

Dragonfire

By Kallie

As the evening sun started to dip behind distant peaks, Ser Lenna, a knight of the realm, could not help but huff and sigh a little. Her journey had been long and hard, and the hardest part by far was yet to come. But after climbing a mountain, sword and shield at her side, armor on her back, her limbs were screaming at her. She had no more than a few scant minutes to rest. Ser Lenna wasn't the kind of fool who would set down her arms and unfurl her pack to sleep directly outside a dragon's cave.

Some would have said that she was a fool to be there in the first place, for what hope did one knight have against a dragon? Ser Lenna wasn't so proud as to disagree with that, but she had never been one to heed such dismal voices. She was both a woman and a knight, and for most, that was an impossibility enough. For her, it was enough to know that victory was possible. Knights could be dragonslayers, and that hope was enough that duty compelled her the rest of the way - duty to her liege lord, the queen, to rescue her daughter, the Princess Alodie.

It had been three dawns since Princess Alodie had been taken. By all accounts, a great dragon had swept from the sky as she was out hunting with her party, and carried the princess off with it. Hunters had tracked the beast to the very mountainside on which Ser Lenna now stood, so here she was. It would take weeks to muster an army large and bold enough to challenge a dragon, and Ser Lenna had given her vow that she would rescue the princess in far fewer days. Upon setting out, she had almost been able to hear the whispers behind her back. They said that she would never return alive, and they were not sorry to say it. For Ser Lenna, though, it was enough that to meet her end on a quest to slay a dragon and save a princess was fitting, for a true knight.

"That's enough time wasted," the gruff knight told herself, breaking the heavy silence around her. She reached up to sweep back a few blonde locks that had escaped her crown braid, readied her sword and shield, and headed into the maw of the huge cave she had journeyed to.

Hefting the shield felt like folly, and the comfort she took in the heavy, familiar object even more so. A shield was useless against a dragon. Ser Lenna knew that perfectly well. Dragonfire could burn through or melt anything - anything at all. It wasn't simply a matter of heat. It was something deeper. The sun rose each day, and Summer followed Spring, and there was nothing that could withstand dragonfire. She would have done better to discard sword and shield both, in favor of, perhaps, a long spear. But the shield was what Ser Lenna knew. It had always been with her. It even bore her coat of arms - a mighty lion, trampling a serpent underfoot. The irony was not lost on her.

Even without the hunters' information, a few steps inside the cave would have made it clear to Ser Lenna that this was the home of a dragon. Gold was everywhere. Doubtless, it was all stolen treasure, but there were no mounds of coins or chests brimming with jewelry. Instead, the gold was all over the floor and the walls, all melted together and left to run, following the natural contours of the stone beneath as it cooled, or else molded through some strange art into bizarre pillars and sculptures the likes of which Ser Lenna had

never before seen. She couldn't help but look at her gilded surroundings with wonder. She'd only ever heard rumors of what a dragon's lair truly looked like. The truth was stranger than she had guessed. Who could fathom the appetites and whims of dragons?

That begged the selfsame nagging question Ser Lenna had asked herself many, many times over the course of her journey: what exactly was she expecting to find? A captive? A corpse? Nothing at all? She couldn't say. What did the dragon want with Princess Alodie? A meal? An ornament? Something more sinister? The knight couldn't answer, but she had resolved to keep faith that she would find the princess alive and well. It wasn't her oath to the queen that bound her to that conviction. It was simply that she couldn't quite bring herself to envision a world without the vivacious young princess she was so fond of.

Ser Lenna headed deeper into the strange, gilded cave step by step, arms raised, on her guard for danger. It was light enough within to save her from needing a torch, even when the long, twisting tunnel took her out of view of the sun, the gold-coated walls reflecting beams of light that were more than enough to illuminate her surroundings. But the gold-drenched light seemed almost sickly, and the way it glimmered off every unnatural surface set Ser Lenna ill at ease. This strange, dim, glimmering place seemed to defy her senses. It felt more like a temple than anything else. The knight muttered a few lines of a half-remembered prayer to keep that particular thought at bay.

