

# THE TURNCLOAK

The first flakes came drifting down as the sun was setting in the west. By nightfall snow was coming down so heavily that the moon rose behind a white curtain, unseen.

“The gods of the north have unleashed their wrath on Lord Stannis,” Roose Bolton announced come morning as men gathered in Winterfell’s Great Hall to break their fast. “He is a stranger here, and the old gods will not suffer him to live.”

His men roared their approval, banging their fists on the long plank tables. Winterfell might be ruined, but its granite walls would still keep the worst of the wind and weather at bay. They were well stocked with food and drink; they had fires to warm them when off duty, a place to dry their clothes, snug corners to lie down and sleep. Lord Bolton had laid by enough wood to keep the fires fed for half a year, so the Great Hall was always warm and cozy. Stannis had none of that.

Theon Greyjoy did not join the uproar. Neither did the men of House Frey, he did not fail to note. *They are strangers here as well*, he thought, watching Ser Aenys Frey and his half-brother Ser Hosteen. Born and bred in the riverlands, the Freys had never seen a snow like this. *The north has already claimed three of their blood*, Theon thought, recalling the men that Ramsay had searched for fruitlessly, lost between White Harbor and Barrowton.

On the dais, Lord Wyman Manderly sat between a pair of his White Harbor knights, spooning porridge into his fat face. He did not seem to be enjoying it near as much as he had the pork pies at the wedding. Elsewhere one-armed Harwood Stout talked quietly with the cadaverous Whoresbane Umber.

Theon queued up with the other men for porridge, ladled into wooden bowls from a row of copper kettles. The lords and knights had milk and honey and even a bit of butter to sweeten their portions, he saw, but none of

that would be offered him. His reign as prince of Winterfell had been a brief one. He had played his part in the mummer's show, giving the feigned Arya to be wed, and now he was of no further use to Roose Bolton.

"First winter I remember, the snows came over my head," said a Hornwood man in the queue ahead of him.

"Aye, but you were only three foot tall at the time," a rider from the Rills replied.

Last night, unable to sleep, Theon had found himself brooding on escape, of slipping away unseen whilst Ramsay and his lord father had their attention elsewhere. Every gate was closed and barred and heavily guarded, though; no one was allowed to enter or depart the castle without Lord Bolton's leave. Even if he found some secret way out, Theon would not have trusted it. He had not forgotten Kyra and her keys. And if he did get out, where would he go? His father was dead, and his uncles had no use for him. Pyke was lost to him. The nearest thing to a home that remained to him was here, amongst the bones of Winterfell.

*A ruined man, a ruined castle. This is my place.*

He was still waiting for his porridge when Ramsay swept into the hall with his Bastard's Boys, shouting for music. Abel rubbed the sleep from his eyes, took up his lute, and launched into "The Dornishman's Wife," whilst one of his washerwomen beat time on her drum. The singer changed the words, though. Instead of tasting a Dornishman's wife, he sang of tasting a northman's daughter.

*He could lose his tongue for that,* Theon thought, as his bowl was being filled. *He is only a singer. Lord Ramsay could flay the skin off both his hands, and no one would say a word.* But Lord Bolton smiled at the lyric and Ramsay laughed aloud. Then others knew that it was safe to laugh as well. Yellow Dick found the song so funny that wine snorted out his nose.

Lady Arya was not there to share the merriment. She had not been seen outside her chambers since her wedding night. Sour Alyn had been saying that Ramsay kept his bride naked and chained to a bedpost, but Theon knew

that was only talk. There were no chains, at least none that men could see. Just a pair of guards outside the bedchamber, to keep the girl from wandering. *And she is only naked when she bathes.*

That she did most every night, though. Lord Ramsay wanted his wife clean. “She has no handmaids, poor thing,” he had said to Theon. “That leaves you, Reek. Should I put you in a dress?” He laughed. “Perhaps if you beg it of me. Just now, it will suffice for you to be her bath maid. I won’t have her smelling like you.” So whenever Ramsay had an itch to bed his wife, it fell to Theon to borrow some servingwomen from Lady Walda or Lady Dustin and fetch hot water from the kitchens. Though Arya never spoke to any of them, they could not fail to see her bruises. *It is her own fault. She has not pleased him.* “Just be Arya,” he told the girl once, as he helped her into the water. “Lord Ramsay does not want to hurt you. He only hurts us when we ... when we forget. He never cut me without cause.”

