

Don't Read in the Closet 2014

ASSASSIN'S LOVE



Sammy Goode

Table of Contents

Love's Landscapes.....3
Assassin's Love – Information5
Assassin's Love6
And Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus?30
Author Bio31

Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

ASSASSIN'S LOVE

By Sammy Goode

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

A gray mist shrouds the scene behind him, as he seems to emerge from its depths, a bloody dagger clasped in his right hand and a gold signet ring in the other. He wears the clothing of a man who would be welcomed at the court of King Henry VIII. His black leather breastplate covers a midnight blue shirt and his black cape billows about him, the hood drawn over his head, exposing only his face. His eyes speak of weariness that is shrouded in sorrow. He lives in smoke and shadow and his is a deadly occupation.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I don't know who I am. I was abandoned when I was a child; they used to call me a freak and beat me because I couldn't speak. I'm mute but I survived.

Then my master, the old Earl, who is a diplomat but who is also a familiar figure at King Henry VIII's court, took me in his household and trained me: I'm an Assassin!

I'm a shadow, working in the shadows; I do what I'm told to do. I have no friends. Sometimes I feel lonely and I dream about something different, something more...

Tell me, is there any hope for me, can you help me!?

Thank you,

Misty.

P.S. Please no BDSM, no D/s, no poly, no incest, no paranormal, no fantasy.

Story Info

Genre: historical

Tags: assassin, mute main character, nobility, set during the time of King Henry VIII's rule

Word Count: 11,847

ASSASSIN'S LOVE

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The boy crouched behind the rough-hewn bed that smelled of death. He could hear distant wailing and long, low moans filtering through, despite cupping his ears in his dirty hands, and rasping out ragged puffs of air between his torn and bloody lips. Anything to keep from hearing... from seeing what lay on the bed above him. He rocked gently on his feet and tried to remember the poem his mother always read to him.

*And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay, for shame,
To save thee from the blame
Of all my grief and grame;
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!*

Miles could hear his mother's soft whisper in his ear. He remembered her sweet breath washing over him as she recited the sad verses and held him close, wooing him to sleep. Soft and gentle was his mam, until the strange sickness. How many hours had he watched as she lay retching, her back seizing as the sweat poured from her? He had tried to soothe her, petting her hair and holding her around the waist, as her body shook and she raved about death.

But he was too small, too young, and the sweating sickness had too firm a hold on his mam. The few coins he begged whilst hiding from the guards was not enough to feed them both. Every time, she would push away the few chunks of hard dark bread and mouldy cheese he had managed to find, telling him in her soft rasping voice to *eat it, to grow strong, to be her good boy*. As he tried not to gulp down the meagre supper, she would pull the flask from beneath her pillow and take long pulls from its mouth, the strong spirits finally soothing her so that she could sleep for an hour or two.

He didn't know how she came by the elixir and the sharp, dismissive tone when he looked at her questioningly quelled any further inquiries on the subject. She rarely spoke to him that way and he felt shamed that she had been so angry with him. He needn't have wondered really, since he actually knew who brought it to her. He'd seen the fancy gentleman deliver it just a few nights

before. He recalled how the two of them had tussled over the bottle, his mam speaking in a teasing voice that he'd never heard before and hoped to never hear again as it made him uneasy, like he was eavesdropping on a conversation that he was too young to understand.

She and the gentleman with the loud, hard voice and the luxurious clothing didn't know he was there, hiding in the gloom. He had snuck into their small shack earlier, when a soft rain had begun to fall. He was supposed to have been begging on the street until the evening fires were lit. That was the rule—he was not to come home till then, for his mother was often occupied, and those who came to give her their washing did not like to have little children about, or so he was told. He was not to leave his place, but he had been cold and wet and wanted the tiny bit of comfort their home provided. So that night he was there and heard those noises she made, soft and pleading, interrupted by an occasional slap or gruff request to spread herself wider. Miles had some idea what went on with these “customers” and it made his skin crawl to hear them. As quickly as he came, the man was gone. After, his mother stood by the wash bucket and scrubbed at her body muttering, “no more, no more.” Then she would drink the medicine and fall into a deep sleep that always frightened him, for she took on the appearance of one already dead.

A sharp sound of scuffling feet broke through the boy's memories, causing him to scramble and press further into the shadows beneath the bed. He was tiny for his nine years and could still fit into little cubbies where few rarely looked. It would not do to be seen, for there were always rumours about young boys who had been snatched from their families and pressed into the service of the king, to tend his soldier's horses and even warm a bed or two. However, it was not that fate which made Miles so fearful. Instead it was what might happen when those same men discovered he was unable to speak. Mute since birth, never making a sound or cry, Miles had found other ways to make his needs known. He had also learned to disappear at a moment's notice when danger was near. His mam had often been startled when he would suddenly appear from a darkened corner. Even at his young age, Miles was already able to go unnoticed and be as silent as a mouse.

He listened as the feet entered the room and then held his breath as he heard the sheeting that separated the bedstead from the rest of the hut rustle and tear.

“Good God. It's the sweats as took her!”

“Shut up, you fool. We're here for the boy. Just don't get too close to the whore and we'll be fine. Now spread out and find the little bastard or His Lordship will have your head.”

Miles pulled back, curling in on himself, determined not to be found. As long as they steered clear of his mam's deathbed, he would never be found. The soldiers tore the little shack apart, smashing the few pieces of furniture. Then as suddenly as the noise had erupted, the night went silent. Miles tensed, straining to hear any sign of what had happened to the men who had just been destroying whatever had lain in their path. He held his breath, waiting.

"Damn the boy to Hell. He must have run off when he saw his whore of a mother dead and gone. Let's go then, we'll check his other haunts and ask about to see if any have seen hide or hair of him."

Miles remained in his spot beneath the bed and waited until the scrape of the boots faded into the distance. And still he paused, almost sniffing the air as a dog would when seeking to discover if there were any intruders about. It was that intake of air that would be his undoing. The bed was shoved back against the wall, and a dagger appeared right before his eyes.

"Don't move, you little bastard."

Rough hands grabbed at his tunic and pulled him from his hiding place. A swift cuff to the head and a fist in his gut, and Miles doubled over in pain as his arms were yanked behind him and bound with a piece of hemp. When he struggled to get loose, he was hit again on the side of his head, and he felt the blood begin to trickle down his temple.

