

ARYA

When she climbed all the way up to the highest branch, Arya could see chimneys poking through the trees. Thatched roofs clustered along the shore of the lake and the small stream that emptied into it, and a wooden pier jutted out into the water beside a low long building with a slate roof.

She skinnied farther out, until the branch began to sag under her weight. No boats were tied to the pier, but she could see thin tendrils of smoke rising from some of the chimneys, and part of a wagon jutting out behind a stable.

Someone's there. Arya chewed her lip. All the other places they'd come upon had been empty and desolate. Farms, villages, castles, septs, barns, it made no matter. If it could burn, the Lannisters had burned it; if it could die, they'd killed it. They had even set the woods ablaze where they could, though the leaves were still green and wet from recent rains, and the fires had not spread. "They would have burned the lake if they could have," Gendry had said, and Arya knew he was right. On the night of their escape, the flames of the burning town had shimmered so brightly on the water that it had seemed that the lake *was* afire.

When they finally summoned the nerve to steal back into the ruins the next night, nothing remained but blackened stones, the hollow shells of houses, and corpses. In some places wisps of pale smoke still rose from the ashes. Hot Pie had pleaded with them not to go back, and Lommy called them fools and swore that Ser Amory would catch them and kill them too, but Lorch and his men had long gone by the time they reached the holdfast. They found the gates broken down, the walls partly demolished, and the inside strewn with the unburied dead. One look was enough for Gendry. "They're killed, every one," he said. "And dogs have been at them too, look."

"Or wolves."

"Dogs, wolves, it makes no matter. It's done here."

But Arya would not leave until they found Yoren. They couldn't have killed *him*, she told herself, he was too hard and tough, and a brother of the Night's Watch besides. She said as much to Gendry as they searched among the corpses.

The axe blow that had killed him had split his skull apart, but the great tangled beard could be no one else's, or the garb, patched and unwashed and so faded it was more grey than black. Ser Amory Lorch had given no more thought to burying his own dead than to those he had murdered, and the corpses of four Lannister men-at-arms were heaped near Yoren's. Arya wondered how many it had taken to bring him down.

He was going to take me home, she thought as they dug the old man's hole. There were too many dead to bury them all, but Yoren at least must have a grave, Arya had insisted. *He was going to bring me safe to Winterfell, he promised*. Part of her wanted to cry. The other part wanted to kick him.

It was Gendry who thought of the lord's towerhouse and the three that Yoren had sent to hold it. They had come under attack as well, but the round tower had only one entry, a second-story door reached by a ladder. Once that had been pulled inside, Ser Amory's men could not get at them. The Lannisters had piled brush around the tower's base and set it afire, but the stone would not burn, and Lorch did not have the patience to starve them out. Cutjack opened the door at Gendry's shout, and when Kurz said they'd be better pressing on north than going back, Arya had clung to the hope that she still might reach Winterfell.

Well, this village was no Winterfell, but those thatched roofs promised warmth and shelter and maybe even food, if they were bold enough to risk them. *Unless it's Lorch there. He had horses; he would have traveled faster than us*.

She watched from the tree for a long time, hoping she might see something; a man, a horse, a banner, anything that would help her know. A few times she glimpsed motion, but the buildings were so far off it was hard to be certain. Once, very clearly, she heard the whinny of a horse.

The air was full of birds, crows mostly. From afar, they were no larger than flies as they wheeled and flapped above the thatched roofs. To the east, Gods Eye was a sheet of sun-hammered blue that filled half the world. Some days, as they made their slow way up the muddy shore (Gendry wanted no part of any roads, and even Hot Pie and Lommy saw the sense in that), Arya felt as though the lake were calling her. She wanted to leap into those placid blue waters, to feel clean again, to swim and splash and bask in the sun. But she dare not take off her clothes where the others could see, not even to wash them. At the end of the day she would often sit on a rock and dangle her feet in the cool water. She had finally thrown away her cracked and rotted shoes. Walking barefoot was hard at first, but the blisters had finally broken, the cuts had healed, and her soles had turned to leather. The mud was nice between her toes, and she liked to feel the earth underfoot when she walked.

