

[Petyr Baelish]

The imposing stronghold, built on top of a peak in the Mountains of the Moon, with a narrow causeway as the only stone road, Eyrie, was said to be impregnable. Nonetheless, Petyr had doubts. According to the information he managed to get and why he fled King's Landing before the new King and Queen arrived at the capital, perhaps Eyrie wasn't a fortress but a trap. Could those wights, as his informants from the Riverlands called them, climb? If so, the best option would be not to oppose the new ruling beings. At least his letters to Lysa prevented her from taking action, so he sent the Vale Army to Harrenhal and joined the others to rescue King Robert, the Royal Family, and the Starks.

Petyr had carefully planned to weaken both the Starks and the Lannisters, aiming to spark conflict among the other kingdoms. At the same time, he took control of the Vale, seemingly neutral and aligning with the winning faction. That would validate his claims over the Vale and gain the trust of the new rulers... And he would rise higher than ever on the ladder of the Game of Thrones. Now, most of his plans had been discarded. The last letter sent by the new Queen, who called herself the Night Queen, and according to his spies in King's Landing, was a child of less than 10 years old, indicated that the Small Council had been dismantled. It had become tough to gather new information from his spy network; most of what he could get was common knowledge in King's Landing. Some of it was hard to believe... An army of wights, the ruling prince of Dorne, Doran, visiting one of Petyr's brothels and paying for five of his finest whores... That wouldn't have been unusual, as many lords visited Petyr's brothels. Nonetheless, that was the problem, Prince Doran had been a disabled man for years, and even if his condition was kept under wraps, Petyr Baelish was among those who knew it. For him to be healed... Rumors claimed the King of Death healed Doran Martell as a reward for Dorne bending the knee before the Harrenhal Massacre.

Baelish had lost a lot in the past month. But still, he was a player in the game and planned to make the most of it. Perhaps the new rulers were out of reach, as everybody had a weakness. Nonetheless, there were still other things to do. And the Vale was a start.

[Gazef]

Something had shifted in Satoru since Princess Renner's death at the Riverlands at the hands of that Baratheon prince. And it wasn't just the fact that he and the others discovered Satoru was a Necromancer, or the fact that he was an undead. The resurrection of Princess Renner, now the Night Queen, fueled Satoru's resolve to go along with whatever Princess Renner's plans were... And to that extent, Satoru had shown more powerful Necromancy spells and magic items that dwarfed the previous concept of Satoru's extent of power in Gazef's mind.

If Satoru was that powerful and afraid to show his undead nature to avoid solitude again... Then Princess Renner's death, a solitary being before Satoru's arrival almost three years ago, might have been truly impactful. Watching Satoru lose his composure for the first time since the

Warrior Captain had met him was a testament to many things, even to someone not as keen-minded as himself: Satoru, despite his undead nature, had a human heart, and Princess Renner was essential to him. Gazef could consider Satoru his friend, and Lakyus and Arche considered Satoru a friend and a mentor. But what Princess Renner was to Satoru was something else. Gazef was sure that if Arche, Lakyus, or himself fell on the battlefield, Satoru would avenge them. But what happened at the Riverlands hinted at the special place Princess Renner held in Satoru's heart.

Gazef emerged from his reverie and resumed supervising the training of the new guards for Harrenhal, the Crown Castle.

That particular task was frustrating, as the Westerosi recruits and soldiers were slow and weak, even the best of them. So Gazef had to simplify things, doing squire training to build some muscle and reflexes.

Gazef had been thinking about several things lately, as his recent tasks would take months, and the progress would be slow. Also, he could be at ease thanks to Satoru's new measures to protect Princess Renner... Rings with defensive properties and some shadow that now inhabited Princess Renner, Arche, and Lakyus' own shadow, sentient beings who would defend them from harm if needed. When Satoru offered Gazef a couple of those Shadow Demons to protect him, Gazef refused; after all, he had his pride as a warrior. Still, Princess Renner wanted Gazef to at least accept a ring for immunity against poisons, as that was a favored way of killing in the Seven Kingdoms.

