

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 72

"Are you sure this is wise, My Lord?" Kinvara asked nervously as Harry slung a heavy bag over his shoulder. Much to her amazement, he showed absolute courage in the face of what surely would be a dangerous journey.

"I assure you, my dear, we'll be fine. You can always change your mind and stay here. I won't think less of you if you do," Harry kindly told her. Beside them, a fully nude Melisandre bounced from side to side, pulling a tight pair of leather trousers over her wide hips. Harry smiled as he watched her large, round breasts bounce tantalizingly.

Kinvara swallowed the lump in her throat. There was a reason that even the Shadowbinders refused to visit Stygai. The City of the Night was steeped in darkness for most of the day, with light reaching the city around noon, and even then, it only remained for a short time. Foul creatures prowled the darkness, and it was said that living corpses inhabited the otherwise abandoned buildings. She had no idea why he wanted to go there, and even less of an idea why Melisandre asked to tag along. The Red Priestess was putting a lot of faith into their Lord. Kinvara was less sure, but there was no way she would be left behind. The Lord of Light wanted her by Harold's side, and she was ever faithful. However, that didn't mean she wasn't frightened.

"I will stay by your side," she stated, trying to sound as confident as possible. He smiled handsomely at her, and it made her stomach pleasantly flutter. Her new favorite pastime was subtly staring at his beautiful face. If possible, she would sit there and stare at it for hours at a time. At the moment, his face was etched with determination.

"I won't let anything happen to either of you. I promise," he said with a smile. For some strange reason, this made her feel a lot better. Melisandre looked up while buttoning her tight trousers and smiled beautifully at her Lord. Kinvara could see that there was no doubt in Melisandre's mind, which made her feel guilty about her own doubts. Kinvara steeled her nerves and sat down on the bed. She grabbed the leather trousers that he had provided her and stuffed her bare feet into the legs. Like Melisandre had done, she stood up and tugged the tight trousers up her shapely thighs. She struggled when they reached her wide hips and jutting ass.

Harry watched Kinvara struggle to get her leather trousers over her large ass and chuckled. He had made a set of clothes for each of the women. While the trousers were leather, he magically adapted them to make them softer and more comfortable, along with temperature regulation. He purposely made them extra tight because he was certain they would look bloody fantastic in them. As he eyed up Melisandre's curvy form, Harry was glad to see he was correct. The trousers fit her body like a glove, and he had to stop himself from throwing her onto the bed and taking her right then and there. He stepped up to Kinvara and jammed his thumbs between the waistband and the flesh of her hips. He tugged the trousers up and over her ass, making her

naked tits jiggle against his chest. Kinvara blushed slightly and gently ran her hands down his forearms. "Thank you, My Lord," she said sweetly.

The girls then put on the socks and boots he had provided. When done, they both stood there, still topless. Their nipples were hard and poking out of their light pink areolas. Harry wrapped an arm around each of their waists and pulled them close. Their backs pressed against his front, and his hand immediately slid up their soft bellies and onto their large, perky breasts. Kinvara gasped, and Melisandre moaned as he freely groped their tits and toyed with their nipples. Melisandre ground her ass against his hip while Kinvara arched her back. He pinched the hard tips of their nipples and rolled them between his fingertips. Harry then kissed the side of each of their necks and then smacked them on the ass. "Put your shirts on," he told them. They quickly complied and pulled the black tank tops over their heads. They pulled them down, covering their breasts, but luckily for him, they still showed off a lot of cleavage. He could see their hard nipples tenting the thin fabric. All in all, they looked very sexy in his opinion.

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Kinvara was surprised that when she left the warm comforts of the temple, she didn't immediately freeze her ass off. The Shadowlands were a cold, dark place, and she didn't think the small shirt she wore would sufficiently blanket her body from the chilly winds. She was glad to discover that she was wrong. She felt quite warm, even though a cold chill was blowing in from the sea.

"Do we have enough supplies to last us the journey?" she asked. The path to Stygai was a long and treacherous one. They would have to head northeast, following the River Ash through the Vale of Shadows. She wasn't looking forward to the journey.

"We aren't walking," he stated and whistled. Both women flinched as the piercing whistle cracked through the quiet city, echoing off the greasy black stone walls of the buildings. Before she could wonder why he had whistled so loudly, she heard a mighty roar high above. All three craned their necks upward, and Kinvara gasped when a monstrous winged figure broke through the low-hanging gray clouds and circled the city, roaring menacingly. Though it was the dead of night, the dozens of lit windows suddenly went dark. She was certain that the people of the city heard the beast's roar and thought the city might be under attack. If they were, she doubted that hiding in the shadows would keep them safe. The beast circled the city, flying lower with every pass. It then flew overhead and flapped its massively powerful wings. Dust and dirt formed a cloud around them, and the women were forced to shield their eyes. Slowly, it lowered and touched down in front of them.

