

Demon Queened

Chapter 41

Rabbits & Foxes & Slimes, Oh My

Written by Princess Kay

Devilla

I woke up once more in the comfort of Lucy's arms - something I was rapidly growing accustomed to. To the point where I actually worried how I'd take it when she inevitably stopped wanting me in her bed... but that was a problem for 'future Devilla.' 'Current Devilla' was more occupied with the question of whether to wake Lucy, alongside the knowledge that I really needed to have a conversation with her about... well, *appropriate* ways of doing so. Primarily whether she would prefer kisses to her breasts, or a shake of her shoulder. For now, I deemed it unnecessary to take either path, preferring to instead appreciate the comfort of her warmth for just a little while longer.

Eventually, however, all good things must come to an end, no matter how much one wished otherwise. In this case, that end was heralded not by the natural waking of Lucy, but the shrill cry of our traveling companion from outside the boundaries of our temporary domicile.

“Eena?! Where the hell did your monster go?!”

“How should I know?” I called back, utilizing a shield of air to block the sound from Lucy’s ears. I needn’t have bothered though, for her eyes were already fluttering open even as the last words left my lips.

“Eena?” she asked as my spell dissipated. “Everything okay?”

“It’s fine,” I assured her, a small smile on my lips as I bent down to kiss her on the forehead. An intimate move I made without thought, and which had me blushing bright red a moment later. “It’s um...” I coughed, clearing my throat and looking away from Lucy’s growing grin. “Bailey. She seems to have wandered off, somewhere, and it’s causing Feyra some measure of concern.”

“Of course I’m concerned!” Feyra yelled back from near the boundary of our tent. She’d apparently come closer at some point. “Your monster of a wolf is off doing who the hell knows what!”

“She’s hardly going to attack anyone, if that’s what you’re worried about,” I remarked, shaking my head as I reluctantly disentangled myself from Lucy’s arms and reached for my pack. Today’s outfit consisted of a black micro skirt and a red halter top that essentially covered my breasts and nothing else. To make up for the lack of fabric, I was wearing a pair of white thigh highs that would *normally* be a match for my currently dyed hair. Not exactly ideal forest wear, but I hoped it

would at least help me to escape accusations of exhibitionism today. “There isn’t even anyone on the road *to* attack.”

“We’re actually pretty close to a town,” Lucy informed me, not bothering to hide her appreciation for my current outfit. “Though I’m planning for us to go around it.”

“Because you don’t want anyone to know where we’re going?” I questioned, arching an eyebrow.

“Because she doesn’t want anyone *stopping* us from going, more like it,” Feyra grumbled from outside our tent. “I swear, she’s got to be the most blasphemous Heroine in history, to be sneaking around the church’s restrictions like this...”

“I’m not *technically* bound by the church,” Lucy pointed out. “I answer directly to the Goddess! And I’m sure the Goddess would want me to help all the people who are suffering right now!”

“Yeah, sure... And I’m sure the *Grand Patriarch* - y’know, the one actually *in charge* of interpreting her intentions - would agree... If you’d fucking *asked*.”

“I did mention it in the letter I sent him,” Lucy replied, before lowering her voice to add, “the same one where I asked for the depetrification spell.”

“But you’re not waiting for a response, are you?” Feyra accused.

“Well... He gets really over-protective, sometimes... Everyone does... But I’m sure it’s fine! Everyone *also* always says that the Goddess must have picked me for a reason! And that reason has to be who I am as a person, right? So I’m sure she’d want me to use my own judgment to decide what’s best! Otherwise, she wouldn’t have picked someone who’d do that in the first place...”

“I can’t speak for the Goddess,” I interjected, choosing my words carefully, “but I personally have faith in your conscience. It’s the biggest part of why I came to you for help, in the first place. Because I believe in your sense of justice. Not the church’s, or the Goddess’s, but *yours*.”

“Thanks, Eena,” Lucy replied, jumping to her feet and giving me a hug. I returned it tightly, willfully ignoring the fact that I could feel her hardened nipples through the cloth of my shirt. A result of the morning chill, surely... “I’m going to get dressed, okay? So maybe you should go call for Bailey? Just so that she doesn’t accidentally stumble into town!”

“I’m pretty sure she’s smart enough to avoid that,” I asserted, shaking my head. “But if it makes you and Feyra feel better, I don’t mind it.”

