

The king's voice was choked with anger. "You are a worse pirate than Salladhor Saan."

Theon Greyjoy opened his eyes. His shoulders were on fire and he could not move his hands. For half a heartbeat he feared he was back in his old cell under the Dreadfort, that the jumble of memories inside his head was no more than the residue of some fever dream. I was asleep, he realized. That, or passed out from the pain. When he tried to move, he swung from side to side, his back scraping against stone. He was hanging from a wall inside a tower, his wrists chained to a pair of rusted iron rings.

The air reeked of burning peat. The floor was hard-packed dirt. Wooden steps spiraled up inside the walls to the roof. He saw no windows. The tower was dank, dark, and comfortless, its only furnishings a high-backed chair and a scarred table resting on three trestles. No privy was in evidence, though Theon saw a champerpot in one shadowed alcove. The only light came from the candles on the table. His feet dangled six feet off the floor.

"My brother's debts," the king was muttering. "Joffrey's too, though that baseborn abomination was no kin to me." Theon twisted in his chains. He knew that voice. Stannis.

Theon Greyjoy chortled. A stab of pain went up his arms, from his shoulders to his wrists. All he had done, all he had suffered, Moat Cailin and Barrowton and Winterfell, Abel and his washerwomen, Crowfood and his Umbers, the trek through the snows, all of it had only served to exchange one tormentor for another.

"Your Grace," a second voice said softly. "Pardon, but your ink has frozen." The Braavosi, Theon knew. What was his name? Tycho... Tycho something... "Perhaps a bit of heat...?"

"I know a quicker way." Stannis drew his dagger. For an instant Theon thought that he meant to stab the banker. You will never get a drop of blood from that one, my lord, he might have told him. The king laid the blade of the knife against the ball of his left thumb, and slashed. "There. I will sign in mine own blood. That ought to make your masters happy."

"If it please Your Grace, it will please the Iron Bank."

Stannis dipped a quill in the blood welling from his thumb and scratched his name across the piece of parchment. "You will depart today. Lord Bolton may be on us soon. I will not have you caught up in the fighting."

"That would be my preference as well." The Braavosi slipped the roll of parchment inside a wooden tube. "I hope to have the honor of calling on Your Grace again when you are seated on your Iron Throne."

"You hope to have your gold, you mean. Save your pleasantries. It is coin I need from Braavos, not empty courtesy. Tell the guard outside I have need of Justin Massey."

"It would be my pleasure. The Iron Bank is always glad to be of service." The banker bowed.

As he left, another entered; a knight. The king's knights had been coming and going all night, Theon recalled dimly. This one seemed to be the king's familiar. Lean, dark-haired, hard-eyed, his face marred by pockmarks and old scars, he wore a faded surcoat embroidered with three moths. "Sire," he announced, "the maester is without. And Lord Arnolf sends word that he would be most pleased to break his fast with you."

"The son as well?"

"And the grandsons. Lord Wull seeks audience as well. He wants —"

"I know what he wants." The king indicated Theon. "Him. Wull wants him dead. Flint, Norrey... all of them will want him dead. For the boys he slew. Vengeance for their precious Ned."

"Will you oblige them?"

"Just now, the turncloak is more use to me alive. He has knowledge we may need. Bring in this maester." The king plucked a parchment off the table and squinted over it. A letter, Theon knew. Its broken seal was black wax, hard and shiny. I know what that says, he thought, giggling.

Stannis looked up. "The turncloak stirs."

"Theon. My name is Theon." He had to remember his name.

"I know your name. I know what you did."

"I saved her." The outer wall of Winterfell was eighty feet high, but beneath the spot where he had jumped the snows had piled up to a depth of more than forty. A cold white pillow. The girl had taken the worst of it. Jeyne, her name is Jeyne, but she will never tell them. Theon had landed on top of her, and broken some of her ribs. "I saved the girl," he said. "We flew."

Stannis snorted. "You fell. Umber saved her. If Mors Crowfood and his men had not been outside the castle, Bolton would have had the both of you back in moments."

