Kindness in Cruelty

Summary

Roslin Frey does not become pregnant on her wedding night. And something must be done to rectify that situation.

Notes

1. Does anyone actually have any interest in reading this pairing? (O_o)
2. For all that is good and holy, read the tags before proceeding with this story.
3. I am definitely going to hell for this. But I've had this idea in my mind forever and I just decided to give in and write it finally.
4. Based more on the show than on the books, but might have a bit of book detail seeping in. (Screw Talisa; either she doesn't exist or Edmure doesn't give enough fucks to think about her).
5. Slightly canon divergent in that it ignores most of Edmure and Jaime's conversation at the Siege of Riverrun in season 6.

It was dark and damp in the dungeon below the Twins, and impossible to tell how much time had elapsed. At first, Edmure had tried his best to keep track of the days, but his cell had no windows, and there was no way to tell when it was day and when it was night. He wasn’t brought food on
anything that seemed like a regular schedule, either, all bland soups and stale breads that could be a
morning meal as easily as an evening one, with no discerning characteristics he could find in any of
it.

So Edmure slept and occasionally ate, and the rest of his time became consumed with trying to
reason out how he’d ended up where he was, a casualty in a war between two boy-kings. How he’d
gone from eating berries out of his new wife’s hands and finding his pleasure in her body to sleeping
in a dirty and dank cell just hours later. It was quite some time before Edmure finally managed to
accept that it wasn’t some kind of bizarre and awful dream.

It seemed such a trivial concern, now, but he’d thought it as good as a death sentence when he’d
been forced to marry a Frey girl, the very thing he’d spent so much of his life trying to avoid. And
then he’d thought his fortunes had abruptly changed when he’d laid eyes on his new wife, probably
the only pretty girl among the whole bunch of Freys. She’d been gentle and kind throughout their
wedding feast, obedient and pleasing during their wedding night, and then…

And then—

It was difficult to even think upon it, the way he’d been pulled from their shared bedchamber, still
naked, and hauled bodily to the dungeons. They’d at least had the courtesy to give him clothes—one
of the few courtesies they’d afforded him—a roughspun tunic and trousers which had quickly
become dirty and grimy in his dungeon cell. Edmure scarcely noticed the smell anymore, nor the
sounds of moans and groans and screams from the cells around him.

At first, he’d been confused, but it had quickly become clear enough what had happened, that they’d
been betrayed—and Edmure felt like a fool. They’d always known old Walder Frey couldn’t be
trusted; there were jokes in the Riverlands about how he served only his own interests, how he had
no loyalty to anyone, and there had been japes about it all for longer than Edmure had even been
alive. Some of the interchangeable Frey brothers had taken particular glee in telling him how they’d
slit his sister’s throat, how they’d shot and stabbed his nephew and mounted his dead direwolf’s head
upon his body.

Edmure hadn’t cried, at least not at first, feeling a numb sense of disbelief that anything so awful
could possibly be true. He insisted to himself that the words had to be lies, that they’d somehow
escaped and the Freys had only told him what they had in an attempt to demoralize him. But the
more he thought upon it—for he could do nothing else—the more he realized that they had no reason
to lie, for he was in chains either way, secure enough in the dungeons under the Twins that he had
no possible hope of escape, regardless of whether his family was alive or dead.

It was when Edmure realized that his family had been slaughtered while he’d been carelessly losing
himself in the pleasures of his new wife that Edmure finally did cry, the grief and hopelessness of his
situation hitting him all in one moment. He didn’t even care that it was undignified for a man to cry,
for there was little more undignified than being left to rot, unwashed, in a cell. He had nowhere to
wipe his eyes or his nose once he finally exhausted all his tears, so he smeared the accumulated
mucus across his sleeve, though he was already filthy enough that he couldn’t tell if it made any
difference at all.

And then Edmure simply sat in the near-darkness, the space only occasionally lit by torches. He
huddled under a thin blanket on days when it was cold, shivering and unable to sleep, but it didn’t
much matter that he didn’t sleep well, because he had nothing to do with his time other than to keep
lying there and trying to sleep some more. His stomach gnawed with hunger, and when they brought
food, he devoured it greedily, no matter how bland or unappetizing it might be, never managing to
feel quite full. His face itched as his beard grew in, sparse and patchy, and the cell stank with the
contents of his chamber pot, which they emptied far too infrequently.