There was no sign of any savagery, at least. No blood, no carcasses, no screams or wailing. Nor, indeed, was there any sign of the dragon itself. With each step, Ser Lenna paused to strain her ears, but she could not detect the sound of the creature's vast bulk moving around. A foolish hope began to grow in her heart, that the dragon might be away hunting or pursuing some other purpose, and that she might discover the princess alive and well, and be able to make good her rescue without the danger of a confrontation. The knight let it grow. Hope was a finer comfort than most, in her shoes.

The hope started to feel far more real and far less foolish once she set eyes on Princess Alodie.

As the cavern opened up into a cavernous space, as wide and tall as any cathedral the knight had ever set foot in, Ser Lenna saw her. Even facing away, even naked, even kneeling as though in prayer, the knight could not have mistaken the princess for anyone else. She had spent too long adoring those long, fiery locks, and each glimpse she had ever caught of the princess's undressed body - having been taken, as another woman, into the princess's intimate confidence - was etched eternally into her memory. A tear came to the knight's eye. Her faith had, for once, been rewarded.

The princess did not seem to register Ser Lenna's footsteps, and did not stir as the knight approached. She simply stared into the darkness beyond, swaying a little on her knees. Ser Lenna frowned.

"Princess?" Ser Lenna called out uncertainly from beside her, as loudly as she dared. "Princess Alodie?"

Princess Alodie's head turned slowly towards her, and her eyes were hidden in shadow. "Oh," she said dreamily. "Good Ser Lenna? I didn't expect to see you here."

The knight's creeping sense of unease was rapidly growing. "I'm here to rescue you, Princess," she whispered urgently. "Come quickly! We might not have long before the dragon returns."

"To rescue me?" Princess Alodie tittered. "That's very good of you, I suppose."

When she made no move to stand, Ser Lenna reached out and took her by the arm, tugging her. "Princess, please! There's no--"

Her words died in her throat when she realized how hot to the touch Princess Alodie was. She could feel it even through her thick gloves. She looked closer, and saw beads of sweat all over the princess's bare skin. Her frown soured further. Clearly, the princess was feverish. She would need to get her back to civilization with great haste. At least it explained the poor girl's odd behavior.

"Lean on me, Princess," Ser Lenna urged, hauling the flame-haired princess to her feet. "I'll carry you, if need be. We must get you home."

The princess didn't resist, at least. For a woman of Ser Lenna's strength, lifting the princess upright was effortless. She stood only unsteadily, though, and was immediately leaning into the knight. Ser Lenna started to lead her back towards the entrance of the cave. There was little time to lose. The princess needed medicine.

"Home," Princess Alodie echoed. "Back home. Back to the castle. Back to my mother, the queen. What will you ask her for, Ser Lenna?"

"What?" All of the knight's attention was devoted to keeping the princess from tripping on the gilded floor of the cave.

"A reward!" Princess Alodie said, too loudly for Ser Lenna's liking. "Just like the stories. The triumphant knight asks for... for the princess's hand in marriage!"

At that, Ser Lenna's head shot round. She could feel the blood draining from her face. "Princess Alodie," she said slowly, painfully conscious of how few steps they'd taken, and how many lay ahead. "You do not know what you are saying. You are delirious."

"But isn't that what you want?" The princess giggled. "Ser Lenna, do you not desire me?"

Ser Lenna flinched, as if struck. "I do not, of course," she replied, voice strained.

"But you do," Princess Alodie protested. "I've long seen it in your eyes."

The knight could not help but try to pull away, filled with a momentary, blind panic that consumed all her other instincts. Princess Alodie kept clinging to her, though, hands wrapped around Ser Lenna's arm with a blacksmith's strength.