“Well... Mostly Feyra,” Lucy admitted. “I’m pretty sure you’re right, to be honest. But part of traveling together is compromising with one another! And if this helps her relax, then there’s no harm in it, right?”

“I suppose not,” I conceded with a soft sigh. “I’ll leave you to get dressed, then.”

I left the tent, careful to keep the flap close to my body, so as to prevent Feyra from getting a glimpse of anything she’d need to burn from her mind. The girl’s issues with nudity were exasperating, in my opinion, but it was like Lucy said - there was no need to make trouble, when simple concessions could avoid it.

“Good to see you awake,” Feyra sniped, before gesturing to the woods outside our clearing. “Now do you think you could call your pet monster back before she does any damage?”

“I already told you she wouldn’t attack anyone unprovoked,” I reminded her.

“And what about if she *was* provoked?” Feyra questioned. “Because let me tell you, most people aren’t just going to pet the pretty puppy with the blood red horn that’s capable of tearing them apart!”

“...I’ll be sure to pass along the fact that you think she’s pretty,” I replied, trying not to let my own newfound concern show. Feyra would probably take it as

fear for her imagined scenario, but the truth was rather the reverse. Since I had ordered Bailey not to attack anyone, there was every chance she'd allow herself to be harmed before breaking that command.

“Bailey!” I called as loud as I could manage. Then again, for good measure. When no response came, I briefly considered using magic to amplify my volume - loud enough to shake the entire forest, if need be - but, thankfully, there was a rustling from the forest before I could implement my plan. A moment later, Bailey strode into camp.

With two rabbits in her mouth, and one impaled upon her horn.

“You hunted breakfast?” Lucy asked from behind me.

Bailey barked, letting loose the rabbits in her mouth, and pushed the third off her horn with a paw, causing it to land on the ground with a soft thump. She looked to me, clearly expecting praise, but all I could manage was a weak smile, centered in a pale face.

“Eena?” Lucy queried, gently wrapping an arm around my waist. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” I assured her, shaking my head. A little too rapidly, perhaps, as I sent my hair flying from side to side. “I’m just... not used to my meat being so... fresh...”

“What?” Feyra asked, rolling her eyes. “Can’t stand the sight of dead rabbits?”

“Feyra!” Lucy exclaimed, dismay clear in her tone. “You shouldn’t make fun of people for being sensitive! Not everyone’s used to hunting.”

“I’m fine,” I promised once again. “It’s not like I’m going to get sick or anything, at the very least... It just... caught me off guard.” The sight of white fur, stained red. The sharp smell. The sight of Bailey, with her black fur also marred by blood. I was under no illusions as to how she’d fed herself before meeting me, just as I knew full well how my own meals were made. But the visceral sight of the dead rabbits hit me more fully than expected. Odd, considering how easily I’d taken to the death of Bailey’s pack... but they hadn’t been particularly bloody.

Besides which, Jacob had never owned a dog, as much as he might have liked one, only a pet *bunny*.

Bailey whined softly, clearly upset by my reaction. It sent a stab of guilt through me. She had clearly hoped for praise, and yet she was met with disgust at

the sight of her efforts. I took a deep breath, squeezed my eyes shut for a moment, and then forced myself to look at her.

“You did fine, Bailey. I’m sure the rabbits will be delicious. I’m simply unused to hunts like this. It’s a me thing - nothing wrong at all on your part...”

“Maybe you should take a walk?” Lucy suggested, glancing between me and Bailey with a worried furrow to her brow. “I’ll make them into something more recognizable as food by the time you’re back, and we can have a good meal if you’re up to it! Or you can get something from wherever you’ve been getting food, if you’d prefer?”

“...I think I’ll take you up on that,” I said, moving towards the woods. I was aware of Feyra giving me a strange look, no doubt wondering why the Demon Queen was unused to bloody corpses, but I couldn’t be bothered to explain myself further. I simply walked into the woods with a shake of my head, hoping to avoid trouble. “Call for me after you’ve eaten.”

For now, I’d go back to the tower for food... or perhaps even eat something from the Empty Bag, once my stomach settled enough to be up for it... Probably the latter, since I wasn’t sure I was up to seeing Abigail, or anyone else, at the

moment. I didn't want to ruin more people's moods, just because I couldn't handle something so simple.

It was best to dine out here, so that Abigail could eat in peace.

