

# Liliana's Indignation

## Kelly Digges

From set *Shadows Over Innistrad*

*When we last saw her, Liliana Vess was receiving an unwelcome guest: fellow Planeswalker Jace Beleren. Jace was looking for Sorin Markov, and tried to convince Liliana to come with him to Markov Manor. When she refused, he set out on his own. What he found there eventually led him to the coast of Nephalia. Liliana, meanwhile, has problems of her own....*

Rain hammered against the windows. A flash of lightning illuminated bare stone walls and a couple of shambling corpses. A boom of thunder followed half a breath later.

Getting closer, then. Good. She needed the lightning, and the storm matched her mood. She sat on a high-backed stone chair, brooding.

*How did it come to this?*

Every path she sought toward freedom only seemed to lead her to more closed doors, more dead ends to escape. She'd made demonic pacts to make herself ageless, undying, at the paltry cost of a soul she was hardly using anyway.

Her breath no longer steamed, even on cold nights like this one.

But demons are harsh masters, and soon she found herself working to subvert her pacts, to kill her demons—to have immortality and freedom both. And so...the Chain Veil.



Swamp | Art by Jonas De Ro

It whispered to her, even now, from the hidden pocket where she kept it. With it, she had killed two demons, lords among their kind. With it, she had commanded armies of the undead even she had never dreamt of, had besieged and taken Thraben itself, the greatest city on Innistrad, just to get her hands on one of those demons.

But the Veil...

She could no longer bring herself to wear the thing on her face, to feel its silken-soft links against her skin. She hated touching it. But when she tried to get rid of it, the pain was unbearable.

And using it was worse.

"Liliana," said a voice. A familiar voice. Wasn't it?

She stood.

"I'm busy," she said, loudly and clearly. "If you've come to torment me again, get on with it."

Something prickled at her temples, a sensation like fingers prying at the door.

"Torment?" said the voice. "I didn't realize it was that bad."

Lightning flashed, illuminating a large black bird perched on the windowsill. As the thunder's echo in her ears subsided, a second voice spoke, seemingly right in her ear.

"I didn't say anything," said the Raven Man.

She turned. There he was beside her, with his white hair, golden eyes, and elegant black and gold robes belonging to a very different time and place. He was...well, she wasn't sure quite what he was, an ignorance she tolerated only because she had no choice. He had appeared to her in her youth, taunted her, taught her. He had set her on the path that brought her here, and appeared now and then to keep her on it.

He could rot in in the nearest available hell, as far as she was concerned.



Art by Chris Rahn

"I'm not in the mood for wordplay," said Liliana.

"Fine," said the first voice. A different voice, definitely, full of sharp suspicion. "Then let's cut to the chase."

The Raven Man's spectral lips hadn't moved. And he didn't look wryly amused, as he usually did. He looked...worried.

*Oh, hells.*

Liliana looked away from the Raven Man. She made a fist, filling it with deadly magic ready to unleash at a moment's notice.

"Let's do," she said. "We'll start with who you are and what you're doing in my house."

Lightning flashed again, this time illuminating a figure, cloaked and hooded. Liliana's scalp crawled.

"You know who I am," said the voice—not from where the figure had been standing. "What you don't know is what I know."

That prickling sensation again. Almost like...

"You'd better do something," said the Raven Man. "I can't keep him out of your head forever."

In an instant, fear became fury.

"*Jace?* Are you insane? I almost killed you!"

"You almost tried," said the voice.

Jace. She'd befriended him on false pretenses, played on his emotions, manipulated him into joining an interplanar crime syndicate, then into overthrowing it. By the time it all went wrong, she'd grown genuinely fond of him, and betraying him had torn out one more strand of her threadbare sense of humanity. Not that that had stopped her, and anyway, if she hadn't done it they'd both be heroically, uselessly dead. Still, she could see why he might bear a grudge.

But never before, at any point in their dysfunctional association, had he threatened her.