“Theon ...” she whispered, weeping. “*Reek.*” He grabbed her arm and shook her. “In here I’m Reek. You have to *remember*, Arya.” But the girl was no true Stark, only a steward’s whelp. *Jeyne, her name is Jeyne. She should not look to me for rescue.* Theon Greyjoy might have tried to help her, once. But Theon had been ironborn, and a braver man than Reek. *Reek, Reek, it rhymes with weak.*

Ramsay had a new plaything to amuse him, one with teats and a cunny ... but soon Jeyne’s tears would lose their savor, and Ramsay would want his Reek again. *He will flay me inch by inch. When my fingers are gone he will take my hands. After my toes, my feet. But only when I beg for it, when the pain grows so bad that I plead for him to give me some relief.* There would be no hot baths for Reek. He would roll in shit again, forbidden to wash. The clothes he wore would turn to rags, foul and stinking, and he would be made to wear them till they rotted. The best he could hope for was to be returned to the kennels with Ramsay’s girls for company. *Kyra*, he remembered. *The new bitch he calls Kyra.*

He took his bowl to the back of the hall and found a place on an empty bench, yards away from the nearest torch. Day or night, the benches below the salt were never less than half-full with men drinking, dicing, talking, or sleeping in their clothes in quiet corners. Their serjeants would kick them

awake when it came their turn to shrug back into their cloaks and walk the walls. But no man of them would welcome the company of Theon Turncloak, nor did he have much taste for theirs.

The gruel was grey and watery, and he pushed it away after his third spoonful and let it congeal in the bowl. At the next table, men were arguing about the storm and wondering aloud how long the snow would fall. "All day and all night, might be even longer," insisted one big, black-bearded archer with a Cerwyn axe sewn on his breast. A few of the older men spoke of other snowstorms and insisted this was no more than a light dusting compared to what they'd seen in the winters of their youth. The riverlanders were aghast. *They have no love of snow and cold, these south-ron swords.* Men entering the hall huddled by the fires or clapped their hands together over glowing braziers as their cloaks hung dripping from pegs inside the door.

The air was thick and smoky and a crust had formed atop his porridge when a woman's voice behind him said, "Theon Greyjoy."

*My name is Reek*, he almost said. "What do you want?"

She sat down next to him, straddling the bench, and pushed a wild mop of red-brown hair out of her eyes. "Why do you eat alone, m'lord? Come, rise, join the dance."

He went back to his porridge. "I don't dance." The Prince of Winterfell had been a graceful dancer, but Reek with his missing toes would be grotesque. "Leave me be. I have no coin."

The woman smiled crookedly. "Do you take me for a whore?" She was one of the singer's washerwomen, the tall skinny one, too lean and leathery to be called pretty ... though there was a time when Theon would have tumbled her all the same, to see how it felt to have those long legs wrapped around him. "What good would coin do me here? What would I buy with it, some snow?" She laughed. "You could pay me with a smile. I've never seen you smile, not even during your sister's wedding feast."

“Lady Arya is not my sister.” *I do not smile either*, he might have told her. *Ramsay hated my smiles, so he took a hammer to my teeth. I can hardly eat.* “She never was my sister.”

“A pretty maid, though.”

*I was never beautiful like Sansa, but they all said I was pretty.* Jeyne’s words seemed to echo in his head, to the beat of the drums two of Abel’s other girls were pounding. Another one had pulled Little Walder Frey up onto the table to teach him how to dance. All the men were laughing. “Leave me be,” said Theon.

