

## **TYRION**

Are you certain that you must leave us so soon?" the Lord Commander asked him.

"Past certain, Lord Mormont," Tyrion replied. "My brother Jaime will be wondering what has become of me. He may decide that you have convinced me to take the black."

"Would that I could." Mormont picked up a crab claw and cracked it in his fist. Old as he was, the Lord Commander still had the strength of a bear. "You're a cunning man, Tyrion. We have need of men of your sort on the Wall."

Tyrion grinned. "Then I shall scour the Seven Kingdoms for dwarfs and ship them all to you, Lord Mormont." As they laughed, he sucked the meat from a crab leg and reached for another. The crabs had arrived from Eastwatch only this morning, packed in a barrel of snow, and they were succulent.

Ser Alliser Thorne was the only man at table who did not so much as crack a smile. "Lannister mocks us."

"Only you, Ser Alliser," Tyrion said. This time the laughter round the table had a nervous, uncertain quality to it.

Thorne's black eyes fixed on Tyrion with loathing. "You have a bold tongue for someone who is less than half a man. Perhaps you and I should visit the yard together."

"Why?" asked Tyrion. "The crabs are here."

The remark brought more guffaws from the others. Ser Alliser stood up, his mouth a tight line. "Come and make your japes with steel in your hand."

Tyrion looked pointedly at his right hand. "Why, I have steel in my hand, Ser Alliser, although it appears to be a crab fork. Shall we duel?" He hopped up on his chair and began poking at Thorne's chest with the tiny fork. Roars of laughter filled the tower room. Bits of crab flew from the Lord Commander's mouth as he began to gasp and choke. Even his raven joined in, cawing loudly from above the window. "Duel! Duel! Duel!"

Ser Alliser Thorne walked from the room so stiffly it looked as though he had a dagger up his butt.

Mormont was still gasping for breath. Tyrion pounded him on the back. "To the victor goes the spoils," he called out. "I claim Thorne's share of the crabs."

Finally the Lord Commander recovered himself. "You are a wicked man, to provoke our Ser Alliser so," he scolded.

Tyrion seated himself and took a sip of wine. "If a man paints a target on his chest, he should expect that sooner or later someone will loose an arrow at him. I have seen dead men with more humor than your Ser Alliser."

"Not so," objected the Lord Steward, Bowen Marsh, a man as round and red as a pomegranate. "You ought to hear the droll names he gives the lads he trains."

Tyrion had heard a few of those droll names. "I'll wager the lads have a few names for him as well," he said. "Chip the ice off your eyes, my good lords. Ser Alliser Thorne should be mucking out your stables, not drilling your young warriors."