# Chapter - 49

I flopped down on the chair across from Freya. "So, how was your first day teaching?" I asked, genuinely curious.

Freya rolled her eyes, but I caught the hint of a smile tugging at her lips. "Oh, you know, I just had to crush everyone's dreams of learning magic from the famous White Mage. But after that? Not bad, actually."

"Shit, I'm sorry about that," I winced, feeling a pang of guilt. "But hey, at least you enjoyed it, right?"

"Surprisingly, yes," she admitted. "Though don't expect any of them to be helping out around here anytime soon. We're looking at a year, minimum."

I couldn't help but groan at the thought. "A whole year? Damn."

"Hey, you're the one who dumped all this in my lap, remember?" Freya shot back, but there was no real heat in her words.

Before I could apologize again, she added, "But I did ask for it, so it's not really your fault, and you did warn me how much work it was going to be."

"Fair enough," I conceded.

"Enough about that, tell me what you've been up to?" she asked

Before I could answer, a knock interrupted us. Robb and Jon poked their heads in, their faces lighting up when they saw me.

"El, you're back!" Robb grinned.

“Hello boys, just got back today. Nice to see you. What brings you here today?”

"Heard you were back from our new guests, and Father wants you to know there's a feast tonight. You and Freya are invited."

"Ah shit, really? Guess I can't skip this one?" I groaned, already dreading the thought of a formal event. "Is he mad at me?"

Jon snorted, a rare display of amusement. "Not mad. Just... stretched thin. Between Tyrion, Oberyn, and now the Tyrells, he's got his hands full."

"Ah, have there been any... incidents?" I asked morbidly, hoping I had missed any major drama.

"Not really, mostly due to them not running into each other," Jon explained.

"Wait, they haven't?" I asked, confusion evident in my voice.

"They definitely know about the others being here but surprisingly haven't met each other yet," he clarified.

Robb shrugged, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. "Tyrion's holed up in that library of yours most of the time."

"When he's not teaching Frog," Freya added, a hint of exasperation in her voice. "And seriously, can you talk to that kid about his name?"

I winced, remembering that slight lapse in judgment. "Yeah, yeah, I know. Not my brightest moment, that. But to be fair, when I asked him what his name was he told me he never had one before so I told him that he can name himself whatever he wants."

"Speaking of not-so-bright moments," Robb piped up, a mischievous glint in his eye, "how exactly did you run into the Tyrells?"

"Uh..." I scrambled for an explanation, feeling the heat rise to my cheeks. "Let's just say I made an... unexpected entrance."

Robb and Jon exchanged a curious look. "Must've been something," Robb smirked. "Lady Margaery couldn't stop talking about you."

I felt Freya's eyes boring into me, and I suddenly felt we were quite close to a landmine I needed to sidestep. "It wasn't... I mean, I didn't..." I stammered, trying to find the right words.

"I did something stupid while I was flying back to Winterfell and I crashed, unfortunately close to the Tyrell contingent," I admitted.

"Wait, you can fly?!" the three of them shouted in unison.

Oh, right. I hadn't even told Freya that bit of information.

"Yes, I figured it out a couple of moons back. That's how I've been able to travel so fast between places," I explained. "Anyway, after I crashed in front of them, I kind of eased the tension as they were quite tense, as you'd imagine. Introduced myself, healed Willas's knee, and walked with them until they reached Winterfell."

"Wow… How exactly do you fly?" Freya asked, her curiosity piqued. Yes! I had successfully managed to distract her.

"Ah, that's pretty easy," I smiled and unfurled my wings, not completely as we were still indoors and my wings were quite big. "Like this."

I enjoyed the looks on their faces.

They spent some time poking and prodding at my wings

"Wait, if you've been flying for so long, how did you crash?" Jon asked, his brow furrowed in confusion.

I felt a little embarrassed at that and tried to distract them. "Well, let me tell you a story about a man named Icarus who tried to fly too close to the sun..."

"So you tried to fly to the sun and burned your wings?" Freya asked skeptically, her eyebrow raised.

"What? No, that's just a story," I backpedaled, realizing my attempt at distraction wasn't working as intended.

"It just... made me want to see how high I could fly."

Seeing their confused looks, I sighed and decided to come clean. "Okay, look. The story of Icarus is all wrong anyway. Flying close to the sun wouldn't melt your wings. The problem is actually the opposite - it gets colder the higher you go."

Their expressions shifted from confusion to curiosity as I continued, "I tried flying too high, and my wings basically froze due to the extreme cold. Next thing I knew, I was falling."

"That's... actually kind of impressive," Robb said, a hint of admiration in his voice. "Terrifying, but impressive."

"Yeah, well, let's just say I won't be attempting that again anytime soon," I chuckled, rubbing the back of my neck.

Freya shook her head, a mix of exasperation and fondness in her eyes. "Only you, El. Only you would think, 'Hey, let's see how high I can fly' and end up nearly killing yourself."