Abigail

Devilla's floor was strangely... *peaceful*, with its owner gone. There was a tension I was used to seeing, or maybe more like *not* seeing? Something so damn *normal* that you only noticed it when it disappeared. The maids were more at ease. The chefs didn't feel like they were a moment away from being fired. Even the head of staff had a smile on her lips. It was surprisingly... *annoying*.

I mean, all this, just because Devilla wasn't around? It wasn't like I didn't *get it*... Hell, it wasn't even the first time I'd *seen it*... but... Damn...

"Um... Abigail?" Lenora asked, awkwardly raising a hand. "Are you... doing okay...?"

"Better than you," I said, rolling my eyes at the nervous dragon girl. I'd invited her to sit on the bed with me while we ate, but she'd insisted on standing in

a corner of the room instead. Just being in the Queen's bedroom was too much for her already, I guess... "Sorry for dragging you in here. I didn't think you'd be so nervous without Devilla around." Not that I'd actually expected her to be absent, in the first place. I was guessing she must have forgotten our plans for breakfast, somehow, despite her so-called perfect memory.

"N-no, it's fine..." Lenora said, shaking her head and hand at me simultaneously. "I-I mean... I've never gotten to eat lunch with a coworker before... N-not that we're coworkers, exactly. I mean, you're the Queen's personal maid! And I'm just an apprentice chef... W-we don't even work in the same area... but... It's nice..."

"Says the girl who's too terrified to even sit down with me," I pointed out.

"I... that's just..." Lenora looked away from me. "I mean, it's the *Queen's bedroom*... What if we get crumbs on the floor...?"

"Then I'll clean it up. I *am* a maid, remember?" I gestured next to me on the bed. "Now come on - either sit down, or put your foot down and tell me you want to go somewhere else. Preferably before your eggs get cold."

"I-I can just reheat them..." she pointed out, glancing between me and the bed. Then me again. Then the bed again. Then me.

“That’s not the point, and you know it,” I grumbled, shoveling a fried egg into my mouth as I got up from my own seat. “Come on, let’s go eat somewhere you’ll be more comfortable... which I guess means literally *anywhere* else...”

“I-I usually just eat in the kitchen before going back to work,” Lenora admitted, following me out of the room with her tail dragging against the carpet.

I opened my mouth to reply, only to be interrupted by a vaguely familiar, high pitched voice.

“Wow! That’s really loser-ish! No offense! I’d just rather die than eat by myself! I mean, there’s soooooo many cute girls to eat with! Or off of. Or out! The last one’s my fave.”

“G-General Sylvanna?” Lenora whispered, staring past me with wide eyes.

Except she wasn’t looking *up* at a ten foot slime, but *down* at... well, she couldn’t have been more than a foot tall.

“Sylvanna?” I asked to confirm, with a hell of a lot more doubt in my voice than Lenora’s, and absolutely none of the awe.

“That’s me!” the mini slime girl declared, waving her hand up in the air with a big smile on her face. “All.... uh... I forget what per... um.... Per-per- amount of me! But it’s definitely me!”

“Right... Devilla mentioned something about this...” Sylvanna could split herself at will, but the smaller she split the dumber she got.

“I told her I’d be coming for stat... uh... info!” Mini-Sylvanna reminded me. “I was supposed to a while ago, but I kept getting distracted and forgetting! At least until a bigger-me sucked me up and then I was all ‘oh right!’ and ‘sigh’ and off I went again! That happened, like... uh... some number of times! A really big one! Higher than I can count right now... the bigger mes probably know, though!”

“Riiiiight... So that’s why Devilla said four percent of you was an insult...” Was this even four percent? For all I knew it was *more*... Now *that* was a scary thought.

“Well, I do really like insulting her!” Sylvanna said. “Cause she stinks! And she’s terrible. And she’s awful! And stuff. Big meanie stuff!”

“...Sorry, Lenora, but can you go ahead and eat by yourself?” I asked, turning to my... friend? Acquaintance? Draconic-coworker? Whatever. “We’re gonna have to do the whole friendly lunch thing another time.”

“That’s fine,” Lenora replied tersely. She wasn’t looking at me, though. She was glaring - *glaring!* - at Sylvanna. “Work comes first, right? Even when your boss is as *caring*, *kind*, and *selfless* as the Queen.”

