

visit the riverfront. It was on the way to the Mud Gate anyway, and she hadn't checked that one today.

The wharfs were oddly quiet when Arya got there. She spied another pair of gold cloaks, walking side by side through the fish market, but they never so much as looked at her. Half the stalls were empty, and it seemed to her that there were fewer ships at dock than she remembered. Out on the Blackwater, three of the king's war galleys moved in formation, gold-painted hulls splitting the water as their oars rose and fell. Arya watched them for a bit, then began to make her way along the river.

When she saw the guardsmen on the third pier, in grey woolen cloaks trimmed with white satin, her heart almost stopped in her chest. The sight of Winterfell's colors brought tears to her eyes. Behind them, a sleek three-banked trading galley rocked at her moorings. Arya could not read the name painted on the hull; the words were strange, Myrish, Braavosi, perhaps even High Valyrian. She grabbed a passing longshoreman by the sleeve. "Please," she said, "what ship is this?"

"She's the Wind Witch, out of Myr," the man said.

"She's still here," Arya blurted. The longshoreman gave her a queer look, shrugged, and walked away. Arya ran toward the pier. The Wind Witch was the ship Father had hired to take her home... still waiting! She'd imagined it had sailed ages ago.

Two of the guardsmen were dicing together while the third walked rounds, his hand on the pommel of his sword. Ashamed to let them see her crying like a baby, she stopped to rub at her eyes. Her eyes her eyes her eyes, why did...

Look with your eyes, she heard Syrio whisper.

Arya looked. She knew all of her father's men. The three in the grey cloaks were strangers. "You," the one walking rounds called out. "What do you want here, boy?" The other two looked up from their dice.

It was all Arya could do not to bolt and run, but she knew that if she did, they would be after her at once. She made herself walk closer. They were looking for a girl, but he thought she was a boy. She'd be a boy, then. "Want to buy a pigeon?" She showed him the dead bird.

"Get out of here," the guardsman said.

Arya did as he told her. She did not have to pretend to be frightened. Behind her, the men went back to their dice.

She could not have said how she got back to Flea Bottom, but she was breathing hard by the time she reached the narrow crooked unpaved streets between the hills. The Bottom had a stench to it, a stink of pigsties and stables and tanner's sheds, mixed in with the sour smell of winesinks and cheap whorehouses. Arya wound her way through the maze dully. It was not until she caught a whiff of bubbling brown coming through a pot-shop door that she realized her pigeon was gone. It must have slipped from her belt as she ran, or someone had stolen it and she'd never noticed. For a moment she wanted to cry again. She'd have to walk all the way back to the Street of Flour to find another one that plump.

Far across the city, bells began to ring.