Lila and Kween in the Lair of the Lamia

Written by x-22, based on characters created by RounderSofter

As they so often did, the rain clouds hung dark and dense in the foothills of the Heather Mountains. In a gradually sloping valley, the ovoid Banshee Lake spread out between the lumpy hills on each side. Rising up from water seething in the torrential rain was the imposing, but much bedraggled, temple formerly known as the Temple of Noon. Only one wing of the expansive stone building had been finished; the main hall's distinct lack of a completed roof particularly noticeable at the moment...

"Kwee-een!" came a petulant cry through the ruins before the falling rain took over the soundscape once more. Sitting in one of the larger rooms of the mostly finished east wing sat high priestess Lila, dressed in an expansive robe of dark blue and purple, a symbol of her station. The chair she was lounging in was so large it might have been called a throne – if it had not resembled a cross between a armchair and a divan, allowing its occupant to recline comfortable. It had been an easy adjustment, but one that did not fully make up for the fact that the chair had been made for someone of somewhat lesser size. Lila's ample buttocks and well-fed thighs barely fitted between the armrests, but that was not what was bothering the priestess right now.

"Kwee-" she called again as the big shape of the naga sorceress Kween sidled unhurriedly into the room. She gave no sign of having heard the blue-haired woman's calls.

"This place is leaking too!" Lila sulked loudly. As if to emphasize her words, a fat water drop fell on the gentle curve of her bulging midsection, prompting her to add a displeased whine.

"Hmm? Oh, yes." The naga glanced up at the roof. "It does need touching up here and there."

"Tou-he-wha-?" Lila sputtered in disbelief, struggling to sit up despite her hefty belly. "The nave has no roof! The walls aren't carved! The west wing isn't... well it simply isn't!"

"Well, why don't we show the villagers the plans for the temple and set them to work?" Kween suggested, her tone so carefree she hardly could be serious.

"We have the plans?" Lila said with a look of surprise, just before another falling drop hit her head.

"No!" Kween exclaimed, spreading her six arms in exasperation, "That's the point; of course there are no plans lying around. In fact, the guy who drew this place died years ago."

"How do you know that?" Lila's voice was curious as she dried her hair with the hem of her robe. "Because while you have been lazing around being rubbed down by sirens, I have been doing some research."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning chasing the villagers into every nook and cranny and interrogating them a little."
Kween admitted.

"So we need a build... dra... a, a... an architect?" Lila asked, sorting out the words in her head.

"You know any?"

"Well, Toobawt back at the Libe thieves guild was pretty good at drawing stuff..." the ex-thief reminisced, "...though come to think about it, he mostly drew lewd pictures of the prostitutes across the street..."

Kween gave her priestess a searching look of curious disinterest.

"Libe?" she asked eventually.

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Well, what is it?" Kween elaborated.

"Uhm, you know that big city down south by the White Bay?"

"Never heard of it." the naga said dismissively, before falling into thought. "Wait, you're not talking about Libu, are you?? As far as I can remember, it's just a little insignificant fishing vi..."

Their eyes widened as they met, both Kween and Lila struck with realization.

"I guess things change." Lila chuckled.

"Well, perhaps we might locate our architect in Libu, if it has grown as much as you say," the sorceress mused.

"I think this calls for some inquiring." she concluded with foreboding glee. "You just stay here."

"But it's wet here!" Lila protested. "And I'm hungry..." she added softly to herself as the naga heaved her bulk around and left in search of a suitable target.

It did not take long for Kween to return, having been away just long enough for Lila to have decided to get out of her seat to avoid the worst of the leaks.

"I see you can stand up on your own. Great. Ready to leave? Good!" the naga said enthusiastically, not waiting for Lila's surprised protest before continuing.

"Huh?"

"That surly guy from the village told me; we're going to Libu to find Drakaina Sybaris." Kween explained, her tone suggesting she was tired of explaining the obvious to her priestess.

"What, and you believe him??" Lila said incredulously, "Isn't that the first rule of adventuring; never trust a skinny innkeeper?"

"Well, he isn't an innkeeper anymore, is he? In fact, he's in charge here while we are away."

"What, you're leaving this place in the hands of Mr. Suspicious and the Cannibal Sisters??"

"Oh, I made it abundantly clear how disappointed I would be if he failed me," Kween grinned evilly, "As for the sirens, well, as long as the are well supplied with lamb, I don't think they will eat too many peasants...
"In fact, when they started raiding the countryside, the farmers around here apparently thought they were my demons and they have readily agreed to subject themselves to me and offer tribute. So supplies probably won't be a problem either."

"I guess there is no time for a little lunch?" Lila inquired hopefully.

"We'll pick up something on the way, now come on, unless you want to stay here and drown." Kween assured her and left before her priestess could pose further questions.

"Are you sure the copper boat is too big for the river...?" Lila asked for the fifth time since they got into Kween's self-propelled cart. Despite its recent upgrade, Lila's encounter with the sirens of Banshee Lake had more or less cancelled out the benefits of the additional space and it creaked ominously as if threatening to fall apart under the weight. As it was, they sat facing each other, both perched over the cart's edges, leaning back to accommodate each other's bellies, not to mention Kween's big tail. Lila felt as if she was spilling over the cart on all sides.

