**Chapter - 37**

As I emerged from the hidden chamber, I traversed a dimly-lit corridor where several maids bustled about their chores. Their attention remained fixated on their duties and occasionally stealing glances at me, paying no heed to Vaylara's ghostly presence floating alongside me.

Lost in my thoughts, I contemplated my next move, realizing that my time here had come to an end.

It was clear that my focus now should be on returning to my forest and finally getting to work on my dragon. Now that I would have Vaylara's assistance, I needed to modify my approach to this task, as she possessed greater knowledge of dragons than I did.

Having made this decision, I resolved to depart this place without further delay.

So I made my way to Shireen’s room, where I could conduct one final inspection before informing Stannis of my intentions to leave.

As I entered the room, I saw Shireen's mother tenderly feeding her some food. They noticed my presence and greeted me warmly, once again expressing their gratitude for my services.

“It was my pleasure.”

I approached Shireen and performed a final check-up to ensure that everything was in order.

"You appear to be in perfect health now, my lady," I informed her. "However, I would still advise against engaging in any strenuous activity for the next few days and recommend that you eat twice as much as usual until your appetite returns to normal."

"Thank you, Ser Healer," Shireen replied gratefully.

"Since my work here is complete, I shall bid you farewell for now. Perhaps we shall meet again someday," I said, preparing to depart.

"So soon?" Shireen's mother exclaimed, clearly disappointed.

"Unfortunately, my lady, I have pressing matters that require my attention back home," I explained.

"Very well, then. Thank you again for all that you have done," she replied, offering a parting smile.

I got up to leave before pausing.

"Excuse me," I asked, turning back to Shireen's mother. "Might you happen to know where I could find Lord Stannis so that I can bid him farewell before I depart?"

"He's likely at the harbor," she replied.

"Thank you kindly for your help," I said with a nod, before turning to leave the room.

As I made my way down the hallway, Vaylara's ethereal voice suddenly broke the silence. "I couldn't help but notice, you didn't use any magic to heal the girl," she remarked.

"You're right. I didn't," I responded matter-of-factly.

"That was the other power you spoke of - the one you were born with," she said in amazement.

"In all my years, I've never seen anything like it."

"I suppose but I didn't need to use much of my powers this time," I remarked, acknowledging Vaylara's observation. "But, how do you know that my abilities match with what I told you?"

"I scanned the girl as well, and my findings confirm your exceptional abilities," Vaylara replied.

"To achieve such a feat is truly impressive."

I couldn't help but feel a sense of pride at those words.

However, her comment seemed like a good opportunity to get some information, and I couldn't help but quip, "Well, you must be quite old to claim knowledge of all types of magic."

"El, have you no manners?" Vaylara chided me. "Did your mother never tell you that it's impolite to ask a lady her age?"

I rolled my eyes at her teasing, knowing that she would eventually tell me her full story. For now, my thoughts returned to my journey home, and I hastened my pace towards the harbor to bid Lord Stannis farewell.

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The carriage ride was not as smooth as he had hoped it would be, and a significant bump snapped him out of his thoughts.

He had been sent on a journey north on an important task that his grandmother had assigned him. While anyone who asked would be told that he was on his way to visit the white mage of Winterfell to have his leg healed, and from what he had heard, it would be a small matter for the healer to fix his knee.

He was genuinely looking forward to the visit, but he also had other important tasks assigned to him. While he had completed some tasks in the Reach as the healer of Highgarden, this was going to be the most important one yet.

The completion of this task held great significance for him, as it was his chance to demonstrate his worth to his family. As they rode past, he glanced at his beloved younger sister, seated opposite him, reveling in the beauty of the surrounding landscape.

Although they were still a week away from Winterfell, a chilling breeze hinted at the wintry atmosphere that awaited them. Memories of his grandmother's words from a few days prior, just before their departure, flooded his mind.

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"Grandmother, you called for me?"

"Yes, Willas. Come, sit. I have something important to discuss with you."

He took a seat, curious as to what his grandmother had in store for him.

"You will be going on a journey to Winterfell," she announced.

He was taken aback at the suddenness of her statement but not entirely surprised.

He had heard the rumors circulating in the Seven Kingdoms and had an inkling of what his grandmother would ask of him.

"May I ask why?" he inquired.

"I hope that the White Mage will be able to heal your leg and provide insight into what's happening in Winterfell," she explained.

He nodded in understanding. "If even a tenth of the rumors about the White Mage's abilities are true, then my leg getting healed is not a doubt, but a certainty. Negotiating a fair price for the healing is the simplest part of the task. What do you want me to do after that?" he asked, sensing that there was more to the journey.

"That will be the hard part. I would have handled the matter myself as it is very important, but that isn't going to happen considering the journey. So, as the next heir to Highgarden and someone with a somewhat competent brain between your ears, unlike your father, you will have to do it."

"The North has always been a significant buyer of our crops, but now that they have figured out how to make glass, what do you think has happened?"

He took a moment to connect the dots and replied, "They have started to make glass gardens for cheap, so they are producing more crops in the winter."

"Correct. Even though the effects are negligible at the moment, they are growing at an alarming rate, and eventually, they will not be buying a single grain from the South."

