**Chapter 31**

**Draconic Surprises**

**Ser William Erenford**

There had been many rumours about the new roads the Queen had ordered to be built, each one more incredible and ridiculous than the last. William had heard a handmaiden confide to one of her friends the roads were supposed to fly in the air like dragons did. An old merchant from Acorn Hall had told them in a conspiring tone that the stones became as smooth as a sword’s blade but only if you created a river of human blood over them. A septon of the Trident was rumoured to have walked from Maidenpool to the Trident, stopping in every village the Seven were going to smite down the heretical work and thereby prove its ‘heretical nature’ to all. These were just four rumours. There were hundreds of others. Hedge witches had been seen cursing stones which were going to be used for the new constructions; dragons had been seen vomiting on the workers to give them ‘draconic ideas’ – William had no idea how you were supposed to say that without laughing – and there would be soon a massive flooding from the Green and Blue Forks to show the Riverlanders how impure this new creation was.

Now that he was seeing the smallfolk and the architects working on the first section of this new road, William could tell the reality was far more boring.

The stones the muscled men were transporting from chariots to the future road were normal stones. The men barking orders were normal men. Smallfolk and knights spoke, screamed, laughed, swore insults and generally did whatever they did when the built something.

If there was blood sacrifice or heresy, William wasn’t able to see it.

“I don’t see the dragon,” grumbled one of the sellswords which had joined their convoy on its way to Fairmarket.

William rolled his eyes, and he wasn’t the only one. Dragon, dragon, dragon. It was like everyone was only interested in the big reptiles. Personally, the Erenford knight thought there was something wrong about wanting to get too close to a flying beast which could roast you in less time it took to joke about it and then feast on your screaming corpse.

Sure, it was peace now and the Crown paid in gold dragons to feed the real ones with sheep, goats and cows, but these were still fire-breathing animals with fangs bigger than your arm.

But for some reason plenty of the youngsters were happy to go wherever a dragon stayed for long.

“The real work has started less than a fortnight ago,” a Charlton men-at-arm replied, “and the spring rains have ceased. Rumour is they don’t need a dragon until a lot of work is done.”

There were plenty of nods and words of approval at that. After so many died against the Greens, there weren’t that many dragons left in the world, and even less in the loyal lands. The Black Queen had one, and her twin the Princess had another...and despite the rumours hundreds of dragon eggs were waiting to hatch in the Eyrie, no one from Seagard and the northern Riverlands had seen another recently.

“Or maybe it’s late because there’s trouble in the Iron Islands...” the first sellsword persisted.

“You know we’re not supposed to use this name anymore!” the hit on the armour of the man was playful and did not hurt, but it was a warning nonetheless. William thanked silently the veteran who had given it.

“If the children have stopped bickering, we will return to the column,” William told the men of his command. “We have to escort the paymaster and the coffers to Fairmarket. We are not paid to stay idle and laugh at the smallfolk exhausting themselves to build the new road.”

“You heard the Captain,” his second rumbled. “Go back to the column! Last one to return to his post will have latrine duty tonight!”

This may be a lot of precautions for nothing, but they were knights and sworn swords, and if it happened there was a danger to their convoy and they didn’t take care of it, no one would pay them anymore. William didn’t know how many coins of silver had been stored in the vaults the Crown paymaster had brought with him from his northern travels, but he had no doubt the sum wasn’t small. Each coffer had been charged on the chariots by two men, and the fact ten mounted riders of the Twins had accompanied them to Fairmarket supported this view.

“Will we cross the bridge and camp to the south of Fairmarket, Ser?”

“Yes,” William said after a few moments of deep thought. “That way we will be...”

Screams resonated and William felt his blood freeze in his veins as a large shadow suddenly loomed above them as it emerged from the spring clouds.

And then it roared, a furious sound making him weak in the knees and the bladder.

For several breaths, all he was focused to do was controlling his horse and fighting his panic.

“What in the Seven Hells? This is not the Queen’s dragon!”

William did not know who had spoken, but he was in the right. Moondancer – Queen Baela’s ride – was getting bigger and longer every time it was seen flying in the skies of the Riverlands, but it was not that big.

And besides, the young dragon was a pale green or another colour close to it. It was beautiful to look at...while this one was muddy brown from snout to tail.

The beast roared again and circled lower, giving them an excellent view over its solid brown scales and scars which could only have been made by other dragons. It was large clue that it was not a new dragon which had been hatched after Bosworth Bridge. Another was the location it landed a small turn of hourglass later. It was not in front of tents or the road, but right in front of a trio of sheep.

