# Chapter - 45

"What in the seven hells happened?"

The question pierced the oppressive silence of the chamber. The acolyte before her trembled, his eyes darting around like a cornered animal.

Fear was etched on his face, and he jumped at every shadow and breeze.

His stuttering was beginning to grate on her nerves, but she knew it wasn’t his fault.

She had heard numerous tales of the nightmare that befell the citadel—accounts she might have doubted had she not witnessed the remnants of the swarm dispersing with her own eyes from Highgarden.

She didn't dare to imagine what it must have been like in the midst of it.

But dwelling on that was not an option right now; she had more pressing matters to attend to.

Before she could glean any coherent information from the terrified acolyte, the heavy wooden door creaked open. One of her men-at-arms stepped in, his expression grim.

"Please tell me you have something," she demanded, without bothering to hide the urgency in her voice.

“The swarm that descended on the citadel had a specific purpose. Other than the seven archmaesters, whose bodies have been mutilated beyond recognition, nobody was harmed.”

Her heart sank. It confirmed her worst fears. Those fools had meddled where they shouldn't have and paid the ultimate price for it.

She had a pretty good idea of who they had pissed off. For who else could it be.

Olenna wanted to curse the stupidity of men if it wasn't equally useful half the time.

It could not have come at a worse time.

Her grandchildren were about to reach Winterfell any day now.

His retaliation to whatever they had done had been swift and brutal, surpassing her expectations. Rumors had placed him at Dragonstone or Winterfell, but clearly, he had moved faster than anticipated.

Wait. No, she was thinking about this all wrong. Maybe he hadn't moved at all; perhaps he had simply sent his swarm to carry out his bidding.

That was even worse. The idea that someone could orchestrate such brutality from the other side of the world sent a shiver down her spine.

"We're dealing with someone extremely dangerous," she muttered, half to herself. "We need to act fast."

Thankfully, the smallfolk were attributing the incident at the Citadel to angering the gods and facing divine retribution.

She turned to the guard that brought her the news. "I need to write a letter to William. I don't care how, but ensure he receives it as soon as possible. He needs to know exactly what's happened here before this situation spirals further out of control. And pray that whatever grudge the mage held ended with the archmaesters."

As the man-at-arms hurried out, she added, "Wait, also let me know if my son starts doing anything foolish to escalate the situation."

Then she cast a glance at the acolyte.

His fear was palpable, and she doubted he knew anything substantial. But she needed answers, and there was nowhere else to turn for them anytime soon.

"Listen to me," she said, her tone softer yet firm. "I know you don't want to be here, and I don't want you here either. The sooner you tell me what I need to know, the sooner we can both get what we want, alright? So, now you're going to tell me everything you know. Every detail, no matter how small, about what those idiots were involved in."

The acolyte gulped and nodded. He began to speak, his words halting at first but gradually gaining confidence as he recounted the events leading up to the massacre. She listened intently, piecing together the fragments of information.

Hoping that she could find the reason.

She needed to know why.

*What the fuck* had they done to warrant such a reaction?

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Oberyn and his family broke their fast with the Starks early in the morning before preparing to leave for the clinic.

"So, are we the first ones here?" Oberyn asked as they exited the castle. His eyes wandered over the imposing architecture, the banners bearing the direwolf sigil, and the somber atmosphere of Winterfell.

"I'm afraid I don't follow, Prince Oberyn?"

"I mean, are we the first southerners to arrive to meet the infamous mage?" he asked, teasingly.

Eddard Stark shook his head. "I'm sorry to say you're the second. Tyrion Lannister has been here for a while, and the Tyrells should be arriving shortly."

Oberyn's expression darkened at the mention of the Lannisters, but he quickly composed himself. If Tyrion was already healed by the White Mage, it could disrupt many of his brother's plans. He exchanged a meaningful glance with Ellaria; they would need to send a raven to Dorne sooner than anticipated.

"I'll be frank with you, Lord Stark," Oberyn said as they walked. "Winterfell is different from what I imagined"

"I hope your journey across Westeros wasn't solely driven by curiosity, Prince Oberyn," Eddard replied, his voice as stoic as ever.

Oberyn grinned. "When the rumors are as intriguing as they are, how could a man like me resist?" Then, more seriously, he added, "I also hope the White Mage might help with my brother's gout."

"I see. How is he faring currently?"

"Doran is managing," Oberyn continued, his tone subdued. "But the gout has been getting worse. We've tried remedies from everywhere, but nothing has worked. When I heard of the White Mage's skills and what he had done in King's Landing, I hoped he might provide a solution."

"Well, here we are." Stark gestured towards a modest building ahead, with a few people lined up outside.

It appeared completely ordinary except for one striking feature: a massive direwolf, larger than any horse Oberyn had ever seen, sprawled in front of the clinic, peacefully napping while everyone seemed to ignore its presence.

Oberyn froze, a shiver running down his spine as he took in the enormous wolf, its jaws large enough to sever a man in half with one bite.

