**Chapter 16**

**The Wounds of the Realm**

**Lord Marq Merryweather**

“Why are my Knights so happy when the outcome is war?” The Lord of Longtable wondered, watching the desolation in front of his eyes.

“I suspect they are thinking of glory and wealth, my Lord,” replied his loyal servant Bertram, who was following him for the better part of two decades.

“And you may be right,” Marq was not grinning right now. “The great and low Knights empty their purses every season in frivolities like tourneys, card games and wine, but they are always convinced next war will see them recover their fortune.”

Marq’s tone made clear what he thought of these men. In a war, there were few winners and the final outcome was rarely the one people thought when the first sword was drawn. In the civil war which had just stopped, the victors were even rarer.

As far as he could tell, the House which had profited the most from this costly disaster was House Tyrell. Like his House, they had remained on the sidelines. When you were on the side supporting the Green Dragon, it appeared to have been the only correct choice.

“War is terrible and the claims of the Dragon Lords were fought in a sea of blood,” he continued, making a move of his arm in direction of what had been before the city of Tumbleton. “But House Merryweather knows peace is far more profitable. Our words are ‘Behold our Bounty’ for a reason, Bertram. From spring to autumn, the rich lands around Longtable are all the golden horn of plenty we need. Between the large wineries my father invested in, the hundreds of farms producing grain and vegetables, the light trade tariffs on the Mander and the renovation of the roads I ordered a decade ago, House Merryweather is more prosperous than it had ever been in this century.”

Something House Footly of Tumbleton could hardly naysay. First, because most of them were long dead and the title and the name had gone to a bastard sired in a night of drunken debauchery twelve years ago. Secondly, because there wasn’t much left of the ancient town of Tumbleton as far as he could tell.

Five years ago during his last visit, Tumbleton had been a sprawling mess. The large dungeon of stone where House Footly lived and ruled their lands had towered over a disorganised mass of wooden houses. There had been little will to solve this problem: the Lord Footly of the time, a bull-like man named Colin, had been notoriously avaricious when it was question to spend money on other things which were not armour and lances. How did Marq know this detail? He had been the one to sell said plate armours and weapons to the Lord of Tumbleton.

Marq had not known Lord Colin Footly well but his fellow Reach Lord had seemed to be a fierce supporter of King Aegon. Obviously the generous loans of gold and silver from Oldtown had not played a role in this allegiance, no Ser.

In his humble opinion, this had been a very bad investment for House Hightower. After two battles which had each time involved dragons on both sides, the city of Tumbleton had been razed. There was a town being rebuilt on the southern shore of the Mander with the high hills on its right and the foundations for a new castle, but the former city and the bridges were one league northwards. The comparison was breath-taking, and it was not an exaggeration.

The dungeon of House Footly still stood, the Smith and the Crone only knew how. It was only a blackened and dirty carcass, ravaged by the fires and the rest of the elements. With the snow surrounding it, it was a source of darkness surrounded by white.

The houses of the smallfolk had fared worse against the dragonfire and the wrath of Green and Black soldiers. Between the fires and the autumn rains, about one half of Tumbleton had disappeared in the first battle and two out of three families had fled southwards.

Maybe, if it had stopped there, Tumbleton could have recovered.

But then the day of the second battle had arrived. What had not been burned in the first clash of arms had been set aflame by enraged Black soldiers. The dragons had also breathed their fiery embrace on the defenceless smallfolk and the stone constructions had been consumed all the same.

From left to right and from the Mander to the high hills, the terrain was a blackened plain littered with ruins. Tumbleton was never going to be rebuilt here. According to the rare travellers coming to see if there was anything left to save, at night there were nightmares and sinister whispers in the wind. The dragons and armies had left this place, but their presence would be felt for generations.

“The Lady Regent of Highgarden has granted a very generous loan to House Footly in order for them to rebuild their town,” remarked Bertram and Marq nodded pensively.

“They are not the only ones.” Dozens of small villages and modest keeps had received help. “The banners of the golden roses are on the ascendant again.”

He did not add that those of the high tower were trampled in the dirt; he didn’t need to. The power loss suffered by House Hightower had been truly spectacular and Marq was thinking the true extent of the disaster remained to be seen. Sure, they had someone of their blood sitting on the Iron throne. Alas for them, they had lost nearly all their main branch to accomplish that. Houses, merchants and guildsmen were constantly defaulting on their loans. The maesters they could influence were not welcome north of the Trident.

