

Arya took her right hand off the grip and wiped her sweaty palm on her pants. She held the sword in her left hand. He seemed to approve. "The left is good. All is reversed, it will make your enemies more awkward. Now you are standing wrong. Turn your body sideface, yes, so. You are skinny as the shaft of a spear, do you know. That is good too, the target is smaller. Now the grip. Let me see." He moved closer and peered at her hand, prying her fingers apart, rearranging them. "Just so, yes. Do not squeeze it so tight, no, the grip must be deft, delicate."

"What if I drop it?" Arya said.

"The steel must be part of your arm," the bald man told her. "Can you drop part of your arm? No. Nine years Syrio Forel was first sword to the Sealord of Braavos, he knows these things. Listen to him, boy."

It was the third time he had called her "boy." "I'm a girl," Arya objected.

"Boy, girl," Syrio Forel said. "You are a sword, that is all." He clicked his teeth together. "Just so, that is the grip. You are not holding a battle-axe, you are holding a--"

--needle, " Arya finished for him, fiercely.

"Just so. Now we will begin the dance. Remember, child, this is not the iron dance of Westeros we are learning, the knight's dance, hacking and hammering, no. This is the bravo's dance, the water dance, swift and sudden. All men are made of water, do you know this? When you pierce them, the water leaks out and they die." He took a step backward, raised his own wooden blade. "Now you will try to strike me..."

Arya tried to strike him. She tried for four hours, until every muscle in her body was sore and aching, while Syrio Forel clicked his teeth together and told her what to do.

The next day their real work began.