"What I want you to do is negotiate with Ned Stark and make sure that the North continues to buy from us at least for the crops they cannot grow."

I nodded, understanding the gravity of the situation. The North's increasing self-sufficiency in crop production could have far-reaching consequences for the economy of Highgarden and the livelihood of our people.

"I will do my best, Grandmother," I replied, my voice filled with determination. "I understand the importance of maintaining our trade relations with the North. I shall negotiate with Ned Stark and find a way to ensure that they continue to purchase our crops."

She placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "I have faith in you, young one. Your wit and intelligence will serve you well in this endeavor. Remember, it is not just about the negotiations but also building a lasting relationship based on trust and mutual benefit."

Negotiating with Ned Stark, a man known for his shrewdness and honor, would be no easy feat, especially since they had been selling their excess grain for alarmingly high prices due to the North's desperation and lack of options.

"That is going to be one of your main tasks. The other one will be to get close to the Mage, find out what kind of person he is, and what his plans are. Someone with as much power as him will not be content with just sitting in that clinic of his, healing people for a few silvers."

"Margery will be going with you. I have already explained what her duties are going to be, and she will help you in this matter."

"Winterfell has become a pivotal center of events, and we need to understand the true nature of what is happening there."

"Rest assured, Grandmother, I will accomplish this task to the best of my abilities."

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Standing on the balcony, he surveyed the sprawling scenery that stretched out before him. A voice from behind interrupted his thoughts, prompting him to turn around.

"You summoned me, brother?" the voice inquired.

"Yes, I received a letter from Tyrion today," he replied, his tone tinged with intrigue. "He shared some intriguing news."

"Has the Mage been successful in healing him?" the voice asked, brimming with curiosity.

"It appears so. Not entirely, but he is expected to make a full recovery within a month," he answered, relaying the information.

"Are you certain?" came the follow-up question.

"Yes, the men I dispatched with him have confirmed the same," he assured.

"That's indeed wonderful news," the voice acknowledged warmly.

"Yes... wonderful, but it alters the situation," he muttered, his voice tinged with contemplation.

"You're still adamant about not making him the heir, aren't you?" the voice challenged, filled with concern.

"I haven't made up my mind yet," he admitted, his tone reflecting the conflict within him.

"You knew this was always a possibility when you sent him to Winterfell." the voice reminded, its words laced with a sense of inevitability.

"Yes, but I had been hoping to find a way to make Jaime see reason and relinquish his white cloak to take his rightful place," he replied, a mix of determination and uncertainty in his voice.

"Very well. I doubt I will be able to change your mind after all these years. Has he been able to find any other information about the changes occurring in Winterfell?"

"Regrettably, not much beyond what we already knew. But he seems to have established a favorable rapport with the Mage, so his time there hasn't been entirely fruitless," he responded, a tinge of disappointment lacing his words.

"Things have been changing too fast in the past few years. What are you going to do?" the voice inquired, eager to understand his plans.

"I am going to wait for Tyrion to return before I make my final decision," he stated, his voice resolute.

**Chapter - 38**

Finding the harbor wasn't a daunting task; it stood out as the bustling heart of Dragonstone, teeming with activity and vibrant energy. Spotting Stannis and Davos engaged in conversation with a group of sailors, I approached them with a polite smile.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," I interjected, mindful of their engrossed discussion.

Their attention shifted towards me, their expressions blending surprise and curiosity. "Ser Healer, you're not interrupting; we were just deliberating on how we will send the first shipment of dragonglass to Winterfell," Stannis clarified, intrigued by my unexpected presence.

"Already?" I exclaimed, taken aback by the swift progress.

"We already had a stockpile of dragonglass at our disposal, which I am planning to dispatch soon. However, the subsequent shipment might take longer as we'll need to commence mining operations," Stannis explained, shedding light on their preparations.

"I understand. I'm in no rush for it, so please take your time with the arrangements," I reassured him, appreciating their dedication to securing the valuable resource.

Returning to our earlier topic, Stannis inquired, "Have you concluded your exploration?"

"Yes, the castle is truly remarkable, even its interior holds fascinating secrets. However, I merely wanted to inform you that I will be taking my leave now. I have thoroughly examined Lady Shireen once more, and she is in perfect health," I conveyed, eager to provide reassurance.

Stannis regarded me, his brow furrowing. "I was hoping to express my gratitude for all you have done. Are you certain you must depart so soon?" he queried.

"Regrettably, yes, Lord Stannis. I have pressing obligations awaiting me in Winterfell, necessitating my swift return," I explained, a touch of urgency lacing my words.

"Very well," Stannis acquiesced, understanding the weight of duty. "I shall arrange for one of my ships to transport you to White Harbor."

"There's no need, Lord Stannis. I have my own means of travel, and I wouldn't wish to burden you with such trivial tasks," I politely declined, acknowledging his gracious offer.

He appeared on the verge of insisting, but then a flicker of realization crossed his features. He remembered the extraordinary swiftness with which I had arrived at Dragonstone, realizing that a slow ship wouldn't suit my needs. With a nod, he relented, respecting my decision.

With our exchange concluded, I set off towards the uninhabited side of the island, the very spot where I had initially landed.

