

## REEK

He heard the girls first, barking as they raced for home. The drum of hoofbeats echoing off flagstone jerked him to his feet, chains rattling. The one between his ankles was no more than a foot long, shortening his stride to a shuffle. It was hard to move quickly that way, but he tried as best he could, hopping and clanking from his pallet. Ramsay Bolton had returned and would want his Reek on hand to serve him.

Outside, beneath a cold autumnal sky, the hunters were pouring through the gates. Ben Bones led the way, with the girls baying and barking all around him. Behind came Skinner, Sour Alyn, and Damon Dance-for-Me with his long greased whip, then the Walders riding the grey colts Lady Dustin had given them. His lordship himself rode Blood, a red stallion with a temper to match his own. He was laughing. That could be very good or very bad, Reek knew.

The dogs were on him before he could puzzle out which, drawn to his scent. The dogs were fond of Reek; he slept with them oft as not, and sometimes Ben Bones let him share their supper. The pack raced across the flagstones barking, circling him, jumping up to lick his filthy face, nipping at his legs. Helicent caught his left hand between her teeth and worried it so fiercely Reek feared he might lose two more fingers. Red Jeyne slammed into his chest and knocked him off his feet. She was lean, hard muscle, where Reek was loose, grey skin and brittle bones, a white-haired starveling.

The riders were dismounting by the time he pushed Red Jeyne off and struggled to his knees. Two dozen horsemen had gone out and two dozen had returned, which meant the search had been a failure. That was bad. Ramsay did not like the taste of failure. *He will want to hurt someone.*

Of late, his lord had been forced to restrain himself, for Barrowton was full of men House Bolton needed, and Ramsay knew to be careful around the Dustins and Ryswells and his fellow lordlings. With them he was always courteous and smiling. What he was behind closed doors was something else.

Ramsay Bolton was attired as befit the lord of the Hornwood and heir to the Dreadfort. His mantle was stitched together from wolfskins and clasped against the autumn chill by the yellowed teeth of the wolf's head on his right shoulder. On one hip he wore a falchion, its blade as thick and heavy as a cleaver; on the other a long dagger and a small curved flaying knife with a hooked point and a razor-sharp edge. All three blades had matched hilts of yellow bone. "Reek," his lordship called down from Blood's high saddle, "you stink. I can smell you clear across the yard."

"I know, my lord," Reek had to say. "I beg your pardon."

"I brought you a gift." Ramsay twisted, reached behind him, pulled something from his saddle, and flung it. "Catch!"

Between the chain, the fetters, and his missing fingers, Reek was clumsier than he had been before he learned his name. The head struck his maimed hands, bounced away from the stumps of his fingers, and landed at his feet, raining maggots. It was so crusted with dried blood as to be unrecognizable.

"I told you to catch it," said Ramsay. "Pick it up."

Reek tried to lift the head up by the ear. It was no good. The flesh was green and rotting, and the ear tore off between his fingers. Little Walder laughed, and a moment later all the other men were laughing too. "Oh, leave him be," said Ramsay. "Just see to Blood. I rode the bastard hard."

"Yes, my lord. I will." Reek hurried to the horse, leaving the severed head for the dogs.

"You smell like pigshit today, Reek," said Ramsay.

"On him, that's an improvement," said Damon Dance-for-Me, smiling as he coiled his whip.

Little Walder swung down from the saddle. "You can see to my horse too, Reek. And to my little cousin's."

“I can see to my own horse,” said Big Walder. Little Walder had become Lord Ramsay’s best boy and grew more like him every day, but the smaller Frey was made of different stuff and seldom took part in his cousin’s games and cruelties.

Reek paid the squires no mind. He led Blood off toward the stables, hopping aside when the stallion tried to kick him. The hunters strode into the hall, all but Ben Bones, who was cursing at the dogs to stop them fighting over the severed head.

Big Walder followed him into the stables, leading his own mount. Reek stole a look at him as he removed Blood’s bit. “Who was he?” he said softly, so the other stablehands would not hear.

“No one.” Big Walder pulled the saddle off his grey. “An old man we met on the road, is all. He was driving an old nanny goat and four kids.”

“His lordship slew him for his goats?”

“His lordship slew him for calling him Lord Snow. The goats were good, though. We milked the mother and roasted up the kids.”

