

Then he saw it, a shadow in the shadows, sliding toward the inner door that led to Mormont's sleeping cell, a man-shape all in black, cloaked and hooded... but beneath the hood, its eyes shone with an icy blue radiance...

Ghost leapt. Man and wolf went down together with neither scream nor snarl, rolling, smashing into a chair, knocking over a table laden with papers. Mormont's raven was flapping overhead, screaming, "Corn, corn, corn, corn. " Jon felt as blind as Maester Aemon. Keeping the wall to his back, he slid toward the window and ripped down the curtain. Moonlight flooded the solar. He glimpsed black hands buried in white fur, swollen dark fingers tightening around his direwolf's throat. Ghost was twisting and snapping, legs flailing in the air, but he could not break free.

Jon had no time to be afraid. He threw himself forward, shouting, bringing down the longsword with all his weight behind it. Steel sheared through sleeve and skin and bone, yet the sound was wrong somehow. The smell that engulfed him was so queer and cold he almost gagged. He saw arm and hand on the floor, black fingers wriggling in a pool of moonlight. Ghost wrenched free of the other hand and crept away, red tongue lolling from his mouth.

The hooded man lifted his pale moon face, and Jon slashed at it without hesitation. The sword laid the intruder open to the bone, taking off half his nose and opening a gash cheek to cheek under those eyes, eyes, eyes like blue stars burning. Jon knew that face. Othor, he thought, reeling back. Gods, he's dead, he's dead, I saw him dead.

He felt something scabble at his ankle. Black fingers clawed at his calf. The arm was crawling up his leg, ripping at wool and flesh. Shouting with revulsion, Jon pried the fingers off his leg with the point of his sword and flipped the thing away. It lay writhing, fingers opening and closing.

The corpse lurched forward. There was no blood. One-armed, face cut near in half, it seemed to feel nothing. Jon held the longsword before him. "Stay away!" he commanded, his voice gone shrill. "Corn, " screamed the raven, "corn, corn. " The severed arm was wriggling out of its torn sleeve, a pale snake with a black five-fingered head. Ghost pounced and got it between his teeth. Finger bones crunched. Jon hacked at the corpse's neck, felt the steel bite deep and hard.

Dead Othor slammed into him, knocking him off his feet.

Jon's breath went out of him as the fallen table caught him between his shoulder blades. The sword, where was the sword? He'd lost the damned sword! When he opened his mouth to scream, the wight jammed its black corpse fingers into Jon's mouth. Gagging, he tried to shove it off, but the dead man was too heavy. Its hand forced itself farther down his throat, icy cold, choking him. Its face was against his own, filling the world. Frost covered its eyes, sparkling blue. Jon raked cold flesh with his nails and kicked at the thing's legs. He tried to bite, tried to punch, tried to breathe...

And suddenly the corpse's weight was gone, its fingers ripped from his throat. It was all Jon could do to roll over, retching and shaking.

Ghost had it again. He watched as the direwolf buried his teeth in the wight's gut and began to rip and tear. He watched, only half conscious, for a long moment before he finally remembered to look for his sword...and saw Lord Mormont, naked and groggy from sleep, standing in the