"So you really do!" Strangely, the princess seemed far from appalled by the revelation. She sighed. "How delightful."

"I..." Ser Lenna could not make any sense of her princess's words, and there was no time to dwell on them. They had to keep moving. She sighed wearily. She had not counted on returning in triumph anyway. "I am most sincerely sorry, your highness. But we've no time for this now. I must see you back to your home. And then, on my honor, I will depart, and you will see me no more."

"My, my," came an unexpected voice from high above, deep and inhuman, but shockingly intimate in the cavern that now felt far, far too small. "I am ever-amused by the things about which your kind cares so

little, and so deeply.”

Ser Lenna froze, sheer dread getting the better of her fight-or-flight instincts. She couldn’t help it. That voice curdled her insides and chilled her to the bone. It felt truly ancient, the experience of eons poured into each word, and it inspired the same insistent reverence the knight felt when she rested her hand against one of the ancient standing stones that dotted the hills and high plains of the kingdom. Every word the dragon - for that was unmistakably what it was - spoke was slow and deliberate, and a little distorted; they had the clear feel of human language forced out of the mouth of a creature in which they did not belong, but which was more than capable of mastering them anyway. Ser Lenna looked up, even though she knew she should have been running, and watched the dragon uncoil.

It came upon them in a vast spiral, its immeasurable, serpentine length extending to fill the cavern and wrap itself around rocks and pillars like a net. The wyrm had, it seemed, been hidden in the shadows above them in that manner, clinging to stalactites and watching Ser Lenna with all the composed arrogance of a regal hunter. It did not deign to pounce upon her, or even block her escape; no, it simply spread its wings a little as it settled at the heart of its golden palace, the span of its pinions emphasizing completely how much this space *belonged* to it. Its scales were a deep red, Ser Lenna thought, but it was difficult to tell, as each one was bathed in the dim, golden light that suffused the cavern, and each one reflected it in turn, so that the dragon seemed to almost glow with its own radiance. It towered over both the knight and the princess, and while its face was completely lacking in any semblance of humanity, the way its lips were drawn back to show fangs as long as swords and a slaving, whip-like tongue managed to convey a total, cruel, unthinking sense of absolute superiority.

No tales, no artistic depictions, did it justice. *This* was a dragon.

“So,” the creature began languidly. Ser Lenna was both horrified and enthralled by the fact that the dragon’s voice had a distinctly feminine quality, despite its strangeness. “Pray tell, what is your name? You, who would steal this brightest jewel of my hoard?”

Princess Alodie giggled at that, as if delighted. Ser Lenna gripped her sword tighter. “Let us pass, fiend!”

The dragon laughed. “Come now. You are what your kind calls a knight, aren’t you? Aren’t you bound to show more honor than that to a prospective foe?”

Ser Lenna snarled at the vast serpent, though she had to acknowledge that she - for it was, plainly, a she - was, it seemed, a thinking and speaking creature. “I am Ser Lenna of Mercia, oathsworn to take the princess from your clutches.”

The dragon nodded its vast head. “Very good. And I am called Keriscatha.” She spoke the name in a peculiar accent that the knight would have struggled to imitate. “Tell me, little knight, are you going to take her back home? Or simply take her for yourself?”

Ser Lenna stiffened, bristling. “Do not question my honor any further! I have pledged to return the Princess Alodie to her rightful place, and that is what I shall do.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Ser Lenna echoed. The dragon’s simple question confused and enraged her in equal measure.

“Do dragons not know the weight of an oath?”

“Why pledge it?” Keriscatha asked, eyes glinting. “I know well the importance of vows and promises to your kind, but it is an enigma to me why you would wed yourself to a quest that is so very in defiance of your own heart.”

“You don’t know my heart,” Ser Lenna replied, though she could feel it pounding in her chest.

“No,” the dragon agreed, ever-smiling. “But she does.”

