

## Dance of the Dragonwolf Chapter 62 (Between Lives and Deaths)

' The wind howled across Winterfell's battlements, carrying with it the promise of death. Rhaenys stood at the highest point of the castle, her Targaryen features sharp against the grey northern sky. Below, thousands of men prepared for what might be their last battle, their torches flickering like desperate stars against the growing darkness.

She turned as Aenar approached, his footsteps nearly silent on the frost-covered stone. His eyes, red as fresh blood, met hers – a reminder of the price they'd all paid to reach this point. The cold didn't seem to touch him, though his breath formed clouds in the frigid air.

"You shouldn't be up here alone," he said, his voice carrying the weight of someone who'd seen too much death. "The storm's getting closer."

Rhaenys pulled her cloak tighter. "I needed to think. To remember."

"Memories are dangerous things," Aenar replied, his gaze turning northward. "Especially now."

"Take care of yourself out there," she said, reaching for his arm. "We can't lose you. Not now."

A bitter smile crossed his face. "I should be the one warning you, Rhaenys. You haven't seen what he can do. What they all can do." His voice dropped lower, haunted. "The Night King's storm isn't like anything you've ever faced. It blinds dragons, freezes men where they stand. His ice spears..." He paused, swallowing hard. "They pierce dragon scales like they're parchment."

"I'll be careful," she promised, but the empty look in his eyes told her he barely heard her. She knew where his mind had gone – to that terrible day.

The memory of his daughter's death hung between them like an invisible wall. Such a tiny thing she'd been, with Daenerys's silver hair and Aenar's long face. Gone now, like so much else they'd lost.

"Aenar," she whispered, stepping closer. "I know no words can heal this wound, but—"

He cut her off with a sharp gesture. "Then don't bring her up."

Instead of speaking, she pulled him into an embrace. For a moment, he remained stiff, but then his arms wrapped around her, holding on as if she were an anchor in a storm. She felt his shoulders shake, though whether from cold or grief, she couldn't tell.

"When this is over," she murmured into his shoulder, "when the dead are truly dead and the Night King is nothing but a memory, we'll find happiness again. All of us. But if something happens. Aenar, please take care of our Aelyssara. Please."

Aenar pulled back, his face a mask of careful control. "I will," he said simply, then turned and walked away toward where Cannibal waited, the massive black dragon's green eyes glowing in the growing darkness.

Rhaenys watched him go, guilt gnawing at her heart. He'd never said it – would never say it – but she knew he blamed her, at least in part, for Rhaella's death. If she hadn't insisted on bringing House Martell into the alliance, if she hadn't trusted in old loyalties and family ties...

"I thought Uncle Oberyn's love for my mother would be enough," she whispered to the wind. "I thought blood would mean more than vengeance."

She'd been wrong. So terribly, fatally wrong.

A horn blast shattered her reverie – deep, resonant, warning. Another answered it, then another, the sound echoing off Winterfell's ancient walls. Rhaenys straightened, her hand automatically going to the sword at her hip.

The storm was visible now, a wall of white racing toward them from the north. But this was no natural blizzard. Through the swirling snow, she could see shapes moving – thousands upon thousands of them, a tide of death flowing across the frozen ground.

Below, the army of the living began to move. Torches flickered as soldiers took their positions. The dragons – Cannibal, Morning, and Rhaellara – shifted restlessly, their scales gleaming in the dying light. She could see Aenar mounting Cannibal, the great beast's green eyes fixed on the approaching storm.

"Mother," Rhaenys whispered. "Give us strength."

The wind carried the sound of breaking ice and shuffling feet. The dead were coming.

A screech split the air – Cannibal, rising into the darkening sky. The black dragon's wings cast massive shadows across the snow, and for a moment, Rhaenys saw Aenar turn in her direction. Even at this distance, their eyes met, and in that instant, she saw not the grieving father or the hardened warrior, but the boy who'd once been Jon Snow, who'd died in the snow and been reborn in fire.

She raised her hand in farewell, and though he didn't return the gesture, she saw his head incline slightly before Cannibal carried him into the gathering storm.

