

The sea breeze of Sea Dragon Point was quite comforting for Harry after months of his departure from the North. While he liked Winterfell, Avalon had become his home in his mind. The comfort and safety he felt in Avalon was something he missed for nearly a year, and he was enjoying his return. The war in the south had forced him to depart for Winterfell and made him spend all the time there as the Stark of Winterfell. After that, the Ironborn attack took him out of the North, further estranging him from Avalon.

But now, he was back. He especially loved the walk among the pine and apple trees of Avalon. The peace with the steady thrum of magic in the castle was something he missed in his time away. The people were also happy to see his return. After all, his return meant the war was officially over, and their loved ones were on their way.

‘Not all of them will be back.’ Harry thought.

While the campaign in the Westerlands and the Iron Islands ended in victory for the North, that victory came at a cost in blood. War always brought death to both sides, and the North was not exempted from this cosmic law. At least, the men he lost in the Iron Islands were very few, and that was the only relief he could give to the people of Avalon. On the other hand, the men mustered by his father suffered greater attrition in the Westerlands. Then, some died due to sickness or suffered permanent fatal injuries. The ugly reality of war was that the suffering continued even after the suspension of all hostilities.

‘Peace is an illusion or, more accurately, fleeting.’ Harry mused.

Therefore, he knew to enjoy the little things in life to keep himself from tipping over to the side of madness like he did in the past.

“My lord.”

Harry found Maester Marwyn walking towards him with his shiny staff in hand, accompanied by the twins Josera and Elsera. He was thankful Maester Marwyn had taken the twins under his wing and started training them to take up some of his duties. As it turned out, Elsera’s magical power was phenomenal. When Harry discovered she had one of the most potent magically powerful blood, he immediately understood her to be a special case. She had a unique condition and connection with magic that turned her blood into a sponge for chaotic magic. In the wizarding world, such wizards and witches were called Blood Mages, and their powers over enchantment and curse-breaking were phenomenal. Knowing this, Harry had charted a special course for Elsera that focused on charms, transfiguration, battle magic, potions and alchemy. Maester Marwyn was also teaching her the art of healing, which only complimented her magical studies.

Josera Snow, on the other hand, was a gifted warg but without the same potential as his twin sister. Therefore, Harry only focused on developing the skill of warging and runes for Josera with some training with melee weapons in the yard. Maester Marwyn took one look at Josera’s warging prowess and took the boy as an apprentice, teaching him ravenry.

Harry was quite happy to see the twins were progressing along nicely. They had at first been disgruntled to be left in Avalon by their father. They had some abandonment issues, but Harry kept them entertained and engaged by opening the wondrous doors to magic and the infinite possibilities that it offered.

‘Perhaps it’s time that I take a more hands-on approach in teaching them magic.’ Harry mused.

“Maester Marwyn, Josera and Elsera. What’s the matter?” Harry asked once they came close.

"A raven came from the capital. Jaime Lannister confessed to his crimes before the court and admitted to the charge of adultery and incest. The false knights have claimed Joffrey and Myrcella as his children before the court. King Stannis writes the Lannister knight was stripped of his white cloak and was executed for his crimes."

"I see." Harry muttered disinterestedly.

Bending down, he picked up a shiny seashell he took fancy from the sand.

"I'm making a seashell necklace for Sansa. Her namesday is approaching." Harry explained to the twins.

"Was there anything else?" he asked when the trio remained standing.

"King Stannis has also issued a bounty of fifty thousand dragons for Cersei Lannister, alive or dead." Maester Marwyn tentatively said, making Harry scoff.

"If Robert Baratheon was not able to get two orphaned children killed for more than a decade, I doubt his brother will do any better with a grown woman." said Harry, shaking his head at the decision to openly proclaim the intent to murder a woman in a martial society like Westeros.

He had hoped Stannis Baratheon was far smarter than this. The newly crowned king just showed the whole of Westeros how petty and easily riled he could become. The man could've sent assassins discreetly to off the former queen if he desperately wanted her dead that much.

"There is one other thing, my lord." Marwyn spoke before nodding at Elsera.