Crowfood. Theon remembered. An old man, huge and powerful, with a ruddy face and a shaggy white beard. He had been seated on a garron, clad in the pelt of a gigantic snow bear, its head his hood. Under it he wore a stained white leather eye patch that reminded Theon of his uncle Euron. He'd wanted to rip it off Umber's face, to make certain that underneath was only an empty socket, not a black eye shining with malice. Instead he had whimpered through his broken teeth and said, "I am —"

"— a turncloak and a kinslayer," Crowfood had finished. "You will hold that lying tongue, or lose it."

But Umber had looked at the girl closely, squinting down with his one good eye. "You are the younger daughter?"

And Jeyne had nodded. "Arya. My name is Arya."

"Arya of Winterfell, aye. When last I was inside those walls, your cook served us a steak and kidney pie. Made with ale, I think, best I ever tasted. What was his name, that cook?"

"Gage," Jeyne said at once. "He was a good cook. He would make lemoncakes for Sansa whenever we had lemons."

Crowfood had fingered his beard. "Dead now, I suppose. That smith of yours as well. A man who knew his steel. What was his name?"

Jeyne had hesitated. Mikken, Theon thought. His name was Mikken. The castle blacksmith had never made any lemoncakes for Sansa, which made him far less important than the castle cook in the sweet little world she had shared with her friend Jeyne Poole. Remember, damn you. Your father was the steward, he had charge of the whole household. The smith's name was Mikken, Mikken, Mikken. I had him put to death before me!

"Mikken," Jeyne said.

Mors Umber had grunted. "Aye." What he might have said or done next Theon never learned, for that was when the boy ran up, clutching a spear and shouting that the portcullis on Winterfell's main gate was rising. And how Crowfood had grinned at that.

Theon twisted in his chains, and blinked down at the king. "Crowfood found us, yes, he sent us here to you, but it was me who saved her. Ask her yourself." She would tell him. "You saved me," Jeyne had whispered, as he was carrying her through the snow. She was pale with pain, but she had brushed one hand across his cheek and smiled. "I saved Lady Arya," Theon whispered back at her. And then all at once Mors Umber's spears were all around them. "Is this my thanks?" he asked Stannis, kicking feebly against the wall. His shoulders were in agony. His own weight was tearing them from their sockets. How long had he been hanging here? Was it still night outside? The tower was windowless, he had no way to know.

"Unchain me, and I will serve you."

"As you served Roose Bolton and Robb Stark?" Stannis snorted. "I think not. We have a warmer end in mind for you, turncloak. But not until we're done with you."

He means to kill me. The thought was queerly comforting. Death did not frighten Theon Greyjoy. Death would mean an end to pain. "Be done with me, then," he urged the king. "Take off my head off and stick it on a spear. I slew Lord Eddard's sons, I ought to die. But do it quick. He is coming."

"Who is coming? Bolton?"

"Lord Ramsay," Theon hissed. "The son, not the father. You must not let him take him. Roose... Roose is safe within the walls of Winterfell with his fat new wife. Ramsay is coming."

"Ramsay Snow, you mean. The Bastard."

"Never call him that!" Spittle sprayed from Theon's lips. "Ramsay Bolton, not Ramsay Snow, never Snow, never, you have to remember his name, or he will hurt you."

"He is welcome to try. Whatever name he goes by."

The door opened with a gust of cold black wind and a swirl of snow. The knight of the moths had returned with the maester the king had sent for, his grey robes concealed beneath a heavy bearskin pelt. Behind them came two other knights, each carrying a raven in a cage. One was the man who'd been with Asha when the banker delivered him to her, a burly man with a winged pig on his surcoat. The other was taller, broad-shouldered and brawny. The big man's breastplate was silvered steel inlaid with niello; though scratched and dented, it still shone in the candlelight. The cloak that he wore over it was fastened with a burning heart.

"Maester Tybald," announced the knight of the moths.

The maester sank to his knees. He was red-haired and round-shouldered, with close-set eyes that kept flicking toward Theon hanging on the wall. "Your Grace. How may I be of service?"

Stannis did not reply at once. He studied the man before him, his brow furrowed. "Get up." The maester rose. "You are maester at the Dreadfort. How is it you are here with us?"

"Lord Arnolf brought me to tend to his wounded."

"To his wounded? Or his ravens?"

"Both, Your Grace."

"Both." Stannis snapped the word out. "A maester's raven flies to one place, and one place only. Is that correct?"

