

Demon Queened

Chapter 28

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Devilla

For the second time in as many days, I found myself following Feyra down the street. Yet where once she had seemed skittish and scared, now she stomped upon the ground and scowled at the air as if the world itself had personally wronged her. An expression quite similar to one I'd seen Abigail make recently - a thought that might have tempted me to laugh, if I wasn't fully aware that I was the shared source of such feelings. Though Abigail, at least, would never put it that way.

Perhaps this was the difference between being paid to show me around for an hour or two, and being forced to reside within my presence for extended periods. Something I could understand - or *would* understand, had Feyra been one of the people forced to live under my incompetent rule. Then, at least, she'd have reason to despise me. As it was? The girl hardly knew me! She acted this way out of fear for my power - she was terrified of being around me, but forced to remain within my presence by Lucy's request, and so she lashed out without regard for self-preservation. Not that I was going to do anything to her for it, beyond frowning at the back of her head.

At least I was getting some useful information out of this whole ordeal. Two things in particular seemed quite worthy of my attention. The first, related to the

Monster Movement, was admittedly more a matter of curiosity than importance - I simply wondered if it was connected to the pack of horned wolves that Bailey had been part of. If so, I was almost grateful that it hadn't been solved quite yet... as twisted and selfish a thought as that might be. Otherwise, I would never have met Lucy, let alone rescued Bailey from her abusive home.

The second thing of import was Feyra's so-called 'curse.' She seemed to believe that it stemmed from one of my ancestors, but I personally found that rather hard to believe. What sort of Demon Queen would give their enemy such a useful power? Let alone let it be inherited, potentially creating a multi-generational advantage for humanity... Not to mention the fact that I'd never even *heard* of any ancestors of mine directly interacting with humans, as an enemy or otherwise. They'd mostly restricted themselves to dealing with the Heroine, negating the influence of my aunts in heaven, but otherwise disturbing the balance of human affairs as little as possible.

Besides which, I wasn't entirely convinced cursing a bloodline was *possible* for us. We lacked the ability to even enchant items, let alone people - the Empty Bag and Indestructible Sword were so valuable for that precise reason!

At the same time, however, I had no alternate suggestion as to the origins of Feyra's powers. The ability to see magical energy was more in line with what I'd expect from a demon than a human - in fact, I was fairly sure some race or another

had that exact ability! I wanted to say... tiger girls? Or lions? Or maybe just basic catgirls...? Some sort of feline, anyway!

I probably should have paid more attention during my classes...

“Is there a reason you’re staring at me like that?” Feyra demanded, glancing back at me before turning down an alleyway. “Because it’s really creeping me out.”

“Apologies,” I replied, wincing. While Feyra’s attitude towards me didn’t exactly beget fondness on my part, I still had no desire for her discomfort. “My mind was simply dwelling on the nature of your curse.”

“Really? Because usually that comes with a lot more glaring.”

“People judge you for it?” I asked, unable to stop a frown. “For something you were born with?”

“Pretty sure it’s normal to judge someone for having evil running through their veins.”

“What makes you so certain that it’s evil?” I questioned, narrowing my eyes at her. “Does it cause you pain? Affect your judgment? Alter your behavior, or otherwise affect the lives of those around you?”

“Could you maybe not be all blasphemous in public?” Feyra asked, lowering her voice to a whisper. I have no clue why she thought I’d be able to hear her - something to ask her about later, considering how easily I *could*. “It’s a curse

because it came from the Demon Queen. Who the fuck knows what sort of strings come with it?”

“I hardly think asking questions is blasphemous,” I grumbled in return. Still, despite my grouching, I acquiesced to her request. In truth, I lacked the heart to go against her in light of the clear distress painted across her features. Even if it was upsetting for her to label her power as a curse, while defending the people who made her see it that way... Not to mention the bit where she insulted my ancestors.

Of course, that isn't to say that I remained eternally locked in silence.

“Aren't we nearing the Ruby Shop?” I asked, noting increasing familiarity with the area. “Don't tell me you have business with Gerard?”

“His daughter, actually,” Feyra replied, coming to a stop outside the familiar two story building. Rather than walking through the front door, however, she began to circle around it towards the back. “Amessa makes my meds.”

“Meds?” I questioned. I did seem to recall her saying something about that, when first we'd met - and the blonde girl that had been chasing her down had responded with something about... “Potions?”

The glare Feyra gave me was fierce enough to make me flinch. “So what if they are? You going to fucking join the parade of people waiting to judge me for them?”

“I don’t even know what you’re taking them for,” I pointed out, trying not to return the girl’s glare in kind. The way Feyra treated me was growing more tiresome by the moment, but something told me that this particular reaction had little to do with me. “Nor am I so conceited as to believe it is any business of mine. Though I am curious as to why one might need a dedicated alchemist - can you not simply consume the raw materials to receive their effects?”

From the way Feyra narrowed her eyes at me, I got the distinct impression that she didn’t believe a word coming from my mouth. A shame, seeing as how I had neither a method nor desire to prove myself to her.

