

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 51

It was well past midnight and only the most hearty of men were still out and about. A few were drunkenly stumbling back to their homes in one of the many slums of King's Landing while others peddled their black market goods. There were fewer guards walking around than there were when Robert sat on the throne. The past several years hadn't been good to the capital city of Westeros. What few guards were available were huddled in their thick cloaks as they did their best to stave off the unrelenting chill of the night. A bitter wind from the North drifted across the open sea and right over the city, bathing every street and back alley in teeth-chattering cold. As such, the guards who were on duty found any nook or cranny that offered the slightest amount of relief and snuggled in for the long night. After all, it wasn't like anyone would be climbing over the city walls.

Inside the Red Keep, it was much of the same. The castle guards walked their patrols slowly and tiredly. The biting chill had sapped them of their strength and had made them sleepy and slow-minded. Everyone of importance was asleep in their warm beds except the Hand of the King, Lord Tywin Lannister. He was still awake, just finishing up his work. He had been mentally raging since he found that his daughter had fled the castle. How she was able to sneak out, he had no clue. He had everyone questioned, and no answers could be found. This only made him angrier. Obviously, someone in this castle knew something, he thought to himself. And those cocksuckers were clearly lying to him. Unfortunately, there was little that he could do about it. Cersei was already gone, and there was no use crying over it. He would have to change his plans around, but not by much. In truth, Cersei held very little value these days. It was more about the principle of the thing. He did not like being disobeyed, especially in trying times like the present. He had a hard enough time training a child to be a King, he did not have the time to worry about his servants stabbing him in the back, let alone his only daughter. If he ever came across her again, she would know of his displeasure, that was for sure. Until then, he simply had to move forward.

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One by one, hundreds of the North's best fighters climbed through the secret passage and into the Red Keep's dungeons. Lord Robb Stark was the third to enter the dungeons. They listened quietly, not hearing anything other than a few rats squeaking nearby. "Torch," Robb called out. The man in front began striking his knife against a piece of flint, sending sparks onto a stick with an oil-soaked piece of cloth tied around the top. When the cloth burst into flames, the man grabbed the stick and held it high into the air, sending light all around the room. More and more flooded in as Robb pushed forward. It took them a while to find their way out of the labyrinth of rooms, but eventually, they found the main door back into the castle proper. Knowing there would likely be a guard outside of this door, they acted quickly. One man pulled the door open as fast as possible while Robb lunged forward and wrapped his hand around the man's mouth from behind. As quick as a snake striking, he buried the blade of a dagger directly into his heart.

His muffled scream of pain seemed louder than it actually was. As the guard's body went limp, Robb pulled him back through the doorway and out of sight. "We move forward as quietly as possible," he told his group of men.

Robb had brought several groups that would act independently of one another. They each had missions. His was to go for the King. As he and his men moved up the castle, other groups continued on to each floor. The largest group made their way out of the castle to take control of the city, killing anyone they met along the way.

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Tywin Lannister quickly drank down the last bit of wine that was in his cup. This wine was a bit more floral than the last shipment they received. He preferred the fruitier varieties, but still, beggars couldn't be choosers. It was his grandson Harold who supplied him with wines from all over the world. It was the least the little bastard could do after raising the boy. Tywin was just about to get up and go to bed when he heard tapping on the window. At first, he thought that it was just beginning to hail, so he ignored it. Then, he heard the tapping again. He stood up in confusion. He was in his chambers in the Tower of the Hand which was way too high for anyone to actually climb. He opened the window and was met with a blast of icy, cold wind and a spray of light mist. Something black shot in just before Tywin slammed the window shut. "Shit!" he cursed under his breath as he wiped the droplets of water from the front of his shirt. He ignored the intruder until it cawed angrily.

He looked over and saw a bedraggled raven with many of its feathers crooked. Tied to its leg was a message covered in wax. All thoughts of sleep forgotten, Tywin grabbed the bird in a not-so-delicate manner and pulled the message from its foot, ignoring the enraged squawk. He hastily unwrapped it from its wax coating and unrolled it.

