

“You know about my circumstances. How?” Harry asked, looking at the shade of his illustrious ancestor.

“That’s such a silly question, young one. You summoned me using the Resurrection Stone, connecting your thoughts and magic to pull my spirit from beyond the veil of death. So long as your magic and mind are connected to the stone, I know everything you know.”

“I see.” Harry muttered.

“Why ask questions to the answers you already know, young Stark? Isn’t that why you refuse to call on the spirits of your family or friends? You fear what they’ll see in your mind. You fear they’ll see the real you.”

Harry couldn’t help but blanch at the words of Ignotus. It took him a moment to regain his bearings as he was suddenly thrust into some uncomfortable memories he thought he had long suppressed. He couldn’t help but sneak a look at the Resurrection Stone, his mind filling with the temptation to summon the shades of his wife, children, parents and even Sirius.

‘It’ll only take three turns.’ a voice whispered in his mind tempting him to commit the deed.

Harry gulped as the temptation became unbearable, but Harry managed to tear his eyes away from the Resurrection Stone after taking a deep breath. He screwed his eyes shut and imagined the smiling faces of the family he had lost. When he opened his eyes, the temptation to disturb the eternal peace his family was enjoying had passed.

“I see. You have a strong heart to not misuse the power of the Stone. No wonder the Hallows chose your soul as their host. When the heart is strong enough, the soul transcends the eternal veil of death between the worlds.” Ignotus said.

Harry stared at the ghost critically.

“You tempted me to summon my loved ones. Why?” Harry asked, his magic flaring up as a visible aura, converging on the spirit with the intent of doing harm.

“Oh!” Ignotus looked impressed as Harry’s magical power managed to press down on his spectral form. “You’ve even managed to bend the Stone to your will enough to impose your will upon spirits. You’re certainly more interesting, Harrion Stark.”

“You didn’t answer my question, Ignotus Peverell.” Harry gritted out, imposing his magic on the spirit and pressuring the spirit into a confined space.

“I needed to know whether the protections my brothers and I placed on the Hallows remained intact. We could not have allowed the Hallows to fall into the hands of a maniac who’d destroy himself and become the puppet of a malevolent force looking to devour worlds and the spirit realm.”

“You’re talking about the Great Other, aren’t you?” Harry asked, easing his power a little bit.

“Yes. He is known as the Great Other in this world, but I knew him as Balor, a mad spirit bent on devouring life so that he could assert himself in the spirit plane.” said Ignotus, feeling a tad more comfortable as the pressure on him eased a little bit.

“Why? What is Balor’s connection to the Hallows?” Harry asked.

“You already know some of the answers to that query, young one. Since the dawn of man arrived in our world, our actions have shaped the world, but our dreams have shaped the spirit world. From our collective dreams, beings of extraordinary power were born to protect us, to fight wars that we could not, to help those we could not, and to give hope so that we may forget the tragedy of existence. These beings, however, became disenchanting as they became the instrument of destruction as men fought with each other. The conflict between different tribes of men led to the conflict of different spirits. Eventually, it led to a permanent state of war between the spirits for dominance over the spirit realm, their birthplace.”

“What does that have to do with the Hallows?” Harry asked, bored by the long-winded story mode Peverell was on.

“Balor was one of the few who nearly managed to take control of the spirit realm. He devoured all those who stood against him, assimilating their power into his own and strengthening his won power in the process. His power grew so much that he was feared across the many cultures of Earth. The Nordic tribes called him Nidhogg, the devourer of all life from Yggdrasil. The Egyptians called him Apep, the harbinger of chaos and the serpent of the Nile. But I knew him as Balor, the one who consumes all souls of those fallen in battle, both mortal and immortal.”

“Balor devoured souls? Like the Dementors?” Harry asked curiously.

“Yes and no. The souls trapped in a Dementor can still reach the Spirit Realm for the Eternal Sleep after the creature dies. But the souls consumed by Balor dissolve into his being, becoming fuel to his power.”

Harry remained pensive as he frowned at his ancestor.

“You said Balor also consumed immortal souls. Why? Why was he after the Spirit Realm?”

“I don’t understand your question, child.” Ignotus looked at him with a frown.

“Balor was already a spirit and an immortal being. What else did he want other than eternal life?” Harry asked.

Ignotus stared long and hard at Harry, mulling over the question before deciding to answer anyway.

“Balor was dissatisfied with the nature of existence. He wanted to consume all life and reshape everything in his image. Human thought influenced the spirit realm more than the spirits themselves. He wanted that to change. He wanted his will to shape all forms of conscious thought. With his will imposed on the dreamscape, he can exert total control and bring peace to all conflict.”

“I take it you stopped him from accomplishing this task.” Harry said after a long interval of silence.

