# Chapter - 53

Silence hung heavy over our party as we made our way back to Winterfell.

What we'd witnessed seemed to have affected all of us.

Ned had done his best to comfort Bran, speaking softly to the boy about duty and honor.

It wasn't quite how I'd planned things, but sometimes the unexpected works out even better.

While it would have been better to have a guide to help me navigate, actually I was pretty sure I could enlist someone from the Night's Watch to do the same, and it would cut down my travel time if I had to go to at least the Wall myself.

This was the biggest issue I would have to deal with, and I didn't want to waste too much time convincing everyone of the existence of the main threat, so getting a head start on that felt great.

I couldn't help but feel a small sense of satisfaction. The seed of doubt had been planted in their minds, just as I'd hoped. The deserter's wild tale and desperate actions had done more to convince them than any words I could have spoken.

It's funny how people are more likely to believe something when they think they've figured it out for themselves.

As we rode, I kept my thoughts to myself. Sometimes, the most effective way to convince someone is to say nothing at all and let others draw their own conclusions.

And judging by the troubled looks on everyone's faces, they were doing just that.

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Robb couldn't shake the unease that had settled over him as their party made its way back to Winterfell. The deserter's ravings about White Walkers still echoed in his mind, made all the more unsettling by his father's grim expression and El's unusual silence. Robb had never seen him look so troubled before.

Hoping to break the silence, he turned to El. "So, quite the tale, huh? White Walkers."

El nodded, his eyes distant. "Yes, quite the tale."

"Do you believe him?" he pressed, curious about the mage's take on the matter.

El raised an eyebrow. "Why ask me?"

He shrugged. "Well, you're the only person I know who's an expert on magic and odd happenings."

El sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Well, you don't need to worry about it. Even if the Others are real, they're quite far away. There's a pretty big wall between us and them."

Before he could respond, they were interrupted by the sound of approaching hooves. Jon appeared on the crest of a nearby hill, waving urgently.

"Over here!" Jon called out.

As they reached the riverbank, he saw Jon dismounting beside something on the ground. Curiosity got the better of him, and he approached to get a closer look.

"Seven hells," Theon cursed, pulling his horse away. "What is that thing?"

He knelt down, his eyes wide with wonder. "It's a wolf. A massive one."

The dead wolf was huge, bigger than any normal wolf he had ever seen, well, except for Fenrir, but he was quite the exception. Its blind eyes crawled with maggots, a grisly sight that made even the hardened men of the North recoil.

Jon shook his head, a hint of excitement in his voice. "No, it's a direwolf. This is the second one to be spotted south of the Wall for centuries."

Lord Stark knelt beside the beast, examining it closely. With a grunt, he yanked something from its throat – a foot of shattered antler, slick with half-dried blood.

"Tough old beast," Jory commented. "Birthing a litter with an antler in her throat."

That's when he noticed the small bundle of fur tucked against the dead wolf's belly. He reached down, scooping up a tiny direwolf pup. Its eyes were still closed, and it nuzzled blindly against his chest, whimpering softly.

"Look," Jon grinned, holding up another pup. "There are five of them."

Bran's eyes widened with excitement as Jon handed him a pup. The young boy cradled it gently, rubbing its soft fur against his cheek.

He saw father frowned, his expression troubled. "It's not natural. Better to give them a quick death. They won't last without their mother."

"No!" Bran cried out, clutching his pup protectively.

Jon spoke up, his voice calm as usual. "Lord Stark, there are five pups. Three male, two female. You have five trueborn children. Three sons, two daughters. The direwolf is the sigil of your House. They were meant to have these pups."

Ned considered this for a moment, his gaze moving from the pups to his children's hopeful faces.

Finally, he nodded. "Very well. But you will feed them yourselves, and train them yourselves…. If they die, you bury them yourself."

"They won't," He said firmly. "We won't let them."

As they prepared to leave, Jon noticed something in the snow. He wandered off, returning moments later with a sixth pup in his arms. This one was different – an albino with fur as white as snow and eyes as red as blood.

"This one's mine," Jon said softly, a small smile on his face.

Robb watched as his half-brother cradled the white pup.

He couldn't shake the feeling that finding these direwolves was more than just luck – it felt like destiny.

As they rode back to Winterfell, the tiny pups nestled safely in their arms, Robb caught El's eye.

He hadn't said much and was watching them from a bit farther away with an unreadable expression, but there was a glimmer of something in his gaze – concern, and for some reason, it seemed even more pronounced than the concern he had shown after the deserter's actions.

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I held back, observing the scene unfold before me. It was eerily similar to what I remembered, another pivotal moment playing out just as it had in my memories. The realization was unsettling. Despite my ability to influence events, it seemed some things were destined to happen unless I intervened directly. Or perhaps I was overthinking it all.

The rest of the world was a mystery to me, and I couldn't help but wonder what other events might be transpiring beyond my sight. For now, though, I had chosen not to interfere with this particular scene. Its importance was clear, and I was reluctant to alter its outcome, even if my past actions seemed to have had little effect on the grand scheme of things.

