

## SAMWELL

The most perilous part of the voyage was the last. The Redwyne Straits were swarming with longships, as they had been warned in Tyrosh. With the main strength of the Arbor's fleet on the far side of Westeros, the ironmen had sacked Ryamsport and taken Vinetown and Starfish Harbor for their own, using them as bases to prey on shipping bound for Oldtown.

Thrice longships were sighted by the crow's nest. Two were well astern, however, and the *Cinnamon Wind* soon outdistanced them. The third appeared near sunset, to cut them off from Whispering Sound. When they saw her oars rising and falling, lashing the copper waters white, Kojja Mo sent her archers to the castles with their great bows of goldenheart that could send a shaft farther and truer than even Dornish yew. She waited till the longship came within two hundred yards before she gave the command to loose. Sam loosed with them, and this time he thought his arrow reached the ship. One volley was all it took. The longship veered south in search of tamer prey.

A deep blue dusk was falling as they entered Whispering Sound. Gilly stood beside the prow with the babe, gazing up at a castle on the cliffs. "Three Towers," Sam told her, "the seat of House Costayne." Etched against the evening stars with torchlight flickering from its windows, the castle made a splendid sight, but he was sad to see it. Their voyage was almost at its end.

"It's very tall," said Gilly.

"Wait until you see the Hightower."

Dalla's babe began to cry. Gilly pulled open her tunic and gave the boy her breast. She smiled as he nursed, and stroked his soft brown hair. *She has come to love this one as much as the one she left behind*, Sam realized. He hoped that the gods would be kind to both of the children.

The ironmen had penetrated even to the sheltered waters of Whispering Sound. Come morning, as the *Cinnamon Wind* continued on toward

Oldtown, she began to bump up against corpses drifting down to the sea. Some of the bodies carried complements of crows, who rose into the air complaining noisily when the swan ship disturbed their grotesquely swollen rafts. Scorched fields and burned villages appeared on the banks, and the shallows and sandbars were strewn with shattered ships. Merchanters and fishing boats were the most common, but they saw abandoned longships too, and the wreckage of two big dromonds. One had been burned down to the waterline, whilst the other had a gaping splintered hole in her side where her hull had been rammed.

“Battle here,” said Xhondo. “Not so long.”

“Who would be so mad as to raid this close to Oldtown?”

Xhondo pointed at a half-sunken longship in the shallows. The remnants of a banner drooped from her stern, smoke-stained and ragged. The charge was one Sam had never seen before: a red eye with a black pupil, beneath a black iron crown supported by two crows. “Whose banner is that?” Sam asked. Xhondo only shrugged.

The next day was cold and misty. As the *Cinnamon Wind* was creeping past another plundered fishing village, a war galley came sliding from the fog, stroking slowly toward them. *Huntress* was the name she bore, behind a figurehead of a slender maiden clad in leaves and brandishing a spear. A heartbeat later, two smaller galleys appeared on either side of her, like a pair of matched greyhounds stalking at their master’s heels. To Sam’s relief, they flew King Tommen’s stag-and-lion banner above the stepped white tower of Oldtown, with its crown of flame.

The captain of the *Huntress* was a tall man in a smoke-grey cloak with a border of red satin flames. He brought his galley in alongside the *Cinnamon Wind*, raised his oars, and shouted that he was coming aboard. As his crossbowmen and Kojja Mo’s archers eyed each other across the narrow span of water, he crossed over with half a dozen knights, gave Quhuru Mo a nod, and asked to see his holds. Father and daughter conferred briefly, then agreed.

“My apologies,” the captain said when his inspection was complete. “It grieves me that honest men must suffer such discourtesy, but sooner that

than ironmen in Oldtown. Only a fortnight ago some of those bloody bastards captured a Tyroshi merchantman in the straits. They killed her crew, donned their clothes, and used the dyes they found to color their whiskers half a hundred colors. Once inside the walls they meant to set the port ablaze and open a gate from within whilst we fought the fire. Might have worked, but they ran afoul of the *Lady of the Tower*, and her oarsmaster has a Tyroshi wife. When he saw all the green and purple beards he hailed them in the tongue of Tyrosh, and not one of them had the words to hail him back.”

Sam was aghast. “They cannot mean to raid *Oldtown*.”