*Lord Snow.* Reek nodded, his chains clinking as he wrestled with Blood’s saddle straps. *By any name, Ramsay’s no man to be around when he is in a rage. Or when he’s not.* “Did you find your cousins, my lord?”

“No. I never thought we would. They’re dead. Lord Wyman had them killed. That’s what I would have done if I was him.”

Reek said nothing. Some things were not safe to say, not even in the stables with his lordship in the hall. One wrong word could cost him another toe, even a finger. *Not my tongue, though. He will never take my tongue. He likes to hear me plead with him to spare me from the pain. He likes to make me say it.*

The riders had been sixteen days on the hunt, with only hard bread and salt beef to eat, aside from the occasional stolen kid, so that night Lord Ramsay commanded that a feast be laid to celebrate his return to Barrow-ton. Their

host, a grizzled one-armed petty lord by the name of Harwood Stout, knew better than to refuse him, though by now his larders must be well nigh exhausted. Reek had heard Stout's servants muttering at how the Bastard and his men were eating through the winter stores. "He'll bed Lord Eddard's little girl, they say," Stout's cook complained when she did not know that Reek was listening, "but we're the ones who'll be fucked when the snows come, you mark my words."

Yet Lord Ramsay had decreed a feast, so feast they must. Trestle tables were set up in Stout's hall, an ox was slaughtered, and that night as the sun went down the empty-handed hunters ate roasts and ribs, barley bread, a mash of carrots and pease, washing it all down with prodigious quantities of ale.

It fell to Little Walder to keep Lord Ramsay's cup filled, whilst Big Walder poured for the others at the high table. Reek was chained up beside the doors lest his odor put the feasters off their appetites. He would eat later, off whatever scraps Lord Ramsay thought to send him. The dogs enjoyed the run of the hall, however, and provided the night's best entertainment, when Maude and Grey Jeyne tore into one of Lord Stout's hounds over an especially meaty bone that Will Short had tossed them. Reek was the only man in the hall who did not watch the three dogs fight. He kept his eyes on Ramsay Bolton.

The fight did not end until their host's dog was dead. Stout's old hound never stood a mummer's chance. He had been one against two, and Ramsay's bitches were young, strong, and savage. Ben Bones, who liked the dogs better than their master, had told Reek they were all named after peasant girls Ramsay had hunted, raped, and killed back when he'd still been a bastard, running with the first Reek. "The ones who give him good sport, anyway. The ones who weep and beg and won't run don't get to come back as bitches." The next litter to come out of the Dreadfort's kennels would include a Kyra, Reek did not doubt. "He's trained 'em to kill wolves as well," Ben Bones had confided. Reek said nothing. He knew which wolves the girls were meant to kill, but he had no wish to watch the girls fighting over his severed toe.

Two serving men were carrying off the dead dog's carcass and an old woman had fetched out a mop and rake and bucket to deal with the blood-soaked rushes when the doors to the hall flew open in a wash of wind, and a dozen men in grey mail and iron halfhelms stalked through, shouldering past Stout's pasty-faced young guards in their leather brigandines and cloaks of gold and russet. A sudden silence seized the feasters ... all but Lord Ramsay, who tossed aside the bone he had been gnawing, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, smiled a greasy, wet-lipped smile, and said, "Father."

The Lord of the Dreadfort glanced idly at the remnants of the feast, at the dead dog, at the hangings on the walls, at Reek in his chains and fetters. "Out," he told the feasters, in a voice as soft as a murmur. "Now. The lot of you."

Lord Ramsay's men pushed back from the tables, abandoning cups and trenchers. Ben Bones shouted at the girls, and they trotted after him, some with bones still in their jaws. Harwood Stout bowed stiffly and relinquished his hall without a word. "Unchain Reek and take him with you," Ramsay growled at Sour Alyn, but his father waved a pale hand and said, "No, leave him."

Even Lord Roose's own guards retreated, pulling the doors shut behind them. When the echo died away, Reek found himself alone in the hall with the two Boltons, father and son.

"You did not find our missing Freys." The way Roose Bolton said it, it was more a statement than a question.

"We rode back to where Lord Lamprey claims they parted ways, but the girls could not find a trail."

"You asked after them in villages and holdfasts."

