

The Vampire 191

Chapter 191 191: A Reason for Vampires (Part Two)

"The Endless Echoes Clan has a great deal in common with bats," Nyrielle explained. "My teacher also has a connection to bats that comes from his power as a vampire rather than his nature as a member of the Endless Echoes Clan. Let me back up a step and I can explain better," she said.

"True Vampires are like witches in a way. I don't want you to think that it's entirely the same, but it helps to provide a way of looking at the world. You have a connection to trees and the forest. That's the part of nature that defines your witchcraft. Every person who is born a witch the way you were embodies some facet of nature."

"Then, the Mother of Thorns embodies things that are... prickly?" Ashlynn asked.

"I'll leave it to her to explain her own domain," Nyrielle said, not wanting to wander off track. "What I'm trying to say is that, just as witches embody a facet of nature, True Vampires embody a facet of death."

"My teacher is known as the Fangs of Death," Nyrielle said.

"Did he give himself that title?" Ashlynn asked. "Or was it earned somehow, the way people call you the 'Blood Princess of the Arena.'" A title like 'the Fangs of Death' sounded impressive, but if it was something that he'd chosen to call himself, it was perhaps a bit much to Ashlynn's sensibilities. But perhaps it was different to the Eldritch.

"It's the title that goes with his power and his position," Nyrielle said, poking Ashlynn when she saw her lover's teasing look. What would her lover think when she heard her own title? "He's the oldest of the

True Vampires on this continent. As far as he and I are aware, there are four of us on the continent and six of us in total, though only my teacher has encountered one of the other two."

"Are the other two from the old countries then?" Ashlynn asked. "I've never heard of there being vampires in the old countries. I would have thought that the Church would have hunted them down long ago."

With more than a thousand years of history in the old countries, it was hard to imagine that any Eldritch people who had lived there could have escaped hunts organized by the Templars and Inquisitors. The Church was ruthless enough to raise the banner of Crusade to ensure that all the lands that paid reverence to the Holy Lord of Light were free of 'demons' and 'evil witchcraft.'

"I can't say if there were any there or not," Nyrielle said, shaking her head. "The other two that we're aware of live in the sea. Supposedly, they're the oldest of all vampires, and the Eldritch Clans of the sea are the first clans. The point isn't to talk about ancient history," she added, trying to bring the conversation back on track.

"What you're saying," Ashlynn said, refusing to allow the mood to grow too heavy. "Is that you've never met the vampires of the sea and you don't know if they're charming or not."

"You!" Nyrielle said, giving Ashlynn a playful shove with her pillow. "I just want you to understand that we're talking about some very old traditions that stretch back for thousands of years," the vampire added. "There are no statues surviving of the first True Vampires or any records of how many of us have held each title. We live for a long time but that doesn't mean we can't be killed, and some knowledge has been lost."

"Much of what we 'know' isn't something that can be considered a confirmed fact like you might read in a history book," she emphasized. "Rather, they are beliefs that have been held for so long that they can feel like facts."

"Then, what is it that your 'no-longer adorable' teacher believes?" Ashlynn asked playfully. "Why does he believe that vampires need to exist?"

"We constrain life," Nyrielle said with a heavy sigh. As much as she wanted to play along with Ashlynn's desire to gossip, she just didn't know how to say this lightly.

Pulling away from Ashlynn, she strode across the cool stone floor to throw another log on the dying fire. Embers might be enough to await the sun if they were sleeping beneath the heavy down blankets but the air in the High Fen was thin and the chill of the night would need hours yet before it gave way to the heat of the day when the open stonework that let breezes flow through would be more welcome.

"We are the ultimate predators," Nyrielle said, staring into the flames of the hearth. Memories flickered in her eyes along with a reflection of the flames as she tried to organize what she needed to say.

"We can sustain ourselves on the lifeblood of others for thousands of years. We can balance our progeny on the edge between life and death and allow them to exist longer than any mortal being should. My teacher believes that there is a purpose behind our existence."

"Whenever a person or a group becomes too powerful," Nyrielle continued, taking on a tone as if she was quoting her teacher. "They can cause death on an unstoppable scale. Extinction. The complete eradication of a species, a clan, a way of life."

"My teacher believes that we exist to constrain people and groups who become that powerful," she said, turning away from the fire at last to return to the bed with Ashlynn. "We're here to prevent unstoppable tides of death by precisely eliminating the ones who would tip the scales."

"That..." Ashlynn didn't know what she should say to that. It sounded both very noble and very arrogant. To believe that a select few people were born to decide when someone had grown too powerful and to kill them before they caused great harm. What gave them the right?

Part of what Ashlynn struggled with was how the idea of someone like Nyrielle's teacher conflicted with things she had believed all her life. She had come to accept that the Church was wrong about witches, the Eldritch, and many other things. But there were core teachings that had nothing to do with hatred that she had yet to examine and challenge.

One of those teachings was that it was the right and nature of all living things to struggle to survive and thrive within the environment they were born to. All people were born to the struggle and how one met the challenges of their life determined how close they would come to the Heavenly Shores when they died.

Those who met their struggle would reach the Heavenly Shores when they died and earn their much-deserved rest. Those who struggled but fell short would be born again, in a higher place, so that they could complete their struggle to reach the Heavenly Shores or at least come closer in the next life than they had before.

What Nyrielle was describing, however, felt like someone had decided to place himself as a barrier at the end of the line. That, after countless lifetimes of struggle, if a person had come too far, and was too successful, he would cut them down before they could reach the Heavenly Shores.

The Church taught that nobles and kings were among those who had struggled the most in their previous lives. That their struggles had become greater than those of the common man as they became responsible for the lives of countless others. With a duty to protect their people and to expand their domain to the west...

"It's us, isn't it?" Ashlynn asked as understanding began to dawn on her. "It's the rise of groups like humans that seek to exterminate everyone else that your teacher is trying to stop."

When she thought about it, about the coming Crusade and everything that humans would do if they won their wars... it was hard to argue that a force existing to oppose such a thing wasn't necessary. But was that really the reason for Vampires to exist?

"It isn't just humans," Nyrielle said, pulling Ashlynn back into her arms and gently stroking her hair. "No one has ever unified this continent. A few Eldritch Emperors have made the attempt, but it's impossible for every clan to accept a single ruler. Once an Emperor makes the decision to exterminate a clan that won't submit to their rule..."

"Your teacher moves against that Emperor," Ashlynn said. "But, an Eldritch Emperor is supposed to be the strongest of all Eldritch rulers. If your teacher is strong enough to defeat an Eldritch Emperor, why doesn't he just become one himself?"

"Because the rest of us would never stand for it," Nyrielle said firmly. "Remember, I said there were four of us on this continent. Let me tell you about the others."

"And you'll tell me if any of the others are 'adorable', right?" Ashlynn said, trying to recapture the fragile levity she'd built. Even to her, it felt a bit forced at this point, but Nyrielle surprised her with a playful, teasing smile that revealed the barest hint of fang.

"Of course," Nyrielle said. "But no matter how 'striking' or 'adorable' they are, none of them compare to you, my darling," she added, leaning in to give Ashlynn a brief kiss on the forehead before she started to speak of the other True Vampires.