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Edited by Bub3loka

2nd Day of the 12th Moon, 303 AC

Baelor Hightower, Pyke

Like everything else on these accursed Islands, the town of Lordsport was windswept, dreary, and grim.

The surroundings were as joyless as the people who called this land home. The only green to be seen was the sickly sort that grew between cracks in the paving or festered upon damp walls. Even the houses were squat and dreary, built of harsh grey rock and mortar that looked as if it would crumble at the first touch. Baelor Hightower had seen hovels in the Marches with more dignity.

The only thing worth a damn was the sprawling stone piers, considered to be the finest in the Iron Islands. Even Baelor, who despised this land and all who dwelt here, couldn't help but be impressed. The shipyards were also formidable, and some of the best ships in the realm were made here.

The expected fight never came—the docks were lifeless. No sentries patrolled the steps leading to the wharves, no fishermen were about their day or peddling their latest catch. No crossbowmen graced the wooden barricades, and there was not even a shouted insult or an angry curse to greet them. Just silence. The town was no better: the small square was devoid of people, and the narrow streets were as empty as a graveyard.

"I expected the Ironmen to give more fight than this." Ser Alan Bulwer's voice was dripping with disdain, his fist squeezing the handle of his axe tight. The man had wanted vengeance for the death of his two brothers in the Reaver's Folly, but found nothing and could only curse out his anger. "Spineless cravens and curs!"

Baelor's jaw was set tight behind the high collar of his storm-grey cloak, and his gloved hand rested lightly on the pommel of Vigilance, its steel hilt shaped in the likeness of a tower wreathed in flame.

The silence was wrong. After the bloody skirmish near Fair Isle, they had expected a gauntlet of blood and steel. Instead, Lordsport greeted them with stillness, not much different from the crypts in the depths of the Battle Isle.

Perhaps the Ironborn were waiting. Perhaps the city watch meant to draw them in and ambush them from the narrow alleys. But even the Botley warriors that should have made their landing a bloody slog were nowhere in sight, and the narrow alleyways could not hide an army.

A few scouts ventured forth into the city, but the expected ambush never came.

"Is it cunning or mere cowardice?" Baelor asked himself, eyes scanning the crooked lanes and shuttered windows. "But even rats can't hide forever, let alone pirates. Find me a townsman. I care not how. A smith, a cooper, a drunkard—any mouth that still draws breath will do."

"At once, Lord Hightower." Ser Alan turned and barked commands. A score of mailed men fanned out, boots ringing on cobbles as they began to break through the tightly closed doors.

Baelor summoned Lord Tommen Costayne, his second and most loyal bannerman. “Keep the fleet alert. If the squid bastards mean to strike from behind, I want our captains ready.”

Costayne nodded grimly and vanished down the gangway toward the ships.

Not long after, Ser Alan returned, dragging a soot-faced man by the scruff of his collar. The man’s beard was thick and tangled, his hands and roughspun tunic were black with coal and soot. His knees buckled as he was shoved forward. A smith.

“Mercy, m’lord!” the man cried, sinking to the stones, palms outstretched in supplication.

“Speak truthfully, and you shall find it,” Baelor said coolly. “What’s your name?”

“Name’s Jard, m’lord. A smith like my father.”

Baelor gave a curt nod. “Very well, Jard the Smith. Where is everyone? This town was meant to house five thousand, yet I see only ghosts.”

“Fled, m’lord,” the man stammered, his eyes darting toward the sky. “Took to the hills, the caves, the sea—whichever was farthest from here. That was... eight days past.”

“Cravens,” Ser Alan spat.

“And the Fleet?” Baelor pressed, his voice sharp. “The Lord Reaper’s private warships?”

The smith’s face blanched, as if Baelor had asked him to name the Stranger. “Gone,” he whispered. “All gone.”

Baelor stepped closer. “Gone where?”

“T-T-the dragon,” the smith whimpered, his wide eyes once again flicking to the sky. “The captains had gathered for the Moot, but a terrible beast swooped down from the sky and burned them all, *ships and men*. Only a f-few fishermen nearby survived and s-spread the word.”

A low murmur passed through Baelor’s knights. Even the hardened veterans shifted on their feet or muttered a prayer.

