

Harry had to admit the capital city had seen better days. Once touted as the most populous city in Westeros, most of its streets and houses were left vacant after the earthquake and tsunami that struck the city. With the Seven Kingdoms plunged into a disastrous war soon afterwards, the city's recovery was further affected. It explained why most of the buildings and streets close to the shore were left in disrepair despite nearly two years had passed after the disastrous incident. Harry supposed the tourney and Stannis' coronation should lighten the city's mood, and people would start resetting the city's ghost towns and streets.

He felt a tad guilty for what befell the city's people. The natural disasters unleashed by the Old Gods turned their livelihoods and lives upside down. He was not even sure why the Old Gods attacked the city in the first place. While King's Landing was the capital and home to the Great Sept of Baelor, everyone knew the true centre of power of the Faith was in Oldtown. The High Septon of the Great Sept of Baelor was merely a figurehead the Starry Sept pretended to exist. If the Old Gods really wanted to attack the Faith at its core, they should've attacked the Starry Sept in Oldtown.

Or maybe they saw some advantage in striking at King's Landing. He was no expert in divine matters or interested in divine problems unless it affected him. The only reason he interfered with the Drowned God was because it was to his advantage to eliminate a hostile god that could later prove to be a hindrance in assimilating the Iron Islands. The Seven, on the other hand, had so far treated him with complete silence from their hand. Harry approved of that attitude.

'However, how long the silence would last has to be seen.' Harry thought, eyeing the giant Weirwood trees that had cropped up all over the city.

"Very subtle." Harry muttered.

He got the distinct impression that the number of Weirwood trees increased more than the last time he paid a visit to the city to facilitate the escape of the Alchemists. It'd seem the Old Gods were busy spreading their roots into the southern part of the continent at an aggressive pace. That must've also been a contributing factor in the migration of people out of King's Landing.

'Well, that should change now. With the coronation and the tourney, more people should feel comfortable to return.' Harry mused.

"My lord. Riders approaching."

Harry's musings were interrupted while he was studying one of the Weirwood trees that had cropped up near one of the abandoned streets of King's Landing. The men guarding him were on full alert with their hands on weapons. While they were supposed to be 'safe' inside the city walls, the lack of City Watch and the general unpredictability of their current situation was not lost on Harry. Therefore, Harry thought it was better to be seated on his horse while facing the riders, whether they be friends or foes.

As the riders came closer, Harry relaxed slightly, seeing the Dornish riding party. He was not surprised to see Nymeria Sand and another Dornish woman, whom he assumed was her cousin, being escorted by a light escort managed to track him down. After all, he was not exactly subtle when leaving for this part of the city.

"It has been a while, Nymeria." Harry greeted the girl once she pulled her horse to a stop nearby with a teasing smirk on his face. "And I must say, you have grown rather... tall!"

"You meant to say beautiful." said Nymeria.

“Did I?” Harry struck a thinking pose. “I don’t seem to recall thinking such a thing.”

“Of course you did. Why else would your eyes sparkle when you look at me?” Nymeria asked.

“Maybe they sparkle for your beautiful companion who dresses in fine silk instead of boiled leather and riding breeches, unlike some.” Harry jested, trotting his horse forward until he was facing the Princess of Dorne.

He had to admit Arianne Martell was indeed a beautiful woman. Flowing black hair that looked like it was weaved out of a night sky, long eyelashes, large dark eyes, olive skin, full lips that held a playful smile, curvy hips, a voluptuous body, and she knew how to dress to best emphasise the curviness of her body. Not to mention, that woman's breasts were perfectly round, which stood out to Harry's eyes. For a moment, Harry almost suspected Princess Arianne was a veela with how he was reacting. He promptly dismissed that notion as he understood he was only naturally attracted to the fairer sex, and Arianne was the peak of female beauty in his eyes.

“Princess Arianne.” Harry nodded respectfully at the heiress of Sunspear. “For once, the rumours were true. Your beauty was not exaggerated.”

“Lord Harrion. The rumours about you were sadly wrong. Most rumours in Dorne spoke of the second son of Lord Eddard having green skin and horns.”