"My fault or not," she said to herself as she headed for her own dragon, "I'll make this right. For Rhaella. For all of us."

The horns continued their mournful song as Rhaenys mounted her dragon. Below, she could hear the shouts of commanders, the clash of steel as final preparations were made, the prayers of men who knew they might not see another dawn.

The storm was almost upon them now, bringing with it the army of the dead and the White Walkers who commanded them. Somewhere in that maelstrom of snow and ice, the Night King waited, the one who had taken so much from them already.

Rhaenys took one last look at Winterfell – at the castle that had sheltered generations of Starks, at the walls that now protected the last hope of the living. Then she urged her dragon skyward, into the teeth of the storm.

As she rose above the battlements, she caught one final glimpse of Cannibal's dark form against the white sky. Then the snow swallowed them both, and the battle for the dawn began.

Meraxes' wings cut through the frigid air as sheets of dragonfire illuminated the darkness below. From this height, the army of the dead looked like a writhing carpet of shadows, their numbers beyond counting. Each pass they made burned hundreds, yet thousands more emerged from the storm to take their place.

The dragon's muscles rippled beneath Rhaenys as they banked hard to avoid a cluster of massive ice shards hurling through the air. Through their shared bond, she felt Meraxes' mixture of fury and fear – emotions no living dragon had felt since the Doom of Valyria.

"Again!" Rhaenys shouted against the wind, and Meraxes responded with a thunderous roar. Dragon fire erupted in a massive stream, turning a swath of wights into ash. The heat was so intense it melted the very snow beneath them, creating a temporary barrier of steam and flame.

Through gaps in the swirling storm, she caught glimpses of the other dragons. Cannibal's distinctive green-tinged wildfire cut through the darkness like lightning, illuminating the massive black dragon's battle with the creature that had once been Silverwing. The sight made her heart ache – Silverwing, once so beautiful and proud, now a twisted thing of ice and rotting flesh.

"Seven save us," she whispered as she watched Aenar and Cannibal engage the dead dragon. Cannibal's wildfire seemed more effective than regular dragonfire, eating through the ice dragon's corrupted flesh like acid. Yet even as parts of it melted away, the creature fought on, mindless in its fury.

But where was the Night King? He should be mounted on his stolen dragon, yet the dead Silverwing fought alone. Something wasn't right.

Meraxes suddenly tensed beneath her, every muscle going rigid. The dragon's thoughts flooded into Rhaenys' mind – danger, cold, death approaching. The temperature plummeted so rapidly that the moisture in the air crystallized, creating a shower of ice crystals that stung Rhaenys' face.

"Tolī (Up!)" she commanded, but the cold had already begun to affect Meraxes. The dragon's movements were becoming sluggish, her wings heavy with forming ice.

Through the thickening storm, Rhaenys caught a glimpse of something that made her blood freeze – a figure standing atop a small hill, its ice-blue eyes gleaming with ancient malice. In its hands, it held a spear.

"Vīlī iksā! (Lower your shoulder!)" Rhaenys screamed, yanking hard on the reins. "Meraxes, vāedas! (Meraxes, move!)"

But it was too late.

The ice spear moved faster than any natural weapon should, cutting through the storm like a bolt of inverse lightning. Rhaenys felt the impact through her bond with Meraxes – felt the dragon's pain as the spear tore through scales, muscle, and bone, taking a massive chunk of her shoulder with it.

Meraxes' shriek of agony shattered windows throughout Winterfell. They began to fall, spinning wildly through the air. Rhaenys clung desperately to the reins, her dragon's pain flooding her mind, mixing with her own terror.

"Stay with me!" she pleaded as they plummeted. "Please, stay with me!"

The ground rushed up to meet them. Meraxes tried to angle her remaining wing to slow their descent, but the damage was too severe. They clipped the side of one of Winterfell's towers, stone exploding around them as they crashed through.

The impact threw Rhaenys from the saddle. She had a brief, disorienting impression of spinning through darkness before something hard struck her head, and the world went black.

