

The Northern Tyrant [Game of Thrones] Chapter 47 - Distant Doom, Steel, Feeding The Queen & Hornwood Conspiracy

Wylis arrived in the castle dungeon, dragging behind him a wooden chair. The place was better than most dungeons as he'd modified it to have a constant, moving air-flow, keeping the dampness under a certain level.

Yet, it was cold.

"M'lord."

"My lord."

The guards manning the dungeon saluted him as they were trained, a simple military salute with a snappy wave of a flat palm against their temples. He never bothered to make it a dramatic, chest-thumping salute.

"Open the wildling's cage, lads."

He watched as the metal lock was removed, and the iron door creaked open. He walked inside, still dragging the chair behind him. It was dark in there, so one of the guards placed a torch against the wall and retreated. Standing at the door, guarding it.

Finally, he settled his chair and sat down on it, staring at the wildling man, both arms tied to metal chains, but loose enough to eat and sleep, but not enough to reach him.

"So, you've decided it's wiser to talk after all. Took you long enough."

"Kill... Kill me."

"Varolf, that was your name, wasn't it?" Wylis said, arms crossed. "I'll grant your wish, but you'll answer me first. Where in the North are you from?"

"Thenn... We were from Thenn."

Wylis gave a low whistle. "That's deep in the North. You've come a long way from home. What was it then? Spilled blood and fled? Or did the dead stir, and you ran like a hound with its tail tucked?"

Varolf shook his head, staring down the entire time, his body thin now. "Run? You'd run if you'd seen what I seen! The dead still walk, they do! They're comin' back, sure as snow. None of them believed me."

Wylis's gaze hardened, his back stiffened. He washed away the smile from his face and leaned forward. "Where did you see them? The dead."

"Way further north. We was out mapping fresh lands, good lakes for fishing. Deep in the Land of Always Winter, that's where we saw it. Only I came back breathing. I hauled some lads with me... and you killed them."

The wooden chair creaked under the weight of his body. Wylis didn't like this one bit. He closed his eyes and thought of it. He already knew he would one day have to deal with the dead. The major question was what type of dead were they. The book's dead or the show, because the latter were easy to deal with. In theory, at least.

Did they appear early, or is it me who found them too early?

"I believe you," Wylis said as he got to his feet. "Aye, the dead are out there. Else why would our forebears build a damned seven-hundred-foot wall of ice? Surely not just to hold back you wild ones."

"Then warn 'em! Warn every last one! The dead are comin'."

Wylis shook his head and shrugged. "Not yet. No one cares for an enemy they can't see. The lords of the South and even half the North have forgotten the old ways and the old tales. They won't stir their asses unless you put proof in their hands. Still, no need to worry. When the dead finally come, they'll find more than just a squabbling kingdom waiting."

"Hah!" Varolf laughed. "You think you can defeat the dead?"

"No. I don't think. I know it," Wylis said, drawing his short-sword. "Now I'll keep my promise. I'd hoped for more, thought you might be from Hardhome. Even so, this wasn't for nothing. Speak your last words."

He stepped forward and raised the sword with one hand. Varolf himself leaned his head down, showing his nape clear.

"Gods have mercy... the dead won't."

Thud!

The head rolled on the floor. There was no other way this could have ended. He had killed Varolf's friends, and the bad blood was already established.

"Burn the body."

He ordered the guard and walked out of the dungeon. It was still the middle of the day, so he went into the private forest he had made, and used that to enter the walled-off industrial district still under construction secretly. Having already created the main machines needed for the textile industry, even the foot-powered sewing machine, he focused on metalworks.

He wanted to build a few core buildings personally, mainly the waterwheels, the blast furnace, and the Bessemer converter. The first one was easy and cheap to build, just a large building to

house the waterwheel and all its connecting gears. The other two, however, were expensive because their outer shell required steel.

But it was an investment he was willing to make. A blast furnace would help him make pig iron, and a Bessemer converter would help him make steel. Combined, the two would become the backbone of Ramsgate's metal industry.

The industrial district of Ramsgate was divided by four canals into five areas that were built like long strips. The northernmost strip, adjacent to the city wall, was where Wylis wanted to establish all metal works. From furnaces to workshops and mass-manufacturing. The waterwheels would power plenty of bellows, hammers, grinders, and more machines.