“And a tail.” Nymeria reminded her cousin.

“A tail, yes. Do you have one of those hidden on your back?” Arianne asked, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“I’m afraid not, Princess. If I had one, it’d be on full display.” Harry replied.

A few minutes later, Harry walked with Nymeria and Arianne along the beaches of King’s Landing. They had walked the length of the beach while their escorts were kept at a distance. The tides crashed down into the shore noisily, spraying them with salty, scented water. The gales of wind also did interesting things to the two women walking by his side. The winds flattened their clothes against the delicate contours of their bodies, which kept distracting Harry throughout their walk.

‘Huh! I’m really under the grip of puberty, aren’t I?’ Harry thought with some amusement as his mind overtly focused on the way Nymeria and Arianne dressed.

“Is it true that you can build castles out of nothing with just a thought?” Arianne asked eagerly.

“That’d be an exaggeration of my powers. The more complex the magic, the more time it takes me to perform them.”

“So, I take it you can’t build me a flying ship right now.” Arianne pouted.

“I’m afraid not, Princess. It’ll take me months to build a new airship, and sadly, all airships are assisting in transporting our men from the Westerlands.”

“This is so unfair. I was hoping to fly among the clouds like the Targaryens of old.” Arianne sighed disappointedly.

“There’s an easy solution to your dilemma, cousin. All you need to do is to invite Harrion to Sunspear. He could come on his airship and whisk you away into the sky.” Nymeria pitched in quickly.

‘Subtle.’ Harry thought amusedly at her antics.

He was almost getting the feeling that Nymeria was purposefully acting obtuse and plainly evident about what was happening. Perhaps she didn't enjoy being the instrument of Doran Martell in his plan to let Arianne woo him to their side.

"Can you do that, Harrion? You should visit Dorne. You'll love the Water Gardens." said Arianne, taking his hand into her own and pressing herself against him.

"Well, I did promise Oberyn and Nymeria that I'd visit their home one day. I suppose I could expedite my visit to Sunspear."

"Oh, that's wonderful!" Arianne almost purred happily at getting her way.

Harry merely smiled at the rather plain attempts from Arianne Martell to try and seduce him. But he caught on to the fact that Nymeria was not wholly into the plan. He had the suspicion early on when they started conversing, but now, he could read her like an open book. The way her eyebrows were pulled together and her repeated gestures with her left hand, whenever Arianne behaved too friendly with him caught his eye. But Harry didn't act like he noticed any of that; he continued to act enamoured with Arianne. In fact, he doubled down on his acting skills and acted like Nymeria didn't even exist, which made the Sand Snake far madder.

It was then Harry confirmed that Nymeria considered him a good friend enough to feel guilty about helping her uncle manipulate him or...

Harry eyed the bastard daughter of the Red Viper out of the corner of his eyes. He didn't dismiss the possibility that Nymeria could be fancying him on some level. After all, he was not the only one under the grip of hormones.

'This could be fun.' Harry mused, a grin tugging at the corner of his mouth.

The bells tolled in the city after the crowning of Stannis Baratheon, the First of his name. The bells heralded the reign of a new king with a new heir. With Stannis Baratheon ascending the Iron Throne, his one-year-old son was now the heir to the Iron Throne. Therefore, the celebrations that followed the crowning also involved the ascension of young Steffon Baratheon as the Prince of Dragonstone. The heir of the Iron Throne was officially showcased before the entire realm even though the child could barely make a few gurgling sounds in return after being named the Prince of Dragonstone.

While the Red Keep and most parts of King's Landing were revelling in celebrations, this was not the state for the entirety of the city. For many, the tragedy that befell their loved ones in the city was far too fresh to celebrate. There were also the losses suffered because of the war to consider.

