

Demon Queened

Chapter 55

Written by Princess Kay

Devilla

“Are you sure you’re truly alright with being left behind?” I asked, wishing to confirm once more that Lucy was fine with Abigail’s suggestion.

“I really am fine with it!” she promised me, with a soft smile. “This is a family reunion for you, too, isn’t it? Not just a chance to ask my questions! This way, you can focus on the first part first and I can do my thing after!”

“It hardly counts as a reunion when we’ve never met before,” I pointed out, a soft frown on my own lips. “And I don’t expect it to be very pleasurable, either... You’re not the only one intent on getting answers tonight, you know? She has information on my mother, and her plans for me, as well...”

“Plans for you?”

“Right... You weren’t there for that, were you?” I murmured, recalling that it was prior to me telling Lucy the truth of things. “My mother supposedly claimed that I would be the one to stop the war. At least according to my aunt’s drunken rants. I intend to find out what it means.”

“Well, if you can get her to open up, then we’ll both win!” Lucy pointed out. “But it’s still starting out as just a dinner with your aunt, right? It’s fine if you don’t include me for that.”

“I suppose...” I reluctantly agreed, eyeing the teleportation circle that would take me back to my room. “It just feels wrong to leave you here, eating dinner by yourself while we feast... Especially since I made you relocate to the forest, after the inn...” Was it free of rats? Probably not. But it was a matter of not knowing! Ignorance was bliss!

“You’re sweet to worry,” Lucy told me, with a quick kiss to my cheek that set my face ablaze. “But I’ll be fine! I ate plenty of meals in the woods by myself before I met you!”

“I don’t believe that’s as good a point as you think it is, in terms of assuaging my guilt...” I grumbled, before shaking my head and moving towards the circle. “But very well. I’ll be back to call upon you shortly...”

“I’ll see you soon!” Lucy agreed.

And just like that I was gone, away from the dark woods and back into my brightly lit bedroom... Or at least I *assumed* that was the way of things. I’d come

to realize that I was terrible at telling the difference between dark and light, unless I actually focused on it.

“Oh good,” came Abigail’s voice. “You’re back.”

“Indee...” I began, only to trail off as I caught sight of the speaker.

It was Abigail, of course - who else would it have been, waiting in my room? - but she looked *different* than what I was used to. Gone was her maid uniform - or rather, there it was, nicely folded upon my bed. Instead, she was wearing a backless black dress. Though it technically covered more than her maid outfit - going almost all the way down to her knees - the way it clung to her - and the absence of concealing frills - left even less to the imagination than usual.

“...Is it too much?” she asked, plucking at the tight hem and doing a quick turn before my eyes. “I didn’t really know how formal I should be going for this, so I just went with my gut and picked out something nice from my closet.”

“N-No,” I said, my tongue suddenly tied as the words seemed to practically be pushing and shoving their way out of my mouth, to better reassure her. “It’s... You look gorgeous.”

“Th-thanks,” she replied - and I couldn’t help but notice the red upon her own cheeks as she did so. As if my compliment had caught her off guard. “Well,

guess we should hurry up and join the others, then? I hear Chloe's Mom's a pretty big stickler for timing."

"Right..."

The trip to my aunt's place went smoothly - if only because I'd grown used to walking through town in disguise, while taking cooking lessons from Abigail. She apparently lived on the 47th floor, in an area that looked closer to suburbs than the urban territory Abigail and her mother inhabited. The houses were a little further away from one another, and there was grass and trees to be spotted between them.

"Is it just me, or is Chloe's mom *way* better off than I was expecting?" Abigail asked, looking up and down the street. "I mean, maybe you're not aware of this, with the whole 'have a whole floor to myself' thing, but space is *kinda* at a premium when your entire civilization is stuffed inside a single tower. It feels downright *weird* seeing this much room between buildings..."

“Well, she *is* the Queen’s aunt,” Chloe pointed out, popping up from inside a nearby bush. “I’m pretty sure she got this place when your dam was still alive, too - guessing Aunt Issa didn’t really want her sister living in relative poverty while she feasted on royal delicacies, every day.”

“Wha-why- why were you...” Abigail looked between the small bush and the girl stepping out of it, obviously confused.

“To surprise you, of course! Really, I’m just glad I properly predicted what street you’d be coming down. Makes the time I spent waiting totally worth it”

“Right...” Abigail sighed, shaking her head. “I guess this is your take on being a trickster?”

“Oh, you haven’t even scratched the surface of that!” Chloe promised, with a sharp toothed grin. “Honestly, I’ve been too busy acting like the responsible one to get any good tricks in, of late. Starting to make me feel all icky and stifled... Not exactly planning to pull a ton of pranks during a big important dinner, though, so you can get that right out of your head.”

“Just a minor trick or two *before* dinner, then?” I guessed, unable to help the smile that came to my own lips.

“Exactly!” Chloe confirmed. “You get it, cuz!”

“Cuz, huh... It’s odd, to hear that word used in reference to myself. In truth, I never truly thought of family as something I could *have*, in this lifetime... the whole idea of people simply spending time with you and loving you because of who you are was a foreign one, for much of my life.”

“Well, you’ve got a whole bunch of family, now,” Chloe pointed out, her sharp toothed grin shifting to a more mundane looking smile as she undid the partial transformation she’d placed upon her maw. “I mean, sure, it’ll take time for everything to properly settle in - but like a big lump of sugar in tea, it’s only a matter of time before you sloooowly melt into the greater whole that is a properly functioning family unit! Or something like that.”