But Baelor only smiled. The moot gathered every reaver lord and captain of import, and now they were all ashes in the wind along with their ships.

“Then the Dragon Queen is wise and just,” he said, letting out a low, gleeful laughter. “And has given us a most splendid gift.”

Ser Alan frowned. “Only the lords and captains are gone, but the castles and their castellans remain. As long as they have a garrison, they won’t surrender—not to you. If we mean to break them all, storming won’t do—we don’t have enough men. Starving them out may take years. Long enough for Daenerys or Aegon to remember the King’s Peace.”

"I care not if it takes ten," Baelor said, his voice darkening as he remembered the sight of Oldtown aflame and the corpses of his kin. If Daenerys had fondness for these scum, she would not have scoured the strength of the Islands and their holy place with fire. No, now is the time to rid the world of this scourge once and for all."

He turned back toward the broken streets of Lordsport. Nothing stirred. Not a gull cried, nor dog barked. Just the wind, and the slow moaning of the sea.

The Ironmen barely cared about anything but ironwork, sailing, and fighting, and it showed. *Make a desert and call it peace.* But wanton slaughter would just sow the seeds of vengeance, no matter how much he wanted to do it. No, he had to play his hand in a way that the Ironborn would never rise again and to the benefit of his House.

"We'll start with the priests."

Alan gave him a sidelong look. "The drowned men?"

"Hang them," Baelor growled. "Each and every one of them. Cut open their entrails so the vultures and ravens can feast, and leave their bones hanging over the shore, so they can forever watch over their cursed drowned god."

His eyes burned with cold fury. "Take the smiths and the shipwrights and all of their craftsmen and bring them home. Those who resist will die. Salt their fields, fell their woods, and leave them nought but cold rock. I will mean to turn this dreary hellhole into the barren waste it should have always been, and I will not leave until I've seen it done!"

Willas Tyrell, Highgarden

It was only when Willas saw his brother that he allowed himself to feel relief. The House of the Dragon had always been mercurial, quick to anger and slow to forgive slights, doubly so now that they had once again mastered dragons and ruled the skies.

He told himself there was no cause for dread—House Tyrell had stood staunchly behind the House of the Dragon, but even that rang half-hollow. They had answered the call to arms, true, but Mace Tyrell had lingered outside Storm's End, sieging a few hundred starved men. His father feasted and drank while the dragon fell to the hammer, and he had remained feasting when King's Landing fell.

Sending Garlan to treat with Aegon and Daenerys had been a gamble. The Targaryens had no need to receive envoys, and less need still to show mercy. The Reach could not match dragons in the sky. Their choices were submission or ruin. Or exile, perhaps—but no roots took hold in soil not their own, and a house uprooted seldom grew strong again without great fortune like Manderly.

When Garlan entered the solar, he bowed low, first to his elder brother, then to their grandmother, who sat unmoved beside the hearth.

“Brother. Grandmother,” Garlan said simply.

Olenna Tyrell didn’t stir from her seat by the fireplace but gave him a stiff nod and took a bundle of scrolls from one of her servants.

“Look at you—a sight for sore eyes,” Willas greeted, motioning for his brother to join him on the table laden with the finest food Highgarden had to offer. “No trouble on the road, I trust?”

Garlan shrugged off his cloak and took his seat. Tall, with broad shoulders and powerful hands, Willas’ younger brother was one of the finest knights of the Reach, even if he preferred the comfort of linen and cotton tunics to the finest silks. Yet Highgarden didn’t need vainglory but men of staunch loyalty and sharp skills.

“No big trouble here in the Reach,” he said, though his smile was brittle. “Refugees are flooding into the Northmarch, mostly ragged folk from the Riverlands. I ran down a few desperate bands of brigands and a handful of deserters. But past the Gold Road... nothing. Not a soul. From the Red Fork to the Gods’ Eye, it’s like death passed through. No holdfast was left unspoiled or a village unpillaged, and the hamlets were all abandoned or a charred wreck. Inns were all torched wrecks, and I saw more corpses left to rot by a ditch near the road that I would care to count.”

That explained the flintiness in Garlan’s brown eyes. He had always been carefree and unruffled, something even the war and loss of family had not managed to destroy entirely. But the sight of desolation had struck another blow to his spirit.

