

DAVOS

Even in the gloom of the Wolf's Den, Davos Seaworth could sense that something was awry this morning.

He woke to the sound of voices and crept to the door of his cell, but the wood was too thick and he could not make out the words. Dawn had come, but not the porridge Garth brought him every morn to break his fast. That made him anxious. All the days were much the same inside the Wolf's Den, and any change was usually for the worse. *This may be the day I die. Garth may be sitting with a whetstone even now, to put an edge on Lady Lu.*

The onion knight had not forgotten Wyman Manderly's last words to him. *Take this creature to the Wolf's Den and cut off head and hands*, the fat lord had commanded. *I shall not be able to eat a bite until I see this smuggler's head upon a spike, with an onion shoved between his lying teeth.* Every night Davos went to sleep with those words in his head, and every morn he woke to them. And should he forget, Garth was always pleased to remind him. Dead man was his name for Davos. When he came by in the morning, it was always, "Here, porridge for the dead man." At night it was, "Blow out the candle, dead man."

Once Garth brought his ladies by to introduce them to the dead man. "The Whore don't look like much," he said, fondling a rod of cold black iron, "but when I heat her up red-hot and let her touch your cock, you'll cry for mother. And this here's my Lady Lu. It's her who'll take your head and hands, when Lord Wyman sends down word." Davos had never seen a bigger axe than Lady Lu, nor one with a sharper edge. Garth spent his days honing her, the other keepers said. *I will not plead for mercy*, Davos resolved. He would go to his death a knight, asking only that they take his head before his hands. Even Garth would not be so cruel as to deny him that, he hoped.

The sounds coming through the door were faint and muffled. Davos rose and paced his cell. As cells went, it was large and queerly comfortable. He suspected it might once have been some lordling's bedchamber. It was

thrice the size of his captain's cabin on *Black Bessa*, and even larger than the cabin Salladhor Saan enjoyed on his *Valyrian*. Though its only window had been bricked in years before, one wall still boasted a hearth big enough to hold a kettle, and there was an actual privy built into a corner nook. The floor was made of warped planks full of splinters, and his sleeping pallet smelled of mildew, but those discomforts were mild compared to what Davos had expected.

The food had come as a surprise as well. In place of gruel and stale bread and rotten meat, the usual dungeon fare, his keepers brought him fresh-caught fish, bread still warm from the oven, spiced mutton, turnips, carrots, even crabs. Garth was none too pleased by that. "The dead should not eat better than the living," he complained, more than once. Davos had furs to keep him warm by night, wood to feed his fire, clean clothing, a greasy tallow candle. When he asked for paper, quill, and ink, Therry brought them the next day. When he asked for a book, so he might keep at his reading, Therry turned up with *The Seven-Pointed Star*.

For all its comforts, though, his cell remained a cell. Its walls were solid stone, so thick that he could hear nothing of the outside world. The door was oak and iron, and his keepers kept it barred. Four sets of heavy iron fetters dangled from the ceiling, waiting for the day Lord Manderly decided to chain him up and give him over to the Whore. *Today may be that day. The next time Garth opens my door, it may not be to bring me porridge.*

His belly was rumbling, a sure sign that the morning was creeping past, and still no sign of food. *The worst part is not the dying, it's not knowing when or how.* He had seen the inside of a few gaols and dungeons in his smuggling days, but those he'd shared with other prisoners, so there was always someone to talk with, to share your fears and hopes. Not here. Aside from his keepers, Davos Seaworth had the Wolf's Den to himself.

He knew there were true dungeons down in the castle cellars— oubliettes and torture chambers and dank pits where huge black rats scrab-bled in the darkness. His gaolers claimed all of them were unoccupied at present. "Only us here, Onion," Ser Bartimus had told him. He was the chief gaoler, a cadaverous one-legged knight, with a scarred face and a blind eye. When Ser Bartimus was in his cups (and Ser Bartimus was in his cups most every

day), he liked to boast of how he had saved Lord Wyman's life at the Battle of the Trident. The Wolf's Den was his reward.

