



ARYA

She was grubbing for vegetables in a dead man's garden when she heard the singing.

Arya stiffened, still as stone, listening, the three stringy carrots in her hand suddenly forgotten. She thought of the Bloody Mummers and Roose Bolton's men, and a shiver of fear went down her back. *It's not fair, not when we finally found the Trident, not when we thought we were almost safe.*

Only why would the Mummers be singing?

The song came drifting up the river from somewhere beyond the little rise to the east. *"Off to Gulltown to see the fair maid, heigh-ho, heigh-ho . . ."*

Arya rose, carrots dangling from her hand. It sounded like the singer was coming up the river road. Over among the cabbages, Hot Pie had heard it too, to judge by the look on his face. Gendry had gone to sleep in the shade of the burned cottage, and was past hearing anything.

"I'll steal a sweet kiss with the point of my blade, heigh-ho, heigh-ho." She thought she heard a woodharp too, beneath the soft rush of the river.

"Do you hear?" Hot Pie asked in a hoarse whisper, as he hugged an armful of cabbages. "Someone's coming."

“Go wake Gendry,” Arya told him. “Just shake him by the shoulder, don’t make a lot of noise.” Gendry was easy to wake, unlike Hot Pie, who needed to be kicked and shouted at.

“I’ll make her my love and we’ll rest in the shade, heigh-ho, heigh-ho.” The song swelled louder with every word.

Hot Pie opened his arms. The cabbages fell to the ground with soft thumps. “We have to *hide*.”

Where? The burned cottage and its overgrown garden stood hard beside the banks of the Trident. There were a few willows growing along the river’s edge and reed beds in the muddy shallows beyond, but most of the ground hereabouts was painfully open. *I knew we should never have left the woods*, she thought. They’d been so hungry, though, and the garden had been too much a temptation. The bread and cheese they had stolen from Harrenhal had given out six days ago, back in the thick of the woods. “Take Gendry and the horses behind the cottage,” she decided. There was part of one wall still standing, big enough, maybe, to conceal two boys and three horses. *If the horses don’t whinny, and that singer doesn’t come poking around the garden.*

“What about you?”

“I’ll hide by the tree. He’s probably alone. If he bothers me, I’ll kill him. *Go!*”

Hot Pie went, and Arya dropped her carrots and drew the stolen sword from over her shoulder. She had strapped the sheath across her back; the longsword was made for a man grown, and it bumped against the ground when she wore it on her hip. *It’s too heavy besides*, she thought, missing Needle the way she did every time she took this clumsy thing in her hand. But it was a sword and she could kill with it, that was enough.

Lightfoot, she moved to the big old willow that grew beside the bend in the road and went to one knee in the grass and mud, within the veil of trailing branches. *You old gods*, she prayed as the singer’s voice grew louder, *you tree gods, hide me, and make him go past*. Then a horse whickered, and the song broke off suddenly. *He’s heard*, she knew, *but maybe he’s alone, or if he’s not, maybe they’ll be as scared of us as we are of them.*

“Did you hear that?” a man’s voice said. “There’s something behind that wall, I would say.”

“Aye,” replied a second voice, deeper. “What do you think it might be, Archer?”

Two, then. Arya bit her lip. She could not see them from where she knelt, on account of the willow. But she could hear.

“A bear.” A third voice, or the first one again?

“A lot of meat on a bear,” the deep voice said. “A lot of fat as well, in fall. Good to eat, if it’s cooked up right.”

“Could be a wolf. Maybe a lion.”

“With four feet, you think? Or two?”

“Makes no matter. Does it?”

“Not so I know. Archer, what do you mean to do with all them arrows?”

“Drop a few shafts over the wall. Whatever’s hiding back there will come out quick enough, watch and see.”

“What if it’s some honest man back there, though? Or some poor woman with a little babe at her breast?”

“An honest man would come out and show us his face. Only an outlaw would skulk and hide.”

“Aye, that’s so. Go on and loose your shafts, then.”

