

## The Vampire 102

### Chapter 102 102: Ashlynn's History Lesson (Part Two)

"Mistress Nyrielle sent her progeny deep into human territory, intending to strike at their homes and force the human armies to turn back to protect their homes," Ashlynn continued. "This is how Mistress Nyrielle's progeny fight. If five of her progeny can turn around an army of five thousand, then hundreds of others will live."

"Everyone at this table, stand up," she said, repeating Paulus' activity. "There are thirty people standing here. Which one of you would leave the table, risking your life if you knew it would save the life of everyone else at the table? Raise your hands," she said, holding up her hand.

Several hands shot into the air without a moment of hesitation as every experienced soldier and hunter volunteered. A number of other people held up their hands, including two mothers holding small children.

"Elder Paulus would have you believe that Mistress Nyrielle is capricious with her allies, spending their lives the way the Lothians spend the lives of their soldiers, but this isn't how she treats them at all," Ashlynn said, smiling at the people with hands in the air.

"A very few people face greater danger than any others so that the people in the vale may tend their herds, grow their crops and live their lives in peace," Ashlynn explained, thinking of the happy villagers she had seen when she visited the villages in the vale.

"Risks are one thing," Paulus interrupted, no longer able to hold his tongue. "But she still spent the lives of all of her progeny and replaced them with humans!"

"Isn't that better then?" Ashlynn said, rounding on Paulus. "If she risks the lives of her younger progeny, they will be human progeny, not Eldritch progeny. Isn't that what you want? For her to stop losing Eldritch lives in the fight against the humans?"

"Now let me finish," Ashlynn said, without giving Paulus a chance to respond. "You wanted to know what happened to the last twenty progeny, so let me explain," she said, returning her gaze to the Frost Walkers.

"Mistress Nyrielle sent her progeny to attack the barons and knights in the rear, but doing so is very dangerous," Ashlynn emphasized. "They had to sneak through enemy territory during the night and hide themselves away at night with no one to guard them as they slept away the long summer days."

"Mistress Nyrielle told you that the Inquisitors have magic to rain down fire," Ashlynn said. "But that isn't the limit of an Inquisitor's power. They are relentless seekers who will stop at nothing until they uncover what they're looking for. A few of Mistress Nyrielle's progeny managed to inflict some damage, leaving carnage in their wake, but doing so alerted the Inquisition to their presence."

"It was worse than the history books say," Nyrielle interrupted, her eyes looking dark and haunted. "The Inquisition captured one of my progeny, a member of the Scaled Clan named Sete. They tortured her with sunlight until she was half mad and then convinced her that if she 'confessed' to the locations of her fellow progeny, they would 'cleanse' her of her vampirism and allow her to return to her clan."

"It was a lie, of course," Nyrielle added, lest anyone misunderstand. "A vampire is perched on the edge of a knife between life and death. Falling off that edge only leads to oblivion. The dead can never return to life. But in her madness, she believed, and many of her brethren died because of it."

"I lived my entire life in fear of the Inquisition," Ashlynn said, looking out over the crowd. "What they would do to me if they saw my mark is far worse than what Owain Lothian did. Make no mistake, behind

the Lothians is the Church of the Holy Lord of Light and they believe that it is the destiny of humanity to rule all lands illuminated by the sun. Right now, they point their swords and spears at Mistress Nyrielle," she said, turning to face Paulus.

"But if she ever falls, they will come to the High Pass next."

Paulus's eyes narrowed as he scanned the great hall. The atmosphere had shifted palpably since the human girl had begun speaking. When he spoke and especially after his small demonstration, there had been murmurs of discontent and nods of agreement with his words.

Now, when he looked around the great hall, he saw furrowed brows and thoughtful expressions. Some of the younger Frost Walkers were leaning forward, hanging on Ashlynn's every word. The younger ones looked a little frightened but the older children had started casting glances at the warriors who raised their hands to say they would take the risks to keep their people safe.

Clearly some of them who had once been content to grow up as fishermen or hunters now thought that nothing could be more noble than a warrior's calling.

When he turned his gaze from the children to the seasoned warriors near the back of the hall, what he saw concerned him even more. Most warriors held themselves with a pride of knowing that they had trained even harder than the greatest of hunters. Many of them had been entrusted with the sacred duty of guarding the ancestral caves where the horns of fallen Frost Walkers were kept. That pride showed in the way they stood and every move they made.

Now, however, they were shifting nervously as they thought about the visions Nyrielle had shared and the way the human girl described the relentlessness of the Inquisition. Even some of Paulus's most staunch supporters were exchanging worried glances, clearly unsettled by what they were hearing tonight.

Paulus' fists tightened in frustration. He had underestimated this human girl, dismissing her as merely Nyrielle's latest pet human. But now, watching her sway the crowd with her words and historical knowledge, he realized she was a formidable opponent in her own right.

The old Frost Walker's mind raced, searching for a way to regain control of the narrative. He couldn't let this outsider undo years of carefully cultivated skepticism toward Nyrielle's methods.

"None of this matters," he said, desperate to claw back control of the conversation. "The humans may be fearsome in the lowlands to the east, but we are defended by the mountains themselves. Other than Lady Nyrielle's progeny, no human could ever fight us in these mountains."

"The people of the Vale of Mists might need to fear humans, but we should concern ourselves with other foes," he insisted. "People like the Tuskans who try to raid our ancestral caves are a bigger threat to us than humans will ever be!"

"Oh?" Nyrielle said, quirking an eyebrow at the blustering elder. Any other time, she might have been more direct in putting him in his place, but at the moment, Ashlynn's approach was working on the majority of the Frost Walkers, and lifting her Seneschal up was more important than smacking Paulus down.

"Is that what you think? Then I suppose you can look forward to your horn adorning a human spear in the years to come," she said, giving him a piercing look. "I have fought the Lothians for over a century," Nyrielle said. "But even I haven't faced humans at their most dangerous. Ashlynn, my darling, how will the humans conquer the High Pass?"