

## Dark and Light

### Chapter 12 - Dark

#### Lily

As soon as they dropped off their bundle of letters, Lily and Kiera went exploring. A new city! A new place!

This particular city – Lily had no idea what it was called – was on the edge of the steppe. A place where cultures mixed and goods were traded en masse. The city's market was filled to the brim with wagons and people scurrying around, preparing for long journeys across the land. Entire trade convoys made camp just outside the city walls, and more than a few adventurers and mercenaries strode through the streets and alleys.

Lily saw people of every colour and creed. Some dressed in furs and animal pelts, others in metal plate, others still in desert shawls. Men and women, old and young.

And, amazingly, she even saw *Darkspawn*.

A whole tribe of Orcs milling about outside the city along with the caravans, some talking to groups of humans while the rest kept their distance.

It was wonderful!

Taking Lily's hand, Kiera led the way through busy streets.

Alone in a place like this, Lily would've been overwhelmed in moments. So much activity and motion, so many people and sights and sounds. The only thing keeping Lily from being crushed and consumed by the countless sensations battering her from all sides was Kiera. The warm fingers intertwined with her own. Whenever things started getting too much, Kiera's thumb rubbed against her skin; soothing away all Lily's panic and uncertainty.

When vendors hollered at her about their wares, Lily even found herself *smiling* as she shook her head at them.

This place – this whole city – was like a dream.

A city filled with beautiful, impossible things.

What easily could've been a nightmare, a foreign place filled with people Lily didn't recognise and customs she didn't know, was instead an exciting, fantastical place with endless opportunities to explore and discover. All because Kiera was there with her.

When Lily caught the scent of something cooking, she knew *exactly* where her love was taking her.

Sure enough, the closer they got, the more scents added to the first. Roasting vegetables and sizzling meats, the smells of herbs and spices Lily couldn't recognise. An onslaught of alluring aromas that made her mouth water and her stomach rumble.

"Must be quite the annoyance," Kiera hummed, her voice somehow clear above the din of activity around them. "Needing to eat constantly. Having to shove strange things into your mouth and down your throat every single day..."

Lily's cheeks flushed.

"One of these days," Kiera laughed, "you're going to blush so bright that it'll turn your face red permanently."

"Maybe you should stop saying silly things then," Lily huffed, face heating all the more. "Unless you *want* your girlfriend to have a tomato face."

"Stop teasing you?" Kiera grinned. "Now where would be the fun in that?"

They turned a corner, entered a new street where a line of food stalls were set up. All selling cooked meals and snacks; everything from meat skewers to vegetable-stuffed bread to cakes and sweetrolls. Behind each food stall was a door into a building they all seemed to share. The place, Lily assumed, where all the actual cooking and baking took place.

Sure enough, as she watched, one of the doors swung open and a woman rushed out carrying a tray of taco-looking snacks. The stall in front of that door was restocked in a matter of seconds and, quickly as she'd come, the woman disappeared back inside the building.

"See anything you like?" Kiera hummed.

Lily, still holding Kiera's hand, walked up and down the row of food vendors. Looking at the variety of foods displayed.

None of these vendors called to her or encouraged her to check out their stock. They were all too busy serving customers they already had. Long lines of customers, in some cases.

"How about..." She stopped near one stall, hesitated, then moved on. "Or maybe..."

Too many options to choose from, and they all looked and smelled delicious! How in the world was she supposed to choose?

"We could take one of everything," Kiera chuckled. "Eat one now, store the rest for later."

"That'd be cheating," Lily said, shaking her head.

No, she needed to be decisive. Confident! Like Kiera!

"What do you think?" Lily asked the succubus. "Which one do you think looks the best?"

"There's only one thing here I want to eat," Kiera said with a cheeky smile. "And it's definitely the prettiest snack I can see."

Lily's cheeks heated once again.

They sat together in a cosy tavern, a small table to themselves.

The hum of voices and music surrounded them, lutes and flutes and soft singing. Pretty women flowed around the large room, weaving their way through a maze of tables and activity with drinks in hand and smiles on their faces.

Whenever one of the pretty tavern girls passed by their table, Kiera flashed them a wink and a smile. More often than not, that resulted in a blush or a returned grin.

"You're shameless," Lily said, smile tugging at her cheeks.

"Where's the fun in shame?" Kiera chuckled.

