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I also want to thank everyone for their support and encouragement.

1st Day of the 13th Moon

Jaime Lannister, King's Landing

Mustering the Crownlands had turned out far harder than Jaime had expected. He had to visit many lords in person, and even then, most were not eager for war and only gathered the bare minimum of knights and men at arms. The Clawmen had yet to answer any ravens, and half of the envoys sent to them had yet to return. Yet even this couldn't take his mind off his woes.

The things he did for love...

His father had disowned him—not publicly, never publicly, because it would hurt the Lannister legacy. But it didn't matter.

Jaime knew Tywin Lannister; the Lord of Casterly Rock *never* took back his words, spoken in private or not. Even though his father was a harsh and unyielding man, Jaime still missed him. And the... cold, dispassionate words had hurt far more than any lance smashing into his breastplate. The swords, axes, and war hammers striking at him in the training yard or a melee couldn't compare.

The knowledge that he would never be called son again just *hurt*.

Yet scorn, mocking, and disappointment were coins Jaime knew well.

Kingslayer. Sisterfucker.

The second one began to spread after Renly's proclamation, and both were true.

The Lord Regent had summoned him, but his Uncle could wait. Pushing down his woes, Jaime went around the royal sept and towards the Maidenvault. It was a long keep of pale red stone, with seven-pointed stars carved on the walls outside.

Yet Jaime found himself barred from the tall carved doors by four stone-faced red cloaks. They had to be from his father's retinue because he didn't recognise any of them.

"You're barring my way, good men," Jaime rested his gloved hand on the gilded hilt of his blade.

"We've received orders not to let anyone pass, Lord Commander," said the burly, dark-haired man at the front. "The Queen is to mourn His Grace's passing undisturbed."

Jaime barely managed to swallow his bubbling chortle. Cersei was more likely to dance over Robert's bones than to mourn the drunken king's death.

"I am the Lord Commander and the Queen Dowager's brother."

"We know," another tall red cloak with sharp blue eyes nodded. "The Lord Hand and the Lord Regent both gave explicit orders not to let the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard through."

Jaime squinted his eyes. The four red cloaks looked disciplined and well-trained, but he could take them down.

The cold-faced Mandon Moore, who had just walked out of the small servant door to the side and stood behind the Lannister men, was another matter. The Valeman, clad in his enamelled steel plate, was the most dangerous of the white cloaks after himself, and even Jaime would hesitate to fight four red cloaks and Moore at once.

They were mocking him, Jaime realised. He was Lord Commander of the Kingsguard now, but he did not command the loyalty and respect the Bold or the White Bull could. Leading the white cloaks was supposed to be the highest honour a knight could achieve, yet Jaime did not feel honoured.

How could he compare to men like the Pale Griffin, the Dragonknight, the Demon of Darry, Ser Ryam Redwyne, or Duncan the Tall? Kingslayer, they still murmured behind his back; only useful for killing unarmed old men and riding in tourneys. And now, Jaime couldn't even see his sister.

It angered him.

Yet his father's orders couldn't be defied, not like this. Jaime knew better than anyone else that Tywin Lannister did not suffer treason or defiance.

He took a deep breath and pushed everything down, schooling his face. "How long is my royal sister supposed to mourn?"

"Seven cycles of the moon and seven days, Ser Jaime," Moore replied. As always, his voice reminded Jaime of a gravestone, and his eyes were as dead as a day-old fish out of water. The Valeman's cold demeanour made him no friends, yet his impassive face did not give away any of his intentions and only made him more dangerous.

"Very well, then." Jaime nodded stiffly and turned around to make way to the headquarters. This could only be his father's punishment for him and Cersei—the price of defying the Lion of Casterly Rock. Over two moons had passed, and Jaime had to wait five more.

The White Sword Tower looked smaller than Jaime remembered. Slender and only four stories, it was just a gnat compared to the Rock. But this was his only home left now.

Only Arys Oakheart was in the Round Room, sitting before the White Book and hungrily drinking in its pages. The pious knight doubtlessly drew inspiration from the great names inked on the white pages. Yet no amount of reading would strengthen his sword hand.