Oldtown and House Hightower would recover. The city and its port were too important to the trade of the Southern realm for any other outcome. But House Tyrell was certainly not going to let them grow so strong a second time and the rest of their bannersmen would remember who had the brilliant idea to proclaim Queen Rhaenyra wasn’t the legitimate sovereign.

Assuredly the woman had been unhinged, but they could have easily formed a coalition of Lords Paramount and called for a great Council the moment her madness was unquestionable.

“Maybe the stewards of the Gardeners will do something worthwhile, for once.” The Seven knew that in one hundred and thirty-one years of history, the Tyrells had not become paragons of chivalry, superb army leaders, symbol of loyalty or excellent bankers. “I have seen enough. Let’s go back to the camp. We have still a long way before we cross the Blackwater and arrive to the capital.”

“In your opinion my Lord, is the situation going to be better there than here?”

Lord Marq Merryweather chuckled at the naive remark.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Bertram.” Aegon and Rhaenyra had ruled in this damned city and there had been the next best thing to two sacks plus a dragon battle. “It is going to be worse.”

**Lord Kermit Tully**

The drawing was really impressive. Yes, there were not many colours, the artist he had hired for the occasion had limited to brown, green and a faint shade of grey. But it was enough for the point he wanted to make in front of the Knights and the bannersmen he had summoned in the hall of Riverrun. That way, everybody who was not familiar with the western frontier of the Riverlands had an idea of what besieging the fortress of the Golden Tooth entailed.

“As you can see,” he pointed his fingers on the critical portions of the drawing interesting him, “the ancestral citadel of House Lefford, better known as the Golden Tooth, is formidably defended. Any army wanting to break through the high pass must walk on a tortuous road whereas the Westerners can easily throw rocks and shoot arrows without fear of reprisal.”

His blue eyes moved to the formidable towers dominating the drawing and the landscapes. Viewed like a bard these were ugly constructions, but the Lord of Riverrun knew from his spies there were four large scorpions directly pointed eastwards and ready to massacre the enemies of House Lannister.

“The second layer of the Golden Tooth defences includes at least four trebuchets, two dozen scorpions, eight of these big ballista we destroyed by the Lakeshore and five catapults, with over six hundred archers and guildsmen to repair and support them. Moreover, there are watchtowers and curtain walls there, there and there to make sure no one save a bird can take the guardians of the Golden Tooth in the rear. The cliffs next to the castle are too steep to climb and the goat paths have a system of alarm fires to warn if someone tries to move around in the middle of the night.”

Little wonder that the Golden Tooth had rarely fallen in the last centuries, and each time it had happened, it had been an enemy from the west which had given the death stroke. House Lefford and its garrison were forced to rely on the fertile hills and villages situated between them and Casterly Rock to survive. Starve them a few moons when they were unable to replenish their supplies, and this ‘invincible citadel’ would fall like any other.

Unfortunately, it was not something the Riverlords had been able to accomplish in living memory. Nine times out of ten, it was they who were invaded and had the shame of watching their fields burned, their villages sacked, their granaries stolen and every indignity it was humanly possible to make committed on their soil.

“We know the problem posed by the Golden Tooth, my Lord,” intervened Ser Robert Keath, his hirsute brown hair giving the brown man some common points with a hedgehog. “But the realm is at peace now. It may not last long after the winter, but we aren’t going to be at war with the Westerlands tomorrow. The snow is too deep, the guards on the high passes must freeze their balls waiting for us to break the peace and my artisans are certainly not going to be happy if I tell them to begin building siege engines in this cold.”

There were vigorous nods and other noises around the table to accompany these words. Kermit was not surprised. For all their talks about pay-back and to burn the Green lands in retaliation, winter was really a horrid season for war. The Northerners present in the South were the massive exception: they thought it was fine weather, especially the Umber boasting half-giants.

It was time to surprise his bannersmen with his plans, then. Or at least the first preparations of what promised to be a long and difficult strategy.

“I do not want to take the Golden Tooth,” the Lord Paramount of the Riverlands said to them, “I want a fortress like the one of House Lefford protecting our lands. Every time a Lannister army takes the field, I want their corpses lying dead before our walls and our fields intact. I want their banners broken before they have the time to gather and pillage all the mills, hamlets and farms between here and Maidenpool.”