“Am I not to m’lord’s taste? I could send Myrtle to you if you want. Or Holly, might be you’d like her better. All the men like Holly. They’re not my sisters neither, but they’re sweet.” The woman leaned close. Her breath smelled of wine. “If you have no smile for me, tell me how you captured Winterfell. Abel will put it in a song, and you will live forever.”

“As a betrayer. As Theon Turncloak.”

“Why not Theon the Clever? It was a daring feat, the way we heard it. How many men did you have? A hundred? Fifty?”

*Fewer.* “It was madness.”

“Glorious madness. Stannis has five thousand, they say, but Abel claims ten times as many still could not breach these walls. So how did *you* get in, m’lord? Did you have some secret way?”

*I had ropes, Theon thought. I had grapnels. I had darkness on my side, and surprise. The castle was but lightly held, and I took them unawares.* But he said none of that. If Abel made a song about him, like as not Ramsay would prick his eardrums to make certain that he never heard it.

“You can trust me, m’lord. Abel does.” The washerwoman put her hand upon his own. His hands were gloved in wool and leather. Hers were bare, long-fingered, rough, with nails chewed to the quick. “You never asked my name. It’s Rowan.”

Theon wrenched away. This was a ploy, he knew it. *Ramsay sent her. She's another of his japes, like Kyra with the keys. A jolly jape, that's all. He wants me to run, so he can punish me.*

He wanted to hit her, to smash that mocking smile off her face. He wanted to kiss her, to fuck her right there on the table and make her cry his name. But he knew he dare not touch her, in anger or in lust. *Reek, Reek, my name is Reek. I must not forget my name.* He jerked to his feet and made his way wordlessly to the doors, limping on his maimed feet.

Outside the snow was falling still. Wet, heavy, silent, it had already begun to cover the footsteps left by the men coming and going from the hall. The drifts came almost to the top of his boots. *It will be deeper in the wolfswood ... and out on the kingsroad, where the wind is blowing, there will be no escape from it.* A battle was being fought in the yard; Ryswells pelting Barrowton boys with snowballs. Above, he could see some squires building snowmen along the battlements. They were arming them with spears and shields, putting iron halfhelms on their heads, and arraying them along the inner wall, a rank of snowy sentinels. “Lord Winter has joined us with his levies,” one of the sentries outside the Great Hall japed ... until he saw Theon’s face and realized who he was talking to. Then he turned his head and spat.

Beyond the tents the big destriers of the knights from White Harbor and the Twins were shivering in their horse lines. Ramsay had burned the stables when he sacked Winterfell, so his father had thrown up new ones twice as large as the old, to accommodate the warhorses and palfreys of his lords’ bannermen and knights. The rest of the horses were tethered in the wards. Hooded grooms moved amongst them, covering them with blankets to keep them warm.

Theon made his way deeper into the ruined parts of the castle. As he picked through the shattered stone that had once been Maester Luwin’s turret, ravens looked down from the gash in the wall above, muttering to one another. From time to time one would let out a raucous scream. He stood in the doorway of a bedchamber that had once been his own (ankle deep in snow that had blown in through a shattered window), visited the ruins of Mikken’s forge and Lady Catelyn’s sept. Beneath the Burned Tower, he

passed Rickard Ryswell nuzzling at the neck of another one of Abel's washerwomen, the plump one with the apple cheeks and pug nose. The girl was barefoot in the snow, bundled up in a fur cloak. He thought she might be naked underneath. When she saw him, she said something to Ryswell that made him laugh aloud.

Theon trudged away from them. There was a stair beyond the mews, seldom used; it was there his feet took him. The steps were steep and treacherous. He climbed carefully and found himself alone on the battlements of the inner wall, well away from the squires and their snowmen. No one had given him freedom of the castle, but no one had denied it to him either. He could go where he would within the walls.

