

Crimson Nightmare (The Permadeath Legacy)

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Gwintin was, at one point, a place she had felt very safe. It was the first town she had called home here in Eden. It was the town she had found love. It was the town she had brought her brother, Aidan Wei, to live once he was finally brought to Eden, a year after she had settled in. The rent was cheap because of the presumed added danger of cohabitating with vampires. During that time period, Cheyenne had never run into any issues with the vampires living there. Besides, it was convenient since the town was so self-sufficient. The Mir Forest and the Blacksalt Sea isolated Gwintin from the bigger cities in the north, forcing it to become independent. Forming its own means of agriculture by building a farm to the north of the city, a blacksmith and apothecary for forging weapons and magic in the west - for their small scale military defense, and a marketplace in the center of town for the goods and supplies any player would need, albeit generally at a slightly marked up price. And, if she were being honest with herself, more often than not she would find herself more trusting of the vampire kin than of the other townspeople. To Cheyenne, there was something about how they held themselves that gave an image she could trust in. They were always loyal to their kinsmen, knowing there was no one else, in either Eden nor the real world, that could understand them better than they could each other. It was such a comforting thought to her back then. A chill breeze brushed past Cheyenne from an oculi that whizzed past her as she entered the marketplace. The small glowing orb was being chased by a rampaging mob, as they all rushed toward some shrieks coming from the same direction that she needed to go. Her body swayed between the gaps of people as she tried to make her way through the masses until she could finally see the so-called monster being hunted, a vampire. "Let me go, I've done nothing wrong!" the vampire pleaded in vain. His body bruised and beaten, his eyes scanning desperately for an escape route. "Lynch the creature!" the mob demanded its maligned form of justice. Their fear fueling their malicious judgement of the boy. Cheyenne allowed herself a glance at the captive. He looked only slightly younger than herself, maybe just entering his twenties or twenty-one, like her brother, at most. He had very typical features of a vampire in Eden, pale skin, light hair, and blood red eyes. Although, he hardly dressed the part. Most of the kin, being sponsored by the Elite, wore garments of higher quality. This added to their already heightened statuses, causing them to become an exterminating force. However, this boy seemed to be practically in rags. She presumed he was a rogue vampire, like herself. Living on his own and trying to survive in Eden, separate from the clan, for one reason or another. "Burn the beast!" they screamed. Cheyenne pushed aside the stagnant players, looking down as she forced her way through the crowd. She knew how this played out, and she would rather not have to be subjected to the sight of it again. In the dark of the night, the streets were only illuminated by torches and the faint glow of the oculi swarmed above the drama. Cheyenne swore under her breath, mostly at the crowd. She had picked tonight to come into town in hopes these antics would have calmed down to a halt. Apparently, she was wrong. The young vampire struggled against the two larger men leading him to the ropes. His eyes wide with terror, fearful of a life unfinished coming to an end. He pushed and dragged his feet along the cobblestone street, but once again his efforts were in vain. Once they had him up on the podium, the town mystics conjured up a confinement spell, which bound his body into a stiff paralysis as the rope was tightened around his throat. His nostrils flared as his breathing quickened. His palms clammed up and a shiver ran up the back of his immobile form. Cheyenne turned around and walked away, closing her eyes as she heard the confirming cheers from the crowd. Most of the shops were closed and packed up at this time of night, but one. The Goods of Gwintin, the shop of Johnny the Keeper, Cheyenne's best friend from even before Eden. He was slightly taller than average height and lanky, like she was, although unlike Cheyenne, his arms were frail and skinny instead of lean. His strawberry hair wisped above his head so care-free, one couldn't help but feel comforted around him. There was no one in any world Cheyenne trusted as much as she trusted Johnny. Johnny turned around and beamed a shopkeeper's grin at Cheyenne as she entered the shop. His grin quickly changed to anxious shock as he rushed over to greet her properly. "Cheyenne! Why have you been gone so long? You had me panicked! I only gave you enough last time to last fourteen days out there! Fourteen days! Two weeks! What were you eating? Were you eating? Are you starving? Should I get you something to drink? I should make you tea! How do you like your tea?" Johnny's words spilled out faster than his