"Yes!" the naga answered angrily as she tried to writhe into a more comfortable position. Eventually, she managed to free one of her hands from being pinned beneath one of her love handles.

"So... who's this Drakaina Sybaris, then?" the priestess wondered, trying to get the conversation going again.

"Apparently, she led the construction of the Prince's palace in Libu."

"Libe." Lila corrected. "You reckon she can build us a new cart as well?"

"Pah! This cart is fine!" Kween exclaimed before having to suck in her gut in order to sit a few inches straighter, bracing the ex-thief's belly with four of her arms while doing so, lest it got her stuck again. Exhaling, her stomach expanding to push at Lila's once more, she continued:

"Now quit your whining and look for an inn with a buffet."

After two days of travel – two days not made more comfortable by Kween's insistence that Lila should try everything on the menu and then some at each inn they stayed at – the cart rolled over the last hillock before the gentle slope down to the shining white city of Libe. With its massive walls and innumerable tiled roofs, it was the biggest city Lila had ever been to.

"Here we are!" she called out, happy to get out; her right foot had gone numb from being wedged under Kween's tail.

"Huh?" the naga blurted, straining with each hand on the side of the cart in an effort to turn around.

"Hngh! …wait! Is that a big rock in the road?" she said casually, just as the cart careened off the road before quickly reversing back onto it again.
"Oh..." Kween exclaimed, her face one of mild wonder at the sprawling city, before composing herself: "Hmph. Good enough, I suppose. Nothing compared to the cities of my day, of course."

"Of course." Lila nodded solemnly.

"Let's go get that architect, then." The cart picked up speed again.

"What??" the blue-haired woman opposite her shouted out, "We can't just go in there!"

"Oh really...?" Kween hissed viciously.

"The whole place is crawling with Cernian Shadow Wardens – monster hunters – and you're, well..."

"And this did not seem necessary to mention before now because...?"

"Because I have come to see you as a friend, not my inhuman demi-god captor...?" the ex-thief ventured innocently.

"Very well..." the naga sighed and the cart pulled up behind a copse, next to an overgrown shrine.

"I don't think praying is going to help."

"Oh, shut up and get out." Kween sneered, obviously unimpressed by her priestess's joke. Heaving, struggling and straining, Lila tried to comply.

"On three?" she suggested after giving up. Her companion simply narrowed her eyes sourly, but did suck in her stomach as the ex-thief's count reached 'three'. Standing up to alight, Lila came to the realization that her legs weren't working properly and tumbled over the side. Kween followed, a little more dignified.

"Get my chest, will you?" the sorceress instructed, sweeping the candle stumps and offering bowls off the altar with her arm. Squatting down awkwardly, Lila did as she was told, coaxing, pulling and panting to get the chest out from under the cart. As it came free, surprising the priestess with its weight, the box crashed into the ground, leaving Lila sitting dazed on the ground.

"Easy does it." Kween told her patronizingly and moved to open the chest, retrieving a bowl and an assortment of pouches. Rummaging through it some more, while Lila strolled over to sit against a small tree, she found a slender vial and poured its contents into the bowl.

"I had hoped I would not have to use this..." the naga muttered to herself as she picked up a pointy bit of silver.

"Oh, what is it?"

"The tooth of a Butterhill Changeling." Kween explained.

"Never heard of them. I'm guessing they are rare?"

"Yes, I suppose so," the naga acceded, dropping the shiny tooth into the bowl, "especially after I ate them all."
Completing the potion, Kween poured the liquid evenly into two tiny cups resembling oversized thimbles.

"So, what is it?" Lila asked as she got to her feet and accepted one of the cups.

"Just a little polymorph potion." the naga explained, draining her cup. Shrugging, Lila did the same.

"This is..." she managed as she felt her skin seethe, her flesh quake, but was cut short as she saw the world explode in a haze of silver sparks and then go black.

"Am I dead?" Lila wearily asked no-one in particular as her eyes fluttered open. She seemed to be lying on the ground.

"Not unless I got Nethermoss and Bleaklichen mixed up again." That voice; was it Kween?

"Again??" Lila exclaimed and shot up before freezing with the realization that she was able to shoot up at all. Laying her hands on her stomach, she was surprised to find only a little pudge around her middle. In fact, her tunic was hanging around her like a tent.

"You have no idea how many changeling teeth you need to get rid of all that." Kween said accusingly. Lila felt tempted to ask how many teeth you needed to disguise a bloody naga, but became too perplexed when she laid eyes on the sorceress. Content to let her priestess retain a little flab, the naga sorceress had turned herself into a svelte human approximation of herself; Lila remembered that jawline from when they first met. Those slender, arched eyebrows and tapered eyes were chillingly similar as well, even if they now had sparkling grey irises and a regally prominent nose keeping them company in the sorceress' face. A pleated dress of deep indigo contrasted with her creamy white skin and embraced her newly acquired body, hugging hips that seemed impossibly wide against her comparably slender waist. Beneath the fabric, the faint bulges of strong, thick thighs were obvious, making her look a bit bottom-heavy. With her auburn-red hair done up in an elaborate array of curls, she looked every bit a prominent noble.