Winterfell's inner wall was the older and taller of the two, its ancient grey crenellations rising one hundred feet high, with square towers at every corner. The outer wall, raised many centuries later, was twenty feet lower, but thicker and in better repair, boasting octagonal towers in place of square ones. Between the two walls was the moat, deep and wide ... and frozen. Drifts of snow had begun to creep across its icy surface. Snow was building up along the battlements too, filling the gaps between the merlons and putting pale, soft caps on every tower top.

Beyond the walls, as far as he could see, the world was turning white. The woods, the fields, the kingsroad—the snows were covering all of them beneath a pale soft mantle, burying the remnants of the winter town, hiding the blackened walls Ramsay's men had left behind when they put the houses to the torch. *The wounds Snow made, snow conceals*, but that was wrong. Ramsay was a Bolton now, not a Snow, never a Snow.

Farther off, the rutted kingsroad had vanished, lost amidst the fields and rolling hills, all one vast expanse of white. And still the snow was falling, drifting down in silence from a windless sky. *Stannis Baratheon is out there somewhere, freezing*. Would Lord Stannis try to take Winterfell by storm? *If he does, his cause is doomed*. The castle was too strong. Even with the moat frozen over, Winterfell's defenses remained formidable. Theon had captured the castle by stealth, sending his best men to scale the walls and swim the moat under the cover of darkness. The defenders had not even known they

were under attack until it was too late. No such subterfuge was possible for Stannis.

He might prefer to cut the castle off from the outside world and starve out its defenders. Winterfell's storerooms and cellar vaults were empty. A long supply train had come with Bolton and his friends of Frey up through the Neck, Lady Dustin had brought food and fodder from Barrowton, and Lord Manderly had arrived well provisioned from White Harbor ... but the host was large. With so many mouths to feed, their stores could not last for long. *Lord Stannis and his men will be just as hungry, though. And cold and footsore as well, in no condition for a fight ... but the storm will make them desperate to get inside the castle.*

Snow was falling on the godswood too, melting when it touched the ground. Beneath the white-cloaked trees the earth had turned to mud. Tendrils of mist hung in the air like ghostly ribbons. *Why did I come here? These are not my gods. This is not my place.* The heart tree stood before him, a pale giant with a carved face and leaves like bloody hands.

A thin film of ice covered the surface of the pool beneath the weir-wood. Theon sank to his knees beside it. "Please," he murmured through his broken teeth, "I never meant ..." The words caught in his throat. "Save me," he finally managed. "Give me ..." *What? Strength? Courage? Mercy?* Snow fell around him, pale and silent, keeping its own counsel. The only sound was a faint soft sobbing. *Jeyne*, he thought. *It is her, sobbing in her bridal bed. Who else could it be?* Gods do not weep. *Or do they?*

The sound was too painful to endure. Theon grabbed hold of a branch and pulled himself back to his feet, knocked the snow off his legs, and limped back toward the lights. *There are ghosts in Winterfell*, he thought, *and I am one of them.*

More snowmen had risen in the yard by the time Theon Greyjoy made his way back. To command the snowy sentinels on the walls, the squires had erected a dozen snowy lords. One was plainly meant to be Lord Manderly; it was the fattest snowman that Theon had ever seen. The one-armed lord could only be Harwood Stout, the snow lady Barbrey Dustin. And the one



closest to the door with the beard made of icicles had to be old Whoresbane Umber.

Inside, the cooks were ladling out beef-and-barley stew, thick with carrots and onions, served in trenchers hollowed from loaves of yesterday's bread. Scraps were thrown onto the floor to be gobbled up by Ramsay's girls and the other dogs.

The girls were glad to see him. They knew him by his smell. Red Jeyne loped over to lick at his hand, and Helicent slipped under the table and curled up by his feet, gnawing at a bone. They were good dogs. It was easy to forget that every one was named for a girl that Ramsay had hunted and killed.

