

Septa Mordane raised her eyes. She had a bony face, sharp eyes, and a thin lipless mouth made for frowning. It was frowning now. "What are you talking about, children?"

"Our half brother," Sansa corrected, soft and precise. She smiled for the septa. "Arya and I were remarking on how pleased we were to have the princess with us today," she said.

Septa Mordane nodded. "Indeed. A great honor for us all." Princess Myrcella smiled uncertainly at the compliment. "Arya, why aren't you at work?" the septa asked. She rose to her feet, starched skirts rustling as she started across the room. "Let me see your stitches."

Arya wanted to scream. It was just like Sansa to go and attract the septa's attention. "Here," she said, surrendering up her work.

The septa examined the fabric. "Arya, Arya, Arya," she said. "This will not do. This will not do at all."

Everyone was looking at her. It was too much. Sansa was too well bred to smile at her sister's disgrace, but Jeyne was smirking on her behalf. Even Princess Myrcella looked sorry for her. Arya felt tears filling her eyes. She pushed herself out of her chair and bolted for the door.

Septa Mordane called after her. "Arya, come back here! Don't you take another step! Your lady mother will hear of this. In front of our royal princess too! You'll shame us all!"

Arya stopped at the door and turned back, biting her lip. The tears were running down her cheeks now. She managed a stiff little bow to Myrcella. "By your leave, my lady."

Myrcella blinked at her and looked to her ladies for guidance. But if she was uncertain, Septa Mordane was not. "Just where do you think you are going, Arya?" the septa demanded.

Arya glared at her. "I have to go shoe a horse," she said sweetly, taking a brief satisfaction in the shock on the septa's face. Then she whirled and made her exit, running down the steps as fast as her feet would take her.

It wasn't fair. Sansa had everything. Sansa was two years older; maybe by the time Arya had been born, there had been nothing left. Often it felt that way. Sansa could sew and dance and sing. She wrote poetry. She knew how to dress. She played the high harp and the bells. Worse, she was beautiful. Sansa had gotten their mother's fine high cheekbones and the thick auburn hair of the Tullys. Arya took after their lord father. Her hair was a lusterless brown, and her face was long and solemn. Jeyne used to call her Arya Horseface, and neigh whenever she came near. It hurt that the one thing Arya could do better than her sister was ride a horse. Well, that and manage a household. Sansa had never had much of a head for figures. If she did marry Prince Joff, Arya hoped for his sake that he had a good steward.

Nymeria was waiting for her in the guardroom at the base of the stairs. She bounded to her feet as soon as she caught sight of Arya. Arya grinned. The wolf pup loved her, even if no one else did. They went everywhere together, and Nymeria slept in her room, at the foot of her bed. If Mother had not forbidden it, Arya would gladly have taken the wolf with her to needlework. Let Septa Mordane complain about her stitches then.

Nymeria nipped eagerly at her hand as Arya untied her. She had yellow eyes. When they caught the sunlight, they gleamed like two golden coins. Arya had named her after the warrior queen of the Rhoynar, who had led her people across the narrow sea. That had been a great scandal too.