



# The Price

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by a.e Tyree

# **The Price**

**A Short Story**

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**a.e. Tyree**

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Madeline struggled upright, pushing the bed sheets out of the way. She grabbed the ceramic basin on the table next to the bed, leaned over the smooth white bowl, and retched. Thin black bile. Her stomach clinched again. More of the foul liquid burned its way up her throat.

The rough-hewed door opened, whisper quiet on well-greased hinges. Angela padded into the room, took the basin from Madeline and examined the contents, sniffing deeply.

“Better today.” She placed the basin back on the table.

Madeline leaned back on the bed, sinking into the soft pillows, “Don’t remember much...how many days?”

Angela wrung excess water from a rag and gently wiped Madeline’s face. “You’ve been here just over a fortnight.” She poured fresh water, brought the beaker to Madeline’s lips. “You’re healing more every day.”

Madeline sipped the water, a blissful cold rivulet soothing her throat.

What had her father taught her about black bile? She frowned, she couldn’t remember. It was blood wasn’t it, blood in the stomach?

“Do you remember how you came to be here? How you were hurt?” Angela asked.

Madeline closed her eyes, “King’s men... they took me...I was in The Tower and...”

Her left hand went to her ribs, bound tightly and starting to heal. She inhaled deeply, pain still seared down her side. She took small, shallow breaths until the pain lessened. She looked at her right hand, wrapped and cradled in her lap. She squeezed her eyes shut. She could still hear the crack as her torturers broke each finger; their laughter as she sobbed and told them the Queen had done nothing wrong.

“You see,” Angela wiped the tears from Madeline’s face, “you are remembering more.”

Madeline bit her lip as Angela reached for her injured hand and slowly moved each finger. They throbbed, but the sharp pain was gone.

“We should be able to take the bandages off tomorrow.”

“So soon? That can’t be right...” Madeline trailed off. Could her memory be that faulty? There was much she couldn’t remember, but she was sure broken fingers couldn’t heal in fifteen days.

The pounding of horse’s hooves echoed on the lane leading to the one-room cottage. Angela moved to the window, drew back the heavy curtains.

“Probably one of his lordship’s couriers.” Angela pulled a small knife from the pocket of her dress, handed it to Madeline. “In case I’m wrong, don’t make any noise, and use this. Can you do that?”

Madeline nodded, clutching the knife with her good hand.

Angela rushed outside to greet the rider. Madeline couldn’t make out what they were saying. If he were just a courier, one of Jerrod’s men, would it be taking so long?

Madeline struggled out of the bed, and jammed her feet in her slippers. She leaned against the end of the bed for support, the knife shaking in her hand. Death was better than going back to The Tower. She took a deep breath and silently recited, *Shama Israel Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echad. Hear Oh Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one.*

Madeline heard the front door latch. Her heart racing, she tightened her grip on the knife. As Angela slipped into the room, Madeleine sagged against the bedpost, the knife clattering to the floor. Angela rushed to her side and pulled Madeline onto the bed.

“You took so long...thought something was wrong,” Madeline tried to catch her breath.

Angela scooped up the knife from the floor and slipped it into the pocket of her voluminous skirt. “I can’t read and his lordship had some instructions for me the courier needed to impart. His lordship said we should be safe here for now, but wants me to prepare what remedies I might need if we had to travel to one of his other estates with little notice.”

“He thinks we might need to flee?”

“Queen Anne is dead, beheaded for treason, and things are in turmoil. His lordship is being cautious.”

“No! She can’t be, she did nothing wrong.” Madeline’s eyes welled with tears. Her beloved Queen, dead. “She was kind to me. Discovered I could read...would sometimes slip me a book on philosophy when I brought her a remedy. We would discuss it when I tended to one of her ailments.”

Angela crossed the room and checked the pot simmering over the fire. She ladled hot water into a cup, adding willow bark. She handed the cup to Madeline, “How long were you her herb mistress?”

“I made her remedies when the King was married to Queen Catherine. She asked me to tend to her exclusively when she became Queen. How long have you been a healer?”

Angela thought for a minute, “Richard the Second was king when his lordship brought me here and had his herb mistress teach me the craft.”

Madeline froze, the steaming cup of tea halfway to her mouth. “That was over a hundred and fifty years ago.” She stared at Angela over the rim. “You have Jerrod’s affliction.”

“Yes. He caught me trying to drink the blood of his horse outside a brothel and recognized the signs. Hannah, the healer tending to this estate was old, so he brought me here to train as her replacement. His lordship taught me what I needed to know to live with the affliction. Old Hannah taught me to have a purpose in this life.”

Jerrod confided to Madeline about his affliction shortly after they became lovers, over four years ago. Blessed with a long life, healing faster than usual, but condemned to feed on blood, she had thought his condition unique.

She stared at her injured hand, her lower lip quivering, “He brought me here, because I have the illness now.”

“It was the only way he could save your life. You were dying when he rescued you from the King’s torturers. He wasn’t sure if he could save you, but he loved you too much not to try. The price is living with the burden.”

“And the black bile?”

“Your body is going through the final changes. Soon the vomiting will stop, and you’ll only be nourished by the blood of other living things.”

Madeline shook her head, “I don’t want this. He should have let me die. I’m a healer, I can not live by drinking the blood of others.”

Taking the cup out of Madeline’s hands, Angela pulled the quilt higher up on the bed. “Sleep now, tomorrow you can choose. You can stay here, learn to live with this, or leave and find your own way. But you are a skilled healer, and have a place in this world. With the affliction, you could help people for many years. But only you can decide if the price is too high.”

## **About a.e. Tyree**

a.e. Tyree believes anything is possible, which may be why she is drawn to writing paranormal stories. A corporate executive and life coach by day, she spends her nights writing stories.

To learn more about a.e.Tyree's work, visit her website at [www.aeTyree.com](http://www.aeTyree.com)