

The Vampire 121

Chapter 121 121: Growing Cold

The music never seemed to stop as Nyrielle and Ashlynn lost themselves in the dance. White and black skirts swirled around each other and they held each other close enough to feel the other woman's heartbeat clearly.

The familiar scent of lavender soap mingled with something warmer, the rich scent of cedar mixed with green, growing things that seemed to almost permeate Ashlynn's skin ever since she began to draw on her power as a witch. As they danced, the fragrance grew stronger, awakening a hunger that Nyrielle briefly struggled to control.

As they danced, Nyrielle's cool hands found the bare skin of Ashlynn's shoulders, tracing gentle patterns from soft shoulders to delicate neck and then lower, to rest just above Ashlynn's beating heart. The music slowed and Ashlynn's warm fingers played with the lace at Nyrielle's waist, tugging as if she was seeking a way to reach the cool skin beneath the dark dress.

Each turn around the dance floor brought them closer together until Ashlynn's cheek rested against Nyrielle's collarbone, her breath warming Nyrielle's skin through the thin fabric of her gown.

It was a moment that had never happened, one that could never happen, but at the moment, Nyrielle let herself go completely, drifting in the illusion that her parents and grandsire were watching her dance with her darling Ashlynn.

At some point, the music faded away, becoming muffled and indistinct as though the musicians were playing from a different room. The Ashlynn in Nyrielle's arms grew cold, her body first matching Nyrielle's normal corpse-like chill and then growing colder still until Nyrielle felt like she was dancing with a block of ice.

"Ashlynn, what's happening to you?" Nyrielle asked, searching the shorter woman's emerald eyes for answers.

"I'm sorry," Ashlynn said, her slippered feet splashing through icy water that covered the dance floor.
"I'm sorry..."

"Ashlynn, Ashlynn, what..." Before Nyrielle could ask any other questions, the woman in her arms faded away, vanishing in a cold mist that evaporated like fog in a strong wind.

"No, no, no, something is very, very wrong," Nyrielle said.

In her daybed, Nyrielle forced her midnight blue eyes open, fumbling at the locks that kept her secure from anyone who would drag her into the sun while she lay helpless and asleep.

Even though she was far underground in the Frost Walker's forest, she could feel the burning sun pressing down on her, sapping her strength and compelling her to sink back into dreams that were memories of times long passed.

Her fingernails grew into claws and her heart beat faster as she felt the echo of Ashlynn's heartbeat within her chest growing slow and weak. Of the two of them, Ashlynn's heart usually beat two or three times to her one, but now, it had become even slower, beating only once for every two of Nyrielle's heartbeats.

Finally, the last of the latches clicked open and Nyrielle flung the heavy lid of her coffin-like daybed open, dashing directly from her bed to the room's only door and wrenching it open. In her haste, she shattered the heavy wooden bar that held the door closed and tore the door itself from the heavy iron hinges but she neither noticed nor cared for the damage she caused in her haste to find answers.

"My Lady?" Captain Lennart said, startled by her early awakening. There were still at least three hours until the sun set and even when Nyrielle woke early, it was never this early, particularly when they were in a place like the High Pass without clouds, fog or tree cover to obscure the sun.

"Help," Nyrielle said, grabbing hold of Lennart's tunic and pulling him forward. "Let me feed..."

"Yes," Lennart said, even more confused than he was a moment ago. She'd fed before they left Orava Village, how could she need to feed again so soon? Still, he did not hesitate to fulfill her demand. As soon as she mentioned feeding, he tore at his tunic, turning his head to bare his neck to her fangs.

Nyrielle's bite wasn't as neat or precise as it usually was and she knew that she likely caused Lennart considerable pain before the pleasure of feeding overwhelmed him, but at the moment it didn't matter. She needed to feed to resist the pressure of the sun and every moment she delayed it became harder to stay awake.

Minutes ticked by as she drank deeply until Lennart cried out in pain. Still, she drank until the bearish man lost his ability to stand. Only then did she withdraw her fangs, meeting the gaze of the shocked soldiers who had come to see why she'd risen so early.

"Something happened, no, something is happening to Ashlynn," he said, looking at the gathered soldiers. "Go to her, go quickly. And tell Lord Ritchel that I want to speak to him here," she said, wiping the blood from her lips with the back of her hand. Despite the burning pressure of the sun above, her

midnight blue eyes had grown dark and predatory and her fingernails remained pointed and sharp enough to tear flesh from bone.

Ashlynn's heartbeat was very weak but it hadn't stopped. At least, it hadn't stopped yet. Whatever was happening to her, Nyrielle hoped she could hold on, at least a few hours more for the sun to set.

"What is happening to you, my darling?" she whispered, kneeling to check on Captain Lennart as the others raced to follow her instructions. She'd nearly gone too far, she realized, looking at the state he was in. As is, he would need days of bed rest to recover and she might need to feed again before the sunset.

Whether it was feeding on one of her own or one of Lord Ritchel's Frost Walkers, she didn't care. At the moment, even if she had gone too far when she fed on Lennart, even if she'd crossed a line she shouldn't, she wouldn't regret it.

When Cellach Lothian set fire to the Vale of Mists, she'd thought that she'd never again feel a fear and helplessness that would drive her to sacrifice the people around her. In the long years since those terrible days, she'd slowly clawed her way back from the abyss that called out to her to surrender to her hunger and an even more primal thirst for power.

Now, she felt the abyss calling to her again and she wasn't sure that she could turn away from it. Not if that was the price to pay to save her Ashlynn.