Still at Ser Lenna’s side, Princess Alodie nodded eagerly. She did not seem even the slightest bit unnerved by the beast’s presence, something that troubled the knight to no end.

“I see the way you look at me,” the princess said, each word a dagger in Ser Lenna’s breast. “I always... well, I wasn’t certain. There are no tales or songs of such affections. But now? Now, it’s all become so clear to me, my darling knight.”

Ser Lenna made herself turn away. “You are not yourself.” She addressed the dragon instead, trying to stoke her fury until it outweighed her shame. “What have you done to her?” she demanded.

“What makes you so sure I have done anything at all?” Keriscatha replied, idly shifting its serpentine body to rest comfortably against the walls of its lair.

“The Princess Alodie would not speak of this!” Ser Lenna shouted. She brandished her sword higher, though it seemed little but a toothpick against the dragon. “You have enchanted her!”

“I have *refined* her,” Keriscatha corrected, as if she were lecturing a stubborn child. “As the iron of your sword is drawn from the rock by fire, so too have I burned away all her... impurities.”

To the knight, that all sounded like so much vile sorcery. “Can it be undone?”

“Oh? Would you return your sword to the earth?” Keriscatha sneered. “In any case, little knight, that is not what you want.”

“Silence!” Ser Lenna’s voice sounded faintly panicked, even to her own ears. The princess, still at her side, reached out to stroke her arm soothingly. The knight could not bring herself to pull away. “I... I will break your hold on her! I will return her to her home.”

The mighty dragon sighed in disappointment. “Are you more dim-witted than I thought? We are not speaking of what *will* or *will not* be, but rather of what you *want*.”

“I want to uphold my oath.” It was all Ser Lenna could seem to say. She glanced behind herself, towards the distant daylight. Perhaps they could simply run. It was, plainly enough, a better prospect than fighting. All this talking was doing nothing at all. Ser Lenna scolded herself for it, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that she was like a mouse between a cat’s paws, ready to be pounced the instant she moved. It left her paralyzed.

“You mortals are such twisted creatures.” Keriscatha shook her head, and sounded almost mournful. “Riven through with petty pretenses and delusions. It is a wonder your kind ever managed to rise out of the

mud. But there is something else in you too, Knight Lenna.” The dragon looked at her with a gaze as piercing as any lance. “I can see it plain. A rich, fine vein of strength and nobility. Perhaps I could make you into something magnificent.”

Ser Lenna ran. She did not think it dishonorable to do so, because Princess Alodie’s safety was her highest purpose. But she did think herself a coward, for the dragon’s foreboding words terrified her in a way she couldn’t name. She didn’t trust the princess to run with her in her current, addled state, so she took her by the hand and dragged her along, confident she could heft the princess over her shoulder if she needed to. Princess Alodie yelped, surprised, as she was pulled long behind the knight.

“Hold her,” Keriscatha commanded.

To Ser Lenna, it was like being hit with a battering ram. She felt herself thrown aside with impossible force, and was sent sprawling onto the hard, gold-drenched ground. In an instant, someone was atop her, wrenching her sword from her hand and restraining her arms behind her back. She fought like mad against the assailant, until she had recovered enough sense to look up and see them for who they were.

It was Princess Alodie.

At first, Ser Lenna did not believe the evidence of her eyes. The princess was slight, and had hardly set foot outside of the queen’s castle. It was impossible that she would suddenly manifest the strength of a bear. But then she looked deeper. Princess Alodie’s naked form, burning hot and covered with a sheen of sweat, was shivering and straining with inhuman effort. The knight looked into her eyes, and saw a strange fire there; an entirely unnatural fanaticism that had been set to blaze within her, filling her with the kind of might that only absolute desperation could summon. Her grip was like iron, and the knight couldn’t bring herself to fight back. Ser Lenna stopped struggling and hung her head, and began the sorrowful task of contemplating just how deeply she had failed.