Weary as he was, Theon had appetite enough to eat a little stew, washed down with ale. By then the hall had grown raucous. Two of Roose Bolton's scouts had come straggling back through the Hunter's Gate to report that Lord Stannis's advance had slowed to a crawl. His knights rode destriers, and the big warhorses were foundering in the snow. The small, sure-footed garrons of the hill clans were faring better, the scouts said, but the clansmen dared not press too far ahead or the whole host would come apart. Lord Ramsay commanded Abel to give them a marching song in honor of Stannis trudging through the snows, so the bard took up his lute again, whilst one of his washerwomen coaxed a sword from Sour Alyn and mimed Stannis slashing at the snowflakes.

Theon was staring down into the last dregs of his third tankard when Lady Barbrey Dustin swept into the hall and sent two of her sworn swords to bring him to her. When he stood below the dais, she looked him up and down, and sniffed. "Those are the same clothes you wore for the wedding."

"Yes, my lady. They are the clothes I was given." That was one of the lessons he had learned at the Dreadfort: to take what he was given and never ask for more.

Lady Dustin wore black, as ever, though her sleeves were lined with vair. Her gown had a high stiff collar that framed her face. "You know this castle."

“Once.”

“Somewhere beneath us are the crypts where the old Stark kings sit in darkness. My men have not been able to find the way down into them. They have been through all the undercrofts and cellars, even the dungeons, but ...”

“The crypts cannot be accessed from the dungeons, my lady.”

“Can you show me the way down?”

“There’s nothing down there but—”

“—dead Starks? Aye. And all my favorite Starks are dead, as it happens. Do you know the way or not?”

“I do.” He did not like the crypts, had never liked the crypts, but he was no stranger to them.

“Show me. Serjeant, fetch a lantern.”

“My lady will want a warm cloak,” cautioned Theon. “We will need to go outside.”

The snow was coming down heavier than ever when they left the hall, with Lady Dustin wrapped in sable. Huddled in their hooded cloaks, the guards outside were almost indistinguishable from the snowmen. Only their breath fogging the air gave proof that they still lived. Fires burned along the battlements, a vain attempt to drive the gloom away. Their small party found themselves slogging through a smooth, unbroken expanse of white that came halfway up their calves. The tents in the yard were half-buried, sagging under the weight of the accumulation.

The entrance to the crypts was in the oldest section of the castle, near the foot of the First Keep, which had sat unused for hundreds of years. Ramsay had put it to the torch when he sacked Winterfell, and much of what had not burned had collapsed. Only a shell remained, one side open to the elements and filling up with snow. Rubble was strewn all about it: great chunks of

shattered masonry, burned beams, broken gargoyles. The falling snow had covered almost all of it, but part of one gargoyle still poked above the drift, its grotesque face snarling sightless at the sky.

*This is where they found Bran when he fell.* Theon had been out hunting that day, riding with Lord Eddard and King Robert, with no hint of the dire news that awaited them back at the castle. He remembered Robb's face when they told him. No one had expected the broken boy to live. *The gods could not kill Bran, no more than I could.* It was a strange thought, and stranger still to remember that Bran might still be alive.

"There." Theon pointed to where a snowbank had crept up the wall of the keep. "Under there. Watch for broken stones."

It took Lady Dustin's men the better part of half an hour to uncover the entrance, shoveling through the snow and shifting rubble. When they did, the door was frozen shut. Her serjeant had to go find an axe before he could pull it open, hinges screaming, to reveal stone steps spiraling down into darkness.

"It is a long way down, my lady," Theon cautioned.

Lady Dustin was undeterred. "Beron, the light."

The way was narrow and steep, the steps worn in the center by centuries of feet. They went single file—the serjeant with the lantern, then Theon and Lady Dustin, her other man behind them. He had always thought of the crypts as cold, and so they seemed in summer, but now as they descended the air grew warmer. Not *warm*, never warm, but warmer than above. Down there below the earth, it would seem, the chill was constant, unchanging.