The rest of "us" consisted of a cook Davos never saw, six guardsmen in the ground-floor barracks, a pair of washerwomen, and the two turnkeys who looked after the prisoner. Therry was the young one, the son of one of the washerwomen, a boy of ten-and-four. The old one was Garth, huge and bald and taciturn, who wore the same greasy leather jerkin every day and always seemed to have a glower on his face.

His years as a smuggler had given Davos Seaworth a sense of when a man was wrong, and Garth was wrong. The onion knight took care to hold his tongue in Garth's presence. With Therry and Ser Bartimus he was less reticent. He thanked them for his food, encouraged them to talk about their hopes and histories, answered their questions politely, and never pressed too hard with queries of his own. When he made requests, they were small ones: a basin of water and a bit of soap, a book to read, more candles. Most such favors were granted, and Davos was duly grateful.

Neither man would speak about Lord Manderly or King Stannis or the Freys, but they would talk of other things. Therry wanted to go off to war when he was old enough, to fight in battles and become a knight. He liked to complain about his mother too. She was bedding two of the guardsmen, he confided. The men were on different watches and neither knew about the other, but one day one man or t'other would puzzle it out, and then there would be blood. Some nights the boy would even bring a skin of wine to the cell and ask Davos about the smuggler's life as they drank.

Ser Bartimus had no interest in the world outside, or indeed anything that had happened since he lost his leg to a riderless horse and a maester's saw. He had come to love the Wolf's Den, however, and liked nothing more than to talk about its long and bloody history. The Den was much older than White Harbor, the knight told Davos. It had been raised by King Jon Stark to defend the mouth of the White Knife against raiders from the sea. Many a younger son of the King in the North had made his seat there, many a brother, many an uncle, many a cousin. Some passed the castle to their own sons and grandsons, and offshoot branches of House Stark had arisen; the Greystarks had lasted the longest, holding the Wolf's Den for five centuries,

until they presumed to join the Dreadfort in rebellion against the Starks of Winterfell.

After their fall, the castle had passed through many other hands. House Flint held it for a century, House Locke for almost two. Slates, Longs, Holts, and Ashwoods had held sway here, charged by Winterfell to keep the river safe. Reavers from the Three Sisters took the castle once, making it their toehold in the north. During the wars between Winterfell and the Vale, it was besieged by Osgood Arryn, the Old Falcon, and burned by his son, the one remembered as the Talon. When old King Edrick Stark had grown too feeble to defend his realm, the Wolf's Den was captured by slavers from the Stepstones. They would brand their captives with hot irons and break them to the whip before shipping them off across the sea, and these same black stone walls bore witness.

"Then a long cruel winter fell," said Ser Bartimus. "The White Knife froze hard, and even the firth was icing up. The winds came howling from the north and drove them slavers inside to huddle round their fires, and whilst they warmed themselves the new king come down on them. *Brandon* Stark this was, Edrick Snowbeard's great-grandson, him that men called Ice Eyes. He took the Wolf's Den back, stripped the slavers naked, and gave them to the slaves he'd found chained up in the dungeons. It's said they hung their entrails in the branches of the heart tree, as an offering to the gods. The *old* gods, not these new ones from the south. Your Seven don't know winter, and winter don't know them."

Davos could not argue with the truth of that. From what he had seen at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, he did not care to know winter either. "What gods do you keep?" he asked the one-legged knight.

"The old ones." When Ser Bartimus grinned, he looked just like a skull. "Me and mine were here before the Manderlys. Like as not, my own forebears strung those entrails through the tree."

"I never knew that northmen made blood sacrifice to their heart trees."

"There's much and more you southrons do not know about the north," Ser Bartimus replied.