"Where is His Grace, Ser Arys?" Jaime coughed, making the reading knight freeze.

"The king is down in the city, visiting the... royal establishments with Sers Blount and Greenfield."

Jaime cursed inwardly. The only royal *establishments* in the city were how the white cloaks called the brothels the Crown had taken after Littlefinger's demise. Of all the things his son could do... Why did he have to pick up Robert's vices, not his strengths?

Joffrey had the talent. An incredible talent for the blade and lance and all the teachers any boy could dream of. He also had good aim with the crossbow for what little it was worth. Alas, it was wasted, for his son cared not for such trivial things, and talent without blood, sweat, and tears to nurture it was as useless as golden ribbons on a swine.

Robert's death was supposed to be liberating... yet why did Jaime feel only more burdened?

In half an hour, he finally dragged himself to the Tower of the Hand to answer Uncle Kevan's summons.

Sitting behind a varnished desk, he waited for Jaime in the Hand's audience chamber. Dressed in red wool and gold, Kevan Lannister was the same make as Tywin Lannister, writ lesser and with none of the ambition. A big man with broad shoulders and a thick waist, he was decent with the sword but couldn't muster a tenth of his eldest brother's presence.

"Uncle," Jaime greeted as he pulled over a chair and lazily sat. "Why is Cersei locked up in the Maidenvault like Baelor's sisters?"

"So she can't drag down the crown more than she already did," Kevan scoffed. "And to have time to reflect on her follies in silence and peace."

"My sister did no such-"

"Jaime," his Uncle's voice grew pained. "For the love of the Seven, open your eyes. It took a single moon for Cersei to drag the realm into war. A terrible Regent and a worse mother - it is like she never bothered to teach Joffrey the intricacies of ruling and the court. I am beginning to doubt she even knew them in the first place. Do you know what will happen if the Faith finds out Joffrey had been sacrificing men to the heart tree?"

Jaime's mouth abruptly shut; he had tried his best to push away the visage of a bloody, strung-up man on the weirwood from his mind. It was an ugly, *cruel* thing that made his spine crawl. And the weirwood, the eerie red tree of the First Men and the Children, had only grown from it. The accursed thing grew from lifeblood instead of water.

"The vile rumours Renly has spread about Cersei, and you certainly don't help either," Kevan sighed. "The word arrived this morning - Robert's brother has married Margaery Tyrell in Highgarden."

Jaime laughed. "Poor girl will have to vie with her brother for Renly's affection."

"It's not a time for your jests, Jaime. Four days ago, Cortnay Penrose assembled the Stormlords at Bronzegate and now marches up the kingsroad with fifteen thousand men."

"That quick?"

Kevan's face grew grim.

"Renly sent word to his bannermen first and *then* announced his claims. You have what - eight thousand men?"

"Nine and a half," Jaime said. "The lords were slow to muster, and many brought the bare minimum in levies, hardly any knights or men-at-arms. And I can employ only so many freeriders and hedge knights with the paltry war chest the Lord Hand allowed me."

"The treasury is *empty*, Jaime. You got the last of it."

"House Lannister never lacks for gold." Jaime felt stupid the moment the words left his mouth. Was he a Lannister anymore? He carried the name, yet the Lion of Casterly Rock was no longer his father.

"Yet House Lannister is not the Crown nor the Iron Throne," Kevan reminded. "Even if Tywin wanted to, he couldn't send hundreds of gold dragons through a raven, and promissory notes would not work since the coffers are empty, and Mace Tyrell and the Faith did not help by calling in their debts. We're barely struggling to pay the mariners of the royal fleet, the gold cloaks, and the royal household guard."

"Just raise the customs and tariffs," Jaime shrugged. "Take a loan from someone."

"I did. Any more, and the traders and merchants will simply take to another port instead. And now, nobody is willing to loan us a single dragon—not the Iron Bank, not the Tyroshi Cartells, nor the Faith, or the Lords. Thankfully, your brother has already managed to rub the coin together to hire three sellsword companies. You have another fifteen hundred men for all the good that those Essosi will do us."