The warrior captain looked at that small ring with an emerald embedded, then at the new recruits. It seemed that they wouldn't be going back to the Re-Estize Kingdom in the foreseeable future.

[Arche]

It's been unsettling to work alongside Elder Liches to establish the new Healing Centers in the former Seven Gods' churches in the different cities of the new Westerlands. Nonetheless, that couldn't compare to the utter dread the locals showed initially. Having their churches taken by "wights," as they called them... But desperation did the trick. As most villagers and lowborns didn't have to seek out Maesters to heal their loved ones, Arche herself had doubts that Maesters' knowledge could impact recovery. That creepy Maester at the Red Keep had informed Arche about the usual healing methods, and all of them were barbaric. Using thread and needle to close wounds? What kind of sadist would do that? And using drugs so people wouldn't remember they were screaming in pain?

When villagers and lowborns spread the news that their ill could be healed, soon the churches had long lines of people waiting for their miracle. Sick people, neglected for years, waited for whatever magic was held at the churches, ignoring the putrid face of the Elder Lich in charge. In weeks, the dread was replaced with hope and even worship, as now Satoru, the new King, was known as the "New God" or "The God of the Seven."

Commoners worshipping Master Satoru brought some issues at King's Landing. For instance, septons seemed outraged, though they didn't address the matter officially. Lakyus nee-sama, now Lady Paramount of the Westerlands, allowed septons to keep doing their homilies at the Great Sept of Baelor. Nonetheless, those places were rumored to be spots where septons tried to turn those who attended against Queen Renner, Satoru, and against those commoners who began to depict Satoru as the Seven-faced God.

Arche herself was wondering... Back in the Baharuth Empire, and especially in the Slane Theocracy, there were old legends of the Six Gods, but those were supposed to be real people who came 600 years ago, helping people when humankind was on the brink of extinction. People of great power, in a league far beyond mere humans and demihumans. And even those Six Gods died. That was all that was known about the Six Gods by the majority of citizens.

What was a god if they could grow old and die like everybody else? Was it just power? Some said that the Six Gods were the ones who brought Tier Magic to the world, and before that, all there was were Wild Magic and supernatural abilities. Thanks to Tier Magic, humans could thrive. But were the Six Gods humans? Or was that just Slane Theocracy's propaganda?

Then again, perhaps a god was simply a matter of power... And that brought Arche's thoughts to Master Satoru. When Master Satoru and the head of the Baharuth Empire's Academy of Magic, Fluder Paradine, sparred, Master Satoru got a draw, and he was depicted as a fellow 6th Tier magic caster by Fluder himself. But was Master Satoru really a 6th Tier magic caster? Summoning an army of undead was definitely beyond 6th Tier magic, as well as that advanced Dragon Chain Lightning Master Satoru used.

In any other situation, Arche shouldn't have had a problem assessing the power of a magic caster, her talent granted her that. Nonetheless, every time she used her talent on Master Satoru, she couldn't read his Tier. Actually, she read zero. Even commoners had traces of magic... Undead certainly had some magic, even if they weren't casters. Perhaps Master Satoru's particular talent also gave him immunity to Arche's talent, or maybe Master Satoru had a magic item to prevent others from reading his magic level. Arche looked at the two rings Master Satoru gave her to use, one with an emerald and another with a ruby. Master Satoru had magnificent rings on all his fingers, under those armored gloves.

That ritual of unspeakable power... the sheer power and all the magic rune circles that surrounded Master Satoru were way beyond 6th Tier... That ritual, despite its twisted and vile nature, was most likely godlike power... Didn't that make Master Satoru a god? In this Westeros, where magic was primitive, it certainly would.

The magic in Westeros was something that intrigued Arche too... Pycelle mentioned that some Maesters trained in the art of magic at the Citadel, but the most powerful witches and sorcerers belonged to Essos, in the city of Qarth and beyond. Master Satoru had mentioned several times the importance of learning from different sources... Perhaps there was something interesting to learn in this world.