“This is...ambitious,” said one of the men sworn to Atranta after the initial moment of surprise was gone. By his voice, ‘ambitious’ was not the word he had thought in his head and no doubt the original choice had been far less polite. “And I realise the advantages of such a fortress doing the exact thing the Westerners have done to our armies so many times in the past. But let’s face it: Riverrun had maybe the money to build such a powerful citadel when the Conciliator was King, but it is no longer the case.”

“It may be useless in any case,” told loudly a Goodbrook stooge Kermit couldn’t bother remember the name of. “We can’t dig the foundations of something like this in the middle of winter and by spring we may be once again at war.”

The first protestations gave strength to the rest of the audience and before a turn of hourglass had the time to happen, every man and woman present was protesting. His bannersmen were too predictable for their own good.

“House Lefford and House Lannisters will try to stop us.”

“The Reach and the Stormlands are the greater threat anyway.”

“One or two watchtowers would be sufficient and not very costly for our purses.”

“We absolutely need the Queen’s support for this and she has never showed any inclination to build this type of castle to face the Golden Tooth.”

“The Bay of Crabs is too vulnerable and we need more warships to protect our naval trade.”

“The one time the Justman tried it, the Brackens and the Blackwoods allied and rebelled against the King of the Rivers because the taxes were too high.”

After this sentence, he saw unhappily it was due time re took control of this discussion.

“And yet, it must happen, Sers.” The seriousness on his visage was sufficient for the loud-mouthed idiots at the table to cease their hand-wringing and their moaning. “Make no mistake, the new capital is at Stone Hedge and we can’t afford a repeat of the war we have just fought. The Lannisters and we have new feuds to settle, and I don’t intend to give them the opportunity to destroy decades of work.”

“We still need the support of the Queen,” the assertion had come from a Vypren this time.

“And I will speak to her Majesty as soon as she returns from the North,” Kermit added with a glare to the one who had cut his speech so rudely. “But I am confident Queen Baela will approve this project.”

**Lord Royce Caron**

The idea of sitting on the Small Council had once been seducing. But then he had been ten years younger, the realm was at peace and the advantages offered by such a title were giving a lot of money, influence and power.

Obviously these ambitions had been dreams of youth, ten or more years ago under King Viserys. It had been before the court was poisoned completely by the feud between the Greens and the Blacks. The terrible war which had forced armies against armies, dragons against dragons and set the Seven Kingdoms aflame was still far away.

Certainly, a merchant or a guild artisan could argue he had gained much power and influence when he accepted to become the new Master of Laws of King Daeron the First of His Name. And in a way, they were right: he had become by default one of the most powerful Stormlords overnight.

But in reality, there was no joy or triumph feeling when he gave one order or repealed a law written by a Black Lord. To wield influence over his peers, he needed two things: power and Lords of Noble Houses. The latter were young men and babes who had stayed at home in the Stormlands. Royce could not, would not, impose ruthless punishments on them for their inexperience in matters of law and justice. Beating your fellow Stormlords in submission had been good for the deceased Lord Borros, but the Lord of Nightsong refused to use the same methods.

He wasn’t the Lord Paramount of the Stormlands, after all, and even if he had been, Lord Borros’ bloody charge at Bosworth Bridge had been a painful reminder that just because your bannersmen followed you it didn’t mean you were in the right. The Noble Houses of the Stormlands were still trying to figure out how many husbands, sons, brothers, uncles and cousins they had lost on this terrible rainy day.

As for gold, well it was best to forget it completely. The Treasury’s coffers were emptied as soon as they were filled to pay the considerable damage caused by the war, the huge quantities of food the highborn and smallfolk needed now that thousands of granaries had been torched and the ships the realm desperately needed to rebuild a shadow of its former naval trade. The war with the Blacks had destroyed tens of thousands lives and divided the Seven Kingdoms in two; but few advisors and commanders had really thought about what it meant for the naval and land trade.

To be fair, Royce doubted the men who had these duties before him had expected a situation like this. But it had happened and now the conflicting claims arriving each day were giving him deep headaches.

If a merchant ship built and commissioned by a company of Oldtown was in the harbour of Oldtown as he spoke, then surely this hull was subjected to the laws of the Iron Throne. It wasn’t complicated. But in the harbours and the coastal towns, such cases were the exception, not the norm. Gulltown had served as a haven for the Black corsairs and there was a minimum of several dozen ‘prize ships’ in the great shipyards of the Vale. Many Reach and Stormlands great merchants’ alliances wanted their return. The reverse was also happening in Southern harbours, by the way.