"The bride weeps," Lady Dustin said, as they made their way down, step by careful step. "Our little Lady Arya."

*Take care now. Take care, take care.* He put one hand on the wall. The shifting torchlight made the steps seem to move beneath his feet. "As ... as you say, m'lady."

“Roose is not pleased. Tell your bastard that.”

*He is not my bastard, he wanted to say, but another voice inside him said, He is, he is. Reek belongs to Ramsay, and Ramsay belongs to Reek. You must not forget your name.*

“Dressing her in grey and white serves no good if the girl is left to sob. The Freys may not care, but the northmen ... they fear the Dreadfort, but they love the Starks.”

“Not you,” said Theon. “Not me,” the Lady of Barrowton confessed, “but the rest, yes. Old Whoresbane is only here because the Freys hold the Greatjon captive. And do you imagine the Hornwood men have forgotten the Bastard’s last marriage, and how his lady wife was left to starve, chewing her own fingers? What do you think passes through their heads when they hear the new bride weeping? Valiant Ned’s precious little girl.”

*No, he thought. She is not of Lord Eddard’s blood, her name is Jeyne, she is only a steward’s daughter.* He did not doubt that Lady Dustin suspected, but even so ...

“Lady Arya’s sobs do us more harm than all of Lord Stannis’s swords and spears. If the Bastard means to remain Lord of Winterfell, he had best teach his wife to laugh.”

“My lady,” Theon broke in. “Here we are.”

“The steps go farther down,” observed Lady Dustin. “There are lower levels. Older. The lowest level is partly collapsed, I hear. I have never been down there.” He pushed the door open and led them out into a long vaulted tunnel, where mighty granite pillars marched two by two into blackness.

Lady Dustin’s serjeant raised the lantern. Shadows slid and shifted. *A small light in a great darkness.* Theon had never felt comfortable in the crypts. He could feel the stone kings staring down at him with their stone eyes, stone fingers curled around the hilts of rusted longswords. None had any love for ironborn. A familiar sense of dread filled him.

“So many,” Lady Dustin said. “Do you know their names?”

“Once ... but that was a long time ago.” Theon pointed. “The ones on this side were Kings in the North. Torrhen was the last.”

“The King Who Knelt.”

“Aye, my lady. After him they were only lords.”

“Until the Young Wolf. Where is Ned Stark’s tomb?”

“At the end. This way, my lady.”

Their footsteps echoed through the vault as they made their way between the rows of pillars. The stone eyes of the dead men seemed to follow them, and the eyes of their stone direwolves as well. The faces stirred faint memories. A few names came back to him, unbidden, whispered in the ghostly voice of Maester Luwin. King Edrick Snowbeard, who had ruled the north for a hundred years. Brandon the Shipwright, who had sailed beyond the sunset. Theon Stark, the Hungry Wolf. *My namesake*. Lord Beron Stark, who made common cause with Casterly Rock to war against Dagon Greyjoy, Lord of Pyke, in the days when the Seven Kingdoms were ruled in all but name by the bastard sorcerer men called Bloodraven.

“That king is missing his sword,” Lady Dustin observed.

It was true. Theon did not recall which king it was, but the longsword he should have held was gone. Streaks of rust remained to show where it had been. The sight disquieted him. He had always heard that the iron in the sword kept the spirits of the dead locked within their tombs. If a sword was missing ...

*There are ghosts in Winterfell. And I am one of them.*

They walked on. Barbrey Dustin’s face seemed to harden with every step. *She likes this place no more than I do.* Theon heard himself say, “My lady, why do you hate the Starks?”

She studied him. “For the same reason you love them.”

Theon stumbled. “Love them? I never ... I took this castle from them, my lady. I had ... had Bran and Rickon put to death, mounted their heads on spikes, I ...”