From up here, she could see a small wooded island off to the northeast. Thirty yards from shore, three black swans were gliding over the water, so serene... no one had told them that war had come, and they cared nothing for burning towns and butchered men. She stared at them with yearning. Part of her wanted to be a swan. The other part wanted to eat one. She had broken her fast on some acorn paste and a handful of bugs. Bugs weren't so bad when you got used to them. Worms were worse, but still not as bad as the pain in your belly after days without food. Finding bugs was easy, all you had to do was kick over a rock. Arya had eaten a bug once when she was little, just to make Sansa screech, so she hadn't been afraid to eat another. Weasel wasn't either, but Hot Pie retched up the beetle he tried to swallow, and Lommy and Gendry wouldn't even try. Yesterday Gendry had caught a frog and shared it with Lommy, and, a few days before, Hot Pie had found blackberries and stripped the bush bare, but mostly they had been living on water and acorns. Kurz had told them how to use rocks and make a kind of acorn paste. it tasted awful.

She wished the poacher hadn't died. He'd known more about the woods than all the rest of them together, but he'd taken an arrow through the shoulder pulling in the ladder at the towerhouse. Tarber had packed it with mud and moss from the lake, and for a day or two Kurz swore the

wound was nothing, even though the flesh of his throat was turning dark while angry red welts crept up his jaw and down his chest. Then one morning he couldn't find the strength to get up, and by the next he was dead.

They buried him under a mound of stones, and Cutjack had claimed his sword and hunting horn, while Tarber helped himself to bow and boots and knife. They'd taken it all when they left. At first they thought the two had just gone hunting, that they'd soon return with game and feed them all. But they waited and waited, until finally Gendry made them move on. Maybe Tarber and Cutjack figured they would stand a better chance without a gaggle of orphan boys to herd along. They probably would too, but that didn't stop her hating them for leaving.

Beneath her tree, Hot Pie barked like a dog. Kurz had told them to use animal sounds to signal to each other. An old poacher's trick, he'd said, but he'd died before he could teach them how to make the sounds right. Hot Pie's bird calls were awful. His dog was better, but not much.

Arya hopped from the high branch to one beneath it, her hands out for balance. *A water dancer never falls*. Lightfoot, her toes curled tight around the branch, she walked a few feet, hopped down to a larger limb, then swung hand over hand through the tangle of leaves until she reached the trunk. The bark was rough beneath her fingers, against her toes. She descended quickly, jumping down the final six feet, rolling when she landed.

Gendry gave her a hand to pull her up. "You were up there a long time. What could you see?"

"A fishing village, just a little place, north along the shore. Twenty-six thatch roofs and one slate, I counted. I saw part of a wagon. Someone's there."

At the sound of her voice, Weasel came creeping out from the bushes. Lommy had named her that. He said she looked like a weasel, which wasn't true, but they couldn't keep on calling her the crying girl after she finally stopped crying. Her mouth was filthy. Arya hoped she hadn't been eating mud again.

“Did you see people?” asked Gendry.

“Mostly just roofs,” Arya admitted, “but some chimneys were smoking, and I heard a horse.” The Weasel put her arms around her leg, clutching tight. Sometimes she did that now.

“If there’s people, there’s food,” Hot Pie said, too loudly. Gendry was always telling him to be more quiet, but it never did any good. “Might be they’d give us some.”

“Might be they’d kill us too,” Gendry said.

“Not if we yielded,” Hot Pie said hopefully.

“Now you sound like Lommy.”

Lommy Greenhands sat propped up between two thick roots at the foot of an oak. A spear had taken him through his left calf during the fight at the holdfast. By the end of the next day, he had to limp along one-legged with an arm around Gendry, and now he couldn’t even do *that*. They’d hacked branches off trees to make a litter for him, but it was slow, hard work carrying him along, and he whimpered every time they jounced him.

“We have to yield,” he said. “That’s what Yoren should have done. He should have opened the gates like they said.”