Arya sprang to her feet. “*Don’t!*” She showed them her sword. There were three, she saw. *Only three.* Syrio could fight more than three, and she had Hot Pie and Gendry to stand with her, maybe. *But they’re boys, and these are men.*

They were men afoot, travel-stained and mud-specked. She knew the singer by the woodharp he cradled against his jerkin, as a mother might cradle a babe. A small man, fifty from the look of him, he had a big mouth, a sharp nose, and thinning brown hair. His faded greens were mended here and there with old leather patches, and he wore a brace of throwing knives on his hip and a woodman’s axe slung across his back.

The man beside him stood a good foot taller, and had the look of a soldier. A longsword and dirk hung from his studded leather belt, rows of

overlapping steel rings were sewn onto his shirt, and his head was covered by a black iron halfhelm shaped like a cone. He had bad teeth and a bushy brown beard, but it was his hooded yellow cloak that drew the eye. Thick and heavy, stained here with grass and there with blood, frayed along the bottom and patched with deerskin on the right shoulder, the greatcloak gave the big man the look of some huge yellow bird.

The last of the three was a youth as skinny as his longbow, if not quite as tall. Red-haired and freckled, he wore a studded brigantine, high boots, fingerless leather gloves, and a quiver on his back. His arrows were fletched with grey goose feathers, and six of them stood in the ground before him, like a little fence.

The three men looked at her, standing there in the road with her blade in hand. Then the singer idly plucked a string. “Boy,” he said, “put up that sword now, unless you’re wanting to be hurt. It’s too big for you, lad, and besides, Anguy here could put three shafts through you before you could hope to reach us.”

“He could not,” Arya said, “and I’m a *girl*.”

“So you are.” The singer bowed. “My pardons.”

“You go on down the road. Just walk right past here, and you keep on singing, so we’ll know where you are. Go away and leave us be and I won’t kill you.”

The freckle-faced archer laughed. “Lem, she won’t kill us, did you hear?”

“I heard,” said Lem, the big soldier with the deep voice.

“Child,” said the singer, “put up that sword, and we’ll take you to a safe place and get some food in that belly. There are wolves in these parts, and lions, and worse things. No place for a little girl to be wandering alone.”

“She’s not alone.” Gendry rode out from behind the cottage wall, and behind him Hot Pie, leading her horse. In his chainmail shirt with a sword in his hand, Gendry looked almost a man grown, and dangerous. Hot Pie looked like Hot Pie. “Do like she says, and leave us be,” warned Gendry.

“Two and three,” the singer counted, “and is that all of you? And horses too, lovely horses. Where did you steal them?”

“They’re ours.” Arya watched them carefully. The singer kept distracting her with his talk, but it was the archer who was the danger. *If he should pull an arrow from the ground . . .*

“Will you give us your names like honest men?” the singer asked the boys.

“I’m Hot Pie,” Hot Pie said at once.

“Aye, and good for you.” The man smiled. “It’s not every day I meet a lad with such a tasty name. And what would your friends be called, Mutton Chop and Squab?”

Gendry scowled down from his saddle. “Why should I tell you my name? I haven’t heard yours.”

“Well, as to that, I’m Tom of Sevenstreams, but Tom Sevenstrings is what they call me, or Tom o’ Sevens. This great lout with the brown teeth is Lem, short for Lemoncloak. It’s yellow, you see, and Lem’s a sour sort. And young fellow me lad over there is Anguy, or Archer as we like to call him.”

“Now who are you?” demanded Lem, in the deep voice that Arya had heard through the branches of the willow.

She was not about to give up her true name as easy as that. “Squab, if you want,” she said. “I don’t care.”

The big man laughed. “A squab with a sword,” he said. “Now there’s something you don’t often see.”

“I’m the Bull,” said Gendry, taking his lead from Arya. She could not blame him for preferring Bull to Mutton Chop.

Tom Sevenstrings strummed his harp. “Hot Pie, Squab, and the Bull. Escaped from Lord Bolton’s kitchen, did you?”

“How did you know?” Arya demanded, uneasy.

“You bear his sigil on your chest, little one.”

