

Demon Queened

Chapter 24

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Feyra

I was still laying in bed when I heard it - three harsh knocks, a pause, and then two softer ones. The Heroine's signal for visiting - one set done with her gauntlet, one set without.

My first thought? Shit. My second? That it was too damn early for this. And my third? There wasn't any time for a third. I had to get out of bed and answer the damn door before that dumbass of a Heroine drew too much attention.

Of course, when I actually got to the door, I didn't so much see a Heroine as a... I don't know... a vague understanding that there was a cloaked figure in front of me? One part of that was what she called her privacy spell. The other part, of course, was the actual cloak, which I insisted she wear if she wanted to visit me.

I knew she hated covering herself up like that. She always wanted to announce her presence - to be a shining beacon of hope for humanity. That kinda shit. But I had enough people whispering behind my back already, what with the whole cursed bloodline thing: people wondering whether I was going to snap, whether the Demon Queen whispered in my ear at night, whether it was only a matter of time before I turned demon on them... Not to mention the less savory rumors about my potion 'dependency.' The last thing I needed was for some idiot to accuse me of corrupting our innocent little Heroine on top of all that. I knew

exactly what sort of blasphemous shit went through her head, and I was *not* going to take the blame for it.

“Heroine? That you?” It paid to be sure. Especially with the fucking Demon Queen in town.

“That’s me!” she confirmed, dropping her spell. Suddenly I could actually focus on her - I could see the bright red hair peeking out from under her cloak, the vibrant orange eyes, and that cheerful smile she always seemed to have at the ready. The one that made it seem like everything was going to be okay, even when you *knew* it wouldn’t be. Like a big fat lie, except for the fact that *she actually seemed to believe it*. “I’m pretty sure it would be less suspicious to just call me Lucy, though?”

“I don’t want to get in the habit.” I pushed the door open and turned away, heading back inside. She followed behind me, as always, shutting the door tight. “It’d be bad if I slipped up and referred to you all casual like in public.”

“I guess...”

“So what are you here for?” I asked, deciding to hurry the Heroine along. The sooner she was gone, the sooner I could go back to staring up at the ceiling and wondering why the hell the Demon Queen had come to town. It obviously wasn’t to attack the Heroine... unless she just hadn’t found her yet?

Hopefully she wasn't keeping tabs on me. And couldn't actually take control of my body, the way some of the rumor-mongers seemed to think she could.

"Well..." She hesitated for a moment. She was blushing. Why was she blushing? "Did you go to the guild last night?"

"No. Why? Your girlfriend finally show up or something?"

"Uh-huh! And she joined the guild, too!"

"...Is that so?" Don't get interested, Feyra. Even if that does sound like incredibly bad news with the Demon Queen in town. And interested in the guild. The guild that the Heroine was apparently going to have good reason to hang out at for a few days. "So uh... You didn't happen to run into anyone *else* interested there, did you?"

Maybe someone more interested in killing the Heroine than kissing her, for example? Or maybe just scouting her mortal enemy out? Or... Well, doing who knew what, actually.

The Demon Queen coming to kill the Heroine this early in her journey was kinda unprecedented. Something about the goddess's restrictions on her person, the cumulative damage of past Heroines, and the toll reincarnation took on her... Or something like that. Lu... *The Heroine* had explained it to me, once, but I hadn't exactly been paying attention.

Point was, things were *weird*, and I was hoping the Heroine would stay away from that weirdness. For *all* our sakes.

“...That’s actually why I need your help, Eff!”

“...Huh?” Shit. “Run that by me again?”

“You got distracted again, didn’t you?” the Heroine accused me, narrowing her eyes at me. “And after asking me a question, too!”

“Right, the guild. You run into anyone else?”

“I already said I didn’t! But I didn’t really spend much time there, either. I sort of, kind of accidentally asked Ee out on a date in front of everyone, and she got upset when the other adventurers started gossiping, so I took her out under a privacy spell. We still had a wonderful night together, though! I’m just sort of worried about how our guildmates will treat her after all this...”

“Ee?” I blinked. “Ee, as in the girl you like, Ee?” I mean, she’d ‘Ee’ before, but... *Ee?* As in *Eena?* The woman I’d shown around today? The one I was pretty damn sure was the Demon Queen!? No. No way, right? There had to be all sorts of girls whose names started with E. Who arrived in town today. And who’d been to the adventurer’s guild... “Uh. What exactly does Ee look like?”

“Huh?” The Heroine blinked. “You actually want to know?!”

