

The Vampire 195

Chapter 195: The Hidden Power of a Witch's Blood (Part One)

"You already know that the place where you have the most power is deep in forests like the Vale of Mists," Nyrielle said. As she spoke, she pulled Ashlynn close and kept her voice low. "Looking back, I'm grateful to Owain for ordering you to be taken outside of Lothian March to be buried. If they'd dumped you in a shallow grave in Lothian City or outside some random farm, you might not have found enough power to sustain your life until I reached you."

"That night," Ashlynn said quietly, thinking back on what she felt when she crawled out of the grave that Sir Tommin and Sir Broll had dumped her in. It felt like the trees themselves were responding to her. Like the forest wouldn't give up on her as long as she didn't give up on herself.

"I felt like the trees pulled me along," she said. "Their roots helped me out of the ground but even after that, whenever I felt like I couldn't go any further, I'd get a little push from the tree I was leaning about and I could stagger another hundred or two hundred paces further."

"You used the power of nature in the High Pass," Nyrielle pointed out. "How did that feel?"

"Cold," Ashlynn laughed. It might seem strange to people who hadn't experienced it, but her experience with 'cold' that day had been just as intense as the fear and loss and everything else that she felt that day. Even now, her memory of that 'cold' was strong and vivid.

It wasn't just because it had been a bitterly cold day that included a plunge beneath the surface of the frozen lake but because when she had drawn on the energy of the frigid wind and the icy water beneath her feet it felt like she was filling herself up with ice water.

"I was able to use the energy of the wind and ice," Ashlynn said, shivering as she recalled the feeling of the magic in the air that day. At the time, all she cared about was finding the strength to fight back against the Tuscans and to avenge Andrus' death, but looking back, it had been a very risky use of her power. "But it didn't feel comfortable at all. Like it was reluctant to help me and that it wasn't meant for me."

"That's because you're the next Mother of Trees," Nyrielle explained, pulling one of the plush blankets closer and wrapping it around herself and Ashlynn. The fire in the hearth had almost burned down to nothing but the early morning air was still chill and the memories she had provoked clearly made it harder for Ashlynn to ignore the chill in the air.

"I'm not aware of all of the major witches," Nyrielle said. "You'll really need to ask your teacher about them. Besides you and the Mother of Thorns, I've also encountered the Mother of Storms and the Father of Earth. I've heard that there was once a Father of Cataclysms who held domain over the eruption of volcanos, earthquakes and the greatest forces of natural destruction, but if that's true, they haven't been seen on this continent for my entire life."

"Just like vampires exist as predators who serve life by killing people and groups who would bring about extinction, witches serve the natural order of the world," the vampire said. "Because of that deep connection to nature, you are also deeply connected to life. A vampire can prevent the loss of life, but they cannot create it. Witches can."

"You said that vampires have a reason to exist," Ashlynn said, pulling the blankets closer and snuggling against Nyrielle. "You stop people from abusing power to cause widespread loss of life. Then, what is the purpose of witches? How do we serve the 'natural order' of things?"

"I don't know," Nyrielle whispered, her lips hovering just above Ashlynn's head. She had thoughts, things she believed, and things she'd learned from her own teacher, but she didn't want Ashlynn to learn much about witches from her. Some things, it was better that she learn from the Mother of Thorns. Others, however, Nyrielle resolved herself to be the one to share.

"What I do know is that your connection to life is much stronger than mine," Nyrielle said softly. "And, now that we are bound together, your connection to life is affecting me. Not in a bad way," she added quickly. "But I'm changing, and the changes are more pronounced every time I feed on you."

"What, what kind of changes?" Ashlynn asked. She twisted herself around in the blankets and Nyrielle's embrace until she could look her lover in the eyes. The expression she saw from Nyrielle was soft and tender, filled with affection as she gently stroked Ashlynn's hair.

"I can feel," Nyrielle said. "Time is like a millstone on a vampire's emotions. Love, hate, joy, sadness... they all wear down until they are only echoes of what they should have been. I, I didn't think my heart was capable of love after my parents died. I promised you affection, but love is something beyond the actions of affection."

"Then, do you love me?" Ashlynn asked. Her heart beat faster in her chest, keeping time with the echo of Nyrielle's heartbeat alongside it as both women fell into each other's watery eyes. For Ashlynn, the outside world completely fell away as she waited to hear Nyrielle's answer.

"I do," Nyrielle whispered, bringing her lips close enough to Ashlynn's to bestow a light kiss on the surface of her lover's lips. The dying fire cast a soft golden glow across their faces as the last stars faded outside their window. "I've been uncertain, but the closer we come, the more time we spend and... and the more I feed on you, the richer the world becomes."

"I don't just love you," she added. "I am happy when I am with you in a way I couldn't be happy before. When I think of what Owain Lothian did to you, a hotter rage burns in my heart than any I've felt since Cellach Lothian burned down everything and everyone that mattered to me. I feel, because of you."