He scoffed. "Ah yes, brave men from the east more likely to run at the first sign of true battle. What's the plan, then?"

"There's no word from Riverrun just yet. The North has called the banners, but they're far away. Worse, Eddard Stark has not yet arrived in White Harbour."

"Perhaps some storm blew him off course?" Jaime proposed lightly, ignoring the unease brewing in his guts.

"One would hope, but if that were the case, he'd be seen in some port or another. It's been nearly three moons, and there's no word of Stark's ships." Kevan stiffly leaned back on the chair. "Autumn storms in the Narrow Sea are harsh."

His Uncle didn't say it, but Jaime heard it nonetheless. Stark was gone, and Tommen, sweet Tommen, was gone with him. His son he would never see again, the realisation sunk in like a warhammer to his gut, knocking the breath out of him. Lost at sea... there would not be even a body to mourn. Were the gods finally punishing him for his sins?

Pushing down his grief, Jaime looked at Kevan. "What now?"

"Now?" His Uncle's face hardened with resolve. "Tywin is still mustering his forces by the Deep Den, so we're on our own for about two moons. You're to slow down Penrose's advance while I fortify the city walls."

So this was it?

Was this the glorious service of the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard? Barred from seeing his sister and reduced to a glorified outrider, not even trusted with defeating some paltry steward. Cortnay Penrose was a good knight as any other, but what did a castellan know of leading an army?

Swallowing his bitterness and anger, Jaime bowed. "It shall be done, Lord Regent."

6th Day of the 13th Moon

Jon Snow, Beyond the Wall

The gates had been quickly restored after Lerna's ilk were hunted down. Now, Warg Hill's surroundings swarmed with activity. A new trench was being dug to divert a part of the Milkwater when finished, but it was over three miles of digging without steel and iron spades. And the snowfall did not help.

Clearing the Haunted Forest had resumed with a furious tempo, as wood was too precious a resource to remain untapped. Stone and bronze axes worked tirelessly while the giants and the mammoths uprooted trees whole. Despite everything, the night raid had not dampened their resolve but hardened it.

And here was Jon, leading a group of two dozen hunters, raiders, and direwolves deeper amidst the trees, looking for slumbering wights hiding amidst the snow. The undead thralls wandering in broad daylight had all been hunted down.

A brown direwolf sniffing amidst the rocks paused, hackles raised. With a snarl, the canine stabbed his snout down and dragged up a flailing corpse. The wight tried to claw at his attacker, but the direwolf simply retreated while Jon had dashed there, Dark Sister streaking through the air, relieving the dead man from his head.

"Fancy sword," Sigorn Thenn grunted. "You only need to chop 'em head off, and they die proper, while the rest 'o us have to burn the thing or smash it to bits. Pity there ain't more of 'em." A great pity indeed; if Valyrian Steel blades were nine a penny, the Others and their wights would have been so much easier to deal with.

"Or the direwolves that just eat 'em." Longspear Ryk pointed at the three canines tearing away at the former wight. Jon didn't like that the wolves and direwolves had all gotten used to gorging themselves on human flesh, even if mere wights. Yet every wolf eating dead things wouldn't have to be fed or hunt for the scarce prey left.

Another direwolf to the side sniffed out a wight, and three hunters pinned it with their spears until it was set ablaze.

In a couple of hours, Jon's group had managed to dig out over two dozen wights. It was slow, tedious work that felt like a pittance, but every wight vanquished would be one less body to face in the night.

Two hours before sunset, they gathered outside of Warg Hill's wall. The other clearing parties had a lesser success, but today had been a good day - over sixty wights had been slain today. Jon still wondered how many bodies the Others could command. It seemed easily over a hundred thousand in his past life, yet it had been hard to count. Piles of charred bones on the battlefield were not easy to make sense of, and counting skulls was morbid work. Yet soldiers were often too tired to sift through the cold snow and slush after a long night of battle.

"Look what I got, har!" Tormund waved a roasted boar leg dripping with juice.

"You caught yourself a pig?" Morna snorted underneath her pale mask. "Should we call you Pigsbane now?"