Anyone coming to Ramsgate would only have to visit that one strip in the market to buy all things related to metals. From little nails to agricultural tools to swords and armor.

So, Wylis started working. He planned to set up the initial buildings, and the rest would be raised by smallfolk under the guidance of planners. The entire strip was to be set up as its own long market. The side adjacent to the city wall would house all the workshops, and the side by the canal would house actual shops with clean entrances and bridges over the canal. Then there were massive warehouses planned for mass production and storage.

Finally, an empty area was left by the easternmost part of the city wall. Beyond the wall was a riverport, so he planned to place large, wooden treadwheel cranes on top of wall towers, giving a three-sixty degree rotational access. It would allow easy loading and unloading of ships directly from within the wall, reducing the need for using carts.

I'm fucking insane.

The fact remained. He was building a future industrial powerhouse when he didn't even have enough blacksmiths or smallfolk to man all the factories he planned. He just hoped for the best and kept building things.

Raising the furnace and converter wasn't a single day's work, as he needed to do a bit of blacksmithing. And he had to do it alone, as he used Earthbending to shape the steel into his desired shape. It saved time and effort.

While he did that, he also planned to build a few large silo towers to store grain. North being so food insecure, it was a must. And having Earthbending made it easy to make them massive, out of rocks, and air-tight to keep moisture away.

He spent the entire day in the industrial district, building the water wheels and furnaces, juggling them whenever he got bored with one thing. Caliburn was a good horse, however, and always brought him food and drinks that Lyanna would send his way.

Besides, ever since he got the ability to understand Caliburn, having him as company wasn't so bad. Even when it was just him doing all the talking.

Telling Caliburn about the sky, the moons, the stars, and receiving his emotional reaction, calling him a liar, was always fun.

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Rasmgate Castle, garrison,

"Listen 'ere lads, our lord ain't no ordinary man. The Gods've kissed him, or maybe he is one himself."

"Hear! Hear!"

Six men huddled together in the shared hall with dozens of bunk beds in rows and columns. Night was approaching, and all six had finished their shift, now prepared to go eat supper and sleep.

But first, they gathered around to talk, and before they knew it, the topic of discussion became Lord Kaiser and the magical incidents in Ramsgate. They tried to keep their words to whispers, but excitement ran high.

"Take me word for it," said Jorran, "You're all from the days Lord Kaiser arrived. We was the very first to join the garrison. We watched Ramsgate change. Gods, I can hardly recognise the place."

"The walls! I swear it's our lord what raised 'em with magic. Ain't no quake that raises walls like that. Take me word, me old nan used to sing me a prophecy. That's exactly who our lord is," said Seamas.

"Look at them ships, lads. See the damned port. Lord Kaiser built his fleet an' now he's sellin' ice! Ice, by the Gods! I've tasted the chilled ale, the food, an' that ice cream. Only the Gods can make so many divine things."

Seamas nodded to that. "Aye, just as me old nan's prophecy said."

Thud!

"Ehm!"

All six men turned their heads and froze for a moment, eyes going wide. The next moment, they jumped, rising to their feet and standing in a line, chest puffed, chin high, arms stiff against their sides.

"Good evening, Ser Chett!"

The men called Lord Kaiser's squire a Ser already because they knew it was only a matter of time.

The six men gulped, finding the tall beast of a man overwhelming. None of them wanted to make rounds on the city wall as punishment. They'd already finished their shift.

"I see. Have I not given you enough work, lads, that you've time to sit and gossip like it's a whore's den?"

The six jerked, scared of Squire Chett's loud scolding. The man had a voice comparable to Lord Kaiser.

"I warned every one of you never to gossip about Lord Kaiser. It's the devil's own tongue. Were you spying on him? Speak true! For if you were, I'll be the one right proud to lay my blade across your necks."

The six men looked down, shivering.

"N-No... Ser... We would never dare."

"You, Seamas, you were there with us at Maidenpool. Lord Kaiser gave his warning clearly enough, no room for gossip. So what's this prophecy rot you've been prattling on about? Speak it. Let's hear what wisdom your old nan's filled your head with."

