

Dark and Light

Chapter 3 – Light

Joseph

“Don’t suppose anyone’s got a Holy Hand Grenade on ‘em?” Gavin asked, breaking the stunned silence.

Before them, in an abandoned mineshaft, were a dozen giant rabbits. Some were walking into walls, others attempting to swim on the hard floor. One, Joe saw, was standing on its hind legs and waving its arms – attempting to fly, probably.

He took a step forward, ignoring the aching pain in his back, drew his sword from its sheath.

“Yo,” Gavin said, voice like nails on chalkboard. “Don’t tell me y’all don’t get the reference? Jesus, dudes. It’s a classic! When we get back home, I’m gonna have to show you-”

A sharp growl was the only warning Joe got.

Out of the darkness, a giant rabbit launched itself at him.

He raised his sword too late, felt the creature collide with him. The world tumbled around Joe as he crashed to the ground, every ache and pain flaring hot.

“Shit!” One of the other guys shouted.

“Get it!” Another called.

His back, the entirety of his spine. His shoulders and hips. The back of his neck and head. His chest. The pain shot through him like needles and knives, stabbing from all angles. His brain pulsed and throbbed, a single image flashing behind his irises.

A woman with red skin. Horns and huge wings, a whip-like tail. And that smug, cocky smile.

The scene rippled in his mind, playing over and over again in a fraction of a second. Constantly repeating. The succubus whore snatching Lily up, leaping out a window, leaving Joe crumpled on the ground. Beaten, bruised, humiliated.

Shame washed over him. Followed immediately by hot rage.

Bitch! He swore silently, planting his hands on the mineshaft floor, pushing himself up. *Whore!*

His body screamed at him, but the pain felt distant. Blocked away by the anger, the pure hatred filling his chest. Once he was back on his feet, Joe looked up – saw the pathetic display the other guys were putting on. Running around like headless chicken, shouting at each other as a rabbit – a fucking *rabbit* - chased them.

Useless. They were fucking *useless*.

He took a shaky step forward, glancing around at the floor.

There.

His sword, flat on the floor a few feet from him.

Laughter echoed inside Joe’s skull. The succubus giggling at him, smiling and licking her lips, her arms wrapped around a terrified Lily. Using her. *Violating* her.

He roared.

Everything froze. The shitshow paused in place, every pair of eyes turning to look at him.

He lunged for the sword.

The Darkspawn lunged for him.

And the guys watched on, wide-eyed and pathetic.

Useless.

Hal

Holy shit.

Joe was fucking *losing it*.

All Hal had been able to do was watch as the jock hacked away at the Darkspawn. Slashing and stabbing like a madman, even as plumes of black smoke rose off the creature, as it exploded and vanished. Joe had roared, attacked the empty air for a few seconds, then charged the next giant rabbit.

Only one of the Darkspawn ended up being aggressive. The rest were lame ducks, just waiting to be butchered. And, as soon as it became clear Joe was planning on killing them all himself, Hal and the rest of the guys hopped into motion. Claiming kills and soaking up the spoils.

Darkspawn died, their Dark was transformed into *something* and absorbed, making Hal and the guys more powerful for it.

Still, as the gang left the abandoned mineshaft, there was an unmistakable tension in the air. A tension hanging over them all like a dark cloud, ready to start raining at any moment.

"I think," Hal said after gulping in a lungful of fresh air, "next time, we should come up with a system. Some way to distribute kills fairly so everyone-

"No," Joe growled, not looking at him. "Kill as many as you can, keep it all for yourself. You want more? Fucking *earn* it."

The rest of the group glanced at each other.

"Actually," Sid the science nerd cleared his throat. "I've been thinking. There's a mage university a few cities over I'd like to visit, maybe study at. Figure out exactly what we are, why we're here. Learn about magic. Maybe figure out a way of getting home."

He spoke every word carefully, watching Joe closely. Hal could sympathise with that; the last thing any of them wanted was for Joe to lose his shit again.

Oddly, though, Joe didn't say anything. Didn't argue the point, didn't go on the expected tirade of how they were a 'group' and needed to stick together to save Lily.

"Y- Yeah," Gavin piped in when it became clear Joe wasn't going to argue. "We should split up, do some side-quests and all that. Going at the main quest right away? Nah, that'll just be painful. Gotta grind a few side-quests first and-"

"Shut up," Joe said softly, voice cold.

Everyone froze.

Slowly, Joe turned around – looked Hal in the eye, then Sid, then Gav. He didn't bother to hide his disdain as his gaze flicked over them.

"You're a fucking joke," Joe spat. "All of you."

Sid bristled, Gav reached for his knives, Hal stood silently. Watching and waiting. Curiosity spiking.

"Do whatever the fuck you want," Joe snapped, glaring at Sid. "You want to fuck around in some silly 'university', go right ahead." His gaze snapped to Gav. "Want to play games and fuck around while Lily's in trouble? Fuck you. Do whatever you fucking want. I'll save her myself. I don't *need* you. I don't need *any* of you."

Hal opened his mouth, about to say something *very* stupid. Thankfully, his survival instincts kicked in, kept him from uttering the words. Reminding Joe how he'd gotten his ass handed to him by Kiera? Unwise.

Joe saw him opening his mouth though, turned his full attention on Hal.

"What?!" The jock growled.

"Nothing," Hal shrugged, smiled. "Don't mind me."

Joe glared at him, and Hal smiled right back.

"Whatever," Joe grunted eventually. "I'm done with you losers. Go fuck about and waste time. I don't care. I'll save Lily by myself."

Then he spun on his heels, began stomping away.

Hal glanced at Sid, who glanced at Gavin. All three shrugged, headed off in their different directions.