“It would not do to let such a treasure escape my clutches,” Keriscatha continued, as if nothing had transpired. The dragon had not moved an inch. “But I would like for you to *understand*. You are lesser. You are blind. You have been made weak, and taught to deny yourself. But it need not be so. Princess, if you would explain?”

“I was just like you,” Princess Alodie said, looking down at the humbled knight. Her voice was bursting with pride. Ser Lenna’s heart ached to see her that way. She had been stripped of her modesty and purity, but somehow she seemed greater for it, stronger and more upright. It was an unsettling combination. “It’s strange. I never would have thought so. I always admired you so, Ser Lenna. I would watch from the window of my chamber each time you rode out, and dream of what it would be like to ride behind you on your horse, arms wrapped tight around your waist. Just the two of us, alone out there, away from everything.”

Ser Lenna went very still.

“But you were just as trapped as me, weren’t you?” Princess Alodie knelt beside her, still keeping her firmly held in place. “Whenever you looked at me with longing in your eyes, you’d look away and curse yourself a moment later. And you were always set apart from the others. From the men. Oh, you poor thing. What were you fighting for, all that time?”

“I.. I was...” Ser Lenna was held spellbound by the princess’s words. “I was trying to...” Her voice trailed away. What had she been fighting for? She hadn’t even been counting on returning home with her life. And

what was 'home' to her, anyway? She knew she shouldn't be listening, she knew this was all wrong, but... it was the princess. *Her* princess. Whatever else, it was her lips, her words.

"I know." Princess Alodie's voice was irresistibly gentle. She steadily relaxed her grip on the knight, as if sensing that all the fight had gone out of her. "It feels like there's no way out, doesn't it? But there is. We can be more than this, Lenna."

"I don't understand," Ser Lenna replied wearily, slumping.

"Then let me show you." Princess Alodie reached across the forlorn knight and cupped her cheek, with the utmost tenderness.

Before Ser Lenna knew what was happening, their lips met in a kiss.

The knight immediately froze, her lips stiff and unmoving, but that didn't seem to dissuade the princess. She had enough heat for both of them, kissing Ser Lenna eagerly, drinking deep from her lips like she was the sweetest of wines. Ser Lenna was utterly lost in the moment, unable to return the kiss, unable to draw back. Her thoughts were in turmoil, but through it all, she couldn't deny that the kiss was as wonderful as it had ever been in her dreams.

"You see?" Princess Alodie whispered, breaking the kiss for just a moment. "We can simply kiss."

When their lips met again, a heartbeat later, Ser Lenna found herself opening to receive the princess, parting, allowing the younger woman's tongue to enter her mouth. The intimacy of it all was making her twitch. She knew little of kissing. She'd always rejected the company of men. Princess Alodie was just as inexperienced, but she seemed not to feel any reserve or hesitation. Her eagerness to explore Ser Lenna was unmatched, and soon they were both panting into each others' mouths as Ser Lenna groped at the air with her hands, spellbound and dizzy.

"You see?" the princess repeated, when she next paused to draw breath. "We can be this. We can be more."

"It's wrong." Ser Lenna's voice was quivering in a way it never had before. "Princess, forgive me, forgive my weakness, forgive--"

"No." Princess Alodie's voice was as gentle as ever, but firm too, and suddenly more regal. "You do not need forgiveness."

To the knight, it felt impossible to disagree, impossible to muster the words to argue. "Then... what?" she pleaded.

"Embrace it." Ser Lenna shook her head, near-panicked. "Shush," the princess soothed. "I know, you're not ready yet. You need to see more. Let me show you."

Ser Lenna nodded, betraying herself, and Princess Alodie reached to her shoulders, fingers swiftly finding the clasps and bindings that held the knight's breastplate in place against her body. Ser Lenna didn't resist as she pulled it free, nor as she unfastened the thick doublet she wore underneath. Beneath that, there was only a linen shirt, and Ser Lenna found herself unable to breathe as the princess worked each button between her soft, deft fingertips. Once they were all undone, Princess Alodie, the woman whose purity she

had vowed to protect, pulled the sides of her shirt apart, and admired the knight's naked body.