"Jesus, be careful. His Lordship wants it in one piece. And bind his damned mouth before he sets to screaming this filthy shack down around our ears."

The soldier who held Miles responded with a deep, guttural laugh and a truth that set Miles' face burning with shame.

"He won't be doing anything of the sort, I can tell you that. This little piece of filth is silent as the tomb. That's right—a bastard with no voice."

"A mute you say? Then why all the fuss about bringing him in?"

"That's not for us to know. Now get the horses."

The other man made no movement, instead belligerently sticking out his chest and setting his jaw with a stubborn look.

"Are you fixing for him to ride behind one of us? 'Cause I can tell you I don't want the likes of him anywhere near me."

"This piece of shite? Ride?"

Again the soldier chuckled, and Miles swore he could feel his blood run cold at the sound.

“No, this little whorson can run along behind. Fetch the longer rope, I'll tie his leash to my mount.”

With a flurry of movement, a noose was fashioned to go around his slender neck, and Miles began the long journey to the home of the Earl of Wessex. The soldiers spared him no pain as they moved along the sodden dirt path toward the castle. Miles stumbled often and fell even more, leaving his knees a bloodied mess and a gash above his eye that bled copiously down the side of his face. After two long miles, the group halted inside the gate, and Miles stood before the main hall door. Trembling with fear and desperate for breath, Miles was pulled along. Before he could get his bearings, he was unceremoniously dumped before a blazing fire.

“As Your Lordship requested, here is the bastard of the washer woman known as Irene.”

“Was it really necessary to drag him through every puddle of mud between here and that hovel he calls a home, Wentworth?”

The soldier shuffled uneasily as he knew the calm demeanour and tone of His Lordship belied the nasty underbelly of a snake about to strike. He chose his words carefully, hoping to get off with just a reprimand and avoid a few days in the stocks.

“He put up a good fight, he did. We had to tie him, or he would have escaped.”

The Earl of Wessex looked up sharply at his guard, and quick as an adder, reached out and struck him on the ear, drawing blood.

“You bloody fool. Nearly brought down by a slip of a boy? I suppose next you'll be telling me he almost bested you before you could even lash his wrists. Get out of my sight and send Bremen to me. Tell her to bring water and a fresh tunic for the boy.”

The guard turned and made a smart retreat. Miles remained by the fire, shivering, and tried to make sense of why he had been brought before the earl. He flinched as the powerful man knelt beside him and placed two fingers beneath his chin.

“Look at me, boy. Come, raise your eyes to mine. There's no need to fear me.”

Miles cautiously raised his eyes, their azure depths glancing surreptitiously toward the face of the man who now ruled over whether Miles lived, died, or

endured some half-life in between. He was shocked to see a flicker of kindness in the older man's eyes, but also took note of a cunning hardness that lay behind the soft glance. Without any forethought as to the folly of his actions, Miles returned the hard stare with one of his own. He would show this man. Miles was no simpleton to be ill-used. The countless beatings and endless mockery he bore on the streets due to his inability to speak had toughened his young heart. He would not be broken, not again. He raised himself to his feet and stared down at the Earl of Wessex, daring him to do his worst. Slowly the earl rose, a fleeting smile passing his lips. He placed his two hands on Miles' shoulders and gripped him tightly, applying just enough pressure to make the boy blanch in pain.

"A bit of fire in you, isn't there, boy? That's good, very good. You'll need every bit of that burning in your belly before I am through with you. After all, if you are to train to one day be my private assassin, you will need all the strength you can muster and then some. Would you like that, boy? Would you like to help me mete out some justice to those who have kept you and yours under their iron fist for so long? I can see by the anger in your eyes you would. Well, don't you worry, you'll get your chance to bring them to heel."

Miles was transfixed by the hatred he saw in the earl's eyes. Grateful that it was not directed at him, he began to wonder exactly what plans the earl had for him and exactly what he meant by "private assassin". All in good time, he supposed, for now there came such a smell that his mouth began to water and his stomach grumble. He looked past His Lordship to see a wizened old woman carrying a tray of food in her hands. Behind her was a young serving girl laden down with fresh clothing and a flagon of water.

"Ah, Bremen, good. Here is the boy I discussed with you. Make sure he's scrubbed clean and fed well. Tomorrow he can begin to serve in the kitchen with you. I need him fattened up if he is to begin his training next month. See to it, Bremen."

The old woman nodded and dipped her head. Then, with a calculating eye, she turned to Miles and began to strip him of his muddied clothes. He made to struggle, but with a slap to his cheek and a harsh glare of warning, he stilled quickly enough. Bremen continued to remove his clothing. He heard the earl chuckle while at the same time his voice washed over him, shocking Miles once more with his remarks.

"You'll like Bremen, boy. You'll find you have something in common. You see, her former master cut out her tongue to punish her insolence. Silent as the tomb she is, just like you."

Miles started, shocked to hear that the earl knew of his affliction. When he caught the sly look of triumph on the man's face, Miles quickly lowered his eyes, his cheeks flaming in embarrassment for being caught out.

"Ahh, you didn't know I knew your little secret, did you? Well, my boy, that mother of yours didn't keep many secrets when she was spreading her thighs to be filled. That I know, first hand. Off with you then. Bremen, see he's bedded down for the night."

The old woman paused and raised her eyes to the earl. She stood and directed a pointed look toward the boy, and then held her hands out in a questioning way. The earl turned on her, exasperation and anger evident in his voice.

"What is it now, Bremen? I can't read your mind, you know."

Once more Bremen looked at the boy and then at the earl. This time she pointed to her ear and then her mouth.

"His name? Is that what you're asking, you old hag? Well, the filthy little thing was called Miles by that whore he called mother. But I've a mind to change that."

The earl paused and looked at the boy. What name to give his latest acquisition? The damnable boy had nearly eluded his guard, hiding in the shadows like the rats that plagued the town. What name to give such a clever boy? Then it struck the earl, causing him to laugh aloud.

"Shadow. His name is Shadow."

Miles closed his eyes and shuddered at the cold laughter that echoed around the hall. Defeated for the moment, he submitted to this new life and the journey that lay ahead.

Nine years later...