"A waste of words. The peasants might as well be blind for all they ever see." Ramsay shrugged. "Does it matter? The world won't miss a few Freys. There's plenty more down at the Twins should we ever have need of one."

Lord Roose tore a small piece off a heel of bread and ate it. “Hosteen and Aenys are distressed.”

“Let them go looking, if they like.”

“Lord Wyman blames himself. To hear him tell it, he had become especially fond of Rhaegar.”

Lord Ramsay was turning wroth. Reek could see it in his mouth, the curl of those thick lips, the way the cords stood up in his neck. “The fools should have stayed with Manderly.”

Roose Bolton shrugged. “Lord Wyman’s litter moves at a snail’s pace ... and of course his lordship’s health and girth do not permit him to travel more than a few hours a day, with frequent stops for meals. The Freys were anxious to reach Barrowton and be reunited with their kin. Can you blame them for riding on ahead?”

“If that’s what they did. Do you believe Manderly?”

His father’s pale eyes glittered. “Did I give you that impression? Still. His lordship is most distraught.”

“Not so distraught that he can’t eat. Lord Pig must have brought half the food in White Harbor with him.”

“Forty wayns full of foodstuffs. Casks of wine and hippocras, barrels of fresh-caught lampreys, a herd of goats, a hundred pigs, crates of crabs and oysters, a monstrous codfish ... Lord Wyman likes to eat. You may have noticed.”

“What I noticed was that he brought no hostages.”

“I noticed that as well.”

“What do you mean to do about it?”

“It is a quandary.” Lord Roose found an empty cup, wiped it out on the tablecloth, and filled it from a flagon. “Manderly is not alone in throwing

feasts, it would seem.”

“It should have been you who threw the feast, to welcome me back,” Ramsay complained, “and it should have been in Barrow Hall, not this pisspot of a castle.”

“Barrow Hall and its kitchens are not mine to dispose of,” his father said mildly. “I am only a guest there. The castle and the town belong to Lady Dustin, and she cannot abide you.”

Ramsay’s face darkened. “If I cut off her teats and feed them to my girls, will she abide me then? Will she abide me if I strip off her skin to make myself a pair of boots?”

“Unlikely. And those boots would come dear. They would cost us Barrowton, House Dustin, and the Ryswells.” Roose Bolton seated himself across the table from his son. “Barbrey Dustin is my second wife’s younger sister, Rodrik Ryswell’s daughter, sister to Roger, Rickard, and mine own namesake, Roose, cousin to the other Ryswells. She was fond of my late son and suspects you of having some part in his demise. Lady Barbrey is a woman who knows how to nurse a grievance. Be grateful for that. Barrowton is staunch for Bolton largely because she still holds Ned Stark to blame for her husband’s death.”

“*Staunch?*” Ramsay seethed. “All she does is spit on me. The day will come when I’ll set her precious wooden town afire. Let her spit on that, see if it puts out the flames.”

Roose made a face, as if the ale he was sipping had suddenly gone sour. “There are times you make me wonder if you truly are my seed. My forebears were many things, but never fools. No, be quiet now, I have heard enough. We appear strong for the moment, yes. We have powerful friends in the Lannisters and Freys, and the grudging support of much of the north ... but what do you imagine is going to happen when one of Ned Stark’s sons turns up?”

*Ned Stark’s sons are all dead, Reek thought. Robb was murdered at the Twins, and Bran and Rickon ... we dipped the heads in tar ... His own head*

was pounding. He did not want to think about anything that had happened before he knew his name. There were things too hurtful to remember, thoughts almost as painful as Ramsay's flaying knife ...

"Stark's little wolflings are dead," said Ramsay, sloshing some more ale into his cup, "and they'll stay dead. Let them show their ugly faces, and my girls will rip those wolves of theirs to pieces. The sooner they turn up, the sooner I kill them again."

The elder Bolton sighed. "*Again?* Surely you misspeak. You never slew Lord Eddard's sons, those two sweet boys we loved so well. That was Theon Turncloak's work, remember? How many of our grudging friends do you imagine we'd retain if the truth were known? Only Lady Barbrey, whom you would turn into a pair of boots ... *inferior* boots. Human skin is not as tough as cowhide and will not wear as well. By the king's decree you are now a Bolton. Try and act like one. Tales are told of you, Ramsay. I hear them everywhere. People fear you."

"Good."

