

He was walking back to the tower to give himself up to sleep at last when Sandor Clegane and his riders came pounding through the castle gate, back from their hunt.

There was something slung over the back of his destrier, a heavy shape wrapped in a bloody cloak. “No sign of your daughter, Hand,” the Hound rasped down, “but the day was not wholly wasted. We got her little pet.” He reached back and shoved the burden off, and it fell with a thump in front of Ned.

Bending, Ned pulled back the cloak, dreading the words he would have to find for Arya, but it was not Nymeria after all. It was the butcher’s boy, Mycah, his body covered in dried blood. He had been cut almost in half from shoulder to waist by some terrible blow struck from above.

“You rode him down,” Ned said.

The Hound’s eyes seemed to glitter through the steel of that hideous dog’s-head helm. “He ran.” He looked at Ned’s face and laughed. “But not very fast.”