

## The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/5143883) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/5143883>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">F/F</a> , <a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Sansa Stark/Daenerys Targaryen</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Sansa Stark</a> , <a href="#">Daenerys Targaryen</a> , <a href="#">Margaery Tyrell</a> , <a href="#">Aegon VI Targaryen</a> , <a href="#">Petyr Baelish</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Alternate Universe - Soulmates</a> , <a href="#">Soulmate-Identifying Marks</a> , <a href="#">Minor Sansa/Margaery</a> , and <a href="#">Sansa/Aegon</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-11-04 Words: 3,083 Chapters: 1/1

# **The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo**

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## Summary

Margaery Tyrell licked her thumb and rubbed at the lion on her breast, which smudged and faded in a way that Sansa's dragon never would.

*i.*

Septa Mordane was the first to notice the three-headed dragon marked in the crook of Sansa's arm, just beneath her elbow. The Septa rubbed at Sansa's skin as if hoping the dragon would fade away. She had Sansa scrub at her arm with a wet rag until her skin was red and raw.

Eventually she had no choice but to speak to lord and lady Stark.

\*

Sansa's father was not angry with her, he said, but he did look sadder than he had since the day Jon Snow had asked him what a bastard was.

"Sweetling," he said gently, "you know that there are no more Targaryens in the Seven Kingdoms."

"Because they were mad and cruel," Sansa parroted Septa Mordane's lessons, "and because of what Rhaegar did to Lyanna?"

"Yes," her father smiled sadly. "Because they were mad and cruel. And because of Lyanna."

\*

Sansa's mother took Sansa's hands in her own. There was a direwolf mark on Lady Catelyn's palm.

"Sansa, you do realise that the marks often mean nothing, especially for highborn ladies, don't you? Your father will find you a husband deserving of your beauty and grace, regardless of whether or not he has a direwolf on his skin."

Sansa knew that her mother spoke the truth, but she could not help but believe in the romance of the marks. "But you have a direwolf mark for father?"

"And when it first appeared I believed it to be for Brandon; your father has no mark at all, and we came to love each other anyway."

\*

Sansa and Arya had most of their lessons from Septa Mordane; it was their brothers who took their lessons with Maester Luwin, but the Maester had been asked to speak with Sansa about the dragon on her skin.

"The soulmate marks are part of a dying magic. You should no more place your faith in them than you would in a prophecy, glass candle, or dragon."

Privately Sansa thought that she would find it quite hard to deny a dragon should she ever find herself facing one, but she held her tongue.

Maester Luwin smiled kindly and clasped Sansa's shoulder. "Try to put this mark, and the Targaryens, out of your mind."

\*

It was true that the marks had always been rare - you had to be destined for a member of a great house for their sigil to appear on your skin - and they had become rarer still since the dragons died out.

Robb, Jon Snow, and Arya didn't have a mark between them. Bran had a lizard-lion on his knee.

Bran had badly grazed his knee leaping from Winterfell's walls, and Sansa was binding it for him so that their mother didn't find out he'd been climbing again. She traced the lizard-lion with her thumb.

"Do you long to meet Lord Reed's daughter, Bran?"

Bran blinked at her. "Why? She's only a girl. I wonder if Lord Reed has a son?"

Sansa laughed; Bran was only seven, and what he longed for in a companion was someone to play at swords with. She knotted Bran's bandage, tugged his breeches back down, and pressed an affectionate kiss to his forehead.

\*

Jeyne Poole had a kraken on the outside of her ankle.

Sansa knew that the heir to the Iron Islands could not marry the daughter of a steward - Robb had told Sansa not to allow Jeyne to tell Theon of her mark; "marrying her will be the last thing on his mind" - but she enjoyed listening to Jeyne spin romantic tales in which she was the reason Theon stopped chasing kitchen girls and visiting with the miller's wife.

Jeyne tucked her foot primly beneath her skirts. "I heard my father say that Prince Rhaegar's brother yet lives in the Free Cities." Jeyne glanced meaningfully at Sansa's arm. "Viserys Targaryen, they call him the beggar king."

*The Beggar King.* The name brought to Sansa's mind an image of a dashing silver prince whose throne had been stolen from him; someone who'd retained his nobility and honour despite the poverty he'd been forced into.

ii.

