



# A Queen's Tide

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Looking out onto the washed grey beach, Kendra wanted nothing more than to run in the opposite direction. She had always found the coastline a harsh and unforgiving place, preferring the green mountains and pristine lakes found inland a five days' ride north. But it was not her choice to be here.

"Your Majesty?" said a soft voice behind her. Kendra did not turn.

"Kendra?" The soft voice tried instead. At this Kendra turned to find Walter, her father's friend, standing a cautious distance away from her. He was the perfect representation of their surroundings, straight-backed, hard features, unfazed by the wild that howled around them.

"Stop looking at me like that Walter. I'm not going to suddenly break – I am not a doll," Kendra urged, knowing he wasn't the only one concerned about her. She walked past him and placed a hand on his shoulder before she continued into the safety of the stone keep. He turned on his heel and promptly followed her.

"I just wish you wouldn't wander off like that. We are all just concerned. And your safety now, more than ever, is crucial." Walter was looking at the floor as he spoke, and didn't notice that Kendra had stopped walking upon hearing his words. Coming just short of walking into her, Walter immediately took a step back. He always made sure he gave his queen the respectful amount of space at all times. Kendra turned to face him and eyed the distance between them.

"You weren't always like this; has my recent change in position changed how you regard me?" Kendra asked. She was disappointed in the cooler way she had been treated by everyone since her parents' passing. Walter looked at the floor at a loss of what to say.

Unsure of where to walk to next, Kendra took a moment to look around her, running her fingers through her bright red hair to smooth it out after being tangled from the ocean's wind.

"Are you hungry, Your Majesty?" Walter offered. She glanced around her once more and nodded to her father's friend. He kindly gestured to the path on her right.

"Thank you," she offered, and they walked to the dining hall in silence, Walter an appropriate distance behind her.

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Some distance from Kendra, past the shore's crashing waves, was a black ship. Its white sails were rippling in the changing wind.

"We're never going to get there if the wind keeps at it like this!" Arihi exclaimed.

"Oh we will, we just might wash up on shore rather than docking!" her uncle Kane boomed. Rolling her eyes, Arihi grabbed hold of the mast's rope ladder and proceeded to climb it.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, girl!" Kane yelled at her.

"Tightening the sails, obviously!" Arihi shot back, just as loud as her burly uncle. Never slipping, Arihi climbed to the top of the mast. Having looped her arm through the rope she began the painful process of slowly pulling the sail tighter against the raging wind. If it would just pick a direction, she thought, they could be there as early as tomorrow eve. As if to taunt her, the wind whipped around and changed direction again. Her violet hair whipped in front of her face.

Down on the deck, her uncle moved the boom to the correct side. Feeling like she had achieved something, even if it was just a marginal tightening of the sails, Arihi landed on the deck with a grin. The ship mates looked at her disapprovingly and she gave them all a bow, her grey eyes shining.

"Shouldn't that be a curtsy?" Turning around, the grin still solidly in place, Arihi gave her mother a precise curtsy. Her mother, Meera, gave an approving look. "Been practicing I see," her mother replied with her own perfectly measured curtsy. Arihi beamed at the compliment of her improvement.

"But why on earth would you climb up there and endanger yourself like that?" Meera continued.

"Why ask someone else to do something you know you can easily do yourself?" Arihi responded, rolling her eyes at the crewmen as they shot looks of disdain at her. "They just wish they could climb up there that fast," Arihi said, reassuring herself.

"I'm sure that's it," Uncle Kane gladly confirmed, slapping one of the crewmen on the back as he walked past. "Nothing a man loves more than watching a princess walk among them."

"I think you mean queen, Kane," Meera corrected.

"Ah yes, of course, still getting used to it, you understand," Uncle Kane assured them.

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Kendra paced the breadth of her chambers, constantly pulling at her skirts to straighten them.

"Your Majesty, please, stop," one of the queen's handmaids pleaded. "You are going to wear a path on the floor."

"Hmm? Oh, sorry, Alice," Kendra mumbled, stopping in the middle of the room. "Are you sure this is appropriate to wear to the council?" she asked for the third time.

"Yes, Your Majesty. They laid out the requirements quite clearly. Being the first ruling queen, they made the requirements specifically for you."



"I don't think I can do this. What if they don't listen to me? What if they laugh? Can they take my crown from me?"

Kendra began to panic. She never thought she would need to do this – no one did. Her father and mother, the late king and queen, were always in good health. There was no reason for her to become queen, especially not like this.

Kendra had waved to her parents as they departed for a trip to the northern lands of their nation. Although they did not make it back to their daughter, having had their carriage overturned during an unseasonable snowstorm. The image that would not leave Kendra's mind was how they had been found, frozen in each other's arms. She found the image both haunting and comforting; to know they had been together and not alone. Although now, she was the one alone. A sharp rap at the door brought her out of this momentary daze.

"Ready, Your Majesty?" Walter walked into the room. Alice looked disapprovingly at him; it was not proper for a man that was not a woman's father or husband to enter their bed chamber. Kendra, however, was so familiar with her father's friends that she did not notice, and in fact appreciated the support.

"I believe so. Am I dressed appropriately for the council?" she asked. Alice rolled her eyes as she looked away.

"Yes, you're perfect. Let's go, they are ready for you."

Taking a breath in and straightening her skirts once more, Kendra walked from her bed chamber. She made her way through the south side of the hold, across the courtyard and into the north wing where the Council Hall resided. Having spent most of her time away from governmental affairs, as was right for princesses, Kendra had no idea what to expect of the council and their hall.

Awaiting the arrival of their young queen, the councilmen stood in small circles before being asked to take their seats in the hall.

"This feels ridiculous. She should not be getting involved so early!" one councilman exclaimed, raising his hands in a violent manner.

"What possible opinions could she have?" agreed another.

"And so soon after her parents' death – how will she make it through the council session in such a delicate state," said another in a slightly more considerate tone.

"All I know is – if she has chosen to go ahead with this charade of being a ruling queen, then hopefully after this session she will realise how in over her head she is, and that her only option is to step down." Most of the councilmen nodded in agreement and took their seats as instructed.

Entering the hall, Kendra saw that it was much more decadent than she had guessed. Seats made of plush green velvet were arranged in a broad circle with a long gap in the middle, separating the room into two halves. As Kendra walked into the hall, all the men seated in these velvet chairs rose. Standing with their chests pushed forward, most eyed her curiously while some whispered to each other with smirks on their faces. Walter gestured for her to take her place on the throne at the

end of the room. Walking to her throne she recognised some of the men from her coronation, which had taken place just yesterday. No one then had introduced themselves, and Kendra was not permitted to interact with many people following the ceremony. Although she had been grateful for this at the time, she now regretted not knowing anyone's names.

Finally reaching her ornate throne, which was covered in a deep red velvet, she faced the members of the council. Upon her sitting, they all seated themselves once more. The soft murmur of polite conversation began to fill the hall and Kendra felt herself relax slightly.