Many similar agreements were null and valid. The Vale was the worst loss – Vhagar had made a pyre of the Riverlands and the North was too distant to be valuable – but the tithes in fishes, furs, grain, silver and many other precious resources were no longer available to rebuild the Crownlands.

And since no Green or Black sovereign had signed anything on trade regulations, of course it fell to him to unravel this nest of problems. It went without saying the Black interlocutors he communicated with by raven were absolutely not cooperative. The prices they demanded for the return of Green ships, to quote a frequent example, were between extortion and high-way robbery. Lord Melcolm was the greediest one, but Lord Grafton was not far behind.

There was never enough time per day to hear and settle all these problems. The fact the future Hand of the King and Master of Coin were on their way to the capital and as such unable to work on their own thankless duties was making things worse. And the King himself was forced to grant audience to an endless queue of men and women each day on the Iron Throne, a duty which left him unavailable for most of the day.

“Sometimes I think the men who died on the battlefield knew what they were doing,” he grumbled as Lord Shermer entered his office just as he tried to decipher the writing of the young Lord Swann. By the Father, the boy was thirteen but his words were a despicable mixture of ink spots and mangled letters.

“May I ask what brought you to this particular revelation?” asked the old Lord. Like Royce, the white-haired man had been given an ‘honour’ when they came back from the massacre. For him, it had been the post of Master of Laws. For Lord Shermer, it had been the title of Lord Commander of the City Watch.

“I didn’t go to the Great Sept recently, if this is what you ask.” He had listened to his fair share of self-righteous sermons in his time, bless the Maiden. And since the Warrior had refused to grant them victory or to give some of the deceased Stormlords something in their thick skulls, Lord Caron knew his faith in the Seven had not emerged reinforced from the last couple of disasters. “What is the problem today?”

There were always a hundred problems ready to bite you somewhere painful at King’s Landing. And you never had any idea when they were going to strike.

“I need more Goldcloaks to enforce order,” the Lord Commander affirmed.

“And I need more assistants, messengers and trusted law-makers,” he retorted far more rudely than he should have. “My apologies,” Royce said immediately after. “But there are no funds available for the rest of the year.”

That was saying quite a few things about the state of the Seven Kingdoms. Fortunately, there was only a fortnight left for this unpleasant year of one hundred and thirty-one years After the Conquest and a shipment of gold they had transferred on the other side of the Narrow Sea should come back in twenty or thirty days.

By the way, Royce had absolutely no desire to trade his current post with the future Master of Coin.

“Apologies accepted, but I really need those men,” the Reach Lord fell upon one of the visitor seats with the face of someone completely exhausted. “There are still killers who were on Daemon payroll in liberty and I don’t think we can leave them plotting in the streets of Fleabottom. The Seven only know what they will try if we give them the time to lick their wounds. The last loyalists of Rhaenyra, the Faith radicals, the bandits taking the refuge behind our walls...we even hanged five murderers pretending to serve the Black Goat of Qohor yesterday.”

“I will talk to several banks,” Royce promised. But many were in a worst situation than the Iron Throne anyway – neither Rhaenyra nor Aegon had been shy when it came to seize their gold coffers – and they were in winter. “Do not expect miracles.”

**Queen Baela Targaryen**

To her pleasant surprise, Baela found that she liked Winterfell and its inhabitants. After her long flight over snowy and empty lands, her hopes had not been high when the home of House Stark came to mind.

Many rumours had spread in the Riverlands the Northern castles were dark and empty places constantly besieged by the fury of the elements. According to the tales, the Northerners chieftains and Lords were loud barbarians and their smallfolk humourless brutes.

So far, the only point she had been able to confirm was ‘constantly besieged by the fury of the elements’, as the northern winds unleashed their wrath against the centuries-old walls. But Winterfell and the vast town it held were the very opposite of dark and empty. Thousands of fires were joyously burning, providing both light and warmth against the terrible cold. Years of dead wood reserves had been stored for this exact purpose and this killed in the cradle the ideas the Northerners were stupid and had empty skulls.