"You are mistaken. It is not good. No tales were ever told of me. Do you think I would be sitting here if it were otherwise? Your amusements are your own, I will not chide you on that count, but you must be more discreet. A peaceful land, a quiet people. That has always been my rule. Make it yours."

"Is this why you left Lady Dustin and your fat pig wife? So you could come down here and tell me to be *quiet*?"

"Not at all. There are tidings that you need to hear. Lord Stannis has finally left the Wall."

That got Ramsay halfway to his feet, a smile glistening on his wide, wet lips. "Is he marching on the Dreadfort?"

"He is not, alas. Arnolf does not understand it. He swears that he did all he could to bait the trap."



“I wonder. Scratch a Karstark and you’ll find a Stark.”

“After the scratch the Young Wolf gave Lord Rickard, that may be somewhat less true than formerly. Be that as it may. Lord Stannis has taken Deepwood Motte from the ironmen and restored it to House Glover. Worse, the mountain clans have joined him, Wull and Norrey and Liddle and the rest. His strength is growing.”

“Ours is greater.”

“Now it is.”

“Now is the time to smash him. Let me march on Deepwood.”

“After you are wed.”

Ramsay slammed down his cup, and the dregs of his ale erupted across the tablecloth. “I’m sick of waiting. We have a girl, we have a tree, and we have lords enough to witness. I’ll wed her on the morrow, plant a son between her legs, and march before her maiden’s blood has dried.”

*She’ll pray for you to march, Reek thought, and she’ll pray that you never come back to her bed.*

“You will plant a son in her,” Roose Bolton said, “but not here. I’ve decided you shall wed the girl at Winterfell.”

That prospect did not appear to please Lord Ramsay. “I laid waste to Winterfell, or had you forgotten?”

“No, but it appears you have ... the *ironmen* laid waste to Winterfell, and butchered all its people. Theon Turncloak.”

Ramsay gave Reek a suspicious glance. “Aye, so he did, but still ... a wedding in that ruin?”

“Even ruined and broken, Winterfell remains Lady Arya’s home. What better place to wed her, bed her, and stake your claim? That is only half of it, however. We would be fools to march on Stannis. Let Stannis march on

us. He is too cautious to come to Barrowton ... but he *must* come to Winterfell. His clansmen will not abandon the daughter of their precious Ned to such as you. Stannis must march or lose them ... and being the careful commander that he is, he will summon all his friends and allies when he marches. He will summon Arnolf Karstark.”

Ramsay licked his chapped lips. “And we’ll have him.”

“If the gods will it.” Roose rose to his feet. “You’ll wed at Winterfell. I shall inform the lords that we march in three days and invite them to accompany us.”

“You are the Warden of the North. Command them.”

“An invitation will accomplish the same thing. Power tastes best when sweetened by courtesy. You had best learn that if you ever hope to rule.” The Lord of the Dreadfort glanced at Reek. “Oh, and unchain your pet. I am taking him.”

“Taking him? Where? He’s mine. You cannot have him.”

Roose seemed amused by that. “All you have I gave you. You would do well to remember that, bastard. As for this ... Reek ... if you have not ruined him beyond redemption, he may yet be of some use to us. Get the keys and remove those chains from him, before you make me rue the day I raped your mother.”

Reek saw the way Ramsay’s mouth twisted, the spittle glistening between his lips. He feared he might leap the table with his dagger in his hand. Instead he flushed red, turned his pale eyes from his father’s paler ones, and went to find the keys. But as he knelt to unlock the fetters around Reek’s wrists and ankles, he leaned close and whispered, “Tell him nothing and remember every word he says. I’ll have you back, no matter what that Dustin bitch may tell you. Who are you?”

“Reek, my lord. Your man. I’m Reek, it rhymes with sneak.”

“It does. When my father brings you back, I’m going to take another finger. I’ll let you choose which one.”

Unbidden, tears began to trickle down his cheeks. “*Why?*” he cried, his voice breaking. “I never asked for him to take me from you. I’ll do whatever you want, serve, obey, I ... please, no ...”

Ramsay slapped his face. “Take him,” he told his father. “He’s not even a man. The way he smells disgusts me.”

The moon was rising over the wooden walls of Barrowton when they stepped outside. Reek could hear the wind sweeping across the rolling plains beyond the town. It was less than a mile from Barrow Hall to Harwood Stout’s modest keep beside the eastern gates. Lord Bolton offered him a horse. “Can you ride?”