“I see the name ‘Sheepstealer’ has not been usurped...”

**King Daeron Targaryen**

There were days Daeron dearly wished all the members of his Small Council could enter the room where the sessions took place and tell him there was no problem and everything was fine in his realm.

More and more he was convinced this was a dream. The good revelations were rare, and the bad outnumbered them four or five-to-one without trying.

And today wasn’t going to be the exception to the rule.

Larys Strong finished his report, which had lasted the next best thing to three turns of hourglass. A silence of consternation greeted his information.

It was understandable, the Green King thought. Most of the Council was used to bad news. But this was awful news, far worse than a mere ‘bad’, and Lord Shermer and Lord Redwyne were openly gaping like fishes.

The Master of Ships was the first to react loudly.

“This can’t be true!”

Larys Strong sniffed disdainfully and placed his hands half-open on his stash of spies’ reports.

“I assure you my Lord, it is true. My spies haven’t emerged unscathed from the Black purges in the Riverlands, but confirming the presence of a dragon is child’s play even for the dumbest agent in my service.”

“Your spies could be lying!”

“One could,” the Master of Whisperers agreed too readily. “But five, of all different backgrounds and who are unaware of each other?” the last man of House Strong shook his head in regret. “No my Lord, there’s no error possible. Assuming these five men and women were all captured and are now singing the lies of the Blacks, the rumours still have already reached Casterly Rock, the Eyrie and it won’t be long before they reach here too. And I have no doubt this is the truth, not embellished rumours. The Blacks have Sheepstealer back in their possession.”

“Assuming it ever left,” the Hand of the King pointed out with a polite smile.

“Yes,” Larys answered, “assuming it left. To be honest, I think the Blacks told the truth: it left. If they had one more dragon at Bosworth Bridge, they would have used against us.”

Daeron wasn’t going to argue against that. The Blacks had inflicted horrifying casualties to the last Green army, and a dragon thrown into the melee or in the aerial fight against him could have changed everything...in that he would have certainly perished and his army would have been routed. Lord Borros had already led the cavalry of the Stormlands to its death, a well-trained dragon would have been able to massacre the reserves of pikemen and bows, and ravage the ranks of the Volantene sellswords when they tried to reinforce the survivors.

“Whether they lost Sheepstealer for a few moons or a few years, they have it back now,” Lord Willam Stackspear said, emptying his second cup of red of the Council. “And we are now in a perilous situation, my Lords.”

Yes, ‘perilous situation’ was an appropriate way to describe the bad news. Daeron breathed loudly before deciding it was time to intervene.

“Since we heard absolutely nothing about Sheepstealer before today, I assume dragon and dragonrider were hidden in the deep north?”

“It is indeed what my thoughts were on the matter, your Grace,” the ageing Master of Whisperers replied. “Not that it was really difficult, obviously. Except White Harbor, most of the trade from the North was completely interrupted during the last winter. If Sheepstealer waited at Winterfell, Deepwood Motte or any other major fortress sworn to the Starks, we had no way to be informed of this secret.”

“A secret that is now no longer one,” Lord Marq Merryweather said. “The Black Queen is on her way to Winterfell if our agents’ messages can be trusted, but Sheepstealer is covering the construction of the new road between Fairmarket and Seagard.”

“Maybe I’m looking at it wrongly, but this is good news,” Royce Caron spoke. “There are a lot of scenarios where the Blacks could have revealed its presence in a far more...devastating and destructive manner.”

The Marcher Lord wasn’t wrong. The revelation of Sheepstealer for a purpose which had nothing to do with war was a good omen for the continuation of the peace. But Daeron couldn’t consider it ‘good news’, not when he could be outnumbered two mature dragons to one if the hostilities resumed.

“I don’t think I am ready to go that far,” Daeron voiced aloud. “However, I think this is all the justification we need to step on the aggressive provocations of certain unruly highborn. As it stands, we have absolutely no chance to win a conflict against the Blacks.”

There were many grim expressions around the table. All the members of the Council could count and knew enough about war to realise martial strength was not in their favour.

“No one will argue against it, your Grace,” his Master of Coin assured him. “While Morning is unavailable to the Blacks as Rhaena Targaryen is in the last stages of her pregnancy, Stone Hedge has Moondancer and Sheepstealer to oppose Tessarion. In fact, they may plan an invasion when the twin of Baela Targaryen has recovered. When it will happen, they will have three dragons against your Blue Queen.”

