

THEON

One moment he was asleep; the next, awake.

Kyra nestled against him, one arm draped lightly over his, her breasts brushing his back. He could hear her breathing, soft and steady. The sheet was tangled about them. It was the black of night. The bedchamber was dark and still.

What is it? Did I hear something? Someone?

Wind sighed faintly against the shutters. Somewhere, far off, he heard the yowl of a cat in heat. Nothing else. *Sleep, Greyjoy*, he told himself. *The castle is quiet, and you have guards posted. At your door, at the gates, on the armory.*

He might have put it down to a bad dream, but he did not remember dreaming. Kyra had worn him out. Until Theon had sent for her, she had lived all of her eighteen years in the winter town without ever setting foot inside the walls of the castle. She came to him wet and eager and lithe as a weasel, and there had been a certain undeniable spice to fucking a common tavern wench in Lord Eddard Stark's own bed.

She murmured sleepily as Theon slid out from under her arm and got to his feet. A few embers still smoldered in the hearth. Wex slept on the floor at the foot of the bed, rolled up inside his cloak and dead to the world. Nothing moved. Theon crossed to the window and threw open the shutters. Night touched him with cold fingers, and gooseprickles rose on his bare skin. He leaned against the stone sill and looked out on dark towers, empty yards, black sky, and more stars than a man could ever count if he lived to be a hundred. A half-moon floated above the Bell Tower and cast its reflection on the roof of the glass gardens. He heard no alarms, no voices, not so much as a footfall.

All's well, Greyjoy. Hear the quiet? You ought to be drunk with joy. You took Winterfell with fewer than thirty men, a feat to sing of. Theon started back to bed. He'd roll Kyra on her back and fuck her again, that ought to

banish these phantoms. Her gasps and giggles would make a welcome respite from this silence.

He stopped. He had grown so used to the howling of the direwolves that he scarcely heard it anymore... but some part of him, some hunter's instinct, heard its absence.

Urzen stood outside his door, a sinewy man with a round shield slung over his back. "The wolves are quiet," Theon told him. "Go see what they're doing, and come straight back." The thought of the direwolves running loose gave him a queasy feeling. He remembered the day in the wolfswood when the wildlings had attacked Bran. Summer and Grey Wind had torn them to pieces.

When he prodded Wex with the toe of his boot, the boy sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Make certain Bran Stark and his little brother are in their beds, and be quick about it."

"M'lord?" Kyra called sleepily.

"Go back to sleep, this does not concern you." Theon poured himself a cup of wine and drank it down. All the time he was listening, hoping to hear a howl. *Too few men*, he thought sourly. *I have too few men. If Asha does not come...*

Wex returned the quickest, shaking his head side to side. Cursing, Theon found his tunic and breeches on the floor where he had dropped them in his haste to get at Kyra. Over the tunic he donned a jerkin of iron-studded leather, and he belted a longsword and dagger at his waist. His hair was wild as the wood, but he had larger concerns.

By then Urzen was back. "The wolves be gone."

Theon told himself he must be as cold and deliberate as Lord Eddard. "Rouse the castle," he said. "Herd them out into the yard, everyone, we'll see who's missing. And have Lorren make a round of the gates. Wex, with me."

He wondered if Stygg had reached Deepwood Motte yet. The man was not as skilled a rider as he claimed—none of the ironmen were much good in the saddle—but there'd been time enough. Asha might well be on her

way. *And if she learns that I have lost the Starks...* It did not bear thinking about.

Bran's bedchamber was empty, as was Rickon's half a turn below. Theon cursed himself. He should have kept a guard on them, but he'd deemed it more important to have men walking the walls and protecting the gates than to nursemaid a couple of children, one a cripple.

Outside he heard sobbing as the castle folk were pulled from their beds and driven into the yard. *I'll give them reason to sob. I've used them gently, and this is how they repay me.* He'd even had two of his own men whipped bloody for raping that kennel girl, to show them he meant to be just. *They still blame me for the rape, though. And the rest.* He deemed that unfair. Mikken had killed himself with his mouth, just as Benfred had. As for Chayle, he had to give *someone* to the Drowned God, his men expected it. "I bear you no ill will," he'd told the septon before they threw him down the well, "but you and your gods have no place here now." You'd think the others might be grateful he hadn't chosen one of them, but no. He wondered how many of them were part of this plot against him.

Urzen returned with Black Lorren. "The Hunter's Gate," Lorren said. "Best come see."

