

The Vampire 167

Chapter 167 167: Empty Bed

Hours later, Ashlynn woke from barely remembered dreams where she was searching for something important through vast and dark forests. What she'd been searching for, she couldn't remember and she'd started to wonder if it had even been her dream or a fragment of Nyrielle's.

The closer they came, the more their hearts beat in unison and the more the thin walls that kept them apart seemed to melt. Not long ago, Nyrielle's impassive, mask-like expression had troubled her greatly, but now, she found herself able to read the subtle shifts in her lover's lips and eyes as easily as reading a book. Nyrielle wasn't unfeeling, but her feelings ran deep and rarely bubbled to the surface.

Even that, however, seemed to be changing. Whether those feelings had always been there or not, Ashlynn couldn't say. All she knew was that the Nyrielle she spent the night with was more 'alive' than the one she'd met in the rain on the night of her marriage to Owain.

Now, however, after a night of passion and bliss, she woke to a bed that was disturbingly empty. Her arms and legs wrapped around a large pillow as if she'd been clutching at it for hours. All around her, there were signs of their night of passion - blankets that had been torn when her body was rocked by the waves of pleasure that flowed from Nyrielle's bite, blood-stained sheets from the moment Nyrielle's control slipped and she raked her claws along Ashlynn's back...

The proof of their passion was all around her but the person responsible for it was nowhere to be seen. It was a barrier they had yet to cross. Ashlynn still didn't have a good understanding of what happened to her lover when the sun rose, only that the sense of presence and connection she felt with Nyrielle became much weaker during daylight hours.

"When will you let me see all of you," Ashlynn whispered, tracing her fingers over the torn bedding.

"What haven't I given you?"

It wasn't a fair statement but when had feelings ever been fair? She knew that her lover had suffered greatly in the past and the more time they spent together, the more she understood that suffering.

Nyrielle was slowly revealing herself to Ashlynn, especially on this trip. It felt petty to complain that there were still so many things that Nyrielle held back but at the same time... she'd once again woken to an empty bed.

Ashlynn had transformed herself into a creature of the night as much as she ever could. She slept through the morning hours most days and gave her nighttime hours to Nyrielle without reservation whenever she could. She wanted to be part of Nyrielle's world.

It was just that the reverse was impossible. She could share Nyrielle's darkness but Nyrielle could never share her daylight. Her mind recognized that this was the way it would always be, but a very human part of her heart wanted things as simple and normal as a morning snuggle followed by breakfast in bed.

"Winter will be different," she reminded herself, throwing back the torn bedding to pad across the cool stone floor into the washroom. Once winter came, the days would be much shorter and most of her waking hours would be spent in darkness. She'd just have to find a way to make the best of their brief time together now and look forward to the long nights that were yet to come.

"Heila," Ashlynn called after washing up and wrapping herself up in a soft satin robe. "I could use a bit of help."

"Did Lady Nyrielle feed on you deeply?" Heila asked a few moments later when she entered Ashlynn's chambers. "You look very pale today," she added, her voice losing its teasing tone.

Thankfully, Zedya was observant enough to notice their departure the night before and to inform the theater before the head of the production did anything to call attention to the empty private box. Heila had intended to tease Ashlynn a bit about being so alluring that Lady Nyrielle couldn't wait till the end of the show to feast on her but seeing Ashlynn's pale face and slow movements she worried that Lady Nyrielle had pushed Ashlynn's limits too far.

"I'm fine as long as I don't stand for too long," Ashlynn said, waving off the concern. "Once I've had a good meal, I'll be better." A meal would do a lot to replenish her lost strength but so would spending time somewhere quiet and filled with nature. The High Fen hummed with life after the drought she'd endured in the High Pass. Unfortunately, a city full of people wasn't the right sort of 'teeming with life' for her needs. A good meal would have to do.

"Help me get dressed and see if Captain Lennart can arrange a carriage for us," Ashlynn said. "I'd like to go out for a meal. It doesn't have to be somewhere fancy," she added quickly. "If I thought I could stand long enough, street food would be fine. I just... I'd like to get out," she said, pointedly not looking at the torn sheets and bedding.

Her room felt too empty without Nyrielle in it. She could relax in a sitting room but the effect would be the same. High Lady Erna's palace belonged to the world that Nyrielle brought her into. She wanted to explore outside that world while her lover slept or she'd just stew on the feeling of separation that daylight forced on her.

"My La-, Ashlynn," Heila said, correcting herself. "If you're struggling to stand, you shouldn't go out to eat. I can have something brought for you, we can relax in the garden, wouldn't that be easier?"

"It would be easier," Ashlynn agreed, reaching out to ruffle her diminutive friend's hair. "But I'd be less comfortable. If it makes you feel better, I'll drink a cup of broth or something before we go, but I want to

go out. This place," she gestured at the luxurious room with its exquisite furnishings and tasteful decorations. "It feels a bit too empty to me right now."

"If Virve can join us for a meal, that would be even better," Ashlynn added. "I haven't thanked her properly for protecting us on the ice that day. I can at least give her a nice meal and an evening off to say thank you for what she did."

"Just going out for a meal?" Heila asked hesitantly. "Nothing strenuous?" Lady Ashlynn always pushed herself to her limits and Heila still didn't understand why. During her lady's blossoming period, she could understand a little that each day was a precious opportunity to build a foundation of strength, but that had ended before they left the Vale of Mists. What could be so important about going out to dinner that she would push herself now after Lady Nyrielle had clearly fed deeply from her?

"We'll see after the meal," Ashlynn said, unwilling to make any promises. If she could, she intended to arrive back at the palace less than an hour before sunset. Time enough to prepare for whatever surprise Nyrielle had in mind for her, but not long enough to feel like she was trapped in this lonely place where Nyrielle had so deeply imprinted herself on Ashlynn.

After last night, her entire body ached with an almost physical craving for Nyrielle's touch. She was certain the feeling would fade within a few days, but right now, she wanted a distraction, and going out would provide a good one.

Besides, she still needed to turn up a few surprises of her own. In a city as large as High Fen City, she was certain she could find what she was looking for.