

Long Live the Queen

1: The Beginning

Chaos. It was the only word that could describe the madness that danced around me as a couple ushered me with them.

“What must we do Arthur,” the lioness, who gripped my hand, questioned frantically. “Keep moving darling. We need to make it to the river, there’s a boat waiting for us. Cassian’s already alerted Andreas and Ciaran; they’re ready for us,” the man spoke with certainty. He believed that whoever these people were, they were going to help us escape from this calamity. The woman looked down at me with her gentle eyes that held an unfamiliar terror. “Come now my darling, we mustn’t stagger. We don’t have much ti-” she stopped short, whipping me back with the force. The man stationed himself in front of us, sword pointed towards a harrowing shadow.

A chilling voice came from it, a man, “Well, look who I have discovered, fleeing with his tail between his legs. Oh, how the people will riot when they discover what a coward their beloved king truly is.”

“Come now Arowbyn, this fight is between you and I. Let my girls leave in peace. I beg of you.”

“Oh how I have dreamed of hearing the great warrior that is King Arthur beg me for something, but I’m afraid it’s too late,” the man uttered. The king fell to his knees in pain and the woman pushed me behind her legs, shielding me from what was to come. “You always underestimated me, my dear king.” “No. I trusted you,” the king grunted out. The man didn’t speak for a moment, just lingered in the shadows cloaking his face. “What a mistake that was,” he finally spit as the king fell to the ground with a deadly thud. The woman let a sob fall from her lips as she tightened her grip.

The man walked closer but his face remained blurry as the woman began, “Please, Arowbyn, don’t do th-,” she crumpled to the ground as well. I remained frozen as he stepped closer to me. His frigid hand grasped my throat as he lifted me from the ground, moving a few feet to the mountain side that I hadn’t realized was there before now. I couldn’t push any words out.

“Long live the queen,” he whispered as he released me and the wind took hold of me.

I awoke with a start. It was always the same dream. The same familiar people who I don’t recall ever knowing. And it’s always the same fall.

I’ve wondered for years why these dreams continue to plague me every night. What is it about these people, this incident, that is so important that I’ve let it consume me? I don’t get very far into my thoughts before I hear my mom calling me down for breakfast. I race down the stairs, eager to distract myself from the horrors that infest my thoughts.

“Mornin’ sweetheart,” my dad called out to me as I enter the kitchen. “Morning. Smells good in here mom.” “Thank you darlin’. You sleep well last night hun?” I didn’t get to answer before a crash sounded in the living room. “What in the worl-,” my dad started as an arrow, of all things, whizzed past me, clipping my ear. “Where is Arya Rafe,” a guttural voice pierced the frigid silence. Thundering footsteps clawed closer, taunting us. I quickly grasped hold of one of

the kitchen knives from the counter and held it close as the footsteps fell in line with the kitchen doorway.

I felt nausea rise as the monstrous beasts stopped before me. Their black, misshapen figures filled the entire doorway, with bat-like wings that towered above them. "Let me ask again. Where is Arya Rafe," the one closest to me growled out.

"Who wants to know," I stammered. Their hollow eyes settled on me as repulsive grins stretched across their faces. They angled their bodies towards me, stepping closer. "You'll be coming with us" *Please*. The one closest reached his taloned hands out and I stabbed out, hitting the flesh of his hand with a disgusting squelch. He howled, stumbling back, gripping his hand. Fury flashed in his eyes as he advanced again. "You shouldn't have done that, little girl." They swarmed me as my father tried to move towards me, "Hey! Stay awa-," he froze, as did my mother, with a snap of one of the beast's fingers. I tried to back away, but their reach was longer than I thought as they grabbed hold of my arms.

Fear coursed through my veins.

"What do you want with me," I squeaked, cursing myself for being so weak. The one I had stabbed spoke, "You'll find out soon enough." He snapped his fingers and darkness welcomed me like an old friend.

2: The Truth

Wind rips around me as light finally fills my vision. I stumbled as my feet came into contact with the lush ground. I tried to look around as best I could with the beasts still gripping me in their arms. What seemed to once be palatial land, was now deteriorating in different parts. This place felt familiar, but I couldn't understand what until I glanced up at the vehement mountain before me, mocking me.