Arya was sick of Lommy going on about how Yoren should have yielded. It was all he talked about when they carried him, that and his leg and his empty belly.

Hot Pie agreed. “They *told* Yoren to open the gates, they told him in the king’s name. You have to do what they tell you in the king’s name. It was that stinky old man’s fault. If he’d of yielded, they would have left us be.”

Gendry frowned. “Knights and lordlings, they take each other captive and pay ransoms, but they don’t care if the likes of you yield or not.” He turned to Arya. “What else did you see?”

“If it’s a fishing village, they’d sell us fish, I bet,” said Hot Pie. The lake teemed with fresh fish, but they had nothing to catch them with. Arya had tried to use her hands, the way she’d seen Koss do, but fish were quicker than pigeons and the water played tricks on her eyes.

“I don’t know about fish.” Arya tugged at the Weasel’s matted hair, thinking it might be best to hack it off. “There’s crows down by the water. Something’s dead there.”

“Fish, washed up on shore,” Hot Pie said. “If the crows eat it, I bet we could.”

“We should catch some crows, we could eat *them*,” said Lommy. “We could make a fire and roast them like chickens.”

Gendry looked fierce when he scowled. His beard had grown in thick and black as briar. “I said, no fires.”

“Lommy’s *hungry*,” Hot Pie whined, “and I am too.”

“We’re all hungry,” said Arya.

“*You’re* not,” Lommy spat from the ground. “Worm breath.”

Arya could have kicked him in his wound. “I *said* I’d dig worms for you too, if you wanted.”

Lommy made a disgusted face. “If it wasn’t for my leg, I’d hunt us some boars.”

“Some boars,” she mocked. “You need a boarspear to hunt boars, and horses and dogs, and men to flush the boar from its lair.” Her father had hunted boar in the wolfswood with Robb and Jon. Once he even took Bran, but never Arya, even though she was older. Septa Mordane said boar hunting was not for ladies, and Mother only promised that when she was older she might have her own hawk. She was older now, but if she had a hawk she’d *eat* it.

“What do *you* know about hunting boars?” said Hot Pie.

“More than you.”

Gendry was in no mood to hear it. “Quiet, both of you, I need to think what to do.” He always looked pained when he tried to think, like it hurt him something fierce.

“Yield,” Lommy said.

“I told you to shut up about the yielding. We don’t even know who’s in there. Maybe we can steal some food.”

“Lommy could steal, if it wasn’t for his leg,” said Hot Pie. “He was a thief in the city.”

“A bad thief,” Arya said, “or he wouldn’t have got caught.”

Gendry squinted up at the sun. “Evenfall will be the best time to sneak in. I’ll go scout come dark.”

“No, I’ll go,” Arya said. “You’re too noisy.”

Gendry got that look on his face. “We’ll both go.”

“Arry should go,” said Lommy. “He’s sneakier than you are.”

“We’ll *both* go, I said.”

“But what if you don’t come back? Hot Pie can’t carry me by himself, you know he can’t...”

“And there’s wolves,” Hot Pie said. “I heard them last night, when I had the watch. They sounded close.”

Arya had heard them too. She’d been asleep in the branches of an elm, but the howling had woken her. She’d sat awake for a good hour, listening to them, prickles creeping up her spine.

“And you won’t even let us have a fire to keep them off,” Hot Pie said. “It’s not right, leaving us for the wolves.”

“No one is leaving you,” Gendry said in disgust. “Lommy has his spear if the wolves come, and you’ll be with him. We’re just going to go see, that’s all; we’re coming back.”

“Whoever it is, you should yield to them,” Lommy whined. “I need some potion for my leg, it hurts bad.”

“If we see any leg potion, we’ll bring it,” Gendry said. “Arry, let’s go, I want to get near before the sun is down. Hot Pie, you keep Weasel here, I don’t want her following.”

“Last time she kicked me.”

“I’ll kick you if you don’t keep her here.” Without waiting for an answer, Gendry donned his steel helm and walked off.

Arya had to scamper to keep up. Gendry was five years older and a foot taller than she was, and long of leg as well. For a while he said nothing, just

plowed on through the trees with an angry look on his face, making too much noise. But finally he stopped and said, "I think Lommy's going to die."

