

“Did I offend you?” Lannister said. “Sorry. Dwarfs don’t have to be tactful. Generations of capering fools in motley have won me the right to dress badly and say any damn thing that comes into my head.” He grinned. “You are the bastard, though.”

“Lord Eddard Stark is my father,” Jon admitted stiffly.

Lannister studied his face. “Yes,” he said. “I can see it. You have more of the north in you than your brothers.”

“Half brothers,” Jon corrected. He was pleased by the dwarf’s comment, but he tried not to let it show.

“Let me give you some counsel, bastard,” Lannister said. “Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armor yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you.”

Jon was in no mood for anyone’s counsel. “What do you know about being a bastard?”

“All dwarfs are bastards in their father’s eyes.”

“You are your mother’s trueborn son of Lannister.”

“Am I” the dwarf replied, sardonic. “Do tell my lord father. MY mother died birthing me, and he’s never been sure.”

“I don’t even know who my mother was,” Jon said.

“Some woman, no doubt. Most of them are.” He favored Jon with a rueful grin. “Remember this, boy. All dwarfs may be bastards, yet not all bastards need be dwarfs.” And with that he turned and sauntered back into the feast, whistling a tune. When he opened the door, the light from within threw his shadow clear across the yard, and for just a moment Tyrion Lannister stood tall as a king.