It was the mountain from my dreams.

"Where are we," I tried to question the beasts. "What matters is that Arowbyn can now make sure he kills you," they sneered. *Kills*. The word set something off in me as I began to fight against their firm grips.

"Stop that," they growled as they tried to tighten their hold, but I managed to get myself untangled from the labyrinth their bodies created. And I did what any sane person would do, I set off away from them and that glowering mountain.

I didn't look back, too afraid that it would waste precious seconds. I didn't make it very far before my face slammed into the sand, claws pinning me down. My breath caught in my throat as they pierced into my back.

"You really thought that you could run from us? My, you must be as stupid as you are weak," the beast laughed.

Weak. There was that word again. The word that haunted my very soul because I knew how true it was. I knew it was true from the moment that I took off running; I wasn't strong enough to fight these three beasts off by myself.

I was too deep in my thoughts that I almost missed the screech of one of the beasts as that disgusting squelch filled my ears. The beast on top of me retaliated to his comrade getting hit by pushing his claws deeper into my back. The pain was antagonizing. It cried out as it was hit, falling off my back.

With the beast no longer holding me down, I scrambled away frantically, pain ripping through me. The beast clawed after me, refusing to let me go. Pure agony blinded me as I felt teeth sink into my ankle. I rolled over to get a better angle to kick the beast off, but a sword stopped my efforts, decapitating the beast in one swish. I sat frozen in my position as I watched the beast's head fall beside my feet. And it was then that my dinner actually did come up.

I was too busy sputtering the acidic bile out of my mouth to notice the scramble of feet towards me or someone kneeling behind me, pacing warm hands on my hunched back or that they had pulled my hair out of my face. It wasn't until they spoke that I registered that they were there. "Shh. Shh. You're alright Arya. You're okay," their deep, comforting voice soothed me.

Once I had finally stopped, I shifted away from the person and scrambled to a standing position as best I could. I registered that a group of people in exquisite armor were staring at me with a look that seemed almost relieved. I tried not to look at the beasts that now lay dead around us or at the red that stained many of the group's weapons.

I opened my mouth and then closed it for a moment, trying to comprehend what had just happened. "Who are you people," I quipped, my eyes darting among them: a short girl with a dark complexion and eyes to match, a man with the stature of a god and winter hair, a slim girl with freckles painting her skin, and finally the one closest to me, a tall boy who looked as though he had stepped out of the night sky with his raven colored hair and sapphire eyes.

Hurt danced throughout their eyes as soon as the question left my lips. The boy closest to me stepped towards me but halted as I tensed. He wet his lips before speaking to me. "I am Dorian Hardarm, king of the kingdom of Ellieth and this is my crew," he pointed at the short girl who smiled slightly at me, "That's Terra, my spymaster. She's the one who informed me that you were being brought here," he continued, shifting his hands to point towards the winter god, "That's Rowan, my high general." He laughed at my hesitancy towards the soldier. "Don't let his build scare you, he's a teddy bear in disguise," he whispered to me as he pointed to the last girl, "And that's Lia, my first commander."

More questions continue to swarm my head, but I decided to ask, "You said my name earlier. How do you know it?" Dorian paused for a moment, contemplating on what to say. He glanced at the others who merely nodded their heads to him.

"Arya, there's a reason those beasts took you. Those are Arowbyn's beasts, the man who's after you."

"Why is he after me? Better yet, who is he?"

Dorian glared at me for my interruption as I muttered a sorry out and he began again.

"Ten years ago, Arowbyn Hark betrayed the king and queen of the kingdom of Eldwood, Queen Diana and King Arthur. Arowbyn led an attack against, using the cruel, vicious beasts that he created, the same beasts that attacked you. He murdered the king and queen with dark magic and many, Arowbyn included, believed that he had killed their only daughter, the rightful heir to the throne. With the royal family gone, Arowbyn took hold of the throne and created a kingdom built on fear rather than respect. But what very few know is that Arowbyn never killed the princess, but rather she survived and Cassian, Arthur's most trusted friend and head of the King's Guard, took the princess to the mortal world and had her live as a mortal. Arowbyn never knew of it until the crown of Eldwood would no longer sit upon his head, a crown made for only the true and rightful heir of the throne. He searched for months, trying to find the princess; we

believed that he would never find her until a girl's dreams called out to him. A girl from the mortal world.

