

ARYA

Faint and far away the light burned, low on the horizon, shining through the sea mists.

“It looks like a star,” said Arya.

“The star of home,” said Denyo.

His father was shouting orders. Sailors scrambled up and down the three tall masts and moved along the rigging, reefing the heavy purple sails. Below, oarsmen heaved and strained over two great banks of oars. The decks tilted, creaking, as the galleas *Titan's Daughter* heeled to starboard and began to come about.

The star of home. Arya stood at the prow, one hand resting on the gilded figurehead, a maiden with a bowl of fruit. For half a heartbeat she let herself pretend that it *was* her home ahead.

But that was *stupid*. Her home was gone, her parents dead, and all her brothers slain but Jon Snow on the Wall. That was where she had wanted to go. She *told* the captain as much, but even the iron coin did not sway him. Arya never seemed to find the places she set out to reach. Yoren had sworn to deliver her to Winterfell, only she had ended up in Harrenhal and Yoren in his grave. When she escaped Harrenhal for Riverrun, Lem and Anguy and Tom o' Sevens took her captive and dragged her to the hollow hill instead. Then the Hound had stolen her and dragged her to the Twins. Arya had left him dying by the river and gone ahead to Saltpans, hoping to take passage for Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, only...

Braavos might not be so bad. Syrio was from Braavos, and Jaen might be there as well. It was Jaen who had given her the iron coin. He hadn't truly been her friend, the way that Syrio had, but what good had friends ever done her? *I don't need any friends, so long as I have Needle.* She brushed the ball of her thumb across the sword's smooth pommel, wishing, wishing...

If truth be told, Arya did not know what to wish for, any more than she knew what awaited her beneath that distant light. The captain had given her passage but he had no time to speak with her. Some of the crew shunned her, but others gave her gifts—a silver fork, fingerless gloves, a floppy woolen hat patched with leather. One man showed her how to tie sailor’s knots. Another poured her thimble cups of fire wine. The friendly ones would tap their chests, repeating their names over and over until Arya said them back, though none ever thought to ask *her* name. They called her Salty, since she’d come aboard at Saltpans, near the mouth of the Trident. It was as good a name as any, she supposed.

The last of the night’s stars had vanished... all but the pair dead ahead. “It’s *two* stars now.”

“Two eyes,” said Denyo. “The Titan sees us.”

The Titan of Braavos. Old Nan had told them stories of the Titan back in Winterfell. He was a giant as tall as a mountain, and whenever Braavos stood in danger he would wake with fire in his eyes, his rocky limbs grinding and groaning as he waded out into the sea to smash the enemies. “The Braavosi feed him on the juicy pink flesh of little highborn girls,” Nan would end, and Sansa would give a stupid squeak. But Maester Luwin said the Titan was only a statue, and Old Nan’s stories were only stories.

Winterfell is burned and fallen, Arya reminded herself. Old Nan and Maester Luwin were both dead, most like, and Sansa too. It did no good to think of them. *All men must die.* That was what the words meant, the words that Jaqen H’ghar had taught her when he gave her the worn iron coin. She had learned more Braavosi words since they left Saltpans, the words for *please* and *thank you* and *sea* and *star* and *fire wine*, but she came to them knowing that *all men must die*. Most of the *Daughter’s* crew had a smattering of the Common Tongue from nights ashore in Oldtown and King’s Landing and Maidenpool, though only the captain and his sons spoke it well enough to talk to her. Denyo was the youngest of those sons, a plump, cheerful boy of twelve who kept his father’s cabin and helped his eldest brother do his sums.

“I hope your Titan isn’t hungry,” Arya told him.

“Hungry?” Denyo said, confused.

“It takes no matter.” Even if the Titan *did* eat juicy pink girl flesh, Arya would not fear him. She was a scrawny thing, no proper meal for a giant, and almost eleven, practically a woman grown. *And Salty isn’t highborn, either.* “Is the Titan the god of Braavos?” she asked. “Or do you have the Seven?”