The young Blood Mage stepped forward and offered him a rock.

"I was visited by a Child of the Forest and was given this, my lord. She asked me to deliver this to you. She said you'd know to read her intent from the rock." said Elsera, offering the rock with a curious look on her face.

"Hmm. You've tried deciphering the magic surrounding the rock, right?" Harry asked amusedly.

"I did, my lord. I apologise." Elsera looked down guiltily.

"Never apologise for using your magic." said Harry. "Instead of trying to force the magic to reveal what's on that rock, why don't you try to warm the rock with your magic."

His suggestion earned him an intrigued look from Elsera.

"Warm the rock with my magic?"

"Yes. Imagine that you are heating the rock with fire. Now, keep that thought in your mind and urge the magic in your hand to do the same to the rock." Harry directed the girl and helped her to do the task.

Just as he promised, the rock glowed with painted runes on its surface, making Elsera gasp in surprise.

"How? How did you know, my lord?" Elsera asked, her inquisitive coal eyes trained on him with wonder he had often seen in many young wizards and witches in the past.

"Sensing magic is a skill that'll develop in time. You just have to learn to listen to the tunes of magic." Harry explained.

His attention went back to the message written in runes.

“Hmm. Most curious.” Harry muttered.

“We also received a missive from the Iron Bank while you were away, my lord. An auction was concluded a few weeks back.” said Maester Marwyn.

“Why didn’t you lead with that?” Harry asked, rolling his eyes at the old maester.

The old maester always had the priorities backwards. After all, who cared a shit about what happened to some prissy Lannister in the south?

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Gerion envied the lives of Magisters in the Free Cities. The political system within most Free Cities was such that wealth translated to political power. While the Essosi made their fortunes using slave labour and the slave trade, he could not find much difference compared to the relationship between Westerosi lords and the smallfolk. Of course, there were regions in Westeros that treated the Smallfolk better and not as cattle. But that was the same case for the Free Cities. The Braavosi treated their less fortunate citizens better than most, and there were Magisters in other Free Cities who treated their slaves and gave them better living conditions than the smallfolk of Westeros.

But the lack of constant wars attracted Gerion the most to Essos. Of course, wars were waged between the Free Cities, but they were sparingly waged and mostly fought between sellsword companies. There was no bloodletting the likes of which Westeros saw every two decades. In the Summer Islands, the people had it much better with their ritualistic war. All major disputes in the Summer Isles were settled by warriors fighting in place of giant armies. Not only did the ritualistic fights avoid unnecessary bloodshed, but they also provided a nice bit of entertainment and revenue for the Princes and the people. He had been one of the fortunate men from Westeros to have the chance to witness a ritualistic battle between two warriors over a land dispute between two Princes of the Summer Isles. The same dispute could’ve burned a few villages in Westeros.

He supposed it was one of the reasons why he was always travelling instead of pursuing any of the duties Tywin had assigned to him in the Westerlands. And right now, he had even more reason never to set foot on Westeros after the recent war. However, he was not the only one affected by the happening in Westeros. Ever since word reached them about the defeat of House Lannister and the fall of the Rock, Gerion and Tyrion were bracing themselves for the inevitable news about Jaime to come any day.

So, when word reached them about Jaime’s execution at the hands of Stannis Baratheon, it came as no surprise. But what surprised them was the rumours of Jaime confessing to his crimes and claiming Joffrey and Myrcella as his children. Gerion desperately wanted to believe the rumours were untrue and merely the product of Stannis Braatheon’s propaganda to malign the Lannister name. But once he ascertained the validity of the information, he was puzzled on what to do next.

Gerion was not at all comfortable with the position he was dealt with by the insistence of his late older brother. In the absence of Tywin and Jaime, the seat of Casterly Rock was now Tyrion’s by all the laws of gods and men. However, he’d have to travel to King’s Landing and prostrate before the

Iron Throne to ensure Tyrion inherited the Rock. Even then, he was not sure whether Stannis Baratheon would be amendable to grant the castle to Tyrion.

