



Embers and Petals

A Full English translation is available.

灰燼花園

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Embers and Petals follows Bertha, a human seeking to avenge her father's death at the hands of vampires. Assigned to guard Agnes, a vampire captive, Bertha grows conflicted as the two form an unexpected bond. Then Bertha discovers the truth: the "monsters" her people have been hunting are in fact mutated villagers, victims of human experiments. She recalls her childhood friendship with Agnes and learns her father died protecting her.

As they flee together, Bertha and Agnes confess their feelings, but Bertha is fatally wounded, sacrificing herself to save Agnes. Grieving yet inspired, Agnes chooses to live on. Centuries later, she runs a flower shop, honoring Bertha's dream of a world free from hate.

More than just striking artwork and compelling storytelling, *Embers and Petals* resists genre conventions. It challenges the eroticization of lesbian relationships in vampire fiction, instead grounding queer love in care, memory, and shared ideals.



Author **Metalmouse**

Metalmouse graduated from Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan. Her work focuses on portraying familial and romantic love among women, as well as stories about women's rights and the consciousness of independence. While she primarily creates themes focusing on girls' love, she also enjoys exploring other possibilities, including family and the search for belonging.

Subverting the Formula: A Lesbian Vampire Narrative in *Embers and Petals*

by Wen-Chien Hsu

The vampire tradition in literature traces back to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the vampire is depicted as a seductive, immortal figure. This portrayal gave rise to strong sexual metaphors in later works, with blood exchange symbolizing the transfer of bodily fluids during sex. As such, vampire stories often touched on sexual temptation, with blood-sucking used to veil desire. This framing helped creators bypass strict censorship, especially in conservative eras like the 1960s.

The trope of vampires fearing sunlight, however, comes not from the novel, but from the film *Nosferatu*, which also introduced associations with disease. Vampires were recast as metaphors for

contagions like plague or STDs, reflecting fears of immigrants or those with rare illnesses.

Within this tradition, the comic *Embers and Petals* is set in a fictional medieval world where the Church serves as antagonist. While secretly experimenting on the vampire Agnes to develop an elixir of immortality, the Church spreads fearmongering lies about witches and vampires preying on humans. They manipulate villagers' fears of outsiders—especially independent women—while their knights massacre “monsters” who are actually victims of the Church's own experiments.

This setup reflects a familiar genre formula, where institutional religion

is an oppressive force. However, the human Bertha resists this structure. As a child, she meets Agnes in the forest, and their relationship grows through quiet, everyday moments. This dynamic replaces the traditional eroticized blood exchange with emotional intimacy, challenging two tropes of the genre: that vampires seduce through sexuality, and that lesbian desire must be expressed through bodily fluid exchange.

Though Bertha loses her memories and joins the Church under pressure, she is drawn back to Agnes. Upon their reunion, they share blood—not as a metaphor for sex, but as a symbol of trust, healing, and resistance to patriarchal control. As they escape together, sharing meals and dancing, their emotional bond deepens. Just before Bertha dies from poison, she recalls their past and seals their love with a kiss.

Though their love is cut short, Agnes chooses to live on. She builds a community around the place where they first met, where people of all kinds can coexist—

fulfilling the dream she once shared with Bertha.

Embers and Petals stands out not just for its artwork and storytelling, but for its quiet resistance to genre conventions. It challenges the eroticization of lesbian relationships in vampire fiction and instead roots queer love in care, memory, and shared ideals. This is precisely what many yuri readers seek: not fetishized portrayals, but emotionally authentic narratives. As such, this comic is not only beautiful and entertaining—it also carries cultural significance. Available online in both Chinese and English, it deserves broader recognition and future print publication.

Wen-Chien Hsu possesses a free-spirited soul. She has worked at LGBTQ+ organizations, the 113 Domestic Violence Hotline, and works as an editor of Books from Taiwan 2.0. She is dedicated to bringing Taiwanese comics and picture books to a global audience.







DELAH,

I'M LOOKING FOR THE COMMANDER. DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS?



THERE ARE MONSTERS EVERYWHERE, AND THE COMMANDER HAS ALSO GONE ON IN EXPECTATION.

TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON.



...THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NORTHEASTERN WOODLAND VILLAGES IS CORRECT.

WE HAVE DISCOVERED GHOULS AND ELIMINATED THEM, AND ALSO RETRIEVED THE DOCUMENTS FROM THE SCENE.

THE REASON WHY THE GHOULS ATTACKED THE VILLAGE REMAINS TO BE CLARIFIED.



BEIDES, WE DISCOVERED THAT THE GHOULS HAD THE ABILITY TO USE WEAPONS, CAUSING INJURY TO ONE OF OUR TEAM MEMBERS.



ALTHOUGH HE IS CURRENTLY UNDER MEDICAL TREATMENT, HIS CONDITION IS STILL CRITICAL.



IT'S A PITY.

IT SEEMS WE DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THESE MONSTERS.



BERITHA, COME WITH ME. I'LL SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING WE CAN DO TO HELP YOUR TEAM MEMBER.

VAMPIRES ARE RARE, AND THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE MANAGED TO CAPTURE ONE ALIVE.

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ONE YET, RIGHT?



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANTED TO CAUGHT ONE.

WE COULD HAVE KILLED THIS MONSTER WITH A SINGLE STROKE.



VAMPIRES SHOW REMARKABLE RESILIENCE

AND AGE MUCH MORE SLOWLY THAN HUMANS.



IF THE CAUSE BEHIND IT CAN BE UNDERSTOOD,

IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A DYING PERSON TO BE REVIVED.



THE COMMANDER INTENDS TO PRESENT THE WAY OF BACKTRAILTY TO THE POPE IN THE CARNIVAL.

I NEED TO KNOW ALL THE SECRETS ABOUT THIS VAMPIRE. CAN YOU HELP ME?



YOU'RE GOING TO INVEST RESOURCES ON IT?!

THERE ARE MONSTERS EVERYWHERE. CURRENTLY, THE INVESTMENT PANEL DOESN'T HAVE THE RESOURCE TO WASTE ON A SINGLE MONSTER!



STOP WASTING OUR TIME JUST FOR SHOWING OFF!



CAPTAIN SCARLET,

THIS IS NOT A POLITICAL TUG-OF-WAR.



It's a time of war and chaos.



NOT ONLY MONSTERS, BUT PEOPLE WE ALSO KILLING EACH OTHER.



IF WE DISCOVER THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY,

IMAGINE HOW MANY PEOPLE COULD BE GIVEN NEW LIFE!



THE CASE OF YOUR TEAM MEMBER IS JUST A TINY FRACTION OF THE CURRENT SITUATION.



IF THE EXPERIMENT SUCCEEDS, THE SERIOUS INJURIES SUFFERED BY YOUR TEAMMATE



WOULDN'T BE A BIG DEAL.