"I'm a natural-born hunter! Pah, when's the last time you caught some prey?" Giantsbane waved the roast like a sceptre, splattering a smidgeon of grease on Morna's mask, then offered it to Jon. "Here, try it. How does it taste?"

Jon cautiously took a bite. "A tad too salty, bland, and chewy, like an old boar. Why?"

"'Tis a wight pig."

"What do you mean a bloody wight?" Jon dropped the boar's leg as if it were on fire. He wanted to spit it out, but the bite was already chewed into his stomach. Yet... it didn't feel any different from regular meat. The moment it was down, a few hunting hounds with the Thenn lunged at the leg.

"Wait," Soren Shieldbreaker grumbled, swatting away the hungry hounds and picking up the roast from the snow. "How did ye roast it without setting it aflame?"

"Well, it takes a certain amount of skill, har! You see, first, ye have to..." Shaking his head, Jon tuned out Tormund's boastful explanation and headed to the gate. It seemed the old bag of wind was not the only one who had considered eating reanimated wildlife like deer, boars, or even bears.

Jon could see how increasing their food supplies would be helpful, even if he disliked it.

It was not only him struggling here to tilt the scales, he realised. Savage folk they may be, but the wildlings wanted to live and thrive like any other and put in the effort in their own way. The burden on his shoulders felt lighter now.

On the way up to the godswood, Jon was intercepted by Orell.

"Redbeard's lot still live," the skinchanger reported. "They set camp on an isle at the mouth o' the Antler." It felt... odd to speak with a man he had slain in another life. But now, Orell was on his side, and so were many other skinchangers. And they were mighty useful. "Where do ye want me to fly next?"

"Go over Hardhome to see if Harle's clans and tribes still live. And then, down to the Wall."

"Crows can't be trusted." Orell's face twisted with distaste. Jon grimaced inwardly; some feuds ran too deep to heal - a ranger had killed his father when young over some scuffle.

"I don't need to trust the crows," he snorted, shaking his head. "But I do need to know what they're doing."

Orell grudgingly nodded and headed back to his tent. Feud or not, the man understood the value of knowledge and information.

Sighing, Jon continued towards the grove. His tent was all packed into the longhall now, but he still visited the heart tree to pray or to take a hot bath in the underground spring with Val. He found himself faced with the young, thin weirwood and sat amidst its snow-covered roots, unsheathing Dark Sister and running an oiled rag down the length of the blade. He had picked up the habit from his father, even if Valyrian Steel never dulled. It always helped Jon soothe his mind and reflect on the situation.

The clarity helped him feel some connections better. At the edge of his mind, Jon could vaguely sense half a dozen direwolves approaching him, even if he had never slipped into their minds.

For some reason, they loved to keep him company in the grove. Ghost, whom Jon could feel far more vividly like a limb that was always there, was now hunting for a wight bear on the other side of the river.

Yet his thoughts drifted southward. It had been over half a year since he had seen his Uncle. Was Benjen still alive? Supposedly, his father had started preparing the Night's Watch, but Jon had no idea *what* those preparations looked like.

A part of him dreaded dealing with the Watch from the side of the free folk. Bad blood ran deep on both sides. Would they call him a savage, a turncloak, for leading some of the wildlings? It had not been an issue before when his whole plan was to look for death, dragging down as many Others as possible into the Seven Hells with him and spreading the word of dragonglass. But now... now he had something to live for. Val had made him remember the sweetness and joy forgotten amidst the darkness and death.

If the Watch had managed to muster a measure of numbers, Jon had to try and establish some sort of a pact, a line of communication, or even a basic understanding. They did have a common foe. The only question was if his men would be willing to entertain such a notion and whether Jeor Mormont would recognise Jon as someone worth negotiating with.

He felt another set of footsteps amidst the snow and opened his eyes.

"Melisandre of Asshai," he greeted the red priestess. No, not even a red priestess anymore, for the mad witch had done the unthinkable. Never would have Jon guessed the Essosi woman would turn to the Old Gods for worship. Jon still didn't trust the woman, even if he could admire her decision. Alas, Jon could no longer shun her if the gods had deemed her worthy.