Turning to Ellaria, he saw the same unnerved expression mirrored on her face. At least he wasn't the only one seeing this, he thought.

He recalled tales of the Mage’s wolf from King’s Landing, but the reality was even more daunting.

"Come along, Prince Oberyn. You and your family need not worry about Fenrir," Stark reassured.

Oberyn didn't want to appear cowardly, so he put on a brave face and began to move forward when—

"Can I pet him?" Nymeria asked in a sweet voice. Normally, he could not refuse her, but in that moment, it felt as though his blood had frozen.

He tightened his grip on his daughters' shoulders and gently ushered them towards the clinic, doing his best to ignore the imposing presence of the massive beast.

Stark knocked on the door, and a soft voice from within called, "Come in."

They entered, greeted by the comforting warmth of the clinic that sharply contrasted with the chill outside. The walls were lined with shelves bearing jars of herbs and potions, filling the air with a pleasant aroma.

A beautiful young woman with fair, clear skin and bright, intelligent eyes looked up from her work as they stepped inside.

"Lord Stark, how may I help you today?" she inquired politely.

"Freya, Is El back yet?" Stark asked.

"No, not yet. You know how he gets when he's working on a new project. He should be back today," she replied.

"Freya, this is Prince Oberyn, his paramour Ellaria, and their daughters."

"Prince Oberyn, this is Lady Freya," Stark introduced. "She is El's apprentice and the finest healer we have in Winterfell at the moment."

He put on his most charming smile. "I see. Well, I'm sad to hear that I cannot meet the infamous Mage today, but all that disappointment has been washed away because I get to bask in your presence, my fair lady."

Freya looked puzzled, uncertain of how to respond.

"What..."

Thankfully, Ellaria intervened to break the awkward silence. "Dear, please refrain from flirting with the healer's apprentice, especially with that enormous wolf right outside. Though I must admit, Lady Freya, you are truly stunning."

Freya blushed, the color spreading across her cheeks, but she quickly composed herself. "Thank you for your kind words, Prince Oberyn, Lady Ellaria. But I'm sure you haven't come here just to flatter me. Please, let me know how I can assist you. I have a long line of patients waiting."

Oberyn chuckled softly. "My apologies for any inconvenience. I am in good health, but my brother suffers from gout, which has recently worsened. The maester in Sunspear fears he may soon lose his ability to walk unaided soon."

Freya nodded, her demeanor serious as she listened intently. "Since he couldn't travel here himself, could you describe his symptoms? It will help me understand his condition better."

Oberyn proceeded to detail his brother's symptoms as accurately as he could.

Listening attentively, Freya nodded thoughtfully. "I understand. Since it's early stages, he won't need a high dosage. I'll provide you with pills he can take daily after dinner for the next month. This should alleviate his symptoms over time. Also, advise him to reduce his meat intake."

She stepped into another room briefly and returned with a glass vial filled with small white pills.

"Here you go. This should suffice. If you notice any new symptoms, discontinue use immediately and send word."

Oberyn eyed the vial skeptically. "Is that all?"

Freya smiled. "If you were hoping to see some magic, I'm sorry to disappoint you. El makes sure to stock up the back with enough medicine for most common illnesses. While gout isn't that common, we have had a few patients come in with the disease, so you're in luck."

Oberyn nodded, accepting the vial. "Thank you, Lady Freya. We'll follow your instructions carefully."

Freya's expression softened. "I hope it helps. Was there anything else you needed?"

As much as he wanted to ask a million more questions, Oberyn decided he didn't need to rush everything today; he simply needed to be patient.

"That will be all, Lady Freya," he replied graciously.

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As much as the oppressive heat was annoying me, I couldn't keep the smirk off my face. It would have been painful if I could still feel pain, but it had been a while since I experienced any—at least the physical kind.

We had to spend another day ensuring the magic flowing into the egg had stabilized before we could drop it. On the bright side, this gave me a day to figure out how to actually get the egg to the planet's core. This was not going to be as easy as I initially thought, but I felt like I had a solution. Whether it would work or not was another question, but we were long past the point of hesitation.

I needed to design a transport capable of enduring both the intense heat and immense pressure at the core. Heat wasn't a major concern, thanks to having the best heat sink in the galaxy. However, the true challenge lay in ensuring the transport could quite literally withstand the weight of the world—at least until it reached its destination.

“The flow of magic has finally stabilized. I can't sense any inconsistencies. You should check once more,” Vaylara said from beside me.

I nodded and placed my hand on the egg and came to the same conclusion.

“Have you figured out how to get it where it needs to go?” she asked.

“Sort of. I have no clue if it will actually reach the center, but it should get close enough. No way to verify until the egg hatches.”

I used up all the leftover biomass I had to create a sandworm—not a large one, just big enough to house the egg and move comfortably. I reinforced its skin as best as I could, knowing it was a one-way trip for the worm. The pressure would eventually make it give in. I couldn't make it as sturdy as the egg shell because it needed to stretch and contract to move.