“All gods are honored in Braavos.” The captain’s son loved to talk about his city almost as much as he loved to talk about his father’s ship. “Your Seven have a sept here, the Sept-Beyond-the-Sea, but only Westerosi sailors worship there.”

They are not my Seven. They were my mother’s gods, and they let the Freys murder her at the Twins. She wondered whether she would find a godswood in Braavos, with a weirwood at its heart. Denyo might know, but she could not ask him. Salty was from Saltpans, and what would a girl from Saltpans know about the old gods of the north? *The old gods are dead,* she told herself, *with Mother and Father and Robb and Bran and Rickon, all dead.* A long time ago, she remembered her father saying that when the cold winds blow the lone wolf dies and the pack survives. *He had it all backwards.* Arya, the lone wolf, still lived, but the wolves of the pack had been taken and slain and skinned.

“The Moonsingers led us to this place of refuge, where the dragons of Valyria could not find us,” Denyo said. “Theirs is the greatest temple. We esteem the Father of Waters as well, but his house is built anew whenever he takes his bride. The rest of the gods dwell together on an isle in the center of the city. That is where you will find the... the Many-Faced God.”

The Titan’s eyes seemed brighter now, and farther apart. Arya did not know any Many-Faced God, but if he answered prayers, he might be the god she sought. *Ser Gregor,* she thought, *Dunsen, Raff the Sweetling, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, Queen Cersei. Only six now.* Joffrey was dead, the Hound had slain Polliver, and she’d stabbed the Tickler herself, and that stupid squire with the pimple. *I wouldn’t have killed him if he hadn’t grabbed me.* The Hound had been dying when she left him on the banks of the Trident,

burning up with fever from his wound. *I should have given him the gift of mercy and put a knife into his heart.*

“Salty, look!” Denyo took her by the arm and turned her. “Can you see? *There.*” He pointed.

The mists gave way before them, ragged grey curtains parted by their prow. The *Titan’s Daughter* cleaved through the grey-green waters on billowing purple wings. Arya could hear the cries of seabirds overhead. There, where Denyo pointed, a line of stony ridges rose sudden from the sea, their steep slopes covered with soldier pines and black spruce. But dead ahead the sea had broken through, and there above the open water the Titan towered, with his eyes blazing and his long green hair blowing in the wind.

His legs bestrode the gap, one foot planted on each mountain, his shoulders looming tall above the jagged crests. His legs were carved of solid stone, the same black granite as the sea mounts on which he stood, though around his hips he wore an armored skirt of greenish bronze. His breastplate was bronze as well, and his head in his crested halfhelm. His blowing hair was made of hempen ropes dyed green, and huge fires burned in the caves that were his eyes. One hand rested atop the ridge to his left, bronze fingers coiled about a knob of stone; the other thrust up into the air, clasping the hilt of a broken sword.

He is only a little bigger than King Baelor’s statue in King’s Landing, she told herself when they were still well off to sea. As the galleas drove closer to where the breakers smashed against the ridgeline, however, the Titan grew larger still. She could hear Denyo’s father bellowing commands in his deep voice, and up in the rigging men were bringing in the sails. *We are going to row beneath the Titan’s legs.* Arya could see the arrow slits in the great bronze breastplate, and stains and speckles on the Titan’s arms and shoulders where the seabirds nested. Her neck craned upward. *Baelor the Blessed would not reach his knee. He could step right over the walls of Winterfell.*

Then the Titan gave a mighty roar.

The sound was as huge as he was, a terrible groaning and grinding, so loud it drowned out even the captain’s voice and the crash of the waves

against those pine-clad ridges. A thousand seabirds took to the air at once, and Arya flinched until she saw that Denyo was laughing. “He warns the Arsenal of our coming, that is all,” he shouted. “You must not be afraid.”

“I never *was*,” Arya shouted back. “It was loud, is all.”

Wind and wave had the *Titan’s Daughter* hard in hand now, driving her swiftly toward the channel. Her double bank of oars stroked smoothly, lashing the sea to white foam as the Titan’s shadow fell upon them. For a moment it seemed as though they must surely smash up against the stones beneath his legs. Huddled by Denyo at the prow, Arya could taste salt where the spray had touched her face. She had to look straight up to see the Titan’s head. “The Braavosi feed him on the juicy pink flesh of little highborn girls,” she heard Old Nan say again, but she was *not* a little girl, and she would not be frightened of a stupid *statue*.