"It's true!" Seamas declared, not backing down. "It's true, Ser. He's the one me old nan always spoke of. She said the day the giants walk South, the North'll roar and the whole realm'll kneel."

"..."

The five other men were silent. Ser Chett was silent. Everyone looked at Seamas as if he had gone mad.

"Is that so? And what more did your old nan have to say, then?"

"Somethin' 'bout the North freezin' an' ice an' fire, but I don't recall it all. Old Nan died years back. I remember the giant's part 'cause... Well, they're giants, ain't they? I swear it, Ser. Our lord's the giant of the prophecy."

"..."

Pat!

Seamas went silent when he felt Ser Chett's hand fall on his shoulder. He gulped, looking up at the tall man's face.

"Seamas, you're a good man, no doubt of it. Likely you'll be among the first chosen for higher lessons, rise to lieutenant, then captain, mayhaps even commander if you prove worthy. You'll have hundreds of men looking to you. And still, you're squandering it on tales and fancies. If I hear of this prophecy once more, I'll have your head struck off. Same for the lot of you. Am I understood?"

"Aye, Ser!"

The six stiffly saluted and watched Ser Chett walk away. They didn't relax until the man disappeared. Then they slumped onto the floor, groaning.

"Damn ye, Seamas! Why'd ye have to run yer mouth?"

Seamas glared at Jorran. "I speak no lies."

"I'm starving." Another said and walked away. "I heard nothing."

"Me neither."

One by one, only Seamas was left alone. But then, he also shrugged and walked. He was just a soldier, after all. He had better things to do.

Like eating delicious food that the Lord Kaiser gave to all men-at-arms.

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Ramsgate Castle,

After a hard day at work, covered in mud, Wylis returned to his castle and took a bath in the hot spring. Joining him were Rhaenys and his son, Magnus. Both had gone to play in the private forest and ended up covered in dirt like him. They were learning footwork and practicing swords from Wenda.

Afterwards, he arrived at the inner, smaller dining hall. Cozy, warm, and reserved for his big family. He found all his children there; the women were arriving one after another. Brandon was already there, enjoying a cup of wine.

But Wylis noticed a figure missing when everyone took their seats.

"Where is Rhaella?"

"She felt some discomfort and decided to rest in her bedchamber," Elia replied.

Ah, the second trimester is ending.

Wylis nodded and got up. "She's not to skip her meals. I'll make her something and dine with her. You all should eat without me."

Ignoring the little giggles the women gave him, he walked into the kitchen, startling the maids working there. All he did was give them a few encouraging words and got to work. Since spice was accessible in Ramsgate for his castle, most of the food that the maids made for them was flavorful.

But for a pregnant woman, flavor wasn't always palatable. So, he grilled some chicken and glazed it with some honey. He used no spice, just a little bit of salt. Since chickpeas were common, he made some hummus and vegetable sticks.

As he'd already optimised diets for all women, pregnant or not, he made sure to follow it. Rhaella currently eats small meals five to six times a day so she won't feel any discomfort. He also tracked fibers and proteins to keep them healthy. Daily walks were mandated.

Soon, he prepared a large tray with food and walked to Rhaella's bedchamber. The tray was large because most of it was his food.

Knock! Knock!

A maid was standing outside Rhaella's bedchamber; it was her duty to always be ready to answer the call. He passed her a smile and walked inside the ex-queen's room. It was airy, the window was open, letting in a soothing breeze. Pots of her favorite flowers were placed around the room, giving it a sweet scent.

Candles were lit nearly everywhere, illuminating the bechamber well. Especially near the bedside, as he found Rhaella lounging with her back against the headboard, legs under the quilt, a book in her hands.

Gorgeous.

Just as the first time he'd seen Rhaella, the woman still had ethereal beauty to herself. Her warm, gentle nature seemingly radiated from her, as if pheromones. Dressed in a loose, full-sleeved, thin white gown, her silvery hair combed and free-falling around her shoulders, she was a sight to behold. Her kissable pink lips curved in a welcoming smile, a smile that could be seen through her lilac eyes as well.

"My lord?"

"Lord?" Wylis turned around to see the door. "Where? Me? I'm just Wylis. Rhaella's Wylis, if you will. Here to feed you with my own little hands."