"In my defense," I protested weakly, "it seemed like a good idea at the time."

The room filled with laughter, and I felt a warmth in my chest. Despite the embarrassment, moments like these - sharing my adventures, even the foolish ones, with friends - made everything worth it.

"So," Jon said, once the laughter died down, "any other magical abilities you've been hiding from us?"

I grinned mischievously. "Now that would be telling, wouldn't it? Guess you'll just have to wait and see."

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Tyrion knew he was smart. He hadn't really had much choice in the matter.

In a world where strength was everything, his mind had been his only weapon. But now, life had changed.

He wasn't a pious man. Faith and hope had been stamped out of him a long time ago. There might have been a time when he believed in miracles, but he had outgrown that childish notion.

Yet, as he looked at his reflection in the mirror, he didn't ever think there would be a day where he would feel vain and slightly narcissistic over his appearance. The face staring back at him was unfamiliar - youthful, unblemished, and decidedly un-dwarflike.

But the letter on his desk from his father brought him crashing back down to earth. His father didn't seem to care much for his wellbeing; he wanted to know more about El.

Tyrion didn't know why he was expecting anything else, actually.

His father wanted to know El's strengths, motivations, and weaknesses.

It was quite funny to him; the world was expecting a scheming, malevolent sorcerer with grand plans of conquest.

But Tyrion knew better. Even from his somewhat brief encounters with the White Mage of Winterfell, he knew what El was: just a boy with so much power in his hands that he didn't know what to do with it.

That was only taking into account what he had seen El do. He also knew that El was lazy.

Tyrion didn't believe that the boy had any grand plans of conquest or for the Iron Throne, for the sole reason that if he had such aspirations, he would have conquered the world already.

He had actually already had this discussion with El, and his answer had told him everything he needed to know:

*"Why would I waste my time doing all that nonsense? I value my time and sanity above all else, Tyrion. I won't do anything that will put that in jeopardy."*

Tyrion had laughed quite hard on hearing that. It told him that as powerful and wise as El was, he was also naive if he thought that the world would let him live in peace.

But Tyrion had made a decision that day, one that would have consequences for him. Consequences he would be happy to deal with.

For there was no other way for him to repay the debt he owed.

And a Lannister always paid his debts.

In this world where men only talked with their fists and swords, Tyrion had always prided himself on being one of the few who trained his mind. So when El had told him to help himself to the library, he had been ecstatic.

He also thought El was stupid to let others, especially him, have access to such knowledge that the maesters of the Citadel would incite wars over. Hungrily, he had devoured the knowledge now at his disposal.

But oh, what knowledge it was.

He had read the Grade 1 books and was fascinated by the workings of the human body. It also had information on how to treat basic issues under a section called "first aid."

He wasn't going to lie; he had gotten a bit cocky at the speed at which he had learned everything.

But one look at the Grade 2 books had put him back in his place. It was quite a few levels above what he could comprehend, and the sheer amount of knowledge one would need to master Grade 2 made him dizzy.

The final nail in the coffin had been when he found out Freya was studying a Grade 3 book. When he had asked her what part she was on, he understood nothing of the words that came out of her mouth.

It was enough to let him know that being a healer was not his calling.

It made sense why they were starting to teach young kids; it would undoubtedly take a lifetime to understand the knowledge that was in that one small bookshelf in El's lab.

The things he learned were going to keep him up at night, especially when he found out what caused most diseases. The knowledge that creatures so small they could not be seen existed in the millions in the air they breathed, the water they drank, and the food they ate was terrifying.

Knowing that these creatures were just lying in wait for the first opportunity to enter a person's body and start eating away and breeding did not help.

Even more disturbing was learning that the body tried to fight back by heating itself - causing a fever - it only worked half the time.

The other half, the fever would kill the person instead.

No, he'd stick to his numbers for now. At least those made sense.

With a final glance in the mirror, Tyrion straightened his shirt. The face might still be strange, but the new height... Well, that was something he could definitely get used to.

As he prepared for the feast, Tyrion couldn't help but smile and wonder how the world would react to his transformation.

It promised to be an interesting evening, to say the least.

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# Chapter - 50

Catelyn looked around the great hall. She always noticed how much bigger it was than the hall in Riverrun, but also more spartanly decorated.

The Starks of old had a different perspective on what opulence looked like.

It was quite rare that this hall was ever used, and she always enjoyed having to organize a feast.

While it was a lot of work, she enjoyed doing it.

It wasn't every day that they would be hosting the heirs of three great houses; her husband's bannermen rarely cared for such intricacies.

She looked around, directing the different maids to ensure everything was in order. One major headache had been figuring out where to seat the main guest of the evening.

The head table was for those of noble houses, and the White Mage made no such claims.

No one even knew what his last name was; he either didn't have one or refused to tell anyone.

But he was also the main reason that so many nobles had gathered in Winterfell.

It was the same reason that she saw so many more people from as far as Mereen gathering in Winterfell, hoping to gain an audience with the Healer of Winterfell.

