

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 55

“You understand that when this is over, you will remain here and rule the North?” Asha asked her brother as they secretly met at the Ironborn camp several miles deep into the Wolfswood. She wanted to make sure that he knew his place. If he didn’t, her only choice would be to stick her blade in his back. For his sake, she hoped he understood what she was getting at. Theon nodded.

“I do not intend to go back to the Iron Islands. I will stay here and rule while I wait for Father’s orders,” he assured her. Asha nodded and continued.

“You do know that you will have to kill two boys who were raised as your brothers? Is this something you can do?” she asked. Frankly, she didn’t know if he had the balls to do it. She could do it without problems. Theon, however, wasn’t raised like her. He was soft.

“I know. I will see it done,” he said without wavering. That was good enough for her. If she had to take a guess, she would wager that he would order someone else to do his dirty work. ‘Weak-willed coward,’ she thought as she looked at him. All she could do was hope that he lived up to her expectations.

“See that you do. We attack at first light,” she told him, ending their conversation. As Theon slumped through the ankle-deep snow, a raven that was perched on a leafless tree branch blinked its eyes and flew back toward Winterfell, having heard their plans.

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Harry’s eyes blinked open as he received a mental ping from one of his woodland spies. ‘So the Ironborn attack early tomorrow morning?’ Harry thought as the massive, black planks that made up the hull of his ship groaned as they flexed. There was no storm, but the ship still rocked slightly. Every so often, a thunk could be heard as chunks of ice struck the side of the ship. The ice pack was drifting down from the Shivering Sea. During the winter, the seas were always rough this far north. If his ship hadn’t been enchanted to counteract the sway, everyone on board would probably have been losing their dinners right about then. Connecting with the drones that were sailing his ship, he discovered that they had just passed north of the Paps and were entering the Bite. From there, they would sail just north of the Three Sisters and then head north to White Harbor.

A soft hand slid down his belly and squeezed his cock. Harry didn’t even need to look to know whose hand it was. Sansa had gotten into the habit of holding his lumber while she slumbered, as it were. Harry didn’t mind. He found the whole thing amusing. Sansa had always been the most needy and territorial of his girls. It was likely due to the fact that she grew up in the North, and she feared that she was less refined than the other girls. All her life she dreamed of leaving

the North for one of the cultured Southern kingdoms, likely because of marriage. Now that her dreams had partly come true, she wasn't about to lose her spot to some sophisticated harlot. As such, she took every opportunity to please and pleasure him. Even as she slept, her hand would gently tug at his cock. 'It's a point in her favor,' Harry amusedly thought. He could hear her gentle breathing, and he could feel her warm breath on his chest. Her shock of red hair covered most of her face, but he could see her closed eyes fluttering as she dreamed.

A female groan was heard from his other side, and Catelyn rolled back over to face him. She slid her arm over his belly and pressed against him. He could feel the soft tips of her nipples brushing against his skin while he cupped her bare ass and gave it a squeeze. In an instant, her soft nipples became hard, and Harry could feel the crinkled tips pressing against his skin. Basking in her body heat, Harry closed his eyes. He still had several hours until he needed to be up.

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As distasteful as he found it, Theon knew that it must be done. He was an Ironborn, not a Northerner, and he would prove his father wrong. Covering himself with furs, he left his room and made his way down to the gateway of the castle walls. As soon as he stepped foot outside, his body began to shiver, and he let out a shuddering breath. A cloud of mist escaped his lips, and Theon quickly wondered if he was shaking because of the cold or perhaps because of what he must do. Shivering, his feet crunched through the snow of the courtyard, and he saw the early risers completing their morning rituals. The sun was barely peeking over the horizon, filling the sky with an explosion of orange and reds. The castle's inhabitants who were doing their early morning deeds didn't look nearly as cold as he felt. They didn't shiver even though they were wearing half as many furs as him. 'They are *real* Northerners ... unlike you,' he told himself sourly. But there was nothing wrong with being an Ironborn, he thought as his teeth chattered.