Even so, she kept one hand on Needle as they slipped between his legs. More arrow slits dotted the insides of those great stone thighs, and when Arya craned her neck around to watch the crow’s nest slip through with a good ten yards to spare, she spied murder holes beneath the Titan’s armored skirts, and pale faces staring down at them from behind the iron bars.

And then they were past.

The shadow lifted, the pine-clad ridges fell away to either side, the winds dwindled, and they found themselves moving through a great lagoon. Ahead rose another sea mont, a knob of rock that pushed up from the water like a spiked fist, its stony battlements bristling with scorpions, spitfires, and trebuchets. “The Arsenal of Braavos,” Denyo named it, as proud as if he’d built it. “They can build a war galley there in a day.” Arya could see dozens of galleys tied up at quays and perched on launching slips. The painted prows of others poked from innumerable wooden sheds along the stony shores, like hounds in a kennel, lean and mean and hungry, waiting for a hunter’s horn to call them forth. She tried to count them, but there were too many, and more docks and sheds and quays where the shoreline curved away.

Two galleys had come out to meet them. They seemed to skim upon the water like dragonflies, their pale oars flashing. Arya heard the captain

shouting to them and their own captains shouting back, but she did not understand the words. A great horn sounded. The galleys passed to either side of them, so close that she could hear the muffled sound of drums from within their purple hulls, *bom bom bom bom bom bom bom bom*, like the beat of living hearts.

Then the galleys were behind them, and the Arsenal as well. Ahead stretched a broad expanse of pea-green water rippled like a sheet of colored glass. From its wet heart arose the city proper, a great sprawl of domes and towers and bridges, grey and gold and red. *The hundred isles of Braavos in the sea.*

Maester Luwin had taught them about Braavos, but Arya had forgotten much of what he'd said. It was a flat city, she could see that even from afar, not like King's Landing on its three high hills. The only hills here were the ones that men had raised of brick and granite, bronze and marble. Something else was missing as well, though it took her a few moments to realize what it was. *The city has no walls.* But when she said as much to Denyo, he laughed at her. "Our walls are made of wood and painted purple," he told her. "Our *galleys* are our walls. We need no other."

The deck creaked behind them. Arya turned to find Denyo's father looming over them in his long captain's coat of purple wool. Tradesman-Captain Ternesio Terys wore no whiskers and kept his grey hair cut short and neat, framing his square, windburnt face. On the crossing she had oft seen him jesting with his crew, but when he frowned men ran from him as if before a storm. He was frowning now. "Our voyage is at an end," he told Arya. "We make for the Chequy Port, where the Sealord's customs officers will come aboard to inspect our holds. They will be half a day at it, they always are, but there is no need for you to wait upon their pleasure. Gather your belongings. I shall lower a boat, and Yorko will put you ashore."

Ashore. Arya bit her lip. She had crossed the narrow sea to get here, but if the captain had asked she would have told him she wanted to stay aboard the *Titan's Daughter*. Salty was too small to man an oar, she knew that now, but she could learn to splice ropes and reef the sails and steer a course across the great salt seas. Denyo had taken her up to the crow's nest once,

and she hadn't been afraid at all, though the deck had seemed a tiny thing below her. *I can do sums too, and keep a cabin neat.*

But the galleas had no need of a second boy. Besides, she had only to look at the captain's face to know how anxious he was to be rid of her. So Arya only nodded. "Ashore," she said, though ashore meant only strangers.

"*Valar dohaeris.*" He touched two fingers to his brow. "I beg you remember Ternesio Terys and the service he has done you."

"I will," Arya said in a small voice. The wind tugged at her cloak, insistent as a ghost. It was time she was away.

Gather your belongings, the captain had said, but there were few enough of those. Only the clothes she was wearing, her little pouch of coins, the gifts the crew had given her, the dagger on her left hip and Needle on her right.