“Jon... *snow*,” the word was said as if Melisandre was tasting it. Her voice was just as alluring as Jon remembered, and her body gave off noticeable heat, if slightly lesser than before. Whatever sorcery she had learned in Asshai and the Red Temples remained. “Your mother must have hailed from a powerful bloodline.”

His throat went dry. “My... mother?”

“I can see *more* now,” her green eye glimmered in a way that made Jon feel naked. “You pulse with *power*, and while all know you’re a son of ice, there’s a fire in your veins equal to it. And with the Gods’ blessing, they meld together seamlessly.”

“Perhaps,” Jon acknowledged, pushing down his trepidation. “Yet I’ve found the past matters little Beyond the Wall. What brings you here?”

Melisandre kneeled before the carved face, clasping her hands together. “You’re not the only devout believer here.” The scene was surreal. Half a year ago, Jon would have rather imagined her burning a heart tree, not praying before it. Yet the witch was still playing her old tricks-she had positioned herself in a way to give him a full view of the pair of full white breasts threatening to burst from her ample cleavage.

“Do you know where Leaf is, perchance?” Jon asked, looking away. “I haven’t seen her for three days.”

“The Singers are all busy digging deeper and deeper into the ground,” she whispered. “Leaf thinks they have found a way to a vast cave network below.”

Nodding gratefully, Jon walked away, leaving the priestess to her prayer.

Many plans and ideas churned in his mind, and a cave network underneath would not be without use.

8th Day of the 13th Moon

Edmure Tully, Riverrun

“Uncle, you’re a sight for sore eyes!”

“Nephew.” A strong hand patted his shoulder. After nearly two decades, his uncle looked far smaller and greyer than he remembered. But no, Edmure had grown tall and could look at the Blackfish face to face. “Where’s Hoster?”

“...Asleep,” the whisper felt heavy upon his tongue.

“While the sun is still up in the sky?” Brynden’s face grew grim.

Edmure sighed and led his Uncle to the private audience chamber above the packed Great Hall. He rang the bell for the servant to bring them a hot meal and a cask of summerwine. After he had called the banners, his friends and many other lords, heirs, and landed knights had gathered here—Riverrun had never been so full, and there was a city of tents outside the walls.

“Father has been ill for two years now,” he gulped a mouthful of red wine from a silver goblet, which felt more bitter than usual. “He’s growing worse by the moon and sleeps more each day. Even his wits leave him—this morning, he thought I was calling the banners to fight Aerys.”

The Blackfish tiredly covered his face with a gloved hand. “The Seven must be testing us.”

“Did something happen to Lysa? She has not sent me a raven in years now,” Edmure frowned as the words left his tongue; he could only remember receiving one raven from her announcing Robert Arryn’s birth.

"Madness. That and grief," his Uncle shook his head. "Lysa has always been capricious and timid, but her stay in King's Landing changed her, and not in a good way. With Jon Arryn and Littlefinger's death, she's locked herself and *Sweetrobin* in the Eyrie, refusing to entertain any visitors."

“Something wrong with my nephew?”

“A sickly boy, and she coddles him like a vase that would fall to the ground and shatter without her presence. The boy is seven now, yet she still breastfeeds him,” Brynden’s craggy face twisted with contempt. “Lysa is turning her son into a spoiled craven.”

“I take it she isn’t calling the banners?” Edmure grimaced. The war would be far harder without the Vale on their side. Yet, it was not his place to meddle in the affairs of House Arryn.

The Blackfish leaned over, his dark voice reduced to a whisper. "When I advised it, Lysa dismissed me from my post. She had ordered the Bloody Gate reinforced and seems to blame House Lannister for the deaths of Lord Arryn and Petyr Baelish."

"This.... this is a hefty accusation to make. Why hasn't Lysa brought her suspicions to the Crown?"

"It's all in her head, I'm afraid," his Uncle said, grabbing a heavy goblet and pouring it full of wine before taking a deep swallow. "It's just the madness of grief speaking, for she has no proof, no matter how hard I asked."

