

Demon Queened

Chapter 27

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Content warning: Dehumanizing use of “it.” (Very short lived, but present.)

Feyra

I eyed the monster-who-may-or-may-not-have-been-the-Demon-Queen for a moment, before activating my curse to get another look at her magic power. It was basically the same as before - pants-shitting-ly *terrifying*. I was pretty sure she had enough magic in her to fry the entire city from where she was standing - Heroine included - without breaking a sweat!

“I don’t suppose you could at least clarify the reason for your distaste?” it questioned, arching an eyebrow. “I’d appreciate the chance to address it, at the very least.”

“It’s nothing,” I said, forcing myself to give it a weak smile. “I’m just not good with people I don’t know.”

“Meaning that you know Lucy well?”

“Everyone knows the Heroine. Not well enough to call her by *name*, though.”

Shit. I had to fight the urge to flinch at my own words. Was I *trying* to pick a fight with the thing? Trying to get myself fucking *killed*? I was just glad the Heroine was still here, because otherwise-

“Well, I’m going to get some supplies!” said Heroine announced, with a big bright smile that stood in total contrast to the *fucking doom* she was hurling my way with every word out of her mouth. “Why don’t you help Feyra get her stuff ready, Eena? I’m sure it would be a great opportunity for you two to get to know each other!”

“Wait, you can’t seriously be planning to leave me alone with that...” I glanced at the creature in question, before settling on, “person?”

“I must admit that I’m not entirely satisfied with the idea of being left with someone who needs to think so hard on my classification, either,” the monster added. “One would think personhood to be at least somewhat guaranteed...”

“Wait. Are you seriously *offended*?” I asked. I was ready to follow that up with a scoff, but the glare it... *she* gave me froze me in place. Not because she looked murderous or furious, or anything - because she didn’t. She looked *irritated*.

“Is the concept so shocking?” she demanded. “Would you enjoy being treated as an object? Or a monster? I know not what bothers you about me, but I hope *you* realize that it’s only for Lucy’s sake that I’m not already turning down this proposal of hers.”

Anger I’d call fake. Hurt? An obvious play at sympathy. But irritation? It was weirdly...human. As stupidly irrational as that might sound.

“...The same Lucy who has decided to put action to words and leave us alone, I might add,” the brunette continued, after a moment. “Honestly, that girl... What sort of person just throws her friends together in a room and leaves?”

“We’re not friends,” I replied, woodenly. “And we’re not in a room.”

I couldn’t believe the Heroine had left me alone with her.

I couldn’t believe I was *arguing* with her. Shouldn’t I have been... I don’t know... Groveling for my life, or something? Trying desperately to appease her?

Except that I had *no idea what she wanted in the first place*.

“She didn’t even specify when or where we’re to meet back up,” the dear-Goddess-just-let-her-be-a-dragon-or-something grumbled. “Seriously, that girl is so sloppy sometimes...”

Agreed. Except for some reason the definitely-Demon-Queen-with-my-luck was *smiling* when she said it.

Though it turned into a heart stoppingly terrifying scowl when she turned her attention back to me. “And if you’re not friends, then why is she so determined to make us get along?”

“Because your girlfriend’s a complete and total busybody, maybe?”

And also the Heroine.

I was badmouthing the Heroine.

In public.

What was *wrong* with me?

“We’re not dating,” the demon muttered, looking away from me. Was she... *blushing*? “In truth, I’m barely qualified to be her friend, regardless of what she thinks on the matter. She hardly even knows me...”

“Since when has that stopped her?” I asked, because apparently I had a fucking death wish. Or maybe it was just that I had no fucking clue what magical words would make her *not* want to kill me, anyway, so it was probably better to risk going out with a bang than hold back and die with a whimper. “That girl would befriend a literal monster if they let her, and you’re over here calling her by *name*.”

Or maybe I was just a fucking idiot who didn’t know how to hold her tongue.

“You and her both keep referring to that as if it’s some great and amazing thing,” the disaster-on-two-legs said with a sigh, “but to me, calling one as they wish to be called seems to only be polite... Rather than acting as if I’m doing everything possible to be close to her, perhaps you should consider why everyone else is so determined to keep *away* from her.”

