

ARYA

Whatever names Harren the Black had meant to give his towers were long forgotten. They were called the Tower of Dread, the Widow's Tower, the Wailing Tower, the Tower of Ghosts, and Kingspyre Tower. Arya slept in a shallow niche in the cavernous vaults beneath the Wailing Tower, on a bed of straw. She had water to wash in whenever she liked, a chunk of soap. The work was hard, but no harder than walking miles every day. Weasel did not need to find worms and bugs to eat, as Arry had; there was bread every day, and barley stews with bits of carrot and turnip, and once a fortnight even a bite of meat.

Hot Pie ate even better; he was where he belonged, in the kitchens, a round stone building with a domed roof that was a world unto itself. Arya took her meals at a trestle table in the undercroft with Weese and his other charges, but sometimes she would be chosen to help fetch their food, and she and Hot Pie could steal a moment to talk. He could never remember that she was now Weasel and kept calling her Arry, even though he knew she was a girl. Once he tried to slip her a hot apple tart, but he made such a clumsy job of it that two of the cooks saw. They took the tart away and beat him with a big wooden spoon.

Gendry had been sent to the forge; Arya seldom saw him. As for those she served with, she did not even want to know their names. That only made it hurt worse when they died. Most of them were older than she was and content to let her alone.

Harrenhal was vast, much of it far gone in decay. Lady Whent had held the castle as bannerman to House Tully, but she'd used only the lower thirds of two of the five towers, and let the rest go to ruin. Now she was fled, and the small household she'd left could not begin to tend the needs of all the knights, lords, and highborn prisoners Lord Tywin had brought, so the Lannisters must forage for servants as well as for plunder and provender. The talk was that Lord Tywin planned to restore Harrenhal to glory, and make it his new seat once the war was done.

Weese used Arya to run messages, draw water, and fetch food, and sometimes to serve at table in the Barracks Hall above the armory, where the men-at-arms took their meals. But most of her work was cleaning. The ground floor of the Wailing Tower was given over to storerooms and granaries, and two floors above housed part of the garrison, but the upper stories had not been occupied for eighty years. Now Lord Tywin had commanded that they be made fit for habitation again. There were floors to be scrubbed, grime to be washed off windows, broken chairs and rotted beds to be carried off. The topmost story was infested with nests of the huge black bats that House Whent had used for its sigil, and there were rats in the cellars as well... and ghosts, some said, the spirits of Harren the Black and his sons.

Arya thought that was stupid. Harren and his sons had died in Kingspyre Tower, that was why it had that name, so why should they cross the yard to haunt her? The Wailing Tower only wailed when the wind blew from the north, and that was just the sound the air made blowing through the cracks in the stones where they had fissured from the heat. If there were ghosts in Harrenhal, they never troubled her. It was the living men she feared, Weese and Ser Gregor Clegane and Lord Tywin Lannister himself, who kept his apartments in Kingspyre Tower, still the tallest and mightiest of all, though lopsided beneath the weight of the slagged stone that made it look like some giant half-melted black candle.

She wondered what Lord Tywin would do if she marched up to him and confessed to being Arya Stark, but she knew she'd never get near enough to talk to him, and anyhow he'd never believe her if she did, and afterward Weese would beat her bloody.

In his own small strutting way, Weese was nearly as scary as Ser Gregor. The Mountain swatted men like flies, but most of the time he did not even seem to know the fly was there. Weese *always* knew you were there, and what you were doing, and sometimes what you were thinking. He would hit at the slightest provocation, and he had a dog who was near as bad as he was, an ugly spotted bitch that smelled worse than any dog Arya had ever known. Once she saw him set the dog on a latrine boy who'd

annoyed him. She tore a big chunk out of the boy's calf while Weese laughed.

It took him only three days to earn the place of honor in her nightly prayers. "Weese," she would whisper, first of all. "Dunsen, Chiswyck, Polliver, Raff the Sweetling. The Tickler and the Hound. Ser Gregor, Ser Amory, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, King Joffrey, Queen Cersei." If she let herself forget even one of them, how would she ever find him again to kill him?