Before Ned could respond, Bran bounded up to us, his face beaming with joy as he showed off his newly acquired pup.

"Look, El!" he exclaimed. "Do you think he'll grow up to be as big as Fenrir?"

I couldn't help but chuckle at his enthusiasm. "I'm sure he will, buddy," I replied, ruffling his hair. "But remember, you'll have to take good care of him and feed him lots for that to happen. It's a big responsibility."

Bran nodded solemnly, clutching the pup closer to his chest.

The sight warmed my heart, even as a nagging voice in the back of my mind reminded me of the fates that awaited these wolves – and their young masters.

Yeah, I wasn't going to let that happen, fates be damned.

As the excitement died down, Ned approached me, his eyes on the pups his sons were cradling.

"Will they cause any issues?" he asked, concern evident in his voice.

I shook my head, offering a reassuring smile. "Not really. As long as they're trained well, they'll be fine. Direwolves are fiercely loyal."

"And like Jon said, it does seem as though fate had a hand in this."

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Jon Arryn held in a cough as he slowly made his way towards the small council chambers. He had been feeling a little under the weather lately, likely due to the amount of stress he was juggling. Trying to keep the realm together was no easy task, especially at his age.

He was quite annoyed to have been summoned to the small council chamber, which was odd considering that the Grand Maester had called for one after skipping their usual summons just a few days back. He wondered what was wrong now that needed attention, hoping it wasn't something he would have to handle himself.

As Jon entered the small council chambers, it seemed that he was the last to arrive, other than Robert of course.

He highly doubted the king would show up considering the hour.

It appeared that Pycelle and Stannis were already engaged in a heated argument. Jon was thankful that Stannis was back; he had been going almost insane handling the tasks of the Hand, the Master of Coin, and the Master of Ships himself. Renly had his hands full with his own duties and was doing nothing to help, seemingly enjoying the show.

Varys remained as enigmatic as ever. The only thing stopping Jon from having him removed was the doubt that he'd find an even half as competent Master of Whispers anytime soon.

Pycelle seemed more animated than Jon had ever seen him. When everyone else noticed Jon's presence, they fell silent.

"Greetings, everyone," Jon said, suppressing another cough. "Grand Maester Pycelle, I hope you have a good reason for calling this meeting at this hour."

Pycelle's eyes were wide with panic. "Foul magic is at play, Lord Hand! The Citadel was attacked!"

Jon raised an eyebrow. "Attacked? By whom?"

"A swarm of locusts!" Pycelle exclaimed. "They descended upon the Citadel and killed all of the Archmaesters!"

"What?" Jon couldn't believe what he was hearing. It sounded absurd.

"It has to be that mage," Pycelle insisted.

"You can't just deny the existence of magic and blame the mage for any unexplained events whenever it seems convenient for you, Grand Maester," Stannis said.

Varys spoke up. "As far-fetched as the Grand Maester's words seem to be, my little birds are singing the same song. While a swarm of locusts descending upon the Citadel might normally be considered a freak accident, the fact that only a handful of the highest-ranking Archmaesters were killed, and not even a page of a book was damaged, suggests that it was an assassination of some sort."

Jon sank into his chair, his mind reeling. If this was true, then there was a very good possibility that it was the White Mage's action. If not, then there were bigger problems at hand.

"Where is the mage now?"

"He should be in Winterfell. I highly doubt he had the time to get to Oldtown of all places after he had come to Dragonstone," Stannis said.

"Do you have any proof that the mage was responsible for this?"

"No, Lord Hand, but..."

"But nothing, while the mage might have the capabilities of arranging something like this," and wasn't that a chilling thought, "I have met the man myself, and I believe Stannis would also vouch for him that he would not do something like this without motive or in retaliation."

Jon leaned forward, his eyes boring into Pycelle. "Now, Grand Maester, I must ask: might the Citadel have taken any actions that could have provoked the White Mage's wrath?"

Pycelle's face contorted, fear flashing across his features before he could compose himself. That fleeting expression told Jon all he needed to know.

"My lord, I... that is to say..." Pycelle stammered, his usual eloquence deserting him.

A wave of relief washed over Jon, tempering his initial alarm. If the Citadel had indeed made a move against the mage, then this wasn't a case of indiscriminate violence. The White Mage had retaliated against a specific threat, not embarked on a random campaign of terror.

"Unless you can provide irrefutable evidence of the mage's culpability," Jon said firmly, cutting off Pycelle's stammering, "I will not entertain any accusations against the man to whom half the capital owes their lives."

Jon leaned back in his chair, considering the implications. Yes, the Citadel was Westeros' center of learning, and the loss of its leadership would undoubtedly cause upheaval. But that was a problem for another day, and quite frankly, not one that fell under his purview as Hand of the King.

"Now," he continued, his tone brooking no argument, "unless there are any other pressing matters, I believe we're done here."