"Little?" Rhaella chuckled. "Forgive me, I caused you trouble."

"Trouble? Gods, I don't have to hear Brandon ramble at the table, thanks to you," Wylis said. He walked around the bed to the empty side and slid onto it, tucking his legs beneath the quilt till he sat snug beside Rhaella, the heavy tray of food resting in his lap.

Rhaella smiled softly and drew nearer, letting her shoulder and sides touch his. "I'm not unwell, Wylis. Truly, you needn't trouble yourself so. I'm quite well, I promise you."

“Not worry for the mother of my children? Rhaella, you ask the impossible,” Wylis said, slicing a bit of chicken while it was still warm. “Come now, eat a little. Your body needs it. Gods know it does. All my children come into this world larger than most.”

Rhaella giggled, slid an arm around his biceps, held it firmly against her full breast, feeling his masculine presence, and then bit the piece of meat he offered on the fork. She simply couldn't bring herself to refuse him.

Wylis ate some as well, making small talk with the woman who could have been mistaken for an angel if Targaryens weren't so damned known and hated. One by one, he fed her small bites until all of her portion was finished. It took him a few more big bites to finish his.

After that, he poured themselves two glasses of mildly flavored wine to wash the aftertaste. He then lounged back in the bed, head and some of his back propped by pillows. Rhaella was snug against him, hugging him from the side, her head on his shoulder.

His one hand caressed her back while her soft hand rubbed his chest.

"Wylis... what do you think Daenerys' future will be like?"

“You mean my daughter's?” Wylis said, catching the faint blush on her pale face. It took all he had not to kiss her brow. “She's but two. Too soon to say what she'll be. She's mine, and she'll choose her own road. A warrior, a singer, a scribe, a wanderer. Blood or no, she sleeps on my chest all the same. And...”

He turned a little and looked at Rhaella. His one hand held her chin, his thumb rubbed her lips. “What's yours is mine.”

Rhaella almost moaned as she smiled and parted her lips, taking his thumb in her mouth and giving it a soft bite, and then suckling.

Wylis felt her hand slide down from his chest and rest on his loins. He felt her hand recoil instantly, her eyes focused on his.

"Wylis? You..."

Wylis shrugged. "What? Can't fault a man for being aroused by his gorgeous woman."

Aye, Wylis was hard as a rock.

"Then... would you like to..."

He shook his head before she could finish. “Rhaella, any day, any hour, my answer would be yes. Always yes. But we can't. You know I'm a bit too much, and... I'd not risk hurting you, not now.”

Yet, he felt Rhaella's hand firmly on his cock, squeezing it with her fist over his loose pants. He knew it had been a while since they had done it. It annoyed him that he couldn't do her right now and then.

"That does not mean we must do nothing," Wylis replied and suddenly turned sideways completely, leaving Rhaella lying flat on the bed. In that position, he slid one arm under her neck, curled his hand, and pushed his middle finger into her mouth.

His other hand reached down, pulled her gown inch by inch over her soft legs, over her belly bump. He kept pulling, she squirmed to let him, until it was messily bunched above her large breasts, under her armpits.

"Just stay like this. Tonight, your Wylis will help you sleep," Wylis throatily whispered and looked down, drinking in her body.

Rhaella was always a beauty; the damned realm knew it. From that fevered night in the Red Keep, he remembered every inch of her softness. Her full, heavy breasts, the gentle yield of her belly under his palms, her creamy, plush thighs that had once locked around his head while he feasted.

But now she was more. Pregnancy had ripened her. Her breasts had swelled fuller, rounder, and taut with milk. The pink nipples glisten faintly at the tips. The gentle curve of her belly rose proudly between them, warm proof of their love, and lower still, between those silken thighs, he could already feel her arousal under his palm.

While his arm remained cradled under her neck, he kept his middle finger sliding lazily between her parted lips, letting her suckle it with that needy rhythm. His free hand roamed slowly, sliding up to cup one heavy breast. His fingers spread wide, palm flattening over the sensitive peak as he squeezed gently. Warm milk instantly spilled against his skin, wetting his palm.

Rhaella whimpered around his finger, her eyes fluttering half-closed in embarrassed bliss, but she arched into his touch, offering more of herself.