"Would you like a mirror?" Kween smiled, her voice sounding just a tiny bit more... human, but no less menacing.

Accepting, Lila could see that her change had been somewhat less dramatic, but it still felt weird looking at her face and not seeing puffed up cheeks or more than one chin. That her magically dyed hair had reverted to her natural dull light brown, felt stranger after so many years. Despite herself, she wished she had gotten a bit more of Kween's elegance. For most of her life, she had been proud to be a hard-working (at least in her own mind) member of the lower class, a rough rogue of the streets, so hankering for the semblance of nobility...? Lila simply chose not to think more of it.

"Come on, let's get to the city and grab our architect." Kween told her impatiently, hands on hips. Lila followed eagerly, unused to being able to move without being weighed down by the results
of overindulging. Not that she was exactly thin, but it was still two hundred pounds or so worth of difference, possibly closer to three hundred after that incidence with the sirens... She was tempted to start running, but having to hold up her now outsized leggings made that difficult.

When they reached the gate, Kween greeted the the guards pleasantly, curtsying with an elegant wave of her heavily ringed hand:
"Good day to you, I am a lady of Rakasia on my way to admire the work of the renowned architect Sybaris."
"Rakasia?" one of the guards asked obliviously.
"The lost city of the South Seas," his companion explained before laughing and indicating with an index finger to his temple that the "lady" was a few jewels short of a crown. Putting her hands on her hips, Kween huffed past them, Lila hurrying after her, very conscious that she was dressed in what amounted to a purple tent while awkwardly trying her best not to loose her leggings as well as her dignity.
"Why did you try to bluff them with that stupid legend?" she asked incredulously.
"It's no legend, you imbecile!" Kween stated definitively, "I was there just a... nevermind."
"So the stories are true?" the thief that had been buried under Lila's priestess flab asked greedily.
The golden halls of Rakasia...
"Let's see if we can find this Sybaris, then." the naga changed the subject and started looking for someone to ask nicely.

"What do you mean I can't come in!?!" Kween demanded, the guardswoman on the other side of the peephole strangely unaffected for a victim of her wrath, "I'm a lady from... oh forget it!"
Swatting the air angrily, she turned on the spot and marched back across the bridge, leaving Lila to shrug with resignation at the guard before realizing her leggings were falling down and hastily gathering them up and hurrying after the sorceress.
They had no problem finding the great architect's residence: Suspended above the deep gorge carved by the river flowing through the city, it was supported by numerous slender arches; the ultimate expression a professional's confidence in her own work. It meant, however, that the only way across was a single bridge, guarded by a woman under so strict orders she would not even consider letting them in.
"Well, that didn't go too well," Lila observed as they rounded a corner and were out of sight.
"I'm not about to be stopped by a pompous bitch in a tin suit!" Kween exclaimed, making it clear that things were not over yet. Faint wisps of purple energy crackled over her arms.
"Of course not..." Lila giggled nervously before catching a glimpse of a washerwoman across the
street, "Wait a minute..."

"What?" Kween barked, turning to look angrily at the priestess.

"I think the thief just had an idea..."

"This will never work!" Kween protested as they made their way towards the mansion once again. Following Lila's plan, they had... appropriated servants' clothes, their hair covered with kerchiefs and Kween's chalky cheeks stained with a little soot. The only dress able to accommodate the sorceress's prodigious thighs and hips hung loosely around her waist, making her hardly recognizable as the stylish lady she had been moments ago. Nevertheless, she remained unconvinced:

"How blind and deaf must she be not to recognize us?"

"Think about it," Lila countered, "She was wearing a visor. No way she got a good look at you through that little peephole!"

Kween considered her words for a moment before agreeing:

"You humans do look a lot like each other," she admitted.

"Uh, yes... Just let me do the talking."

"That's what you're not paid to do." Kween sniffed, salvaging her pride.

Lila knocked on the door and began to wait. After a few moments, the peephole slid open.

"What do you wa- oh, I'm sorry, I thought it was that crazy chick again," she apologized gruffly.

"Oh not at all!" Lila assured her nervously, "In fact, we are the new servants."

"Is that so?" the guard did not sound terribly convinced.

"Oh, you probably haven't heard we were coming!" the ex-thief smiled anxiously, doing her best not to blink furiously or scratch the back of her neck.

"What?? Of course I have! And it's about time someone showed up, too!"

"So... you... well, we'll get straight to work, then!"

"Excellent!" the guard exclaimed cheerfully and unlocked the door.

Walking through a corridor, they were immediately shown to the servants' quarters and then into the kitchen. Even this room had walls of carved marble, though they were quite stained with soot now. Bent over a bubbling cauldron was an old woman, her silver hair gathered into a bun under her kerchief.

"Illa!" the guardswoman called out, "these are the new servants."