With a sigh, Brynden turned to the still-warm beef ribs and began hungrily cleaning the juicy meat off the bones while tearing away from the freshly baked venison pie. It was little wonder, for his Uncle had probably been riding hard on the road, subsiding himself on dried foodstuffs or whatever the inns could offer for dinner.

Edmure also turned to his serving of ribs, but the supple dark roast did not arouse his appetite. No matter how he rolled the numbers in his mind, without the Vale, things were not in their favour.

"I didn't see Frey banners outside," Brynden noted after washing down a bite of meat with wine. "Many others are also missing."

"My scouts say some are on the way," Edmure explained after pushing away the serving of beef. "But Frey, Darry, Deddings, and Perryn have not answered the call to arms. They are dragging their feet with their muster."

"The Late Walder Frey hasn't croaked yet, eh? The last time I saw the old weasel, he offered me a wife."

Edmure grimaced. "You and me both."

"Deddings and Perryn are bordering on the Reach and Westerlands, so they're probably wary of raids into their land," Brynden muttered darkly. But it didn't matter because they were defying their liege lord. Edmure did not feel ready to wage war, neither on his future bannermen nor with another kingdom.

But his Uncle's blunt presence gave him a degree of relief. Brynden Tully had fought in almost every significant conflict since before Edmure was born, and he had plenty of experience.

A hurried knock on the door interrupted them.

"Ser Edmure." It was Pell's nervous voice - a younger guardsman, "The Tyrell and the Lannister's envoys were spotted."

Under his Uncle's advice, Edmure had decided to receive Garlan Tyrell and Daven Lannister in the Great Hall before the rest of his lords. It was like a small court, where he sat on the high seat, with his Uncle to his left and the Riverlords on the high table.

Edmure decided that both were dangerous warriors, but they couldn't look any different from each other despite being similar in frame and stature. Garlan had a short brown crop atop his head and was garbed in a green surcoat, while Daven had a long, tangled mess of yellow while garbed in crimson.

And they both offered him a bride in exchange for the Riverlands.

"I have no love for Tywin Lannister and his ilk," Lord Jason Mallister pointed out coldly. "But it's suspicious for Renly to levy such vile accusations with little proof that would make him king *after* his elder brother has died."

Edmure spied around the faces of his lords; a few were hard to read, but many nodded in agreement - it *was* suspicious.

"The proof is all inked down, my lords," Garlan shrugged jovially. "It's all in the book - the Lineages and Histories of the Great Houses of the Seven Kingdoms by Grandmaester Malleon."

The words were met with a wave of murmurs.

Lord Clement Piper stood up. Marq's father was a short, fat, bow-legged man with a mop of curly red hair. "And have you read the book yourself?"

"I have not," the Tyrell knight admitted freely. "But my Lord Father and His Grace Renly have, and their word is enough for me."

"Mighty convenient that the two copies of the book you spoke of can only be found either in the Citadel or with your father." Ser Ronard Vance snorted. His father, Lord Norbert Vance, had gone blind last year, so he had come here to lead the Atranta forces. "I suppose you didn't bring the tome with you?"

Garlan's grimace was all the answer they needed.

Edmure stood up then, and any chatter quickly ceased, "I have decided."

He looked at Cerenna Lannister, the Queen's sister. She was a willowy maiden nearing twenty with flowing golden hair, sea-green eyes, and an easy smile. The Reach offered him many brides, but none were here nor as important as the king's good sister. And no wife would make Edmure stand against his kin. *Family*, Duty, Honour, and kin always came first.

"Riverrun shall stand with King Joffrey!"

The clamour was almost deafening as many of his friends started rising toasts, but his eyes were set on Garlan Tyrell, who just had a wan smile but stood straight and proud.

Edmure's heart felt heavy. The rose knight was a man he would have made fast friends with if the circumstances had been different. Perhaps they still could at the end of the war. It wasn't much of a choice, but in a rare moment of clarity, his father advised him against declaring before hearing what both sides had to offer.