He let his hand drift lower, caressing the gentle swell of her belly. From there, his fingers continued, tracing the soft doughiness of her thighs, so plush and creamy they parted for him with the slightest urging.

He spread them just enough, then laid his fingers along the entire length of her moist heat. Her folds were already slick, glistening with arousal that coated his fingertips in warm, silky nectar. He just rested there, feeling her pulse and flutter against his.

Wylis lifted his gaze to her face. Silvery hair spilled messily across the pillows, framing those luminous eyes that shone with helpless need.

She looked so small and fragile that it sometimes haunted him in nightmares. What if he hadn't sailed out that night to save her?

But then she was here, warm and real and moaning softly around his finger, utterly his.

"Rhaella..." he muttered, pulling his middle finger from between her lips. He leaned down, pressing his forehead to hers, his massive frame caging her so easily that her pregnant body felt like a soft doll against his chest. "Have you thought of any names?"

As he asked, his hand slid lower between her thighs. His thick middle finger parted her soft, moist petals with care, brushing firmly over her swollen clit in a teasing stroke.

"Ooooh..." Rhaella arched, her beautiful face instantly blushing. "I... I want you to... name them... my love."

Slosh!

Wylis thrust another thick finger inside her without warning. The two digits stretched her open, pumping in slow, deep curls that stirred her drenched walls. His broad palm ground against her clit with every thrust, the heel of his hand rubbing firm circles that sent jolts of pleasure racing up her spine. His fingers were so thick, unyielding, filling her until she could hear every wet squelch.

All the while, Wylis kept his forehead pressed to hers, their eyes locked in heated silence. Warm breaths mingled between their parted lips, never quite closing the distance into a kiss.

Rhaella felt like her entire body was burning. Her cunt was slippery and aching, clenching greedily around his thick, invading digits, while her heavy breasts felt strangely ticklish and tight, nipples peaked and leaking faint drops of milk.

"Oh..." She reached up with one trembling hand, fingertips brushing the rough scratch of his beard.

Oh gods, how much she loved this man. Her first true love, laughable as it seemed, was found only after years of a cold marriage. She had grandchildren, for god's sake. But the depth of emotions she felt for him was something she had never known before, making her heart ache even as her body sang.

"Mmmm... Wylis..." She arched her hips higher, chasing the building pressure, so close to tipping over the edge. "I..."

She could feel his rough fingers reaching so deep inside her, stretching apart within her, and making her feel fuller than she should. The delicious pressure worked her closer and closer, her throat turning dry as desperate little whimpers escaped her lips.

She bit down on her lower lip hard, trying to hold back, and he noticed that.

"Let me help, my queen."

She nearly frowned in confusion until she felt it.

Her lilac eyes widened as his head dipped lower. She felt his warm lips latch onto one aching, milk-heavy nipple, and started to suckle. That ticklish sensation flooded through her breast as he drew her sweet nectar straight into his mouth.

“Aaaaah...” Rhaella cradled his face lovingly against her breast, fingers threading through his hair to urge him. She felt every pull as he drained a warm mouthful and swallowed it down with a low, satisfied groan that vibrated against her flesh.

“Mmmm... Yes... Wylis... I’m close!”

She felt him drain nearly all the milk from that breast in long, greedy swallows. Then he shifted, moving onto the other swollen nipple with the same greed. His strong lips and gentle scrape of teeth sent fresh sparks racing straight to her pussy. Her toes curled tight, her hips jerked against his still-pumping fingers as her pleasure coiled tight.

But then his face hovered over hers again, mouth slightly puffed, lips squeezed shut. She knew exactly what he held for her, and Gods save her from the shame and the wicked thrill...

Rhaella opened her mouth wide hungrily and spread her tongue out flat in total surrender. She closed her eyes in embarrassed bliss and simply felt.

His mouth locked over hers in a deep kiss, and then it spilled. The warmth of her own milk flooded onto her tongue. It tasted faintly of cream and unmistakably of him. She moaned helplessly into the kiss, swallowing every drop he fed her while his thick fingers never stopped their relentless rhythm.

Her tongue messily chased the last traces of his taste along the rim of his lips, swallowing greedily before the kiss turned into pure chaos. Their tongues tangled in a sticky, breathless dance.