“Wow! That’s a list of ad...ad... words I never thought anyone would use for Devilla! I mean, selfless? She’s, like, the *most* selfish! And the least kind! And the worst! I mean, she totally threatened my entire species, y’know?”

“When she was, like, seven,” I pointed out. “I mean, yeah, it sucked, and no, being a kid doesn’t entirely excuse it, but as the closest thing to an adult in the equation you could have cut her a little slack... maybe not abuse her for the next fourteen years, at the very least?”

“Pshhh, like she would have known what to do with kindness!” Sylvanna crossed her arms. “That girl has, like, zero heart! None! She’s basically a monster! I bet she wouldn’t even spare a scrap of food for a starving orphan!”

“Sh-she would!” Lenora said before I could reply. “She definitely would... I bet she’d spare a whole meal!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Sylvanna said. “Whatever. I’m just here to find out how she’s doing with the whole ‘get-the-spell-from-you-know-who’ thing!”

“Who?” Lenora asked, blinking.

“Nobody!” I interrupted before Sylvanna could say something stupid.

“Nobody you need to worry about. Trust me, okay?”

Lenora looked back and forth between me and Sylvanna, before slowly nodding. “Okay?”

“It’s not like I was gonna say it!” Sylvanna protested, as Lenora went down the hallway. “I mean, even I know better than to say Queenie’s with-”

“ROOM!” I interrupted, opening the door to Devilla’s bedroom and pointing inside.

“...Fine...” The mini-Sylvanna pouted, before starting to slide her way in through the door. “But it’s not like I have anything to talk to you about, anyway!”

“Yes, you do. Because *I’m* the one who’s going to give you a status report about Devilla... assuming you’re going to be able to actually report it to... big you?”

“Of course! I have the bestest memory!” Sylvanna promised. “You’ll see!”

“Sure I will,” I replied, glancing down at the breakfast still on my plate. Cold eggs, cold sausage, cold toast...

Hopefully Devilla was having a better breakfast than me.

Devilla

Walking in the woods - upwind from camp - did, in fact, help my mood.

Color soon returned itself to my cheeks, and hunger quickly began to stir within my belly. Thankfully, I had an Empty Bag full of food for just such an occasion.

Today, I was particularly in the mood for a set of skewers. They were a bit fancier than what I'd eaten with Lucy - marinated in sauce for who knows how long prior to their cooking, with spicy peppers and onion interspersed between the glistening chunks of meat. Though I'd originally requested them in the hopes of eating a more casual meal - something other than the 'fine dining' I was used to in this life - the chefs had nevertheless poured all their skill into making something worthy of their Queen. Or perhaps it was better to say 'worthy of their time,' considering their low regard for me on a personal level...

Regardless, I was excited to take a bite. Before the succulent meat could even reach my teeth, however, a high pitched whine stole my attention, drawing my eyes to the ground. A red fox sat there, its white tipped tail sashaying from side to side as it eyed me and my breakfast.

"Hungry?" I questioned, arching an eyebrow. I was surprised to find a wild animal willing to beg for food, but perhaps it had had some luck with humans in

the past. The campsite we had chosen was one often used by those traveling the same road as us, after all...

“I suppose I could spare a bite,” I declared, tugging a piece of meat from the skewer and crouching down to offer it to the canine. “You know, you remind me a little of my cousin...”

The fox’s nose twitched, its tail flicked from side to side, and its body tensed - then it was in the air, its teeth clamping down not upon the proffered treat but rather the wooden stick that had been grasped by my other hand. Though my hold upon the skewer did not waver, the thin stick itself snapped under the weight of the flying fox, who scampered off as soon as it landed.

I stared after the retreating animal for a moment, shocked, amused, and a touch indignant. Then, a moment later, worry crossed my face - for it had taken not just meat, but onion... Something I was pretty certain foxes weren’t meant to have. At least, that was my guess going off their relation to dogs...

I hesitated a moment, unsure of what to do. I could have simply let the matter go, of course. It had stolen far more than what I had generously offered, after all, so one could say that any ill fate that befell it was merely its comeuppance... but it was food *I* had put within its reach. It was my responsibility,

to some extent... So, with a sigh, I levitated myself an inch off the ground - relying on arcane magic - and took off after the scampering creature.

It wasn't difficult to track. At least not for me - not when I honed my ears, and focused on the sounds it made running through the underbrush. What it lacked in subtlety it made up for in swiftness, but with me floating an inch above the ground I had little trouble keeping up.