The captain of the *Huntress* gave him a curious look. “These are no mere reavers. The ironmen have always raided where they could. They would strike sudden from the sea, carry off some gold and girls, and sail away, but there were seldom more than one or two longships, and never more than half a dozen. Hundreds of their ships afflict us now, sailing out of the Shield Islands and some of the rocks around the Arbor. They have taken Stonecrab Cay, the Isle of Pigs, and the Mermaid’s Palace, and there are other nests on Horseshoe Rock and Bastard’s Cradle. Without Lord Redwyne’s fleet, we lack the ships to come to grips with them.”

“What is Lord Hightower doing?” Sam blurted. “My father always said he was as wealthy as the Lannisters, and could command thrice as many swords as any of Highgarden’s other bannermen.”

“More, if he sweeps the cobblestones,” the captain said, “but swords are no good against the ironmen, unless the men who wield them know how to walk on water.”

“The Hightower must be doing *something*.”

“To be sure. Lord Leyton’s locked atop his tower with the Mad Maid, consulting books of spells. Might be he’ll raise an army from the deeps. Or not. Baelor’s building galleys, Gunthor has charge of the harbor, Garth is training new recruits, and Humfrey’s gone to Lys to hire sellsails. If he can winkle a proper fleet out of his whore of a sister, we can start paying back the ironmen with some of their own coin. Till then, the best we can do is

guard the sound and wait for the bitch queen in King's Landing to let Lord Paxter off his leash."

The bitterness of the captain's final words shocked Sam as much as the things he said. *If King's Landing loses Oldtown and the Arbor, the whole realm will fall to pieces*, he thought as he watched the *Huntress* and her sisters moving off.

It made him wonder if even Horn Hill was truly safe. The Tarly lands lay inland amidst thickly wooded foothills, a hundred leagues northeast of Oldtown and a long way from any coast. They should be well beyond the reach of ironmen and longships, even with his lord father off fighting in the riverlands and the castle lightly held. The Young Wolf had no doubt thought the same was true of Winterfell until the night that Theon Turncloak scaled his walls. Sam could not bear the thought that he might have brought Gilly and her babe all this long way to keep them out of harm, only to abandon them in the midst of war.

He wrestled with his doubts through the rest of the voyage, wondering what to do. He could keep Gilly with him in Oldtown, he supposed. The city's walls were much more formidable than those of his father's castle, and had thousands of men to defend them, as opposed to the handful Lord Randyll would have left at Horn Hill when he marched to Highgarden to answer his liege lord's summons. If he did, though, he would need to hide her somehow; the Citadel did not permit its novices to keep wives or paramours, at least not openly. *Besides, if I stay with Gilly very much longer, how will I ever find the strength to leave her?* He *had* to leave her, or desert. *I said the words*, Sam reminded himself. *If I desert, it will mean my head, and how will that help Gilly?*

He considered begging Kojja Mo and her father to take the wildling girl with them to the Summer Isles. That path had its perils too, however. When the *Cinnamon Wind* left Oldtown, she would need to cross the Redwyne Straits again, and this time she might not be so fortunate. What if the wind died, and the Summer Islanders found themselves becalmed? If the tales he'd heard were true, Gilly would be carried off for a thrall or salt wife, and the babe was like to be chunked into the sea as a nuisance.

*It has to be Horn Hill*, Sam finally decided. *Once we reach Oldtown I'll hire a wagon and some horses and take her there myself.* That way he could make certain of the castle and its garrison, and if any part of what he saw or heard gave him pause, he could just turn around and bring Gilly back to Oldtown.

They reached Oldtown on a cold damp morning, when the fog was so thick that the beacon of the Hightower was the only part of the city to be seen. A boom stretched across the harbor, linking two dozen rotted hulks. Just behind it stood a line of warships, anchored by three big dromonds and Lord Hightower's towering four-decked banner ship, the *Honor of Oldtown*. Once again the *Cinnamon Wind* had to submit to inspection. This time it was Lord Leyton's son Gunthor who came aboard, in a cloth-of-silver cloak and a suit of grey enameled scales. Ser Gunthor had studied at the Citadel for several years and spoke the Summer Tongue, so he and Qurulu Mo adjourned to the captain's cabin for a privy conference.

Sam used the time to explain his plans to Gilly. "First the Citadel, to present Jon's letters and tell them of Maester Aemon's death. I expect the archmaesters will send a cart for his body. Then I will arrange for horses and a wagon to take you to my mother at Horn Hill. I will be back as soon as I can, but it may not be until the morrow."

"The morrow," she repeated, and gave him a kiss for luck.