This was why Jon Arryn had fought Stannis tooth and nail for the High Septon to officiate the crowning ceremony. In the absence of the congregation of septons sworn to the Great Sept of Baelor, the Starry Sept had chosen to name a new High Septon. Jon knew it was Oldtown's way of quickly asserting themselves as the centre of the Faith of the Seven. But he could hardly contest such a play at power from Oldtown because the Crown was not financially sound enough to rebuild a grand sept in the capital on short notice. Nor did he think he could convince Stannis to do such a thing. The effort he expended on convincing Stannis to hold the crowning ceremony using the High Septon itself

was enormous. He managed to do so only because he could persuade Stannis to pick and choose his fights. Turning the Faith against the Iron Throne on the first day was not exactly good governance.

Besides, there were ample problems to deal with other than the Faith.

Chief among them was the succession of Casterly Rock, the Paramountcy of the Westerlands, the rewards for the loyal lords and many other lesser unaddressed issues remained at large. His eyes inadvertently fell on the delegation from Oldtown while the lords across the realm presented the newly crowned king with gifts.

“Have you heard any whispers from the Hightowers?” Jon whispered to the Master of Whispers.

“They’ve been in talks with Lord Florent seeking support for Baelor Blacktyde’s claim on the island. They’ve amassed support from the Starry Sept. It seems Baelor Hightower has taken the Seven, and it has been Oldtown’s greatest ambition to see the Iron Islands converted to the Faith.” Vary whispered back.

“They are confident to support Baelor Blacktyde? It’ll not be the first time Oldtown attempted to subvert the Ironborn culture.” said Jon.

“I do not know, Lord Hand. Now that his grace has shown himself open to splitting off some islands from the Ironborn to the North, they might be sensing an opportunity.” Varys said with a thoughtful frown.

“This won’t sit well with the Northerners.” Jon muttered.

“Perhaps Lord Stark won’t protest much, seeing as Baelor Blacktyde was a hostage in Oldtown ever since the last rebellion and had nothing to do with the recent Ironborn raid on the North.” said Varys.

“It’s not Eddard I’m worried about,” Jon muttered, but he shook his head when Vary looked at him in askance. “Have you heard of any discontent from the Northerners?”

“There is always discontent in the Seven Kingdoms, Lord Arryn. The North is no exception. Their complaint is that they tire of wars in the south, a relatable sentiment everyone shares.” said Vary, waving his hand dismissively.

Jon was placated somewhat upon hearing Varys’ words. The Master of Whispers had been his sole ally in the Small Council during the trying times of the last few years. Therefore, Varys’ words brought some much-needed comfort to his mind.

“Why the sudden concern about our Northern friends, Lord Hand? I’ve always thought the Northmen were the easiest to rule for a king sitting on the Iron Throne. Historically, they’ve been the least troublesome lot for the Targaryen reign until Arys Targaryen burned a Stark alive.”

“You are right, of course. It seems Harrion Stark knows the right words to say to get what he wants.” Jon muttered.

“Hmm. I wouldn’t be so sure, my lord.”

“Huh? What’d you mean?” Jon raised a questioning eyebrow at Varys.

“From what my little bird says, the young Stark is quite smitten by the Dornish Princess. They’ve been joined at the hip since they were properly introduced. It seems young Harrion Stark, despite his colourful personality and achievements, is just a boy.” said Varys.

'The Dornish! Of course, I had forgotten all about them in the haste of the coronation.' Jon thought.

Adopting a stern visage, Jon fully looked at the Master of Whispers.

"Tell me everything that Prince Oberyn has been up to in the city."

"I see my niece has more than captured your interest, Harrion." said Oberyn, his dark eyes glittering playfully.

Harry eyed Arianne Martell, sitting a step below him on the stands with Nymeria as the tourney progressed. A knight of House Florent was trying his best to unseat a knight of House Brune. The knights had already taken three passes against each other, and no clear victor could still be seen. The crowd was enthused to see the two knights battling it out in the joust.

"Princess Arianne is charming and beautiful." Harry replied, and judging by the laughter coming from Oberyn, it was the right thing to say.

"Arianne tells me she extended you an invitation to Sunspear."

"Oh, yes. She invited me to visit the Water Gardens as well." said Harry.

"Have you accepted?" Oberyn asked curiously.

