

We'd been standing on the mountainside almost an hour. It was an interesting way to get a sense for the other people standing there.

Vigdis had been pacing restlessly since we arrived. She walked back and forth, in circles, varying her stride length and her speed, but always moving. At the same time, though, there was no implication of fear in her posture or attitude. She wasn't concerned about what would happen; she was just naturally restless, impatient.

Sveinn had been calm to start. After about fifteen minutes, though, he started to fidget. He tapped his finger restlessly against his sword for a minute, then noticed what he was doing and stopped. A few seconds later he began to tap his foot, and did that until he noticed it and, again, stopped. And so on, for the next forty minutes. There was no fear in him, either, but unlike Vigdis, there was a great deal of tension there.

The next step down was Kyi. She was a short distance away from the rest of us, and like me, she was mostly watching the other jötnar. I got the distinct impression that she was an acute observer, not the sort to miss much. Like Sveinn, she was fidgety, but I thought it reflected an underlying attitude more in line with Vigdis's. Kyi was meant for movement, for action, even if it was quiet movement and subtle action. Prolonged inactivity of this sort left her feeling restless, even though she was otherwise relaxed.

Then there was Haki. He was also standing at a distance, although in his case it was for a slightly different reason. Kyi was wary, and she didn't fit in with the others, didn't belong. Haki was more the sort who didn't belong *anywhere*. He preferred his own company, and had little desire for anyone else's. He was not a social creature. Since he had arrived he'd been standing and waiting patiently, unmoving. His attention was more on the surroundings than the other people standing there.

And then there was Kjaran, who stood absolutely still and said not a single word. There was something unnerving about him, something that made him seem less a person than a thing.

Finally people approached up the trail. There were three of them. The first, and the one that I was most interested in, was a man. He was not a jotun, although there was a certain degree of similarity there, a certain amount of *connection*. He was wearing armor and a sword, and if everything went well today, he would be my lord by tomorrow.

The woman standing next to him was clearly subservient to him, at least in this matter, and I ignored her. I got the distinct impression that it wouldn't be a good idea to do that indefinitely, but for the moment it would work. I was more interested in the third person. She looked like a dog, but there was an intelligence in her eyes and a purpose to her movements that suggested the appearance was deceiving. I was not sure what she was.

They reached us, and the man walked up to the main group. "Hi," he said. "I'm Winter. And you are?"

Sveinn was the first to react, predictably; he was the kind of man who would take the initiative, take a leadership role, in most situations. That was readily apparent. Just now, he bowed, briefly but deeply. "I am Sveinn Wartooth, jarl," he said.

"Vigdis the Howling." Her voice was pleasant and even somewhat excited, which surprised me. I noticed that she was also watching the dog-creature closely.

"Haki Who-Fights-Alone." Haki sounded...not bored, precisely, so much as disinterested. That was typical for him, though. Haki's life was really all about fighting; everything else was just a chore to be taken care of.

I realized that I should probably give my own answer rather than just stand there and listen to the others, so I spoke up next. "Tindr the Exile," I said. I couldn't keep a hint of bitterness from entering my voice at the byname. It was true enough, I supposed—I was certainly exiled. But to make that a part of your *name* was not exactly something I'd have chosen.

"Kyi Greyfell." She sounded almost as excited as Vigdis, although it was more understandable coming from Kyi. This was the opportunity of a lifetime for her.

There was a long, drawn-out pause, and then I realized what was going on. "His name is Kjaran the Silent, jarl," I said. "He doesn't talk much. Or at all. Thus 'the Silent.'"

"Ah," Winter said. "That's...interesting. Well, come on, I'm not doing interviews out here."

The new jarl led us through a portal into his world. It was there, but very warm; even having known to expect it, it still caught me by surprise.

He interviewed each of us individually, while the others waited downstairs. I was the last to be called up, which didn't surprise me. I knew that I tended to fade into the background. I was at peace with that.

Upstairs, I found myself in a small study. There was a wooden desk, a couple of chairs. Winter was sitting in one of the chairs, and the woman who had been with him earlier was in the other. The dog-creature was there as well, sitting on Winter's feet.

There was no chair on my side of the desk. It was a deliberate statement, I was sure. That was fine. I understood.

"Tindr," he said. "What do you have to offer?"

"I think quickly and I'm good with numbers," I said.

There was a pause. "That's it?" he said.

I shrugged. "I'm not a great fighter," I said. "I'm not going to pretend that I am. I don't know much about strategy or administration. I don't have any political contacts worth speaking of. But I learn quickly. I can think on my feet. I'm good with numbers, and after how things ended back home, I've got nowhere else to go. You take me, and I'll be the most loyal housecarl you could ask for. Because I don't have anyone else to turn to." I shrugged again. "That's all I've got to offer you, really."

There was a long, pregnant pause, and then he smiled. "That's enough," he said.