Edmure was only starting to accept that this would be the remainder of his existence—for who could come rescue him with his family all dead?—when his cell door opened and one of the guards surprised him by coming in far enough to grab him by the arm and drag him off his cot. Edmure was too startled to react at first, for they’d previously entered his cell only enough to deposit a plate of food on the floor or take away his chamber pot to empty; never, not since that first day they’d dragged him down there, had any of them ventured to touch him.

There was a second guard behind him, Edmure realized as the first one fastened his hands in irons behind his back. He struggled halfheartedly as his hands were wrenched behind him, but he knew that it would do no good. He was weak and underfed, and he’d never been a strong or large man in the first place; even if he’d been at full strength, he’d never have been a match for two armed men.

Edmure’s thoughts raced as he was marched down the hallway past countless cells, some occupied and some empty. When he realized they were leading him out of the dungeons, he felt a moment of pure confusion, uncertain if he was to be saved or executed. His brain searched for anyone he thought might have had the power and the desire to rescue him; he had heard no news of his uncle among the horrific stories about the deaths of his family members, but Edmure couldn’t imagine that the Blackfish—if he did live—would have been able to amass an army large enough to be a true threat, not in the amount of time that had passed. Edmure was uncertain how long it had been, but it certainly hadn’t been that long, not unless Edmure had somehow lost his mind already.

So execution, then. That was the only option that made any sense, since he no longer had any value as a bargaining chip.

Edmure tried to steel himself for it, for the inevitability of his death. He told himself to show them no fear; he would not give them the satisfaction.

Except that they weren’t leading him outside to be hanged or beheaded; instead, they were leading him up a flight of stairs, and he tripped over his own foot, his body sluggish and clumsy from the prolonged period of inactivity. The guard leading him elbowed him in the ribs, almost hard enough to make him collapse right there on the staircase.

“Move,” the man hissed in frustration, and had Edmure been another man, a cockier man—one more like Jaime Lannister, perhaps—he might have pointed out that being hit was directly counterproductive to the order. But Edmure was not Jaime Lannister, could never master that same air of cavalier disregard for his status as a prisoner, so he stayed silent and concentrated on the simple task of picking up one foot and then the other, making certain he didn’t trip a second time. That simple task took up nearly all of Edmure’s focus, leaving none behind to worry about where they were taking him and why.

After what seemed like an innumerable amount of stairs, they finally reached the door, and the second guard pushed it open before Edmure was shoved unceremoniously inside.

It was a bedchamber, Edmure noticed dimly, and a fairly lavish one at that, clean and richly furnished. Edmure blinked in confusion, taking in his surroundings; had Walder Frey decided that Edmure was to be kept in better accommodations in deference to his high birth? But no—that was not Walder Frey, and the whole situation set Edmure on edge, for there was something so clearly wrong about it.

But then the guard standing behind Edmure uncuffed him and shoved him toward the table—and it was only then that Edmure noticed that it was covered in food, all manner of it—meat and bread and plums and honey cakes. Edmure’s stomach growled at the sight.
“Eat,” the guard said brusquely, and there was no doubt in Edmure’s mind that the words were an order. What he didn’t know was why, what prompted the sudden change in his fortunes. But both guards were looking at him with menacing glares, and both had swords at their belts, so Edmure sat.

He began eating slowly, tentatively, eyes flicking to his captors every so often, expecting them to do something horrible to counter this unexpected act of kindness. When they didn’t, Edmure relaxed, if only marginally; he was certain that he’d eat all the food laid out on the table, but he ate only until he felt almost uncomfortably full, for it wouldn’t do for him to vomit up the whole of what he’d consumed. Especially when he didn’t know when he’d get the chance at another decent meal.

He was just finishing when some servants brought in a tub and began filling it with warm water, and despite the apparent kindness of the gesture, Edmure felt his body tense. All of this was too good to be true; he knew there was no way there wasn’t some kind of catch at the end of all this. *Unless someone truly had negotiated for him?* Edmure thought, feeling an impossible surge of hope. *But who?*

The same guard who had given all the previous instructions pushed a hand against his shoulder suddenly, impatiently.