“The Kingdoms go to war, and the Riverlands weep.” Willas shook his head. “But they had chosen their lot. I see you still found time to shear your beard off, even on the road.”

“Leonette likes it more this way,” his brother said with a wry smile as he sat on one of the tapered chairs and took a plate with a chicken stuffed with almonds and currants basted with spiced wine until its skin had turned golden. His brother’s marriage to Leonette had been political, but they had found love there. “Though I may still regret it when the snows come. An innkeeper I met a week prior said this winter will be bad. He kept complaining how the dull ache in his knees was worse than ever, and would not go away—an omen from the Father himself.”

Willas snorted.

“No summer lasts forever. Autumn has turned, giving way to the cold of winter, and we will have to deal with it... and the dragons. Tell me of Daenerys and Aegon.”

His brother swallowed a mouthful of chicken and chuckled. “Ah, straight to the main course, I see. Lordship has made you impatient, brother.”

“This is not a time for jests, Garlan. The fate of our house rests on their whims.”

“Indeed.” Garlan sighed, his shoulders slumping. “I saw little of Daenerys, but what I heard was not good. The mother of dragons, they call her to her face, but behind her back, they whisper she’s her father’s daughter. Impetuous, moody, quick to take offence, and never to forgive a slight. Aegon is far more level-headed, thank the Seven. Their minds are set on breaking the Westerlands. And then, if what I heard around the camp is truthful, once the lions fall, the dragon plans to go after the defiant wolves.”

Willas let out a breath. "That is good news."

Garlan raised a brow. "You call that good?"

"It buys us time," Willas said. "Time to prove our worth and our loyalty. Time to stay their fire away from Highgarden. Time to make ourselves too useful to remove. So long as the lions don't surrender too quickly, it will be enough. Those with castles might cower at the might of dragons, but the Lannisters of Casterly Rock live in a mountain of stone. And mountains do not burn."

"And starving them out might take years," Garlan finished, a tired sigh rolling off his lips. "Gods, can't this blasted war come to an end, at last?"

"It ends," came a dry rasp from the hearth, "when men with foolish ambitions grow tired. Or when there's no one left to bleed. Which is to say never. Cersei Lannister has died."

Garlan stiffened. "How?"

"Wine and folly. Slipped from a balcony into the Sunset Sea, they say—though I'd wager her brother gave her a helpful shove. Likely with the left hand; the right went missing some time ago."

Willas winced as her cackle echoed across the solar. Garlan only shook his head.

"It's unseemly to take joy in the misfortune of others, grandmother," he reminded quietly. "They might be our foes, but—"

"Spare me your platitudes," Olenna snapped. "I'll dance on the graves of all who wronged us if my knees allowed it. Tywin's shrew of a daughter cost us too much. Her end is long overdue. It's even better for us—perhaps with someone competent in Casterly Rock taking charge, the dragons will be busy for longer than you'd dare hope."

"Or it would force Tommen's rule and Casterly Rock to collapse faster due to infighting," Willas pointed out slowly. "We still have to send men up the Ocean Road as Aegon has requested. At least ten thousand, so as not to be considered shirking our obligations. Perhaps even more, if we mean to take Crakehall by storm."

"Perhaps." Olenna's eyes had drifted to her newest scroll. Her brow furrowed. Her breath caught. "Seven save us."

"What is it now?" Willas asked, dread stirring in his chest.

"Aegon and Daenerys are gone. Dead."

"What?!" Garlan jumped from his seat, "I left their camp less than a fortnight past—" His brother mumbled several curses even while Willas winced in pain from flinching too hard.

"How does one kill dragonlords with an army?" Willas asked. "Treachery?"

"Their camps were ringed with Unsullied," Garlan said, shaking his head. "The royal tents were better guarded than the vaults of Oldtown. Aegon never went anywhere without at least a score of knights."

"Death by stupidity," their grandmother rasped out in a dry chuckle. "Imbeciles. Aegon and Daenerys and their dragons are dead—to Jon Snow and fire. Ned Stark's bastard somehow had a dragon."

The brothers exchanged a look. Willas blinked for a good minute as the outlandish words tried to fight their way through his confused mind. A Stark bastard and hatching dragons were not things one would mention in a single sentence. *It didn't make sense.*

"It doesn't make sense," Garlan voiced his thoughts aloud.