After a few minutes ticked by and Kendra had glanced over each member individually, Walter appeared by her side.

"Your Majesty, you can call the session to order and ask the members to begin." Kendra had known this, so at least felt prepared, if not still terrified. Rising to her feet again, the room grew quiet.

"Members of the council, I, Queen Kendra, daughter of King Edward, call this session of the council to order and ask for the council members to begin the session." Kendra surprised herself with her clear speech and ample sound.

A member to her right rose from his seat,

"Thank you, Your Majesty. And may I say on behalf of my party, how grateful we are to have you here in what must be such a difficult time." Nodding to the member and seating herself back on her throne, Kendra felt such relief.

For the next three hours, Kendra listened to the mess that was a council session. The members did not take long to begin snarking at each other, hurling insults, yelling, slamming fists and generally displaying barbaric behaviour. Kendra could not hide the shock on her face although she tried.

"Surely the queen is not too surprised," said a sneaky voice beside her. A man small in stature with an unusually large head had appeared by her side without her noticing. A little box sat on his lap which held his parchment and ink. He was writing down the words the members were yelling, pausing when they were incoherent.

"I'm sorry?" Kendra asked, shocked by his seeming familiarity with her, although they did not know one another.

"Your Majesty," he smirked, bowing his head with an amused expression. "I'm the scribe, Lord Nye, but you can call me Harry."

Kendra had never been addressed so brashly. She stared for a moment and then to Harry's surprise, laughed. This made him smile.

"That's good to know," Harry said.

"What is good to know?"

"That you can laugh at yourself. It's a rare quality and not one found in this room very often."

"Hmmm, yes, I can see that."

Taking a look around, none of the members had even registered that she was speaking. This, she realised, was an issue. They should always listen when she



speaks, just as they should stand as she did. Not that she minded right now, as she was glad that they did not hear her shared quips about their pride.

“So, you write down what is said in these sessions?” Kendra queried.

“Whatever is legible yes, though I generally do not write it down word for word, but more of a summary, removing the un-clever insults and profanity,” Harry clarified.

“Hmmm, do you think I could read the previous session summaries? I fear I am a little out of touch,” Kendra asked, looking back at the members as one threw a shoe across the room.

“A queen interested in politics? Then again you are not like the previous queens, who all had kings to look after this side of things. Yes, you can read as many as you like. I don’t suppose you know where the Scriptorium is?” Harry quipped. Kendra paused.

“I have not spent a lot of time in this hold, though I would think it would be on the north side, away from the sea and at least on the first floor to avoid damp, or perhaps on the south side as to obtain the most sunlight?” Kendra mused.

“Well would you look at that, she’s smart too,” Harry observed. Kendra, growing used to his brashness, smiled at the compliment, one that she felt he did not give out too often. “It’s on the south end; you can meet me there tomorrow.”

“What time will you be there?”

“I’m always there.”

Sitting back into her chair, Kendra returned her attention to the council session and tried to listen to the current argument. But admittedly, she had no idea what the two red-faced men were yelling about.

Another painful hour later, the session was finally over. After Kendra thanked her council members for their time and work, she exited the hall as they watched her go.

Once Kendra had left the hall, the councilmen began to leave and spilled out into the courtyard.

“Not one indication of mourning!” A councilman raged.

“Not even dressed in mourning clothes. Her expressions alone were far too concerning and attentive,” another councilman concurred.

“Did anyone notice her speaking with Lord Nye? What nonsense could he have filled her head with?” a particularly large Councilman asked.

“Forget Harry – what about her address and demeanor towards us. Not in the council for a few minutes and already attempting to command,” another large councilman scoffed.

It had begun to rain, and Kendra lifted her face to the falling drops, feeling the relief of being out of that hall and away from its loud men in expensive clothing.

Walter escorted her back to her chambers. Seeing the concerned look on her face, he attempted to comfort her.

"You did very well, Your Majesty. You spoke clearly. I think the members were very impressed," he offered, though her brow furrowed more intensely in response. "Is there anything I can help you with, Your Majesty?" he asked, trying to coax her into telling him what was bothering her.

"I wonder if you will accompany me to the Scriptorium tomorrow morning?" Kendra asked him, looking out the window and not at his face.

Moving into her eye line Walter responded, "The Scriptorium?" Kendra looked at him, unsure if he would think less of her if she did not understand today's debate.

"Yes, the Scriptorium, I would like to learn more about the previous council sessions."

"I'm sure we could have the scrolls brought to your chambers. Surely that would be more comfortable, Your Majesty?"

"Thank you, Walter, but no – I would like to visit the Scriptorium."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Walter answered, waiting for Kendra to disappear back into her chambers.

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Arihi sat hanging her legs off the ship's edge. Facing the wind, it ripped through her violet hair. She smiled to herself, revelling in the salt air and the sound of the water breaking on the ship's hull. Arihi quickly remembered why they were at sea and her smile faded.

Her people were known for their water skills, living on a large collection of islands south of the large land they were sailing towards. While they had plenty of food and natural resources, their islands did not bear much metal ore. They would usually trade for it, although over the past decade or so the traders had gradually stopped coming to their islands. This had caused their people to use what metal ore could be found within their land. A blue iron was discovered, although it was a limited resource.

Arihi's father, the king, had instructed some of his most skilled sailors to track where the traders were travelling to, and found they had been going to this mysterious larger land. Arihi was told this land had more resources and more people than any other. Traders preferred to conduct their business there, as they were able to bargain for the best deal.

It became obvious that something would need to be done to keep their people prosperous. Arihi's father had decided to act, and with their spears and daggers, decided to sail to this land and pillage it. Arihi knew they needed to do more than just pillage to survive, but the idea of invading was not one she relished.

Foreign forces had approached their islands and tried to invade – it was a horrific time in their history. There were numerous attempts over the years. The last had occurred when Arihi was just eleven years old. Her father had died in that battle, leaving Arihi as queen. However, her mother Meera had taken regency while Arihi



grew up. Coming of age at eighteen, one moon cycle ago, the first act she decided to take was much like her: blunt and impulsive. She decided to set sail to the northern land with the island's army.

While her proclamation shocked many, most were thrilled. They had known the king had intended this, but he was killed before he had had the chance. Many praised the young queen for leading her people so confidently, but her uncle warned her to be cautious.

While she valued his advice, given his experience, she would often catch him staring at her in a way that made her skin crawl. She felt it was too obvious of a cliché for the king's brother to be jealous of the young new queen.

Contemplating her realm's future, Arihi was brought back to the present by a squawking gull flying above her. She scanned the watery horizon. She jumped to her feet and ran to the mast, climbing as fast as she could. Reaching the brass bell, she rang it as loudly as she could.

"Land, northward!" she cried.

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Waking earlier than usual, Kendra sat at her window, watching the coming storm begin to roll in over the ocean from the south. She had grown used to the wind and the rain of the coastline, but this storm promised to be more imposing. As Alice, her handmaid, came into the room to wake her, she came into the chamber with a panicked look, until she saw Kendra sitting there.