On the road Arya had felt like a sheep, but Harrenhal turned her into a mouse. She was grey as a mouse in her scratchy wool shift, and like a mouse she kept to the crannies and crevices and dark holes of the castle, scurrying out of the way of the mighty.

Sometimes she thought they were *all* mice within those thick walls, even the knights and the great lords. The size of the castle made even Gregor Clegane seem small. Harrenhal covered thrice as much ground as Winterfell, and its buildings were so much larger they could scarcely be compared. Its stables housed a thousand horses, its godswood covered twenty acres, its kitchens were as large as Winterfell's Great Hall, and its own great hall, grandly named the Hall of a Hundred Hearths even though it only had thirty and some (Arya had tried to count them, twice, but she came up with thirty-three once and thirty-five the other time) was so cavernous that Lord Tywin could have feasted his entire host, though he never did. Walls, doors, halls, steps, everything was built to an inhuman scale that made Arya remember the stories Old Nan used to tell of the giants who lived beyond the Wall.

And as lords and ladies never notice the little grey mice under their feet, Arya heard all sorts of secrets just by keeping her ears open as she went about her duties. Pretty Pia from the buttery was a slut who was working her way through every knight in the castle. The wife of the gaoler was with child, but the real father was either Ser Alyn Stackspear or a singer called Whitesmile Wat. Lord Lefford made mock of ghosts at table, but always kept a candle burning by his bed. Ser Dunaver's squire Jodge could not hold his water when he slept. The cooks despised Ser Harys Swyft and spit in all his food. once she even overheard Maester Tothmure's

serving girl confiding to her brother about some message that said Joffrey was a bastard and not the rightful king at all. “Lord Tywin told him to burn the letter and never speak such filth again,” the girl whispered.

King Robert’s brothers Stannis and Renly had joined the fighting, she heard. “And both of them kings now,” Weese said. “Realm’s got more kings than a castle’s got rats.” Even Lannister men questioned how long Joffrey would hold the Iron Throne. “The lad’s got no army but them gold cloaks, and he’s ruled by a eunuch, a dwarf, and a woman,” she heard a lordling mutter in his cups. “What good will the likes of them be if it comes to battle?” There was always talk of Beric Dondarrion. A fat archer once said the Bloody Mummerys had slain him, but the others only laughed. “Lorch killed the man at Rushing Falls, and the Mountain’s slain him twice. Got me a silver stag says he don’t stay dead this time neither.”

Arya did not know who Bloody Mummerys were until a fortnight later, when the queerest company of men she’d ever seen arrived at Harrenhal. Beneath the standard of a black goat with bloody horns rode copper men with bells in their braids; lancers astride striped black-and-white horses; bowmen with powdered cheeks; squat hairy men with shaggy shields; brown-skinned men in feathered cloaks; a wispy fool in green-and-pink motley; swordsmen with fantastic forked beards dyed green and purple and silver; spearmen with colored scars that covered their cheeks; a slender man in septon’s robes, a fatherly one in maester’s grey, and a sickly one whose leather cloak was fringed with long blond hair.

At their head was a man stick-thin and very tall, with a drawn emaciated face made even longer by the ropy black beard that grew from his pointed chin nearly to his waist. The helm that hung from his saddle horn was black steel, fashioned in the shape of a goat’s head. About his neck he wore a chain made of linked coins of many different sizes, shapes, and metals, and his horse was one of the strange black-and-white ones.

“You don’t want to know that lot, Weasel,” Weese said when he saw her looking at the goat-helmed man. Two of his drinking friends were with him, men-at-arms in service to Lord Lefford.

“Who are they?” she asked.

One of the soldiers laughed. “The Footmen, girl. Toes of the Goat. Lord Tywin’s Bloody Mummers.”

“Pease for wits. You get her flayed, *you* can scrub the bloody steps,” said Weese. “They’re sellswords, Weasel girl. Call themselves the Brave Companions. Don’t use them other names where they can hear, or they’ll hurt you bad. The goat-helm’s their captain, Lord Vargo Hoat.”

