

The Vampire 46

Chapter 46 46: Hasty Escape

Now that she'd done it, now that she'd claimed the life of a man who was powerless to fight back against her, Ashlynn's stomach railed against her, trying to expel the thin porridge she'd eaten for breakfast along with a mouthful of bile. Stubbornly, she swallowed the contents of her stomach back down and took several deep breaths.

Marcell had warned her that if she ever needed to kill someone, it was best if it looked like something other than an interrogation. Accidents were good, as was anything that prevented people from finding a body. But, when you had no other choice, it was best to make it look like a different sort of crime had taken place, like a robbery, rather than an interrogation.

With trembling hands, she ripped the dagger from his chest and plunged it in twice more, splattering more blood across herself and the bed sheets in the process. Then, she finished what he had started when he removed his belt and pulled his breeches down around his ankles before tossing his boots carelessly on the floor.

Before she left the room, she took a last glance around, her eyes taking in everything from the spilled wine and shattered jug to the rumpled sheets. It certainly looked like there had been a struggle but did it look like she'd killed him to defend her virtue?

Thinking quickly, she stripped one of the broken pieces of lacing from her bodice and placed it in his hand, hoping it added enough to the scene to sell the story she wanted Owain and his knights to believe. Whether it would work or not, she had no idea but it was already too late to do anything more.

Racing through the castle, she ignored the startled looks of the few servants she passed, using the small servant's corridors to bypass the guards and enter the kitchen where her eyes desperately sought to find Ollie.

"Lynnda," Otis exclaimed when she burst into the kitchen looking frantic. "I heard that Sir Kaefin took ya, whot..." his voice trailed off as he got a look at the bright red handprint on her face and the bloodstains across her bodice.

"Merciful Lord of Light on the Heavenly Shores," he whispered, dropping the ladle in his hands as he stared at her. "Whot have ya done?"

"Ollie? Where's Ollie," Ashlynn asked, ignoring the stunned cook's question. Right now, the only thing that mattered was getting away before she was captured for killing Sir Kaefin, and for that, she needed...

"Lynnda?" Ollie asked, emerging from the larder with a sack of oats over his shoulder. "Lynnda, what happened to..."

"No time," Ashlynn said, dashing across the kitchen and taking hold of Ollie's hand to drag him along. "I need your help to get out of here. You know all of the secrets of this place don't you? You must know a way to get out of the walls unseen."

"Impossible," Ollie said, staring at her with wide eyes. "I know the servant's hidden ways, sure, but a secret escape route, only Lord Owain and his knights would know about that."

"Damn it, lass, tell me whot happened!" Otis roared, slamming his meaty hands onto a chopping block. "Did ya hurt Sir Kaefin? Is he after ya?"

"He's dead," Ashlynn said as flatly as she could manage. "That's why I need to run. He, he tried to..."

"So that's how it is," Otis said, visibly slumping as his worst fears were concerned. If she'd simply injured him to escape, there might have been a chance that she could plead for mercy from Lord Owain, particularly if her virtue had been at risk.

Killing a knight, however, could never be excused, even if it was a knight like Sir Kaefin who never truly fought for his lord. A peasant had no right to kill their betters, no matter how overbearing the lords were.

"Ollie," Otis said in resigned tones. "Take her ta tha salley gate. There shouldn't be many men there. I'll distract 'em. Just go."

"Mister Otis," Ashlynn said. "This is my problem, you should stay out of trouble."

"Oh, I'll stay outta trouble," he said, picking up a long-handled metal scoop from the rack of fireplace tools. "I'm blaming this on you," he added, scooping up several hot coals and flinging them toward the heavy burlap sacks of grain.

"Now run," the cook said. "Ya don't have much time."

"Thank you, Mister," Ashlynn said, grabbing hold of Ollie's hand and pulling him from the kitchen as the bags of grain began to smoke and smolder. "One day, if I can, I'll pay you back for this Mister Otis," she said as she fled the room.

"Now, where's the salley gate?" Ashlynn asked, pinching Ollie to break the gangly youth out of his shocked daze.

"It's, it's this way," the young man said, taking off at a run toward one of the side walls.

Behind them, smoke began to pour from the kitchens as Otis shouted "Fire, fire!"

Loud bells began to ring, summoning servants and soldiers alike from all over the villa to fight the growing blaze in the kitchens. In the confusion, no one seemed to notice that Ashlynn and Ollie were headed in a direction that was both away from the fire and away from the well where people gathered to fill buckets to fight the growing fire.

"Here," Ollie said when they reached the small iron-bound door set in a side wall. It was intended for a single column of soldiers to use when the main gates were besieged, to give the inhabitants of the villa a chance to fight off their attackers.

While the main gates would never be abandoned unless circumstances within the keep were truly dire, the few men posted at the salley gate had been among the first to run toward the well to fight the fire, leaving it undefended for Ashlynn.

"I should get to the well," Ollie said, turning to leave before Ashlynn caught hold of his tunic.

"Let it burn," she said more fiercely than she intended. "Come with me."

"Lynnda, I can't," he said, his face crumpling as he met her sincere gaze. "I need to put out the fire before the villa burns down."

"If it burns, it burns," she said. "Ollie, someone must have seen you running with me. Right now, they don't care because of the fire, but when they find Sir Kaefin, if you're still here, they'll capture you because you helped bring me here. If you stay, they'll kill you just like they'd kill me," she said.

"But, but I didn't do anything!" Ollie protested, his words piercing Ashlynn's heart like the dagger she'd used to kill Kaefin.

It was true that he hadn't done much to be punished for. In that respect, Otis was far more guilty than Ollie was. Now, even though he hadn't done much other than befriend her, he was going to lose the life he'd managed to build through years of working for Owain's family.

It might be a simple life and one few people would envy, but she wasn't just pulling him out of the castle when she grabbed his hand, she was pulling him away from everything and everyone he knew and he'd done nothing to deserve it.

"I just showed you to the gate and..." Ollie started, only for Ashlynn to interrupt him.

"And that's enough. Now come on," she insisted, dragging him toward the gate with strength that surprised the young man. She resolved to make it up to him afterward but right now, she was too afraid that staying would only cost him his life when Owain found out he'd helped her.

"We have to get to the forest before they come after us on horseback," she said as they began to run.
"The forest will slow them down but if we can't get there fast enough, we're doomed."