

# Demon Queened

## Chapter 25

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## Devilla

“I can’t believe you came home with a privacy spell,” Abigail muttered, glancing down at the hand that held her own, before turning to glare at...

Something. Not me, exactly. Nor Bailey, who’s lupine head was laying upon my lap. The only target I could detect was the wall - or perhaps the tower? The world as a whole? “After everything I went through...”

“*That’s* what you’re focused on?” I questioned, arching a brow. “I’d have thought Lucy’s confession of affection to make a much better bid for your attention.”

“I mean, sure,” she grumbled, shifting her gaze to me. The anger had thankfully left her gaze, but I could sense her frustration all the same. “The fact that the literal nightmare of our people has somehow developed a crush on you is big news. But it’s also so mind bogglingly insane that I can’t even process it right now. So yeah, I’m more focused on the fact that I apparently unleashed political chaos *and* had to deal with that bitchy lamia for *no damn reason.*”

“I still can’t believe you met Nivera,” I admitted, shaking my head in disbelief. A completely valid sentiment on my part, that was only *partially* driven by pangs of guilt and a desire to avoid eye contact with my poor maid. “Do you have any idea how long it’s been since her name passed through my head?”

“Since you made it illegal to *say* her name, maybe?” Abigail remarked, before narrowing her eyes at me. “Speaking of which, it’d be great if you changed that. I usually prefer to insult people by name over species.”

“Right...” I nodded, my cheeks turning pink as I recalled the brash law I’d put in place. An abuse of power, if ever there was one. “Consider it legal.”

Abigail didn’t say anything, at first. She merely stared at me. Only after several uncomfortable seconds of this did she press a hand against her forehead, let loose a pained groan, and mutter, “I can’t believe I’m friends with the fucking Demon Queen... You seriously just changed the law, didn’t you?”

“I’ll need to alert Sylvanna and have word of it spread... But effectively, yes.” I suppose it *was* weird from an outside perspective. Jacob certainly would have found the idea ‘mind boggling.’ In fact, the mere thought of any American president changing the law with a word was enough to send shivers down my spine. And yet, at the same time, the knowledge that I could do so felt as natural to me as the fact that I could talk at all.

Personally, I was more stuck on the fact that Abigail had actually begun to consider me a friend. It felt to me as if she’d been through nothing but suffering at my hands. She’d been forced to deal with Mifa, then Sylvanna, and now Nivera, all because of me. And for what? A few french fries? Delicious as they might have

been, I wasn't sure even paradise on a plate could pay her back for what she'd been through.

She'd probably just glare at me if I pointed it out though.

"Right..." Abigail muttered, blissfully unaware of my likely headache inducing doubts. "Because that makes it any *less* crazy. Also, speaking of Sylvanna, what's the deal with you two, anyway? I mean, obviously she hates your guts, and you feel terrible about what you did to her and all that, but... is it just me, or are you sorta *afraid* of dealing with her?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to call myself 'afraid,'" I protested. "I simply... Dislike the way she makes me feel." Small. Insignificant. *Stupid*. Like a child, in over her head, desperately lashing out at the world while simultaneously begging for someone else to take her burdens away. The same as when we'd first met. "We both know I deserve it, though."

"I mean, you *did* threaten to leave her entire population petrified," Abigail confirmed. "But, like I keep telling you, you aren't the same person anymore. You just need to give her time to learn the real you."

"I don't think it's that simple, Abigail," I said, shaking my head. "Fifteen years of forced labor is a bit much to forgive, no matter how much I change my behavior. Even if I was arrogant enough to think myself worthy of a second chance, I'd still say you're asking too much from her. "

“Fifteen years...?” Abigail whispered. The look of horror on her face was expected, painful as it may have been. Her next words, however, were not.

“Devilla... How old were you, exactly, when you made that threat?”

“Around seven? It was a little bit after the debacle with Nivera - so more like fourteen years and change, I suppose. Though I hardly think it makes a difference.”

“And how old was Sylvanna?” Abigail pressed, again narrowing her eyes. Somehow, despite her glare being pointed in my direction this time, it still didn't feel as if it were meant for me.

“Seventeen, I believe? Too young for the duties I pushed upon her, no matter how you slice it.”

“Too... Devilla! You were *literally* just a little kid! And she's been talking to you like... like *that*? This whole time!?”

“Of course not... She's had time to calm down since the start. But I hardly see what that-”

“Okay, first off?” Abigail said, holding up a hand to interrupt me. “You and her aren't talking anymore. I'll handle the status reports, or whatever. Second? What the hell happened with Nivera? Because if it's anywhere close to being as fucked as this, I'm going to need details.”

