

was as good as his word. He left the rest unsaid; that King Robert would ignore him, Lord Tywin would ask if he had taken leave of his senses, and Jaime would only laugh.

“You are a young man, Tyrion,” Mormont said. “How many winters have you seen?”

He shrugged. “Eight, nine. I misremember.”

“And all of them short.”

“As you say, my lord.” He had been born in the dead of winter, a terrible cruel one that the maesters said had lasted near three years, but Tyrion’s earliest memories were of spring.

“When I was a boy, it was said that a long summer always meant a long winter to come. This summer has lasted nine years, Tyrion, and a tenth will soon be upon us. Think on that.”

“When I was a boy,” Tyrion replied, “my wet nurse told me that one day, if men were good, the gods would give the world a summer without ending. Perhaps we’ve been better than we thought, and the Great Summer is finally at hand.” He grinned.

The Lord Commander did not seem amused. “You are not fool enough to believe that, my lord. Already the days grow shorter. There can be no mistake, Aemon has had letters from the Citadel, findings in accord with his own. The end of summer stares us in the face.” Mormont reached out and clutched Tyrion tightly by the hand. “You must make them understand. I tell you, my lord, the darkness is coming. There are wild things in the woods, direwolves and mammoths and snow bears the size of aurochs, and I have seen darker shapes in my dreams.”

“In your dreams,” Tyrion echoed, thinking how badly he needed another strong drink.

Mormont was deaf to the edge in his voice. “The fisherfolk near Eastwatch have glimpsed white walkers on the shore.”

This time Tyrion could not hold his tongue. “The fisherfolk of Lannisport often glimpse merlings.”

“Denys Mallister writes that the mountain people are moving south, slipping past the Shadow Tower in numbers greater than ever before. They are running, my lord... but running from what?” Lord Mormont moved to the window and stared out into the night. “These are old bones, Lannister, but they have never felt a chill like this. Tell the king what I say, I pray you. Winter is coming, and when the Long Night falls, only the Night’s Watch will stand between the realm and the darkness that sweeps from the north. The gods help us all if we are not ready.”

“The gods help me if I do not get some sleep tonight. Yoren is determined to ride at first light.” Tyrion got to his feet, sleepy from wine and tired of doom. “I thank you for all the courtesies you have done me, Lord Mormont.”

“Tell them, Tyrion. Tell them and make them believe. That is all the thanks I need.” He whistled, and his raven flew to him and perched on his shoulder. Mormont smiled and gave the bird some corn from his pocket, and that was how Tyrion left him.

It was bitter cold outside. Bundled thickly in his furs, Tyrion Lannister pulled on his gloves and nodded to the poor frozen wretches standing sentry outside the Commander’s Keep. He set off across the yard for his own chambers in the King’s Tower, walking as briskly as his legs could manage. Patches of snow crunched beneath his feet as his boots broke the night’s crust, and his