'Robb Stark and his men have entered the Red Keep through an old tunnel. They intend to take the throne before the sun rises,' the message read. There was no signature.

For a quick second, Tywin brushed it off as a jest. How could the Starks enter the Red Keep unnoticed? Then he thought better of it. It was better to raise the alarm and end up looking foolish rather than do nothing and lose your head. He quickly made his way to the guard that was stationed near the entrance to his tower. "Ring the bell! Raise the alarm and gather your men. Send guards to the King's chambers. Have the entire castle searched for intruders," he growled. The guard snapped to attention and immediately did what he was told. Within a few minutes, Tywin was hurriedly making his way to Tommen's room, collecting every guard that he could find along the way.

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Robb Stark quickly pushed the thick, oak door open as his men finished slitting the throats of the Kingsguard who were guarding King Tommen's door. Robb slipped in, and though he

couldn't see very well in the low light, he could clearly see the young, blonde boy asleep in his bed. Laying on his back, Robb saw his chest slowly moving up and down. With his dagger in hand, he silently crept up to the boy. His stomach twisted in disgust, but he knew that he must. "Forgive me, lad," he quietly pleaded before driving his dagger right into the boy's heart. His small body barely jerked as he pulled the long blade from his chest. He stared at the bloody blade, hating what war did to men like him. Suddenly, he heard a disturbance behind him. A scream from one of his men. He turned just in time to catch an arrow in the neck. It pierced true, entering the windpipe and exploding out the back. The arrow ran out of momentum halfway through. Robb stumbled, his hand flying up to his neck. He grabbed the shaft of the arrow as blood gurgled in his throat. As loud as he had ever heard, a bell began ringing, and he knew that he had been betrayed. By whom, he did not know. 'I will never know,' he lamented, falling to his knees with blood pouring down his chest. His body fell onto its side as he took his last few breaths.

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As soon as the door shut behind Tywin Lannister, the forgotten raven flew off of his desk and transformed mid-air. The black bird morphed and took the shape of a handsome, young man with black hair and dazzling green eyes. As Harry's feet touched the ground, he immediately went into his grandfather's desk, searching through his paperwork. It was only a few minutes later that he found what he was looking for. Harry waved his hand and made magical copies of everything. Battle plans, troop numbers, hidden garrisons, secret supply roads ... He got everything. 'These will be a nice gift for the Northern army,' Harry thought.

For his newly-created plans for Westeros, he would need both the North and the Westerlands weakened significantly. That was why he was secretly playing both sides. No matter what, neither Robb nor Tommen would escape the night with their lives. At least, that's what everyone would think. As heartless as Harry could sometimes be, even he wouldn't condemn his little cousin to death over such selfish plans. That was why, lying in Tommen's bed, was a pig Transfigured to look just like the boy. The real Tommen was in a deep, magical sleep. He would deliver the boy back home and keep his identity hidden until everything had blown over. Perhaps one day in the future, he could rule the Westerlands or something. Until then, he could spend his childhood just being a kid with his mother.

There was no doubt in his mind that Robb would achieve his goal that night. Harry had cleared out most of the guards all the way up to Tommen's room. Harry went invisible and began making his way to the room. Almost there, he heard the alarm bells beginning to ring. When he finally got there, he saw his grandfather looking over the dead body of Tommen while Robb lay lifeless on the cold, stone floor, an arrow buried halfway into his neck. A pool of blood had formed around him, and Harry was certain that Robb Stark was dead. Nodding in satisfaction, he disappeared, letting everything else play out on its own that cold, winter night.

With Robb Stark gone, he would need to find anyone else who could make a claim for Winterfell. Sansa's brothers were the obvious ones. Harry hadn't been keeping close tabs on

what was going on in the North. The only thing he knew was that Sansa's brother, Jon Snow, was at Castle Black. Her sister had been missing since she escaped King's Landing during Joffrey's mad reign. She too would need to be found. Thankfully, he had drones stationed practically everywhere, and he had trade ships that visited every remote corner of Planetos. He would find her, sooner rather than later most likely, he thought.