"Gonna flirt with every pretty thing you see?" Lily asked with a roll of her eyes.

"Most likely," Kiera winked. "You should give it a try!"

Perhaps that should've annoyed Lily. Her lover flirting with other girls. It was, after all, the type of thing that typically caused arguments and trouble in relationships. Yet Lily felt no annoyance at watching Kiera wink and smile at other women, making them rosy-cheeked and flustered.

It was Kiera's nature.

Not as a succubus – though that probably played a part – but as a *person*. She was confident and comfortable in her sex appeal, her naughty side. There was no shame, no need for validation, no doubts or uncertainty. Kiera was unapologetically herself.

And Lily loved that about her.

Kiera would flirt and tease with pretty strangers because it was fun, carefree, amusing. She'd wink and smile and, with a glance, make straight women question their sexuality. But would she go further than that? Betray Lily?

Never. Not in a million years.

The succubus would sooner see the world burn than hurt Lily.

And Lily knew it. Felt the truth of it every time they were alone together, staring into the other's eyes.

She gazed at Kiera then. Soaked in the sight of her.

Flowing raven hair, full red lips, eyes so dark and mesmerising that staring into them was like staring into the night sky. A few strands of hair fell over Kiera's brow, flowing lightly

whenever a breeze passed by. Her pale, flawless skin was wrapped in a traveller's dress. Leather and rugged, open at the front in a valley of tantalising cleavage.

Lily's eyes would've been glued to that cleavage if not for an even more alluring sight.

Kiera's lips were curled into a small, easy smile. A smile of simple happiness. Of joy in its purest form. No stress or worry, no doubt or hesitation, no burdensome thoughts. Just happiness. Enjoying the moment for what it was and forgetting all else.

"You're beautiful," Lily whispered.

She hadn't meant to say the words, just think them. Yet out they came, breathy and gentle and true.

Kiera blinked at her in surprise. Her cheeks went rosy.

Blushing. Kiera was *blushing*.

Lily smiled wide.

"Don't look so surprised!" She said quickly, before Kiera could recover, hide her flush behind a confident grin. "You said I should give it a try! And you're right. It *is* fun!"

"Have you ever heard of 'Melnesi Iced Pastry', by any chance?"

Lily shook her head, pursed her lips.

"Melna," Kiera said from somewhere in front of Lily, "is a city in the Imperial Heartlands. Very rich, very nice city. Every year in the city there's this massive baking competition."

What this had to do with why Kiera had blindfolded her, Lily had no idea. She listened, waited.

"See, the city is famous for an iced bun, one that got named after the place. Every year, the best bakers in the region gather and compete, seeing which of them can make the most delicious Melnesi Iced Pastry – as decided by the city's Priesthood."

A sweet scent wafted to Lily. Not the distinct aroma of pastry or baked goods, but strictly something... sugary.

Lily's mouth watered as her mind raced.

"The Melnesi Iced Pastry is quite simple, really," Kiera said, her voice growing closer. "A large, sweet-baked bun covered with a healthy heaping of white icing, a single cherry added on top. Nothing complicated but, from what I've been led to believe, quite tasty..."

As Kiera approached, so too did the sugary scent.

"You can take the blindfold off now," Kiera purred, close enough that Lily could almost *taste* the icing.

Slowly, fingers clumsy, she reached around the back of her head, undid the loose knot Kiera had tied. The blindfold fell away from Lily's face, revealing a sight that was instantly scorched into Lily's mind and memory forever.

Kiera, standing before her, topless.

Her huge, perfect breasts covered in warm icing. A single cherry over each nipple.

"What do you think?" Kiera said, eyes twinkling. "Should I enter the next competition?"

Lily gaped.

Kiera slid her hands over her tummy, lifted them up to the undersides of her enormous breasts. As she hefted the considerable weight, one of her long fingers curled up, scooped a dollop of icing.

She dropped her tits, let them bounce and sway in front of Lily's face. The finger with icing, Kiera lifted to her lips.

She sucked it dry. Smiled.

"Go ahead," the succubus teased. "It's delicious."

Lily gulped, took a tentative step closer.

"That's it," Kiera hummed.

As Lily leaned in, Kiera tilted her head back and pushed out her chest. Offering herself to Lily.

## Kiera

As soon as Kiera slid onto the bed, Lily was atop her. Delicate fingers holding Kiera's breast still as she licked the icing and kissed the skin. Lily nuzzled into her breast, cheek white with icing and lips glazed.

