

A moment later the two champions appeared from opposite sides of the garden. The knight was attended by two young squires, the sellsword by the Eyrie's master-at-arms.

Ser Vardis Egen was steel from head to heel, encased in heavy plate armor over mail and padded surcoat. Large circular rondels, enameled cream-and-blue in the moon-and-falcon sigil of House Arryn, protected the vulnerable juncture of arm and breast. A skirt of lobstered metal covered him from waist to mid thigh, while a solid gorget encircled his throat. Falcon's wings sprouted from the temples of his helm, and his visor was a pointed metal beak with a narrow slit for vision.

Bronn was so lightly armored he looked almost naked beside the knight. He wore only a shirt of black oiled ringmail over boiled leather, a round steel halfhelm with a nose guard, and a mail coif. High leather boots with steel shinguards gave some protection to his legs, and discs of black iron were sewn into the fingers of his gloves. Yet Catelyn noted that the sellsword stood half a hand taller than his foe, with a longer reach... and Bronn was fifteen years younger, if she was any judge.

They knelt in the grass beneath the weeping woman, facing each other, with Lannister between them. The septon removed a faceted crystal sphere from the soft cloth bag at his waist. He lifted it high above his head, and the light shattered. Rainbows danced across the Imp's face. In a high, solemn, singsong voice, the septon asked the gods to look down and bear witness, to find the truth in this man's soul, to grant him life and freedom if he was innocent, death if he was guilty. His voice echoed off the surrounding towers.

When the last echo had died away, the septon lowered his crystal and made a hasty departure. Tyrion leaned over and whispered something in Bronn's ear before the guardsmen led him away. The sellsword rose laughing and brushed a blade of grass from his knee.

Robert Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie and Defender of the Vale, was fidgeting impatiently in his elevated chair. "When are they going to fight?" he asked plaintively.

Ser Vardis was helped back to his feet by one of his squires. The other brought him a triangular shield almost four feet tall, heavy oak dotted with iron studs. They strapped it to his left forearm. When Lysa's master-at-arms offered Bronn a similar shield, the sellsword spat and waved it away. Three days growth of coarse black beard covered his jaw and cheeks, but if he did not shave it was not for want of a razor; the edge of his sword had the dangerous glimmer of steel that had been honed every day for hours, until it was too sharp to touch.

Ser Vardis held out a gauntleted hand, and his squire placed a handsome double-edged longsword in his grasp. The blade was engraved with a delicate silver tracery of a mountain sky; its pommel was a falcon's head, its crossguard fashioned into the shape of wings. "I had that sword crafted for Jon in King's Landing," Lysa told her guests proudly as they watched Ser Vardis try a practice cut. "He wore it whenever he sat the Iron Throne in King Robert's place. Isn't it a lovely thing? I thought it only fitting that our champion avenge Jon with his own blade."