“Wash,” commanded the monosyllabic guard, and Edmure legitimately wondered whether the man was incapable of speaking in complete sentences or in fact in speaking more than one word at a time. It was clear enough that the guards didn’t intend to leave, nor to turn their backs, but Edmure wanted to be clean even more than he had any care for his dignity, such as it was. Sighing, he stood up and shed his clothing before stepping into the tub.

The water was warm and soothing against his skin, and he’d even been left soap and oils to wash his hair and body. Edmure made quick work of it, uncertain how long they’d let him enjoy the luxury, and the water quickly turned black with the dirt and grime that covered his body. They’d even left him with a cloth with which to dry himself but no new clothing that Edmure could see; he wondered why they’d let him wash himself only to put on his dirty clothing once more.

He dried himself off, but before he could ask about the clothing, one of the guards snatched the cloth away, leaving him bare once more—and before he realized what had happened, they had dragged him to the bed. Edmure struggled, confused, as they chained him down, naked and spread-eagled, with one of his limbs chained to each of the bedposts. His struggles were in vain; he remained too weak to wrestle away both men, and once he was chained, it was impossible for him to move but to wriggle his torso, his hands and feet chained too tightly to the posts for him to possibly escape.

Edmure may have thought that there was no greater indignity than what he’d already suffered, but he’d have been wrong; there was nothing more humiliating than being chained naked to a bed under the gaze of his jailers. It was clear enough that whatever hopes he may have had for a rescue were misplaced; he was not being saved.

“What are you doing?” he demanded, but there was no authority in his voice, weak and raspy as it was from disuse. And even if it hadn’t been, Edmure didn’t imagine there was any possible way to sound commanding from his current position.

But neither of the men answered, both looking down at him with contempt in their eyes. At least, Edmure reasoned, they likely didn’t intend to take him as a man took a woman; they’d chained him face-up, not the ideal position for a rape.

Such a small consolation.
Edmure tried a few more times to question them, but it was clear enough they had no intention of revealing what they were doing, so eventually Edmure fell quiet and lay slack against the bed. He tried to focus on the softness of the fine sheets against his skin instead of on the ache in his wrists and ankles from the manacles or the fact that he lay there, naked and vulnerable. There was at least a fire roaring in the grate; though he was nude, he was not cold, not the way he’d been in the dungeons. He let his eyes fall closed.

After what seemed like an eternity, Edmure heard a sound; his eyes shot open and he jerked against his bonds, but the sound was just the door opening, and when he lifted his head, he was shocked at what he saw there. Lady Roslin stood in the doorway in a simple grey gown; when she met his gaze, her eyes were sad, her expression apologetic.

“I’m sorry, My Lord,” she said, and the words sounded sincere despite everything. Part of Edmure wanted to believe the best in this woman, in his wife—wanted to believe that a woman so demure and beautiful could not possibly have had a part in the slaughter that was their wedding feast. He wanted to believe that she hadn’t had a hand in any of this, that she was a victim as much as he was.

But that was the same naïveté that had caused them to walk into the Twins thinking Walder Frey would give them a second chance after breaking one oath. And even so, Edmure was still desperate to believe it.

“You were very kind to me on our wedding night,” Roslin said, gently and with regret. “You do not deserve this.”

The whole situation set Edmure on edge, and he wondered what she was apologizing for. For his family being murdered? For him being taken captive? For him being mistreated in the dungeons? For him being forced naked onto this bed? Perhaps for all of it.

“Deserve what?” Edmure heard himself asking dimly, as though through a fog, and Roslin gave him another sad look, still standing just inside the doorway, not having taken any steps closer to him. The two guards still stood by the door, silent and still.

“This is my wife, Edmure thought quietly to himself. Her family are monsters. She may be a monster.

“My moon blood has come and gone, My Lord,” she explained slowly, and Edmure blinked, his mind feeling slow, unable to quite fathom why they were having this conversation, especially such as they were.

“...what?” he breathed, comprehending.