The boat was ready before she was, and Yorko was at the oars. He was the captain's son as well, but older than Denyo and less friendly. *I never said farewell to Denyo,* she thought as she clambered down to join him. She wondered if she would ever see the boy again. *I should have said farewell.*

The *Titan's Daughter* dwindled in their wake, while the city grew larger with every stroke of Yorko's oars. A harbor was visible off to her right, a tangle of piers and quays crowded with big-bellied whalers out of Ibben, swan ships from the Summer Isles, and more galleys than a girl could count. Another harbor, more distant, was off to her left, beyond a sinking point of land where the tops of half-drowned buildings thrust themselves above the water. Arya had never seen so many big buildings all together in one place. King's Landing had the Red Keep and the Great Sept of Baelor and the Dragonpit, but Braavos seemed to boast a score of temples and towers and palaces that were as large or even larger. *I will be a mouse again,* she thought glumly, *the way I was in Harrenhal before I ran away.*

The city had seemed like one big island from where the Titan stood, but as Yorko rowed them closer she saw that it was many small islands close together, linked by arched stone bridges that spanned innumerable canals. Beyond the harbor she glimpsed streets of grey stone houses, built so close they leaned one upon the other. To Arya's eyes they were queer-looking,

four and five stories tall and very skinny, with sharp-peaked tile roofs like pointed hats. She saw no thatch, and only a few timbered houses of the sort she knew in Westeros. *They have no trees*, she realized. *Braavos is all stone, a grey city in a green sea.*

Yorko swung them north of the docks and down the gullet of a great canal, a broad green waterway that ran straight into the heart of the city. They passed under the arches of a carved stone bridge, decorated with half a hundred kinds of fish and crabs and squids. A second bridge appeared ahead, this one carved in lacy leafy vines, and beyond that a third, gazing down on them from a thousand painted eyes. The mouths of lesser canals opened to either side, and others still smaller off of those. Some of the houses were built *above* the waterways, she saw, turning the canals into a sort of tunnel. Slender boats slid in and out among them, wrought in the shapes of water serpents with painted heads and upraised tails. Those were not rowed but poled, she saw, by men who stood at their sterns in cloaks of grey and brown and deep moss green. She saw huge flat-bottomed barges too, heaped high with crates and barrels and pushed along by twenty polemen to a side, and fancy floating houses with lanterns of colored glass, velvet drapes, and brazen figureheads. Off in the far distance, looming above canals and houses both, was a massive grey stone roadway of some kind, supported by three tiers of mighty arches marching away south into the haze. “What’s that?” Arya asked Yorko, pointing. “The sweetwater river,” he told her. “It brings fresh water from the mainland, across the mudflats and the briny shallows. Good sweet water for the fountains.”

When she looked behind her, the harbor and lagoon were lost to sight. Ahead, a row of mighty statues stood along both sides of the channel, solemn stone men in long bronze robes, spattered with the droppings of the seabirds. Some held books, some daggers, some hammers. One clutched a golden star in his upraised hand. Another was upending a stone flagon to send an endless stream of water splashing down into the canal. “Are they gods?” asked Arya.

“Sealords,” said Yorko. “The Isle of the Gods is farther on. See? Six bridges down, on the right bank. That is the Temple of the Moonsingers.”

It was one of those that Arya had spied from the lagoon, a mighty mass of snow-white marble topped by a huge silvered dome whose milk glass windows showed all the phases of the moon. A pair of marble maidens flanked its gates, tall as the Sealords, supporting a crescent-shaped lintel.

Beyond it stood another temple, a red stone edifice as stern as any fortress. Atop its great square tower a fire blazed in an iron brazier twenty feet across, whilst smaller fires flanked its brazen doors. “The red priests love their fires,” Yorko told her. “The Lord of Light is their god, red R’hallor.”

I know. Arya remembered Thoros of Myr in his bits of old armor, worn over robes so faded that he had seemed more a pink priest than a red one. Yet his kiss had brought Lord Beric back from death. She watched the red god’s house drift by, wondering whether these Braavosi priests of his could do the same.