While the dragons were killing each other and the Lords died in great battles, Lord Stark and his bannersmen were ordering a last harvest, filling their larders with the dozens of big elks they had hunted and repairing their redoubts for the arrival of winter. It was why the first muster ordered by Lord Cregan had arrived so late. And as much as some of her Riverlands bannersmen threw accusations right and left, the Black Queen wished there had been more Noble Houses to think of this between Casterly Rock and Storm’s End. There had been so many granaries, farms and caravans burned that the number of deaths caused by the war was the only reason there wasn’t mass starvation for the two sides.

Winterfell thus was the first city-castle Baela could see preserved from the bloody war. Northerners in comfortable furs were crowding the large streets, the markets were providing the clansmen and the smallfolk everything they needed to endure the cold season. The gaunt, desperate and hateful expressions which had become so common in the Riverlands were not present here. In fact it was even more jovial atmosphere, because with the old and the young generation away, the men, women and children sworn to House Stark had enough supplies to last between seven and eight years of winter.

For the first time when she had landed with Moondancer, the people of Winterfell had been genuinely happy and curious to see her. It was a very different ambiance from Stone Hedge and the rest of the territories she owned in the South, where every subject from the ten years-old orphan to the eighty name days grey beard wanted something from her or her dragon. Oh, they were respectful and polite, but the South wanted to use her and profit from her rule.

No, Winterfell was not silent and empty but the affairs of the realm she had to deal with were less pressing and far simpler to deal with. The demands and requests which had arrived were not poisoned with the hate and the myriad of complaints so common when she was holding court in her new capital. The Northern petitioners had cunning certainly, but the winter conditions and their very nature did not give them much time for the bowing and the flatteries Vale Lords took for granted.

But the best part of Winterfell, and the one she was walking to, at the moment, was without contest the hot springs of the Great Keep. Or more precisely, the baths warmed by the hot springs which were destined to the prestigious of visitors of Winterfell. Moondancer disagreed, of course. Her growing dragon loved having a crowd around him in ecstasy. Especially when the perks including scratching the scales, polishing the claws, giving dried meat outside the meals and large warm blankets to sleep under in the tower which had been granted to her for the duration of her royal visit.

“You can leave me,” she commanded to her escort, who all bowed before taking position on each side of the door next to the big direwolf statues. For the present time, the group of warriors charged to protect her was including only guards of Winterfell. The possibility of sending a Kingsguard with her had been discussed during the last Council before her departure, but it had rapidly been abandoned. Moondancer was not yet strong enough to carry her weight plus another passenger and the essential clothes and messages forming her baggage. And even in the contrary case, the only person her bonded had authorised so far on his back was Rhaena. It was not exactly out of the norm: many young and ancient dragons did not even tolerate other persons coming near dancer. By these standards, Moondancer was extremely well- mannered.

The bath room she entered was emphasizing northern architecture. The stones were soft, warm and of a light grey shade. According to the construction workers of Winterfell, the stone quarries they had been extracted from were about one hundred and fifty leagues northwards, at the limit between the Wolfswood and the great western mountain range of the North. On the left, the statue of a woman held in her immobile hands a stone baby. On the right, seats of stone were available, flanked with new grey stone representations of wolves and other Northern predators.

But in front of her were the really important things. The large warm pool promising comfort and pleasure was there...as well as a thin black-haired woman.

Baela had opened and close the wooden door silently, thus the occupant of the bath was still presenting her back to her as she began removing her clothes. The boots, the two layers of coat, the heavy clothes...suddenly in these warm temperatures provided by the hot springs, it was easy to remember how cold it really was outside and how good it would be to enjoy the summer sun once again on her visage.

By the time the Westerosi Queen had removed everything but a dark black robe – with the three-headed red dragon on her chest, naturally – her undergarments and the simple diadem on her head, the woman finally became aware of her presence.

“Your Grace,” the curtsy from Nettles was so badly assured Baela could not help but smile.

“No need for protocol here,” the eldest of the twin Targaryen sisters said. “Call me Baela when we’re alone.”

“Yes, your...Baela.”

Nettles blushed as she saw Baela watching her body. Quickly, the former shepherdess emerged from the waters, seized a towel in the Stark colours and covered her body. Too bad for her, Baela had seen everything which mattered.

Frankly, she was not impressed. Baela had seen the portraits of all her father’s wives during their early adulthood. Political marriages or not, there was no contestation possible that Queen Rhaenyra her own mother and Lady Royce had been stunning in looks and body before their first pregnancies.