The old woman looked up.

"Right then; Illa will tell you what to do." And with that, the guard left. The old woman continued to stare before pointing at Kween and calling accusingly: "You! You are the one in my
dreams!"

Kween shot Lila an accusing glance, before taking a step closer.

"You must be mistaken..." she said disarmingly, but Illa did not seem inclined to listen.

"Yes, it is you! You have taken human form, but I can see it is you!" The old woman fell to her knees. "What is your command, my lady?"

"Maybe I should 'quit thinking so damn long-term all the time', eh?" Kween called back to Lila with a smug smirk. The ex-thief huffed, folded her arms and muttered something about 'if it wasn't for me...'

"Just a moment. Keep cooking." The sorceress held up a silencing finger to the prostrate woman and turned to Lila, "We need to get close enough to Sybaris to grab her. I'm thinking we distract her with a delicious meal..." With that, she touched the cook's forehead, a turquoise mist seeping to envelope the woman.

"There. Wasteful, but it should provide inspiration for a few days; more than enough for our purposes."

"I think it's already working." Lila licked her lips at the scent from the cauldron.

"My lady, forgive me," Illa interrupted as the haze subsided, but kept on working, "But you will never get past Jalinda; she watches lady Sybaris constantly!"

"Then getting past her might prove a little harder this time..." Lila agreed, but could not finish her train of thought before steps could be heard in the hall. They passed the door, then stopped.

"Oh my, that smells delicious!" Jalinda the guard exclaimed as she entered the kitchen. She was no longer dressed in full armour, having replaced it with a tunic of Drakaina Sybaris' household's crimson and white leggings and shirt. She still had her sword in her belt scabbard, however, ready for duty. Without her visored helmet, they could finally get a good glimpse of her face; she had a square jaw, full cheeks and a hooked nose and, even if her hair was a cascade a gold more fitting for a fairytale princess, this made her look like a woman who could handle herself in a fight.

The warrior woman smiled cheerfully and Lila and Kween exchanged meaningful looks.

"You are welcome to try some," the priestess invited eagerly, signalling for Illa to make a bowl ready.

"Hmm, I could go for an early dinner right about now," Jalinda agreed and sat down, peeling off her gloves as Illa put the dish in front of her.

"Would you like some ale with that, perhaps?" Lila offered, but did not wait for Jalinda's muffled "yesh pleash" before pouring her a mug. The guard accepted it and took a big gulp before returning to her food. Quickly, Lila made sure to fill up the mug again.

They had no trouble convincing Jalinda to have both seconds and thirds, each offer answered by eager assent. By the fourth portion, muffling a belch with the back of her hand, she straightened up,
undid her belt and sighed with relief:

"Oh my... you girls certainly know your stuff." In response, Kween did her best attempt at grateful humility and curtsied deeply, quickly followed by Lila.

"I do believe there might be some left..." the sorceress hinted sweetly, looking into the cauldron with exaggerated surreptitiousness.

"I really couldn't..." Jalinda groaned, putting a hand to her belly, following Kween's eyes, "Oh, all right then; just one more bowl!"

Having coaxed the guardswoman to finish off her meal with some honey cake, Lila offered to help Jalinda up. Rising unsteadily, she spread her fingers across her stomach with a faint groan, prompting the ex-thief to follow her upstairs to her room.

The guard's bedroom happened to be the second of three doors on that floor, the first leading to the gatehouse and the third presumably leading to the lady Sybaris' quarters. It was a simple affair with a good-sized bed, a wardrobe and a simple washstand as the only furniture.

"Oh, I... I just need to sit down for a bit..." Jalinda mumbled as she did just that, then promptly fell backwards into the bed, revealing the tight bulge of her belly, and started snoring contently. Cocking an eyebrow, Lila turned and left.

"Good thing your spell lasts for a bit, then!" Lila exclaimed cheerfully in an attempt to diffuse Kween's anger. Upon returning, the sorceress had angrily explained that the cook had helpfully mentioned that lady Sybaris was out of town and would not return for a few days, depending on the wind. Unsurprisingly, the ex-thief's optimism did little to assuage Kween's anger:

"Congratulations; you just volunteered to cook the guardswoman breakfast in bed tomorrow morning!"

So, over the next days, Kween had devised a work allocation that seemed very fair indeed: She would point and Lila would grudgingly obey, doing whatever chores the sorceress felt necessary. For her part, the ex-thief did her best to turn as many tasks as she could over to Illa. This included, but was not limited to, changing bedclothes (after Lila inadvertently got tangled up in a bunch of linen) and cleaning (after she realized it was tiring work). One of the things she could not worm her way out of, however, was delivering Jalinda's meals, as this was an excellent opportunity to take a look at Sybaris' private quarters. They soon realized that there were two more servants in the complex, in addition to Illa, and this meant that sneaking about the place became that much harder, even if they could distract Jalinda with chicken legs and French toast. Particularly Lagin, the custodian and keeper of birds, seemed suspicious, but it might be the old man was simply annoyed.
by Kween's overbearing attitude. In addition, it seemed that the sorceress's spell was starting to wear off, because he and the stable boy, Rouhard, seemed quite unaffected by it. Still, if someone wasn't complaining that their subtle attempts to addict the other servants had failed, it would be Jalinda, since it meant there was more for her. As a result, the guardswoman could often be found on her post, voraciously attacking Lagin and Rouhard's intended portions.

