

The dust cloud that arose from the fall of the Great sept of Baelor alone killed hundreds of smallfolk on Visenya's hill.

At least, that was the talk in the Red Keep.

The true extent of the devastation remains unknown as people were finding it difficult to assess the situation. According to all the reports he heard from the small council meetings the Sept of Baelor has struck down almost half the people that have their homes in Visenya's hill. According to Grand Maester Pycelle, it was a miracle that the Red Keep was spared the same fate as the Sept of Baelor. Even the Dragonpit has caved in despite being in ruins for nearly a century. Thankfully, the reputation of the Dragonpit has kept the place deserted from any serious settlements.

As far as Jaime knew, there was not much loss of life being reported from Rhaenys' hill.

Not that it mattered in the end because the settlements outside the city walls were gutted by the sea. It was as if the gods wiped the shores clean of everything. Not even the homes and many small castles were spared from the wrath of the sea. In the blink of an eye, the shores of King's Landing were wiped clean leaving no survivors. The tales he has been hearing spoke of half-eaten bodies of men, women and children being strewn across the shores of Crownlands thanks to the sea throwing out the dead into the land. This situation has even scared the Crownland lords to hole themselves up in their homes fearing there was some curse upon the capital city by the gods.

If the Crownland lords were behaving like morons, then the smallfolk couldn't be blamed for taking their meagre possessions and running away from the city as if their lives depended on it. This has dealt a serious blow to the rescue efforts in Visenya's hill as a portion of the city watch was now diverted away to keep watch over the flow of people out of the city.

"Oh, my King!" a throaty moan interrupted his musings making Jaime scowl.

While the city was coming undone brick by brick the King was rutting away with his whores in the chambers of the Red Keep with no care for the happenings outside. It made his blood boil because he was a glorified bodyguard of a whoring oaf with no sense of concern for the subjects the man claims to protect and rule. The creaking sounds and lusty moans coming from behind the door only increased as time passed, making Jaime restless. At this very moment, he knew good men were out there in the streets helping the people of this wretched city recover. Some were undoubtedly taking advantage of the chaos and there was no one capable of overseeing the city's recovery.

Jon Arryn was just one man in this cesspool of a city with little to no tact when it comes to whipping up the lazy and incompetent fools infesting the court and the city watch. It was almost painful to watch the old falcon try to heave under the weight of the Iron Throne with Robert's fat ass staying on that awful chair. The thought of giving his help crossed Jamie's mind but he promptly discarded the thought.

'I'm the Kingslayer to these fools. Let those with their precious honour help them in time of their need.' he thought vindictively.

Just as the thought made its exit from his mind, he saw Ser Barristan approach in his steel plate armour with the customary white cloak of the Kingsguard bellowing behind his back.

'Here comes the self-proclaimed knight of honour. The knight who stood by as a madman raped a helpless woman but finds fault in killing said madman for the sake of stupid oaths. Ser Barristan the Bold.' Jaime mentally scoffed in derision.

“Ser Jaime. Is his grace available?” the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard asked, his pale blue eyes eyeing Jaime neutrally.

“His grace wishes not to be disturbed while he is otherwise engaged in a matter of great importance.” Jaime said that with a straight face.

“Ahhh! Yes, your grace. Right there!”

Not even the lusty moans of the serving wench made him lose his composure. Jaime stared at Barristan as if he was deaf to the happenings of Robert Baratheon’s chambers. But he did enjoy the disappointed and sad look the ‘honourable’ knight was now sporting thanks to the activities of the King while his city lay in ruins.

“Has he been there for long?” Barristan eventually asked.

Jaime could smell the awkwardness in the air. But that was nothing compared to the smell inside Robert’s chamber.

“For hours without end.” Jaime admitted.

Seeing the incredulous look of the Lord Commander he further added, “There are a couple of whores inside his chambers. He has been taking turns at them with wine and steak powering his vivacity all day.”

He saw the way Barristan’s face fell at his honest words. For a moment, he felt a pinch of sympathy for the old knight. He could understand someone like Barristan who had taken the white cloak at such a young age to serve the old king Jaehaerys the Second could not be thrilled to serve Robert the Whoremonger or Robert the Drunkard. Those were the names the King was getting famous by in the streets according to the Master of Whispers.

‘Then again the man served Aerys the Mad. Suffering Robert Baratheon’s proclivities should be far easier.’ Jaime thought.