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# Chapter - 54

I arrived back at the clinic just in time to see Freya getting ready to start the class.

Well, that was just unacceptable. I had to teach the kids something, or I couldn't in good conscience call myself a headmaster.

Seeing me enter, Freya stood up from the main desk and took a seat at the back of the room.

I glanced around, noting the familiar faces - Sansa and Jeyne, Nymeria, and a bunch of other students whose names I did not know yet. Of course, Frog was sitting attentively in the front row.

Damn, was I becoming an elitist already?

Never mind, I would learn all their names later.

"Hello everyone," I began with a smile. "I'm sure you've learned the basics about different organs and body systems. Today, we'll explore how they all work together."

I had given this some thought on how to give a memorable lecture to a bunch of teenagers and had come up with a brilliant idea.

With a flourish, I used my powers to create tiny, palm-sized, anime-style characters right there in the classroom.

"Let me tell you a story," I said, as the characters playing the roles of different cells came to life before the students' eyes.

I introduced all the main characters and tried my best to play out the first episode of Cells at Work in a way that the kids from Westeros would understand, enjoy, and learn from.

What followed was a whirlwind tale of the body's inner workings - heroic white blood cells battling invading germs, diligent platelets patching up wounds, and hardworking red blood cells delivering oxygen.

The students watched in wide-eyed fascination as the drama unfolded.

It was more challenging than I'd anticipated. Controlling so many characters, giving them voices, and constantly creating new ones to add to the scene required intense concentration.

I was actually starting to sweat as I pushed my multitasking abilities to their limits, determined to make this lesson unforgettable.

By the time I finished, the students were buzzing with excitement, peppering me with questions about everything they'd seen. Even Freya looked impressed and had some questions of her own.

I addressed the class one last time. "Alright, that's all for today. Before our next session, I'd like each of you to write a summary of what you learned and a list of questions about parts of the story you didn't fully understand."

The students filed out, their excited chatter filling the air. I slumped into a chair, feeling a deep sense of satisfaction despite my exhaustion.

Freya approached, her expression a mix of curiosity and concern. "That was... quite something," she said. "I've never seen you use your powers like that before."

I managed a tired grin. "Thought I'd try something new. Seemed to go over well."

She nodded, then hesitated. "El... is everything alright? You seem... I don't know, like something's on your mind."

I sighed, knowing I couldn't put this off any longer. "Actually, there is something I need to talk to you about. I'm planning a trip... north of the Wall."

Freya's eyes widened in shock. "North of the- El, what are you thinking? Why would you go there?"

I took a deep breath and recounted the events of the past few hours, explaining my concerns and why I felt I needed to investigate this myself. As I spoke, I could see the worry in Freya's eyes, but also a growing understanding.

When I finished, she was quiet for a moment before asking, "When will you be back?"

"I'm not quite sure," I admitted.

"When will you be leaving?"

"Most likely tomorrow," I replied, bracing myself for her reaction.

Freya didn't look happy, but I could see she understood the gravity of the situation. She took my hand, her grip tight. "Promise me you'll be careful," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

I squeezed her hand back. "I promise. And I'll come back as soon as I can."

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Marwyn the Mad, they called him. He had never understood why. He had his doubts, of course, but he could never fathom why no one else shared his curiosity about the arcane.

Now, he finally understood.

It seemed the only reason he was still alive was that his death would have raised too many questions with the Hightowers. So instead, they had ruined his reputation, ensuring that anyone he tried to speak with dismissed his words as the ravings of a madman.

A snort escaped his lips at the thought. Who was the madman now?

He had been planning a trip to Winterfell to meet the White Mage and learn from him when he witnessed the cloud of death encompass the Citadel.

He wouldn't lie and say he wasn't scared; in fact, he had nearly soiled himself at the sight.

But after what felt like an eternity - though it had only been a few moments - the swarm of locusts dispersed.

Only the screams of the people remained.

Even though every instinct screamed at him to stay away, his curiosity won out.

All his life, he had been in pursuit of magic, and he could not turn away from what was clearly a magical phenomenon happening right before his eyes. No matter how horrifying it was, he needed to find answers.

So he made his way back to the Citadel, only to find chaos reigning. Maesters scurried about like headless chickens, and he found himself in the unenviable position of being the voice of reason. It disappointed him greatly to see the state the Citadel had fallen into.

Half the maesters had run away, and Marwyn suddenly found himself the highest-ranking Archmaester left.

The title he knew had only been given to him as a joke now thrust him into a position of responsibility. It fell to him to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of this disaster.

Strangely, or perhaps worryingly, the swarm seemed to have targeted only the Archmaesters. The acolytes and lower-ranking maesters in the tower remained largely unharmed, save for a few injuries sustained in the panic.

Not one book or stone was harmed in any way.

This had all the hallmarks of an orchestrated assassination and a warning.

The common folk and septons were quick to blame divine wrath, claiming the Citadel must have angered the gods.

They weren't entirely wrong, he mused, just mistaken about which power they had offended.

