

# The Vampire 101

## Chapter 101 101: Ashlynn's History Lesson (Part One)

The great hall had gone still and all eyes gathered on Paulus. Despite his gray fur and stooped shoulders, he still radiated the might of a powerful sorcerer as he drew himself up to his full nine feet of height, looking out at the expectant gazes of the Frost Walkers.

"You mean to tell us, Lady Nyrielle, that you lost the lives of nearly six out of every ten of your progeny, just to repel a single human invasion?" Paulus said. "My people, stand for a moment, go ahead, stand up," he said, gesturing for the attendees of the banquet to stand.

"There are twelve tables at our gathering tonight," the elder said, sweeping his arm out in a wide gesture. As he spoke, his horn glowed and with the sweep of his arm, seven glowing balls of icy blue light formed. "If a light comes to rest at your table, sit down," he said, scattering the lights across the twelve tables.

Some lights landed on adjacent tables while others skipped over a few tables before choosing another. In the end, everyone sitting at the seven tables sat down, nervously looking around at the Frost Walkers who still stood.

"So, this is what your war against the humans is like," Paulus said. "Everyone who is still standing, look at those sitting and imagine that your lord has traded their lives away to fight against the humans. Are you proud? Do you feel that it was heroic? Or do you see friends you'd miss, loved ones you would mourn, perhaps a child or parent who was unlucky to sit at the wrong table through no fault of their own?"

"Is this the kind of leader you'd have us trust, Lord Ritchel?" Paulus said, turning his gaze upon the Eldritch Lord of the High Pass. "This is the example you'd have your son follow? But wait," he added, rounding on Nyrielle.

"Of the twenty remaining progeny, where are they now? Everyone, everyone should sit down," Paulus said, his shoulders slumping and his voice sounding weary. "Lady doesn't need living Eldritch allies, she'll surely find some humans to replace you all when you're gone."

Around the hall, most people sat, feeling extremely awkward after Paulus' demonstration. Some of them felt that his example wasn't quite right but many were still looking at the tables who had sat first and imagining the people sitting at those tables being torn away from them.

"Mistress Nyrielle," Ashlynn said softly, standing next to Nyrielle and gently touching her shoulder. "You've given this old man enough of your words. Let me resolve this for you," she said, her emerald eyes burning.

Outwardly, Nyrielle looked as cool and impassive as ever, but inwardly, her heart had been pierced by the spectral blades of countless ghosts conjured by the evening of storytelling. While others might not know, an echo of Nyrielle's heart beat within Ashlynn's own chest. How could she not know how much it had pained her to lose her progeny?

"Good," Nyrielle said after a brief moment. "They should hear the truth from you so they understand what they're really up against," she said, gently cupping Ashlynn's face with a cold hand before returning to her seat. "Educate them, my darling Ashlynn."

"Lord Ritchel," Ashlynn said, turning to the evening's host. "Heila will translate my words. Can you amplify her voice? Heila, I'm counting on you," she said with a slight smile, placing a hand on the horned woman's shoulder before she turned to face the assembled Frost Walkers. Once Ritchel had worked his magic, she began to speak.

"You may have heard my name," she began, taking a few steps away from the table so everyone could see her while Heila translated from behind. "I am Ashlynn Blackwell, daughter of Count Rhys Blackwell in a territory far from Lothian March. I am Lady Nyrielle's Seneschal, I am a Child of the Earth and, for a single night before he attempted to murder me, I was Owain Lothian's wife."

At first, few seemed interested in her introduction. Human lands and titles mattered little to them outside of the Lothians who presented the only threat they'd ever known. But when Heila translated her last words, a ripple of shock spread through the crowd and all eyes turned to her.

"Before my marriage to the next Marquis of Lothian, I studied the history of the march," Ashlynn continued calmly. "So I can tell you what happened after Cellach Lothian fell. Humans call that war the 'War of Undying Demons,' in honor of Nyrielle's progeny. The progeny she gathered from High Fen City came from clans no human had ever seen before and her progeny terrified humans to their bones."

"But Nyrielle was merciful, killing only Cellach Lothian and the soldiers who came to fight. She spared his sons, Odhran and Leon," she said, turning to look at Hauke sitting beside his father. "They were boys even younger than little lord Hauke, not old enough to pick up weapons and take to the battlefield."

"Thirty years passed, and in the Lothian tradition, Odhran as the eldest took up the mantle of Marquis while Leon entered the Church, becoming a high priest, one of the most talented seen in decades," she explained. "They spent their whole lives rebuilding the Lothian army and fortifying the Temple in Lothian City before they returned to the Vale to wage a war of retribution."

"Cellach Lothian slew Mistress Nyrielle's parents and she killed the father of Odhran and Leon. Of course, they swore vengeance," Ashlynn said sadly. "They started the 'Brothers' War' with an invasion on the Vale of Mists, bringing with them the full might of Lothian March and the Church within the march. During the war, Inquisitors were stationed at the castle of every baron and priests at the manors of every knight."

"The brothers were so terrified of Nyrielle's progeny that they ordered the body of every slain Eldritch soldier be burned on the spot or cleansed with holy fire to prevent them from rising again," Ashlynn said, her voice growing soft. When she'd first read the account, she'd thought it a wise and prudent move from the brothers.

It was only after coming to the vale and meeting members of the Horned Clan like Harrod and the Clan of the Great Claw like Captain Lennart that she gained an appreciation for what that must have looked like. She couldn't imagine the pyres heaped with fearsome, savage demons, only the broken bodies of diminutive soldiers little larger than Heila and battered bearish faces as sweet as Georg's.

Reading history was one thing, and she'd been passionate about it when she studied at home in Blackwell County. Now, however, living with Nyrielle, Thane, and all the others, history was no longer something cold and distant, trapped in the pages of books. It lived and breathed and shaped the people she'd come to love as her newfound family.

And now, a frightened old man was trying to twist that history into something darker and uglier than it already was, to slander and isolate the people she loved, and Ashlynn refused to let him get away with it.