He was not wrong. Davos sat beside his candle and looked at the letters he had scratched out word by word during the days of his confinement. *I was a better smuggler than a knight*, he had written to his wife, *a better knight than a King's Hand, a better King's Hand than a husband. I am so sorry. Marya, I have loved you. Please forgive the wrongs I did you. Should Stannis lose his war, our lands will be lost as well. Take the boys across the narrow sea to Braavos and teach them to think kindly of me, if you would. Should Stannis gain the Iron Throne, House Seaworth will survive and Devan will remain at court. He will help you place the other boys with noble lords, where they can serve as pages and squires and win their knighthoods.* It was the best counsel he had for her, though he wished it sounded wiser.

He had written to each of his three surviving sons as well, to help them remember the father who had bought them names with his fingertips. His notes to Steffon and young Stannis were short and stiff and awkward; if truth be told, he did not know them half as well as he had his older boys, the ones who'd burned or drowned upon the Blackwater. To Devan he wrote more, telling him how proud he was to see his own son as a king's squire and reminding him that as the eldest it was his duty to protect his lady mother and his younger brothers. *Tell His Grace I did my best*, he ended. *I am sorry that I failed him. I lost my luck when I lost my finger-bones, the day the river burned below King's Landing.*

Davos shuffled through the letters slowly, reading each one over several times, wondering whether he should change a word here or add one there. A man should have more to say when staring at the end of his life, he thought, but the words came hard. *I did not do so ill*, he tried to tell himself. *I rose up from Flea Bottom to be a King's Hand, and I learned to read and write.*

He was still hunched over the letters when he heard the sound of iron keys rattling on a ring. Half a heartbeat later, the door to his cell came swinging open.

The man who stepped through the door was not one of his gaolers. He was tall and haggard, with a deeply lined face and a shock of grey-brown hair. A longsword hung from his hip, and his deep-dyed scarlet cloak was fastened at the shoulder with a heavy silver brooch in the shape of a mailed fist.

“Lord Seaworth,” he said, “we do not have much time. Please, come with me.”

Davos eyed the stranger warily. The “please” confused him. Men about to lose their heads and hands were not oft accorded such courtesies. “Who are you?”

“Robett Glover, if it please, my lord.”

“Glover. Your seat was Deepwood Motte.”

“My brother Galbart’s seat. It was and is, thanks to your King Stannis. He has taken Deepwood back from the iron bitch who stole it and offers to restore it to its rightful owners. Much and more has happened whilst you have been confined within these walls, Lord Davos. Moat Cailin has fallen, and Roose Bolton has returned to the north with Ned Stark’s younger daughter. A host of Freys came with him. Bolton has sent forth ravens, summoning all the lords of the north to Barrowton. He demands homage and hostages ... and witnesses to the wedding of Arya Stark and his bastard Ramsay Snow, by which match the Boltons mean to lay claim to Winterfell. Now, will you come with me, or no?”

“What choice do I have, my lord? Come with you, or remain with Garth and Lady Lu?”

“Who is Lady Lu? One of the washerwomen?” Glover was growing impatient. “All will be explained if you will come.”

Davos rose to his feet. “If I should die, I beseech my lord to see that my letters are delivered.”

“You have my word on that ... though if you die, it will not be at Glover’s hands, nor Lord Wyman’s. Quickly now, with me.”

Glover led him along a darkened hall and down a flight of worn steps. They crossed the castle’s godswood, where the heart tree had grown so huge and tangled that it had choked out all the oaks and elms and birch and sent its thick, pale limbs crashing through the walls and windows that looked down

on it. Its roots were as thick around as a man's waist, its trunk so wide that the face carved into it looked fat and angry. Beyond the weir-wood, Glover opened a rusted iron gate and paused to light a torch. When it was blazing red and hot, he took Davos down more steps into a barrel-vaulted cellar where the weeping walls were crusted white with salt, and seawater sloshed beneath their feet with every step. They passed through several cellars, and rows of small, damp, foul-smelling cells very different from the room where Davos had been confined. Then there was a blank stone wall that turned when Glover pushed on it. Beyond was a long narrow tunnel and still more steps. These led up.

