

Demon Queened

Chapter 15

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Proofread by FallingLeaf

Abigail

“What the *fuck*, Yara?!” Nivera screeched, pointing an accusing finger at the goblin in the doorway. “You were supposed to wait until I was done!”

The general clicked her tongue, turning away from her... probably-not-a-maid, to give me and Bailey a once over. “Normally, this is where I’d apologize on Nivera’s behalf, if only for the sake of niceties. Seeing as how you’re the ones who dragged us all into this mess to begin with, though, I figure you deserve whatever you got. Frankly, if it was up to me, I wouldn’t have agreed to this meeting in the first place.”

“Why agree, then?” Bailey asked, catching me off guard with the first words she’d spoken since Nivera walked in. She looked about as tense as I’d ever seen her, but weirdly enough, her teeth weren’t showing. Her jaw was set, but her lips were pressed thin. And she wasn’t growling. I guess I should have been thankful for it, considering who she was talking to, but it was honestly kinda uncomfortable seeing her show so much restraint. And not just with her, but Nivera too. It felt like

I was missing something. “Snake insult Queen to anger Maid. General step in to stop Snake. Why?”

Something like *that*.

“You noticed, huh?” Yara chuckled. Because apparently Bailey was *right!*?

“Know what insults to Queen sound like. Anger. Disgust. Disdain. Snake different. Tone wrong. Sentences fake. Never just accuses - always asks Maid something.”

Was *that* why Bailey had kept quiet? When the hell did she get so good at reading people? And how!?! She barely even interacted with anyone! Most of the time, she just laid on the ground in her wolf form, with her eyes shut, and... her ears twitching... Okay, yeah, no, forget I asked.

“Heh. Looks like the wolf’s seen right through you, ‘Snake.’ You wanna tell them what’s going on, or should I?”

“This wasn’t the fucking deal, Yara,” Nivera seethed, clenching her fists. And her tail? I’m not really sure if you can “clench” a tail, per se, but the tip of it was curling and uncurling as it slid across the ground next to me.

“I’ll take that as a no, then.” Yara gave an exaggerated sigh, then shrugged with a smirk. “Well, she’ll probably break down and start giving you the information eventually, one way or another, so for now I’ll just tell you enough to get the ball rolling. Starting with a proper introduction.”

“‘Maid’ Abigail, ‘Wolf’ Bailey, it is my distinct displeasure to introduce you to the bitchy snake in the grass known as Nivera-”

I heard something *creak*. I guess Nivera’s tail found something to squeeze - the juice cup she’d dropped when Yara walked in.

“-Lingington. General Sallina’s niece. And, more importantly-”

A loud *crack* rang out, and a few drops of black juice splattered against my leg.

“-the only other idiot in this entire tower who’s ever had the misfortune of considering Devilla a friend.”

“*Childhood* friend!” Nivera interjected, while Yara’s poor tableware kept on creaking and cracking. It was pretty much nothing but a bundle of splinters at this point. “We haven’t spoken in over a decade! And also, I hate her!”

“We’re a few months shy of the fifteen year mark, actually,” Yara said. She didn’t so much as glance at Nivera, which was clearly only worsening the girl’s temper, judging by how red her face was getting. Not that I really cared about her emotional well-being, but was it really okay to ignore a girl who’s trembling with rage? “And hate’s too simple a term for Nivera’s idiocy. She’ll insult Devilla until she’s blue in the face, then curse at anyone who dares to agree. Just think of her as Devilla’s estranged, but still weirdly overprotective, sister or something. They’re basically family, anyway, so it’s fitting enough.”

“We are *not* family!” Nivera lifted the tip of her tail up, shaking it at Yara like it was a fist. Or maybe a mace, seeing as how it came with a bundle of pointy wooden bits. “She literally made it illegal to say my name in her presence!”

“And you’re *literally* engaged to her cousin. If that doesn’t qualify you for family, I don’t know what does.”

“Hold on a second!” I shouted, wanting to get a word in before Nivera could violently derail the conversation any further. Surprisingly, it actually worked, with both of them going silent - though that actually led to a kinda awkward moment, where I realized I’d shouted before actually thinking through what I wanted to say.

I mean, I'd expected Nivera to start smashing and or throwing things, but instead she was lowering her tail back to the carpet, and letting go of the wooden shrapnel. I could see the anger draining out of her in real time, as her shoulders slumped and her fingers uncurled. Though she was still glaring at Yara. Who was ignoring her to stare at me. Who still hadn't actually said anything. "...Devilla has a cousin?"