The worm wiggled slowly, and I carefully made sure the egg was connected in a way that allowed all the heat from the worm's outer skin to be absorbed directly into it, ensuring it wouldn’t burn up.

It barely took any time before it was ready.

"Go forth, my child, and fulfill your divine purpose," I declared theatrically.

Vaylara rolled her eyes at my dramatics, though a smile betrayed her amusement.

Together, we watched as the worm slowly burrowed deeper until it reached a depth where the tunnel began to collapse behind it, eventually disappearing from sight.

With a final glance at the hole, I grabbed Vaylara's book and swiftly ascended towards the surface. I had lingered underground for too long, and the discomfort was becoming unbearable. I needed some fresh air.

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A/N: If you wish to read ahead you can find 8 more chapters on my Pa treon

# **Chapter - 46**

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The icy wind whipped through my hair as I soared higher into the azure sky.

My mind drifted, lost in the exhilaration of flight. The world below shrank away, its troubles becoming distant memories with each powerful beat of my wings.

I reveled in the freedom, drinking in the crisp air and endless horizon.

Flying was a gift I'd never take for granted, a joy that renewed itself with every ascent.

Vaylara's voice cut through my reverie, tinged with impatience. "Do you plan on going anywhere besides up?"

Her words snapped me back to reality. "I... may have lost track," I admitted sheepishly.

Then, inspiration struck. "But now that you mention it, there is something I want to check."

With renewed purpose, I angled my body skyward and began to climb. Higher and higher we ascended, pushing beyond what I thought possible.

As we reached dizzying altitudes, the air thinned and the effectiveness of my wings waned, but my determination only grew stronger.

A grin spread across my face as I called out to Vaylara, "You might want to hold onto something!"

Channeling magic to my extremities, I focused my energy with intense concentration. Suddenly, we rocketed upward, propelled by explosive bursts of arcane power. The world below us shrank rapidly, becoming a tapestry of miniature landscapes.

"Wooooooooooooooo!" I shouted, my voice filled with unbridled joy as we hurtled through the thinning atmosphere.

Vaylara's voice carried a mix of awe and exasperation. "It pains me to see you waste magic like this," she chided, though I could hear the smile in her words.

I couldn't suppress a giggle. If only she knew the true extent of my power – with the magical equivalent of a nuclear reactor as my heart, depleting my reserves was a far-fetched notion. I'd have to reshape continents before feeling the slightest drain.

As we approached the boundary between sky and space, the air vanished entirely. The outer layer of my skin crystallized in the extreme cold, I was in no hurry to fix it as it was serving as a protective shield for my inner tissues. I knew I could easily regenerate later, but my more delicate areas began to protest against the harsh conditions of near-space.

Despite the discomfort, the view was breathtaking.

The curvature of the world below us, the vast expanse of stars above – it was a sight few had ever witnessed. In that moment, suspended between earth and cosmos, I felt truly limitless.

I had only seen it in pictures but seeing it in person was something else entirely.

"Well, what do you know, Westeros is not flat." I said with a smile

I mean, I wasn't a 'flat Westeros' believer or anything but I remember speaking to Maester Luwin about the lands beyond the Sunset Sea. No one had ever returned from voyages to chart what lay beyond.

When I suggested that sailing far enough would eventually loop back to Essos, the shock on his face was unexpected.

It dawned on me that everyone in this world believed it to be flat, with the sun revolving around the planet. I considered explaining the truth but then began to doubt myself. How could I be so sure when this wasn't even my original world?

After all, people on Earth took quite some time to figure out that their world wasn't flat and that the universe didn't revolve around them. Even then, some went back into denial.

I mean, planets were round because of physics and gravity, right??

Then I remembered that I was probably violating every law of physics I knew on some fundamental level every time I used my powers.

So, finally having visual confirmation that this world was indeed round came as a relief.

"What do you mean 'not flat'?" Vaylara asked, confusion evident in her voice.

"Never mind, it'll take too long to explain. I've seen all I need to," I brushed her off, not wanting to delve into a complex explanation of planetary physics.

Vaylara's tone turned dry. "Satisfied yet, or shall we continue this madness?"

"Aww, worried about me?" I teased, unable to resist the urge to prod her.

Her eyes narrowed, a retort forming on her lips. "Of course not, you—"

But her words never reached completion. A sudden, overwhelming sense of wrongness crashed over me like a tidal wave. The world tilted violently, my equilibrium shattering into a thousand pieces.

My vision began to darken, as I fought against the tide of unconsciousness, desperately clinging to awareness, but it was a battle I was rapidly losing.

"Fuck," I managed to mutter before everything went black.

The last sensation I registered was falling, plummeting from the edge of space back towards the planet below.

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Margaery's eyes sparkled with excitement as she caught sight of the ancient castle on the horizon. "Look, Brother! There it is—Winterfell," she exclaimed, her voice filled with wonder.

Willas followed her gaze with a measured smile. "Indeed, sister. The seat of House Stark." Despite his calm exterior, Willas felt a surge of relief. They had almost reached their destination, and he was weary of traveling and the biting northern cold.