Even the street where his clinic was located had become one of the most profitable places to set up any sort of business.

People had begun to call it El’s Street.

She still had conflicting feelings about the man and his sorcery.

The magic he practiced required no sacrifices, at least nothing that she could find out. It went against everything that she had been taught. Such magic should have come at a cost; she still refused to believe otherwise.

As nothing in this world was granted without a price. And she couldn't even begin to fathom what price El had paid in exchange for such power.

In the years that he had been in Winterfell, she had been looking for signs of foul play, but she hadn't been able to find any.

The one person that she had thought understood had turned out to be a traitor to the crown. Her childhood friend Petyr had understood her concerns, and then Ned had told her that Petyr had been stealing from the crown. Not even in small amounts - it seemed enough to leave the crown in massive debt.

She didn't know what to believe anymore.

Everyone that had been healed by him only sung his praises.

She had stopped trying to convince Ned that allowing the mage to continue living in the North was a disaster waiting to happen since he healed her little Rickon.

It was one of the lowest moments in her life; her youngest son was dealing with a fever that he would not wake up from. She had prayed and prayed to her gods and had received no answer.

She had done nothing but watch as Ned put his foot down and called for El.

He had healed her son in mere moments before leaving without asking anything in return.

She had stopped trying to find faults in him since that day and had thanked him sincerely and apologized for her behavior.

But she still felt uneasy around him; it wasn't something she could control.

All her children adored the mage, and a few weeks ago, Ned had informed her that Sansa would be learning healing.

She had dreaded the worst upon hearing that, but learning that her innocent daughter wouldn't be dabbling in magic brought her immense relief. Instead, Sansa would mainly be learning the normal, slow way of healing from Freya.

Freya was another matter altogether. Catelyn didn't know what to think about that girl. She knew Freya's mother, who used to work in the castle before she and her husband had opened their own shop.

Catelyn had visited her once, hoping to uncover something about the mage and to check if she had noticed any changes in her daughter since she started learning.

That discussion hadn't gone as she had imagined. The mother's only complaint had been that Freya had all but moved into the clinic and wasn't married yet.

She did learn that the mage was either unable to teach his magic to others or unwilling and was just teaching Freya to be a better healer.

Even Maester Luwin had nothing but praise for the girl, saying he regularly visited to learn more about healing from someone only slightly older than Robb.

Catelyn had a hard time wrapping her head around the matter.

But she had relented, and Ned had said he'd convinced their steward to send his daughter, Sansa's handmaiden, to attend the lessons with her. Today had been the first day of classes, and Catelyn had wasted no time in asking Sansa how it went.

Listening to her little girl excitedly explain what she had learned brought a smile to Catelyn's face and put most of her worries to rest.

As she continued to oversee the preparations for the feast, she couldn't help but wonder how the evening would unfold.

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Oberyn scanned the bustling feast hall, his eyes searching for the elusive mage.

The revelry was in full swing, but the reason everyone had gathered here—was still conspicuously absent.

It made sense, he supposed. Everyone had arrived early, eager to catch a glimpse of the infamous White Mage.

It seems that the warden of the north had just thrown one big feast in order go get done with

"Looking for someone?" a voice cut through his thoughts.

Oberyn turned to face the speaker, not immediately recognizing him.

"Willas! Glad to see you. I heard you had arrived. It's been a long while—you've grown taller," he said with a warm smile.

"Prince Oberyn, it's good to see you're doing well. It has been some time. The last we met was under... less than ideal circumstances," Willas replied, his tone careful but not unkind.

Oberyn grimaced at the memory. "I do apologize for that. How is your leg?"

Willas smiled, waving off the concern. "It's alright, Prince Oberyn. It was an accident; I never blamed you for it. If anything, I blamed my own youthful arrogance. I'm wiser for it now." His smile widened.

"Besides, if anything it has given me an excuse to be here and it's not a problem anymore."

His eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Ah, you work fast. I thought you had just arrived, and you've already met the mage?"

"Yes, but it was a... chance encounter. We were just about to reach Winterfell when we crossed paths with him," Willas explained.

"The gods must favor you," Oberyn mused. "I've been here for days now and haven't had the chance to meet him. Tell me, what is he like?"

Willas paused, considering his words carefully. "Very different from what I expected. I doubt anything I say could truly prepare you for meeting him in person."

Oberyn leaned in, intrigued. "Now you've really piqued my curiosity. Do go on."

As Oberyn and Willas continued their conversation, a sudden hush fell over the feast hall. All eyes turned towards the entrance, where two figures had just appeared.

El strode in, his signature white coat drawing every eye in the hall. At his side was Freya, looking stunning in a simple yet elegant black dress.

Oberyn couldn't help but stare. This was the man everyone had been waiting for, the subject of countless rumors and speculation. He didn't look particularly imposing or magical, yet there was something about him that commanded attention.

El's eyes scanned the room, a hint of amusement playing at the corners of his mouth. He leaned over and whispered something to Freya, who stifled a laugh.

