

The Vampire 193

Chapter 193 193: The Power Behind Vampire Titles (Part Two)

"Just because a person in a position of power falls to madness or the frailty of the mind doesn't mean that the Gnawing Death has come for them," Nyrielle said with a light chuckle. "Philosar would like you to believe so," she added. "It enhances his mystique and aura of fear. My teacher often says that Philosar lies and boasts, taking credit even when he wasn't involved and denying blame when he was."

"No wonder a person like him is attuned to the rat," Ashlynn whispered, shivering in dread at the thought of someone with the power to gnaw away at a person's mind. Growing up in her father's manor, she'd spent most of her childhood immersed in books and studying with tutors. Her mind was the thing she prized the most. To know that someone could destroy it directly was one of the most terrifying things she'd ever heard.

For a few moments, she'd considered Nyrielle's idea that she might like browsing Philosar's library. Now, however, she felt she was better off avoiding such an insidious person.

"What about the other one?" Ashlynn asked, wanting to change the topic to something less likely to give her nightmares. "You once said that your grandsire Torbin was descended from the 'Jaws of Death', didn't you? Who's he and what does he do?"

"His name is Bardas," Nyrielle said with a twinkle in her midnight blue eyes. "He's very pretty in the same way that Thane is pretty. Strong, rugged and he lets his predatory nature shine. You haven't met anyone from the clan of the Golden Mane yet," she added, looking a touch wistful.

"They all have a sort of feline grace when they move," Nyrielle said. "Bardas could model for one of Erna's sculptors and everyone would believe that the resulting statue was too ideal to be real. Long flowing hair, perfect proportions... he has no shortage of women who are eager to spend time with him."

"Oh? Do I have competition I need to worry about?" Ashlynn asked, putting on an expression of mock jealousy. "Is there a history between you?"

"All three of them have tried to court me at one time or another," Nyrielle said casually. "Bardas might have moved my heart if we'd met under different circumstances. When I was a little girl, I thought he was very charming, but he treated me like a favored grandchild."

"He praised Torbin for taking in my parents and he gave me a piggy back ride on his broad shoulders," Nyrielle said with a nostalgic look on her face. It had been one of the most normal and happiest memories of her childhood, being spoiled by the ancient ancestor who came to visit her grandsire. "By the time I grew up and he grew interested..."

"He was already fixed in your mind as a doting grandparent," Ashlynn chuckled. "Then, if I ever meet him, I'll thank him for his error. You belong to me and no one else," she said, wrapping her arms around Nyrielle's arm and holding her close between her breasts.

"You should meet him some day," Nyrielle agreed. "He's easier to be around, in part because he's more straight forward. The 'Jaws of Death' represent violent ends. He's attuned to the wolf, and while there is savagery and senselessness to what he does, there is less cunning and scheming to it."

"I'm not sure I believe that," Ashlynn said as she tried to reconcile the image of the handsome man who gave young girls piggy back rides with someone who engaged in 'savage and senseless' slaughter. A man who could wear such different faces couldn't be a simple man.

"Both Shabnalû and Philosar target different sorts of powerful individuals," Ashlynn said. "Are you telling me that Bardas doesn't? That he just slaughters randomly, bringing violent death wherever he feels like it?"

"No," Nyrielle said, shaking her head. "He brings slaughter that targets groups rather than individuals. Sometimes, a powerful ruler is a threat. Eliminate the king or lord or whatever and their kingdom falls apart, or it at least becomes less threatening."

"Other times, it's a whole group that threatens to tip the scales," Nyrielle said. "You've seen the Tuscan hunters who prey on other Eldritch Clans for their magic. Imagine if there were armies of Tuscan hunters that were hundreds or thousands of men strong. Even if you pulled down their lord, another would only take his place and the problem would continue."

"So the Jaws of Death are meant to 'cull' strong groups," Ashlynn reasoned. "Bardas brings death on a larger scale because if he doesn't, the group he's targeted will cause extinction. It's not impossible to think of a world where too many Tuscan hunters overwhelm the Frost Walkers until there are none left to hunt."

"And in that world, the Tuscan hunters would turn to the next target that struck their fancy," Nyrielle said. "Perhaps they would seek the hides of the Scaled Clan, or the teeth of the Heartwood Clan. If there are too many Tuscans hunting other clans, then those clans will eventually vanish from the earth."

"I see," Ashlynn said. In a grim sort of way, it made sense. Bardas acted as a check on powerful groups, violently thinning their ranks until they posed less of a threat to others around them.

The more she thought about it, the more it formed a strange sort of symmetry. Whether this was truly the reason that vampires existed or not, Shabnalû, Philosar and Bardas had found purpose in their existence. Their methods might be ruthless or cruel but from a certain perspective, they prevented more

deaths than they caused. Each used their own unique nature to prevent greater tragedies from unfolding.

"So, what about you, my love?" Ashlynn said gently. The fire had burned low again, casting long shadows across the room that danced across Nyrielle's delicate features, enhancing the hint of darkness that spilled from Nyrielle whenever her emotions ran strong enough to unconsciously touch her power.

For a moment, she wondered if Nyrielle was even aware that she'd pulled shadows to herself. Reaching out, she cupped her lover's face gently, letting her eyes say what words would have felt too impertinent to say out loud. It was fine. Whatever the answer was, Nyrielle didn't need to hide it from her.

As much as Ashlynn wanted to keep things light and playful, they'd finally reached the point where Nyrielle felt the most reluctant. Talking about Nyrielle's teacher or the other True Vampires was one thing, but none of them were anywhere nearby. None of it mattered at the moment. Now, when it came to Nyrielle herself, things were very different.

Whether she believed the vampire's reasoning or not didn't matter. What mattered was that they believed, and that the person who mattered more to her than anyone else in the world likely believed as well.

In a strange way, Ashlynn felt like she was finally coming to understand Nyrielle's faith. Only, in the faith of the vampires, Nyrielle wasn't just a believer, she was one of the pantheon's deities.

"I am called the Harbinger of Death," Nyrielle said softly, her midnight blue eyes meeting Ashlynn's emerald gaze with great reluctance. "I bring about the death of the soul."