Miles melted into the shadows behind the hanging tapestries and watched the crowd. Beneath his hooded cape lay the dagger he had been given earlier that night. It was Twelfth Night and, as was the custom for the close of the feast, the Lord of Misrule or the "King" of the twelve days of Christmas was now to be overturned and all power returned to Henry, the true king. It was a silly festival and one Miles did not care for in the least. The idea that for twelve days the true king would allow someone else to have authority over the days' events was unthinkable to him. Of course, his opinion hardly mattered, being

nothing more than a servant in the Earl of Wessex's keep. At least that was what the earl told everyone he was. For nine years, Miles had actually been systematically honed and trained into what he now was—an assassin, one of the finest and most deadly. Miles had lost count of the many times he had been sent out to dispatch some traitor to the crown. Tonight he would once again spill a man's blood with the silent rasp of his steel blade.

It mattered little to Miles who the intended victim was; he was merely a deadly shadow, to be used and then allowed to fade back into his life in the kitchen, where he still assisted the old woman, Bremen. Miles felt a twinge of guilt and something akin to a flash of pain roll in his gut as he remembered her face earlier, when he had returned from his time with the earl. She wore that troubled look that told him how much she feared for him and the mission he was to carry out for His Lordship. Miles thought her worries would lessen as time wore on, after all this was not his first, nor would it be his last kill.

As he stood in the gloomy alcove, watching the evening's festivities, Miles recalled the very first time he had returned to the warmth of Bremen's kitchen and how she had petted and soothed his trembling. For one brief second, he closed his eyes and allowed the memory of that first time to roll over him.

The Fifth Earl of Dembry was a cold and calculating man who supposedly had aspirations for the crown. Disguised as one of the earl's stable boys, Miles waited for five long hours along the trail that the man took as his daily exercise. Stepping from behind the tree where he hid, the then fourteen-year-old Miles startled the earl's horse, causing it to rear madly and the earl to lose his seat and fall to the hard, packed earth below. Quick as lightning, Miles struck, grabbing the man's head and pulling it back to deliver the killing blow. Leaving the body to spill its blood on that narrow trail, Miles ran, with tears streaming down his face, to the guard who had escorted him from His Lordship's castle. Tossing him a fresh tunic and admonishing him to leave off his girlish tears and bury the bloody tunic in some leaves and dirt alongside the pathway, the guard then pulled Miles onto the back of his horse and returned him to his keeper: the Earl of Wessex.

Miles recalled the Earl of Dembry's shocked visage as he'd stepped from behind that tree and quietly slit the man's throat. He did so with an air of cold detachment, belying the fear and horror that lay just beneath the surface. Each time he wielded the knife, the very marrow of his soul seemed to shrivel and close off, making him more beast than man.

Bremen often tried to show him he was much more than what the earl had fashioned, using her gentle hands to communicate her affection for him. Each

time he returned to her warm kitchen, trembling with the realization that another man's blood still clung to his blade, he would sit and allow her to pet him, soothing his shaking limbs and bringing him back from the shadows of death. They would rest there, two beings wrapped in their world of silence, yet so attuned to what the other thought and felt. Bremen was the closest thing to a mother he would ever claim, and while he often chafed at her annoying ability to dress him down without uttering a word, he loved her more than the woman he had left behind all those years ago, in that filthy hovel he had once called home.

Miles shook himself ever so slightly to dispel the memory and focus on his task at hand. For eleven long nights, he had come to this dimly lit hiding place to watch the "Lord of Misrule"—one James Rothman, Duke of Wellingham. A high-standing and favoured member of King Henry's court, the duke was known for his good humour. However, underneath the mask of utter contentment and loyalty to the crown lay a viper who had insinuated himself so closely to the king that it was rare to see one without the other. Rumours abounded about Rothman's insatiable thirst to have the crown for himself, and there was good evidence that he would use this, the twelfth and final night of the celebration, to make his move.

While watching Rothman over the course of the celebration, Miles had also noted his salacious proclivities toward bedding young boys. Many of the nights when he hid, watching the man's evening routine, it had been Miles himself and his ability to create a noisy diversion before evaporating into the night that had saved the young boys that were brought to the duke's bed. By disrupting his filthy lusting and planting the fear that he was being observed, Miles was able to save the boys from the duke's foul caresses. Having so easily foiled his plans before, Miles had no doubt he would be able to gain access to the bedroom chamber again, dispatch him and save one more boy from losing his innocence.

The roar of the crowd drew Miles' attention to the raised dais, where the king and Rothman stood, exchanging bawdy comments and ending the night's festivities. As the two men warmly embraced, and the king made off to retire to an upstairs chamber, Rothman watched his departure with obvious affection. No one would suspect that the duke was plotting to kill King Henry later that same night, but not before he sated himself on a piece of young flesh. It would take some time for the revellers to settle for the night and thereby allow Rothman to slip into the king's chambers unseen to carry out his foul deed. In the meantime, the man would satisfy his disgusting proclivities to while away

the time. As Henry made his exit, Miles watched Rothman give a slight nod of his head and direct his gaze to a young boy, not much beyond ten years of age, who would be his next victim. Standing next to the lad was his older brother. Suddenly, as if detecting he was being watched, the man turned and his glance hit upon the very spot where Miles remained hidden.

For just a moment, Miles was lost staring into the depths of eyes so commanding he could scarcely breathe. Fair as the sun and casting a long, lean shadow, Miles watched as Sir Anthony, Duke of Wales bent down to whisper in his younger brother's ear. Miles felt an unusual heat stir in him, as he watched those lips press close to the boy's ear. For just a moment, he allowed himself to think about how it would be to feel the caress of that warm breath against his own neck. Then, just as quickly, Miles felt the shame of his own poor upbringing and despicable profession douse any dreams of that sort.

As it was customary for young boys to squire older aristocracy, the young lad now left his brother's care and made his way to Rothman's side. With clenched fists and nausea filling his gut, Miles watched the boy be led away, presumably to Rothman's bedchamber, where the young lad's duties should only be to fetch wine for the duke and tend to his side till bedtime. Never should there be any other use of the boy, yet Miles knew that would not be the case this night.