The last thing she heard was Meraxes' keening cry of pain and, distantly, Cannibal's answering roar of rage.

Then silence.

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Consciousness returned slowly, accompanied by searing pain and bitter cold. Rhaenys' eyes fluttered open to a sight that froze her blood – white walkers surrounded her. Their ice-blue eyes fixed upon her with ancient, emotionless intensity.

Ignoring the pain that she felt in her body, she sprang to her feet, Dark Sister singing as she drew it from its scabbard. The Valyrian that usually was so bright, now its light seemed to have been stolen, it no longer looked as special.

"Back!" she commanded, her voice hoarse but strong, spinning slowly to keep all of them in view. "Stay back!"

But none of them moved to attack. Instead, they stood like statues carved from ice, watching, waiting.

Then she felt it – a wave of cold so intense it made the previous chill seem like a summer breeze. Footsteps crunched in the snow. The white walkers parted like a frozen sea, making way for their king.

The Night King emerged from the storm like a nightmare given form. His crown of ice sparkled, and those terrible blue eyes fixed upon her with an intelligence that was somehow worse than the emptiness of his servants.

Aenar's words echoed in her mind: **"Kill him, and they all fall."**

With a cry that was part fury and part desperation, Rhaenys lunged forward, Dark Sister aimed at the Night King. He stepped aside with inhuman grace, the blade passing through empty air. Again and again, she attacked, each strike precise and deadly – and each time, he moved just enough to avoid the blade.

How can this happen? She was a good swordswoman; she was as good as Aenar himself, so how could the Night King dodge everything with ease? Why was this happening? Why was there so much pain? Rhaella? Why did they all have to leave this world? Why? Why Punish Us?

Tears froze on her cheeks as she fought. "Why?" she screamed at him. "Why are you doing this? Why cause so much suffering?"

The Night King's face remained impassive, but there was something almost curious in his gaze as he watched her attacks become increasingly desperate. Then, faster than her eye could follow, his hand shot out and caught her right wrist.

The cold that seized her arm was beyond anything she'd ever felt. She watched as the flesh turned blue, ice crystals spreading beneath her skin. Her fingers went numb, and Dark Sister slipped from her useless grasp.

The Night King caught the falling sword with his free hand, the Valyrian steel smoking where his frozen flesh touched it. Their eyes met one final time, and then the blade plunged into her throat.

**'Child of Fire, welcome.'**

The words weren't spoken – they seemed to form directly in her mind, ancient and terrible and somehow familiar. She collapsed into the snow, her blood steaming where it met the frozen ground.

The pain began to fade, replaced by a spreading numbness. The grief that had haunted her since Rhaella's death – the guilt, the regret, the endless what-ifs – all of it seemed to be dissolving like snow in spring.

With her last moments of consciousness, Rhaenys thought of Aenar. She saw his face, not as he was now, but as she remembered him from happier times – smiling as he held his daughter, pride shining in his eyes.

'I'm sorry,' she tried to say, but no words came.

### **Aliandra Martell**

Before her stood a girl who couldn't have been much older than herself. Her dark hair in a braid reminded her of her sister, and her olive skin reminded her of someone from House Martell, especially her face. But her eyes, beautiful, hunting purple eyes, were the signs of someone with Valyrian Blood. She wore a black dress embroidered with red dragons, and despite her youth, she carried herself with the unmistakable bearing of royalty.

"I am Rhaenys Targaryen," the girl declared. Her eyes seemed hollow; it felt like looking at the eyes of a corpse.

Aliandra blinked, her mind struggling to make sense of the claim. "That's impossible. Princess Rhaenys is in her forties. The Queen Who Never Was—"

"I'm not her," the girl cut in, a flash of irritation crossing her features. "I am the daughter of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and Princess Elia Martell."

A derisive laugh escaped Aliandra's lips. "Now I know you're lying. There has never been a marriage between House Targaryen and House Martell." Her hand instinctively reached for the dagger she always kept at her hip, only to find it missing. "Who are you really? How did you get past the guards?"