Nevertheless, after a moment of tense silence, she looked away with a huff. “Amessa’s potions are just a little different, alright? You’ll see soon enough.” Saying so, she all but stomped her way towards the back of the shop, rapping her knuckles fiercely against the wooden door.

The response was near immediate - the door swung inwards, and a girl’s head poked out. She looked almost a match with Feyra, at first glance, with her green hair and brown eyes. A closer look, however, showed the similarities to be rather shallow. Where Feyra was rather tall, at five foot nine, this girl barely came up to my own natural height, at five foot four. Where Feyra’s skin was pasty white, this girl boasted a dark complexion. And where Feyra’s hair was dark green, this

girl's hair had a bright vibrancy about it, giving off the impression that it was mere moments from springing to life.

“Feyfey!” she called out, in a high pitched voice, a manic grin upon her lips. “You’re just in time - the mirror lilies are done growing, so I just need to mash them, smash them, and make them into... what did you want this time? Pills? Paste? Soup? I bet I could make a great potion soup! Need you to take a look at them, first, though - let me know what the magic levels are like!”

“Whatever’s quickest,” Feyra replied, scowling. “And can you maybe not spill the beans on my meds in front of strangers?”

“Strangers...?” The girl’s eyes locked on mine. “Oh! Feyfey made a friend? How rare!”

“We’re not friends,” Feyra interceded, before I could reply. “We’re temporary party members for an important request.”

“Hmmm... Hmmm...” The girl nodded, slowly, looking me up and down in the process. I couldn’t help but notice that she paused for a moment whenever her eyes landed upon my chest. “Sooooooooooooooooo, you’re totally secret besties and you don’t want anyone to know? Got it! My name’s Amessa, but a gorgeous girl like you can call me anything, so long as it’s complimentary! Now get inside, so I can powder Feyfey’s order for travel!” Saying so, her head disappeared back into

the building, a hand taking its place a mere moment later to gesture at us to come in.

“Is it just me, or does your friend have rather selective hearing?” I questioned, moving to follow after the girl. While under normal circumstances the trait likely would have irritated me, I had to admit that her cheery acceptance was a wonderful break from Feyra’s foul treatment of me.

“More like delusional hearing,” Feyra rebutted, moving quickly to stay ahead of me and enter the girl’s abode. I allowed it, seeing little reason to do otherwise. We would both be entering the same domicile, regardless.

In fact, I decided to go a little further, and stop moving for the moment. The better to take a deep breath, and enjoy the momentary respite from Feyra’s presence after she’d passed indoors. It wouldn’t last long - couldn’t last long, as I didn’t really want to know what nonsense she’d be filling Amessa’s head with if I tarried - but truthfully, I needed a moment to myself.

The way Feyra looked at me... Like I was a step away from ending her, at any moment... If it wasn’t clear to me that she meant something to Lucy, I would have abandoned all hope of getting along with her already. As it was, we were going to have to have a talk, and soon. Because as it stood, I had to admit I wasn’t sure I could tolerate traveling with the girl.

A decision for the future. For now, it was time to enter the alchemist's lair. A lair which... to be honest... wasn't quite what I'd expected. Not that I quite knew myself what those expectations were, or how they had managed to form in the brief period I'd known about her. Yet I could say with certainty that they had been betrayed.

I suppose it came down to the term "alchemist" - it made me think of boiling cauldrons, bottles of liquids, and exotic ingredients. None of which this room had. Instead of potions lining the shelves, there were pots of dirt, with plants in various stages of growth. Instead of a cauldron atop a fire, there was what looked to be a small kitchen, featuring a stove and a pot atop it. And instead of exotic ingredients, there were... socks? And skirts, and shirts, all littered across the floor. In short, it felt less like an alchemist's atelier, and more like a messy studio apartment. It even had a shabby looking mattress shoved into one corner.

"Heeeeeey!" the alchemist in question called out to me, waving happily, as a far less chipper Feyra unleashed a long sigh. "Wanna see a neat trick? Feyfey told me she needs some extra meds, so I'm about to do a thing!"

"I said it would be *nice* to have more meds," Feyra corrected, groaning. "Not that I could *afford it*."

"Awww... I wanted to show off to the pretty lady..." Amessa's cheeks puffed up into a pout - for about half a second, before a new idea brightened her

expression. “Maaaaybe we could do a trade? You get me some interesting plants, I throw in an extra dose or two of your meds?”

“I don’t have time for a fucking side quest, Amessa. I’m going on a trip. Hence the whole damn reason I wanted extra meds.”

“If it’s materials you’re after, I might have a thing or two to give,” I remarked. “Assuming you’re willing to take monster parts, as well as plants?”

“Like hell she is!” Feyra snapped. “Nobody’s stupid enough to taint their soul with that sort of crap.”

I paused, caught off guard by her vehement refusal. Though perhaps I shouldn’t have been - I did recall Lucy saying something about people not consuming monster meat, now that she mentioned it. A shame, since plant based potions were by far the weakest variety, but I suppose most people didn’t know what they were missing.

“Speak for yourself, Cursecurse!” Amessa declared, sticking her tongue out in Feyra’s direction. “Maybe you can’t risk that sorta thing, but I’m *blessed*, remember? I can totally handle a monster or two!”

