

Grenn was standing his ground as Jon had taught him, giving Albett more than he cared for, but Pyp was hard-pressed. Rast had two years and forty pounds on him. Jon stepped up behind him and rang the raper's helm like a bell. As Rast went reeling, Pyp slid in under his guard, knocked him down, and leveled a blade at his throat. By then Jon had moved on. Facing two swords, Albett backed away. "I yield," he shouted.

Ser Alliser Thorne surveyed the scene with disgust. "The mummer's farce has gone on long enough for today." He walked away. The session was at an end.

Dareon helped Halder to his feet. The quarryman's son wrenched off his helm and threw it across the yard. "For an instant, I thought I finally had you, Snow."

"For an instant, you did," Jon replied. Under his mail and leather, his shoulder was throbbing. He sheathed his sword and tried to remove his helm, but when he raised his arm, the pain made him grit his teeth.

"Let me," a voice said. Thick-fingered hands unfastened helm from gorget and lifted it off gently. "Did he hurt you?"

"I've been bruised before." He touched his shoulder and winced. The yard was emptying around them.

Blood matted the fat boy's hair where Halder had split his helm asunder. "My name is Samwell Tarly, of Horn..." He stopped and licked his lips. "I mean, I was of Horn Hill, until I... left. I've come to take the black. My father is Lord Randyll, a bannerman to the Tyrells of Highgarden. I used to be his heir, only His voice trailed off.

"I'm Jon Snow, Ned Stark's bastard, of Winterfell."

Samwell Tarly nodded. "I... My mother calls me Sam."

"You can call him Lord Snow," Pyp said as he came up to join them. "You don't want to know what his mother calls him."

"These two are Grenn and Pypar," Jon said.

"Grenn's the ugly one," Pyp said.

Grenn scowled. "You're uglier than me. At least I don't have ears like a bat."

"My thanks to all of you," the fat boy said gravely.

"Why didn't you get up and fight?" Grenn demanded.

"I wanted to, truly. I just... I couldn't. I didn't want him to hit me anymore." He looked at the ground. "I... My lord father always said so."

Grenn looked thunderstruck. Even Pyp had no words to say to that, and Pyp had words for everything. What sort of man would proclaim himself a coward?

Samwell Tarly must have read their thoughts on their faces. His eyes met Jon's and darted away, quick as frightened animals. "I... I'm sorry," he said. "I don't mean to... to be like I am." He walked heavily toward the armory.

Jon called after him. "You were hurt," he said. "Tomorrow you'll do better."

Sam looked mournfully back over one shoulder. "No I won't," he said, blinking back tears. "I never do better."