"Oh, hello there," Lila greeted Jalinda nonchalantly as she entered the gatehouse, carrying a tray weighed down with roast duck, pork dumplings and sugar-coated, deep-fried pastries. "I just thought I should bring you some lunch."

The guardswoman's initial response was a stifled burp as she put a final cleaned bone down on top of a pile of the things on the plate in front her; the remains of brunch. Licking her grease-soaked fingers, she adjusted the waist of her tights and indicated she was finished with a sweep of her hand. Lila neatly switched the two trays.

"I hope you like it." It was fairly redundant; Jalinda had already offered a polite "Thank you" and begun to attack the dumplings. Leaving the guardswoman to her meal, Lila tip-toed surreptitiously out of the room and hurried over to Sybaris' door.

It was locked, but she had anticipated this; the ex-thief came prepared, using a bent cauldron handle and a slender knife. The improvised tools meant the picking was not done in a hurry and she cursed the fact that she no longer had her thief's belt; it probably even fit around her waist now! When the lock finally opened, Lila decided not to push her luck and picked up the tray and left. Jalinda would probably be open to dinner soon enough.

Coming down the stairs, Lila was greeted by Kween's shouting angrily at Rouhard:
"What do you mean 'she's coming'?!" she demanded, grabbing the stable boy's arm and with a hand on her hip, bored her eyes into his skull. Soon taking her eyes off the man, the sorceress stared with angry bewilderment at the empty space where her third arm was not pointing a furious index finger at her target.

"Err..." the stable boy ventured to his perplexed interrogator.

"I thought she was becalmed in Sinosis!" Kween pressed on, shaking her head back to the matter at hand.

"Sh-she must have decided to take a coach!"

"Damn it!" Kween released the boy and turned to Lila: "How is your work progressing?"

"Oh, very well." Lila assured her. "Jalinda certainly has an appetite!"

"Not that, you brainless bint! The room!"

"Oh, right."
"Have you found anything??" Kween demanded impatiently, hands raised as if to grab hold of her companion and shake the information out of her.

"No, I got the door open just now."

"Ju-no- How can it take so long??" Kween shouted, arms over her head in exasperation.

"Because you are having me do all the work here!" Lila retorted, raising her voice. "Well, maybe not all the work, but... it's still a lot!"

"Stop complaining, will you?? Now get yourself to the kitchen and make sure the guard won't interfere; Sybaris could be here any time now."

When Lila eventually managed to manoeuvre the immensely heavily laden serving tray up the stairs, she found Jalinda snoring loudly on the little platform bed in the corner of the gatehouse, one hand hanging limply over the side, with a half-eaten pastry on the floor under it. The sparkle of sugar coated the guardswoman's tunic, and a few grease stains lined her mouth, just out of reach of her tongue. For a moment, Lila simply stopped in the doorway, observing the sleeping woman. Occasionally, Jalinda would mumble and moan, scratching her belly, before continuing to snore. Putting the tray down, Lila picked up the chair, put it next to the bed, and placed the tray on top of it, wafting the smell of steak, gravy, fried potatoes and thick cream sauce over the guardswoman.

Licking her lips, Jalinda began to open her eyes with a murmur of contentment. Stretching with an impressive yawn, she settled back with her eyes closed, smiling faintly.

"That smells divine." she muttered, taking a moment or two to wake up properly, before propping herself up on her elbows.

"Here, try the beef." Lila encouraged, skewering a piece of steak on a fork and sticking it in Jalinda's face. The woman took a bite, chewed thoughtfully and sighed with satisfaction. Moving the tray over to the table again, Lila helped Jalinda out of the bed and got her seated in front of the food.

"Just eat up," she said anxiously, "and I'll go get the mashed potatoes. And the meatballs. And the pudding, the cheesecake and wine. And fruit and..."

"Are you sure she's occupied??" Kween whispered as she and Lila approached Sybaris' door.

"Oh, she's probably passed out, face first in the cream pie by now." the ex-thief assured her as she eased the door open. Unlike the rest of the building, which was lit by numerous arched windows, this room was left in darkness, lit only from the now open door. The walls were covered in shelves from top to bottom, filled with curious models, numerous books and several rolls of parchment. Scrolls also covered every available surface except the curtained bed at the far end of the room. Several chandeliers hung from the ceiling above them, but instead of risking lighting one
of them, Kween grabbed a brass lamp from a desk, lit it, and closed the door behind them.

"Now, let us see if there is something we can use here..." They begun to look through the stacks of paper and parchment, careful not to disturb anything.

"These certainly are fanciful." Lila observed as she paged through drawings of various buildings.

"Let's just hope she works this well under duress." Kween commented, opening a drawer before freezing.