Nettles...Nettles was definitely not of the same mould. Her hairs were long and there was evidence they had never been carefully combed. Despite her confirmed status of dragonseed, no hint of silver or white could be found in this black mane. The colour of her eyes was a dirty shade of orange, her skin was tanned with a few scars here and there and the rest of her body would never be considered ‘pretty’, even by Northern standards. The less said about her breasts and her legs, the better.

For the ten thousandth time, Baela wondered what had her father thought when he had invited this young woman into his bed. Was it because Queen Rhaenyra had sent him away and he wanted a warrior instead of a highborn Lady to keep him company? Or had there been other reasons, even less acceptable and that she didn’t know about?

Unfortunately, her father had not confided his secrets in her or in anyone else before his death. Thus this mystery – like many others – had died with him.

“Maester Selwyn told me you are recovering well from your pregnancy,” Baela declared as the Dragonstone born woman looked at her with eyes alternating between defiance and concern. “You and your daughter will suffer no ill effects from your travel in the northern wilderness.”

“I suppose you will want Sheepstealer and me in the Riverlands next moon...” The lack of enthusiasm in the former shepherdess’ voice was a good hint this was not something she would enjoy.

Baela waited a moment before answering, evaluating the woman who had given birth to the last addition to the ranks of House Targaryen. Nettles’ body was muscled, but not overly so. Baela herself had begun to exercise with sword and spear since her escape from Dragonstone, and she could recognise the signs. Her father must have given Daena’s mother lessons to defend her life, but her greatest asset was and continued to be Sheepstealer.

“I do not,” and surprise came on her interlocutor common’s visage. She would have to speak with several Lords to teach her how to hide her emotions, else the Southern Lords were going to devour her the moment she was presented to them. “The peace is sufficiently fragile between Blacks and Greens that I prefer let you stay with your daughter at Winterfell for the next year. My cousin Daeron is smarter than his brother Aegon ever was, but if King’s Landing learns we have a dragon big enough to stale Tessarion alone, they are going to panic.”

And given the reports and tales she had heard of the first moons of the Dance, this meant assassins, poisons, daggers in the dark and perhaps war.

“You don’t want another war,” and there was a touch of stupefaction in Nettles’ attitude.

“Oh I would gladly accept the head of the last Greens and their favourite traitors if someone was to bring me them next fortnight.” Baela admitted. “But the Seven Kingdoms won’t resist if there is more bloodshed. Vengeance will have to wait.”

She didn’t provide the ugly problems and the rider of Sheepstealer didn’t ask for them. Honestly, the ruler in her didn’t truly know how the realm had not collapsed in the moons after Bosworth Bridge. That the North and the Vale were more or less intact and had not been fought over had enormously helped...but by all rights order had been easier to re-establish than she had thought possible. It may be everyone was sick of war for this decade. Stranger things must have happened in Westeros before her birth.

“What are your intentions towards my daughter?”

And here it was, the issue which had caused the lover of Father to flee across half the realm.

“You daughter is a Princess of the Blood now.” Baela told her, removing the diadem from her head and letting her long silver hairs flow freely upon her shoulders. “Before I decide what positions and duties to give her, I will have to see if she is a dragonrider or not. My sister will come with a few dragon eggs after her wedding with Lord Stark’s Heir.”

If the answer was positive, the young Daena Targaryen may be granted a Lordship in the North where House Targaryen would be free to hatch and train the new generation of dragons. West or east of Long Lake, there were a lot of promising locations which might be fit for their flying mounts. Her Hand had not spoken against it, since she was going to give the New Gift back in payment.

“And if she is not?”

Baela did her best to ignore the temptation of the hot bath waiting for her.

“She will remain second in the line of succession for the Throne.” It was a throne which was more shadows and mirrors than hard and true steel, alas. “And she will be trained to be the equal of the founders of our line.”

Women had long been forced on a second role since the death of Queen Visenya; it was long time this trend was stopped and reversed. Who knows, maybe Queen Rhaenyra would not have been forced to kill so many and resort to an iron fist in her rule if King Jaehaerys had not excluded women from all the important positions of the Seven Kingdoms.

“I do not want my daughter to become a Queen,” and the words of her fellow dragonrider seemed sincere.

This was a wise choice. Baela was one, and hot bath aside, the privileges weren’t worth it compared to the thousand-and-one headaches it caused.