“We must needs conceive a child, My Lord,” she told him then, quite formally, her cheeks acquiring a slight pinkish tinge. “Maester Brenett says this is the right time to try.”

The reality of the situation suddenly hit Edmure like someone had poured a bucket of ice water over him. It suddenly all made sense—why he was here, why they had fed him and bathed him, why they’d left him nude and chained him down. None of it had been for Edmure’s benefit; it had all been for the Lady Roslin, so she wouldn’t be forced to bed an unwashed prisoner.

And it was clear enough that that was exactly what Roslin intended to do, what her father intended her to do. He intended her to come into this room and have sex with him, more than likely under the watchful eye of the two guards, since they made no indications of moving. Edmure almost laughed, and in the same moment he felt as though he might vomit, wondering why the whole ordeal was necessary. Wondering why they didn’t just find another man who vaguely resembled him and have Roslin lie with him instead, then claim the babe was of Edmure’s seed. No one would ever have to
know the truth.

But instead, they’d decided to go through this whole exercise. Perhaps Walder Frey cared more about blood than Edmure would have guessed. Or perhaps he simply wanted to torture them both.

Roslin cleared her throat uncomfortably, and it was only then that she finally took a few steps toward the bed. She slowly lowered herself to sit on the edge of the mattress, next to Edmure—and Edmure couldn’t help but flinch away as far as his bonds would allow him, feeling a sharp bite of anger in his chest. It was difficult to fathom somehow, even still, how much things had changed—how desperately he’d wanted her after their wedding and how little he wanted her now. She was beautiful, still, but this whole thing was sick and twisted, and it had Walder Frey’s hands all over it.

“I’m sorry, My Lord,” she said again, more softly this time—perhaps meant for Edmure’s ears only, for the two guards remained on the far side of the room, overseeing the proceedings. He wasn’t sure if the guards were there for her safety or to ensure that she truly completed the act—and when Edmure looked upon Roslin’s face, reluctantly, he saw her eyes were wet with unshed tears. “I’m sorry.”

And it struck Edmure, then, that he truly might not be the only victim in this, for it was clear that she didn’t want this any more than he did—or she was quite a better actress than he’d taken her to be. Edmure wanted to reassure her and scream at her in the same breath; instead, he chose to say nothing.

Softly, tentatively, she reached out and found his cock, taking it into her small, delicate hand—but for all that this was his wife before him, for all that he had the memories of their wedding night, of burying himself inside her—his body had had no immediate reaction to her next to him on the bed, his flesh limp and unresponsive in her tentative hand. It was clear enough that she had no practice with this act, no skill and no artifice; she held his cock in her hand like it was a roll of bread, no eagerness and no desire. Her reserved inexperience had been charming on their wedding night, and there had been no lack of eagerness from him; with him chained down, with two men watching them with piercing eyes, he wasn’t certain her shy ineptitude would be enough to rouse him. Perhaps if they’d brought a whore, an experienced one with a skilled mouth who’d bare her beautiful tits to him—but without that, this could be the least arousing experience of a woman touching his cock possible.

Edmure squeezed his eyes shut and drew in a deep breath, not sure whether he wanted to will his body to respond just to get the thing over with or will it to continue to be stubborn, because it was his only possible avenue of defiance here, the only possible thing he could do to fight back. It was a petty thing, he supposed, to want to resist just for the sake of it, but Edmure couldn’t help the urge. After a long minute, when it was clear that her inartful attempts weren’t doing much good, Roslin released a soft sigh.

“I’m sorry, My Lord,” she said yet again, timidly. “I am not…well-versed in the ways of pleasing a man.”

Edmure opened his eyes and looked up at her—and she truly did look guilty, sincere and guilty. She looked, Edmure thought, like a caged dog, stuck inside and uncertain of how to get out, and despite everything, despite his initial desire to resist, he found her felt pity for her and her situation, however much better it was than his own. Her sad, remorseful eyes made him feel guilty, too. Edmure sighed resignedly, letting his eyes fall closed for another long moment before making a resolution and opening them again.

“More…firmly than that,” he told her finally, resignedly—and the look Roslin gave him was one of desperate relief. Edmure couldn’t help but think that she felt as though she’d found an ally in all this,
and perhaps he had too, for all that that was even possible. And Roslin listened to his words immediately, gripping him more tightly as he’d asked; she, at the very least, took direction well.