She could see him now, right in front of her. She willed her zombie minions to attack him, but ropes of light bound their arms and legs, sent them toppling to the ground. She mentally beckoned more to help, to overwhelm him, but felt no reply.

"They're not coming," said Jace. "All tied up."

Liliana had never actually seen Jace lose a fight he'd had time to prepare for.

"Get out of my house," said Liliana.

"Why?" said Jace. "Am I scaring you?"

His eyes glinted beneath his hood.

"I certainly hope this display is frightening you," said the Raven Man. "This isn't like him."

"Yes," said Liliana, to Jace. "This isn't like you. I'm not convinced this *is* you."

The sensation at her temples became a pounding, with a whisper of voices behind it. She resisted the impulse to strain to hear them, which would only give him an opening. He really was attacking her, then.

*Enough!* She lashed out at him with a whip of death magic—just enough to cause agony.

The bolt of purple light slid right through him, and his image popped like a soap bubble.

"First you try to hide it from me," he said, this time from a corner of the room. "Now you're trying to silence me. But you can't hide something this big. Not forever."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Liliana. "I don't know what you think is happening. But you are *way* out of line."

She turned toward him, but when he spoke again he was behind her. She'd seen him use his illusions and his mind magic to melt away into the shadows and become a phantom, to keep his opponents guessing. He'd never done it to her, and she didn't care for it.

"The drownyard," he said. "The angels! I've seen what they're building out there. And you're helping them. Admit it!"

The pressure at her temples became a splitting pain.

"Liliana," said the Raven Man. "I've invested too much in you—"

"Stop it!" said Liliana. "There are a lot of drownyards on Innistrad, I *warned* you about the angels, and you know damn well I wouldn't help an angel for all the gold in Orzhova!"

"Not for gold," he said. "For the Chain Veil, for the problem I wouldn't help you solve. You tried to keep me from seeing what happened to Markov Manor. You tried to keep me from finding Sorin. Why? Afraid I'll tell him what you're up to?"

"I tried to keep you from getting yourself killed," said Liliana. "And I don't know anything about Markov Manor I haven't already told you."

"You can't lie to me," said Jace. He seemed to be losing his train of thought. "You know better. You're... you're redirecting a whole world's mana into this...moon...thing, just to—just to be rid of the Chain Veil? Is that it?"

His voice was coming from all around the room now, his hooded form moving every time she blinked. There were two of him, then three. This little show would be annoying enough even if she'd actually done whatever it was. Based on false accusations, it was downright infuriating.

"Days ago you came to my door asking for help, Jace," she said. "Yet now here you are with accusations?"

"You can't keep secrets from me," he said, an edge of menace creeping into his voice. "All I need is time."

"I don't know what you ever saw in him," said the Raven Man, his face very close to hers. "You're nothing to him but a puzzle to be solved. And he's nothing to you, nothing whatsoever. Or did I misunderstand you?"

"Whatever you're accusing me of," said Liliana, "step out into the light and say it to my face. This isn't what you think it is."

"How would you know what I think?" snapped Jace. "And why should I trust anything you say? You've done nothing but lie to me, caused me nothing but pain."

Her head throbbed.

"He's getting through your defenses," hissed the Raven Man. "*Do something!*"

One of the images of Jace snapped his head toward the Raven Man, eyes wide.

"Who—"

*So you can see him!*

There was no time to dwell on that revelation, which was followed quickly by another. Liliana smiled.

*And I can see you.*

She let loose a bolt of magic at Jace, the real Jace, that left him doubled over in pain. The other two Jaces vanished.

“Now then—” she started to say. But the pressure at her temples started up again. Damned fool.

She raked another blast of necromantic energy over him. He cried out, fell to the floor—and lifted his head, eyes glowing, face contorted.



Liliana's Indignation | Art by Daarken

“Tell me what I need to know,” he said, rising. “Tell me about the drownyard.”

“He’s asking leading questions, trying to bring certain thoughts to the front of your mind,” said the Raven Man. He smirked. “A basic maneuver of the telepath.”