As I got closer to my destination Vaylara's annoyance was palpable as she glided beside me, her frustration growing with each passing moment.

“So, how do you plan on returning, then?”

I glance at her, acknowledging the persistence of her inquiry. It's about time I provide a clear answer.

“I intend to fly, of course.”

Vaylara's eyes widened with disbelief, her voice tinged with skepticism.

“Flying requires much more than just raw power. It's a skill that requires finesse and time to master.”

I shrug nonchalantly, brushing off her concerns.

“Eh, you're overcomplicating it. Flying is a lot simpler than you think.”

Vaylara opens her mouth to retort, but before any words escape, Wings sprout from my back.

With a single powerful flap, I ascend into the open sky, leaving Vaylara momentarily speechless below.

Having reached the desired altitude, I settled into a glide, gracefully navigating northwards through the open sky. And just as the wind whispered around me, carrying me toward my destination, Vaylara reappeared beside me, her expression a mix of defeat and resignation.

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The ship's gentle sway provided a soothing rhythm, allowing him to delve into his thoughts regarding his upcoming adventure to Winterfell. Although he lacked a solid reason for the visit, his penchant for exploring intriguing destinations would certainly come in handy this time.

As he immersed himself in contemplation, Ellaria approached from behind and encircled him with her arms. Her touch brought comfort and familiarity.

"What occupies your mind so deeply, my love?" she inquired, her voice laced with curiosity.

"The same enigma that, I'm sure, plagues the thoughts of every noble in Westeros at the moment," he replied, his gaze fixed on the horizon.

"Hmm, it won't be long until we reach White Harbor, provided we don't make any unnecessary stops along the way," Ellaria remarked.

"Unfortunately, my dear, we have to make a detour to Dragonstone today for resupplying. However, it shouldn't delay us by more than a day," he explained, a tinge of annoyance in his voice.

Engrossed in each other's company and the tranquility of the breeze, they savored the moment before he remembered something important.

"How are the girls faring?" he inquired, his concern evident.

A smile graced his paramour's face as she responded, "Nymeria's seasickness has improved, although she still experiences occasional bouts. As for Obara, she's simply restless due to the lack of activities aboard the ship."

"I believe you should go and inform them that we will soon be reaching port. That should lift their spirits," he suggested, a tender note in his voice.

It wasn't long before the sight of Dragonstone's port emerged on the horizon, marking their impending arrival.

The ship gradually approached Dragonstone's port, its imposing cliffs and ancient castle looming ahead. The crew prepared to dock, and as the vessel glided into position, a sense of anticipation filled the air.

Ellaria took her leave, gracefully navigating the deck and disappearing below to deliver the news to their daughters. Meanwhile, he remained on the ship's deck, taking in the sight of Dragonstone with a mix of fascination and nostalgia. The island held a rich history, once home to the formidable Targaryens and their dragons.

As his gaze fell upon the stark, volcanic landscape, a rush of memories inundated his mind. It had been ages since he last trod upon this island, a time when his desert sister held sway as the lady of the castle.

The recollection of those tender moments spent with his dear sister was bittersweet, for it was swiftly eclipsed by a surge of anger, fueled by the knowledge that the brother of the Usurper now ruled over this land. But revenge simmered within him, a fire that would not be extinguished easily.

This journey, he knew, would grant him a valuable understanding of the new dynamics at play—variables that would either aid or impede his quest for vengeance. With determination etched upon his features, he vowed to make the most of this opportunity.

Lost in his contemplation, he started at the sound of approaching footsteps. Ellaria reappeared, accompanied by Nymeria and Obara. The presence of his beloved and their daughters brought him back to the present, momentarily grounding him in their shared reality.

The girls, now brimming with excitement, ran towards him, their youthful energy uncontained. Nymeria's complexion had regained its color, and Obara's restlessness had transformed into eager anticipation.

"We're finally making port!" Nymeria exclaimed, her voice filled with relief.

"Yes, my darling," he replied, beaming at their enthusiasm. "Dragonstone awaits us for a brief respite before our journey to Winterfell."

As the ship docked and the gangplank extended, they disembarked onto the ancient stones of Dragonstone. The island's eerie beauty surrounded them—the remnants of a forgotten empire.

Soon, they found themselves in the market next to the port , where merchants and traders had set up temporary stalls. The scent of spices and exotic goods filled the air, mingling with the sea breeze. He led his family through the bustling crowd, his eyes scanning for supplies that would sustain them on their onward journey.

He dispatched his men to secure the necessary provisions and set about exploring the surroundings. To his surprise, the island buzzed with activity, far more bustling than he had remembered from his previous visit. Curiosity piqued, he couldn't help but wonder what had transpired to attract such a multitude of ships and people.

It didn't take long for him to uncover the reason behind the heightened activity after a quick chat with one of the locals. It appeared that Lord Stannis's daughter had contracted greyscale, and the White Mage had journeyed to Dragonstone to cure her.

Astounded by the speed of the mage's success at curing an incurable disease, he lamented the missed opportunity to meet the Healer. However, a small part of him was relieved that the encounter hadn't transpired, as it would have necessitated interaction with the stoic Lord of Dragonstone.