At length Ser Gunthor reemerged and gave the signal for the chain to be opened so the *Cinnamon Wind* could slip through the boom to dock. Sam joined Kojja Mo and three of her archers near the gangplank as the swan ship was tying up, the Summer Islanders resplendent in the feathered cloaks they only wore ashore. He felt a shabby thing beside them in his baggy blacks, faded cloak, and salt-stained boots. "How long will you remain in port?"

"Two days, ten days, who can say? However long it takes to empty our holds and fill them again." Kojja grinned. "My father must visit the grey maesters as well. He has books to sell."

"Can Gilly stay aboard till I return?"

“Gilly can stay as long as she likes.” She poked Sam in the belly with a finger. “She does not eat so much as some.”

“I’m not so fat as I was before,” Sam said defensively. The passage south had seen to that. All those watches, and nothing to eat but fruit and fish. Summer Islanders loved fruit and fish.

Sam followed the archers across the plank, but once ashore they parted company and went their separate ways. He hoped he still remembered the way to the Citadel. Oldtown was a maze, and he had no time for getting lost.

The day was damp, so the cobblestones were wet and slippery underfoot, the alleys shrouded in mist and mystery. Sam avoided them as best he could and stayed on the river road that wound along beside the Honeywine through the heart of the old city. It felt good to have solid ground beneath his feet again instead of a rolling deck, but the walk made him feel uncomfortable all the same. He could feel eyes on him, peering down from balconies and windows, watching him from the darkened doorways. On the *Cinnamon Wind* he had known every face. Here, everywhere he turned he saw another stranger. Even worse was the thought of being seen by someone who knew him. Lord Randyll Tarly was known in Oldtown, but little loved. Sam did not know which would be worse: to be recognized by one of his lord father’s enemies or by one of his friends. He pulled his cloak up and quickened his pace.

The gates of the Citadel were flanked by a pair of towering green sphinxes with the bodies of lions, the wings of eagles, and the tails of serpents. One had a man’s face, one a woman’s. Just beyond stood Scribe’s Hearth, where Oldtowners came in search of acolytes to write their wills and read their letters. Half a dozen bored scribes sat in open stalls, waiting for some custom. At other stalls books were being bought and sold. Sam stopped at one that offered maps, and looked over a hand-drawn map of Citadel to ascertain the shortest way to the Seneschal’s Court.

The path divided where the statue of King Daeron the First sat astride his tall stone horse, his sword lifted toward Dorne. A seagull was perched on the Young Dragon’s head, and two more on the blade. Sam took the left

fork, which ran beside the river. At the Weeping Dock, he watched two acolytes help an old man into a boat for the short voyage to the Bloody Isle. A young mother climbed in after him, a babe not much older than Gilly's squalling in her arms. Beneath the dock, some cook's boys waded in the shallows, gathering frogs. A stream of pink-cheeked novices hurried by him toward the septy. *I should have come here when I was their age, Sam thought. If I had run off and taken a false name, I could have disappeared amongst the other novices. Father could have pretended that Dickon was his only son. I doubt he would even have troubled to search for me, unless I took a mule to ride. Then he would have hunted me down, but only for the mule.*

Outside the Seneschal's Court, the rectors were locking an older novice into the stocks. "Stealing food from the kitchens," one explained to the acolytes who were waiting to pelt the captive with rotting vegetables. They all gave Sam curious looks as he strode past, his black cloak billowing behind him like a sail.

Beyond the doors he found a hall with a stone floor and high, arched windows. At the far end a man with a pinched face sat upon a raised dais, scratching in a ledger with a quill. Though the man was clad in a maester's robe, there was no chain about his neck. Sam cleared his throat. "Good morrow."

The man glanced up and did not appear to approve of what he saw. "You smell of novice."

"I hope to be one soon." Sam drew out the letters Jon Snow had given him. "I came from the Wall with Maester Aemon, but he died during the voyage. If I could speak with the Seneschal..."

"Your name?"

"Samwell. Samwell Tarly."

The man wrote the name in his ledger and waved his quill at a bench along the wall. "Sit. You'll be called when wanted."

Sam took a seat on the bench.

Others came and went. Some delivered messages and took their leave. Some spoke to the man on the dais and were sent through the door behind him and up a turnpike stair. Some joined Sam on the benches, waiting for their names to be called. A few of those who were summoned had come in after him, he was almost certain. After the fourth or fifth time that happened, he rose and crossed the room again. "How much longer will it be?"

"The Seneschal is an important man."

"I came all the way from the Wall."

"Then you will have no trouble going a bit farther." He waved his quill. "To that bench just there, beneath the window."