The smug bastard was right. Liliana’s vision swam as Jace tried to force his way into her mind.

“Stop it,” she said. “Even if I knew anything about a drownyard, your tricks wouldn’t work on me.”

She sent another bolt of agony through him, then another, but he kept up his attacks. He fell, rose, fell again—and this time only made it back up to his knees before she lashed him again.

“Tell me,” he growled.

Her skin had begun to burn, her demonic scars etched in purple flame. And the Veil...oh, the Veil wanted to help her. It siphoned off a few stray rivulets of necromantic energy and returned them to the stream fivefold. She struggled to hold it back, to keep it from killing him instantly.

“Stop doing this!” she said. “I can’t control—”

Jace was screaming now, eyes still glowing, his assaults on her mind intensifying along with the pain.

*“Just...tell...me!”*

The backlash started, agony suffusing Liliana as the Chain Veil took its toll. Blood began to drip from her scars. She gritted her teeth. She'd felt worse, though—when the scars were administered, for instance. She'd survive this. Jace might not.

"He's almost broken through," said the Raven Man. "Kill him."

"Don't tell me what to do!" she shouted—at both of them, at the Chain Veil, at the moon and the world and at death itself. "Stop it!"

"You'll have to kill me," wheezed Jace, tears streaming from inhuman glowing eyes. Liliana's vision began to fade.

"Do it," said the Raven Man.

"Jace, *I don't want to hurt you anymore!*"

The words echoed against stone, the pounding in her head stopped, and for a moment there was no sound but the boom of thunder and the drumming of the rain. The Raven Man sighed in disgust and disappeared in a rustle of feathers.

The glow in Jace's eyes faded, and he stared up at her, wan and sweating, looking suddenly very vulnerable and very young.

"Any more?" said Jace. His voice was hoarse. "As in, any longer? Or as in more than you already—"

"I don't owe you any answers," said Liliana. "And you damn well owe me some."

That, at least, told her she was dealing with the real Jace. Who else would pick apart her wording rather than face the reality of the situation?

"What did you do to me?" he asked, breath still coming in heavy gasps. "I feel like death."

"That's the idea."

He almost smiled, then his eyes went wide and he staggered to his feet.

"You're bleeding!" he said.

"Yes."

Genuine concern, moments after trying to pry open her mind like a jam jar.

"We should—"

"No," she said. "Tell me what the hell is going on."

Finally, a few zombies padded into the room. Not her freshest specimens. These were the tattered ones she used for sentry duty—he'd probably missed them on his sweep. She set them between her and Jace, but didn't have them attack. Not yet.

"You really don't know?"

Zombies grabbed his arms and legs. He didn't struggle.

"Jace," she said through gritted teeth. "Explain. Now."

"I went to Markov Manor," he said. "It was...inside out, rocks floating everywhere, vampires stuck in the walls. All that. Right? I found a book. It's a fascinating book. She's been studying—"

"Who?"

Lightning flashed, and Liliana saw the book on his belt. It was a large, ornate thing with an unusual binding. She wouldn't mind perusing it herself—unless it was the reason Jace was so out of sorts.





Tamiyo's Journal | Art by Chase Stone

"The moonfolk! She's been—you know moonfolk? *Fascinating* book. She's been studying the moon—the moon, and what it causes. The tides, the werewolves, the angels. It's all connected! Those weird stones in the countryside—you haven't touched them, have you? Don't touch them. Just...don't. They all point the same way, so there was a, um...a...they all point *toward* something, is what I'm saying. Not a compass point. A place."

"Where?"

A crash of thunder.

"Parallax!" said Jace, looking at the window, as though the storm had answered him. "That's the word, thank you."

"*What place?*"

"Nephil...Neph...Nephalia," he stammered. "A drownyard, on the coast. I mean, they're all on the coast. Of course they are. *Drown*. Drawn. I was drawn, to this particular one. That's where I saw it."

"Saw what?"

"The moon!" he said.