She was not surprised. Kurz had died of his wound, and he'd been a lot stronger than Lommy. Whenever it was Arya's turn to help carry him, she could feel how warm his skin was, and smell the stink off his leg. "Maybe we could find a maester..."

"You only find maesters in castles, and even if we found one, he wouldn't dirty his hands on the likes of Lommy." Gendry ducked under a low-hanging limb.

"That's not true." Maester Luwin would have helped anyone who came to him, she was certain.

"He's going to die, and the sooner he does it, the better for the rest of us. We should just leave him, like he says. If it was you or me hurt, you know he'd leave us." They scrambled down a steep cut and up the other side, using roots for handholds. "I'm sick of carrying him, and I'm sick of all his talk about yielding too. If he could stand up, I'd knock his teeth in. Lommy's no use to anyone. That crying girl's no use either."

"You leave Weasel alone, she's just scared and hungry is all." Arya glanced back, but the girl was not following for once. Hot Pie must have grabbed her, like Gendry had told him.

"She's no use," Gendry repeated stubbornly. "Her and Hot Pie and Lommy, they're slowing us down, and they're going to get us killed. You're the only one of the bunch who's good for anything. Even if you are a girl."

Arya froze in her steps. "*I'm not a girl!*"

"Yes you are. Do you think I'm as stupid as they are?"

"No, you're stupider. The Night's Watch doesn't take girls, everyone knows that."

"That's true. I don't know why Yoren brought you, but he must have had some reason. You're still a girl."

"I am not!"

"Then pull out your cock and take a piss. Go on."

“I don’t need to take a piss. If I wanted to I could.”

“Liar. You can’t take out your cock because you don’t have one. I never noticed before when there were thirty of us, but you always go off in the woods to make your water. You don’t see Hot Pie doing that, nor me neither. If you’re not a girl, you must be some eunuch.”

“*You’re* the eunuch.”

“You know I’m not.” Gendry smiled. “You want me to take out my cock and prove it? I don’t have anything to hide.”

“Yes you do,” Arya blurted, desperate to escape the subject of the cock she didn’t have. “Those gold cloaks were after you at the inn, and you won’t tell us why.”

“I wish I knew. I think Yoren knew, but he never told me. Why did you think they were after you, though?”

Arya bit her lip. She remembered what Yoren had said, the day he had hacked off her hair. *This lot, half o’ them would turn you over to the queen quick as spit for a pardon and maybe a few silvers. The other half’d do the same, only they’d rape you first.* Only Gendry was different, the queen wanted him too. “I’ll tell you if you’ll tell me,” she said warily.

“I would if I knew, Arry... is that really what you’re called, or do you have some girl’s name?”

Arya glared at the gnarled root by her feet. She realized that the pretense was done. Gendry knew, and she had nothing in her pants to convince him otherwise. She could draw Needle and kill him where he stood, or else trust him. She wasn’t certain she’d be able to kill him, even if she tried; he had his own sword, and he was a lot stronger. All that was left was the truth. “Lommy and Hot Pie can’t know,” she said.

“They won’t,” he swore. “Not from me.”

“Arya.” She raised her eyes to his. “My name is Arya. Of House Stark.”

“Of House...” It took him a moment before he said, “The King’s Hand was named Stark. The one they killed for a traitor.”

“He was never a traitor. He was my father.”

Gendry's eyes widened. "So *that's* why you thought..."

She nodded. "Yoren was taking me home to Winterfell."

"I... you're highborn then, a... you'll be a lady..."

Arya looked down at her ragged clothes and bare feet, all cracked and callused. She saw the dirt under her nails, the scabs on her elbows, the scratches on her hands. *Septa Mordane wouldn't even know me, I bet. Sansa might, but she'd pretend not to.* "My mother's a lady, and my sister, but I never was."

"Yes you were. You were a lord's daughter and you lived in a castle, didn't you? And you... gods be good, I never..." All of a sudden Gendry seemed uncertain, almost afraid. "All that about cocks, I never should have said that. And I been pissing in front of you and everything, I... I beg your pardon, m'lady."

