

The Vampire 45

Chapter 45 45: Interrogation

Ashlynn's heart chilled when Sir Kaefin mentioned people that Owain wouldn't care if he lost. Suddenly it made sense why such inexperienced servants like Otis had been sent to the Summer Villa instead of bringing his own personal staff. Only close retainers like Kaefin had accompanied him on this journey.

Owain had hurried out here before it was safe. The soldiers he'd brought weren't enough to hold the villa against an attack from Nyrielle's forces but they were likely enough to secure his retreat while everyone else in the villa was sacrificed. Likely the place wouldn't be truly fortified until Jocelynn arrived in a few weeks, at a point that the nights had grown too short for Nyrielle's progeny to attack the villa.

"Since you don't know about the Inquisitor," Ashlynn said, pressing the dagger firmly enough into Kaefin's neck to draw a drop of blood. "Tell me about Owain's plans after he leaves. I'm sure you must know something about that."

"Know, of course I know," Kaefin said hastily, sweat beading on his brow as the dagger bit into his neck. "Blackwell County, after this, we're going to Blackwell County."

"I already knew that," Ashlynn said, feeling the strength of her magic beginning to weaken. "Tell me what he's doing there. Who is he meeting and what does he hope to gain?" she asked, her voice becoming sharper and impatient.

Without her magic to maintain his terror, she wasn't sure that she could keep him suppressed enough to answer her questions. She had to hurry to learn anything she could about the Lothian's plans to fight Nyrielle before she ran out of energy to fuel her sorcery.

"He's meeting with representatives of the guilds," Kaefin said, trying to understand why an assassin would care so much about what Owain was planning in Blackwell County. "The Brotherhood of Armaments, the Fellowship of Wayfinders, the Carter's Guild, the Iron Mongers, and the Staunch Armorers."

"I know that he's preparing for the next war against the Vale," Ashlynn said, taking a fistful of Kaefin's tunic in her hand and shaking him, slamming his head into the bedpost. She'd never interrogated anyone before and the single lesson she'd received from Marcell before she left didn't fully prepare her for the situation she found herself in.

"What is he offering the guilds? It has to be something special if he's getting the attention of five different guilds at once." Ashlynn asked, ignoring Marcell's advice to let her victims hang themselves with careless words. She didn't have enough time for him to ramble on. Even if she was giving away what she wanted to know, she had to have answers.

"Minerals from Airgead Mountain," Kaefin said, his brows lowering in a frown. The more he spoke to this strange assassin, the more he felt like things weren't what he thought they were. "He's taking out everything that's left from Marquis Bors's last raid on the mountain to convince the guilds to back the next war."

Ashlynn frowned at the news, trying to recall everything she'd learned about the profits from the last war but nothing came to mind.

Ashlynn's concentration wavered, her magic flickering like a candle in the wind. The strain of maintaining her spell was taking its toll, and she could feel her control slipping as a sensation like pins and needles pricking her skin spread across her chest. She needed to wrap this up quickly, before her spell shattered entirely.

Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she pressed on with her questioning, her voice more strained and less fierce than it had been just moments before.

"You said 'everything that's left,'" she said. "How much is that? Is it more or less than the dowry he gave my- gave the Blackwells for Ashlynn's marriage?" Ashlynn asked, cursing herself when she stumbled and nearly said 'my family.'

As soon as the words left her mouth, Ashlynn realized her mistake. She saw Kaefin's eyes widen, his expression shifting from fear to confusion, then to dawning recognition. Worse, her spell was breaking, and with it, her control over the steward.

Kaefin's eyes went wide the moment she slipped, several pieces falling into place from the assassin's strange interest in Owain's plans to the way she spoke, her voice sounding more and more familiar to him the more they talked.

He wanted to deny it. It should be impossible but, as he looked at the curvy figure of the woman he'd once envied Owain for obtaining, he couldn't deny the truth before his eyes.

"You're Ashlynn Blackwell," he whispered, his words quiet as if he didn't entirely believe it.

"Oh Kaefin," Ashlynn said, her brows lowering as she pressed harder with her hand on his chest, forcing him up against the bedpost. "It would have been better if you'd never realized."

When she'd started, Ashlynn hoped to have enough magic left to scramble his memories of their encounter. She couldn't make him forget everything, but she was certain she could make him forget

what she'd asked him and what he'd told her. Enough that she could knock him out and slip away while he was unconscious.

Now, however, it was impossible for him to forget something as shocking as encountering his lord's dead wife. If she'd had another year of practice, she might have been able to blot away a strong memory like that, but her skills were still far too undeveloped.

Now that her identity had been revealed, Ashlynn was left with a difficult decision about what to do with Sir Kaefin.

Zedya, she was certain, could erase her presence from his memories along with any memories of the interrogation. She could likely even weave together something he would believe to explain his injuries.

Ashlynn, however, had pushed her limited magic to the limit to keep him under her spell for as long as she had. She'd already begun to feel a prickling pain across her chest that suggested any further use of sorcery would begin to incur a permanent price. As is, she would need to go several days without using her magic in order to recover her energy again.

The information had been worth the cost, but now she faced a moment she'd hoped to avoid. Briefly, she considered trying to force him to take her out of the villa. If she could take him back to the Vale of Mists as her captive, she was certain that they could get even more information out of him.

She dismissed the notion almost as soon as it occurred to her. It was childish to think that he would remain compliant all the way out of the fortress. One cry for help would be all it would take to doom her escape. That left her with only one option she could think of that would let her get away.

She'd discussed it with both Nyrielle and Thane. She thought she made preparations for it and hardened her heart to it. She would have her revenge and Owain would die at her hands. Now, however, someone else would die first.

"You deserve this for what you've done to countless women before me," Ashlynn said, more to herself than to Sir Kaefin. Moving the knife from his neck, she traced the tip lower until it was directly over his rapidly beating heart.

Kaefin had only a single, terrified moment to realize what she intended before Ashlynn placed a second hand on the wooden hilt of the dagger and drove it directly into his chest.

A hot red spray splattered the bodice of her dress, her hands, and sleeves as she struck out a second time and a third before leaving the blade embedded in his chest.

The pain of her assault shattered the spell that kept him too terrified to resist but by the time he regained enough of his wits to struggle, the light had already begun to fade from his eyes.

"You deserved this," she repeated, ensuring that those words were the last ones he heard.