

Ser Rodrik tugged thoughtfully at his white whiskers. "What are you suggesting?" he asked the prince.

"Live steel."

"Done," Robb shot back. "You'll be sorry!"

The master-at-arms put a hand on Robb's shoulder to quiet him. "Live steel is too dangerous. I will permit you tourney swords, with blunted edges."

Joffrey said nothing, but a man strange to Arya, a tall knight with black hair and burn scars on his face, pushed forward in front of the prince. "This is your prince. Who are you to tell him he may not have an edge on his sword, ser?"

"Master-at-arms of Winterfell, Clegane, and you would do well not to forget it."

"Are you training women here?" the burned man wanted to know. He was muscled like a bull.

"I am training knights," Ser Rodrik said pointedly. "They will have steel when they are ready. When they are of an age."

The burned man looked at Robb. "How old are you, boy?"

"Fourteen," Robb said.

"I killed a man at twelve. You can be sure it was not with a blunt sword."

Arya could see Robb bristle. His pride was wounded. He turned on Ser Rodrik. "Let me do it. I can beat him."

"Beat him with a tourney blade, then," Ser Rodrik said.

Joffrey shrugged. "Come and see me when you're older, Stark. If you're not too old." There was laughter from the Lannister men.

Robb's curses rang through the yard. Arya covered her mouth in shock. Theon Greyjoy seized Robb's arm to keep him away from the prince. Ser Rodrik tugged at his whiskers in dismay.

Joffrey feigned a yawn and turned to his younger brother. "Come, Tommen," he said. "The hour of play is done. Leave the children to their frolics."

That brought more laughter from the Lannisters, more curses from Robb. Ser Rodrik's face was beet-red with fury under the white of his whiskers. Theon kept Robb locked in an iron grip until the princes and their party were safely away.

Jon watched them leave, and Arya watched Jon. His face had grown as still as the pool at the heart of the godswood. Finally he climbed down off the window. "The show is done," he said. He bent to scratch Ghost behind the ears. The white wolf rose and rubbed against him. "You had best run back to your room, little sister. Septa Mordane will surely be lurking. The longer you hide, the sterner the penance. You'll be sewing all through winter. When the spring thaw comes, they will find your body with a needle still locked tight between your frozen fingers."

Arya didn't think it was funny. "I hate needlework!" she said with passion. "It's not fair!"

"Nothing is fair," Jon said. He messed up her hair again and walked away from her, Ghost moving silently beside him. Nymeria started to follow too, then stopped and came back when she saw that Arya was not coming.

Reluctantly she turned in the other direction.