

The Vampire 117

Chapter 117 117: Nature's Fury

Nyrielle's library, as vast as it was, contained very few books about witchcraft. Ashlynn understood, from what she'd read so far, that sorcery drew on a person's own life energy while witchcraft drew on the energy of nature and the elements.

Thus far, Ashlynn had only been able to connect to the energy of living plants and the earth itself. At times, she wondered if that connection had been formed when she was buried underneath a cedar tree when Owain nearly killed her. Her desperation to survive let her touch magic that she'd never dared to dream about and the trees and earth had responded to her need.

Now, as she watched Andrus' wide-open eyes freeze over before the Tuscan shook him off the spiked club, she found herself in tune with the icy winds and frozen lake in a way she'd never expected to.

The winds scoured the lands, stinging everything and robbing everyone it touched of the warmth of life. The ice formed a cage that locked away anything living in the lake and the water itself was heavy, dark, and chilling in its depths.

The instant she watched Andrus die, she wanted nothing more than to cleanse the earth of the people who had brought violence to what had been a joyous day of making friends and learning. Now, one of those new friends would never follow her, clambering from rock to rock in the mountainous terrain. He would never taste the 'monster fish' he'd helped to catch or boast to his seven siblings about his accomplishment the way he'd boasted to Virve.

The Tuscans had taken all of that from them and more. Worst of all, he had died chasing after her, and as much as she hated the Tuscans for killing him, she hated herself for putting him into that position.

The winds and ice were harder to control than anything she'd ever done with trees or the earth, and the winds and ice shards stung her exposed skin even as it bent to her will. Maybe it stung her because deep down, she felt that she should suffer for her role in Andrus' death. It didn't matter, all that mattered was that she had the strength now to kill the man who killed him.

It only took a few heartbeats of time before Ashlynn began to move, stalking across the ice to the wailing, wounded Tuscan. Her sword was still embedded in his tusk and she needed it to kill someone.

As she approached, the blood staining the Tuscan's shaggy hair froze and he scrambled on the ice in a frenzied attempt to escape the approaching icy reaper. His trunk had been severed, an eye destroyed and pain flooded his mind as bone-chilling cold radiated from each of his wounds. He'd completely lost the demeanor of an indomitable hunter marching toward an inexorable victory.

By the time Ashlynn reached him, his limbs had frozen in place and he'd fallen to his hands and knees on the icy surface of the lake. His lungs burned with a cold like thousands of shards of ice stabbing from within every time he drew a shuddering breath and frost had covered his remaining eye. When Ashlynn wrenched her sword free of his tusk, it snapped off clattering to the ice like a dropped toy.

"She really is a child of the earth," Tunerk the club-wielding Tuscan breathed, tightening his grip on his weapon as a slow grin spread between his tusks. "Her head will be a fine trophy!"

Seeing her power, Tunerk raised his trunk in the air, letting out a mighty blast of air that echoed off the frozen lake like the sound of a dark and twisted trumpet. The Frost Walker horns in his club and lashed to his tusks began to glow, each one radiating different forms of frosty power.

Tunerk held nothing back. He slammed his club into the ice, glaring at Ashlynn as if he was issuing a challenge. More than a simple display of dominance, however, the cracks that formed in the ice allowed

him to draw forth the icy water of the lake, freezing it into a thick shield that covered his left arm. Several more spears of ice formed in the air around him, circling lazily as though they were waiting for their prey to make a move.

"Just how many Frost Walkers did you have to kill and defile to gain that power," Ashlynn said as she stalked toward Tunerk. "How many were innocently fishing when you killed them? How many of them were never a threat to your life until you decided to murder and plunder?"

Tunerk scowled at the human witch, clearly not understanding her language but Ashlynn didn't care whether he understood or not. His actions only served to strengthen her conviction that this man should never be allowed to harm another.

For a tense moment, neither of them moved. The next moment, Tunerk began to raise his club for a charge when Ashlynn shot toward him with the speed of an arrow fired from a crossbow.

"Mist Walker. Dance," Ashlynn said softly as she leaped into the air, taking several steps to soar above the startled Tuscan before diving for the ground behind him. She'd already seen what happened when Andrus charged a Tuscan from the front and she had no desire to contend with his spiked tusks in addition to the deadly club.

One of the ice spears grazed off her left leg as she shot toward the ground, tearing through the warm breeches and spilling a thin rivulet of blood that stung mightily the instant it was exposed to the cold air. In the heat of the moment, however, Ashlynn couldn't allow herself to care for minor wounds.

As soon as her feet touched the icy surface of the lake she lunged for the back of the Tuscan's knees, slicing powerfully with her falchion to sever the tendons in each leg. Blood erupted from the wounds, spurting from severed arteries and splattering across Ashlynn's face and chest as she dashed out of the way of the falling Tuscan.

Ice cracked as his body fell heavily to the ice. His trunk blared out a furious blast of shock and pain as he fell. Several icy spears launched at Ashlynn as the Tuscan attempted to roll around in a way that would let him crush the devious insect that had laid him low.

'Don't block, attack the weapon.' Thane's words echoed in Ashlynn's mind as the darksteel falchion danced in her hands, shattering the icy spears one after another. Shards of ice peppered her face and hands leaving behind several small cuts but not one of the spears survived her onslaught to inflict any meaningful damage.

Already, the icy wind flowing over the wound on her leg had begun to accelerate the healing of the only serious injury Tunerk had inflicted. The wounds on her face and hands healed at a rate that was visible to the naked eye. Each of those wounds still came with its own measure of pain. Just because it healed quickly didn't mean that it didn't hurt, but Ashlynn welcomed the pain as part of the penance she owed to Andrus.

"Die, witch!" Tunerk shouted, doing the only thing he could think of to bring down this terrifying woman. He raised his club high overhead, intending to smash it into the ice and send both himself and Ashlynn tumbling into the icy depths below. At least they would die together.

As soon as she saw his intention, however, Ashlynn dashed forward, her falchion flickering out in a blur too fast for most eyes to see. The next instant, Tunerk's club, along with the hand holding it, sailed through the air before falling to the ice dozens of feet away.

More blood erupted from the severed limb and Tunerk began to twist on the ice, clutching at the severed limb and howling in rage and pain.

"Enough," Ashlynn spat, stepping in and thrusting out with her sword. The blade shivered in her hands as she struck, becoming lodged in the Tuscan's skull without penetrating until Ashlynn summoned all of her strength, drawing on the stinging winds and the icy energy around her to thrust deeply into the Tuscan's skull.

The darksteel blade seemed to drink in the warmth of the Tuscan's blood, absorbing it to feed the cold, crystalline patterns of frost spreading from where it pierced flesh and bone. As her sword sank deeper, the blade drank deeper and frost raced through the Tuscan's veins like flame consuming lamp oil, transforming blood to ice in an instant.

Ashlynn watched with a cold, murderous stare as Tunerk's wide eyes clouded over with the same deadly frost that had claimed Andrus' life. It did nothing to bring Andrus back, but as she watched the light fade from the Tuscan's eyes, she promised herself that she would douse the hairy giant in enough lamp oil to create a pyre that could be seen from miles away. At least his death could light the way for Andrus' journey to the Heavenly Shores.

Wrenching her blade free, Ashlynn felt the fury that gripped her heart subsiding along with a great deal of the icy energy she'd borrowed from the environment around her. Freed from the tunnel vision that accompanied her rage, she looked around the lake to see how the rest of the battle was faring, hoping that Virve and Hauke had been successful in defeating the other remaining Tuscan.

What she saw, however, sent an entirely different chill down her spine.