

THE VAMPIRE & HER WITCH

Chapter 5 5: Becoming Hers (Part One)

Half an hour after rescuing Ashlynn from the side of the ancient roadway, the dark carriage thundered through a series of towering gates set in mighty stone walls that protected the people of the vale from human attack.

"Stop here," Nyrielle commanded, gently wrapping her arms around Ashlynn to carry her out of the carriage. "There's an Ancient Oak not far from here," she told Thane as she exited the carriage.

"I will take Ashlynn there, her pulse is weak and I fear that we'll run out of time," she said. "Move swiftly. I need warm water and a cloth to wash her and a dress for her to wear. Choose something of mine that would suit her."

"Mistress," the amber-eyed man said, kneeling at Nyrielle's feet. "Forgive me but if time is short, shouldn't you take her now?"

"I refuse to treat her that way," Nyrielle said firmly. "She is to become my Seneschal. This moment is important and I will not shame her by rushing it."

"She's already suffered too much from a husband who treated her like chattel," she said, gently stroking Ashlynn's hair. "I will not do the same. Go quickly and bring what I require."

"Your will, Mistress," he said before the shadows grew deeper around him and he vanished into the night.

"Just a little bit longer," Nyrielle said softly, dashing off into the night at a speed too fast for the human eye to follow. Her midnight blue eyes glowed faintly as she wove her way through the dark forest until she reached one of the oldest trees in the vale.

When she arrived at her destination, the Ancient Oak towered over the two women. More than a hundred feet tall with a trunk as large as a small cottage, the tree stood atop a small hill near the source of a twisting stream.

Few things in this world could make Nyrielle feel young but the Ancient Oaks of the vale had been ancient when her grand-sire first became a vampire. Standing next to it, underneath its broad canopy, she couldn't help but feel like a small child seeking shelter under an elder's cloak.

"Ancient one," she said, setting Ashlynn at the base of the tree next to its mighty roots. "I've brought one of your children, but she is very weak. I fear she will not survive forming the blood pact to save her life," she said solemnly.

Next to her, Ashlynn watched with blurry vision, struggling to resist the pull of the abyss as Nyrielle knelt beside her. The vampire drew a slender silver blade from her waist and cut deeply into her palm before making a fist and holding it over the roots of the tree.

"Ancient One," Nyrielle said formally. "I offer you a piece of my eternity. Please grant her a portion of your strength so that I can save her from the cruelty that she's suffered."

When the blood dripped onto the root, rather than splattering as it should, the drop of blood was absorbed directly into the ancient tree. Moments later, the leaves of the ancient tree shook as though blown by a wind no one else could feel and a soft green glow descended from its branches, wrapping around Ashlynn like a warm blanket against the cold night air.

When the energy enveloped her, Ashlynn's pulse grew stronger and her breathing became less ragged. Several of the small cuts and scrapes she'd suffered during her escape from the shallow grave healed, leaving only a trace of dried blood behind on her tender skin.

"Thank you, Ancient One," Nyrielle whispered, turning her attention back to Ashlynn and gently stroking her hair. "It won't be long now. Once we form our pact, you will gain a semblance of my healing ability. Your life will become tenacious and these injuries will fade within a day or two."

"Mistress," two voices called as Thane returned, accompanied by another vampire.

"Thank you, Thane," Nyrielle said, taking a covered bucket of hot water, soap, and a cloth from him. "Please search the area and ensure that nothing will interrupt us. Zedya can assist me with anything else that I require," she said, turning her attention to the other vampire.

Unlike Thane whose appearance was striking and predatory, were it not for her flawless pale skin and deep amethyst eyes, Zedya would be described as plain or common anywhere she went. Even the elegant dress she wore seemed incongruous, giving her the appearance of a servant dressing in their master's clothing.

"I brought two options, Mistress," Zedya said, holding up a pair of elegant gowns that could have been worn to the most extravagant of royal balls. Each one glittered with carefully set gemstones, reflecting the soft glowing light of

the Ancient Oak. "Would you prefer green or lavender for our new Seneschal?"

"Let her choose," Nyrielle said, putting all of her attention on Ashlynn as she pulled back the cloak to reveal the entirety of the young woman's bruised and battered body.

Seeing the extent of her injuries, Nyrielle marveled at the young woman's ability to cling to life. Bruises covered almost every inch of her torso, stretching from her rounded hips and narrow waist all the way up to her full bust.

From the unnatural way her chest moved when she drew breath, it was also clear that several of her ribs had been broken. Further up, one eye had turned dark purple and was so swollen that it couldn't fully open, and Ashlyn's bow-shaped lips had been split by what must have been a heavy blow.

"This may sting," she whispered, dipping the cloth in warm soapy water as she began to wash the dirt from Ashlynn's tear and dirt-stained face. "I'm sorry I won't be able to paint your face for you," she said softly, straining to keep the heat of desire and hunger from her voice.

"But to me, even like this, you are beautiful," Nyrielle whispered.