“Nevermind,” I muttered, looking away. I wasn’t involved! I wasn’t. I wasn’t! I mean, it wasn’t like I could actually do anything if I was right! If I told

the Heroine, she'd just challenge the Demon Queen and get killed! And *technically*, I didn't even have any proof that she was the Demon Queen to begin with! She could have been an... I don't know. An angel or something? Or maybe a dragon in disguise? There were tales about dragons doing that!

Either way, this wasn't my business.

"So what was that about wanting help from me again?"

"You're acting really weird, Eff..." the Heroine whispered. She looked concerned. Which... I guess is a pretty damn obvious reaction to have with the way I was acting, but it gave me hives. I didn't need anyone being concerned about me! "Did something bad happen?"

"Uh-uh. No personal shit. That's the rule, remember?" She didn't stick her nose into my business, I... Okay, maybe I did stick my nose into hers a *little*, but only to give the bare minimum of advice! And only because the optimistic idiot was likely to do something stupid if I didn't.

Not that my advice was helping that much, if she was asking possible Demon Queens out in front of an audience...

...Not that 'Ee' and 'Eena' were the same or anything! Or that she was definitely the Demon Queen, here to play with her food.

Nope.

"Can we get back to the bit where you said you needed my help?"

“Right! I want you to go on a quest with Ee and me!”

“...Huh?”

“I want you to go on a quest with Ee and me!” the Heroine repeated, reaching out to snatch up my hands. For once, I was actually shocked enough to let her. “To pick healberries!”

“*Healberries?!?*” I demanded. No. No way. “Like, from Daroom?! In the middle of a Monster Movement? Are you out of your mind?!?”

Healberries were exactly what sounded like - berries that could be used for healing potions. I’d been told they grew in various places all over the continent, but the closest spot to us was Daroom - specifically in the forest, which was pretty damn dense with magic.

Which, of course, meant that it was dense with monsters. And if that wasn’t reason enough to nope out, there was the tiny little detail of us being in the middle of a Monster Movement. Something that happened every three years or so, when *something* went weird in the middle of the Daroom Woods and caused all the local monsters to move out of the depths for a while. It made even the relatively safe places where healberries grew absolutely deadly. Which in turn jacked up the prices, and made healing potions super expensive.

All of which was to say.... “Why the hell would anyone in their right mind want to go there?!?”

“To find the cause of the Monster Movement, and bring it to a close, of course!” the Heroine declared, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Which... Y’know, her being her? Maybe it kinda was. “That way, healing potions will become affordable again!”

“...Figures... And let my guess - you want me to use my powers to help figure out what’s causing it?”

“And to help find the best healberries!” the Heroine confirmed, with a happy little headbob. Like she was asking me to go on a fun little outing with her not-the-Demon-Queen girlfriend, rather than wanting me to risk getting torn limb from limb just to help a bunch of people I didn’t even know with potions. “That way, we can bring a bunch back and help out at least some people, even if the rest of the plan doesn’t work out!”

And for money. Money that could be used to get *my* potions. But still! There was no way I was going to do that! Especially not with that monster in human skin tagging along! That was basically just asking to be killed.

...Wait. Didn’t that mean the Heroine was just asking to be killed?

“Plus, I thought it would be a great way to show everyone that you and Ee are good people! Since we’d be doing something that would help everyone so much...”

“You mean make them think of me as your pet redemption project?” I muttered, trying very hard not to think about the Heroine in bloody pieces, torn apart by monsters she never saw coming. Because she wandered into the woods with a monster, full of confidence, and absolutely no warning about what she was getting into.

“Do you really think it would be that bad?”

“Yes!” Not that there was any guarantee that the person she was going with was actually the Demon Queen. Hell, maybe going out there would get her *away* from ‘Eena.’

“Don’t you think there’s still a chance we could get something better if we try?”

“No.” If ‘Ee’ *wasn’t* Eena, she’d basically be on a fool’s mission, but she’d probably be fine. If she *was*? She’d die. Torn apart by monsters while her fake girlfriend laughed.

“So you won’t come with us?”

A fake girlfriend my advice maybe helped her get with...

“I... didn’t say that...”

Fuck. Me.

“So you’ll-”

“Decide *after* I meet your girlfriend.” Who probably wasn’t even the Demon Queen, anyway!

And then I was being hugged. Crushed. Squeezed to death by a squealing Heroine who was acting like I’d granted her fondest wish. Or maybe her second fondest. You know, *after* being fucked by definitely-not-the-Demon-Queen.

...I’d always known I was destined for hell, with the whole cursed bloodline thing, but it was at times like this that I had to wonder if I was already there.