

# Demon Queened

Chapter 42

Woodland Walk

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## Abigail

“So?” Mini-Sylvanna asked, gelatinous hands on her half-formed hips.

“What’s Queenie up to? Has she made any pro-pro... uh... Has she gotten the spell thingy yet?”

“She’s close,” I promised. “Lucy doesn’t know the spell, but she’s promised to get it and give it to Devilla.”

“Right. Because promises are totally things Heroines keep to Demon Queens. Next you’re going to tell me to trust Queenie, or something?” Sylvanna giggled. “Trusting Queenie! That’s a good one!”

“Devilla thinks she’ll keep it,” I told her. “And while I don’t exactly know what to make of the whole ‘trustworthy Heroine’ thing either, I *do* trust Devilla.”

“Because you’re a dumb-dumb,” Sylvanna declared. “A dummy dumb-dumb who does dumb things. Like trusting in someone with no heart!”

“She’s got more heart than *you*,” I snapped, crossing my arms in front of my chest. “At least she’s actually *trying to do something* about all the crap she pulled! You’re just gleefully abusing her without a care in the world.”

“And why *should* I care?” Sylvanna demanded. “She sucks! In a really... like... sucky way! She threatened all the slime girls in existence! All of them!”

“Is that all you can say? Because I agree it was sucky of her, but we already talked about that in the hallway and I’m *pretty sure* neither of us are going to be changing our answer any time soon.”

“Well... Uh... She did other things, too! Like... uh... She slapped maids for saying they’re prettier than her! And made a bunch of chefs sit in the dungeon for a day when they messed up her food!”

“You think I don’t know she was a bad boss?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at Sylvanna. “I used to have to pretend I was terrified of her, just to keep from being fired, because she *literally* couldn’t tell the difference between fear and respect! But she’s *changed*. She’s become a better person!”

“People don’t change!” Sylvanna insisted. “Tiger girls can’t change their stripes! Except for really bad dye jobs, which don’t really stick. Which... probably means something, like, met... uh.... a fork-ly? Or something? It’s something big me likes to say!”

“Well she...” I hesitated. I wanted to say that Devilla had changed. I was pretty sure she *had*. But it wasn’t like I could explain the whole ‘memories shoved into her head’ thing, and I wasn’t going to get anywhere arguing with Sylvanna’s world view. Plus, when I thought about everything Nivera told me - everything

she'd said about how Devilla *used* to be... "Well, maybe she's always been good, deep down, and the fucked up politics just dyed her bratty for a bit. I honestly don't know *what* to think. But I do know that Devilla's trying her best. For you. For me. For *everyone*."

"Whatever," Sylvanna huffed. "You just keep believing in your stinky boss. You'll see, though! You, and that dragon girl, and everyone else! You'll all see how terrible she is!" Sylvanna declared, before turning towards the door and stretching her arm up to reach the handle. A moment later she had the door pulled open, and she slipped out into the hall, making her way past a stressed out looking Lenora on the way back to her own floor.

"I-is everything okay?" Lenora asked me, nervously fiddling with the end of her tail. "I couldn't hear anything from out here, but... she looks mad..."

"Everything's fine," I promised, forcing a smile. "We just have a difference of opinion on Devilla. But she'll see - Devilla will come through in the end."

Maybe Sylvanna didn't have any faith in Dev, but *I did*.

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## Devilla

A growl assaulted my ears, moments before a blur of green and purple launched itself at me. A sigh escaped my lips as I caught the incoming creature's paw and tugged it forward, drawing it into a brief spin before tossing it back into the woods from whence it came. "I can see why nobody wants to come here during the Monster Movement. The attacks are becoming a real nuisance."

We were barely at the outskirts of the Daroom Woods, and yet already I'd had to fend off razor-clawed sloths, electricity-welding possums, and now what looked to be some sort of poisonous jaguar. It was utterly absurd.

