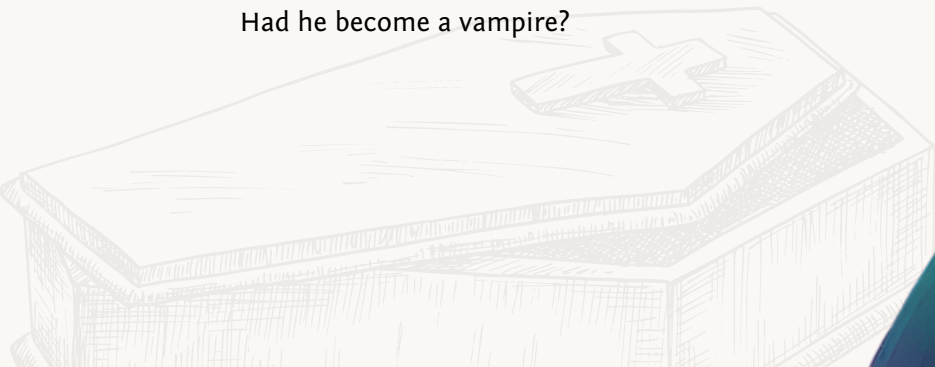




Season 30

WHISPERS OF THE PAST

All she could remember was that haunting castle with the green glow and her lover returning from the grave. And those teeth.
Had he become a vampire?



"You promised!" Aydae shouted as her eyes shot open. She blinked and looked around. Nothing. She was sitting up straight in her bed, her fists clutching the bed sheets. Apart from the flickering candlelight in her chambers, there was no one else there.

Aydae wiped a few hairs from her sweaty forehead and pondered. Why had her dream felt so real? And why had she had the same dream every night for the past week? It was already torture having lost the man she loved, and now she had to see him in pain every time she went to sleep. Aydae buried her face in her hands.

There must be something more to this. She began to recall details from the dream, trying her best to find any clues as to why the same dream kept recurring. All she could remember was that haunting castle with the green glow and her lover returning from the grave. And those teeth. Had he become a vampire?





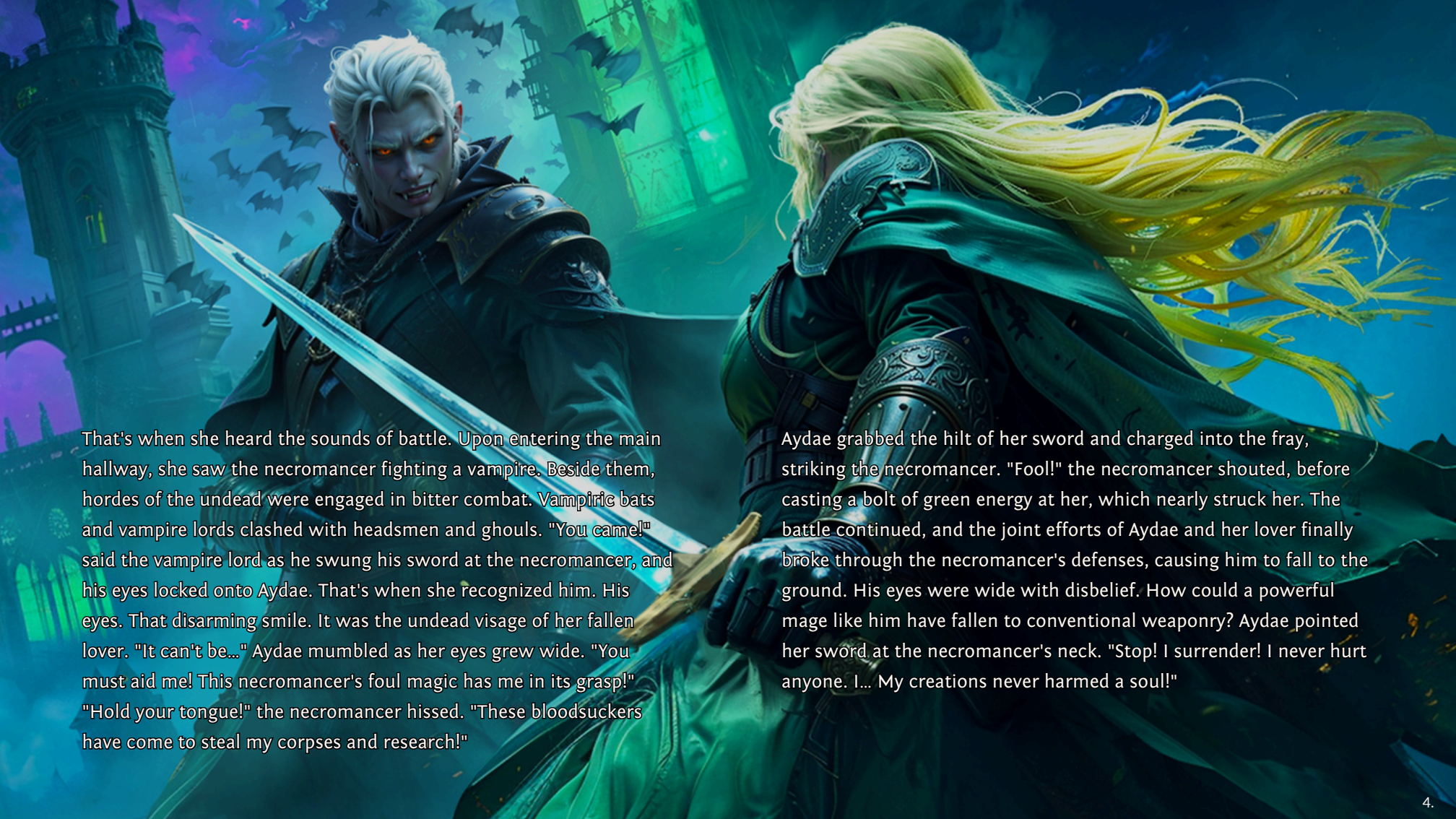
Aydae didn't wait until dawn. She grabbed her gear, saddled up, and headed into the nearby villages to ask questions about this mysterious castle. Soon, she picked up rumors about a necromancer living in the forbidden mountains in a castle that matched the description of the one in her dream.