"How reliable is your spy, grandmother?" Willas prodded.

"Quite reliable—an acolyte I recruited that serves in the Golden Tooth." Olenna scrunched up her wrinkled face and sighed. "He could be lying, of course. But the words inked down are shaky, as if his hand had been trembling out of agitation. A tale of sorcery, madness, and magic, but he risked sending a raven under his maester's nose with two armies at his doorstep—it has to be important."

"We must know more," Willas decided as his fingers slowly drummed on the table. "Perhaps his wits were scrambled with fear. This is too... we have to have it confirmed from two other sources."

Olenna nodded. "I'll see what I can do. But we must still prepare contingencies..."

"I say your spy has had a few cups of wine too many," Garlan quipped lightly, and his eyes grew distant. "I saw the Targaryen dragons. They were enormous, gargantuan beasts, bigger than the elephants of the far east, but with wings and scales and fire. Far from the supposed size of the Black Dread, but not something some newly hatched dragon dabbling in sorcery could slay along with a whole army."

"I trust Caren," Olenna bit back, her eyes hardening. "The boy is from the Arbour, your distant cousin if born on the wrong side of the sheets, and has no reason to lie. At least not to me, who sponsored his entry to the Citadel."

"We still need to know more," Willas repeated, exhaustion seeping into his voice. "I find it unlikely that a Stark bastard can command a dragon or have mastery over sorcery unseen in this part of the world before. Even the Conqueror and his sister-wives couldn't burn a whole army with their dragons before exhausting them, despite fighting on a field of dried grass—the Field of Fire."

"Snow's mother could have easily been a dragonseed from the Crownlands," she clicked her tongue. "A pretty thing with the silver-gold hair, sparkling purple eyes, and pale skin that makes the Valyrian maidens so desired. Perhaps one of the fruits of Aerys' many dalliances, with a face pretty enough to break down Eddard Stark's vaunted honour."

"I thought the Targaryens stopped sowing wild seeds after Daemon Blackfyre—"

Olenna snorted.

"Don't be naive, Willas. Pah! As if men's lusts could be sated so easily! They stopped acknowledging the bastards, sure, and instead turned to pretty baseborn maidens for the baser aspects of pleasure."

“What of the eggs? Dragon eggs are no common cabbage to be bought on the market.”

“Dragons flew all over the Seven Kingdoms for a century, and I wouldn’t be surprised if there were a clutch or two that nobody knew of,” Olenna murmured. “How do you think Aerys’ daughter got hers?”

“I suppose that would explain it.” Willas paused, rubbing his brow. Why was such a heavy burden placed on weak shoulders like his? “Let’s say Jon Snow has a dragon, and your spy has not lost his wits. It doesn’t change things. Stark instead of a Targaryen—we merely trade one dragonlord for another. There’s hardly anyone to oppose him. A man of twenty, with a dragon and his whole life ahead of him, can take the Seven Kingdoms with enough time, just like the Conqueror did.”

“Send an envoy to Winterfell,” his grandmother advised. “Baelor knows better than to refuse us passage through the Iron Islands. It will also give us time to inquire further about the *happenings* at the Golden Tooth. Should the letter be the ramblings of a drunkard, the envoy can always sail back home.”

Garlan took a generous gulp of Arbour Gold and looked at Willas with amusement.

“Will I have to go North and swear fealty to Jon Stark now?”

Olenna Tyrell scowled.

“Are you a dog to wag your tail without even being summoned? We must wait for him to call on House Tyrell first,” she said, words sharp and biting as always. Then, her eyes lit up, and she cackled with glee. “Oh, he’s far more cunning than I expected.”

“How so?”

“Snow—or well, Stark now. What’s to stop him from legitimising himself? Regardless, Stark wedded Stannis’ scarred daughter. Or at least a girl who is claimed to be her. A blood claim to the Iron Throne with the power to enforce it.”

Willas grimaced.

“How convenient. Brother,” he turned to Garlan and patted his shoulder, “I’ll be counting on you again.”

“I suppose I’ve never toured through the Iron Isles and the North,” Garlan murmured, sounding far less enthusiastic than before.