"*Stop that!*" Arya hissed. Was he mocking her?

"I know my courtesies, m'lady," Gendry said, stubborn as ever. "Whenever highborn girls came into the shop with their fathers, my master told me I was to bend the knee, and speak only when they spoke to me, and call them *m'lady*."

"If you start calling me m'lady, even *Hot Pie* is going to notice. And you better keep on pissing the same way too."

"As m'lady commands."

Arya slammed his chest with both hands. He tripped over a stone and sat down with a thump. "What kind of lord's daughter are you?" he said, laughing.

"*This* kind." She kicked him in the side, but it only made him laugh harder. "You laugh all you like. *I'm* going to see who's in the village." The sun had already fallen below the trees; dusk would be on them in no time at all. For once it was Gendry who had to hurry after. "You smell that?" she asked.

He sniffed the air. "Rotten fish?"

"You know it's not."

“We better be careful. I’ll go around west, see if there’s some road. There must be if you saw a wagon. You take the shore. If you need help, bark like a dog.”

“That’s stupid. If I need help, I’ll shout *help*.” She darted away, bare feet silent in the grass. When she glanced back over her shoulder, he was watching her with that pained look on his face that meant he was thinking. *He’s probably thinking that he shouldn’t be letting m’lady go stealing food.* Arya just knew he was going to be stupid now.

The smell grew stronger as she got closer to the village. It did not smell like rotten fish to her. This stench was ranker, fouler. She wrinkled her nose.

Where the trees began to thin, she used the undergrowth, slipping from bush to bush quiet as a shadow. Every few yards she stopped to listen. The third time, she heard horses, and a man’s voice as well. And the smell got worse. *Dead man’s stink, that’s what it is.* She had smelled it before, with Yoren and the others.

A dense thicket of brambles grew south of the village. By the time she reached it, the long shadows of sunset had begun to fade, and the lantern bugs were coming out. She could see thatched roofs just beyond the hedge. She crept along until she found a gap and squirmed through on her belly, keeping well hidden until she saw what made the smell.

Beside the gently lapping waters of Gods Eye, a long gibbet of raw green wood had been thrown up, and things that had once been men dangled there, their feet in chains, while crows pecked at their flesh and flapped from corpse to corpse. For every crow there were a hundred flies. When the wind blew off the lake, the nearest corpse twisted on its chain, ever so slightly. The crows had eaten most of its face, and something else had been at it as well, something much larger. Throat and chest had been torn apart, and glistening green entrails and ribbons of ragged flesh dangled from where the belly had been opened. one arm had been ripped right off the shoulder; Arya saw the bones a few feet away, gnawed and cracked, picked clean of meat.

She made herself look at the next man and the one beyond him and the one beyond *him*, telling herself she was hard as a stone. Corpses all, so

savaged and decayed that it took her a moment to realize they had been stripped before they were hanged. They did not look like naked people; they hardly looked like people at all. The crows had eaten their eyes, and sometimes their faces. Of the sixth in the long row, nothing remained but a single leg, still tangled in its chains, swaying with each breeze.

Fear cuts deeper than swords. Dead men could not hurt her, but whoever had killed them could. Well beyond the gibbet, two men in mail hauberks stood leaning on their spears in front of the long low building by the water, the one with the slate roof. A pair of tall poles had been driven into the muddy ground in front of it, banners drooping from each staff. One looked red and one paler, white or yellow maybe, but both were limp and with the dusk settling, she could not even be certain that red one was Lannister crimson. *I don't need to see the lion, I can see all the dead people, who else would it be but Lannisters?*

Then there was a shout.

The two spearmen turned at the cry, and a third man came into view, shoving a captive before him. It was growing too dark to make out faces, but the prisoner was wearing a shiny steel helm, and when Arya saw the horns she knew it was Gendry. *You stupid stupid stupid STUPID!* she thought. If he'd been here she would have kicked him again.