It was all Ser Lenna could do not to shrink under the princess's gaze as the cave's air hit her skin, making her nipples hard and causing her breath to start up again in uneven shudders. Her whole body was now, like her princess's, drenched in sweat that glistened in the dim light along all the contours of her muscles. Ser Lenna had led the life of a warrior and a soldier, and it showed. There was no wasted flesh on her body, just the layer of fat needed to keep her warm on long months of campaigning, and beneath it, prodigious musculature. Her abs were clearly visible, and though her chest was still soft, behind it clearly lay the powerful muscles that had helped her to swing a sword and win a knighthood. Hers wasn't the kind of perfect, idealized physique that sculptors liked to depict in their art, though. Her skin was bristling with scars, new and old, and all over, she had a thick and rugged quality to match any warhorse.

Princess Alodie stared long and hard at her knight's body, eyes filled with a mixture of awe, admiration, and lust.

"You are as fine as I could ever have imagined," the princess breathed. She reached out and ran a hand down Ser Lenna's abdomen, feeling experimentally at her muscles, tracing their contours and pressing against them a little. Ser Lenna shivered.

"I am... not beautiful," Ser Lenna said quietly.

"You are beautiful!" Princess Alodie replied, with unexpected fierceness. "You are more than beautiful."

The knight did not know what to say to that at all.

The princess's soft fingertips traveled downward, and with Ser Lenna's heavy doublet out of the way, it was effortless for her to unbuckle the knight's belt, pull her hose aside, and press her palm against Ser Lenna's cunt.

Ser Lenna held back a moan, but only just. She was already wet; the dire awfulness of her situation had not blinded her to the beauty of her princess's body. Moreover, she was perilously sensitive. Being touched by another woman felt nothing like when she touched herself. The writhing anticipation between each little movement built and built, until, when the touch finally came, it seemed to send flaring sparks running right through her. Ser Lenna felt her body responding like never before, cunt throbbing and hips pressing needily against Princess Alodie's hand. The sensation was indescribably good, but she had never felt more unworthy, nor less like a knight.

"This is what you want," Princess Alodie breathed. Ser Lenna had never heard her sound that way before; sultry and alluring. She owned it completely, the fire in her eyes making it clear that she drew an invigorating kind of power from behaving this way, from treating her knight this way. "Isn't it? It's OK, Lenna, you can tell me."

The squirming knight truly felt like she could. The princess's tempting words and her keen touch had drawn the two of them into their own little world. Ser Lenna felt utterly wrapped up in her, as private and safe as she would if they had been between bedsheets. Princess Alodie had drawn her into a confessional mood. She felt like she could betray all of her own secrets.

Only, they weren't private or alone. They were in a dragon's lair, and Keriscatha was still there, looming

over them like a majestic, inhuman goddess. Something in the creature's affect made her seem vaguely disinterested, like the mortal passions being acted out in front of her were little of her direct concern. But nonetheless, those bright, reptilian eyes saw everything. Ser Lenna withered under their gaze.

"I'm... sorry," she forced out, slumping once more. It was all she could bring herself.

"I understand."

Princess Alodie's voice was, as ever, endlessly gentle, but Ser Lenna nonetheless felt crushed under the weight of her prospective disappointment. The knight could no longer discern what she herself wanted. Her honor was in tatters. She was no knight. She could not save her princess, nor even please her. She felt herself a broken thing, bereft of any hope. Perhaps everyone had been right. Perhaps everyone had always been right. All the dissenting, scornful voices; all the doubters. Perhaps she had simply succumbed to the weakness that all kinds of wise and learned men attributed to her kind. Ser Lenna looked back, in a single instant, on all the hard-fought contests and battles that had earned her a place at the knight's banquet table, pretending she didn't see how the rest of them looked at her and laughed at her. It all seemed to cumble away in her mind's eye. What was it all worth, if it had only led her here? Nothing.

