

Where Are You Now When I Need You Most (This Time, I'll Never Leave)

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Where Are You Now When I Need You Most (This Time, I'll Never Leave)

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Summary

Rhaenyra Targaryen wins the Dance of Dragons and is the Queen of Westeros. Alicent is granted mercy.

Notes

Author's Note: This fanfiction begins months after Rhaenyra Targaeryan conquers King's Landing during the Fall of King's Landing, right before the Battle Above the God's Eye — where Aemond and Daemon die — but following the death of Jacaerys Velaryon at Battle of the Gullet. Aegon II doesn't escape to Dragonstone as Larys is killed during the conquest at the hands of Alicent Hightower who is granted mercy for this action; Aegon II is kept imprisoned, awaiting trial. Otto Hightower has been executed.

Alicent did not know why she'd been granted mercy. That's not true, she knew why, but she didn't know why Rhaenyra thought she was deserving of this mercy. Alicent has done unforgivable things. Not to say that Rhaenyra hasn't, but Alicent was the one who started it all, right? If not her, then it was Alicent's father or Alicent's son, Alicent's somebody. A special punishment should be reserved for the woman who'd decided to ruin a family, to ruin a kingdom, to ruin an empire, because her power-hungry father abhorred the thought of a woman-ruler and wanted to sit his own

on the throne. Or because her son was too blinded by vengeance to restrain his dragon, her son who started a war.

Otto was dead now. He was the first Rhaenyra executed upon claiming her birthright. Daemon had smiled, almost ear to ear when Otto's head had rolled onto the throne room's stone floors. When his blood was spurting from the severed vein in his neck. When his headless body had folded itself in ultimate defeat. Rhaenyra hadn't, she'd sought Alicent's eyes — Alicent, who was forced to watch her father's beheading as her only punishment — with almost an apology. Alicent knew she wasn't apologizing for killing him, Rhaenyra was apologizing that he'd ever gotten this far. Apologizing to Alicent for the way her father had used her. But then, Alicent had realized, it was just almost an apology. Rhaenyra was just making sure Alicent had seen what she could do now. How easily she could kill Alicent — if she wanted to, if Alicent ever gave her another reason.

It has been months since Rhaenyra first sat on the Iron Throne, commanding the death of Alicent's father and the imprisonment of her brother Aegon. It has been months since Rhaenyra had pardoned Alicent publicly, for the killing of Larys Strong — the murder of his brother Harwin and his father the Lord Strong, and a treasonous man who sought to sneak the false heir Aegon to safety so one day he would return to take the Queen's seat. Alicent was granted a place in the court, to respect her standing as a former queen and Viseys's wife. She was granted a room in the Red Keep, a room that Alicent did not leave. Most days, she took her meals in her room, and ventured only as far to the courtyard for a daily walk, escorted by one of Rhaenyra's knights. She was grateful to have the walk, though a moment of loneliness is all she really desires most days. Daemon was upset she was granted the mercies she received, asking Rhaenyra, right before she pardoned Alicent, Do you really want to keep the usurpers whore mother alive? Alicent did not mind being hated by Daemon or Rhaenyra, after all she'd allowed horrible things. Would Rhaenyra even have done half the the things she'd done if she hadn't lost Luke?

Even still, Rhaenyra's been sitting on the throne for months and the war has yet to come to an end. Aemond was still out there. Alicent knew that he was wreaking havoc in the Riverlands. She'd heard Rhaenyra's knights speak about his actions. It has been thirteen days since Daemon arrived at Harrenhal, waiting for Aemond to take up his challenge to a duel. Alicent prayed her son surrender, so that he could come back in one piece and she could see him just once before he too was sentenced to death or life imprisoned. Knowing the how deeply the loss of Lucaerys affected Rhaenyra — enough for her to sacrifice all tact and fight in earnest — Alicent doubted Aemond would be granted the mercy she was. She's been bracing for his death for all the months she's been confined to her room, but nothing, she supposed, can really assuage the loss of a child.

Thinking of losing Aemond reminded Alicent of Helaena, of baby Jahaerys. Alicent has done many unforgivable things, but Rhaenyra has done them too. Alicent was grateful Rhaenyra let her live, and that too in comfort, but Alicent still hated Rhaenyra. She hated Rhaenyra, the Queen who was no longer Alicent's childhood companion, but the killer of Alicent's grandchild, the reason her daughter went mad, the reason she no longer speaks. Alicent has lost a father and just as much lost a daughter and her grandson, she feared losing Aemond too. All Alicent could do was pray her son made the right choice and hate Rhaenyra, the Queen who had killed much of Alicent's family but kept Alicent alive.

Then again, Alicent was perhaps the reason Rhaenyra lost her own father, her son, and her crown.

Thus, Alicent was nothing but confused when one of Rhaenyra's knights came and stood at her chamber's doors, behind which she had been confined during these months, demanding that she join the Queen for dinner in the evening.

