd be good enough. Was she happy? Was she sad? Did she die like all the rest of them?

He hoped not. He wanted to protect her, pull her out of danger, like Maekar had done.

Why couldn't he have saved Daeron as well? Aelora was just his niece, while Daeron was his son. His *first* son.

He suddenly hated her. Why did she get what he had always wanted?

But then he felt two strong hands grabbing his face, calloused and warm.

He could recognise them anywhere: *Father.*

The first hands that ever held him, that raised him high in the sky, that slapped him.

"Daeron?" his voice arrived to his ears, filled with worry.

Yes, it's me, he wanted to tell his father. *Your first son.*

Why couldn't he always say his name like that? Why did it have to be filled with anger and disgust most of the time?

He thought for a moment that he would crush his skull with his strong hands.

No once could hurt him like his father.

No one could make him happy like his father.

He thought everything was bearable whenever he caressed his face and told him that everything would be alright.

And every time his father acted bitterly, the pain returned, as if it were still a fresh wound.

"Daeron, can you hear me?"

Yes. Yes, I'm here.

Can't your hear me, father?

Can't you see?

"Go call Bloodraven."

No. No!

He wanted to stay with his father. He wanted to be cradled in his arms, like when he was a child and his father a mere green boy.

His father was warm, always smelled of lavender because he was always kissing Mother.

Summerhall was empty when he went away to war, or to court, or to pay a visit to uncle Baelor.

His siblings hid in his bed, while he wanted to hid in Maekar's.

But then two cold hands grabbed him and Daeron fell.



When he had been four, Daeron had gotten ill with the Shivers and put to bed. He had been secluded in his room, with the company of a Maester and his parents. His mother used to keep vigilant on him during the day, while his father watched over him at night. Mother would feed him the little crumbs of food his system could get, while Father would rub his temples at night. Dyanna would sing happy Dornish songs to make him smile, Maekar would sing lullabies to get him to sleep.

He used to do that so rarely—*singing*—that Daeron couldn't strain from the memory. It had felt strange even then, but in a positive way: his father didn't posses his mother's melodic voice, but he tried to hold back the sobs and that was enough.

There was singing now as well.

No, not *singing.*

More like a monotonous tune.

A chant.

A prayer.

Daeron opened his eyes and was met with lilac ones. For a moment he thought he had died and his mother had come to greet him in the afterlife, to cradle him and sing to him in death like she used to do in her life.

But then he remembered that she rarely prayed. And her eyes were a deep shade of *purple.*

Dyanna wore her hair loose and smiled brightly. This woman had a veil around her head instead and looked sad.

She clutched her Seven Pointed Star around her neck and stopped praying when she noticed him opening his eyes.

"Daeron?" she whispered, her hands shaking while she reached for his.

He wanted to push her away, to tell her that she wasn't Dyanna and to cry out for his father.

But Aelinor was a childless mother and Daeron was a motherless child.

"How do you feel?" her voice broke through his thoughts.

"Bad." he didn't want to lie to her.

She moved suddenly, reaching for a cup nearby and bringing it to his lips.

Daeron wasn't surprised when he tasted water.

He emptied two of them before he let go to the pillow again, closing his eyes. "Where's my father?"

He wanted his father.

"Training in the courtyard."

"And Aelora?"

"Attending a Small Council meeting with Baelor."

Daeron let out a humourless laugh. "So you're the only one that cares enough to stay?"

He knew it was wrong even to assume that. Aelinor didn't care for Daeron, she just wanted a *child.*

"It is not like that." her hand found his again, caressing ever so slightly. She was sweet, he wondered why his uncle refused to share her bed. For being so bookish, Aerys really was stupid.

"They've been here all night long, they were so worried." she continued with her small voice. "But Aelora's presence was needed for the meeting."

"And Maekar? Was his presence *needed* in the training yard?" he sneered at her reasoning, but she only sighed.

"You know your father better than me." she murmured.

Aye, he did. That's why he dreamed he would be at his bedside when he woke up.

He turned around, not able to look at the piety in his aunt's eyes.

Why did she look at him like that? He should be the one to piety her. She was doomed to a sad life, tied to a mad man too focused on books to care about her.

Yet what was Daeron, if not a mad man as well?

"Ah, I see you're awake."

Daeron's heart stopped when his voice reached his ears.

No one had heard the door opening, but Daeron didn't even question it: Lord Bloodraven moved like a snake in a garden, silent but deadly, ready to bite the lamb and feast upon its flesh.

And Daeron was his lamb.

He didn't turn to look at him, at his red eye that saw more than what everyone thought, at his empty socket that seemed to stare at him nonetheless.

How many eyes does Bloodraven have?

A thousand and one.

He didn't turn when the man sent Aelinor away or when he sat in her chair. Daeron wanted to remind him of his station, of the fact that his aunt was a noble woman and the wife of a prince, while he was only a bastard grown proud thanks to his half-brother's benevolence.

But he didn't.

He just couldn't look at him.

He was sure that if he did turn, Brynden Rivers would see everything: his dreams, his desires, his own thoughts.

But then two hands grabbed his shoulders and forced him on his back. They were so cold that Daeron had goosebumps spread across his skin.

He saw now that red eye which stared into his soul.

Brynden Rivers wasn't a warrior, not as muscular as Baelor and Maekar—who kept training even in their older days—he wouldn't be able to raise the hammer that his father still trained with, bigger than Rhae herself. Bloodraven flesh, instead, was flaccid like Daeron's, yet he had forced the drunken prince to look at him so effortlessly.

He remembered that Bloodraven had put an end to the Blackfyre rebellion, by killing his half-brother and his two children.

Kinslayer, that was the name used for people killing their own blood. The septons said that those men were cursed, yet Daeron saw Bloodraven only being rewarded for it.

Maybe the gods had mistaken them and had sent Daeron the dreams, right after Redgrass Field. He wondered how that could have happened: Bloodraven was a pale, white-haired man; Daeron had sand brown locks and his skin was tanned after spending his afternoons running around Summerhall.

"You dreamt."

It wasn't a question. The master of Whispers knew it better than him.

"I did not." Daeron whispered. He didn't remember anything, only being unable to see and losing his conscience.

"I'm not talking about tonight." Brynden Rivers stood up from his seat, walking slowly toward the window.

"What?" Daeron asked confused. He was always an enigma to him and the entire court.

Bloodraven didn't turn. Daeron was glad about it, he didn't want to see that red eye. Yet staring at his winestain birthmark upset him all the same.

"Come." he ordered. He never asked about anything.

Daeron saw no point in laying in bed and disobey: Bloodraven would probably raise him on his feet with his own weak hands that held incredible strength.

He took a deep breath, pushing up in a seated position: his head didn't spin anymore, his eyesight was clear, yet he felt *exhausted.*

He craved for wine, that always made him feel stronger.

He let out a groan, putting his feet down on the floor. It was cold, but still warmer than Brynden's hands. His legs felt like jelly, his entire body felt weak.

When he pushed himself up on his knees, his pace was unsteady and lame. He looked as if he would crumble on the ground at any moment, but his resolution was as strong as his exhaustion: he wouldn't fall before the bastard's eyes.

When he reached the window, just a few meters of distance from his bed, his chest was shattered by laboured breaths.

It felt as if he had just fought for his life, not taken a few steps.

"You're weak." Bloodraven noted out, as if Daeron hadn't noticed.

He didn't have enough breath to voice out his affermative response, so he just nodded.

"You know why is that?" his tone dimmed, sounding even raspier.

Daeron raised his gaze on him: on his red eye, the red and raw skin of his eye socket, his red birthmark, the red of his robes.

Daeron was starting to *hate* that colour.

"Because you *fought* against it."

Daeron's heart dropped even further. "What?" he didn't understand. He probably wanted not to.

"Your mind was aching to dream, yet you refused to close your eyes and let go to that need. So you exhausted your body and passed out." Bloodraven's voice sounded like the screeching of Valyrian steel against a rock.

Daeron stared out of the window.

He always dreamt of red blood, he didn't want to see anymore red.

"You have no idea of what you're playing with, of the power that you have. This is more than just dragon blood, which permitted us to soar the skies: this is pure magic." his voice raised, sounding like a roar. "This is a gift."

Daeron sneered at his words, still refusing to look at him. "This is a *curse*."

"Call it what you want." Bloodraven attacked. "You would have died tonight."

Now his words hit the mark.

Daeron's breath itched, keeping his eyes glued to the window. "You're bluffing," he whispered; he was Master of Whispers, he knew how to lie to carve out informations. "I told you I didn't dream tonight."

"That's only because I stopped your dream." Bloodraven replied. "Or, to be clear, Shiera did with her potion. If it weren't for her, you would have met the gods that you curse upon."

Shiera Seastar, known as the most beautiful woman alive. And the most dangerous.

Daeron remembered her mismatched eyes, the colours of green and blue reflected by the sapphires and the emeralds of her necklace. But she didn't come to visit at Summerhall, like Rhaegel or Baelor; or roam around the court, like Aerys and Brynden. She kept herself locked in her rooms, hidden in the Maidenvault. But unlike her cousins Daena, Rhaena and Elaena—the daughters of king Aegon III that he had seen sometimes in his dreams—who had been secluded there to preserve their innocence, she didn't keep her virginity for her future husband and permitted men into her bed; so many men, the rumor said.

And some of them had been her half-brothers: Bloodraven and Bittersteel.