“He’s no fucking lord,” said the second soldier. “I heard Ser Amory say so. He’s just some sellsword with a mouth full of slobber and a high opinion of hisself.”

“Aye,” said Weese, “but she better *call* him lord if she wants to keep all her parts.”

Arya looked at Vargo Hoat again. *How many monsters does Lord Tywin have?*

The Brave Companions were housed in the Widow’s Tower, so Arya need not serve them. She was glad of that; on the very night they arrived, fighting broke out between the sellswords and some Lannister men. Ser Harys Swyft’s squire was stabbed to death and two of the Bloody Mummers were wounded. The next morning Lord Tywin hanged them both from the gatehouse walls, along with one of Lord Lydden’s archers. Weese said the archer had started all the trouble by taunting the sellswords over Beric Dondarrion. After the hanged men had stopped kicking, Vargo Hoat and Ser Harys embraced and kissed and swore to love each other always as Lord Tywin looked on. Arya thought it was funny the way Vargo Hoat lisped and slobbered, but she knew better than to laugh.

The Bloody Mummers did not linger long at Harrenhal, but before they rode out again, Arya heard one of them saying how a northern army under Roose Bolton had occupied the ruby ford of the Trident. “If he crosses, Lord Tywin will smash him again like he did on the Green Fork,” a Lannister bowman said, but his fellows jeered him down. “Bolton’ll never cross, not till the Young Wolf marches from Riverrun with his wild northmen and all them wolves.”

Arya had not known her brother was so near. Riverrun was much closer than Winterfell, though she was not certain where it lay in relation to

Harrenhal. *I could find out somehow, I know I could, if only I could get away.* When she thought of seeing Robb's face again Arya had to bite her lip. *And I want to see Jon too, and Bran and Rickon, and Mother. Even Sansa... I'll kiss her and beg her pardons like a proper lady, she'll like that.*

From the courtyard talk she'd learned that the upper chambers of the Tower of Dread housed three dozen captives taken during some battle on the Green Fork of the Trident. Most had been given freedom of the castle in return for their pledge not to attempt escape. *They vowed not to escape,* Arya told herself, *but they never swore not to help me escape.*

The captives ate at their own table in the Hall of a Hundred Hearths, and could often be seen about the grounds. Four brothers took their exercise together every day, fighting with staves and wooden shields in the Flowstone Yard. Three of them were Freys of the Crossing, the fourth their bastard brother. They were only there a short time, though; one morning two other brothers arrived under a peace banner with a chest of gold, and ransomed them from the knights who'd captured them. The six Freys all left together.

No one ransomed the northmen, though. One fat lordling haunted the kitchens, Hot Pie told her, always looking for a morsel. His mustache was so bushy that it covered his mouth, and the clasp that held his cloak was a silver-and-sapphire trident. He belonged to Lord Tywin, but the fierce, bearded young man who liked to walk the battlements alone in a black cloak patterned with white suns had been taken by some hedge knight who meant to get rich off him. Sansa would have known who he was, and the fat one too, but Arya had never taken much interest in titles and sigils. Whenever Septa Mordane had gone on about the history of this house and that house, she was inclined to drift and dream and wonder when the lesson would be done.

She *did* remember Lord Cerwyn, though. His lands had been close to Winterfell, so he and his son Cley had often visited. Yet as fate would have it, he was the only captive who was never seen; he was abed in a tower cell, recovering from a wound. For days and days Arya tried to work out how she might steal past the door guards to see him. If he knew her, he would be

honor bound to help her. A lord would have gold for a certainty, they all did; perhaps he would pay some of Lord Tywin's own sellswords to take her to Riverrun. Father had always said that most sellswords would betray anyone for enough gold.

Then one morning she spied three women in the cowed grey robes of the silent sisters loading a corpse into their wagon. The body was sewn into a cloak of the finest silk, decorated with a battle-axe sigil. When Arya asked who it was, one of the guards told her that Lord Cerwyn had died. The words felt like a kick in the belly. *He could never have helped you anyway*, she thought as the sisters drove the wagon through the gate. *He couldn't even help himself, you stupid mouse*.

