

The fire was blazing up nicely. Bronn stood, tucked the flint back into his pouch, and tossed Tyrion his dagger. "Fair enough," he said. "My sword's yours, then... but don't go looking for me to bend the knee and mlord you every time you take a shit. I'm no man's toady."

"Nor any man's friend," Tyrion said. "I've no doubt you'd betray me as quick as you did Lady Stark, if you saw a profit in it. If the day ever comes when you're tempted to sell me out, remember this, Bronn-I'll match their price, whatever it is. I like living. And now, do you think you could do something about finding us some supper?"

"Take care of the horses," Bronn said, unsheathing the long dirk he wore at his hip. He strode into the trees.

An hour later the horses had been rubbed down and fed, the fire was crackling away merrily, and a haunch of a young goat was turning above the flames, spitting and hissing. "All we lack now is some good wine to wash down our kid," Tyrion said.

"That, a woman, and another dozen swords," Bronn said. He sat cross-legged beside the fire, honing the edge of his longsword with an oilstone. There was something strangely reassuring about the rasping sound it made when he drew it down the steel. "It will be full dark soon," the sellsword pointed out. "I'll take first watch... for all the good it will do us. It might be kinder to let them kill us in our sleep."

"Oh, I imagine they'll be here long before it comes to sleep." The smell of the roasting meat made Tyrion's mouth water.

Bronn watched him across the fire. "You have a plan," he said flatly, with a scrape of steel on stone.

"A hope, call it," Tyrion said. "Another toss of the dice."

"With our lives as the stake?"

Tyrion shrugged. "What choice do we have?" He leaned over the fire and sawed a thin slice of meat from the kid. "Ahhhh," he sighed happily as he chewed. Grease ran down his chin. "A bit tougher than I'd like, and in want of spicing, but I'll not complain too loudly. If I were back at the Eyrie, I'd be dancing on a precipice in hopes of a boiled bean."

"And yet you gave the turnkey a purse of gold," Bronn said.

"A Lannister always pays his debts."

Even Mord had scarcely believed it when Tyrion tossed him the leather purse. The gaoler's eyes had gone big as boiled eggs as he yanked open- the drawstring and beheld the glint of gold. "I kept the silver," Tyrion had told him with a crooked smile, "but you were promised the gold, and there it is." It was more than a man like Mord could hope to earn in a lifetime of abusing prisoners. "And remember what I said, this is only a taste. If you ever grow tired of Lady Arryn's service, present yourself at Casterly Rock, and I'll pay you the rest of what I owe you." With golden dragons spilling out of both hands, Mord had fallen to his knees and promised that he would do just that.

Bronn yanked out his dirk and pulled the meat from the fire. He began to carve thick chunks of charred meat off the bone as Tyrion hollowed out two heels of stale bread to serve as trenchers. "If we do reach the river, what will you do then?" the sellsword asked as he cut.