“I ... my lord, I ... I think so.”

“Walton, help him mount.”

Even with the fetters gone, Reek moved like an old man. His flesh hung loosely on his bones, and Sour Alyn and Ben Bones said he twitched. And his smell ... even the mare they’d brought for him shied away when he tried to mount.

She was a gentle horse, though, and she knew the way to Barrow Hall. Lord Bolton fell in beside him as they rode out the gate. The guards fell back to a discreet distance. “What would you have me call you?” the lord asked, as they trotted down the broad straight streets of Barrowton.

*Reek, I’m Reek, it rhymes with wreck.* “Reek,” he said, “if it please my lord.”

“*M’lord.*” Bolton’s lips parted just enough to show a quarter inch of teeth. It might have been a smile.

He did not understand. “My lord? I said—”

“—*my lord*, when you should have said *m’lord*. Your tongue betrays your birth with every word you say. If you want to sound a proper peasant, say it as if you had mud in your mouth, or were too stupid to realize it was two words, not just one.”

“If it please my—m’lord.”

“Better. Your stench *is* quite appalling.”

“Yes, m’lord. I beg your pardon, m’lord.”

“Why? The way you smell is my son’s doing, not your own. I am well aware of that.” They rode past a stable and a shuttered inn with a wheat sheaf painted on its sign. Reek heard music coming through its windows. “I knew the first Reek. He stank, though not for want of washing. I have never known a cleaner creature, truth be told. He bathed thrice a day and wore flowers in his hair as if he were a maiden. Once, when my second wife was still alive, he was caught stealing scent from her bedchamber. I had him whipped for that, a dozen lashes. Even his blood smelled wrong. The next year he tried it again. This time he drank the perfume and almost died of it. It made no matter. The smell was something he was born with. A curse, the smallfolk said. The gods had made him stink so that men would know his soul was rotting. My old maester insisted it was a sign of sickness, yet the boy was otherwise as strong as a young bull. No one could stand to be near him, so he slept with the pigs ... until the day that Ramsay’s mother appeared at my gates to demand that I provide a servant for my bastard, who was growing up wild and unruly. I gave her Reek. It was meant to be amusing, but he and Ramsay became inseparable. I do wonder, though ... was it Ramsay who corrupted Reek, or Reek Ramsay?” His lordship glanced at the new Reek with eyes as pale and strange as two white moons. “What was he whispering whilst he un-chained you?”

“He ... he said ...” *He said to tell you nothing.* The words caught in his throat, and he began to cough and choke.

“Breathe deep. I know what he said. You’re to spy on me and keep his secrets.” Bolton chuckled. “As if he had secrets. Sour Alyn, Luton, Skinner,

and the rest, where does he think they came from? Can he truly believe they are *his* men?"

"His men," Reek echoed. Some comment seemed to be expected of him, but he did not know what to say.

"Has my bastard ever told you how I got him?"

That he *did* know, to his relief. "Yes, my ... *m'lord*. You met his mother whilst out riding and were smitten by her beauty."

"Smitten?" Bolton laughed. "Did he use that word? Why, the boy has a singer's soul ... though if you believe that song, you may well be dimmer than the first Reek. Even the riding part is wrong. I was hunting a fox along the Weeping Water when I chanced upon a mill and saw a young woman washing clothes in the stream. The old miller had gotten himself a new young wife, a girl not half his age. She was a tall, willowy creature, very *healthy*-looking. Long legs and small firm breasts, like two ripe plums. Pretty, in a common sort of way. The moment that I set eyes on her I wanted her. Such was my due. The maesters will tell you that King Jaehaerys abolished the lord's right to the first night to appease his shrewish queen, but where the old gods rule, old customs linger. The Umbers keep the first night too, deny it as they may. Certain of the mountain clans as well, and on Skagos ... well, only heart trees ever see half of what they do on Skagos.

"This miller's marriage had been performed without my leave or knowledge. The man had cheated me. So I had him hanged, and claimed my rights beneath the tree where he was swaying. If truth be told, the wench was hardly worth the rope. The fox escaped as well, and on our way back to the Dreadfort my favorite courser came up lame, so all in all it was a dismal day.