“I don’t think they will ever risk Morning in a fight against me,” Daeron contradicted his councillor. “Dragon and rider are too young, too untested. But two adult battle-dragons are already bad to fight, though of course the outcome is never won in advance.”

Something his two eldest brothers could have vigorously approved, if they were still alive to speak of it. Their ambush on Meleys the Red Queen had worked, but they had lost Sunfyre for all intent and purposes, and the wounds Aegon had suffered had broken him. The problem was still that he was in the position of Meleys, with his cousin playing the role of Sunfyre and Sheepstealer flying as Vhagar in this hypothetical battle.

And in this instance, the Blacks could afford to lose Sheepstealer as long as they killed him first.

“I know the subject of discussion is not pleasant...” the venerable Lord Shermer began prudently, “but is there truly no way to add more dragons to our ranks?”

“Unfortunately, there isn’t,” Daeron reluctantly informed the Lord Commander of the City’s Watch. “We have only three dragons available at this time, and I can’t conjure new ones by making a wish on top of the Red Keep. I have Tessarion. The hatchling born for my son Viserys is three moons old, and while this red-scaled dragon may be rival my Blue Queen in time, neither dragon nor rider will be ready for over a decade. And the third is the Cannibal.”

At least half of the Council participants shivered at the name. The Cannibal was likely the mightiest flying reptile having survived the Dance, this was an openly acknowledged truth.

On the other hand, saying it was a ‘Green’ dragon was a huge lie. The Cannibal had no master save the Cannibal. None of the surviving records at Dragonstone remembered the egg from which the carnivorous animal had hatched. Some guards and wardens had taken to whisper this was the beast Maegor the Cruel should have claimed as his own, and that the rejection of his true master had cursed both sides of the union, the dragonrider with madness and the dragon with an unending hunger for the flesh of its own species.

Daeron didn’t believe this foolery, of course. But it couldn’t be denied he ‘owned’ the Cannibal by sole virtue of owning Dragonstone.

“We could try recruiting dragonseeds once more...” Lord Alan Redwyne’s grimace told everyone around the table how happy the Lord of the Arbor was to propose this idea.

“No,” Daeron immediately replied. It was to crush this idea as soon as possible. “The civil war proved this was a bad idea all along, and we won’t do it again. Even if I was eager to attempt it, the Cannibal has killed over two scores of candidates since my father’s death. Contrary to one might thing, we have not an endless number of dragonseeds available.”

Many had been assassinated on the orders of his brother or Rhaenyra. More had been devoured, trampled or burned to deaths by dragons. Some had gone to war or fled to destinations unknown. And there weren’t a lot more of these silver-haired bastards and dragonlords’ grandchildren coming to replenish their ranks.

“People would likely revolt if they were forced to march to their deaths on the slopes of the Dragonmount,” Marq Merryweather approved as his hands played with the golden chains of his office.

“And trusting a bastard to not betray us when he or she would have the largest dragon from the Marches to the Wall would be a grave mistake,” Larys Strong pointed out.

Daeron nodded. He hadn’t forgotten the Two Betrayers. That the Green cause had been bolstered momentarily wasn’t the point. These two dragonriders had had no respect and no loyalty to House Targaryen once they were given a taste of power.

“And your sister, your Grace?” Royce Caron asked. “Obviously we can’t ask her to tame an adult dragon, but she was the rider of one, even if for a short time. Could it not be possible to hatch another dragon for her?”

“My sister is...not ready to take another dragon.” In fact, Jaehaera was not ready to do anything save living day after day and take her meals. The deaths of their family in front of her had crippled her, and of the sweet and kind girl only a hollow shell remained. Daeron had surrounded her with the kindest girls of her own age he could find, and there was some small progress, but he was not going to trust her with a dragon. Not now. Maybe not for the rest of her life.

At least for the next decade, they would have to avoid an all-out war, since their slight superiority in armies was completely irrelevant given their inferiority in numbers where dragons were concerned.

“We will discuss Sheepstealer’s return again tomorrow. For now I want to hear how the rebuilding of the Lannister’s merchant fleet fares...”

**Lord Kermit Tully**

Kermit had thought during the Dance dead enemies were the best kind one could have. He hadn’t changed much of opinion in the last years, but it had only been recently noticing a big problem.

Dead enemies could not be interrogated once they were captured. And once they were dead, their masters did not take long to replace them.

The Lord of Riverrun watched the corpse who had fallen ten feet from the small river for a long time, almost wishing it could rise again and told him who had paid him to spy on the western defences of the Riverlands.