"Ah, you scared me, Your Majesty," Alice said, short of breath.

"Don't worry, I haven't run away," Kendra said, giving Alice a comforting smile.

"It's not so much the running away I am concerned about," Alice responded, as she went to fetch Kendra's gown for the day.

"No? You're not worried I will pack my bags and leave?"

"No, I am not, as I know you would ask me to go with you. I am more worried about a man's influence," Alice said.

"And which man would you be talking about?" Kendra asked, having turned serious at this allegation. Alice looked up at Kendra, taking in her maturing figure obvious through her night dress, her long red hair hanging down to her waist, and her wide blue eyes.

"Well, Your Majesty, you have grown and changed a lot this past year. I think many men would look to corrupt you, especially since..." Alice stopped herself.

"Sorry Your Majesty, it is not my place."

"You have known me since I was a babe, no point in stopping there – especially since?" Kendra asked.

"Well, I have no doubt you will be a great queen. But there are some who are worried about someone with such a gentle disposition being in charge. As they would be more easily coerced," Alice finished, fidgeting with her clothes.



"I see. Do you think I am easily coerced?" Kendra pushed, sitting on her bed.

"Um, Your Majesty, I would not say so. Though you are still so young." Alice looked anywhere but at Kendra.

"I did not mean to upset you. As always, I appreciate your honesty. And I appreciate you telling me what others are thinking. Rest assured I am learning fast," Kendra stood and reached out to Alice, taking her shoulders in her hands. "But I appreciate the concern, really I do."

"Of course, Your Majesty." Alice gave Kendra a small smile.

"Do you think I could get dressed now?" Kendra laughed.

Waiting for Walter outside the Scriptorium, Kendra noticed the sky above the courtyard had begun to blacken. Its foreboding unnerved her.

"I would have thought you were used to the rain by now, Your Majesty?" Walter appeared by her side.

"Rain yes, but sea's thunder and lightning I am still adjusting to," Kendra replied.

"After you," Walter gestured to the large double doors of the Scriptorium.

"Thank you," Kendra said as she walked past him and through the doors.

Kendra gasped as she entered the enormous room. Scrolls lined the walls to what seemed impossible heights. There seemed to be an intentional ordering of the scrolls, though only the one who placed them there would know how to navigate them. The piles seem to loom overhead and though the shelves looked sturdy, they also looked like a light wind could bring it all down.

"You came!" a voice called behind a large pile of scrolls and blank parchment. Weaving herself around shelves and a large table, Kendra could finally see Harry sitting with a quill in his hand.

"I told you I would," Kendra replied.

"I didn't realise you would bring your guard dog," Harry shot a stare towards Walter.

"It wasn't my idea to come here," Walter shot a nasty look back at Harry, the two staring each other down.

"Do you need me to leave the room?" Kendra asked after an uncomfortable amount of time had passed. Walter looked at her shocked, while Harry laughed.

"No, of course not, Your Majesty, I apologise," Walter said, gritting his teeth.

"Hmmm, I apologise too. I fear that Walt here, and I, disagree more often than not when it comes to politics and how we should act in our privileged positions," Harry offered.

"Walt?" Kendra asked, smiling at Walter.

"Only to him, Your Majesty," Walter responded, then turned abruptly on his heel and waited outside the double doors.

"I see," Kendra responded.



“Oh, don't worry about him, he just doesn't like not being the smartest person in the room. Though I would've thought he'd be used to that, spending so much time with you. Or perhaps you do not let on to this fact?” Harry asked, rising from his seat at the large wooden table.

Ignoring his question, Kendra wandered around the room looking at the scrolls. Harry followed close behind, neither speaking. Turning back to him, Kendra asked, “This is all very impressive. But where are the council session records?”

“Right this way,” Harry said, taking her hand and leading her to the far corner of the room. He gestured to a smaller wooden table which sat against a window looking out over the ocean. Scrolls were laid out neatly on the table's surface. “Sorry, no velvet chairs in here,” Harry said, as he offered Kendra one made of wood.

“This will be fine, thank you,” Kendra said, grabbing the first scroll.

“Not one to waste time, are you?” Harry laughed, but Kendra was already engrossed in the scroll. “Just call if you need any help.”

“Thank you,” Kendra murmured, as Harry walked back to his stack of parchment.

Hours passed as Kendra poured through the scrolls. She became used to how the council men spoke and realised now what they had all been arguing about.

“Why did I not know this? Harry!” Kendra yelled out.

“Yes?” Harry yelled back, appearing before her moments later.

“Why did I not know about this? How bad is it?” Kendra demanded.

“I'm going to go out on a limb here, and guess no one has told you what is happening up north?” Harry asked, leaning against a shelf.

“No, and I do not understand why. Tell me – now,” Kendra ordered.

“Well, as you know, your parents were caught in a bad snowstorm. What's more is they weren't even that far north, and the past few winters have been more severe. This is nothing to be alarmed about, it happens from time to time, but what it means is those who live north have not been able to grow as many crops. So slowly but surely, we have started to run...low,” Harry summarised.

“How low?”

“The lower levels of our society are starving, Your Majesty.”

“I do not understand...why did my parents not address this?”

“Many thought it was just one bad winter, and then two, and finally three. That is why your parents headed north, to see what could be done.”

“I just thought it was a freak storm, I had no idea.”

“Everyone thought it was something that would right itself, but left unchecked we are now in an uncomfortable situation.”

“I read yesterday's scroll. They still have no solutions, they just argue about how the other party has not found any, and continue on for hours placing blame with each other.”

“Welcome to the council. They are mostly useless.” Kendra shot a desperate look at Harry. “Sorry,” Harry conceded.

"What are we going to do?"

"That is not for you or me to decide. That is why there is a council. It is their job to find solutions."

"You just said they are useless."

"They are, but the world hasn't ended yet has it?"

Shaking her head, Kendra leant against the small table.

"Are there supply records? Something that I can look at to see our situation?"

"There are yes, but I think maybe you've had enough for one day."

"Bring them to me."

"Are you sure?"

Kendra ignored him. "Walter!"

"Yes?" Walter appeared amongst the shelves.

"Please can you ask the staff to fetch something for the three of us to eat and some water?" Kendra asked. Walter looked concerned and went to disapprove, but changed his mind.

"Of course."

"Thank you. Now Harry, where are they?"

"Stay here, I will fetch them," Harry assured her. Walter and Harry shared a nervous exchange.

Harry brought Kendra the scrolls while Walter organised their food. Without speaking, Kendra poured through the records for an hour, ignoring the food and water that was eventually placed beside her. Harry and Walter sat around her quietly, at times eating, but mostly nervously looking over her shoulder, at a loss of what to do.

After some time, the light started to fade. Kendra looked up from her scroll to see that the growing storm clouds were responsible for the lack of light.

