

The Vampire 111

Chapter 111 111: Hauke's Uniqueness

It took Ashlynn several more attempts before she was able to conjure a functional stool that she quickly draped a fur over before taking a seat across the hole in the ice from Hauke.

"That is much harder than you make it look," Ashlynn said as she carefully tested her stool to make sure it would hold her weight.

Once she'd taken a seat, she attempted to replicate Hauke's actions of threading the thick, barbed fishing hook through the small bait fish he'd caught for her. After several attempts, she finally managed to hook the bait in a way that felt secure though she'd poked several additional holes in the fish in the process.

"I'm sure it's easier without gloves getting in the way," Hauke said, feeling somewhat awkward as he created an ice spike for her to use if she managed to catch anything. "I'm sorry, I should have offered..."

"No, no, not the fish," Ashlynn quickly said, unrolling a considerable length of line before throwing her hooked bait into the hole in the ice with a loud -PLUNK- sound. "I meant, how do you make things that look so delicate out of something as fragile as ice?" Ashlynn asked, pointing at the Frost Walker's stool.

"It isn't easy," the young Frost Walker admitted, conjuring another stool for Heila to sit on next to Ashlynn. "My father spent a great deal to buy books for me from other Eldritch nations. Math, engineering, natural science. He even hired a tutor from the High Fen who taught me how they designed the canals and waterways of the fen."

"You, you studied math and engineering to enhance your sorcery?" Ashlynn asked, momentarily taken off guard by his answer. Nyrielle's approach to sorcery was more, primal she supposed, grounded in using power to directly enforce her will on the environment or people.

Growing up, her tutors had referred to Eldritch sorcery as 'superstitions that can manifest in reality' and nothing she'd seen so far had forced her to shed that worldview. What Hauke was saying, however, sounded far more educated and refined than anything she'd seen so far from Nyrielle and her progeny.

"Sorcery is about bending the world to our will," Hauke said as though he were quoting one of his tutors. "But the world resists being bent. The more you force something to be what it isn't, the harder it becomes and the more energy it takes. But if you don't change much and you use natural laws when you form your constructs, it takes much less energy to achieve results."

For several minutes, Ashlynn considered his words, thinking about the ways she'd used sorcery so far as well as her limited experience with witchcraft. While she thought, the fishing line in her hands twitched, or at least, she thought it did, but when she pulled on the line, there was no resistance that would suggest she'd hooked anything.

What Hauke was saying sounded more like her experience with witchcraft than what Nyrielle had taught her about sorcery but maybe the two things weren't as different as she thought?

Her experience cooperating with trees almost aligned with what he was saying. It was impossible to ask a tree for something it couldn't give, and the tree needed things in return. She still had the branch from the Ancient Oak that she hoped the Mother of Thorns could help her fashion into a wand and in exchange she had promised the oak to plant some of its seeds.

"I wish I could introduce you to someone I admire," Ashlynn said, looking at Hauke with a trace of sadness in her emerald eyes. "Isabell is a Master Engineer in Blackwell City. She studied hard to apply

the latest discoveries in math and engineering to all of her work. When she rebuilt part of my family's home, she was able to replace walls that had tiny, narrow windows with much larger ones that brightened up the oldest parts of our home without making the walls any weaker."

As much as Ashlynn tried to keep her voice light, she couldn't help but worry about Master Isabell. By now, she was certain that the capable engineer had received her letter, she only hoped that it arrived soon enough for her to make arrangements before Owain arrived in Blackwell County.

While the two women weren't close enough to be considered friends, she deeply admired Isabell for rising to the top of her guild. More than that, as someone who had been trusted to rebuild part of the Blackwell manor, she felt she could trust her to keep an eye on Jocelynn.

"I bet she used a bunch of arches to distribute the load," Hauke said with a toothy grin, oblivious to the wrinkled brow that had formed on Ashlynn's face. "Arches and domes are very strong. That's why I shaped the icehouse like this," he said, gesturing at the dome that kept them safe from the biting wind outside. "If it snows and we need to shelter here, the dome could hold the weight of snow much better than a flat roof."

"You said that your father had to bring in books from other nations and he hired a tutor from the High Fen," Ashlynn said, changing the topic slightly. "I'm guessing that most Frost Walkers don't practice sorcery the way you do, so why did Lord Ritchel want you to do things differently than everyone else?"

"Because of this," Hauke said, tapping his iridescent horn. "There are seven different kinds of sorcery we practice. The most common ones are Formed Ice like the stool you made and Dancing Snow that creates or manipulates snow drifting on the air," he said before his voice trailed off as he watched Ashlynn checking her fishing line yet again.

"Um, it's probably hard to feel the line for tugs with gloves on too, isn't it?" Hauke said. "Here, I can do something that will help. Ice. Sphere. Line," he intoned quickly, forming a small ball of ice around Ashlynn's fishing line where it entered the water. "Now you just need to watch the ice ball, if it dips below the water, then pull."

"That's brilliant," Ashlynn said, staring at the line. She'd seen fishermen use various kinds of floats to mark where they put nets or traps but it was her first time seeing a float used to mark a fishing line. "Thank you. So, Formed Ice, Drifting Snow, what are the others?"

"There's also Formless Ice," he said, conjuring a small ball of ice that he twisted and shaped in his hands like it was clay.

"Formless Ice is very rare," Hauke continued, wrapping a thin layer of ice around his wrist like a bracelet before flexing his wrist. As he moved, the ice deformed and returned back to its original shape. "People who understand Formless Ice can clad themselves in armor made of ice that will flex when it needs to and harden the rest of the time."

"I don't think I understand how that would work," Ashlynn said. It seemed to be the opposite of working with the natural laws of ice. Didn't ice seek to hold its shape?

"I don't know if I can explain it easily. I'm not sure if I have the right words," Hauke said, looking at Heila and receiving a head shake in reply. It wasn't that there was a language barrier that she couldn't help him translate through, if he knew the words he wanted to use she could find a way to explain it. But if he wasn't sure how to explain something in Eldritch, she didn't know enough about sorcery to help him figure out how to articulate things.

When Hauke glanced at Andrus, the young soldier also shook his head. He and Virve were taking turns keeping watch outside the icehouse so they had time to recover from the frigid winds, but after receiving a scolding from Virve, he was trying to be mindful of his place.

Thankfully, he had no talent for sorcery and he really couldn't contribute to the conversation, even if he wanted to. Instead, he stood patiently at Lady Ashlynn's shoulder and watched the hole in the ice as though a fish monster might erupt from the lake to threaten his charge.

Virve had assured him that the fish served to them the night before were harmless, but when he saw the giant fish frozen in blocks of ice as trophies, he couldn't help but worry that such a monstrous fish could swallow him whole. Some of the fish were more than twice as long as he was tall and weighed as much as four of him!

No matter what anyone said, Andrus wasn't about to treat the hole in the ice as a harmless thing. If one of those monster fish leaped out of it, then he would be ready to protect Lady Ashlynn from it.