But the body didn’t move or twitch, not after receiving four arrows in his back. The black feathers were particularly sinister, so close to the red of the blood and the tainted leather armour.

“He had a small book with him,” his captain of the guards told him. “We will have to send it back to see if the Council can learn something from it. It’s all coded, and it’s not in Westerosi tongue.”

Kermit huffed. One more reason to lament the fact they hadn’t been able to take alive the spy, then. Aside from the obvious, that is: they didn’t know who the man had been in contact with in the Riverlands.

The Lord Paramount of the Riverlands raised his right hand and the archer approached the corpse to take back their arrows, while the other men-at-arms began to search for the purse and the personal objects of the dead man.

“Westerner,” one of the men from House Vance spat, once a large casket of water from the river removed the dye of the hairs and blonde hairs became all too noticeable.

“One of the Lannister scum,” another spearman approved as the purse was found and gold coins fell from it to his hand. “He has lion’s coins! If these aren’t proof he was a spy...”

Kermit knew instantly there was something deeply wrong.

“Show me.” And his consternation didn’t decrease as the golden coin was placed in his right hand.

The coin was the size of a golden dragon, though maybe a bit smaller than it had been under the reign of Viserys. But this was all that was relatively normal. Where a dragon should have been on one side, there was a roaring lion. On the other side was the face of the Southern King Daeron I.

It was not a Black coin, and it looked it had been minted recently. But it was not the sort of coins the Green merchants choosing to cross the frontier used.

Had it been done for smuggling or for more nefarious purposes?

“The lion looks wrong, my Lord,” one of his guards, Alain, if he wasn’t mistaken spoke.

“Aside from the fact it shouldn’t be here in the first place?” House Targaryen, for all its issues, had ruthlessly enforced the currency changes once the Conquest was over. Gardener, Arryn, Stark, Lannister, Hoare...whether they survived or not Balerion the Black Dread, everyone had melted the existing coins for the new gold and silver money. Using old money hadn’t exactly been made illegal, but aside from the Westerlands and their inexhaustible mines, the gold dragon was far bigger than other coins and people deeply resented when they were short-changed in a bargain.

“I think it’s the lion of House Reyne, my Lord.”

“Now, that is interesting...” the Lord of Riverrun murmured.

House Reyne was arguably for House Lannister what House Bolton was for the Starks or House Grafton was for the Arryns of the Vale. It was the second most powerful House of the Westerlands, and many times in the past they had intrigued against the Lannisters, the mines of their lands under and around Castamere granting them wealth and influence only surpassed by the Masters of Casterly Rock.

“The Reynes never showed in the last years much independence from the West,” alas, their spies westwards had not taken a lot of interest in what the red lion banners were doing. Maybe they were going to have to change that, and soon.

“Maybe they were behind the provocations,” by a strange coincidence, the violence and the frontier incidents had entirely shrunk off and then went entirely extinct as rumours of Sheepstealer’s arrival spread across the Riverlands.

“Maybe...but we still have no idea who was behind it and what they expected to create by angering us...aside from the usual war gestures.”

**Queen Baela Targaryen**

Baela had often wondered in the last couple of years how she would look if she got pregnant. The secondary question would be how the children from Addam and she would take from once they were born.

The first hadn’t happened yet, of course, as her stomach remained completely flat, though not for any lack of trying.

But as she walked on the deserted inner citadel’s ramparts of Winterfell, the Black Queen had a better idea about it thanks to her sister.

“You are jealous,” her sister teased as she gave one more glance to the large belly from which a new Targaryen child would be born in approximately a moon.

“Of course I am!” the silver-haired monarch replied in a semi-offended tone. “We were married at the same time, and you achieved it on your first try!”

The two sisters stayed serious for a moment before bursting into laughter together.

“Don’t worry, you will get pregnant too. It’s just a question of time...especially given how much time you spend in bed with your husband.”

Baela rolled her eyes.

“I should never have told you that in my letters.”

“And break your promise?”

The eldest twin stuck her tongue out for sole reply.

“Rickon told me there had been complications on the Wall.”

“If by ‘complications’ you mean ‘some Green Lords sent merchants with hulls filled with second-rate weapons to sell weapons to the wildlings’, I’m afraid the answer is yes.”

Rhaena raised an impressed eyebrow.

“I wasn’t even aware the savages of the lands Beyond-the-Wall had markets and trade locations to sell goods, never mind weapons.”