“... rode south with Robb Stark, fought beside him at the Whispering Wood and Riverrun, returned to the Iron Islands as his envoy to treat with your own father. Barrowton sent men with the Young Wolf as well. I gave him as few men as I dared, but I knew that I must needs give him some or risk the wroth of Winterfell. So I had my own eyes and ears in that host. They kept me well informed. I know who you are. I know what you are. Now answer my question. Why do you love the Starks?”

“I ...” Theon put a gloved hand against a pillar. “... I wanted to be one of them ...”

“And never could. We have more in common than you know, my lord. But come.”

Only a little farther on, three tombs were closely grouped together. That was where they halted. “Lord Rickard,” Lady Dustin observed, studying the central figure. The statue loomed above them— long-faced, bearded, solemn. He had the same stone eyes as the rest, but his looked sad. “He lacks a sword as well.”

It was true. “Someone has been down here stealing swords. Brandon’s is gone as well.”

“He would hate that.” She pulled off her glove and touched his knee, pale flesh against dark stone. “Brandon loved his sword. He loved to hone it. ‘I want it sharp enough to shave the hair from a woman’s cunt,’ he used to say. And how he loved to use it. ‘A bloody sword is a beautiful thing,’ he told me once.”

“You knew him,” Theon said.

The lantern light in her eyes made them seem as if they were afire.

“Brandon was fostered at Barrowton with old Lord Dustin, the father of the one I’d later wed, but he spent most of his time riding the Rills. He loved to

ride. His little sister took after him in that. A pair of centaurs, those two. And my lord father was always pleased to play host to the heir to Winterfell. My father had great ambitions for House Ryswell. He would have served up my maidenhead to any Stark who happened by, but there was no need. Brandon was never shy about taking what he wanted. I am old now, a dried-up thing, too long a widow, but I still remember the look of my maiden's blood on his cock the night he claimed me. I think Brandon liked the sight as well. A bloody sword is a beautiful thing, yes. It hurt, but it was a sweet pain.

“The day I learned that Brandon was to marry Catelyn Tully, though ... there was nothing sweet about *that* pain. He never wanted her, I promise you that. He told me so, on our last night together ... but Rickard Stark had great ambitions too. *Southron* ambitions that would not be served by having his heir marry the daughter of one of his own vassals. Afterward my father nursed some hope of wedding me to Brandon's brother Eddard, but Catelyn Tully got that one as well. I was left with young Lord Dustin, until Ned Stark took him from me.”

“Robert's Rebellion ...”

“Lord Dustin and I had not been married half a year when Robert rose and Ned Stark called his banners. I begged my husband not to go. He had kin he might have sent in his stead. An uncle famed for his prowess with an axe, a great-uncle who had fought in the War of the Ninepenny Kings. But he was a man and full of pride, nothing would serve but that he lead the Barrowton levies himself. I gave him a horse the day he set out, a red stallion with a fiery mane, the pride of my lord father's herds. My lord swore that he would ride him home when the war was done.

“Ned Stark returned the horse to me on his way back home to Winterfell. He told me that my lord had died an honorable death, that his body had been laid to rest beneath the red mountains of Dorne. He brought his sister's bones back north, though, and there she rests ... but I promise you, Lord Eddard's bones will never rest beside hers. I mean to feed them to my dogs.”

Theon did not understand. “His ... his bones ... ?”

Her lips twisted. It was an ugly smile, a smile that reminded him of Ramsay's. "Catelyn Tully dispatched Lord Eddard's bones north before the Red Wedding, but your iron uncle seized Moat Cailin and closed the way. I have been watching ever since. Should those bones ever emerge from the swamps, they will get no farther than Barrowton." She threw one last lingering look at the likeness of Eddard Stark. "We are done here."

The snowstorm was still raging when they emerged from the crypts. Lady Dustin was silent during their ascent, but when they stood beneath the ruins of the First Keep again she shivered and said, "You would do well not to repeat anything I might have said down there. Is that understood?"

It was. "Hold my tongue or lose it."

"Roose has trained you well." She left him there.