His thick fingers never stopped pumping in and out of her drenched cunt with wet, filthy sounds, driving deep and curling against that sensitive spot. At the same time, his other hand reached from beneath her neck to grope and knead her milk-slick breasts, fingers spreading and squeezing until fresh beads of cream leaked more and more.

"Mmmmm... Gods... help me-eeeeeeh!"

She couldn’t take it anymore. His fingers stretching and fucking her, his tongue devouring her mouth, the constant pull and pinch on her sensitive nipples. The sensations exploded through her body.

Her heels dug hard into the bedding, back bowing sharply as her hips snapped upward, harder onto his hand. A hot gush erupted from her cunt, soaking his thick fingers and palm, splattering messily against his wrist and the sheets under her. Her walls clenched wildly around his pumping fingers.

Slosh! Squelch!

The obscene, wet squelches and rhythmic sloshing filled her ears even as her lips stayed sealed to his in a messy, milk-stained kiss. Pleasure crashed through her in waves, every muscle trembling, her pregnant belly quivering as she squirted, drenching them both.

She was deliciously sore, yet he didn't stop. His fingers kept fucking her through every aftershock, drawing out every last flutter of her pussy. She twitched and whimpered into the kiss, her body helplessly riding the lingering waves of ecstasy.

"Mmm..."

Finally, after what felt like an eternity of blissful torment, her strength gave out completely.

Rhaella collapsed flat onto the bed, limbs loose and trembling, chest heaving. She felt his thick fingers slide slowly out of her pulsing core, leaving her empty and dripping.

To her shame, she saw he brought those glistening fingers to his mouth and licked them clean with slow strokes of his tongue. A big, satisfied grin spread across his handsome face. The sight so wickedly arousing that her spent cunt gave another weak, needy flutter.

"You taste so... sweet, my Rhaella."

Rhaella blushed furiously, her cheeks burning as she reached up to cup his face. She panted softly, eyes half-lidded and heavy with exhaustion and lingering pleasure. "Shall I...?"

"No. You're near asleep, I can see it. And Lyanna's likely waiting, gods know she doesn't wait quiet. Even if I roused her from sleep, she'd only dare me to prove my strength on her."

Rhaella giggled weakly, nodding against the pillow. Yes, Lyanna was like that. A wild woman packed in an unsuspectingly short and athletic frame.

She let Wylis gently tug her thin gown back down over her body, smoothing the fabric with careful hands, and dotting kisses across her spent frame, until she was proper once more. Then, to her quiet delight, he stayed.

He pulled her close into the warm, protective embrace of his massive frame, one strong arm curled around her, her head resting against his broad chest.

"Wylis..." She lovingly glanced at his face, waiting for his undivided attention. "Let's have more children after this."

"We'll decide that after you bring this one into this world. Now, sleep."

After getting his peck on her forehead, the steady beat of his heart lulled her into sleep.

That night, she dreamt of the hot spring, the warm water soothing her body as she soaked peacefully. In the dream, she listened to the cheerful voices of her new big family chatting and laughing nearby. All the while, her man sat right beside her.

It was so ordinary, yet so dreamy.

#####

Hornwood, the North,

The distance between Ramsgate and Hornwood wasn't a lot. But since there was no solid road established between them, the journey wasn't smooth. Still, Wylis' carriages were helpful, their suspension providing much relief to Ashara and Arthria as they journeyed with him.

He, with twenty men-at-arms, and Chett, rode on horseback. It was still a whole day-long journey, however.

"See that the men take no wine offered. We're here for work, not feasting. When we're home and off duty, they may do as they please. But here, no drink and no whores. Is that clear?" Wylis ordered, taking his budding army seriously.

Chett nodded, "I've warned them, my lord. I will repeat it once we arrive."

With a nod, Wylis urged Caliburn to trot faster. There were many things on his mind. He'd personally made the bastard sword for Lord Hornwood; it was beautiful, oil-quenched, oxidized in a controlled manner. It held a matte black sheen with repeating patterns.

Now, he hoped the man would be willing to sell him the lands he wanted. He didn't like that he needed to take all the gold, as that increased the possibility of failure.