The green glow was an unmistakable clue. Aydae tugged on the reins, and her horse neighed as it sped off towards the rumored location. As she got closer, the screeching of bats filled the night sky. The cacophony tore through the silence of the darkness like a knife through silk. To her surprise, the bats in the distance turned out to be much larger than she'd expected. She drew her bow and readied an arrow right before the large beast could sink its claws into her.

The first bat hit the ground as Aydae, still mounted on her horse, fired off a series of arrows. Before she could down another, however, a bat kicked her off her horse from behind. Aydae rolled over a few times before stopping herself by digging her heels into the dirt. Once she'd picked herself up, her eyes widened. The bat she'd shot down was flying again, her arrow still protruding from its chest. Steel-tipped arrows wouldn't cut it. She had to think of another plan.

Her horse circled around, and Aydae grabbed the saddle as it passed her and hauled herself back up onto her mount. She galloped towards the castle, zig-zagging to avoid the bats' attacks. Drawing her silver sword, she stood up straight on her saddle and jumped off her horse through one of the castle's open windows. She performed a forward roll to absorb the speed of her jump and readied herself as she stood back up, before proceeding deeper into the necromancer's castle.





That's when she heard the sounds of battle. Upon entering the main hallway, she saw the necromancer fighting a vampire. Beside them, hordes of the undead were engaged in bitter combat. Vampire bats and vampire lords clashed with headsman and ghouls. "You came!" said the vampire lord as he swung his sword at the necromancer, and his eyes locked onto Aydae. That's when she recognized him. His eyes. That disarming smile. It was the undead visage of her fallen lover. "It can't be..." Aydae mumbled as her eyes grew wide. "You must aid me! This necromancer's foul magic has me in its grasp!" "Hold your tongue!" the necromancer hissed. "These bloodsuckers have come to steal my corpses and research!"

Aydae grabbed the hilt of her sword and charged into the fray, striking the necromancer. "Fool!" the necromancer shouted, before casting a bolt of green energy at her, which nearly struck her. The battle continued, and the joint efforts of Aydae and her lover finally broke through the necromancer's defenses, causing him to fall to the ground. His eyes were wide with disbelief. How could a powerful mage like him have fallen to conventional weaponry? Aydae pointed her sword at the necromancer's neck. "Stop! I surrender! I never hurt anyone. I... My creations never harmed a soul!"

"Do it!" hissed her lover. "End his miserable life!" he said, his grin revealing his shiny, pointed teeth. Aydaae raised her arm and then spun around, striking the man she once loved in his chest with her silver blade. His eyes widened. "The man I loved would never delight in the suffering of others," she said and twisted the blade, pulling it free. "You are not him. You're an empty shell made up of hate and undeath," Aydaae continued as she watched her lover's face disintegrate like burning flakes of paper.

The vampiric army immediately stopped fighting and fled the scene as the necromancer's servants chased them out of his castle. "Thank you..." the necromancer said. "Don't thank me, you vile fiend. Keep your corpses to yourself and leave these lands," Aydaae replied.

"Yes, yes! Of course. I'll leave right away. Take the castle. It was never mine to begin with," the man said. "I'll be gone by dawn!" He scrambled to his feet and rushed off to gather his research.

And so Aydaae returned, her mind clear of the horrible whispers and nightmares. Perhaps now she could truly lay her lover to rest.

Aydaae

