

The Vampire 162

Chapter 162 162: A Touch of Glamor

Bright sunlight filtered through elaborately carved stone lattice windows, spilling onto a plush bed where Ashlynn had slept the remainder of the night and much of the day away. The faint splashing of fountains could be heard outside the window along with the occasional bright high pitched notes of birdsong.

A sharp pain behind her eyes accompanied by the feeling like sand had been poured under her eyelids made it impossible for Ashlynn to remain asleep once she'd begun to wake, even though she wanted nothing more at the moment than to pull the soft blankets back over her head and shut out the world.

"Ashlynn," Heila said softly, forcing herself to omit the honorific 'my lady.' So long as they weren't in public, Ashlynn had asked to be treated more like a friend and Heila intended to do so, even if it felt uncomfortable to be so intimate with Lady Nyrielle's Seneschal.

"I have something for you to drink," Heila said, climbing onto the bed with a chilled cup in one hand. "It should make you feel better."

"I used to mock Father's knights when this happened to them," Ashlynn said, taking the cup in both hands and drinking eagerly. The drink turned out to be a sweet, chilled willow bark tea that carried the flavor of several other herbs which brightened the mind and soothed the body.

"Heila, please don't let me drink like that ever again," Ashlynn said as she handed the empty cup back to Heila. Near her bedside, she found another cup with a large pitcher of chilled water. After drinking two full cups down and sitting still on the soft bed for several minutes she was finally beginning to feel human again.

"Did I make a fool of myself last night?" Ashlynn asked, raising an eyebrow at her diminutive friend. "I remember that I spoke quite a bit but I don't remember what I said."

"No one thought you were a fool," Heila said with a light laugh. Gently, she pulled Ashlynn from bed and led her from the opulent bedroom to a private washroom. "You'll feel better when you've had a chance to freshen up but you don't need to worry about being presentable to the public. At Lady Nyrielle's request, I've made some arrangements for you today before the sun sets."

"Oh?" Ashlynn said, pausing as she inhaled the rich scent of honeysuckle and sage that permeated the soap in the washroom. "What does she have in mind?"

"Several surprises," Heila said with a bright smile. "You'll see."

After washing up, Heila presented Ashlynn with a soft, fluffy cream-colored robe and a pair of fuzzy slippers, insisting that she didn't need to be any more dressed than that before their first appointment.

"Appointment? Heila, I can't see people in nothing but a bathrobe," Ashlynn insisted.

"Of course you can. You won't be keeping the robe the whole time anyway, now come," Heila said, pulling Ashlynn's hand and leading her into a luxurious sitting room with overstuffed lounge chairs.

As soon as both women had taken a seat on the soft lounge chairs, Heila rang a bell summoning well dressed servants from the Scaled Clan who placed a tray of small sandwiches, bite sized pastries and

several slices of rich cheeses between the two women. The meal was accompanied by delicate crystal goblets filled with a sparkling pear cider that tickled the tongue as well as the nose.

"Our first visitor is a clothier named Aleydya," Heila said, ringing a bell to summon their first guest. "She's designed ball gowns and formal wear for the wealthy and powerful of High Fen City for more than thirty years and even made High Lady Erna's coronation ensemble."

The woman who entered was an immaculately dressed member of the Scaled Clan with brilliant red and copper patterned scales who wore a figure hugging dress made of golden silk trimmed in delicate black lace. When she entered, her movements were precise and efficient, without a hint of wasted effort.

"Greetings Seneschal Ashlynn," she said, making a strange bow that held both hands out as far to her left as she could stretch them. "Your Lady Heila brought Lady Nyrielle's request to me this morning. I'm afraid I won't be able to create anything truly one of a kind for you on such short notice but I have several items that can be quickly tailored to suit your itinerary. Just tell me which pieces you like and I'll have them prepared and delivered to you in time for each of the events you're attending."

"I'm attending events?" Ashlynn asked Heila, blinking in confusion. Her itinerary? She had to check with Heila to make sure she'd translated the word correctly as it wasn't part of the common Eldritch speech she'd learned so far.

"I told you, several surprises," Heila giggled. "Lady Nyrielle intends to take you on a tour of High Fen City's best entertainment. You'll need formal dresses for two nights of entertainment plus a gown fit for dancing one night."

