

# THE VAMPIRE & HER WITCH

## Chapter 4 4: Blood Bound

The single lantern in the carriage cast dark shadows that danced over Nyrielle's lithe figure, cloaking her in darkness that made her seem even less human than she had before baring her fangs.

When she stepped out of the carriage, Ashlynn had thought that the books she'd read about the Demon Lady of the Vale couldn't possibly be about the ethereal beauty who strode out of the darkness like a savior.

Now, however, staring into the starry abyss of the other woman's eyes while her figure seemed to blend with the dark shadows, Ashlynn's heart was seized by the icy grip of reality. Despite her elegant looks and refined manners, Nyrielle wasn't human.

"Vampire," Ashlynn whispered. Despite the fatigue dulling her mind, the flash of fangs and Nyrielle's mention of a 'bond of blood' was all she needed to match up the legends she'd read about demons who lived beyond death, feeding on the blood of the living.

"You're going to make me like you, aren't you," Ashlynn said, seeking confirmation of her suspicion more than asking a question. "Like Thane," she realized. No wonder they seemed nothing like the demons she'd read about. They were humans who had been turned into vampires.

"Make you a Vampire?" Nyrielle said with a musical laugh. "My darling Ashlynn," she purred, placing a finger beneath the younger woman's chin and lifting slightly as though to expose her delicate neck. For a moment a look of desire flickered across her face before she suppressed her desire to ravish the beauty in front of her.

As bruised and battered as Ashlynn was, it did nothing to make her body less captivating to the Eldritch Lady. Instead, with so much blood so close to the surface it turned her into an almost irresistible delicacy that she had to force herself to resist.

"As tempting as it would be to drain every last drop of blood from your body," Nyrielle said a moment later once she'd suppressed her desires and her face returned to a placid mask. "I would never dream of spoiling you that way."

"You don't realize how special you are," she continued, moving her fingers from under Ashlynn's chin to brush a stray wisp of hair from the young

woman's brow. "If I made you a vampire like Thane, you would lose the magic that makes you so extraordinary."

"You have a gift, Ashlynn," Nyrielle whispered, coming close enough for her breath to tickle the hairs on Ashlynn's neck. "You should be cherished and nurtured so that you and your gift can flourish. Thane is powerful beyond what humans can comprehend but he is nothing compared to what you can become."

"I-is it really that great? I thought this power was a curse," Ashlynn said bitterly, struggling to accept the vampire's words. All her life she'd been told to hide her mark, to never touch the power of demons, that she was cursed, and that she would have to work twice as hard to earn redemption from the Holy Lord of Light.

Now, Nyrielle called it a gift and said she was to be cherished. It was so hard to accept that Ashlynn felt there must be something more to this, something that the vampire stood to gain from her by making this offer.

"If you aren't going to make me into something, someone, like Thane," she began, stumbling slightly and reminding herself that Thane wasn't a mindless demon like she'd been taught but a person who had once been human. "What are you going to do to me? What do you get out of it?"

"I get you," Nyrielle said, as though it was all the explanation Ashlynn needed. Seeing that the answer didn't satisfy the young woman, she paused as she tried to find the best way to explain what she meant. There were so many gaps in what Ashlynn knew that things that had long ago become common sense to her must seem strange and foreign to the young woman.

"A vampire is an existence that has moved beyond death," she said after thinking for several moments. "But a Child of the Earth is a person who can channel the magic of life. If you became one of my progeny like Thane, you would die and lose your ability to channel the magic of life." When she saw comprehension beginning to form in Ashlyn's emerald eyes, she continued.

"If I were like Thane, the progeny of another vampire, there would be nothing else I could do to save your life," she explained. "You would lose your magic but you would continue to exist to pursue your vengeance. But Ashlynn, you're far too special to spoil in that way when there is a better option."

"Form a Pact of Blood with me," she whispered, tracing her fingers down along Ashlyn's neck to rest on the swell of her bosom above her heart.

"Become my Seneschal, the first among all those who serve me."

"Do this and you will gain a measure of my powers to wield on my behalf, including the power to heal your own wounds."

"And if I do this," Ashlynn said, her face heating at the intimate way Nyrielle touched her. "You'll gain access to my power as well? To the power of life?"

"A measure of it, yes," the vampire said smoothly. "The pact will strengthen us both, so long as you surrender to me you will gain everything you desire and lose nothing that makes you special."

"This is an offer that only Vampire Royalty can make," she added. "And we can only bind one person as our Seneschal our entire lives. To me, I can't think of anyone more worthy than you," she said, her hand slipping within the folds of the cloak to wrap around Ashlynn's slender waist in a gentle embrace.

"I cannot force you," Nyrielle whispered, bringing her lips close enough to brush against Ashlynn's as she spoke. "But I promise that I will never let you regret choosing to give me your everything."

Ashlynn trembled in Nyrielle's embrace, her mind struggling to keep up as the other woman's soft words and gentle caresses overwhelmed her senses. Half a day ago, she felt like nothing could compare to the feeling of Owain's arms

around her when he kissed her in front of all the lords and ladies who attended their wedding.

Now, her heart melted as she listened to Nyrielle insist again and again that she was special, unique, and deserved to be treasured. Owain had promised to fight for her, to defend her armor and shield her from anything that would bring her harm. Nyrielle promised that she would never let her regret binding herself to the powerful vampire.

Owain told her that she was beautiful and that she would be a good mother to his children. In letters, when she told him about the books she read and the things she studied, he told her that he would relieve her of those burdens so she could enjoy life with the ladies of the march.

Nyrielle spoke of treasuring and nurturing her, helping her to learn how to use her gift. She promised they would grow stronger together. Perhaps there was truth to the records that said demons always pursued greater strength but the part that caught her attention was when Nyrielle mentioned growing together.

Owain, she realized, would have protected her but he would never nurture her. The work she'd done to study governance and the administration of a lord's fief were things he saw as burdens to relieve her of. One day she might gain the title of Marquess but the skills she'd developed to help her husband rule his march would be entirely wasted.

"You'll let me help you?" Ashlynn asked, hoping to hear the answer she longed for.

"I'll rely on you," the vampire said. "Just like you'll rely on me."

Ashlynn's vision became misty as Nyrielle's words pulled tears from her eyes. For a moment she hesitated. Everything she wanted when she left home to marry Owain, offered to her on a silver platter. More than that, if she accepted Nyrielle's offer, she wouldn't have to hide the secret of her power, instead she'd learn to use it.

The price, however, was to bind herself eternally to a vampire. To give up not just her homeland but her humanity, serving Nyrielle for centuries to come.

Even if her family hadn't betrayed her, they would never accept the woman she'd become. Her father might even lead the charge to hunt her down in order to redeem her family in the eyes of the king and the Church.

But what was the alternative? She could feel her body's strength fading. Nyrielle's magic kept her from feeling the pain of her wounds but she was still balancing on the edge of a knife between life and death.

If she didn't make a choice soon, she might lose the chance forever, slipping into the dark oblivion of death that awaited everyone who existed outside the Holy Lord of Light's graces.

Taking a deep breath, she made the decision that would change the course of her life irrevocably.

"Then I'll become your Seneschal," Ashlynn said firmly. "For long as we both live."