"Where are we?" asked Davos as they climbed. His words echoed faintly though the darkness.

"The steps beneath the steps. The passage runs beneath the Castle Stair up to the New Castle. A secret way. It would not do for you to be seen, my lord. You are supposed to be dead."

Porridge for the dead man. Davos climbed.

They emerged through another wall, but this one was lath and plaster on the far side. The room beyond was snug and warm and comfortably furnished, with a Myrish carpet on the floor and beeswax candles burning on a table. Davos could hear pipes and fiddles playing, not far away. On the wall hung a sheepskin with a map of the north painted across it in faded colors. Beneath the map sat Wyman Manderly, the colossal Lord of White Harbor.

"Please sit." Lord Manderly was richly garbed. His velvet doublet was a soft blue-green, embroidered with golden thread at hem and sleeves and collar. His mantle was ermine, pinned at the shoulder with a golden trident. "Are you hungry?"

"No, my lord. Your gaolers have fed me well."

"There is wine, if you have a thirst."

"I will treat with you, my lord. My king commanded that of me. I do not have to drink with you."

Lord Wyman sighed. "I have treated you most shamefully, I know. I had my reasons, but ... please, sit and drink, I beg you. Drink to my boy's safe return. Wylis, my eldest son and heir. He is home. That is the welcoming feast you hear. In the Merman's Court they are eating lamprey pie and venison with roasted chestnuts. Wynafryd is dancing with the Frey she is to marry. The other Freys are raising cups of wine to toast our friendship."

Beneath the music, Davos could hear the murmur of many voices, the clatter of cups and platters. He said nothing.

"I have just come from the high table," Lord Wyman went on. "I have eaten too much, as ever, and all White Harbor knows my bowels are bad. My friends of Frey will not question a lengthy visit to the privy, we hope." He turned his cup over. "There. You will drink and I will not. Sit. Time is short, and there is much we need to say. Robett, wine for the Hand, if you will be so good. Lord Davos, you will not know, but you are dead."

Robett Glover filled a wine cup and offered it to Davos. He took it, sniffed it, drank. "How did I die, if I may ask?"

"By the axe. Your head and hands were mounted above the Seal Gate, with your face turned so your eyes looked out across the harbor. By now you are well rotted, though we dipped your head in tar before we set it upon the spike. Carrion crows and seabirds squabbled over your eyes, they say."

Davos shifted uncomfortably. It was a queer feeling, being dead. "If it please my lord, who died in my place?"

"Does it matter? You have a common face, Lord Davos. I hope my saying so does not offend you. The man had your coloring, a nose of the same shape, two ears that were not dissimilar, a long beard that could be trimmed and shaped like yours. You can be sure we tarred him well, and the onion shoved between his teeth served to twist the features. Ser Bartimus saw that the fingers of his left hand were shortened, the same as yours. The man was a criminal, if that gives you any solace. His dying may accomplish more good than anything he ever did whilst living. My lord, I bear you no ill will. The rancor I showed you in the Merman's Court was a mummer's farce put on to please our friends of Frey."

“My lord should take up a life of mummery,” said Davos. “You and yours were most convincing. Your good-daughter seemed to want me dead most earnestly, and the little girl ...”

“Wylla.” Lord Wyman smiled. “Did you see how brave she was? Even when I threatened to have her tongue out, she reminded me of the debt White Harbor owes to the Starks of Winterfell, a debt that can never be repaid. Wylla spoke from the heart, as did Lady Leona. Forgive her if you can, my lord. She is a foolish, frightened woman, and Wylis is her life. Not every man has it in him to be Prince Aemon the Dragonknight or Symeon Star-Eyes, and not every woman can be as brave as my Wylla and her sister Wynafryd ... who *did* know, yet played her own part fearlessly.