I shook my head, a wry smile upon my lips. “Your concern is as touching as it is misplaced, Abigail. I'm royalty, remember? I'm meant to-”

“Details. Now.”

Now it was my turn to glare at the interrupting Abigail - or it would have been, had Bailey not picked that moment to lift her head up from my lap and growl - at *me*. As it was, with both of them against me, all I could do was shake my head and sigh.

“You’re both being ridiculous. But if you both insist... Well, I can’t say I’m heartbroken about not getting to meet with her. Though, as far as details with Nivera go, I think you’ll find yourself disappointed.”

“Uh-huh.”

Somehow, she didn’t look very convinced. Nor did Bailey, for that matter, who actually went so far as to roll her eyes. I didn’t even want to know where she’d picked *that* up.

“Seriously... It was a simple case of me being selfish,” I explained. “I’d begun to ignore my duties as a princess, in order to pursue more time with her. Her parents disapproved of my actions. They tried to interfere with our friendship - to keep her away from me, so that I would spend more time doing what I was supposed to. So, like an idiotic brat, I fired her dam, who was working as one of my Generals. A decision that *obviously* didn’t go over well. Nivera became upset with me, for good reason. I got upset, for what I thought was a good reason. Except while she contented herself with calling me names, *I* locked myself away and...

well, made various terrible decisions...” Like studying my mother’s old speeches, so that I could try and talk like her at her most formal, in a vain attempt to earn the people’s respect, if not love. Then, when that didn’t work, I started firing various Generals. I refused to follow any advice, screaming and throwing things at anyone who dared to go against me. I even went so far as to strip one of the bloodlines of political power - and maybe broke a few of their representative’s bones, when she objected to the decision... A move of such monumental idiocy that it almost tore the tower apart.

“I do not believe I can stress enough just how horrifically I messed up, Abigail. How close the tower came to falling apart under my terrible excuse for leadership. It’s why I largely withdrew from the political sphere. I became content to complain about everyone else failing to put in an effort, despite knowing full well that I could do no better...”

“Funny,” Abigail muttered. “I get the feeling Nivera would put it pretty differently. Also, you were *seven*.”

“I was also in charge!” I retorted. “If everyone had died, my age would have made for little solace. Especially when all I had to do was continue listening to those who knew better.” I frowned. “And besides, if the only issue was my behavior at *seven*, then people would hardly hate me to this day, now would they?”

My behavior might be better now, but I still spent almost a decade and a half making every single person hate me.”

“Yeah, well...” Abigail hesitated, as if searching for a counter that we both knew didn’t exist. “Maybe if people knew more about what happened in the past, they’d at least be quicker to accept that you’re trying to be better now...”

“Perhaps,” I agreed. “But I have no interest in garnering sympathies with tales of a poor childhood. It would come across as nothing but excuses. And rightfully so, so far as I’m concerned.”

“Well, you’ve got *my* sympathy, anyways. And I want to know more about what happened back then, too! Preferably from someone less biased than you. Like Nivera, may the Fallen One help me...”

“Fine,” I conceded, throwing up my hands as Bailey released another growl of affirmation. “Talk to her, if you wish. But I’m not sure why you think she’d give a less biased opinion than me. In fact, I struggle to believe she doesn’t hate me, after everything I did. The idea that she might somehow want to *help me*, after everything is hard to wrap my mind around... Keep your guard up, Abigail. And ask for her aunt to be present, if possible.”

“General Sallina?” she queried me, tilting her head a little to the left. “Not Chloe?”



“I can hardly entrust your wellbeing to Nivera’s fiancée,” I pointed out, frowning at the mere thought of it. “Especially when I know absolutely nothing about the girl, other than the fact that we’re theoretically related. If she intends to act as a tempering force then more power to her, but this and that are unrelated.”

“Fair enough, I guess. But a General? I didn’t think you got along with any of them.”

“I don’t,” I confessed. “But of them, there’s none I’d trust more than Sallina. There was a time I considered her close to family - in fact, I might even go so far as to say that I saw her as a surrogate mother figure, in part. Before she chose to take in Nivera, at least.”

She’d been my tutor. The only teacher I’d ever had that actually made learning seem worthwhile. Perhaps it had something to do with the encouragement she’d given me, whenever I struggled with a question, and the approval she’d grant whenever I came to an answer. But in the end, all we were was teacher and student. She was actually *related* to Nivera - if only barely - and, more importantly, Nivera had actually needed her. It was obvious whose side she’d choose, when it came down to it.

Of course, that wasn’t to say she’d given up on me entirely. She’d at least tried to patch things up with me and Nivera, back before I went so far as to make

saying her name illegal. But I suppose I must have crossed a line at some point.