“Yes. And yet, his prediction came to pass. Mankind brought forth the end of all life on Earth.” Ignotus said airily.

“So, he is a prophet as well.” Harry snarked.

“Not much of a prophet when his prediction was the death of something. Every beginning has an end.” Igotus shrugged.

“So, you somehow defeated Balor and banished him here, to this world. Then you followed him here and bound him beyond the Wall.”

“You give me too much credit, young one. It took a lot of sacrifice and effort from other spirits and wizards to strip Balor of his power and banish him to these lands.” Igotus said, shaking his head.

“Tell me how you defeated Balor. What is his connection to the Hallows? How did you travel to Westeros? What do you know about the Old Gods and other deities of this world?”

“That’s a lot of questions.” Igotus said tiredly.

“Don’t worry. Take your time to answer them in as much detail as possible. I’ve got a lot of time on my hands.” said Harry, taking a seat on the floor and staring pointedly at the ghost of Igotus Peverell.

“All right, then.” Igotus sighed and then launched into his explanation.

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Harry sat at the high table with his mother to his right side. Sansa was seated to his left side, taking a spoonful of a slice of the Lemon cake she liked so much. Arya and Bran were sitting next to his mother, forced to behave as the Lady of Winterfell watched over them like a hawk. Jon’s seat lay vacant beside Maester Luwin, who was sitting beside Sansa. Harry’s eyes went straight to Jon, who was animatedly talking to Asher Forrester, who had accompanied Lord Gregor Forrester to take part in the feast he threw to celebrate the capture of assassins.

Almost all the major houses of the North had sent representatives except for a few. Lady Dustin had refused to attend, but many of her Ryswell kin were in attendance. House Bolton was absent, as well

as House Mormont. The former had an excuse, as the last two Boltons were in the south fighting the war. The latter, on the other hand, had no such excuse. Other Northern houses were represented by distant cousins or young sons and daughters. In House Manderly's case, the portly lord of White Harbour had brought his granddaughters to Winterfell and several distant relatives.

It was a shame the Mormonts had not come for some reason. He was planning to have a chat with Mormonts and Manderlys about strengthening the coastal installations on either side of the Wall. In the wake of certain revelations from Ignotus Peverell, Harry wanted to expedite the preparations made at the Wall. For that to happen, he needed the sea lanes wide open to both sides of the Wall.

At least, Eastwatch-by-the-sea hosts some galleys and some infrastructure for expansion. Westwatch-by-the-bridge, the westernmost outpost of the Night's Watch, remains unmanned to this day. According to Maester Luwin, the outpost guarding the Gorge was abandoned since Daeron II's reign. It used to be a supply depot of the Wall and acted as a landing post for troops from the Bear Islands and other coastal towns during Wildling invasions. A bridge connected to the tower across the Gorge allowed the brothers of the Night's Watch to cross the river and take the Wildling armies from their backs should they attack the Wall. The bridge and the castle allowed the Night's Watch to contain the Wildlings and denied them to sail around the Wall using the Gorge.

'Both castles must be restored and expanded before it's too late. Maybe, I shouldn't wait for the port in Bear Islands to be finished.' Harry decided, looking thoughtfully at the few Iron Bank representatives and some of the courtiers of the Sealord in the feast hall.

Harry considered that it was his luck that the Sealord had decided to commission a Valyrian steel sword. He didn't completely understand all the details, but the Sealord had decided to partake in the bidding conducted in the Iron Bank and decided to outbid several Essosi Magisters and merchants. After the Tyrells won the bid for a sword, the next winners in the next six-month breaks were all won by wealthy Essosi. The last Valyrian weapon he had forged was a double-headed axe for the Archon of Tyrosh.

'Perhaps, the Braavosi felt like they were being one-upped by the Tyroshi.' Harry thought, knowing the rivalry between Braavos and the other daughters of Old Valyria ran deep.

Either way, he was all too happy so long as these rivalries ended up filling his coffers with more gold and silver.

With the Braavosi here in Winterfell, it was perhaps time to send out feelers for a contract to build a port at the mouth of the Gorge. Similarly, the port facilities near Eastwatch-by-the-sea also need fast repair. The Wildlings must be relocated from Beyond the Wall before Balor regains his strength. The rise of magical energy in the world might've posed a threat to Balor because it led to the rise of the Old Gods. But if Ignotus' warning rang true, Balor must've got a backup plan other than just a straight-up assault on the Wall.

"My lords! My lords!"

All the activity came to a halt when Harry took to his feet, calling for the attention of the nobles gathered under the roof of Winterfell.