The maester mopped sweat from his brow with his sleeve. "N-not entirely, Your Grace. Most, yes. Some few can be taught to fly between two castles. Such birds are greatly prized. And once in a very great while, we find a raven who can learn the names of three or four or five

castles, and fly to each upon command. Birds as clever as that come along only once in a hundred years."

Stannis gestured at the black birds in the cages. "These two are not so clever, I presume."

"No, Your Grace. Would that it were so."

"Tell me, then. Where are these two trained to fly?"

Maester Tybald did not answer. Theon Greyjoy kicked his feet feebly, and laughed under his breath. Caught!

"Answer me. If we were to loose these birds, would they return to the Dreadfort?" The king leaned forward. "Or might they fly for Winterfell instead?"

Maester Tybald pissed his robes. Theon could not see the dark stain spreading from where he hung, but the smell of piss was sharp and strong.

"Maester Tybald has lost his tongue," Stannis observed to his knights. "Godry, how many cages did you find?"

"Three, Your Grace," said the big knight in the silvered breastplate. "One was empty."

"Y-your Grace, my order is sworn to serve, we... "

"I know all about your vows. What I want to know is what was in the letter that you sent to Winterfell. Did you perchance tell Lord Bolton where to find us?"

"S-sire." Round-shouldered Tybald drew himself up proudly.

"The rules of my order forbid me to divulge the contents of Lord Arnolf's letters."

"Your vows are stronger than your bladder, it would seem."

"Your Grace must understand — "

"Must I?" The king shrugged. "If you say so. You are a man of learning, after all. I had a maester on Dragonstone who was almost a father to me. I have great respect for your order and its vows. Ser Clayton does not share my feelings, though. He learned all he knows in the wynds of Flea Bottom. Were I to put you in his charge, he might strangle you with your own chain or scoop your eye out with a spoon."

"Only the one, Your Grace," volunteered the balding knight, him of the winged pig. "I'd leave t'other."

"How many eyes does a maester need to read a letter?" asked Stannis. "One should suffice, I'd think. I would not wish to leave you unable to fulfill your duties to your lord. Roose Bolton's men may well be on their way to attack us even now, however, so you must understand if I skimp on certain courtesies. I will ask you once again. What was in the message you sent to Winterfell?"

The maester quivered. "A m-map, Your Grace."

The king leaned back in his chair. "Get him out of here," he commanded. "Leave the ravens." A vein was throbbing in his neck. "Confine this grey wretch to one of the huts until I decide what is to be done with him."

"It will be done," the big knight declared. The maester vanished in another blast of cold and snow. Only the knight of the three moths remained.

Stannis glowered up at Theon where he hung. "You are not the only turncloak here, it would seem. Would that all the lords in the Seven Kingdoms had but a single neck..." He turned to his knight. "Ser Richard, whilst I am breaking fast with Lord Arnolf, you are to disarm his men

and take them into custody. Most will be asleep. Do them no harm, unless they resist. It may be they did not know. Question some upon that point... but sweetly. If they had no knowledge of this treachery, they shall have the chance to prove their loyalty." He snapped a hand in dismissal. "Send in Justin Massey."

Another knight, Theon knew, when Massey entered. This one was fair, with a neatly trimmed blond beard and thick straight hair so pale it seemed more white than gold. His tunic bore the triple spiral, an ancient sigil for an ancient House. "I was told Your Grace had need of me," he said, from one knee.

Stannis nodded. "You will escort the Braavosi banker back to the Wall. Choose six good men and take twelve horses."

"To ride or eat?"

The king was not amused. "I want you gone before midday, ser. Lord Bolton could be on us any moment, and it is imperative that the banker return to Braavos. You shall accompany him across the narrow sea."

"If there is to be a battle, my place is here with you."

"Your place is where I say it is. I have five hundred swords as good as you, or better, but you have a pleasing manner and a glib tongue, and those will be of more use to me at Braavos than here. The Iron Bank has opened its coffers to me. You will collect their coin and hire ships and sellswords. A company of good repute, if you can find one. The Golden Company would be my first choice, if they are not already under contract. Seek for them in the Disputed Lands, if need be. But first hire as many swords as you can find in Braavos, and send them to me by way of Eastwatch. Archers as well, we need more bows."