mouth could form them. Cheyenne stood there patiently and didn't bother trying to answer until she was certain that he was out of breath. Not that he gave her a chance to answer before disappearing into the back room to, presumably, make the tea. "I was fine. I just rationed things out differently this time and it managed to last me a little longer out there," she said. It was a lie, but the last thing she needed was his heart throbbing at a time like this. Cheyenne had only managed to feed on a few rabbits while she was out in the forest. And, although this was enough to quench her thirst for now, there was no telling how much a human heart could trigger her. His pulse lowered as he fixed the tea for them. They sat together in the shop as they drank. "Well, whatever you did, I hope you noted it down because we're going to need your supplies to last for much longer spans of time. A month, if possible," he said. "A month? Are you alright, Johnny?" she asked. He nodded at her. Cheyenne stared anxiously at her best friend. Just minutes ago he was panicking that she had been gone for so long but now he is pushing her away for longer? Her mind raced with reasoning as she waited for him to speak. "I'm fine, but I'm not sure if you will be for very much longer. The town just got approved for a security increase against vampires. There have been a couple more incidents around town from...um..." he didn't want to say it but Cheyenne already knew. She had smelt them a couple days back. She cursed herself, she should have known that they would become an issue at some point. "Richard's guild is back," Cheyenne's face and words boiled over with silent rage. Richard Lon, the most recent leader of the Lon Guild, was someone she had a long, dark history with. Richard was two years her senior, so she hadn't known him outside of Eden, but they met in Gwintin her first year in game. He and Cheyenne got on instantly, but now-a-days she considered their relationship more like house and fire. Richard was her first and last love here in Eden. Her grip tightened on the tea cup. Johnny's eyes fell to the floor. The fear in them burrowing into the floorboards. He had seen first-hand what Richard's clan was capable of, and he could only have gotten stronger over the years. She sighed and finished her tea, then she got up from her seat and started packing this month's supplies into her inventory. "You're leaving town then?" Cheyenne asked. "I-I figured it was the only smart choice. I wanted to wait until you got back though so I knew you would be alright and set until I was in the next town. I'm only moving to Hallifax, for now. So, I will still be right outside the forest, if you need me. I'll just be a little further up north. I'm not sure how tolerant of vampires Hallifax is. Although, I am assuming that they will be slightly more accepting since they don't have as strong of a history with your.. um.. with Richard's kind," Despite his knowledge of what the clan was capable of, Johnny still waited for Cheyenne to return. She allowed herself a worried sigh as she shook her head at her friend. She didn't know whether to be thankful or to worry more about him. As much as she had appreciated his friendship, she knew that Johnny needed to take situations like these more seriously. He wasn't a vampire hunter, after all. There wouldn't be much he could do to defend himself, if there were to be an attack on Gwintin. Even with his knowledge of vampire mechanics in Eden. This was a part of the arrangement that Cheyenne and Johnny had agreed upon. He supplied her with fresh blood to quench her thirst as well as he could and she allowed him to study her, as a self proclaimed 'vampire enthusiast.' Back when Richard and Cheyenne were together, Johnny had always secretly wanted to ask him questions but was too afraid to ask. So, despite it being a curse to Cheyenne, Johnny viewed it as an opportunity. In school, vampirism was a fairly short subject since it wasn't a big deal in the game before the Lon clan really formed into a guild and took over the city of Lamia. So, it had now become more of a 'learn as you go' scenario. This, of course, meant that Johnny would try and learn which things they had learned from school were true and which could be myths. Since there was not much known about vampires, folklore filled in the gaps of knowledge. This is what Johnny used as his guide. He would scribble down notes in his journals in-game. Although, knowing him, the notes he was keeping in his hab module were probably much more extensive. Cheyenne could just imagine Johnny staying up into the early lights of the morning theorizing and hypothesizing over his notes by candle light whenever he logged out of Eden. Unfortunately, this also meant that Johnny would put himself in situations where he would be at risk of running into a vampire to test said theories. Granted, as dangerous as it was, his obsession was somewhat productive. After all, it inspired him to gain some, albeit not that great, proficiencies in swordplay. That was his main muse for a few months