Marwyn stood in the very chamber where the Citadel's former leadership had met their grisly end.

His eyes fell upon rows of leather-bound tomes lining the walls. Not just books, but journals - the private musings of those who had ruled from the shadows for centuries. With trembling hands, he pulled one from the shelf and began to read.

As Marwyn pored over the detailed ledgers, a fury unlike anything he'd ever known began to burn within him. Each page revealed new horrors, new manipulations.

These men, these self-proclaimed puppet masters, had played at being gods for far too long.

They had shaped the fate of kingdoms, snuffed out lives and entire bloodlines, all in the name of their grand design. Any trace of magic, any whisper of the extraordinary that they couldn't bend to their will, they had sought to destroy utterly.

His fingers clenched, nearly tearing the delicate pages. How many lives had been ruined? How many wonders lost to the world because of their arrogance?

Marwyn's chest heaved as the magnitude of their hubris crashed over him. They had believed themselves above the very gods themselves. And now, in their hubris, they had finally overreached.

The more Marwyn uncovered, the clearer the picture became. This attack wasn't random; it was retaliation. And while the masses might blame the gods, anyone with a working brain would know who the true culprit was.

Marwyn leaned back in his chair, his mind racing. The Citadel had made a grave error in angering the White Mage, and now they had paid the price.

But what would come next? And more importantly, what was he supposed to do now?

He knew one thing for certain: changes had to be made to the Citadel, whether the remaining maesters liked it or not.

And he intended to be at the forefront of that change, guiding the institution back towards the pursuit of true knowledge, rather than the consolidation of power.

He would need to sadly delay his trip noth, there was work to be done.

Marwyn eyed the journals, knowing he'd have to burn them soon. The plots contained within could throw the entire continent into anarchy if they fell into the wrong hands.

His musings were interrupted as Olenna Tyrell entered the room.

"Ah, Lady Tyrell. What can I do for you?" Marwyn greeted them.

Olenna cut straight to the chase. "Spare me the pleasantries, Marwyn. Tell me what you've found out."

Marwyn sighed. "Where do I even start?"

"How about what these morons did to get themselves killed in the first place?" Olenna pressed.

"Going through their misdeeds, it would be easier to list who wouldn't want them dead," Marwyn replied dryly, his voice dripping with bitter amusement.

Olenna's eyes narrowed, her gaze sharp as a blade. "We'll get back to that. What did they do against the White Mage to elicit such a reaction?"

Marwyn took a deep breath, his face grim. He recounted the Archmaesters' ill-fated plans to develop a poison potent enough to kill the mage. Their efforts, though zealous, had borne little fruit.

"But that plan was still in its infancy," Marwyn continued, his voice low. "What likely triggered this response was their insatiable greed. They wanted to get their hands on his knowledge through his apprentice... by abducting her."

"I doubt that went well," Olenna sighed, her voice heavy with foreboding.

"It went horribly wrong, as you expected," Marwyn confirmed, his eyes haunted. He described Archmaester Vance's ill-fated journey north, how he had hired mercenaries for his nefarious scheme.

"He had just returned to report back," Marwyn's voice dropped to a whisper, "when whatever curse the mage had placed on him triggered the swarm."

Olenna absorbed this information, her face a mask of careful neutrality. "So there was a good reason for these attacks."

"Why do you care so much about that?" Marwyn enquired, curiosity getting the better of him.

Olenna's composure cracked for just a moment, revealing a flash of genuine fear. "Because I have two grandchildren who should be in Winterfell right now, trying to gain favor with the mage," she replied, her voice tight with concern.

"Ah, that makes sense," Marwyn nodded, understanding dawning on his face. The stakes, it seemed, were higher than he had realized.

Olenna leaned forward, her eyes blazing with intensity. "What do you suggest we do now? My grandchildren could be in danger if the mage decides to retaliate further."

Marwyn stroked his chin thoughtfully, weighing his words carefully. "I don't believe your grandchildren are in immediate danger, Lady Olenna," he said slowly. "The mage's attack was precise, targeting only those directly involved in the plot against him." He paused, noting the worry still etched on her face. "However," he added, "it would be wise to send a message to Winterfell, making them aware of the occurrences and advising that we don't involve ourselves in the matter anymore."

Olenna nodded slowly, her shoulders relaxing slightly. "Very well. I have already sent a message since I heard of the events and put the pieces together. I just didn't have any confirmation of what that order of maesters had done to elicit such a response." A flicker of pride crossed her face. "And I trust Willas to make smart decisions based on what he knows."

Her gaze sharpened again. "What other things have they been doing?"

Marwyn's face darkened. "Well, I don't want to list out everything, but I am going to burn this as soon as I look through it for anything important." He took a deep breath. "The main thing I think you should know is how they slowly orchestrated the fall of the Targaryen dynasty over the century."

"How?" Olenna asked, stunned.

Marwyn's lips quirked in a humorless smile. "It seems as though trusting a group of old men with delusions of grandeur to deliver all your mail was not the smartest of ideas."