"Well," Oberyn muttered to Willas, "he certainly knows how to make an entrance."

Willas nodded, a smile tugging at his lips. "Oh this is nothing. Just wait until you talk to him."

Willas glanced at Oberyn, a smile playing on his lips. "Would you like me to introduce you?"

Oberyn grinned, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "My dear Willas, I thought you'd never ask. Lead the way!"

They made their way through the crowd, Oberyn's charismatic presence parting the sea of nobles effortlessly. As they approached, El looked up from his conversation with Robb Stark.

"Ah, Willas," El greeted with a grin. "I see you're putting that leg to good use already, Hope you haven't had any more accidents?"

Willas shifted slightly, a faint blush coloring his cheeks. "I have been careful," he assured El. "Oh, there's someone who has been quite eager to meet you." He turned, gesturing to Oberyn with a flourish. "I'd like to introduce Prince Oberyn Martell of Dorne."

Oberyn stepped forward, his smile dazzling and his arms outstretched. "The infamous White Mage! I was beginning to think you were avoiding me."

El raised an eyebrow, looking amused. "Just El is fine. And avoiding you? I wouldn't dare, Prince Oberyn. I've heard you're quite persistent."

Oberyn laughed heartily. "Oh, I like you already! Tell me, El, is it true that you were able to outdrink the King? Of all the rumors I heard of your abilities, that was the most outlandish one!"

El's eyes twinkled mischievously. "Now, now, Prince Oberyn. I wouldn't be much of a mage if I told you all of my tricks?"

"Ha! A man after my own heart," Oberyn exclaimed, clapping El on the shoulder.

"I can see we're going to get along splendidly. Now, how about you show me some of that Northern hospitality and join me for a drink?"

El chuckled at Oberyn's enthusiasm. "Just a moment, Prince Oberyn. I believe an introduction is in order." He turned slightly, gesturing to Freya who stood beside him.

"Willas, this is Freya, my apprentice. She makes sure that I don't get trampled by the long line of patients."

Freya smiled warmly, offering a graceful curtsy to Willas. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Lord Willas," she said, her voice soft but confident.

Willas bowed his head respectfully, a genuine smile on his face. "The pleasure is all mine, Lady Freya. I've heard much about your skill and dedication to healing."

A faint blush colored Freya's cheeks at the compliment. "You're too kind, my lord. I merely do my best to help those in need."

Oberyn, not one to be left out of such pleasant exchanges, stepped forward with his signature charm. His eyes twinkled as he addressed Freya. "Ah, Lady Freya! Forgive my earlier oversight. It's a delight to see you outside the clinic walls, And might I say, you look absolutely radiant this evening."

Freya's smile widened at Oberyn's familiar charm. She smoothed her dress, looking slightly self-conscious but pleased. "Thank you, Prince Oberyn. It's a welcome change to be out of my work clothes for once. Though I must admit, I feel a bit out of my element here."

"Nonsense, I must thank you for allowing my daughters to attend your class today," Oberyn continued.

"They had a wonderful time. In fact, Nymeria is quite keen on attending the classes full-time."

Freya beamed. "That's wonderful to hear. We'd be delighted to have her."

She was about to respond when a familiar voice chimed in. "Ah, discussing the illustrious School of Medicine, are we?"

El grinned. "Indeed we are, Tyrion. Glad you decided to join us. I heard you were busy reading through my library?"

"Ha! I certainly tried," Tyrion replied with a smirk. "I barely skimmed through your grade 2 books before my head started getting dizzy. I decided that I needed a drink. And here I am."

Oberyn tried to keep his shock to himself, and Willas beside him was mirroring his expression as they both stared at the completely different person claiming to be Tyrion Lannister. The man formerly known as the Imp looked nothing like he previously had. Instead, he looked and sounded like a teenager.

The only things that stayed the same were his mismatched eyes and the blond hair that didn't look out of place and appeared oddly mesmerizing on a teenager.

He was only a head shorter than Oberyn now.

"Hello there, Prince Oberyn, Heir Tyrell. Long way from home, aren't you? Are you alright? You look like you've seen a ghost," Tyrion said with an infuriating smirk on his face that left him with no doubt about his identity.

Oberyn knew that the shortest Lannister had made his way to Winterfell and had expected him to possibly be different, but this was another matter entirely. He struggled to find words, his usual wit failing him in the face of such an unexpected transformation.

Willas managed to gather himself first. "Lord Tyrion, it's... quite a surprise to see you like this. I trust you're well?"

Tyrion's smirk widened. "Better than ever, Lord Tyrell. It's amazing what a bit of Northern air can do for one's health."

El, enjoying the stunned reactions, decided to throw them a lifeline. "Tyrion here has been here for a while making a nuisance of himself."

Tyrion acted offended at that “I'll have you know that I have been on my best behavior since I have been here”

His mind whirled with the implications of Tyrion's transformation. If the mage could do this, what else was he capable of? He looked at El with newfound respect and a touch of wariness. This man was far more powerful than he had imagined, and Oberyn knew he would need to tread carefully.