“Because she’s the *Heroine*. She’s-”

“A person,” the bane-of-all-existence interrupted, narrowing her eyes at me. “One who deserves to be seen as the lonely girl she is, and not just the symbol you all want her to be.”

“...Whatever,” I muttered. Because what the hell was I supposed to even say to that? How was I meant to explain to the maybe-embodiment-of-sin that most people didn’t like hanging around someone who had the right to *judge them for their sins*? “I’ve got a few things I need to handle if we’re going on a trip. Some of which require me to go outside the walls. Feel free to just hang out here, though - I’ll tell the Heroine we tried to get along, if you do.”

“Tempting,” she replied, before shaking her head. “But I promised Lucy that I would not lie to her. If you’re going beyond the walls to take care of your business, then I see no choice but to follow.”

“Of course...” Okay. Smile at the maybe-source-of-all-evil, me. Smile and pretend that everything is okay.

“Besides,” the living-embodiment-of-terror added, “you’ve already made up your mind to join us, have you not? So we might as well make a sincere attempt at getting along.”

...Fuck. I *had* made up my mind, hadn’t I? I mean, I couldn’t exactly let the Heroine walk away with the Demon Queen, never to return. Not after everyone had seen me with them!

Not that I’d be able to do much more than die at ‘Eena’s’ hand if I tried to get in the way... Hell, if she really was the fucking Demon Queen, then maybe she’d even make use of my cursed blood and turn me into one of her servants for

real. Turn all those rumors about me into fact... But hey, better a life under the evil queen than a death from being torn apart by a mob of angry city folk who wanted to know what the fuck happened to their beloved Heroine!

It wasn't like I'd be able to sleep soundly knowing I sent said Heroine off to her doom, either, so...

"Though speaking of that request," the new-bane-of-my-existence added, "I'm afraid Lucy failed to fill me in on the details. Perhaps you could regale me with information along the way?"

"...Fuck it. Follow me." I gestured for the all-powerful-being-that-could-crush-me-like-a-bug to follow. She did - walking just a little to the side of me, where I couldn't help but catch sight of her in the corner of my eye. Like she was actively *trying* to give me a heart attack.

"First off," I explained, "what do you know about the Monster Movement?"

"Nothing," the probable-mother-of-all-monsters replied, shaking her head. "Though if I had to guess, I would say it had something to do with the movement of monsters?"

I snorted. She was being a smartass! The nightmare-of-all-nightmares was cracking jokes! And smiling, when she saw my reaction... Almost like she was happy to amuse me.

Was she even capable of feeling positive emotions like that? Or was she just trying to lull me into a false sense of security? I could always ask... if I wanted to die a horrible death at her hands. Or worse - get a well meaning lecture from the Heroine.

“Something like that,” I said, instead. “More specifically, *something* happens inside Daroom Woods every three years or so - nobody has a clue what, but it makes the local monsters wig out and start moving out of the depths. Which makes the monsters that live near the edges move, and... basically just fucks up everything for everyone. But the important bit for us is that it makes the healberries in Daroom Woods harder to get, which jacks up the price of healing potions to the point where no commoner can afford them.”

“Really?” the monster-in-human-skin asked, arching an eyebrow. “I would think that bit about it ‘fucking up everything for everyone’ would have just as much to do with us - that *is* why Lucy wants us to solve the root problem, is it not?”

“Yeah, well... she’s the Heroine,” I replied, shrugging my shoulders. “It’s her job to worry about stuff like that. We’ll get first your rookie request taken care of as long as we can get the healberries, though. There’s a standing request for them at the guild.”

“If it were anyone but Lucy at the helm, I’d say my request was more of an excuse than a reason,” the brunette-monstrosity said. “But with Lucy being Lucy, she probably truly does view both as equally important... She’d likely say that it was divine providence that we could try and take care of both issues in one go. Especially when she thinks that your reputation and mine could be improved through the use of this request...”