The flash of lightning was so quick, Kendra thought she had imagined what it illuminated. The lightning flashed again, and there they were again. Slowly standing and leaning closer to the windowpane, her hand against the glass, Kendra saw them again, as the lightning illuminated the ocean's horizon.

Ships! Many, many ships. Kendra turned to her companions. Her mouth open and her eyes wide, she pointed to the horizon. Walter and Harry both gathered closer over her shoulder.

"Oh my Lord in Heaven," Walter muttered.

"That does not look good," Harry agreed.

"We have to leave now, Your Majesty!" Walter started, grabbing Kendra by the arm.

"Wait!" Kendra pulled back on his grip.

"We don't have time. We need to get you to safety now." Walter pulled on her arm again, this time more gently.



"One minute," Kendra begged. Looking at her face, he dropped his grip. "Here, go over these numbers," Kendra said, as she handed Harry the current store records. Harry looked at the parchment.

"What do you want me to do with this?" He asked, aghast.

"If we restrict how much each household is to have, it may buy us some time," she responded.

"What are you talking about?" Walter asked, coming close to her again.

"I do believe that the queen is recommending rationing the wheat and corn crops across all classes. This could mean we all survive another year. I mean it does not look like an enjoyable amount per person, but I suppose it is better than the deaths of everyone who does not own a castle." Harry showed Walter the parchment.

"Why have the council members not proposed this before?" Walter asked, directing his question to Harry.

"Maybe because they all like large portions whenever they eat," Harry smirked.

"Well if we live to survive these ships, I will have to remind them of the word 'gluttony'," Kendra snapped, unimpressed. Both men looked at her, completely unsure how to react. "Well, Walter? I think we can leave now."

"Of course, Your Majesty." Walter barely got out, before the alarms began to sound.

"Well, I guess they aren't traders, then," Harry said, walking away, looking over the parchment Kendra had handed him.

Walter and Kendra left the Scriptorium and its high shelves, heading towards the north end of the hold.

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Climbing down from the mast, Arihi was greeted by Meera.

"I know I shouldn't say this, but for the last few days I thought we would never see land," Meera confided in her daughter.

"Not everyone is made for sailing Mother – but you did it anyway." Arihi comforted her before moving around her to the ship's stern, where Uncle Kane was speaking to the ship's captain.

"I think we should wait for the wind to die down," Kane was saying to him.

"Why would we do that?" Arihi asked. "The storm is coming from behind us and will allow us to surprise them all the more. For all we know they have already seen us. The element of surprise is vital to our success."

"I agree with Queen Arihi. If we wait, we will lose that edge," the captain said.

"But if the wind is too strong, we will run aground," Kane furthered.

"Are you suggesting that the good captain of these ships, whose sole purpose in life is to know the ways of the sky and sea, cannot handle it?" Arihi sniped, walking



around the captain, putting her arm around his shoulder. The captain looked amused and cocked an eyebrow at Kane.

"Fine, let's see how many of us drown," Kane snapped and walked away in a huff.

"Someone woke up on the wrong side of the cabin bed," Arihi joked, before winking at the captain and following her uncle. "It's okay uncle, we knew there would be risk before we left, and made the decision to come here anyway."

Turning quickly, Kane put his red face close to Arihi's.

"One day something will happen that you won't be able to smart talk your way out of," he snapped.

"Perhaps, but I'm ready to face that eventuality. It's a pitfall of my personality," Arihi said calmly, before walking away, leaving her uncle fuming.

"You don't always have to bait him," Meera said as her daughter rejoined her.

"Where would the fun be in that?" Arihi asked, and they both turned as a loud crack of thunder rippled above them. With the storm clouds gathering around them, Arihi looked towards the shoreline and took a deep breath. The wind rushed behind her and lightning struck to her right. She did not flinch, but instead smiled.

Kane stood there watching Arihi. When he was her age he did not possess her confidence. Watching his dream of becoming king be within his grasp, only for his little niece to be crowned as their leader – it infuriated him. She did not have his experience, nor would she ever, having led a sheltered life as a princess until now.

Deciding to utilise his anger, Kane began to rally the ship's crew and onboard warriors, as was the duty of the most experienced fighter.

"I'm not a fan of Kane's, but he was an impressive warrior in his day," a crewman said to another.

"You think he could even throw a spear the length of the deck now?" joked a warrior.

"Even the young queen put him in his place. Though I'd be wary following her into battle due to her every changing fancy," the captain agreed.

"Still - at least she would go into battle, will he be able to?" another crewman baited.

All of those on deck watched as Kane began his appeal.

Arihi turned as she heard her uncle begin to rally them. Walking back onto the main deck amongst the men, she heard a few snicker at him. They were not rising to his call. Seeing the rest of their ships get into formation and flank theirs, Arihi began to climb the mast. Those who had been standing around her on the deck watched as she climbed. More warriors and crew members began to notice her, and soon all eyes were upon her. Realising he did not have their attention, Kane followed their eyes up the mast.

Taking advantage of her uncle's hesitation, Arihi cried out, "Warriors of the Southern Isles, while we are not strangers to the sea and her cruelty, we are unfamiliar with this foreign land and the bounty she possesses. We know not of her



strength or weapons, but in spite of this we will raise our spears and our arrows, our swords and our daggers, and we will attack with the power of our ancestors, as we feel them all around us in the roar of the thunder, and the strike of the lightning!”

The battalions cheered in solidarity. “So join me, feel the wind on our backs and the salt in our faces, as we take what others have taken from us!” The cheering became one with the thunder, and each ship sounded their horns of war until they came roaring onto the shoreline.

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Still trying to remain delicate in his manner towards his queen, Walter held Kendra’s arm tentatively as he led her to the War Rooms.

“Sorry, Your Majesty, but we must move quickly,” Walter offered by way of apology. Kendra was having difficulty keeping up with him, and while his grip was gentle, his tone was not. Kendra knew this was not good, but she had never seen war of any kind, no battle, not even a drawn sword.

“What is happening? Why are they here? Who are they?” Kendra asked urgently, her voice catching as the seriousness of the situation began to dawn on her.

“We need to get to the War Rooms, Your Majesty, where you will be kept safe.” As Walter finished, a troop of twenty guards ran past them in full armour. Kendra watched them as they went, turning her body as they passed by her. Things were so urgent that they did not even greet her the way they should.

“Walter, please!” Kendra pleaded. Walter came to an abrupt halt.

“Your Majesty, we must be as quick as we can. We do not know this enemy, I have not seen ships like those we saw on the horizon. We do not know if they have more, or if some were further ahead and could already be here. So, we must get you to safety now!” Walter’s eyes were blazed, and his grip tightened on her arm. Kendra had not seen this side of Walter before, this urgent and abrupt Walter was coarse and she did not care for his manner, in fact it scared her. As they continued to race toward the War Rooms, Kendra quietly kept up with him. They came to a set of large double doors, similar to those of the Scriptorium, although these were reinforced with steel.