Time froze with jagged ends as Dorian's words raced through me. *Could it be? Could I be that princess? No, I am not strong enough to give a presentation at school, much less rule a kingdom.*

"Arya," he declared, "don't you see that you're that girl. You're Arya Rafe, daughter of the mighty King Arthur and Queen Diana of Eldwood. You are the rightful heir to the throne and it is you we need to put an end to Arowbyn's reign and restore peace among the kingdoms of the Ancient Country."

3:Reunion

Ice clawed its way up my body as my feet dug into the ground, holding me steady. Fragments, of what I believed to be merely dreams, danced around my mind, playing over and over again. I went to speak, but paused, trying to gather my thoughts. *I couldn't possibly be this great queen they believed me to be, I was far too weak to be capable of such strength.*

I decided that it would be better to voice my thoughts, rather than skirt around them. "I...I...I'm not this great powerful queen that you believe me to be," I whispered, my eyes darted to the ground trying to avoid their scrutinizing stares, "I'm not capable of it." *There it was, the truth that I tried so desperately to avoid.* One of them scoffed and I noticed two midnight boots step closer to me. Dorian placed his warm hands underneath my chin, lifting it to meet his careful gaze, a gaze I think I once knew.

"Oh Arya, you have no idea how wrong you are," he muttered, taking a step back and looking from me to the others. "I know you probably don't remember, but we knew each other before the attack, were great friends actually. Partners in crime." I tried to think of a reply but Dorian continued on before I could, "Oh you were such a fiery child, with your undying stubbornness and loyalty. Arowbyn liked to pick on me as a child because of his poor relationship with my father. But you never seemed to let him get a word out before you would unleash hell upon him, your tongue lashing out with every foul thing you could think of." He seemed to be reminiscing the memory as fondness washed over him. He stared back at me, making sure that I held his gaze. "Arya, it is because of you that I was able to face Arowbyn without fear lining my body.

My voice caught in my throat as I recognized the gratefulness that laced his words. He reached his hand out, "Now come on. We need to leave; we don't have much time with that." And with that I grasped hold of his hand and he led me to a beautiful auburn stallion. "This is Torryn," Dorian pointed out as he stepped behind me to lift me on the majestic creature's back, quickly getting on after. We set off, wind ripping past us. I gripped hold of the reins before me as Dorian caged me in. "Where are we going," I called out, trying to be heard over the vicious wind. "Home," Dorian replied.

It wasn't until a few hours later around midday that an elaborate castle came into view, concealed by a rich and exuberant forest that seemed home to every plant imaginable. I stared in awe around me as we reached the fronthold of the castle, stopping and dismounting. Dorian helped me off as a man stepped forward. I was wrong earlier when I had said that Rowan looked like a god because this man outweighed him in every sense of the word. His dark locks were pulled back, displaying the scars that spotted his angular face.

He stopped before me, a ghost of a smile appearing on his face before he bowed before me. "My queen," his crisp voice declared firmly. Words escaped my mind as others began to bow, even Dorian. *I'm not this queen they believe me to be. I'll just disappoint them.*

The man rose back up. "M'lady. I am Cassian Blackthorne, your father's closest friend and leader of his King's Guard." *Your father.* The words sent shards piercing my body, recalling a man I didn't remember, and perhaps, never would.

Dorian cut off my sorrow-filled thoughts as he addressed us, "Cassian, there is something that we need to discuss now, all of us," he looked at me softly, gesturing me to follow.

I walked with them through the stone halls that towered around us. We walked deep into the castle before we stopped before two wooden doors with a crest wrought onto them. Dorian ushered us in as we sat around a small, circular, wooden table, with him taking the chair at the head of the table. "What is it," Cassian urged.