Kiera reached down, thumb brushing aside a fleck of icing as she caressed Lily's cheek.

"Must taste nice," Kiera cooed. "Enjoying?"

Lily's eyes flicked up at her. The girl smiled, teeth flashing as she bit down on a cherry.

"Mm'hm," Lily hummed as she chewed and swallowed.

"Perfect," Kiera said, moving her hand from Lily's cheek to the back of her head.

"Then be a good girl and eat it all. Lick me clean..."

Lily was only too happy to oblige.

Licking up the icing, kissing the smooth skin underneath. She nibbled on Kiera's nipples as if they tasted as sweet as the cherries had. And, before long, the icing had been completely replaced by Lily's saliva.

Curiously, Lily slowed down towards the end, as if the last few bits of icing were somehow more challenging than the rest.

It took Kiera an embarrassingly long time to realise why.

Lily was full. She'd eaten too much today already.

Still, the petite girl finished her 'meal'. Licking up every drop of icing until none remained. She smiled to herself as she completed the task, gave one of Kiera's nipples a little kiss, then slumped. Her head coming to rest on Kiera's pillowy bust.

Kiera brushed the back of Lily's head, insides flaring with joy as Lily closed her eyes, let out a satisfied sigh, smiled.

"Good girl," Kiera said softly, fingers brushing through Lily's hair. "You did great, love."

Lily murmured, the sound so quiet and adorable that Kiera couldn't help but fall in love with her all over again. Warmth swelled inside her, a tingling light that suffused every inch of her.

She held Lily close. Basked in the girl's touch.

And she listened.

A whole world of sounds and noises opened themselves to her. Scampering critters in a building nearby. Snoring in one of the tavern's other rooms. The shuffling of metal on metal as a guard made his rounds several streets away.

Kiera ignored it all. Focused on one set of sounds alone.

Gentle, slow breathing – faint and calm and relaxed. The rhythmic thump-thump of a steadily beating heart.

Sounds that she'd grown intimately familiar with.

Lily wasn't quite asleep yet, but she was drifting there. A minute from now and Kiera's flower would be out cold.

The girl's mouth moved, said something so quiet that, even with her enhanced hearing, Kiera could barely make out. Incoherent mumbles, no fully formed words or meaning. Just a little something Lily did sometimes before sleep took her.

Kiera closed her eyes. Gently stroked her fingers through Lily's hair, careful not to wake her or disturb her sleep.

Thump, thump. Thump, thump.

If Kiera had a heart, would it beat like that?

Thump, thump. Thump, thump.

Could Lily hear her own heartbeat? Feel it under her skin?

Thump, thump. Thump, thump.

What was it like, being human?

Sure, Kiera had Human Form. It was the shape she was currently wearing. But, even in this form, she wasn't *actually* human. She didn't have a beating heart, didn't need to eat, couldn't sleep. What did being human truly feel like?

Kiera considered for a moment.

Then a tiny smile tugged at her lips.

Annoying, most likely. All that effort and work, all the chores Lily went through just to exist. Eating and drinking and sleeping and breathing. Every day, filled with those same repeated actions.

How did Lily manage it all without going insane?

Maybe that's why she needed to sleep so much - she needed the time to recover from seeing to all her other needs.

A third of her day spent sleeping. Every day.

But Kiera was thankful for it.

These moments – the quiet ones – were just as beautiful as the waking ones. Being this close to Lily, holding her and safeguarding her, *feeling* her, was a blessing that Kiera appreciated and enjoyed every single second of.

Without really intending to, she began to hum a tune.

Quietly – more a vibration than actual sound. And slow. Peaceful. A tune not dissimilar to the songs the bards had been playing earlier.

## Lily

Lily stared down at Kiera's sleeping form in confusion.

But why was she confused?

Something about the sight – Kiera snoring in bed – was *wrong*. More than wrong. It was *disturbing*.

But why?

No answers came.

She was certain she *knew*. Was sure of it. But, for the life of her, she couldn't figure it out.

It was frustrating. Terrifying.

She glanced around, recognised the room instantly.

They were in the room they'd rented. A small, inn room with a single bed and a small table and not much else at all. A single door, no window, barely any space to move around.

Lily was standing beside the bed naked, brow furrowed.

Something was wrong. Something was deeply, deeply *wrong*.