Next came a huge brick structure festooned with lichen. Arya might have taken it for a storehouse had not Yorko said, “That is the Holy Refuge, where we honor the small gods the world has forgotten. You will hear it called the Warren too.” A small canal ran between the Warren’s looming lichen-covered walls, and there he swung them right. They passed through a tunnel and out again into the light. More shrines loomed up to either side.

“I never knew there were so many gods,” Arya said.

Yorko grunted. They went around a bend and beneath another bridge. On their left appeared a rocky knoll with a windowless temple of dark grey stone at its top. A flight of stone steps led from its doors down to a covered dock.

Yorko backed the oars, and the boat bumped gently against stone pilings. He grasped an iron ring set to hold them for a moment. “Here I leave you.”

The dock was shadowed, the steps steep. The temple’s black tile roof came to a sharp peak, like the houses along the canals. Arya chewed her lip. *Syrio came from Braavos. He might have visited this temple. He might have climbed those steps.* She grabbed a ring and pulled herself up onto the dock.

“You know my name,” said Yorko from the boat.

“Yorko Terys.”

“*Valar dohaeris.*” He pushed off with his oar and drifted back off into the deeper water. Arya watched him row back the way they’d come, until he vanished in the shadows of the bridge. As the swish of oars faded, she could almost hear the beating of her heart. Suddenly she was somewhere else... back in Harrenhal with Gendry, maybe, or with the Hound in the woods along the Trident. *Salty is a stupid child*, she told herself. *I am a wolf, and will not be afraid.* She patted Needle’s hilt for luck and plunged into the shadows, taking the steps two at a time so no one could ever say she’d been afraid.

At the top she found a set of carved wooden doors twelve feet high. The left-hand door was made of weirwood pale as bone, the right of gleaming ebony. In their center was a carved moon face; ebony on the weirwood side, weirwood on the ebony. The look of it reminded her somehow of the heart tree in the godswood at Winterfell. *The doors are watching me*, she thought. She pushed upon both doors at once with the flat of her gloved hands, but neither one would budge. *Locked and barred.* “Let me in, you stupid,” she said. “I crossed the narrow sea.” She made a fist and pounded. “Jaen told me to come. I have the iron coin.” She pulled it from her pouch and held it up. “See? *Valar morghulis.*”

The doors made no reply, except to open.

They opened inward all in silence, with no human hand to move them. Arya took a step forward, and another. The doors closed behind her, and for a moment she was blind. Needle was in her hand, though she did not remember drawing it.

A few candles burned along the walls, but gave so little light that Arya could not see her own feet. Someone was whispering, too softly for her to make out words. Someone else was weeping. She heard light footfalls, leather sliding over stone, a door opening and closing. *Water, I hear water too.*

Slowly her eyes adjusted. The temple seemed much larger within than it had without. The septs of Westeros were seven-sided, with seven altars

for the seven gods, but here there were more gods than seven. Statues of them stood along the walls, massive and threatening. Around their feet red candles flickered, as dim as distant stars. The nearest was a marble woman twelve feet tall. Real tears were trickling from her eyes, to fill the bowl she cradled in her arms. Beyond her was a man with a lion's head seated on a throne, carved of ebony. On the other side of the doors, a huge horse of bronze and iron reared up on two great legs. Farther on she could make out a great stone face, a pale infant with a sword, a shaggy black goat the size of an aurochs, a hooded man leaning on a staff. The rest were only looming shapes to her, half-seen through the gloom. Between the gods were hidden alcoves thick with shadows, with here and there a candle burning.

Silent as a shadow, Arya moved between rows of long stone benches, her sword in hand. The floor was made of stone, her feet told her; not polished marble like the floor of the Great Sept of Baelor, but something rougher. She passed some women whispering together. The air was warm and heavy, so heavy that she yawned. She could smell the candles. The scent was unfamiliar, and she put it down to some queer incense, but as she got deeper into the temple, they seemed to smell of snow and pine needles and hot stew. *Good smells*, Arya told herself, and felt a little braver. Brave enough to slip Needle back into its sheath.

