

The Vampire 118

Chapter 118 118: Freezing Doom

While Ashlynn had been engaged in her battle with Tunerk, Imnek had relentlessly attempted to reach Hauke to obtain his iridescent horn.

Virve, however, resolutely stood in the way of the Tuscan leader. Seeing Ashlynn smoothly sever the trunk of one of the Tuscans, even with the loss of her sword, was a powerful reminder that Ashlynn was like Nyrielle's progeny. The power at her command was far greater than what Virve herself could manifest, and worse, she was likely to get in Ashlynn's way if she attempted to join the fray.

That didn't mean that her duties as a guard ended the moment Ashlynn set foot on the battlefield. Instead, as much as she wanted to sink her claws into the man who clubbed Andrus to death, she turned on the last remaining foe, intent on protecting Heila and Hauke.

Placing herself between Imnek and the others provoked the ire of the Tuscan leader who furiously swung his maul at her, treating her much the same way that Tunerk had treated Andrus. Unfortunately for Imnek, Virve was nothing like the young horned soldier out on his first venture to the frozen mountains.

Where Andrus had relied on his advantage in raw speed and precise aim to dash in and strike a blow before darting away, Virve moved with the practiced efficiency of a veteran warrior. Each time the maul swung, she shifted just enough to let it pass, never wasting movement or leaving herself off balance.

Riding the edge of Imnek's range, each time the maul mist her by a less than a hand's breadth, she darted back in, her darksteel claws tearing into Imnek's arms, leaving behind crisscrossing cuts that slowly dyed the Tuscan giant's fur red before dripping to the ice below, leaving a bloody trail as the pair moved across the ice.

For a moment, it seemed to Hauke and Heila that the powerful Tuscan would be easily defeated. Already, the damage done to his arms had slowed his swings and when he did strike out with the maul, Virve seemed to have an easier time avoiding the rash and impatient blows.

Unfortunately, Imnek's impatience didn't get the best of him for long. As soon as he recognized Virve as a genuine threat, he turned his full murderous attention on her. His maul struck out again and again, no longer aiming at her torso but seeking to destroy her limbs any time she extended an arm to swipe at him or stepped forward to advance.

"You need to help her," Heila insisted, tugging on Hauke's deep blue tunic. "It's not fair, he's too much bigger than Virve. Please," she said, her eyes wide and filled with tears after seeing Andrus fall. "She needs your help."

"I know she does," the young Frost Walker said. His voice sounded frightened and frustrated. The Tuscan was even larger than his father and his tusks bore thirteen sharpened horns that spoke of just how many of Hauke's clansmen he'd killed. The icy aura around him was thick and malicious, as if the spirits of the slain Frost Walkers had become bloodthirsty revenants eager for others to suffer the same cruel fate they had.

"I don't know how to hurt him without hurting her in the process," Hauke said, wracking his brain for anything he could do that would be useful.

-CRUNCH-

The sickening sound of bone shattering filled the air as Imnek's maul crashed into Virve's forearm, shattering both bones in a single blow. A deep and haunting trumpet blast of victory blared from the Tuscan's trunk as he pressed forward, tearing through Virve's thick padded armor with the sharpened horns mounted on his tusks.

"His feet and legs," Heila said, tapping rapidly on Hauke's leg to make her point. "Or his knees like, like Andrus did when he hit the first one," she explained, looking around the lake for what had happened to the wounded Tuscan only to find that he'd moved far from the battle, pulling himself across the ice to reach the island in the middle of the frozen lake.

"Lady Nyrielle always tells Lady Ashlynn that sorcery is about finding the most efficient way to use energy," Heila added, thinking back over the things she'd overheard while attending to her lady during Lady Nyrielle's dinner-time lessons.

"She says that using a small amount of energy to tip something precarious is better than pushing against a steady boulder," Heila said, hoping she had recalled Lady Nyrielle's point correctly. "Can you hit him when he takes a step or something?"

"If I try to hurl an ice spear or anything else at him, I might hit Virve," Hauke protested. It was better, in his mind, to aim for the head since Imnek towered over Virve by several feet, but the giant Tuscan moved too quickly to be an easy target. He'd already spent a good deal of his energy in the morning to create the ice house and practice sorcery with Ashlynn.

Now, after creating a new barrier and the few attacks he'd made on the group of Tuscan, he was rapidly approaching his limits. If he was going to do anything, he couldn't afford to waste his magic on attacks that wouldn't land.

"What about what you did to make the icehouse?" Heila asked. "Could you trap his legs in ice?"

"That, that might work," Hauke said, looking at the situation rapidly deteriorating for Virve. In order to land a few strikes of her own she'd taken a punishing blow to the body from Imnek's maul. Now, bright pink foamy blood could be seen on her lips and her every breath was accompanied by a high-pitched wheeze.

"Fountain. Flow. Soaking Serpent," Hauke intoned, his horn glowing a flickering shade of icy blue as he summoned a tendril of water from the hole in the ice that snaked its way across the frozen surface of the lake to reach the Tuscan giant's legs. Icy water pooled around Imnek's feet before ascending his legs like oil drawn up the wick of a lamp, soaking through the pelts that formed his breeches until his hairy legs were sodden to the skin.

"What the!" Imnek shouted, startled by the sudden chill on his legs. In the moment of distraction, Virve rushed him, sinking the claws of her right hand deep into the flesh of his ribs and raking the length of his torso.

"Flash Freeze!" Hauke intoned, instantly locking Imnek's legs in place as a layer of ice encased both legs.

The powerful Tuscan roared in pain and anger, shaking his head and shredding Vivek's padded armor with the cruel, sharpened horns mounted on his tusks. A moment later, his trunk snaked around the bearish woman's neck, lifting her off the ground as her broken arm dangled uselessly at her side.

"Virve!" Ashlyn shouted, horrified at the sight that greeted her eyes as soon as she looked away from the fallen Tunerk. Before she could process everything else that was happening, her feet had already started to move, dashing across the ice in a desperate attempt to reach her remaining guardian before she met the same fate as Andrus. The icy wind seemed to bend around her, pushing her from behind as if the earth itself wanted her to make it in time.

Hearing Ashlynn's cry, Virve smiled weakly in the Tuscan's grip. If she was going to die today, she thought, raising her uninjured arm to grab hold of the Tuscan's trunk, she would at least take a piece of this giant with her before she died.