Walter pounded heavily on the door. They opened and the councilman who had welcomed her to the council session only yesterday, answered. “Where have you been? Come in quickly,” he said sharply. “Your Majesty, we sent guards to escort you from your chambers, but you were not there?” The councilman inflicted a question on her whereabouts, as they moved past him into the room.

“The queen was in the Scriptorium,” Walter said flatly, annoyed that the councilman felt he could question the queen on her whereabouts.

“The Scriptorium? Whatever for?” he asked, standing by the doors as they were secured behind him.

"What business is that of yours Crawford? If the queen wishes to spend time in the Scriptorium, then she will," Walter snapped, to the surprise of everyone in the room, even Walter himself. After an awkward pause, Kendra broke the silence.

"I was looking into our crop shortage, Lord Crawford." Disbelief washed over his face. This amused Kendra, although she tried not to let it show in her expression. "But perhaps we can discuss that, once this more urgent threat is dealt with?" Kendra offered.

Both Walter and Lord Crawford looked at her. To them she had always been a small child, a young girl, and now she stood there just as tall as they, and spoke more calmly than they had been able to at this time.

"Yes, of course, Your Majesty." Lord Crawford regarded her, remembering himself again.

"Thank you, Lord Crawford. Now perhaps you could tell me more about this enemy?" Kendra asked, taking a seat at the head of the table. Kendra had paused only slightly, upon remembering that she had in fact been in this room before, when she was much smaller, and had seen her father sit there. Kendra extended her hands down the armrests of the large wooden chair and looked down the table – there was no chair at the other end. Confused for a moment, she realised that is where, normally, the king's wife would sit.

"Lord Crawford?" Kendra repeated, tearing her eyes off the chair-less space.

Taking a seat to her right, Lord Crawford responded, "We did not immediately recognise them. Their ships are vastly different from any of our near neighbours. However, one of our men said their ships look rather blue in colour, and that he had seen something similar when he worked on his father's merchant ship."

"Where did this soldier see these ships while aboard his father's?" Kendra replied.

"Quite far south, Your Majesty, past the open sea for some weeks." Lord Crawford answered, taking the seat to Kendra's right.

"So they have travelled a fair way?" Kendra asked, mulling over why an enemy would appear after no previous contact or wrongdoing.

"It appears so, yes, though we know little about them. We do not even know who rules them. This does put us at a slight disadvantage. Though we have a large army, Your Majesty, and more can be here in a couple days' time," Lord Crawford said.

"So we are likely to win?" Kendra questioned.

"Until we see how many are aboard their vessels, and our reinforcements arrive, it is unclear. Though we should be grateful that they chose to attack this stronghold," Lord Crawford said, turning to Walter for support.

"Why is that?" Kendra asked.

"Because," Walter said, taking the seat to her left. "This is the largest and most well-guarded stronghold, which means they do not know our land either."



Looking from Walter to Lord Crawford and back again, Kendra mulled over this. They did not know their enemy, but their enemy did not know them either. To know they were on equal footing in that regard was a small comfort, but still Kendra would rather be at an advantage.

“Is it possible to find out more about them? Perhaps this soldier's father can tell us more?” Kendra asked.

“We have sent out a messenger to our ports further south, for anyone with knowledge about blue ships to ride here immediately, Your Majesty,” Lord Crawford assured her.

“So what do we do know?” Kendra asked, feeling useless.

“Nothing, Your Majesty. We just need to keep you safe, and the troops will defend the stronghold,” Walter said. He leant towards her and placed a reassuring hand on hers. Lord Crawford observed them together and hid a smirk under the guise of scratching his large nose.

“Thank you, Walter.” Kendra gave his hand a firm squeeze, and then removed hers from his grip.

Now standing in opposite corners of the War Room, Kendra, Walter and Lord Crawford looked around at nothing in particular, attempting to take their mind off the coming battle. They occasionally offered each other food or drink; each refusing. There were no windows in the War Room, but there was no mistaking the sound when the battle began. Kendra looked up at Walter, who was looking at Lord Crawford, and Lord Crawford was staring at the door. Making all three of them jump, the double doors sprung open.

“Excuse me, Your Majesty?” A lieutenant regarded his queen with a quick bow, before turning to Lord Crawford. “My Lord, you are needed.”

“Of course. What can you tell me about them?” Lord Crawford asked the lieutenant as they both left the room, leaving Kendra and Walter behind.

“They can’t just leave without telling us anything!” Kendra exclaimed. Looking at his queen, Walter silently agreed, and followed after the councilman and lieutenant to find out more.

Kendra was left alone in the War Room. The candles flickered as the sea breeze came through the crack between the double doors. Thinking to herself, Kendra decided to do something out of character, and left the War Rooms signalling to the guard who had been standing at its doors to stay where he was. She headed in the opposite direction to that of the lieutenant, Lord Crawford and Walter.

Kendra’s mother had always been her father’s opposite. She had been free spirited and seen royal protocol as somewhat of an unnecessary formality. Kendra followed the pathways she had taken with her mother many years before, when her mother had decided to sneak out of the keep to watch the sunset over the beach.

Careful not to trip on her skirts as she descended the steep, winding staircase, Kendra eventually came to a small wooden door at the bottom. Tentatively opening it, she was pleasantly surprised to find no one guarding it. Although this



made sense as all guards should have been facing the enemy, it did bother Kendra to know that someone could easily infiltrate the stronghold this way. Turning back several times, only to then regain her determination and continue on, Kendra headed to the stables. Doing her best to go unnoticed while she broke her mare out of her stall, she was not successful, as the stable boys immediately recognised her. She was able to communicate to them the need for secrecy, and they seemed all too willing to do as their young queen asked of them.

Pulling herself up onto her mare with no saddle and one leg either side, she knew it was not proper to ride like this, but these were desperate times. Besides, her mother would only ride 'properly' until they were out of sight of the guards. Smiling at the memory of her mother, Kendra wondered how she had become so unlike her.

Like her father, Kendra usually acted more cautiously and did her best not to upset anyone. Kendra thought about how she had felt growing up, and how her father had encouraged her to do as she was told and reprimanded her mother for being careless. While Kendra had done as her father had asked, she could not help but think about the council members, and their treatment of her. Perhaps her mother's rebellious spirit is exactly what she needed. With that notion in her head, she urged her mare onward and rode to the north hill.

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As the rowboats plunged into the pebble beach beneath the stone stronghold, the chaos of war began. The warriors of the Southern Isles began to leap from the boats onto the ground below. Many found themselves struggling slightly to march up the beach, as they were not used to this pebble landscape. However, having the salt water on their armour invigorated them, and soon they were a line of one thousand strong on the shore, weapons in hand.

Arihi stood at the front of a rowboat. Her blue iron armour had been fastened around her, and her crown made of blue spear heads was placed on her head. Looking up at the stronghold, she noticed the men there; they looked in shock at the sight of them. Arihi took the spear of the warrior beside her and lifted it above her head. The stone stronghold released their foot troops accompanied by rows of a few hundred horsemen and archers readied on the stronghold's walls.

