

## ARYA

“There’s ghosts, I know there is.” Hot Pie was kneading bread, his arms floured up to his elbows. “Pia saw something in the buttery last night.”

Arya made a rude noise. Pia was always seeing things in the buttery. Usually they were men. “Can I have a tart?” she asked. “You baked a whole tray.”

“I need a whole tray. Ser Amory is partial to them.”

She hated Ser Amory. “Let’s spit on them.”

Hot Pie looked around nervously. The kitchens were full of shadows and echoes, but the other cooks and scullions were all asleep in the cavernous lofts above the ovens. “He’ll know.”

“He will not,” Arya said. “You can’t taste *spit*.”

“If he does, it’s me they’ll whip.” Hot Pie stopped his kneading. “You shouldn’t even *be* here. It’s the black of night.”

It was, but Arya never minded. Even in the black of night, the kitchens were never still; there was always someone rolling dough for the morning bread, stirring a kettle with a long wooden spoon, or butchering a hog for Ser Amory’s breakfast bacon. Tonight it was Hot Pie.

“If Pinkeye wakes and finds you gone—” Hot Pie said.

“Pinkeye never wakes.” His true name was Mebble, but everyone called him Pinkeye for his runny eyes. “Not once he’s passed out.” Each morning he broke his fast with ale. Each evening he fell into a drunken sleep after supper, wine-colored spit running down his chin. Arya would wait until she heard him snoring, then creep barefoot up the servant’s stair, making no more noise than the mouse she’d been. She carried neither candle nor taper. Syrio had told her once that darkness could be her friend, and he was right. If she had the moon and the stars to see by, that was enough. “I bet we could escape, and Pinkeye wouldn’t even notice I was gone,” she told Hot Pie.

“I don’t want to escape. It’s better here than it was in them woods. I don’t want to eat no worms. Here, sprinkle some flour on the board.”

Arya cocked her head. “What’s that?”

“What? I don’t—”

“Listen with your *ears*, not your mouth. That was a warhorn. Two blasts, didn’t you hear? And there, that’s the portcullis chains, someone’s going out or coming in. Want to go see?” The gates of Harrenhal had not been opened since the morning Lord Tywin had marched with his host.

“I’m making the morning bread,” Hot Pie complained. “Anyhow I don’t like it when it’s dark, I told you.”

“I’m going. I’ll tell you after. Can I have a tart?”

“No.”

She filched one anyway, and ate it on her way out. It was stuffed with chopped nuts and fruit and cheese, the crust flaky and still warm from the oven. Eating Ser Amory’s tart made Arya feel daring. *Barefoot surefoot lightfoot*, she sang under her breath. *I am the ghost in Harrenhal*.

The horn had stirred the castle from sleep; men were coming out into the ward to see what the commotion was about. Arya fell in with the others. A line of ox carts were rumbling under the portcullis. *Plunder*, she knew at once. The riders escorting the carts spoke in a babble of queer tongues. Their armor glinted pale in the moonlight, and she saw a pair of striped black-and-white zorses. *The Bloody Mummies*. Arya withdrew a little deeper into the shadows, and watched as a huge black bear rolled by, caged in the back of a wagon. Other carts were loaded down with silver plate, weapons and shields, bags of flour, pens of squealing hogs and scrawny dogs and chickens. Arya was thinking how long it had been since she’d had a slice off a pork roast when she saw the first of the prisoners.

By his bearing and the proud way he held his head, he must have been a lord. She could see mail glinting beneath his torn red surcoat. At first Arya took him for a Lannister, but when he passed near a torch she saw his device was a silver fist, not a lion. His wrists were bound tightly, and a rope around one ankle tied him to the man behind him, and him to the man

behind him, so the whole column had to shuffle along in a lurching lockstep. Many of the captives were wounded. If any halted, one of the riders would trot up and give him a lick of the whip to get him moving again. She tried to judge how many prisoners there were, but lost count before she got to fifty. There were twice that many at least. Their clothing was stained with mud and blood, and in the torchlight it was hard to make out all their badges and sigils, but some of those Arya glimpsed she recognized. Twin towers. Sunburst. Bloody man. Battle-axe. *The battle-axe is for Cerwyn, and the white sun on black is Karstark. They're northmen. My father's men, and Robb's.* She didn't like to think what that might mean.