She had forgotten that for an instant. Beneath her cloak, she still wore her fine page’s doublet, with the flayed man of the Dreadfort sewn on her breast. “Don’t call me little one!”

“Why not?” said Lem. “You’re little enough.”

“I’m bigger than I was. I’m not a *child*.” Children didn’t kill people, and she had.

“I can see that, Squab. You’re none of you children, not if you were Bolton’s.”

“We never were.” Hot Pie never knew when to keep quiet. “We were at Harrenhal before he came, that’s all.”

“So you’re lion cubs, is that the way of it?” said Tom.

“Not that either. We’re nobody’s men. Whose men are you?”

Anguy the Archer said, “We’re king’s men.”

Arya frowned. “Which king?”

“King Robert,” said Lem, in his yellow cloak.

“That old drunk?” said Gendry scornfully. “He’s dead, some boar killed him, everyone knows that.”

“Aye, lad,” said Tom Sevenstrings, “and more’s the pity.” He plucked a sad chord from his harp.

Arya didn’t think they were king’s men at all. They looked more like outlaws, all tattered and ragged. They didn’t even have horses to ride. King’s men would have had horses.

But Hot Pie piped up eagerly. “We’re looking for Riverrun,” he said. “How many days’ ride is it, do you know?”

Arya could have killed him. “You be quiet, or I’ll stuff rocks in your big stupid mouth.”

“Riverrun is a long way upstream,” said Tom. “A long hungry way. Might be you’d like a hot meal before you set out? There’s an inn not far ahead kept by some friends of ours. We could share some ale and a bite of bread, instead of fighting one another.”

“An inn?” The thought of hot food made Arya’s belly rumble, but she didn’t trust this Tom. Not everyone who spoke you friendly was really your friend. “It’s near, you say?”

“Two miles upstream,” said Tom. “A league at most.”

Gendry looked as uncertain as she felt. “What do you mean, *friends*?” he asked warily.

“Friends. Have you forgotten what friends are?”

“Sharna is the innkeep’s name,” Tom put in. “She has a sharp tongue and a fierce eye, I’ll grant you that, but her heart’s a good one, and she’s fond of little girls.”

“I’m not a little girl,” she said angrily. “Who else is there? You said *friends*.”

“Sharna’s husband, and an orphan boy they took in. They won’t harm you. There’s ale, if you think you’re old enough. Fresh bread and maybe a bit of meat.” Tom glanced toward the cottage. “And whatever you stole from Old Pate’s garden besides.”

“We never stole,” said Arya.

“Are you Old Pate’s daughter, then? A sister? A wife? Tell me no lies, Squab. I buried Old Pate myself, right there under that willow where you were hiding, and you don’t have his look.” He drew a sad sound from his harp. “We’ve buried many a good man this past year, but we’ve no wish to bury you, I swear it on my harp. Archer, show her.”

The archer’s hand moved quicker than Arya would have believed. His shaft went hissing past her head within an inch of her ear and buried itself in the trunk of the willow behind her. By then the bowman had a second arrow notched and drawn. She’d thought she understood what Syrio meant by *quick as a snake* and *smooth as summer silk*, but now she knew she hadn’t. The arrow thrummed behind her like a bee. “You missed,” she said.

“More fool you if you think so,” said Anguy. “They go where I send them.”

“That they do,” agreed Lem Lemoncloak.

There were a dozen steps between the archer and the point of her sword. *We have no chance*, Arya realized, wishing she had a bow like his, and the skill to use it. Glumly, she lowered her heavy longsword till the point touched the ground. “We’ll come see this inn,” she conceded, trying to hide the doubt in her heart behind bold words. “You walk in front and we’ll ride behind, so we can see what you’re doing.”

Tom Sevenstrings bowed deeply and said, “Before, behind, it makes no matter. Come along, lads, let’s show them the way. Anguy, best pull up

those arrows, we won't be needing them here."

Arya sheathed her sword and crossed the road to where her friends sat on their horses, keeping her distance from the three strangers. "Hot Pie, get those cabbages," she said as she vaulted into her saddle. "And the carrots too."

