

Westerosi weddings were far more eventful than wizarding weddings. Harry found that out in the most painful way. His legs were sore from all the dancing he had to endure as part of the wedding of his uncle Edmure. He chanced a look at the fight that was developing inside a hall of Golden Tooth, where a few Freys and Mallisters were engaged in a scuffle of sorts. The Vances and Pipers were also butting in, and soon it snowballed into a full-blown fight. Again!

“Oh, look! That guy got punched in his nose.” Robb said giddily.

When Harry looked at the guy Robb was pointing to, he had to hold back his laughter at seeing the odd angle at which the guy’s nose was in.

“That seems to be an improvement more than anything else on that face.” Garlan commented with a snort.

Harry had to agree with that assessment. The entirety of House Frey was a bunch of assholes, and they looked like they had a genetic disease running through their whole family. The more Freys he encountered at the wedding, the more he was sure they were suffering from a magical curse or something. Even the Targaryens who wedded brother to sister were said to be hauntingly beautiful, and they were the most inbred family in the history of Westeros. So, to see House Frey suffering from what he first assumed was the aftereffects of inbreeding, he could only think of a magical curse gripping the entire family. Whatever it was, it must’ve been done by a powerful sorcerer or magical creature. Bloodline curses were no easy feat for a magical being to bind into a bloodline. He’d know as he was intimately familiar with the blood curse in his late wife’s family that claimed Daphne’s and Astoria’s life despite their young age.

“So, what will you do now that you’ve been knighted?” Harry asked, looking at the second son of Mace Tyrell.

“Frankly, I don’t know. I never expected to be knighted so early.” said Garlan, looking thoughtful for a moment.

“There’ll be a tourney at King’s Landing after the crowning of Prince Stannis. Maybe you should enlist.” Robb suggested.

“Huh! Maybe I will. But I need a squire if I’m to participate in a tourney. Are either of you interested?” Garlan asked hopefully.

“A squire?” Robb asked with a frown.

Harry exchanged a look with Robb. While they considered Garlan a good friend, they knew his loyalties were to Highgarden. Taking a Stark as squire by Garlan for a tourney in King’s Landing would send a political message. With Stannis Baratheon as King, any friend of House Tyrell would find themselves in disfavour in the court. At least, that was the fear, as everyone

in Westeros knew of the bad blood between Stannis and Mace Tyrell. There were even rumours that Stannis might give the wardenship of the South to House Florent.

Thankfully, Robb understood the meaning of his look without uttering a single word out loud.

"I don't think I'd be pursuing knighthood." Robb said.

"The same." Harry followed shortly, weighing in on Robb's side.

"But why?" Garlan asked confusedly.

"Well...our father is not one, and he is a renowned warrior with great skill with a sword. So, it's not as if I've to become a knight to become a good warrior." Robb rightly pointed out.

"And I dislike the oaths sworn by the knights and the anointing ceremony. They have too much connection to the Faith of the Seven." said Harry. "You should ask Theon. The tourney might be a good distraction for him."

"You're right. Theon might benefit from shifting his attention from what's happening to Lord Balon." Garlan nodded thoughtfully.

Harry was relieved to see Robb escape the situation without committing to Garlan. The last thing he wanted was for them to rock the boat too much by consorting themselves with the Tyrells in the capital. After all, they had just received the islands of Blacktyde and Harlaw as well as the basing rights for Fair Isle. There were other issues Harry had in mind that needed the aid of Stannis Baratheon. Therefore, they could not afford to get alienated from the royal court.

"Lord Harrion."

Harry had to forcibly keep down the urge to twitch his eyebrows in annoyance as he looked at the shy, blushed face of Barbara Bracken.

"May I have this dance?" she asked shyly, her onyx eyes looking at him like a doe.

In the background, he could hear the song of Bear and the maiden fair flaring up on the strings of the bards. He could see Lord Jonos Bracken eyeing them out of the corner of his eyes. Harry was tempted to blow off the girl, but he could see Barbara Bracken was scared out of her mind and was merely following her father's orders to the letter.

"You may, Barbara." Harry nodded, taking her hand and leading her to the dance floor.