The Bloody Mummers began to dismount. Stableboys emerged sleepy from their straw to tend their lathered horses. One of the riders was shouting for ale. The noise brought Ser Amory Lorch out onto the covered gallery above the ward, flanked by two torchbearers. Goat-helmed Vargo Hoat reined up below him. "My lord cathellan," the sellsword said. He had a thick, slobbery voice, as if his tongue was too big for his mouth.

"What's all this, Hoat?" Ser Amory demanded, frowning.

"Captiths. Rooth Bolton thought to croth the river, but my Brafe Companions cut his van to pieceth. Killed many, and thent Bolton running. Thith ith their lord commander, Glover, and the one behind ith Ther Aenyth Frey."

Ser Amory Lorch stared down at the roped captives with his little pig eyes. Arya did not think he was pleased. Everyone in the castle knew that he and Vargo Hoat hated each other. "Very well," he said. "Ser Cadwyn, take these men to the dungeons."

The lord with the mailed fist on his surcoat raised his eyes. "We were promised honorable treatment—" he began.

"*Silenth!*" Vargo Hoat screamed at him, spraying spittle.

Ser Amory addressed the captives. "What Hoat promised you is nothing to me. Lord Tywin made *me* the castellan of Harrenhal, and I shall do with you as I please." He gestured to his guards. "The great cell under the Widow's Tower ought to hold them all. Any who do not care to go are free to die here."

As his men herded off the captives at spearpoint, Arya saw Pinkeye emerge from the stairwell, blinking at the torchlight. If he found her missing, he would shout and threaten to whip the bloody hide off her, but she was not afraid. He was no Weese. He was forever threatening to whip the bloody hide off this one or that one, but Arya never actually knew him to *hit*. Still, it would be better if he never saw her. She glanced around. The oxen were being unharnessed, the carts unloaded, while the Brave Companions clamored for drink and the curious gathered around the caged bear. In the commotion, it was not hard to slip off unseen. She went back the way she had come, wanting to be out of sight before someone noticed her and thought to put her to work.

Away from the gates and the stables, the great castle was largely deserted. The noise dwindled behind her. A swirling wind gusted, drawing a high shivery scream from the cracks in the Wailing Tower. Leaves had begun to fall from the trees in the godswood, and she could hear them moving through the deserted courtyards and between the empty buildings, making a faint skittery sound as the wind drove them across the stones. Now that Harrenhal was near empty once again, sound did queer things here. Sometimes the stones seemed to drink up noise, shrouding the yards in a blanket of silence. Other times, the echoes had a life of their own, so every footfall became the tread of a ghostly army, and every distant voice a ghostly feast. The funny sounds were one of the things that bothered Hot Pie, but not Arya.

Quiet as a shadow, she flitted across the middle bailey, around the Tower of Dread, and through the empty mews, where people said the spirits of dead falcons stirred the air with ghostly wings. She could go where she would. The garrison numbered no more than a hundred men, so small a troop that they were lost in Harrenhal. The Hall of a Hundred Hearths was closed off, along with many of the lesser buildings, even the Wailing Tower. Ser Amory Lorch resided in the castellan's chambers in Kingspyre, themselves as spacious as a lord's, and Arya and the other servants had moved to the cellars beneath him so they would be close at hand. While Lord Tywin had been in residence, there was always a man-at-arms wanting to know your business. But now there were only a hundred men left to

guard a thousand doors, and no one seemed to know who should be where, or care much.

As she passed the armory, Arya heard the ring of a hammer. A deep orange glow shone through the high windows. She climbed to the roof and peeked down. Gendry was beating out a breastplate. When he worked, nothing existed for him but metal, bellows, fire. The hammer was like part of his arm. She watched the play of muscles in his chest and listened to the steel music he made. *He's strong*, she thought. As he took up the long-handled tongs to dip the breastplate into the quenching trough, Arya slithered through the window and leapt down to the floor beside him.

He did not seem surprised to see her. "You should be abed, girl." The breastplate hissed like a cat as he dipped it in the cold water. "What was all that noise?"

"Vargo Hoat's come back with prisoners. I saw their badges. There's a Glover, from Deepwood Motte, he's my father's man. The rest too, mostly." All of a sudden, Arya knew why her feet had brought her here. "You have to help me get them out."