Dorian paused for a long while before he spoke up, his words sharp, "I received a message this morning that Arowbyn plans to attack Ellieth tomorrow at dawn." "He'll fail," Lia sneered. Dorian simply shook his head. "His deteriorating sanity has caused his powers to frenzy" "His collection of beasts doubles our armies," Rowan proclaimed, silencing them all.

Was this all because of me? Was Arowbyn planning on attacking them because he wanted to be sure I was dead?

My mouth opened and words spewed from it before I could even register what I was doing, "Why don't we just attack him instead?"

4: The Final Battle

They all gaped at me as I stuttered to explain myself, "Well I mean, you said that Arowbyn is planning on attacking your kingdom at dawn and that his armies over power yours, so why don't you use the deadliest war tactic there is, the element of surprise. Ambush his kingdom tonight before he has the chance to ambush you."

Silence filled the room as they all contemplated the idea of attacking Arowbyn first. "It's possible sir," Cassian started, "the armies are ready whenever you call, you know that. Besides, we all know the layout of Eldwood by heart. We could attack first and win."

Dorian contemplated Cassian's words before he nodded his head. "Okay," he whispered, "Okay. We will attack first." He glanced at Cassian, "Go prepare the armies. You too," he said looking at Rowan as well.

"Terra, I need you to go now and let me know any information on Arowbyn. Understood?"

"Yes, your Grace."

Dorian's eyes moved to Lia next, "Gather a small team of my best assassins and you will leave first. Cut down every guard at every entrance; we don't want Arowbyn to know we're coming before we've reached Eldwood's doors. You're dismissed." They all left and soon only Dorian and I were the only other ones in the room.

It took a moment before Dorian looked over at me, "Come with me Arya." I followed him out of the room into a series of hallways before we reached two large encrusted doors again. He opened them, leading me into what seemed to be a massive bedroom of sorts. We stopped before a table that held an object I couldn't quite see due to Dorian's figure cutting off my sight. He reached forward and picked the object up and turned around so I could get a closer look at it. *A sword.*

“This was your father’s sword, Arya,” Dorian spoke softly, “I want you to have it for this battle. Go on, take it,” he urged. I tentatively lifted my hand towards the sword and wrapped around the hilt of it, lifting it before me. The sword felt like it belonged in my hands and better yet, it felt as though I knew what to do with it.

“We will win this war and you will get your throne back, I promise,” Dorian whispered fervently. I simply nodded back.

It was midnight by the time that we had reached Eldwood, and Dorian and I were creeping along a tunnel that led into the castle. Whispers of screams danced around me as my dreams became reality.

“My, my. Look who’s come to visit me,” a chilling voice pierced the silence. We slowly turned, coming face to face with Arowbyn. “I must say Hardarm, you have more nerve than I gave you credit for.” Arowbyn quickly raised his hands, sending Dorian cowering to the ground in pain. I didn’t know what to do, how to solve this, so I did the first thing that came to my mind: I charged, sword raised.

Steel met the shadows that swarmed Arowbyn, quickly grabbing hold of my sword and ripping it from my hands. Pain began to rack my body, making my knees buckle before me. The sense of chains tensed against my body, holding me to the ground as Arowbyn towered over me.

“This seems familiar, doesn’t it,” he laughed. I tugged against the chains, willing them to break. “Please, you really thought that you could defeat me. You’re weak, just like your parents.” *You’re weak. You’re weak. You’re weak.* It was the two words that had haunted me for years. But yet, now, they couldn’t feel farther from the truth because I had finally *discovered* that it wasn’t all the bad things that happened in life that determined my strength but rather my ability to overcome them. *And I had.*

“You’re right,” I whispered, feeling the invisible chains tense against me. Arowbyn stilled. “I am like my parents, the rightful ruler of the throne,” and with that power erupted from me, breaking the chains and sending Arowbyn to the floor.

I rose and picked up my discarded sword, stalking over to Arowbyn who looked at me with fear in his eyes. “And like you said all those years ago, ‘Long live the Queen,’” I spit, plunging my sword into his heart.