But for now, he plastered on his most charming smile. "Well then, I believe we have much to discuss over those drinks. Shall we?"

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Jon Arryn sat in the Tower of the Hand, poring over letters from across the Seven Kingdoms. The candlelight flickered, casting long shadows as he sifted through the pile of reports.

"Hm, it seems the mage has been busy," he muttered, reading Stannis' account of how El had arrived at Dragonstone, healed his daughter in minutes, and departed the same day. It wasn't something that concerned him at the moment and picked up another letter.

His brow furrowed as he came across disturbing news from the Vale. Ships reported unusual pirate activity in the Bite around the Three Sisters. Rumors spoke of one of the Sweet Sister islands going up in flames, with no survivors. While Jon doubted the severity of these tales, multiple reports confirmed increased pirate movement, as if something big had happened and scattered them like a disturbed hornets' nest.

Littlefinger's escape was another thorn in his side. How that rat had managed to slip away still baffled him, and the missing gold severely limited his options for addressing the mounting problems.

The Queen's behavior troubled him too. Her change in demeanor had been far from subtle. Jon wondered if she somehow knew what he was investigating. No, that seemed impossible. If his suspicions were true and Cersei knew, she would have fled to the Westerlands by now – or had him poisoned already.

So many things were happening at once that Jon wasn't sure if they were all connected. It felt as though the peace he had fought for was slowly unraveling, and no matter how many issues he resolved, more kept appearing.

Weariness settled over him like a heavy cloak. Jon drained the last of his wine, deciding he would deal with it all tomorrow. It was getting late, and the weight of the realm's problems seemed to press down on his aging shoulders.

Still, as he made his way to his chambers, Jon couldn't shake a growing sense of unease. The game was changing, pieces moving in ways he couldn't quite grasp. He only hoped he had the strength to keep the realm together in the face of whatever was coming.

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# Chapter - 51

Tyrion was thoroughly enjoying the feast, his new appearance drawing curious glances and whispers from the gathered nobles. He sipped his wine, relishing the taste and the novel experience of not being at eye level with people's crotches.

Across the hall, Oberyn Martell stood with Ellaria, deep in conversation. His eyes occasionally flicked to Tyrion, his brow furrowed in thought.

"This complicates things," Oberyn murmured to Ellaria.

Ellaria nodded, her eyes sharp. "Indeed. Tywin Lannister has an heir now, and he's become a friend of the White Mage."

Oberyn's lips tightened. "We need more information. I'll see what I can find out from the imp. Why don't you go see what you can learn from Freya? She's all but confirmed to be the White Mage's paramour."

With a squeeze of Ellaria's hand, Oberyn made his way to Tyrion.

"You look like you're having fun, imp," Oberyn said as he approached. "Oh, I apologize. I guess I can't call you that anymore."

Tyrion's lips quirked in a sardonic smile. "Oh, I don't mind at all, Prince Martell. It was the name I grew up with," he replied, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

Oberyn's eyes narrowed slightly, annoyed that he couldn't seem to get under Tyrion's skin. He decided to press further. "Well, should I call you Heir Lannister then? Or does your father still intend to make the Kingslayer his heir someday?"

That got a reaction from Tyrion, but not the one Oberyn expected. Tyrion's smile turned bitter. "Very few people can claim to know how the mind of my father works, and luckily, I am not someone cursed with that ability."

'Huh,' Oberyn thought to himself. 'It seems there's still a lot of bad blood there. That's good to know.'

Aloud, he said, "Come now, surely your new... stature has improved your standing with your father?"

Tyrion's mismatched eyes met Oberyn's, a spark of defiance in them. "While I can completely understand that you have endless plots on how to destroy my father and his entire line, maybe even justifiably so, I would like it if you kept me out of them."

With that said, Tyrion turned to walk away.

Oberyn, not one to let someone else have the last word, called after him. "Life rarely goes the way we would like it to go, Lord Tyrion."

He saw Tyrion pause at that. "I know, Prince Oberyn. I am the last person who needs to be reminded of that," Tyrion replied softly before continuing on his way.

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Freya felt completely out of her depth. She had tried to convince El to go to the feast alone, but he hadn't listened. Now, she found herself overwhelmed by the attention of the nobility gathered in Winterfell's great hall.

As a baker's daughter for god's sake, she didn't know how to talk to these people.

She answered politely where she could and just smiled where she couldn't. Everyone seemed desperate to know what was going on between her and El. What was she supposed to say when she herself hardly knew and was scared to bring up the topic in front of him?

She had been so focused on other things lately that she may have started taking El for granted. Now, she couldn't help but notice the vultures circling, especially when she saw Margaery ask El for a dance and he accepted.

It didn't stop there. It seemed as though every lady wanted to dance with El. An ugly feeling rose inside Freya, one she had never experienced before. She tried to squash it down, but it persisted.