He didn't know what was going through Tyrion's mind. Ever since word reached them about Jaime's execution, Tyrion had fallen silent. Gerion suspected the helplessness of the situation must haunt Tyrion more than anyone else. They had tried to cajole the Golden Company to take up the contract for House Lannister in their fight against the Iron Throne. Unfortunately, the sellswords were disinterested in signing a contract. Their reasons were sound, and Gerion could hardly refute them when they pointed out they lacked a fleet to cross the Narrow Sea.

Besides, they were already too late in contacting the Golden Company. Even if Gerion had somehow hired enough sellsails to the cause, there was no guarantee that the Royal Fleet wouldn't engage them in transit. The captains of the Golden Company had also pointed out that it'd be futile to expect their movements to remain unseen from the Dornish. According to the captains of all the major sellsword companies, sailing a fleet through the Stepstones and landing the troops in the Stormlands was an impossible task without ensuring Dornish neutrality.

"Have you decided on what you are to do, nephew?" Gerion asked as they lounged on a cushion in Magister Vhaegry's mansion.

"I must return to Westeros." said Tyrion.

"You realise what that entails. The Iron Throne could have our heads despite our lack of participation in the war."

"If I don't return now, I stand to lose Casterly Rock. Forgive me for saying this, uncle. My head is less valuable to me than the Rock." said Tyrion.

"If you don't have your head, you won't be having the Rock." Gerion pointed out.

"If I don't have the Rock, there won't be much use for my head." Tyrion replied.

"That's where you are wrong, nephew. Have you thought of leaving Westeros and starting a new life elsewhere?" Gerion inquired.

"Once, when I was much younger. I thought of running away to a far-off land unreachable from the hawkish eyes of my father. But I later realised it was a stupid dream."

"Seeking a home elsewhere is not stupid, Tyrion."

"Look at me, uncle. Do you think a disfigured dwarf like me will get it any better elsewhere?" Tyrion asked with a raised eyebrow. "At least in Westeros, I have the Lannister name."

To his shame, Gerion could not argue against his nephew on that point. As a well-travelled man, he knew Tyrion was right. But Westeros had never been this dangerous for his nephew. It was not just Stannis Baratheon they had to worry about. With House Lannister as weakened as it was, all their enemies would be surrounding their house like vultures and feast on their family's carcass. There was also the internal strife waiting to happen if Tyrion was to pursue his claim on the Rock. After all, Tywin had no shortage of enemies inside House Lannister, and they'd be out in numbers to keep the Rock out of Tyrion's hands.

"Did you wonder why we never heard any mention of Kevan?" Gerion suddenly asked.

"What do you mean, uncle?" Tyrion asked.

“Kevan was captured by Stannis Baratheon in the Reach. Why do you think he was not sentenced to death or even sent to the Wall till now?” Gerion posed the question to his nephew, whose face fell into a thoughtful frown.

“You think Stannis wants Uncle Kevan to inherit the Rock?” Tyrion asked.

Gerion knew his nephew was trying to hide his emotions, but he could read the boy easily. He knew a profoundly ambitious and cunning face was hiding deep inside Tyrion. Now more than ever, he understood Tyrion would not let Casterly Rock slip from his grasp. Gerion couldn't help but shake his head as the realisation came to him.

“Why are you smiling, uncle?” Tyrion asked with a frown.

“I was merely amused by the fact that of all the children of Tywin, you resembled him the most. It's quite ironic, isn't it Lord Lannister?” Gerion grinned at his nephew, who looked surprised by his observation.

“I'm not like my father.” Tyrion vehemently denied shaking his head.

“On that, we can agree, Imp.”

Gerion suppressed a groan when Cersei walked in on that moment with a swagger.

“Niece.” Gerion nodded curtly at the woman who singlehandedly destroyed House Lannister and everything Tywin built.

“Uncle. I assume you're here to do something about those who wronged our house.” Said Cersei, sliding onto a couch across from them gracefully.

“We are looking at the one who wronged our house.” Tyrion said coldly, glaring at Cersei with an intensity that made Gerion blink in surprise.