Daeron wondered if their animosity had started once Shiera had flowered into a woman, or if the hatred was sown from the womb.

If she had chosen her strong brother Aegor or the smart one Brynden, when she gave away her maidenhead.

Daeron had never bedded a virgin. They were offered to him, of course, as a prince of the realm: the fairest and youngest of them all. Daeron had always refused them.

He believed one ought to be gentle with a twelve year girl, whore or not, and he knew nothing of gentleness.

But he didn't see gentleness either in the man standing before him, nor could he imagine it in the brute warrior that had hidden away in Tyrosh. Whoever had been first, he hadn't been gentle.

But she probably liked it better this way. Shiera was a witch. And witches are not gentle creatures. The smallfolk said that she bathed in blood to preserve her beauty.

Daeron raised his eyes on his cousin now, on his pale face and pale hair. He looked right back at him, making Daeron's skin prickle.

Witch. Just like his sister. It was clear who Shiera had given her maidenhead to.

"Why did you let her save me?" he choked out on his own breath. He felt like rotting flesh. That was all he ever was.

Bloodraven looked away, he was probably wondering the same thing. Daeron would have been better off dead.

Let him meet the gods. Let him look into their eyes and pray for their forgiveness. His brother believed himself a dragon, a being closer to gods than to men. He wanted to be a god as well, to be worshipped by the ones that loved him. Instead they were just terrified, wondering when his next fit of madness would hit.

The gods were cruel and his brother was as well. Daeron was nothing but lame. He couldn't be a god, nor a prince or a knight.

He thought he could be a martyr, if they killed him quickly: he didn't want to suffer any longer. And yet they had *saved* him.

Bloodraven smirked. He probably enjoyed watching him suffer, that's why he nodded towards the window and said those words.

"*He* begged for your life."

Daeron shouldn't have turned, because the sight of the bastard's birthmark was better than the one of his father, hammer in hand, getting ready to fight against his opponent, a poor little knight who would be the target of the man's rage for that day and yield soon enough.

"*Maekar.*" the raspy in his voice made Daeron's skin crawl. "How sweetly he begged for your life, asked me to try anything in my power to save you."

His father was a stern, cold man. He had never begged for anything in his life. Not even for his own life, when he had gone to war, or for Dyanna's one, when she was bleeding in a bed.

Yet he had done it for him.

And despite his father's wishes, Daeron wanted to die even more.



"So the princess runs away with the love of her life..."

"It doesn't have to be this dramatic!"

"Why am I the horse in this story?"

Poor little Egg was asking this question for the third time in a row, yet neither Daella or Rhae were answering him. They were far too busy conjuring up a story to distract Daeron from his "long recovery"—that's how the Grand Maester had called it, claiming that the prince needed resting and should not leave his rooms. The old man acted so arrogant and sure of himself that Daeron had felt the need to remind him that he had done nothing to save him, rather it had all been Shiera's merits.

The Grand Maester had gone a deep shade of red, while Baelor shut him down with an exhausted look.

Now his siblings had joined him after supper, to keep him company until they had to go get changed for dinner. Egg had missed his training appointment with cousin Valarr to be there.

"I think you look cute as a horse." Daeron leaned forward to catch his cheek between his thumb and his index. His youngest brother had the softest cheeks since birth and Daeron has always pinched them in an act of affection.

Egg smiled at him now, leaning forward in his embrace and resting his head against Daeron's shoulder. The little one let out a sigh, used to their sisters' attics by now. He was in minority, since Aemon's departure for Old Town. Not that any of them could impose themselves around Daella or Rhae: the former would have smiled gently and shaken her head at their proposal, while the latter would have screamed until they played by her rules.

Daeron kissed his head, with his silver-gold hair that reminded the world of their heritage as dragonlords, a long time ago. Egg payed back his affectionate gesture with a bright smile, before Rhae grabbed her young brother's collar and pushed him up.

"Egg, you can't lay atop of Daeron! He's weak!" she reprehended him vehemently, as if Daeron might pass out from the mere exertion.

"I'm fine, Rhae." Daeron sighed, trying to push himself up on his hands to get into a seated position.

But two firm hands pushed him down on the pillows again, Daeron wouldn't have been able to fight them even if he had all his strength.

"You aren't." Valarr replied calmly, shooting him a hard look.

He had come earlier than his siblings, to pay him a visit after hearing the news of his almost death. It was a polite thing to do—to visit someone on the verge of dying—and his cousin was the picture of formality.

Daeron had expected for him to stay five or ten minutes, before taking his leave. Yet he had talked to him for half a hour and remained there even after his loud siblings joined. Valarr had smiled at the chaos and said that he was used to the noise: Viserys was already a handful and he had no doubt that Vaelor would join his brother when he was old enough.

Daeron had asked about his family, of course he had: he wasn't as galant as Valarr, but he knew the etiquette of court. His cousin had spoken fondly of his children, of pale haired Viserys and dark haired Vaelor.

But when Daeron had asked him if he meant to have another child ("The dragon has three heads." he had joked), his cousin's expression had darkened and he had not answered. The situation had not gone better when he had asked after his wife: Valarr had said that Kiera was recovering but that was all.

Then an embarrassing silence had settled, thankfully soon broken by Daella, Egg and Rhae walking in.

Valarr hadn't left, hadn't even stood up from his seat at his side. Whoever he was avoiding by remaining in his chambers, Daeron didn't know, but he had a sensation it had to do with Kiera. They probably had argued, but he didn't ask about what. It wouldn't have been *polite.*

Daeron sighed now, but didn't protest. if they had been kids—like many years ago, when they used to be inseparable—Daeron would have reminded Valarr that he was older (by mere months), while his cousin would have replied with his usual politely sarcastic remark: "But I'm the heir."

But they weren't children anymore: Valarr had grown into the responsible heir, husband and father, while Daeron drowned in cups and desperation.

He would lie if he said he didn't miss those old days, filled with warm afternoons in Summerhall where they would run in the gardens; or their time at Dragonstone, where they would go down on the beach and find comfort from the heat in the waves of the sea.

Valarr had loved the sea; he bet he was happy to live still on the island, to roam on the shore of his childhood with his kids and his wife. Kiera came from Tyrosh, she probably liked the sea as well.

His cousin passed him a cup of water, bringing it closer to his lips. He seemed to have several nervous habits, something that Daeron had noticed in that half hour spent together: he fidgeted with his rings, readjusted his hair or the covers around Daeron, reached for his cousin's cup every ten minutes and refilled it immediately.

Daeron drank all—he had learned it was pointless to pass it back to Valarr half empty, he would find a way to make him drink all the water—before laying back down as the future king commanded.

Then Valarr resumed in his usual routine: put the cup down, refilled it and readjusted the covers around him. It was a crazy behaviour and yet *he* was called Mad Daeron.

After ten minutes, the motion repeated. Daeron was about to say that this was psychotic behaviour, when a knock on the door interrupted him right before.

The white cloak assigned to his family—Ser Willem? Willie?—walked in to announce the next guess: another relative that was coming to say his last goodbye to "dying Daeron."

He was already sighing, an afterthought of telling to the sworn shield to send the person away, before the man told him who it was.

Daeron's breath itched.

Aelora walked in, draped in red and black. She looked like a Valyrian goddess. Yet again, when didn't she?

She looked around herself, surprised probably by the amount of people already in the room, before curtsying respectfully. "Cousins, I didn't expect these much people. I came to look in on Prince Daeron."

She was as polite as Valarr, that's why Daeron was surprised when, instead, his cousin answered to her words by standing up abruptly and storming out of the room, without even saying goodbye.

His expression had turned sour, he had raised to his feet and got ahold of the door, before slamming it behind himself.

Aelora looked back once, but she didn't try to stop him. Even Rhea and Daella, still immersed in their story, knotted their eyebrows in confusion.

"What..." he began unsure, eyeing her and the closed door from which Valarr had walked out a moment before.

The dragon princess swallowed, keeping her eyes glued to the floor. "I fear the prince is crossed with me."

Daeron's attention was piqued at that, though he didn't feel it in himself to be so bold as to ask. And she didn't explain further.

She just raised her eyes on him and waited, like a litter waste cat that waits to be fed after the rest of its siblings have eaten.

They had had tons of kittens back at Summerhall, when he was a child. Daeron always used to feed the unwanted one, knowing that no one cared if it lived or not.

It had reminded Daeron of himself.

She reminded him of himself now.

He wanted to throw up at the thought.

"Princess." Daeron greeted her after a long moment of silence.

She wasn't going to be left like a stray cat. Or like Daeron. She was a princess.

His voice was gruff and raspy—had been so since he had woken up that morning—but he tried to stand in a seated position nonetheless.

It was shameful, to be honest, how he always seemed on the verge of dying whenever she was near.

How *pathetic* he must look to her eyes.

Yet the moment he tried to raise, she walked towards him immediately. "Please don't." she tried to push him back with her soft hands, but she wasn't as strong as Valarr. Daeron could resist her even in his condition, but he gave in to her wish.

Now her amethyst gaze hoovered over him. Daeron could read fear and alarm in it and he wanted for nothing more than to comfort her.

Maybe that was why he took her hand with his, the one she had laid on his chest, right on his heart.

Daeron couldn't explain to himself why he had done so—or probably didn't want to admit it. But she couldn't leave her hand there, feeling how fast his heart beat. She would call for the Maester, claiming that he was feeling unwell again.