"What? She didn't tell you?" Nivera asked, finally looking away from Yara and towards me. Not that I was exactly craving acknowledgement from a violent snake girl. Especially not when it came with a smug smirk.

"Don't let Nivera get to you," Yara warned me, shaking her head. "She's just testing you - pissing you off, so she can peel apart your reactions. It's how she deals with everyone. Personally? I'd be more surprised if Devilla *had* told you anything - I doubt she even knows Chloe exists."

"Of course she doesn't," Nivera scoffed, looking away from me *and* Yara, in favor of staring down at her tail. Or maybe the spilled juice *next* to her tail, which she was now magically pulling out of the carpet fabric for some goddess forsaken reason, to create a big floating glob of black juice. She couldn't actually be cleaning, could she? "You bloodliners did everything you could to keep her away

from the redbloods in her family, didn't you? Treating them like a stain on the great Satanne name."

"Says the bloodliner," Yara retorted, folding her arms and glaring at her.

"You can pretend to be a redblood all you want, Nivera, but you can't change what runs through your veins."

The very tip of Nivera's tail tilted back, then whipped forward, in what had to be one of the most childishly dramatic gestures I'd ever seen, as all the juice she'd gathered flew towards Yara. It splattered against something - a wind shield of some sort, I guess? - about half an inch in front of the general, with the droplets flying off to either side of her. Yara didn't so much as flinch. Which was an impressive display of iron-clad nerves, and all that, but...

"Any chance you two can stop it with the private feud for a minute, and actually explain what the fuck is going on? Because as shocking as the whole 'secret cousin' thing is, I'd actually like to move onto the fact that a minor errand is apparently unravelling some sort of fucking conspiracy!?"

“You’re the one who asked,” Nivera pointed out. Which... Y’know, fair?

But it was kinda hard to take her complaint seriously when she was pouting like a sulky child, with her arms crossed, and her head turned to the side.

Her choice to start flinging the cup’s splinters against Yara’s shield - one at a time - wasn’t exactly helping, either.

“And it’s not a conspiracy,” Yara added, rubbing a few fingers against her half-bowed forehead. “But it *is* complicated. By which I mean you’re going to have way too many questions, and I’ve got enough of a headache already. Nivera can explain it better, anyway.”

“We can talk details in Yara’s office,” Nivera said, sliding her tail under the wooden platter and flipping it up, so that she could catch it - and, of course, throw it. Except this time she threw *hard* - like, smash through the wind shield with a bang, hard. Like, Yara actually had to hold out her palm to block it, and the platter *cracked* when it hit, hard.

“Fuck!” Yara cursed, waving her hand about, like she was trying to shake off the pain. The glare she directed at Nivera, though, was surprisingly... Not furious? More mildly irritated. “Fine. You broke through the damn shield. Satisfied?”

“No.”

I took a moment to stare at the two women. Nivera, with her arms crossed and her cheeks puffed out. Yara, rolling her eyes and shaking her head, acting like Nivera was throwing a tantrum rather than unleashing an attack that probably would have broken my hand. And the only thing I could think to say was...

“Yeah, no, I’m not going anywhere with *either* of you. Yara just said it’s not a conspiracy, so why not just tell me here?”

Nivera pursed her lips. Her head turned a little, and her eyes darted over to Yara. The goblin yawned, and leaned back against the doorframe. It didn’t escape my notice that she’d stuck her feet out as far as she reasonably could, in the process. Which... wasn’t all that far, really, but it was enough that a snake girl without legs wouldn’t be able to push through without shoving her out of the way. Something Nivera looked tempted to do for a moment, as her body tensed and her fingers started to twitch, like they wanted to curl into fists. After a few seconds, though, she let out a loud groan and threw up her hands, causing Yara to let loose with a smug smirk that wiped away any sense of gratitude I might have had

towards her. It was pretty damn clear at this point she was just doing this to fuck with Nivera, rather than to help with me.

“Fine,” Nivera grumbled. “Whatever. Yara’s apparently decided I don’t get to keep secrets, anyway! And it’s not like we have a *spyproof office* right down the hall or anything!”

“Anything that can be found out with a few minutes of legwork doesn’t count as a secret. Especially when Abigail’s probably the only girl in the tower who hasn’t figured this bit out, anyway. And maybe Bailey. Hard to get a read on that one.”

