

## The Vampire 23

### Chapter 23 23: Intimate Magic

Ashlynn's lessons didn't begin until the following evening when Nyrielle joined her for a simple meal on the terrace, overlooking the misty vale and the River Luath. A crescent moon hung overhead and the cool night air made Ashlynn grateful for the warm fur-trimmed cloak in her closet.

The cold might not bother Nyrielle who wore one of her elegant black dresses, but Ashlynn had yet to find a way to ignore the chill.

"I've prepared a book for you," Nyrielle said, opening a leather satchel filled with supplies and withdrawing a slender leather notebook that looked freshly made. "I considered translating one of the classic texts in the library for you, but I thought it would be better to write something just for you."

"You wrote this just for me? In a single night?" Her fingers traced over the soft leather cover before opening the notebook and flipping through pages of delicate, flowing script and clearly drawn diagrams.

"Not a single night," Nyrielle said, smiling at the look of wonder she saw blossoming on the other woman's face. "A few nights. I was just waiting for you to be ready."

"So, where do we begin," Ashlynn asked, setting the book down and giving Nyrielle her full attention.

"Sorcery requires three things," Nyrielle began, her expression becoming serious. "The first is energy. I mentioned this the other night, that sorcery uses the energy of your own body, but the more you practice, the more energy you'll be able to hold and the more energy you'll be able to release at once."

Seeing Ashlynn draw breath to ask a question, the vampire placed a finger gently on the young woman's lips. "Basics first, questions later."

"Energy is the easiest to understand," she said. "The next one is a little more abstract. All sorcery needs an anchor. An anchor can be anything but magic can't just exist on its own or it will dissipate."

"Yesterday, when I created lights for us, I used the mist of the vale as an anchor, attaching my energy to the mist. If I tried to create a light made of pure energy, it would have lasted for a moment and then faded away. Mist is fine for a temporary anchor, but if you want to create a lasting enchantment you need to use a sturdier anchor."

Reaching back into the satchel, Nyrielle produced a polished crystal sphere the size of an apple and set it on the table. "We can use this for practice later."

"The final thing you need is called 'The Shape of Will.' You have to form a strong concept of what the magic will look like and do, giving your magic shape and enforcing your will upon it before it can take life."

"Sorcery doesn't need formal incantations or ritual circles," Nyrielle explained. "But those are tools that help us to shape our will. The words I spoke last night describe the swirl of mist, the color of the light, and the way they should follow us."

"So, if I wanted to," Ashlynn said, unable to hold back from asking a question. "I could design my own sorcery. My own incantations or rituals, as long as they helped me to shape my will?"

"Exactly," Nyrielle said with a smile. "That's why I wrote you a simple guide. It's best, eventually, if you develop your own magic. What I gave you in that book are things to get started with. It will help you establish a foundation that you can build on."

"At the same time, creating your own magic is dangerous," Nyrielle warned. "Remember what I said the other night. All magic has a cost and it must be paid. If you aren't careful, you can accidentally create magic that has a higher cost than what you're prepared to pay."

"What happens then? Does the magic fail?"

"Only if you lose control of your will," Nyrielle said. "More often, if a sorceress creates magic that requires too high of a price, the magic will drain her life until it succeeds or the sorceress dies in the attempt. You could age your body by years or decades while your magic feeds on you."

"That, that sounds terrifying," Ashlynn said, imagining herself growing old and frail while a mystical storm of her own making raged around her, draining her very life away. The thought of it sent a chill down her spine and curbed her enthusiasm for rushing ahead.

No wonder Nyrielle looked so serious when we started. Mistakes could be deadly.

"Then, how do I begin?" Ashlynn asked, placing a hand gently back on the book. "Should I read this first?"

"You begin by feeling energy," Nyrielle answered, moving to stand behind Ashlynn. Guiding her to stand, Nyrielle wrapped her arms around Ashlynn lifting her blouse and untucking it from the waistband of her skirt.

"What are you...?" Ashlynn started, her pulse quickening as Nyrielles delicate fingers continued their work, lifting her shift and brushing her soft skin with the tip of a sharply pointed nail.

"I'm going to guide you," Nyrielle breathed against her neck, her fangs brushing against Ashlynn's tender flesh. "It's better if there's nothing between us," she added, suppressing the hunger that rose within, her breath catching as she forced herself to hold back, focusing on the cool energy within her instead of the warm woman in her embrace.

"You can stop me if you wish," Nyrielle whispered. "I will protect you. No matter what, say the words and I will withdraw my magic and keep you safe from your own."

"No," Ashlynn said with a gentle shake of her head. "Keep going." Her heart trembled as desires built within her. A desire for the power of sorcery swirled around the desires evoked by Nyrielle's closeness, offering to fulfill all the promises that her arranged marriage never could.

The mixture of desires was intoxicating, melting Ashlynn's resistance to Nyrielle and leaving her wanting only one thing. More.

Slowly, one cool hand slid higher along Ashlynn's trim waist pulling a gasp from her pert lips as the hand came to rest over her sternum. The other hand tugged at the waistband of her skirt, pushing it down until Nyrielle's palm lay across her navel and the tips of the vampire's fingers brushed the mark of the witch on her hip.

"Here," she whispered, her lips inches from Ashlynn's ear, the scent of her lavender soap filling Ashlynn's nose. "This is where you'll find the energy you need. Close your eyes. Just feel."

Slowly, a dark midnight blue flame spilled along Nyrielle's arms, tracing its way over the dark satin of her gown before reaching the splayed fingers of her hands.

"It's cold," Ashlynn said, biting her lower lip at the sensations stirring within her. The feeling of something cool sank deeper into her chest and lower, like the caress of a cool breeze on damp skin raising goosebumps along the line that ran between her navel and her sternum.

Her chest rose and fell against Nyrielle's cool hand, her breathing becoming quicker and shallow as her heart beat faster. Within her chest, the echo of Nyrielle's heartbeat pulsed faster, quivering with a combination of desire and hunger that stirred the vampire's cool, mystical energy.

"That's my energy," Nyrielle said. "It's cold because I'm not alive. But you are. I need your warmth, my darling. Your life. Feel the cold within you," she said, curling the fingers of the hand on Ashlynn's sternum and tracing the tips of her fingernails along Ashlynn's ribs.

"Wrap your warmth around the cold."

Slowly, Ashlynn brought her hands up, tracing them along Nyrielle's soft satin sleeves until her hands rested over the vampire's, pinning Nyrielle's cool hands to her warm flesh. Gently, her fingers traced over the back of Nyrielle's hands, working their way along her fingers until she reached her smooth, polished nails.

Heat built with Ashlynn, starting lower than her navel and spreading upward, rising toward her chest like a growing tree, spreading its branches wide from the center of her chest. Her arms warmed and her

palms grew slick as she imagined herself becoming a mighty tree that could shelter Nyrielle from a cold winter storm.

More heat built within her core, flowing down her legs like the roots of a tree until her toes curled in her soft leather boots, like her toes needed to sink themselves into the soft soil of the vale of mists.

Green flames enveloped her body, gently warming her like a warm summer breeze, dancing around the dark blue flames of Nyrielle's energy, entwining each other but never blending, always just a thin line separating the two.

"This is your power," Nyrielle said softly. "This is what you were born to. Now that we've raised your power to the surface," she whispered, her fangs brushing over the surface of Ashlynn's neck, directly above the arteries carrying her heart's blood and pulsing with their racing heartbeats.

"It's time to give your power shape," she said, speaking not just to Ashlynn, but to the deeply yearning energy swirling between them, building and building in intensity, crying out for release.