

TYRION

Somewhere in the great stone maze of Winterfell, a wolf howled. The sound hung over the castle like a flag of mourning.

Tyrion Lannister looked up from his books and shivered, though the library was snug and warm. Something about the howling of a wolf took a man right out of his here and now and left him in a dark forest of the mind, running naked before the pack.

When the direwolf howled again, Tyrion shut the heavy leatherbound cover on the book he was reading, a hundred year-old discourse on the changing of the seasons by a long-dead maester. He covered a yawn with the back of his hand. His reading lamp was flickering, its oil all but gone, as dawn light leaked through the high windows. He had been at it all night, but that was nothing new. Tyrion Lannister was not much of a one for sleeping.

His legs were stiff and sore as he eased down off the bench. He massaged some life back into them and limped heavily to the table where the septon was snoring softly, his head pillowed on an open book in front of him. Tyrion glanced at the title. A life of the Grand Maester Aethelmure, no wonder. “Chayle,” he said softly. The young man jerked up, blinking, confused, the crystal of his order swinging wildly on its silver chain. “I’m off to break my fast. See that you return the books to the shelves. Be gentle with the Valyrian scrolls, the parchment is very dry. Ayrmidon’s Engines of War is quite rare, and yours is the only complete copy I’ve ever seen.” Chayle gaped at him, still half asleep. Patiently, Tyrion repeated his instructions, then clapped the septon on the shoulder and left him to his tasks.

Outside, Tyrion swallowed a lungful of the cold morning air and began his laborious descent of the steep stone steps that corkscrewed around the exterior of the library tower. It was slow going; the steps were cut high and narrow, while his legs were short and twisted. The rising sun had not yet cleared the walls of Winterfell, but the men were already hard at it in the yard below. Sandor Clegane’s rasping voice drifted up to him. “The boy is a long time dying. I wish he would be quicker about it.”

Tyrion glanced down and saw the Hound standing with young Joffrey as squires swarmed around them. “At least he dies quietly,” the prince replied. “It’s the wolf that makes the noise. I could scarce sleep last night.”

Clegane cast a long shadow across the hard-packed earth as his squire lowered the black helm over his head. “I could silence the creature, if it please you,” he said through his open visor. His boy placed a longsword in his hand. He tested the weight of it, slicing at the cold morning air. Behind him, the yard rang to the clangor of steel on steel.

The notion seemed to delight the prince. “Send a dog to kill a dog!” he exclaimed. “Winterfell is so infested with wolves, the Starks would never miss one.”

Tyrion hopped off the last step onto the yard. “I beg to differ, nephew,” he said. “The Starks can count past six. Unlike some princes I might name.”

Joffrey had the grace at least to blush.