The Hunter's Gate was conveniently sited close to the kennels and kitchens. It opened directly on fields and forests, allowing riders to come and go without first passing through the winter town, and so was favored by hunting parties. "Who had the guard here?" Theon demanded.

"Drennan and Squint."

Drennan was one of the men who'd raped Palla. "If they've let the boys escape, I'll have more than a little skin off their back this time, I swear it."

"No need for that," Black Lorren said curtly.

Nor was there. They found Squint floating facedown in the moat, his entrails drifting behind him like a nest of pale snakes. Drennan lay half naked in the gatehouse, in the snug room where the drawbridge was worked. His throat had been opened ear to ear. A ragged tunic concealed the half-healed scars on his back, but his boots were scattered amidst the

rushes, and his breeches tangled about his feet. There was cheese on a small table near the door, beside an empty flagon. And two cups.

Theon picked one up and sniffed at the dregs of wine in the bottom. “Squint was up on the wallwalk, no?”

“Aye,” said Lorren.

Theon flung the cup into the hearth. “I’d say Drennan was pulling down his breeches to stick it in the woman when she stuck it in him. His own cheese knife, by the look of it. Someone find a pike and fish the other fool out of the moat.”

The other fool was in a deal worse shape than Drennan. When Black Lorren drew him out of the water, they saw that one of his arms had been wrenched off at the elbow, half of his neck was missing, and there was a ragged hole where his navel and groin once had been. The pike tore through his bowels as Lorren was pulling him in. The stench was awful.

“The direwolves,” Theon said. “Both of them, at a guess.” Disgusted, he walked back to the drawbridge. Winterfell was encircled by two massive granite walls, with a wide moat between them. The outer wall stood eighty feet high, the inner more than a hundred. Lacking men, Theon had been forced to abandon the outer defenses and post his guards along the higher inner walls. He dared not risk having them on the wrong side of the moat should the castle rise against him.

There had to be two or more, he decided. While the woman was entertaining Drennan, the others freed the wolves.

Theon called for a torch and led them up the steps to the wallwalk. He swept the flame low before him, looking for... *there*. On the inside of the rampart and in the wide crenel between two upthrust merlons. “Blood,” he announced, “clumsily mopped up. At a guess, the woman killed Drennan and lowered the drawbridge. Squint heard the clank of chains, came to have a look, and got this far. They pushed the corpse through the crenel into the moat so he wouldn’t be found by another sentry.”

Urzen peered along the walls. “The other watch turrets are not far. I see torches burning—”

“Torches, but no guards,” Theon said testily. “Winterfell has more turrets than I have men.”

“Four guards at the main gate,” said Black Lorren, “and five walking the walls beside Squint.”

Urzen said, “If he had sounded his horn—”

I am served by fools. “Try and imagine it was you up here, Urzen. It’s dark and cold. You have been walking sentry for hours, looking forward to the end of your watch. Then you hear a noise and move toward the gate, and suddenly you see eyes at the top of the stair, glowing green and gold in the torchlight. Two shadows come rushing toward you faster than you can believe. You catch a glimpse of teeth, start to level your spear, and they slam into you and open your belly, tearing through leather as if it were cheesecloth.” He gave Urzen a hard shove. “And now you’re down on your back, your guts are spilling out, and one of them has his teeth around your neck.” Theon grabbed the man’s scrawny throat, tightened his fingers, and smiled. “Tell me, at what moment during all of this do you stop to *blow your fucking horn?*” He shoved Urzen away roughly, sending him stumbling back against a merlon. The man rubbed his throat. *I should have had those beasts put down the day we took the castle*, he thought angrily. *I’d seen them kill, I knew how dangerous they were.*

“We must go after them,” Black Lorren said.

“Not in the dark.” Theon did not relish the idea of chasing direwolves through the wood by night; the hunters could easily become the hunted. “We’ll wait for daylight. Until then, I had best go speak with my loyal subjects.”

Down in the yard, a uneasy crowd of men, women, and children had been pushed up against the wall. Many had not been given time to dress; they covered themselves with woolen blankets, or huddled naked under cloaks or bedrobes. A dozen ironmen hemmed them in, torches in one hand and weapons in the other. The wind was gusting, and the flickering orange light reflected dully off steel helms, thick beards, and unsmiling eyes.

Theon walked up and down before the prisoners, studying the faces. They *all* looked guilty to him. “How many are missing?”