Edmure's gaze was drawn to a pair of sea-green eyes again, blinking innocently at him with great interest. He had bedded a few women and fought in a handful of tourneys, but Father above, he was not ready to be wed or to lead a war.

???, Elsewhere

Who was he?

The name eluded him, and all the memories blurred together in the cold.

Snow was dancing in the wind, yet it only hardened his resolve. He knew one thing for certain - it was time for battle, time for bloodshed.

He was into the breach. His shield slammed into his foe, knocking him back, while Ice's crystalline blade sank into the reaver's neck, slicing through the coif and splattering his face with blood. The Ironmen tried to swarm him, but his men all surged from behind, pushing away the scum.

He cleaved through a shield clean, taking part of the arm with him while another foe tried to skewer him with a spear. The iron tip skidded across the side of his breastplate and lodged into the strap to the side. With an angry snarl, he sliced off the offending spear, pulled the shaft of the spear to unbalance the reaver and slammed his armoured shoulder into him, sending him sprawling off the rampart and into the yard below. He blocked another stab, aiming for his face and swung Ice again.

It was a bloody fight on the ramparts, for the reavers fought to the last. There would be no surrender here, for he was not willing to offer them any mercy. He did not remember why they were fighting anymore, nor when, where, or how.

But it didn't matter, for he had to fight. It felt good, it felt right, and it made his blood sing in a way that nothing else did.

Catching a thrown axe with his shield, he descended the staircase and into the yard, cutting a bloody swathe through his foes.

9th Day of the 13th Moon, ???

The things he did for power...

Yet the road to greatness was not one lesser man could undertake.

"It no longer feels like cold stone," Euron Greyjoy's eyes drank in the orange scaly stone in his hands as if nothing else existed. It felt heavier in his arms, and the brown swirls had lost their dullness. "Yet it is far from awakened."

Maelor, the Myrish wizard, coldly looked at the surrounding fishing village - women, children, and old men, all clasped in irons. They were all lying on the ground, some gurgling or making other incoherent sounds. But their eyes were empty, hollow, bereft of any substance as the bodies still lived yet were merely an empty shell.

Greyjoy's freaks and fools were now going around, slitting the shell's throats one by one. Many shacks and huts were aflame; sinister black plumes were blotting out the sun above.

"Only death can pay for life. But their essence, their lives are too meagre to awaken a dragon from stone," Maelor murmured. "Hundreds more would be required at this pace."

"And hundreds more you shall have," the Crow's Eye promised, an eerie smile spreading across his blue lips.

The wizard leaned tiredly on the goldenheart staff. "We must hurry. The stars hang uneasily on the night sky, and each night is more troubled than the last. Change is brewing, and we must be ready to ride atop the crest of its wave."

"And ready we shall be." Greyjoy laughed; it was a rich, lusty sound that sent cold shivers down one's spine.

The presence of the dragon egg swelled Maelor's powers with each day, and so did the rituals.

But Maelor knew Euron Crow Eye was not to be trusted, for his promises were empty, his hand ruthless, and his smiles - cruel. Joining the mad Greyjoy had been a gamble. Losing it would be a fate worse than death, but winning?

Winning would make him the greatest man in the world.

Author's Endnote:

Maelor is the name of the Myrish wizard.

Starring Euron 'The Path to Success is Paved with Murder and Sacrifice' Greyjoy, Jaime the Sisterfucker, Tormund 'pork is pork' The Pigsbane, and Edmure 'I was just chilling; why tf is suddenly everything going to shit, and I'm getting all those marriage offers, yo?!' Tully.

This chapter made me comb through so many things, including the number of musters, speed, medieval army economics and all that jazz. I don't intend to go into great detail, but no army will be teleporting. I found myself watching vids on medieval army logistics and many other things into the last few evenings and combing through... annoying trivia like - how medieval armies were funded, etc.

Anyway, the Crown's poor financial policy comes to bite them in the arse, and Tywin cannot teleport no matter how much he wishes to. Sorry, Tywin.

I wanted to include a Robb PoV in this chapter, but it would bloat it so much.

Over 60 days later, people start noticing that Ned Stark has not arrived where he should have been.