Sam returned to the bench. Another hour passed. Others entered, spoke to the man on the dais, waited a few moments, and were ushered onward. The gatekeeper did not so much as glance at Sam in all that time. The fog outside grew thinner as the day wore on, and pale sunlight slanted down through the windows. He found himself watching dust motes dance in the light. A yawn escaped him, then another. He picked at a broken blister on his palm, then leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

He must have drowsed. The next he knew, the man behind the dais was calling out a name. Sam came lurching to his feet, then sat back down again when he realized it was not his name.

"You need to slip Loras a penny, or you'll be waiting here three days," a voice beside him said. "What brings the Night's Watch to the Citadel?"

The speaker was a slim, slight, comely youth, clad in doeskin breeches and a snug green brigandine with iron studs. He had skin the color of a light brown ale and a cap of tight black curls that came to a widow's peak above his big black eyes. "The Lord Commander is restoring the abandoned castles," Sam explained. "We need more maesters, for the ravens... did you say, a penny?"

"A penny will serve. For a silver stag Loras will carry you up to the Seneschal on his back. He has been fifty years an acolyte. He hates novices, particularly novices of noble birth."



“How could you tell I was of noble birth?”

“The same way you can tell that I’m half Dornish.” The statement was delivered with a smile, in a soft Dornish drawl.

Sam fumbled for a penny. “Are you a novice?”

“An acolyte. Alleras, by some called Sphinx.”

The name gave Sam a jolt. “The sphinx is the riddle, not the riddler,” he blurted. “Do you know what that means?”

“No. Is it a riddle?”

“I wish I knew. I’m Samwell Tarly. Sam.”

“Well met. And what business does Samwell Tarly have with Archmaester Theobald?”

“Is he the Seneschal?” said Sam, confused. “Maester Aemon said his name was Norren.”

“Not for the past two turns. There is a new one every year. They fill the office by lot from amongst the archmaesters, most of whom regard it as a thankless task that takes them away from their true work. This year the black stone was drawn by Archmaester Walgrave, but Walgrave’s wits are prone to wander, so Theobald stepped up and said he’d serve his term. He’s a gruff man, but a good one. Did you say Maester *Aemon*?”

“Aye.”

“Aemon *Targaryen*?”

“Once. Most just called him Maester Aemon. He died during our voyage south. How is it that you know of him?”

“How not? He was more than just the oldest living maester. He was the oldest man in Westeros, and lived through more history than Archmaester Perestan has ever learned. He could have told us much and more about his father’s reign, and his uncle’s. How old was he, do you know?”

“One hundred and two.”

“What was he doing at sea, at his age?”

Sam chewed on the question for a moment, wondering how much he ought to say. *The sphinx is the riddle, not the riddler*. Could Maester Aemon

have meant *this* Sphinx? It seemed unlikely. “Lord Commander Snow sent him away to save his life,” he began, hesitantly. He spoke awkwardly of King Stannis and Melisandre of Asshai, intending to stop at that, but one thing led to another and he found himself speaking of Mance Rayder and his wildlings, king’s blood and dragons, and before he knew what was happening, all the rest came spilling out; the wights at the Fist of First Men, the Other on his dead horse, the murder of the Old Bear at Craster’s Keep, Gilly and their flight, Whitetree and Small Paul, Coldhands and the ravens, Jon’s becoming lord commander, the *Blackbird*, Dareon, Braavos, the dragons Xhondo saw in Qarth, the *Cinnamon Wind* and all that Maester Aemon whispered toward the end. He held back only the secrets that he was sworn to keep, about Bran Stark and his companions and the babes Jon Snow had swapped. “Daenerys is the only hope,” he concluded. “Aemon said the Citadel must send her a maester at once, to bring her home to Westeros before it is too late.”

Alleras listened intently. He blinked from time to time, but he never laughed and never interrupted. When Sam was done he touched him lightly on the forearm with a slim brown hand and said, “Save your penny, Sam. Theobald will not believe half of that, but there are those who might. Will you come with me?”

“Where?”

“To speak with an archmaester.”

*You must tell them, Sam*, Maester Aemon had said. *You must tell the archmaesters.* “Very well.” He could always return to the Seneschal on the morrow, with a penny in his hand. “How far do we have to go?”

“Not far. The Isle of Ravens.”

They did not need a boat to reach the Isle of Ravens; a weathered wooden drawbridge linked it to the eastern bank. “The Ravenry is the oldest building at the Citadel,” Alleras told him, as they crossed over the slow-flowing waters of the Honeywine. “In the Age of Heroes it was supposedly the stronghold of a pirate lord who sat here robbing ships as they came down the river.”