Olenna's eyes narrowed dangerously. "...Is there anyone from that order still alive, perchance?"

"Ah, I was getting to that," Marwyn replied. "There is one still alive."

Olenna sighed, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "Let me guess, it's the Grand Maester, probably soiling his pants in King's Landing at the news."

"Yes," Marwyn confirmed, a hint of dark humor in his voice.

"Very well," Olenna said, her tone turning cold. "I will have him dealt with. Best not leave any loose ends."

Marwyn nodded in agreement. He had never really liked Pycelle anyway.

Olenna rose to leave, but paused, her gaze sharp as a dagger. "I trust you'll keep me informed of any further developments?"

"Of course, Lady Olenna," Marwyn agreed solemnly.

As she swept from the room, Marwyn turned back to the pile of incriminating journals.

The game had changed it seems and he was very glad he was not playing it.

# Chapter - 55

Sansa couldn't contain her excitement as she and Jeyne left the healing class, their footsteps echoing through Winterfell's stone corridors.

Sansa thought back to when her father had first told her about the class. She'd been eager to join, but a little nervous too. Septa Mordane's warnings about displeasing the gods had made her hesitate. And what if she wasn't any good at it?

But from the very first lesson with Freya, Sansa had been captivated. It wasn't the mystical experience she'd half-expected, but learning about the human body fascinated her in ways she never imagined.

Today's class with El, though - that was something else entirely.

"Did you see how adorable those little platelets were?" Jeyne gushed, her eyes sparkling.

"I know, it was incredible!" Sansa agreed, a smile playing on her lips. "I can't wait for the next lesson. Do you think we'll see more of the play?"

"I hope so," Jeyne replied. As they rounded a corner, she lowered her voice conspiratorially. "Do you think we'll learn to do magic like that someday?"

Sansa shrugged, her mind still buzzing with everything they'd learned. "I don't know, but I can't wait to find out what else they'll teach us!"

Sansa nodded eagerly.

Their discussion continued, and Sansa realized how foolish her earlier fears now seemed. How could something that helped people be wrong? El's magic wasn't the dark sorcery from Old Nan's tales - it was about healing and teaching others to do the same.

As they neared the castle, a commotion caught their attention. Her brothers and Arya were huddled in the courtyard, small furry bundles squirming in their arms. Their mother stood nearby, her face a mix of exasperation and concern as she spoke in hushed tones with their father.

Curious, Sansa approached her siblings.

Bran looked up, grinning, and held out a tiny ball of gray fur. "Look, Sansa! Father's letting us keep them."

Sansa gasped as she took the pup, its warm weight settling in her arms. It yawned, revealing tiny pink gums, and blinked up at her with golden eyes. "What are they?" she asked, though she already knew the answer.

"Direwolf pups," Jon explained, cradling a white one. "We found them in the woods. Their mother was dead."

She could hear her mother's voice . "Ned, are you sure this is wise? Direwolves are not pets."

Fathers reply was firm but gentle. "The direwolf is the sigil of our house, Cat. These pups were meant for the children."

As Sansa stroked her pup's soft fur, she felt a connection she couldn't explain. It was as if the tiny creature belonged with her.

"What will you name yours?" Arya asked, her own pup playfully nipping at her fingers.

Sansa looked down at the little wolf, its trusting eyes meeting hers. "Lady," she said softly. "I'll call her Lady."

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I descended the winding stone steps into the underground cavern.

Bioluminescent fungi clung to the walls, casting an eerie glow that barely illuminated my path.

I had gone through a phase where I tested out what I could make glow.

As it turns out, almost anything.

I entered the main chamber and saw Vaylara's spectral form shimmered near our experimental setup.

"Any updates on the egg?" I asked, approaching the complex array of magical symbols and instruments, much of which remained a mystery to me.

Vaylara turned, her ethereal features unreadable. "Surprisingly stable. Everything is working as intended, for now."

I nodded "When do you think it will hatch?"

She sighed, "I'm still unsure. This is uncharted territory, even for me. It's a miracle it hasn't blown up in our faces yet."

"Just asking a question. No need to get testy."

I paused. "Actually, there's something important I need to discuss with you."

Vaylara's form shifted, her attention fully on me now. "I'm listening," she said, her tone carrying a hint of curiosity.

I took a deep breath, "White Walkers. What do you know about them?"

Vaylara's eyes narrowed, a flicker of something - surprise? concern? - passing across her face.

"...Why do you ask?"

"I am pretty sure that they're going to attack the Wall in the next five years or so," I said, without beating around the bush

"What?!" Vaylara exclaimed, her form flickering with agitation. "How do you know this?"

I waved a hand dismissively. "How doesn't really matter at the moment. The point is, they've been on the move recently. I'm planning on scouting the threat myself, maybe even capturing a wight so I can convince Ned to let the wildlings move south of the Wall for a bit. If nothing else, it'll decrease the potential recruits for the Night King's army."