Gendry laughed. "And how do we do that?"

"Ser Amory sent them down to the dungeon. The one under the Widow's Tower, that's just one big cell. You could smash the door open with your hammer—"

"While the guards watch and make bets on how many swings it will take me, maybe?"

Arya chewed her lips. "We'd need to kill the guards."

"How are we supposed to do that?"

"Maybe there won't be a lot of them."

"If there's *two*, that's too many for you and me. You never learned nothing in that village, did you? You try this and Vargo Hoat will cut off your hands and feet, the way he does." Gendry took up the tongs again.

"You're *afraid*."

"Leave me alone, girl."

“Gendry, there’s a *hundred* northmen. Maybe more, I couldn’t count them all. That’s as many as Ser Amory has. Well, not counting the Bloody Mummers. We just have to get them out and we can take over the castle and escape.”

“Well, you can’t get them out, no more’n you could save Lommy.” Gendry turned the breastplate with the tongs to look at it closely. “And if we did escape, where would we go?”

“Winterfell,” she said at once. “I’d tell Mother how you helped me, and you could stay—”

“Would m’lady permit? Could I shoe your horses for you, and make swords for your lordly brothers?”

Sometimes he made her so *angry*. “You stop that!”

“Why should I wager my feet for the chance to sweat in Winterfell in place of Harrenhal? You know old Ben Blackthumb? He came here as a boy. Smithed for Lady Whent and her father before her and his father before him, and even for Lord Lothston who held Harrenhal before the Whents. Now he smiths for Lord Tywin, and you know what he says? A sword’s a sword, a helm’s a helm, and if you reach in the fire you get burned, no matter who you’re serving. Lucan’s a fair enough master. I’ll stay here.”

“The queen will catch you, then. She didn’t send gold cloaks after Ben *Blackthumb!*”

“Likely it wasn’t even me they wanted.”

“It was too, you know it. You’re *somebody*.”

“I’m a ’prentice smith, and one day might be I’ll make a master armorer... *if* I don’t run off and lose my feet or get myself killed.” He turned away from her, picked up his hammer once more, and began to bang.

Arya’s hands curled into helpless fists. “The next helm you make, put *mule’s ears* on it in place of bull’s horns!” She had to flee, or else she would have started hitting him. *He probably wouldn’t even feel it if I did. When they find who he is and cut off his stupid mulehead, he’ll be sorry he didn’t help.* She was better off without him anyhow. He was the one who got her caught at the village.

But thinking of the village made her remember the march, and the storeroom, and the Tickler. She thought of the little boy who'd been hit in the face with the mace, of stupid old All-for-Joffrey, of Lommy Greenhands. *I was a sheep, and then I was a mouse, I couldn't do anything but hide.* Arya chewed her lip and tried to think when her courage had come back. *Jaen made me brave again. He made me a ghost instead of a mouse.*

She had been avoiding the Lorathi since Weese's death. Chiswyck had been *easy*, anyone could push a man off the wallwalk, but Weese had raised that ugly spotted dog from a pup, and only some dark magic could have turned the animal against him. *Yoren found Jaen in a black cell, the same as Rorge and Biter*, she remembered. *Jaen did something horrible and Yoren knew, that's why he kept him in chains.* If the Lorathi was a wizard, Rorge and Biter could be demons he called up from some hell, not men at all.

Jaen still owed her one death. In Old Nan's stories about men who were given magic wishes by a grumkin, you had to be especially careful with the third wish, because it was the last. Chiswyck and Weese hadn't been very important. *The last death has to count*, Arya told herself every night when she whispered her names. But now she wondered if that was truly the reason she had hesitated. So long as she could kill with a whisper, Arya need not be afraid of anyone... but once she used up the last death, she would only be a mouse again.

With Pinkeye awake, she dared not go back to her bed. Not knowing where else to hide, she made for the godswood. She liked the sharp smell of the pines and sentinels, the feel of grass and dirt between her toes, and the sound the wind made in the leaves. A slow little stream meandered through the wood, and there was one spot where it had eaten the ground away beneath a deadfall.

There, beneath rotting wood and twisted splintered branches, she found her hidden sword.

Gendry was too stubborn to make one for her, so she had made her own by breaking the bristles off a broom. Her blade was much too light and had no proper grip, but she liked the sharp jagged splintery end.