"It's alright," Princess Alodie whispered, as she bore witness to Ser Lenna's collapse. She eased her hand away from the knight's body, retreating from her as one might from a wounded boar. "A weapon has to be beaten into shape before it can at last be tempered. That's what Keriscatha taught me. You're ready."

The princess backed away slowly, leaving Ser Lenna kneeling in a heap. Then, the dragon approached. Keriscatha loomed over her, slithering until her vast maw was positioned directly in front of Ser Lenna's eyes. The knight felt no fear. What was the worst that could happen? Death was no horror to her. She didn't feel death approaching, though. It was only a vague sense, an instinct, but instead, she felt herself on the crest of something much different. It was the same kind of feeling she got when she crossed the threshold of a church.

Keriscatha the dragon opened her mouth, and Ser Lenna saw a fierce blaze ignite within her throat.

That was all the time she had to prepare herself for what was coming. A single instant later, she was bathed in flame. It was all around her, shrouding her view of the cave, the princess, the dragon. To Ser Lenna, it was as if the world itself had been consumed by fire, all of it replaced by the orange-red-white of furious incandescence. It didn't hurt, though. She could feel the flames lapping at her skin, but they brought no pain. Instead, they brought transformation.

Dragonfire could destroy *anything*, after all.

Even if they didn't hurt, the flames *burned*. As Ser Lenna opened her mouth to breathe, perhaps to scream, she felt them roaring down her throat and spreading within her, and that was when they truly did their work, burning what was within as surely as they spared what was without. She closed her eyes, and then, in her mind's eye, she was gone, she was backward, transported into memory. She felt herself flitting between different past moments, too many to count, so many they seemed almost infinite. Each and every one of them was a moment of guilt, shame, or weakness. She saw each time she'd looked at another woman with desire in her eyes, only to rebuke herself with the harshest self-recriminations she could muster. The emotions she had felt at all those times hit her like a tide, and for a few seconds, Ser Lenna thought that she would drown.

Then, the fire came. It tore through each one of those memories like a blazing sword, leaving nothing but ash in its wake. The feeling of those memories being ripped apart by roaring heat made the knight feel like

her body was tearing open, but then, they were nothing at all, and she couldn't even remember what she had lost. Each of those painful memories, hanging heavy in her heart, was burnt away, and those that weren't were soon smothered by a thick smoke that left Ser Lenna's head too addled to think. Yet it was difficult to ignore that as her memories burnt and melted and faded, a strange lightness was starting to fill her.

She lost more than that to the dragon's fire, much more, too much to keep track of. The memory she tried hardest to hold on to was, naturally, the memory of her knighthood. Of kneeling before the queen, pledging herself, feeling her sovereign's blade rest keenly on her shoulders as she was awarded the prize she had chased for so long. Ser Lenna wanted to scream and weep as flames devoured the scene, consuming all the tapestries and banners that had been hanging in the throne room, whilst the raw heat of the draconic inferno split apart the stonework. She couldn't stop it. The dragon's fire was remorseless, and it left nothing in its wake.

No, she soon realized. Not nothing.

With so much of her life burnt to wreckage and ruin, it was someone clearer to grasp what remained. Through the smoke, through the heat, Ser Lenna seized on the memories that still presented themselves to her, making them even more a part of herself than they had been. They were, most of them, memories of courage and defiance. She remembered the first time she had taken up a sword. She remembered training furiously with it, alone, each practice blow filled with spite and determination. She remembered spitting in the eyes of the men who laughed at her after she defeated them in duels. And besides those, there were memories of desire, pure and fierce, untainted now by guilt or shame. Her loyalty and love for Princess Alodie felt more whole than ever, and burned like a bright star.