“Six.” Reek stepped up behind him, smelling of soap, his long hair moving in the wind. “Both Starks, that bog boy and his sister, the halfwit from the stables, and your wildling woman.”

Osha. He had suspected her from the moment he saw that second cup. *I should have known better than to trust that one. She’s as unnatural as Asha. Even their names sound alike.*

“Has anyone had a look at the stables?”

“Aggar says no horses are missing.”

“Dancer is still in his stall?”

“Dancer?” Reek frowned. “Aggar says the horses are all there. Only the halfwit is missing.”

They’re afoot, then. That was the best news he’d heard since he woke. Bran would be riding in his basket on Hodor’s back, no doubt. Osha would need to carry Rickon; his little legs wouldn’t take him far on their own. Theon was confident that he’d soon have them back in his hands. “Bran and Rickon have fled,” he told the castle folk, watching their eyes. “Who knows where they’ve gone?” No one answered. “They could not have escaped without help,” Theon went on. “Without food, clothing, weapons.” He had locked away every sword and axe in Winterfell, but no doubt some had been hidden from him. “I’ll have the names of all those who aided them. All those who turned a blind eye.” The only sound was the wind. “Come first light, I mean to bring them back.” He hooked his thumbs through his swordbelt. “I need huntsmen. Who wants a nice warm wolfskin to see them through the winter? Gage?” The cook had always greeted him cheerfully when he returned from the hunt, to ask whether he’d brought anything choice for the table, but he had nothing to say now. Theon walked back the way he had come, searching their faces for the least sign of guilty knowledge. “The wild is no place for a cripple. And Rickon, young as he is, how long will he last out there? Nan, think how frightened he must be.” The old woman had nattered at him for ten years, telling her endless stories, but now she gaped at him as if he were some stranger. “I might have killed every man of you and given your women to my soldiers for their pleasure, but instead I protected you. Is this the thanks you offer?” Joseth who’d

groomed his horses, Farlen who'd taught him all he knew of hounds, Barth the brewer's wife who'd been his first—not one of them would meet his eyes. *They hate me*, he realized.

Reek stepped close. “Strip off their skins,” he urged, his thick lips glistening. “Lord Bolton, he used to say a naked man has few secrets, but a flayed man's got none.”

The flayed man was the sigil of House Bolton, Theon knew; ages past, certain of their lords had gone so far as to cloak themselves in the skins of dead enemies. A number of Starks had ended thus. Supposedly all that had stopped a thousand years ago, when the Boltons had bent their knees to Winterfell. *Or so they say, but old ways die hard, as well I know.*

“There will be no flaying in the north so long as I rule in Winterfell,” Theon said loudly. *I am your only protection against the likes of him*, he wanted to scream. He could not be that blatant, but perhaps some were clever enough to take the lesson.

The sky was greying over the castle walls. Dawn could not be far off. “Joseth, saddle Smiler and a horse for yourself. Murch, Gariss, Poxym, you'll come as well.” Murch and Gariss were the best huntsmen in the castle, and Tym was a fine bowman. “Aggar, Rednose, Gelmarr, Reek, Wex.” He needed his own to watch his back. “Farlen, I'll want hounds, and you to handle them.”

The grizzled kennelmaster crossed his arms. “And why would I care to hunt down my own trueborn lords, and babes at that?”

Theon moved close. “I am your trueborn lord now, and the man who keeps Palla safe.”

He saw the defiance die in Farlen's eyes. “Aye, m'lord.”

Stepping back, Theon glanced about to see who else he might add. “Maester Luwin,” he announced.

“I know nothing of hunting.”

No, but I don't trust you in the castle in my absence. “Then it's past time you learned.”

“Let me come too. I want that wolfskin cloak.” A boy stepped forward, no older than Bran. It took Theon a moment to remember him. “I’ve hunted lots of times before,” Walder Frey said. “Red deer and elk, and even boar.”

His cousin laughed at him. “He rode on a boar hunt with his father, but they never let him near the boar.”