“You must bring gifts, of course,” Willas mused. “Generous gifts. Shireen’s mother is a Florent—and we can’t give her cause for displeasure, lest the damn foxes see themselves backed by a dragonlord.”

The Queen of Thorns tossed the scroll into the fire.

“I’ll arrange for a suitable selection,” she said, voice solemn for once. “And do not be too quick to offer fealty unless requested,” she advised. “It would make us look weak, as if we need House Stark to stay in power. You ought to take your time and assess the situation and the mood in Winterfell first. If the dice have fallen as we now suspect, perhaps a betrothal between Willas and Sansa Stark—”

“Other men’s leavings. Taking her for a wife back then was fine. But now? She’s been twice wedded,” Willas darkly reminded. “Twice bedded by a bastard and an Imp.”

“You’re a grown man, not a boy lost in youthful flights of fancy, Willas.” Her voice grew callous. “Only fools and smallfolk marry for love. The Game is no place for misplaced pride. You will be her third husband and ought to do it with a smile if it brings us into the sole dragonlord’s good graces. It’s not like the Stark girl has any better marriage prospects than you.”

Willas wanted to object, to roar and shout that he was the Lord of Highgarden and his word was the law... but he was not a warrior. That path was denied to him; the fate of a cripple was to forever rely on others, and deep inside, he knew his grandmother had the right of it.

Near Westwatch, Shireen Baratheon

Shireen blinked. She was alive, and nothing hurt. That was quite a surprise since falling from so high should have seen her turn into a mangled mess of flesh and bone. It felt like she fell onto a soft ball of cotton instead of a rocky shore covered with a thin layer of snow and frost.

The chill that threatened to sink into her bones down to the very marrow was also gone, rebuffed by a warm pulse above her chest. The dancing snowflakes that choked the air evaporated the moment they touched her cloak. It made her feel safe, as if he were by her side.

Yet her joy quickly drained as a pained shriek echoed in the dark. In the skies above, Stormstrider was twisting in the air, flapping his wings angrily, but one of them seemed stiff. Dark, steaming blood was dripping from a large tear in it.

Her heart leapt into her throat as her dragon’s wings finally faltered and he crashed into a snowy hill to the southwest. Something deep inside told her that Stormstrider wasn’t dead. But he might as well be; a dragon who couldn’t fly was no better than a sitting duck. Worse, whatever had struck them in the air still lurked behind the curtain of snow that covered the frozen Bay of Ice.

Not that it mattered. The Northern army was slowly but surely being surrounded.

Shireen wanted to rush to where Stormstrider had fallen, but the daunting wall of over ten feet of snow blocked her in that direction. Only the giants and their mammoths cleared a short pathway to the forests in the hills to the south, and everything else was blocked by the thick quilt of snow.

Even if she reached Stormstrider, it would change nothing.

The Northern camp was defended facing the Gorge to the north and the parts of the Bay to the west, but the south and east were wide open. And now, the wights and White Walkers could flank them from the back and the side.

The Northmen were valiant fighters, but their numbers weren’t endless. Unlike the undead thralls, their strength would wane with time, and once they could no longer lift their torches and shield, they would fall. And when they did, they would rise again, eyes shining blue, trying to snuff out all the warmth of the living.

With Stormstrider struck down from the sky, the last chance of victory was gone.

The battle was lost before it had even started.

There was no path forward, no retreat, no hope. Only the encroaching dark, the snow that fell without end in the dark, and the tide of shambling wights that never ended. They would all die here—men of the North, the mountain clans, wildlings and free folk, giants and black brothers of the Watch alike. It was not a question of if, but when.

Perhaps Umber had been right—Shireen should have flown away, and now she would die with them all.

The thought shamed her. A bitter laugh escaped her lips like a plume of smoke.

'As if I would run from my duty.'

The air grew colder. It was not the harsh bite of winter wind, but something crueller, something far more insidious. With each breath, it felt like her lungs were raked with icy needles. That was when she knew.

They were here.

Shireen saw their eyes first, twin flames of ice, burning with unnatural cold that froze even her mind. Then came their shapes—tall and gaunt, clad in black armour, gliding like spectres across the snow-cruised plain from the Bay of Ice. Each step was as graceful as it was inhuman, impossibly swift and silent.