“When treating with liars, even an honest man must lie. I did not dare defy King’s Landing so long as my last living son remained a captive. Lord Tywin Lannister wrote me himself to say that he had Wylis. If I would have him freed unharmed, he told me, I must repent my treason, yield my city, declare my loyalty to the boy king on the Iron Throne ... and bend my knee to Roose Bolton, his Warden of the North. Should I refuse, Wylis would die a traitor’s death, White Harbor would be stormed and sacked, and my people would suffer the same fate as the Reynes of Castamere.

“I am fat, and many think that makes me weak and foolish. Mayhaps Tywin Lannister was one such. I sent him back a raven to say that I would bend my knee and open my gates *after* my son was returned, but not before. There the matter stood when Tywin died. Afterward the Freys turned up with Wendel’s bones ... to make a peace and seal it with a marriage pact, they claimed, but I was not about to give them what they wanted until I had Wylis, safe and whole, and they were not about to give me Wylis until I proved my loyalty. Your arrival gave me the means to do that. That was the reason for the discourtesy I showed you in the Merman’s Court, and for the head and hands rotting above the Seal Gate.”

“You took a great risk, my lord,” Davos said. “If the Freys had seen through your deception ...”

“I took no risk at all. If any of the Freys had taken it upon themselves to climb my gate for a close look at the man with the onion in his mouth, I

would have blamed my gaolers for the error and produced you to appease them.”

Davos felt a shiver up his spine. “I see.”

“I hope so. You have sons of your own, you said.”

Three, thought Davos, *though I fathered seven*. “Soon I must return to the feast to toast my friends of Frey,” Manderly continued. “They watch me, ser. Day and night their eyes are on me, noses sniffing for some whiff of treachery. You saw them, the arrogant Ser Jared and his nephew Rhaegar, that smirking worm who wears a dragon’s name. Behind them both stands Symond, clinking coins. That one has bought and paid for several of my servants and two of my knights. One of his wife’s handmaids has found her way into the bed of my own fool. If Stannis wonders that my letters say so little, it is because I dare not even trust my maester. Theomore is all head and no heart. You heard him in my hall. Maesters are supposed to put aside old loyalties when they don their chains, but I cannot forget that Theomore was born a Lannister of Lannisport and claims some distant kinship to the Lannisters of Casterly Rock. Foes and false friends are all around me, Lord Davos. They infest my city like roaches, and at night I feel them crawling over me.” The fat man’s fingers coiled into a fist, and all his chins trembled. “My son Wendel came to the Twins a guest. He ate Lord Walder’s bread and salt, and hung his sword upon the wall to feast with friends. And they murdered him. *Murdered*, I say, and may the Freys choke upon their fables. I drink with Jared, jape with Symond, promise Rhaegar the hand of my own beloved granddaughter ... but never think that means I have forgotten. The north remembers, Lord Davos. The north remembers, and the mummer’s farce is almost done. My son is home.”

Something about the way Lord Wyman said that chilled Davos to the bone. “If it is justice that you want, my lord, look to King Stannis. No man is more just.”

Robett Glover broke in to add, “Your loyalty does you honor, my lord, but Stannis Baratheon remains your king, not our own.”

“Your own king is dead,” Davos reminded them, “murdered at the Red Wedding beside Lord Wyman’s son.”

“The Young Wolf is dead,” Manderly allowed, “but that brave boy was not Lord Eddard’s only son. Robett, bring the lad.”

“At once, my lord.” Glover slipped out the door.

The lad? Was it possible that one of Robb Stark’s brothers had survived the ruin of Winterfell? Did Manderly have a Stark heir hidden away in his castle? *A found boy or a feigned boy?* The north would rise for either, he suspected ... but Stannis Baratheon would never make common cause with an imposter.

The lad who followed Robett Glover through the door was not a Stark, nor could he ever hope to pass for one. He was older than the Young Wolf’s murdered brothers, fourteen or fifteen by the look of him, and his eyes were older still. Beneath a tangle of dark brown hair his face was almost feral, with a wide mouth, sharp nose, and pointed chin. “Who are you?” Davos asked.