Edmure felt his cock twitch in her grasp, just barely, and he bit his lip, wondering what else he could tell her. It would all go very much better, of course, if they’d unchain him, but he knew that wasn’t likely to happen; it would go a bit better, at least, if she’d strip off her dress and lay beside him without her clothing—but somehow, he stopped himself from asking her for that, not wanting to ask her to dishonor herself that way in front of witnesses. Their bedding ceremony had been bad enough for that; Edmure had noticed the way she’d tried to cover herself when she’d been stripped of her clothing, the way her skin had turned pink with shame at being so exposed. Edmure had newly learned how that felt; he’d never been particularly ashamed of his nudity, but there was nothing more liable to make one feel ashamed than being left chained naked by two men. Even in front of his wife, he felt ashamed; he was far from his best, any muscle he’d previously had already melting away, leaving him skinny, pale, and probably sickly-looking. He probably wasn’t one to inspire desire in her, either.

“Kiss me,” he requested instead, not certain if she’d comply—but after a second’s hesitation, she did, leaning down and pressing her lips tentatively against his. Her nervousness and inexperience was clear in this, too, for she touched his lips with hers in the same way a mother might kiss a child, with affection but no desire. It was not the way for a man and wife to kiss, did nothing to rouse him—and were his hands free, he would have grasped his hand around the back of her neck and pulled her down to deepen the kiss, but he had no ability to do that, not with his arms chained. Instead, he had to try to instruct her merely with his mouth, hoping she remembered their wedding night enough to be able to follow. He inched his tongue out to touch her lower lip, begging entrance—and she allowed it, leaning into him a little more. Edmure sighed, trying to lose himself in the kiss, trying to forget the circumstances enough that they could get through this.

And as Roslin’s hand continued to work him, Edmure felt his body begin to respond in earnest, his flesh stiffening in her grip—and she seemed slightly emboldened by that, the movements of her hand becoming surer, more confident. That helped, too, helped make him feel slightly less as though this was being forced upon them—although it was—but if he focused on that more than on what his wife was doing, he had no hope of getting through this. For this required no desire from Roslin, as awful as that sounded—but from him, it required not only his ability to remain roused but also his ability to finish, and he had never had less confidence in that ability.

It seemed to take a long time before his flesh roused fully in Roslin’s small hand, and only then did she finally pull back from the kiss, looking down at him with a questioning expression, eyes still guilty.

“Is it…enough?” she asked, almost a whisper, and her voice wavered almost as though she might burst into tears at any moment. Edmure swallowed thickly.

“Yes,” he told her softly with a frown, wondering if he should voice the concern at the tip of his tongue, for Roslin seemed no more flushed with desire than Edmure himself was. A part of him wanted to hurt her, to punish her for her family’s misdeeds, for he could not punish them—but his compassion for her won out over his anger.

“My apologies, My Lady,” he whispered then, hopefully quietly enough that their guards would not overhear. “But if you are not…wet, this will be painful for you.”

Roslin looked slightly startled at the proclamation, and then flushed deeply.

“I was…warned of that,” she assured him quietly, her face beet red as her hand dipped into the bodice of her dress, removing a vial from it. She cleared her throat uncomfortably. “I brought oil.”
Edmure almost wanted to be offended that she’d come already expecting not to be aroused by him, but of course, that was absurd; he certainly wasn’t aroused by her, at least on in these circumstances. They’d had no problems on their wedding night, before all the awfulness, the manipulations.

He mused the that oil might have come in handy sooner, but he said nothing of that, just nodded to Roslin in grim acceptance, sure he’d never felt so resigned to bedding a woman as he was then. She nodded back at him, as if steeling herself, before removing the stopper from the vial of oil and pouring some into the palm of her small hand. Slowly, almost nervously, she returned her now-oiled hand to his cock.

The oil had, thankfully, been close to her flesh inside the bodice of her dress, close enough that it was already warm from her body heat when she slicked him with it. Edmure couldn’t help the little gasp that escaped his lips at the new slickness, and Roslin noticed, her mouth forming into a wordless ‘oh’ as she stroked him slowly with an oil-slick hand. Edmure couldn’t help but roll his hips up into her grasp, as abbreviated as the movement was, and his wife gave him a small, sad smile and removed her hand.