He would deny it, of course, but she would insist because she was so damn stubborn. She would lay her head on his chest just to hear the tumbling noise of his heart beat and Daeron would kiss her hair, her brow, her cheek to reassure her.

He was going mad, Bloodraven was right. He still wondered why he had left him alive, why his father had pleaded for his life if he hadn't even disturbed to visit him since he had woken up.

Everyone had come, *but* him: Aelinor and Jena, Baelor and Matarys, queen Myriah and king Daeron, his brother Aerion with Aelor, cousin Valarr.

And now Aelora. Sweet Aelora who had put her hand on his chest and who now retrieved it back.

Daeron took a sigh of relief, despite himself.

Better this way, he thought. *Run away.*

Her eyes moved to her lap, while she twisted those shining rings of hers. The one she had given him—red and black just like her dress—burned on his chest, hidden beneath the collar of his chemise. It had been too little to wear and only betrothed men wore rings belonging to maidens, so he had stolen a small necklace from Daella's collection—she had far too many—and wore it around his neck now, *above his heart.*

"How are you?" her voice was but a little whisper, Daeron was sure he wouldn't have heard it if his siblings hadn't been awfully quiet.

"Well." was his answer.

"You almost died."

"I should have."

She raised her eyes at that, but Daeron couldn't read the emotions behind them. He didn't want to feel pitied again, not from her.

He shot Daella a look and she understood immediately. She took both of her youngest siblings by hand and guided them out.

Aelora watched them go, waiting for the door to be closed before speaking again. "There was no need to send them away."

"There was, instead."

"People may talk about the fact that we're here alone."

"Are you scared about your honour, princess?" he chuckled humourlessly at that, looking away just like her. "Do not worry, no one will conjure up anything, since I'm almost dying."

"Why do you say such a thing?" she snapped now. Daeron hadn't even noticed he had gotten closer, but her sudden shout and turn in his direction made him pull back in surprise.

She never snapped, not even when her twin and his brother used to play tricks on her, back at Summerhall during their usual visits. She would hold back the tears—because she was a proud dragon, like everyone in their family—and walk away gracefully. But as soon as she reached the first dark corridor she would crumble on the floor and cry; Daeron would follow her and hide away just to hear her cry. He never knew why he did that, why he wouldn't comfort her like Mother did when he was the one upset. He would just pry on her during one of her weak moments, as if to remind himself that she was equally human. She had looked like a goddess since she was born.

Then she had grown and looked even more unreal. Aerion and Aelor kept teasing her, but still she didn't snap; she was Baelor's pupil now and already so similar to him in this aspect. He was sure that the heir to the throne didn't wish for emotional distressed people by his side: a capable ruler should know when to master their emotions and let logical thinking prevail.

Yet now she *snapped.* "Why do you keep saying that?" her eyes shined with fury. "You shouldn't wish to die, you have a family that loves you."

That was the least of excuses he had ever heard and made him furious just like she was.

His family couldn't even *comprehend* what he was going through.

His mother was *dead.*

Aerion despised him, he called him Drunken Daeron or Mad Daeron, he kept repeating what a nuisance he was to their family's reputation.

Daella, Aemon, Aegon and Rhae loved him, but that wasn't enough to prevent nights of horrors.

And his father...his father had begged for his life, but not because he cared for him: only because that was the *right* thing to do and Maekar always did his duty.

"With all due respect, you know nothing about me." his tone was bitter now as he got closer to her. He wouldn't raise his voice like she did.

"And you know nothing about me!"

"I've made no assumptions about *your* life, princess."

She chuckled humourlessly, looking away. She sounded like Aerion when she pronounced her next words. "Oh poor Daeron. He's haunted by visions of the future." She stilled, as if hearing her own words too late.

"I AM!" he snapped just like her. He had promised himself he would not lose his temper, but if he had gotten his looks from Dyanna, he had gotten his rage from Maekar, boiling hot like dragon fire.

He had launched himself against her, taking her by the shoulders and shouting those words in her face. And she had shrunk back, *scared.*

Daeron swallowed, tightening the grip on her. He bet he looked like a madman before her *terrorised* eyes.

He wondered if she'd start crying now. If he would stand there and watch her cry or if he'd press her against his chest, letting her listen to his heartbeat.

Instead he let her go.

She pulled back, but didn't stand. He had expected her to run away, he almost wished she did.

"Then learn to live with it." she whispered, her eyes still fixed on him, still shocked.

He only looked away, having nothing to say.

He had tried, he was still trying to. But there was no cure, the gods had given him a...

"Curse." he breathed out. "This is a curse."

"Still, there's no excuse to say such things, your father..."

"What about my father?" he was trying so hard to keep his temper at bay.

"He *begged* for your life." her tone changed, getting lower and sadder.

Pity from her, *again.*

"You have no idea how heartbreaking that scene was." she whispered, looking away. "*You have no idea, Daeron.*"

But he had. Hadn't he witnessed his father begging the gods to keep his mother alive?

They hadn't listened, they never did.

He watched a tear roll down from her eye. She was looking down, her head slightly tilled, so the tear barely rolled down her face and stopped right under her temple. He caught it before it could fall on the bedsheets, making her gasp in surprise.

But he kept his hand there, caressing her skin. Dyanna always used to kiss his temple, wishing for him to have nice dreams.

Even if it was born out of pity, he wanted to kiss it off, to wish her nice dreams, all those dreams he had never had.

"I should have died." he repeated. No bitterness, no dramatics. Just facts. "It would have spared us both a great deal of trouble."

"I am not troubled."

"Then you have not been paying attention."

Aelora's breath barely caught, but he saw it.

Good. Let her understand.

"You should leave me be," he said, taking his hand back. "Return to your books, your translations. Find some other mystery that does not..." he stopped, his jaw tightening. "...that does not rot from the inside out." he finished, quieter.

That was closer to the truth.

Aelora moved forward, close enough now that he could see the fine details again: the steadiness in her gaze, the absence of pity he had expected and found himself almost... disappointed not to see.

"You think this is beyond understanding," she said.

"I know it is."

"You are wrong."

"I am dying," he replied flatly. "That is not a matter of interpretation."

"Then fight back and live."

The words landed harder than they should have. Daeron let out a breath that might have been a laugh. "You speak as if it were a matter of will."

"It is a matter of refusal." she corrected.

He looked at her then, *really* looked: there was no uncertainty in her face, no hesitation.

Only that same relentless clarity she had shown in the library. It irritated him. It intrigued him.

"You refused to sleep," she continued. "You fought it until your body failed. That is not weakness."

"It nearly killed me."

"But it did not."

"That is not an argument."

"It is," she said calmly. "You survived."

Daeron pushed himself up, slowly, using the wall behind him for support. His legs protested the movement, unsteady, but he forced them to hold.

"I survived because Brynden Rivers interfered," he said. "Because his witch brewed some concoction and forced me back into waking. Not because of anything I did."

Aelora remained silent for a moment, her eyes wandering away as if she was searching for *something*, for a solution perhaps. "Then we remove him from the equation."

That made him blink. "You...what?"

"You do not go to him," Aelora said. "You do not rely on him. If this is something that can be understood, then we will understand it without him."

Daeron stared at her. "You say that as if you have a choice."

"I do."

"You do not."

This was madness. She was mad.

"I decide what I involve myself in. And I have decided."

Of course she had. Of course.

Daeron shook his head, once. "You are involving yourself in something that will destroy you."

"Then we ensure that it does not."

"*We.*" he almost laughed. Gods, she was convincing. 'We' sounded too good, coming from her lips. He could get addicted to that.

Daeron's mouth twitched faintly. "You presume much, princess." he said once again.

"Then correct me."

He moved closer. The world tilted slightly, the edges of it softening again, that familiar pressure beginning to build behind his eyes.

Not now.

Not here.

Aelora saw it. Her hand moved before he could stop her, fingers closing around his wrist.

The effect was immediate: the noise coming from the window sharpened, the blur receded, the pressure eased.

Daeron stilled. Slowly, he looked down at where she held him, then back at her.

But he didn't focus on the fact that her touch had eased the tension in his brain—like the other night—rather on the fact that she had touched him with intente for the first time.

"You will regret this." he whispered, eyes wide as he looked down at her.

"Perhaps." she said, meeting his gaze without flinching. "And yet, I will not stop."

Silence stretched between them, filled now with something heavier than before.

Daeron looked at her for a long moment.

Then, despite everything...

"...what did you find?" he asked.

Chapter End Notes

new chapter is out!! sorry for the delay.

we're finally back with daeron's pov. i think this dwells more on his powers, i'm deeply interested in dragon dreams so expect this story to go into the details of his gift (or, as he calls it, curse). as i like to say, we're just getting started.

another important part of his character is his relationship with his parents and i bordered on the oedipus complex in this capter (freud, you would have loved daeron).

we also meet two characters that will be very present in daeron's plot: aelinor and bloodraven.

even if we know so little about her, i'm deeply interested in aelinor and plan to work on her and daeron's joint desire to fill the void they both feel.

as for brynden, it would only make sense for him to get a special interest in a dragon dreamer like daeron. i know that maekar would not tolerate having him around his kids, but he'd come to compromise for daeron, especially if he believed that bloodraven could help him.

i loved writing another cute moment between the maekarlings and including valarr!! i promise we'll getting more of him, daeron truly needs a friend.

a little bit of angsts between him and aelora, but i swear things are set in motion now: soon they won't be able to stay away from one another, you'll see.

as always, leave a kudos and a comment if you liked it, i love replying and interacting with fans.

you can find this story on ao3 (ale_28), on wattpad and on tumblr (lomlherondale there)

my other socials: lomlherondale on tiktok, twitter and reddit

Chapter 6: Lemoncakes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A servant knocked on the door, walking in once she was granted entry. She carried a fine dress, shining cream adorned with gold.