Whenever she had a free hour she stole away to work at the drills Syrio had taught her, moving barefoot over the fallen leaves, slashing at branches and whacking down leaves. Sometimes she even climbed the trees and danced among the upper branches, her toes gripping the limbs as she moved back and forth, teetering a little less every day as her balance returned to her. Night was the best time; no one ever bothered her at night.

Arya climbed. Up in the kingdom of the leaves, she unsheathed and for a time forgot them all, Ser Amory and the Mummer's and her father's men alike, losing herself in the feel of rough wood beneath the soles of her feet and the *swish* of sword through air. A broken branch became Joffrey. She struck at it until it fell away. The queen and Ser Ilyn and Ser Meryn and the Hound were only leaves, but she killed them all as well, slashing them to wet green ribbons. When her arm grew weary, she sat with her legs over a high limb to catch her breath in the cool dark air, listening to the squeak of bats as they hunted. Through the leafy canopy she could see the bone-white branches of the heart tree. *It looks just like the one in Winterfell from here.* If only it had been... then when she climbed down she would have been home again, and maybe find her father sitting under the weirwood where he always sat.

Shoving her sword through her belt, she slipped down branch to branch until she was back on the ground. The light of the moon painted the limbs of the weirwood silvery white as she made her way toward it, but the five-pointed red leaves turned black by night. Arya stared at the face carved into its trunk. It was a terrible face, its mouth twisted, its eyes flaring and full of hate. Is that what a god looked like? Could gods be hurt, the same as people? *I should pray*, she thought suddenly.

Arya went to her knees. She wasn't sure how she should begin. She clasped her hands together. *Help me, you old gods*, she prayed silently. *Help me get those men out of the dungeon so we can kill Ser Amory, and bring me home to Winterfell. Make me a water dancer and a wolf and not afraid again, ever.*

Was that enough? Maybe she should pray aloud if she wanted the old gods to hear. Maybe she should pray longer. Sometimes her father had



prayed a long time, she remembered. But the old gods had never helped him. Remembering that made her angry. “You should have saved him,” she scolded the tree. “He prayed to you all the time. I don’t care if you help me or not. I don’t think you could even if you wanted to.”

“Gods are not mocked, girl.”

The voice startled her. She leapt to her feet and drew her wooden sword. Jaqen H’ghar stood so still in the darkness that he seemed one of the trees. “A man comes to hear a name. One and two and then comes three. A man would have done.”

Arya lowered the splintery point toward the ground. “How did you know I was here?”

“A man sees. A man hears. A man knows.”

She regarded him suspiciously. Had the gods sent him? “How’d you make the dog kill Weese? Did you call Rorge and Biter up from hell? Is Jaqen H’ghar your true name?”

“Some men have many names. Weasel. Arry. *Arya*.”

She backed away from him, until she was pressed against the heart tree. “Did Gendry tell?”

“A man knows,” he said again. “My lady of Stark.”

Maybe the gods *had* sent him in answer to her prayers. “I need you to help me get those men out of the dungeons. That Glover and those others, all of them. We have to kill the guards and open the cell somehow—”

“A girl forgets,” he said quietly. “Two she has had, three were owed. If a guard must die, she needs only speak his name.”

“But *one* guard won’t be enough, we need to kill them all to open the cell.” Arya bit her lip hard to stop from crying. “I want you to save the northmen like I saved you.”

He looked down at her pitilessly. “Three lives were snatched from a god. Three lives must be repaid. The gods are not mocked.” His voice was silk and steel.

"I never mocked." She thought for a moment. "The name... can I name *anyone*? And you'll kill him?"

Jaqen H'ghar inclined his head. "A man has said."

"*Anyone*?" she repeated. "A man, a woman, a little baby, or Lord Tywin, or the High Septon, or your father?"

"A man's sire is long dead, but did he live, and did you know his name, he would die at your command."

"Swear it," Arya said. "Swear it by the gods."

"By all the gods of sea and air, and even him of fire, I swear it." He placed a hand in the mouth of the weirwood. "By the seven new gods and the old gods beyond count, I swear it."

*He has sworn.* "Even if I named the king..."