“I was not talking to you, Imp.” Cersei bit out.

“Cersei.” Gerion said firmly, attracting his niece's attention. “Jaime is dead.”

“What!” Cersei's face lost all colour.

“Jaime was executed by Stannis Baratheon for cuckolding the king. Before he died, he confessed his crimes and claimed Joffrey and Myrcella as his children.” Gerion said quietly.

“No... This is wrong. You're lying!” Cersei shouted, jumping to her feet and turning her blazing eyes on Tyrion. “You! This is your work, demon!”

“Sit the fuck down!” Tyrion snarled. “You'll not blame me for your mistakes anymore. Because of you, Jaime lost his life, and only the gods know what happened to Joffrey or anyone else with the Lannister name.”

“Joffrey! What happened to my son?” Cersei fell to her knees with tears freely rolling down her cheeks. “Uncle, please tell me. What happened to my son?”

“I do not know, niece. You'll have to prepare your mind for the worst.” Gerion said truthfully.

“No. No!” Cersei screamed.

It took them some effort to force Cersei to take the Dreamwine. She was inconsolable, and Gerion had the feeling she'd be challenging to handle in the coming days. Despite Cersei's wrongdoings,

Gerion could only see her as the bright child she once was. Once Cersei fell asleep muttering all the time about Joffrey, Gerion stepped out of her room while servants nursed her.

“If you return, you might be forced to do unspeakable things, Tyrion. Stannis Baratheon won’t stop hunting for Cersei and Myrcella. Do you think you can maintain a level head and endure for the sake of the rest of the family? You might be forced to watch your sister and niece suffer like Elia Martell and her children.”

The silence that he received from Tyrion made him understand that his nephew was thinking deeply about the matter.

“Now you realise what is at stake, nephew. It’s not that you have to harm hundreds and thousands for every scrap of power as Lord of the Rock. The challenge would be to live with your decisions, knowing that you have betrayed friends and family to get what you want.”

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Harry was reading the reports about the glass-making units functioning within Avalon. The war had not put a dent in the output or earnings from selling glass. The revenue had only increased as more and more Essosi markets opened for Avalonian glass. Since glass from Avalon was now generating a brand value of its own due to his reputation and the quality of designs, Harry was planning to etch a marker on the glass itself instead of the crates. He wouldn’t put it past the Myrish to exploit his reputation and sell off their wares poised as Avalonian glass. They might even sell faulty, low-quality glass masqueraded as Avalonian glass to harm his reputation.

‘I’ll need to make some modifications in the glass work.’ Harry decided, nodding to himself.

He wrote down a quick reminder in his diary. After that, he went to the backlog reports meticulously filed by Maester Marwyn. The records were about reports from White Harbour about his suggestion to send selected sailors to train with the Manderly fleet. The plan was to get some sailors from Avalon to get some real-life experience in naval battles. The pirates in the Three Sisters had graciously offered themselves as training dummies by their continued aggression on merchant ships coming in and out of White Harbor. Despite repeated warnings given to the Vale and the lords of the Three Sisters, they had refused to act against the pirates based out of the islands. Therefore, they had come to a decision to use the situation to their advantage.

While the Bite and the Narrow Sea don’t have the same seafaring conditions as the Sunset Sea, Harry was sure the battle experience would come in handy someday. Besides, he was discreetly warned by his budding spy network he had the warlocks create that there were plans by his rivals in Myr to hire pirates to target ships from the North. It would not work so long as the Braavosi fleet sailed the Narrow Sea, but it was better to be prepared.

A knock on the door made Harry look up from the parchments lying about on his desk.

“Come in.”

The door opened, and Harry saw Jon step into his chamber.

“The airship has returned from Blacktyde.” said Jon.

“Good. Let’s see whether the Valkyrie brought me a nice present from those pirates.” Harry said with a grin.

If all went according to plan, he just got some experienced sailors from Blacktyde, and they needed some personality adjustments. While he was excited to get the sailors he needed, he was not looking forward to the migraine with all the Mind Arts he was about to employ.