Kiera sighed upon seeing it: it was the ninth gift in five days. But she knew better than to turn it down. She had tried it, the first time—when the present had been a hundred white roses delivered in her chambers—but Valarr had answered to her dismissal with decision: the next day it had been two hundred.

And so every day, since their fight, he had given his wife gifts of every sort, hoping for a reconciliation.

Aelora knew it took more than that.

"At least it's not a dagger this time." the pink haired woman commented.

She had a long vail wrapped around her head, waiting for her newly dyed hair to dry off. Aelora always helped her to do it: she had known very little about Tyroshi costumes when they had first met, but she had quickly learned in her two years spent at Kiera's side, to the point now to know the right amount of colouring needed to reach the right hue of pink that her friend appreciated.

"Do you think I could use it to stab my husband?"

Aelora snorted at her comment, shaking her head. She wasn't a stranger to her sarcastic comments, though she wondered how much ironic her friend was those days, after such a big fight.

It had been bad. So bad that people had already started whispering about the rift between the young prince and his wife and how Valarr would soon dismiss her and send her back to Tyrosh, yet it seemed to Aelora that her cousin was trying everything in his power to make up with Kiera, while she was the one who refused to give him a chance to reconcile.

Not that Aelora faulted her for that: she understood why Kiera didn't want to hear from him again, after what he had said.

Yet the young wife moved now around the room to have a better look at the fabric. Aelora, way too tired from the constant brush-water-dye-dry-brush some more routine, remained seated, her eyes fixed on Kiera.

She was so beautiful, her Kiera, even with a cloth wrapped around her head that made her look like a pink egg.

"Do you think I could wear this to the tourney festivities?" her friend asked.

"You could. But hadn't you planned not to attend?"

In the midst of her fury, she had said as much to Valarr. But now she sighed, looking away.

"My presence is required, the tourney is in Vaelor's honour."

"I don't think that Vaelor would care much about your absence." Aelora stated, trying to make her laugh. Kiera had the most vibrant laughter in all the Seven Kingdoms, second only to the Laughing Storm

probably.

And what she had said was true: Vaelor was just three weeks old and slept peacefully in his crib in his mother's rooms.

Another one of Kiera's decision: since Valarr had been spending his time with Viserys, making him play in the gardens with Maekar's younger children, she had taken Vaelor for her, letting him sleep in her bed, the place once occupied by Valarr himself.

"But others will." her friend whispered. Her eyes looked sad, something unusual and almost unnatural in such a sweet person.

And when Kiera wasn't dejected by the nobles whispers, she was the sweetest person alive: just like now, when she knelt before Aelora and took her hands in hers.

Aelora caressed her palm, ever so softly, suddenly feeling a deep rush of affection, especially when her friend sighed and looked at her.

It reminded her of the first night she had summoned Aelora in her rooms, eyes bloodshot after all the crying: her cousins had returned to Tyrosh, after having spent some months with her in Westeros, helping her to adjust to her new life. But once Kiera was happy and freshly pregnant, there was no reason for them to remain longer.

Her hands had been shaking while she passed Aelora her brush, asking her in High Valyrian—she was still very conscious of her accent when talking in Common Tongue—to help brush her hair.

Aelora had held her hands in hers and reassured Kiera that she wasn't alone in her new life.

It had become a habit since then, to take each other's hands when the other was upset.

"I'm tired of this situation." Kiera whispered, looking up at her with her big brown eyes.

"Then make peace with Valarr." Aelora proposed to her. She knew that her friend loved him: he could make her laugh instantly.

And it was the most rational thing to do. Valarr loved her as much as he loved his pride, he would never admit defeat.

But neither would Kiera, the little shake of her head was the confirmation she needed: she wouldn't even entertain the thought.

Didn't matter that she missed having him by her side every night and that Vaelor would wake her every three hours to latch at her breast, Kiera wouldn't let go of the offence. She hadn't been so proud once, but she had become as much after two years in her marriage: one ought to grow claws to survive among dragons.

"He thinks showering me with gifts will be enough."

"He's trying, Kiera."

"He should apologise."

Aelora couldn't say she disagreed with that. But she was a Targaryen and she knew everything about their fiery tendencies.

"It feels like it's three of us in this marriage." Kiera's tone raised, but she still kept it low because of Vaelor's sleeping form in the crib. "Me, him and his mother."

Aelora kept her mouth shut at that as well, knowing that her friend needed to vent and having no heart to disagree with that either.

Jena Dondarrion was her aunt, Baelor's wife and the future queen of the Seven Kingdoms: Aelora respected her for that. But she made Kiera's life a living hell.

"And he keeps listening to her." Kiera's vehement voice turned into a sob. "I'm his wife, I gave him heirs, yet I'm still the second choice."

"There's no choice, Kiera." Aelora sighed, squeezing her hands and trying to make her see reason. "He loves her as a mother and you as a wife, you're both important to him."

"And yet he listened to her words."

"They weren't untrue, Kiera."

"I should have told him!"

She had tried to keep her voice down, she really did. But Aelora knew that one could do as much and each recounting of Jena's actions only made Kiera angry.

So it was no surprise when her friend shouted those words against her and Vaelor's sobs followed.

Kiera pressed her eyes shut, keeping her tears at bay: she had cried enough during those days. Aelora instead sighed and stood up, reaching for the small boy, since his mother was in no condition to put him back to sleep.

Vaelor recognised her touch and calmed down a bit, when she took him in her arms: she had cradled him countless times since his birth and Aelora was the only lady Kiera trusted enough to look after her children. So she now pressed the child close to her chest, looking down at him.

The baby was adorable: chubby cheeks, purple eyes, a head of dark hair—unlike his brother Viserys—but he also possessed the loudest wail one could ever hear. Uncle Baelor had joked the first night that the whole island could hear him when he cried.

Valarr could put him to sleep with ease, way more capable of Aelora and, sometimes, of Kiera herself.

After minutes spent to cradle the child, the dragon princess turned to the pink haired woman, seeing her distraught expression as she remained sat on the floor.

"You should have told him, Kiera, I give you that," Aelora murmured, trying to comfort her but making her see reason as well. "But Valarr ought to know that you can't have anymore children."

"You don't understand," Kiera shook her head, tears falling down again. She had spent five days crying. "He'll divorce me and marry someone else."

"Why would he do that? You have given him two sons."

"Because I'm Tyroshi!" Kiera shouted again, turning all the efforts that Aelora had put into making Vaelor sleep in vain.

Aelora cradled him again as he broke into other sobs, his mother paralleling him.

Aelora was suddenly overwhelmed, but, as the Hand of the King said, a true leader showed their true colour in the moments of discomfort.

"Kiera, that's not true," she tried again, softer, her hands moving in synchrony to ease up the child close to her chest. "Westerosi nobility might care about that, but Valarr doesn't. He loves you."

Kiera only chuckled at her words, defeated and humourlessly. "He may love me all you want, but you can't deny that he's *ashamed* of me and my costumes."

"Kiera..."

"The children don't count, they're the blood of the dragon and his heirs: whether *contamination* I had, his blood burned it down. But their mother *is* dispensable."

"Kiera, that's not true."

"I bet Jena would be even happier if I were to take a ship by my own accord and sail back to Tyrosh."

"Kiera!"

Now it was Aelora's turn to raise her voice. She cared little about the fact that Vaelor was now very much awake—he wouldn't have slept anyway.

"Enough with this talking, you're not going anywhere." she declared, kneeling down on the floor before her, making her look right into her eyes.

Kiera always said she had purple eyes full of decision. And she must have seen that same sentiment in them now, because her rant stopped with a sudden breath and she nodded.

Aelora took it as an agreement. She wouldn't go anywhere.

She had her.

And she had *Valarr.*

Especially Valarr.

The lists were nearly complete.

From the gallery above the tourney grounds, Aelora could see the final preparations unfolding in careful order: pavilions being raised in the colors of a dozen great houses, squires hurrying back and forth with arms too full, knights already testing their footing on the packed earth below.

"The Reynes will take offense if placed beneath the Freys." a deep voice talked behind her.

Aelora did not look up from the parchment in her hands. "They always do," she replied, adjusting a name slightly to the left. "But they will attend regardless." Aelora's quill stilled. Slowly, she lifted her gaze.

Baelor Breakspear stood tall behind her, one hand absentmindedly playing with the ring on the other. He had not changed his attire from that morning, when she had seen him right after the Small Council meeting: he always summoned her in his solar right after, to inform her about the topics of discussion or what they needed to concentrate about.

They were a team, he said. Yet only one of them was granted a seat on the Council. It made Aelora's skin crawl with irritation: she wanted that seat, that silver brooch that Baelor showed on his chest.

The man took a step forward now, making Aelora's attention snap back on him. He hadn't changed, yet somehow he seemed different.

Focused on something. On *her,* she realised.

"I was under the impression," he said mildly, "that you preferred not to rely on certainty where offense is concerned."

Aelora held his gaze. "I do not," she replied. "But in this case, the outcome is predictable."

"Mm." That was all he said, yet it was enough.