After that it was back to scrubbing and scurrying and listening at doors. Lord Tywin would soon march on Riverrun, she heard. or he would drive south to Highgarden, no one would ever expect that. No, he must defend King's Landing, Stannis was the greatest threat. He'd sent Gregor Clegane and Vargo Hoat to destroy Roose Bolton and remove the dagger from his back. He'd sent ravens to the Eyrie, he meant to wed the Lady Lysa Arryn and win the Vale. He'd bought a ton of silver to forge magic swords that would slay the Stark wargs. He was writing Lady Stark to make a peace, the Kingslayer would soon be freed.

Though ravens came and went every day, Lord Tywin himself spent most of his days behind closed doors with his war council. Arya caught glimpses of him, but always from afar—once walking the walls in the company of three maesters and the fat captive with the bushy mustache, once riding out with his lords bannermen to visit the encampments, but most often standing in an arch of the covered gallery watching men at practice in the yard below. He stood with his hands locked together on the gold pommel of his longsword. They said Lord Tywin loved gold most of all; he even *shit* gold, she heard one squire jest. The Lannister lord was strong-looking for an old man, with stiff golden whiskers and a bald head. There was something in his face that reminded Arya of her own father, even though they looked nothing alike. *He has a lord's face, that's all*, she told herself. She remembered hearing her lady mother tell Father to put on his

lord's face and go deal with some matter. Father had laughed at that. She could not imagine Lord Tywin ever laughing at anything.

One afternoon, while she was waiting her turn to draw a pail of water from the well, she heard the hinges of the east gate groaning. A party of men rode under the portcullis at a walk. When she spied the manticore crawling across the shield of their leader, a stab of hate shot through her.

In the light of day, Ser Amory Lorch looked less frightening than he had by torchlight, but he still had the pig's eyes she recalled. One of the women said that his men had ridden all the way around the lake chasing Beric Dondarrion and slaying rebels. *We weren't rebels*, Arya thought. *We were the Night's Watch; the Night's Watch takes no side*. Ser Amory had fewer men than she remembered, though, and many wounded. *I hope their wounds fester. I hope they all die*.

Then she saw the three near the end of the column.

Rorge had donned a black halfhelm with a broad iron nasal that made it hard to see that he did not have a nose. Biter rode ponderously beside him on a destrier that looked ready to collapse under his weight. Half-healed burns covered his body, making him even more hideous than before.

But Jaqen H'ghar still smiled. His garb was still ragged and filthy, but he had found time to wash and brush his hair. It streamed down across his shoulders, red and white and shiny, and Arya heard the girls giggling to each other in admiration.

I should have let the fire have them. Gendry said to, I should have listened. If she hadn't thrown them that axe they'd all be dead. For a moment she was afraid, but they rode past her without a flicker of interest. Only Jaqen H'ghar so much as glanced in her direction, and his eyes passed right over her. *He does not know me*, she thought. *Arry was a fierce little boy with a sword, and I'm just a grey mouse girl with a pail*.

She spent the rest of that day scrubbing steps inside the Wailing Tower. By evenfall her hands were raw and bleeding and her arms so sore they trembled when she lugged the pail back to the cellar. Too tired even for food, Arya begged Weese's pardons and crawled into her straw to sleep. "Weese," she yawned. "Dunsen, Chiswyck, Polliver, Raff the Sweetling.

The Tickler and the Hound. Ser Gregor, Ser Amory, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, King Joffrey, Queen Cersei.” She thought she might add three more names to her prayer, but she was too tired to decide tonight.

Arya was dreaming of wolves running wild through the wood when a strong hand clamped down over her mouth like smooth warm stone, solid and unyielding. She woke at once, squirming and struggling. “A girl says nothing,” a voice whispered close behind her ear. “A girl keeps her lips closed, no one hears, and friends may talk in secret. Yes?”