Edmure watched in half trepidation and half anticipation as she slid herself fully onto the bed, gathering her skirts up around her so she could straddle his thighs—and Edmure was struck once more by the absurdity of the situation the closer they came to the actual act. Roslin looked nervous again, but even if he’d wanted to reassure her, any words he might have thought of seemed to die in his throat.

But Roslin pressed on bravely even without any prodding from him, biting her lip as she moved to position herself, her skirts falling over his body, protecting both their modesty from their unwanted audience. She met his eyes one more time, a strange desperation in them—and Edmure could do nothing but nod once more, the sound of their breathing loud in his ears.

And then Roslin was reaching up beneath her skirts and gripping at the base of his oiled length, positioning herself—and then, excruciatingly slowly, she was lowering herself onto him. She winced slightly despite the oil she’d used to ease the way, and Edmure wanted to feel badly about that, except that the feeling of being buried inside a woman—his wife, he reminded himself absurdly—was too overwhelming to focus on much else. Edmure started to release a groan, then stifled it, not wanting to give the guards the satisfaction of hearing his pleasure.

He closed his eyes, sucking in a slow breath as Roslin moved against him—and this, at least, seemed somewhat instinctual for her, perhaps because she could feel it too. She moved experimentally at first, rolling her hips until she managed to find a rhythm she could maintain, pressing her hands against his chest for leverage. It was strange, awkward, almost mechanical—but it was stimulating enough to keep his body interested. If he didn’t open his eyes, if he could manage to forget the manacles around his wrists and ankles—a difficult prospect for how they ached—he could almost imagine that there was nothing abnormal about the situation.

The delusion helped, but what helped even more was when Roslin started to make soft noises, ones she obviously tried to stifle as well. Edmure’s eyes slid back open, and he looked up into his wife’s eyes—and there was pleasure there, however muted, however restrained it might be by the awful circumstances.

It was only the look of his wife’s flushed pleasure that allowed him to finish; he felt the waves of pleasure crash over him, felt himself spilling his seed inside her—and with an absurd sense of mental clarity, he thought, *We may have just conceived a child*—and then Roslin slowed above him, then stopped. Edmure let himself revel in that, in the feeling of pleasure coursing through his veins, in the knowledge that something good might come out of the whole awful situation—instead of focusing
on the way Roslin slowly eased herself off him with another wince.

But then she surprised him by coming to lie down next to him on the mattress, carefully configuring herself around his bound limbs, resting her head against his shoulder. He tried to move to look at her, but bound as he was, it was difficult. Her hand pressed gently against his chest.

“It’s time to go, m’lady,” said one of the guards—the one Edmure hadn’t heard speak yet, he noted to himself, so there was still no conformation that the other one could speak more than one syllable at a time. Roslin sat up a little to regard him.

“Lying down for awhile afterward increases the chances of conception,” Roslin told the man in a sweet voice. “Maester Brenett told me so.”

A strange look screwed up the guard’s face, like he wasn’t certain if he should argue with Lady Roslin or not, like he wasn’t sure whose orders to follow. In the end, he seemed so flummoxed that he fell silent, his face held in an uncomfortable scowl. Edmure, for his part, wasn’t certain if the words were truth or a lie; Roslin seemed too sweet to be able to lie convincingly, but Edmure had never tried to conceive a child before, so he had no knowledge of the truth of the matter. It was strange, he thought, that she was lying with him like this, as if he wasn’t chained, as if they were truly no more than man and wife. He wasn’t certain how to feel about it.

“Can’t we remove his chains?” Roslin pressed them after a moment, earnestly—and the confused guard’s face turned even more perplexed.

“We have orders, m’lady,” he told her in a stilted tone, and Roslin sighed and lowered herself back down, tucking her head against Edmure’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered again, for perhaps the millionth time that night, and Edmure wasn’t sure whether he was glad to hear it or simply exhausted by it. “I tried. At least you can stay out of the dungeons for a short while longer.”

