

Baratheon, the king's brother. He'd seen the Seven Kingdoms from one end to the other; he'd feasted and wenched and fought in a hundred battles. They said it was Donal Noye who'd forged King Robert's warhammer, the one that crushed the life from Rhaegar Targaryen on the Trident. He'd done all the things that Jon would never do, and then when he was old, well past thirty, he'd taken a glancing blow from an axe and the wound had festered until the whole arm had to come off. Only then, crippled, had Donal Noye come to the Wall, when his life was all but over.

"Yes, life," Noye said. "A long life or a short one, it's up to you, Snow. The road you're walking, one of your brothers will slit your throat for you one night."

"They're not my brothers," Jon snapped. "They hate me because I'm better than they are."

"No. They hate you because you act like you're better than they are. They look at you and see a castle-bred bastard who thinks he's a lordling." The armorer leaned close. "You're no lordling. Remember that. You're a Snow, not a Stark. You're a bastard and a bully."

"A bully?" Jon almost choked on the word. The accusation was so unjust it took his breath away. "They were the ones who came after me. Four of them."

"Four that you've humiliated in the yard. Four who are probably afraid of you. I've watched you fight. It's not training with you. Put a good edge on your sword, and they'd be dead meat; you know it, I know it, they know it. You leave them nothing. You shame them. Does that make you proud?"

Jon hesitated. He did feel proud when he won. Why shouldn't he? But the armorer was taking that away too, making it sound as if he were doing something wrong. "They're all older than me," he said defensively.

"Older and bigger and stronger, that's the truth. I'll wager your master-at-arms taught you how to fight bigger men at Winterfell, though. Who was he, some old knight?"

"Ser Rodrik Cassel," Jon said warily. There was a trap here. He felt it closing around him.

Donal Noye leaned forward, into Jon's face. "Now think on this, boy. None of these others have ever had a master-at-arms until Ser Alliser. Their fathers were farmers and wagonmen and poachers, smiths and miners and oars on a trading galley. What they know of fighting they learned between decks, in the alleys of Oldtown and Lannisport, in wayside brothels and taverns on the kingsroad. They may have clacked a few sticks together before they came here, but I promise you, not one in twenty was ever rich enough to own a real sword." His look was grim. "So how do you like the taste of your victories now, Lord Snow?"

"Don't call me that!" Jon said sharply, but the force had gone out of his anger. Suddenly he felt ashamed and guilty. "I never... I didn't think..."

"Best you start thinking," Noye warned him. "That, or sleep with a dagger by your bed. Now go."

By the time Jon left the armory, it was almost midday. The sun had broken through the clouds. He turned his back on it and lifted his eyes to the Wall, blazing blue and crystalline in the sunlight. Even after all these weeks, the sight of it still gave him the shivers. Centuries of windblown dirt had pocked and scoured it, covering it like a film, and it often seemed a pale