With provisions secured and pleasantries exchanged with the locals, they embarked on their ship, bidding farewell to Dragonstone. As they set sail, the island gradually receded from view, becoming a mere silhouette on the horizon. The ship's gentle sway resumed, offering a comforting rhythm that soothed his thoughts. His mind now brimmed with visions of Winterfell and the adventures that awaited them in the North.

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Anxiety fuels his desperate sprint through the nightmarish hallway. His heart races, pounding in his chest. Fear grips him, pushing him to his limits. The hallway, shrouded in darkness, stretches endlessly ahead, mocking his efforts to escape.

The clanging of chains reverberates through the air, haunting his every step. Their relentless pursuit never falters, growing louder with each passing moment. He pushes himself harder, trying to outpace the ominous sound, but the chains remain steadfastly close, a constant reminder of his impending doom.

Suddenly, his foot catches on an unseen obstacle, and he crashes to the ground. As he struggles to rise, the hallway morphs into a room of distorted mirrors. The rattling chains fade away, replaced by an eerie silence that fills him with unease.

Confusion washes over him as he tries to comprehend the abrupt transformation. His own reflections in the mirrors come to life, closing in on him with malevolent intent. Their whispered pleas for salvation echo through the air, sending shivers down his spine.

Then, a horrifying sight unfolds before him—the reflections start bleeding profusely from every pore. Blood drips down their distorted faces, staining the mirrors with a surreal crimson hue. The horror of the scene intensifies, engulfing him in a suffocating nightmare.

In a jolt, he awakens, drenched in sweat, his heart pounding against his ribcage. Trembling, he frantically checks his body, his hands trembling over his skin, searching for any sign of wounds. Gradually, he realizes that it was all just a haunting dream, a mere illusion crafted by his restless mind.

“Nightmare… It was just a nightmare” he mutters.

Relief washes over him as he takes in his surroundings. He finds solace in the safety of the ship's cabin, its sturdy walls shielding him from the terrors of the night. The journey back to the citadel offers hope, a sanctuary far removed from the darkness that haunted his dreams.

He sits upright on his bunk, his breath still rapid from the remnants of the nightmare. His mind races, piecing together the fragments of the dream that shook him to his core. Determination flickers in his eyes, fueled by the urgency to protect others from the looming threat.

Casting a quick glance around the dimly lit cabin, he gathered his thoughts. His voice quivered with a mixture of fear and resolve as he muttered to himself.

"I need to warn everyone. Whatever knowledge we could gain from that monster is not worth the danger. He must be killed and not allowed to continue his masquerade as a healer."

**Chapter - 39**

It only took an hour for Vaylara to stop giving me the silent treatment, and since I had pretty much figured out how to keep my wings on autopilot, she started teaching me the basic theory of magic.

Pretty soon, I had realized that magic was very similar to coding. It seemed that even reincarnation was not enough to help me escape that particular pain in the ass. Thankfully, this time around, I was a lot smarter, and the end result was nothing as bland as a shitty webpage. That kept me pretty motivated to learn all I could.

The only problem now was that I had to learn another freaking language that seemed harder than Mandarin for some fucking reason. I mean, I know that shrinking an entire sentence into one letter is efficient, but ughh.

One thing I noticed was that the magic I was being taught was not the Harry Potteresque "throw colors in people's faces" kind of magic, but more like pentagrams and circles type of magic. While it wasn't the fast battle kind of magic I had in mind, it was very versatile.

After approximately half a day of learning, Vaylara finally felt confident enough to allow me to attempt my first spell. Although I was tempted to try it while flying, I decided it would be safer to practice on solid ground.

Unfortunately, I was currently soaring over water, but I spotted a few islands that appeared to be suitable for a brief stop.

I managed to locate a relatively secluded section of one of the islands and landed in a spacious clearing.

"Let's start with something small," she suggested, raising her hand. A vibrant blue spell circle materialized above her palm, and lightning began to crackle within it. Each fork of lightning that veered too far from the circle's boundaries was drawn back inward, creating a captivating visual display.

"As you can observe, this circle consists of only two runes: lightning and containment. Now, it's your turn to give it a try."

As I raised my hand, a wave of uncertainty washed over me. "Um, how exactly do I create the circle?" I inquired, feeling a bit lost.

Vaylara chuckled, finding amusement in my novice status. "Oh, my dear fledgling magician, worry not. The circle creation comes later. For now, you can either draw it by hand on a parchment or trace it on the ground."

Letting out a sigh, I realized she might be teasing me. "Well, I suppose drawing on the ground it is, since I don't have any parchment with me... Unless, of course, I could borrow a few pages from your grimoire?" I proposed, hoping for a momentary solution.

She responded with a mischievous smile, giving me a warning tinged with amusement. "You're certainly welcome to try, but I doubt you'll be pleased with the outcome."

That was a clear rejection. Accepting the reality, I picked up a nearby stick and began etching the runes onto the ground, adjusting my work based on Vaylara's instructions.

Before long, the familiar crackling sound of lightning filled the air, accompanied by a sense of exhilaration. I gazed at the ball of swirling electricity before me, a wide grin spreading across my face.