Edmure’s mind still felt foggy from his climax, and he couldn’t quite wrap his mind around why Roslin was doing this, why she was making any attempt at kindness toward him. He was her husband only in name, and they’d met only once; he wasn’t certain if it was purely human compassion on her part or if she truly felt some sort of affection for him. In the end, he could think of nothing to say to her in return, so he remained silent, pressing his eyes closed and steeling himself for the inevitable return to his cell. His shoulders ached from his arms being stretched above his head, his wrists and ankles sore from where he’d shifted against the irons that held him; though he was in a comfortable bed in comfortable quarters, it was difficult to say whether any additional time out of the dungeons was a blessing or a curse.

Roslin did have to leave eventually, and she did with a soft kiss upon his cheek and a regretful look. It was only after she was gone that the guards unchained him without words, and they were kind enough to allow him to wipe himself down before returning him to the dungeons. They gave him a new set of clothes, too, clean ones, but it didn’t especially matter, Edmure thought to himself, for they’d be filthy again in a matter of days.

If nothing else, the encounter had given Edmure another thing to muse upon during the time in the dark cell, something besides the fate of his family. He then began to wonder whether or not they’d created a child together, whether or not he’d have a son or daughter many moons down the line. And then he also began to wonder at the repercussions of that—if they had a son, would he be executed, for they’d have no need of him anymore? Or would they want a second son, just in case something happened to the first?
To be kept alive merely as breeding stock, as though he were a stallion and not a man, was not a particularly cheering thought. But being killed wasn’t either.

It wasn’t so perplexing the second time the guards came for him, when they brought him upstairs. It made it easier to judge the time that had passed, too, which seemed hazier and more nebulous the longer he remained in the cell. But if they were calling on Edmure again, he knew that it could mean only one thing—that Roslin’s moon blood had come, that it had been about a turn of the moon since he’d last been out of his cell.

His beard had grown in fuller, though still patchy in places, as seemed to be his way. He hadn’t caught sight of himself, but he presumed he must look an absolute mess, though they at least allowed him to wash the grime off himself once more, and gave him a nice meal to eat. Edmure had resigned himself to it, that second time, when he saw Roslin walk into the room—and he supposed as tortures went, this couldn’t be the worst that could be done to him.

“Can’t we unchain him?” Roslin surprised Edmure by asking the guards again that time, turning pleading eyes upon the two men who had brought him from the dungeons, but they still refused.

“’Fraid not,” the guard told her, a different man than the last time. “It’s for your protection, m’lady.”

“She wouldn’t hurt me,” she assured the man with a surprising amount of conviction, and Edmure wondered what it was about him that had inspired any of that trust she had in him. She was correct, of course, if only because he knew it would be too stupid to try; he’d been in the dungeon at least two moons already, and he was underfed and far too weak to try to fight his way out of a fortress.

Edmure wasn’t certain if he was disappointed or glad when the guards came to him a third time, this time accompanied by Lothar Frey, who jeered at him all the way up the stairs about Edmure’s inability to impregnate his sister.

“Mayhaps your cock don’t work right,” the man taunted as Edmure stripped that time to get into the bath, trying his best to ignore the man, for the bath was one of the few luxuries he ever got from them. “Mayhaps that’s why it’s so small.”

Edmure didn’t rise to the insult, for he had far more to worry about other than what his wife’s brother thought of the state of his cock, and he wasn’t about to start a fight with the man that he knew he couldn’t win. Lothar was the one who chained him to the bed that day, which Edmure simply submitted to with a sigh; it was better, he realized, than struggling, because the result would still be the same but struggling would leave him with dark bruises on his wrists and ankles. They’d been worse the second time than the first, his skin growing thinner and sallower by the day.

Roslin wasn’t amused when she finally arrived.

“Mayhaps he should be fed better, then,” she scolded her brother with her hands on her hips. “His seed can’t be strong if his body is weak.”