Was that who she was? There was only one answer to give. She could remember no other self. Ser Lenna found that with everything else stripped away, that fact was as easy to accept as a feather on her back. In her mind's eye, she reached out for the star, for the fire, and claimed it.

The knight opened her eyes. The flames were gone. She was back in the cavern, Princess Alodie at her side. It had been seconds, at the most, but in those precious seconds, everything had happened.

"How do you feel?" asked the dragon Keriscatha, her magnificent voice echoing between the gilded walls of her lair.

Ser Lenna looked up at the dragon with wonder in her gaze. Her earlier coarseness abhorred her. Keriscatha was the most beautiful and regal creature she had ever seen. All her fear, horror and stigma was melted away to nothing. In its place, she felt nothing but a deep reverence for this immense, powerful, ancient dragon, and a deep gratitude for the lightness and clarity of purpose she now felt. How could she have resisted? She had been a fool. Keriscatha, in her wisdom, had saved her from herself. Ser Lenna had been in stuck in a dark and dismal place, but now, she was on fire with determination. The dragon looming over her was a goddess - a true goddess, not some distant being who slept in the heavens. A goddess who genuinely deserved to be worshiped.

If only everyone knew what it meant to be within her power.

Ser Lenna raised herself to her knees. For all her ordeal, she didn't feel weary. She felt stronger than ever.

"My queen," she began. "From this day henceforth, I swear myself to your service. I shall be your

knight until my last breath. I shall stand against all your enemies, and I will deliver to you any prize you should desire, and I will conquer in your name the kingdom you so rightfully deserve.”

Keriscatha nodded, pleased. Her approval felt like the warmest of sunbeams.

“Rise, my first and greatest knight,” the dragon rumbled. “I believe the time has come for me to involve myself in mortal affairs. A kingdom will be a fine thing. But there is time for that later. For now, why not enjoy what you have spent so long denying yourself?”

Ser Lenna bowed low in thanks, and turned to Princess Alodie. The princess was smiling joyfully, and Ser Lenna was now able to fully enjoy her nakedness.

“I’m so glad,” Princess Alodie whispered breathlessly. “It’s been too long, my knight. Here, let me finish showing you.”

“No,” Ser Lenna replied playfully. She lifted her princess off her feet and carefully set her down on her back, on the floor of the cavern. “Let me show you.”

Princess Alodie giggled as Ser Lenna used her hand to pry her legs apart, and her giggles dissolved into hopeless moans as her devoted knight lowered her head and brought her lips to the princess’s cunt in worshipful service.

Ser Lenna was aware of eyes and crossbows trained carefully on her as she rode up to the castle gates. That was only natural. She had changed without, as well as within. Her armor had been left blackened and twisted by the impossible heat of the dragon’s flame, and while Ser Lenna wore it as a badge of honor, she knew that to others, it must look like she had ridden out of Hell itself.

They would soon learn better.

She dismounted at the gate and heard gasps; behind her, on her horse, was Princess Alodie. The two of them had ridden out together, just as the princess had often dreamed.

“Open!” Ser Lenna demanded, banging her gauntleted fist against the massive gate. “I bring the princess.”

“Who comes?” replied a thin, reedy voice from on high. “A woman? You are not known to us.”

Beneath her helm, Ser Lenna grinned wildly. She drew her sword and hefted her shield, and raised her voice high and proud.

“I am Ser Lenna,” she declared. “Knight of the dragon. And I have come to take this place for a new mistress.”

The astonished cries she heard from all around were immediately silenced when Keriscatha crested the

nearby hills, her vast wings and serpentine length magnificently unfurled in the afternoon light. Ser Lenna's breast swelled with pride. It was her and a dragon against a kingdom - surely the hardest battle she had ever fought. But she knew she was equal to the task. She had been reforged in dragonfire, and she had never felt stronger.

"Long live the dragon queen!"

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