The girl – Rhaenys, if that was truly her name – sank onto a nearby chair. "I'm not entirely sure myself." Her voice grew distant, as if recalling a painful memory. "I remember dying. There was so much pain, and then... nothing. Until an old man spoke to me. He said I needed to save someone."

"You've gone mad," Aliandra said flatly, taking a step back. "How can someone die and still be alive? Do you take me for a fool?"

"I understand your skepticism—"

"Answer me! How did you get here?" Aliandra's voice rose sharply as she glanced around the chamber, and her eyes fell back on the bed where her little sister should have been sleeping. "Where is Lorella? What have you done with my sister?"

Rhaenys's expression softened. "The little one? She's still sleeping beside you."

"What are you talking about? I'm standing right here—"

"You're dreaming, Aliandra," Rhaenys said gently. "This is all a dream."

The revelation should have been shocking, but somehow it explained the strange quality of the air, the too-bright stars above. Still, Aliandra's suspicion remained. "Fine. Let's say I believe this is a dream. What do you want?"

A profound sadness swept across Rhaenys's face as she gazed up at the star-strewn sky. "I want many things. I wish my daughter had never died. I wish my uncles hadn't betrayed my trust." Her voice caught slightly. "But most of all, I wish to see Aenar again."

"Aenar?" Aliandra's eyes widened. "You mean Prince Aenar of House Targaryen?"

Hope blazed in Rhaenys's eyes as she leaned forward eagerly. "You know him? He's here? In your time?"

Aliandra took an involuntary step back. "I've never met him personally, but..." She shook her head. "I don't think Prince Aenar would want to meet a Martell right now."

"What do you mean?" Confusion clouded Rhaenys's features. "Why wouldn't he want to meet a Martell?"

Aliandra's laugh was bitter. "My brother Lykard killed his cousin, Laenor Velaryon. Now the dragons seek vengeance against House Martell." She began pacing, her frustration evident. "My father attempts diplomacy while my brother plays his dangerous games, and I'm caught between them all, trying to save our house from destruction."

"Laenor Velayron is dead?" Rhaenys whispered, genuine shock crossing her features. "That's... that's not right. It wasn't supposed to happen that way..." She pressed her fingers to her temples as if trying to sort through confused memories.

"What do you mean, 'supposed to happen'?"

"The memories are like smoke," Rhaenys said, her voice strained. "I remember my death so clearly – the Night King, Aenar, Daenerys..." Pain flashed across her face. "I remember my uncles, Oberynd and Doran, how they promised me to help me, only to stab me in the back when they thought they knew better than me."

The garden's edges start to blur. Rhaenys stood quickly, reaching out to grasp Aliandra's hand. Her touch felt real despite this being a dream.

"Listen to me," she said urgently. "Aenar... he's not who you think he is. He's not who anyone thinks he is. But he's not your enemy – not truly."

"My brother killed his cousin. I don't know him, but I know the entire House Targaryen and Velayron will want my head and the heads of my families in spikes, so this makes Prince Aenar my enemy."

"My brother...he is not like that. I know he changed after he was brought back but he always held mercy in his heart—" The edges of her form began to fade. "Find a way to talk to him. Please tell him this...Aenar, Dany. Once this war is over. I want us to build a House with a Red Door and Lemon Tree Outside.' Tell him this, and he will understand."

"What does that—" Aliandra gasped as she opened her eyes. For a moment, she didn't know where she was, but she felt the familiar weight against her arm. She looked to her right to see her little sister sleeping quietly with her new pet snake sleeping quietly.

Aliandra looked back at the same chair, and for a moment, she expected to see Rhaenys, but the chair was empty. She sighed, not understanding what happened. This was completely new to her. She had strange dreams before, and sometimes, she dreamed of faces she had never seen before, or places she had never seen, yet those places felt so real like she was there. But, she had never dreamed of something like this. She knew not and needed time to think.

Slowly, she pulled her arm away, not wanting to wake Lorella. Once her arm was free, she put her legs over the bedframe and brought them down until they touched the carpet that decorated the entire floor of her bedchamber.