Theon look at the boy doubtfully. “Come if you like, but if you can’t keep up, don’t think that I’ll nurse you along.” He turned back to Black Lorren. “Winterfell is yours in my absence. If we do not return, do with it as you will.” *That bloody well ought to have them praying for my success.*

They assembled by the Hunter’s Gate as the first pale rays of the sun brushed the top of the Bell Tower, their breath frosting in the cold morning air. Gelmarr had equipped himself with a longaxe whose reach would allow him to strike before the wolves were on him. The blade was heavy enough to kill with a single blow. Aggar wore steel greaves. Reek arrived carrying a boar spear and an overstuffed washerwoman’s sack bulging with god knows what. Theon had his bow; he needed nothing else. Once he had saved Bran’s life with an arrow. He hoped he would not need to take it with another, but if it came to that, he would.

Eleven men, two boys, and a dozen dogs crossed the moat. Beyond the outer wall, the tracks were plain to read in the soft ground; the pawprints of the wolves, Hodor’s heavy tread, the shallower marks left by the feet of the two Reeds. Once under the trees, the stony ground and fallen leaves made the trail harder to see, but by then Farlen’s red bitch had the scent. The rest of the dogs were close behind, the hounds sniffing and barking, a pair of monstrous mastiffs bringing up the rear. Their size and ferocity might make the difference against a cornered direwolf.

He’d have guessed that Osha might run south to Ser Rodrik, but the trail led north by northwest, into the very heart of the wolfswood. Theon did not like that one bit. It would be a bitter irony if the Starks made for Deepwood Motte and delivered themselves right into Asha’s hands. *I’d sooner have them dead,* he thought bitterly. *It is better to be seen as cruel than foolish.*

Wisps of pale mist threaded between the trees. Sentinels and soldier pines grew thick about here, and there was nothing as dark and gloomy as an evergreen forest. The ground was uneven, and the fallen needles disguised the softness of the turf and made the footing treacherous for the horses, so they had to go slowly. *Not as slowly as a man carrying a cripple, though, or a bony harriidan with a four-year-old on her back.* He told himself to be patient. He'd have them before the day was out.

Maester Luwin trotted up to him as they were following a game trail along the lip of a ravine. "Thus far hunting seems indistinguishable from riding through the woods, my lord."

Theon smiled. "There are similarities. But with hunting, there's blood at the end."

"Must it be so? This flight was great folly, but will you not be merciful? These are your foster brothers we seek."

"No Stark but Robb was ever brotherly toward me, but Bran and Rickon have more value to me living than dead."

"The same is true of the Reeds. Moat Cailin sits on the edge of the bogs. Lord Howland can make your uncle's occupation a visit to hell if he chooses, but so long as you hold his heirs he must stay his hand."

Theon had not considered that. In truth, he had scarcely considered the mudmen at all, beyond eyeing Meera once or twice and wondering if she was still a maiden. "You may be right. We will spare them if we can."

"And Hodor too, I hope. The boy is simple, you know that. He does as he is told. How many times has he groomed your horse, soaped your saddle, scoured your mail?"

Hodor was nothing to him. "if he does not fight us, we will let him live." Theon pointed a finger. "But say one word about sparing the wildling, and you can die with her. She swore me an oath, and pissed on it."

The maester inclined his head. "I make no apologies for oathbreakers. Do what you must. I thank you for your mercy."

Mercy, thought Theon as Luwin dropped back. There's a bloody trap. Too much and they call you weak, too little and you're monstrous. Yet the

maester had given him good counsel, he knew. His father thought only in terms of conquest, but what good was it to take a kingdom if you could not hold it? Force and fear could carry you only so far. A pity Ned Stark had taken his daughters south; otherwise Theon could have tightened his grip on Winterfell by marrying one of them. Sansa was a pretty little thing too, and by now likely even ripe for bedding. But she was a thousand leagues away, in the clutches of the Lannisters. A shame.

The wood grew ever wilder. The pines and sentinels gave way to huge dark oaks. Tangles of hawthorn concealed treacherous gullies and cuts. Stony hills rose and fell. They passed a crofter's cottage, deserted and overgrown, and skirted a flooded quarry where the still water had a sheen as grey as steel. When the dogs began to bay, Theon figured the fugitives were near at hand. He spurred Smiler and followed at a trot, but what he found was only the carcass of a young elk... or what remained of it.

He dismounted for a closer look. The kill was still fresh, and plainly the work of wolves. The dogs sniffed round it eagerly, and one of the mastiffs buried his teeth in a haunch until Farlen shouted him off. *No part of this animal has been butchered*, Theon realized. *The wolves ate, but not the men*. Even if Osha did not want to risk a fire, she ought to have cut them a few steaks. It made no sense to leave so much good meat to rot. "Farlen, are you certain we're on the right trail?" he demanded. "Could your dogs be chasing the wrong wolves?"

