

Chapter 88: Demigoddess Reunion

Lysette flared out her aura to assess the situation, but it wasn't until she turned around and saw Serrena's fiery grin that she lowered her guard and replaced her grimace with a smile. The two approached one another, with Mirae trailing just behind Lysette, and the two shared a handshake followed by a somewhat awkward silence as they tried and failed to come up with any further way to solidify the greeting.

"If it isn't the talk of the town herself," Serrena said.

Lysette sighed. "I go away for a few days and everyone is *still* talking about me? What's a girl gotta do to get a little privacy?"

"I'm just messing with you. How should I know, anyway? I only just arrived back in Domark just now myself. Anyway, let's have a seat."

Serrena motioned to a nearby table and the three of them sat down.

"Anyway, it seems you're finally back to your old self again. 'Bout damn time if you ask me—the brooding, moping, feeling sorry for yourself thing you had going on was quite frankly, disgusting. An absolute abomination for one of *my* disciples."

"Well, you can thank Mirae for that. Anyway, we just came to report on a mission and I think we're heading back to the Academy. Are you going to tag along?"

"Sure, let me just report in on my own assignment and we'll get going."

Serrena walked over to the counter and began chatting with Leonn about a pack of dire wolves that she'd eradicated near the eastern edge of Domaria. She spoke with a mix of swagger and confidence, relaying some information she'd discovered about some possible causes and ways forward. She continued to discuss other matters and general pleasantries for a few more minutes before returning to where Lysette and Mirae were standing with a sack of 100 platinum.

“So, Lyse,” Serrena asked. “Is it true that you dueled Leonn himself for your B-Rank promotion exam?”

“It’s true.”

“Well, holy shit! I didn’t think he’d actually decide to challenge you himself.”

“Well, for a mild-mannered receptionist who is the paragon of professionalism, he certainly is quite a talented Cultivator in his own right. I only barely managed to defeat him.”

“Damnit, Lyse. I thought after everything I’ve been putting myself through, I’d finally managed to surpass you. But here you are, just barreling past me. It’s... It’s infuriating.”

“Perhaps we should spend some time bolstering the ranks of your followers when we get back to campus. I think it would do both of us some good.”

“Did you just—” Serrena looked around. *“Apparently you’re also a telepath.”*

She made an exaggerated sighing sound through the telepathic link. *“Damnit, Lyse; just how far have you come?”*

“Is it appropriate for you to speak such words, Miss Demigoddess of Ambition? I would rather my friend not damn me, even in jest. Such words carry more weight when spoken by one who harbors divinity within her.”

“Fine. I concede your point. Moving to other matters, have you heard any news from Zarielle?”

“Nothing at this point, though I’ve learned some rather disturbing information which does relate to the gods. It’s a solemn matter and I think it’d be better to discuss this tonight. All four of us, where no prying eyes or ears might catch wind of matters which don’t concern them.”

“So, one of the crafting rooms over in Building 6, tonight, shortly after dusk. I’ll be there.”

“See you tonight?”

Serrena nodded and walked off before turning around as she neared the door. “You want a ride up to Domark before we part ways? I recently gained the ability to fly, and I know how much you hate those carriage rides.”

Lysette turned to Mirae and smiled, materializing her own icy wings. “You have no idea how much I am looking forward to skipping the line.”

Serrena shook her head. “Of course you can fly,” she muttered under her breath. “Shall we, then?”

The three stepped outside and, after Serrena took a moment to stretch, she leapt high into the air. As she ascended over the top of the guild hall, she ignited a crimson jet at her feet that kept her aloft much like a rocket. She grinned and waved from her skyward perch, beckoning her two disciples to join her.

Lysette stood behind Mirae, wrapping around their waist and, once she had a good grip upon them, vibrated her wings in rapid succession and began floating up to meet Serrena. She hadn’t previously noticed, but her wings vibrated with a certain rhythmic, almost melodic hum, a low murmur that Mirae seemed to find particularly relaxing as they rested in her arms. Serrena’s fiery jet, on the other hand, crackled with the calming sounds of wood popping and flames flickering over an open campfire.

The two ascended higher into the sky, Lysette taking the lead to avoid Serrena’s jets from behind, and shortly thereafter, one of the flying carriages took off a few hundred feet away. Although Lysette couldn’t confirm with her aura at such a distance, it certainly looked like her previous suspicions were correct. The carriage was ever so slightly contracting as it took off, all with the presumed goal of making the ride as uncomfortable as possible for the passengers

inside. *How despicable!* She clenched her fist as she and Serrena continued their flight up to the edge of the sky island high above.

They arrived about a minute before the carriage did and quickly vacated the platform as station attendants shooed them away to prepare for the arrival. Lysette dispelled her wings and, after making their way through a crowd of gasping onlookers, made their way onto one of the main roads leading back to campus.

“I don’t know how I feel about all the gawking,” Serrena said. “Have they never seen someone fly before? It’s not *that* uncommon.”

“It’s not, but there’s something you should be aware of. Now that you’ve awakened to your divinity, mortals are going to naturally be drawn to you, to express awe and reverence toward you.”