"Nuisance?" Feyra asked. "You think this is a *nuisance*?! A nuisance is... I don't know... being out of bread when you want a sandwich, or something! This is a fucking *disaster zone*!"

"I think Eena just has different standards," Lucy remarked, putting a hand on Feyra's shoulder. "I mean, none of these creatures are much of a threat to her."

"...Perhaps I am downplaying the dangers, a little," I admitted, privately wondering if I'd gone a little overboard with showing off my power. It wouldn't do for anyone to get hurt because I'd held back, though. "What I don't understand is

why they're suddenly swarming us. The creatures on the way here weren't nearly so eager to try their luck against us."

"That's probably because of Bailey," Lucy informed me, causing the horned wolf in question to turn her head towards us. "Horned wolves are pretty strong, and monsters are pretty smart - they aren't going to mess with any group that contains one when we're just passing through their territory... especially since the territory they're protecting is only temporary, anyway. They usually prefer to live in places with a higher concentration of magic!"

"A higher concentration?" I questioned, unfamiliar with the phenomenon.

"Uh-huh! Forests and stuff tend to have more magic power, which means the monsters that live in them can recharge their magic quicker and use their abilities more often. That also means that most of the monsters that get displaced can't use their abilities as freely as they're used to, though, so they're also more cautious! But now we're reaching the ones that have just barely managed to cling to the outskirts of the woods - they don't want to risk what they have, so they're acting a lot more territorial... even though they're really outmatched..."

"It's not like *they* know that, though," Feyra pointed out. "If they did, they'd probably turn tail and flee for their lives."

“Perhaps if I spread out some magical energy, then?” I suggested. “Though the last time I tried that, I only ended up instigating an attack...”

“You mean with the spiked bears?” Lucy asked. “I don’t think that’s really a worry, this time. Everything here already wants to attack us...”

“It’ll basically make it impossible for me to find any healberries, though,” Feyra said. “You know, the things we’re theoretically here to find? I’m not even going to be able to turn my magic vision on to begin with if you’re flooding the whole damn area.”

“We can find the healberries on the way back,” Lucy replied. “Though I was sort of hoping your ability might be able to help us figure out what’s causing the Monster Movement... I’m pretty sure whatever’s doing it is closer to the center of the woods, though, so we can worry about that when we get there!”

“You’re far too carefree for a Heroine,” Feyra complained, putting her head in her hands. “But fine. Whatever. Not like we can really take our time looking for healberries when these damn monsters are attacking us every five minutes, anyways...”

“Alright then,” I murmured, focusing on my magic. I felt the warmth of it suffuse my being, flowing through my skin as the energy left me, saturating a wide

area around us. It was enough that I was pretty sure I felt the hit to my magic capacity, though it was already lessening, my regeneration outpacing the energy required to sustain my control over the magic.

The response was both immediate and dramatic. An array of tiny creatures scattered from the underbrush, spiky lizards and long fanged squirrels running for the trees. As did something... bigger. Something large, whose journey I could track through the shifting of branches and leaves, but whose body was rendered invisible even to my senses.

“...Anyone else a little freaked out by the whole invisible stalker thing?”

Feyra asked. “How long was that thing even there?”

“I have no idea,” I confessed, staring in the direction it went. “I’m simply glad it didn’t try attacking.”

“Me too,” Lucy agreed. “I didn’t even know there were invisible monsters in these woods...”

“I suppose that was rather the point,” I quipped, shaking my head. “Perhaps we can warn people when we’re done with our mission?”

“We should!” Lucy agreed. “Though hopefully it’ll move back into the woods, afterwards...”



Bailey let out a little noise that I took to be agreement. She sounded almost annoyed, though, sniffing the air and glaring after the creature. Perhaps she was annoyed that she'd missed it?

“What?” Feyra asked, seemingly also picking up on Bailey's ire. “Don't tell me you couldn't smell the damn thing either?”