Ironborn were strong and resilient, he told himself. Possibly even more than the people of the North. They were proud people who took what they needed or wanted and didn't take no for an answer. He could see the strength and courage in his sister's eyes. 'She is a true Ironborn,' he sourly thought. He could also see the way she looked at him with contempt. She thought him unworthy. The thought had hit him full in the belly. When he first realized it, it was all he could do to keep himself from beating her black and blue. She may have been raised like a man by their father, but that didn't mean that she was one. *He* was a man. It was the one thing that he could hold over her.

His plan was to take over Winterfell and put the Starks to the sword. This would make his father proud, he was sure. Hopefully, Balon would welcome him back home with a loving embrace and declare him the heir of the Salt Throne. If not, then Theon would remain in the North, ruling until he was able to amass an army large enough to take the Iron Islands by force. Then his father and sister would be forced to kneel before him. What he would do to them, he hadn't decided yet. He supposed that it depended on what they would have to say for themselves. Either way, he was getting ahead of himself. First, he needed to take Winterfell.

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It was still dark when Asha and her band of a thousand Ironborn silently crept out of the woods. On the horizon, only the barest sliver of light was beginning to make itself known. She didn't need to tell them what to do. They already had their orders.

Their booted feet sank deep into the fresh layer of white powder that had fallen hours before. As they moved toward their goal, fresh flakes of snow were still falling, tumbling lazily from up high to cover their tracks. They made sure not to use torches so the castle guards wouldn't see them. Not long after, they reached the edge of Winter Town, which was little more than several long rows of small houses. Near the gate, there was a square where the town's people peddled their wares. This was also the area of the town that housed its few businesses, such as the inn and the alehouse. At the edge of the town, Asha held up her hand, ordering her men to stop. They stopped, and Asha and her few chosen moved forward, catlike and quiet. Taking slow, deliberate steps, they kept to the shadows to not be seen by the handful of guards that protected the town during the night. Asha could see them. Three men were just outside the square. All three had swords on their hips. They were practically huddled together while talking, likely near-frozen from the long, cold night.

Asha looked at her men and nodded her head. "Now!" she whispered. Completely silent, she and her men ran over and began beating the guards over the head with wooden clubs that they had carved the previous night. None of the guardsmen wore helmets. Instead, they had headcovers made of rabbit fur to keep warm. These headcovers did nothing to stop the blunt instruments from caving in their skulls. Asha swung her club so hard that when she connected, the impact sounded like a hollow gourd being dropped onto the stone floor. The wet, hollow thunk was quickly followed by the man's surprised yelp. His body hit the snow-covered ground, and before he could even try to get up, Asha dropped the club and removed her sword from her slim waist. She placed the tip against his neck and pushed. The tip slid in partway, and she was forced to press the pommel into her belly and use her body weight to sever through his thick spine. There was a gurgle, then nothing more. The beautiful, white snow underneath his neck turned red as the blood poured from his wound.

Beside her, one of her men seemed to be having too good of a time. He brought his club up again and swung it down with brutal force. His victim was already on the ground, clearly dead. His head was caved in, and his brain looked like mush. As the club struck the pile of destroyed meat and bone, a shower of blood sprayed in every direction, some even hitting her. He lifted the club again but was stopped by her.

"Enough!" she hissed quietly, her eyes burning with rage. They were there for a reason that didn't include satiating their psychotic urges. His club dropped to the ground with a muffled thump. "Let's go," she ordered.

They began their short journey back to their group, walking a bit faster than before. Now they just needed to wait for her brother to do his part. Asha threw her arms out to catch her balance. The normally muddy lanes were iced over and solid. It was very easy to slip and fall. Just as they were about to turn the corner, they heard a woman scream. The scream cracked through the silence, and the bitter cold seemed to make it even louder. "WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!" a gruff, male voice joined in. They turned the corner and Asha saw what was causing the commotion.

Several of her men were attempting to pull a woman into what must have been her home. Her furs were scattered, and her dress was torn at the shoulder. Two more of her men were on each side of a tall, bearded man, holding his arms apart. At that moment, another of her men thrust his sword directly into the man's belly. He opened his mouth and let out a scream of agony.

"WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE?!" Asha heard from the castle gateway. She closed her eyes and gritted her teeth. Running to her men, she jammed her dagger into the woman's throat. They let her gasping body fall to the ground.

"You stupid, fucking cocksuckers!" she quietly growled, slapping the small group of men across the head. They had just given away their position because they couldn't wait to take what they wanted. 'I only hope Theon isn't as stupid as this lot,' she thought to herself as she slapped another. Their lives were now in his hands.

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"WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE?!" Theon heard one of the guards at the gate yell out. It was easily heard over the deafening silence. Before that, he had heard a woman scream, followed by a man screaming. Had his sister fucked up the plan already? Theon burst into a run, pulling his sword from his hip. When he reached the gate, two guardsmen were getting ready to open it.

"What happened?" Theon asked, joining them.

"A scream," one of them said.

"Jory an' his men will handle it," the other guardsman said, not wanting to pull the heavy gate open. Opening the gate was especially hard this early in the morning because of the cold.

"JORY?! ... JORY?!" the first guard yelled, and they listened close. No one responded.

"Open the gate and go find out what has happened," Theon ordered as he tightly gripped his sword's handle. The two guards looked at each other before reluctantly beginning the process of lifting the heavy, iron gate.

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Asha and her men suddenly heard the loud grating of thick, heavy metal rubbing against stone. They stayed quiet until they heard the loud thunk as the gate hit its highest point. Now they just needed to wait for her brother's signal.

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Guardsmen Alford Snow sighed happily as he emptied his bladder in a hidden corner of the castle's main square. He watched as the white snow beneath him steadily turned more and more yellow with every second. Just as he was shaking out his cock to make sure he didn't dribble down his leg, he heard the loud scream of a woman quickly followed by a man's pained yell. He stuffed his cock into his trousers and attempted to button up as fast as possible. As he was finishing up, he heard the gate beginning to open. This was strange, he thought.

Alford had been born a bastard but had worked his way up until he finally achieved the rank of guard. It was likely the highest rank that a person of his breeding would ever achieve. As such, he held his position in the highest regard. He would never forget the way other bastards would look upon him with jealousy. Working in the castle gave him a sense of pride, and he took his job seriously. Most days, he was stationed on top of the wall during the afternoon shift. The reason for this was currently slung over his broad shoulder. Over his shoulder was a bow made of weirwood. It was a gift from his Lord, Eddard Stark, and was the finest crafted bow that he had ever seen. It was gifted to him when he competed in and won one of his Lord's bowman competitions. Just looking at the bow filled him with pride. After being gifted the bow, his Lord declared that he should be one of the guards stationed atop the wall to defend the castle from raiders or wildlings. That had been his job every day since. Normally, he would still be warm in his room, but his fellow guards wanted to have a bit of a party that night, and they very much hoped that some fresh deer meat might be on the menu. Since he was the best hunter, it was up to him to wake up early and hopefully bring home a buck before his normal afternoon shift.

Because of his job as a guardsman on the castle wall, he very well knew that the castle gates shouldn't be opened for another couple of hours at least. Curious, he kept to the shadows and watched everything unfold. He heard Theon Greyjoy order the gates open. He watched his two friends, Osvald and Molner turn the cranks on each side of the gate. The iron gate climbed higher and higher until it locked into place with a loud thunk. Then, in complete shock, he watched Theon use his sword and swipe Osvald across the neck. His head spun off of his body and hit the ground several feet away. Still in shock, he watched as the Iron Islander ran over to Molner and ran him through the belly before he could even get his sword off of his hip. Snapping out of his shocked state, Alford instantly became enraged. Pulling the bow from his shoulder, he notched an arrow in the string and took aim. Just before letting the arrow fly, Theon whistled loudly. The loud, sudden noise affected his aim. As he let the arrow fly, instead of hitting him directly in the spine, the arrow hooked right, burying itself in Theon's shoulder. Theon yelled out in pain, reaching back to grab the arrow shaft. Before Alford could notch another, Theon ran outside of the gate and out of sight.