Ser Justin's hair had fallen down across one eye. He pushed it back and said, "The captains of the free companies will join a lord more readily than a mere knight, Your Grace. I hold neither lands nor title, why should they sell their swords to me?"

"Go to them with both fists full of golden dragons," the king said, in an acid tone. "That should prove persuasive. Twenty thousand men should suffice. Do not return with fewer."

"Sire, might I speak freely?"

"So long as you speak quickly."

"Your Grace should go to Braavos with the banker."

"Is that your counsel? That I should flee?" The king's face darkened. "That was your counsel on the Blackwater as well, as I recall. When the battle turned against us, I let you and Horpe chivvy me back to Dragonstone like a whipped cur."

"The day was lost, Your Grace."

"Aye, that was what you said. 'The day is lost, sire. Fall back now, that you may fight again.' And now you would have me scamper off across the narrow sea..."

"... to raise an army, aye. As Bittersteel did after the Battle of the Redgrass Field, where Daemon Blackfyre fell."

"Do not prate at me of history, ser. Daemon Blackfyre was a rebel and usurper, Bittersteel a bastard. When he fled, he swore he would return to place a son of Daemon's upon the Iron Throne. He never did. Words are wind, and the wind that blows exiles across the narrow sea seldom blows them back. That boy Viserys Targaryen spoke of return as well. He slipped through my fingers at Dragonstone, only to spend his life wheedling after sellswords. 'The

Beggar King,' they called him in the Free Cities. Well, I do not beg, nor will I flee again. I am Robert's heir, the rightful king of Westeros. My place is with my men. Yours is in Braavos. Go with the banker, and do as I have bid."

"As you command," Ser Justin said.

"It may be that we shall lose this battle," the king said grimly. "In Braavos you may hear that I am dead. It may even be true. You shall find my sellswords nonetheless."

The knight hesitated. "Your Grace, if you are dead — "

" — you will avenge my death, and seat my daughter on the Iron Throne. Or die in the attempt."

Ser Justin put one hand on his sword hilt. "On my honor as a knight, you have my word."

"Oh, and take the Stark girl with you. Deliver her to Lord Commander Snow on your way to Eastwatch." Stannis tapped the parchment that lay before him. "A true king pays his debts."

Pay it, aye, thought Theon. Pay it with false coin. Jon Snow would see through the imposture at once. Lord Stark's sullen bastard had known Jeyne Poole, and he had always been fond of his little half-sister Arya.

"The black brothers will accompany you as far as Castle Black," the king went on. "The ironmen are to remain here, supposedly to fight for us. Another gift from Tycho Nestoris. Just as well, they would only slow you down. Ironmen were made for ships, not horses. Lady Arya should have a female companion as well. Take Alysane Mormont."

Ser Justin pushed back his hair again. "And Lady Asha?"

The king considered that a moment. "No."

"One day Your Grace will need to take the Iron Islands. That will go much easier with Balon Greyjoy's daughter as a catspaw, with one of your own leal men as her lord husband."

"You?" The king scowled. "The woman is wed, Justin."

"A proxy marriage, never consummated. Easily set aside. The groom is old besides. Like to die soon."

From a sword through his belly if you have your way, ser worm. Theon knew how these knights thought.

Stannis pressed his lips together. "Serve me well in this matter of the sellswords, and you may have what you desire. Until such time, the woman must needs remain my captive."

Ser Justin bowed his head. "I understand."

That only seemed to irritate the king. "Your understanding is not required. Only your obedience. Be on your way, ser."

This time, when the knight took his leave, the world beyond the door seemed more white than black.

Stannis Baratheon paced the floor. The tower was a small one, dank and cramped. A few steps brought the king around to Theon. "How many men does Bolton have at Winterfell?"

"Five thousand. Six. More." He gave the king a ghastly grin, all shattered teeth and splinters. "More than you."

"How many of those is he like to send against us?"

"No more than half." That was a guess, admittedly, but it felt right to him. Roose Bolton was not a man to blunder blindly out into the snow, map or no. He would hold his main strength in

reserve, keep his best men with him, trust in Winterfell's massive double wall. "The castle was too crowded. Men were at each other's throats, the Manderlys and Freys especially. It's them his lordship's sent after you, the ones that he's well rid of."