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'Horseface Arya ... If only they could see me now,' she thought to herself as she wore the face of a beautiful, young woman who had lost her child at birth and had asked for the gift. She stared at herself in the mirror. Her beautiful, chestnut hair was done up in a bun with a long, thick, silver pin holding it in place. Her body had soft, feminine curves that would draw the attention of any man ... and even some women, she thought with amusement. She continued to gaze at her new face. Sight ... What a luxury, she told herself. It was only when something was taken away, that one could understand just how valuable it truly was. That was true for her sight, but then again, it was true for a lot of things. 'Family,' quickly came to her mind. Arya Stark shook her head to rid herself of the thoughts. This was not the time.

She ran her hands down her slim sides and over her widening hips. She was ready to go. Leaving the House of Black and White, Arya walked the streets of Braavos with confidence. The winter winds blew hard from the north, nearly unraveling the bun of hair on her head. She pulled her cloak tighter around her young body. As she walked, she could feel the tension of the people as they went about their daily lives. Soon winter would fully be upon them, and the crucial harbors and ports that they rely on would be frozen over. Contrary to these beliefs, the leaders of the city had assured their citizens that the harbors would remain open. The black trade ships that visited daily would continue plying the city with their wares. Arya had heard that the owner of these black ships had other ships that were much bigger. The leaders called them Icebreakers, and supposedly, they would break the ice apart and keep the trading lanes open. That meant food, furs, leathers, medicines, and most importantly, firewood would continue being traded to the city.

At first, Arya snorted to herself. How often do promises go unkept, she thought. But then, she remembered who owned these black ships. The Dread Lord was what many of the sailors and sellswords called him as they sang his praises or told tales of his various atrocities. Such a strange name she had thought. After a bit of digging, she discovered that the Dread Lord was actually a man named Harold Hill, the bastard son of Jaime Lannister. Arya's hand clenched into a fist. The Lannisters were on her list. She owed them a hefty debt which she was eager to pay back.

One thing could be said though. The Dread Lord was powerful ... powerful and wealthy, and he apparently had more gold in the Iron Bank than the next ten richest kingdoms combined. As such, he had tremendous influence in the city, which he rarely if ever used. However, it was the Iron Bank that cut the deal with the newly-minted King, and if the Iron Bank told you something, you better believe that it's true. That didn't stop the people from worrying though. Every day it

was getting colder and colder, and the traders coming from further north were already complaining about cake ice forming in the Shivering Sea. It wouldn't be long until everything was iced over.

Arya pushed those thoughts from her mind as she came upon the first bridge. She would have to cross many more before she reached her destination. Once she was on the mainland, she continued west until she reached the canal where she paid a boatman to take her south a ways. When they reached the junction of two canals, she told him, "This is as far as I go." The man docked along the side, and Arya hopped out.

Again heading west toward the Happy Port, she was forced to listen to dozens of catcalls from drunk and lustful sailors. She didn't mind, however. She had heard much worse things since her escape from King's Landing. Arya could smell her destination before she could actually see it. After losing her eyesight, she could only rely on her ears and nose, and the sounds and smells of the Satin Palace were unmistakable to her. Blind Beth, the poor, little beggar girl was what the locals had called her. What they didn't know was that she was collecting information to pass along to the Kindly Man. Disguised as Beth, she had infiltrated all but the most wealthy of areas in Braavos, and she could recognize them all by their smell alone. The Satin Palace was much less offensive than other brothels and taverns. The brothel was scented in fragrant perfumes that the lovely, young girls wore to attract their wealthy clientele. The place was quieter than other places she had visited. The girls spoke in soft, sweet voices as their satins and silks rustled. Even though she could identify the location by its scent and sounds, she was still happy to have her vision back.