[Oberyn Martell]

He wasn't a man who enjoyed torture. After all, he was a warrior. If some ill deeds demanded extra pain or a slower death, Oberyn had some special poisons to coat his weapons with and do it on the battlefield. He did that with the Old Lion and Lorche... oh yes, their deaths were gory and slow, full of pain. But the Mountain deserved better. It didn't matter that capturing him alive cost Oberyn six good men; Oberyn sent some gold to his soldiers' families, both those the Mountain killed and those he maimed in his attempt to avoid judgment.

Judgment came in long torture. Oberyn wanted Gregor broken, the same way the Mountain broke Oberyn's sister when he raped her to death... And the Mountain was a stubborn one. So Oberyn had Gregor's tendons and muscles cut so he couldn't attempt escape or harm more of the soldiers that were in charge of him. The Mountain remained in the filthiest cell, his teeth broken, his fingers severed, his balls burned with red-hot iron. Still, the Mountain wanted to fight... That stubborn rapist was more of a beast than a man, and perhaps it was for the better. That way, when Oberyn finally managed to break him, it would be the sweetest revenge he could get. Oberyn's long-lost sister deserved nothing less.

[Olenna Tyrell]

The losses of the campaign to Harrenhal were overwhelming. Not even when Aegon the Conqueror arrived in Westeros with his dragons had the Reach suffered so many casualties. Most of the armies were slain, and the surviving ones were terrorized or already harmed themselves. So the best course of action was to remain low, as the Reach wasn't in a position to withstand conflict with the other kingdoms. It would take at least a decade, if not two, to recover the forces lost in a single day... Or was it proper to say a single minute?

For now, the Tyrells would be the most loyal to the new rulers, as they might help if other kingdoms wanted to mess with the Reach lords or the farming fields. The Reach would provide food to the new Easterlands and the Riverlands to stay on the best terms with that damned child queen. Perhaps a marriage could be offered. Lady Lakyus was of marriageable age, and that Arche sorceress would be in a few years... So it would be best to befriend those girls, as according to reports, they seemed more approachable than that Skeleton King and the so-called Night Queen.

[Varys]

The Red Keep had changed. Without the Small Council, Varys thought he could suggest some capable people to take charge of the many duties that a city the size of King's Landing needed. With the nobles from the main houses across Westeros dismissed, Lady Lakyus accepted Queen Renner's advice and put some lowborns and small house nobles in charge. Varys

couldn't object; those Queen Renner chose were capable and honorable. According to his little birds, they didn't have anything dirty under the rug. From the Small Council, only Pycelle and Varys remained; and Varys knew Pycelle wouldn't last much longer as Lady Lakyus sent a letter to the Citadel requesting another Maester. It was evident she didn't trust him, and Varys couldn't blame her for that, Pycelle was a filthy man, and any intelligent woman would notice the cues.

That was something that troubled Varys. Lakyus was intelligent and strong; in her spars, she proved to be better and faster than the knights. Varys hadn't seen such skill with the sword since Ser Arthur Dayne, and perhaps Lakyus was even faster, and she was in her early teens. Varys couldn't tell, as he wasn't a swordsman. Lady Lakyus truly meant to help the people of her domains, both nobles and commoners alike. Despite Varys despising the means, all kinds of magic, especially the one those monstrosities called Elder Liches could perform, being vile in nature, Lady Lakyus meant no ill will. On the contrary, her ideals were too pure... and she paired those ideals with stubbornness. That was a bad mix that would normally end in death.

And that was the problem. If something happened to Lakyus, a close friend of Queen Renner, doom would fall upon not only the culprit but King's Landing altogether. For now, attacking Lady Lakyus was simply idiotic. There were two towering skeletal monsters in dark armor called Death Knights that protected Lady Lakyus all the time. And those Death Knights were strong, as Queen Renner made it clear when she ordered all the disbanded Kingsguard to attack them for a good ten minutes nonstop in public... and those monsters didn't take any damage. On the contrary, all the swords and spears were broken or dented... only the war hammers remained, and the Death Knights weren't scratched. The message was clear: those Death Knights were able to defeat and bring death to whoever dared to attack Lady Lakyus.

