

The Vampire 186

Chapter 186 186: Spilling Blood

For a moment, Jacques aura flared becoming even more prickly than it had been when he danced with Ashlynn. As soon as that aura approached Ashlynn, however, it melted like snow in the summer sun, unable to harm her in the slightest.

It wasn't that she was immune to his magic, if Jacques wanted to harm her, it was easily possible. It was just that his desire to protect her was far greater than his irritation at her demand and that desire to protect wouldn't lose out to a momentary fit of pique.

"I hear what you sayin', ma petite," the reptilian witch said, his scaled brow furrowing as he looked at the glass in her hand. "But a witch's blood, dat's powerful stuff to be spilling in a place like these before people like your Mistress. I'll give three drops to de ground for hurtin' your friend. But dat glass you're holdin'," he said, his voice dropping low and dark. "Dat's meant for wine, not what you're askin'."

"As you said," Ashlynn said, extending the glass toward Jacques. "A witch's blood is powerful. It shouldn't be wasted on the floor when it can serve a greater purpose. Do this for me," she said, stepping forward and placing a hand on his broad, muscular chest. "Put as much trust in me as I put in you on the dance floor."

Around them, everyone stilled, watching to see what the famed Sandbox Witch would do when confronted so directly. Several thought that this Seneschal was leaning heavily on the power of the Blood Princess to force the witch into compliance while others wondered if she really was the future Mother of Trees. If that was the case.... Would any lesser witch dare to refuse her?

At the side, High Lady Erna's unblinking eyes took it all in, briefly meeting Nyrielle's gaze to see what her own teacher thought of things. Seeing the small proud smile tugging at the corner of the vampire's lips, Erna sat back herself, waiting to see the show unfold.

If there was no need for her to intervene then it was best that she not make a move. Besides, even she was interested in seeing if Ashlynn could make this proud, arrogant witch from the Ancient Clan back down.

"You don't leave me much choice," Jacques said, his heavy tail twitching in agitation. "Maybe I was wrong to call you ma petite. You got somethin' of de acorn in you, Child of de Earth. So much promise wrapped up in such a hard shell, and just as bitter when you bite down."

Smoothly taking the champagne flute from Ashlyn, he raised the palm of his left hand to his mouth and bit down decisively, piercing his thickly scaled skin before dripping three drops of blood into the glass.

"Blood as sap. Strength of bark. Staunch and slow, heal and grow," Jacques muttered softly, making a fist with his bleeding hand as soon as he'd finished dripping into the glass. Instantly, a dark, grayish-green light enveloped his hand as the blood seemed to melt back into his flesh and the wound closed up like it had never been there.

"I'm putting my trust in you, cher," he said, holding out the glass.

"You won't regret placing your trust in me," Ashlynn said, deliberately speaking loud enough for the onlookers to hear. Since this had become a spectacle, she would use it in whatever way she could.

"Mistress Nyrielle," she said, returning to her lover's side with the champagne flute of blood. "Jacques, the Sandbox Witch, offers his blood to you in apology for approaching your lover without your permission. He understands that I am yours and will always be yours, and no one is to covet what you possess," Ashlynn added with a smile.

"But Mistress," Ashlynn added, making a display of pouting like a spoiled nobleman's daughter. She'd never really used this kind of expression to get her way, but Jocelynn seemed to be a master of using it against her parents and so she adopted it now. Not because she thought it would sway Nyrielle's thinking, but because of how the onlookers would perceive it.

"If you desire the blood of a witch," she said, turning her neck slightly. "Mine is yours, whenever you feel the slightest bit of thirst. So rather than drink this stranger's blood, feed on me if you have a thirst."

"My darling Ashlynn," Nyrielle said, her face glowing with pride. Reaching out to take the glass from her Seneschal, she tipped it over and poured it on the floor directly. "With you to savor, how could I thirst for anyone else."

"This should be enough to settle things, shouldn't it?" Ashlynn confirmed, sliding into Nyrielle's arms and turning to face Jacques. "Perhaps now we can retire somewhere private for a bit, until the masks come off?"

"Well now," Jacques said with a deep, rolling laugh. "Looks like we really have found de next Mother of Trees. And ain't she somethin' fierce?"

"I agree," High Lady Erna said, finally emerging from the crowd to address the situation. "I had my doubts when she first arrived in High Fen City. I thought she should at least fight a few dozen rounds in the arena to prove that she's worthy of standing so close to my heroic teacher," she said with a self deprecating chuckle.

"She asked me how many dead gladiators she needed to pile at my feet before I would consider her worthy," Erna said, gazing out at the gathered crowd. "Everyone, this is Seneschal Ashlynn of the Vale of Mists," she said, gesturing for Ashlynn to remove her mask. "Remember her because she already possesses a strength of will and a refusal to submit that would rival any champion in the arena."

"Within a year or two," Erna said, taking a glass from a nearby servant and raising it to offer a toast. "I imagine that the Vale of Mists will rise to heights it hasn't seen in generations. So, a toast. To the Blood Princess, Lady Nyrielle and her Seneschal, Ashlynn, the future Mother of Trees. Long may they live!"

"Long may they conquer," the audience responded, raising their glasses in salute to the beautiful couple in icy blue and crimson red.

Today, those who had speculated that Nyrielle would be giving up on the Vale of Mists quickly revised their opinions and the ones who dismissed her new human Seneschal as yet another eccentric follower like her current progeny quickly began thinking of what they could do to win over the favor of the next Mother of Trees.

All around the banquet, people quickly realized that the conversations that took place after the masks came off would be much, much more consequential than they imagined when they accepted the palace's invitation to join in the masquerade.