

She giggled at him. "It's so skinny."

"So are you," Jon told her. "I had Mikken make this special. The bravos use swords like this in Pentos and Myr and the other Free Cities. It won't hack a man's head off, but it can poke him full of holes if you're fast enough."

"I can be fast," Arya said.

"You'll have to work at it every day." He put the sword in her hands, showed her how to hold it, and stepped back. "How does it feel? Do you like the balance?"

"I think so," Arya said.

"First lesson," Jon said. "Stick them with the pointy end."

Arya gave him a whap on the arm with the flat of her blade. The blow stung, but Jon found himself grinning like an idiot. "I know which end to use," Arya said. A doubtful look crossed her face. "Septa Mordane will take it away from me."

"Not if she doesn't know you have it," Jon said.

"Who will I practice with?"

"You'll find someone," Jon promised her. "King's Landing is a true city, a thousand times the size of Winterfell. Until you find a partner, watch how they fight in the yard. Run, and ride, make yourself strong. And whatever you do..."

Arya knew what was coming next. They said it together.

"Don't... tell... Sansa!"

Jon messed up her hair. "I will miss you, little sister."

Suddenly she looked like she was going to cry. "I wish you were coming with us."

"Different roads sometimes lead to the same castle. Who knows?" He was feeling better now. He was not going to let himself be sad. "I better go. I'll spend my first year on the Wall emptying chamber pots if I keep Uncle Ben waiting any longer."

Arya ran to him for a last hug. "Put down the sword first," Jon warned her, laughing. She set it aside almost shyly and showered him with kisses.

When he turned back at the door, she was holding it again, trying it for balance. "I almost forgot," he told her. "All the best swords have names."

"Like Ice," she said. She looked at the blade in her hand. "Does this have a name? Oh, tell me."

"Can't you guess?" Jon teased. "Your very favorite thing."

Arya seemed puzzled at first. Then it came to her. She was that quick. They said it together:

"Needle!"

The memory of her laughter warmed him on the long ride north.