And then there was that prophecy Chett informed him about. To all, it was nonsense, but he took it seriously. It was true, after all. The trajectory Tyrant's Squire had set for him would one day make the realm kneel to him. And his body possessed the blood of the giants, which was a rumor. And then there was ice and fire mentioned. Once Chett uttered that, he took the prophecy seriously.

However, there was nothing he could do. He'd already learned of *the Others* rising, so the prophecy mattered not.

As Caliburn carried him, he stared at the Tyrant's Squire's blue screen. He had a few titles whose rewards, once stacked, could help him. 'The Northern Sword' gave him a greater influence in the North, respect, fear, and awe. 'Tyrant's Games' made his lies ten percent more believable. 'Tyrant of the Trident' gave him more status. 'The Kingmaker' title gave his name, actions, and words more weight, no matter where he was. 'The Kingslayer' made nobles fear him.

Hope Politics Mastery helps.

"My lord, we can see the castle."

Wylis focused ahead on the road. They had crossed the Hornwood forest and arrived at the northwestern edge of Sheepshead Hills. The Hornwood castle was nothing to awe, just a stone castle with surrounding stone and timber walls. There was a town outside the castle, but it was better suited to be called a village instead. The houses had thatched roofs, rotting wooden walls, and some were even crumbling. The road passing through the town was muddy beyond belief.

[Annoyance.]

So muddy that even Caliburn complained. After all, the big boy didn't want his new Valyrian steel horseshoes to get dirty. That was what Wylis thought.

Since the castle sat on the hill, it had a wide view of its surroundings. But it was surrounded by trees on three sides, so the view wasn't that great either.

"Gates!"

Hornwood guards went into action as soon as his entourage approached the castle gates. There was no moat, just a metal portcullis and wooden, reinforced doors.

Wylis didn't have to stop once. His house sigil fluttered high, on the carriages and in the arms of his men at the lead. They crossed the castle walls and arrived at a rather wide courtyard. Still muddy, but at least clean and lacking stench.

Armors' shining.

He noticed that the Hornwood soldiers' armor was shining. Although the armor was limited to helmets and pauldrons, the rest was chainmail and leather. The North wasn't big into full-plated armor; it was too expensive and impractical in the muddy, snowy grounds of the North.

Wylis' soldiers had fine armor, however. Shining silver, helmets, chainmail, breastplates, pauldrons, gauntlets, and more. He was preparing them for a different frontier, after all.

Moments later, Chett led him to the castle's entrance. He stopped once he arrived in front of a small lineup. Lord Halys Hornwood was a tall northern man with raven hair and an ever-laughing face. Dressed in simple robes and a fur cloak. Then there was Lady Donella Manderly, slightly chubby, with dark brown hair and raven eyes. She was a head shorter than her husband. Beside her was a little boy, three or four years old.

Wylis got off his horse and greeted the lord. First, it was a simple handshake, but then the jovial man pulled him in an awkward embrace. His frame was too big to be hugged like that. But he didn't mind; it was good for him.

"My lady," he then kissed Donella Manderly's hand, adding a few words to her beauty. Daryn, the heir to Hornwood, was gawking at his massive frame, pulling away from his mother in fright. But then Wylis laughed and pulled out a tactical candy from his cloak.

Finally, he hugged Benjen, who'd come to Hornwood early to plan for his visit. After that was the castle's Maester, Medrick. The old man didn't seem to like him much, noticeable by the cold greeting.

"And this beauty is my woman, my paramour, my love, Ashara Dayne." Wylis introduced Ashara after that. "And this little lady is my daughter, Arthria."

"I'm Arthria." Arthria gave a cute bow, holding the hem of her lavish skirt. "Thank you... umm... inviting us."

Ah! My giant heart.

Wylis nearly giggled like a maiden seeing his almost three-year-old daughter speak. He reckoned Ashara had told her to do this, and she almost nailed it. And seeing how Lord and Lady Hornwood were reacting, they were in awe of her cuteness as well. Arthria was by far the most charming child he had personally seen, and that was true for the realm.

"My Gods! Hello, little lady." Lord Halys knelt and greeted Arthria like a lady. "Welcome to Hornwood."

"Thank you." She chirped, gifting a smile that melted hearts.

