

The Vampire 18

Chapter 18 18: Just Watch

"Ashlynn, my sweet, I need you to come with me tonight."

When she heard the words, Ashlynn's heart froze and her mind tumbled to a stop, the book she'd taken from the library slipping from her hands to land on the bed beside her.

She'd been waiting to approach Nyrielle but still hadn't resolved how she felt about the other woman. Her heart warmed when she thought of the tender caresses and whispered words of affection that Nyrielle had lavished on her only for her heart to plunge into her stomach whenever she recalled the cold, expressionless mask she'd seen too often on the vampire's face.

Now, however, Nyrielle was anything but expressionless. While she still possessed the tall, regal bearing that accentuated her slender frame, she lacked the elegance and refinement she'd possessed in all of Ashlynn's previous encounters with her.

A loose, puff-sleeved dress hung from Nyrielle's delicate shoulders, the soft black fabric making her already pale skin look bone white. Dark tresses of hair flowed behind her without any decorative combs or hairpins and her waist lacked the familiar corset or even a waist cincher.

She looked as though she'd dressed in a hurry and rushed to Ashlynn's room as soon as the sun had set.

Ashlynn's heart quaked as she took in Nyrielle's appearance and the look of strain on her face. Already, the vampire's eyes had begun to glow with a faint midnight blue radiance that lured her into the dark, inky depths of her pupils.

"All right," Ashlynn breathed, agreeing before she realized she was doing it.

In the next moment, she returned to her senses, instantly wishing to protest but it was already too late. She wanted to resist, to tell Nyrielle to ask her first rather than instantly submitting but by the time the thought had fully formed, Nyrielle had slipped behind her and scooped her up off the bed like she was fetching her bride.

"Where are you taking me?" Ashlynn asked as Nyrielle raced through the ancient castle, leaving the front gates in a blur and heading down one of the many trails leading through the forest of the vale.

"Cairigh village," Nyrielle said. "It's their turn next. You don't need to do anything, just watch."

"Watch what? Why do you need me?"

"I need you because I'm hungry," Nyrielle said, flashing along the trail faster than a horse could gallop. Trees whipped by in a blur and the wind of their passage frightened several birds and small rodents but Nyrielle didn't seem to care as she pushed herself to reach the village faster.

"This is your fault," the vampire said, briefly glancing at Ashlynn while she ran. "I should have been able to go another day without feeding," she continued, looking away from Ashlynn before the sight of her graceful, exposed neck could tempt her into stopping now.

Nyrielle trembled as she ran, fighting to block out the sound of Ashlynn's pulse in her ears, refusing to acknowledge the young woman's tantalizing scent that blended rosewater and trepidation. Her lips parted revealing fangs that had grown longer but she bit her bottom lip and suppressed the hunger that threatened to overwhelm her mind like thick fog.

It wasn't only that she needed to slake her thirst sooner than she expected. When she woke this evening, the gnawing hunger that clawed at her mind surged with a strength she hadn't experienced in years. It was as though she'd gone days beyond the point at which she should have eaten.

Now, the hunger within her threatened to break free of her control. She dared not contemplate the carnage that would be left behind if that happened, particularly not when she was carrying Ashlynn in her arms, and so she put even more of her limited energy into rushing toward the village.

"It's because of our pact," Ashlynn realized. "All of the strength I've been gaining when I train with Thane, that's coming from you, isn't it?"

"Your first lesson in sorcery. All energy must come from somewhere. Everything you do has a price that must be paid," she explained, trying to distract herself from the hunger. "This should be a temporary problem. It will pass in a few moons when you finish the blossoming of your power."

"Do you," Ashlyn began, stopping short a moment later, afraid to give voice to the thought that had sprung unbidden to her mind. Once it had, however, she couldn't rid herself of it and the increasingly pained look on Nyrielle's face sent a shiver through her.

"Do you need my blood?" she asked, turning to look away from Nyrielle, afraid to see her expression while at the same time offering up her slender neck.

Before Ashlynn could second guess herself for making the offer, Nyrielle turned, stopping her dash through the forest to press a bewildered Ashlynn up against a nearby cedar tree. Their bodies, one flush with warmth and the other cold as the early spring air, pressed up against each other.

With one hand, Nyrielle captured Ashlynn's wrists, pinning them against the tree above her head. With the other hand, she cupped Ashlynn's face, lifting ever so lightly until her midnight eyes stared directly into the young woman's startled emerald gaze.

For a moment, both women held perfectly still before Nyrielle moved, her lips pulling back to reveal elongated fangs as she lowered her head toward Ashlynn's neck.

Ashlynn screwed her eyes shut, telling herself over and over again that she had offered this, had asked for this. She had no right to be afraid now, no right to regret even if it had been a careless offer.

Yet, no matter how much she told herself that she had accepted it, her body screamed at her to run, flee, escape in any way she could from the predator about to devour her.

"Don't tempt me," Nyrielle breathed, her lips brushing against Ashlynn's neck. Her tongue flicked out, tracing along the tender flesh of the other woman's neck, feeling her pulse quickening as she savored her taste.

"I told you," she breathed. "Tonight, just watch."