"Now!" Arihi cried, as she jumped from the rowboat, and the warriors of the Southern Isles collided with those of the stone stronghold.

Flashes of steel against blue iron, arrows flying overhead, and the trample of hooves sounded around Arihi, as she joined the battle on the pebble beach. She had her own warriors all around her, but this did not stop her. Ensuring she was not left out of the action, she took her spear and plunged it into the chest of an enemy soldier. He fell, and she looked up.

Something on the hill to the north caught her eye – a red-haired woman on a black horse. Losing focus for a moment, Arihi was brought back to the fight by



receiving a blow to the head from a nearby horseman. Her surrounding soldiers took the horseman down and rowed her back to the safety of the ship.

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What Kendra saw on that hill would stay with her forever. Halting her mare, she sat and watched as steel clashed with blue iron. Spears soared through the air, swords found their targets, arrows hit shields, and blood was spilled. The gore and its continuation was bewildering. These soldiers seemed more motivated as they saw more blood, their cries becoming more aggressive. Kendra realised this was not just happening with the enemy's soldiers, but also with her own.

She watched as one of her captains, in his silver armour, charged his white steed into the battling crowd, hit someone with his shield, and stabbed another with his sword. Kendra continued to watch as the captain was then unhorsed and stabbed with a blue iron spear.

Having seen enough to know that no one would really 'win' this battle – both sides losing soldiers – Kendra rode hurriedly back to the stables. Handing her mare to the stable boys she ran to the little wooden door through which she had exited the stronghold. Opening the door, she was confronted by Walter standing at the bottom of the winding steps a firm frown on his face.

"I knew your mother too, you know," Walter said, with a mixed tone of disapproval, while also being pleased with Kendra's new found boldness.

"I needed to see it for myself," Kendra said, pushing past him and continuing up the narrow stairs. Walter moved aside and followed after her, not disagreeing. Once they reached the top, they could see Lord Crawford standing at the doors of the empty War Room and could see he was agitated.

"Your Majesty! We were terribly worried!" Lord Crawford exclaimed, upon seeing them both.

"I am fine, thank you Lord Crawford," Kendra replied, offering no explanation. "How are the troops?" she asked.

"They are...doing fine, thank you, Your Majesty," Lord Crawford said, while looking into the War Room. "But it would be best if you were to stay here – for your protection."

"Thank you for considering my safety. I would like you to call back the soldiers," Kendra said. Lord Crawford's head shot up, and he looked her dead in the eye. To Lord Crawford's surprise, Kendra held his gaze.

"Your Majesty, we do not need to retreat, we are not losing."

"I know that, but it is my decision, is it not?"

"Well...yes, but Your Majesty, we should only retreat if we are losing, which we are not."

"Are we winning?"

"...No, I would not say that we are – which is why we must keep on them!"

"I've made up my mind. Call them back into the stronghold." Kendra sat at the head of the table within the War Room, to reinforce her position. Disgruntled, Lord Crawford headed for the southern wall. Walter, saying nothing, took the seat to Kendra's right.

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Letting out a groan, Arihi rose from her cabin's bed and perched on its end. Despite its small size, Arihi had always found it quite comfortable – although not today.

"What happened? Where are we?" Arihi asked, squinting at the figures in her cabin through swollen eyes.

"We are back on our ship," Arihi heard her mother say.

"Did we lose?" Arihi asked, attempting to stand, but immediately regretting it. Placing her hand on her head, she found a large lump rising from just above her right eye.

"No, the enemy retreated," Meera replied. Assessing her daughter's wounds, she couldn't help but be relieved that a messy-looking bump on the head was the worst of it. "But our own warriors are mostly in worse condition than you."

"They retreated? Does that not mean we have won?" Arihi's vision spun around her, and she gripped the bed forcefully.

"No. They retreated; they did not surrender." Meera walked over to her daughter and offered her some water. Taking the wooden mug, Arihi considered this information.

"Were their warriors as badly off as ours?"

"Yes. It was a fair fight," Meera answered. Looking down at her daughter, Meera marvelled at her. Arihi's violet hair had been courtesy of her grandmother's bright locks, although now it was matted with salt water and blood. Even through this, Meera could see her daughter's proud features and her ever curious eyes, struggling under the weight of the wound above them.

"They will have more warriors arriving soon, I'd guess?" Arihi asked. Kane shifted uncomfortably in his seat across the cabin, causing Arihi to notice him.

"Something wrong, uncle?"

"Just that you are right, and our warriors can handle them when they come." Kane said defensively.

"You think so?" Arihi asked her uncle.

"Of course!" Kane exclaimed, shifting once more.

"I'm not so sure. I would like to see everyone, but I'm not sure I can right now. Do we have anything I can put on this to stop the throbbing?" Arihi asked, gesturing to her forehead.

"I'll find you something," Meera answered, then ushered her brother-in-law out in front of her, as they left Arihi to her cabin.



Arihi lay back onto her bed. She wondered why the enemy had retreated if no one was losing. She hadn't heard of any leader doing that. Arihi was, of course, relieved that this had happened, as it sounded like her warriors were in worse condition than she. But still, why had this happened?

Waking up to the gentle rock of a ship at anchor, Arihi rose to find she had something strapped to her head. Pulling it off, she realised it was seaweed. Her mother must have come and tended to her while she slept. No one knew the Isles' plant life better than Meera – she always had the cure for one ailment or another.

Arihi wrapped her warm bed coverings around her and walked out onto the deck. It was early in the morning, with the sun not yet risen, but the blackness of the sky had begun to soften. Pulling the covering closer around her, she walked to the ship's bow and once again looked out at the landmass that stood before her, more than an arrow's range away.

Looking at the stone stronghold's tower, she noticed a lone candle in one of the windows, and beside it a mess of bright red hair.

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Once the troops had been brought back within the keep's gates, Kendra went around to wish them all well and thank them for their bravery. Walter watched on and admired her from a distance. Kendra grew aware of him and walked over.

"They do not look overly well, do they?" Kendra asked in a hushed voice, to not draw any attention. Walter simply nodded. "So you agree with my decision to retreat, then?"

"I think you made the right decision for these men, yes."

"But not for this country?"

"That is not what I meant. I think there are only a few leaders in our history who would be so merciful, see a no-win situation, and make a difficult decision."

Regarding Walter's face for a moment, Kendra decided to believe him, and continued on her rounds to comfort the troops.

Remaining with the troops until she was more in the way than helpful, Kendra excused herself to a chorus of thanks from the soldiers, and those who tended to them. Not feeling like she could sleep, Kendra went back to the Scriptorium on her own, Walter having left her some time earlier.

As she knocked on the large double doors, she was surprised when Harry readily greeted her.

"I'm surprised you are still here and not further inland?" Kendra made fun, as she entered the cluttered room.

"Me? A coward? Unfortunately that occupation doesn't pay very well," he responded, unbothered by her teasing. "Now what are you doing here? I thought you would be rather busy, with the, you know... ship people" Harry whispered, even though there was no one else in the room.