Varys could understand the reasons for such a public demonstration. Lakyus was intelligent but naive in her ideals; many would try to manipulate her in time, but for now, the memory of the Harrenhal Massacre and the public display of the Death Knights was too fresh for anybody who harbored the idea of attacking Lady Lakyus. And of course, the policies to heal people at the churches and teach the commoners how to read and write were earning the support of the masses. Nonetheless, Varys knew better, even with popularity and a formidable force, some might find a way... Another problem to deal with.

[Ironborn]

The cold breeze hit the seasoned Ironborn sailor at the docks. Gray and windy skies for days, perfect for sailing. Nonetheless, those bastards were delayed by about a week. While it wasn't uncommon for a raiding ship to delay some days when they ventured inland, having their fun with the local women, those they couldn't bring back to the Iron Islands for... reasons, it was odd for that to happen to six ships at the same time. Ironborn were seasoned sailors; not even in the worst storms ever recorded did the Iron Islands lose three ships... much less six. There were also reports of other ships disappearing... and their scouts hadn't reported any naval army on the east coast.

The people at the docks had been ordered to report the arrival of any of those delayed or missing ships and make their captains go straight to the lord in charge, or Balon Greyjoy, depending on whether they landed at Red Harbor or Lordsport, to be punished most likely, unless the bounty they brought was worth their time.

The sailor waited patiently during the rest of his watch. It seemed his shift was going to be uneventful, when, with the last lights of sundown, he spotted one ship approaching. The Iron Islands flag, House Goodbrother's flag too, and the right colors. So, one of the delayed ships was approaching. No, two... three... At the horizon, other ships could be seen. All of them from the Iron Islands. Usually, most sailors couldn't notice the difference from that far away, but Ironborn had keen eyes, and their flags and casks had some details meant to be recognizable for them, among other tricks that set Ironborn apart as the best sailors in Westeros.

Something was off. The ships began sailing to the different islands. Usually, raiding ships would land either at Red Harbor or Lordsport. The smaller docks at the other islands were meant for scouting ships, shipbuilding, and minor vessels meant for transportation, trade, or fishermen.

Several scouting ships sailed to intercept the suspicious vessels. They wouldn't make it to the shore due to the speed and maneuverability gap. But then the scouting ships set on fire, one by one, illuminating the night sky like distant torches. The alarms were sounded, as the night shift gathered to stop any hostile force... and then hell fell. Skeletons and rotting corpses dressed in rags and clothes barely resembling Ironborn attire began to attack as soon as the ships landed. Fire rained on the defending forces, screams of pain and dread echoed... as dead men rose and began to attack their former comrades. The fierce warriors and sailors held their ground, bringing torches to try to burn the "wights," but then a towering skeleton with dark armor, a massive shield, and sword emerged from the now blazing ship and shattered any kind of defense the Ironborn tried to muster.

Then it was evident. Retreat was the only option.

[Balon Greyjoy]

The Greyjoy lord had wanted the independence of the Iron Islands for decades, and he found the perfect opportunity when King Robert fell to a group of newcomers from who knows where. Even if the tales of them controlling wights were to be believed, Balon would love to see wights swimming from the mainland to the Iron Islands. Long before that happened, the ruthless sea would claim those piles of bones, crushing them to the shores they came from, and whatever was left would be food for the fish.

Balon had been wary of a naval army the new Queen could gather. He deployed some spies to the main ports along the western shore of the continent, from Lannisport to Flint's Finger. They would keep him informed using ravens. And even if that child queen dared to gather a naval army, she would soon learn about the prowess of the Ironborn naval army, unrivaled in sailing skills and superior in ships and naval warfare. What could a bunch of inlanders playing sailors do? Even those meek, so-called sailors from Lannisport wouldn't stand a chance. Nonetheless,

as a cautious man, he ordered his raiding ships to stop their pillaging and gather back at the Iron Islands, as those ships were faster. The Iron Island lord planned to send them to pillage whatever port dared to host an army meant to attack him. What kind of resolve and morale would those sailors have if back home their women and children were ravished and killed?