"Your rapid learning is truly impressive. It gives me hope that this journey won't be as lengthy as I had initially anticipated," she remarked, a genuine smile gracing her face.

The crackling lightning dissipated as I ceased fueling the spell, yet my grin remained firmly in place.

"I want to attempt a more challenging spell," I declared, my enthusiasm driving me forward.

Vaylara regarded me for a moment before her grimoire floated in front of me, its pages flipping on their own accord.

"Choose whichever you desire. By now, your reading skills should be sufficient to grasp the essence of each spell," she encouraged, her voice filled with confidence.

Without hesitation, I delved into the pages, scanning through the array of spells presented before me. After a few minutes of browsing, one particular spell caught my attention.

Although I couldn't fully comprehend the intricacies of the spell, I sensed that it stood a few tiers above the basic one I had just attempted. Furthermore, my inner yearning for fiery spectacles seemed to align with the nature of this spell.

Vaylara approached me from behind, peering over my shoulder to examine my choice. "Quite a significant leap in complexity here. Are you certain you wouldn't prefer to start with something simpler?" she questioned.

"No, it doesn't appear overly complicated. It may be time-consuming, but I believe it will provide me with a deeper understanding of the runes," I responded, my determination unwavering.

While the sensible choice would have been to start with a smaller spell, such as casting a fireball or something of that nature, I already possessed the ability to do so using my shard powers. Therefore, I resolved to push myself further.

Vaylara arched an eyebrow, pausing for a moment before giving me her approval. "Very well, if you have the confidence, go ahead," she conceded.

With her encouragement and occasional guidance to address any uncertainties, I diligently transcribed the intricate runes from the grimoire onto the floor.

By the time I was done night had fallen and the product of my efforts could be seen etched on the ground, a grand pentagram adorned the ground, its lines replaced by elaborate letters, forming a complex symbol.

Somewhere during the process of drawing the circle, a realization dawned upon me. The spell wasn't just about summoning a more potent fire; it involved cursed flames. However, my excitement and eagerness had overridden any concern I may have had, and I disregarded the ominous implications of the spell's name.

Eager for feedback, I turned to Vaylara and posed the question, "So, how did I do?"

"It's passable," Vaylara responded, her tone hinting at a mixture of approval and caution.

I simply shrugged, content with her assessment. Good enough was sufficient for me.

Without any hesitation, I commenced channeling my magic through specific components of the spell, following the precise intervals I had learned. As I poured my energy into the incantation, I witnessed an inferno materialize before me. A sense of exhilaration overwhelmed me, and I couldn't help but burst into maniacal laughter.

However, my elation was short-lived. I soon noticed that the flames were growing beyond my control. Concerned, I ceased channeling my magic, attempting to halt the expansion of the fiery manifestation. But to my horror, cutting off my magic seemed to have the opposite effect. The flames accelerated their growth, taking on the shape of a colossal serpent that consumed the entire clearing, leaving us trapped at the center.

"Is it supposed to be doing that?" I inquired, my voice tinged with concern.

Vaylara's coy smile persisted as she responded, "I have no idea. Cursed fire is known for its unpredictable nature, especially during its manifestations."

I stared at her, wide-eyed and incredulous. It became evident that she harbored some petty resentment towards me for my bullshit powers, but dwelling on that now would serve no purpose. Instead, I redirected my focus towards the escalating inferno, which continued to grow despite my ceasing to channel my magic into it.

The aura surrounding the flames became increasingly sinister, while their hue deepened into a darker shade of crimson.

"In hindsight, attempting to summon cursed fire as my second spell was perhaps not the wisest decision," I admitted, acknowledging my lapse in judgment.

The colossal serpent locked its gaze with mine, poised to strike at any moment. I stood frozen, paralyzed by uncertainty. However, to my surprise, the serpent's attention shifted towards Vaylara, seemingly reconsidering its target.

I sensed a flicker of basic intelligence within the serpent's gaze as it seemingly reached a conclusion. Recognizing the futility of attacking us, particularly the spirit accompanying me, it abruptly changed its course, slithering away from our direction and disappearing into the dense forest. In its wake, the unrelenting blaze continued its destructive path, engulfing everything in its fiery embrace.

The serpent's retreat brought a momentary respite, but the devastation left in its wake served as a stark reminder of the havoc that had been unleashed. The crackling flames devoured the surroundings, reducing them to a charred landscape. The trail of destruction left behind served as a haunting testament to the raw power of the cursed fire.

Overwhelmed by the chaos unfolding before me, I turned to Vaylara, desperately seeking answers. "What did I do wrong?" I implored, eager to rectify my mistake.

Vaylara responded, her tone matter-of-fact, "You didn't do anything fundamentally wrong. You simply forgot to incorporate a control mechanism into the spell. However, even if you had, it wouldn't have made much difference in this situation. You decided to summon hellfire in an area that is inherently steeped in sin."

Her explanation came without much concern for the rapidly spreading inferno that surrounded us, growing with alarming speed.

"What do you mean, 'steeped in sin'? I'm not even sure where we..."

As the words began to form on my lips, a surge of realization washed over me. I mentally conjured a map, trying to discern our precise location. It quickly became evident that I had been flying from Dragonstone to Winterfell, and I had unknowingly landed on an island situated midway between the two.

