

THE VAMPIRE & HER WITCH

Chapter 3 3: An Irresistible Offer

For several breaths, Ashlynn couldn't move or speak as she was captivated by the woman who emerged from the carriage. Her heart thundered in her chest and her body trembled with the desire to do something. Pain wracked her body turning the edges of her vision black and muddling her thoughts as she struggled to figure out what to do.

Part of her wanted nothing more than to flee before this otherworldly woman could tear her heart from her chest. Another part of her begged to open her mouth and accept the woman's offer, desperate to latch onto the ethereal beauty as though she was a rope thrown to a drowning woman.

"You, you're the D-demon Lady of the V-vale," Ashlynn said, forcing her words through chattering teeth.

Hearing the title, a momentary frown flickered across the other woman's face before her expression returned to a calm, impassive mask that revealed nothing of what she thought or felt.

"We do not use the term demon," the woman said calmly. "But yes, I am the Eldritch Lady of the Vale. You may call me Nyrielle. Your name is Ashlynn, isn't it? You were Young Lord Owain's bride?"

"Y-you know me?" Ashlynn gasped, the surprise temporarily driving back the fog of pain that clouded her mind. How could this demon know her name?

"Do you think I wouldn't come to see the bride of the next Marquis of Lothian?" Nyrielle asked, as though it were natural for a ruler of an enemy kingdom to visit a wedding. "You know too little of me and much of what you believe are lies."

"If you really knew about me," she continued. "You would understand that you have nothing to fear. Words will not make you believe," she said, shaking her head as she watched Ashlynn tremble from both cold and fear.

"Thane," the Eldritch Lady said, turning to face the cloaked figure who drove the carriage. "Place her in the carriage and fetch my cloak for her. We shouldn't linger on the road."

"Your will," the man said, bowing briefly before he turned towards the shivering Ashlynn.

Before Ashlynn could part her lips to protest, the man called Thane vanished from her sight, appearing the next moment as he knelt in the soft soil at the base of the tree, reaching out to scoop up the trembling woman.

Seen up close, his features under the hood were strong with a square jaw and dark brows that hovered over piercing, almost predatory amber eyes. If he'd worn a beard, Ashlynn would have called his features rugged but not even a trace of stubble marked his flawless porcelain skin.

"Forgive my rudeness, Earth Child," he said, gently lifting her from the ground as though she weighed nothing at all. In the time it took for Ashlynn to blink, they'd arrived beside the carriage as Thane set her gently on a step.

"I'll fetch you a cloak," he reassured her. "But that sheet has been doused in oil," he said, stepping away to retrieve a cloak from a trunk at the rear of the carriage.

A moment later, Thane returned, holding up a dark cloak lined with rich purple satin. "I won't look," he promised, turning his head away and holding the cloak

high enough to give Ashlynn a moment of privacy. "You can let go of the sheet now."

It was a simple gesture, one she would have expected from any well-trained servant of a noble house, but seeing a demon behave in such a refined manner shook Ashlynn deeply. The Church taught that demons were savage and uncultured, constantly warring with each other in an endless battle to claim the throne of the strongest.

The simple gesture managed to shake her free of the paralysis that gripped her when Nyrielle offered to help.

Moving stiffly and gritting her teeth against the pain of her injuries, she stood and peeled the wet sheet off her skin, dropping it to the ground and with it, the last remnant of her identity as Young Lord Owain's wife.

The ring he'd placed on her finger once belonged to Owain's grandmother and he hadn't hesitated to strip it from her along with her mother's pearl necklace when he believed that he'd beaten her to death. Now, she truly had nothing from the life she led before.

The pain of that loss blended with the pain of her battered body, leaving her feeling cold and numb from her wet skin to the core of her heart.

As soon as the bed sheet hit the ground, Thane gently wrapped the soft cloak around Ashlynn, scooping her up in his arms and placing her gently on a padded seat in the carriage. Moments later, Nyrielle stepped into the carriage and took a seat facing Ashlynn.