This was the first time Kinvara had ever seen a dragon, and she wasn't ashamed to say she was terrified. It was bigger than she could possibly imagine and covered in sharp scales thicker than any armor. The beast was dark in color, though not quite black. One thing that surprised her was how much heat it radiated. From thirty feet away, she could feel the intense heat expelled from its nostrils as it breathed. It was so big that it barely fit in the courtyard outside the

temple. If it moved even slightly, it would surely rip huge chunks out of the nearby buildings. Its throat was rumbling, though it wasn't quite a growl. Still, she could feel the vibrations in her bones. Her Lord began walking toward the beast, and Melisandre quickly followed him. Kinvara couldn't quite get her legs to move. She stayed there, locked in place by her sense of self-preservation. Everything inside of her was screaming to stay away. Only a lunatic would dare get that close to an unshackled dragon. Melisandre turned her head and waved her over, not looking too pleased at her hesitation. Kinvara sucked in a shaky breath and forced her legs to move. The closer she got, the more she expected the beast to swing its head and swallow her whole. She was very pleased to be proven wrong. Kinvara joined them right by the dragon's side.

Harry climbed up on Daemon's back and held out his hand. Melisandre climbed up and grabbed it, and Harry pulled her up and sat her directly in front of him. He did the same for Kinvara. It was obvious she was very nervous about being so close to Daemon. He certainly didn't blame her for that. Daemon was an imposing figure, to be sure. Her body trembled as she followed them up, and once she took his hand, Harry pulled her up and sat her in front of Melisandre. Harry used his powers to make sure they wouldn't fall off mid-flight. "Are you girls ready?" he called out.

"Yes!" Melisandre called back.

"No!" Kinvara squealed as she held on for dear life. Harry laughed merrily and reached over Melisandre's shoulder. He gently rubbed Kinvara's back, easing her stress.

"Don't worry, Kinvara. I won't let you fall," he promised her. Harry rubbed her back until he felt her calm.

"Alright ..." she finally said, though he could still hear the nervousness in her voice. Feeling it was the best he was going to get, Harry patted Daemon's side and mentally commanded him to rise. Daemon pushed himself up until he stood on all fours, and their heads were even with many of the three-story buildings' roofs. In front of him, he could see the muscles straining on Kinvara's forearms as she held onto Daemon's scales with a death grip. Harry chuckled and shook his head. She didn't understand how wonderful it was to fly, but she was about to learn. Harry gave the mental command, and Daemon reared and began flapping his wings. They immediately shot twenty feet higher, and the tip of his wing clipped the corner of a building and tore a chunk out, sending stone tumbling below. The wind whipped violently, sending their long hair flying in all directions. Kinvara squeaked in terror and hunched low, afraid she would fall off. Melisandre was nervous as well, but she tried not to show it.

Higher and higher they rose with every flap of his wings. Soon, they were much higher than the tallest tower in Asshai. At that height, the salty wind blowing in from the sea was very strong and cold, but Harry's magic and Daemon's body heat did a great job keeping them all warm. They started moving forward, and before long, they were on their way.

Kinvara shut her eyes as they lifted off, scared to fall. She felt the beast moving, and since she hadn't fallen off yet, she felt it was a good time to open them. Her heart jumped when she saw how high they were. Down below, the city's northern boundary slipped past them, and they were heading straight for the Ash. The river was easy to spot. It glowed green in the darkness, and she saw that glow winding and snaking into the far distance. The river had cut a deep valley between the jagged mountains, and they flew through it, avoiding the highest peaks. "How are you doing?" Kinvara heard Harry ask. She could clearly hear the amusement in his voice.

"It's frightening being so high up!" she loudly called out to him. The wind rushing past her ears made it hard to hear, but she definitely heard him laugh.

"You'll get used to it! Trust me, it's much better than walking!" he practically shouted. Though it was hard to see, she knew the ground below them was very uneven and treacherous. That didn't even factor in the near-constant falling rocks that tumbled down the mountainsides or the vicious animals lying in wait. She had heard rumors of giant cats in these mountains. Tales said they were twice as long as a man was tall, and their claws were sharp enough to pierce stone. As much as she would like to see one, Kinvara definitely didn't want to come face to face with such a beast. Still, she craned her head and looked over the side of the dragon, hoping to see one of these elusive cats prowling the mountainside.

"What's that?!" Melisandre called out and pointed into the distance. Kinvara followed her finger and squinted. It looked like a dark, shapeless blob silhouetted against the night sky. They kept an eye on the shape, and it appeared to grow in size as they got closer. In fact, the amorphous shape was rapidly growing by the second. It seemed like in the blink of an eye, it was upon them. The women squealed and ducked their heads right before Harry threw up a magical shield.