Moss and creeping vines covered the walls, Sam saw, and ravens walked its battlements in place of archers. The drawbridge had not been raised in living memory.

It was cool and dim inside the castle walls. An ancient weirwood filled the yard, as it had since these stones had first been raised. The carved face on its trunk was grown over by the same purple moss that hung heavy from the tree's pale limbs. Half of the branches seemed dead, but elsewhere a few red leaves still rustled, and it was there the ravens liked to perch. The tree was full of them, and there were more in the arched windows overhead, all around the yard. The ground was speckled by their droppings. As they crossed the yard, one flapped overhead and he heard the others *quorking* to each other. "Archmaester Walgrave has his chambers in the west tower, below the white rookery," Alleras told him. "The white ravens and the black ones quarrel like Dornishmen and Marchers, so they keep them apart."

"Will Archmaester Walgrave understand what I am telling him?" wondered Sam. "You said his wits were prone to wander."

"He has good days and bad ones," said Alleras, "but it is not Walgrave you're going to see." He opened the door to the north tower and began to climb. Sam clambered up the steps behind him. There were flutterings and mutterings from above, and here and there an angry scream, as the ravens complained of being woken.

At the top of the steps, a pale blond youth about Sam's age sat outside a door of oak and iron, staring intently into a candle flame with his right eye. His left was hidden beneath a fall of ash blond hair. "What are you looking for?" Alleras asked him. "Your destiny? Your death?"

The blond youth turned from the candle, blinking. "Naked women," he said. "Who's this now?"

"Samwell. A new novice, come to see the Mage."

"The Citadel is not what it was," complained the blond. "They will take anything these days. Dusky dogs and Dornishmen, pig boys, cripples, cretins, and now a black-clad whale. And here I thought leviathans were

grey." A half cape striped in green and gold draped one shoulder. He was very handsome, though his eyes were sly and his mouth cruel.

Sam knew him. "Leo Tyrell." Saying the name made him feel as if he were still a boy of seven, about to wet his smallclothes. "I am Sam, from Horn Hill. Lord Randyll Tarly's son."

"Truly?" Leo gave him another look. "I suppose you are. Your father told us all that you were dead. Or was it only that he wished you were?" He grinned. "Are you still a craven?"

"No," lied Sam. Jon had made it a command. "I went beyond the Wall and fought in battles. They call me Sam the Slayer." He did not know why he said it. The words just tumbled out.

Leo laughed, but before he could reply the door behind him opened. "Get in here, Slayer," growled the man in the doorway. "And you, Sphinx. Now."

"Sam," said Alleras, "this is Archmaester Marwyn."

Marwyn wore a chain of many metals around his bull's neck. Save for that, he looked more like a dockside thug than a maester. His head was too big for his body, and the way it thrust forward from his shoulders, together with that slab of jaw, made him look as if he were about to tear off someone's head. Though short and squat, he was heavy in the chest and shoulders, with a round, rock-hard ale belly straining at the laces of the leather jerkin he wore in place of robes. Bristly white hair sprouted from his ears and nostrils. His brow beetled, his nose had been broken more than once, and sourleaf had stained his teeth a mottled red. He had the biggest hands that Sam had ever seen.

When Sam hesitated, one of those hands grabbed him by the arm and yanked him through the door. The room beyond was large and round. Books and scrolls were everywhere, strewn across the tables and stacked up on the floor in piles four feet high. Faded tapestries and ragged maps covered the stone walls. A fire was burning in the hearth, beneath a copper kettle. Whatever was inside of it smelled burned. Aside from that, the only light came from a tall black candle in the center of the room.

The candle was unpleasantly bright. There was something queer about it. The flame did not flicker, even when Archmaester Marwyn closed the door so hard that papers blew off a nearby table. The light did something strange to colors too. Whites were bright as fresh-fallen snow, yellow shone like gold, reds turned to flame, but the shadows were so black they looked like holes in the world. Sam found himself staring. The candle itself was three feet tall and slender as a sword, ridged and twisted, glittering black. “Is that...?”

“...obsidian,” said the other man in the room, a pale, fleshy, pasty-faced young fellow with round shoulders, soft hands, close-set eyes, and food stains on his robes.

“Call it dragonglass.” Archmaester Marwyn glanced at the candle for a moment. “It burns but is not consumed.”

“What feeds the flame?” asked Sam.

