

Ser Kevan leaned forward. “We had a thought to put you and your wildlings in the vanguard when we come to battle.”

Ser Kevan seldom “had a thought” that Lord Tywin had not had first. Tyrion had skewered a chunk of meat on the point of his dagger and brought it to his mouth. Now he lowered it. “The vanguard?” he repeated dubiously. Either his lord father had a new respect for Tyrion’s abilities, or he’d decided to rid himself of his embarrassing get for good. Tyrion had the gloomy feeling he knew which.

“They seem ferocious enough,” Ser Kevan said.

“Ferocious?” Tyrion realized he was echoing his uncle like a trained bird. His father watched, judging him, weighing every word. “Let me tell you how ferocious they are. Last night, a Moon Brother stabbed a Stone Crow over a sausage. So today as we made camp three Stone Crows seized the man and opened his throat for him. Perhaps they were hoping to get the sausage back, I couldn’t say. Bronn managed to keep Shagga from chopping off the dead man’s cock, which was fortunate, but even so Ulf is demanding blood money, which Conn and Shagga refuse to pay.”

“When soldiers lack discipline, the fault lies with their lord commander,” his father said.

His brother Jaime had always been able to make men follow him eagerly, and die for him if need be. Tyrion lacked that gift. He bought loyalty with gold, and compelled obedience with his name. “A bigger man would be able to put the fear in them, is that what you’re saying, my lord?”

Lord Tywin Lannister turned to his brother. “If my son’s men will not obey his commands, perhaps the vanguard is not the place for him. No doubt he would be more comfortable in the rear, guarding our baggage train.”

“Do me no kindnesses, Father,” he said angrily. “If you have no other command to offer me, I’ll lead your van.”

Lord Tywin studied his dwarf son. “I said nothing about command. You will serve under Ser Gregor.”

Tyrion took one bite of pork, chewed a moment, and spit it out angrily. “I find I am not hungry after all,” he said, climbing awkwardly off the bench. “Pray excuse me, my lords.”

Lord Tywin inclined his head, dismissing him. Tyrion turned and walked away. He was conscious of their eyes on his back as he waddled down the hill. A great gust of laughter went up from behind him, but he did not look back. He hoped they all choked on their suckling pigs.

Dusk had settled, turning all the banners black. The Lannister camp sprawled for miles between the river and the kingsroad. In amongst the men and the horses and the trees, it was easy to get lost, and Tyrion did. He passed a dozen great pavilions and a hundred cookfires. Fireflies drifted amongst the tents like wandering stars. He caught the scent of garlic sausage, spiced and savory, so tempting it made his empty stomach growl. Away in the distance, he heard voices raised in some bawdy song. A giggling woman raced past him, naked beneath a dark cloak, her drunken pursuer stumbling over tree roots. Farther on, two spearmen faced each other across a little trickle of a stream, practicing their thrust- and-parry in the fading light, their chests bare and slick with sweat.