

Tales of the Daemonica Hysterica; the Gauntlet of Laughter
By Feathers

Lelina turned and looked about her. Her rectangular temple had been carved out of the rock directly beneath the den of her pack and its single entrance was guarded and warded at all times to prevent the Unworthy to get in. Its walls were smooth and dark terracotta, as were the tiles on the floor. Smokeless candles hung in brackets on the walls and shed pools of soft orange light on the floor. The ceiling was flat but on its polished surface were delicious depictions and representations of her God, the Laughing God. She noted, with delight, that they had added a scene of her mother wrapped up in His embrace, feathers tickling her feet. Lelina smiled. Her mother would have liked that.

Between her and the entrance to the temple a circle had been drawn with salt. It was large enough to hold a single person. About the circle, set at even spaces, were six chairs and foot stocks. Sat in them, dressed in simple wool shorts and vest tops, sat her offering. There were three humans: Rex, a bald young man just out of his teens; Sylvie, a long black haired girl in her twenties and Cass, a middle aged woman with silver hair. They were blind folded and barefoot with their arms tied behind them. The other three were a mix of slaves taken from the other tribes: Tiri, a beautiful fox girl with three tails; Maraq, a brutish looking bull with horns that curled over his head; Sessna, a purple haired, black winged raven woman, was last, snapping her beak at every little sound.

“Offering – check,” Lelina said and let out a happy sound before moving to the next item. “Now for the Acolytes.”

Lelina let out a brief chuff and from the shadows behind her, six of her robed Acolytes, each a young pup from the Gray wolf clan, appeared and moved to take their place at the back of their specific offering. The offerings began to wriggle and squirm as they knew what was coming next.

“Begin.”

Lelina watched as each of the acolytes walked past their offering and knelt at their feet. They chanted softly, moving as one they proceeded to gently tug the leather boots off of their offerings. Lelina grinned, relishing in those wonderful moments. The boots were dropped and then feathers drawn from the Acolyte’s sleeves.

Maraq let out a snort of defiance, which made the sight all the sweeter for Lelina when the feather settled on his toes and started sawing with gentle touches. Maraq fell instantly silent, biting his lip but Lelina knew there could be no resistance. “Nooo no no noo nooo ho ho aah ha ha ha! Stop this dahaamn you all! Aha haa ha!”

The others were starting to giggle now, trying their best to resist, but Lelina’s acolytes were well trained and would not fail to draw them all gently into hysterics.

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Lelina wondered why they fought it? Did they not realize it was a gift, a blessing to serve Him? Besides which, in all the years her family had served Him, not a single Offering had resisted the touch of her feathers. Not one. And she would be damned if that would be ruined on her watch.

Rex was the first to crack, his young features twisted with helpless laughter as the feather on his feet wiggled between his arches. Lelina listened to his cries with an almost affectionate smile on her lips. "Gaaa haa ha ha ha haa!" he cried. "Aaaaa ha ha ha hee hee hee hee hee! Noooo hooo, help mee heee! Aha ha haaaa! You're killing mee he he aha ha haa!"

Sessna was next. Her large taloned feet, hardened through years of hunting, were ill prepared for the irresistible delicacy of the magic feather. It twitched and wiggled all over her toes, slithering up and down until she could only squawk and shriek. Her cries pierced the air, loud and unrestrained. She was helpless to staunch the laughter that poured from her. Lelina tittered; what a fitting sound for the ritual.

"Mistress."

Startled and a little irritated for having her attention wrenched from the offering, Lelina turned to see another Acolyte standing beside her. This one was hooded, as were all the others. "What is it?" Lelina asked, biting back her anger.

"I have been chosen for you," the Acolyte's voice sounded female.

"For me...oh, oh yes, right." Lelina blushed and felt the first stirrings of butter flies in her stomach. Her anger vanished as she remembered the last part of the ritual. "Have you got it with you?"

The acolyte nodded once and from her sleeves drew a long white feather; it looked soft and very fluffy. Again Lelina felt her cheeks warm and she gulped down her excited anticipation. "One of the Blessed feathers," said the Acolyte.

"Very well," she said. "Be ready."

Lelina collected the book in her hands and walked down from the dais. She stopped at the foot of the steps. A large hard backed chair with velvet cushions awaited her along with a foot stool of similar ilk. There were no stocks for her, oh no, the High Priestess would not be so humiliated – she would need no restraint to endure what lay ahead. With practiced delicacy she sat in the chair and lifted her feet onto the foot stool; this was something she'd done hundreds of times before.

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At that moment Sylvie, the youngest female human in the offering, let out a wild shout. "Eeee hee heeee yessss!" she cried. "Ahahahaaaahahahaaa it tickles! It tickles sooo bad! Ahhaa ha ha haaa haaa! Not my toes, please! Staaaahaap tickling my feet! Aha heh ha he ha haaaaaaaaaaaa! Cass! Please help meehee ha ha ha haa ha ha ha please!!"

Lelina looked up to see the exchange. Cass, the older woman with silver hair, was wiggling her feet for the feather that was tickling them, giggling and tittering softly; clearly enjoying such a treaty. Cass looked over at Sylvie. "There there child," she soothed, giggling delightedly as the feather went up her sole. "There is no help for us now..eee hee hee.....this tickling eheee he ha ha haaa is aaha ha haa our fate....just let it haaaappenn aha ha ha aha haaaaaa!"

Pleased as she was at Cass's words, Lelina could not afford any unwanted word spoken by the offering to ruin the ritual. She motioned for the two women to be gagged but that did little to stifle the wild laughter that was starting to pour from them. Once that was done, she settled back in her chair.

"You may take my shoes," Lelina said, feeling the first touch of a blush on her face.