"Did you hear that?" she hissed, slowly closing the drawer, looking about warily. Lila nodded; from the hall came a woman's voice.

"You tell the marquis that it will be ready when it is ready." a haughty voice instructed on the other side of the door; Lila thought it resembled Kween's somehow.

"Quick! Behind the curtains!" the ex-thief whispered intently, eyes wide, pointing to the bed. Not wasting any time, they hurried over and closed the curtains behind them, just as the door opened up.

"I have no time for his foolish demands!" the woman continued. "Now get those candles lit and maybe I will consider the marquis' request."

The moments passed until the woman broke the silence once again, telling whoever was in the room "That will be all". The door closed. A chair scraped the floor. Silence. Eventually, Lila dared to open a tiny slit in the curtains and looked out.

In the now brightly lit room, a striking woman of aristocratic dignity sat at the desk, leafing through parchments, stopping to consider some of them. Her skin was fair, almost translucent, while her long, thick hair jet black. Dressed in a sumptuous dress of crimson velvet with details of gold and wearing a gold tiara, Drakaina Sybaris might as well be royalty; there was no question her architect career was paying well. Even her dark eyes looked like they were flecked with gold as they scanned the pages over her long, straight nose.

Time passed, but eventually Drakaina looked up from her work, gazing away in the distance, deep in thought. She got up and walked past the bed, Lila catching her heart in her throat. They could hear the ruffle of parchment, then a chest being opened. The steps went back towards the desk. Both let out a sigh of relief a split second before the curtains were thrown aside and Lila and Kween found themselves face to face with Drakaina Sybaris.

"I thought as much!" she screamed, violently jabbing what looked like branding irons – though they did not hurt – into their flesh before they had a chance to react, her speed incredible. "Shadow Wardens, no doubt!"

Lila tried to deny the accusation, but her mind would not cooperate, having probably decided it would be a wasted effort. Kween spread her arms wide, ready to conjure an attack, but the tell-tale dancing flashes of brightly coloured lightning were curiously absent.

"Oh, your magic will avail you none now, Cernian scum!" the architect smiled triumphantly,
though it was more of a curl of her lip than an actual smile. Throwing aside the metal rods, she picked up a delicate bottle from her belt and held the seemingly empty vessel between two fingers. Taking a step away from the bed, she let it crash to the floor. A hiss filled the air and before she could figure out what had just happen, Lila felt her body weaken and her vision starting to blur. The last thing she saw was Drakaina Sybaris turning around to leave them, then it all went black.

When she came to, Lila found herself lying on a mattress of straw, chains around her feet and hands. Looking about for as much as her restraints allowed her, she could see Kween similarly indisposed, staring indignantly at the ceiling.

"It is good to see you have finally awoken." Lila looked up to see Sybaris enter the room, now dressed in a gown of red, black and gold, a shawl covering her head. Her hands were folded across her abdomen, somewhere within her expansive sleeves, giving her a sombre, and at the same time fairly intimidating appearance.

"I apologize that my servant Jalinda seems to have been unwilling to share our food, gorging herself while you have gone hungry." she said solemnly, her wolfish smirk suggesting she was not so concerned for their well-being. "Allow me to rectify this. Right away."

And with that, an army of spindly black little sprites marched in, though it was hard to see them, weighed down as they were with overflowing vats of gruel.

"Now eat, gorge, and grow fat!" the architect said, her voice animated, but steady. She looked at Kween; "I think I might eat you first."

Either there was still some of Kween's magic left in the food or lady Sybaris had a few tricks of her own up her sleeve, because once the imps had coaxed her to take one bite, Lila felt her resistance crumble, opening her mouth wide to the incoming feast. She was not to be disappointed; the imps were relentless, barely allowing her time to breath – and after a few portions, that was exactly the way she wanted it; the gruel was so delicious her mind practically melted at its taste, removing all thoughts but the desire for more. Losing track of time, the world shrunk down to the food being crammed into her mouth and her rapidly distending stomach; she was faintly aware of the skin of her belly straining against the fabric of her bodice as she grew, but she was only concerned with one thing: More! And more, and more, until her incessant hunger faded into nothingness and she lost consciousness.

Waking up again, Lila had no time to get her bearings before a big ladle was crammed into her mouth once more, her tongue immediately coming to life, trying to scoop up as much as possible before the utensil left her mouth again. At first, she was aware of a vague pain in her distended
belly, but as the gruel kept pouring into her hungry mouth, it died down, all her senses devolving into ravenous desire once more. It did not take long before she drifted into unconsciousness again.

There was no way for Lila to count how many times she woke to be fed only to faint again before finally coming to without finding a gleeful sprite cramming her full of gruel.

"Ugh... I'm sorry, but I seem to have eaten you, Kween..." she moaned, suddenly realizing her hands were free to clutch her seemingly naga-sized belly. Opening her eyes, she realized she might have exaggerated, but it did not prevent her gut from obscuring her vision, looming more than two feet above the floor, and immobilizing her far more than the chains ever could.