The boy looked to Robett Glover. “He is a mute, but we have been teaching him his letters. He learns quickly.” Glover drew a dagger from his belt and gave it to the boy. “Write your name for Lord Seaworth.”

There was no parchment in the chamber. The boy carved the letters into a wooden beam in the wall. *W ... E ... X*. He leaned hard into the *X*. When he was done he flipped the dagger in the air, caught it, and stood admiring his handiwork.

“Wex is ironborn. He was Theon Greyjoy’s squire. Wex was at Winterfell.” Glover sat. “How much does Lord Stannis know of what transpired at Winterfell?”

Davos thought back on the tales they’d heard. “Winterfell was captured by Theon Greyjoy, who had once been Lord Stark’s ward. He had Stark’s two young sons put to death and mounted their heads above the castle walls. When the northmen came to oust him, he put the entire castle to sword,

down to the last child, before he himself was slain by Lord Bolton's bastard."

"Not slain," said Glover. "Captured, and carried back to the Dreadfort. The Bastard has been flaying him."

Lord Wyman nodded. "The tale you tell is one we all have heard, as full of lies as a pudding's full of raisins. It was the Bastard of Bolton who put Winterfell to the sword ... Ramsay Snow, he was called then, before the boy king made him a Bolton. Snow did not kill them all. He spared the women, roped them together, and marched them to the Dreadfort for his sport."

"His sport?"

"He is a great hunter," said Wyman Manderly, "and women are his favorite prey. He strips them naked and sets them loose in the woods. They have a half day's start before he sets out after them with hounds and horns. From time to time some wench escapes and lives to tell the tale. Most are less fortunate. When Ramsay catches them he rapes them, flays them, feeds their corpses to his dogs, and brings their skins back to the Dreadfort as trophies. If they have given him good sport, he slits their throats before he skins them. Elsewise, t'other way around."

Davos paled. "Gods be good. How could any man—"

"The evil is in his blood," said Robett Glover. "He is a bastard born of rape. A *Snow*, no matter what the boy king says."

"Was ever snow so black?" asked Lord Wyman. "Ramsay took Lord Hornwood's lands by forcibly wedding his widow, then locked her in a tower and forgot her. It is said she ate her own fingers in her extremity ... and the Lannister notion of king's justice is to reward her killer with Ned Stark's little girl."

"The Boltons have always been as cruel as they were cunning, but this one seems a beast in human skin," said Glover.

The Lord of White Harbor leaned forward. “The Freys are no better. They speak of wargs and skinchangers and assert that it was Robb Stark who slew my Wendel. The arrogance of it! They do not expect the north to believe their lies, not truly, but they think we must pretend to believe or die. Roose Bolton lies about his part in the Red Wedding, and his bastard lies about the fall of Winterfell. And yet so long as they held Wylis I had no choice but to eat all this excrement and praise the taste.”

“And now, my lord?” asked Davos.

He had hoped to hear Lord Wyman say, *And now I shall declare for King Stannis*, but instead the fat man smiled an odd, twinkling smile and said, “And now I have a wedding to attend. I am too fat to sit a horse, as any man with eyes can plainly see. As a boy I loved to ride, and as a young man I handled a mount well enough to win some small acclaim in the lists, but those days are done. My body has become a prison more dire than the Wolf’s Den. Even so, I must go to Winterfell. Roose Bolton wants me on my knees, and beneath the velvet courtesy he shows the iron mail. I shall go by barge and litter, attended by a hundred knights and my good friends from the Twins. The Freys came here by sea. They have no horses with them, so I shall present each of them with a palfrey as a guest gift. Do hosts still give guest gifts in the south?”

“Some do, my lord. On the day their guest departs.”