"I see both your resemblance in her, my lord, my lady," Donella said. "Please, let us go inside. We have prepared a modest feast for this evening."

Wylis, a little protective and aware of all the eyes on Arthria, lifted her in his arms. "Please, lead us in."

He gave a nod to Chett while passing, reminding his squire to keep the men in line. He had Ashara and Benjen to help him inside the castle in the meantime. Both of them knew why they were there.

The visit was planned to last three nights, so Wylis didn't bother raising the topic that night. He just sat with Lord Halys, met with lesser nobles of his lands, and feasted. He listened to Lord Halys tell tales, then he did the same.

Sometime in the middle of their talks, they found a common ground. Both of them disliked the Boltons. Halys had more reason because he shared a border with the Boltons. And Halys also knew of what Boltons had tried in Ramsgate before.

"As they say, my lord. You can choose your friends, but not your neighbours," Wylis said, the feast reaching its end, his cup of ale empty. "I'm troubled even when we're not neighbours. I can't imagine your difficulties."

"Damn them all. Hah, fools, every last one. I know their kind, their ambitions," Lord Halys drunkenly rumbled. "Bah, enough o' that now. What can I do for you, m'lord? Benjen said ye came speakin' o' trade? Hah, what's a little man wi' some timber to offer, eh? Still... I'll do what I can, that I swear."

Wylis silently listened to him, rambling and slurring drunkenly. By now, he had a grasp on Lord Halys' personality. The man was friendly, jovial, and easygoing. A bit too accommodating, even. Always asking what he can do. That almost made Wylis feel bad about what he was doing. But then he reminded himself that this was a fair trade. A Valyrian steel sword was worth castles. Besides, once he'd have the Resource Map, he'd help some Northern lords, and Hornwood would be in that list.

"Aye? Heh... damn my cursed luck. My Father kept me from marchin' south in the rebellion. Heard tales o' the Tyrant o' the Trident... an' now I've seen him." He lifted his cup with a wobble. "Drink wi' me, m'lord. To the Tyrant o' the Trident!"

Wylis did that, raised his cup high.

Thud!

Lord Halys downed the entire cup and fell face-first on the table, snoring. The nearby lesser nobles howled in laughter at that, raised their glass and started singing something.

Wylis maintained a smile and drank his cup as well. Ashara was already gone, having taken Arthria to sleep. So, he looked to his side, at Benjen.

"Follow me."

With the creak of his chair, he got up, still smiling towards the nobles. He waved his hand and walked out of the great hall, heading towards his bedchamber. As soon as the loudness was left behind, his smile vanished into a cold stillness, his eyes turned steely serious.

He spoke nothing, arms behind his back. After knocking once, he walked inside the bedchamber. Ashara was combing her hair, having changed into a modest nightdress. Arthria was asleep in an extra bed nearby. He dared not leave his daughter alone in another room.

Wylis waited, letting Benjen enter behind him. Once he heard the door shut, he poured himself a cup of water and drank it.

Crash!

"Bastards!" He threw the cup with a suppressed shout, "How dare they! Ashara, did you drink this water?"

"I-I did... What happened, Wylis?"

His jaw tightened, gaze falling on Arthria. "Her?"

"No, she fell asleep during the feast."

He exhaled to that and looked at Benjen. "I was poisoned at the feast."

It was heartwarming seeing both Benjen and Ashara rush towards him and hold his arms as if scared he'd fall.

"Don't trouble yourselves. Poison won't take me, you both know that. It's not the water, it's the cup. Tainted with a slow poison. A sip or two won't finish a man, but enough of it will. It wears you down, leaves you weak, easy prey for rot and sickness. We'd die in Ramsgate later, quiet as you please, and none would question it... If I hadn't seen through it."

Seeing Ashara was a little shaken by that, surely worried about Arthria, he held her by the shoulders and helped her sit on the bed.

"Why would Lord Hornwood do that?" Benjen asked. "He didn't strike me as such a man."

"Aye, he's likely not the one."

"Then who?" Benjen asked.

Wylis sighed, rubbing his face annoyedly. At that point, it felt like a curse. As much as Tyrant's Squire helped him, he always found trouble seeking him ever since he'd awakened the damn thing.

"What can you tell me about the maester, Benjen?"