For once he did not argue. They set off as she had wanted, walking their horses slowly down the rutted road a dozen paces behind the three on foot. But before very long, somehow they were riding right on top of them. Tom Sevenstrings walked slowly, and liked to strum his woodharp as he went. "Do you know any songs?" he asked them. "I'd dearly love someone to sing with, that I would. Lem can't carry a tune, and our longbow lad only knows marcher ballads, every one of them a hundred verses long."

"We sing real songs in the marches," Anguy said mildly.

"Singing is *stupid*," said Arya. "Singing makes noise. We heard you a long way off. We could have killed you."

Tom's smile said he did not think so. "There are worse things than dying with a song on your lips."

"If there were wolves hereabouts, we'd know it," groused Lem. "Or lions. These are our woods."

"You never knew we were there," said Gendry.

"Now, lad, you shouldn't be so certain of that," said Tom. "Sometimes a man knows more than he says."

Hot Pie shifted his seat. "I know the song about the bear," he said. "Some of it, anyhow."

Tom ran his fingers down his strings. "Then let's hear it, pie boy." He threw back his head and sang, "*A bear there was, a bear, a bear! All black and brown, and covered with hair . . .*"

Hot Pie joined in lustily, even bouncing in his saddle a little on the rhymes. Arya stared at him in astonishment. He had a good voice and he sang well. *He never did anything well, except bake*, she thought to herself.

A small brook flowed into the Trident a little farther on. As they waded across, their singing flushed a duck from among the reeds. Anguy stopped where he stood, unslung his bow, notched an arrow, and brought it down.

The bird fell in the shallows not far from the bank. Lem took off his yellow cloak and waded in knee-deep to retrieve it, complaining all the while. “Do you think Sharna might have lemons down in that cellar of hers?” said Anguy to Tom as they watched Lem splash around, cursing. “A Dornish girl once cooked me duck with lemons.” He sounded wistful.

Tom and Hot Pie resumed their song on the other side of the brook, with the duck hanging from Lem’s belt beneath his yellow cloak. Somehow the singing made the miles seem shorter. It was not very long at all until the inn appeared before them, rising from the riverbank where the Trident made a great bend to the north. Arya squinted at it suspiciously as they neared. It did not *look* like an outlaws’ lair, she had to admit; it looked friendly, even homey, with its whitewashed upper story and slate roof and the smoke curling up lazy from its chimney. Stables and other outbuildings surrounded it, and there was an arbor in back, and apple trees, a small garden. The inn even had its own dock, thrusting out into the river, and . . .

“Gendry,” she called, her voice low and urgent. “They have a boat. We could sail the rest of the way up to Riverrun. It would be faster than riding, I think.”

He looked dubious. “Did you ever sail a boat?”

“You put up the sail,” she said, “and the wind pushes it.”

“What if the wind is blowing the wrong way?”

“Then there’s oars to row.”

“Against the current?” Gendry frowned. “Wouldn’t that be slow? And what if the boat tips over and we fall into the water? It’s not our boat anyway, it’s the inn’s.”

We could take it. Arya chewed her lip and said nothing. They dismounted in front of stables. There were no other horses to be seen, but Arya noticed fresh manure in many of the stalls. “One of us should watch the horses,” she said, wary.

Tom overheard her. “There’s no need for that, Squab. Come eat, they’ll be safe enough.”

“I’ll stay,” Gendry said, ignoring the singer. “You can come get me after you’ve had some food.”

Nodding, Arya set off after Hot Pie and Lem. Her sword was still in its sheath across her back, and she kept a hand close to the hilt of the dagger she had stolen from Roose Bolton, in case she didn't like whatever they found within.

The painted sign above the door showed a picture of some old king on his knees. Inside was the common room, where a very tall ugly woman with a knobby chin stood with her hands on her hips, glaring. "Don't just stand there, boy," she snapped. "Or are you a girl? Either one, you're blocking my door. Get in or get out. Lem, what did I tell you about my floor? You're all mud."

"We shot a duck." Lem held it out like a peace banner.