She hadn't seen the Queen since the day she'd been pardoned.



Alicent was not allowed to wear green. Not in Rhaenyra's presence at least. The knight had made sure Alicent was clear of Rhaenyra's peculiar demand.

But I'll have nothing to wear. My raiment, they're all in green.

I'm sorry Queen Alicent. I'll inform her Highness.

Alicent did not expect Rhaenyra to be serious. Just some hours later, the knight returned with a package in hand. Wrapped in delicate silk, Alicent received a black gown, embroidered thinly with red.

Humiliation. Is that what Rhaenyra wanted? For Alicent to be stripped and redressed, like a doll or a particularly hard-won spoil that Rhaenyra could swing in the wind as a proclamation of her victory? Alicent had rarely ever worn black, even in her youth, and she had not worn red since she'd discovered Rhaenyra's deceit.

The gown was a spit in Alicent's face.

For the first few days after her pardoning, Alicent had felt nothing but gratitude. To be alive after it all was a gift. Her hatred for Rhaenyra was wayside, just for those few days. In its place was a tenuous understanding. Alicent would be grateful to be alive and be grateful that her Aegon was alive, and she would stay out of the way. She would be a symbol of Rhaenyra's victory, yes, something to prove Rhaenyra's graciousness and regality. Something to prove the weak-willed nature of the Hightowers, a family hungry for power but not strong, steadfast, or wise enough to attain it. But Alicent had foolishly believed she wouldn't be so humiliated in the process, at least so obviously.

Who else would be at the dinner? Would her former allies in war be sitting there, watching Queen Mother Alicent Hightower the Pardoned eat at her enemy's table, wearing her enemy's house's colors? Colors that she had made a point not to wear for the last decades? Would Rhaenyra make a point out of it, calling it lovely when she'd scoffed the first night — ironically at the feast that preceded her wedding to Laenor — Alicent had worn green? Would she laugh, finally, at Alicent's cowardliness in accepting a pardon instead of remaining true to her cause?

Would she relish in Alicent's demise? Rhaenyra, the same girl Alicent had grown alongside, the same girl Alicent had loved so many years ago?

Alicent was asking too many questions for a woman in her position. She knew she had no choice but to wear the dress. No matter her anger.

When the time came, that is what she did.

A handmaiden was sent to her chamber to attend a bath for Alicent. In it, she poured milk and rose petals and a little bit of lavender. It was warm, welcoming. When Alicent descended into the tub, she melted just slightly, remembering elaborate rituals of beauty she'd engage in before the hectic war. The handmaiden washed Alicent's hair while Alicent bathed. After, the maiden dried it with a towel and brushed it as Alicent painted her lips and rouged the apples of her cheeks. Alicent had not done so much since the news of Viserys's death.

Alicent did not know why she was putting so much effort into this dinner. Would looking good fulfill her idle wishes? Wishes that perhaps the dinner would be news of the end of the war. Perhaps she would receive news of Aemond's surrender and return. Perhaps Helaena would be

happy to hear this news, of her fondest brother's return, and perhaps Helaena would feel a little less mad. Perhaps the months and her victory over King's Landing had mellowed Rhaenyra's own grief, perhaps Rhaenyra would keep Aemond alive and Alicent would not have to lose any more family.

Once her hair had been sufficiently brushed, Alicent sent the handmaiden out, assuring her that she could dress herself. Upon the handmaiden's departure, Alicent slipped into the dress, which smelled like Rhaenyra, and Alicent felt less angry knowing that Rhaenyra had not been petty enough to make this dress special for Alicent's humiliation.

Alicent did wear her green jewelry, even though it did not match. A necklace, made of gold and emerald, it was her favorite. And earrings, made of the same material, that almost touched the exposed slope of skin at the base of her neck.

Despite her resignations, Alicent still wanted to fight. Just a little. To let Rhaenyra know that no matter her cowardice, Alicent was brave enough to sit at dinner with her former friend, her former enemy, and now her Queen, without hanging her head entirely in shame towards the woman that had taken so much from her, a woman she had taken a lot from.

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Alicent couldn't help but notice that Rhaenyra's nostrils widened at the sight of the mismatched jewelry and dress upon Alicent's entrance.

"I thought I said nothing green?" Rhaenyra asked, standing at the opposite head of the table.

"I am not wearing green, your grace." Alicent responded. She approached the opposite end of the table, where the plates were set. They stood opposite each other for a brief moment before Alicent sat first. Another motion of disrespect. "I am adorned, perhaps even bejeweled, in green. While I appreciate the generous gesture of the dress, it came without adornments. I can't come to a dinner of this caliber and not be properly presented."

"It is just you and I, Alicent." Rhaenyra punctuated each word with muted rage, sitting down so hard that the crooked chair thumped against the stone floor. Even still, Alicent was prickled with childhood yearning, how many times had Rhaenyra said her name with joy and friendship and love? This was the first time Alicent had heard Rhaenyra call her by her name since her pardon, it was just as full of vitriol as it had been that day.