He hadn't killed as many Darkspawn as the others, and no-where near as many as Joe. But, even so, he had points to spend. Attributes to boost, spells to empower, abilities to unlock, a dizzying number of options.

Should he increase his stamina and recovery rate? Make it so he could fuck all night long, leave no slut unsatisfied. Or maybe bulk up his strength, turn himself into some chiselled Adonis? Tempting, for sure. But then there were his spells...

"Blessed Heart-Strings," Hal read aloud, scrolling through his expansive spell list. "Brightshine Bardsong, Fiddle of the Faithful, Song of Purity..."

That last one sounded interesting.

He read the description, felt his eyebrows quirk up.

A song to restore the 'purity' of those who heard it. Purging dark, salacious thoughts from their minds and memories and filling the void with 'faith' and 'commitment'. Which seemed like an interesting way of building a fucked-up, sexless cult.

Pass.

"This one, though..."

Blessed Heart-Strings. A spell that'd enchant Hal's lute, make it so that each string tugged on a different emotion or feeling for those listening. He could make one string increase lust while another reduced uncertainty or inhibition. Now *that* was much more up his street.

He unlocked the spell, amped it up as much as he could with all the power he'd absorbed. Then he cast it, filling his lute with magic.

The next thing he knew, he was passing out. His empty mana pool draining away all his strength.

He woke up in the early hours of the morning.

After struggling to light a candle, he picked up the lute and felt a new *sense* awakening at the edges of his mind. He could *feel* the strings, and *feel* the emotions – or lack thereof - attached to them.

As if he'd done it a thousand times before, he began tuning the strings with emotions and impulses. Somehow, he just *knew* how to do it. It felt as natural as breathing.

Lute on his lap, he tuned strings. Plucked them, enjoyed the musical, magical sound that reverberated off the room's walls, tweaked them for maximum potential. And, given just how many strings there were, the potential for emotional tweaking was off the charts.

"Guitars," he hummed as he worked. "Eat your hearts out."

"Talk to yourself often?" A woman's voice asked.

Hal jumped, bounced on the bed, had to clutch the lute to keep it from dropping off his lap. His eyes rose to his room's window, to the feminine figure shadowed there. Red skin and large, bat-like wings, curved horns on her head, and a long, sharp tail.

Despite the transformation, the total change in her appearance, Hal recognised her.

"Kiera," he gulped. "Hey..."

She wasn't dressed as a priestess now. She wasn't dressed *at all*. The succubus was naked, tits exposed in all their bounteous glory. Hal's eyes were drawn to them like magnets.

"How... How've you been?" He choked out.

"You know," Kiera said, voice deeper and far huskier than he remembered. "My face is up here."

It took his brain a few more seconds to reengage. The thought formed in his head, and temptation overwhelmed him. Slowly, he began plucking strings. One to encourage lust and arousal, another to empty Kiera's head of thoughts, another still to purge

hesitation and inhibition. The strings began forming a little, seductive tune.

A tune that came to an abrupt end as Kiera's tail lashed out, wrapped itself around Hal's throat. She lifted him up, raised him by his neck. The lute dropped, clattered to the floor.

"The next time you try using magic on me," Kiera said, voice like a crackling fire, "I'll castrate you. Understood?"

Hal nodded his head quickly.

She dropped him, rolled her eyes, waited for him to stop coughing and choking and spluttering.

"So..." Hal croaked when he could finally speak again. "Come to... to kidnap me too?"

"You wish," Kiera said, shaking her head. "Just here to deliver a message, is all. From Lily."

Hal raised an eyebrow at her, rubbed his throat.

"Here," the succubus said, waving her hand and summoning a sheet of parchment from thin air. She handed it to Hal, glaring at him as he stared at her tits. "Take it."

He made sure to move slowly, savour each moment of this encounter. If he could have, he'd have seduced the succubus there and then. Fucking a slut *that* hott? It would've been a dream come true.

One day, he promised himself.

The moment the letter was in his hand, Kiera backed away, launched herself out the window, disappeared into the night.

He looked out the window for a few long moments, some small part of him hoping the succubus would return – do what a succubus was meant to do and spend the rest of the night in bed with him. But no, she was gone.

So he turned his attention to the letter.

It was Lily's handwriting, her words. Several paragraphs, some information only Lily would know – to let the guys know she wasn't being coerced. A whole lot of gushing about 'following her heart' and that the guys 'shouldn't worry'. She was safe, happy, blah, blah.

"Well shit," Hal sighed. "That should be me. Damn."

Still, a weight lifted from his chest. A pressure released. Lily was fine. Happy. She was doing okay. That was good.

He'd have liked it more if she'd come herself. At least then, Hal would've been able to *really* test the lute. Fucking Lily would've been a nice goodbye. But alas, that would have to wait for another day too. For when he was more powerful, able to seduce and control Kiera and Lily both.

He set the letter aside, thought for a moment.

The *right* thing to do now would be to share the letter with the other guys. He knew where they'd be tonight, so showing them all Lily's letter would be easy enough. But... What would he gain from it?

"Gav's in that fancy inn across town," he mused aloud. "Joe's bunking at the cathedral. Sid will be at the library, most likely... That's a lot of walking..."

He shrugged to himself, grinned.

Snatching up the letter, he moved to his bedside table, the candle lit there. Watching the parchment burn to nothing made Hal's grin widen even more.

The other guys? They didn't need to know Lily was fine.

In a way, this was Hal *helping* the team. Making sure they were all plenty motivated to keep going, keep getting more powerful.

Mostly, though, it'd just be fucking *hilarious* seeing Joe's face, weeks or months from now, learning that the girl he was trying to rescue couldn't care less about being saved by him. Served the asshole right for his temper tantrum today.

Hal brushed the small pile of ash off his side table, plucked his lute off the floor,

resumed 'tuning' it.