The woman snatched it from his hand. "Anguy shot a duck, is what you're meaning. Get your boots off, are you deaf or just stupid?" She turned away. "*Husband!*" she called loudly. "Get up here, the lads are back. *Husband!*"

Up the cellar steps came a man in a stained apron, grumbling. He was a head shorter than the woman, with a lumpy face and loose yellowish skin that still showed the marks of some pox. "I'm here, woman, quit your bellowing. What is it now?"

"Hang this," she said, handing him the duck.

Anguy shuffled his feet. "We were thinking we might eat it, Sharna. With lemons. If you had some."

"Lemons. And where would we get lemons? Does this look like Dorne to you, you freckled fool? Why don't you hop out back to the lemon trees and pick us a bushel, and some nice olives and pomegranates too." She shook a finger at him. "Now, I suppose I could cook it with Lem's cloak, if you like, but not till it's hung for a few days. You'll eat rabbit, or you won't eat. Roast rabbit on a spit would be quickest, if you've got a hunger. Or might be you'd like it stewed, with ale and onions."

Arya could almost taste the rabbit. "We have no coin, but we brought some carrots and cabbages we could trade you."

"Did you now? And where would they be?"

“Hot Pie, give her the cabbages,” Arya said, and he did, though he approached the old woman as gingerly as if she were Rorge or Biter or Vargo Hoat.

The woman gave the vegetables a close inspection, and the boy a closer one. “Where is this *hot pie*?”

“Here. Me. It’s my name. And she’s . . . ah . . . Squab.”

“Not under my roof. I give my diners and my dishes different names, so as to tell them apart. *Husband!*”

Husband had stepped outside, but at her shout he hurried back. “The duck’s hung. What is it now, woman?”

“Wash these vegetables,” she commanded. “The rest of you, sit down while I start the rabbits. The boy will bring you drink.” She looked down her long nose at Arya and Hot Pie. “I am not in the habit of serving ale to children, but the cider’s run out, there’s no cows for milk, and the river water tastes of war, with all the dead men drifting downstream. If I served you a cup of soup full of dead flies, would you drink it?”

“Arry would,” said Hot Pie. “I mean, Squab.”

“So would Lem,” offered Anguy with a sly smile.

“Never you mind about Lem,” Sharna said. “It’s ale for all.” She swept off toward the kitchen.

Anguy and Tom Sevenstrings took the table near the hearth while Lem was hanging his big yellow cloak on a peg. Hot Pie plopped down heavily on a bench at the table by the door, and Arya wedged herself in beside him.

Tom unslung his harp. “*A lonely inn on a forest road,*” he sang, slowly picking out a tune to go with the words. “*The innkeep’s wife was plain as a toad.*”

“Shut up with that now or we won’t be getting no rabbit,” Lem warned him. “You know how she is.”

Arya leaned close to Hot Pie. “Can you sail a boat?” she asked. Before he could answer, a thickset boy of fifteen or sixteen appeared with tankards of ale. Hot Pie took his reverently in both hands, and when he sipped he smiled wider than Arya had ever seen him smile. “Ale,” he whispered, “and *rabbit.*”

“Well, here’s to His Grace,” Anguy the Archer called out cheerfully, lifting a toast. “Seven save the king!”

“All twelve o’ them,” Lem Lemoncloak muttered. He drank, and wiped the foam from his mouth with the back of his hand.

Husband came bustling in through the front door, with an apron full of washed vegetables. “There’s strange horses in the stable,” he announced, as if they hadn’t known.

“Aye,” said Tom, setting the woodharp aside, “and better horses than the three you gave away.”

Husband dropped the vegetables on a table, annoyed. “I never gave them away. I *sold* them for a good price, and got us a skiff as well. Anyways, you lot were supposed to get them back.”

I knew they were outlaws, Arya thought, listening. Her hand went under the table to touch the hilt of her dagger, and make sure it was still there. *If they try to rob us, they’ll be sorry.*

“They never came our way,” said Lem.

“Well, I sent them. You must have been drunk, or asleep.”

“Us? Drunk?” Tom drank a long draught of ale. “Never.”