“Perhaps you understand, then.” Wyman Manderly lurched ponderously to his feet. “I have been building warships for more than a year. Some you saw, but there are as many more hidden up the White Knife. Even with the losses I have suffered, I still command more heavy horse than any other lord north of the Neck. My walls are strong, and my vaults are full of silver. Oldcastle and Widow’s Watch will take their lead from me. My bannermen include a dozen petty lords and a hundred landed knights. I can deliver King Stannis the allegiance of all the lands east of the White Knife, from Widow’s Watch and Ramsgate to the Sheepshead Hills and the headwaters of the Broken Branch. All this I pledge to do if you will meet my price.”

“I can bring your terms to the king, but—”

Lord Wyman cut him off. “If *you* will meet my price, I said. Not Stannis. It’s not a king I need but a smuggler.”

Robett Glover took up the tale. “We may never know all that happened at Winterfell, when Ser Rodrik Cassel tried to take the castle back from Theon Greyjoy’s ironmen. The Bastard of Bolton claims that Greyjoy murdered Ser Rodrik during a parley. Wex says no. Until he learns more letters we will never know half the truth ... but he came to us knowing *yes* and *no*, and those can go a long way once you find the right questions.”

“It was the Bastard who murdered Ser Rodrik and the men of Winterfell,” said Lord Wyman. “He slew Greyjoy’s ironmen as well. Wex saw men cut down trying to yield. When we asked how he escaped, he took a chunk of chalk and drew a tree with a face.”

Davos thought about that. “The old gods saved him?”

“After a fashion. He climbed the heart tree and hid himself amongst the leaves. Bolton’s men searched the godswood twice and killed the men they found there, but none thought to clamber up into the trees. Is that how it happened, Wex?”

The boy flipped up Glover’s dagger, caught it, nodded.

Glover said, “He stayed up in the tree a long time. He slept amongst the branches, not daring to descend. Finally he heard voices down beneath him.”

“The voices of the dead,” said Wyman Manderly.

Wex held up five fingers, tapped each one with the dagger, then folded four away and tapped the last again.

“Six of them,” asked Davos. “There were six.”

“Two of them Ned Stark’s murdered sons.”

“How could a mute tell you that?”

“With chalk. He drew two boys ... and two wolves.”

“The lad is ironborn, so he thought it best not to show himself,” said Glover. “He listened. The six did not linger long amongst the ruins of Winterfell. Four went one way, two another. Wex stole after the two, a woman and a boy. He must have stayed downwind, so the wolf would not catch his scent.”

“He knows where they went,” Lord Wyman said.

Davos understood. “You want the boy.”

“Roose Bolton has Lord Eddard’s daughter. To thwart him White Harbor must have Ned’s son ... and the direwolf. The wolf will prove the boy is who we say he is, should the Dreadfort attempt to deny him. That is my price, Lord Davos. Smuggle me back my liege lord, and I will take Stannis Baratheon as my king.”

Old instinct made Davos Seaworth reach for his throat. His fingerbones had been his luck, and somehow he felt he would have need of luck to do what Wyman Manderly was asking of him. The bones were gone, though, so he said, “You have better men than me in your service. Knights and lords and maesters. Why would you need a smuggler? You have ships.”

“Ships,” Lord Wyman agreed, “but my crews are rivermen, or fisherfolk who have never sailed beyond the Bite. For this I must have a man who’s sailed in darker waters and knows how to slip past dangers, unseen and unmolested.”

“Where is the boy?” Somehow Davos knew he would not like the answer. “Where is it you want me to go, my lord?”

Robett Glover said, “Wex. Show him.”

The mute flipped the dagger, caught it, then flung it end over end at the sheepskin map that adorned Lord Wyman’s wall. It struck quivering. Then he grinned.

For half a heartbeat Davos considered asking Wyman Manderly to send him back to the Wolf's Den, to Ser Bartimus with his tales and Garth with his lethal ladies. In the Den even prisoners ate porridge in the morning. But there were other places in this world where men were known to break their fast on human flesh.