“They haven’t.” Baela smiled. “As far as the Night’s Watch and every guard we have in the vicinity of the Wall are concerned, their boats were coming ashore and they found the biggest and meanest barbarians, before selling them weapons for almost nothing in return.”

Lord Manderly and several of her advisors thought some of the exotic products and the wood were going to be sold at Braavos during the return travel. Or they would have sold these goods in the Sealord’s city, if some dangerous pirates didn’t assault them before their hulls sailed into the Narrow Sea.

“Hopefully, between the ship’s losses and the reappearance of Nettles with Sheepstealer, it will be enough to convince the warmongers of the Reach, Westerlands and Stormlands to back off for now. We have the numerical advantage in dragons and many of the Northern troops have stayed battle-hardened.”

She had done all she could to convince the Greens her kingdom was no easy prey they could challenge in all impunity. Whether it would be enough didn’t depend on her anymore.

“I hope so,” Rhaena stopped walking and sat on one of the smallest chairs one of the Winterfell servants were keeping around once she felt tired. Baela leaned against the grey and sturdy stone in the mean time. “The Dance was terrible enough when we were a single kingdom. Now that there are two realms...”

The sovereign of the Riverlands, Vale and the North could only agree with her sister on this. And Rhaena hadn’t access to every report, ruling with her husband at Winterfell and handling the ‘joys’ of pregnancy. Baela had, and the testimonies of merchants and spies painted a far grimmer picture than she felt comfortable with.

It had not been a decade since Bosworth Bridge happened. In fact it was not even a half-cycle of seasons; peace had been signed at the beginning of winter and they still were in a rather rainy spring. But minds were changing. People were changing, on both sides of the frontier.

There were obvious signs. If someone decided to visit, say Saltpans, and ask for a drink, beer and apple liquor would likely be ready to be served, but not anything from the Arbor. The sweet wines would likely be from Lys, not from anywhere in the Reach. The Greens had raised the prices of their wine casks steadily during the winter, and in retaliation for certain taxes placed on the goods of Riverlands merchants, Baela had added some taxes on her own on the Arbor and Reach wines. The end result was many drinking habits going out of existence and new ones taking their place...and of course plenty of Reach Lords screaming high and loud the Blacks were shutting them down out of their markets.

Gold, gemstones, wine; the Greens truly had a lot of useful things in their Southern kingdoms. But they had also a frontier with Dorne. Baela was not going to envy them on this.

“Anyway I destroyed a large group of wildlings and their boats as they tried to bypass the Wall by sea,” Baela told her twin. “Between the Night’s Watch efforts and Moondancer’s flames, the wildlings lost between two thousand and three thousand warriors, along with plenty of the steel weapons the Southrons sold them. They should have learned the lesson attacking the Wall defended by a dragon is not a good idea.”

For the moment, she decided to stay quiet on the awful feelings the ice-forged defence had on Moondancer and her senses. It had been deeply unpleasant. If dragons were fire, the Wall and the forest north of it smelled like ice...sorcerous ice.

It was as something had tainted the very lands and the Wall long ago.

It had not prevented her from flying around the Wall with Moondancer, but it had discouraged her from staying long in pursuit of the wildlings. Besides, the forests and the wild immensities would have made her hunt useless after a few hours. A dragonrider could see a lot from the sky, but it could not see everything, and the enemies of the rangers knew how to conceal themselves.

“Let’s hope they won’t return in our lifetime.”

“I will settle for a decade of two,” Baela confessed. “With the Houses of the North back in the former New Gift, walls and defences are built once more. Give it ten years, and Queenscrown and the Umbers will have several heavily armoured companies formed to defend against raids and any ‘King-Beyond-the-Wall’.

Assuming any existed in the first place, of course. The black brothers had heard a lot of rumours from nearby wildling villages and their prisoners, but no one had seen a great army leader, merely emissaries and clan leaders claiming to speak in his name.

“Then let’s hope we will have that decade. It will give us another dragon...assuming we can discipline the younger addition to our family.”

Baela feigned to not have heard the groan of her sister after this remark.

“Everyone can be disciplined...except me. I am, after all, the Queen.” She sniffed haughtily in a parody of the Reach women arriving with their outrageously decorated dresses.

“I knew ruling was going to be bad for your sense of importance,” Rhaena commented. “But really, you will have to deal with our young half-sister sooner or later. Nettles may not be here for now, but even when she was, this wild hellion is doing far too many fooleries and tricks when she thinks the servants and the guards aren’t looking.”

And her sister hadn’t finished.