“*Your* reputation, maybe.” Not that I knew what was wrong with said reputation, to begin with. “Me? I’ll just be seen as the Heroine’s pet rehab project. I’ll probably get twice as much scorn from our guildmates, just for failing to live up to whatever the fuck they think that means, expectation wise.”

Aaand now I was complaining about the Heroine’s ‘generosity’ in public, where anyone could hear me. Fuck. My. Life.

“And yet you’re agreeing to come anyway,” the demon remarked, stating the obvious like it was supposed to mean something to me. “Was it a matter of feeling like you couldn’t refuse? Or perhaps a sense of camaraderie, deeper than you’d have me believe?”

Was she... *teasing* me? “I’m coming because neither of you have the expertise to tell healberries from normal redberries.”

“And you’re the foremost expert on it?” the... evil-woman? Fuck the creative titles. *Eena* asked. “So good that Lucy could ask you, and you alone?”

“With my curse?” I replied. “I’m the best around.”

“Your... curse?” Eena asked, arching an eyebrow. Did she not know? No. No way. Not if she was really the Demon Queen, anyway... But shouldn’t a dragon (or whatever) at least be able to smell the Demon Queen’s stench on me? Unless she was just faking ignorance.

“My bloodline curse,” I said, instead of asking any of that and getting myself smooshed for my trouble. “It lets me see magical power.”

“I wasn’t aware that was something humans could do...” she replied. Which... I mean... ‘Humans’? *Seriously?! Was she even fucking trying to fake being one of us?* “Wait... Is *that* why you were so scared of me when we first met?”

“...No.” Yes!

“You’re *still* scared, aren’t you?” she accused me, crossing her arms and glaring at me. “You’re just hiding it better.”

“Why? Because you could squash me and everyone else like a bunch of bugs?” Or because my self-preservation instincts were apparently broken? But, again, what was I supposed to do here? Keep insisting that she didn’t bother me, when she could already tell otherwise? I was pretty sure the only reason me and Lucy had been left alone so far was that Eena liked playing with her food!

Though, if so, I had to rethink my stance on her acting skills. The pained look in her eyes looked way too fucking real.

“I see...” she murmured, lowering her head. “So that’s the view you hold of me...” And then, to my surprise, a small, sad looking smile flickered across her features. “I suppose Lucy would say that I simply need to change your mind, any way I can. Perhaps through civil conversation, for whatever good it will do? Starting with this curse of yours - I’ve never heard anything like it.”

The pain in her voice? The forced optimism? It almost made me feel bad for her. At least until she asked about my fucking curse. Then I *knew* she had to be playing with me. There was no way the Demon Queen - or a demon, or a monster, or anything else that had to do with that bundle of sins! - wouldn’t know. But I could still hear the Heroine’s voice, telling me to give her a chance. And I knew she’d take Eena’s side, so...

“It’s a curse put on my family by the Demon Queen. It shows up in the bloodline at random - I was the first person to get it in three generations, or something...” My parents weren’t exactly thrilled about it, either.

“The Demon Queen cursed your family to have... powers?” Eena asked, arching an eyebrow. Her words sounded almost mocking. Her intent was *definitely* mocking. It *had* to be. But her voice sounded confused. “That hardly seems like something she’d inflict upon her enemies.”

“The power to know how screwed we are when we’re faced with beings like you?” Not demons. I didn’t say demons, or monsters, and the Heroine couldn’t claim otherwise!

“The power to know what you can and can’t fight is hardly disadvantageous,” Eena countered. “Not to mention the auxiliary effects - the power to identify healberries, for example.”

“Yeah, well... maybe she didn’t think that through all the way... Or maybe the rumors about me turning into a demon after I die are true, and the powers are just a side effect.”

Eena didn’t reply to that. She just gave me this... look. Not one of pity, like I was used to getting about my bloodline, or distrust, or anger. Just... frustration. Was it because I’d figured out her game? It had to be... The other option - that she actually thought my powers were a blessing - was too ridiculous to even consider.

I decided not to ask what was going through her head, though. Something told me I wouldn’t like the answer.