She glanced out the window and raised an eyebrow. The moon was hidden behind rain clouds, but her point was clear.

"Not *that* moon," he said. "The other moon. Invisible...but I saw...doesn't matter. There were angels flying around. Zombies, too. I mean, the angels were flying. They were—uh, the zombies—were building some huge stone structure, angels wheeling in the sky, and I thought—I thought—since you'd tried to keep me from going to Markov Manor...and I know how much you're worried about the Veil. Enough to try something really...crazy."

He stared at her, eyes suddenly clear.

"It's full of ghosts," he said. "Souls. And you want to be rid of the ghosts but keep their power for yourself. And if there's one thing they know about here, it's ghosts—"

Her throat tightened, and for a moment she thought he really had read her mind. Then he snapped his head to one side, where there was nothing but a silent zombie, holding him in place.

"Shut up!" he hissed. "Geists, fine! Who cares?"

"Who—"

"Never mind!" he said. "These stone things are redirecting all this mana, and it's all going to this drownyard henge, and the zombies are building it and the angels are going mad and you hate angels and you might...you might need a lot of mana. To be rid of the Chain Veil, or to alter it somehow. That makes sense. Doesn't it?"

"No," she said. "It doesn't make any sense, and you're not acting like yourself."

It wasn't that unlike Jace, really, to get over-involved in a particularly enticing mystery. But no matter how deep he got, he maintained some measure of control—of himself and his powers, if not of the situation. And the one time she'd seen him lose control, he'd ended up putting himself under a mental lockout that took half a year and the death of a friend to snap him out of.

Jace was a very powerful telepath. If he went mad, he'd take her with him. Among others.

"Don't experiment with the Veil," he said. "Don't do it. So many voices. So many souls. You don't know what you might unleash."

"I—"

"Tell me you won't experiment with the Veil."



The Chain Veil | Art by Volkan Baga

She knelt down next to him and tried to hold his attention. She didn't want to touch him. She was, in fact, afraid of him. Nonetheless, she cupped his chin, made him look at her. He blinked and flinched.

"Jace," she said quietly. "What happened to you out there?"



"Nothing," he said. "Everything. Nothing *happened*. Everything was already like this."

He tried to turn his head, but she held him in place until he was forced to look at her. She stared into eyes that were not quite the eyes she knew.

"You really didn't do this?" he said.

"I really didn't."

"Oh, thank *gods*," he said.

He slumped forward, and her zombies let go of him. Liliana gently laid his head in her lap, running her fingers through his hair, thinking fast.

She had to keep him here. Had to get him to a healer, or maybe a geistmage—to someone, anyone, who could untangle whatever had happened to his mind. He wouldn't be safe until she did, and neither would she.

"You need some rest," she said. "Some time to think. And a bath, if you don't mind me saying so."

He pushed her hand off of his head and sat up. She rested her hand on his on the stone floor, trying to anchor him. Trying to keep him here.

"No time," he said. "If it's not you—"

"It's not like you to go running off on a hunch," said Liliana.

Keep him focused. Keep him here.

"I know people here. I have access to resources you don't. If this drownyard you saw is connected to what's happening with the angels, we can uncover it."

"The shepherd turns on her flock," said Jace.

He meant Avacyn. Avacyn had turned on her own, had unleashed violence and cruelty that seemed to shock everyone besides Liliana.

"Is that from your book?" said Liliana.

Jace looked at her, eyes suddenly focused again. He pulled his hand back and clutched the book on his belt.

"You don't get to read it."

"I don't want—" said Liliana, then decided on honesty. "I won't."

"I have to go to Thraben," he said.

"What?"

"Thraben," he said. "That's where the cathedral is, right? That's where I'll find Avacyn."

"You can't just walk up to Avacyn and demand answers," said Liliana. "Especially not now. She will kill you."

*And I'm not sure she'd be wrong, at this point.* That grim calculation still stung, and Liliana took a measure of comfort in that.

"Thraben," he said firmly. "Have you been there?"

"Yes."