Their moment of contemplation was abruptly shattered by a commotion among their guards. Before Willas could inquire about the disturbance, he heard it—a sound unlike anything he'd encountered before.

All eyes turned skyward as a dark shape hurtled from the heavens, leaving a trail of displaced clouds in its wake

"By the Seven," Willas muttered, his brow furrowed in disbelief. "What is that?"

As if in answer to his question, the plummeting form unfurled enormous wings, slowing its descent. Yet it still struck the earth with tremendous force, shaking the ground and startling the horses.

Ser Clayton, the knight in charge of their escort, was the first to snap out of surprise barked orders to his men. "Steady the horses! Don't let them bolt!"

After a few minutes of ensuring everything was fine and the horses were calmed down, Willas noticed that whatever had fallen from the sky had crashed quite close to where they currently were, and it was on the way to Winterfell anyway.

Willas, his curiosity piqued, turned to his sister. "Margaery, stay here with the guards. Ser Clayton and I will investigate."

Margaery's eyes flashed with determination. "But brother, I want to see it too!"

Willas sighed, torn between indulging his sister's curiosity and ensuring her safety. "It could be dangerous, Margaery. We don't know what we're dealing with."

"Then why are you going?" Margaery countered, her tone brooking no argument.

Willas hesitated for a moment before nodding reluctantly. "Very well, but stay close and be prepared to retreat at my word."

With that, the Tyrell siblings, accompanied by Ser Clayton and a small contingent of guards, cautiously approached the impact site. As they drew closer, they could see a small crater in the earth, smoke and dust still rising from its center.

"By the Seven," Willas muttered, leaning heavily on his cane as he peered into the crater.

Margaery, her curiosity overcoming her caution, took a step closer. "Look, brother! There's something moving in there!"

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I jolted awake with that familiar sensation of falling, but this was far more intense than any dream. A sharp sting across my face snapped me fully into consciousness.

My eyes flew open, and two immediate realities hit me:

Vaylara was right in front of me, her mouth moving frantically, though her words were lost in the deafening rush of wind and the ringing in my ears.

More alarmingly, we were plummeting towards the ground at a terrifying speed.

Craning my neck, I saw the earth rushing up to meet us. While I might survive the impact, I was clearly not at my best, and risking it seemed foolish.

With a grunt of effort, I unfurled my wings to their full span. I managed two desperate flaps before my legs made contact with the ground.

Those flaps had slowed me just enough to avoid breaking any bones. Still, the landing was far from graceful. My knees were killing me. A small crater marked our point of impact, the commotion of my landing echoing across the landscape.

Exhausted and disoriented, I let myself fall backward, wings still outstretched. I lay there, gulping in deep breaths, trying to calm my racing heart and piece together what had happened.

As my senses slowly returned to normal, I became aware of Vaylara's voice, now clear and laced with concern.

"Are you alright?" she demanded, her usual sarcasm replaced by genuine worry.

I groaned, attempting to sit up. "I think so," I managed, wincing at the soreness in my muscles. "What happened up there?"

Vaylara's expression was a mix of relief and exasperation. "I don't know, You passed out," she explained. "One moment we were at the edge of the world, the next you went limp and we started falling. I've been trying to wake you for what felt like an eternity."

I nodded slowly, processing her words. "Thank you," I said sincerely.

As I gathered my strength to stand, I couldn't help but wonder what had caused my blackout. Was it the altitude? Some unknown metaphysical limit to my powers? Or something else entirely?

As the ringing in my ears subsided, a flicker of paranoia crossed my mind.

Had Vaylara attempted to kill me? But as quickly as the suspicion arose, reason swiftly dispelled it. If she'd truly wanted me dead, I was certain she'd had countless opportunities far more convenient than this elaborate plummet from the stratosphere. Moreover, her frantic efforts to rouse me before impact contradicted any murderous intent.

Probing my inner senses, I pieced together the events leading to my blackout.

The realization struck me with the force of a battering ram – I had no one to blame but myself.

I'd given myself the *bends*, of all things.

The rapid ascent had wreaked havoc on my brain, the one organ I'd been too cautious to modify extensively. Plus the way in which I had modified the rest of my body had not helped either.

Despite my expertise in observing and subtly tweaking others' gray matter, I'd shied away from experimenting on my own neural pathways. It wasn't due to arbitrary rules I'd set for myself, unlike the original Red Queen; it was just very fucking hard, and I'd gotten lazy chasing easier pursuits.

Now, the cumulative effect of my bodily alterations and this latest escapade had caught up with me.

The irony wasn't lost on me – with all my power, in a world of magic and dragons I almost died due to my own stupidity... twice now.

As I lay there, wings splayed out like some fallen celestial being, a chuckle escaped my lips. The absurdity of the situation was too much to bear silently. My body ached, every muscle screaming in protest, yet I felt strangely alive. The earth beneath me was cool and damp, grounding me in more ways than one. The vast sky above, which had nearly claimed me, now seemed to mock my hubris. I inhaled deeply, the scent of crushed grass and disturbed soil filling my nostrils, a stark reminder of how close I'd come to disaster.

