

## The Vampire 227

### Chapter 227 227: The Mark of A Witch

"Now, Little Sister," Amahle said as she walked across the room to retrieve a large, well-worn, leather-bound book. "I'll explain to you what needs to happen in order to transform little Heila into a true witch."

"Since it's the first time for you, I'll hold your hand the whole way through the process. If we waited for you to be able to do it all by yourself, there wouldn't be much time for Heila to learn before you need to leave, so please put your trust in me to see you through this one," she said, returning to the table and taking a seat next to Ashlynn.

Ashlynn had never known what it was like to have an older sister. She'd been the oldest of two and she'd done her best to be a big sister to Jocelynn, but because she was confined to the Blackwell Manor most of the time, she knew she'd fallen short of what a good 'big sister' really was.

Now, however, she felt like she was finally getting a good look at what it could be like to have someone who acted as a wise older sister to her. Ashlynn was too well trained to be oblivious to the things that Amahle was doing to foster the feelings growing in her.

From sitting next to her as a peer instead of across the table from her as a teacher, Amahle was taking deliberate actions to lower herself from the mighty position of 'Mother of Thorns' to instead become 'big sister Amahle,' but just because the actions were deliberate, it didn't mean the desires behind them weren't genuine.

"Thank you, big sister Amahle," Ashlynn said. Her shoulders visibly slumped in relief at the older woman's offer of support. Like a good sister, Amahle wasn't going to do anything for her, but she would help her along the way and that was exactly what Ashlynn needed at the moment.

She could still feel the lingering warmth of Heila's tiny body in her arms, and the feeling of the diminutive woman trembling as she pleaded her case was one that Ashlynn didn't think she'd ever be able to forget.

At a certain point, it hadn't been the words that moved Ashlynn's heart, but the tone of Heila's voice, the frantic beat of her heart, and the quiet trembles as she spoke that broke down any resistance Ashlynn had to the idea of Heila taking on the risks to become part of her coven.

"You heard how Heila feels," she said, giving Amahle a helpless look. "I need to do everything I can to be worthy of her feelings. I couldn't forgive myself if she suffered because my ignorance caused me to fall short."

"You still need to prepare your heart for a hard decision, darlin'," Amahle said gently. Her spider-like legs clicked on the wooden floor as she adjusted her position so she could wrap one arm around Ashlynn while the other opened the old leather-bound book.

"You've seen how the witches in my coven are named," she said, slowly turning the pages of the book as the scent of old paper and ink filled the air. "Sandbox, Thistle, Rose, Blackberry... Holly," she continued, her voice catching slightly on the last name before she forced herself to continue.

"They're more than just names," she explained, turning away from the book to look at Ashlynn, watching the young woman soaking up every word she said like a sponge. "They represent a very real power that I've helped to grow within them. You and I, we were born with our marks. In order for anyone else to become a witch, we have to give them one."

"How much do you know about your own mark, Ashlynn? Has anyone explained your mark to you and the things that it represents?" Amahle asked. Given the amount of superstition and outright misinformation that seemed to circulate among humans, she was worried that she would have to correct several misconceptions before she could get to the truth.

"I know next to nothing," Ashlynn admitted sadly. "My parents managed to locate enough records to confirm that it was likely a genuine mark of the witch, but information about witches is difficult to find unless someone holds an office of authority within the Church."

"When I came to the Vale of Mists, Mistress Nyrielle told me a little bit more about the differences between sorcery and witchcraft," Ashlynn added. "But from the very beginning, she has been reluctant to tell me much about the traditions of witches. She said that I would learn those things from you and that she would teach me the other things I needed to know as her Seneschal. There was so much to learn, I never really gave it much thought until now."

"I see," Amahle said, nodding in understanding and a small portion of reluctant gratitude for Nyrielle's restraint. The less Ashlynn had been told, the easier it would be to set her on the right path instead of correcting misunderstandings.

In order to give Ashlynn an example, the powerful witch untucked the hem of her loose black blouse from her simple dark skirts and lifted it upward, revealing a coiled, vine-like mark that swirled around the smooth skin of her belly.

"This is my mark," she said, using the tip of one of her spider-like legs to point carefully at the birthmark. "You see how it has taken the shape of a vine with five thorns. Each thorn matches one of the elements. The longer the thorn, the stronger my affinity for that element. For me, wood is the strongest, then water, earth, air, and this tiny thorn in the middle tells you how abysmal my talent at fire is."

"The mark isn't a source of our power," Amahle explained. "But it is a manifestation of it. Eldritch witches have spent thousands of years learning what we can about the ways these marks manifest and you can understand a great deal about a witch if you can glimpse her mark."

"Learning your affinities is just one of the things that examining a mark can tell you," the powerful witch added. "My mark curls inward on itself. This is something common among mothers of thorns who are strong in the ways of protection, sheltering others under the cover of our prickly exteriors. There are others who have been better at inflicting pain, misery, and suffering, or tearing down the homes and fortresses of their opponents."

"Understanding the mark can help to unlock your understanding of your own talents, but it also exposes your weaknesses to anyone who can understand your mark. Knowing that, are you willing to let me examine your mark?"

Ashlynn had always kept her mark to herself, not because it would expose her strengths and weaknesses to others, but because it would be deadly if it were ever discovered by the Church in the place where she grew up.

Now, however, she was receiving a chance to better understand her own mark and in doing so, her own power. But the price meant that she'd have to reveal her strengths and weaknesses to the Mother of Thorns. They'd only just met the day before... could she really take that step so quickly?