

Prologue III

| [Ambience](#) |

Clouds blotted out the sun and much of the sky, though patches of blue shone through at times. Casterly Rock jutted far into the air, a castle built atop a mountain. From the ground, it seemed the castle's golden spires pierced the clouds.

From atop, the place was awash in numbers, however, and little pierced anything but the occasional quill through paper. The Lion had begun to lend his vast stores of gold, having learned from a passing Essosi trader out of Lys about how the Rogares plied their trade. Since, men traveled less to Braavos or to Lys to borrow coin. They had protested, but what were some blue-haired fools across the world going to do to stop him? He had a fleet, and there would be hell to pay if they interdicted his trade. Because of him few now had to brave the Narrow Sea or worse, the Stepstones, for it. They would be thankful and help him to smash to splinters any privateers sent after his ships.

Perhaps the best part of the situation, the men the Lannisters sent out to collect on debts did not have far to go, either.

Once or twice a week his collectors would return to the Rock with bloody cudgels and gold, his debtors having made good on their payments if they weren't already. In his time, the Old Lion had established a reputation as a harsh but fair lender. People finally had begun to learn to pay back what they owed, but they still came back.

His biggest boon of late was in Duskendale, a vast sum lent to the lords of that keep. They'd said it was to build warships, he didn't really care. All they had to do was pay him back, and as one of Westeros' principle trade hubs Duskendale would have no difficulty doing so, less so with new warships guarding their coast. All he had to do was wait for the gold to come rolling back to him.

The copper counters left a ledger on his desk, scrawled on in their narrow script. Casterly Rock's wealth grew, and the first payment from Duskendale had arrived on a wagon that very morning. Two thousand pieces of gold! He didn't even have to send anyone into the mines to bring it up, either. It arrived on a wagon.

Contented, the Old Lion grabbed for a golden pitcher and poured himself a cup of wine-- a good vintage, out of the Arbor. Never difficult to get a hold of for a man of means, though he once or twice pitied the common man who had to live on tavern ales when his mind drifted to those who lived so far below the Rock, in Lannisport and the surrounds.

A serving girl entered the room, one he was passingly familiar with. He didn't know her name-- why would he? All the same, she came carrying another pitcher.

"I don't need any more wine," he said, gesturing to his still-full cup. The gold liquid sloshed about within the glass, upset by the sudden motion of his hand.

She continued to his desk, setting the pitcher down. Whoever she was she didn't seem to hear him, and she wore an odd expression on her face. It immediately made him a little uneasy, but not so much to change his behavior.

"Go on, get," he said dismissively, looking at the unwanted second pitcher of wine. He waved his free hand.

She bowed her head, at last giving some acknowledgement of his presence, and looked down at the desktop. "Your ledger, m'lord," she said, pointing at a drop of wine staining the page.

The Old Lion didn't even stop to consider it odd that the serving girl referred to it as a ledger, he crossed the room to examine the stain himself. The fool girl must have spilled on it. He hissed, "What have you done?"

As he approached, he set down his glass and looked at the page. "I'll have you thrown out of the castle for this."

Her features showed some kind of sheepish look of apology when he looked back up, and grabbed his wine again. He drank from the cup, studying the red spot on the page. The girl had picked up the errant pitcher and looked him over one last time.

That was when the sensation of choking struck him, and he reached for his glass and attempted to drink the wine it held-- but the wine would not pass his throat. He spit it up on the desk, ruining his papers and put the glass back down. When he looked up, eyes pleading for help, the serving girl was gone, her pitcher with her. He hadn't even drank from it. What was happening?

Breath was impossible for him to take, now, even as his lungs heaved. A moment came when he realized he was going to die, even as his eyes watered and his hands clawed helplessly at his throat. The realization brought him no peace as his body writhed in the struggle to take in any air.

In the end he thought on his legacy, on the empire he had established, on the family he had raised. As his vision slowly faded he tumbled sideways out of his chair, the only noise beyond the thump being the sad, weak, phlegmy sound his throat made as he tried to draw his final breath. In those final instants of consciousness he had only one word on his mind:

Why?