“His grace needs to be informed of the small council meeting. Lord Arryn insists that he attend this meeting.” Barristan said.

“His grace cannot be disturbed. Those were his orders.” Jaime parroted the same line the White Bull used to say to Prince Rhaegar whenever the Silver Prince made his attempts to intervene in Aerys’ activities in the Queen’s chambers.

The crinkling eyes of Ser Barristan let Jaime know that the knight was reminded of those days.

“Then I suppose I shall wait for his grace.” Barristan said, taking his stand by the door.

“I suppose there is honour in becoming a mere messenger.” Jaime could not help but quip.

“Yes, there is. Those who stab their king when his back is turned might not see it.” Barristan firmly retorted.

“It seems age has not dulled your humour, Ser.” said Jaime, a strained smile on his lips.

“Then I fear for your wits Ser Jaime for you seem to be misinterpreting facts as humour.” Ser Barristan said blandly.

Jaime was about to retort back but his ears picked up a distant rumble.

“Did you hear that?” Jaime asked, looking at the lord Commander.

“Hear what?” Barristan frowned.

“That!” Jaime exclaimed as the low rumbling began to become audible and even began to shake the painted glass window.

“Another tremor?” Barristan asked worriedly. “We should inform his grace.”

But before anything of the sort could be done there was a tremendous explosion. The painted glass shattered raining down shards of glass pieces forcing Jaime to turn away and shield himself with his cloak and armour. His ears were ringing from the sound of the explosion and he was left disoriented for a minute. When he finally regained his bearings, he saw Ser Barristan on the floor with blood coming out of his ears.

“Ser Barristan.” Jaime rushed to the old knight’s side and shook him awake. “Ser, are you all right?”

The Lord Commander groaned but otherwise remained unresponsive. More tremors shook the Red Keep and it was then Jaime saw a green glow from the broken window. It was as if the air outside was glowing with a green hue. He dragged Ser Barristan to the side and helped him lean against the wall after which he slowly approached the window. The sight he saw made him swear a thousand curse words all against his own person.

Visenya’s hill was set ablaze by wildfire with long tongues of green fire reaching high enough to touch the clouds. And he could only curse and blame himself for he had forgotten all about the caches of wildfire Aerys planted beneath the Great Sept of Baelor.

“It’s my fault. It’s all my fault.” Jaime whispered over and over taking in the city that was ablaze in green flames.

It was to this scene Robert Baratheon walked in half naked with sheets wrapping around his body and two whores joined to his hip on either side.

“Huh! Sorry ladies. It’d seem I was not the cause of those tremors.”

**XXXXXXXX**

Oleanna smiled watching her granddaughter sleeping soundly by her side. The poor thing had dozed off after nursing her sore leg all afternoon. She didn’t lack servants for that kind of work but it gave her more satisfaction when she was pampered over by her young granddaughter. Margery also loved to take care of her mostly for the stories she’d get to enjoy but still, it was out of genuine affection. What more could an old woman like her could ask for from her granddaughter?

‘You have such a kind heart my Little rose.’ Oleanna mused, petting Margaery’s brown hair.

But kind people get nothing in the Seven Kingdoms. It was a lesson her granddaughter has yet to learn but one Oleanna would teach her soon. She’d have waited a few more years before imparting several lessons to her granddaughter but certain circumstances have changed. The unprecedented rise of House Stark all thanks to the eight namesday old Harrion Stark has challenged the very notion of age in the Game of Thrones that the Great Houses of Westeros play. No other youngster has changed the Game so much in such little time. She was almost giddy to meet this young man.

Not that she needed to wait much longer. If the captain spoke true their ship should be reaching Avalon by evening. It was hoped they'd reach the castle before sunset. She'd have avoided the trip but it was now House Tyrell's turn to secure a Valyrian steel weapon of their own. Many of their vassals could boast of owning a Valyrian steel blade and now House Tyrell will no longer be shamed as such for their lack of such an exquisite weapon. A Valyrian steel weapon was not valued for merely its superior quality of steel or its dominance on the battlefield. It was a symbol of wealth and legacy that made the owners stand apart from others. And now House Tyrell was about to own a Valyrian steel sword. Most importantly they were even welcome to watch the forging of the blade which was a rare event in itself.