before he became a shopkeeper. Since his shop also included food, he had access to a large supply of animals from the local farm. As a part of his role as a butcher, when he would prepare meats, Cheyenne would have him save the excess blood for her to consume. "But Aidan..." Johnny's voice trailed off. They both knew it was ridiculous to even consider Aidan fleeing the city. Knowing him, he was planning to stay in Gwintin until the bitter end, if it means he might have a chance at seeing Richard again. Cheyenne closed her eyes and let out a heavy sigh. Johnny meekly spoke up once again, "You know, Shy. If you tell your brother -" "Tell him what, Johnny?" her voice cracked as she furiously screamed at him. "That I'm a vampire? That I'm not dead, but worse, one of the creatures of the Mir he has hell-bent his life around hunting? Does that sound like a smart choice to you?" Johnny's eyes fell back to the floors as Cheyenne's welled up with tears, imagining the worst scenarios that would come from Aidan knowing the truth about her. "To have me stabbed with a stake the second he sees me? To make him lose his older sister twice? Is that what you want to happen, huh? Is it?" Johnny stepped back slightly and Cheyenne suddenly realized she was baring her fangs at him. She quickly shut her mouth and moved away from him. She was getting no better than them. She was starting to act like she had behaved when she first transitioned: impulsive, easily agitated, aggressive. It took a long time for her to regain her humanity, and it was only thanks to Johnny that she was even able to get to this state. Cheyenne calmed her breathing and apologized to him, "Johnny, I'm..." He shook his head and stopped her with a wave of his hand. His face was kind with understanding as he brushed off her hostility. It was painful for Cheyenne to think of how well he had adapted to her threats and abuse. Even if they were only on occasion; they were still too often for her liking. Although, she had gotten better than she used to with controlling her impulses. Back in the beginning of Cheyenne's transformation, her 'other side' would completely overtake her consciousness. To her, it always felt like this out-of-body experience. Her mind would clear of all thoughts save for her most primal instinct, to feed. She shivered as she recalled that sensation that still haunted her worst nightmares. She could feel her hands clam up and her palms begin to sweat at the thought of losing control again. "I know I crossed a line there. Honestly though, Shy. Don't you think it is time? Vampire or not, you're his sister and you are," Johnny paused for a moment considering his word choice before continuing, "alive, for lack of a better word. I still think he would want to know. Besides, what will happen when he starts his vengeance speech and Richard says he didn't kill you?" That wasn't an issue. Cheyenne knew that wouldn't be an issue. No matter what Richard said, Aidan wouldn't listen. No amount of clever wordplay could sway what he knew he saw and to Aidan, that was that. In most cases, his stubbornness would be a burden but, for once, it seemed like a benefit for her. Cheyenne proceeded to pack her inventory in silence and checked through it all for anything else she might be able to pick up from Johnny or sell to him before she had to leave again. She and Johnny were still avoiding the real and immediate issue with Aidan that they both knew they needed to solve now, Aidan staying in town. It was a hard topic to talk about, considering that they both knew neither of them had any control over Aidan or what he was going to do with his life. Regardless, she couldn't help but be concerned for her baby brother.

Trust kills as swift as any dagger. Tragedy follows any path you take. Shy only hopes it doesn't catch up.

Eden was built as the perfect fantasy reality. Instead of being a means of entertainment for its players, it became a world where the rich extort the poor to fight and die for their own amusement. As a pawn, your life is your own. But death in the game doesn't mean you reload and start over. When you die in Eden, you die in the real world. Sometimes survival comes at the cost of another's life. What will you leave behind when the only certainty in life is your death?

This is a novella-sized standalone episode in The Permadeath Legacy Series.

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