

the lordling they'd been hired to pleasure... a took that Tyrion Lannister did not ever care to see again.

He lifted the candle and looked her over. Bronn had done well enough; she was doe-eyed and slim, with small firm breasts and a smile that was by turns shy, insolent, and wicked. He liked that. "Shall I take my gown off, m'lord?" she asked.

"In good time. Are you a maiden, Shae?"

"If it please you, m'lord," she said demurely.

"What would please me would be the truth of you, girl."

"Aye, but that will cost you double."

Tyrion decided they would get along splendidly. "I am a Lannister. Gold I have in plenty, and you'll find me generous... but I'll want more from you than what you've got between your legs, though I'll want that too. You'll share my tent, pour my wine, laugh at my jests, rub the ache from my legs after each day's ride... and whether I keep you a day or a year, for so long as we are together you will take no other men into your bed."

"Fair enough." She reached down to the hem of her thin roughspun gown and pulled it up over her head in one smooth motion, tossing it aside. There was nothing underneath but Shae. "If he don't put down that candle, m'lord will burn his fingers."

Tyrion put down the candle, took her hand in his, and pulled her gently to him. She bent to kiss him. Her mouth tasted of honey and cloves, and her fingers were deft and practiced as they found the fastenings of his clothes.

When he entered her, she welcomed him with whispered endearments and small, shuddering gasps of pleasure. Tyrion suspected her delight was feigned, but she did it so well that it did not matter. That much truth he did not crave.

He had needed her, Tyrion realized afterward, as she lay quietly in his arms. Her or someone like her. It had been nigh on a year since he'd lain with a woman, since before he had set out for Winterfell in company with his brother and King Robert. He could well die on the morrow or the day after, and if he did, he would sooner go to his grave thinking of Shae than of his lord father, Lysa Arryn, or the Lady Catelyn Stark.

He could feel the softness of her breasts pressed against his arm as she lay beside him. That was a good feeling. A song filled his head. Softly, quietly, he began to whistle.

"What's that, m'lord?" Shae murmured against him.

"Nothing," he told her. "A song I learned as a boy, that's all. Go to sleep, sweetling."

When her eyes were closed and her breathing deep and steady, Tyrion slid out from beneath her, gently, so as not to disturb her sleep. Naked, he crawled outside, stepped over his squire, and walked around behind his tent to make water.

Bronn was seated cross-legged under a chestnut tree, near where they'd tied the horses. He was honing the edge of his sword, wide awake; the sellsword did not seem to sleep like other men.

"Where did you find her?" Tyrion asked him as he pissed.

"I took her from a knight. The man was loath to give her up, but your name changed his thinking somewhat... that, and my dirk at his throat."