

*Celime*

Please understand certain apprehension when out of nowhere when my own men had nearly given up the search for her, she arrived on my very doorstep telling me she was needed at your side. Somewhat numb struck, I enquired, almost demanded to Stepan to know of what was going on. He took some days in replying to me perhaps my worst fears, but gave no description other than he had failed in protecting you and a price was paid. He takes pains to detail how important a vigil Daemander kept over you, but nary a word of any malady or worse. Yet at least you write me this night. Reassurance of your safety was welcome relief.

What you speak of sounds... monstrous. I wonder how much Lord Stepan values you Celime, and somewhat fear it as well. Next he and I speak he will find displeasure at his desire for peace at any end. Forgiveness is not at issue here, Celime, for there is nothing that you have to forgive for in my eyes from what you have said. It appears as others have taken what they want from you, and lament with hearts but little else. I am no churlish aristocrat and guard dear all close to me.

Daemander shall not wane in his service, and do not think that distance lessens this role you have taken, for that you have the

backing not just of myself, but of all of Bentara. I wish to see you soon, a meeting under Lord Dall is in order to discuss this new turn of events. I know Lord Dall is most interested in Stepan, and has had his eye on the two siblings since before their coming of age. He even knew their mother. Stepan has written to him and to all the circle members proclaiming his innocence in this he has created. I am less convinced than others. I pray you shall accompany him, by my expense and I hope you come for not just Stepan nor the politics.

Count Bryce Korel