

## friends make the best teachers

by iztopher

Te'ijal and Lars are friends. They bond over necromancy and soul-stealing, and having things to learn from each other.

For the prompt from AnneLaurant on Tumblr: "How about some weird/wholesome Lars and Te'ijal friendship story or so? XD"! I was absolutely delighted for the opportunity to write these two, I love them.

Huge credit to Ishti for being the co-creator of the Te'ijal and Gyendal backstory headcanon!

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Te'ijal liked Lars. First it had surprised her to know that this sorcerer, who impressed her in their first shared battle by lobbing a Sacrifice spell at the werewolf barreling towards her, had a scarce seventeen years under his belt. Then it surprised her to learn that this *child* was a necromancer. After years of monotony in the Underworld, Te'ijal liked being surprised. She liked learning things, especially about her new traveling companions.

She invited herself along on his visit to his guild in Veldarah, but he didn't seem to mind. In fact, he appreciated the company, if their extensive discussion on the difference between spirit-ciphering and soul-stealing on the way back was any indication.

"The spirit," he explained, "has to do with magic and emotions. The soul is more physical than that. I'm surprised you don't know this - well, I guess vampires don't really *have* souls, do they?"

Te'ijal also enjoyed surprising people. She beamed at him. "We do, actually! It is why I am able to travel the world, and a ghost is not. Their soul is bound to the Underworld, and so they cannot leave. Mine exists in my body, and so I can."

"But it's safe you to wear *that*?" he gestured at the soul pendant.

"It's curious," she admitted. "It must have been designed deliberately to be safe for use by an undead. I would not be surprised if a vampire was the one to create it."

There was a thought. "Are vampire necromancers common?"

Te'ijal shrugged. "I am not sure. The type of magic your guild practices is common amongst us, but most vampire mages do not call themselves necromancers. My brother certainly does not."

Lars skidded to a stop. "Wait, your *what*?"

"My brother?" Te'ijal asked, narrowing her eyes. Then she laughed. "Oh, have I not mentioned him?"

"You have not! I didn't even realize vampires could *have* brothers."

"Tsk, Lars. First believing we don't have souls, and now believing we don't have brothers. You have much to learn about the undead."

He flustered, apparently embarrassed to have the gap in his knowledge pointed out. "They don't exactly teach much about them at the Academy, and I'm the youngest necromancer taken on in decades, so really I'm-"

"Worry not, young Lars. I'm only teasing you." She smiled at him, mostly fang, and he was surprised that he found the expression soothed his nerves instead of wracked them. "Perhaps we could teach each other. You help me learn about humanity, and I help you learn about vampires and other undead."

He regained his confidence, apparently satisfied by the thought that this hundreds-of-years-old woman wanted to learn something from him. He started his stride towards the inn back up. "Why don't you start by telling me what having a brother means? Is it the same thing as it is for humans, or were you turned by the same sire, or..."

She cut him off with her laughter, and failed to catch that his glower meant she should stop. "We do not use the word sire. *Makers* are not considered related to the vampires they have turned." She paused and frowned. "I suppose, at least not inherently. Sometimes they were related as humans, and so they are as vampires."

"Is that what happened with you and your brother? Did one of you turn the other?"

"Ah, no. We emerged from the same grave together."

She said it so casually, but Lars nearly tripped over himself overhearing it. "Same grave?" he squeaked out.

If Te'ijal noticed how off-guard she'd caught him, she didn't show it. "Most vampires were humans, or elves, or some type of mortal, once. But the first

vampires had to come from somewhere. My brother and I are not nearly so old, but every so often, a vampire is conjured by the sheer force of the world's belief in them."

This started to make sense to Lars, who had always taken comfort in the idea that belief and magic were intertwined. "Magic is powered by conviction," he said, as if he was repeating it. "One of my professors was studying the relationship between confidence of Sorcerers and the strength of their casting. They proposed that, rather than confident Sorcerers being confident because they were skilled, they were skilled *because* they were confident." Lars liked that theory. It meant he wasn't, like some people claimed, *self-absorbed*. He was *self-nurturing*. "Like the chicken and the egg."

Te'ijal tilted her head at him. "Chicken and egg?"

"You know those birds that attacked us on the way into town?"

"I am aware of what a chicken is, Lars."

"Okay, fair enough. Did you know they lay eggs?"

She pursed her lips. Her fangs poked out. "I recall having read that in books, but I confess it didn't seem worth memorizing."

"Well, they do. And so people argue about what came first - the first chicken, which laid the first chicken egg, or the first chicken egg, which hatched into the first chicken. One of them had to, right? But neither could exist without the other. So people say 'chicken and egg' to mean a debate about which of two things is the cause and which is the effect."

Her face lit up and she clapped her hands together. "Yes, I see! Like the corpse and the rot."

"I... Sure."

"Did the corpse die because it was rotting from disease? Or is the rot spreading because someone died?"

Lars felt like a healer could probably answer that one a bit more definitively, but he wasn't personally confident enough to start down that path, especially now that the inn was coming into view. The last thing he needed was for Rhen, or worse, *Dameon*, to overhear him say something wrong and correct him. "Yeah, I think that's the same thing."

The more time they spent together, the more surprised Lars was to feel like

he actually had things to *teach* Te'ijal. When they'd first met, she'd seemed like some inhuman, impossible being, with her wild red hair and the most intimidating shot Lars had ever seen. But for all the history she knew or magic she'd experienced firsthand, there was something obvious to him that she didn't understand. He never would have thought there would be things he knew that someone five hundred and twenty eight years old didn't. He liked the way it made him feel. Sue him, he liked teaching people things. Especially when they listened so attentively.

Of course, Lars knew that it helped that Te'ijal had apparently never been a human. He tried not to envy her for emerging into the world as an adult, a brother by her side and no parents to make decisions for her.

"What's your brother like?" he asked her one night, still sitting across from her around the campfire while the others slept.

"Hm." Te'ijal thought about it, drumming her fingers against the log she was sitting on. "A bit like you, actually."

"Like *me*?" Lars was an only child. He was surprised by how off guard it caught him to be compared to someone's family. He liked it.

"Well, certainly. You're both reflective. You're both academics. Gyendal studies often. He prides himself on knowing more than others."

If Lars felt a little self-conscious at her roundabout way of calling him arrogant, it quickly faded as she continued.

"As a result, he is quite magically adept. He pours over tomes written by humans, which most vampires disregard, because he understands different perspectives in magic yield different powers. Not unlike your discussing vampirism with me." She laughed a little, apparently at his expense, "and much like you becoming a Necromancer while having little experience with the undead, Gyendal has precious little practical experience with humanity. He didn't understand why I wanted to experience the Overworld first hand."

"I'm glad you did."

"Me too, uplander." She paused. "That's another thing about you both: I enjoy spending time with you."

He met her smile across the flames.

Lars liked Te'ijal, too.