“Shit!” Alford cursed. Without a second to waste, he ran toward the bell tower.

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“Shit!” Asha cursed as she spotted her brother slowly stumbling down the snowy lane. He was hunched over painfully, and when he got close, she could see an arrow buried in the back of his shoulder. Suddenly, the castle bells began ringing. An alarm had been sounded.

“Asha!” he cried out. “We must hurry!”

Cursing again, she called out, “TO THE CASTLE!”

Her men roared with excitement. They were sick and tired of hiding out in the woods, freezing half to death. It was time for some fun! High above them, a raven cawed loudly.

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As soon as Harry got the signal, he appeared inside Bran’s room. Almost instantly, his direwolf became aware of an intruder. It growled menacingly but became quiet when Harry stunned him. The boy began to stir, so Harry quickly stunned him. He transfigured both into beads and placed them in his pocket. Next, Harry made his way to Rickon’s room where he did the same. With both rooms empty, Harry exited the castle and entered the courtyard. It was at this time when the Ironborn invaders came running through the gate, murderously screaming.

The few guards that had made it into the courtyard were no match for the hundreds of marauders. Every single one was hacked to pieces. High above, hanging out of a window was another guard, continuously firing arrows at the Ironborn. ‘He’s a damn good shot,’ Harry thought as one after another fell to his arrows. Almost every shot was a kill shot. One arrow pierced an invader’s eye while another went directly into a man’s open mouth. His scream was cut short when the arrowhead erupted from the back of his skull. Harry then remembered that he couldn’t just stand there invisibly watching the guard take his shots. He needed to finish up.

Invisibly, he appeared at the back of the attacking horde. Looking behind him, he could see many attackers plundering the village right outside the castle gates. Quickly and easily, he stunned two of them and took them up to the boys’ rooms. Making one look like Bran and the other like Rickon, he left them in their beds, stunned to look like they were still asleep.

With that done, Harry took the real boys back to his castle and placed them in an isolated section where no one besides him was allowed to go. He would make sure to keep them safe until he finally returned them to their family. That, however, wouldn’t be until after he was done with his plans. All they would know was that they were captured by the Ironborn and held hostage.

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Asha and a small group of her men made their way through Winterfell. Originally, taking the castle was supposed to be Theon's job, but he was dumb enough to get himself shot with an arrow, so now it was up to her. The castle had significantly more guards than the outer courtyard, and already a dozen of her men had been killed. As they rounded the corner, she barely had enough time to duck as a sword collided with the stone wall. A hellish clank of metal against stone made her ears ring. She only just threw herself to the side to avoid another attack. Her men were fighting their own guards, so no one was going to be there to have her back. His sword was nearly twice as big as hers, and when he swung it, she found trying to parry his strikes to be a mistake. As the two swords collided, the impact and vibration made it feel like her forearms snapped in half. She cried out with a girlish scream. Oh, how she hated that. Asha hated sounding weak and womanlike. The large guard brought his sword up over his head. Instead of rolling to the side, Asha struck out with her foot and connected with the man's groin. A tortured howl left the man's mouth as the sword dropped from his hand. It bounced off the ground and spun in her direction. The sharp edge clipped her calf, slicing her trousers and cutting her flesh. Asha hissed in pain but fought it off long enough to swing her blade and slice open the guard's belly. He cried out, holding his gut as he fell to the floor. Turning around, she saw one guard driving his sword down through one of her downed men's chest. She struck while he wasn't looking, and the edge of her sword dug halfway through the back of his neck. By then, even more of her men were dead. Only superior numbers were keeping them alive. Thankfully, there didn't seem to be any more guards. Following the directions that Theon had given, she finally found the first boy's bedroom.

The little lad was sleeping away. Wanting to get this over with, she took out her dagger and jammed it into the side of his head. His body jerked only once before he let out a gasping breath. After that, he didn't move. The other Stark boy was only a few doors down. Like his brother, he received a knife in the head while sleeping. With the job done, they went back down and regrouped with her men. They needed to finish taking the rest of the castle.