"Next time," Vaylara said, her voice a mix of concern and exasperation as she helped me sit up, "perhaps we should stick to lower altitudes?"

I nodded, wincing as pain lanced through my skull. "Duly noted. But hey, at least the view was breathtaking."

Vaylara shook her head, a reluctant smile tugging at her lips. "You're impossible, you know that?"

As I was about to retort, the distant sound of hoofs reached my ears.

I sighed, realizing the commotion of my landing hadn't gone unnoticed. "It seems my landing wasn't as quiet as I'd hoped. We have company."

Vaylara's rolled her eyes. "I'll let you deal with that. I'm quite tired from waking you up." With that, she began to fade, retreating back into her book.

I groaned, pushing myself to my feet and trying to make myself presentable. As the sound of hoofs grew louder, I couldn't help but wonder what kind of explanation I could possibly give for the crater I'd created and my rather dramatic arrival. This was going to be an interesting encounter, to say the least.

'Hopefully it's just a patrol from Winterfell who won't ask many questions.'

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# Chapter - 47

The whispers I overheard confirmed that this was not a bunch of soldiers from Winterfell.

I beat my wings once more, scattering the dust and smoke, then folded them back into my body.

As the air cleared, I saw a group of knights, their armor and demeanor betraying their foreign origin. Among them stood two figures who immediately caught my attention: a boy and a girl, clad in southern attire unsuited for the harsh Northern climate.

While the boy was unfamiliar, there was no mistaking the young woman. She bore the unmistakable features of young Natalie Dormer.

The Tyrells had reached the North.

*Damn*, I thought, recalling Ned’s warning about their impending arrival after my spectacular actions in King's Landing.

That almost felt like a lifetime ago.

They all seemed extremely on edge, which was understandable. I would have been nervous too in their position.

Their shocked expressions told me I had made quite an entrance.

I stood, brushing off my clothes, and decided to break the ice.

"Hello there. Sorry about the dramatic arrival. Hope I didn't startle you too badly."

The young man recovered first, his eyes widening with recognition. "You must be the White Mage of Winterfell. I'm Willas Tyrell, and we were just on our way to see you."

I'm not sure what gave me away but I was impressed that he had connected the dots to arrive at the correct conclusion.

I grinned. "That's me, though I prefer El."

"Where are your wings?" Margaery blurted out, then blushed.

"Ah, those. They're... tucked away for now. Magic, you know," I said with a wink.

They had seen me flying—or crashing, at least. That certainly wasn't going to cause any issues…

Oh who was I kidding. It was bound to get out at some point, so I might as well roll with it.

Willas cleared his throat. "My apologies. This is my sister, Margaery."

"Pleasure to meet you both. So, what brings the Roses of Highgarden this far north?"

"Nothing elaborate, I assure you. When word reached Highgarden about the magic healer in Winterfell, my curiosity was piqued. At first, I didn't believe the rumors—no offense—but once word spread about your deeds in King's Landing, I couldn't stay away."

"You see I hurt my knee in a jousting accident, and it never healed properly. I've come to see if you could heal it in any way."

"Ah, I see. That shouldn't take long. You might want to sit down, though."

"Really? Here, just like that?"

"Well, I'd feel like an ass if you had to limp all the way to Winterfell when I could do something about it here and now."

He sat down on the grass with a bewildered expression. One magic touch later, all the broken bone fragments in his joint were dissolved, and I healed the break properly.

"There you go, good as new. It might be a little stiff since you haven't used its full functionality for a while, but you should get used to it in an hour or so."

Willas stood up slowly, testing his healed leg. His cane was completely forgotten. He walked a bit, then a smile spread across his face, and he broke out into a sprint.

"That's probably not a good idea..." I barely finished my sentence before he tripped and face-planted into the ground.

His sister and the guards rushed towards him in worry.

"I'm fine," he said, refusing any help and getting up on his own. Thankfully, the fall hadn't caused any other injuries.

"I did tell you to take it easy for a while. While your leg is healed, your mind hasn't fully accepted the fact yet."

"Thank you so much, Lord El. I don't know how I will ever repay you."

"Meh, standard healing rates apply. You owe me a silver."

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Margaery could hardly believe her eyes. Of course, she had been hoping for her brother to be healed, but they hadn't even reached their destination yet.

She could hardly believe their luck. The person they had been looking for had literally fallen from the skies.

And he had wings.

Even though she had only gotten a brief glimpse of them, they looked majestic and beautiful.

Which were nowhere to be seen now—they had to be magic, of course. What else could they be?

No one since the Targareyans of old could claim power over the skies and that was with the help of their dragons

But he didn't need any dragons to fly

And the way in which he had healed her brother was instant and a little underwhelming.

This was not the magic that she had been envisioning in her mind

Where were the lights,the candles, the blood sacrifices that the septa had droned on and on about?

She hadn't believed her, of course, but she had expected more.

