

The Vampire 98

Chapter 98 98: The Blood Princess (Part Two)

Old Fabiene's tale of Nyrielle's legendary battle in the arena of High Fen City captivated the entire hall. From the esteemed guests at the high table to the lucky servants who waited at the side for orders to fulfill, the Frost Walkers listened in rapt attention.

Bit by bit, the elderly woman recounted the Blood Princess's ordeal, facing one challenger after another while enduring grievous wounds. As Fabiene continued her story, parents lifted up their children, pointing and whispering to pay attention to a tale they would likely never hear told again.

Lord Ritchele himself leaned forward, his massive frame casting a shadow over the table. On his plate, a half finished portion of fish lay forgotten as he became engrossed in the tale. He'd heard the story before, but this was his first time hearing it in so much detail from someone who had actually witnessed it.

Somehow, when the story was distilled down to simple facts recounted by his grandfather, the enormity of what Nyrielle had accomplished felt almost... ordinary. His grandfather said she was strong enough to do it, so she was strong enough to do it. Only now did he realize how savage those battles must have been and how agonizing the injuries she suffered in the process truly were.

Beside him, Hauke sat transfixed, his mouth slightly agape. The glow in his horn pulsed erratically, flaring with excitement when Fabiene spoke of victory and dimming to a pale flicker when she spoke of Nyrielle's horrific wounds. He glanced at Nyrielle, then back to Fabiene, struggling to reconcile the elegant vampire at the table with the relentless warrior in the story.

"Father," Hauke whispered, his voice barely audible so as not to disrupt the story. "Is this why you always say we cannot lose the goodwill of the Vale of Mists? Because of Lady Nyrielle?"

"This, and many other reasons, my son," Ritchel said solemnly. "Listen closely, and remember how hard she fought for her people. She saved more than just the Vale of Mists with her courage. You could do far worse than to learn from her example."

Further down the table, Paulus glowered as he overheard Lord Ritchel's words. Certainly, Lady Nyrielle's actions sounded grand at the moment, but in the end, had she truly treated her allies well? From the stories he'd heard, this battle didn't gain her any allies, only kindling to burn in the fires of her vengeance, but these fools were too blind to see it. At least, too blind at the moment.

"I came back the next night," Fabiene said. "And I watched her do it again. More men surrendered, but word had spread that a person could become a Lord of the Vale of Mists if they could defeat one vampire in the arena, and even stronger fighters began to come forth."

For Nyrielle, the stronger challengers were what she needed most, but in the depths of winter, many of them took several days to arrive. Still, she couldn't stop. Once she'd made her declaration, she'd wagered her future and the future of the Vale of Mists on what she could achieve on the Arena sands.

"Ten days," Fabiene said. "The sons and daughters of Eldritch Lords and High Lords came from countless miles away to take the Vale of Mists from her, but none of them did. Some pierced her through with spears and one man severed her arm, but no one could claim victory."

"You can heal back a severed arm?" Ashlynn whispered, her eyes wide as she looked at Nyrielle.

"It hurts," the vampire said softly. "But as long as it hasn't been destroyed and I feed soon enough, I can make myself whole again," she said, her eyes still closed as she drew deeply on the warmth of Ashlynn's touch.

In those days, she'd been alone. Before Thane or Zedya or any of the others, she'd lost her grandsire, lost her parents, lost most of the soldiers of the Vale of Mists. Her people were scattered like the seeds of a dandelion on the wind and she was only hanging on to life because she refused to die before Cellach Lothian paid for what he'd done.

"Blood Princess Nyrielle," Fabiene said, her tone full of admiration that bordered on worship. "Many times when life has been hard, I've remembered you on those sands. You must have fought a thousand men those nights but never once did you give up. I've always thought, no matter how hard life has been, my life has never been so hard as that. So, thank you, for giving an old woman the strength to keep going on, no matter how hard it was."

Throughout the hall, people stood and cheered. Some clapped, others stomped. Many praised Nyrielle, the 'Blood Princess' for her indomitable courage while others shouted their thanks to Old Fabiene for sharing the tale. As the crowd began to quiet, however, a wicked gleam flashed in Paulus' eyes as he stood to slowly clap for Nyrielle.

"Blood Princess Nyrielle," he said, his voice pitched to reach the very back of the grand hall. "We're all inspired by your tenacity to hold onto your territory no matter the cost. While I'm too young to have witnessed those terrible days, my father told me many stories. I wonder, could you tell me if they're true?"

"There are many stories from those days," Nyrielle said, opening her eyes and directing a piercing stare at Paulus. "Which tale is Elder Paulus curious about?"

"I heard that you took away fifty champions in total, and that they became your first progeny," Paulus said, a dark grin tugging at the corners of his leathery lips. "Is that true?"

"Forty-seven," Nyrielle corrected, in a tone that was far too light and airy for the intensity with which she stared at them. "And yes, they were my progeny. Many of them fought to the brink of death. If I did not take them as my progeny, they would have died from their wounds even if I spared their life."

Ashlynn blinked, looking at Nyrielle in surprise. She'd only met three of Nyrielle's progeny and none of them had come from the arena in High Fen City. Yet she was certain that Thane said her Mistress only had seven progeny. If that was the case...

"Ah, I suppose 'fifty' makes a better story than 'forty-seven'," Paulus said, derailing Ashlynn's thoughts. "But, Lady Nyrielle, if you made forty-seven people into vampires, that must have been a terrifying force. So, answer a question for me, Lady Nyrielle," he said, directing his gaze out over the audience before returning it to Nyrielle and Ashlynn.

"Why is it that you only have seven progeny now?" Paulus asked, unknowingly asking the very question he'd planted in Ashlynn's mind. "And why is it that your only surviving progeny are humans that you took afterward? Of the forty-seven brave warriors who became your progeny, not one is with us still, yet your human progeny are as old as I am."

"My Lord Ritchel was just saying that it is important to be a good ally to the Vale of Mists in your war against the humans," Paulus said, his voice growing as cold as the wind outside the great hall. "But tell me, what happened to the last forty-seven allies who joined your war against the humans?"