Sansa stopped dreaming of the beggar king once she was betrothed to Joffrey Baratheon; what use did she have for lost Targaryen princelings when she had a golden lion?

Joffrey didn't have a mark, and he claimed not to care about Sansa's - they were leftovers of a bygone age, he said.

Queen Cersei was kind about it too. At least, at the time Sansa had thought her kind.

Cersei's fingernails dug into the skin of Sansa's wrist as she pushed her sleeve back to reveal the three-headed dragon. "You are fortunate, Sansa, that we no longer let sigils on our skin dictate our futures."

Cersei flicked her hair over her shoulder, briefly revealing the lion rampant beneath her ear. Sansa thought that she had been meant to see it. "Is that—?"

Cersei smoothed her hair back into place. "I would not have been the first Casterly Rock Lannister to marry some minor cousin, but then I would not have become queen."

"And you would not have married King Robert," Sansa said with a hopeful smile.

The Queen's smile did not reach her eyes. "Yes. There is that."

\*

It was Lancel Lannister who brought her the news that Viserys Targaryen had been slain on the Dothraki Sea by his sister's husband.

Lancel was kind; he tried to comfort her, and did not question why she wept for a man she had never met.

It was not until later that it occurred to Sansa that Cersei or Joffrey might have guessed that in the dark of the night she pressed her fingertips to the dragon marking her skin and prayed for rescue; that Lancel might have been sent with the news to taunt her.

\*

There was a lion on the slope of Margaery Tyrell's breast, and unladylike as it was Sansa could not stop staring at it.

She had never noticed Lady Margaery's mark before, but she had also never known the other girl to wear a gown cut quite so low in the bosom.

Margaery noticed where Sansa's gaze was being drawn. She laughed lightly, licked her thumb, and rubbed at the lion, which smudged and faded in a way that Sansa's dragon never would.

"There is a fashion in the Reach for betrothed ladies to have the sigil of their future husband's family permanently inked onto their skin."

Sansa frowned at the smudge on Margaery's skin. "That doesn't look permanent."

"Mine is only painted on; after all, none of us know what the future will bring." Margaery smiled indulgently. "Plus, they do it with needles, which I dislike."

"My sister always hated needles," said Sansa, hoping that wherever Arya was she still hated needles.

“I heard an interesting rumour about you, Sansa, it is said that you have a mark in truth. Is that true, may I see it?” Margaery must have misunderstood Sansa’s horrified expression, because she said, “Unless, of course, it is somewhere... delicate.”

“No.” Sansa held out her arm, her heavy bell sleeve hanging down. “It’s just below my elbow. You can look.”

Margaery lifted Sansa’s hand and pressed a kiss to her knuckles before she pushed Sansa’s sleeve up to reveal her dragon.

“Oh,” said Margaery, something akin to disappointment in her eyes. “I suppose I had assumed it was going to be a rose.”

Sansa could feel the spot where Margaery’s lips had brushed her hand. “For Willas’ sake?” she asked, unsure.

Margaery raised Sansa’s arm and pressed her mouth to the inside of Sansa’s wrist; for a fleeting second Sansa thought she felt Margaery’s tongue against her skin.

“Yes, sweet girl, for my brother’s sake.”

In the time it took for Sansa to regain her composure, Margaery had dropped Sansa’s hand, vanquished the sadness from her eyes, and quirked her lips into a mischievous smile.

“Well,” she said, “should I ever chance to meet any dragons I’ll be sure to tell them about you.”

\*

Lord Tyrion had stopped. Her imp husband hadn’t raped her on their wedding night.

Sansa knew that she should say something kind, but she worried that Tyrion would take that as a sign to resume. It was all she could do to suck in deep breaths and clutch the blankets to her body.

Her husband sat at the foot of the bed, a pillow held over his jutting manhood. He didn’t seem to know where to look, and his eyes found Sansa’s dragon mark.

“I’ve always wanted to meet a dragon,” he said.

Sansa offered him a watery smile; it was all she could offer. “Me too.”

*iii.*

Sansa reminded herself that she was safe and free of the Lannisters here in the Eyrie.

She reminded herself again as her Aunt Lysa planned Sansa’s marriage to her sickly, shaking cousin Robin.