"My bitch knows the smell of Summer and Shaggy well enough."

"I hope so. For your sake."

Less than an hour later, the trail led down a slope toward a muddy brook swollen by the recent rains. It was there the dogs lost the scent. Farlen and Wex waded across with the hounds and came back shaking their heads while the animals ranged up and down the far bank, sniffing. "They went in here, m'lord, but I can't see where they come out," the kennelmaster said.

Theon dismounted and knelt beside the stream. He dipped a hand in it. The water was cold. "They won't have stayed long in this," he said. "Take half the dogs downstream, I'll go up—"

Wex clapped his hands together loudly.

“What is it?” Theon said.

The mute boy pointed.

The ground near the water was sodden and muddy. The tracks the wolves had left were plain enough. “Pawprints, yes. So?”

Wex drove his heel into the mud, and pivoted his foot this way and that. It left a deep gouge.

Joseth understood. “A man the size of Hodor ought to have left a deep print in this mud,” he said. “More so with the weight of a boy on his back. Yet the only boot prints here are our own. See for yourself.”

Appalled, Theon saw it was true. The wolves had gone into the turgid brown water alone. “Osha must have turned aside back of us. Before the elk, most likely. She sent the wolves on by themselves, hoping we’d chase after them.” He rounded on his huntsmen. “If you two have played me false —”

“There’s been only the one trail, my lord, I swear it,” said Gariss defensively. “And the direwolves would never have parted from them boys. Not for long.”

That’s so, Theon thought. Summer and Shaggydog might have gone off to hunt, but soon or late they would return to Bran and Rickon. “Gariss, Murch, take four dogs and double back, find where we lost them. Aggar, you watch them, I’ll have no trickery. Farlen and I will follow the direwolves. Give a blast on the horn when you pick up the trail. Two blasts if you catch sight of the beasts themselves. Once we find where they went, they’ll lead us back to their masters.”

He took Wex, the Frey boy, and Gynir Rednose to search upstream. He and Wex rode on one side of the brook, Rednose and Walder Frey on the other, each with a pair of hounds. The wolves might have come out on either bank. Theon kept an eye out for tracks, spoor, broken branches, any hint as to where the direwolves might have left the water. He spied the prints of deer, elk, and badger easily enough. Wex surprised a vixen drinking at the stream, and Walder flushed three rabbits from the

underbrush and managed to put an arrow in one. They saw the claw marks where a bear had shredded the bark of a tall birch. But of the direwolves there was no sign.

A little farther, Theon told himself. *Past that oak, over that rise, past the next bend of the stream, we'll find something there.* He pressed on long after he knew he should turn back, a growing sense of anxiety gnawing at his belly. It was midday when he wrenched Smiler's head round in disgust and gave up.

Somehow Osha and the wretched boys were eluding him. It should not have been possible, not on foot, burdened with a cripple and a young child. Every passing hour increased the likelihood that they would make good their escape. *If they reach a village...* The people of the north would never deny Ned Stark's sons, Robb's brothers. They'd have mounts to speed them on their way, food. Men would fight for the honor of protecting them. The whole bloody north would rally around them.

The wolves went downstream, that's all. He clung to that thought. *That red bitch will sniff where they came out of the water and we'll be after them again.*

But when they joined up with Farlen's party, one look at the kennelmaster's face smashed all of Theon's hopes to shards. "The only thing those dogs are fit for is a bear baiting," he said angrily. "Would that I had a bear."

"The dogs are not at fault." Farlen knelt between a mastiff and his precious red bitch, a hand on each. "Running water don't hold no scents, m'lord."

"The wolves had to come out of the stream *somewhere*."

"No doubt they did. Upstream or down. We keep on, we'll find the place, but which way?"

"I never knew a wolf to run up a streambed for miles," said Reek. "A man might. If he knew he was being hunted, he might. But a wolf?"

Yet Theon wondered. These beasts were not as other wolves. *I should have skinned the cursed things.*

It was the same tale all over again when they rejoined Gariss, Murch, and Aggar. The huntsmen had retraced their steps halfway to Winterfell without finding any sign of where the Starks might have parted company with the direwolves. Farlen's hounds seemed as frustrated as their masters, sniffing forlornly at trees and rocks and snapping irritably at each other.

Theon dared not admit defeat. "We'll return to the brook. Search again. This time we'll go as far as we must."