"Damn it! We're on Three Sisters," I muttered under my breath, the gravity of the situation sinking in.

Vaylara, ever quick-witted, couldn't help but comment, "Ah, so you've figured out our location. Do enlighten me."

Realizing the implications, I admitted, "It's an island with a notorious history of being infested with nothing but pirates."

Understanding dawned upon Vaylara's face as she connected the dots. "Ah, that would certainly explain the rapid spread of the fire," she acknowledged.

"How do I stop it?" I urgently pressed, my mind racing for a solution.

Vaylara's response came with a hint of reproach, "Shouldn't you have considered that before? Regardless, it's too late now. Once you severed your connection to the spell, the fire cannot be extinguished, especially given the sin-infested environment you chose."

Frustration welled up within me as I muttered, "There should have been a warning."

Vaylara, still maintaining her composure, replied dryly, "There is a warning. It is on the next page."

"That makes no sense!" I protested, feeling a mixture of confusion and irritation.

"Of course, it does! The spell was developed through extensive trial and error. Naturally, the side effects would only become apparent after its creation. It's your own fault for being too eager to proceed without reading the fine print," Vaylara retorted.

"Fortunately, we're on an island, so the fire should be contained within its borders," she added, seemingly unperturbed by the escalating disaster surrounding us.

As the intensity of the heat reached an unbearable level, I reluctantly acknowledged the futility of my efforts. With a heavy heart, I took to the skies, seeking refuge from the growing discomfort. From above, I could make out the serpent tearing its way through the ships that were desperately trying to escape. I watched helplessly as the relentless inferno consumed the entire island, leaving behind nothing but a desolate, scorched wasteland.

While I was no saint, condemning an island full of people, even a pirate infested one to a fiery death due to a mistake I made, left a bitter taste in my mouth.

The haunting cries of anguish carried by the wind pierced through the air, serving as a grim reminder of the devastation caused by my ill-fated spell.

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A/N: Sorry about the late updates guys I went from Student to Unemployed… again. So it's kinda hard to get in that writing zone after having gone through an average of 15 rejections per day. Anywho, onto more important stuff, I am desperately in need of a BetaReader to pick up the pace on this story and I don't really know how to go about doing that so i'm just putting it out there to anyone interested.

A/N: Hey everyone, sorry for the long gap... again. The monsoon has started, and while I'm happy that it's no longer 50 degrees outside, it comes with a wave of flu that has made me write this chapter in a cough syrup-induced haze, which I'll leave for you guys to decide if it's good or not.

Anyway, if you want to read eight more chapters, consider checking out "elfon" on Pa treon.

**Chapter - 40**

In need of solace, I sought refuge in the depths of my private forest, skipping Winterfell entirely. Thankfully Vaylara understood what I needed, so she let me have the solitude I craved.

My emotions were in disarray. Throughout my time in Westeros, I had engaged in numerous morally questionable deeds.

Within twenty-four hours of my arrival in this familiar world, I had indirectly caused the death of another human being, justifying it as self-defense without a second thought.

In the beginning, I had convinced myself that this realm wasn't my true reality; my fragility barred me from the luxury of risking life and limb in the name of some higher moral code. The specter of death loomed in myriad forms, making the concept of mercy an unaffordable luxury.

Yet, as time passed, such justifications crumbled. I was no longer the feeble entity I once was.

The real source of my turmoil wasn't the remorse over my brazen attempt at that disastrous spell, nor was it the weight of countless lives extinguished in its fiery aftermath that weighed on me. Given the chance, I would have eagerly pitted myself against the island's pirate denizens, besting them with nothing more than the strength of my own hands.

What truly incensed me was the paralysis of my thoughts at the first sign of things going beyond my control—an unexpected twist that left me reeling, utterly unprepared and exposed. It was this vulnerability, this sudden seizing of my faculties when faced with the unforeseen, that ignited a storm of frustration within me.

As I journeyed deeper into self-reflection, an unsettling truth began to crystallize: I had grown complacent, even arrogant. But why? What was the root of this unwelcome transformation?

The answer now seemed glaringly obvious—I had drifted from my original purpose. My relentless quest for power, once driven by a clear objective, had become aimless. My mastery over magic, which had flourished out of sheer curiosity, had indeed made me stronger, but it was a strength born from having too much time on my hands, rather than a necessity.

This shift wasn't inherently detrimental; however, it had a profound effect on my psyche. The primal fear of death, which had once spurred me on, now seemed a distant memory. This fear had been the catalyst for my pursuit of power, pushing me to limits I hadn't dared to explore before. Yet, here I was, having achieved—or perhaps, surpassed—my initial goals, only to find myself adrift in a sea of newfound power, without direction or purpose. This lack of a driving force, this absence of a goal, had unwittingly led me to a state of complacency, leaving me vulnerable to the very arrogance I had once despised.

Engulfed in a sea of contemplation, I was oblivious to the outside world. Thus, the silent breach into my forest went unnoticed, until suddenly, a pair of arms wrapped around me from behind, snapping me back to reality.

"Freya? How did you know I was back?" I questioned, caught off guard.