"I cannot easily heal your injuries," the Eldritch Lady said gently as the carriage began to move. "But I can stop you from feeling pain," she added, reaching out with a pale hand, touching Ashlynn between the brows.

The instant her fingertip made contact, Ashlynn felt like she'd been plunged into a cold bath, pulling a painful gasp from her swollen lips. The next moment, however, a warmth began to flow from Nyrielle's fingertip, soothing all of the aches and pains like a soothing soak in a hot bath.

"Thank you, your ladyship," Ashlynn said, sinking into the cushions of the carriage and relaxing for the first time since this day began. Now that the Eldritch Lady's magic had soothed her hurts, the fog of exhaustion she'd barely managed to hold at bay with the combination of pain and desire for vengeance began to overwhelm her.

"I'm sorry," she said softly, her eyes growing heavy. "I need to..."

"You need to stay awake," Nyrielle interrupted, her finger leaving the younger woman's brows to trace down along her neck, then moving lower, pulling the cloak aside until she could rest her hand over Ashlynn's chest.

"Your will to live and your clumsy use of magic has carried you this far," the Eldritch Lady said. "But your fight isn't over yet. Death clings to you, inches from claiming your life," she explained, startling Ashlynn out of her fatigue.

"A person can do many amazing things when they balance on the edge of the knife between life and death," Nyrielle continued. "You've drawn strength from the forest to keep yourself alive but now that your desperate flight has ended, you cannot surrender."

"No, I can't die now," Ashlynn said, firming up her resolve and fighting off the fatigue that threatened to pull her down into an eternal sleep. "Not until I can drag the people who did this to me down with me."

"Vengeance isn't a bad thing to live for," Nyrielle said, her painted lips forming a faint smile. "But it would be such a waste for a Child of the Earth to throw her life away just to kill a few petty people who feared her power."

"Is 'Child of the Earth' what you call witches?" Ashlyn asked, her exhausted mind struggling to understand the unfamiliar term

"It's what we call young 'witches' who have yet to master their powers," Nyrielle said. "You need guidance and practice before you can be called an Earth Mother. If you wish, I can help you take your first steps on that road. I can also heal your wounds and help you obtain your vengeance."

"Of course I wish it," Ashlynn said, reaching up to clutch Nyrielle's hand. "Please, I'll do whatever you wish in return."

"Whatever I wish?" Nyrielle said, her midnight blue eyes roaming over Ashlynn's figure underneath the cloak. In the blink of an eye, she moved from her own seat to a place next to Ashlynn, her body pressed up against Ashlynn's and her lips just inches from the younger woman's ears.

"What if I want you in return? I can heal you," the Eldritch Lady whispered. "But I must form a bond of blood between us. Would you pay that price? Would you become mine for the rest of my life?"

"Don't you mean the rest of my life?" Ashlyn asked, turning to look at Nyrielle in confusion.

When she met the other woman's eyes, they seemed like they'd grown larger, the whites of her eyes turning dark and her pupils swelling to become a deep abyss ringed by midnight blue that Ashlynn felt she would drown in.

"I mean what I say," Nyrielle said, lifting her hand from Ashlynn's chest to gently cup her cheek. "Accept my offer, become truly mine, and you will live alongside me for all of my days. Your parents, your sister, Young Lord Owain, and any of his children or grandchildren will become dust in tombs before my life ends."

"Is it worth it to you?" Nyrielle asked mildly. "Not a few decades of service, but centuries, bound to me by an unbreakable bond of blood."

"Everyone you wish to kill for your revenge will die, one way or another, but you won't. You'll accompany me until no one even remembers the day you claimed your vengeance or that you were once a human noblewoman."

"For that brief moment of vengeance," she asked again, her lips curving seductive smile at the thought of possessing a woman who could grow into a powerful witch. The more she considered a future with Ashlynn, the more her smile grew, revealing sharp fangs. "Would you give me all of you?"