"Wyman Manderly." The king's mouth twisted in contempt. "Lord Too-Fat-to-Sit-a-Horse. Too fat to come to me, yet he comes to Winterfell. Too fat to bend the knee and swear me his sword, yet now he wields that sword for Bolton. I sent my Onion Lord to treat with him, and Lord Too-Fat butchered him and mounted his head and hands on the walls of White Harbor for the Freys to gloat over. And the Freys... has the Red Wedding been forgotten?"

"The north remembers. The Red Wedding, Lady Hornwood's fingers, the sack of Winterfell, Deepwood Motte and Torrhen's Square, they remember all of it." Bran and Rickon. They were only miller's boys. "Frey and Manderly will never combine their strengths. They will come for you, but separately. Lord Ramsay will not be far behind them. He wants his bride back. He wants his Reek." Theon's laugh was half a titter, half a whimper. "Lord Ramsay is the one Your Grace should fear."

Stannis bristled at that. "I defeated your uncle Victarion and his Iron Fleet off Fair Isle, the first time your father crowned himself. I held Storm's End against the power of the Reach for a year, and took Dragonstone from the Targaryens. I smashed Mance Rayder at the Wall, though he had twenty times my numbers. Tell me, turncloak, what battles has the Bastard of Bolton ever won that I should fear him?"

You must not call him that! A wave of pain washed over Theon Greyjoy. He closed his eyes and grimaced. When he opened them again, he said, "You do not know him."

"No more than he knows me."

"Knows me," cried one of the ravens the maester had left behind. It flapped its big black wings against the bars of its cage.

"Knows," it cried again.

Stannis turned. "Stop that noise."

Behind him, the door opened. The Karstarks had arrived.

Bent and twisted, the castellan of Karhold leaned heavily on his cane as he made his way to the table. Lord Arnolf's cloak was fine grey wool, bordered in black sable and clasped with a silver starburst. A rich garment, Theon thought, on a poor excuse for a man. He had seen that cloak before, he knew, just as he had seen the man who wore it. At the Dreadfort. I remember. He sat and supped with Lord Ramsay and Whoresbane Umber, the night they brought Reek up from his cell.

The man beside him could only be his son. Fifty, Theon judged, with a round soft face like his father's, if Lord Arnolf went to fat. Behind him walked three younger men. The grandsons, he surmised. One wore a chainmail byrnie. The rest were dressed for breakfast, not for battle. Fools.

"Your Grace." Arnolf Karstark bowed his head. "An honor." He looked for a seat. Instead his eyes found Theon. "And who is this?" Recognition came a heartbeat later. Lord Arnolf paled.

His stupid son remained oblivious. "There are no chairs," the oaf observed. One of the ravens screamed inside its cage.

"Only mine." King Stannis sat in it. "It is no Iron Throne, but here and now it suits." A dozen men had filed through the tower door, led by the knight of the moths and the big man in the silvered breastplate. "You are dead men, understand that," the king went on. "Only the manner of your dying remains to be determined. You would be well advised not to waste my time with denials. Confess, and you shall have the same swift end that the Young Wolf gave Lord Rickard. Lie, and you will burn. Choose."

"I choose this." One of the grandsons seized his sword hilt, and made to draw it.

That proved to be a poor choice. The grandson's blade had not even cleared his scabbard before two of the king's knights were on him. It ended with his forearm flopping in the dirt and blood spurting from his stump, and one of his brothers stumbling for the stairs, clutching a belly wound. He staggered up six steps before he fell, and came crashing back down to the floor.

Neither Arnolf Karstark nor his son had moved.

"Take them away," the king commanded. "The sight of them sours my stomach." Within moments, the five men had been bound and removed. The one who had lost his sword arm had fainted from loss of blood, but his brother with the belly wound screamed loud enough for both of them. "That is how I deal with betrayal, turncloak," Stannis informed Theon.

"My name is Theon."

"As you will. Tell me, Theon, how many men did Mors Umber have with him at Winterfell?"

"None. No men." He grinned at his own wit. "He had boys. I saw them." Aside from a handful of half-crippled serjeants, the warriors that Crowfood had brought down from Last Hearth were hardly old enough to shave. "Their spears and axes were older than the hands that clutched them. It was Whoresbane Umber who had the men, inside the castle. I saw them too. Old men, every one." Theon tittered. "Mors took the green boys and Hother took the greybeards. All the real men went with the Greatjon and died at the Red Wedding. Is that what you wanted to know, Your Grace?"