The guards were talking loudly, but she was too far away to make out the words, especially with the crows gabbling and flapping closer to hand. One of the spearmen snatched the helm off Gendry's head and asked him a question, but he must not have liked the answer, because he smashed him across the face with the butt of his spear and knocked him down. The one who'd captured him gave him a kick, while the second spearman was trying on the bull's-head helm. Finally they pulled him to his feet and marched him off toward the storehouse. When they opened the heavy wooden doors, a small boy darted out, but one of the guards grabbed his arm and flung him back inside. Arya heard sobbing from inside the building, and then a shriek so loud and full of pain that it made her bite her lip.

The guards shoved Gendry inside with the boy and barred the doors behind them. Just then, a breath of wind came sighing off the lake, and the

banners stirred and lifted. The one on the tall staff bore the golden lion, as she'd feared. On the other, three sleek black shapes ran across a field as yellow as butter. Dogs, she thought. Arya had seen those dogs before, but where?

It didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was that they had Gendry. Even if he *was* stubborn and stupid, she had to get him out. She wondered if they knew that the queen wanted him.

One of the guards took off his helm and donned Gendry's instead. It made her angry to see him wearing it, but she knew there was nothing she could do to stop him. She thought she heard more screams from inside the windowless storehouse, muffled by the masonry, but it was hard to be certain.

She stayed long enough to see the guard changed, and much more besides. Men came and went. They led their horses down to the stream to drink. A hunting party returned from the wood, carrying a deer's carcass slung from a pole. She watched them clean and gut it and build a cookfire on the far side of the stream, and the smell of cooking meat mingled queerly with the stench of corruption. Her empty belly roiled and she thought she might retch. The prospect of food brought other men out of the houses, near all of them wearing bits of mail or boiled leather. When the deer was cooked, the choicest portions were carried to one of the houses.

She thought that the dark might let her crawl close and free Gendry, but the guards kindled torches off the cookfire. A squire brought meat and bread to the two guarding the storehouse, and later two more men joined them and they all passed a skin of wine from hand to hand. When it was empty the others left, but the two guards remained, leaning on their spears.

Arya's arms and legs were stiff when she finally wriggled out from under the briar into the dark of the wood. It was a black night, with a thin sliver of moon appearing and disappearing as the clouds blew past. *Silent as a shadow*, she told herself as she moved through the trees. In this darkness she dared not run, for fear of tripping on some unseen root or losing her way. On her left Gods Eye lapped calmly against its shores. on her right a

wind sighed through the branches, and leaves rustled and stirred. Far off, she heard the howling of wolves.

Lommy and Hot Pie almost shit themselves when she stepped out of the trees behind them. “Quiet,” she told them, putting an arm around Weasel when the little girl came running up.

Hot Pie stared at her with big eyes. “We thought you left us.” He had his shortsword in hand, the one Yoren had taken off the gold cloak. “I was scared you was a wolf.”

“Where’s the Bull?” asked Lommy.

“They caught him,” Arya whispered. “We have to get him out. Hot Pie, you got to help. We’ll sneak up and kill the guards, and then I’ll open the door.”

Hot Pie and Lommy exchanged a look. “How many?”

“I couldn’t count,” Arya admitted. “Twenty at least, but only two on the door.”

Hot Pie looked as if he were going to cry. “We can’t fight *twenty*.”

“You only need to fight *one*. I’ll do the other and we’ll get Gendry out and run.”

“We should yield,” Lommy said. “Just go in and yield.”

Arya shook her head stubbornly.

“Then just leave him, Arry,” Lommy pleaded. “They don’t know about the rest of us. If we hide, they’ll go away, you know they will. It’s not our fault Gendry’s captured.”

“You’re stupid, Lommy,” Arya said angrily. “You’ll *die* if we don’t get Gendry out. Who’s going to carry you?”

“You and Hot Pie.”

“All the time, with no one else to help? We’ll never do it. Gendry was the strong one. Anyhow, I don’t care what you say, I’m going back for him.” She looked at Hot Pie. “Are you coming?”

Hot Pie glanced at Lommy, at Arya, at Lommy again. “I’ll come,” he said reluctantly.