Screams took Balon out of his reverie as he noticed through his window the dots of fire... several fires could be spotted at the docks.

An urgent knocking came to his night chambers.

"Lord Balon! Wights! Wights have landed on ships and are attacking our men! Others are setting everything on fire!"

Balon ordered all the fighting forces on the island to gather and defend the castle. The chaos and screams slowly but steadily began to fill the night wind, as more and more houses were set on fire. The soldiers were fleeing, trying to save themselves, while the wights were growing in number. When someone died, they rose back again and joined the invading wight forces. Small lights, fires, could also be spotted from the other islands. And the air began to smell of blood and death. Fear evolved into terror as Balon realized that all the ports, not just the main ones but the smaller and even the hidden ones, were taken. Wights and others, in dark cloaks, were setting every ship and boat on fire.

Everything seemed too coordinated to just be the work of mindless beings. Every escape route had been shut down; every ship on the coast had been burned or was on fire.

It was doom.

[Tyrion Lannister]

News of the fall of the Iron Islands reached the coasts weeks later. Ironborn ships that happened to be on the open sea during the Wights' Night returned only to find their demise when they landed, overwhelmed by the reanimated corpses of those who once were their peers. The Queen had ordered sailors and traders not to travel to the Iron Islands several weeks ago. At first, Tyrion thought the Queen had planned a trade blockade against the Iron Islands when he received the letter forbidding his commercial ships at Lannisport from sailing to those islands.

The Queen's plan was cunning, and Tyrion was waiting for another letter instructing him to reinforce the naval security of the Westerlands to complete the blockade and prevent the Ironborn from acquiring non-food supplies through pillaging. But that letter never arrived... The truth behind it was more ominous. A handful of Ironborn survivors managed to escape the Iron Islands as their returning ships were attacked by wights when they landed at Red Harbor. A similar fate might have fallen upon merchants and sailors who disobeyed the Queen's orders. Those islands were now called the Wights' Islands, and no one dared go near them.

The few surviving Ironborn sailors had tales of utmost dread. Tyrion, as one of those who had been at Harrenhal during the Massacre, knew better. That devious Queen had turned the Iron Islands, the bane of the western coast for centuries, into haunted islands. Without any help from

the Western lords, they expected her to summon them to gather a naval army to attack the self-proclaimed independent Iron Islands. Those fools didn't have the wisdom to keep their heads low... As Westeros, now under the name of the Western Empire, hadn't seen a ruler so powerful since Aegon the Conqueror, and that was debatable...

Giant dragons or wights and pitch-black giant monstrosities with dark tentacles and mouths, immune to spears and arrows, and able to splatter armored horses and siege constructs as if they were grapes. Tyrion had had nightmares of those giant dark demons leveling Casterly Rock, with him inside it. Those nightmares were a reminder not to mess with the Queen and that Skeleton of a King named Satoru.

It was clear to Tyrion who among them made the calls, and that little child was fascinating to his eyes... Her decrees were intriguing, and the results were outstanding. In a month, the nobles were in fear and the common folk worshipped her and the King of Death. Teaching lowborn how to read and write, healing them, adjusting the taxes on behalf of farmers according to different factors, and based on the productivity of the land they worked. Lords were angry, but they had to obey nonetheless... their income reduced.

The Imp just wondered how the new rulers would deal with the lack of funds the Crown had due to years of King Robert's excesses.

[Princess Renner]

Renner felt elated. Every day during royal audiences, she sat comfortably on the lap of her beloved Satoru while she listened to the many problems of the local lords and village chiefs. Not that she cared, but her "throne" was so perfect and comfortable that she didn't mind solving the little problems of those idiots that called themselves lords and chiefs.

Lord Darry approached, reporting the capture of some highwaymen who blackmailed commoners who approached the churches looking for healing. Renner had been receiving similar reports during audiences and via letters from several lords in the area. Everything was going according to plan, as such free "miracles" would lure the scum of society to try to profit at the expense of commoners... Renner was waiting for the right time to call off the free healing, blaming it on the incapacity of the local lords to protect the churches and keep the criminals away.