Another chuckle from Yara had me glancing over my shoulder. Bailey must have moved when I wasn’t paying attention, because she was now standing maybe half a step behind and to the right of me. Guarding me, I guess. Though she didn’t exactly paint a picture of vigilance at the moment, with her head and juice cup tilted way back, and her tongue stuck stretched out to lick the last few droplets of juice off the inner rim. I really wish I could say Yara was purposefully trying to piss me off, putting Bailey’s observational skills above mine under the

circumstances, but considering how well she'd been reading the room so far...

Well, I was still pissed, but not about the comparison.

“You know, I'm getting pretty tired of everyone insulting my intelligence instead of just answering a simple question! I think it's pretty obvious at this point there's information I don't have!”

“Oh, there's a ton of information you don't have,” Nivera scoffed, before finally turning her head to look at me. “But let's just start with what you do.” She held up a finger. “One of the Demon Queen's maids *somehow* managed to become her first friend - or confidante, or whatever the fuck your relationship is - in over a decade.” A second finger. “Said Queen's personality seems to have flipped around overnight.” A third. “The Queen suddenly started going in and out of the tower, bringing in new food, and a wild demon girl from a species nobody's ever heard of before!” A fourth. “And then, when the Queen's out doing who knows what, the Queen's mysterious new companions request a private meeting with the general in

charge of the tower's food supplies." A fifth. "So that you could ask her about General Nella's favorite fucking snack, of all things!"

I opened my mouth. Then I closed it and crossed my arms. "So, what?" I asked with confidence I absolutely did not feel, and an absolute refusal to let the blood drain from my face. "You think I did something to Devilla?"

"Fuck no," Nivera snorted. "I mean, I considered it. I'd be an idiot not to. But there's no way you could work magic on the freaking *Demon Queen*, of all people, and you obviously don't have what it takes for manipulation. Devilla probably got some bit of info in the rite that changed things for her."

I took a moment to decide whether I should be more relieved or insulted by her read on me, before deciding that I could figure that shit out *after* I had more information on why I was even here. "So what-"

"Remember what I told you at the start?" Yara cut in. "About General Doll keeping everyone away from you? That's because everyone was afraid of history

repeating itself. Because of what happened the *last* time they interfered with Devilla's attempts to make a friend."

"What happened...?"

"Things got fucked up, is what." Nivera spoke softly, barely going above a whisper, but there was anger in her voice. Just like when she'd talked about how I wouldn't be here if I cared about Devilla, except bigger. *Fiercer*. "My parents practically disowned me. Devilla started firing people, and restructuring everything. Putting aside the nitty gritty details of how fucking terribly that whole mess went, I'm sure even you can guess how it ended - with her locked up in her room, throwing tantrums and screaming at her staff about breakfast orders. Trying to convince herself she didn't need anyone, because *they* taught her she couldn't *have* anyone. All because a bunch of self-important assholes couldn't stand the idea of me being the only one with their little princess's ear."

“It’s called politics,” Yara added, pushing off of the doorframe, stretching towards the ceiling, before turning to walk down the hall. “I can’t stand it personally. Same with Nivera, I guess, but she’s actually *good* at it. ...So long as she lets other people do the talking, that is.”

“Fuck you.” Nivera glared at Yara’s retreating back, before turning her eyes back to me. “Everything was going fine. Doll was working non-stop to convince everyone that it was better to let Devilla galavant around rather than risk breaking her again. Even Sylvanna was in your corner. But you just had to open the fucking box, didn’t you?”

“I...” I was going to kill Lenora for suggesting this meeting. And then myself, for thinking it was a good idea. And maybe slap my past self for agreeing to work with Devilla, in the first place, while I was at it - not that I’d actually change my mind, even if I could. But I was sure as hell going to curse that fact! When the hell did I get so attached?

“...Are you sure there’s no chance I could ask you for help, instead?” I called out to Yara, as Nivera turned away from me and began to slither down the hall after the goblin.

“You’d have a better chance of getting into a Heroine’s pants!” Yara called back. Thankfully, she was facing the wrong direction to see me wince. “But I’ll get you another one of those potions, alright? Just don’t let Nivera fling any of this one at me.”

“Potions...?” I glanced over at Bailey, who tilted her empty cup towards me.

“Gives energy. Clears mind. Helps focus. Useful.”

I stared at Bailey’s cup for a moment, then the shards of the cup I’d almost taken, and finally Nivera’s retreating back. I remembered the way she’d started to rile me up, just as I reached for the drink...

“What the hell have I gotten myself into...?”

“Don’t worry,” Bailey said, walking past me to follow the others. “I protect Maid.”