

Jon chewed his lip. The raven flapped its wings at him. “War, war, war, war, “ it sang.

“It’s not,” Mormont told him. “Gods save us, boy, you’re not blind and you’re not stupid. When dead men come hunting in the night, do you think it matters who sits the Iron Throne?”

“No.” Jon had not thought of it that way.

“Your lord father sent you to us, Jon. Why, who can say?”

“Why? Why? Why?” the raven called.

“All I know is that the blood of the First Men flows in the veins of the Starks. The First Men built the Wall, and it’s said they remember things otherwise forgotten. And that beast of yours... he led us to the wights, warned you of the dead man on the steps. Ser Jaremy would doubtless call that happenstance, yet Ser Jaremy is dead and I’m not.” Lord Mormont stabbed a chunk of ham with the point of his dagger. “I think you were meant to be here, and I want you and that wolf of yours with us when we go beyond the Wall.”

His words sent a chill of excitement down Jon’s back. “Beyond the Wall?”

“You heard me. I mean to find Ben Stark, alive or dead.” He chewed and swallowed. “I will not sit here meekly and wait for the snows and the ice winds. We must know what is happening. This time the Night’s Watch will ride in force, against the King-beyond-the-Wall, the Others, and anything else that may be out there. I mean to command them myself.” He pointed his dagger at Jon’s chest. “By custom, the Lord Commander’s steward is his squire as well... but I do not care to wake every dawn wondering if you’ve run off again. So I will have an answer from you, Lord Snow, and I will have it now. Are you a brother of the Night’s Watch... or only a bastard boy who wants to play at war?”

Jon Snow straightened himself and took a long deep breath. Forgive me, Father. Robb, Arya, Bran... forgive me, I cannot help you. He has the truth of it. This is my place. “I am... yours, my lord. Your man. I swear it. I will not run again.”

The Old Bear snorted. “Good. Now go put on your sword.”