In the center of the temple she found the water she had heard; a pool ten feet across, black as ink and lit by dim red candles. Beside it sat a young man in a silvery cloak, weeping softly. She watched him dip a hand in the water, sending scarlet ripples racing across the pool. When he drew his fingers back he sucked them, one by one. *He must be thirsty*. There were stone cups along the rim of the pool. Arya filled one and brought it to him, so he could drink. The young man stared at her for a long moment when she offered it to him. "*Valar morghulis*," he said.

"Valar dohaeris," she replied.

He drank deep, and dropped the cup into the pool with a soft *plop*. Then he pushed himself to his feet, swaying, holding his belly. For a moment Arya thought he was going to fall. It was only then that she saw the dark stain below his belt, spreading as she watched. "You're stabbed," she

blurted, but the man paid her no mind. He lurched unsteadily toward the wall and crawled into an alcove onto a hard stone bed. When Arya peered around, she saw other alcoves too. On some there were old people sleeping.

No, a half-remembered voice seemed to whisper in her head. They are dead, or dying. Look with your eyes.

A hand touched her arm.

Arya spun away, but it was only a little girl: a pale little girl in a cowlled robe that seemed to engulf her, black on the right side and white on the left. Beneath the cowl was a gaunt and bony face, hollow cheeks, and dark eyes that looked as big as saucers. “Don’t grab me,” Arya warned the waif. “I killed the boy who grabbed me last.”

The girl said some words that Arya did not know.

She shook her head. “Don’t you know the Common Tongue?”

A voice behind her said, “I do.”

Arya did not like the way they kept surprising her. The hooded man was tall, enveloped in a larger version of the black-and-white robe the girl was wearing. Beneath his cowl all she could see was the faint red glitter of candlelight reflecting off his eyes. “What place is this?” she asked him.

“A place of peace.” His voice was gentle. “You are safe here. This is the House of Black and White, my child. Though you are young to seek the favor of the Many-Faced God.”

“Is he like the southron god, the one with seven faces?”

“Seven? No. He has faces beyond count, little one, as many faces as there are stars in the sky. In Braavos, men worship as they will... but at the end of every road stands Him of Many Faces, waiting. He will be there for you one day, do not fear. You need not rush to his embrace.”

“I only came to find Jaqen H’ghar.”

“I do not know this name.”

Her heart sank. “He was from Lorath. His hair was white on one side and red on the other. He said he’d teach me secrets, and gave me this.” The

iron coin was clutched in her fist. When she opened her fingers, it clung to her sweaty palm.

The priest studied the coin, though he made no move to touch it. The waif with the big eyes was looking at it too. Finally, the cowed man said, “Tell me your name, child.”

“Salty. I come from Saltpans, by the Trident.”

Though she could not see his face, somehow she could feel him smiling. “No,” he said. “Tell me your name.”

“Squab,” she answered this time.

“Your true name, child.”

“My mother named me Nan, but they call me Weasel—”

“Your name.”

She swallowed. “Arry. I’m *Arry*.”

“Closer. And now the truth?”

Fear cuts deeper than swords, she told herself. “Arya.” She whispered the word the first time. The second time she threw it at him. “I am *Arya*, of House Stark.”

“You are,” he said, “but the House of Black and White is no place for Arya, of House Stark.”

“Please,” she said. “I have no place to go.”

“Do you fear death?”

She bit her lip. “No.”

“Let us see.” The priest lowered his cowl. Beneath he had no face; only a yellowed skull with a few scraps of skin still clinging to the cheeks, and a white worm wriggling from one empty eye socket. “Kiss me, child,” he croaked, in a voice as dry and husky as a death rattle.

Does he think to scare me? Arya kissed him where his nose should be and plucked the grave worm from his eye to eat it, but it melted like a shadow in her hand.

The yellow skull was melting too, and the kindest old man that she had ever seen was smiling down at her. “No one has ever tried to eat my

worm before,” he said. “Are you hungry, child?”

Yes, she thought, but not for food.