Aliandra repeated the words she had heard from this 'Rhaenys', who claimed to be the daughter of Elia Martell and Rhaegar Targaryen.

Aliandra didn't know all the names of Princes born to House Targaryen, but she knew all the names of Princesses born to House Martell. The last Martell daughter with the name Elia was born before the Targaryens started their conquest, so she found it unlikely that a Targaryen had somehow married a Martell daughter, and something like that wasn't written in books.

Aliandra walked over to the open window and looked up at the starry sky. She didn't know who this Rhaenys was, and there was no reason to trust this girl, but...she knew House Targaryen and House Velayron were coming; she knew House Martell was lucky once, but it would not be lucky again, especially when their enemy this time would be the army of House Velayron, Lord Corlys Velayron was known as one of the best Leaders of the Sea. Prince Daemon Targaryen was known even in Dorne; many said he was the best Dragonrider of House Targaryen since Princess Visenya.

And Prince Aenar Targaryen. Somehow, it leads to him. She didn't know why, but she felt that Aenar was the most dangerous one.

*'Aenar, Dany. Once this war is over. I want us to build a House with a Red Door and Lemon Tree Outside.'*

Aliandra repeated the words in her head. Lemon Trees were grown in Dorne; it was warm enough for Lemon Trees to be grown in this place, and if this Rhaenys was telling the truth for being a half-Martell, that would explain her wanting Lemon Trees if she was somehow raised in Dorne, but what did this all mean? Aliandra knew not, but at this point, she needed every

opportunity to stop this war as soon as possible. If sending this message to Prince Aenar would somehow help, then she would find a way to send it.

But deep down, she doubted it would help much. Even if these words would somehow convince Prince Aenar Targaryen to suddenly drop his sword. Laenor Velayron was still dead, and that was not something a simple letter could change.

Aliandra looked back at her sister, and she felt her determination returning. She would find a way to save her family. No matter what, she would not allow her sister, her brother, or her parents to be burned. They had done nothing wrong.

As for Lykard...she didn't know what to do with him.

### **Aenar Targaryen**

The dream shifted like sand in the wind. One moment Aenar was in his chambers at Dragonstone, the next he stood in an endless expanse of red desert. The air shimmered with heat, yet he felt no warmth.

"Bastard," a voice called from behind him, smooth as silk and sharp as steel. "Or should I say, Prince Aenar?"

Aenar turned slowly, his hand instinctively reaching for Longclaw – a sword he hadn't carried in this life. Instead of the familiar pommel, his fingers found only empty air.

Lykard Martell stood before him, tall and imposing in flowing red robes. Red vipers slithered around his feet, their scales gleaming like fresh blood. Unlike the usual dreams of sand and sun that haunted Dornishmen, Lykard's eyes were cold and calculating.

"Who are you really?" Aenar demanded, his voice steady despite the serpents that began circling closer. "How do you know things you couldn't possibly know?"

Lykard's smile was all teeth. "Things I couldn't possibly know? Like what, bastard?"

"You called me bastard." Aenar took a step forward, refusing to be intimidated. "Who are you really– Ramsay Bolton..." A viper hissed. "Oberyn Martell..." Another snake snapped its jaws. "Tywin Lannister..."

Lykard's laughter erupted suddenly, echoing across the dream-desert like thunder. It was not the laugh of a madman, but something worse – a man who knew exactly what he was doing.

"You think I must have lived another life to know these things?" Lykard's eyes glittered with amusement. "That I must be like you, carrying memories of a future that never was?"

The snakes coiled around Aenar's feet, but he stood his ground. "How else could you know?"

"Because I learned, bastard." Lykard's voice dropped to a whisper that somehow carried over the wind. "Do you think yourself wise, Prince?" Lykard Martell's voice was as smooth as silk over steel, his amber eyes glinting like the sun setting over a poisoned desert. "You Targaryens, with your dragons and your dreams. You believe the world bends to fire and blood, as if it were that simple. As if power were a flame you could tame with sheer will."