“Everyone has taken to call her ‘accomplice’ Trickster. Two wings, emerald scales, a tail, smaller than a middle-sized cat, but largely able to give us a hell of a trouble if we don’t stop it in time.”

“I wasn’t exactly an obedient child at her age,” the Black Queen pointed out, but her sister just watched her like she was another young child in need of a spanking. “Fine, but you realise I can’t take her with me back to the Riverlands for now. The Greens have certainly been cowed into submission by the appearance of Sheepstealer by now...I hope. But if I show them Daena and her ‘accomplice’, they are going to be afraid, they are going to be outright terrified.”

“The baby dragon they just hatched for their Crown Prince isn’t going to be enough to fight Morning, never mind Moondancer,” Rhaena agreed. “And since I can’t ride my dragon this year, they could try to break the peace and launch an unprovoked aggression before we have time to react.”

“That’s what I’m afraid, yes,” the silver-haired woman replied. “The Riverlands, no matter what we do, will always be vulnerable to dragonfire attacks and attacking our granaries would result in starvation and thousands of deaths...again. I’m afraid Daena will stay at Winterfell with you for now. That’s not something I’m willing to change for now.”

Perhaps in some years when more dragonriders would have been born and dragons hatched to be bonded with them, it would be different. But this year it was out of the question.

“In this case we need a tutor which will tame both girl and dragon,” Rhaena said.

“Or many tutors...”the rider of Moondancer proposed. “The more, the merrier, when it comes to wild girls.”

“You know something about that, don’t you?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Baela grinned.

**Balon Pyke**

“They’re getting better, failure after failure.”

“Yes, this time they were two leagues away from reaching a bay they could have used for landing.”

Balon shook his head as around him most of his warriors exchanged bawdy jokes about the lack of sailing and navigation skills the greenlanders sailors possessed. Not that there were false to begin with, but once you had spend more than a fortnight listening to them, you had heard them all.

“I suppose there is no hope this ship will sail again,” the Great Wyk leader said, as he continued to watch below the not-so-unusual spectacle of a ship half-broken on the dark rocks right in front of the tall cliffs.

“I am not sorry about it, Lord. As the Storm God’s breath is my witness, I think it’s a slaver ship.”

Balon had the urge to curse. If he had ever felt some friendship with the Essossi, the ravages of their corsairs and flesh-traders after the kingsmoot of flames and deaths had cured him of it.

“I am not familiar with the shape of the hull and this red wood,” he admitted after more scrutiny. “Where it does come from? Volantis? Qarth?”

It wasn’t one of Myr or Lys that much was certain. Balon and the surviving Ironborn had seen their warships before, and those had departed long ago and never returned. According to the few merchants hoisting the black dragon’s banner who had decided to recently visit Great Wyk, the Northern kingdom of the continent had trade accords with these two Free Cities, like Tyrosh had with the Southern Westerosi.

“Nah, this red wood is the mark of the Slaver’s Bay scum. They are a bad lot, these murderers and eunuch-masters.”

Balon winced. Thank the Gods – though the identities of the deities they were supposed to pray were a bit vague now that they had no ship to sail across the seas – for big favours then. The ship was a large carrack, and certainly could have fielded one hundred crossbowmen and swordsmen to ransack their isle at will.

“I’m surprised they went so far west now that the war is over. It’s not like there are a lot of people here to enslave anymore, and slavery is still illegal according to the greenlanders.”

Naturally, every Iron King of note since Harren Hoare had perished in the inferno of his citadel had taken liberties with this law, but these days it was respected...if only because all the thralls and salt waves had been killed, freed or had their restrictions removed now that they needed every strong arm to toil the fields and harvest some sustenance.

“Err...at this subject, my Lord...”

“What is it, Ravos?”

“It is...possible...that the Red Kraken paid the Iron Price with a few ships from Slaver’s Bay long ago.”

Many times Balon had repeated his half-brother had gotten incredibly lucky in that he had been killed before his peers – the captains of the Ironborn fleet – could manifest vigorously their disapproval about the outcome of the war. Today was not going to make him change his opinion on this.

“How many are ‘a few’?” He asked, refraining from showing his tiredness.

“No less than three, no more than five, Lord,” the former reaver assured him.

It was enough for them to send a few ships in the name of vengeance, then.

If Davos went to the same place Dalton was in the afterlife, he was going to have huge difficulties not strangling the ‘Red Kraken’ for all the headaches he had given him...

**Author’s note**: The Greens are unhappy about Sheepstealer...if only they knew. The Game of Thrones will continue...one way or another.