"I didn't, actually. Fenrir led me here," was the gentle response that came.

"What seems to be troubling you?" she probed, her eyes mirroring a deep concern.

"Nothing," I hastily responded, a lie so thin it barely veiled the turmoil within.

Her gaze, however, pierced through my facade with ease.

I could never hold a poker face.

Confronted by her unwavering gaze, my defenses crumbled. "I suppose I'm just a bit lost," I conceded, the words tasting of both defeat and relief. It was an admission that, while difficult, felt necessary—a step towards confronting the disquiet that had taken root within.

"Did something happen at Dragonstone?" Freya's inquiry came laced with worry, her eyes scanning my troubled features for clues.

"No, Dragonstone unfolded just as I had anticipated. The princess was healed without a hitch," I offered, aiming to quell her apprehensions. "It's merely that... an unforeseen event occurred on the return journey, a product of my own hubris."

Freya's gaze intensified, her eyes seeking the unspoken truths lurking behind mine.

"Would you like to talk about it?" she gently asked.

"Not particularly," I confessed, my eyes veering off, hesitant to tread through the murky waters of my reflections.

"Enough about me. What did I miss while I was away?" I redirected, hoping to steer Freya away from my inner turmoil. My plea hung in the air, a silent wish for respite from the introspection that gnawed at me.

Even though she didn't seem to want to let the matter rest, she relented and thankfully did not press the issue. "Nothing much has happened here, But If you were hoping for a quiet couple of days where you could hide away in your forest, I'm going to have to disappoint you. Apparently, a few lords from the far south are coming here seeking an audience with you," she said with a small smile, fully aware of my disdain for such political matters.

I sighed in dread, not looking forward to the nuisances that lay ahead.

Interacting with more nobility was the last thing I wanted right now. On the other hand, I wasn't even sure what I was going to do for a while, as I did not want to experiment with magic again unless I was sure of what I was doing or was far enough away from civilization. Perhaps I would go beyond the wall before I started setting more stuff on fire again.

Freya must have seen the reluctance on my face. "But if you are that against it, I'm sure no one needs to know you're back just yet," she suggested, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

Well, I would happily set aside my existential crisis to deal with at a later date if Freya was implying what I think she is implying.

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After fooling around for a bit while we laid on the bed of my makeshift house, it's hard to label it 'makeshift' any longer.

What began as a humble abode amidst the wilderness had now expanded beyond my initial imaginings, thanks in no small part to the worm I engineered specifically for construction purposes. This creature, a marvel of my own making, consumes dirt and rocks, excreting a substance akin to concrete to fortify the walls of my expanding domain.

The house, impressive as it stands, merely scratches the surface of the expansive subterranean world I've created. A vast network of underground spaces and interconnected tunnels stretches out beneath the earth, a testament to my architectural ambition and the worm's industrious labor.

I didn't really have any idea what I was going to use them for, other than as a lab and some storage, but I'm sure I'll find some use for it eventually.

I noticed Freya shifting her gaze toward me, snapping me out of my reverie.

She seemed to hesitate, gathering her courage before speaking. "There's something important I need to ask you."

Alarm bells rang in my head at her words, though I managed to keep my expression neutral.

She paused momentarily, carefully observing my reaction before she proceeded, "Some of my friends have inquired if you're willing to mentor more apprentices."

The suggestion immediately elicited a sense of unease in me. With the amount of tasks I was already juggling, adopting more responsibilities seemed utterly impractical. However, before I could voice my hesitation, she continued.

"I know you're overwhelmed with your research and various duties," she said, her tone gentle yet sincere. "And I'm conscious that I have much to learn before I can significantly contribute to the field of healing. However, I think if I begin teaching..."

Her words dwindled into silence, her unfinished proposal lingering between us. A shadow of doubt passed over her face as she braced for my potential objections.

"Are you sure? My help might be limited to just writing a few additional books," I warned, my statement laden with caution.

"It's something I want to do," she admitted, her nervousness palpable yet underscored by a surprising determination.

Reflecting on her proposal, I realized it had its merits, considering the long-term benefits. Initially, the thought of having additional apprentices appealed to me, primarily to offload some of the routine work. However, the notion of teaching a large group about complex biology wasn’t exactly appealing.

Freya, on the other hand, had the smarts to handle the teaching. She was exceptionally bright, the kind of smart that would have seen her excel in my previous world. So, I was confident she could take on the teaching aspect.

But my vision went beyond just teaching. Ideally, I wanted this to evolve into a teaching hospital that could eventually operate independently, without my constant oversight.

Even with Freya overseeing, for me to trust them with treating my patients under my supervision, they'd need to meet very stringent criteria.

If I pursue this path, I fear I'll be responsible for introducing something profoundly vile into this world.

*Entrance Exams*

But I remembered something my dad always said: if you're going to do something, do it right.

So with a heavy heart I say, "Okay..."

Her reaction was immediate and full of excitement.

"Thank you, thank you..." she began, but I had to interject.

"But," I cautioned, "I'll outline the general framework for the levels of knowledge and responsibilities, but that's as far as my involvement goes. I'm not good at teaching."

"Don't say that, you're really good at teaching," she countered, her tone tinged with mild confusion."You taught me so well."