"We won't find them," the Frey boy said suddenly. "Not so long as the frog eaters are with them. Mudmen are sneaks, they won't fight like decent folks, they skulk and use poison arrows, You never see them, but they see you. Those who go into the bogs after them get lost and never come out. Their houses *move*, even the castles like Greywater Watch." He glanced nervously at greenery that encircled them on all sides. "They might be out there right now, listening to everything we say."

Farlen laughed to show what he thought of that notion. "My dogs would smell anything in them bushes. Be all over them before you could break wind, boy."

"Frog eaters don't smell like men," Frey insisted. "They have a boggy stink, like frogs and trees and scummy water. Moss grows under their arms in place of hair, and they can live with nothing to eat but mud and breathe swamp water."

Theon was about to tell him what he ought to do with his wet nurse's fable when Maester Luwin spoke up. "The histories say the crannogmen grew close to the children of the forest in the days when the greenseers tried to bring the hammer of the waters down upon the Neck. It may be that they have secret knowledge."

Suddenly the wood seemed a deal darker than it had a moment before, as if a cloud had passed before the sun. It was one thing to have some fool boy spouting folly, but maesters were supposed to be wise. "The only children that concern me are Bran and Rickon," Theon said. "Back to the stream. Now."

For a moment he did not think they were going to obey, but in the end old habit asserted itself. They followed sullenly, but they followed. The

Frey boy was as jumpy as those rabbits he'd flushed earlier. Theon put men on either bank and followed the current. They rode for miles, going slow and careful, dismounting to lead the horses over treacherous ground, letting the good-for-bear-bait hounds sniff at every bush. Where a fallen tree dammed the flow, the hunters were forced to loop around a deep green pool, but if the direwolves had done the same they'd left neither print nor spoor. The beasts had taken to swimming, it seemed. *When I catch them, they'll have all the swimming they can stomach. I'll give them both to the Drowned God.*

When the woods began to darken, Theon Greyjoy knew he was beaten. Either the crannogmen *did* know the magic of the children of the forest, or else Osha had deceived them with some wildling trick. He made them press on through the dusk, but when the last light faded Joseth finally worked up the courage to say, "This is fruitless, my lord. We will lame a horse, break a leg."

"Joseth has the right of it," said Maester Luwin. "Groping through the woods by torchlight will avail us nothing."

Theon could taste bile at the back of his throat, and his stomach was a nest of snakes twining and snapping at each other. If he crept back to Winterfell empty-handed, he might as well dress in motley henceforth and wear a pointed hat; the whole north would know him for a fool. *And when my father hears, and Asha...*

"M'lord prince." Reek urged his horse near. "Might be them Starks never came this way. If I was them, I would have gone north and east, maybe. To the Umbers. Good Stark men, they are. But their lands are a long way. The boys will shelter someplace nearer. Might be I know where."

Theon looked at him suspiciously. "Tell me."

"You know that old mill, sitting lonely on the Acorn Water? We stopped there when I was being dragged to Winterfell a captive. The miller's wife sold us hay for our horses while that old knight clucked over her brats. Might be the Starks are hiding there."

Theon knew the mill. He had even tumbled the miller's wife a time or two. There was nothing special about it, or her. "Why there? There are a

dozen villages and holdfasts just as close.”

Amusement shone in those pale eyes. “Why? Now that’s past knowing. But they’re there, I have a feeling.”

He was growing sick of the man’s sly answers. *His lips look like two worms fucking.* “What are you saying? If you’ve kept some knowledge from me—”

“M’lord prince?” Reek dismounted, and beckoned Theon to do the same. When they were both afoot, he pulled open the cloth sack he’d fetched from Winterfell. “Have a look here.”

It was growing hard to see. Theon thrust his hand into the sack impatiently, groping amongst soft fur and rough scratchy wool. A sharp point pricked his skin, and his fingers closed around something cold and hard. He drew out a wolf’s-head brooch, silver and jet. Understanding came suddenly. His hand closed into a fist. “Gelmarr,” he said, wondering whom he could trust. *None of them.* “Aggar. Rednose. With us. The rest of you may return to Winterfell with the hounds. I’ll have no further need of them. I know where Bran and Rickon are hiding now.”

“Prince Theon,” Maester Luwin entreated, “you will remember your promise? Mercy, you said.”

“Mercy was for this morning,” said Theon. *It is better to be feared than laughed at.* “Before they made me angry.”