Commoners would think it was the local lords who wanted gold, now with the reduced taxes... And without the always-available free healing, the commoners would learn to work for their healing, to be loyal and dependable. After all, free things are usually taken for granted. Meanwhile, the Queen was mapping the criminals, giving them time to organize, join forces, build hierarchies, and grow. That way, it would be far easier to take control of them.

The halls of Harrenhal almost felt empty, though there were still several scores of Elder Liches doing all kinds of administrative jobs, from financial to communication. As well as several Death Knights and Death Warriors guarding the walls, inner, outer, and main doors. While Captain Gazef would be close to the Crown Hall, most of the time, he was busy training the recruits and

guards. In a few months, humans would join Harrenhal as maids, cooks, and more, trustworthy, dependable, and loyal people, but for now, the undead did the trick.

Three men in their thirties entered the audience hall, claiming to be from the Iron Bank of Braavos. Indeed, Renner had been expecting them to arrive, considering the large amount of gold the Crown owed the Iron Bank, thanks to Robert's idiocy and Baelish's poor judgment in resorting to loans to a bank not under the control of Westeros.

Tycho Nestoris: "It's a pleasure to finally meet Your Graces. We are from the Iron Bank of Braavos and came to this lovely place to discuss the debt the Westeros throne owes the Iron Bank."

"I've heard about the Iron Bank, and I have read the Iron Throne owed the Iron Bank three million gold dragons. It's most unfortunate the Iron Bank lent gold to a decadent king who only ate, hunted, and got drunk, or to a Master of Coin whose best accomplishment was to sweet-talk old lady nobles and run brothels. That kind of poor judgment makes me wonder how that bank of yours hasn't gone bankrupt yet," Renner replied, her tone icy.

"If you allow me, Queen Renner," spoke Noho Dimittis, "The Throne didn't owe; it still owes 3,000,291 gold dragons..."

"According to the contract. The contract was between the Iron Throne of Westeros and the Iron Bank. The Iron Throne is no more, nor is Westeros, as now you are in the Western Empire. There are several details in the contract that exempt the Western Empire from paying the debts of the Iron Throne. By principle, we aren't liable to pay for the squandering of mediocre rulers or their people. Nonetheless, I acknowledge you as representatives of a banking group; you are just people doing your jobs. So you are free to collect your due from the natural inheritors of your debts... Petyr Baelish is at the Eyrie. We can give you Robert Baratheon so you can demand him to pay... Or perhaps the Iron Bank may want to use its old ways and fund any opposing force," Renner's eyes gleamed with malice.

Satoru interjected, "I might suggest you use every last gold dragon in your vaults to hire every single warrior and farmer in Essos. You can hire until the last dog and cat to join forces... And we might crush you all nonetheless. Or perhaps we can just bring death to Braavos... and every bank you have in Essos and Westeros."

Tycho Nestoris responded cautiously, "We don't need to go to war. If the new Queen isn't in a position to pay, we can make reasonable adjustments."

"That's not the point. Paying for others' debts is idiotic. We have no relationship with the Baratheons nor Petyr Baelish. And your bank policies are quite outdated," Satoru replied sharply. "If you lack credit life insurance policies, that's not our problem. And the Queen is right, if you want to fund rebels, you can try. But let me warn you: when you cross that line, you will commit two fatal mistakes. One: you will lose more gold by funding the loser's faction. Two: I will not show mercy and will obliterate every one of your banks and vaults."

"We could expand our domain to Essos, Satoru," I beamed at my beloved, giving him my brightest smile.

Satoru nodded.

After a short, polite farewell, the three representatives left the hall. Unknown to them, a flicker in Tycho Nestoris' shadow was the only hint that they didn't leave alone.

Renner's smile widened as she thought of the near future. The Iron Bank would face a barrage of bad choices that would serve several purposes: uniting her opposition in tight factions and ultimately weakening the powerful Iron Bank to a point where Satoru and she could take over that financial institution.