There was no way Oleanna was going to slip such an opportunity to pass by. After all, who can claim they watched the forging of a new Valyrian steel sword with their own eyes? There are famed smiths of Qohor capable of recasting Valyrian steel but they won't be showing anyone their methods. The fact that the Stark boy was not at all concerned showed profound ignorance or confidence. Either Harrion Stark was too stupid to give away his secrets or he was confident that his methods cannot be replicated. Either way, she was curious to see to which side the Stark boy leaned and see the process with her own eyes.

Besides, there was the new castle of Avalon that Gormon was singing praises of upon his return to Highgarden. There were certainly some curious rumblings in the Citadel after the Archmaesters have returned and based on the overall gist she got from Gormon they were very much impressed and stunned by this Harrion Stark.

A sudden knocking on her door shook her out of the thoughts that kept her engaged.

"Come in." she said.

The door to her cabin swung open and on the other side was her grandson, Willas.

"Grandmother. We're nearing Avalon. Come, it is a sight to see." Willas said excitedly.

The sound even awoke Margaery from her slumber.

"We are? Let's go watch the magical castle grandma." Margaery squealed excitedly, all signs of sleep flew away and a radiant smile asserted itself on her face.

"Very well then. Do help this old woman my dears."

Together they made their way to the bow of the ship and the sight that greeted them was majestic. The evening sun illuminated the castle which was surrounded by twelve tall towers jutting out high into the sky. The castle was carved out of white marble but the tower roofs were painted dark brown. So when looked upon from a distance, the castle looked like a giant cake with chocolate toppings on the towers. The castle was surrounded by a giant wall almost as high as the one in Highgarden. Encampments could be seen on the wall with many soldiers standing guard. There was even a giant glass dome surrounding a building that was shining under the sunlight. A colossal Weirwood tree could be seen towering over the wall with its leaves looking blood red under the evening sun shielding many of the buildings under its shadow.

It was quite a sight to see.

"Well, Gormon was not wrong in saying the castle does not have a stone out of place." she mused aloud before turning on her grandson. "Have you noticed it yet Willas?"

"It's as if the whole castle has been carved out of a single stone." Willas said in awe.

"Yes. I have only seen one castle in Westeros and that is Dragonstone." Said Oleanna, looking intently at her grandson whether he'd pick up the clue.

"Valyrian architecture." Willas turned to her with wonder in his eyes.

"Yes." said Oleanna, happy that her grandson was not as slow as her son.

"It's so beautiful." Margaery squealed with wide eyes drinking in the beautiful castle that was sitting proudly atop a hill.

"That it is my little rose. That it is..." she trailed off staring at the majestic sight.

It took them more than an hour to enter the castle mostly because there were no port facilities for them to safely disembark. Their ship had to be anchored far away from the shore and use a rowboat to row their way to the shore. It was certainly going to be very difficult for the men accompanying in their escort ships to make land. Not that she was worried about some no-name soldiers of the Reach but they need to restock essentials for their return journey. There was a reason that three ships were escorting her and the children. The Ironborn may have surrendered and suffered heavy losses in their failed rebellion but they were a stubborn lot. She wouldn't put it past those pirate scum to attack her ship on transit through the sea. They've kept as close to the shores as possible but you never know. These waters have been treacherous for thousands of years and she didn't expect it to change just because the Ironborn was soundly defeated by Robert Baratheon.

"It's a shame that Loras never got to see this with us." said Willas, as they made their way inside the castle's walls walking in through the giant doors made of wood.

"Hmm. He'll get his chance in the future. He could visit Garlan and take a detour to Avalon." said Oleanna, before catching the wood used around the castle. "It seems the Forresters have generously supplied the Starks with their precious ironwood."

However, all warmth and playfulness fled Oleanna's eyes as she saw the man that was coming to greet their party.

"Lady Tyrell. Willas." Oberyn Martell greeted them.

"Prince Oberyn. I hope you are doing well."

"As well as one could hope." Oberyn said, smiling politely before eyeing Margaery curiously.

"My sister, Margaery." Willas introduced.

"Ah, of course. The littlest rose in the garden." Oberyn reached out to pet Margaery's hair but Oleanna intervened by pulling her granddaughter behind her.

"I didn't know Princes of Dorne now served at the leisure of Starks. My... my... how the times have changed."

"As thorny as I remember. A grape who became a thorn in the gardens of Highgarden. You are a rare breed indeed my lady. I've often said to my brother that you'd have thrived in Dorne not that you're doing any less in the Reach."