“Don’t call me that!” Feyra all but growled, crossing her arms. “And don’t take her materials, either. I don’t care if you’re fucking blessed by the goddess herself, you shouldn’t be fucking around with sins like that.”

“Goddess above, you’re more of a worrywart than pops,” Amessa complained, shaking her head. “It’s my body, and I’ll do what I want with it! Up to and including putting... Uh.... What sort of monster materials did you have on you, anyway?”

“Horned wolves,” I replied, thankful for the excuse to interject into their conversation. “Specifically their horns. What do you mean by ‘blessed,’ though?”

“I mean I’m from a blessed bloodline, of course! On my mother’s side.”

“Her ancestor was blessed by the angels,” Feyra helpfully explained, no doubt noting my furrowed brow. “Just like mine was cursed by the Demon Queen. It’s *usually* a highborn thing.”

“Great gram gram was totally from a noble line... Or something? Pops gets all mad when I ask him questions about it! I get the feeling there’s a dark and scary-”

“She was a bastard child,” Feyra interjected. “It’s a miracle that the blessing actually showed in her descendant. Why the heavens would choose someone like Amessa for it, I have no fucking clue...”

“Rude!” Amessa protested, puffing up her cheeks. “True, but rude! And it totally ruins the mysterious family background I was trying to spin, too! Rude rude rude!”

“Uh-huh...”

Feyra looked rather tired from the shenanigans - a sentiment I could well understand, though my own ire was directed at the church. The clear source of this blessed bloodline versus cursed bloodline nonsense. Nonsense I might have believed, had they restricted themselves to only the blessed - I could certainly see my human-loving aunts in heaven handing out powers, if they had the means. But the supposed nature of the 'cursed' bloodlines threw everything into doubt. As did the fact that the rich and powerful just so happened to be blessed, while common folk with Feyra were inflicted with a 'curse.' Something fishy was at play, here, and I...

Well, I had no idea what I wanted to do about it, or if I *should* be doing anything at all. Human politics didn't really concern me. It wasn't my job to sort out their prejudices. My involvement began and ended with irritation at their use of my family as a pawn in their games...

Still, if Lucy wished to counter this prejudice, through Feyra, I could at least try and swallow my distaste for the girl's behavior, so that I wouldn't interfere.

"Sooo about those horny horns I'm totally putting in my body, no matter what Feyfey has to say on the matter?" Amessa prodded, a grin upon her features that said she knew exactly what sort of pained facial expression Feyra was making behind her. "What do they do, exactly?"

“Horned wolves have two abilities,” I informed her, deciding to ignore the way she’d chosen to word things. “One is destructive in nature - that which they pierce with their horns will crumble to ash. I must admit that I’m not entirely sure how it works without a horn - perhaps poking something with a fingernail will do?”

“Oooooooooooh, ash horns! I wonder what would happen if I used it on potion ingredients?” she murmured, eyeing one of her potted plants.

“I couldn’t say,” I confessed. “I don’t know if the ash is edible, or if it would retain its power-giving capabilities. But I do hope for your sake that it proves beneficial - especially seeing as how the second property might not be of any use at all...”

“The second property?” Amessa asked.

I nodded, reaching into the stuffed bag at my side, and then further entering the Empty Bag within it, to find one of the wolves. I was careful to snap off its horn while it was still in the bag, muffling the sound with a bit of localized magic that stilled the air around it, before pulling out the pointy red shaft. “The wolves utilized telepathy, on a closed loop system. Only those who have imbibed the material would be able to participate - and only with permission. A problematic property, if nobody else is willing to consume the material.”

“I dunno...” Amessa murmured, frowning. “Me and you equals two, doesn’t it?”

My surprise must have shown on my face, for once again Feyra provided an answer.

“You wouldn’t know what it fucking does if you weren’t willing to take it. It’s like you’re not even trying to hide things!”

“Perhaps I simply see no shame in it,” I replied, pushing through the embarrassment that surely showed itself upon my cheeks. “Monsters, to me, are but animals with magic - not the walking sins you seem to believe them to be.”

“We can be no-shame buddies, then!” Amessa declared, grinning from ear to ear. “But later, ‘kay? Right now, I wanna work on Feyfey’s stuff! And show you a magic trick. Which the horn will *totally* cover - especially if you promise to come back again, at some point!”

“I didn’t agree to this!” Feyra protested.

“But you’ll still take the meds~!” Amessa replied. “We both know you get all grumpy without your potions, Feyfey, and this way I can give them to you without you feeling all ‘Oh no, I owe you a favor!’”

“...Just don’t come crying to me when you lose your blessing, or whatever,” Feyra replied, looking away from the girl.

Somehow, I doubted she was at risk of that.

“So! Magic trick time!” The girl declared, running over towards the wall and pulling down a potted plant. How she knew what was what, in the absence of any labels, or so much as a leaf coming from the pot’s barely grown occupant, I could not say. Though I did begin to get an inkling of an idea when her hair began to glow, and the sprout began to grow.

The girl was using dryad magic.