Stepping carefully from his hiding place, the Shadow crept from the hall and made his way swiftly to the still empty bedchamber. There, he hid himself behind the curtained window and waited for the right moment to spring the trap that would snuff out the life of the vile debaucher. With one quick slice of his blade, Miles would relieve the world of not only an assassin set on killing the king, but a despoiler of young boys. He did not have to wait long. Rothman led his victim into the darkened room, staying the boy's hand as he reached out to light the bedside candle with the one he carried. Plucking the candle from his fingers, Rothman placed it down and turned on the boy, grabbing him roughly and tearing at his leggings while trying to free his own cock from its bindings. As the boy made to cry out for help, Miles watched as Rothman cuffed the boy on the head, knocking him senseless for a brief enough time to divest him of his coverings and expose his tender backside.

Soundlessly, Miles crept from his hiding place and grabbed the man, wrenching back his head and slicing the soft skin at his neck. As the knife cut through flesh, the door to the chamber flew open, and the boy's brother entered the room with his sword drawn. Sir Anthony seemed to freeze midstride, as he

watched the fountain of blood arc from Rothmans's neck. Miles saw Sir Anthony blanch momentarily as he watched the now still body slump to the floor. Their eyes met, and each took the measure of the other. Slowly, Sir Anthony sheathed his sword and began to approach Miles, his hands extended outward as if trying to soothe a startled animal. The look of wary compassion in the man's eyes was nearly Miles' undoing. Recovering with a snap of his head, Miles pulled his hood down over his eyes, casting his face in shadow once more.

Sir Anthony paused, uncertain how to proceed, yet clearly longing to touch Miles and keep him from leaving. Miles allowed himself to be halted momentarily, his eyes glued to the other man's face. For just a second, Miles wished he could truly speak and assure Sir Anthony that he was not the evil man others believed him to be. He wanted this man to understand that all he had been commanded to do was done in defence of the king, and not for bloodthirsty gain. For his part, Anthony greatly desired to thank Miles for saving his brother, and even more, to assure him that he would never forget the debt he now owed him.

The two men stood, each filled with an odd sense of longing. Anthony took a step closer, shocked by the sudden and sharp need that rose up in him to touch Miles. Then the silence was shattered by the frantic sobs of the half-naked boy clinging to the foot of the bed, diverting Anthony's attention to the needs of his younger brother, which should have allowed Miles to make his escape through the bedchamber window, to safety.

But the picture of Anthony sweeping his brother into his arms and rocking him gently to soothe him captured Miles, causing him to stand a moment longer before finally turning to flee. As he made his way to the opening, he heard Sir Anthony crooning to his sobbing brother. The softly uttered words seemed so familiar. When had Miles heard them before? He stood still, trying to make sense of what he was hearing, and then it struck him. He nearly doubled over, the sharp pain of remembrance tearing at him as the soothing words became clear:

*And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay, for shame,
To save thee from the blame
Of all my grief and grame;
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!*

Miles closed his eyes and felt the touch of a long lost hand upon his brow, as it tenderly stroked his hair and carried him off to sleep. For just a moment, the assassin known as Shadow was back in his mother's arms, safe and loved. Miles felt the trickle of a single tear fall soft upon his cheek and opened his eyes to see Anthony gently clothing his brother with a tender touch. Once again their gazes locked, and this time Miles saw the gratitude in the nobleman's look. The hazel eyes seemed to burn right through his hooded disguise and take his measure, not finding it wanting or lacking in the least. Before that assessment could waver, Miles turned and clambered out the window, grabbing at weathered vines to ease his passage to the ground. Once more, the Shadow melted back into the night that was his home.

One year later...

Anthony stood looking over the latest missive from the king. He shook his head and felt the old familiar tension creep up his shoulders, as he read that the current queen was to be disposed of to make room for another. Apparently, this one promised to be a better breeder and more likely to produce the all-elusive male heir Henry panted after these days. Tossing the parchment onto the desk, he rubbed his eyes and thanked the heavens once more that he had a younger brother who could inherit, should the need arise. And, as always, thoughts about his brother led him back to that night and his own stupidity. Even now, he still cringed inwardly at the idea that he'd allowed his brother to play the part of servant boy. Worse than that, he had, in fact, encouraged it. All this so that he could curry favour with Rothman, who had, in turn, carried the favour of the king—that favour which Anthony himself was once desperate to have. But at what cost? His brother's virtue? Had it not been for the Shadow, the night would have taken a much more desperate turn.

For just a moment, Anthony closed his eyes, recalling the man who had saved his brother that night. So quiet and still. But those eyes, the blue so true and gaze so fierce—yet lurking beneath, one could detect a strange sort of melancholy. Anthony shuddered as he recalled that flushed cheek and plump lip. Despite the bulky clothing, there was a hint of a lean and muscled body, coiled and ready to spring at a moment's notice.

Anthony sat, leaning back in his chair, and let his hand drift down to stroke his hardening cock. Licking his lips, he once again pulled the picture of the cloaked man to the forefront of his mind. The Shadow. He idly wondered what it would feel like to be in the embrace of such a dangerous and exciting villain.

As forbidden as the assignation would be, the idea of falling into the arms of the mysterious Shadow made Anthony's cock pulse and grow. Stroking with a firmer hand, Anthony began to fumble at his hosen in order to feel the heat of his flesh in his hand. If he allowed himself to dream, he could pretend it was another man's hand sliding against his dripping shaft. Those eyes... the firm jaw and sweet lips... Shadow...

Anthony groaned and shook as he spilled, his cock jerking in his hand. The only sound echoing in the duke's library was his own harsh, unsteady breaths, as he felt the old mixture of shame and sweet release flood his senses. There was no doubt in his mind that he wanted the man known as the Shadow. Given the opportunity, he would surely invite him to share his bed, without any hesitation. Reaching for a cloth he kept hidden in a lower drawer, Anthony chuckled at himself.

Look at me, all moon-eyed over a common criminal. His hand stilled, the cleaning rag clenched in his fist, his thoughts slowly coalesced. No, that's not right. The Shadow isn't common. He's much more. Anthony tried to reach back in his memory and recall that night when he stood face-to-face with the man. He remembered thinking there was something fragile about him. Such an air of sadness around him. Hardly an emotion one attributes to a cold-blooded murderer. I do wonder if the rumours are true and he's nothing more than a pawn in the hands of a conniving manipulator who may very well be the true threat to the crown.

It wasn't lost on Anthony or his trusted inner circle that the victims of every assassination that had been carried out in the last several years was someone who was close to the crown. But was there something more? Where did this Shadow come from? Who controlled him? Who sent him out on his bloody missions?