“As we grow strong and self-sufficient, we shall attract enemies in the neighbourhood and even from across the seas. We have experience dealing with the enemies in the neighbourhood, and now we have shown we can take care of the enemies from across the seas thanks to the diligent work of House Manderly. The Lords of White Harbour remain steadfast in defending the North from honourless enemies who are too cowardly to fight us face-to-face. For this, House Stark thanks House Manderly for their unfailing loyalty and work in guarding our shores against the enemies of the North.”

“House Manderly!”

“Wyman! Wyman!”

House Manderly received a lot of appreciation from the assembled Northmen. At the same time, they also expressed their displeasure against Myr.

“Sending assassins like cowards. Honourless Myrish curs!”

“Cowards!”

“Silver-haired cunts!”

“Essosi mongrels!”

“Valyrian sisterfuckers!”

A slew of name-calling piqued up, and Harry had to wait a bit for all the usual colourful vocabulary of the Northmen to die down.

“The seas remain treacherous with unpredictable winds and turbulent tides. But we also have friends across from the sea, honoured representatives of the Iron Bank and the Sealord of Braavos. I welcome them heartily into our midst on behalf of the North and House Stark.”

There was a smatter of applause, but Harry got the feeling the Northmen were not that enthusiastic about hosting foreigners in the North. The Northern lords were martially inclined and therefore looked down on most Essosi. The Braavosi were marginally held in higher regard in comparison as they didn't practice slavery in their city.

“To a prosperous future for the north and our friends.” Harry raised his glass.

“For the north!”

“House Stark!”

“The Black Wolf!”

Seeing that the Northmen were charged up, Harry clapped his hands.

“Let's have some Northern songs in here.”

Going by the eager faces of his guests, Harry inferred they agreed wholeheartedly with the sentiment.

“Keep an eye on Bran and Arya.” Harry whispered to Maester Luwin, who agreed readily as Winterfell resonated with songs.

Harry climbed down from the high table to interact with his guests as the Northmen danced and became merry. Somehow, he ended up dancing with a few daughters of the lords like Alys Karstark, Wynafryd Manderly, Wylla Manderly and Mira Forrester. By the time Harry managed to excuse himself from the dance floor, he was pretty much spent for the night and wanted to curl up in his bed.

Unlike his siblings, who had the privilege of going to bed early, he had certain duties to oversee as the Stark of Winterfell. And those duties led him straight to the solar of the armoury of Winterfell with the Braavosi representatives in tow. Leading the three representatives of the Sealord inside, Harry showed them the sword he had made for the Sealord.

“I was surprised to see the design specifications set forth by the Sealord. I thought Lord Antaryon would ask for a small sword as the city of Braavos is known for using the water dance in combat.” Harry commented, inviting the Braavosi inside and showing them the sword he had made for the Sealord.

“For duels, small swords are quite useful for showmanship. The Sealord is of the opinion that this sword does not get associated with showmanship in the future.” Lissandden Antaryon said, who was a kinsman of the Sealord and a courtier in the Braavosi court.

“I see. Then I hope the Sealord won’t be disappointed with his sword.” said Harry, standing to the side and watching the Braavosi observe the sword he made.

After the Braavosi were escorted to their quarters with the sword in their possession, Harry found Lord Manderly.

“My lord. I hope the Braavosi were satisfied with the sword.”

“They were. Come, Lord Manderly. We have some important matters to discuss.” said Harry leading the Lord of White Harbour away to discuss the matter of ports.

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Cersei was relieved to see the high walls and towers of Tyrosh in the distance. It was a long journey and one rife with strife for her. Her eyes took in the massive harbour that housed a large fleet of ships. A lone enormous tower made of red stone stood at the mouth of the harbour overlooking the fleet of ships. Letting out a sigh, Cersei sat on a chair beside her bed and looked at her sleeping daughter. Seeing the innocent face of her daughter brought some much-needed hope and peace to her mind.

‘Magister Vhaegrys will help us. He will help us.’ she assured herself.

She had no other recourse but to believe Magister Vhaegrys would welcome her with open arms and give her and Myrcella refuge from her enemies. A sudden knock on the door of her cabin broke her out of her musings. She was immediately on her feet and smoothed out her red silken dress before she opened the door. It was no surprise to see Captain Rowello on the other side of her cabin with a silly grin.

“Rowello.” Cersei smiled coyly, rubbing herself against the pirate captain’s body.

“My queen. The harbour of Tyrosh fast approaches. It seems our time together is fast coming to an end.”

“I think not, my brave captain. It’ll take time for Magister Vhaegrys to assemble your reward. Time that we could spend in a bed.” Cersei whispered sultrily, eyeing Rowello with a smouldering look.

The lust shining in Rowello’s eyes gave her a sense of triumph. That sense of victory and knowledge that she was manipulating the pirate to his early demise made it easier for her to ignore the wandering hands that traced the contours of her body.