As the dance progressed, Harry noticed his uncle Edmure was happily dancing with his newly wedded wife. He could even see his mother having a quiet conversation with his grandfather. He had to admit he had a lot of misconceptions about Hoster Tully, mostly from how his mother always kept him and his siblings far away from Riverrun. But he was pleasantly surprised to learn his grandfather was rather chill in the mind but refused to show that side in the open. The Lord of Riverrun might've been rather strict and overtly focused on politics to the point where the man was selling out his

daughters to secure the safety of the Riverlands. But he could see why the man was so hyper-focused on doing everything possible to alienate his immediate family.

The political situation after Aerys Targaryen's escape from Duskendale had deteriorated the situation in the Riverlands. The factionalism within the royal court had, in turn, forged factions amongst the Riverlords. The firm hand of the Targryens and their support for House Tully was the only thing keeping the peace in the Riverlands. Without that firm hand of support, Lord Hoster was faced with the difficult task of threats and spiralling internal squabbles among the Riverlords. With the royal court divided between Tywin Lannister, Aerys Targaryen and Rhaegar Targaryen, the only possible play in Hoster Tully's book was to amass support from his neighbouring kingdoms, which he later did at the expense of his daughters. The Lord of Riverrun had tried to tie himself to Tywin Lannister, but Aerys had blown up that plan by naming Jaime Lannister into the Kingsguard.

War was all but a reality for Hoster Tully, and Harry could see the genuine surprise of his grandfather when the war turned out to be between the Targaryens and Baratheons instead of a civil war between Aerys and Rhaegar. Harry was quite interested to learn that Rhaegar Targaryen and Aerys Targaryen were amassing support from the lords of Westeros in the shadows to fight against each other. He could only glean so much from his grandfather's mind before he was stolen away from his side by his mother. There was also the curious bit of information about his aunt Lysa, who was now the Lady of the Eyrie.

The scandal that some nobody from the Fingers of the Vale got his aunt pregnant was undoubtedly an important piece of information. Especially considering that man was now the Master of Coin in the Small Council, working closely with Jon Arryn. Blackmail material against any potential foes was always welcome in his book.

'Perhaps Jon Arryn was aware.' Harry thought.

While a man like Jon Arryn was not infallible, the Lord of the Eyrie was a shrewd politician. Or perhaps the Master of Whispers might've notified Lord Arryn of the past between his wife and Petyr Baelish.

Either way, it was a scandal that he gleaned from his grandfather's mind. He did not find it particularly useful, but he now knew the early abortion his aunt went through might've been why she had not carried out successful pregnancies. Similarly, a goldmine of information on scandals and betrayals was hidden inside his grandfather's mind, that made Harry decide to hang around the Lord of Riverrun. Unfortunately, his grandfather was engaged in a long conversation with his mother and Ser Brynden Tully.

While keeping his eyes on his grandfather over Barbara Bracken's shoulder, he caught the eye of Prince Oberyn. His former teacher was standing alone near a secluded corner without a beautiful woman by his side. From that alone, Harry knew the Dornish prince was present for the wedding for some other purpose. Thankfully, the song came to an end, and Harry courteously led Barbara to her father's side before he sought out Oberyn Martell.

"Prince Oberyn. I thought you'd have left for Sunspear with your souvenir." said Harry, standing across from the Red Viper.

“Oh, this?” Oberyn fished out a human skull out of nowhere. “I was in a festive mood after exacting my vengeance, so I thought a little celebration was in order.”

“And what better place than the wedding that has the chance to spell the doom for House Lannister.” Harry snorted.

“Exactly!” Oberyn beamed. “If the gods were kind, the lions would find themselves with a worthy contender in Lord Leo Lefford.”

“It has not been decided whether the Paramountcy would be transferred to House Lefford.” Harry said airily.

“Somethings need not be said aloud, Harrion. A man like Stannis Baratheon won’t go easy on the lions like his brother did with the Ironborn.” Oberyn said confidently.

“So, you’ll be at the capital to ensure your opinions on the matter are heard by his grace.” Harry commented, grinning at the Dornish prince.

“Of course. I’ll be partaking in the tourney and having a say in court. Dorne’s voice will be heard in the Red Keep.” Oberyn said firmly before an easygoing smile bloomed on his face. “Besides, a delegation from Sunspear will be arriving at King’s Landing.”