"Does it not retain its caliber still? You are the Queen. I am the Queen Mother." Alicent continued on, renewed spite pushing her words out of her mouth and not Alicent herself. "Unless you are having second thoughts, your grace? As to your title and role?"

"I had your treasonous father killed, your treasonous son jailed. Do you really think you can speak to me like this, so openly?"

"You killed my father, imprisoned my son, killed my grandson, drove my daughter to madness, and now your lap-dog husband is hunting my second son. And yet, I am here, meant to eat dinner with you after all that. Should I not think I can speak my thoughts? Have you meant to take that from me too?"

"Alicent," Rhaenyra chuckled, the first laugh during the whole war Alicent thought, and clenched her fist before slamming it down on the table with such force the floor underneath them vibrated. "Don't be so self-righteous. You killed my son, you started a war, you drove me from my home with your demands just so when my father died you could install your shit son as the King."

“You could’ve easily had me killed. Alongside my father, and Aegon. But I’ll say again, I am here, eating dinner with you.”

Alicent stared at Rhaenyra. Rhaenyra stared back. They hadn’t really looked at one another since Otto’s beheading, which had come after Alicent had spent three days in the dungeons. Alicent had been beyond disheveled, skin browned with dirt and emanating a stench that revolted people twenty feet away. Rhaenyra had granted her life, but Alicent had not been given the chance to clean herself. But then, as Alicent sat in front of Rhaenyra in the Targaryen’s house colors and mismatched green jewelry, she was the picture of beauty. Clean and perfumed, cheeks rouged and lips colored, hair brushed and silk. Rhaenyra looked every bit the Queen, strong-shouldered and elegantly put together. Her purple eyes were still piercing with the turmoil of emotions she’d faced in the last year.

There was a question in the air. Rhaenyra didn’t want to answer. So the silence stretched until the clamoring of servants bringing food to the table disrupted it. They served both of them, pieces of pheasant and bread and pastry and stewed boar. Rhaenyra cut some meat onto her plate, skewered a small piece onto her fork, and lifted it into her mouth.

“I need you alive.” Rhaenyra admitted, her mouthful of food obstructing the admission. “Daemon, he’s in Harrenhal.”

“I know.” Alicent cut some meat onto her own plate, and takes a bite.

“It’s been fourteen days. Your son Aemond, if he concedes the war will end.”

“Aemond doesn’t want a life in prison, Rhaenyra. He knows the price he will have to pay for his mistake.”

“Lucaerys. Was. Not. A. Mistake.” Rhaenyra shook, a vein in her forehead suddenly more pronounced. “Aemond started this war. By killing my son. He knew what he was doing the minute he chased Luke with Vhagar.”

“Aemond was just as much a boy. Boys are prideful. What’s left to be angry with? You took your son for a son. Need I remind you of the condition you’ve sent my daughter into?”

“Alicent I am not here to contest your perspective. I am not here to compromise mine. I am here to ask you to send Aemond a raven and you are here to consider just this request.”

“It doesn’t matter what I say, he won’t come back to King’s Landing. He won’t stop fighting. He ___”

“I will grant him a pardon. As a motion of mercy if he takes the knee and acknowledges me as the true Queen. He will face no imprisonment and no execution. He can be my ward.”

Alicent remembered her offer to Rhaenyra, when Aegon had taken the throne and Alicent had sent her father to settle the matter diplomatically, and she was sure Rhaenyra remembered it too.

“You’ve his brother still in the dungeons.”

“He won’t believe you.”

Rhaenyra opened her mouth to speak but then closed it. Her shoulders slumped.

“I will let Aegon out. He will be my cupbearer.”

“I am not asking you to do that. You don’t want him as king.” Alicent tugged at her fingernails. “Call me unfeeling, but he’s done too much... just too much. His forgiveness is in hands that do not belong to you nor I. He is not fit to rule, and I should’ve seen it earlier.”

“Alicent. End this war. Keep your son alive. Daemon will stop at nothing to bring him to King’s Landing dead. So much has happened already, we have both hurt each other enough. Can’t we stop?”

Alicent wanted to end the dinner. They both had not taken a bite beyond their first. Their plates were still full.

“Will you kill me if I say no?” Alicent asked. She’d already made up her mind. She’d send the raven.

Rhaenyra clenched her jaw. “You have been spared because you prevented any further war. I spared your life because I thought you might have miraculously kept the backbone you grew when you killed Larys, a backbone that would end this war.”

Alicent hummed. “So you won’t kill me then?”

“I could never kill you Alicent.”

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By the end of dinner, Alicent verbally agreed to send Aemond a raven. Rhaenyra watched as she wrote the letter. Ultimately it did not matter. Daemon and Aemond had already died by the time the raven arrived in Harrenhal. Alicent and Rhaenyra received news the day next. Rhaenyra’s keening cry could be heard throughout the castle. Alicent wept quietly and alone in her chamber.

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