Her limbs betrayed her. Her joints stiffened. Her breath caught in her throat. Cold seeped into her bones, and even her courage was frozen solid. Her hand, half-frozen and shaking, found the hilt of the bronze dagger Jon had pressed into her palm. Not even a moon's turn had passed since then, but it felt like a lifetime ago.

The dagger felt small now. Insignificant. She drew it all the same, raising it between herself and the two White Walkers who now fast approached, swords of frost gleaming in their hands.

They made no sound save for a chilling crackle, like ice splintering underfoot. The sound mocked her. They did not even see her as a threat.

Dread pooled in her belly; Shireen knew she was dead.

The nearest of them blurred forward, impossibly swift. She flinched as the sword drove toward her chest.

But there was no pain.

She looked down and blinked. The blade had struck, yet did not pierce. Instead, it skittered against a film of reddish light that shimmered faintly around her, like molten glass. The White Walker drew back, eyes narrowing, and struck again. The same result.

Shireen stood dumbfounded—until a memory echoed in her skull.

"Just stab them with the pointy end."

Jon's words.

Before she could think, her body moved. She ducked low, the bronze dagger thrusting forward. It scraped across blackened armour until it found a joint between the waist and thigh. She drove it in with all her strength.

The White Walker let out a sound like the howl of the wind passing through the Gorge. Then he shattered, ice flesh breaking into a thousand pieces, each fragment melting at visible speed before her eyes.

She had killed it.

But there was no time for triumph. Three Walkers converged, their eyes burning brighter now, furious. They glided toward her like shadowy wraiths, with cruel blades poised to strike her.

And then something brushed past her.

A horseman crashed into them, glass-tipped spear driving through the helm of one of the Walkers, shattering it on the spot. The other two turned, their movements a flurry of ice as they hacked him into pieces along with his horse. Within a handful of heartbeats, only a steaming mess of raked flesh and bone remained.

Shireen knew his face. One of the Karstark lancers, name unknown—another soul who had given his life without hesitation.

The brave man had won her a moment, but it was far from enough.

The Walkers lunged at her with renewed urgency. A white blur crashed into one of them, and Ghost knocked it to the other before disappearing into the snow.

Shireen turned, staggered, and ran—just as thunder rolled through the ground. Stiffly, she glanced over her shoulder.

A wave of steel and horseflesh surged toward her. Northmen on destriers, Lord Umber at their head, giants towering behind. The host parted around her like water around a stone and swept toward the enemy.

One Walker fell to obsidian-tipped spears. The other turned, retreating across the Bay, vanishing into the shambling horde rising to meet the Northmen. The horsemen slowed down, barely wheeling around before the frozen sea.

Greatjon reined his horse beside her, panting, snow crusting in his beard.

“Your Grace!” he called, voice raw. “You must leave!”

“Leave where?” she rasped. The dagger still trembled in her hand. “I will not leave. Not the men and not Stormstrider.”

“A battle is no place for a queen,” Umber said, pulling off his helm. His face was grey, whiskers caked in frost. “We’ll be outflanked soon, I fear. Come, I’ll see you to the rear myself, at least.”

Shireen nodded, too cold and tired to argue further—no one knew better than her that without a dragon, she was useless in battle. Umber lifted her into the saddle like a child, and though she burned at the indignity, she did not fight him. Even now, she could feel Stormstrider’s dull pain in the far corner of her mind—his presence far more vivid than ever before.

As they turned, another blood-curdling shriek rang out.

Another gust of wind came, accompanied by that flash of frost, and three of the giants fell behind each other, skewered by a giant shard of ice.

Not even a heartbeat later, their eyes turned burning blue, and Shireen felt terror crawl down her spine as they all turned to her, lunging.

The nearby living giants barely held them down, just in time for the men to rush in with the torches.

Shireen looked around at the faces of the men surrounding her. Lords and freefolk, sworn swords and raiders, all worn and grim. Not one of them expected to live.

Only a miracle could save them now.

???, Elsewhere

The half-corroded shackle exploded, and her powers rushed into her. Yet she was still stuck here; her body merged with the very ice of the dream by the curse of her kinsmen.

She did not scream. Her rage had long cooled into ice. She smothered the ember of wrath and cast her mind forward—to the battle below.

