

Dark and Light

Chapter 8 – Dark

Kiera

“They don’t know anything,” she said softly, brushing her fingers through Lily’s hair. “Not yet.”

“Are you certain?” Darumaug asked. “You know the Princes and their politics. All the secrets and lies and-”

“I’m certain,” Kiera whispered.

She looked down at Lily, resting her head on Kiera’s lap as she slept, face so peaceful and serene that Kiera ached at the sight of it. A pretty, innocent girl that Kiera had to protect at all costs.

“They don’t know,” Kiera said. “And, with any luck, they’ll never find out.”

“I wouldn’t count on that,” her friend sighed. “It’s only a matter of time before word spreads. A bunch of humans who can kill us, take our power and make it their own?”

“As long as Lily’s friends don’t go overboard, there’s no reason to believe any of the others will find out about them. Killing a few Runties here and there? No-one’s going to notice that, much less care about it.”

“Giving humans the key to obtaining limitless power and expecting them *not* to use it?” Darumaug snorted. “Unlikely.”

Kiera frowned. Remembered the other four Outlanders.

Unlikely indeed.

But still... It was worth hoping for, wasn’t it?

Maybe the boys would be smart enough to not draw attention to themselves. Maybe they weren’t the idiots they’d seemed.

So far as Kiera knew, no other Darkspawn had been sent to investigate the Outlanders. The only two that knew what the Outlanders could do – these ‘Paladins’, as the Priests had called them – were Kiera and Darumaug themselves.

For the time being, at least, there didn’t seem to be any threat for Kiera to worry about – besides the broken Pact.

But *that* was far above and beyond Kiera’s responsibility.

The only thing that mattered to her was Lily.

“She wants to visit the Northern Wastes,” Darumaug said softly, eyes on Lily’s sleeping face. “I think she wants to meet the goblins there, make some friends.”

“And who gave her that idiotic idea?” Kiera said, eyes narrowed at the dragon-man.

He just shrugged, smiled.

“I was thinking I’d take her east. The Lazy Lakes, maybe.”

“Never been,” Darumaug said. “Heard it’s beautiful, though.”

“It is,” Kiera smiled, looking over at her friend. “And you’ll get to see ‘em yourself for once.”

He raised an eyebrow at her.

“You’re coming with us,” Kiera said. “And no, you *can’t* refuse.”

“But... why?” Lily said, sounding so sad and soft that Kiera almost caved – promise the girl everything she wanted and more.

“Because,” Kiera said, somehow holding firm despite the overwhelming adorableness Lily exuded. “It’s too dangerous. The tribes are always fighting each other, humans are always launching armed ‘expeditions’ to reclaim land, and there are all sorts of feral, human-hating Darkspawn up there. Besides, the Northern Wastes are *freezing*. I would have thought you’d had enough of freezing cold weather by now.”

Lily scrunched her face up in a cute pout.

Kiera couldn't resist. She leaned towards the girl, planted a kiss on her rosy cheek.

The pout was gone in an instant, replaced by shy blushing and a puffy-cheeked smile. Which only made Kiera want to kiss her more, smother every inch of that pretty face with kisses.

"Come on," Kiera said, taking Lily's hand. "Mog's waiting."

"He's coming with us?" Lily asked excitedly.

"Sort of," Kiera grinned, guiding the way through the maze of tunnels Darumaug called a home. "He'll fly there with us, then head back here on his own right after. He doesn't like being away from the mountains for too long."

"Just there and back?" Lily frowned. "Why's he doing that?"

"I asked him to," Kiera smiled wider.

"Hmm..." Lily hummed, narrowing her eyes at Kiera. "What's going on? Not another 'surprise' I hope..."

Kiera stopped. Just a few more turns and they'd be in the entrance chamber; a huge, empty space large enough for Darumaug's True Form to fit comfortably inside. She turned to Lily, smiling from ear to ear.

"You know how you said 'never again' the last time we flew together?" She asked.

"Sorta," Lily frowned. "I was kinda tired and... *No*."

Her eyes widened. She stared up at Kiera like a frightened rabbit, ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

"No! You *can't* be serious!"

"Since flying with *me* was so traumatic," Kiera said, eyes twinkling, "I figured you'd *much* rather fly with Mog instead. You should be honoured! Not many humans can say they've ridden a dragon before!"

Lily

She spread her arms out wide, felt the wind rushing through her hair and over her skin as Darumaug dived. Laughter burst from her lips, her eyes wide, her whole body tingling with energy.

