

“You?” Bronn’s voice was amused.

“Absurd, isn’t it?” Tyrion began to whistle the song again. “I married her,” he finally admitted.

“A Lannister of Casterly Rock wed to a crofter’s daughter,” Bronn said. “How did you manage that?”

“Oh, you’d be astonished at what a boy can make of a few lies, fifty pieces of silver, and a drunken septon. I dared not bring my bride home to Casterly Rock, so I set her up in a cottage of her own, and for a fortnight we played at being man and wife. And then the septon sobered and confessed all to my lord father.” Tyrion was surprised at how desolate it made him feel to say it, even after all these years. Perhaps he was just tired. “That was the end of my marriage.” He sat up and stared at the dying fire, blinking at the light.

“He sent the girl away?”

“He did better than that,” Tyrion said. “First he made my brother tell me the truth. The girl was a whore, you see. Jaime arranged the whole affair, the road, the outlaws, all of it. He thought it was time I had a woman. He paid double for a maiden, knowing it would be my first time.

“After Jaime had made his confession, to drive home the lesson, Lord Tywin brought my wife in and gave her to his guards. They paid her fair enough. A silver for each man, how many whores command that high a price? He sat me down in the corner of the barracks and bade me watch, and at the end she had so many silvers the coins were slipping through her fingers and rolling on the floor, she...” The smoke was stinging his eyes. Tyrion cleared his throat and turned away from the fire, to gaze out into darkness. “Lord Tywin had me go last,” he said in a quiet voice. “And he gave me a gold coin to pay her, because I was a Lannister, and worth more.”

After a time he heard the noise again, the rasp of steel on stone as Bronn sharpened his sword. “Thirteen or thirty or three, I would have killed the man who did that to me.”

Tyrion swung around to face him. “You may get that chance one day. Remember what I told you. A Lannister always pays his debts.” He yawned. “I think I will try and sleep. Wake me if we’re about to die.”

He rolled himself up in the shadowskin and shut his eyes. The ground was stony and cold, but after a time Tyrion Lannister did sleep. He dreamt of the sky cell. This time he was the gaoler, not the prisoner, big, with a strap in his hand, and he was hitting his father, driving him back, toward the abyss...

“Tyrion. “ Bronn’s warning was low and urgent.

Tyrion was awake in the blink of an eye. The fire had burned down to embers, and the shadows were creeping in all around them. Bronn had raised himself to one knee, his sword in one hand and his dirk in the other. Tyrion held up a hand: stay still, it said. “Come share our fire, the night is cold,” he called out to the creeping shadows. “I fear we’ve no wine to offer you, but you’re welcome to some of our goat.”

All movement stopped. Tyrion saw the glint of moonlight on metal. “Our mountain,” a voice called out from the trees, deep and hard and unfriendly. “Our goat.”

“Your goat,” Tyrion agreed. “Who are you?”