The wolf shook her head, before growling after the beast and taking a step forwards, leading the charge deeper into the woods. For my own part, I merely traded a glance with Lucy before following after, determined not to let Bailey get too far ahead of us. For all her protectiveness, there were clearly threats she couldn't detect, let alone handle.

Not that I was going to tell Bailey that.

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Our journey through the woods wasn't precisely a quiet one. We stomped upon foliage, forced our way through underbrush, and occasionally hacked through a branch or two, generally making a nuisance of ourselves in the eyes of the forest

ecosystem. Not that said ecosystem seemed intent on lodging complaints. In fact, many of the animals seemed to be making a bit of a mess themselves as they scampered away from my display of magical might.

“I never knew there were so many types of monsters around here,” Lucy commented, her eyes sparkling as she watched a flock of pink birds take to the skies. “Life really is always interesting around you!”

“Always the optimist,” I remarked, unable to help the smile that came to my lips, even as I shook my head from side to side. “How far do you think we are from the center of this forest, anyways?”

“No clue!” Lucy chirped, flashing me a bright smile. “But I’m sure we’ll find it if we keep going straight!” Saying so, she reached into her pack and pulled out a wooden disk with a metal arrow on it. It was a compass that she’d been checking on and off since entering the forest. A necessity, with the trees around us having grown thicker, and the canopy above our heads blocking out our view of the sun.

Except...

“Is it just me, or have the trees been getting *thinner* lately? I can almost see the sky again.”

“It’s not just you,” Feyra confirmed, looking up, and then down again. “It’s only in this area though. The trees thicken up on either side of us...”

“It’s almost like a path!” Lucy pointed out, before frowning. “Why would anyone make a path in the Daroom Woods, though?”

“Maybe it leads to a bandit hideout, or something?” Feyra suggested.

“If it *is* a path, then it must have been abandoned quite a while ago,” I remarked. “The trees might be lacking, but the ground’s overgrown with underbrush as anywhere else.”

“We should follow it!” Lucy declared. “It might have something to do with the Monster Movement!”

“I doubt it,” Feyra scoffed. “It’ll probably just lead to some sort of... I don’t know. Wooden fort? Whatever bandits like to use!”

“...Not bandits,” I corrected, shaking my head as I followed a bend in the ‘path,’ pushing through a few branches to reveal a clearing. Within it sat a small building, with a pointed roof and an equal-armed cross sticking out of its crumbling roof, arrows attached to each segment. It was a symbol I recognized from the silver coins that humans used. “Not unless they’re the religious sort.”

“What’s a church doing here?” Lucy asked, eyes wide.

“There’s a plaque on the wall,” I remarked, walking towards it with narrowed eyes. In truth, I could read it from across the clearing, but I didn’t see the need to announce just how good my eyes were. Instead, I waited until I was right in front of the crumbling building, Bailey trailing just half a step behind me, her head swiveling back and forth as she sniffed the air. “Milton Monastery. In isolation we learn...”

“Who the fuck would isolate themselves in a monster infested forest?” Feyra demanded, gesturing around us to make the point.

“People who are really determined to learn things, I guess?” Lucy suggested, studying the plaque. “Do you think there’s any chance they learned about the Monster Movement while they were here?”

“Assuming this place doesn’t *predate* the Monster Movement,” Feyra remarked. “It’s only been a thing for the last couple decades.”

“Well there’s only one way to find out,” I declared, moving towards the building. “We’ll have to explore it ourselves...” Not that I was sure a building this decrepit would have anything to teach us. I wasn’t an archaeologist, able to pick apart hidden truths from exploring a relic. The only hope I had was that some bit of writing had somehow survived... and yet, at the same time, I couldn’t help but

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wonder if it was truly a coincidence that we'd found a monastery here in the center of the forest. One that likely predated the Monster Movement, no less.

Perhaps I was only overthinking things, though. It wasn't as if the church had anything to do with monsters, after all... Right?