For the next half an hour, Ashlynn was treated to a display of one stunning dress after another. The dresses that Aleydya presented weren't just beautiful pieces of clothing, they were breathtaking works

of art in silk, velvet and lace that many noble ladies in the Kingdom of Gaal would have mortgaged their own daughters to wear.

The style of the dresses was much more 'fitted' than Ashlynn was accustomed to with lace panels across the bodice that plunged so deeply and were open enough in their design that they would have been considered scandalous in either Lothian March or Blackwell County. It took Heila's whispering in her ear about how she would feel about Nyrielle seeing her in such daring dresses for Ashlynn to acquiesce to the racy designs the clothier seemed to prefer.

Ashlynn expected that things would end there, but after taking her measurements, the three dresses were displayed on wire and muslin dress forms while Aleydya retreated to the side.

"Next is Lemititi, High Lady Erna's personal jeweler," Heila explained with a twinkle in her eye. "The High Lady has a large collection and she's agreed to loan a few pieces to you during your stay."

"Lady Ashlynn," the jeweler greeted, performing a bow similar to the one used by the clothier. Unlike the clothier, the jeweler was a member of the Glass Eyed Clan who arrived with several velvet lined boxes containing exquisite pieces of jewelry.

"The current trend is to place a jewelry 'net' over the top of your dress," Lemititi explained, holding up a long piece of jewelry with interlinked gold chains set with sparkling emeralds and diamonds. "Since the Scaled Clan do not nurse their young, they lack the anatomy to produce a bust as full as yours, my lady," the jeweler said, as though this were a great tragedy. "Since that's the case, might I suggest something that accents your shoulders and drapes along your arms?"

"Isn't this a bit... extravagant?" Ashlynn said. She had never seen the crown jewels or been to any events attended by the current queen or princess but the display before her would cost as much as a dozen sailing ships in Blackwell County.

Some of the stones were large enough that she didn't think the daughter of a count would even be allowed to wear something so luxurious. Just possessing any of them would make a noble house a target of envy from all of their neighbors and if they lacked the standing to wear them, even displaying such fine jewelry would invite comments about putting on airs or attempting to rise above their station.

"Not at all," the jeweler insisted. "High Lady Erna's Majordomo reminded me that Lady Nyrielle was her teacher in her youth. As Lady Nyrielle's Seneschal and companion, the courtesy you're shown reflects High Lady Erna's respect for her teacher and cannot be lacking. Please," he said, gesturing at the glittering cases. "Just tell me what you like and pay no mind to the details."

Jewelry gave way to shoes and accessories, followed by hosiery and intimate undergarments made of such fine lace that it left Ashlynn both blushing in embarrassment and eagerly anticipating Nyrielle's reaction to seeing her lover wrapped in such elegant dark silk lace.

Choosing garments, however, turned out to be only the beginning of the 'surprise' that Heila was guiding her through. While her gown for the evening was being altered and other items were being prepared, Ashlynn was whisked into an opulent bathing chamber where several female servants waited to groom her for the evening's festivities.

After bathing in jasmine scented water that seemed to caress her skin like liquid silk, Ashlynn surrendered to expert hands that worked scented oils into every muscle. The massage left her floating in a haze of pleasure as tension melted from her muscles before her skin was gently scrubbed with a mixture of coarse sugar and oils infused with unfamiliar spices that carried a warm scent that was neither floral nor woody but somehow a mixture of both.

The calluses that had begun to form on her hands from training with the sword vanished along with the rough patches of skin that had formed on her body after several days spent in the frigid, dry air of the

High Pass. From one expert's care to the next, each treatment seemed designed to make her feel more pampered than the last, until her skin glowed with renewed vitality.

Her long hair was washed, brushed out, and pressed between flat heated stones to straighten her usual soft waves. Her long fingernails were rounded and shaped, polished and painted a deep emerald green before tiny jewels were embedded in the polish to give her nails a scintillating sparkle. Even her eyebrows were carefully plucked and teased into shape until the gentle arches swept down to sharp points that gave her a more mature and sensual air that radiated a bit of danger.

By the time the sun set, Ashlynn felt like she'd been completely transformed. She had always carried herself with the poise expected of a noblewoman, but when she looked at her reflection in the mirror, her breath caught at the sight of an elegant and sophisticated woman who could only be called... regal. Perhaps the queen of Gaal herself couldn't compare.

"My darling," Nyrielle's voice called from the doorway. "I've come to take you away..."