

## ***Demon Girl* by Penelope Fletcher**

*Rae Wilder has problems. Supernatural creatures swarm the earth, and humanity is on the brink of extinction. Stalked by a handsome fairy who claims she is like him, demonkind, Rae thinks maybe it was a mistake breaking the rules by going over the Wall into demon territory. Plunged into a world of dark magics, fierce creatures, and ritual sacrifice, she is charged with a guarding a magical amulet. The changes to her mind and body are startling, but rather than accept her purpose she struggles against who she is destined to be. Throw in a big lust for a vampire who can't keep his hands off her, and life starts to get complicated. Rae is forced to make the ultimate choice: to live and die human, or embrace her birth-right and wield magics that could turn her into something wicked, a force of nature nothing can control.*

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I clasped his hand and curled my fingers around his. They were rock solid, cold. He pulled me up and my legs wobbled, so his other hand snagged my waist to steady me. For a moment I stood, but was weightless as he carried my weight. The sensation was unusual. I scowled and stared into the face of my vampire.

He was older than me, not by much, and he was ugly. Swept back from his forehead and longer than fashionable his hair was coal black, and cut close at the neck. His eyes were red ringed, like he was sickly, and had a peculiar stillness about them. He hadn't blinked, not once since he'd first revealed himself to me. His eyebrows were thick, and dark, as was the smattering of hair on his chin, which had a deep cleft. His brow jutted out from his face and his cheeks were gaunt giving him a look of the starved. It was a strong face but one that did not appeal to me.

Straightening, I pulled myself from his grip and knocked his hands away.

A faint, dry scent hit the back of my throat and my hackles rose. Swallowing hard, my eyes left his as I controlled the sudden urge to launch myself at him. To rip, bite and tear. A manic giggle bubbled in my chest. The thought of launching yourself at a vampire was ridiculous and suicidal, but my body was seriously contemplating it. He brushed the hair out of my eyes and I recoiled. He hadn't made a move for a vein, yet, but he was a blood drinker, and I was full of blood.

He flashed me a smile and his chalky lips framed pearly fangs flanked by two smaller canines. They had run right out as he'd touched me. For a moment I was overcome. I stared at them, the spiky tips resting on his lower lip, a startling shade of ruby red. Everyone knew vampire fangs ran out when they were mad or bloodlusty. Which was he? Probably the latter, if he was mad my limbs would be scattered across the forest floor by now.

"You're going to kill me now," I said steadily.

I'd been through too much to deny that I was living on borrowed time. To be honest I was waiting for the hammer to fall. I would die there, food for the vampire-boy that the fairy-boy was hunting. Breandan would return eventually like he promised and find my rotted corpse. Would he be sad? Would he and the 'we' he'd referred to, lament over my body. Would they give me a proper burial? After all he had said I was like him, fairykind too. In my last moments of life pondering on how I felt about being named a demon, I did not feel disgust or fear, but sort of a

resigned relief. I was no longer a freaky human girl, but a fairy. My strangeness made perfect sense now.

“I am not going to kill you.”

The vampire had spoken. It took me a while to realize he had, because my last words had been a statement not a question. And even if he'd interpreted it as a question, it was clearly rhetorical. I was living my last moments and the flashbacks of my life were about to commence so the interruption was not appreciated. But since he'd spoken again I felt obliged to say something back, and I was getting used to conversations with strangers.

“Why?” I asked, genuinely puzzled. “You didn't dive through that hole for fun. If the wires had caught you you'd have set off the klaxon and had Clerics with stakes and silver on your ass until you were ash. Vampires don't seem the self-sacrificing kind to me. Plus, the sun is rising.” I pointed east. “You don't have much time, and to be out this early, or late, you must be super hungry to risk the true death. Or suicidal. Which brings me back to the fact you guys are big on the self preservation.”

He made a low rumbling noise and his shoulders shook. It was laughter, and it was gruesome, and wretched. “I have been looking for you.”

I thought about this. For a vampire to be looking for you and not hunting you was unheard of. It was intriguing and I knew then that curiosity was about to get me into more trouble.

“You're not the first to try that line today. You demons know how to flatter a girl.”

He growled a little. “Fairies.” He said the word like a curse.

I sighed again, exaggerating the rise and fall of my shoulders. Fine, my tribulations for the morning were not over. I could deal with that, but I needed the safety of Temple walls. The forest was no longer comforting, but alien and hostile.

“If you're not going to eat me would you mind if we walked and talked? I'm tired but have to keep going, or I'll be late for class.”

He remained still and peered past me into the trees. I found it hard to read his face. His expression was not worried, but I thought it brooding, or rather, preoccupied with being anxious about something.

“I need to find a dark place. A safe place.”

The dead and the sunlight didn't mix well. They burned, badly, and burst into extravagant blue and red flames. Then their blackened corpses flaked into ash.

I could see why he might be anxious to find a 'dark place' as he put it.

“My wardrobe is dark.” The words popped out of my mouth before they registered.

“Wait,” I said, and held up my palm. The standard cracks in my judgment were now gaping canyons, and there were all kinds of crazy ideas flying around. “You're friendly, right? If I help you, you aren't going to turn on me. Or turn me.”

“As you pointed out, the sun is rising and I weaken by the moment. I need to talk to you. Hear what I have to say then I'll go.”

“Okay,” I said slowly. There did not seem to be too big a downside to this arrangement. “I can do that, hear you out. But tell me, the fairy-boy I met is hunting you.” I watched his face carefully. “Why? Did you do something bad to him or his kind?”

He looked me over so intently I squirmed in my skin. He made a quick movement with his hand that said 'so what?'.

“If they find my resting place they will kill me, and they won’t listen to what I have to say, which is why you must.”

I mouthed my next words silently before I spoke them aloud. “I’m a fairy too.” It was easy to say and I smiled. “It’s important I know if talking to you will get me in trouble.” I paused then grunted. “In more trouble than I already am, I mean.”

His eyebrows rose and he focused on me more intently. I backed up a pace and couldn’t help cupping my neck with my hand. He tilted his head and narrowed those bottomless eyes of his.

“I smell magics, but you seem human to me in every way.”

“You seem to know a lot about me and what I’ve been doing. But then if you knew a lot about me you would know I have only just found out I’m a fairy.” That sentence was convoluted, and I had confused myself. It made some kind of crazy sense, so I stood my ground and waited for his answer.

The vampire did not seem confused. “I can explain. But at night.” His eyes darted to the east and his mouth pulled down.

The sky was much lighter now, but the clouds gave extra cover. Time was running out. I was beyond terrified, the curls of fear in my stomach were tornadoes, and I felt a responsibility to protect this vampire from bursting into a firework display.

“My wardrobe it is.” He placed a hand on my lower back and I jerked away. “Watch the hands,” I said and eyed him.

“I’m going to carry you,” he explained. “It will be faster and we will not be seen.”

No doubt he could carry me, but still, the thought of being so close to death itself was worrisome. His presence still rubbed me up the wrong way. I was strong willed, not infallible, and my losing control would be fatal.

“No funny business. I’ll scream, and dead or not, it will hurt your ears.”

He shook his head, face serious. “No funny business,” he promised.

“Could you put the fangs away?”

“I like the way you smell.”

“That is creepy,” I said and plucked at my bottom lip. “You’re creepy.”

His body kind of vibrated, and a strange grizzly sound came out of his mouth. I guess since vampires didn’t use air to talk or breathe they sounded, moved, and even laughed differently to normal beings. I jumped, but thankfully he was too preoccupied with laughing to notice, or to comment on noticing.

“No biting. I swear.”

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