"I'll have to consult with my father for the specifics. Otherwise, yes. I'd love to visit Sunspear and the Water Gardens." Harry answered, grinning at the Red Viper.

Harry was quite amused to see how easy it was to manipulate the Martells. Prince Oberyn was a strong warrior he respected, but he supposed political intrigue was not the Red Viper's forte.

'Doran Martell must be the brains, and Oberyn the brawn.' Harry thought.

The stands erupted in cheers as the Florent knight managed to unseat the Brune on the fifth pass.

"Did you know the Hightowers have brought Baelor Blacktyde along with them? I've been told the Hightowers had a long meeting with Lord Arryn last night."

"Hmm." Harry grunted but didn't look bothered by the information Oberyn so graciously shared.

"Do you not understand what this means? The Hightowers are throwing their support behind Baelor Blacktyde so that he can reclaim the island of Blacktyde from you."

"I was approached by Lord Arryn with the matter of Baelor Blacktyde. Lord Arryn was convinced Lord Baelor Blacktyde would be a good lord to keep the peace on the island and swear oaths to Avalor and Winterfell." said Harry.

"You realise this is a trap, right? The Faith has been trying their best to..."

"...to convert the Iron Islands into the Faith, and I know they've failed innumerable times." Harry finished for Oberyn. "I know enough, Prince Oberyn."

"So, what did you say?" Oberyn asked curiously.

“Nothing except that I’ll think about it.”

“And?” Oberyne looked curiously at him, but the crier chose that moment to announce the next knights to partake in the joust.

“From the Stormlands, Ser Patrick Swan. From the Iron Islands, Ser Baelor Blacktyde.” the crier announced loud and clear.

The crowd erupted in cheers as the two knights emerged on their horses, armed to the teeth. The knights waved their hands to the crowd as they took position against each other in the tourney ground. The knights charged with their lances at the ready when the horn was blown. On the first pass, both knights broke their lances but managed to stay on their horses. The people cheered as both knights took up new lances and rode against each other.

Magic flared up in Harry’s hand, and he cast the Confundus charm on the Stormlander knight without anyone noticing. At the last minute, Ser Patrick Swan raised the tip of his lance so that its tip punched straight into the neck of Ser Baelor Blacktyde. The last Blacktyde was blown off his feet and smashed into the ground on his back. The stands let out a collective gasp at what happened as men rushed to aid the downed knight. It was later announced that Ser Baelor Blacktyde succumbed to his wound and died with a splintered piece of wood lodged in his throat. The young knight had bled out, with Maesters unable to stop blood flow.

“Well, that neatly ties up the question of Blacktyde, doesn’t it?” Harry said with a grin.

His hands were clean as far as the public was concerned, and Oldtown lost their first pawn in the game. He was not amused by their little play to try and get at the Iron Islands at his expense. It was almost enough to revisit his current agreements with the Reach for the fleet they were building for him. In the end, Harry decided to cut down on the numbers instead, as he could now outsource that work to Harlaw and Blacktyde. All he had to do was provide them with timber and gold.

With most of his work finished in the capital, Harry was ready to leave the city and never return. The sentencing of Jaime Lannister and Joffrey Waters was an event in which he was the least bothered. The outcome of that trial was not in any way interesting to his plans. Therefore, Harry departed early from King’s Landing, leaving the Dornish to try their little plots on his father instead. He had an interesting companion accompanying him to the Riverlands. Harry had the distinct pleasure of getting acquainted with the Master of Coin, Petyr Baelish. It was the same man his grandfather expelled from Riverrun for fornicating with his aunt Lisa.

Harry hadn’t initially thought much of the man on their journey, but he had the distinct displeasure of peeking inside the man’s mind. After getting disturbing information from Baelish’s mind, Harry was faced with killing a hostile snake or allowing it to flourish in the south. In the end, he chose to go ahead with the latter option. Despite Petyr Baelish’s obvious animosity for his family, the man remains a useful troublemaker. Harry was confident with snakes like Baelish hanging around the royal court, it was only a matter of time before the Iron Throne would find itself in trouble.

“Chaos is a ladder.”