To one side, gliding just a few feet away, was Kiera. Leathery, red-and-black skin glistening with cloud moisture.

Lily's heart thundered in her ears. That, paired with the rushing wind, all but deafened her. She couldn't hear what Kiera was saying, couldn't read her lips – all she could do was guess; look at Kiera's wide grin and imagine what the succubus was trying to tell her.

Darumaug's wings flared out.

The weightlessness of the dive ended abruptly. The dive's momentum crushed Lily into her seat at the nape of Darumaug's long neck as the dragon slowed down, levelled out. An instant later, the pressure was gone, the tension disappearing. Wings splayed out on either side like a scaly football field that Lily was in the centre of.

Because of the dragon's sheer size, and how high they were flying, it was impossible for Lily to see the ground below. No mountains on the horizon, no landmarks at all. Just scales and sky. Shiny red and clouded, pale blue.

When Lily looked left, she saw Kiera swooping in close.

The succubus spun in the air, twirled, did little loops and tricks with a swiftness and finesse that'd make eagles envious.

"Show-off," Lily giggled, cheeks aching from her smiling.

Kiera looked at her as if she'd heard Lily – though that wasn't possible, not with the wind and air rushing past to steal the words away. And yet, that twinkle in Kiera's eyes...

She *had* heard.

Kiera drifted closer to her, twirled in the air. The next thing Lily knew, Kiera was rolling in the air above her. Spinning from Lily's left, over her head, to her right.

As the succubus spun in the air, Lily's eyes move, drawn in by a very particular sight. They found their way, like magnets, to Kiera's bare chest.

Breasts much firmer than they were in Kiera's Human Form, yet still swaying and bouncing slightly as the succubus swept through the air. Big, firm, red breasts with hard, dark nipples. Sleek and round and huge. Perfect breasts that-

Kiera caught her staring.

Lily's gaze flicked from Kiera's chest to her face, had to look away from the teasing smile that tugged at Kiera's lips.

The succubus swept through the air, the sound of her laughter lost to the winds. She flew in close to Lily again, rolled up over Lily's head. Lily had to tilt her head back to look up at her.

Their faces were no more than a foot apart.

Kiera smiled down at Lily. Huge wings spread out in a smooth glide, red tips glowing like two bright flames.

Lily's lips parted as the succubus drifted closer.

She closed her eyes. Felt warm, gentle, taloned hands on her cheeks. An instant later, Kiera's lips were on hers. Their tongues danced, all thoughts in Lily's head evaporating away. Wind rushed in her ears, quiet compared to her thundering heart.

The embrace broke apart far too soon.

Kiera pulled back, flapped her leathery wings, flew up higher. The wicked grin she flashed made Lily tremble.

Then she was gone. Dancing through the sky like some magnificent bird of prey; swooping under Darumaug and out of sight, emerging on the other side with fluttering wings. Every now and then, the dragon's wings would rise and fall too, launching them higher into the air. Mostly, though, Darumaug seemed content with gliding to their destination, Kiera swooping and diving and drifting around them all the while.

"Here," Darumaug's Human Form said, sweeping his hand through the air. Stone jars and pots materialised, dark and polished. "Some food I prepared before we left."

The scents of cooked meat, herbs and spices and steaming vegetables wafted up from the stone containers. Lily's mouth began watering, her stomach rumbling at the delicious smells. If the meals in those jars and pots were anything like the other things Darumaug had cooked for her...

Kiera stopped forward, put her hand on one of the stone jars. An instant later, it was gone. Sucked into the infinite nothingness. Kiera's item storage ability. She touched the next container, and the one next to that. And, before long, all of them had vanished.

"Sure you don't want to stick around for a while?" Kiera asked. "Explore a little before you get back to your mountains?"

Darumaug shook his head.

"Another time, perhaps," he said, turning on the spot. He began walking away, his red robe disappearing as he went.

Watching as the man shapeshifted into a massive dragon was fascinating. Scaled wings sprouted from his back, his head transforming into horns, his limbs and body expanding out, skin shifting into the bright red scales. In moments, he'd grown from being a tall man into a mansion-sized creature of fangs and claws and fire.

Gargantuan wings spread out, beat against the air. The force of their movement blasted Lily with wind – so much so that she almost toppled over at the force of it.

Then Darumaug was airborne, climbing into the sky.

"Dragons and their mountains," Kiera said with an eyeroll, drawing Lily's attention.

"Wouldn't be surprised if Mog wanted to turn back the moment we left the mountain range."

She turned to Lily, grinned.