King Stannis ignored the jibe. "Boys," was all he said, disgusted. "Boys will not hold Lord Bolton long."

"Not long," Theon agreed. "Not long at all."

"Not long," cried the raven from its cage.

The king gave the bird an irritated look. "That Braavosi banker claimed Ser Aenys Frey is dead. Did some boy do that?"

"Twenty green boys, with spades," Theon told him. "The snow fell heavily for days. So heavily that you could not see the castle walls ten yards away, no more than the men up on the battlements could see what was happening beyond those walls. So Crowfood set his boys to digging pits outside the castle gates, then blew his horn to lure Lord Bolton out. Instead he got the Freys. The snow had covered up the pits, so they rode right into them. Aenys broke his neck, I heard, but Ser Hosteen only lost a horse, more's the pity. He will be angry now."

Strangely, Stannis smiled. "Angry foes do not concern me. Anger makes men stupid, and Hosteen Frey was stupid to begin with, if half of what I have heard of him is true. Let him come."

"He will."



"Bolton has blundered," the king declared. "All he had to do was sit inside his castle whilst we starved. Instead he has sent some portion of his strength forth to give us battle. His knights will be horsed, ours must fight afoot. His men will be well nourished, ours go into battle with empty bellies. It makes no matter. Ser Stupid, Lord Too-Fat, the Bastard, let them come. We hold the ground, and that I mean to turn to our advantage."

"The ground?" said Theon. "What ground? Here? This misbegotten tower? This wretched little village? You have no high ground here, no walls to hide beyond, no natural defenses."

"Yet."

"Yet," both ravens screamed in unison. Then one quorked, and the other muttered, "Tree, tree, tree."

The door opened. Beyond, the world was white. The knight of the three moths entered, his legs caked with snow. He stomped his feet to knock it off and said, "Your Grace, the Karstarks are taken. A few of them resisted, and died for it. Most were too confused, and yielded quietly. We have herded them all into the longhall and confined them there."

"Well done."

"They say they did not know. The ones we've questioned."

"They would."

"We might question them more sharply... "

"No. I believe them. Karstark could never have hoped to keep his treachery a secret if he shared his plans with every baseborn manjack in his service. Some drunken spearman would have let it slip one night whilst laying with a whore. They did not need to know. They are Karhold men. When the moment came they would have obeyed their lords, as they had done all their lives."

"As you say, Sire."

"What of your own losses?"

"One of Lord Peasebury's men was killed, and two of mine were wounded. If it please Your Grace, though, the men are growing anxious. There are hundreds of them gathered around the tower, wondering what's happened. Talk of treason is on every lip. No one knows who to trust, or who might be arrested next. The northmen especially — "

"I need to talk with them. Is Wull still waiting?"

"Him and Artos Flint. Will you see them?"

"Shortly. The kraken first."

"As you command." The knight took his leave.

My sister, Theon thought, my sweet sister. Though he had lost all feeling in his arms, he felt the twisting in his gut, the same as when that bloodless Braavosi banker presented him to Asha as a 'gift.' The memory still rankled. The burly, balding knight who'd been with her had wasted no time shouting for help, so they'd had no more than a few moments before Theon was dragged away to face the king. That was long enough. He had hated the look on Asha's face when she realized who he was; the shock in her eyes, the pity in her voice, the way her mouth twisted in disgust. Instead of rushing forward to embrace him, she had taken half a step backwards. "Did the Bastard do this to you?" she had asked.

"Don't you call him that." Then the words came spilling out of Theon in a rush. He tried to tell her all of it, about Reek and the Dreadfort and Kyra and the keys, how Lord Ramsay never

took anything but skin unless you begged for it. He told her how he'd saved the girl, leaping from the castle wall into the snow. "We flew. Let Abel make a song of that, we flew." Then he had to say who Abel was, and talk about the washerwomen who weren't truly washerwomen. By then Theon knew how strange and incoherent all this sounded, yet somehow the words would not stop. He was cold and sick and tired... and weak, so weak, so very weak.