Footsteps.

Lily's gaze snapped to the room's door. The light spilling through the edges of the doorframe dimmed, disappeared. And, a moment later, darkness began leaking into the room. Under the door, around it, tendrils of pure night bled into the room.

Instinctively, Lily backed away. Pushed herself into the furthest corner. Away from the thing that was forming from the darkness.

A figure, black as oil, grew from the shadows.

A woman.

Face and hair and body all subtly different shades of black, her eyes the darkest of all – like two little windows into the abyss.

It looked at Lily, and Lily cowered away.

Then it turned to stare at Kiera. Sleeping, defenceless Kiera.

Lily froze.

The creature raised its hand, summoned a jet-black sword from the darkness and held it high above the bed. Above Kiera.

Lily reacted on pure impulse. No thoughts, no hesitation, Lily leapt towards the bed. Threw herself atop Kiera's sleeping form, blocked the falling sword with her own body.

She felt the dark blade slap harmlessly against her back, heard it shatter like glass.

No pain, no cut.

Lily rolled around, bawled her fists ready to strike.

The creature of darkness tilted its head at her.

Then it smiled.

"I can see why she likes you," it said in a deep, feminine voice. "You pass the test. I will allow you to continue courting my daughter."

*Daughter?*

Lily narrowed her eyes at the figure, glanced back at Kiera.

"That's right," the woman made of shadows chuckled. "She's not the one who's sleeping. You are."

"I'm... dreaming?"

"Not quite," the woman shrugged, taking a step back to give Lily some space. "But close enough."

"Who-" No, that was the wrong question. "*What* are you?"

"A concerned parent," the woman smiled.

In that smile, Lily saw the resemblance. The echo of Kiera in the woman's dark features.

"The Anchor in your pocket," the woman said. "May I see it, please?"

"My pocket?" Lily said, confused. *Anchor?* "But I'm not wearing-"

She looked down at herself, saw that she was fully dressed. But hadn't she been... She shook her head, reached down into the pocket – somehow knowing exactly where to find it – and grasped the magical, twenty-sided gemstone there.

Lily was about to pull it out, present it to the woman, when she stopped herself. She stared at the woman suspiciously.

"I could compel you to trust me," the woman said softly. "Or I could force you to obey. Both options would be as simple as blinking, and I shall do neither. It's your freedom to choose, I won't take that from you."

Something about that felt... rehearsed. Lily fingered her gemstone, unconvinced. Wary.

"I will say, though," the dark woman winked. "It never hurts to be on good terms with your future mother-in-law."

And there it was again, the echo of Kiera.

If this was just a dream, it couldn't hurt to show this woman – Kiera's *mother*, apparently – the gemstone. Could it?

Lily made a snap decision. She pulled the gemstone out of her pocket, held it out for the woman to take. A sliver of dread snaked its way into her chest, even as she held her hand out. She had no idea what she was doing, what this *thing* wanted. The gemstone was important! She couldn't just risk giving it away like-

"Ah," the woman said, shaking her head slowly. "So *that's* what He's doing. Clever and cunning, especially for Him. But desperate. He's always been too impatient... Thank you for showing me, Lily."

Lily blinked, glanced from the gemstone to the woman who'd made no move to take

it. Hesitantly, she put the gemstone – the Anchor – back in her pocket.

“While this vision might not be real,” the shadow woman said, gazing over at the sleeping Kiera. “Your actions in it are genuine. You really would have defended her with your life.”

“That was-” Lily flushed. Why was she blushing? “I wasn’t-”

“You’d die for her. But would you kill for her?”

Lily’s mouth slammed shut. She stared at the figure made of liquid blackness, uncertain how to respond.

“In the end,” the woman said, “you’ll know. Would that I could be there to witness it. But, alas, my time is short. He has His champion, and I’ll have mine.”

The vision began to blur. The room’s walls rippling, the shadows distorting.

“Do look after her, won’t you?” The woman’s voice said, sounding further and further away. “Troubled times lay ahead.”

Reality began to crumble around her, the dream-world collapsing in on itself. She could feel her mind stirring, consciousness gripping her from someplace else. The shadow woman faded to almost nothing, before flaring back, straining against the collapsing reality around them.

“Oh, and Lily...” The woman reached a hand up, pointed at her own onyx face, the corner of her mouth. “Right here, you have a bit of icing on you...”

And then the dream ended.