Lothar left before Roslin came to Edmure’s bed that time, perhaps not wanting to watch his sister in such a position, and it was one of those small things for which Edmure could be thankful. Her words seemed true enough, too; his body was slow to rouse and even slower to find release, and he felt exhausted and drained afterward. It cheered him, at least, that his wife was advocating for him, although he still couldn’t quite fathom why she even cared for him at all. Perhaps she was simply concerned about conceiving a child, perhaps not wanting to ever have to go through the horrific exercise again—but Edmure liked to believe that she truly did care for him in some way, for that was something he could cling onto when he lay on his dingy cot, something to keep him from falling completely into hopelessness and despair.
But whatever the reason, his rations did improve after that, seeming to come more often and with more variety. They occasionally even brought him meat or fruit to go along with his bread and bland soup, and for the first time, Edmure started to feel some modicum of hope—if not for his release then at least for the fact that his life could become less miserable. He began to hope that his wife would not fall with child just to be able to continue to have some measure of humane treatment—except for the fact that if they decided they thought he wasn’t able to sire children, he might quickly become useless to them.

The next time, Roslin came in while he was still in the bath—and Edmure felt embarrassed, somehow, despite everything, curling into himself as if to hide his body from her. He was most mortified to have her see how dark the water had become, though he knew it was of no fault of his own; it felt wholly inappropriate for her to know how filthy he truly was.

“His beard is growing far too long,” she told one of the guards. “I’ve come to shave him.”

Edmure was shocked and apprehensive when she produced the blade, but the guards allowed it, allowed her to lower herself to the ground beside the tub and lather his face, Edmure feeling unsettled and embarrassed the whole time.

“I thought you might appreciate it, My Lord,” she told him softly, and Edmure recognized this for what she tried to make it—an act of kindness toward him, Roslin doing whatever she was able to do to make the whole thing less awful for him. And Edmure had to admit that it did make a difference.

Roslin wasn’t half bad at it, didn’t cut his flesh at all—and he had to admit that being clean-shaven once more did something to make him feel neater, more like himself. He knew he’d have to deal with the itchy discomfort of his beard beginning to grow in once more, but it seemed a price worthwhile to pay for at least a few moments of relief.

“Are these truly necessary?” Roslin asked sadly when the guards went to cuff him to the bed, and the two exchanged a confused look.

“He could hurt you, m’lady,” one of them pointed out, and Roslin gave him an exasperated look.

“I was just beside him while he was unchained with a blade in my hand, and he made no attempt to hurt me,” she pointed out to him with a meaningful look, and Edmure wasn’t certain what it said about him that the thought hadn’t even crossed his mind, even though it was the closest he’d come to having a weapon in his hand in many moons. “Leave the irons.”

Surprisingly, that time, they did, and it was an odd luxury to be able to lie in a comfortable bed without the discomfort of the irons or the awful positioning. He got the novel experience of bedding his wife under his own power for the first time since his wedding night, and it made all the difference, less a chore and so much easier to pretend that they were somehow just a normal couple, if he could ignore the watchful eyes of their guards. Roslin even did him the pleasure of stripping down to her shift, and the two of them bundled together under the covers was a previously unthinkable extravagance.

It was difficult to return to the dungeons that time, more difficult than it had ever been—and Edmure had a frantic, desperate thought that it might be better never to experience that kindness, for that made the other parts harder. He lay in his cell and wished for his wife to fall with child, then seconds later wished that she never would. He wished for a daughter so they’d keep him alive to try for a son; he wished for a son so they’d end his misery, his hopeless stint in the cold and miserable dungeon.

The days stretched on and he thought of Roslin, then thought of his family, then considered the hopelessness of his situation—wondered when was the last time they’d served him anything decent,
how many days it had been since he’d had a treat of meat. His ribs had started to protrude, his skin hanging sallow off of him, and his beard grew in again, itchy and grating. His hair grew long enough to fall into his eyes, limp and greasy and unwashed—and Edmure had no idea how many days had passed, except that his hair and his fingernails continued to grow, and Edmure realized that it must have been more than a moon’s turn, that there was no way that it hadn’t been, and if he hadn’t been called for again, he knew what that must mean.

It must mean that the Lady Roslin was with child, and it was difficult to figure out whether the feeling in his chest was happiness or despair—or perhaps, he thought, it was the gnawing feeling of hunger, or the empty feeling of hopelessness, or the encroaching tendrils of utter insanity.

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