

## The Vampire 178

### Chapter 178 178: Frozen Fangs

"What would you like me to do with this opportunity," Erkembalt asked, finally tearing his eyes away from the contents of the box to look at Ashlynn and Nyrielle. When he called it rare, he wasn't just speaking about the materials. A chance to work directly for an Eldritch Lady and her most precious servant would afford him layers of protection that couldn't be bought with money.

"A Vampire and her Seneschal," he mused, his bushy tail puffing up with excitement as he offered his first idea. "Do the two of you desire matching weapons? The horns are very distinct from each other but even if their capabilities diverge, I can ensure they look like a graceful and elegant pair meant to be carried by each of you."

"They would be like a pair of frozen fangs," he said eagerly. Shoving aside the books on his counter he snatched a slate from underneath the books and pulled a piece of chalk from one of his many pockets before beginning to sketch two elegantly curved blades that were clearly inspired by the fangs of a vampire.

"Originally, I had intended for one of them to be used by my darling Ashlynn," Nyrielle said as she watched the man excitedly sketching. "The other, I thought she might choose to give to a friend of hers who remains in the Vale of Mists. After all, a darksteel fighting knife may be a bit of a stretch for young Ollie, but something like this could give him an edge like no other," she said, giving Ashlynn a knowing look.

"You thought of Ollie at a time like this?" Ashlynn said, raising an eyebrow in genuine surprise. Even she hadn't considered using these horns to make something for the friend she'd made in the kitchens of the Summer Villa but once Nyrielle said it, it was hard to refute her thinking.

"Ollie is important to you," Nyrielle said, running her alabaster fingers gently through Ashlynn's pale blonde hair. "You have so few people like him that represent a connection to your life outside of Eldritch lands. So of course, I think of ways to strengthen the people you care about."

"That's why," Nyrielle said, cupping Ashlynn's face gently as if there wasn't anyone else in the room. "If these horns don't resonate with you, since you've declared Heila to be your lady-in-waiting, I thought you might want to use one for her as well."

"Lady Nyrielle," Heila said, quickly dropping into a deep curtsy. "I, I'm not worthy of such an extravagant gift." She already felt that her elevation was something that she didn't fully deserve. How could she possibly accept something so extravagant without doing anything to earn it?

"No, you are," Ashlynn said, her eyes shining as she looked at her lover's smiling face. "And Mistress Nyrielle is right to suggest something like this for you," she said, turning away from Nyrielle to look at her diminutive friend.

"Weren't you just upset that you couldn't fight back on the lake when the Tuscans attacked?" Ashlynn said, raising an eyebrow at Heila. "With something like this, you wouldn't be as helpless in the face of danger."

"But, but I don't know anything about fighting with knives," she said in a small voice. Part of her, a very small part of her, briefly entertained a fantasy of dashing across the ice with a blade in hand, fighting beside Ashlynn and Virve against the Tuscans but she immediately shook her head at the thought. Andrus had years of training in weapons before he joined in that battle but look what had happened to him? It was foolish to think she would fare any better.

"Little lady," Erkembalt interrupted when he saw her eyes falling to the floor. Maybe this diminutive woman wasn't a brave warrior but that didn't mean he couldn't give her a weapon that would turn her

into a force to be feared. In fact, the idea of creating something that could rise to such a challenge lit a fire in his eyes that burned with eagerness to show the world that even someone like this serving girl could be deadly with one of his artifacts!

"To someone your size, a blade made from one of these horns would almost be a small sword," he began, wiping the slate clean and beginning to sketch again. This time, it was just one blade, shaped like a curved small sword but proportioned for a much smaller wielder. "I have an idea for it if you'd like to hear it," he said eagerly, hoping he could entice her into sharing his enthusiasm.

"Please," Ashlynn said before Heila could object. It was clear that Heila still struggled with her sudden change in status but at times like this, it was her duty as Heila's lady to pull her through until she learned to stand up for herself. "Tell us what you have in mind."