Heart pounding, Arya managed the tiniest of nods.

Jaen H’ghar took his hand away. The cellar was black as pitch and she could not see his face, even inches away. She could *smell* him, though; his skin smelled clean and soapy, and he had scented his hair. “A boy becomes a girl,” he murmured.

“I was *always* a girl. I didn’t think you saw me.”

“A man sees. A man knows.”

She remembered that she hated him. “You scared me. You’re one of *them* now, I should have let you burn. What are you doing here? Go away or I’ll yell for Weese.”

“A man pays his debts. A man owes three.”

“Three?”

“The Red God has his due, sweet girl, and only death may pay for life. This girl took three that were his. This girl must give three in their places. Speak the names, and a man will do the rest.”

He wants to help me, Arya realized with a rush of hope that made her dizzy. “Take me to Riverrun, it’s not far, if we stole some horses we could —”

He laid a finger on her lips. “Three lives you shall have of me. No more, no less. Three and we are done. So a girl must ponder.” He kissed her hair softly. “But not too long.”

By the time Arya lit her stub of a candle, only a faint smell remained of him, a whiff of ginger and cloves lingering in the air. The woman in the next niche rolled over on her straw and complained of the light, so Arya

blew it out. When she closed her eyes, she saw faces swimming before her. Joffrey and his mother, Ilyn Payne and Meryn Trant and Sandor Clegane... but they were in King's Landing hundreds of miles away, and Ser Gregor had lingered only a few nights before departing again for more foraging, taking Raff and Chiswyck and the Tickler with him. Ser Amory Lorch was here, though, and she hated him almost as much. Didn't she? She wasn't certain. And there was always Weese.

She thought of him again the next morning, when lack of sleep made her yawn. "Weasel," Weese purred, "next time I see that mouth droop open, I'll pull out your tongue and feed it to my bitch." He twisted her ear between his fingers to make certain she'd heard, and told her to get back to those steps, he wanted them clean down to the third landing by nightfall.

As she worked, Arya thought about the people she wanted dead. She pretended she could see their faces on the steps, and scrubbed harder to wipe them away. The Starks were at war with the Lannisters and she was a Stark, so she should kill as many Lannisters as she could, that was what you did in wars. But she didn't think she should trust Jaen. *I should kill them myself*. Whenever her father had condemned a man to death, he did the deed himself with Ice, his greatsword. "If you would take a man's life, you owe it to him to look him in the face and hear his last words," she'd heard him tell Robb and Jon once.

The next day she avoided Jaen H'ghar, and the day after that. It was not hard. She was very small and Harrenhal was very large, full of places where a mouse could hide.

And then Ser Gregor returned, earlier than expected, driving a herd of goats this time in place of a herd of prisoners. She heard he'd lost four men in one of Lord Beric's night raids, but those Arya hated returned unscathed and took up residence on the second floor of the Wailing Tower. Weese saw that they were well supplied with drink. "They always have a good thirst, that lot," he grumbled. "Weasel, go up and ask if they've got any clothes that need mending, I'll have the women see to it."

Arya ran up her well-scrubbed steps. No one paid her any mind when she entered. Chiswyck was seated by the fire with a horn of ale to hand,

telling one of his funny stories. She dared not interrupt, unless she wanted a bloody lip.

“After the Hand’s tourney, it were, before the war come,” Chiswyck was saying. “We were on our ways back west, seven of us with Ser Gregor. Raff was with me, and young Joss Stilwood, he’d squired for Ser in the lists. Well, we come on this pisswater river, running high on account there’d been rains. No way to ford, but there’s an alehouse near, so there we repair. Ser rousts the brewer and tells him to keep our horns full till the waters fall, and you should see the man’s pig eyes shine at the sight o’ silver. So he’s fetching us ale, him and his daughter, and poor thin stuff it is, no more’n brown piss, which don’t make me any happier, nor Ser neither. And all the time this brewer’s saying how glad he is to have us, custom being slow on account o’ them rains. The fool won’t shut his yap, not him, though Ser is saying not a word, just brooding on the Knight o’ Pansies and that bugger’s trick he played. You can see how tight his mouth sits, so me and the other lads we know better’n to say a squeak to him, but this brewer he’s got to talk, he even asks how m’lord fared in the jousting. Ser just gave him this look.” Chiswyck cackled, quaffed his ale, and wiped the foam away with the back of his hand. “Meanwhile, this daughter of his has been fetching and pouring, a fat little thing, eighteen or so—”

“Thirteen, more like,” Raff the Sweetling drawled.