Why else would she have betrayed me to Lucy in the game?

The worst part was, I didn't even know *why*. Jacob skipped the associated dialogue! All I could remember were the sex scenes - something I was less than happy about, all considering. Though, considering how fast he'd been going at the end, I had blissfully little knowledge of even that! Mostly I just recalled flashes of bare skin and... blue... scales...

"Sallina has *red* scales, though..." I whispered

"Huh?"

"Sallina wasn't in the game," I said, my voice rising in pitch and excitement alike. "She wasn't the one who betrayed me in it!"

"The game?" Abigail questioned, her brow furrowing. "You mean the one from your old world?"

I nodded. "A game whose timeline we've apparently diverged from... Though I suppose that's hardly a surprise, considering everything I've been up to."

At least, I *assumed* my actions were the cause of this discrepancy. Perhaps I'd fired her in the game's timeline? Though it was hard to imagine myself doing so. Even her choosing Nivera over me hadn't been enough to inspire such an action, after all... Perhaps she'd tried to reach through to me, again, in that timeline? To stop me from going further down the dark path that led to my defeat?

If so, I could only hope that my response had ended with her losing her job, and nothing else.

“It doesn’t matter, in the end,” I declared, more to myself than Abigail.

Whatever that version of me had done to Sallina, whatever Sallina may have done to inspire it, it was all constrained to a world of fiction. None of it had come to pass in reality. “It’s just nice to know...”

“Okay?” Abigail replied, obviously confused, but thankfully willing to move past it. “So Nivera’s aunt is trustworthy, I guess?”

“That would be the main takeaway, yes,” I confirmed. “Though it might be best to take that assessment with a grain of salt. As much as it pains me to say, it has been quite a few years since our last serious discussion. A lot could have changed.”

“You’re giving me a lot of conflicting signals over here,” Abigail complained. “Trust Sallina more than Nivera, but don’t trust Sallina too much? How about I just... Talk to them and see what happens? Maybe bring Bailey along? She’s actually pretty good at getting a read on people.”

I glanced down, towards the horned wolf in question. Her response was to stick her tongue out and wag her tail. The very picture of a household pet.

“...If you say so.”

“Just trust in us,” Abigail insisted. “You’ve got enough to worry about with the Heroine crushing on you. Which is still breaking my brain to imagine, by the way.”

“I know what you mean...” I confessed, grimacing. “It’s hard for me to imagine *anyone* developing feelings for me. Let alone someone as pure as Lucy...”

“Could you maybe not turn my words against yourself like that?” Abigail demanded, crossing her arms in front of her chest. “That’s not what I meant, and you know it.”

“I simply meant-”

“What? That you’re unworthy of love? Because news flash, Devilla! There’s other people in your life who like you. Maybe not in that way, but... I wasn’t kidding when I called you my friend, earlier. And I wasn’t taking pity on you, either, so don’t even go there! I care about you. Hell, I can even see how someone could fall for you!”

“I...” I hesitated. I wanted to argue with her. To remind her of all that I had done wrong. To tell her that it wasn’t a matter of whether someone *could* fall for me, but whether I *deserved* it. But she’d heard it all before, hadn’t she? What point was there in bringing it up? I was only going to annoy her with it...

Besides, I could practically hear her insisting to me that the affections of others weren’t for me to dictate. Just as I could picture Lucy nodding in the

background, barely holding back a speech about her love not being a thing I needed to earn...

“Thank you. For saying that.”

“Why do I sense an if in there?” Abigail grumbled, looking me up and down. “Like ‘thanks for saying that, even if it isn’t true’ or ‘I don’t deserve it.’”

“Even I know better than to annoy you with that refrain,” I remarked, turning my head away from her - though I could do little to escape Bailey’s growl of annoyance.

“Uh-huh. One of these days I’m going to drill it into your brain that it’s okay for people to care about you. And that I can forgive you for whatever crap you think you’ve put me through, even without your permission. Something tells me it’ll take longer than we have, though... Didn’t you say the Heroine was waiting for you?”

“She prefers Lucy,” I pointed out. “As do I, actually. It helps to separate her in my mind from the genocidal maniacs who held the title before her.”

“Well, it feels *weird* calling her by name,” Abigail complained. “It sounds too much like the Fallen One’s.”

Bailey let out a short bark - one that sounded suspiciously like a laugh.

“Right, well...” I hesitated a moment, looking between the happily panting Bailey and the now glaring Abigail. “Do I want to know what’s going on between you two?”

“It’s nothing. Go back to the Her... *Lucy*. We’ll hold down the fort here, alright?”

“...Right...” I muttered, reaching into my bag to pull out the teleportation circle. “Time to experiment with teleportation magic, then.”