I fixed her with a serious look. "You definitely know a lot more than I do about this. So spill."

Vaylara was quiet for a moment, gathering her thoughts. "All I know is from the records of what happened the last time the Long Night started," she began.

"When the Children of the Forest felt threatened by men cutting down their forests, they created a being made of ice capable of fighting their battles for them."

"Not very smart of them," I muttered.

"Indeed," Vaylara agreed. "They did too good of a job and lost control. Now the White Walkers have only one goal: to eradicate all life on the planet and bring forth an eternal winter."

She went on to explain how Bran the Builder, along with the Children of the Forest and the champion of light, rallied the kingdoms to build the Wall. "But there's been no record of them actually defeating the Night King," she finished. "Just pushing him back to the Land of Always Winter."

I leaned forward, my curiosity piqued. "Tell me more about his magic."

Vaylara's face darkened, her voice dropping to a near whisper. "His necromancy is formidable, but that's not the real threat to you at least. When he's near, his domain is absolute. No other magic can penetrate it. And if what you're saying is true, I shudder to think how powerful he's become over the last 8,000 years."

"So, you're saying I can't just summon hellfire and be done with it?"

"The hellfire might work on his army," Vaylara conceded, "but against him? I doubt it. He's a being forged from ice. Your fleshcrafting would be useless, even if you could touch him. In the end, your magic might only serve to help you flee."

We delved into potential weaknesses - Valyrian steel, dragonglass - but Vaylara remained skeptical about their effectiveness against the Night King himself. And it wasn't like I had any Valyrian steel lying around anyway. I had some dragonglass, so I could test that out at least.

A grin spread across my face. "So, fancy joining me on this little adventure?"

Vaylara's eyes narrowed. "That depends. What's your brilliant plan if the Night King shows up during your little adventure?"

I shrugged, "Run for the hills?"

“You don't really need to worry anyway; I will not be running off in search of the Night King. I will mostly be getting my hands on a wight, mabe talk to some wildlings, see what they know, even meet a child of the forest if we are lucky”

She sighed in exasperation. "Fine. I'll come with you. I need to keep you from getting yourself killed at least until you fulfill your deal."

"Excellent," I beamed. "We leave tomorrow. I've got some preparations to make."

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Not gonna lie, but that conversation made me a little nervous.

The time for messing around was over. There was one main issue in this world that I needed to address, and it was time to investigate it properly.

And as much as I would have liked to deal with it by myself ASAP, I wasn't really sure I could. Sure, the show made it look easy, but very few things in life ever were.

My greatest weakness and limitation at the moment was my own mind. The little show I'd put on for the students had finally made me realize this. It was time to upgrade my brain.

I had a good idea of how to achieve it; I just hadn't tested it out yet. I wanted to be alone for it. No one could really help me if I messed up anyway.

I made my way to my room, lay down, and closed my eyes. Calming myself, I thought, 'Relax, you've practiced this before.'

Making my thoughts faster was easy enough. It kind of made me feel stupid for not doing it already, but I wanted to take it a step further.

I pictured my mind palace and slowly compartmentalized parts of the neurons in my brain that were barely being used, rearranging them.

It took a moment, and then, as if a switch had been flipped, I felt it happen.

It was weird.

I could legitimately talk to myself now, not just voice out my thoughts in my mind.

'How's it going?' one part of me asked.

'Pretty good. What do you want to do now?' the other replied.

'Do you think two is good enough, or should we keep going?'

'The scans show everything working well so far, no neuron degradation. But I suggest we get used to one voice in your head first for some time before we jump to four. It's not like it takes long to do it now that we know how.'

'Makes sense. But I am not going to be running two threads all the time. You're right, one is enough for now. I just need someone to brainstorm with now.'

'OK, division of labor?'

'We don't need permanent division. Attack/defense makes more sense considering where we're going. If things start going south, we're both working on defense.'

'Fair enough. Speaking of defense. I can already see one big problem.'

'I know. All the redundancy means nothing now that we have one giant magic heart as a lynchpin for everything to fall apart.'

'Glad you know the problem. Any ideas?'

'Not really. Creating this one was a hit and miss anyway. I highly doubt it will work another time. Just make sure to protect it adequately.'

'OK, now in case the Night King does show up, what are we gonna do?'

'I had hoped to have my dragon ready by then, but that is not happening.'

'As much as I'd like to take Fenrir with me, I don't think it's a good idea to leave Freya alone, and Skitter is not going to be back anytime soon.'

'You thinking what I'm thinking?'

'Lovecraft?'

'Yep.'

'Don't you think jumping to create eldritch horrors, just because we are a little nervous, is overreacting a bit?'

'Spoilsport.'

'I am already starting to regret this.'

# Chapter - 56

Pentos

Illyrio frowned as he read the letter in his hands. The news from across the Narrow Sea was troubling, to say the least. The White Mage of Winterfell had long been a subject of gossip and intrigue, even in Essos. His healing abilities were legendary, drawing the desperate and wealthy from far and wide.