Satoru and Renner flew together, using [Mass Fly], but she preferred Satoru holding her while flying. Especially at night, to watch the beautiful moon and starry sky with her beloved. Now, in the privacy of the castle, Renner could be herself. She usually held Satoru's hand, sat on his lap, or hugged him most of the day. They would take stargazing flights at night. It was everything Renner wanted. Nonetheless, she wanted more.

Renner was aware she was only nine years old, and they would have to wait some years to consummate their love. Satoru was a gentleman, not sharing the same bed with her just yet. Nonetheless, Renner wouldn't have minded sharing, even if sex was still off the table. And that was also an issue, could they ever consummate their love? And what about having offspring? She wanted to know, but she was aware Satoru wouldn't talk to her about that kind of topic for a few more years. So she had to ask him bit by bit. Of course, Satoru would notice; his intellect would very soon unravel Renner's intentions. And then Renner would need to be direct.

There were so many things she wanted to do with Satoru, but her child body was in the way...

[Eddard POV]

It had been months since the King of Death and the Night Queen's ascension to the Throne. What kind of Throne? Ned wasn't sure. King's Landing was no longer the Crown city; it was now part of the Easternlands, with Lady Lakyus Aindra as its Warden. Ned's family was together, and despite Catelyn still being distant toward Jon, at least, thanks to the latter saving Robb during the Harrenhal Massacre, she wasn't as antagonistic. It was a slight shift, but Ned hoped it would be enough for now.

While the North remained largely unchanged compared to other lands, taxes hadn't increased, and the new decrees seemed reasonable. Despite resistance from the more traditional lords, they begrudgingly began to implement them. One of the most notable decrees was the abolition of Trial by Combat and the ban on torture as a means of extracting confessions. The latter was quite reasonable for the Starks and Karstarks, under torture, a man would confess to anything. Nonetheless, the Boltons despised the new decree. Queen Renner announced the implementation of courts in every major city across the Western Empire, promising fair trials to anyone who could pay the fee, using magical means. This meant a cut in the power of the Wardens and their bannermen, who would no longer judge matters themselves but instead delegate that responsibility to the courts, and pay for it.

Ned had no issues with the schools, new buildings meant for children, including lowborns, to learn how to read and write. Orphanages, where parentless children could be cared for, were also established. These new institutions were built using gold from the vaults of every lord, which led to mixed opinions. Nonetheless, what else could be done but obey?

Aegon the Conqueror had subdued the North with the arrival of his dragons. The Night Queen did it with an army of wights, demons taller than dragons, and a magic caster capable of bringing back the dead and healing the legs of a crippled man.

Catelyn took Bran to the Healing Church, managed by one of those monstrous wights who could speak. The Elder Lich, as it called itself, said that the degree of healing Bran required to walk again was available at Harrenhal, and that the Starks would need to state their case to the Night Queen.

That sparked a heated discussion, and Ned didn't want to exert his authority, especially since they were talking about the well-being of one of his children.

Arya, Catelyn, Rickon, and Jon wanted to take Bran to Harrenhal. Robb, Sansa, and Ned were against the idea. In the end, it was Bran who made the decision, he wanted to go to Harrenhal. Ned had to accept, wondering what the Night Queen would demand from them in exchange for healing Bran's legs.

[Melisandre POV]

If she weren't immune to fire, she would have perished that fateful night at Dragonstone. Her ritual to spy on that foreign sorcerer at Harrenhal had gone terribly wrong. The fire of fate had turned black, then grew out of control, consuming everything and everyone in its path. But Lord R'hllor had protected her, and that meant something. The Lord of Light wanted her to do His will, and it was clear to her that the sorcerer at Harrenhal was the Lord of Death, the sworn enemy of the Lord of Light.

It was her mission to find Azor Ahai and the Lightbringer sword to put an end to the Lord of Death. R'hllor needed His champion, and Melisandre would find him. She had been mistaken when she thought Stannis was Azor Ahai, but his scorched body had proven her wrong. Melisandre knew she needed to be careful; the Lord of Death was beyond her power as a Red Priestess. She wouldn't antagonize him directly, but she would gather information, to help Azor Ahai to the best of her abilities when Light and Darkness clashed once more.