Coming down the lane with a slight limp was a man that she knew well. She had spent ten days following him and learning his routine. Behind him was a group of four men that stayed close, but not enough to crowd him. These were his bodyguards, and he never went anywhere in public without them. Every three days, the man would visit the Satin Palace and hire one of his favorite girls. Once he had sated his lust, he would leave and return to Ragman's Harbor where he would board his private boat and sail around the island. He would stop at the Purple Harbor and exit his boat before walking the short distance back to his luxurious home. There were very few opportunities to get at him. That's why sometimes, you had to make your own luck, Arya happily thought. The man entered the brothel, and she patiently waited. No one wondered why a pretty, young girl was hanging out near the brothel. They probably figured that she was a whore trying to steal business away from them. That was fine with her. Less than an hour later, the man came out with his four guards in tow looking much less tense. He began making his way west toward the harbor. Arya followed slowly, keeping her distance. They walked over the short bridge and were about to cross in front of the Happy Port when a group of a dozen or so men jumped into the lane, knives in hand.

She couldn't hear what they were saying, but she didn't need to. It was amazing what will happen when you spread certain news to certain people, she thought sneakily. A wealthy man with minimal guards was an easy target for thieves, or at least they thought. His four men fought quite valiantly, cutting down several in the short time it took her to arrive at the scene. The rich

man was walking backward, clearly afraid. Arya was only ten steps away when she reached up and pulled the silver pin from her hair. Her hair unfurled and cascaded down her back where it was caught by the wind. It blew back and fanned out as she walked by. With a short jab of her hand, she pricked the man with the needle sharp tip. She heard him hiss slightly, but she kept walking. Wrapping her hair back up, she stuck the pin back through, taking heed not to jab herself while doing so. His guards never noticed anything out of the ordinary as they fought off the would-be thieves. By then, a crowd was beginning to form, but Arya just walked by. Once she was a safe distance away, she turned and looked. The rich man was starting to stumble forward. His face was sweating, and she could see his hands trembling violently. He clutched at his chest and dropped down to one knee. Those near him rushed in, thinking that he was having a health-related episode. In reality, a very potent venom was rapidly shutting down his organs. Arya continued to watch as he was laid on his back. Suddenly, his back arched, and he yelled in pain. This happened three times. The fourth time, his back arched, but he did not yell. He collapsed with foam dripping from the corner of his mouth. His eyes which were once bright and seeing were now fishy and dull. His body twitched one last time and never moved again. As the city guards came rushing in, Arya felt that it was a good time to return to the House of Black and White. The gift had been given and received. She had no more uses for this face.

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"Is there anything I can do for you?" Harry asked Margaery as they casually walked through one of the rose gardens at Highgarden. Margaery looked tired and stressed, though she attempted to look strong. Her arms were wrapped around his as she pressed her chest against his bicep.

"With my father and brothers gone, that leaves me as the ruler of the Reach ... at least for now," she added. Harry nodded.

"There will be many plotting to get their hands on the title. I have no doubt that several Lords of the Reach are already making plays for Highgarden. Some might offer you their sons or even themselves for marriage in exchange for safety and security. And with your Army still away ..."

Harry told her.

"There is little I can do to stop any of it," she finished. "How I wish that I could find out who targeted my brothers. Was it one of my father's bannermen? Was it an assassin hired by the North or perhaps the King? I may never know," she sadly shook her head.

"I ask again ... Is there anything I can do for you, My Lady?" he asked her. Margaery smiled and held him tighter.

"Are you able to keep the wolves away while I try and settle my family's affairs?" she asked him. "I would be very grateful, Your Grace." A shadow suddenly passed over her, and Margaery looked up. High above her, the black silhouette of a dragon was circling overhead.

"I believe that can be arranged," Harry smiled and wrapped an arm around her slim waist. Margaery melted into him as he held her possessively.

'With Harold here, nothing can touch me,' she concluded which gave her a deep sense of security. "Will you stay with me tonight?" she asked him, locking her big beautiful eyes on his. "I don't want to be alone."

Harry smiled kindly at her. "Your wish is my command, My Lady," he teased, and Margaery smiled sweetly. She rested her head on his chest and listened to his loud, thumping heart. Her eyes closed, and she felt his arms hug her tighter.

Harry kept himself from chuckling. Her mother had said those exact words to him last night, and he obliged her by sharing her bed. It seemed that neither of them could do without him. 'Highgarden is practically mine already,' he thought to himself amusedly as Margaery cutely nuzzled his chest with her cheek. Hopefully, the rest of Westeros would be as easy to take.