He had just touched Willas's knee, and the next moment, it was healed.

She was happy for her brother, no doubt, but now the entire reason they had come to Winterfell was done. This meant that they couldn't really stay in Winterfell much longer than it would be considered polite.

And that made the task that her grandmother had given her even harder.

"Would you like to join us as we go to Winterfell?" her brother asked.

"Sure, I was heading there anyway,"

As they continued their journey towards Winterfell, the mood among the group lightened considerably. Willas, still marveling at his newly healed leg, alternated between cautious steps and excited bursts of movement.

She had been quietly observing, waiting for the right moment. Finally, she approached El and spoke up.

"I still can't believe it," she said, shaking her head in wonder. "None of the maesters in the Citadel could do anything more than briefly numb his pain, yet you healed him in an instant. Could you tell me how your magic works, Lord El?"

He chuckled. "It's a bit complicated to explain, my lady, and honestly, I'm still figuring it out myself. Let's just say it involves a bit of divine favor and a lot of time spent reading through dusty tomes."

"I see. In King's Landing, they say you healed the entire capital in a single day. Is that true?"

"Well, the stories tend to grow in the telling," El replied with a wry smile. "But yes, I did help out with some healing there. It was quite a day."

She spent the rest of the journey getting to know the enigma that had captivated all of Westeros.

-------------------------------------------

Not many people enjoyed their jobs, especially those who toiled away at tasks they despised just to fill their stomach.

Sandor considered himself fortunate to be a guard, despite the less-than-ideal circumstances of his childhood. Being a guard, particularly working for the Lannisters, ensured that he had enough coin to keep his stomach full and even afford a warm bed with a whore now and then.

As long as he didn't get any bright ideas of course, this arrangement suited him well.

The power that came with his position was another perk he relished. But he also knew the importance of keeping his mouth shut in front of the right people and ensuring the safety of those he was charged to protect.

Maybe he had started enjoying it a bit too much, or perhaps he had become too good at his job. Either way, it had led to him being put in charge of the crown prince.

He would have been happy about the fat payday he was about to get for nothing more than following around the prince in the Red Keep, if he hadn't already interacted with the little cunt.

The first week of the boy's taunting had tested his control.

Multiple times, he had thought of gutting the little bastard and watching him choke on his own blood. But knowing his own head wouldn’t be long for his shoulders kept him from acting on those thoughts

Not reacting had been the right move, as the spoiled brat lost interest when his insults no longer elicited a reaction from him. Over time, Sandor had learned to ignore the shrill voice of the prince.

But his job had become much harder, not just because he was guarding the crown prince, but because the prince's cruelty toward everyone around him was bound to make someone snap and jam a knife in his throat regardless of the consequences.

No matter how satisfying it would be to watch the little cunt die, Sandor knew his own head would be on a pike soon after for his failure.

Now was one of those times the little cunt was being insufferable again.

The king had caught him red-handed indulging his bouts of cruelty, and he hadn’t been able to blame it on anyone else.

Watching the king try to smack some sense into his son had made Sandor's day, but he knew the boy would be even more unpleasant for the next few days.

He followed the crying and whining future king of the Seven Kingdoms, who was now on his way to complain to his mother about the injustice done to him.

Once again, Sandor thought maybe it was best to pack his shit and leave before the cruel little bastard had a chance to ascend the throne and become the next Mad King.

It wasn’t the prince's cruelty that gave rise to these thoughts—he had seen his fair share of cruel monsters in his life. It was the mix of idiocy, and power mixed with the cruelty that he knew was not going to end well.

His thoughts were halted as the brat finally reached the queen's chambers.

The queen was another matter altogether. It didn’t take a maester to figure out where the little cunt got his vices from.

He wasn’t blind—the queen had her own brand of cruelty, exercised more subtly. She didn’t need to throw tantrums or scream insults; her malice was a quiet, dangerous thing, like a coiled snake ready to strike.

But something had changed recently.

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Joffrey stormed through the halls of the Red Keep, his face twisted in a scowl. He had always been able to get what he wanted with a mere snap of his fingers, but lately, things had changed.

The courtiers who once scrambled to please him now seemed less eager, and the servants were no longer as quick to jump at his commands. It was infuriating.

Just when he was in the middle of teaching a serving maid her place his father had seen him and slapped him for doing what was his right as a crown prince.

It seemed like the entire world was out to get him, so he went to the one person he knew would always be at his side.

He burst into his mother's chambers without knocking, his voice already raised. "Mother, Father hit me for no reason!"

His mother was sitting on her balcony, staring out into the city. She turned to look at him.

"Come, my little lion, tell me what happened."

"I did nothing wrong," Joffrey replied, his voice petulant.

"Really, he hit you for no reason?" She raised an eyebrow, clearly not convinced. "Clegane, come in."

What? Why was his mother calling his dog?

"Yes, your grace," Sandor replied, stepping into the room.

"Why did my oaf of a husband hit Joffrey?" she asked, her voice cold and demanding.