“You make it sound like I’d lose my sense of self in it,” I pointed out, frowning a little.

“Yeaaaah, I’m not the best at metaphors. Try not to poke at it too much, or it’ll fall apart like a sandcastle before the might of a toddler’s foot. My big point is that right now you’re in the teacup with the rest of us, but you haven’t actually made yourself a part of us. You’re forcing yourself to trust us, because you want what we’re offering, but you’ve been by yourself for so long that it doesn’t feel *real*. Unless I’m mistaken?”

“...No,” I confessed, with a grimace. “You’re not. As much as I want to accept Nivera as a sister, of sorts, I’ve spent fourteen years trying my damndest to never think about her. It’s... difficult, to accept that we’re suddenly connected together. No matter how happy the thought makes me...”

“Just give it time,” Chloe suggested. “And make sure you don’t accidentally alienate the people *already* in your life, just because you’re chasing after something new... Or am I imagining that slightly neglected look on your face, Abby?”

Abigail jumped, faintly, obviously caught off guard by her sudden inclusion in the conversation. A misstep on my part - I should never have allowed the conversation to drift so far from what she could participate in.

“I’m fine,” Abigail promised, as if to assuage my fears. “I mean, I get it - you’re talking family stuff. It doesn’t affect me.”

“Perhaps not directly,” I interjected, before Chloe could reply. “But you are as important to me as any member of this pseudo-family. Perhaps even more so.”

My words, meant only to reassure my friend, seemed instead to fluster her. Her cheeks turned bright red, and she looked away from me. “Careful who you say that crap to. You’re going to give someone the wrong idea...”

“Then let the wrong idea form in their heads,” I declared. “I care not a whit, so long as the truth reaches *your* ears. So I’ll say it, again, Abigail - you are important to me.”

“And you’re *both* important to me!” Chloe added. “Important guests, that is. The house is right this way!” Saying so, she grabbed my hand and Abigail’s, and began to drag us down the street. “Come on! The sooner we get to the table, the sooner we can get this incredibly awkward dinner started!”

“You say that like you’re looking forward to it,” I remarked, frowning. “I didn’t think you the sort to dine upon misery.”

“Misery? No. But stuffed pork chops and thrice baked potatoes? Yum! You can always tell just how awkward Nivera expects a conversation to go by how good she makes the food, and this one’s going to be a doozy...”

“Wait,” Abigail called out, her pace just short of a run as she struggled to keep up with Chloe’s fast, if short, strides. A problem I could relate to. “You mean *Nivera’s* the one cooking?”

“Surprised?” Chloe grinned. “She’s actually pretty good at it. Mostly because she’s too paranoid to let anyone else cook her meals, when she can help it, but still! You haven’t lived until you’ve tasted her potted meatballs.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I remarked, trying not to chuckle at the mental image of Nivera in an apron. It wasn’t even all that funny - just... different than how I normally envisioned her.

“Well, I guess if nothing else, it’s good to know the food won’t suck...”
Abigail sighed.

“Right?” Chloe grinned. “Always look on the bright side of things! That’s my motto of the minute. And hey, I’m pretty sure we’re going to get the answers you’re looking for today, too. It’s just... maybe... gonna be a bit messy...”

“Messy?” I queried, a little concerned by the phrasing. “What do you mean messy?”

“I mean, Mom might... say some things you aren’t gonna wanna hear. Mostly about your own mom. She’s... not a fan...”

“If that’s all, we’ll be quite fine,” I assured her, shaking my head and smiling. Though perhaps my smile was a touch *colder* than the norm. “We don’t need to get along. I’m not entirely fond of aunts who never even make an appearance in their niece’s lives, in any case. I just need answers...”

“Well, you’re getting them,” Chloe promised me, releasing my hand and Abigail’s alike so that she could wrap me up in a sudden hug. “With a side of

family too. Because no matter what reason Mom did - or didn't - have for not contacting you, nothing's going to change the fact that you're in my life *now*."

"...You know, I don't recall *you* ever trying to visit me, either," I pointed out. There was no heat to my words, though. My aunt was one thing, but Chloe wouldn't have had the autonomy to seek me out until long after I'd descended into brathood. It was unlikely I'd have willingly seen her, even if she *had* tried. Still... "I'm honestly rather surprised you never showed up and tried to help. Not that I deserved it - but you just seem like the sort who wouldn't let that stop you... Unless you thought I was too far gone, even for your sake?"

"Actually, I considered it," Chloe admitted. "I drew up all sorts of plans to sneak up to your room and give you an earful. Nivera always shot me down whenever I suggested it, though - always with some logical flaw on why my plan wouldn't work. Not that I was going to let a little thing like logic keep me from at least slipping you an invitation to our wedding, but... Well, you snapped out of it on your own before it came to that."

"When is the wedding, anyways?" Abigail asked.

"It's postponed, actually," Chloe admitted, with a shrug. "Just until everything gets sorted out with you guys and the whole saving the world thing... It

was going to be just a couple weeks after the coronation, originally, but then Illa suddenly started acting differently and Niv got way too freaked out about that to concentrate on wedding things, even for a minute... The delay will be worth it in the end, though! Just so long as *you* actually attend your sister's wedding."

"I'll be there," I promised, a faint smile tugging at the corner of my lips. I probably should have felt bad about interfering with their plans - I *did* feel bad, in fact - but... knowing that I was wanted there? Filled me with a fuzzy sort of warmth inside.

"Good," Chloe declared with a grin, before coming to a sudden halt in front of a blue doored building. "Now come on in! Dinner should be ready by now - and it smells *amazing*."