"I'd like to to see you try!" Kween groaned, catching Lila's attention. The sorceress seemed to have been at least as well fed as herself, her stomach bulging threateningly through her ruined shirt, so impossibly enormous Lila could not believe it had not ruptured long ago.

"Do you... really think she will... eat us?" the ex-thief asked, her breath laboured.

"I cannot see why she should do this otherwise." Kween opined.

"Oh..." Lila said thoughtfully, "I sure hope we get more to eat first..."

"You ravenous rattlebrain!" the sorceress shouted, "Quit thinking about delicious, irresistible, tasty gruel for one second!"

"Oooh... gruel..." Lila said dreamily before snapping out of her reverie, "I mean, yes, of course; we need to get out of here! Can't you just... shift back... into a naga...?"

"Not without magic..." Kween mumbled angrily, "...or until the effect wears of..."

"How long is that?"

"Maybe a few days, maybe weeks, depending on how long we have been here."

"A few weeks??" Lila grinned with bubbling glee. From beyond her bloated belly was the clang of the dungeon gate. "Oh, great! The food's here!"

Over the next days, or rather any period of time, for any accurate measure of time was meaningless, Lila subtly felt her body swell as she gulped down immense amounts of the fatty gruel served to them. Her thickening thighs strained against her skirt, eventually breaking free of confinement, tearing long gashes through which her bulging flesh oozed, skin tight from her rapid weight gain. A thick layer of flab had settled across her distended belly, creating a soft cushion around her stuffed stomach and making it bigger than ever. Having given up on containing her gut a long time ago, Lila's bodice was starting to lose the battle against the rest of her as well, flaring out to accommodate her bulging flanks and with flabby flesh poking through split seams all over. Her body rendered immobile, her thickening double chin was beginning to hamper her field of vision, restricting her to looking up at the ceiling or to her sides. She considered checking how Kween was
But I want food! she complained to herself, despite feeling ready to explode. With no food forthcoming, she rolled her head over to the side:

"Do you... think they..." laying eyes on the sorceress beside her, she was rendered speechless. If Lila had been overfed, Kween must have been gorged half to death. Her already ample thighs had simply burst through her skirt – leaving only ripped cloth – each one probably bigger than Sybaris' waist. Propped up on pillows, probably so they might feed her even more, her hefty gut spilling over her thighs, the layer of fat so thick the beginnings of a huge belly roll were starting to form, despite her stomach being at least as stuffed as Lila's. The sorceress's love handles were bulging like overripe fruit, each the size of a pumpkin. Even her arms, draped across the pillows, must have grown two- or even threefold and, like the rest of her flesh, were so tight and bloated her white skin seemed to be shining – briefly, Lila wondered if she might see her own reflection in her companion's thighs. Her angular jaw had given way to a soft double chin, her once well-defined cheeks had puffed up to obscure her vision and flank her nose on each side. Her ample bosom was prominently propped up by the fat rolls above her stomach and partially concealed, if no longer contained by the tattered remnants of her shirt.

"Wow..." the priestess eventually managed.

"Silence!" Kween ordered, closely followed the sound of the gate, footsteps and the sound of Sybaris' voice:

"Well, well, well. Look who finally woke up. Regretfully, I have to inform you that there is no gruel left. Not to worry; I do not think it will bother you for long..."

Standing on the landing at the dungeon entrance to their left, the architect was visible even to the glutted Lila, dressed in a hooded gown of black with veins of gold meandering across its surface. Underneath her hood, her eyes were glowing intently as she looked them over.

"What's in that stuff, anyway?" Lila wondered, a little upset, though whether it was because the architect had not come to feed them, or because she was about to be eaten, she could not tell. In fact, she was feeling a bit odd, as if she was boiling inside, about to explode.

Oh my, I finally did it; I have eaten myself to death, she decided.

"Oh, just your ordinary cream, butter and sugar – and of course a dash of that magic of yours, extracted from the cook. I am sorry to tell you, she did not survive the process."

"Listen up, Sybaris," Kween called out confidently, Lila barely hearing, being preoccupied with presumably blowing up, "what do say we make a deal: You let us go and I won't crush you for harming my follower?" The architect chuckled heartily, a laugh completely devoid of any mirth.

"Oh, what a tempting offer!" she mocked. "However, I think I will have to be content with eating you both."

"So be it..." Kween said menacingly, grinning with malicious intent. Distracted by her skin
seemingly bubbling and flesh melting like hot wax, Lila still managed to see the sorceress turning a sickly shade of blue in the corner of her eye. And then, she decided it best to pass out.

The magic of the polymorph potion leaving her body, Kween's flabby thighs began to fuse together as scales began to appear on their bluing skin. Arms shot out of her torso, her entire form crackling with the power of mana as she drew energy from the rapidly digesting food in her equally rapidly shrinking belly. Rising up on her nearly formed tail, she answered Sybaris' slightly puzzled look with a smug grin.