But this latest development was far more disturbing. The leadership of the Citadel had been killed in a gruesome and public manner. Illyrio could read between the lines - Varys clearly suspected the White Mage was responsible.

His musings were interrupted when Viserys barged into his study without warning.

The self-proclaimed rightful king of Westeros was far from what one would expect of the last scion of an ancient and powerful line.

At one and twenty, he was more of a spoiled child than a king-in-waiting.

Illyrio sighed inwardly, drawing on years of experience. "What can I do for you, Your Grace?" he asked smoothly.

"Is everything ready for today, Illyrio?" Viserys demanded.

"Of course, Your Grace. All has been prepared as you requested."

Viserys nodded, then noticed the letter. "You look troubled. What news?"

Illyrio hesitated, then decided sharing some information might be useful. "Disturbing tidings from Westeros, Your Grace. The Citadel was attacked by a swarm of locusts."

"Locusts?" Viserys's brow furrowed. "How is that possible?"

"My sources believe the White Mage of Winterfell may be responsible."

Viserys's eyes widened. "The healer? Why would he do such a thing?"

"That remains unclear," Illyrio said carefully. "But it seems his powers may be greater - and more dangerous - than previously thought."

Viserys paced, his mind clearly racing. "This could change things. Will he be a problem when I take back my throne?"

"Of course not, Your Grace. The people of the Seven Kingdoms do not take kindly to magic, so it shouldn't be hard to find the support needed to act against the mage," Illyrio reassured.

Viserys began muttering, "Yes... Yes, he will feel the wrath of the dragon if he stands in my way."

"You don't need to worry about all that for now, Your Grace. Here, I have a gift for the princess for today's ceremony," Illyrio said, changing the subject.

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Daenerys stood by the window, her eyes fixed on the shimmering waters of Pentos Bay. The midday sun cast a golden glow across the city, its warmth a stark contrast to the chill of anxiety in her chest.

The sound of footsteps made her turn. Her brother strode into the room with a lilac gown draped over his arm. His gaunt face was alight with a feverish excitement.

"There you are, sweet sister," he said, holding out the gown. "A gift from Illyrio. Feel how fine the fabric is."

Daenerys ran her fingers over the delicate silk, but found no joy in the beautiful garment. "He's given us so much," she murmured. "We've been his guests for a year, and he's never asked for anything in return."

Viserys scoffed. "Illyrio's no fool. He knows I won't forget my friends when I take back my throne." He hung the gown by the door, then turned back to her with a critical eye. "You still slouch. Stand up straight - let them see you're a woman now."

Daenerys straightened her back, trying not to flinch as Viserys adjusted her posture. His touch made her uncomfortable, but she knew better than to resist.

"Don't fail me tonight," he warned, his voice low and threatening. "You don't want to wake the dragon, do you?"

"No," Daenerys whispered.

Viserys smiled, an unsettling mix of affection and madness in his eyes. "Good. When they write the history of my reign, sweet sister, they will say it began tonight."

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The courtyard of Illyrio's manse buzzed with nervous energy as Daenerys, Viserys, and their host awaited the arrival of Khal Drogo.

Daenerys wore the lilac gown, her makeup artfully applied, though it somehow made her look even younger than her fifteen years. She fidgeted nervously, her eyes darting around the enclosed space.

Illyrio smiled at Daenerys, taking her hand and giving it a comforting squeeze.

"She is a vision, Your Grace," he said to Viserys. "Drogo will be impressed."

Viserys frowned, eyeing his sister critically. "She's too skinny. Are you sure he likes his women this young?"

"She's had her blood, she's old enough," Illyrio assured him. "Look at her! Daughter of the past king, sister to the future king... he'll want her."

"I suppose," Viserys muttered. "The savages have queer tastes. Boys, horses, sheep..."

Illyrio's smile tightened. "Best not suggest this to Khal Drogo."

"Do you take me for a fool?" Viserys snapped.

"I take you for a king," Illyrio replied smoothly. "Kings lack the caution of common men. My apologies if I have given offense."

As the sound of approaching horses reached them she got a first look at Khal Drogo, Viserys leaned closer to Daenerys. "You see how long his hair is?" he whispered, nodding towards Khal Drogo. "When Dothraki are defeated in combat, they cut off their braids in disgrace. Khal Drogo has never been defeated. A savage, of course, but one of the finest killers alive. And you will be his queen."

Daenerys stared at the Khal, her voice small. "I don't want to be his queen. Please, please, I don't want to, I want to go home."

Viserys grabbed her arm, his fingernails digging into her skin as he dragged her into the shadows. "Home? How do we go home?" he hissed. "They took it from us. How do we go home?"

Tears welled in Daenerys' eyes. "I don't know."

"I do," Viserys said, his voice softening. "We go home with an army. With Khal Drogo's army."