Aenar Targaryen stood still, his eyes locked onto Lykard, unblinking. He said nothing, but his silence was as much a challenge as words.

Lykard smiled faintly. "You and your ilk think power lies in dragons, in fire and blood. You gaze into the flames and fancy yourselves gods, born to rule. But fire blinds, Targaryen. It consumes, leaving nothing but ash. I have found power in places where your precious dragons dare not tread. You Targaryens speak of Old Valyria and its ruined glories, but you've never walked the blackened streets of Asshai, where shadows move like living things and the air tastes of decay."

"You speak in riddles," Aenar said coldly, though his gaze did not falter. "Words are wind, Martell."

Lykard smirked, stepping closer. "Words are wind, yes—but wind can shape mountains given time, can it not? Do you think the winds of Asshai are mere whispers? Do you know what I've seen there? What I've touched? The shadowbinders call it the Black Mother, a thing older than your Valyrian gods, older even than the Rhoyné that shaped my ancestors. They walk in shadows that have never known the sun, Aenar. They whisper secrets that would make your hair turn white and your dragon blood curdle in its veins."

"Do you know what I learned there, Aenar? That power is not given. It is not born. It is taken, pried from the void, clawed from the places where even gods fear to tread."

He stepped closer, and the very air seemed to ripple around him. "No second life. Everything I know is what I learned by myself."

"You're lying," Aenar said.

"Am I?" Lykard's smile widened. "Tell me, how sure are you that you're the only one who came back? How certain are you that your memories are truly yours alone?"

The snakes rose up, their bodies forming a wall of scales and fangs around them.

"You think you understand the game you're playing," Lykard continued. "But you're still the same bastard who knew nothing, just wearing a different name. The same man who watched his daughter die because he trusted the wrong people."

Aenar's fury erupted. "Don't you dare speak of her!"

"Or what?" Lykard's eyes blazed. "You'll kill me? Like you killed the boy who betrayed the Watch? Like you burned Princess Arianne Martell while she was begging that she knew not the wine was poisoned?"

Aenar could still hear Arianne's screams; he could still remember Rhaenys telling him that Arianne had not known; in those moments, Aenar had listened to no one. His daughter was gone, and the wine given to Daenerys was given by Arianne's hands as a gift for her pregnancy, but it had all been a trap. The Martells could not be trusted. Arianne must have known it was poisoned. She must have...She must have...

*'Your grace. I swear I did not know the wine was poisoned. I swear.'*

"Remember this, Aenar Targaryen," Lykard's voice followed him as the dream collapsed. "I learned everything by traveling this mad world. And that makes me far more dangerous than any ghost of your past life."

"I will burn House Martell to the ground," Aenar growled, his voice carrying the ice of the North and the fire of Old Valyria. "Every stone, every tower, every grain of sand that bears your name. For Laenor, for what you did—"

Lykard's laughter cut through the air again, but this time it held a sharp edge of mockery. The red vipers around them hissed in concert with their master's mirth.

"Oh, how noble you sound," Lykard said, wiping an imaginary tear from his eye. "The avenging dragon, seeking justice for his fallen cousin." His face suddenly hardened, all trace of amusement vanishing. "I did what I did to protect my family. They may hate me for killing Laenor and that little pup dragon, but I did House Martell a favor. They banished me for nine whole years. I wanted to take revenge against those I used to love and call parents. I wanted to impale them with my spear and watch as blood dripped down from their bodies. I would have made sure it would have lasted, but my siblings were and are innocent. Aliandra, and Qyle. They are innocent, but the Black Mother showed me a vision, she showed me you. You sat on a Throne, A Throne made out of the bodies of my family. You sat on it and called it **justice**. I knew I had to learn more of who you are. For my siblings' sake. I made the plan to get your cousin killed."

He circled Aenar like one of his vipers, his voice dropping to a dangerous whisper. "One less dragon to worry about. One less threat to my people. Because I'm the only one who sees you clearly, Aenar Targaryen. I'm the only one protecting them from what you truly are."