“You could have taken them yourself,” Lem told Husband.

“What, with only the boy here? I told you twice, the old woman was up to Lambswold helping that Fern birth her babe. And like as not it was one o’ you planted the bastard in the poor girl’s belly.” He gave Tom a sour look. “You, I’d wager, with that harp o’ yours, singing all them sad songs just to get poor Fern out of her smallclothes.”

“If a song makes a maid want to slip off her clothes and feel the good warm sun kiss her skin, why, is that the singer’s fault?” asked Tom. “And ’twas Anguy she fancied, besides. ‘Can I touch your bow?’ I heard her ask him. ‘Ooohh, it feels so smooth and hard. Could I give it a little pull, do you think?’”

Husband snorted. “You and Anguy, makes no matter which. You’re as much to blame as me for them horses. They was three, you know. What can one man do against three?”

“Three,” said Lem scornfully, “but one a woman and t’other in chains, you said so yourself.”

Husband made a face. “A *big* woman, dressed like a man. And the one in chains . . . I didn’t fancy the look of his eyes.”

Anguy smiled over his ale. “When I don’t fancy a man’s eyes, I put an arrow through one.”

Arya remembered the shaft that had brushed by her ear. She wished she knew how to shoot arrows.

Husband was not impressed. “You be quiet when your elders are talking. Drink your ale and mind your tongue, or I’ll have the old woman take a spoon to you.”

“My elders talk too much, and I don’t need you to tell me to drink my ale.” He took a big swallow, to show that it was so.

Arya did the same. After days of drinking from brooks and puddles, and then the muddy Trident, the ale tasted as good as the little sips of wine her father used to allow her. A smell was drifting out from the kitchen that made her mouth water, but her thoughts were still full of that boat. *Sailing it will be harder than stealing it. If we wait until they’re all asleep . . .*

The serving boy reappeared with big round loaves of bread. Arya broke off a chunk hungrily and tore into it. It was hard to chew, though, sort of thick and lumpy, and burned on the bottom.

Hot Pie made a face as soon as he tasted it. “That’s bad bread,” he said. “It’s burned, and tough besides.”

“It’s better when there’s stew to sop up,” said Lem.

“No, it isn’t,” said Anguy, “but you’re less like to break your teeth.”

“You can eat it or go hungry,” said Husband. “Do I look like some bloody baker? I’d like to see you make better.”

“I could,” said Hot Pie. “It’s easy. You kneaded the dough too much, that’s why it’s so hard to chew.” He took another sip of ale, and began talking lovingly of breads and pies and tarts, all the things he loved. Arya rolled her eyes.

Tom sat down across from her. “Squab,” he said, “or Arry, or whatever your true name might be, this is for you.” He placed a dirty scrap of parchment on the wooden tabletop between them.

She looked at it suspiciously. “What is it?”

“Three golden dragons. We need to buy those horses.”

Arya looked at him warily. “They’re *our* horses.”

“Meaning you stole them yourselves, is that it? No shame in that, girl. War makes thieves of many honest folk.” Tom tapped the folded parchment with his finger. “I’m paying you a handsome price. More than any horse is worth, if truth be told.”

Hot Pie grabbed the parchment and unfolded it. “There’s no gold,” he complained loudly. “It’s only writing.”

“Aye,” said Tom, “and I’m sorry for that. But after the war, we mean to make that good, you have my word as a king’s man.”

Arya pushed back from the table and got to her feet. “You’re no king’s men, you’re robbers.”

“If you’d ever met a true robber, you’d know they do not pay, not even in paper. It’s not for us we take your horses, child, it’s for the good of the realm, so we can get about more quickly and fight the fights that need fighting. The king’s fights. Would you deny the king?”

They were all watching her; the Archer, big Lem, Husband with his sallow face and shifty eyes. Even Sharna, who stood in the door to the kitchen squinting. *They are going to take our horses no matter what I say*, she realized. *We’ll need to walk to Riverrun, unless . . .* “We don’t want paper.” Arya slapped the parchment out of Hot Pie’s hand. “You can have our horses for that boat outside. But only if you show us how to work it.”