“I hope Nymeria will be present in this delegation?” Harry asked.

“Of course, Nymeria will be present at the capital. She’ll be accompanying my niece, Arianne.” said Oberyn.

“I see.” Harry muttered.

He did see more than what the Red Viper intended. The mind of Oberyn Martell was like an open book to Harry, thanks to his skill in the mind arts. Therefore, all the plans being spun by the vipers of Dorne and the Varys lay bare before his mind.

“Nymeria often said that Arianne was the bolder but shorter version of herself. I suppose it’ll be fun to meet more of your family, Prince Oberyn.” said Harry.

“Indeed. My niece has been most eager to meet you as well.” said Oberyn, a grin tugging at the corner of his lips.

'I bet.' Harry thought amusedly.

“Bedding! It's time for the bedding ceremony.”

There was a clamour in the hall of Golden Tooth as men and women rushed towards the groom and bride.

“Come now, student of mine. This'll be your first chance to remove clothes from a woman’s body.” said Oberyn.

“I'm not much of a proponent of tradition that strips women off their clothes by strange men on their wedding night.” Harry deadpanned.

“Your loss.” Oberyne shrugged before rushing into the clamour to strip Alysanne Lefford bare.

While the lords and knights heartily stripped the new Lady of Riverrun, the ladies of the realm were doing something similar to Edmure Tully. Unlike Lady Alysanne, the heir of Riverrun was enjoying the ladies' attention as they stripped him out of his clothes. The bride and groom were led into their marriage bed, and that was the last Harry saw of his uncle and newly wedded aunt.

He had the chance to meet them at a private dinner at Riverrun hosted by his grandfather. It had the added benefit of a familial ambience for handing over a gift he was preparing for his uncle. The dinner was more for the sake of his grandfather, who was quite taken by Sansa, Arya and Bran. He had to suppress his laughter when Bran nearly bit off Lord Hoster's finger instead of the steak his grandfather was trying to feed Bran. While his mother and siblings, except Robb and himself, were supposed to travel back to Winterfell after the wedding, Lord Hoster convinced them to stay at Riverrun till the coronation of Stannis.

All the major Lords of Westeros were to be present at the Red Keep to give their oaths of fealty to the new king, and House Stark was no exemption. They were supposed to leave for King's Landing soon while the Northern army marched back to their homeland.

“Before we leave for the capital, I meant to give you this, uncle.” said Harry, drawing a Valyrian steel dagger fastened on his belt.

The gleam of wonder in his uncle's eyes was a joy to watch. Harry almost wished he had forged a sword as a gift, but he had vowed never to forge a sword outside business deals after he struck a deal with the Iron Bank.

“This is a magnificent gift, nephew.” Edmure said with genuine appreciation.

“That's not all. I have one more gift.”

Harry took a small box from his pocket and held it out for Lady Alysanne.

“I took it from the treasury of Balon Greyjoy. There was not much, but this one caught my eye.” Harry explained.

When Lady Alysanne opened the box, she gasped in surprise, seeing a necklace of white pearls inside.

“This a beautiful gift. Thank you, Lord Harrion.” Lady Alysanne beamed at him.

Of course, his gifts to the bride and groom raised protests from Arya and Sansa. As Sansa put it, she deserved the shiniest pearls in the world as a gift. This led Harry to give a horn made of whalebone to Robb, a bow made of Ironwood to Lord Hoster, a shiny ruby studded gold ring to Sansa, a silver bracelet to Arya and a sapphire studded silver necklace to his mother as gifts. He enjoyed the climbing eyebrows of the Tullys as he pulled more and more stuff out of his pocket that should have been physically impossible.

At last, he turned his eyes to Bran, who was looking at him with large puppy eyes. There was nothing in his expanded pouch hidden inside his pocket that could possibly interest Bran. But he didn't need to dip his hand into his pocket in search of a gift for Bran. Summoning the Elder Wand into his hand,

Harry tapped on an extra spoon, sitting conspicuously close to Bran on the table. The spoon turned into a fluffy wolf toy, making Bran let out a whoop of joy before promptly hugging the toy to his heart. The silence that permeated the dining chamber was deafening in the wake of his open display of magic.

“Oh, come on. I can make flying ships, and you’re surprised I can make a small toy using magic!”