“What feeds a dragon’s fire?” Marwyn seated himself upon a stool. “All Valyrian sorcery was rooted in blood or fire. The sorcerers of the Freehold could see across mountains, seas, and deserts with one of these glass candles. They could enter a man’s dreams and give him visions, and speak to one another half a world apart, seated before their candles. Do you think that might be useful, Slayer?”

“We would have no more need of ravens.”

“Only after battles.” The archmaester peeled a sourleaf off a bale, shoved it in his mouth, and began to chew it. “Tell me all you told our Dornish sphinx. I know much of it and more, but some small parts may have escaped my notice.”

He was not a man to be refused. Sam hesitated a moment, then told his tale again as Marywn, Alleras, and the other novice listened. “Maester Aemon believed that Daenerys Targaryen was the fulfillment of a prophecy... her, not Stannis, nor Prince Rhaegar, nor the princeling whose head was dashed against the wall.”

“Born amidst salt and smoke, beneath a bleeding star. I know the prophecy.” Marwyn turned his head and spat a gob of red phlegm onto the

floor. “Not that I would trust it. Gorghan of Old Ghis once wrote that a prophecy is like a treacherous woman. She takes your member in her mouth, and you moan with the pleasure of it and think, how sweet, how fine, how good this is... and then her teeth snap shut and your moans turn to screams. That is the nature of prophecy, said Gorghan. Prophecy will bite your prick off every time.” He chewed a bit. “Still...”

Alleras stepped up next to Sam. “Aemon would have gone to her if he had the strength. He wanted us to send a maester to her, to counsel her and protect her and fetch her safely home.”

“Did he?” Archmaester Marwyn shrugged. “Perhaps it’s good that he died before he got to Oldtown. Elsewise the grey sheep might have had to kill him, and that would have made the poor old dears wring their wrinkled hands.”

“Kill him?” Sam said, shocked. “Why?”

“If I tell you, they may need to kill you too.” Marywn smiled a ghastly smile, the juice of the sourleaf running red between his teeth. “Who do you think killed all the dragons the last time around? Gallant dragonslayers armed with swords?” He spat. “The world the Citadel is building has no place in it for sorcery or prophecy or glass candles, much less for dragons. Ask yourself why Aemon Targaryen was allowed to waste his life upon the Wall, when by rights he should have been raised to archmaester. His *blood* was why. He could not be trusted. No more than I can.”

“What will you do?” asked Alleras, the Sphinx.

“Get myself to Slaver’s Bay, in Aemon’s place. The swan ship that delivered Slayer should serve my needs well enough. The grey sheep will send their man on a galley, I don’t doubt. With fair winds I should reach her first.” Marwyn glanced at Sam again, and frowned. “You... you should stay and forge your chain. If I were you, I would do it quickly. A time will come when you’ll be needed on the Wall.” He turned to the pasty-faced novice. “Find Slayer a dry cell. He’ll sleep here, and help you tend the ravens.”

“B-b-but,” Sam sputtered, “the other archmaesters... the Seneschal... what should I tell them?”

“Tell them how wise and good they are. Tell them that Aemon commanded you to put yourself into their hands. Tell them that you have always dreamed that one day you might be allowed to wear the chain and serve the greater good, that service is the highest honor, and obedience the highest virtue. But say nothing of prophecies or dragons, unless you fancy poison in your porridge.” Marwyn snatched a stained leather cloak off a peg near the door and tied it tight. “Sphinx, look after this one.”

“I will,” Alleras answered, but the archmaester was already gone. They heard his boots stomping down the steps.

“Where has he gone?” asked Sam, bewildered.

“To the docks. The Mage is not a man who believes in wasting time.” Alleras smiled. “I have a confession. Ours was no chance encounter, Sam. The Mage sent me to snatch you up before you spoke to Theobald. He knew that you were coming.”

“How?”

Alleras nodded at the glass candle.

Sam stared at the strange pale flame for a moment, then blinked and looked away. Outside the window it was growing dark.

“There’s an empty sleeping cell under mine in the west tower, with steps that lead right up to Walgrave’s chambers,” said the pasty-faced youth. “If you don’t mind the ravens *quorking*, there’s a good view of the Honeywine. Will that serve?”

“I suppose.” He had to sleep somewhere.

“I will bring you some woolen coverlets. Stone walls turn cold at night, even here.”

“My thanks.” There was something about the pale, soft youth that he disliked, but he did not want to seem discourteous, so he added, “My name’s not Slayer, truly. I’m Sam. Samwell Tarly.”

“I’m Pate,” the other said, “like the pig boy.”