She has to understand. She is my sister. He never wanted to do any harm to Bran or Rickon. Reek made him kill those boys, not him Reek but the other one. "I am no kinslayer," he insisted. He told her how he bedded down with Ramsay's bitches, warned her that Winterfell was full of ghosts. "The swords were gone. Four, I think, or five. I don't recall. The stone kings are angry." He was shaking by then, trembling like an autumn leaf. "The heart tree knew my name. The old gods. Theon, I heard them whisper. There was no wind but the leaves were moving. Theon, they said. My name is Theon." It was good to say the name. The more he said it, the less like he was to forget. "You have to know your name," he'd told his sister. "You... you told me you were Esgred, but that was a lie. Your name is Asha."

"It is," his sister had said, so softly that he was afraid that she might cry. Theon hated that. He hated women weeping. Jeyne Poole had wept all the way from Winterfell to here, wept until her face was purple as a beetroot and the tears had frozen on her cheeks, and all because he told her that she must be Arya, or else the wolves might send them back. "They trained you in a brothel," he reminded her, whispering in her ear so the others would not hear. "Jeyne is the next thing to a whore, you must go on being Arya." He meant no hurt to her. It was for her own good, and his. She has to remember her name. When the tip of her nose turned black from frostbite, and the one of the riders from the Night's Watch told her she might lose a piece of it, Jeyne had wept over that as well. "No one will care what Arya looks like, so long as she is heir to Winterfell," he assured her. "A hundred men will want to marry her. A thousand."

The memory left Theon writhing in his chains. "Let me down," he pleaded. "Just for a little while, then you can hang me up again." Stannis Baratheon looked up at him, but did not answer. "Tree," a raven cried. "Tree, tree, tree."

Then other bird said, "Theon," clear as day, as Asha came striding through the door.

Qarl the Maid was with her, and Tristifer Botley. Theon had known Botley since they were boys together, back on Pyke. Why has she brought her pets? Does she mean to cut me free? They would end the same way as the Karstarks, if she tried.

The king was displeased by their presence as well. "Your guards may wait without. If I meant harm to you, two men would not dissuade me."

The ironborn bowed and retreated. Asha took a knee. "Your Grace. Must my brother be chained like that? It seems a poor reward for bringing you the Stark girl."

The king's mouth twitched. "You have a bold tongue, my lady. Not unlike your turncloak brother."

"Thank you, Your Grace."

"It was not a compliment." Stannis gave Theon a long look. "The village lacks a dungeon, and I have more prisoners than I anticipated when we halted here." He waved Asha to her feet. "You may rise."

She stood. "The Braavosi ransomed my seven of my men from Lady Glover. I would gladly pay a ransom for my brother."

"There is not enough gold on all your Iron Islands. Your brother's hands are soaked with blood. Farring is urging me to give him to R'hllor."

"Clayton Suggs as well, I do not doubt."

"Him, Corliss Penny, all the rest. Even Ser Richard here, who only loves the Lord of Light when it suits his purposes."

"The red god's choir only knows a single song."

"So long as the song is pleasing in god's ears, let them sing. Lord Bolton's men will be here sooner than we would wish. Only Mors Umber stands between us, and your brother tells me his levies are made up entirely of green boys. Men like to know their god is with them when they go to battle."

"Not all your men worship the same god."

"I am aware of this. I am not the fool my brother was."

"Theon is my mother's last surviving son. When his brothers died, it shattered her. His death will crush what remains of her... but I have not come to beg you for his life."

"Wise. I am sorry for your mother, but I do not spare the lives of turncloaks. This one, especially. He slew two sons of Eddard Stark. Every northman in my service would abandon me if I showed him any clemency. Your brother must die."

"Then do the deed yourself, Your Grace." The chill in Asha's voice made Theon shiver in his chains. "Take him out across the lake to the islet where the weirwood grows, and strike his head off with that sorcerous sword you bear. That is how Eddard Stark would have done it. Theon slew Lord Eddard's sons. Give him to Lord Eddard's gods. The old gods of the north. Give him to the tree."

And suddenly there came a wild thumping, as the maester's ravens hopped and flapped inside their cages, their black feathers flying as they beat against the bars with loud and raucous caws. "The tree," one squawked, "the tree, the tree," whilst the second screamed only, "Theon, Theon, Theon."

Theon Greyjoy smiled. They know my name, he thought.