“Lommy, you keep Weasel here.”

He grabbed the little girl by the hand and pulled her close. “What if the wolves come?”

“Yield,” Arya suggested.

Finding their way back to the village seemed to take hours. Hot Pie kept stumbling in the dark and losing his way, and Arya had to wait for him and double back. Finally she took him by the hand and led him along through the trees. “Just be quiet and follow.” When they could make out the first faint glow of the village fires against the sky, she said, “There’s dead men hanging on the other side of the hedge, but they’re nothing to be scared of, just remember fear cuts deeper than swords. We have to go real quiet and slow.” Hot Pie nodded.

She wriggled under the briar first and waited for him on the far side, crouched low. Hot Pie emerged pale and panting, face and arms bloody with long scratches. He started to say something, but Arya put a finger to his lips. On hands and knees, they crawled along the gibbet, beneath the swaying dead. Hot Pie never once looked up, nor made a sound.

Until the crow landed on his back, and he gave a muffled gasp. “*Who’s there?*” a voice boomed suddenly from the dark.

Hot Pie leapt to his feet. “*I yield!*” He threw away his sword as dozens of crows rose shrieking and complaining to flap about the corpses. Arya grabbed his leg and tried to drag him back down, but he wrenched loose and ran forward, waving his arms. “I yield, I yield.”

She bounced up and drew Needle, but by then men were all around her. Arya slashed at the nearest, but he blocked her with a steel-clad arm, and someone else slammed into her and dragged her to the ground, and a third man wrenched the sword from her grasp. When she tried to bite, her teeth snapped shut on cold dirty chainmail. “Oho, a fierce one,” the man said, laughing. The blow from his iron-clad fist near knocked her head off.

They talked over her as she lay hurting, but Arya could not seem to understand the words. Her ears rang. When she tried to crawl off, the earth moved beneath her. *They took Needle.* The shame of that hurt worse than

the pain, and the pain hurt a lot. Jon had given her that sword. Syrio had taught her to use it.

Finally someone grabbed the front of her jerkin, yanked her to her knees. Hot Pie was kneeling too, before the tallest man Arya had ever seen, a monster from one of Old Nan's stories. She never saw where the giant had come from. Three black dogs raced across his faded yellow surcoat, and his face looked as hard as if it had been cut from stone. Suddenly Arya knew where she had seen those dogs before. The night of the tourney at King's Landing, all the knights had hung their shields outside their pavilions. "That one belongs to the Hound's brother," Sansa had confided when they passed the black dogs on the yellow field. "He's even bigger than Hodor, you'll see. They call him *the Mountain That Rides*."

Arya let her head droop, only half aware of what was going on around her. Hot Pie was yielding some more. The Mountain said, "You'll lead us to these others," and walked off. Next she was stumbling past the dead men on their gibbet, while Hot Pie told their captors he'd bake them pies and tarts if they didn't hurt him. Four men went with them. One carried a torch, one a longsword; two had spears.

They found Lommy where they'd left him, under the oak. "I yield," he called out at once when he saw them. He'd flung away his own spear and raised his hands, splotchy green with old dye. "I yield. Please."

The man with the torch searched around under the trees. "Are you the last? Baker boy said there was a girl."

"She ran off when she heard you coming," Lommy said. "You made a lot of noise." And Arya thought, *Run, Weasel, run as far as you can, run and hide and never come back.*

"Tell us where we can find that whoreson Dondarrion, and there'll be a hot meal in it for you."

"Who?" said Lommy blankly.

"I told you, this lot don't know no more than those cunts in the village. Waste o'bloody time."

One of the spearmen drifted over to Lommy. “Something wrong with your leg, boy?”

“It got hurt.”

“Can you walk?” He sounded concerned.

“No,” said Lommy. “You got to carry me.”

“Think so?” The man lifted his spear casually and drove the point through the boy’s soft throat. Lommy never even had time to yield again. He jerked once, and that was all. When the man pulled his spear loose, blood sprayed out in a dark fountain. “Carry him, he says,” he muttered, chuckling.