Aelora set the quill down with measured care. She knew that sound: it was a small gesture of disagreement, for which Baelor didn't need words. And after so many years together, Aelora had learned to understand him: his words, his actions, his silence and his lies. "If you disagree, uncle, you may alter the arrangement."

"I do not disagree."

Aelora looked at him, at his mismatched eyes that roamed over the pavilions.

He had been rather troubled in the past days, because of Valarr and Kiera's big fight. Their relationship wasn't his business, of course, but it did concern the Hand of the King once the woman had declared she wouldn't take part to the festivities.

Valarr, for his part, had taken the reprehend from his father with a bowed head and a silent pout, storming out once Baelor had told him to do anything to save his marriage.

Not for Kiera.

But for her rich dowry and the Tyroshi alliance. The same country where Rohanne, her children and Aegor had fled to. There were still lords who claimed that the descendants of the Red Dragon were the legitimate rulers.

But there was something else that troubled the Heir of the Iron Throne, a woman who answered to the name of Jena Dondarrion and that, unlike anyone else in the realm, Baelor couldn't control.

"I am observing." his voice brought her back to reality now, his eyes on her face.

There it was: the *disagreement.*

Aelora resisted the urge to look back down at the parchment. His eyes were kind, but they made her uncertain nonetheless.

Aelora had always deemed herself smart, a quality that made her rather proud of herself. She certainly liked to win over Aelor at chess or put Valarr to shame when quoting random numbers on the realm's agricultural productions.

But if there was a person that could make her lose all her arrogance, that was Baelor.

She suddenly felt small again, just like when her mother used to scold her for helping her father out of his rooms.

"I was not aware I required observation."

"Everyone does," Baelor said gently. "From time to time."

That tone: not the voice of the Hand, not the voice of a prince. Something quieter, more familiar. It unsettled her more than any rebuke might have. Suddenly she wished he raised his voice against her, like Lady Alys had done countless times.

But Baelor never lost his temper. And neither did Aelora, since she had learned to control her emotions and not let them get the best of her. Or so she thought.

A good ruler always used their head and not their heart, that's what her uncle had taught her. And she knew it.

Yet she wasn't as composed and intelligent as Baelor.

She made mistakes and let her temper win her over, like she had done with Valarr after his discussion with Kiera.

She wasn't *perfect* like Baelor.

"I have completed the seating arrangements," she murmured, gesturing lightly to the spread of lists before her. "The Dornish delegation has been placed where..."

"Aelora."

Her name, spoken softly, cut cleanly through her words. She stopped.

She imagined, for a moment, how it would be like: to see him lose his temper. She knew she'd be heartbroken, the reprehend would sting more than a beating or the raised voice of her mother.

Yet she *craved* for it.

Because she preferred anger to pity. She was a dragon.

Hadn't that been what her brother had done as well? Leaving Dragonstone in the middle of the night, instead of receiving pitiful glances the morning after, like it had happened to Matarys, who favoured his mother in looks and personality.

But Mataryss was a Dondarrion at heart as much as Aelor was a dragon, just like her. They had shared the same womb, had come into the world together.

Aelora hadn't begged him to return—like Matarys had asked her to do—and Aelor hadn't returned.

Baelor stepped closer, not imposing or commanding, simply closing the distance until he stood beside her rather than behind her. "You have done excellent work," he said. "As you always do."

Aelora inclined her head slightly. She didn't understand where he was going with his words. She wasn't as intelligent. "I am glad it meets your expectations."

"My expectations are not the matter in question."

Aelora let out a breath she didn't realise she was holding. But it didn't ease the tension, rather knotted her stomach even more. "Then what is?"

He studied her for a moment, not as a lord studies a courtier or a master would do with his student.

As something else. Something older.

It slightly reminded her of her father—her *real* one—during one of those days where he was looking better. Most of them, they were on Dragonstone, on the beach.

Rhaegel would sit beside her, because both of them didn't know how to swim. And he would look at her fondly and preoccupied at the same time, like Baelor did now.

"You have corrected the same line three times." he said.

Aelora's eyes flicked, despite herself, to the parchment. The ink there was indeed thicker, the name written and rewritten with minute adjustments.

"I was refining the placement." she lied under her breath.

"You were avoiding the next task."

Her fingers tightened slightly against the edge of the parchment. "I do not avoid tasks."

She was always proper in her work. She folded her nightgown before putting on her dress, she prayed at meals and before going to sleep, she always finished a book even when it turned out to be boring.

"No," Baelor agreed. "You avoid thoughts."

That struck closer than she liked.

Aelora straightened. "If there is something you wish to ask, uncle, I would prefer you do so plainly."

Enough with games. She had never liked games.

Aelor and Aerion always kept her out of theirs, because she wasn't strong enough. Aelora had always kept herself out of *Baelor's* ones, because she wasn't smart enough.

They relied on the truth instead, that had been the base of their relationship. Both of them were well versed in the lies of court, but there was a certainty in always saying what one thought.

And when one managed the realm, certainty was mandatory.

A faint smile touched his lips. "I have always appreciated that about you."

"Then?"

Baelor's gaze softened, just slightly. "You are distracted."

The word settled between them, simple and *unavoidable.*

It was like Daeron's dreams: he tried to run from them and yet they kept coming back, to haunt him night after night.

Aelora's responsibility were her own form of torture, one that she craved nonetheless.

They had been oppressing her for as long as she could remember, since she had been old enough to look after Rhaegel and make sure he didn't stuff his mouth with too much lemoncakes during banquets.

But they also meant knowledge, recognition, *power.*

Aelora did not answer immediately.

Below them, a cheer rose as two knights clashed in a practice bout, the sound carrying upward in a dull echo. She let it fill the silence for a moment longer than necessary.

"There is much to be done," she said at last. "Distraction would be...inefficient."

"And yet," Baelor said quietly, "here it is."

It was true: she had been distracted from her tasks.

But she had her goal in mind and she'd do everything in her power to achieve it.

She exhaled slowly. "I am managing it."

"I do not doubt that."

That was the problem: he never doubted her, not in the way others did or the way that could be dismissed.

She should have been happy: Baelor *trusted* her, Baelor recognised her capabilities.

But there was something else.

Someone.

"Aelora," he continued, more gently now, "you have been at my side for years. I have seen you balance matters far more complex than seating arrangements and wounded pride."

Her jaw tightened, almost imperceptibly.

"You are sharper than you were a year ago," he said. "Quicker to see advantage. Quicker to act."

Yet I'm losing.

Aelora did not look at him. "That is what you taught me."

"It is," he agreed. "But I did not teach you to carry everything alone."

That made her look up.

There was no censure in his expression, no disappointment. Only *concern.* Infuriating, quiet concern.

"I am not alone," she murmured.

Baelor held her gaze. "No," he said. "You are not. And yet you stand as though you are."

Something in her chest shifted, uncomfortable and unwelcome.

Aelora looked away first. "The tourney will bring half the realm to King's Landing," she said, returning deliberately to safer ground. "Tensions will be high. Old grievances..."

"Yes," Baelor said softly. "And you are already accounting for them."

She hesitated, only for a moment. "Then what is it?"

It had only been a whisper, but he was close enough to hear her.

"Daeron."

The name landed differently.

Aelora stilled. She wondered for half a second if he had been unwell again, but if that had been the case she would have been told. The Maester had promised as much: and if her closeness to the Hand of the King hadn't convinced the old man, the gold coins with the effige of the dragon—enough to buy him a night with three maidens—had played the trick.

"What about him?"

Baelor watched her, long enough that she felt her skin crawl again. It felt just like when she was small and she would blackmail her brother to sneak into the kitchen to retrieve a lemoncake for her.

But Aelor wasn't astute and would be discovered. So at the end Aelora would find herself in front of the scowl of her mother, because in the midst of his petulant tears, Aelor would say her name.

She felt the same now. She felt even worse, as if she had been the one stealing from the kitchens and had been found with her mouth stuffed with lemoncakes. Just like Rhaegel would do every morning in queen Myriah's chambers, if his mother didn't stop him.

"You spend time with him," he said. "In his bedchamber."

"We're never alone."

"I'm not talking about this."

Aelora met his gaze again. This time, she did not look away. "He requires assistance." she whispered. She could have spent her free time in way more useful ways, yet she felt the need to help him.

Maybe she should have listened to aunt Alysanne—king Daeron's bastard sister—when she had asked her if she wanted to take the veil like her. Aelora had been five and had thought at the time that the only veil that would soothe her was the marriage one.

"And you have chosen to provide it."

"I have."

Baelor inclined his head slightly. "As is your way."

There was something in that she could not quite place. She looked at him for a long time, trying to comprehend his gaze.

But it couldn't be what she was seeing: approval.

"Aelora," he said, quieter now, "there is a difference between understanding a problem and believing you can solve it."

She could solve it. This wasn't economics or agriculture knowledge, where Baelor could best her.

This was *different.*

She held his gaze. "I am aware."

"Are you?"

The question was gentle, but it still cut.

Aelora drew in a breath, steadying. "He is not a problem," she said. "He is...a circumstance."

Baelor's expression shifted, just slightly. "Is that what he is to you?"

The question lingered for too long.

Aelora turned back to the parchment, picking up her quill though she did not immediately write. "He is a prince of the realm," she said. "And what affects him may affect us all."

Careful. Measured. Safe. Just like Baelor had taught her. This had been the result of his teaching: replying with the right words but saying actually nothing.

This was what kept wars at bay.