Tom Sevenstrings stared at her a moment, and then his wide homely mouth quirked into a rueful grin. He laughed aloud. Anguy joined in, and then they were all laughing, Lem Lemoncloak, Sharna and Husband, even the serving boy, who had stepped out from behind the casks with a crossbow under one arm. Arya wanted to scream at them, but instead she started to smile . . .

“*Riders!*” Gendry’s shout was shrill with alarm. The door burst open and there he was. “*Soldiers,*” he panted. “Coming down the river road, a dozen of them.”

Hot Pie leapt up, knocking over his tankard, but Tom and the others were unperturbed. “There’s no cause for spilling good ale on my floor,” said Sharna. “Sit back down and calm yourself, boy, there’s rabbit coming. You too, girl. Whatever harm’s been done you, it’s over and it’s done and you’re with king’s men now. We’ll keep you safe as best we can.”

Arya’s only answer was to reach over her shoulder for her sword, but before she had it halfway drawn Lem grabbed her wrist. “We’ll have no more of that, now.” He twisted her arm until her hand opened. His fingers were hard with callus and fearsomely strong. *Again!* Arya thought. *It’s happening again, like it happened in the village, with Chiswyck and Raff and the Mountain That Rides.* They were going to steal her sword and turn her back into a mouse. Her free hand closed around her tankard, and she swung it at Lem’s face. The ale sloshed over the rim and splashed into his eyes, and she heard his nose break and saw the spurt of blood. When he roared his hands went to his face, and she was free. “*Run!*” she screamed, bolting.

But Lem was on her again at once, with his long legs that made one of his steps equal to three of hers. She twisted and kicked, but he yanked her off her feet effortlessly and held her dangling while the blood ran down his face.

“*Stop it, you little fool,*” he shouted, shaking her back and forth. “*Stop it now!*” Gendry moved to help her, until Tom Sevenstrings stepped in front of him with a dagger.

By then it was too late to flee. She could hear horses outside, and the sound of men’s voices. A moment later a man came swaggering through the open door, a Tyroshi even bigger than Lem with a great thick beard, bright green at the ends but growing out grey. Behind came a pair of crossbowmen helping a wounded man between them, and then others . . .

A more ragged band Arya had never seen, but there was nothing ragged about the swords, axes, and bows they carried. One or two gave her curious glances as they entered, but no one said a word. A one-eyed man in a rusty

pothelm sniffed the air and grinned, while an archer with a head of stiff yellow hair was shouting for ale. After them came a spearman in a lion-crested helm, an older man with a limp, a Braavosi sellsword, a . . .

“Harwin?” Arya whispered. *It was!* Under the beard and the tangled hair was the face of Hullen’s son, who used to lead her pony around the yard, ride at quintain with Jon and Robb, and drink too much on feast days. He was thinner, harder somehow, and at Winterfell he had never worn a beard, but it was him—her father’s man. “*Harwin!*” Squirming, she threw herself forward, trying to wrench free of Lem’s iron grip. “It’s me,” she shouted, “Harwin, it’s me, don’t you know me, don’t you?” The tears came, and she found herself weeping like a baby, just like some stupid little girl. “Harwin, *it’s me!*”

Harwin’s eyes went from her face to the flayed man on her doublet. “How do you know me?” he said, frowning suspiciously. “The flayed man . . . who are you, some serving boy to Lord Leech?”

For a moment she did not know how to answer. She’d had so many names. Had she only dreamed Arya Stark? “I’m a girl,” she sniffed. “I was Lord Bolton’s cupbearer but he was going to leave me for the goat, so I ran off with Gendry and Hot Pie. You *have* to know me! You used to lead my pony, when I was little.”

His eyes went wide, “Gods be good,” he said in a choked voice. “Arya Underfoot? Lem, let go of her.”

“She broke my nose.” Lem dumped her unceremoniously to the floor. “Who in seven hells is she supposed to be?”

“The Hand’s daughter.” Harwin went to one knee before her. “Arya Stark, of Winterfell.”