Anthony rubbed his brow and picked up the note concerning the king once more. Was it treason to think that the king should not be allowed to summarily kill a wife that did not produce an heir post haste? Well, if it was, then Anthony was in opposition to the crown for the first time in his twenty-eight years walking the earth. And wasn't that a thought to bring one up short? Nonetheless, something had to be done about this egotistical king who ran the throne with his cock in his hand.

With a resigned air, Anthony realised it was time to call the others together and figure out how to rein in the man who was swiftly destroying the monarchy. Perhaps between the six of them, they could figure out some way to appeal to the king. If not, then they would have to move to somehow limit his

power, or even destroy Henry completely. Treason. That is what he was contemplating. The word churned in his gut. The meeting must take place soon, and with great caution so as not to attract any unwanted attention. Invitations should be delivered today, if at all possible. Anthony sat and began to write.

Miles paced the narrow confines of his room. He had been summoned to the earl's chambers and knew he needed to move immediately to obey or suffer the consequences. Even now, the memories of the training he received flashed in his mind. The numerous times he was told he had disappointed His Lordship, and the beatings he received as a reminder to try harder, move faster. And for what? To become a weapon in the hands of an old man who one day hoped to see his own progeny on the throne. Oh yes, Miles was no fool. He may be mute, but his ears and eyes were sharp and aware. He'd heard the ramblings of His Lordship when he least suspected anyone could overhear. He knew that each time he was dispatched, it was to save the king from potential harm. But Miles also knew that the earl took much pleasure in seeing his peers cut down, for each one brought his own son that much closer to the throne.

Miles stopped and rubbed his face with his hands. There was nothing for it, really. This was all he was good for in the end. It was all he knew and he never faltered. Not once. Except for that one night, when he was discovered by Sir Anthony. For just an instant, he felt the weight of all the blood he had spilled. He could smell it; all the death he had delivered. He could see the horror of it reflected in that face. Those eyes that looked upon him with pity and something more. Affection. Yes, that was what he swore he saw, gratitude and affection. Miles closed his eyes at the memory. He remembered how, later that night as he lay in his bed, he conjured that face and shamefully stroked himself off while contemplating that mouth kissing his, those hands caressing him.

Miles opened his eyes. He was a fool to think that anyone, much less a man of noble birth, would want the likes of him. He turned and snatched up his dagger, sheathing it in his boot, and drew his hood down over his head. He felt the cold hard lump settle in his stomach and the carefully blank expression steal over his face. Without further delay, he left his room and silently made his way to the earl's chambers and his next assignment.

Thirty minutes later, the man known as the Shadow looked down at the piece of parchment in his hand. He could feel the weight of His Lordship's stare as his own mind whirled, trying to take in all he had been told. If the earl was to be believed, then there was a plot by six trusted advisors of the king to

either “persuade” Henry to change his ways or lose his position of power. It seemed a king who made a habit of beheading his wives was not someone these men cared to pledge allegiance to anymore. On the paper in his hand was the name of the first of the six men to be dispatched. Miles opened the folded sheet and felt the blood leave his face as he read the name on the parchment. Lord Anthony, Duke of Wales. The paper fluttered to the floor, glancing off Miles’ boot, where his dagger lay sheathed and ready to strike.

He looked up and caught sight of the gleeful expression on the earl’s face. Here was the only man whom he had ever dared to trust, and for the first time Miles felt something akin to doubt stir in his belly. Wasn’t the earl just a bit too happy with this turn of events? Surely there must be some sadness that a man such as Sir Anthony, a person held in such high regard by so many, should be employed in the business of bringing down the crown?

Miles puzzled over the earl’s reaction for a minute, a new thought emerging. Perhaps His Lordship had lost sight of his mission. Maybe now he was more consumed with positioning his own son to the throne than protecting the king. Miles pondered the man before him, and it slowly dawned on him that he had always taken everything he’d been told as truth. He had never questioned his orders from the earl. He had never hesitated to carry out any task he was given. Rather, he had blithely gone out as an assassin to murder whomever the man designated as dangerous to the monarchy. A building sense of horror emerged at his own gullibility and blind trust.

Miles watched as the earl’s eyes narrowed like that of a hawk spying his prey. Quickly, he dropped his eyes and, bending to retrieve the paper, he folded it slowly, giving himself a second to catch his breath. With steady hands that belied his growing unease, Miles handed the missive back to the earl and bowed his head in acknowledgement of the work set out for him. Turning toward the door, Miles forced himself to move slowly so as not to reveal his sudden and intense mistrust of the man who stood behind him. Just as he reached for doorknob, he heard the earl clear his throat.

“Take extra care with this one, Shadow. It would not do to leave even a trace of who we are behind. I fear this Sir Anthony is a clever dog who must be quickly brought to heel.”

Miles froze and felt the white hot blaze of anger fill him at the callous words. How dare he call Sir Anthony a dog? The earl was not fit to wipe the feet of such a noble man. Drawing in a shuddering breath, Miles once again nodded his head and moved to take his leave.

“Oh, and Shadow?”

Miles stopped, knowing he must acknowledge the request in the earl's tone. He looked back over his shoulder, the movement causing the hood to hide most of his face from view.

“See that you come in and move directly to your cell tonight. No going to Bremen for kitchen scraps, or whatever it is you do when you return from your missions. I will be entertaining a guest tonight—one of the king's closest advisors. He and I must not be disturbed for any reason, particularly by the likes of you.”

Once more Miles felt the slow burn of rage rise up in his gut. Nodding briefly, he turned and made for the stables and the horse that awaited him. Taking the reins from the young boy who had readied his mount, Miles vaulted into the saddle and kicked the horse into a fast trot. Once on the main road, he pushed the animal to lengthen its stride and flew through the night toward the home of Sir Anthony, Duke of Wales; his next victim.

Anthony swirled the amber liquid round the goblet and took a sip, letting the wine slide down his throat, warming him as it descended. The fire was banked for the night, darkening the room. He had allowed his man to undress him only so far, keeping his shirt and hosen on for the time being. To any observer, he appeared relaxed, possibly even deep in his cups and wholly unaware of his surroundings. In actuality, Anthony's free hand lay quite close to the hidden dagger beneath the seat cushion, and he was attuned to every noise and movement that broke the silence of the night.

He was waiting for the Shadow.

