

The Vampire 230

Chapter 230 230: Choosing A Seed

Ashlynn and Amahle spent several hours with the old, worn book that described the covens of Ashlynn's predecessors. The more she read, the more certain trends began to emerge.

"Oak seems like the most common choice," Ashlynn said as she leafed through her notes. Outside the window, insects droned with a high-pitched buzzing that made it hard to concentrate the way she was accustomed to in the quiet studies behind solid stone castle walls, but taking notes and keeping herself organized as they worked through the records helped her to stay on track even when the increasing heat and incessant droning conspired to sap her focus.

"Virtually every Mother of Trees has given birth to an Oak Witch at some point," Ashlynn said, looking at the tick marks she'd made on the page to note how often this particular tree had come up. "And it seems like those witches wield considerable strength."

"The Oak brings elements of physical might, resilience, endurance, protection, and other elements that make it an excellent source of strength for witches who will face grave trials and battle strong enemies," Amahle agreed. It also helped that no matter where a person was, there were different types of oak trees that were native to the area, making it a familiar tree to witches the world over.

"If I'd been the Mother of Trees, I might have considered Oak for Jacques," she added. After all, she'd chosen the Sandbox tree for Jacques because of his physical capabilities and intensity. The physical might and considerable toughness of the Oak tree would have suited him almost as well. In the end, however, she was the Mother of Thorns, not the Mother of Trees, and seeing how Jacques had grown along with the Sandbox Tree, she couldn't help but feel that this was the best choice for the prickly witch from the Ancient Clan, even if she had been the Mother of Trees.

"But little sister," Amahle said, raising an eyebrow at Ashlynn as she sipped her tea. "While the Oak is strong and mighty, do you truly believe it's a tree that suits little Heila? She's not the sort who's lookin' for trouble to stand in the way of is she?"

"No, not at all," Ashlynn said, shaking her head. "I know that Heila wants to become someone who can protect me, but as far as I'm concerned, she doesn't need to transform herself into a warrior to accomplish that."

"She's a gentle person," Ashlynn said, looking out the window at the soft light filtering through the thick canopy and dense fog of the Briar. For a place that was filled with so many thorns, it had its softness as well and it was that softness that Ashlynn thought suited Heila best.

"She's filled with care and concern for others. She, she's been very good to me and I've come to rely on her quite a bit," she said with a bit of embarrassment. Heila had given her so much, yet it felt like she hadn't done nearly enough to repay the horned woman's kindness and dedication.

"You pulled aside the Black Locust," Amahle said, tapping a sheet of paper with one of her spider-like limbs, pulling Ashlynn's focus back before her mind wandered too far. Over the past few hours, the older witch had come to appreciate Ashlynn's methodical approach to things, as well as her persistence in working through the oppressive heat and humidity as the day dragged on.

While Ashlynn had been reading, she immediately rejected several possibilities, but whenever she encountered something that held the slightest chance of being a good fit, she pulled it aside to discuss it with her big sister. The pen in her hand moved with smooth, even strokes trained from many years under the supervision of her family's tutors and her skills at organizing her thoughts and information showed as she prepared each idea to discuss with Amahle

Not all of Ashlynn's ideas had been good ones, and Amahle found herself filling in gaps or contradicting assumptions as they went, but this was precisely why her little sister needed a teacher. Without guidance, there were too many places that she could wander astray.

"The Black Locust is an even stronger protector than the Oak," Ashlynn said, flipping through the book to a page that described the last person to bear the title of 'Black Locust Witch.' "I was drawn to this statement, that the Black Locust Witch not only warded their coven's home with powerful barriers, but warded the coven against internal strife, sewing peace, harmony and love within the coven."

One of the things that Ashlynn was coming to realize is that whichever tree she bound a member of her coven to, the tree would influence far more than just their powers. Jacques was prickly not just because it was his nature, but because he was the Sandbox Witch and he'd taken on the prickly, thorny exterior of his namesake tree.

Some witches seemed to be able to create healthy and well-balanced covens, but others assembled collections of people who tended toward the most extreme expressions of their bonded plant. The notes about the Black Locust Witch seemed to indicate that they'd been in such a coven, with forceful personalities who needed a moderating influence beyond what the Mother of Trees at the time was capable of.

"I thought that Heila might find this suitable since she has a strong desire to protect me," Ashlynn said, dabbing at the sweat that had formed on her brow and draining the last of the cooling mint tea in her cup before she continued. "I think, over time, her desire to protect will grow to include the rest of the coven. She's kind and determined and this would give her a way to express her desires without placing a pressure on her to go to war."

That was something that Ashlynn deeply wanted to avoid with Heila. There were other people who could take up the banner and march to war against the Lothians or any other enemies she had. She would likely seek out people to join her coven expressly because they were warriors who could become her champions in battle.

"Now darlin'," Amahle chided gently. "Remember what I said about catering to her desires as opposed to choosing what will be best for her. The way you describe it, this is something you think that Heila might choose for herself. It's not a bad thing to indulge her in what she desires, but you have to be her mother in this, not her friend. Sometimes, a mother has to make her children eat their vegetables, even when they don't want to."

In truth, the Black Locust might not be a bad choice if Heila wanted to become the protector of her coven, but it was a hard and unyielding tree that would also demand a greater level of... stubbornness than what Amahle had seen from the diminutive young woman. Heila seemed very accommodating and the Black Locust wasn't.

"Set aside Heila's desires for a moment and focus on what you think is best for her," the older witch advised. "What would be the best choice you could make for Heila, whether it's what she wants or not?"

For a moment, Ashlynn's hand twitched, ready to grab a sheet of paper she'd almost set aside several times because she considered it to be a poor fit for Heila's own desires. And yet, it offered something so compelling that she hadn't been able to make herself completely disregard it.

"The Yew," Ashlynn finally said, pulling the sheet of paper in front of her. "The records say that the Yew Witch walks between the worlds of the living and the dead, though it doesn't sound like they're balanced in a place between the way vampires are," she said.

"I don't think Heila has any deep interest in communing with the dead, and the passages about the occasions where the Yew Witch confronted vampires make it sound like their magic is particularly suited to warding against 'forces of darkness,'" Ashlynn said, reading over the notes in the book. "But..."

"If you needed someone who could help keep you safe from the vampires in your life," Amahle said with a pleased smile. "Giving birth to a Yew Witch would be a good decision. And, even if you don't need protection from your Lady Nyrielle and her progeny, you can't deny that your life will be filled with encounters with other True Vampires and their progeny."

"But that's not why you pulled the Yew tree aside, is it?" Amahle asked, turning her crimson eyes on Ashlynn with a gaze that seemed to bore directly into the younger witch's heart.

Of course, there was another reason to select the Yew, and Amahle recognized it almost immediately, but would Ashlynn admit to it?