

## The Vampire 185

### Chapter 185 185: Respect For My Teacher

By this point, a small crowd of spectators had formed around the face-off between Lady Nyrielle, the Blood Princess, and Jacques, the Sandbox Witch. Bloodsport had been a part of the culture of High Fen city for too long and no one wanted to miss a good show if one was about to erupt.

Elsewhere in the great hall, serpentine servants had quietly slipped away to find High Lady Erna. While there were ways to allow a bit of violence to erupt at the masquerade, should the situation call for it, a confrontation between a powerful witch and an even more powerful vampire was one that could harm even onlookers. Before that happened, they hoped that High Lady Erna could suppress the rowdy guests.

"Mistress Nyrielle," Ashlynn said, tugging at her lover's dress and gazing pleadingly up at her. If she'd realized that things would turn out like this, she would never have accepted Jacques' invitation to dance. She could have stopped this then and that made it her responsibility to stop it now. "May I say a few words?"

"You want to plead for him?" Nyrielle said, looking helplessly at the woman in her arms. Sandbox Witch or not, Jacques wasn't a match for Nyrielle and she deeply desired to put him in his place for making a move on her darling Ashlynn. Her lover, however, still had a soft heart that sought to resolve things with words when a sharp blow would have settled things much more cleanly.

Taking a deep breath, Ashlynn discarded everything she had been prepared to say and attempted to start over from her lover's perspective. Clearly, the way her magic responded to Jacques was different from what anyone had expected. Even Zedya had been worried that Ashlynn would be injured by him.

Looking from Zedya to Heila, Ashlynn's heightened senses caught something she'd missed while she was dancing. There wasn't so much as a drop of blood on Ashlynn's dress but there were small drops on

Heila's gown. Seeing her lady-in-waiting hovering in Zedya's shadow and clutching at her palm changed Ashlynn's perception of events significantly.

"Heila," she said softly. "Are you hurt?"

"These wounds aren't large my Lady," Heila said, clutching her hand anxiously. When she spoke to Zedya, it seemed like rushing to report things had been the right thing to do but now she wasn't as certain. If Ashlynn wasn't in any danger then she may have made things worse by rushing to get help too soon.

"Jacques," Ashlynn said, turning her emerald gaze on the Sandbox Witch. "You hurt my friend?"

"Ah," the witch said, understanding dawning in his golden eyes. "I didn't know she was your friend, cher," he said, spreading his hands wide and lowering his head. "Thought she was just another bloodsucking mosquito, trying to climb higher by clingin' to your skirts," he added, glaring at the other women who'd been hovering nearby. "I was just tryin' to keep dem from spoilin' our dance."

"I never asked you to do that," Ashlynn said with a frown. "You hurt my friend and offended my Mistress. Those wrongs need to be settled," she said firmly.

Beside her, Nyrielle smiled. Ashlynn was starting to adjust to the Eldritch manner of seeing things. Actions their outcomes mattered more than intentions. If she'd pleaded that he didn't mean to harm her or cause offense, it would have been a very human way of solving things. Now, it seemed like she understood why that would always be taken as a position of weakness and cowardice among the Eldritch.

Whatever Jacques intended, he would have to suffer some consequences for his actions or Nyrielle wouldn't be satisfied. More importantly, seeing the way Ashlynn reacted to Heila's injuries, as minor as they were, it was clear that she wouldn't be satisfied either. Her darling was becoming more ruthless, Nyrielle thought.

"I ain't so proud I can't admit when I done wrong," Jacques said with careful dignity. "But ma petite, you ain't de Mother of Trees yet to be standin' in judgment over me. Best remember you'll be learnin' from my maman soon enough, and we all her children till you have children of your own," he reminded her.

Of course, the Mother of Thorns had warned him that Nyrielle's power wasn't to be underestimated just because she lacked the title of High Lady. Titles in Eldritch Lands needed to be claimed with strength but they weren't just a reflection of a person's strength.

There were, for example, several people who fought in High Lady Erna's arena who could topple an Eldritch Lord like Ritchel if they wanted to, but in the domain of a High Lady, there was no title for them to claim unless they wanted to rule a subordinate domain in her name.

At the edges of the gathering, Ashlynn spotted people making way for someone else and guessed that it would be High Lady Erna. Things really were getting out of control and she needed to bring them to a conclusion quickly while she still held the momentum. Of everyone involved, she was the weakest and the instant that the other people lost their willingness to go along with her suggestions, everything would fall apart.

Stepping briefly into the crowd, Ashlynn retrieved a narrow champagne flute, quickly drinking the fizzy golden alcohol before approaching Jacques. The sparkling wine burned on her throat going down when she drank so quickly but at the moment, she didn't care.

"I can respect the Mother of Thorns," Ashlynn said. "And I can respect you. When you danced with me, you were the most perfect gentleman I've ever met. Not once did your hands wander somewhere inappropriate and even your eyes never strayed from my face. In every way I could ask for, toward me, you were a consummate gentleman."

"Toward my friend and my mistress, however, you were somewhat lacking," Ashlynn said firmly. "You were the first to shed blood tonight," she added, pointing at the drops of blood on Heila's dress.

"Whether you thought you were protecting me or not, I'll have a few drops of blood from you in apology for what you did to my friend. This much shouldn't be considered disrespectful to one of my teacher's children, should it?"