

## The Vampire 116

### Chapter 116 116: Blood On Ice

"In general, there are two kinds of fighters," Thane explained to Ashlynn on a dark and misty night in the Vale of Mists before her departure. "Power fighters," he said, lifting a large and heavy two handed sword, before delivering a crushing overhand blow to one of the practice targets. "And speed fighters," he added, lifting a lighter, slender rapier and deftly puncturing the target several times in quick succession.

"Which kind of fighter are you?" Ashlynn asked, furrowing her brow at him as she caught her breath after several minutes of intense practice. She found him to be both much faster than her and to be significantly stronger so she struggled to place him in either category.

"When I was a knight, I was a power fighter," he said, offering a courtly bow. "Heavy armor slows you down, and the weapons you need to overcome an armored opponent aren't light either. If you're strong enough though, you can wade through even crowded battlefields and keep fighting like an unstoppable juggernaut."

"My sister was the opposite," he said, setting a hand gently on the rapier's hilt. "Speed fighters don't belong on crowded battlefields. They're deadly in duels and less honorable fights in places where people don't wear armor to protect themselves. On the battlefield, against an armored knight, a speed fighter has no chance, but take away the armor and attack that same knight in a crowded tavern and they'll die before they've finished pulling back their sword to swing."

"You said 'when you were a knight,'" Ashlynn pointed out. "Does that mean you're a speed fighter now?"

"No," Thane said with a deep chuckle. "It means that the dichotomy no longer applies once I became a vampire. Even in armor, I'm faster than any human would ever be and at the same time, I'm stronger than even our friends from the Clan of the Great Claw."

"That's why I picked the falchion for you," he reminded her. "You're faster than humans now, and stronger than many among the Eldritch peoples. Use that combination of speed and power and you'll understand why vampires are so feared, even within the Eldritch nations."

Now, as she raced across the ice, Ashlynn understood what Thane had meant far better than she had at the time. Broll had been a power fighter who was used to fighting in armor and he died because he was overly reliant on the armor's protection to accommodate his wide, powerful swings.

The Tuscans were just like Broll, doubled in size with added tusks. They wore heavy pelts and had thick skin under their shaggy fur in place of armor but they all carried heavy weapons. A single blow, whether from the mauls or the clubs, or even the long iron chain, would be enough to cripple, maim, or kill a person.

Ashlynn recognized this, yet she charged them anyway. Behind her, she vaguely heard Virve's cry of protest as she and Andrus scrambled to keep up with her, but Ashlynn had no intention of holding back from using any of her gifts to end this fight as quickly as possible, before anyone could be hurt.

"Mist Walker. Dance," Ashlynn whispered, springing off the ice and allowing the frigid wind at her back to carry her even faster through the air as she soared above the lead Tuscan in a blur of movement that was too fast for his snow-blinded eyes to follow.

Dismissing her sorcery after a final push off of the snow-filled air, Ashlynn dropped onto her unsuspecting prey like an eagle swooping down from the sky. Her darksteel blade whistled through the air, its curved blade aimed directly at the face of the second maul-wielding Tuscan.

Too late, the hairy Tuscan realized the danger he was in, raising the haft of his maul to block Ashlynn's blade. After dozens of hours of practice, her sword cleaved through the thick wooden haft of the maul with only the slightest shiver of resistance before it met flesh.

Blood erupted as the Tuscan's final attempt to bat away her blade with his flexible trunk failed. Half of his trunk fell to the ice with a meaty -SPLAT- while her blade cleaved past the trunk and into his face, destroying one eye before Ashlynn fell further and came to a stop, her blade wedged in the ivory of his trunk.

"Rarwgh!" the wounded Tuscan bellowed in pain and fury, dropping the two halves of his broken maul to snatch at the witch who dangled from his tusk.

Letting go of her sword, Ashlynn dropped to the icy surface of the lake, barely avoiding the Tuscan's powerful grasp.

"My Lady," Andrus yelled, whipping his mace forward as he raced toward the woman he was supposed to be protecting. "Catch!"

For a moment, Ashlynn almost leaped for the weapon only to dash out of the way as the wounded Tuscan thrashed, his spiked tusks whistling through the air and leaving a trail of glittering icy energy in their wake. Andrus' throw went wide as Ashlynn moved quickly to avoid the wildly stomping feet of the Tuscan and the mace clattered to the ice more than a dozen feet away from her.

"Andrus watch out!" Virve cried, struggling to catch up to Ashlynn's sorcery-fueled flight and the horned soldier's fleet-footed dash.

The warning, however, came a moment too late. Imnek, the leader of the Tuscan hunters, had given up on his companions, charging ahead to reach his prize, the Frost Walker with an iridescent horn. Imnek completely ignored Andrus in his rush to reach his prize, but the club-wielding Tuscan behind him didn't.

Alerted by Virve's cry, Ashlynn was too far away to do anything but watch in horror as the spiked club tore through the air and slammed into Andrus' diminutive figure. Against Lothian swords and spears, the young horned soldier's thick gambeson and heavy fur-lined cloak would have done much to protect his life.

Against the spiked club as thick as a tree trunk, however, it was little different than a summer tunic for all the protection it provided him. Bones crunched sickeningly and blood splattered across the ice. Brilliant blue-white energy flared as one of the sharpened Frost Walker horns embedded in the club pierced deeply into Andrus' chest.

For a moment, Andrus' hazel eyes met Ashlynn's. His mouth was open and his face contorted in pain but no sounds came out as icy magic washed over him, freezing his blood and flesh from the inside out before the Tuscan shook his club, dropping Andrus' frozen corpse on the ice with a heavy -THUNK.-

For a moment, the only thing Ashlynn could hear was the whistling of the icy wind. The bellowing of the wounded Tuscan, the clash as Virve blocked Imnek's charge, she heard none of it as her world narrowed to the man who had killed her young bodyguard.

Somewhere deep inside her, something fell into place. Something that had struggled to connect with 'nature' in this barren, icy landscape found its resonance with the cold fury that gripped her heart.

The wind that tore the tears from her eyes spun around her, gathering the shattered fragments of the ice house that remained after Hauke's attack and blending them with frozen blood from the injured Tuscan into a terrifying cyclone of nature's fury bent to Ashlynn's will.

"You. Will. All. Die," she said in a voice even colder than the icy air around her.