"As spectacular as this reunion is I think it is appropriate for our guest to rest in the warmth of the castle and take bread and salt, my prince." Vayon Poole interjected before tempers flare having known there are issues between the Red Viper and the Tyrells beforehand.

“Come my love. Let Lady Tyrell and her grandchildren take the guest rights and rest. I’m sure you can catch up with our northern neighbours tomorrow.” Said Ellaria, leading away Oberyn who waved his goodbyes to Willas who returned them despite Oleanna’s displeasure.

“I don’t know how you can stand that man and his antics, Willas. He is the reason your leg is hurt.” Oleanna furiously whispered at her grandson.

“You were the one who taught me to always keep a calm mind. Besides, Prince Oberyn never meant to hurt me. Accidents happen in jousts as I’m sure you know. I’m rather thankful that I got off easy with my life intact. I know many knights who have broken their necks upon being unseated in a joust.” said Willas. “Now, come grandmother. I’m sure we don’t want to keep Lord Harrion Stark waiting.”

As they were escorted inside the castle Oleanna noticed the change of colour. If the castle was white on the outside it was pitch black on the inside except for the strange squiggly lines that oozed a pale yellow glow. The castle was also well defended by a second wall which was connected by a bridge to the outer wall. There was a forty feet depth from the bridge and the ground and some hundred feet distance between the two walls. Strangely enough, she saw some apple trees in between the walls.

Once they crossed inside the inner wall, she saw the many keeps that sprawled out over the large circular area guarded by six tall towers. The ground was paved with black stone as far as she could see. Small streams of water and water fountains could be seen almost everywhere. There was even a statue of a colossal wolf that has water pouring out of its maw and getting collected in what appeared to be a pool.

“Is that... hot water?” Willas goggled at the pool.

Oleanna was also taken aback as her eyes finally noticed the steam coming from the pool.

“Yes. Lord Harrion made it so that the smallfolk get easy access to clean hot water for their daily use. Pipes are laid out from the sides of the pool delivering warm water to the different households and settlements outside and inside the castle walls.” said Vayon Poole.

“Where does this water come from?” Oleanna asked, finding it a bit difficult to understand the depth of facilities she was seeing in a newly built castle like Avalon.

“Frankly speaking my lady, I have no clue. Lord Harrion is blessed by the Gods with many gifts. I he commands the water to flow as he wishes and it just... happens.”

Oleanna stared at the man incomprehensibly before shaking her head.

‘The more I learn the less everything makes sense.’ she thought, following behind the steward to a larger keep with statues of two snarling wolves carved on the door.

“This is the Great Keep where Lord Harrion holds court and welcomes his guests. Please be welcome to Avalon.”

As the doors swung open Oleanna’s breath hitched at the sight she beheld. It was a giant hall paved with smooth spotless white marble. There were seats made of the same white marble with red colouring, lining on the two sides of the hall all the way to the other end of the hall where a throne of black and gold stood proudly on a raised dais. On a closer look, she realized her mistake.

The throne was made of black marble and the golden yellow colour was the cushion. This was the same for the white marble seats that lined the hall on either side. The red colour she was seeing was

the cushions and based on a cursory look it was made of the finest silks. She also took note of the giant golden banners with a snarling black lion hanging from the many flagpoles inside the hall.

“Grandmother.” Margaery whispered.

“Yes, my dear.”

“Look up there!”

Oleanna frowned at her granddaughter who was pointing straight up. When she looked up her eyes widened as she saw what appears to be ten giant spherical balls aligning themselves around what appears to be a bright ball of golden light captured inside a glass sphere. Further back on the ceiling, there were little spots of white light twinkling away on a black background akin to a clear starry night sky.

“Welcome, to my humble home.” Said a voice that echoes throughout the hall.

Oleanna found the source of the sound to be a boy dressed in a blue doublet and black breeches. Undoubtedly, it was the Stark boy as she identified his black hair and stormy grey eyes even from this distance.

“Even though I’ve only heard about you all from Garlan, I can easily identify all of you thanks to his descriptive skills. On behalf of House Stark of Avalon, I welcome you into my halls as my honoured guests.”

‘So, this is Harrion Stark.’ Oleanna thought, eyeing the steady eyes and firm posture of the boy standing before her. ‘This one has the looks of a wolf.’