“Like your fan club?”

Lysette gripped Mirae’s hand a bit tighter. *“Maybe you’ll meet a special someone too.”*

“I wouldn’t get your hopes up if you’re expecting anything to happen on that front. Nor do I particularly welcome the idea.”

She switched from telepathy back to spoken words. “Anyway, what are you two going to do now, and does it involve custards?”

“Yes to the second question, although there are a couple of people I’m hoping to run into while we’re there.”

“You don’t mind if I join you two, do you?”

“Of course not. I think it’d be great if I could start introducing you to other people, and for you to be taking the first steps toward your own ascension.”

Serrena sighed. “You think they’ll all accept me? I’ve not exactly been the nicest person to a lot of them. Just like I wasn’t exactly the nicest person to you when we first met.”

“Seems like we’re both having to work on being appropriate leaders for our followers.”

Mirae squeezed Lysette’s hand. “I think you’re doing a pretty good job. Both of you.”

“I think you’re more than a little bit biased, Mirae,” Serrena said. “Even if it does make my ego feel good to hear you say something like that.”

“And I will continue to do what I can to support the both of you,” Mirae said.

Serrena gave a polite expression of thanks as the three made their way onto the campus. A few small monuments on the grassy commons had been erected in the three days she and Mirae had been gone, and numbers of wreaths, lilies, and other flowers were laid atop the structure of polished stone. A handful of students stood or knelt around the site, some weeping, others barely able to hold back tears, and still others looking on with pained yet solemn expressions as they paid tribute to the students lost in Asterion’s senseless attack.

But apart from that, there was little in the way of evidence that the attack had ever occurred, at least on the surface. All of the buildings had since been repaired and the bustle of students wandering around campus had returned to the way it was before. Most of the conversations were about random goings on, or lamenting the start of classes once more the next day.

However, more than a few students spoke in whispers about Lysette herself. Some were praising her actions on the night of the blood moon, heralding her as a sort of savior. Still others believed her to be a harbinger of ill-omen, a few brave souls even suggesting that she had orchestrated events behind the blood moon. That, in particular, earned Lysette’s ire like few things could, and she made a mental note of the two brave yet severely misguided individuals

who'd made that claim. And finally, a few were questioning just who Mirae was and how the two were connected.

None approached to sate their curiosity, something for which Lysette was grateful as she and her two companions passed by and made their way into the dining hall. The rich aromas of delicious foods of all varieties rushed into her nostrils, and her mouth began watering from the anticipation of the first good food she would be having in nearly a week. The fact that she, as a Godslayer, no longer needed to eat, failed to even slightly blunt her appetite. Rather, the fact that she could eat with abandon without suffering any negative effects only exacerbated her gluttonous desires as she made her way inside, Serrena and Mirae following close behind.

She hurriedly gathered her custard, one of only three remaining despite it being quite early for the evening meal. And she gathered some cheese-and-pepper-stuffed portobellos that she'd started to grow fond of, along with a rich and creamy seafood bisque being served special that day before making her way back to the dining area behind.

But her quiet enjoyment of her upcoming meal was cut short by an argument between a pair of students, neither of whom she recognized offhand. It was spoken in quiet, yet exasperated tones, and clearly audible to Lysette despite their attempts to keep their conversation buried among the cacophony.

“We need to start thinking about what this means!” a female voice said.

“We don't even know if there is a 'this'!” a male voice responded.

“There's definitely *something* going on— that much I'm sure about. There were definitely no big anomalies among the new students this year during the entrance exams. And yet, there are a number of first year students that are already reaching Essence coefficients of nearly three hundred. Three or four I could see, but we're talking *dozens*.”

“And what’s *your* theory for what’s going on? Let’s assume that your hypothesis is correct and it’s not all just rumors and bluster. Maybe there was just a lot of untapped potential among the new class?”

“Not a chance. There’s absolutely no reason to believe that *this* year’s class is particularly talented in a way that none of the classes have been in the previous thirty years. The only questions are: Who would have the resources to do such a thing? And why *now*?”

“Maybe someone in the palace? There was that attack last week. Maybe someone is anticipating more attacks and is funneling resources to the students so we could defend ourselves?”

“The palace has never done such a thing. Not that I’ve ever heard of, anyway. No, I’m worried that there’s something much, much deeper at play here. Someone with immense power has decided something is going to change around this campus. And whoever it is, might not even be mortal.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Samantha. You mean to tell me that the *gods* are taking an interest in this Academy, of all places on Aimarion? Surely you jest.”

“Theo, I agree that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, but considering that what’s happening right now is nothing short of extraordinary, we have to consider this as a possibility.”

“So what do we do if it really is divine intervention?”

“Figure out which god and why, and try to appease them somehow. It’s all we really can do.”

Lysette smiled as she sat down at a table against the far wall and took her first bite of custard in far too many days. It was delicious as always, sweetened yet further by the knowledge that her own strength had grown significantly in the past week and her plans were slowly bearing

fruit. It might take a few more months, maybe even years, of careful planning and working in the shadows, but soon enough, the first of her many ambitions was about to begin. Revolution.