He smiled now but said nothing. For a long moment, the only sound between them was the distant clash of steel and the faint scratch of her quill finally moving across the page.

Then, quietly: "You have always seen further than most."

Aelora paused.

"Do not forget," he continued, "to see what is directly before you."

She did not answer, but her hand stilled again.

Baelor reached out then, just briefly, and rested his hand against her shoulder.

A simple gesture, familiar. Like a father.

Aelora's shoulder eased completely. It reminded her of those times when she was still small enough to hide in Baelor's arms and cry, because her cousins had left her out from their games again.

There were days when a story from her wise uncle wasn't enough and only his steadying hold could make her stop crying.

"Sweet girl." he used to call her.

More than once Aelora had wished for Baelor to be her father. He would make her his heir in that case, she was sure. Why would he favour talentless Valarr or boring Matarys?

Viserys I had three male children, yet he had named his firstborn Rhaenyra as his heir.

"You need not prove anything to me, *sweet girl.*" he said now.

It landed heavier than anything else he had said.

Aelora's throat tightened, just slightly. "I know." she replied, but it did not sound entirely certain.

He used to rock her to sleep, on those sandy shores, after Rhaegel had tried to throw himself in the sea, creating a great commotion and almost dying.

Uncle Maekar had swam to reach him and save him, claiming after that it had all been an accident. But then her father had shouted that it had been intentional and that had made her mother cry.

Which had triggered Aelora's own sobs. So Baelor held her *for hours.*

But that had been the past: now he withdrew his hand after thirty seconds. "Finish the lists," he said, his tone returning gently to formality. "We will review them together before dusk."

"Yes, uncle."

He turned to leave, then paused, but he didn't look back.

"Be careful, Aelora."

And then he was gone.

Aelora remained where she was, the quill poised above the parchment.

Below, the tourney grounds continued their restless preparation. Above, the wind shifted, tugging lightly at the edges of the scrolls.

Baelor had gone away minutes before, when she finally exhaled.

He had the sweetest Valyrian accent.

Aelora had always supposed Baelor was the better speaker she had ever heard: he followed the rules with absolute certainty and didn't stumble on the words, making the High Valyrian sound like a song.

She had heard other people speak it, mostly Kiera's relatives, but the Tyroshi dialect was only a pale imitation of the language of her native home.

Her uncle was impeccable in his accent, but Daeron spoke it naturally, without the stiffness that Aelora herself or the Hand could fall in, especially while reading a complicated passage.

He had learned it from his dreams, he had said. He dreamt only in High Valyrian, the language of dragons.

Aelora would lie if she said she didn't feel a little bit self-conscious when reading in front of him, a sensation that she hadn't felt in a long time: she would always be the one better equipped to converse, lacking no knowledge of languages or arguments.

They were reading Jaenara's Adventures again: Aelora had already put down her own thoughts about Sothoryos for the future Small Council meeting, so this time she wasn't interested in the descriptions the book offered.

Instead, they were focusing on the first passage, on the dragon dream that the rider had experienced and that had inspired her adventure. They had been reading it for days now, always the same passage, but to no avail.

The Valyrians practiced blood magic, had a knowledge about this sort of things now lost to them: they could interpret a vague oneiric scene and understand all the metaphors that it contained.

They were trying now to do the opposite process, starting from the outcome and trace back the kind of dream that she might have experienced. The problem was that they lacked the theological and magical knowledge that the Valyrians used for interpretation, not to mention that their only source circa dragon dreams was Daeron himself (and he seemed to see more destruction than adventures).

Daeron had already protested once she had walked in, again with the same book in her hands. But he had shut down after one reprehending look, giving up and sitting down against the pillows.

He was still abed and growing more restless each day, which showed now by the way he shifted in his bedsheets, claiming he wanted a pause. Aelora sighed but gave in to his request.

Daeron smirked once she conceded a pause, closing the book on his knees. "You should practice."

"What?"

"Practice your High Valyrian."

"I do practice."

"Then you should practice *more*."

Aelora shot him a look of admonishment. "Don't play with fire, cousin."

Daeron only snorted, raising his hands. "I wouldn't *dare*."

That stole a little smile from her, one that Daeron returned.

He looked better, less pale or tired, yet shadows still lingered beneath his eyes. But he didn't look half dead anymore.

"What do I get wrong?" she whispered after moments of silence, without tearing her eyes off of him.

The corner of his mouth raised in a small smile. He was cocky, Aelora would give him that. "It's not a matter of making grammatical mistakes, rather the pronunciation."

He opened the book again, pointing to certain words; Aelora didn't even need to read, she remembered them by memory now, after spending five days straight on them.

"Sometimes you stumble here or the pronunciation is far too quick here." he pointed some passages to her, but she was only half listening.

All her attention was on his eyes, that looked way more focused, or his rosey cheeks as he spoke, or the scent of lavender of his freshly washed hair. It filled her with a sense of relief, seeing him getting better.

"Aelora," her name on his lips brought her back to reality. "Are you listening?"

She snapped out of her disattention, blinking twice before finding her focus again. "Yeah, sorry. I got distracted."

"By my beautiful face?" Daeron joked, stealing her a chuckle.

"To be fair, I was recognising the fact that you seem to look better."

"I *feel* better."

"I'm happy to hear that." she smiled, looking back at him again.

Daeron's gaze remained on her for a long beat, before smirking. "You should thank Valarr."

She swallowed.

While Kiera had secluded herself in her chambers and only let Aelora in (she had other ladies as well, but she only tolerated them when she was in a good mood, which had not been the case for five long days

now), Valarr had spent all his time out training or back at Red Keep, seeking out—to everyone's shock—*Daeron's* company.

"Really?" she asked, trying to mask her own surprise.

Daeron smirked at her tone. "We're friends." he said, but he sounded as if he wanted to add more.

Aelora looked away, trying to make sense of the sudden knot around her throat. In truth, she didn't want to acknowledge the feeling that surged within her.

Valarr.

Always Valarr.

He took everything away from her: he was a man, he was the heir, he was Baelor's legitimate son, he was Kiera's husband.

And now he was Daeron's friend.

"It is surprising," she murmured after moments of silence, raising her gaze on him again. "I did not recall the two of you being close."

"We were, many years ago," Daeron revealed, looking away with a fine smile, as if reliving those old days. "Then...I guess life happened." he added more quietly, his smile faltering for just a second.

But it was enough for Aelora to notice. Yet she resisted the impulse to reach for his hand: it wouldn't be proper and he wasn't losing his balance on reality, so there would have been no excuse for her to do so.

"We were born a few weeks apart from one another, you know," he murmured, smiling again as he looked at her. "Though I'm older."

"I know that," she offered back a little smile. "The queen always calls you her 'first sweet boy.'"

The surprise in his gaze didn't pass unnoticed. "Does she?"

Aelora nodded. "Oh yes. And you had immense privileges because of it."

"I did not!"

"First son, first grandson and first nephew. I bet you were spoiled." she continued with her teasing, not being able to hide a smirk.

Daeron chuckled at her words. "Well, not for long. Soon enough Valarr came along and he was the heir. The king probably showed him to the entire Red Keep the moment he was born."

Aelora laughed softly at that. "Yeah, I can see that happening."

She remained quiet for a moment, but for once it wasn't an embarrassing silence, like the sort that weighs on your shoulder and demands you to find something to say in order to break it. "But you were named after the king himself, so I bet you had your own leverage over dear grandfather."

"Well, I believe Father called me like that to appease him. You know, a premature boy strong enough to wail all night long was a strange sight, indeed." Daeron winked, making her sigh and shake her head. But she couldn't deny it was funny. He was funny.

"Careful, one might think you're a bastard." she giggled now at her own joke, while he smirked at her tone.

"Do not worry. Unlike Daemon Blackfyre, the chances of me starting a war are very slim." he laid back against the pillows, looking up at the ceiling. "And you're the one to talk!" he accused her with a chuckle after a moment. "You were the only girl among boys until Daella was born. You were practically *reigning*."

"I was *not!*"

"You were!" he laughed out loud, raising his head again. "Whatever you told us to do, we were at your service."

"Aelor and Aerion were never at my service."

"But I was," Daeron pointed out, raising a finger up to her face. "I always stole lemoncakes from the kitchen for you."

That made her stop in her tracks.

Daeron had been brought up in Summerhall for most of his life, a lightly fortified castle assigned to the king's youngest prince as his permanent residence. After the Blackfyre Rebellion and because of Dyanna's frequent pregnancies, Prince Maekar and his family seldomly left the castle, therefore it was them—Rhaegel's family—the ones who travelled often to spend time with his younger brother and his children.

Aelora didn't particularly like those journeys: it meant relentless hours of listening to Aelor and Aerion's teasings, Daeron's recounting of his strange dreams and Aemon's sudden bursts in tears when his older brother pinched his cheek too hard. Not even Daella, her first female cousin, could offer any real consolation: she was a cute baby to look at, but she wasn't old enough to play with her.

Summerhall wasn't exactly her favourite place to visit, but there Aelora, who had been a picky eater as a kid, had discovered her love for lemoncakes, that tasted differently from the ones she only partially enjoyed in King's Landing. Whether it had been the lemons—that grew in Summerhall and soaked in the summer sun—or some other secret ingredient that the cook put in them, Aelora had come to the point that lemoncakes had become her only source of sustainment.

Which soon enraged her mother: she understood now that she couldn't just keep going by only eating sugar-filled pies, but it still hurt when Alys had forbade her from ever consuming another one.