"A year later this same wench had the impudence to turn up at the Dreadfort with a squalling, red-faced monster that she claimed was my own get. I should've had the mother whipped and thrown her child down a well ... but the babe *did* have my eyes. She told me that when her dead husband's brother saw those eyes, he beat her bloody and drove her from the mill. That annoyed me, so I gave her the mill and had the brother's

tongue cut out, to make certain he did not go running to Winterfell with tales that might disturb Lord Rickard. Each year I sent the woman some piglets and chickens and a bag of stars, on the understanding that she was never to tell the boy who had fathered him. A peaceful land, a quiet people, that has always been my rule.”

“A fine rule, m’lord.”

“The woman disobeyed me, though. You see what Ramsay is. She made him, her and Reek, always whispering in his ear about his rights. He should have been content to grind corn. Does he truly think that he can ever rule the north?”

“He fights for you,” Reek blurted out. “He’s strong.”

“Bulls are strong. Bears. I have seen my bastard fight. He is not entirely to blame. Reek was his tutor, the first Reek, and Reek was never trained at arms. Ramsay is ferocious, I will grant you, but he swings that sword like a butcher hacking meat.”

“He’s not afraid of anyone, m’lord.”

“He should be. Fear is what keeps a man alive in this world of treachery and deceit. Even here in Barrowton the crows are circling, waiting to feast upon our flesh. The Cerwyns and the Tallharts are not to be relied on, my fat friend Lord Wyman plots betrayal, and Whoresbane ... the Umbers may seem simple, but they are not without a certain low cunning. Ramsay should fear them all, as I do. The next time you see him, tell him that.”

“Tell him ... tell him to be afraid?” Reek felt ill at the very thought of it. “M’lord, I ... if I did that, he’d ...”

“I know.” Lord Bolton sighed. “His blood is bad. He needs to be leeches. The leeches suck away the bad blood, all the rage and pain. No man can think so full of anger. Ramsay, though ... his tainted blood would poison even leeches, I fear.”

“He is your only son.”

“For the moment. I had another, once. Domic. A quiet boy, but most accomplished. He served four years as Lady Dustin’s page, and three in the Vale as a squire to Lord Redfort. He played the high harp, read histories, and rode like the wind. Horses ... the boy was mad for horses, Lady Dustin will tell you. Not even Lord Rickard’s daughter could outrace him, and that one was half a horse herself. Redfort said he showed great promise in the lists. A great jouster must be a great horseman first.”

“Yes, m’lord. Domic. I ... I have heard his name ...”

“Ramsay killed him. A sickness of the bowels, Maester Uthor says, but I say poison. In the Vale, Domic had enjoyed the company of Redfort’s sons. He wanted a brother by his side, so he rode up the Weeping Water to seek my bastard out. I forbade it, but Domic was a man grown and thought that he knew better than his father. Now his bones lie beneath the Dreadfort with the bones of his brothers, who died still in the cradle, and I am left with Ramsay. Tell me, my lord ... if the kinslayer is accursed, what is a father to do when one son slays another?”

The question frightened him. Once he had heard Skinner say that the Bastard had killed his trueborn brother, but he had never dared to believe it. *He could be wrong. Brothers die sometimes, it does not mean that they were killed. My brothers died, and I never killed them.* “My lord has a new wife to give him sons.”

“And won’t my bastard love that? Lady Walda *is* a Frey, and she has a fertile feel to her. I have become oddly fond of my fat little wife. The two before her never made a sound in bed, but this one squeals and shudders. I find that quite endearing. If she pops out sons the way she pops in tarts, the Dreadfort will soon be overrun with Boltons. Ramsay will kill them all, of course. That’s for the best. I will not live long enough to see new sons to manhood, and boy lords are the bane of any House. Walda will grieve to see them die, though.”

Reek’s throat was dry. He could hear the wind rattling the bare branches of the elms that lined the street. “My lord, I—”

“*M’lord*, remember?”

“M’lord. If I might ask ... why did you want me? I’m no use to anyone, I’m not even a man, I’m broken, and ... the smell ...”

“A bath and change of clothes will make you smell sweeter.”

“A bath?” Reek felt a clenching in his guts. “I ... I would sooner not, m’lord. Please. I have ... wounds, I ... and these clothes, Lord Ramsay gave them to me, he ... he said that I was never to take them off, save at his command ...”