He brushed her cheek with the back of his hand, speaking with an unsettling tenderness. "I'd let his whole khalasar fuck you, all forty thousand men and their horses too, if that's what it takes"

As Illyrio escorted Khal Drogo towards them, Viserys whispered nervously to his sister, "Smile. And stand up straight. Let him see that you have breasts. Gods know, they're small enough as is."

Daenerys forced a smile and straightened her posture, her heart pounding in her chest as she prepared to meet the man who would decide her fate.

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I finally emerged from my labyrinth with Vaylara in tow and began the long journey north. The plummeting temperatures slowed my progress considerably, but after several hours of flying, the Wall finally came into view.

And what a sight it was.

It took nearly an hour of high-speed flight to reach the damn thing after it first appeared on the horizon. I flew towards the top and landed, realizing I had missed someone quite close to where I touched down. I should have expected it, considering how near the elevator I had landed.

I smiled and waved at him. "Hello there!"

And he was running away. I sighed.

I didn't chase after him - there would be no point. He would be back, or at least send someone more important. Meanwhile, I took in the amazing view.

"Damn, I really should get myself a wizard's tower or something," I mused.

I immediately climbed up on the battlements, dangling my legs over the edge. Vaylara materialized next to me.

"Quite the view, isn't it?" she remarked.

"It is indeed," I agreed.

"It has quite the presence, doesn't it?" Vaylara continued.

"Of course it does. If what you said earlier about the Night King's return is true, then it has grown stronger over the years. It feeds off his power - quite a masterpiece in itself."

"Huh, neat," I said, continuing to stare off into the distance.

A noise drew me out of the silence. I turned around and saw the elevator start to work a few meters away. Nice - it seemed company was about to arrive.

Boy, was that a slow elevator. I had almost flown down to see what was taking so long, but as always, I restrained myself.

After what felt like forever, I saw a bunch of men in black walk out of the wooden elevator.

'Huh, no wonder it was slow,' I thought.

I pretended not to notice them as they spotted me and started warily approaching, hands on their swords, while I just continued to swing my legs and whistle.

"I can't even begin to tell you the number of people who have sat there and slipped to their deaths," one of them called out.

"Let me guess - new recruits?" I replied.

"Yes, but not the majority."

"Really? That's interesting. But thank you for your concern, Benjen. I assure you I'll be fine."

"If you say so," Benjen responded. "What brings you to the Wall, El?"

"Not something as simple as sightseeing, I'm afraid."

"I was afraid of that," Benjen sighed. "You want to take this inside? It's hard to speak with all this wind."

"Sure, lead the way," I agreed, standing up and following Benjen and his men towards the elevator

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It had been a quiet day as usual when he heard the bell signaling that there were intruders on the Wall. It didn't make much sense - maybe a few wildlings were able to scale the Wall. As far-fetched as that sounded, it had happened before.

He quickly gathered some of his men and made his way to the elevator to see what the commotion was all about. Things didn't get any clearer once he reached the top and questioned the man who had raised the alarm. He just kept mumbling about a man falling from the sky.

But he was at least able to get a rough idea of where said intruder was. He told his men to stay alert and made his way to the silhouette he could see sitting with legs dangling over the edge.

As he finally got closer, things started to make less sense. The person was barely wearing any furs, just a white co... oh. Things finally started to make sense, and he signaled his men to stand down. The White Mage of Winterfell had come to the Wall.

It was his second time meeting him, and as far as he could tell, he was an easygoing and reasonable sort. Once they reached the elevator, he asked, "You seem to have scared Pete here with your arrival. How did you do that anyway?"

"Oh, I'm sorry Pete, my bad," El replied. "I flew here. How else?" he said with a grin.

"Of cour... WHAT?"

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I was now in a room with Benjen and Jeor Mormont. The Commander and the First Ranger were the people in charge of this place, and the silence in the room was finally broken by the Lord Commander.

"Are you sure?"

I had just finished telling them what had happened with the deserter and what I had told Ned. I even passed along the official letter he had given me to pass along.

"About as sure as I can be without seeing one with my own eyes, and you can tell me you haven't come across odd occurrences."

The look they shared between them was enough to answer my question.

"You are right, there have been some odd sightings that have gotten more frequent in the last few years. So what do you propose?"

"Well, I was planning on going around and looking at the places that the deserter mentioned, talk to some wildlings, see if they know better. It would be easier if I had someone to help me navigate, but that's kind of up to you and a bit optional. Or if you have a detailed map by any chance, that works."

"I will come with you. No one else will be able to navigate with you as well as I can," Benjen said.

"You sure? It's going to be pretty dangerous."

"Of course. I doubt I will be in much danger while I'm traveling with the most prominent healer in Westeros."

"Aww, you're gonna make me blush."

"When do you wish to leave?"

"You think you can have everything ready tomorrow at dawn?"

"Yes."

"Perfect. That should give me enough time to look around Castle Black and do some sightseeing. Oh, before I forget, I need a horse, and since I don't want to feel like I owe any favors, if anyone in the castle needs healing, you can send them my way. I'll do it for free for today."

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