"I'm the Prince of House Targaryen. I am the blood of the dragon, and you, Lykard Martell, will learn what it means to fight a dragon. I do not fear your shadow, I do not fear the Black Mother. I do not fear Death itself. **You speak of visions, Lykard, as though they give you wisdom. But visions are only shadows cast by fear. You claim to protect your family, to act for their sake, but all I see is a serpent biting its own tail, poisoning everything it touches. You do not fear me because you think your shadows shield you. You think your darkness makes you untouchable. But let me tell you this, Lykard: shadows cannot stand against flame. And I, the blood of the dragon, will burn away your shadow.**"

He leaned closer, his voice dropping to a near-growl that seemed to echo through the room.

**"You may not fear death, but death fears me. I will show you what it means to challenge the fire, Martell. When I am done with you, the Black Mother herself will weep for her foolish child, and your name will be ash scattered by the winds. You will not only learn what it means to fight a dragon, Lykard. You will learn what it means to *burn*."**

At that moment, the dream ended, and Aenar Targaryen woke up on his bed while Lykard Martell pulled out his face from the Dark Water.

A smile played on their lips. They would not stop until the other one was Dead.

## **Winterfell**

The snowflakes danced around Winterfell's courtyard as laughter echoed off the ancient stone walls. Sara Stark's cheeks were flushed pink from the cold and exertion as she ducked behind a snow-covered barrel, narrowly avoiding the snowball her brother had launched at her head.

"You'll have to do better than that, Cregan!" she called out, already packing another snowball between her mittened hands.

"Just wait until SnowWing gets bigger!" Cregan shouted back from behind his own fortification. "Then we'll see who's laughing!"

Sara rolled her eyes at the mention of his dragon. "SnowWing this, SnowWing that. Is that all you talk about now?"

A white blur shot through the air, catching Sara on the shoulder. She almost let out a shriek of fear, but thankfully, the dragon returned back to its owner. Cregan's triumphant laugh rang out. "Mother says SnowWing will be big enough to ride in two years! We'll explore everything beyond the Wall, maybe even fly to Essos!"

"In this weather?" Sara packed her snowball extra tight. "SnowWing might not like the snow as much as you do."

"He's called SnowWing for a reason," Cregan protested, emerging from his hiding spot. The week-old dragon perched on his shoulder, its scales gleaming like freshly fallen snow. "Mother says he's growing faster than normal dragons."

Sara finally landed a hit, the snowball exploding against her brother's chest. "Is that why you keep asking her about war? 'Mother, how long until SnowWing can breathe fire? Mother, when can we fight in battles?'"

She mimicked his eager tone perfectly, making Cregan flush. "That's not how I sound!"

"Yes, it is!" Sara ducked another snowball. "Remember what Mother said? 'If you're lucky, my sweet summer child, you'll never need to ride your dragon in war.'"

"At least my egg hatched," Cregan retorted, then immediately looked guilty. "Sorry, Sara. I'm sure yours will hatch soon."

Sara's smile didn't waver. "I hope it never does. SnowWing is enough dragon for both of us." She glanced toward the keep. "Why is Uncle Bennard coming? Nobody will tell me." She quickly added, wanting to change the subject. She had enough of talking about dragons.

Cregan's face grew serious as he shrugged, brushing snow from his cloak. "Father says he hasn't been the same since... well, since Night."

Both children fell silent at the mention of their uncle's direwolf. Night was massive even by direwolf standards, with fur as dark as the shadows between stars. But it was the wolf's eyes that troubled Sara most – sometimes they seemed too human, too aware.

"I don't like how he looks at people now," Sara whispered. "Like he's forgotten how to be around them."

"That's what happens when you spend too much time warging," Cregan said wisely, repeating words he'd obviously heard from adults. "You forget which skin is truly yours."

The afternoon light began to fade, and Sara retreated to her chambers, leaving wet footprints on the stone floors. Her room was warm thanks to the hearth, where her dragon egg sat nestled in the coals, its silver surface reflecting the flames. She pointedly ignored it, instead settling at her table with a book on healing arts borrowed from Maester Samwell.