Anthony knew he would come. After meeting with the others, there had been a flurry of very careful inquiries made to determine just who or what the Shadow was and if he was a pawn for someone much more powerful and dangerous. It had taken some time, but finally information had been obtained that the assassin was actually under the thumb of the Earl of Wessex. All that had to be done after that was to let slip the names of all the men in his group to someone who was a known spy for Wessex. As the leader, he knew that his name would be the first handed to the Shadow. And so he waited for the assassin to arrive, aware his life may very well hang in the balance. Hence, the dagger hidden by his side.

However, he was hoping that he had read that tiny spark within the Shadow's eyes correctly on that night so long ago now. Surely he was not the

only one who had felt that fleeting sense of longing and need. There had to be more than just a cold-blooded killer there, and it was that which Anthony was relying on to save him from this night.

A breeze stirred at the window and the distant bay of a hound in distress broke the calm. Anthony stirred slightly in his chair and then fell back into his brooding. If the Shadow chose to strike before allowing Anthony to speak, there would be little for him to do except defend himself and hope to escape mortal injury. While Anthony himself was well versed in swordplay, a dagger was not his normal weapon of choice. Still, he was quick and agile, and hopefully that would serve him well. But Anthony also possessed one more element of surprise that he was sure would knock the Shadow off his stride. He knew the assassin's name, his real name, and even now called it to mind. *Miles*. The man with the remarkable eyes was called Miles.

As if just thinking the name had conjured the man himself, Anthony caught the slightest of movements in the corner of his eye and listened as the barest of footfalls indicated the Shadow was drawing near. As the heavy hand descended to grasp his forehead, thereby allowing the assassin to pull back his head, Anthony grabbed his arm and felt the man behind him still. Quietly, he spoke:

“You are safe here, Miles. You don't have to fulfil this mission tonight. You can come here, next to me, and sit. We can converse as equals, you and I, and make our peace with each another.”

The silence was deafening. Anthony tensed as the arm he was holding went slack. Why didn't the man speak? At the very least he could acknowledge Anthony's offer with one of his own.

“Come now, Miles, surely you can speak freely now? I've called you out. You need no longer hide behind that silly name others call you by. Please, sit with me so that I can explain how you came to be here and how I knew that Wessex would send you.”

Slowly, Anthony felt the arm he was holding slip from his grip and then listened as Miles came round before him and stood by the empty chair across from his own. Nodding his head, and indicating for Miles to sit, Anthony took a deep breath and leaned forward to pour another goblet of wine for his infamous guest. Reaching out, he proffered the wine to Miles, who grasped it in his hand and without breaking off his stare, took a long pull. Anthony raised his own in a mock salute and drank deeply, then settled back, determined to wait for the other man to speak first. Miles mirrored his host and rested the goblet on his

thigh. After a moment, he reached up and pushed back the hood that hid his face from view and relaxed in the chair to await his fate.

Miles had always known this day would come. Sooner or later he knew he would be found out, and the consequences had always allowed for a swing on the gallows. Perhaps Anthony would be lenient and let him simply disappear into the shadows permanently. While Miles had little idea where he could run to, he had no doubt that he could find some foreign clime in which to hide.

Time ticked by slowly as each man contemplated the other. With not one word spoken, they seemed to take the measure of one another. Finally, frustrated at the reticence of the man who was both his captive and, in an odd way, his captor, Anthony stirred and muttered a curse.

“God’s teeth, man, surely you have something to say to me? Aren’t you the least bit curious as to how I knew you would be coming for me this night and had not been dispatched to one of the others? I daresay you’d at least want to hear how I came to know your movements. Aren’t you even wondering who spies on you and Wessex? Don’t you want the name of the one who lives and works beside you in the earl’s keep but is *my* eyes and ears?”

Anthony stopped to draw a breath. He could feel the anger rising to the surface now, and the resigned look on Miles’ face did nothing to ease it. His fury at the Earl of Wessex and the countless ways he had obviously beaten his assassin into submission had no bounds. Anthony felt his hands clench into fists, the desire to throttle Miles until he broke the cursed silence coursing through him. If only he could have gleaned more about the man from his equally reticent spy. Other than his name and that he was seemingly loyal to the earl, his inquiries had fallen on deaf ears.

Unbeknownst to Anthony, the idea of a spy in the earl’s keep had indeed rattled Miles much more than he dared show. Upon hearing there was a spy, he struggled to keep his countenance placid and unaffected. But, if Sir Anthony knew so much about Miles, how was it he did not understand that there was no earthly way Miles could respond to his questions? Hadn’t his source informed him that Miles was bereft of speech? A mute with little way to communicate? Or could it be that he was being toyed with? Mocked and ridiculed, as he had been in his youth? Miles looked closely at Anthony and felt his hope for something more crumble. He had been such a fool to even dream that this man could ever feel any sort of affection for someone like him. Miles felt a grim resolve take hold as he reached back to pull his hood over his face once more.

He would not give this man one more moment to see the shattered dreams that now occupied his thoughts.

“Oh no you don't, my dear Shadow. I want to see those pretty eyes when we speak about this intrigue we've got ourselves embroiled in.”

Anthony crouched forward to stay Miles' hand, and the touch sent a jolt through both men. Lifting his eyes in shock, Miles locked gazes with Sir Anthony and watched as the man licked his lips and heaved a soft sigh. Leaning closer, Anthony raised a hand and let it caress the bristly cheek. He saw the soft blue eyes register shock and then an unbearable look of longing and need, before Miles closed his eyes.

The kiss was soft, tentative, and hinted of more. Miles felt himself push into the brush of Anthony's lips, responding as best he could. This was the first time he had ever kissed another, much less a man, and the feelings that rolled through him seemed to go straight to his cock, making it begin to fill with desire. He felt Sir Anthony's hand slip around his neck and pull him forward. The kiss deepened. Miles fought to keep his own fingers from fisting Anthony's shirt. He could feel the tongue pushing against his lips, demanding entrance, and then opened, allowing it to slip inside. Miles felt as though his body was aflame with need, his cock growing rapidly and his senses heady with arousal. Too soon, Sir Anthony broke off the kiss, but did not let go of his hold on Miles. Instead, he pressed their foreheads together and exhaled a shaky breath.