A few hours later, she waited in her cabin with Myrcella in her lap. The Blue Maiden was moored at the harbour, and Rowello had gone ahead to Magister Vhaegrys. She could do nothing but pray to all the gods for her and her daughter’s safety.

“Are we home, mother?” Myrcella asked in a small voice.

“No, my sweet. We will be going to a better place.” said Cersei, holding her daughter close to her bosom.

A knock on the door made her heart skip a beat. It was with trepidation that she opened the door.

“Your grace, the Captain is askin’ for ya’.”

Cersei stared at the yellow-teethed pirate uncomprehendingly for a moment.

“The Magister has sent a wheelhouse for ye’ and yer’ lass.” The pirate said again.

Cersei finally managed to understand what the pirate was seeing. She tried her best not to show the relief that was flooding her mind out in the open.

“Come, Myrcella. Let’s go and see the Free City of Tyrosh.”

Cersei regally marched out of her cabin with Myrcella in her arms. She could feel the lusty eyes of the pirates following her every move, but she paid it no mind. She was nearly free, and if her plan succeeded, all these pirates would meet a most painful end within the week. She found she had no quarrel with dead men.

The wheelhouse Magister Vhaegrys so kindly provided took her and Myrcella inside the high walls of Tyrosh. Everywhere she looked, bright shades of colours greeted her eyes. Even the people of Tyrosh dyed their hair in ridiculous colours like blue and orange. The streets were paved with white stone, and unlike King’s Landing, the smell of flowers and oils filled her nose. She looked at her daughter, who was all too happy to take in the new sights, unaware that they were hiding away in a distant

land. Cersei took her daughter into her lap, and together they watched the many streets and the strange Tyroshi people as their wheelhouse moved further into the city.

Finally, the wheelhouse came to a halt before a manse. The moment she stepped out of the wheelhouse, she was greeted by a familiar-looking red-haired man.

“Your grace. Princess Myrcella. The House of Vhaegrys is honoured to host the daughter and granddaughter of Lord Tywin Lannister.” said Magister Vhaegrys, reaching out with his hand.

Cersei gave the older man her hand, and the Magister pressed a kiss on her knuckles.

“Please step into the manse and take rest, your grace. Consider my home as your own.”

“Thank you, Magister Vhaegrys.” Cersei replied, smiling politely at the older man.

She kept a tight hold on Myrcella as they were led inside the manse of the Magister. Collared slaves fanned her and Myrcella every step of the way into the manse.

“Those pirates. Did they mistreat you, my lady?” Magister Vhaegrys asked once they were out of earshot of Captain Rowello.

“I want those pirates dead. Spare no one. But Rowello should not be touched. He is mine to kill.” Cersei whispered back coldly.

She watched the Magister nod in understanding.

“I shall make the arrangements speedily to give a proper welcome to these pirates.” Magister Vhaegrys promised.

Cersei had to wait for four days until the Magister informed her in confidence that he had made the arrangements to end the pirate scum. On the fifth day of her stay in Tyrosh, she invited Captain Rowello into her chambers in the manse while his men were busy whoring and drinking in the pleasure houses of the city.

“Come inside, Captain Rowello.” she batted her eyelashes at him.

The pirate was already smitten with her as she had forgone any dress and wrapped herself in a white towel.

The foolish pirate captain, drunk in lust, eagerly stepped into her chambers. Cersei giggled as the captain growled and took her straight to the bed without a second thought. As the filthy pirate explored her body, Cersei reached out with her left hand to the dagger hidden under a pillow. She grunted and moaned at Rowello’s ministrations, but no amount of pleasure could deny her the revenge she sought.

The moment her fingers wrapped around the dagger’s hilt, she plunged it straight into the neck of Rowello without any hesitation. The pirate, so busy desecrating her body, didn’t see the dagger coming. Rowello choked as the dagger sank to the hilt on the side of his neck.



Cersei turned her head as warm blood splashed against her face. She wrenched the dagger back and repeatedly stabbed the man who forced her to debase herself to survive. The pirate struggled, but his fate was set.

“You forgot who I am, scum. I’m a Lannister.” Cersei growled into Rowello’s ear before she pushed the man away from the top of her body.

The wide lifeless eyes of Rowello stared into nothingness while Cersei cleaned the blood off her body with the towel. She wiped the blood off the dagger on the towel as she stood over Rowello with her foot pressing down on his chest.

“A lion may choose to lay with the sheep, but the sheep may not live long to tell the tale.” Cersei spat on the corpse.

Dressing into a better dress that befits her station, she called for the servants to dispose of the corpse. Cersei hoped Magister Vhaegrys kept his word and the rest of the pirate scum were on their way to meet the Stranger.