“Well, be that as it may, she’s not much to look at, but Eggon’s been drinking and gets to touching her, and might be I did a little touching meself, and Raff’s telling young Stilwood that he ought t’ drag the girl upstairs and make hisself a man, giving the lad courage as it were. Finally Joss reaches up under her skirt, and she shrieks and drops her flagon and goes running off to the kitchen. Well, it would have ended right there, only what does the old fool do but he goes to *Ser* and asks him to make us leave the girl alone, him being an anointed knight and all such.

“Ser Gregor, he wasn’t paying no mind to none of our fun, but now he *looks*, you know how he does, and he commands that the girl be brought before him. Now the old man has to drag her out of the kitchen, and no one to blame but hisself. Ser looks her over and says, ‘So this is the whore

you're so concerned for' and this besotted old fool says, 'My Layna's no whore, ser' right to Gregor's face. Ser, he never blinks, just says, 'She is now' tosses the old man another silver, rips the dress off the wench, and takes her right there on the table in front of her da, her flopping and wiggling like a rabbit and making these noises. The look on the old man's face, I laughed so hard ale was coming out me nose. Then this boy hears the noise, the son I figure, and comes rushing up from the cellar, so Raff has to stick a dirk in his belly. By then Ser's done, so he goes back to his drinking and we all have a turn. Tobbot, you know how he is, he flops her over and goes in the back way. The girl was done fighting by the time I had her, maybe she'd decided she liked it after all, though to tell the truth I wouldn't have minded a little wiggling. And now here's the best bit... when it's all done, Ser tells the old man that he wants his change. The girl wasn't worth a silver, he says... and damned if that old man didn't fetch a fistful of coppers, beg m'lord's pardon, and *thank him for the custom!*'"

The men all roared, none louder than Chiswyck himself, who laughed so hard at his own story that snot dribbled from his nose down into his scraggy grey beard. Arya stood in the shadows of the stairwell and watched him. She crept back down to the cellars without saying a word. When Weese found that she hadn't asked about the clothes, he yanked down her breeches and caned her until blood ran down her thighs, but Arya closed her eyes and thought of all the sayings Syrio had taught her, so she scarcely felt it.

Two nights later, he sent her to the Barracks Hall to serve at table. She was carrying a flagon of wine and pouring when she glimpsed Jaen H'ghar at his trencher across the aisle. Chewing her lip, Arya glanced around warily to make certain Weese was not in sight. *Fear cuts deeper than swords*, she told herself.

She took a step, and another, and with each she felt less a mouse. She worked her way down the bench, filling wine cups. Rorge sat to Jaen's right, deep drunk, but he took no note of her. Arya leaned close and whispered, "Chiswyck," right in Jaen's ear. The Lorathi gave no sign that he had heard.

When her flagon was empty, Arya hurried down to the cellars to refill it from the cask, and quickly returned to her pouring. No one had died of thirst while she was gone, nor even noted her brief absence.

Nothing happened the next day, nor the day after, but on the third day Arya went to the kitchens with Weese to fetch their dinner. “One of the Mountain’s men fell off a wallwalk last night and broke his fool neck,” she heard Weese tell a cook.

“Drunk?” the woman asked.

“No more’n usual. Some are saying it was Harren’s ghost flung him down.” He snorted to show what he thought of such notions.

It wasn’t Harren, Arya wanted to say, *it was me*. She had killed Chiswyck with a whisper, and she would kill two more before she was through. *I’m the ghost in Harrenhal*, she thought. And that night, there was one less name to hate.