“I've wanted to do that ever since the night you rescued my little brother. What is it about you that causes my blood to rise up and boil so? Can you feel it? Do I affect the same response in you, my sweet assassin? No, you are no assassin, are you? Merely a man who has been unjustly forced into a life he would never choose for himself. You are a good man, aren't you, Miles? A man who deserves so much more than life has handed him thus far. Someone who deserves a destiny better than the one another has mapped out for him. Someone who deserves to be loved. Would you like that, Miles? Would you like to be loved... by me?”

Anthony drew back then and looked at Miles for his response. There had been other times when Miles had felt frustration over his inability to utter his feelings aloud but never before was it this intense. Shoving away his exasperation with himself, he nodded, hoping that it would be enough to let Sir Anthony know how deeply his words and touch had affected him. When he saw

the smile glance across Anthony's face, Miles allowed himself to relax once more and enjoy the presence of the other man.

"I thought so. I felt it in the way your mouth tangled with mine. But I had to be sure. But perhaps we should check again—just to be certain, eh?"

With a low chuckle, Sir Anthony swept in again and took command of Miles, wrapping one arm around his shoulder and placing the other at his waist. This time the kiss was more demanding, startling the breath from Miles and causing him to wrap his own hands around Anthony's head. Hearing a low moan escape from the other man, Miles pressed his body against him, trying to feel the hard flesh against his own. With a muffled curse, Anthony drew back and began tearing at Miles' hood, drawing it off and flinging it to the floor, to be followed almost immediately by the leather breastplate Miles wore. Anthony tore at the midnight blue shirt that kept his hands from feeling the warm flesh of the man that had just been in his arms. When he felt two rough hands do the same with his shirt, he laughed aloud and swept first Miles' and then his own shirt off and sent them sailing across the room.

Swooping back in, Anthony pushed his chest into the hard wall of muscle before him and sighed upon the soft lips that bewitched him so. His senses completely overwhelmed, Miles reached out tentatively and smoothed his hand down over the soft skin of Sir Anthony's back. Once again, Anthony broke off the kiss, and their breath came in short, shallow bursts. But this time he reached down and let his hand glide across the hard cock that now hid beneath the dark hosen Miles wore. The solid piece of flesh jerked under his caress and Anthony smiled.

"Tell me you want this, Miles? Tell me you will let me taste what lies beneath this coarse cloth."

Miles leaned his head back and felt a wave of remorse flood his mind. He could never utter the words of affection Anthony so obviously needed to hear. How could he submit to this noble man when he was so broken and ill-used? As if aware of his torment, Anthony quietly shushed away the fears that threatened to consume Miles. Stroking back the hair from his lover's face, Anthony eased away to look at Miles, and it occurred to him that he had never heard Miles utter a word; not one. Every time he had attempted to draw him out tonight, Miles had met him with stubborn silence, refusing to answer. Was it refusal? *What if...* The vision of the old woman frantically gesturing and grunting out gibberish to him as he plied her with question after question as to

which of his men the earl would target first rose before him. She had been mute, unable to speak, and yet more expressive than many who had their full faculties about them ever would be.

Anthony looked at Miles once more, and what he saw in the depths of his eyes and the defeated bearing of his body affirmed his conclusions. He would never hear his lover sigh or gasp in delight. There would never be quiet conversations or intimate moments whispering words of affection together. And yet... the stories those eyes held, the way those hands so softly caressed, the way those soft lips submitted to Anthony's urging; perhaps words were not necessary after all. Couldn't they create a language that was all theirs and learn to understand one another without the need to speak at all?

Anthony leaned in and brushed his lips against that lush mouth once more. He felt Miles relax slightly. Once again hands began to touch and stroke. Before long, both men were trembling from a deep need to feel only flesh against flesh.

"Come, help me. Help me draw away this damned cloth that keeps you hidden from my eyes."

Miles stood and looked bewilderingly at Anthony, uncertain as to what he should do next. With a gentle tug, Anthony began to draw down the hosen from the long, muscular thighs that caused his cock to twitch and fill once more. When he succeeded in removing them completely, he stepped back to admire the gorgeous shape of the man before him. A long, thin cock curved upward from a dark tangle of curled hair. There was a small wet splatter on the trim, tight belly that merged into a broad chest, strong and well muscled. The head of Miles' cock glistened and called out to be tasted. Anthony knelt at his lover's feet and responded with his wet and willing mouth.

Miles watched as Anthony stripped him bare and fought against turning away to hide his form from those insistent eyes. His breath left him when he saw the appreciative glances and the lusty glimmer rise in the other man's expression. And then, to his horror, he watched the young duke drop to his knees and reach for his aching cock. Miles scrambled backward, his face bearing an expression of shock. Anthony nearly fell to the floor and pushed himself up in surprise. When he saw the look on his lover's face, he quickly stood and went to him, once again stretching out a gentling hand.

"What is it, Miles? Why do you turn away from my touch? Do you not relish this as much as I do?"

Miles opened his mouth, only to close it again in despair. How to tell this man that he should never be brought so low as to kneel to someone like him? Never before had his lack of ability to speak been so frustrating. He ran a hand through his hair and then scrubbed it over his face. How could he make Anthony understand that he wanted those same caresses, but that he could not yet accept such low behaviour from the man for whom he felt such affection? Miles stepped forward and mimicked Anthony's behaviour, falling to his knees and reaching for the half-hard cock that lay against the slender thigh. He felt a hand fall on his head, forcing his face back.

“Are you sure this is what you want, Miles?”

Miles nodded and tried to move back down to capture the long, fat cock between his lips. The desire to have this man, to feel his tongue touch and taste, was fast becoming an overwhelming need. However, the hand tangled in his hair held him fast, and those demanding eyes raked over his face once more, looking for any signs of distress or remorse. One finger reached out to slide across his mouth, and Miles shuddered from the excitement that this simple touch wrought inside him.

“You are the most beautiful man I have ever seen. Do you know that? Without uttering a word, your eyes and touch still speak volumes to me. You and I will learn each other's ways. We will take delight in finding each place that gives pleasure and builds to release. You are mine now, as I am yours. Wessex will never touch you again, Miles, believe it. You are safe with me here. Safe to love and be loved. Do you understand what I am telling you? That I want you here with me, for as long as you desire?”

Miles tried to blink away the tears that threatened to spill down his cheeks. No one had ever wanted him, not like this, not like Anthony. He nodded slowly and moved his mouth. Anthony leaned forward to see what it was Miles was trying to say.