She lost herself in the pages, studying diagrams of herb properties and wound treatments. The warmth of the fire and the familiar comfort of learning made her forget about dragons and wargs and all the other magical things that seemed to be creeping into her orderly world.

Until something nudged her shoulder.

Sara turned, expecting to see her handmaid or perhaps her mother. Instead, she found herself staring into eyes like molten silver, set in a scaled face that was decidedly draconic. The dragon – her dragon – was the size of a well-fed cat, its scales the same shimmering silver as the egg had been. It cocked its head at her, curious and innocent.

The scream that tore from Sara's throat echoed through the chamber. All she could see were the flames from her nightmares, of flesh melting from bone.

"Help!" she shrieked, scrambling backward so violently she knocked over her chair. "Mother! Father! Someone!"

The dragon recoiled from her fear, letting out a confused chirp that sounded almost hurt. It backed away, wings half-spread, but Sara couldn't stop screaming.

The door burst open, and Gael Targaryen rushed in, her silver-gold hair flying behind her. She took in the scene in an instant – the overturned chair, the newly hatched dragon, and her terrified daughter almost pressed against the far wall.

"Oh, sweetling," Gael said softly, moving toward Sara. "It's alright. The dragon won't harm you."

But Sara's eyes weren't seeing the present anymore. In her mind, she was somewhere else – somewhere filled with flames and screams. She could feel the heat on her skin, smell burning flesh, hear the terrible screech of a dragon's cry.

"Take it away!" Sara screamed, crawling backward until she hit the corner of her room. "Please, Mother, take it away! I can feel the flames – they're burning me alive!" Her hands clawed at her arms as if trying to extinguish invisible fire. "I don't want to burn again! Please, please, I don't want to burn!"

"Sara, love, you're safe," Gael tried to approach her daughter, but Sara only pressed herself further into the corner, her eyes wild with terror. "No one is burning. The dragon is just a baby—"

"NO!" Sara's voice cracked with hysteria. "In my dreams – every night in my dreams – it burns me! I feel my skin melting, I smell my hair burning, I—" She broke off into violent sobs, her whole body shaking. "Please, Mother, please take it away. I can't... I can't..."

The silver dragon chirped softly from where it stood, its head tilted in confusion at its bonded human's reaction. It took a tentative step toward Sara, causing her to let out another terrified shriek.

"Stay away from me!" Sara covered her face with her hands, rocking back and forth. "Make it go away, make it go away, make it go away..."

Gael looked between her daughter and the newly hatched dragon, her heart breaking for both of them. The dragon's eyes held such hurt and confusion at its human's rejection, but Sara's terror was real and deep-rooted.

"Very well," Gael said softly, her voice heavy with resignation. She approached the dragon carefully, speaking in High Valyrian. "Gō, byka mēre. Iksan rhaenar iā tubī lir īlva jikagon. (Come, little one. We'll find you a temporary home.)"

The dragon resisted at first, its eyes fixed on Sara's trembling form, but eventually allowed Gael to pick it up.

"I'll place him in Cregan's chamber for now," Gael said, cradling the confused creature. "We'll... we'll figure something out."

As Gael turned to leave, the dragon let out a mournful cry that seemed to pierce straight through Sara's soul. But even that couldn't overcome the paralyzing fear that gripped her, the phantom sensation of flames consuming her flesh.

Gael paused at the door, looking back at her daughter still huddled in the corner. "We'll talk about these dreams, Sara. When you're ready."

But Sara didn't respond, lost in her own private horror. As the door closed behind her mother and the dragon, she could still feel the ghost of flames licking at her skin.

In the silence of her room, Sara Stark wept, torn between the terror of her memories and the sudden guilt she felt in her heart.

Was this a mistake? She wondered, remembering SilverEye's body. The little Direwolf was abandoned by his mother, and he died alone.

Was she doing the same?

**Note: I have noticed a steep decline in likes on this story, and I would like to know what I can do better. If there is something you think I should do more, less, or change, let me know in the comments. I want my stories to be as good as possible.**