“Of course Sweetrobin doesn’t have a direwolf mark, but you should thank your lucky stars that anyone is prepared to have you with the stain of the Targaryens on your skin. And not everyone can be so lucky as Petyr and myself—”

Littlefinger wore a strained smile around a mouthful of capon, and Sansa stared down at her own supper.

“—Petyr has a trout on his... Well, that’s not something an unwed maiden should hear.” Sansa suddenly lost her appetite. “And I... well, I’m certain I would have had a mockingbird mark if only you’d taken it as your sigil sooner, my love.”

\*

"It's on my inner thigh," said Petyr, when he found Sansa after her aunt's funeral.

"Pardon me?"

“My trout mark. It’s on my inner thigh, and it’s not for Lysa.”

“I— Why are you telling me this?”

Littlefinger took Sansa’s hand. “Have you heard of Aegon Targaryen?”

“The conqueror?”

“The sixth of his name.”

History had been one of Sansa’s better lessons; it was all just stories, but she seemed to have misplaced an Aegon somewhere. “There were only five kings named Aegon, I thought.”

Littlefinger’s thumb stroked back and forward across the back of Sansa’s hand, and she fought the urge to pull away. “Ah, but if Rhaegar’s son had lived, he would have been the sixth.”

Sansa could not keep the look of surprise from her face. “Did he live?”

“They found a babe next to Princess Elia, his skull smashed beyond recognition, and now in the East the Golden Company have taken a contract with a boy-king calling himself Aegon VI Targaryen.”

“Is he the true Prince Aegon, though?” Sansa asked.

Littlefinger’s laughter was unkind, and his fingers were creeping up Sansa’s arm, pushing her sleeve aside.

“You disappoint me, Sansa. Aegon’s true identity matters less than the fact that he has the Targaryen look, a good story, and an army.” Petyr traced Sansa’s mark. “My trout wasn’t for Lysa, and your dragon may not be for Aegon, but we can still turn them to our advantage. When Aegon quite possibly Targaryen crosses the Narrow Sea he will marry a highborn maiden with a three-headed dragon on her skin.”

Sansa was married in Griffin's Roost with the brown dye washed from her hair. She wore a direwolf cloak, and a gown with sleeves split from the elbows to draw attention to the Targaryen sigil on her arm.

Her new husband was handsome with lilac eyes framed by long lashes. He was learned, gallant, and everything Sansa had once dreamt Viserys Targaryen would be.

He chafed, though, at being wed to a girl who had been betrothed to Joffrey, and married to the Imp; the niece of the woman who had brought Prince Rhaegar low. He quarreled with both Littlefinger and Jon Connington on the subject, and Littlefinger warned Sansa that she would have to try all the harder to win Aegon.

Aegon was unhappy with this marriage, and brusque with Sansa, but he was not cruel or frightening; he was not Joffrey, Tyrion, or Petyr.

Mayhap Aegon was a Targaryen in truth; mayhap Sansa could learn to love him, or at least love the idea of him.

\*

Sansa's husband stood naked in the candlelight pouring himself a goblet of wine, and Sansa could see that there was no direwolf, no mark of any kind, on his skin.

"How did it feel?" he asked Sansa, who was sitting up in bed with the coverlet held loosely against her breasts and her legs drawn up to avoid the wet spot.

"A little sore, my lord. I mean, Your Grace."

"No, I mean—" Aegon knocked back his wine. "I'm sorry if I hurt you, my lady." He crossed the chamber, sat on the edge of the bed, and took Sansa's arm. "I mean *this*. I don't have a mark; did it *do* anything when we—? Did you feel anything?"

Sansa knew better than to tell Aegon that she'd felt more during one stolen kiss with Margaery Tyrell than she had when Aegon was trying to plant a child in her belly.

In truth, she no longer knew whether the kiss with Margaery had actually happened, or if it was merely a story she'd told herself so many times she'd forgotten it was made up.

Sansa couldn't meet Aegon's lilac eyes. "I don't think they're meant to do anything—"

Aegon's grip on Sansa's arm tightened. "It doesn't mean anything, you know. It doesn't mean I'm not a Targaryen. I trust you've heard those rumours?"

Sansa winced, and Aegon loosened his grip. "My mother once told me that the marks mean nothing, and I have seen little in this life to make me believe otherwise."



Aegon smiled, it did not reach his eyes. "I mean to be king, and you are my queen. We are in this together."

v.