"Speak the name, and death will come. On the morrow, at the turn of the moon, a year from this day, it will come. A man does not fly like a bird, but one foot moves and then another and one day a man is there, and a king dies." He knelt beside her, so they were face-to-face, "A girl whispers if she fears to speak aloud. Whisper it now. Is it *Joffrey*?"

Arya put her lips to his ear. "It's *Jaqen H'ghar*."

Even in the burning barn, with walls of flame towering all around and him in chains, he had not seemed so distraught as he did now. "A girl... she makes a jest."

"You swore. The gods heard you swear."

"The gods did hear," There was a knife in his hand suddenly, its blade thin as her little finger. Whether it was meant for her or him, Arya could not say. "A girl will weep. A girl will lose her only friend."

"You're not my friend. A friend would *help* me." She stepped away from him, balanced on the balls of her feet in case he threw his knife. "I'd never kill a *friend*."

Jaqen's smile came and went. "A girl might... name another name then, if a friend did help?"

"A girl might," she said. "If a friend did help."

The knife vanished. "Come."

"Now?" She had never thought he would act so quickly.

"A man hears the whisper of sand in a glass. A man will not sleep until a girl unsays a certain name. Now, evil child."

*I'm not an evil child*, she thought, *I am a direwolf, and the ghost in Harrenhal*. She put her broomstick back in its hiding place and followed him from the godswood.

Despite the hour, Harrenhal stirred with fitful life. Vargo Hoat's arrival had thrown off all the routines. Ox carts, oxen, and horses had all vanished from the yard, but the bear cage was still there. It had been hung from the arched span of the bridge that divided the outer and middle wards, suspended on heavy chains, a few feet off the ground. A ring of torches bathed the area in light. Some of the boys from the stables were tossing stones to make the bear roar and grumble. Across the ward, light spilled through the door of the Barracks Hall, accompanied by the clatter of tankards and men calling for more wine. A dozen voices took up a song in a guttural tongue strange to Arya's ears.

*They're drinking and eating before they sleep*, she realized. *Pinkeye would have sent to wake me, to help with the serving. He'll know I'm not abed*. But likely he was busy pouring for the Brave Companions and those of Ser Amory's garrison who had joined them. The noise they were making would be a good distraction.

"The hungry gods will feast on blood tonight, if a man would do this thing," Jaen said. "Sweet girl, kind and gentle. Unsay one name and say another and cast this mad dream aside."

"I won't."

"Just so." He seemed resigned. "The thing will be done, but a girl must obey. A man has no time for talk."

"A girl will obey," Arya said. "What should I do?"

"A hundred men are hungry, they must be fed, the lord commands hot broth. A girl must run to the kitchens and tell her pie boy."

"Broth," she repeated. "Where will you be?"

“A girl will help make broth, and wait in the kitchens until a man comes for her. Go. Run.”

Hot Pie was pulling his loaves from the ovens when she burst into the kitchen, but he was no longer alone. They’d woken the cooks to feed Vargo Hoat and his Bloody Mummers. Serving men were carrying off baskets of Hot Pie’s bread and tarts, the chief cook was carving cold slices off a ham, spit boys were turning rabbits while the pot girls basted them with honey, women were chopping onions and carrots. “What do you want, Weasel?” the chief cook asked when he saw her.

“Broth,” she announced. “My lord wants broth.”

He jerked his carving knife at the black iron kettles hung over the flames. “What do you think that is? Though I’d soon as piss in it as serve it to that goat. Can’t even let a man have a night’s sleep.” He spat. “Well, never you mind, run back and tell him a kettle can’t be hurried,”

“I’m to wait here until it’s done.”

“Then stay out of the way. Or better yet, make yourself of use. Run to the buttery; his goatship will be wanting butter and cheese. Wake up Pia and tell her she’d best be nimble for once, if she wants to keep both of her feet.”

She ran as fast as she could. Pia was awake in the loft, moaning under one of the Mummers, but she slipped back into her clothes quick enough when she heard Arya shout. She filled six baskets with crocks of butter and big wedges of stinky cheese wrapped in cloth. “Here, help me with these,” she told Arya.

“I can’t. But you better hurry or Vargo Hoat will chop off your foot.” She darted off before Pia could grab her. On the way back, she wondered why none of the captives had their hands or feet chopped off. Maybe Vargo Hoat was afraid to make Robb angry. Though he didn’t seem the sort to be afraid of *anyone*.