"Really now..." the architect said with what for her must have passed for surprise. As she did, she began to rise above the floor as the thick yellow-green tail of a snake emerged from her skirts, arms spreading wide to brandish sharp claws on scaled hands. Staring intently on the transforming naga beneath her, the lamia's face contorted into one of animalistic ferocity, the gold in her eyes growing more obvious, her pupils shrinking to black slits.

"I thought as much..." Kween commented, purple-pink energy leaping across her arms. Leaning forward, she threw a huge cylinder of roaring magical power, just missing the lightning-quick lamia and annihilating the doorway behind her.

"Well, this is an interesting turn of events!" Sybaris called out, sounding genuinely thrilled, and began to close the distance between them, ducking and weaving to avoid the flying bolts of energy. Concentrating all hands in one final bolt, Kween blew a large crater in the floor where the lamia had just stood, sending shock waves throughout the mansion. Moving to avoid the attack, Sybaris lunged towards the naga, snarling viciously to reveal sharp teeth and a long, slender tongue dancing among them. Kween began to dodge the incoming claws, but, being a good deal bigger and heavier than her opponent, changed her mind and reached out with her hands. Realizing the naga's change in tactics a split second too late, the lamia found her hands caught in Kween's grip.

"Now, about that deal..." the sorceress said with slow deliberation and started to wrench her opponent to the ground.

"I'm listening." Sybaris smiled, quickly lashing out with her tail against the hands holding her. Just as one hand lost its grip, another moved to take its place, the grapple turning into a stalemate. Finally managing to wrench one arm free, the lamia arched her body, quickly spinning around to curl her tail around the naga's chest. Finding her opponent at her back, Kween stretched and flailed her arms for a firmer hold, but could not find the manoeuvrability to reach Sybaris. Instead, she began to struggle with the coiling tail, using her strength in an attempt to prevent the lamia from constricting her.

"Is this not exciting?" Sybaris hissed, moving closer to Kween's ear. Moving along with the force of the lamia's embrace, Kween arched backwards, her gut rising prominently beneath Sybaris' tail. Twisting her entire body, the naga spun around, partially dislodging her opponent and, grabbing
hold of the tail around her chest, threw her to the ground. Spending valuable time getting her bearings, Sybaris suddenly found herself pinned down by six arms, the huge form of Kween looming above her.

"Hello, my name is Kween," the naga introduced herself smugly, using her weight to immobilize the lamia's writhing tail, "and I have a job for you." Sybaris made a final attempt to break free, but found the naga to heavy to shift.

"A pleasure doing business with you." she smiled wryly, ceasing her struggling.

"Ah! Isn't it great being one's old self?" Kween smiled triumphantly and leant back as their cart slowly pulled itself up the hill above Libe, putting four of her hands behind her head. Lila did not reply, deciding the naga could only sound cheerful if it was to annoy or belittle her. Not being quite as magical as Kween – or magical at all, actually – the ex-thief had found that, when she woke up to see the naga crushing the carnivorous architect with her body weight, instead of fuelling magical power, the undigested gruel had simply gifted her with a thicker midsection as the polymorph spell wore off. If nothing else, the weight she had gained during Drakaina Sybaris' fattening had not carried over, but it certainly did little to alleviate the space problem in the cart. Obviously, Kween's cheerfulness had to be smug mocking of her discomfort. Nevertheless, it was little she could do but live with it and hope the next inn they stayed at knew how to roast their pork. *Mmm, roasted pork...*

"This is the last time I'm going anywhere with you in that thing!" Lila declared as they approached the temple, after they had finally managed to manoeuvre themselves out of the cart and onto the boat.

"I'm beginning to think the loftiness of your station is going to your head." Kween shook her head in mock disappointment.

"No, it's going to my hips!" the priestess countered, slapping her hip for emphasis, her anger unabated by the naga's jesting. "Anyway, how can you be so sure you can trust Sybaris?"

"Simple: I can't." the sorceress admitted, "However, I do trust her ego to rise to the challenge I gave her."

"Oh, Kween, how you do play on people's strings!" Lila praised dramatically as they entered. "Speaking of untrustworthy people; we must have been away for weeks, aren't you afraid the Predator Patrol will have flown off – with all the peasants they can carry?"

"You know what...?" Kween said as the door closed behind them. Lying sprawled on straw and feather beds were Thelxiepeia, Parthenope, Leucosia, Aglaope and Peisinoe, grown so fat it would have been a bit hard to recognize them if it were not for their wings – and their persistent nudity. Having plumped up to at least twice the size they were when Lila and Kween last saw them, it was
obvious that the sirens had been well fed in their absence. In the middle of the gorged gaggle stood Ligeia by a huge cauldron, dressed only in her apron as always, dipping a ladle deep into the last remnants of stew.

"Please Ligeia!" Leucosia pleaded as the ladle approached her, clutching her bloated belly, "No more! I'm so full, I... I... I say..." Inhaling the aroma, the siren gave in, eagerly slurping up the offered food.

"My turn!" Parthenope panted from behind her stuffed stomach, arms and wings spread out in gluttonous surrender.

"No, me first!" Peisinoe moaned, and the bickering continued.

Kween turned to Lila:

"I don't think that will be a problem."