Daenerys Targaryen was beautiful.

Under the circumstances - the wake of her husband's death, and being summoned to King's Landing to answer to the new queen - it was probably not the right thing for Sansa to be thinking. But the queen was beautiful; she was wearing a silver gown, and her eyes were a shade darker than Aegon's had been.

The queen had received Sansa in her private solar rather than the throne room, for which Sansa had cause to be grateful; she did not have fond memories of being called before the Iron Throne.

"Sansa Stark, I presume?"

Sansa had been addressed as Her Grace at Griffin's Roost, and Alayne Stone and Lady Lannister before that. The sound of her true name coming from Daenerys' lips was welcome indeed.

Sansa cleared her throat. "Yes."

"I have heard much about you, my lady." The Starks had risen up against the Targaryens; Sansa had been married to the queen's false nephew. "Lord Tyrion, Margaery Tyrell, and your brother Bran all spoke of the Stark girl with the dragon mark."

Silently Sansa offered her arm to the queen. Daenerys took her hand, and ghosted her fingers up Sansa's arm until she reached the dragon mark. It didn't *do* anything - not in the way Aegon had meant - but Sansa's breath caught in her throat all the same.

"I'm sorry," said Daenerys. "It could not always have been easy to bear this."

"Not always, no."

"It always angered my brother Viserys that I had a direwolf on my skin."

Sansa had not expected that. "You-?"

The queen's lips quirked. "I would offer to show it to you, but we have only just met."

\*

The dragon Viserion seemed to have taken a liking to Sansa. He had lowered his head to the ground and allowed Sansa to stroke his snout; the heat of his scales lingered on Sansa's palms.

“Viserion was the dragon Bran warged into,” said Daenerys as they walked back from the dragon pit. “Mayhap he recognised you?” Sansa smiled at the notion.

Sansa was not entirely sure why she stayed. She had no reason to love King’s Landing. The queen, for all her beauty and kindness to Sansa, was a dangerous and unpredictable woman, and Bran would welcome her home to Winterfell. The dragon marking her skin had never brought anything good into her life.

And yet she lingered the capital as she and Daenerys flirted over dragons; circling each other, and tilting towards a dalliance that felt somehow inevitable.

\*

“One of my advisors suggested that my direwolf might be for Bran,” Daenerys teased lightly.

Sansa laughed, and the bell that the queen had braided into her hair tinkled. “I know the marks rarely match up, but Bran’s love is a woman of the Crannogmen.” Sansa remembered Bran as a boy, asking after Lord Reed’s son. “Or mayhap not a woman.”

Daenerys’ fingers brushed Sansa’s. “I hear that’s a very easy mistake to make.”

\*

Sansa’s chambers had been packed up, and her luggage made ready for the journey North.

Daenerys picked her way between the loaded trunks. “Will you return to King’s Landing or remain in Winterfell?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen my brother in too long—” sweet-natured, crippled Bran, who was the Stark in Winterfell now “—and truly I don’t know what life I could have here.”

“I cannot make you a queen,” said Daenerys stepping close to Sansa and taking her hands.

“I have rather lost my appetite for queenhood.”

“I find myself in want of a lady-in-waiting.” The queen pushed up on her toes; Sansa was the taller of them. Their lips were very close, and Sansa could feel the other woman’s breath when she said, “That’s a delicate way of saying paramour.”

It was Daenerys who closed the distance to press their lips together, and Daenerys who broke the kiss. She wrapped her fingers around Sansa’s wrist and slid them up her arm; she pressed her thumb into Sansa’s dragon mark.

“It’s the only life I can offer you. Think on whether you can bear it.”

“I will,” promised Sansa, mourning the queen’s warmth when Daenerys pulled away.

Moat Cailin became impassible with snow while Sansa lingered in the North.

She spent the two-year winter at Winterfell with Bran and the Reed siblings; with Jeyne Poole and Theon Greyjoy, who clung together as though they were the only thing keeping each other afloat. She wrote letters to King's Landing and thought of the silver queen with the violet eyes.

When she returned to the capital to take up her position as lady-in-waiting she discovered that Dany's direwolf ran across her hip. Sansa knelt and pressed her mouth to the mark; she traced the direwolf with her tongue, and heard her queen laugh then gasp above her.

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