Hot Pie was stirring the kettles with a long wooden spoon when Arya returned to the kitchens. She grabbed up a second spoon and started to help. For a moment she thought maybe she should tell him, but then she remembered the village and decided not to. *He’d only yield again.*

Then she heard the ugly sound of Rorge's voice. "*Cook*," he shouted. "We'll take your bloody broth." Arya let go of the spoon in dismay. *I never told him to bring them*. Rorge wore his iron helmet, with the nasal that half hid his missing nose. Jaen and Biter followed him into the kitchen.

"The bloody broth isn't bloody ready yet," the cook said. "It needs to simmer. We only now put in the onions and—"

"Shut your hole, or I'll shove a spit up your ass and we'll baste you for a turn or two. I said broth and I said now."

Hissing, Biter grabbed a handful of half-charred rabbit right off the spit, and tore into it with his pointed teeth while honey dripped between his fingers.

The cook was beaten. "Take your bloody broth, then, but if the goat asks why it tastes so thin, you tell him."

Biter licked the grease and honey off his fingers as Jaen Hghar donned a pair of heavy padded mitts. He gave a second pair to Arya. "A weasel will help." The broth was boiling hot, and the kettles were heavy. Arya and Jaen wrestled one between them, Rorge carried one by himself, and Biter grabbed two more, hissing in pain when the handles burned his hands. Even so, he did not drop them. They lugged the kettles out of the kitchens and across the ward. Two guards had been posted at the door of the Widow's Tower. "What's this?" one said to Rorge.

"A pot of boiling piss, want some?"

Jaen smiled disarmingly. "A prisoner must eat too."

"No one said nothing about—"

Arya cut him off. "It's for *them*, not you."

The second guard waved them past. "Bring it down, then."

Inside the door a winding stair led down to the dungeons. Rorge led the way, with Jaen and Arya bringing up the rear. "A girl will stay out of the way," he told her.

The steps opened onto a dank stone vault, long, gloomy, and windowless. A few torches burned in sconces at the near end where a group of Ser Amory's guards sat around a scarred wooden table, talking and

playing at tiles. Heavy iron bars separated them from where the captives were crowded together in the dark. The smell of the broth brought many up to the bars.

Arya counted eight guards. They smelled the broth as well. “There’s the ugliest serving wench I ever saw,” their captain said to Rorge. “What’s in the kettle?”

“Your cock and balls. You want to eat or not?”

One of the guards had been pacing, one standing near the bars, a third sitting on the floor with his back to the wall, but the prospect of food drew all of them to the table.

“About bloody time they fed us.”

“That onions I smell?”

“So where’s the bread?”

“Fuck, we need bowls, cups, spoons—”

“No you don’t.” Rorge heaved the scalding hot broth across the table, full in their faces. Jaqen H’ghar did the same. Biter threw his kettles too, swinging them underarm so they spun across the dungeon, raining soup. One caught the captain in the temple as he tried to rise. He went down like a sack of sand and lay still. The rest were screaming in agony, praying, or trying to crawl off.

Arya pressed back against the wall as Rorge began to cut throats. Biter preferred to grab the men behind the head and under the chin and crack their necks with a single twist of his huge pale hands. Only one of the guards managed to get a blade out. Jaqen danced away from his slash, drew his own sword, drove the man back into a corner with a flurry of blows, and killed him with a thrust to the heart. The Lorathi brought the blade to Arya still red with heart’s blood and wiped it clean on the front of her shift. “A girl should be bloody too. This is her work.”

The key to the cell hung from a hook on the wall above the table. Rorge took it down and opened the door. The first man through was the lord with the mailed fist on his surcoat. “Well done,” he said. “I am Robett Glover.”

“My lord.” Jaqen gave him a bow.

Once freed, the captives stripped the dead guards of their weapons and darted up the steps with steel in hand. Their fellows crowded after them, bare-handed. They went swiftly, and with scarcely a word. None of them seemed quite so badly wounded as they had when Vargo Hoat had marched them through the gates of Harrenhal. “This of the soup, that was clever,” the man Glover was saying. “I did not expect that. Was it Lord Hoat’s idea?”

Rorge began to laugh. He laughed so hard that snot flew out the hole where his nose had been. Biter sat on top of one of the dead men, holding a limp hand as he gnawed at the fingers. Bones cracked between his teeth.