Almost...

*She began to remember... a name that had been forgotten. **Nysa**.*

Her name. Not the one given to her by her kin that was unpronounceable by human tongue, but the name gifted to her by her man, by her love. Nysa shook her head and focused on the battle below.

Humans were fragile beings, she knew.

Nysa could feel the power thrumming in the blood of the Daughter of the Storm. It was slow but unyielding, like the waxing and waning of the tides, and she could feel it even through Brandon’s Wall. It was old, ancient, older than she was... the rising power of things that ought to have dwindled. A gust of the west wind, a clap of heavenly thunder, a glitter of bubbling earthfire, and the ember that came from the children of summer.

It was old, it was slow, but it was tangible to her senses.

*Nysa **wanted** it. Such power would be the catalyst to break the final fetters holding her in the dream. To overcome the pesky magic of Brandon’s Wall and have her vengeance!*

Nysa focused, then, on her last child. Born of magic, ice, and malevolence instead of flesh and blood, but it was still hers.

The battle under the wall was simple. Her memory was still fresh of the day her husband had explained to her the core of human fighting. Battles were merely a contest of who could push out, exhaust, and surround the foe first.

And she had the advantage of tirelessness and numbers on her side, the advantage of the hundreds of thousands of humans and beasts that had perished in the Lands of Always Winter and had not been cleansed by fire or eaten clean by decay. It had taken time and countless years to delve deep into the skills of necromancy to tap into them, but Nysa had all the time in the world.

And now, her patience was rewarded.

The humans arrayed themselves in a U-shaped wedge around the Daughter of the Storm, their backs to their wooden walls.

But they had no time to retreat and close the gap as the wights slowly but surely surrounded them. Nysa sent more towards the fallen drake, but the beast was still awake, his fall softened by the thick snow. The drakeling was now spewing plumes of purple flame, setting the approaching wights on fire and melting the snow around him. Even the ice dolls could barely withstand the flame, unable to advance, only to be peppered down by a rain of frozenfire arrows.

More humans appeared, riding unicorns led by a skinwalker atop a massive boar, waddling a clear path through the thick snowfall, and defending the drake with a dogged persistence.

Her child peppered the human army with his javelins, skewering one living fool after another. Yet no matter how many fell, how great the pressure was, the dragon and the Daughter of the Storm were defended as if the men refused to let them perish, even if it was the last thing they could do. It was almost endearing, and yet it vexed her all the same.

The raised dead cut off the path of retreat toward the human walls, leaving the men surrounded, and they promptly turned the U-shaped formation into a circle.

The minutes turned into hours, and nearly a dozen ice dolls had shattered, but the men were not giving up, even as they died in doves, exhausted and surrounded.

Their senseless struggle and the futility of men's stubborn perseverance brought her joy. Even their fires and frozen flames were soon running out.

Once she decided they were nearing the breaking point, she sent her child and his toys forth.

He was powerful, her most powerful yet, as fitting for any child of ice and malice and magic. He tore through the men like a sword through snow, cutting a bloody path towards the Daughter of the Storm.

The men turned rabid, trying to block her son's path, but it mattered not, even as a half-giant cracked his head on her child's own, trying to stop it. It amused her how far those warm-blooded fools would go for their convictions—how futile their efforts ended as her child swept all opposition away.

Frozenfire bounced off his armour and flesh, and he slaughtered the fools; neither men nor giants, not half-giants, were a match for him. He was perfect, the pinnacle of her mastery of ice and death.

The Daughter of the Storm was shaking, Nysa could tell. Her fear was palpable even from here. She muttered a prayer, but it would not save her. Her child arrived, his sword brandished for a strike.

The blood protection cracked under his strength. Another strike, and it shattered like glass.

Then, a name whispered so softly under her breath, like a sigh in the wind, reached Nysa's ears from the girl's mouth. It was wistful and sad, like a prayer.

Jon.

*She paused, then, and so did her child. Jon... **Jon.***

Her husband's name. The love they had taken from Nysa. Her midnight moon.

*Rage erupted like a volcano in her chest, clouding her senses with fury. **She dared?!***

'END HER!'

Her child again swung towards the now defenceless Daughter of the Storm.