"Ahh, that's because you're pretty," I responded with a straight face.

A cascade of emotions danced across her features, morphing from puzzlement to a flush of embarrassment, before crystallizing into indignation.

Then, she playfully began to swat at me, a mock battle ensuing.

"I'm kidding. I mean, certainly, your beauty is undeniable, but the real reason teaching you was so easy is because you're incredibly smart," I hastened to explain.

At first, she looked annoyed, but then her gaze softened, searching mine for a few moments before she cuddled into me and whispered one last thank you.

Ah, life was good, but why did I have this nagging feeling that I was forgetting something important.

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Archmaester Vance Pov

At last, he found sanctuary within the citadel's protective embrace. The respite from the restless nights, where slumber fled the moment his eyes shut, was a profound relief. Yet, he could not afford to succumb to the comfort of safety—not just yet.

His resolve was unyielding: he must ensure the demise of the Cursed Mage as soon as possible.

The initial step was imperative—he had to inform his peers.

"Archmaester Vance, I didn't expect your return so soon," remarked someone upon seeing him.

Without pausing for pleasantries, he disregarded the greeting. With a sense of urgency propelling him, he hastened towards the citadel's summit, where he knew his fellow Archmaesters had convened.

Vance burst into the meeting room, and luckily, a meeting was already in progress. The room went silent, all eyes on him.

"Archmaester Vance, you've returned so soon? And with such urgency, what happened on your mission?" inquired someone, observing his hurried stride.

A wave of discomfort passed through Vance, but it quickly gave way to indignation as he recalled the recent events. "He's a demon, practicing blood magic in secrecy. It's imperative we stop him once and for all, along with anyone associated with him."

He went on to reveal everything he had witnessed upon arriving at that cursed site. Vance detailed the hiring of a mercenary to secure what was needed. He also recounted the chilling sight of the mercenary's return, in a terrifying state, bleeding profusely from every orifice before collapsing lifeless.

A profound silence enveloped the room, the faces of those around him marked by grave concern. This quiet, yet intense response, assured Vance that his fellow Archmaesters fully grasped the severity of the situation.

After a brief but intense deliberation, they came to a unanimous decision.

"The assassination of the White Mage of Winterfell shall be our paramount objective. Considering the threat he poses, we are compelled to act decisively to neutralize him by whatever means available. The practice of magic in a world of learning and knowledge is intolerable. It must be eradicated completely."

"Does anyone propose an alternative approach to handling the mage, or are we in agreement to move forward as originally planned?"

As the Archmaesters took turns presenting their strategies, each proposal proving to be more clever and sinister than the one before, Vance experienced a deep sense of relief flooding through him.

The council's unanimous dedication to swiftly addressing the threat renewed his hope. He began to believe that a peaceful night's sleep, untainted by the specters of his fears, might finally be achievable.

As Vance's spirits were momentarily lifted by the council's swift declaration, he began to notice a slight buzzing. It slowly escalated from a mere annoyance to an ominous cacophony.

"What infernal noise is that?" an Archmaester voiced, echoing the room's growing annoyance.

With apprehension tightening his chest, Vance made his way to the door that opened onto the citadel's uppermost balcony, drawn by the growing tumult outside.

As he thrust the door open, he was confronted with a scene of unspeakable horror.

A vast swarm of locusts engulfed the citadel, their sheer mass obscuring the sun and plunging the day into an eerie, premature dusk.

A chilling realization dawned on Vance: his escape had been no stroke of luck. He had been deliberately released, a pawn manipulated by the mage to uncover his co-conspirators.

There was no doubt in Vance's mind about who had orchestrated this catastrophe.

Overwhelmed by despair, Vance collapsed to his knees, his voice reduced to a mere whisper,

*"Seven save us."*

As if on cue, the swarm descended, swooping down on the tower with a ferocity that mirrored his own nightmares.

Chaos erupted in the heart of Oldtown, a black cloud that seemed to swallow the city whole. But for Vance, the external pandemonium faded into the background, overshadowed by the immediate battle for survival.

His hands moved frantically, swiping at the air, as he tried to get rid of the relentless swarm of locusts. These pests, driven by some incomprehensible force, seemed to have a personal vendetta against him. And every time he tried to take a breath more of them came at him, cutting off his air supply more.

His movements were frenetic, almost desperate, as he flailed against the air, trying to stop the onslaught of locusts. These minuscule assailants, propelled by an inexplicable force, seemed singularly focused on him, especially his mouth and nose. With every breath Vance attempted, it felt as though the swarm intensified, each locust vying to cut off his lifeline, making air an increasingly scarce commodity.

Breathing became an impossible task. The onset of panic was swift, a rising tide that threatened to drown him from within. His vision began to blur, the edges darkening as if night were falling at an unnatural pace.

He stumbled, his body rebelling, no longer responsive to his commands. Collapsing, the ground rushed up to meet him.

As consciousness waned, his world narrowed to a single point of focus — a pair of haunting, red eyes. Eyes that had stalked the periphery of his nightmares, now materialized in the flesh, presiding over his demise.

And then, as if snuffed out by a cruel gust of wind, everything receded into oblivion.