“You are wearing rags,” Lord Bolton said, quite patiently. “Filthy things, torn and stained and stinking of blood and urine. And thin. You must be cold. We’ll put you in lambswool, soft and warm. Perhaps a fur-lined cloak. Would you like that?”

“No.” He could not let them take the clothes Lord Ramsay gave him. He could not let them *see* him.

“Would you prefer to dress in silk and velvet? There was a time when you were fond of such, I do recall.”

“No,” he insisted, shrilly. “No, I only want these clothes. Reek’s clothes. I’m Reek, it rhymes with peek.” His heart was beating like a drum, and his voice rose to a frightened squeak. “I don’t want a bath. Please, m’lord, don’t take my clothes.”

“Will you let us wash them, at least?”

“No. No, m’lord. *Please.*” He clutched his tunic to his chest with both hands and hunched down in the saddle, half-afraid that Roose Bolton might command his guardsmen to tear the clothes off him right there in the street.

“As you wish.” Bolton’s pale eyes looked empty in the moonlight, as if there were no one behind them at all. “I mean you no harm, you know. I owe you much and more.”

“You do?” Some part of him was screaming, *This is a trap, he is playing with you, the son is just the shadow of the father.* Lord Ramsay played with



his hopes all the time. “What . . . what do you owe me, m’lord?”

“The north. The Starks were done and doomed the night that you took Winterfell.” He waved a pale hand, dismissive. “All this is only squabbling over spoils.”

Their short journey reached its end at the wooden walls of Barrow Hall. Banners flew from its square towers, flapping in the wind: the flayed man of the Dreadfort, the battle-axe of Cerwyn, Tallhart’s pines, the merman of Manderly, old Lord Locke’s crossed keys, the Umber giant and the stony hand of Flint, the Hornwood moose. For the Stouts, chevrony russet and gold, for Slate, a grey field within a double tressure white. Four horseheads proclaimed the four Ryswells of the Rills—one grey, one black, one gold, one brown. The jape was that the Ryswells could not even agree upon the color of their arms. Above them streamed the stag-and-lion of the boy who sat upon the Iron Throne a thousand leagues away.

Reek listened to the vanes turning on the old windmill as they rode beneath the gatehouse into a grassy courtyard where stableboys ran out to take their horses. “This way, if you please.” Lord Bolton led him toward the keep, where the banners were those of the late Lord Dustin and his widowed wife. His showed a spiked crown above crossed longaxes; hers quartered those same arms with Rodrik Ryswell’s golden horsehead.

As he climbed a wide flight of wooden steps to the hall, Reek’s legs began to shake. He had to stop to steady them, staring up at the grassy slopes of the Great Barrow. Some claimed it was the grave of the First King, who had led the First Men to Westeros. Others argued that it must be some King of the Giants who was buried there, to account for its size. A few had even been known to say it was no barrow, just a hill, but if so it was a lonely hill, for most of the barrowlands were flat and windswept.

Inside the hall, a woman stood beside the hearth, warming thin hands above the embers of a dying fire. She was clad all in black, from head to heel, and wore no gold nor gems, but she was highborn, that was plain to see. Though there were wrinkles at the corners of her mouth and more around her eyes, she still stood tall, unbent, and handsome. Her hair was brown and grey in equal parts and she wore it tied behind her head in a widow’s knot.

“Who is this?” she said. “Where is the boy? Did your bastard refuse to give him up? Is this old man his ... oh, gods be good, what is that *smell*? Has this creature soiled himself?”

“He has been with Ramsay. Lady Barbrey, allow me to present the rightful Lord of the Iron Islands, Theon of House Greyjoy.”

*No, he thought, no, don't say that name, Ramsay will hear you, he'll know, he'll know, he'll hurt me.*

Her mouth pursed. “He is not what I expected.”

“He is what we have.”

“What did your bastard do to him?”

“Removed some skin, I would imagine. A few small parts. Nothing too essential.”

“Is he mad?”

“He may be. Does it matter?”

Reek could hear no more. “Please, m’lord, m’lady, there’s been some mistake.” He fell to his knees, trembling like a leaf in a winter storm, tears streaming down his ravaged cheeks. “I’m not him, I’m not the turncloak, he died at Winterfell. My name is Reek.” He had to remember his *name*. “It rhymes with freak.”