She had cried and stamped her feet on the ground, shouting like a disobedient child, but Alys had not given in: she never did. And her poor attempt to send her brother to retrieve one had ended in an even bigger punishment.

So at the end Aelora had given up and retreated to her room, only to find a small lemoncake on her nightstand, waiting for her after dinner. And so had occurred the night after, and the night after that.

"It was you?" she looked at Daeron with newly found surprise and...something else, something that strangely felt like affection. "You brought me lemoncakes?"

He looked at her for a long moment, his eyes unreadable, before he sighed and looked away. "Aye," he slumped back. "You were shouting so loud, not even Aerion cried as loud when he broke his leg. Bringing you a lemoncake was the only way to make you stop complaining."

She had always supposed it had been her father. Yet now she discovered she had been wrong.

"I..."

Aelora found herself at loss for words, which was surprising, considering she liked to discuss so much.

"Thank you," she murmured, unsure on what to say. "It meant a great deal for me, back in the day."

Daeron nodded, without looking back at her.

The silence that followed was a familiar one: tense with words left unsaid, words that neither of them had the courage to utter.

Aelora looked down at the book they had been reading for days, of the brave Jaenera who crossed seas atop her dragon, seeking out new adventures.

Aelora had never been brave, otherwise she would have ventured into the kitchen herself, without caring about the possibility of being found.

But, despite the vast knowledge that she had build for herself, she hadn't learned much in that regard.

That was probably why she retreated back to her own chamber, after muttering some excuse about Kiera needing her services.

Because to remain there would mean danger to fall into something she wasn't prepared to face.

The clash of swords rang loud in the courtyard, sweating knights engaging one against the other. One might have thought that the training had only incremented, what with the tourney being so close, but anyone who was acquainted with Aelor Targaryen knew that his pace in training never eased and each day he worked himself to the bone.

He was the son of a third son: his sword was everything he could count on.

Yet now he engaged his opponents even more aggressively than usual, as if he was fighting for his own life and not a simple tourney where he should prove his valor.

Aelora noticed it while observing her twin: knights, masters at arms, even Kingsguards didn't stand a chance against the rage that her brother reversed for them the moment they picked up a sword, whether it was a wooden one or made of Valyrian steel.

She was about to take a step forward, to interrupt Aelor in his relentless training, but a hand held her back.

"Princess, please step back. You might get hurt." a Kingsguard stepped up, pushing her to the side gently while the men tossed and turned on the ground.

Her brother looked to be the one in charge, but then again when wasn't he?

Aelora swallowed, standing to the side and watching the scene: when she had come to the training yard, she should have expected to find him in the midst of fighting.

But she had waited enough: they needed to talk.

She turned around, seeing various familiar faces: other members of the Kingsguard fought against masters at arms, but Aerion was making the most noises and shouted for Aelor to "show the dragon's prowess."

They had always been like that: loud, violent, egotistic. The only difference was that Aerion wouldn't discern from enemies and friends, while Aelor would only fight with grown people that could stand a chance.

That had been the case until then: now a younger boy stepped up, aged six and ten (just a year older than her and her twin), yet half Aelor's size. But despite their clear differences, that young man had been knighted before her brother, only because of his status. But he had recognised her twin's capabilities, because his first act as knight was to appoint Aelor as one.

"Cousin." he drew his sword, standing tall on the ground. He had red hair, favoured his mother's family in appearance, but had apparently gained the Targaryen's bravery, because he stepped up as the next opponent.

Aelor always used to smirk the moment he saw *him* joining the committee back on Dragonstone. Her brother would best everyone else on the training yard and looked out for someone he could unload his rage upon: someone strong enough to take it, if not to answer it back.

But instead that day the smirk died on his lips.

"Matarys, no." Valarr had turned, eyeing his brother with a worried glance.

Aelor turned as well, but he looked like a predator seizing his prey. Matarys didn't look scared, he didn't step back.

Aelor's blade came down again, heavy enough that Matarys had to catch it with both hands. The impact jolted through him, boots scraping against packed earth as he was driven back another step.

Her brother charged with a rage that was impossible not to notice: that wasn't a fine knight or a competent sell sword. That wasn't even a man who needed to kill, that was a man that *wanted* to.

Matarys's answer was a twist of his wrist, deflecting the next blow just enough to slip sideways and strike for Aelor's flank.

He was faster, everyone knew it, lighter on his feet, sharper in his angles. Under normal circumstances, that would have been enough to keep the upper hand.

These were not normal circumstances.

Targaryen madness, that's what the Maesters called it. That's what Aelora called it as well. Her father Rhaegel was mad, Aelor might have lost his wit as well, for all she knew. She had been away for so long, her brother had changed so much.

A murmur spread through the watching knights, but no one stepped in because no one quite dared.

The next strike came without warning, Matarys barely caught it. The force of it nearly knocked the blade from his hand. The red haired man was panting, clearly unable to withstand Aelor's brutal force, yet he didn't yield. Because despite his Dondarrion's appearance, Matarys was a Targaryen and had that fiery temper.

The ginger boy's expression hardened. If Aelor wanted force, then force he would have, but not blindly.

He shifted his footing, waited, while Aelor lunged. Matarys moved at the last second, letting the weight of the strike carry past him, turning sharply and bringing his own blade up toward Aelor's side.

For a heartbeat he had him. But then Aelor's hand shot out, faster than it should have been for a man his size, catching Matarys by the shoulder and wrenching him off balance. The motion broke the angle, the strike glancing uselessly aside as Aelor drove into him.

They looked like two dragons who danced together, one around the other, one against the other.

They crashed together, armor ringing loud in the silence of the training yard.

Matarys staggered, breath knocked from his chest, barely managing to keep hold of his sword as Aelor shoved him back again.

"What was that?" her brother shouted against Matarys, holding him down by the shoulder hard enough to bruise.

Someone who would have walked on them now and seen them might have believed Aelor was teaching him to fight, acting as a severe teacher.

But that wasn't a friendly match, it wasn't even a rivalry. That was a deep rage that had no explanation.

Matarys kicked the ground off his feet suddenly, his ankle trapping Aelor's leg and pushing him down suddenly, while his sword was knocked out of his hand. Her brother was strong, but her cousin was faster: he trapped Aelor beneath his body and started to punch his face with his bare hands.

That wasn't tournament practice, that looked much more like a bloody scene from a relentless battle, where either one of them was going to perish.

And yet they didn't yield.

Matarys' blows started to slow down, while he grabbed Aelor's face with both his hands and crashed his skull into the ground: once, twice, thrice.

Aelora was frozen in her place, her breath stopped: she had never seen her brother being beaten like that on the training ground. Aelor had never been bested since he was seven and the men who he challenged —masters at arms, Kingsguards—could never do him any harm: the firsts treated him as a pupil, the seconds had sworn an oath to protect him with their own lives.

She wanted to shout at Matarys to stop, but her body had stopped cooperating.

"Stop them." she caught the hand of a man beside her, her breath uneven. She wasn't able to look at his face, she just couldn't tear her eyes off that scene.

Aelor's skull would now have been teared open, if it wasn't for the helmet protecting his face. That was the reason why he soon gained back the high ground, twisting beneath their cousin's body until he could turn their bodies around, pining Matarys beneath himself.

He teared the same hulk from his head now and stared down at their cousin, his hand wrapped firmly around his throat.

It was an ugly scene to witness: both man panting, twisting, fighting with their bare hands as if they were lowly born and not royal knights. They were covered in mud and something else that clearly looked like blood, even from that distance: Aelor's nose was red like Matarys' hair and this one's leg was bent in a strange angle.

But they didn't stop. Matarys' breath was so loud that it was the only audible noise in the training yard, while his hands grabbed Aelor's throat and tried to reach for his eyes; her brother, for his own part, tried

to keep his opponent pined to the ground with one hand, while his other one searched blindly for the closest sword around them.

Matarys' hand collided with her brother's face, the noise ringing in the space between them, making him turn his head and spat blood on the ground.

A flicker of something crossed Aelor's face, rage sharpened into focus. He surged forward again, but this time Matarys didn't fully turn the blow. It crashed into his guard, driving him down into the mud.

The yard erupted: voices now, shouts. But too late: Aelor had finally found what he was searching for.

He raised his blade again and...

"Enough."

The word cut through everything.

A third figure stepped in, catching Aelor's descending strike with brutal force. Steel screamed as it met steel.

Aelora teared her eyes off the scene to find Valarr standing near the two, his sword catching the blade that was about to make him brotherless.

Everything stilled around them, while Aelora finally found her breath again.

Her brother's blade remained locked against Valarr's for a heartbeat longer than necessary, then he wrenched it free.

Matarys pushed himself up from the ground, breathing hard, one arm slower to respond than the other.

"It was just practice, my prince." Aelor's gaze was fixed on the second in line to the Throne. Valarr's expression was dark, as if he was resisting the urge to fight against her twin himself. But if Matarys could stand a chance against Aelor under normal circumstances, his older brother couldn't even in that case.

His poor capacities were already known around the court, despite Valarr's own attempts to hide it. To fight against Aelor now—so full of rage that even Kingsguards barely managed to withstand—wouldn't just add fuel to the rumor, but make it burst into a giant fire.

"He's right," Matarys took a step forward, eyeing his brother. He could barely stand. "There was no need to intervene."

Valarr didn't even turn to look at him: his gaze remained on Aelor, threatening probably for the first time in his life.