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Sandor looked at the little cunt's face, which promised retribution should he tell the truth, and at the cold, uncaring eyes of the inhumanly beautiful queen. He knew who he was more afraid of.

"Um, the prince shot a crossbow at a maid, Your Grace."

"I see," Cersei replied, her voice icy and indifferent.

"Why?" she asked, turning to Joffrey.

"She didn’t get me my water when I ordered her. I don't need a reason anyway. I am the crown prince; I can do what I want to these peasants."

The queen looked annoyed at the entire situation. "Joffrey, you must understand that there are consequences for your actions. We cannot afford such reckless behavior, especially now."

Joffrey's eyes widened in disbelief. "You're supposed to support me, not criticize me!"

"I am supporting you," Cersei replied, her tone icy. "By telling you the truth. Now, if you have nothing else to say, I have important matters to attend to."

Stunned by her dismissal, Joffrey stood there for a moment, his mouth opening and closing as if searching for a retort.

"You're not my mother!"

For a split second, the cold, uncaring mask on the queen's face was replaced by an expression of fear. Then it turned into fury.

Before Joffrey could react, she smacked him across the face harder than the king had. "You better think twice before the next time you talk to your mother like that..."

Joffrey couldn't comprehend what had just happened. He stood there, shocked and silent, before running away.

Sandor stood there a few moments, comprehending what he had just seen.

"Get out of my room, Clegane," Cersei ordered, her voice shaking with anger.

He could not get out of the room fast enough.

Sandor knew the queen was terrifying before, but now she was something else entirely. Maybe the prince was onto something when he said she was an imposter.

# Chapter - 48

It took me an embarrassingly long time to realize that Margaery was flirting with me.

Actually, I still wasn't sure.

Sue me—I wasn't used to it.

Thankfully, we reached Winterfell before things escalated, and I made up an excuse to sneak away after a quick goodbye.

I headed straight to the clinic, surprised to find no line of patients. Fenrir was dozing in his usual spot, but the main area was empty. I heard Freya's voice coming from the new extension I had added to the clinic, and it hit me—class was in session.

I was late.

To my own class.

The one I was supposed to teach.

In the school I had created.

Where I was technically the headmaster.

Damn it, this had to be some sort of curse.

I quickly composed myself and silently made my way around the back.

I didn't want to interrupt Freya's first lecture.

She was probably mad enough at me already.

Damn, she looked pretty hot being serious and teaching. I should get her a pair of those strict teacher glasses.

She was explaining the basics of human biology, and I was impressed by the detailed drawing she was using. It must have taken her a long time to create because it was far beyond anything I could manage.

My drawing skills were as atrocious as my handwriting.

Even with superhuman dexterity, I couldn't fix that.

All my notes looked like a serial killer's ramblings.

I blamed it on the damn quill. God, I would kill someone for a decent pen.

Wait a minute, while I couldn’t get a ballpoint pen made, I could definitely get an ink pen crafted.

I knew how it worked; it was quite simple, honestly. I just needed to get a design sent to the blacksmith. No, wait—it was a delicate task. Did Winterfell have a jeweler? I would have to find out.

Anyway, that was a thought for later. I was getting distracted.

I turned my attention back to the lesson being taught.

It was just basic introductory stuff: the names of different organs in the body and a simple explanation of their functionalities.

I still remember the day I tried to teach Freya about human anatomy. As smart as she was, my lousy drawings couldn't help her visualize the complexity of the human body.

So, I decided to create different organs. When Freya didn’t freak out and run away, I got a little carried away and started creating and assembling all the organs like a gruesome and bloody Lego set.

It wasn't until I was creating the brain that I realized what the hell I was doing. I stopped just in time, looking at the human form I had created before adding the skin.

Thankfully, I hadn't made the actual brain yet. Instead, I created a replica that was just muscle tissue made to look like a brain and made sure to dissolve everything into biomass thoroughly as soon as the lesson was over.

Something told me that if I had gone through with my little self-induced experiment, I wouldn’t have liked the results. So, I decided I wasn’t going to try that again for a long time.

I sat at the very back of the class I had created by buying the two shops next door.

They were more than happy to sell them for the absurd amount of gold I had paid.

It wasn't like they were bad people, but they probably hadn't expected me to just agree to the first number they threw out. They definitely weren't expecting me to offer double if they packed up and left by the next day.

Which they were more than happy to do.

I don't know why I was acting like that. Maybe it was the first chance I had to use a significant chunk of the money I had earned.

Being the only competent magic doctor on the continent was a lucrative business, even though I offered my services dirt cheap.

Actually, most of it was Freya's, as she had treated far more patients than I had by now.

One day I’ll convince her to take her share. Until then, most of it would be sealed up in a safe under the clinic.

I was sure someone would be stupid enough to try and break in one day, despite Fenrir guarding the clinic most of the time. Well, he slept most of the time, but it was almost impossible to sneak past him.

Speaking of sneaking in...

I scanned the classroom and quickly found who I was looking for. He wasn’t hard to spot, being the only male student there.