“Who are you men?” A crease appeared between Robett Glover’s brows. “You were not with Hoat when he came to Lord Bolton’s encampment. Are you of the Brave Companions?”

Rorge wiped the snot off his chin with the back of his hand. “We are now.”

“This man has the honor to be Jaqen H’ghar, once of the Free City of Lorath. This man’s discourteous companions are named Rorge and Biter. A lord will know which is Biter.” He waved a hand toward Arya. “And here —”

“I’m Weasel,” she blurted, before he could tell who she *really* was. She did not want her name said here, where Rorge might hear, and Biter, and all these others she did not know.

She saw Glover dismiss her. “Very well,” he said. “Let’s make an end to this bloody business.”

When they climbed back up the winding stair, they found the door guards lying in pools of their own blood. Northmen were running across the ward. Arya heard shouts. The door of Barracks Hall burst open and a wounded man staggered out screaming. Three others ran after him and silenced him with spear and sword. There was fighting around the gatehouse as well. Rorge and Biter rushed off with Glover, but Jaqen H’ghar knelt beside Arya. “A girl does not understand?”

“Yes I do,” she said, though she didn’t, not truly.

The Lorathi must have seen it on her face. “A goat has no loyalty. Soon a wolf banner is raised here, I think. But first a man would hear a certain name unsaid.”

“I take back the name.” Arya chewed her lip. “Do I still have a third death?”

“A girl is greedy.” Jaqen touched one of the dead guards and showed her his bloody fingers. “Here is three and there is four and eight more lie dead below. The debt is paid.”

“The debt is paid,” Arya agreed reluctantly. She felt a little sad. Now she was just a mouse again.

“A god has his due. And now a man must die.” A strange smile touched the lips of Jaqen H’ghar.

“*Die?*” she said, confused. What did he mean? “But I unsaid the name. You don’t need to die now.”

“I do. My time is done.” Jaqen passed a hand down his face from forehead to chin, and where it went he *changed*. His cheeks grew fuller, his eyes closer; his nose hooked, a scar appeared on his right cheek where no scar had been before. And when he shook his head, his long straight hair, half red and half white, dissolved away to reveal a cap of tight black curls.

Arya’s mouth hung open. “Who *are* you?” she whispered, too astonished to be afraid. “How did you *do* that? Was it hard?”

He grinned, revealing a shiny gold tooth. “No harder than taking a new name, if you know the way.”

“Show me,” she blurted. “I want to do it too.”

“If you would learn, you must come with me.”

Arya grew hesitant. “Where?”

“Far and away, across the narrow sea.”

“I can’t. I have to go home. To Winterfell.”

“Then we must part,” he said, “for I have duties too.” He lifted her hand and pressed a small coin into her palm. “Here.”

“What is it?”



“A coin of great value.”

Arya bit it. It was so hard it could only be iron. “Is it worth enough to buy a horse?”

“It is not meant for the buying of horses.”

“Then what good is it?”

“As well ask what good is life, what good is death? If the day comes when you would find me again, give that coin to any man from Braavos, and say these words to him—*valar morghulis*.”

“*Valar morghulis*,” Arya repeated. It wasn’t hard. Her fingers closed tight over the coin. Across the yard, she could hear men dying. “Please don’t go, Jaqen.”

“Jaqen is as dead as Arry,” he said sadly, “and I have promises to keep. *Valar morghulis*, Arya Stark. Say it again.”

“*Valar morghulis*,” she said once more, and the stranger in Jaqen’s clothes bowed to her and stalked off through the darkness, cloak swirling. She was alone with the dead men. *They deserved to die*, Arya told herself, remembering all those Ser Amory Lorch had killed at the holdfast by the lake.

The cellars under Kingspyre were empty when she returned to her bed of straw. She whispered her names to her pillow, and when she was done she added, “*Valar morghulis*,” in a small soft voice, wondering what it meant.

Come dawn, Pinkeye and the others were back, all but one boy who’d been killed in the fighting for no reason that anyone could say. Pinkeye went up alone to see how matters stood by light of day, complaining all the while that his old bones could not abide steps. When he returned, he told them that Harrenhal had been taken. “Them Bloody Mummies killed some of Ser Amory’s lot in their beds, and the rest at table after they were good and drunk. The new lord will be here before the day’s out, with his whole host. He’s from the wild north up where that Wall is, and they say he’s a hard one. This lord or that lord, there’s still work to be done. Any foolery

and I'll whip the skin off your back." He looked at Arya when he said that, but never said a word to her about where she had been the night before.