However, that ugly feeling was quickly replaced with joy when El asked her for a dance.

Especially due to the fact she was the only one *he* had asked, and she couldn't help but feel a vindictive pleasure at the crestfallen faces of the other ladies.

The dance had been the best part of the night so far, but sadly, the song had to end. El was promptly dragged away by Oberyn to get more drunk, leaving Freya once again surrounded by the noble ladies.

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Say what you will about the Middle Ages, but they definitely knew how to throw a party. Or maybe that was just me, because I was a bit shitfaced.

There was booze, good food, pretty girls, and live music - although the music could have been better. That thought brought me to a sudden stop. I'd been here for years now and I hadn't built myself a proper guitar to introduce some culture to these people. I'd have to fix that soon.

Ugh, so many things to do, I should start keeping track. I still don't have a proper pen.

I'd turned off my ability to not let alcohol affect me for tonight. I could still sober up instantly, but I felt like I was in a safe enough space that I could get properly drunk for the first time since... well, since the day I'd died. Maybe I had some mental trauma regarding that.

And if shit did go south, Fenrir was pretty close by, and he was a pretty big deterrent. But I digress.

I was currently surrounded by a bunch of boring people I had no idea who they were, droning on and on about something I couldn't care less about and boring me to tears. But then I saw the perfect reason to excuse myself.

I spotted Freya once again surrounded by Margaery, Ellaria, and a bunch of other ladies. I locked eyes with her, and even though she looked calm on the surface, I knew that she was screaming at me to help her get out of the situation.

The only problem was, I didn't think me going to rescue her from the den of hungry lions was going to help in any way. But just because I was too cowardly to help didn't mean I could just stand by and do nothing. If I didn't do anything, I would never hear the end of it.

So, steeling myself and putting on my best charming face, I decided to wade into the fray and save my damsel in distress. This was either going to be hilarious or disastrous. Probably both.

As I approached the group, I could feel the eyes of every lady in the vicinity turn towards me. It was like they had some sort of sixth sense for drama. I plastered on my most charming smile and hoped I didn't look as nervous as I felt.

"Ladies," I said, bowing slightly and trying not to wobble. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything important, but I was wondering if I could borrow Freya for a moment?"

Margaery smiled sweetly. "Of course, Lord El. We were just getting to know your lovely apprentice better."

I could see the relief in Freya's eyes as she stepped towards me. "If you'll excuse me, ladies," she said politely.

As we walked away, I leaned in close to whisper, "You owe me one. I just walked into the lion's den for you."

Freya giggled, the tension leaving her shoulders. "My hero," she said, only half-jokingly. "Next time, maybe don't wait until I'm contemplating setting my dress on fire as a distraction?"

I laughed, leading her towards a quieter corner of the hall. "Deal. Now, how about we give them something to really talk about?"

"What did you have in mind?" Freya asked, a mix of curiosity and apprehension in her voice.

I wiggled my eyebrows mischievously. "How about we sneak out of here?"

Once we were safely away from the crowd, Freya let out a relieved sigh. "Thank you. I thought I'd never escape their endless questions and gossip."

"Happy to help," I said, dropping the drunk act. "Though I'm not sure my dashing rescue did much for your reputation."

Freya rolled her eyes. "Please. Half the castle already thinks we're... you know." She blushed slightly. "This will hardly make a difference."

I chuckled, feeling a warmth spread through my chest at her words. "Fair enough. So, are you up for a little adventure?"

Her eyes lit up with excitement. "What did you have in mind?"

"I've got an idea," I said with a mischievous grin. "But first, we need to make a stop by the kitchens."

We slipped out of the great hall, snagging a bottle of wine and some leftovers from the feast. Then we made our way up to one of the towers, where we could look out over Winterfell and the lands beyond.

The night air was crisp, and the stars shone brightly overhead. We settled in, passing the wine back and forth as we nibbled on our pilfered feast.

"Much better than stuffy small talk, eh?" I said, taking a swig from the bottle.

Freya nodded, gazing out at the twinkling lights of Winter Town. "It's beautiful up here. I can't believe I've never done this before."

"Well, now you know all my secrets," I teased. "Sneaking out of feasts, stealing food, and finding the best views in the castle."

She laughed, bumping her shoulder against mine. "Truly, you are a man of many talents."

We fell into comfortable silence for a while, just enjoying the peace and each other's company. But eventually, my curiosity got the better of me.

"So," I said, trying to sound casual. "What exactly were those ladies needling you about?"

Freya groaned. "Oh, you know. The usual. How did a commoner like me end up as your apprentice? Are we secretly betrothed? Do I know any juicy gossip about the Starks?"

I winced. "Sorry about that. I guess being associated with me comes with its own headaches."

She shook her head, smiling softly. "Don't apologize. It's worth it, you know. Everything you've taught me, everything we've done to help people... I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Her sincerity caught me off guard, and I felt a warmth in my chest that had nothing to do with the wine. "I'm glad," I said quietly. "I don't know what I'd do without you, Freya."