A barrier of silvery mist appeared in front of the dragon, and whatever the creature was, it slammed right into it. There was a blinding flash of light as the magical shield flared from the contact. However, Harry was wrong about one thing. It wasn't one big creature. The shield flared dozens of times, which was followed by dozens of high-pitched screeches. Harry turned and looked down over the side of Daemon, and he saw the large creatures tumbling down toward the mountain. He thrust his arm downward and summoned one of them. It flew right back up, and Harry grabbed hold of one of its twisted, broken wings. He whistled appreciatively when she saw what it was.

"What creature is this?" Melisandre asked, angling her body to get a better look at the dead creature. Kinvara did likewise.

"Some species of bat," Harry said, looking at its head. The eyes were black, round, and beady, with a snout similar to a fox's. The bat was extremely large. It was by far the largest he had ever seen. From the tip of the snout down to its stubby tail, it must have been four feet long. Though he couldn't see it, he guessed the wingspan must have been at least ten feet. Its fur was mostly

black but peppered with silvery gray hairs throughout the body. Its teeth were long and vicious-looking, like dozens of slightly curved needles.

"I've lived in Asshai for hundreds of years, and I have never seen one of those. I didn't even know they existed," Kinvara told him, studying the large creature. Harry dropped his shield and tossed the dead bat over the side. Just as he did, Melisandre cried out.

"There's more of them!" she called out over the rushing wind. Sure enough, another dark shape was moving toward them. Instead of throwing up another shield, Daemon opened his deadly maw and belched a torrent of fire into the dark shape. Burning bats tumbled from the sky, yowling agonized screeches as they burned alive.

"We're off to a good start, huh?" Harry joked good-naturedly. Kinvara had her head on a swivel, constantly scanning the horizon for potential threats while Melisandre leaned back and rested her back against his chest.

"If you're going to terrify me, then you can at least hold me until I calm down," she called out, which made him chuckle. Harry wrapped his arms around her slender waist and kissed her mostly bare shoulder. Melisandre squirmed against him to get comfortable.

Thankfully for them, they didn't run into any more strange creatures during their journey. Even at the high speed of a dragon, it still took them hours to follow the Ash upriver and reach their destination. Daemon pulled up and hovered in place. Harry ordered him to fly higher, and he beat his powerful wings and rose. Eventually, they got so high that the morning light was finally able to reach them. Melisandre and Kinvara basked in the light and prayed to their god as Harry studied the city below.

Stygai was known as the city of corpses to the locals, and no one dared venture there. It was said that ghosts haunted the abandoned city, and demons and other twisted creatures prowled the dark streets. Down below, the ancient city was built into the very point where two canyons joined. The single canyon then stretched out on both sides of the Ash and would continue downriver until it met Asshai. From so high up, Harry spotted something very strange. The two tributaries that fed the Ash met somewhere in the city, but that wasn't what was strange. Harry could clearly see that the water from the two tributaries didn't shimmer with the same pale green phosphorescence. The water only glowed green when it left the city. Something weird was going on down there.

The city itself was a sight to behold. A tall, fortified wall stretched from one side of the valley to the other, and an arched opening allowed the green glowing water to escape the city. The city itself consisted of towering spires that seemed to climb up the rocky junction between the conjoined tributary valleys. Everything was made from the same black, greasy stone found in Asshai, and the entire city was shrouded in shadows. Just beyond the city wall, a winding path was cut from the mountain and led up to the city. Harry couldn't see a single light anywhere in the city.

When the women were done with their prayers, Harry ordered Daemon to land beyond the wall and near the lowest part of the path. The closer they got to the ground, the fierce wind from Daemon's beating wings sent rocks tumbling in all directions. A large stone rolled across the ground and tipped into the green waters of the Ash. The putrid water began bubbling and churning, and Harry was certain something was down there. Still, he was unperturbed as the dragon touched down. Harry slipped from Daemon's back and held up his arms. Melisandre hopped down, and Harry easily caught her in his arms. He set her on the rocky, uneven ground and did the same for Kinvara. Harry then smacked Daemon's haunch and said, "Stay above the city. Keep the skies safe."

Daemon roared in agreement and started flapping his mighty wings. Harry protected the women with his magic to keep them safe from the flying, jagged rocks the wings were kicking up. As soon as Daemon was up in the air, Harry began scanning his surroundings.

"The air is foul here," Kinvara stated, wrinkling her nose cutely. Melisandre agreed.