"This ends now." the dark haired man ordered, with all the authority of a future king.

Aerion let out a soft, almost disappointed breath. "Pity," he murmured. "It was just getting interesting."

Valarr shot him a look, but Aerion only smiled. The yard began to breathe again, noise returning in cautious waves as the moment passed.

Aerion, despite his comment, wrapped an arm around Aelor's shoulder, pushing him back towards a corner of the training yard.

Aelor let himself be guided by their cousin, but his eyes never left Matarys, who was limping while his brother held him by the shoulder and helped him sit down on a step

Aelora had never ran faster towards her brother: Aerion was walking him inside, surely to have a Maester take a look at his bloodied nose.

Aelora moved before her mind even knew.

The corridors of the Red Keep were never meant for running.

They twisted too sharply, turned too often, opened without warning into stairwells and shadowed galleries. Yet Aelora moved through them with uncharacteristic haste, her slippers whispering against the stone as she gathered her skirts in one hand.

"Aelor!" she shouted. Despite the fact that he was hurt, him and their cousin were moving fast into the corridors of the Red Keep.

It slightly reminded her of when they were kids: Aelor used to replace her with Aerion, whenever his cousin was back at the capital or they went to visit him and his family at Summerhall.

The first years she had tried to be included in their games, running right behind them while they tried everything to get rid of her: pair her up with Daeron, tell her to go grab something in their chamber and disappearing when she returned, even ignore her purposely when she ran after them.

Soon Aelora had grown, found her interests and stopped chasing after them. Yet now she felts as if all those years had been cancelled in an instant: she was running after them, again, and they were ignoring her, *again.*

But she was not that little girl anymore, with her small feet that hurt after hours spent walking around the halls of the Red Keep. She chased after them now and reached them: they couldn't just quicken their pace —not with Aelor in that condition anyway.

She grabbed his wrist and turned him around: he was so weak that he didn't put a resistance.

He turned halfway, his posture rigid, as if the simple act of pausing cost him something.

Beside him, Aerion Targaryen did not bother to hide his irritation. He glanced back first, eyes flicking over Aelora with quick assessment before settling into something sharper.

"Well," Aerion drawled. "Here comes the other half."

Aelora ignored him, scanning her twin's face instead. Up close his face looked even worse. His face was swollen and his nose was surely broken, blood still flowing down his face: droplets ran from his nose down to his lips, his chin and then falling onto the ground. He had formed a trail of blood in the corridor. His knuckles were even worse, already bruising.

But his eyes—so blue like their mother's—were alight with something else, something that looked like pure rage still burning within him.

"You're hurt." she observed stupidly.

"I'll live." he dismissed her, pulling back his wrist from her hold. "I've had worst."

"We must go now, cousin." Aerion interrupted, his arm moving between her and her twin to separate them.

But Aelora didn't back down, her gaze still burning holes into her brother's eyes.

He needed to go see a Maester immediately, Aelora knew that, it was the most rational thing to do. But she couldn't let him go, not like this. Not when his eyes appeared like this.

They had always reminded her of the sea: not the stormy, grey one that crashed on Dragonstone rocking shores; but a calmer one, where the sun set after a heated day and lovers kissed languidly in the water.

But now it looked as if the sun had set for hours, waves crashing on the sand, lovers drowning beneath the water. They reminded her of the sea that night on Dragonstone, when he had ran away without notice.

Matarys had wanted to drown, that night. Valarr hadn't told her as much, but she had heard it from the fishermen who had ran out of their houses the moment they heard desperate screams.

"You should not have been there." her twin said. He didn't listen to Aerion's words either.

Aelora's fingers tightened slightly around the fabric of her skirts, since her had left her hand. "You could have been killed."

A breath of something like a laugh escaped Aerion behind him. "That would have required effort from the other side."

She shot him a look sharp enough to cut, but he only smiled wider. "Stay out of this, cousin." she said coldly.

"I'm enjoying it."

"Then do so silently."

Aerion's grin did not fade, but he inclined his head in mock concession.

Aelora turned back to her brother. "You need a Maester."

"We're already going." his tone was flat.

He turned again, as if that settled the matter. He didn't expect Aelora to step in front of him, to prevent him from leaving.

"What happened?" she insisted. She had been wanting to ask that question for so long. "You were not sparring, that was..."

"I know what it was."

"Then why..."

"Enough."

The word landed harder than it should have.

Aelora stilled, while her brother exhaled slowly, as if reining something in.

"It is done," he said, quieter now. "There is nothing to be gained from picking at it."

"I'm just trying to understand." she tried again, but her brother interrupted her: "There is nothing to understand."

Aelora searched his face, those eyes so familiar to her. Not a day had gone by where she hadn't known her brother. "You are lying." she said softly.

Aerion huffed under his breath. "Gods, she's persistent."

Aelor's jaw tightened. "You are imagining things."

"I am not."

"You are."

"You were trying to hurt him."

That left them all speechless, Aelora herself didn't know where that had come from. But now she had said it, and it wasn't as if she hadn't thought it.

Silence stretched, broken only by her twin's threatening murmur: "Are you accusing me, Ael?"

"No, I...I don't know what to think." she shook her head, looking away. That was not the brother she had been brought up with, the one who always upholds his knightly vows and doesn't let rage consume him.

"For once, you are mistaken."

Aelora raised her gaze, but he was deliberately avoiding hers now. "I have never seen you fight like that."

"You have not seen me fight often."

"I have seen enough."

Aerion stepped forward then, breaking the line between them with casual ease. "And I have seen quite enough of this conversation." His hand landed lightly on Aelor's shoulder, steering him past her. "The Maester," he added, tone turning practical in a way that did not suit him. But if Aerion could sometimes act less like a monster and actually care for someone, that was Aelor. "unless you intend to bleed across the floor for her benefit."

Her brother allowed himself to be moved this time.

Aelora turned quickly, falling into step beside them. "I am coming."

"No." Aelor said immediately.

"Yes."

"There is no need."

"There is."

He stopped again, more sharply this time, and turned to her fully. "Aelora." her name, spoken like that, usually softened her.

But it did not now; she was far too worried for him, to let him have his way. The flight from Dragonstone, his hard glances at Matarys, the betrothal to Daella, the fight: everything was piling up.

"You will not dismiss me like a servant," she said. "Not when you walk away bleeding like that, after fighting as if your life depended on it. You cannot expect me to pretend not to see it."

"I expect you to trust me."

"I expect you to be honest with me."

Something in his expression hardened. "This is quite enough, sister."

Aelor never called her sister. She was Aelora, Ael, princess most of the time. Never *sister.*

Aelor held Aelora's gaze for a long moment. Then, more quietly: "You do not need to involve yourself in this."

"I already am."

"You should not be."

"You do not decide that for me."

Aelor sighed, as if exhaustion—from the physical fight? the discussion?—was finally settling over him. "Go back," he said, not unkindly this time. "Please."

The word sat strangely between them.

Aelora's resolve faltered. She studied him, the set of his shoulders and the way he held himself too still. She looked at her brother, seeing for the first time those blue eyes—the ones she always gazed at since she was born—completely drained.

Sun had set forever.

"You are not fine," she whispered. "Let me..."

"No."

That hurt worse than a slap. Her twin, the person she had known even before coming into the world, was openly rejecting her now.

Aelora's lips parted, another argument ready, but something in her own heart stopped her. She had learned, through her years as Baelor's pupil, when it was pointless to argue and when to pursue one's ambitions. This was a case of the formal rather than the latter.

Aerion shifted beside them, impatience returning. "If this is concluded..."

"It is." Aelor replied.

Aelora did not move and, for a heartbeat, neither did he.

Then he stepped past her. But this time, she did not try to stop him.

She turned as they walked away, watching the distance grow between them. Aelora felt a strange sensation settling on her while she watched their figures become smaller, as if a door had been shut, not in her face, but behind him.

For the first time since she was born, she felt completely lonely.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back with a new chapter!! sorry for the delay, been stressing very much over my imminent start of uni.

we start off with aelora and kiera's scene, valarr was so crossed last chapter because they actually fought, because of jena's intrusion (though why aelora is in this mess, you'll find out next chapter). kiera reminded me so much of larra rogare here, especially when she mentioned sailing back to tyrosh (foreigns never fare well in the red keep), but aelora thankfully talked some sense into her.

i literally bawled my eyes out while writing aelora and baelor's scene, it was so healing in a way and aelora needed to hear that. i just love their relationship in general and the way they communicate.

DAERON'S SCENE!!! I LOVED WRITING IT!!! i adore yearning daeron.

we go from that sweet moment to an attempted murder LMAO. aelor and matarys are having many relationship problems and are not the best at communicating, but I swear the angst is almost done. also will we ever learn the reason for their fight? maybe

during the last scene we see a glimpse of aelor and aerion's friendship (loser second sons) and, I'll be honest, his fight with aelora wasn't planned, but considering the lack of communication between them it was only a question of time.

as a mentioned earlier, i'm starting uni in a couple of days, but i'll try to be as active as possible. i'll just try to find my footing a little bit at first and get organised with the studying, also because i'll be travelling back and forth for the first month.

as always, if you liked leave a kudos and a comment, I'm always happy to reply.

this story can be found on ao3 (my username is ale_28), wattpad and tumblr as well (my username is lomlherondale)

my other socials: tiktok, twitter and reddit (lomlherondale on all 3 of them)

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