Not that there was much to 'keep up' with. The journey lasted barely a minute, before the fox came to a halt in front of its burrow, turning around and dropping the skewer as it bared its teeth at me. Unusual behavior from a fox, from my understanding, but a quick glance into the burrow it protected revealed the reason for its defensiveness. Another fox dwelled within its depths, protectively draped over a few kits whose form I could just barely make out.

"...No wonder you're desperate for food." I sighed, bending down and reaching for the skewer. The fox let out a high pitched scream, similar to a woman's yell, and attacked my hand immediately. Its claws made no headway against my skin, however, and in the end it could do nothing to stop me from taking away its 'hard won' meal. "I suppose the Monster Movement is tough on wild animals, as well as humans, hmm? But this isn't fit for your ilk..."

Instead, I reached into my bag and pulled out a large steak. One I knew hadn't been cooked with onion, or garlic, or *anything* beyond salt. I quickly tore it apart with my bare hands, letting the pieces rain down upon the ground for the fox to take.

"This will suit you better," I declared, bending back down to place the final piece in front of the creature. It sniffed my hand, curiously, for a moment - then barked, its hackles rising as it snatched up the piece and ran back into its burrow. "...Not enough to win your trust, I take it? Well, I can hardly blame you... I *am* a stranger..."

"I think it might have more to do with me, actually!" came a voice from behind me.

"Lucy?!" I spun, surprised to find the redhead standing behind me, waving happily.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle it. Or you! I think you were a little too focused on the fox to notice me, though."

"That... might be the case," I admitted, a rueful smile on my lips. "I've noticed I have a tendency to block things out when I'm focused..." Like how I

didn't even register everyone talking in the guild hall when I first reunited with Lucy. "...How much of that did you catch?"

"Well, I only came out at the end," Lucy admitted. "So I didn't really see much. But I did hear a lot before that! The scream was sort of worrisome. Especially when I heard you say that the food you had wasn't 'fit for its ilk.' But then, when I got close, I saw you pulling out a steak, instead! How much food did you bring back, anyway?"

"More than I need," I confessed. "Though not enough to feed *every* creature in these woods."

"I guess we'd better hope the other foxes don't get any ideas, then!" Lucy teased me, a bright smile on her face. "Do you still have enough for your breakfast?"

"And then some," I confirmed. While it was true I didn't have enough for *everything* in the forest, I could probably feed those in the near vicinity without issue if I was willing to burn through my entire supply. "But why? Weren't you planning to eat the rabbit?"

“Well, I started thinking about the smell,” she admitted. “And I didn’t want you to get uncomfortable! So I told Bailey she could have all of it. She’s probably done eating by now!”

“Are you sure that was wise?” I questioned, furrowing my brow. “It seemed to me that you were quite looking forward to eating it.”

“Not if it makes you uncomfortable! I mean, I’m not really sure why it bothers you so much... and you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to! But you’re more important to me than any rabbit!”

“It’s hardly a secret,” I confessed. “It’s merely that I had a pet rabbit as a child... and a stuffed animal, too, for that matter.”

“Had?” Lucy asked. “What happened to them?”

“The rabbit died years ago... it’s little more than a bittersweet memory at this point. And as for the toy... Well, I... asked someone to hide it... It reminds me of my mother, you see - it was something she had made for me - and... during my dark period, there came a day where I couldn’t stand to see it. So I asked... or more like *demand*ed that someone hide it away from me. Somewhere I would never find it...”

“Do you think you could get it back?” Lucy asked, reaching out to squeeze my hand.

I shook my head. “I’m not even sure what happened to the girl who hid it. Fired from my service some time ago, no doubt... assuming she didn’t quit, to escape me. I was... unpleasant to be around, during those dark days. And I honestly find it hard to believe that I’m all that much better, now...”

“Well, I like being around you!” Lucy declared, giving my hand another squeeze. “And I’m pretty sure Bailey appreciates you, too!”

“Then I suppose all that’s left is to bring Feyra around, hmm?” I teased, forcing a small smile. One that became more real when Lucy flashed me a grin of her own.

“If anyone can do it, it’s you! I’m sure of it!”

“You have too much trust in me,” I feigned complaining, shaking my head. “But when you say it with such confidence... why, I almost find myself believing it.”