"It stinks of death and decay," she added, staring at the bubbling surface of the Ash. Harry walked over to the river's shore and scraped his booted foot across the ground. Every inch was practically covered in bones. He knelt and grabbed one. Examining it closer, he saw that it was a deformed fish skull. One eye socket was almost fully closed, and the other socket was misshapen and elongated. He dropped the skull, which broke apart upon hitting the ground. That slight noise was all it took for the lake's surface to explode.

The foul, green water sprayed in all directions, making the women shriek and jump back. Something erupted from the water's depth, though he couldn't see what. It lunged forward, and with his cat-like reflexes, Harry jumped to the side. After not striking him, the thing continued forward at the speed of a crossbow bolt, aiming directly for the women. Harry's hands shot forward, and he gripped the creature. Its skin was warm and very slimy. It smelled wretched, and the stink was powerful enough to make his eyes sting and water. Not only that, but the palms of his hands began to burn. He blocked the pain from his mind and held onto the powerful creature. Its forward momentum was stopped, dropping short of the women who were smartly stepping back. That was when Harry got his first look at it.

It was definitely a snake of some sort, only larger than any he had ever seen. Even the pythons and anacondas of his original world couldn't compare to the size of this beast. Its skin was scaleless, milky pink, and appeared to be rotting in places. Half of its body was still underwater, and it thrashed violently, trying to break free of his grip. It screeched loudly, and when he looked toward the head, he saw both Melisandre and Kinvara holding out their hands. A dark, smoky mist shot from their palms and encased the creature's thrashing head. It continued to screech, but the piercing noise was somehow muffled by the darkness smothering it. Harry tugged the creature backward and away from the women. By then, the pain in his hands was agonizing, but he continued to block it from his mind. He tugged again, and the rocks underneath the gargantuan beast crunched as it was dragged across them. Once the beast was sufficiently

distanced from the women, Harry let go, and quicker than they could blink, his flaming sword sliced through the air and cut the creature clean in two. Soupy brown blood sprayed from both severed ends while the back half slowly slid back into the river and out of sight. The front half flopped across the ground like a fish out of water, and the women were forced to move further away out of fear of being crushed by the long, two-foot-thick body.

With his sword in hand, Harry went up to the head, which was still shrouded by the black mist. He dropped his boot down, pinning the snake against the ground, and thrust his flaming blade into the mist and pierced the top of the skull. A pitiful wail echoed across the valley, and the flames of his sword dispelled the mist. When the mist vanished, all that was left was the partial body of the rotting snake with a sword through the top of its skull. Harry left the sword in its head, keeping it pinned to the ground. Harry hissed and looked at his palms. The women quickly joined him. They looked down at his upturned palms and gasped with revulsion.

"R'hllor help us!" Melisandre gasped at the sight of his ruined hands. The skin was almost completely melted off, and most of the muscle and even some bone were showing. Kinvara's face paled at the horrific sight.

"I think the slime on that thing was slightly acidic," Harry joked through a wince. Melisandre didn't look too pleased at his comical attitude toward his devastating injury. "Calm yourself, my dear," Harry told her. "I'll be fine," he assured them. His hands began radiating golden light, and soon, the women were forced to shield their eyes. When the light dimmed, much to their amazement, the skin on his palms had been completely healed. It was like he had never been injured. Melisandre grabbed his hands and gently caressed his healed skin. His skin was just as soft and smooth as before. She looked up at him in disbelief. Harry smiled handsomely at her and leaned in, kissing her forehead. Melisandre closed her eyes and appreciated the romantic action.

"How is that possible?" Kinvara asked, stepping up to him and testing his new skin as well. She held the bottom of his palm and gently ran her fingers over the top.

"I'm very good at what I do," was all he told her. He then grabbed her waist and pulled her in for a deep, passionate kiss. Kinvara's arms instantly wrapped around his neck, and she leaned into the kiss, opening her mouth. Harry gave her shapely bottom a squeeze before breaking free of her grasp. He left her standing there, slightly out of breath, as he walked over to the dead snake and pulled the sword from its head. The head was the size of a serving tray, and he could feel how heavy it was when he pulled the sword out, causing the head to lift up before plopping back down. The stench was foul and overpowering, and the pool of watery, brown blood was washing over the ground and nearing his boot. Harry waved his hand and magically cleaned all three of them. He didn't want the stink remaining any longer than it had to.

"It appears Stygai holds danger at every turn," Kinvara stated as she looked at the dead beast. Harry flicked his hand, sending the grotesque corpse splashing back into the river.

“Indeed,” Harry agreed. “So stay close and do as I say ... Understand?”

Both of them quickly nodded and joined his side. Practically pressed against his side, the two women followed their Lord onto the winding, rocky path that led up the mountain and into the heart of darkness.