A few days later, Harry and Robb were on their journey to King’s Landing with a guard detail provided by their grandfather. As Riverrun disappeared behind Harry, he was reminded of the last-minute advice from his grandfather.

“The heir to Blacktyde is a hostage in Oldtown. Baelor Blacktyde converted to the Faith of the Seven. It’s possible the Faith and House Hightower would push for Baelor to retake his seat. Make sure you don’t get talked into a corner. Engage firmly with Lord Arryn and never concede an inch from your demands.”

It was a brilliant piece of advice from the man who secured the east and north flanks of the Riverlands. But Harry was never going to concede on any demands from Oldtown anyway.

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Arianne was a confused woman these days, all thanks to her father. She had just celebrated her nine and ten namesday last month, which meant most women in Westeros at her age were already married and nursing babies on their breasts. However, the foremost reason for her confusion was the change in behaviour of her father, Doran Martell. The ruling Prince of Dorne had stopped hiding his head in the sands of Dorne and struck a mighty blow at their blood enemies.

Of course, it was her uncle Oberyn who struck the blow, taking the head of Tywin Lannister. But still, her father had amassed a fleet out of nowhere to attack the Lannisters, most of them being Summer Island sellsails and pirates from the Stepstones. Her father also had the courage to send over half of their army to attack the Westerlands. To confuse her further, her father had called her into his solar after word of Tywin Lannister’s execution reached Sunspear and gave her a strange order.

“You’ll be travelling to King’s Landing to attend Stannis Baratheon’s coronation. You’ll be escorted by my trusted guards and Nymeria. Once in the city, Oberyn and Nymeria will introduce you to Harrion Stark.”

“What am I supposed to do? Bed him?” Arianne asked spitefully.

“You are to charm him, daughter. Strike a friendship with him and get familiar with his family so that when I meet House Stark with a betrothal offer, they’ll agree without a second thought.” Doran said calmly.

“You want me to marry?” Arianne asked incredulously.

“Why would I keep you from marrying with a powerful lord who’d bring more prestige, power and influence to Sunspear and Dorne?” Doran asked with a perplexed look.

And that was the end of the conversation that left her flummoxed. Ever since that conversation, she had been in deep thought about what her father was doing. She was inclined to believe her father was trying to marry her off into the cold North, but why Harrion Stark? As her father had said, the second son of Eddard Stark was a powerful lord with great feats to his name. At the ripe age of two and ten, Harrion Stark had waged a successful naval war against the Ironborn and won several islands to his name. She could think of a long list of reasons why Harrion Stark as her husband would increase her chances of claiming Sunspear over her brother Quentyn. She had known her father had intended to replace her as the heiress with her younger brother early on. She had rightly assumed this was the reason her father always rejected betrothal proposals that came her way from within and outside Dorne.

But now, she didn’t know what to think!

According to some rumours, Harrion Stark was rich, powerful, a dangerous foe with his unique magic and, most importantly, the owner of a sky fleet that puts the dragons of House Targaryen to shame! There was also the fact that her uncle spoke highly of Harrion Stark, and the Stark boy was her uncle’s student. While she disliked her father’s decisions, she trusted her uncle never to lead her astray.

Therefore, a question remained burning in her mind. If her father meant to replace her with Quentyn, why was he ensuring more power to her side by offering her hand in marriage to one of the most powerful lords of the Seven Kingdoms? Did her father finally come to his senses and abandon his plan to let Quentyn inherit Sunspear? Or was this some sort of ploy to steal her rightful inheritance?

Arianne admitted she was out of depth in seeing through her father’s plan.

“I assume you’ve been told what is expected of me with Harrion Stark.” Arianne said, tightening the cloth protecting her mouth, ears, and eyes from the desert winds.

“Yes, Princess.” Nymeria nodded briskly.

“You’ve known him far longer, cousin. Tell me everything you know of Harrion Stark.” said Arianne, setting her eyes on Nymeria, who was riding a horse like her, as they neared the Marches.

Arianne listened closely, hanging on to every word of her cousin Nymeria. Of course, she would not take everything said by her cousin as the ultimate truth.

‘No. I’ll make the judgment when I meet Harrion Stark. If he can deliver Dorne, that should make him a valuable suitor to my hand in marriage.’ Arianne thought.