"That's why I am here. I wondered what information you might have on them? A soldier said something about islands to the south, and that merchant boats used to pass through their seas?" Kendra asked, wandering around the room like she might find something useful.

"The Southern Isles you mean?" Harry answered her, walking away from where she stood.

"The Southern Isles?" Kendra repeated him.

"Yes, an interesting place. I've never been myself, but I hear there are some *interesting* natural properties within the islands themselves."

"And you believe such talk?"

"Of course not – though seeing their blue metal did make me curious."

"Did you see them? The soldiers?"

"Only in glimpses from my window here."

"They were so..."

"Colourful?"

"They had such bright hair!"

"I wouldn't have thought you biased against hair colour, Your Majesty"

"I'm not, it's just red hair is normal. Blue, purple and green hair, on the other hand..."

"There were some brunettes and blondes amongst them I believe, and I didn't see any purple hair?"

"I did, on a girl. They let girls be soldiers."

"Indeed..."

Both looked at each other for a moment to consider how different their enemy was from them, and neither could reconcile their people being better than the other.

"Do you have anything I can read? I do not think I will be able to sleep tonight."

"I could, but answer me one thing. If you were kept safe in the War Rooms, how did you see what they looked like?"

"Because I was not in the War Rooms for the entire battle."

"Where were you?"

"On the north hill."

"How did you get from the tight grip of Walt, and the War Rooms, to the north hill?"

"I answered your one question, in fact I answered two. Now, where are those scrolls?"

Regarding his queen with a smirk of appreciation, he gestured to a small mound of darkly stained scrolls.

"What happened to them?" Kendra asked, gently lifting one to read.

"The salt from the sea darkens the parchment," Harry said simply, and returned to his own work.



As the sunlight faded, the full moon provided enough light for Kendra to be able to read the darkened scrolls, if she held them up by the window. After struggling on like this for some time, Harry brought a candle over and placed it on the sill.

"I thought candles were not allowed in here?"

"They aren't, Your Majesty," Harry responded. He then collected his scrolls and sat beside her, abandoning his desk which had been engulfed in the night's darkness. Giving him a smile of appreciation, Kendra continued reading, although she was not sure what she was looking for.

After reading by candlelight for many hours, Kendra turned to see Harry asleep in his chair. Taking a small reprieve, she looked through the window out to the ocean. The moon was reflecting on the ocean's dark surface, the only thing breaking the horizon was the fleet of ships.

They sat far enough away that Kendra did not feel threatened by them, but she did not feel at ease at their presence, either.

Looking more closely, Kendra noticed something on one of the ships. There was a woman standing at the ship's bow, on her own, with long purple hair.

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As the sun began to rise, Arihi stood and watched the stone tower, and the red-haired woman in the window also stayed.

"What are you doing out here?" Meera approached her daughter.

"Just wanted some air," Arihi responded, turning to her mother.

"It's freezing in these northern oceans. Come, let's get you something to eat."

Arihi followed her mother as they went into the dining galley. Glancing over her shoulder, Arihi found that the red-haired woman was no longer in the window.

Remaining quiet throughout the meal, Arihi regarded the warriors who were well enough to eat with them. They seemed to deal with her in a nice enough way, and commented on her wound by way of appreciation, but she could not help but feel she had let them down somehow.

"What's wrong, Arihi? You look like you have the weight of the seas on your shoulders," Meera asked.

"Nothing, Mother, I'm just thinking."

"You? Thinking? Are you sure that knock to the head didn't do more damage?" Meera mocked, and Arihi smiled in return. After they had finished their meal, Arihi returned to her cabin and changed.

The lucky warriors who were fit enough to eat in the gallery waited until their young queen left before coming together to guess what their fate might be.

"Well, that didn't go as I'd hoped. At least they didn't get past us to our ships," a warrior with his arm in a sling said tiredly.

"Their shores are difficult to fight on, those stones belong in rivers not on beaches," a disgruntled warrior said.

"Did you see the queen get hit?" an eager crewman asked.

"Did you see her hit them?" a blue-haired warrior asked, wide eyed.

"Both instances were incredible – at least it took a solid blow to take her down and she has survived it," a warrior who had been part of the queen's guard stated. The surrounding warriors agreed, nodding in unison as the ship swayed in the swell.

Once Arihi was dressed, she walked over to the small mirror built into the wall, and gently prodded the gash on her forehead. Taking the leftover seaweed, she pressed it gingerly against her wound, wincing as the salt made contact with the skin.

"How is it feeling?" her mother asked, having rejoined her.

"Well, it looks better – but it still feels the same," Arihi answered.

"That will change. It will heal. Though I'm afraid you will have a sizable scar there."

"Hmm, that's okay, I think it makes me look like I've seen more than just the start of a battle."

"You made your people proud. Don't start doubting yourself now."

"I'm not. I just...I feel torn. We could have lost all our warriors if the fight had kept going. But rather than seeing who would come out on top, they decided to save their warriors, and by extension ours. I have never heard of that happening."

"I can't say I've ever heard of it happening, though I would venture that whoever rules this stone house is a thoughtful person."

"Thinking things through is not my strong point."

"That's why you are worried?"

"Yes."

Both mother and daughter looked at each other, unsure of what the day would bring.

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Once the sun had risen, Kendra crept past Harry's sleeping body and the rows of dusty scrolls, and headed to the War Rooms. Arriving at its doors, Kendra was surprised to find a soldier guarding them.

"Your Majesty," he said, bowing and stepping aside.

"Thank you," Kendra replied and walked past him, checking him briefly to see if he was injured in any way.

"Your Majesty!" Lord Crawford exclaimed gladly when she entered the room.

"Good morning Lord Crawford. Hello, councilmen." Kendra nodded to the other councilmen who had also gathered. Taking her seat at the head of the table, she was shocked to see Walter sitting at the other end at the formerly empty seat.

"Good morning," he said warmly. Rather than respond verbally in fear of her confusion becoming clear, Kendra instead inclined her head by way of asking what



he was doing there. She received no response, and the councilmen continued their conversation about the battle, the enemy, and their strategy moving forward.

After some time had passed, Kendra tried to offer her insights from her readings through the night. The councilmen were disinterested – one patted her arm, and then turned his back to her. Leaning back in her chair, Kendra looked at the men around her, each speaking over the next. Their red faces and yellow teeth began to merge together in her mind, becoming one indistinguishable mess of loud opinions and short tempers. Sighing heavily, Kendra rose from her chair and walked towards the large double doors. Opening them, she asked the soldier to come inside. He was confused but did as his queen asked.

“Do you mind if I use this?” Kendra asked the soldier, whose face was mystified, but again did not refuse his queen. “Thank you.” Kendra grabbed the handle of the soldier’s sword and unsheathed it, the sound drawing eyes.

The sword was heavier than she thought it would be, but she held it out in front of her, unwavering. Moving the sword through the air, admiring the way it moved, Kendra almost forgot why she had picked it up in the first place. Lowering it slightly, she saw that the councilmen and Walter were all staring at her.