All morning she watched the Bloody Mummers strip the dead of their valuables and drag the corpses to the Flowstone Yard, where a pyre was laid to dispose of them. Shagwell the Fool hacked the heads off two dead knights and pranced about the castle swinging them by the hair and making them talk. "What did you die of?" one head asked. "Hot weasel soup," replied the second.

Arya was set to mopping up dried blood. No one said a word to her beyond the usual, but every so often she would notice people looking at her strangely. Robett Glover and the other men they'd freed must have talked about what had happened down in the dungeon, and then Shagwell and his stupid talking heads started in about the weasel soup. She would have told him to shut up, but she was scared to. The fool was half-mad, and she'd heard that he'd once killed a man for not laughing at one of his japes. *He better shut his mouth or I'll put him on my list with the rest*, she thought as she scrubbed at a reddish-brown stain. It was almost evenfall when the new master of Harrenhal arrived. He had a plain face, beardless and ordinary, notable only for his queer pale eyes. Neither plump, thin, nor muscular, he wore black ringmail and a spotted pink cloak. The sigil on his banner looked like a man dipped in blood. "On your knees for the Lord of the Dreadfort!" shouted his squire, a boy no older than Arya, and Harrenhal knelt.

Vargo Hoat came forward. "My lord, Harrenhal ith yourth."

The lord gave answer, but too softly for Arya to hear. Robett Glover and Ser Aenys Frey, freshly bathed and clad in clean new doublets and cloaks, came up to join them. After some brief talk, Ser Aenys led them over to Rorge and Biter. Arya was surprised to see them still here; somehow she would have expected them to vanish when Jaen did. Arya heard the harsh sound of Rorge's voice, but not what he was saying. Then Shagwell pounced on her, dragging her out across the yard. "My lord, my lord," he sang, tugging at her wrist, "here's the weasel who made the soup!"

"Let go," Arya said, wriggling out of his grasp.

The lord regarded her. Only his eyes moved; they were very pale, the color of ice. "How old are you, child?"

She had to think for a moment to remember. "Ten."

"Ten, *my lord*," he reminded her. "Are you fond of animals?"

"Some kinds. My lord."

A thin smile twitched across his lips. "But not lions, it would seem. Nor manticores."

She did not know what to say to that, so she said nothing.

"They tell me you are called Weasel. That will not serve. What name did your mother give you?"

She bit her lip, groping for another name. Lommy had called her Lumpyhead, Sansa used Horseface, and her father's men once dubbed her Arya Underfoot, but she did not think any of those were the sort of name he wanted.

"Nymeria," she said. "Only she called me Nan for short."

"You will call me *my lord* when you speak to me, Nan," the lord said mildly. "You are too young to be a Brave Companion, I think, and of the wrong sex. Are you afraid of leeches, child?"

"They're only leeches. My lord."

"My squire could take a lesson from you, it would seem. Frequent leechings are the secret of a long life. A man must purge himself of bad blood. You will do, I think. For so long as I remain at Harrenhal, Nan, you shall be my cupbearer, and serve me at table and in chambers."

This time she knew better than to say that she'd sooner work in the stables. "Yes, your lord. I mean, my lord."

The lord waved a hand. "Make her presentable," he said to no one in particular, "and make certain she knows how to pour wine without spilling it." Turning away, he lifted a hand and said, "Lord Hoat, see to those banners above the gatehouse."

Four Brave Companions climbed to the ramparts and hauled down the lion of Lannister and Ser Amory's own black manticore. In their place they

raised the flayed man of the Dreadfort and the direwolf of Stark. And that evening, a page named Nan poured wine for Roose Bolton and Vargo Hoat as they stood on the gallery, watching the Brave Companions parade Ser Amory Lorch naked through the middle ward. Ser Amory pleaded and sobbed and clung to the legs of his captors, until Rorge pulled him loose, and Shagwell kicked him down into the bear pit.

*The bear is all in black*, Arya thought. *Like Yoren*. She filled Roose Bolton's cup, and did not spill a drop.