“Yours.”

As clearly as if the word had been uttered aloud, Anthony read the silent declaration and smiled. Reaching down, he drew Miles to his feet and kissed him with a passion that pulled them both under its spell. Their mouths locked, hips shoved in toward one another and ground flesh against flesh. A moan broke loose from Anthony's trembling mouth as the excitement built. Once more, Miles dropped to his knees, determined not to be thwarted again, and surrounded Anthony's cock with his lips.

Now it was Anthony's turn to throw back his head and groan in pleasure at the warm, wet sucking motion engulfing his shaft. Anthony wrapped his fingers in the dark, lustrous hair and guided Miles on and off his cock, revelling in the glory of his touch. For endless minutes, the two men posed thusly, each one worshipping the other in their own way, the silence broken only by the guttural moans and sighs of pleasure. The taste of Anthony exploded in Miles' mouth, flooding it with a bitter flow that he scrambled to swallow. He felt his own cock pulse and spend, painting the floor white beneath him.

Shattered, the two men slumped in a loose embrace on the bedroom floor, allowing their soft caresses to signify their growing affection for each other. No more would one half of this pair need to lurk in the dark, for this night found the Shadow fading for good, and in its place a man was born; one who would be forever cherished by a noble duke.

Epilogue

The Earl of Wessex raised his goblet to his guest. He felt a sense of smug satisfaction that he was finally being afforded the attention he so richly deserved after years of service to the crown. Of course, each time a threat to the king had been dispatched, the earl took the credit, leading king and nobility alike to believe that it was his hand that wielded the blade striking down each nobleman that showed any move to usurp the throne. Hence, the true identity of the elusive Shadow remained unknown to all. Thus, the king and his trusted advisors understood the assassin to be the Earl of Wessex himself.

Now with dinner complete, he hoped the king's man would get around to the purpose of his visit. Earlier, the earl had taken note of a long, flat box that his enigmatic dinner guest held close to his side throughout their meal. Could it hold some trinket or gift to show the king's gratitude for all he'd accomplished on his behalf? Near bursting with curiosity, the earl was about to question the contents of the box when Bremen appeared at the entrance to the hall. Motioning for the earl to attend her, she slipped back into the shadowy hall. A flash of anger coursed through him. The old hag had certainly forgotten her place in recent months. Why, she seemed almost delighted whenever she received her daily orders, as if she had some secret that only she knew and held dear. Well, she would receive the sting of his lash this night, for interrupting such an important moment as this.

Begrudgingly, the earl excused himself and rose to leave the hall. No sooner had he reached the alcove that led to the kitchens than he felt a tingling at his

back. Looking over his shoulder, he felt a slight breeze caress his cheek, but saw nothing else amiss. When he got to the kitchen, the old hag was nowhere to be found, and her disappearance affirmed her pending punishment all the more. Shrugging off his impatience, the earl returned to the hall and his waiting guest. Once more, he lifted the wine to his mouth, taking a long draught and wincing at the slightly bitter aftertaste. One more strike against Bremen for serving a cheaper wine on such an important night.

As the effects of the wine began to take hold, the earl felt a flush of excitement course through him, as the other man placed the well-oiled box on the table and made to open it. He opened his mouth to speak and found that his tongue had grown numb. He attempted to raise his hand to his mouth and found he could not. His limbs refused to obey him. They had been struck with such lassitude that he was barely able to move, much less speak.

“Are you having some difficulty, Milord? Finding it hard to muster the strength to move, perhaps? Do not fear, that is just the poison slowly wending its way through your body. It shan't be long now, before you drift off to sleep and your heart ceases to move as well. But before you do, the king had something specially made for you. Look here, isn't it a beauty?”

The man pulled a cunning dagger from the box. When the earl was able to see it entirely, his eyes widened in recognition. He tried in vain to protest that he could not accept the weapon, for it bore such a keen resemblance to the one wielded by his own pet assassin, the Shadow. He desperately tried to move, to escape the vision of death that swam before his drooping eyelids. He heard the man stand and move behind him, and then felt the press of the cold blade at his throat.

“Never fear, Milord. I do not intend to slit your vile throat. No, that would not do, you see, for the king wishes the world to know that it was he who discovered the despicable assassin named the Shadow and removed that blight from the earth. You, Sir, will be found by your servants tomorrow morn, poisoned by your own hand, your deadly blade held tight in your rigoured fist.”

Wessex watched in horror as the handle of the dagger was pressed into his palm and his fingers moved to wrap it up tight. The emissary from the king took one last sip from his own wine glass and gathered his box, tucking it under his arm. Before he stepped away from the table, he withdrew a sealed letter from his pocket and placed it next to the earl. Then he moved toward the entrance to the courtyard, where his horse awaited him.

The earl sat at the empty table and felt his heart slow its already sluggish pace.

In just a few minutes, the Earl of Wessex breathed his last breath. He would be found in the morning light, sitting as if transfixed, his eyes staring sightlessly at the dagger in his hand. The note, which lay on the table beside him and bore his own seal, would be discovered and later delivered to the king. It bore a confession of his crimes and his regret that he could no longer live as the foul murderer he had become. The bloody reign of the assassin known only as the Shadow had ended.

There was only one witness to the evening's activities, and she would bear the secret of the earl's murder to her tomb. She could be trusted to do so, for she was just an old woman, made mute at the hands of another many years before. She would be overlooked and found to be lacking as a credible witness.

Bremen stood in the shadows, her job complete. The boy she took into her kitchen so long ago was finally safe. The foul beast that had nearly broken him was dead. Her turn as spy to a golden-haired duke was finished. She turned back to her kitchen and began to ready it for the day ahead.

The End

And Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus?

*And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay, for shame,
To save thee from the blame
Of all my grief and grame;
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!*

*And wilt thou leave me thus,
That hath loved thee so long
In wealth and woe among?
And is thy heart so strong
As for to leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!*

*And wilt thou leave me thus,
That hath given thee my heart
Never for to depart,
Nother for pain nor smart;
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!*

*And wilt thou leave me thus
And have no more pity
Of him that loveth thee?
Hélas, thy cruelty!
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!*

—Sir Thomas Wyatt

Author Bio

Sammy Goode is a playwright /director by choice and a teacher by day. This is her third time writing for the M/M Goodreads Group.

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