“Ah, finally, I have your attention,” Kendra said, moving back over to the head of the table. “I would like you,” she said, pointing the sword at one of the councilmen, “to tell me how many soldiers are, at this moment, able to fight.” A few of the councilmen began to smirk and mutter to each other. Moving the sword through the air, narrowly missing one of their hands, Kendra brought their attention back to her.

“Well?” she asked impatiently.

“A hundred or so, Your Majesty,” the councilman responded.

“Thank you. Now I would like you,” she said, aiming the sword at Lord Crawford, “and you,” moving the sword’s point toward Walter, “to go onboard that first ship sitting out there, and deliver their leader a message for me.”

Both men looked horrified. To be lowered to messengers was more than just insulting.

“Your Majesty, we can surely arrange any message you have to be delivered to their king,” Lord Crawford suggested.

“I finally understand why you men are so obsessed with these things. They demand attention,” she said calmly, ignoring Lord Crawford’s suggestion. “To command those you talk to, is something I am still learning. Though the task is made much more difficult when those you speak to have no interest in being commanded by you.” No one moved or said a word. Kendra looked up and placed the sword on the table.

“You will both go to the ship and deliver this message. I do not trust a regular messenger to convey my intentions correctly, but between the two of you, you may come close.

“I want you to invite their leader to come and join me in a conversation – a discussion.” Still no one moved. “You see, while you were all sleeping in your soft

beds lined with lace, I was reading about our enemy. I learnt that they come from islands of great wealth. Great wealth, yes, but they are not able to source everything they need from their lands. They need resources – which we have. They also have different crops to us. Perhaps they can help solve our hunger problem which you all ignored until it began to affect you.”

Pausing momentarily, the councilmen mumbled quietly to themselves. Kendra reached for the handle of the sword once more, and the mumbling stopped. Smiling to herself, she returned the sword to its owner, and opened one of the double doors. Turning back to the men surrounding the table she said, “I would like you to leave now.”

Piling into a small vessel, Lord Crawford and Walter refused to speak to each other. Walter had briefly pulled Kendra aside before he left to join this messenger mission. He had tried to apologise to her if he had upset her in any way. Kendra insisted that she was not upset with him, and the only reason she needed him to attend to this mission was to ensure that nothing went amiss. Feeling reaffirmed in her good graces, he had felt good leaving her, until he was on this boat heading towards an enemy they knew so little about.

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Upon hearing the ship's horn, Arihi ran out of her cabin to see what was happening. She was surprised to see a small boat approaching. Running back into her cabin briefly to fetch her crown, she went into the royal chamber. It was an area she most avoided due to its grandeur, feeling more comfortable on the deck or in the galley. Meera and Kane followed her in there, happy that she had known what to do without being told.

Arihi impatiently sat in a high-backed chair, waiting for the small boat's occupants to arrive. The door finally swung open, and two men accompanied by enemy warriors entered the chamber. Arihi scanned the warriors first, and then the two unarmed men. She had to conceal her amusement at their clothing, with their frills and shiny buttons.

“Good morning,” the rounder of the two offered. His red face seemed oddly confident.

“Good morning,” Arihi replied.

“You speak the language of the north?” he replied, delighted.

“Yes. Merchants from your land have been coming to ours for many lifetimes,” Arihi responded cautiously. “What is it you want?”

“Our queen has sent us here, to ask if your leader will join her for a...conversation,” said the second man. Though taller than the first man, he seemed smaller due to his lack of roundness, Arihi noted though, that his tone was much more appropriate to the situation.

“A conversation?” Arihi repeated.



“Yes, to talk – between the two of you,” the skinny man replied, realising that Arihi was wearing a crown.

“To talk.” Arihi repeated, again. Intrigued by this offer and eager to meet another queen, Arihi rushed her response. “Yes, I will meet with your queen to talk.” She could feel the tension of her own people around her. “I will of course be accompanied by my own people,” Arihi quickly followed up, attempting to ease that tension.

“Of course,” the skinny man replied. Arihi watched as he evaluated those around her.

“We will follow after you leave,” Arihi said, by way of asking them to leave.

“Thank you,” the larger red-faced man said, pulling on the sleeve of the second man. They left and piled back into their small boat.

“Who will come with me?” Arihi asked, without turning to look at those behind her. A chorus of voices offered to accompany her, and Arihi grinned.

Once the small boat was almost ashore, the crew on Arihi’s ship signalled one of their own narrow ships to come forward. Loading thirty or so well fairing warriors, as well as Uncle Kane, Meera and Arihi, they set for the shore once more. As they drew closer to the stone tower, Arihi’s nerves grew, but so did her curiosity.

As they reached the shore, half of the warriors disembarked, the other waiting for Arihi, her mother and uncle to reach the pebble beach before following. A few remained with the narrow boat to guard their way back home.

The skinny man awaited them at the bottom of the tower. Arihi followed as some foreign soldiers guided them along, up into the stone tower. The steps were hard and the walls cold. While Arihi did not care for it, she was interested to see more of the differences between their two lands. Upon reaching the top of the wall, Arihi paused to look out at their ships, and was happy to see how intimidating they looked.

The skinny man remained in Arihi’s view for the entire walk through the stronghold, something Arihi was sure he had done intentionally. They reached a large drawn door which hung above their heads, held in place by metal chains. Looking above her at the door, Arihi realized she had entered a great hall.

There were strange seats with lush fabric coverings. They were to her left and right, with an aisle down the middle separating them. At the end of this path, a woman wearing a crown made of bronze daggers was seated in a large chair. It was covered in that same lush fabric, only this one matched the bright blood-red of her hair.

Both queens made eye contact, and immediately recognised the other from their moonlit encounter through windows and on ship bows. Both could not help but let a small smile appear on their faces. Walter appeared at Kendra’s side and placed his hand on hers for reassurance. Arihi watched as Kendra sweetly removed it.

“Your Majesties, I introduce to you, Queen Kendra,” Walter gestured towards Arihi and Kane stepped forward.

"Your Majesties, I introduce to you, Queen Arihi," Kane said with an unexpected tone of pride, which made Arihi smile.

"Please, join me," the red-haired queen said to the violet-haired queen.

"Thank you," replied Arihi. Kendra gestured for a chair, equal to the one she sat upon, to be placed on the other end of the parted sea of velvet seats.

"You appear to be made from fire and I from water," Arihi ventured.

"It does appear that way, yes," Kendra agreed.

"As we both know water extinguishes fire," Arihi gambled.

"Usually, perhaps." Kendra paused, "Though it depends on that fire's kindle. In some cases, water only adds to the growing flame," Kendra countered.

"So I guess the question is, what are you made of?" Arihi asked. They looked at each other for a moment, both having forgotten those around them. Calculated smiles spread across each of their bright faces.

"Welcome to the queen's tide," Harry declared quietly, as he captured the meeting on his parchment.