He was engrossed in the lesson, a far cry from the terrified kid I first encountered.

It was quite a funny sequence of events. I was lounging around the clinic when Fenrir returned, only a few minutes after leaving. I had hoped he had gone to hunt or something.

Instead, he came back with a kid in tow.

That was strange enough, but what made it even odder was the kid's terrified expression. He didn’t make a sound as Fenrir carried him by the back of his shirt, like a giant cat carrying a kitten.

Fenrir gently set the kid down in front of me and promptly went back to sleep.

The bizarre scene snapped me out of my daze.

I immediately checked the kid for any injuries. I doubted Fenrir would traumatize a child for no reason.

I checked the kid over and found nothing life-threatening or needing immediate attention, except for one small detail.

He didn’t have a tongue.

Not that he was born without one; it had been very cleanly cut off and healed when he was very young.

This kid wasn’t just any random child; he was one of Varys’ little birds.

Things started making more sense when I saw the book he was hiding behind his back.

The kid looked almost resigned to his fate when I discovered it.

By then, quite a crowd had gathered, and I didn’t want to scare him any further, so I gently guided him into the clinic.

“Okay, kid, you don't need to be scared. I'm not gonna hurt you. I know who sent you. I doubt you had much say in the matter.”

“But you still tried to steal from me, and you need to pay for that. So here's the deal: you work for me now. You tell me everything you know about Varys and his network of little birds. In exchange, I will heal your tongue.”

It took him a few seconds to comprehend what I was saying but after he understood he didn’t waste a second, nodding vigorously.

So I healed his tongue and asked, “Okay then, first thing: who were you supposed to pass the book to? Because I doubt you were supposed to make your way back with it yourself.”

The kid tried to talk but only managed some incoherent gibberish.

Oh, right—just because he had his tongue back didn’t mean he knew how to speak.

I went to my desk, grabbed some parchment, and handed it to the kid.

He started writing down everything he knew, and I discovered that the kid didn’t have any specific instructions beyond dropping off the book behind an inn and waiting for further directions.

I doubted I could get my hands on his handler, who probably bolted as soon as the kid got caught. It had been quite a public scene, and I wasn't in the mood to hunt him down.

“Okay, so here’s what you’re going to do: I’m going to get someone to teach you how to speak, and then you, along with that person, are going to teach a bunch of kids how to read and write.”

And just like that, I hired my first intern and handed him off to Tyrion, who would teach him how to speak. He could then teach the rest of the kids to read and write.

God, I loved being in charge. It was so nice being able to pass off work I didn’t want to do.

I snapped out of my thoughts and looked at the rest of the class.

I saw Sansa sitting with one of her handmaidens, Jenny something, paying close attention.

I also noticed two more faces that seemed out of place. It was almost impossible to find anyone with that complexion in the North. I would ask Freya about them later.

Oh fuck, the lesson was almost done.

Why does this keep happening to me? First, I was really late to a class I was supposed to teach in a school I had created. Then I spent half the time ogling the teacher and the rest daydreaming.

I kept myself hidden at the back of the class, waiting until all the students had slowly filed out. Just as I was about to surprise her, she spoke up.

“I know you're there. Why are you hiding?”

“Um, instinct, I guess. You sound quite mad at me.”

“I am. You said you’d be back two days ago.”

“I’m really sorry. I got caught up in something I couldn't leave unfinished.”

“You missed the first class. The only one you were supposed to teach.” Freya crossed her arms, clearly unimpressed.

“I know, I know. I'll make it up to you. How about I teach the next two classes?” I pleaded earnestly.

She sighed, her frustration softening just a bit. “No, it’s fine. You can help with teaching the next class. I asked for this anyway, and I have a feeling you’d just traumatize the kids or go off on some random tangent too complicated to understand.”

“Whatever you say, ma'am.” I said with a little salute.

“By the way, I saw a few unfamiliar faces in the class today. Who were they?”

“They’re Prince Martell’s daughters. They were thinking of enrolling and wanted to sit in on the first lesson before making a final decision. They paid quite a generous amount just to sit in on the first class.”

“Wait, the Martells are here already?” I asked, surprised.

She sighed. “Yes, that was another thing you were supposed to be here for. They’ve been to the clinic almost every day now.”

“Is it Oberyn or Doran?”

“It’s Oberyn. His brother has gout and is unable to make long journeys.”

“Huh, I just ran into the Tyrells on my way back to Winterfell. That means there’s quite a huge collection of nobility gathered here. They all want something from me, and I guess there will be a feast of some sort at the castle tonight. I kinda feel bad for Ned.”

“Well, I’ll worry about all that stuff later. Have I had the chance to mention how absolutely irresistible you look all dressed up as a strict teacher?”

She blushed but then smiled coyly at me. “Is that any way to talk to your teacher, mister?”

It was my turn to be surprised before a grin spread across my face. "I guess I need to learn some manners, then. Can you teach me?"

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A/N: Hey guys, sorry about the late update. I was moving and had an interview to panic about, so…