Been there, seen it, sacked it with an army of zombies. She wasn't keen on going back.

"Will you—"

"No," she said. "I'm not going with you. Jace, be sensible. Stay here. We'll make inquiries. We'll find out what's really going on."

"We," echoed Jace.

He staggered to his feet, looming over her as lightning flashed and thunder boomed. She let him.

"You and I are not a *we*," he said. "You're trying to keep me here."

She rose, smoothly, and looked him in the eye.

"You got me," she said. "I am trying to keep you here. Because you need help, and I want to help you."

"You want to help me," he said, "but only if I'll stay with you. Only as long as it's convenient. That about sums things up, doesn't it?"

There was only so much of this she could take. Her right hand flared with necromantic energy, acrid and purple-white.

"Right now," she said, "the most *convenient* thing I could possibly do is strike you dead and stop worrying what kind of violence you're going to stir up by shouting accusations at an insane archangel."

He stepped closer, grabbed her wrist—had he ever grabbed her wrist like that?—and pointed her glowing palm at his chest.

"Do it," he said. His voice was hoarse and wild.

It wouldn't be the worst thing she'd ever done. End the threat. End the uncertainty. If their situations were reversed, she knew he'd at least consider it.

"You ever have a pet when you were a kid?" she asked instead. "A mouse or something?"

Her hand still crackled with carefully contained necromancy.

"I...I don't remember when I was a kid. Much anyway." He glanced down at her hand in almost child-like confusion. "W-why?"

"Humor me," she said. "You must have taken care of an animal at some point."

"There was...a dog," he said. "In Ovitzia. I fed her scraps. Scratched her head when I went by."

"What happened to the dog?"

"One day I came by and she was—" He stopped, swallowed, blinked. "Why are you asking me this?"

"How did you *feel*?"

"Sad," he said. "Pretty devastated, actually, for a while. But I—I got over it, obviously."

"Why?"

"Because...because I always knew it was going to end that way. Didn't think about it, but I knew. I—Lili, *why*?"

"Because that's how I'll feel when you're dead, you idiot," she said. "Sad. For a while. And then I'll get over it. Because I always knew it was going to end that way. So don't lean too hard on my good intentions toward you. One of these days you'll find they no longer support your weight."

He let go of her wrist and stepped back.

"I'm probably going to die in Thraben," he said. "Sorry in advance for that. But somebody has to know what's going on."

Jace turned and walked away.

She watched him go, then peered out the rain-streaked window as his hooded shape slipped into the shadows outside her manor.

"Mistress," said a rasping voice from the stairwell. Gared, his name was. With his hunched back and different-sized eyes, he did a fair impression of a homunculus.



Behind the Scenes | Art by David Gaillet

She turned, trying not to look startled.

"How long have you been watching?"

"Oh, a while," croaked the squat figure, tapping a finger against his engorged right eyeball. "S'what I do around here, mostly."

"So he could've read your mind?"

"Oh, no, Mistress. Haven't got one. Master says so, anyway."

He cackled inanely.

"Fine," said Liliana. "Is it time?"

"The Master bids you come to the tower," said Gared, head bobbing. "Storm's in full swing. He needs the Object."

She snorted. Gared turned and ambled toward the stairs.

"I wish you'd call it what it is," she said.

"Master Dierk is a man of learning," said Gared. "He wishes to remain detached from the, ah, poetry of the situation. What does it chain, hmm? What does it veil? You? *Them*?"

"Shut up," said Liliana. But she followed.

"Yes, Mistress," said Gared, with no greater deference. "That's the rest of what I do around here, mostly."

Liliana followed the lurching figure to the stairwell of the high tower. She pulled the Chain Veil from her pocket and glanced to the window, thinking of Jace, unsure whether to worry for him or fear him. On a branch, in silhouette, a raven croaked its reproach. Then lightning flashed, thunder boomed, and the raven was gone. Liliana walked upward, into darkness.



Crow of Dark Tidings | Art by Tianhua X