"The longer horn here," the artificer said, pointing at the softly glowing white horn. "It carries the power of snow sorcery. For a little lady who isn't good at fighting, it could be good to hide yourself in a small whirlwind of dancing snowflakes. It would help you run away or avoid the attacks of your enemies. If you learn to fight more over time, you could also use it to conceal your approach, appearing from a flurry of snow as a surprise to your enemy."

"That's the simplest use of a blade made for snow sorcery, but it goes far beyond that," Erkembalt added, tapping his temple with a claw. "Use the blade the way a witch would use a wand and invoke the sorcery the Frost Walker once knew directly. Don't just hide yourself in a snow flurry, hide all your allies and help them advance or retreat together. Throw up a blizzard to slow and disorient your enemies. Use your mind," he emphasized. "Fight smart."

"You could do that much with a blade made from this horn?" Ashlynn said, blinking in surprise.

"That much and more," Erkembalt said with an eager grin. "This horn is very old. It contains many layers of sorcery built up over decades. Whoever receives the blade I make from it should be prepared to spend years mastering its depths."

"And the other one?" Nyrielle prompted. "It's intended for a human boy, taller than I. He has limited fighting experience but I'm told that he's quite skilled with butchering and skinning knives used in kitchens."

"Hmm... the energy from this horn is much less complex, but it hasn't been worn down by old age," the artificer said, examining Torsten's horn closely. "You mentioned that it would be difficult for this boy to use a darksteel blade. I can make something for him that would be just as sharp. Moreover, freezing the blood of anyone he stabs with such a knife shouldn't be terribly difficult," he said, painting a grizzly picture of the wounds that would be inflicted by such a blade.

Even if only a small quantity of blood was frozen, the wound would likely suffer from frostbite and become difficult to stitch closed even after the freezing magic had lost its hold on the body. Small wounds that might have been survivable could become deadly, something that an amateur fighter like Ollie might need when encountering veteran warriors like the knights who surrounded Owain.

"Beyond that, he'll have to experiment with the uses of sorcery frozen within the horn," Erkembalt added as he adjusted the spectacles on his nose. "He might be able to conjure a shield made of ice with this, or perhaps he could conjure spears of ice to hurl at distant opponents. The flexibility is less but the potency is just as great as the other horn."

"That sounds like something very useful for my friend," Ashlynn said, smiling again at her lover for being so thoughtful. "I don't need a blade for myself. Please craft things that my friends can use to protect themselves in times of danger."

"My Lady," Heila started, tears forming in her eyes. Just earlier today, Ashlynn had spent an exorbitant amount of money to provide her lady-in-waiting with a new wardrobe including a few pieces of jewelry that each cost more than an entire year of her previous wages. Now, she was bestowing an artifact on her rather than taking it for herself. It was... it was too much and the emotions that surged in her chest were too hard to contain.

"You're my friend, Heila," Ashlynn said, reaching out to gently stroke the diminutive woman's soft chestnut curls. "I'll feel better knowing you have something like this to keep you safe. So accept this from me and don't complain that it's too much."

"Th-thank you, Ashlynn," Heila managed to say after taking several deep breaths. "I promise, I'll learn how to use it and I'll use it to keep both of us safe." She might not be able to rush into battle the way Virve and Andrus had but maybe, just maybe, she could find other ways to fight at Ashlynn's side.

While the two younger women shared a moment, Nyrielle and Zedya shared a look of their own. It had been Zedya's suggestion to bestow one of the horn-weapons on Heila in the first place. Now that Nyrielle saw the look of delight on Ashlynn's face when she was able to do something so meaningful for Heila and Ollie...

As much as Nyrielle wanted to give Ashlynn stronger tools to protect herself, this was just as good, if not better. There would be other opportunities to strengthen her lover, and until she found one, she would just have to stay closer to Ashlynn to protect her directly. And that... that wasn't a bad outcome either.