"What are your plans, El?" she asked, her voice soft but curious.

Even though it felt like a simple question, I knew it was anything but. There was a certain weight to it, so I guess it was time to be honest about things.

"I'm pretty sure you know by now that I'm not from around here," I began. "Where I'm actually from is a long story for another day, but when I first came here, I was lost and scared."

I took a deep breath before continuing. "I had no plan, but I wasn't helpless. I had a choice to make: either live out in the woods with Skitter and Fenrir or find a town to live in. As much as I would have hated living in the woods, I did like the freedom it gave me, not being tied down to a place. But my choice was easier to make once I ran into Jon in the woods. I knew I could find a safe place to stay for a while to find myself and get better at my abilities in Winterfell without the people in power trying to control me."

"So my plan was to stay here for a few years, offer my services in exchange for my stay, and then leave after I was confident enough to survive on my own and travel the world."

I paused, looking at Freya. "But then I met you... and somewhere down the line, I realized that traveling the world on my own would be quite boring and lonely."

I trailed off, gathering my courage. "Then we started this clinic, and you've made sure that turned into something beautiful. I don't want to just let it disappear or leave you with all the work. So when you said that you wanted to teach others how to heal, I thought it was a great idea. We could teach some people and someday, when we trusted them to take care of it on their own..."

"So I still want to go, but I would like to do that with you. Maybe get married too along the way."

It took my drunk brain a moment to process what my mouth had just said but…

Freya's eyes widened. "El... are you asking me to marry you?"

"No... I mean, yes, but not right now," I stammered. "There's this kind of tradition from where I'm from where I get down on one knee and present you with a ring and ask if you'd like to get married. And I don't have a ring yet. I'm blabbering..."

I took a deep breath to calm myself. "What I'm saying is, I will ask you to marry me someday soon, and you will very clearly know that I am asking."

She didn't reply for a while, and I was starting to panic a bit when she kissed me. It was a soft, gentle kiss.

"I will be waiting," she said, her eyes shining.

She leaned her head on my shoulder, and we sat there in silence, watching the stars twinkle overhead.

For a moment, all the complications and responsibilities faded away, and I was just a guy enjoying a quiet moment with someone special.

All in all, not a bad way to end the night.

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# Chapter - 52 Pilot

It had been a few days since the feast and thankfully the day hadn't led to any violence. There was some tension that I could notice between the guests, but that was expected.

In that time I had finally found a jeweler, which hadn't been that hard as it seemed like I could literally find any sort of shop imaginable just a short way away from my clinic. Well, it wasn't really a clinic anymore; it was a full-fledged hospital with a school attached to it.

It also had an ICU which was pretty pointless when I was in town but came in handy when I wasn't around. It only had about a dozen or so beds for now.

Tyrion had made himself very useful in managing everything and it seemed like he was having fun while doing it.

Anyway, the jeweler had been pretty fascinated when I showed him my design of a pen and explained its working. He said that he would get working on it immediately and I had commissioned two custom-made ones.

He had refused to accept any payment so I had made a deal with him: he could keep the design and make as many as he wanted to sell them, and the hospital and school I had built would get an endless supply of free pens for as long as either existed.

He had agreed immediately.

With nothing to do for the moment, I made my way to the castle cause I was a bit bored.

I came across a scene as I was passing the courtyard that gave me a sense of déjà vu. Jon and Robb were teaching Bran how to shoot a bow although he missed by quite a margin. He was quite bad at it.

I heard Jon say some words to help him aim and look towards the balcony where Ned and Catelyn were watching, giving him encouraging smiles.

"Well, which one of you was a sharpshooter at nine?" Ned called down.

When out of nowhere one arrow struck dead center and Arya came out of her hiding spot with a bow and a cocky smirk on her face and ran away.

'Oh dear… I guess it's time then.'

I made a U-turn and started walking back towards the clinic with a million different thoughts in my head.

I was a bit concerned, not by the fact that the main plot had started.

That I was expecting to happen any time now. I had no clue about the dates or anything, but the Stark children starting to look like exact copies of the show's counterparts was a big giveaway.

What concerned me was the fact that the scene was frame by frame the exact scene that I remember watching all those years ago.

But that shouldn't have been possible.

Not to be quite narcissistic or anything, but I was quite a big deal around these parts and I was quite sure I had created enough ripples to have changed most of the main plot, especially during my little ego trip in King's Landing.

That was quite concerning to me as it implied that certain events were still going to happen the same way as they did regardless of my presence. Well, I wasn't sure yet, but considering how the actual story went, one could understand why I would be concerned.

I reached the clinic but didn't go inside.

I just walked up to Fenrir and scratched behind his ears.

"Wake up boy, we got work to do."

He woke up without much fuss; he knew it was important.

I climbed up on his back and nudged him towards the exit of the town.

It wasn't like I was in a hurry and we left the city.

