

An Extract From:

*Winter of Ice and Iron*

by

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## *Chapter One*

When he was fourteen, Innisth Maèr tried for the first time to kill his father. He did not succeed. He found out instead something that he should have realized beforehand: that the Immanent Power of Eäneté protected its master from any ordinary attack. Even an unexpected attack. Even an attack by the heir. Innisth also learned that it is a great deal easier and less painful to discover such things through logic than it is to learn them through trial and error. Both lessons proved useful, in time.

Innisth survived his father's punishment, and the subsequent years of his youth. When he was twenty, he tried again to murder his father. This time he succeeded. This time, he had thought out his plan with cold deliberation, and, when the opportunity presented itself, on the fifth day of the month of frost, he seized the chance. He knew that the Eänetén Power would block any attempt to stab or bludgeon or poison its master. But there was nothing it could do to preserve a man flung down a sheer thousand-foot cliff.

The Immanent Power of Eäneté came to Innisth after his father's death. Generally a Duke's heir mastered his Power while surrounded by supporters and allies, perhaps men and women themselves bound to allied lesser Powers, who knew best how to help a new heir survive the often brutal transference of the deep tie.

Innisth Maèr mastered the Power of Eäneté alone, in the cold heights, lying in the trampled snow at the top of the ice-edged granite cliff. Tàisaroiè was a wild and ferocious Power, long shaped by the rugged countryside and the high cutting winds of Eäneté, and by the cruelty of a long, long line of Eänetén dukes, none of whom had taught it much of gentleness. It was not a Great Power; not quite. But it was old and strong and fierce; certainly no minor Power.

But Innisth was his father's true son. He encompassed his Power, and mastered it, and bound it, and he did not freeze to death there in the heights because Taisaroiè would not allow its master to die such a death.

By the time he got to his feet and brushed the snow off his face and out of his hair, it was nearly dusk. Innisth did not look toward the cliff edge where his father had fallen, the narrow edge between earth and sky from which he had so nearly fallen himself. He found his horse and his father's horse not far away, in the shelter of the firs in the lee of the mountain's high ridge. Though he was stiff with cold, he mounted and rode down the long steep way to the gate at the mouth of the pass.

The men stationed there knew immediately what had happened. At least, they knew the important part of what had happened. They knew because Innisth Maèr came out of the pass alone, leading his father's horse by its reins. And they knew because of the look on Innisth's face, or by some subtle difference in his manner, or perhaps because they could feel the dense, invisible presence of the Eänetén Power spreading out above and around him. Innisth did not know what his face showed; he had spent so many years turning an impervious mask to the entire world that by now he should show nothing at all to any observer. But he was aware of the Power that accompanied and surrounded him. It would not have surprised him to know that other men could feel it, too.

Innisth did not accept an escort back to the house that was now his and not his father's: the massive house that loomed out of the forested slopes of the mountain, gray and thick-walled and forbidding, to dominate the town below. He told the men where to look for his father's body and the bodies of his father's servants, and they took his orders with white-faced impassivity. He left his father's horse with them and rode his own black mare down from the gate of the pass toward that great grim house. He did not look back.

There were more men-at-arms at the courtyard gate, of course. They were not so quick to understand, until Innisth said, "I am now Eäneté." Then he said, "Send for my seneschal, and for your captain, and bid all the household staff assemble here in the courtyard." It was cold, with the frigid stillness that sometimes lay across the

mountains during the midwinter dusk. But the courtyard was the only place large enough for all the staff to assemble. And there were other advantages to the courtyard besides its sheer size. Even at night. “Light all the lanterns, and light torches,” Innisth commanded the men-at-arms, and they ran to obey.

Innisth swung down from his black mare and gave her reins to the stableman who hurried up to take her. That man had seen the men-at-arms rush away, and he could see that Innisth had come home alone. He wasn’t stupid. He lowered his head and murmured, “Your Grace,” and took the mare away very quickly.

If one included all the men-at-arms in the count, the household staff comprised well over a hundred men and women. There were the stablemen and grooms, the huntsmen and kennel girls, the kitchen staff and scullery maids, the old women who stayed in the attics of the servants’ quarters and spun wool and wove cloth, and the seamstresses who made the cloth into finished clothing. In the back of the assembly hovered the girls who endlessly polished the wooden floors and the brass doorknobs, and the boys who clambered dangerously about on the outside walls to wash the house’s many fine glass windows. To one side stood the house physickers and the grim old librarian with his assistant scribe. To the other side stood the men-at-arms, drawn up in their neat ranks, with their captain at their head. Before them all, with the torchlight casting his heavy features into unreadable shadow, stood Innisth’s father’s seneschal and his father’s personal servants – including the special servants, with their rusty-black clothing that did not show blood.

Innisth stood before them all, his shoulders straight and his cloak thrown back, where the brilliant lantern light showed him clearly. They all knew his father was dead. He did not have to tell them so. Word must have run through the house, even in the few moments they had required to assemble, but he believed they would have known anyway. He thought the empty space where his father should have stood echoed with the old Duke’s absence. To him it seemed that absence echoed through the entire house, louder than a shout. The assembled staff were utterly silent. They did not know yet how the shift of power from the old Duke to the younger would affect them.

Innisth looked along the silent lines of the gathered staff. He said, flatly, “Captain Tregeris,” and beckoned, the crook of one finger – his father’s gesture, deliberately, for Innisth was determined to shrink from nothing. He wanted his father’s captain to obey, unthinkingly. So he used his father’s gesture and his father’s tone.

The captain of the men-at-arms stepped out, approached Innisth, and saluted. He was not a young man, but not old; his shoulders were broad and his mouth narrow and he thought much of himself and little of others – except for Innisth’s father, whom he had always feared and admired and sought to emulate. His eyes ran up and down Innisth’s frame, curious and scornful, for he had, following the old Duke’s lead in this as in all else, never much regarded his son.

Innisth took one step forward, flicking his smallest knife out of his sleeve and into his hand. He stabbed the captain in the stomach, and then stepped back while the man’s mouth fell open and he sank down, quivering, his hands clutching at the hilt of the knife. The knife was small, but it was a vicious quilled blade, and when the captain steeled himself and jerked it out, a great dark gush of blood followed, and his breath followed it in a voiceless moan, and he died.

It had all been very quick, though at the same time the moment seemed to Innisth to stretch out and out, until he was half surprised that, when he looked up again, the whole assembly was still frozen in shocked stillness. The moment would break soon, for such a silence could not hold long, no matter it seemed at first inviolable.

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