"Enjoy the flight?"

"Mm'hm," Lucy blushed.

It'd been scary at first. Terrifying, actually. Climbing onto a dragon's back, being launched into the air, gripping on for dear life as Darumaug darted down between mountain peaks and valleys. Several times, Lily's life had flashed before her eyes.

Once they were past the mountain range, though, things got *much* better. Rather than racing through the landscape like they had a death wish, Darumaug and Kiera had flown up high, sailed on the wind effortlessly.

It'd been like going from riding a rollercoaster to relaxing on a boat floating on gentle waters.

The boat in gentle waters bit? That'd been *lovely*. Watching Kiera dance about, flying free as any bird, radiating beauty and elegance and finesse. It'd been something Lily was certain she'd remember fondly for the rest of her life.

The rollercoaster bit, though?

Hard pass on *that*.

Kiera chuckled, bounced on the spot.

Her True Form disappeared in an instant, replaced with her stunningly beautiful Human Form. Huge breasts bouncing as she landed on the grassy ground with bare feet. She twirled on the spot, sturdy travelling clothes from nowhere wrapping themselves around her nakedness. She came to a stop facing Lily.

The mischievous smile on Kiera's face sent hot tingles coursing through Lily.

Lily looked away, blushing profusely.

She made a show of 'examining' their surroundings, hiding her embarrassment as best she could.

Nothing. There was *nothing*.

No remarkable landmarks, no towns or settlements in the distance, no mountains on the horizon. Short, wild grass spread out in all directions, brown and green and dull. Hills rose and fell like desert dunes but, beyond that, there wasn't anything. Not a tree or building or road to be found.

"So, uh," Lily murmured, face still hot, "where are we?"

"Middle of nowhere," Kiera's said.

Even though she wasn't facing the woman, Lily could picture the shrug. The half-cocked smile. The twinkle in her eye.

"I see that," Lily whispered.

"Mog told me you wanted to go to the Northern Wastes," Kiera said. "Figured I'd bring you here instead. Plenty of Darkspawn on the steppe, and they're far less likely to attack on sight. And..."

Kiera paused.

Silent seconds ticked by.

"...And?" Lily said, finally turning back to Kiera.

"And," the succubus grinned. "There's something else. Let's call it a surprise!"

"Mmm..." Lily frowned. "Is *this* surprise going to give me a heart attack too?"

Kiera's grin widened.

Kiera

She leaned back on the bedroll, looked up at the stars. Thousands of tiny, twinkling lights. Too many to count. The star-strewn sky was black until Kiera *really* looked. Focused her

gaze. Then, she saw the colour. Clouds of violet and green and blue, all frozen together some place far beyond the sky. She saw a flying star and the glowing trails it left behind. And there, almost too small to see, a spec of pure, true blackness.

She blinked, and all the colour vanished. The sky was back to its black curtain and tiny pinpricks of sharp light.

The moon wasn't there. Sometime later tonight, it'd make an appearance. But, for now, the night was clean. Untainted.

When Lily laid herself down, rested her head on Kiera's shoulder, the girl let out a little sigh. Exhausted and sleepy and content. Kiera smiled, kissed the top of her head, squeezed her close.

The girl mumbled something unintelligible and, a few seconds later, was fast asleep. Kiera closed her eyes.

She couldn't sleep. For all her abilities and powers, sleep was something beyond her. But, for a while at least, she could feign it. Pretend. Close her eyes, lay still and silent, lose herself for a time.

She focused in on the tiny things. Lily's soft breathing, her heartbeat against Kiera's skin, the flowery scent that always seemed to follow her, the subtle warmth of Lily's body against hers. Kiera focused on them all. Let them engulf her.

In her mind, Kiera painted a picture of Lily. Rosy cheeks, smiling sweetly, kind eyes looking up at her.

And then she made the image move. Memories of Lily, imaginings of the two of them together. What would Lily think of the steppe tribes? How would she react to seeing more Darkspawn? She remembered the pretty girl's laughter, so bright and innocent and joyous. She thought back to the first time they'd encountered each other. Kiera trying to spy on Lily and her friends, Lily using some strange power that'd detected her, the connection it somehow formed.

She thought back further, to a time before Lily. Decades and decades, centuries ago.

All those adventures alone. Exploring the human world.

How different would that have been if she'd had Lily at her side? Both of them, discovering the world together...

She pictured it. Imagined it.

All those places... The sights... The people...

And, before she knew it, morning had come. Lily was stirring awake. A new day had arrived.