We didn't really go very far and were just loitering around and I didn't have to wait for long and

I saw Ned along with a couple of his men and his sons riding somewhere and came towards me once they spotted us.

"El what are you doing here?"

"Nothing much just taking Fenrir out to stretch his legs, don't want him to get fat."

I got a growl for my comments.

"What are you guys up to? You look like you left in quite a hurry."

"We received word that a deserter of the Watch had been caught. We were on our way to deliver justice."

Yeah, that's about what I expected. "Wow, pretty morbid. Do you mind if we join you? Don't really have anything better to do at the moment."

"Very well."

And just like that I was part of the group. I mainly hung around with Jon and Bran.

It didn't take long to reach the place.

It was all set up just like I remembered, it seemed like a place where executions took place.

At least the ones that were important enough to happen outside the castle itself.

Pretty soon the man was brought forward with hands chained. I believe his name was Gared.

Muttering the whole time:

"White Walkers”

I saw the White Walkers”

“I saw them. I know I broke my oath. And I know I'm a deserter. I should have gone back to the Wall and warned them, but... I saw what I saw. I saw the White Walkers. People need to know. If you can get word to my family... tell them I'm no coward."

That was my cue.

"Do you mind if I ask him some questions, Lord Stark?"

He looked confused for a moment before he nodded.

"Gared was it, so you say you saw some White Walkers?"

"Yes my lord."

"What did they look like?"

"Tall and gaunt, with flesh pale as milk. Its movements made no sound as if it could glide on the snow. Its armor appears to be carved from ice. Its sword is translucent, a shard of crystal so thin it almost seems to vanish when seen edge-on. It was their eyes that were the most haunting. Blue eyes that seemed to glow and so so cold. They emerge silently from the shadows, on all sides of the clearing. Five of them... six... seven... their strange swords shimmering in the moonlight."

"Fascinating and where do you say you saw these White Walkers?"

"We were hunting down some wildlings a few day’s ride north of Craster's Keep."

Ok so far so good. Next part was a bit delicate, I didn't want to openly challenge the execution, but I needed to at least let everyone in the North have some idea of what was coming.

"Say I could convince Lord Stark here to let you keep your head on your shoulders for a bit longer, would you in exchange take me to the place where you found the White Walkers?"

That's when shit went south and he freaked out and was able to push off the knight holding him and tried to run away again. At least that's what I thought he was trying to do.

“No no no don't make me go back there”

He didn't get far and everyone got their swords out.

Instead of stopping he just ran face first into the first sword he saw.

'Ok I did not see that coming.'

Everyone stood there in shock for a moment, trying to process what had just happened. Ned was the first to recover, barking orders to his men to check if the deserter was still alive.

I walked up to the body, already knowing what I'd find. The man had managed to impale himself right through the neck. There was no saving him now.

I knelt by the body, confirming what we all already knew. "He's gone, Lord Stark," I said, my voice low. "Whatever he saw out there... it terrified him enough to choose this over facing it again."

Ned's face was grim as he nodded, his eyes scanning the shocked faces around us. "Aye, it seems so."

I stood up, brushing the dirt from my knees. "We might want to have this conversation a bit further away," I suggested quietly, nodding towards the boys and the guards.

Ned understood immediately. We walked a short distance, far enough that no one could overhear us. Once we were alone, he turned to me, his eyes searching my face. "Do you believe what he said?"

I paused, choosing my words carefully. The weight of what I was about to say hung heavy in the air. "Well," I started, "he was either telling the truth or insane enough to believe he was. But I can tell you for sure, he wasn't lying."

Ned's eyebrow raised, a mix of skepticism and curiosity on his face. "And that's enough to make you want to investigate?"

I shrugged. "It's intrigued me enough that I plan to check it out."

Ned looked at me skeptically. "You'd journey north of the Wall based on the ravings of a madman? In search of fictional creatures?"

I leaned in, my voice low and serious. "All stories have some truth to them, Lord Stark. And tell me, do you really believe your ancestors built a wall of ice 700 feet tall, stretching from coast to coast, that's stood untouched for 8000 years just to keep out some wildlings?"

Realization dawned on Ned's face. "Are you saying... the White Walkers are real?"

I held up my hands. "I'm not saying anything definitive. What I am saying is that I'm going to find out for myself."

Ned calmed a bit, his brow furrowing. "What do you suggest I do then?"

"For now, don't do anything drastic," I advised. "Just keep what we've discussed in mind when you receive news from the Night's Watch. If you start calling the banners over this or try to tell others, I don't think they'll believe you."

"Wait for me to come back. I'll look around, try to get some irrefutable proof that they're back. Then we can see where this goes."

"Very well," Ned nodded. "When do you plan on leaving?"

"I have some things to take care of first. Possibly tomorrow or the day after." I glanced over at Bran, whose face was frozen in shock. "For now, you might want to talk to your sons."

Ned followed my gaze, his expression softening with concern.

‘An execution was bad enough, but watching a man kill himself... That sticks with you.’