

The Vampire 190

Chapter 190 190: A Reason for Vampires (Part One)

"I told you before that no one knows where the first vampire came from or how we came to be," Nyrielle said, holding Ashlynn gently while she spoke. "I think it must have been the same as it is for witches like you. Some of us were born like this because we're a necessary part of the world."

"If anyone created vampires," Nyrielle continued. "Then they were powerful enough to create witches as well. I'm sure the human Church would suggest that their deity has the power to create beings like us but..."

"The Church teaches that witches have stolen the power of the Holy Lord of Light," Ashlynn said sadly. "The Church doesn't teach anything specific about vampires, at least, not that I know of. It teaches that vampires are 'demons' like all other Eldritch people."

"It's true that we live among the Eldritch," Nyrielle said, gently stroking Ashlynn's hair. "But we're not an Eldritch Clan any more than witches are an Eldritch Clan. We're something else. Something that the world needs to exist."

"What do you mean by that? Something that the world needs to exist?" Ashlynn asked, sitting upright to look at her lover's face. As she spoke, Nyrielle's tone had become distant, as if she was reluctant to put these thoughts into words.

The sight of it made Ashlynn's heartache. She wanted to know. She wanted to understand and not just because Jacques had arrived to disrupt the delicate rhythm she and Nyrielle had formed. She wanted to understand because she cared about Nyrielle, but she didn't want to make the moment so heavy and uncomfortable.

It was just... she didn't know how she could help lighten the weight that seemed to come with the topic. At the moment, she could only listen and let Nyrielle take it at her own pace.

"This is something that I learned from my teacher," Nyrielle said, her eyes gazing at the distant past. "His name is Shubnalu, and he's a member of the Endless Echoes Clan. He says that his clan has nothing to do with his place as a True Vampire though and I'm inclined to believe him."

"Endless Echoes?" Ashlynn asked. There were hundreds of different Eldritch Clans and she was still working to learn about the most important ones.

"They're a nocturnal clan with small eyes and very large ears on top of their heads," Nyrielle said. The firelight caught the mischievous glint in her midnight blue eyes as a sudden idea struck her.

For a moment, her eyes darted around the room as if she needed to make sure that neither Zedya nor Heila had slipped in where they might see what she was about to do. Then, she lifted her pale hands to her head, cupping them like enormous ears while scrunching her face into an exaggerated squint. The shadows her hands cast on the wall mimicked the shape of giant, floppy ears, making the gesture even more comical.

The sudden shift from Nyrielle's usual ethereal grace to such playful silliness caught Ashlynn completely off guard. Laughter bubbled up from her chest, bright and genuine, and she felt the tension in her shoulders dissolve as Nyrielle's own musical laughter joined hers.

"You," Ashlynn managed between fits of giggles, watching the way her normally composed lover's face lit up with delight. "You did that on purpose. Are they really like that?"

"They are," Nyrielle laughed. "But if you ever tell my teacher that I think members of his clan are adorably cute, then I'll abandon you and run away," she teased, glad that she had been able to break the tension. The cold, frequently expressionless Nyrielle of just a year ago would never have done such a silly thing, but ever since Ashlynn had swept into her life, she found herself breaking free of her cold shell in surprising ways.

"Okay, that's it," Ashlynn said, pulling away from Nyrielle and scooting across the large, plush bed in order to retrieve a pair of pillows. Nyrielle's moment of silliness had given her a window of opportunity and she finally saw a way to remove some of the heaviness that clung to this conversation.

"I never got to have a sleepover when I was younger," Ashlynn said. Her voice held a touch of bitterness and a trace of longing for a sister who felt farther away every day but she continued regardless. "Jocey did, just not at our manor, at least, not if I was also home. But whenever she went visiting other young ladies, they would stay up late and talk about all sorts of things, including gossip about men."

"I have never heard you gossip about anyone," Ashlynn said, giving Nyrielle a flat look and tossing a pillow at her. "So now, I want to hear about this teacher of yours. He had small eyes and large floppy ears," she said, mimicking Nyrielle's movements and placing cupped hands on her head like giant ears. "And you found him adorable? Was he tall, or muscular? Tell me, I want to hear the details," she said, flopping back down on the bed next to Nyrielle.

For a moment, Nyrielle sat and blinked at her lover but then laughter overtook her as she caught the pillow Ashlynn had flung at her. When had she ever had a sleepover with young ladies of similar station? Never once in her life. But if her darling wanted to gossip... it certainly wasn't a bad thing.

"He wasn't very tall at all," Nyrielle said with a bright smile. "A little taller than you but only barely. But when he entered the room, everyone looked at him like he was a giant ten times his size. He isn't physically powerful or imposing, more... cute. At least to my eyes. But his aura is deep and bloody and his voice is rich and smooth like velvet."

"Oh? So did you like him? You sound like you found him very charming," Ashlynn teased.

"No, not in that way. Not ever," Nyrielle quickly insisted. A moment later, however, she seemed less certain. "Maybe early on. Right after I met him, I was still very young. He felt princely, for lack of a better word. Like someone from my father's stories about the noble lords of the land before the Church anointed the first King of Gaal."

"Once he became my teacher, I stopped seeing him that way," Nyrielle added. "His methods aren't gentle. It was impossible to feel affectionate towards him after the first few months. I respect him, but I wouldn't say that I could ever feel attracted to him anymore."

"I still think people from the Endless Echoes Clan are adorable," she said, holding up a finger as if to mark an exception. "Just not him. He's too harsh to be adorable."

"What was it you were going to say about the Endless Echoes Clan not having anything to do with his powers?" Ashlynn prompted, taking Nyrielle's hands in her own and snuggling close while they spoke.

As silly as treating this like a night of young women's gossip sounded, it seemed to be working. The echo of Nyrielle's heartbeat within her chest was steadier, lighter, and held much less strain than it had at the beginning of the conversation. At times, Ashlynn forgot that Nyrielle had missed out on just as much of a normal childhood as she had.

At moments like this, if they could both recapture a bit of what they'd missed, it was worth a little bit of exaggerated playfulness. And if it let them talk through the sensitive and painful parts of their mutual pasts, then that was all the more reason to give it a try.

