

THE VAMPIRE & HER WITCH

Chapter 6 6: Becoming Hers (Part Two)

Ashlynn shivered under the other woman's touch, her face heating at the compliments. At the moment, she felt anything but beautiful but she heard nothing but sincerity in the vampire's words.

Nyrielle worked gently, washing her with lavender-scented soap that blended with Nyrielle's own floral scent enough for Ashlynn to believe it must be the same one that the vampire herself used.

For some reason, the realization struck her as one of the funniest things she'd ever considered and she couldn't help but giggle while Nyrielle washed the dirt from her back and shoulders. She'd never once imagined what kind of soap a demon preferred and never expected to find the answer so pleasant.

"Oh?" Nyrielle said, a wicked grin forming on her lips that displayed a flash of fang. "Did I find a ticklish spot? I'll have to remember it," she teased, tracing a finger along Ashlynn's spine.

"No, not ticklish," Ashlynn said, trembling at the other woman's touch. "It's just, I never considered what kind of soap a vampire might prefer. I like it," she added quickly. "I think lavender suits you."

For a moment, Nyrielle's hands paused before she continued washing like nothing had happened. "Zedya brought two dresses for you, you should look at them and pick the one you prefer," she prompted.

"The green one," Ashlynn said as soon as she saw the two dresses. "I know they're both yours," she added, leaning back as Nyrielle washed her hair and allowing her mind to drift as the energy from the Ancient Oak strengthened her. "But I think I'll always remember you smelling like lavender. You won't mind if I don't wear your favorite color, will you?"

"Lavender isn't my favorite color," Nyrielle said, her hands pausing again. "It was my mother's favorite. She kept a garden full of lavender," she said wistfully, blinking away moisture that collected in her eyes as she returned to washing Ashlynn's hair.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Ashlynn said, realizing she'd touched something sensitive. "Then, what is your favorite color?"

"There's a moment," Nyrielle responded after a brief pause. "It's the moment before the sun peaks above the hills when the sky blushes like a ripe peach. It's as much of the sun as I've ever seen, but I find it beautiful even if what follows is deadly."

"So it's true? You really can't live under the sun?" Ashlynn asked. "Will that be true of me too when I become your Seneschal?"

"You don't need to worry about that," Nyrielle said, helping Ashlynn to stand and taking a towel from Zedya to gently pat her dry. "One of the reasons a vampire takes a Seneschal is to have someone who can act in the light while we're confined to the dark."

Once she was dry, it didn't take long to help her into the emerald green velvet and silk dress. They left the bodice loose enough that it barely stayed in place, both to prevent putting pressure on her injuries and because Ashlynn was fuller in the chest than Nyrielle was.

The dress was also too long for Ashlynn, dragging in the soft grass beneath the oak tree, but she didn't need to move much to take her place facing the vampire she was about to bind her life to.

Between them, Zedya stood with a silver dagger in one hand and a silver goblet in the other.

"There are ancient words for this ceremony," Nyrielle said. "You wouldn't understand them and the words themselves aren't what carries the power anyway. Instead, I'll give you my promise and you can give me yours," she said, taking the silver dagger in her hand and cutting into her palm for a second time this evening, spilling several drops of blood into the goblet.

"As your Mistress, I promise to shelter you beneath my wings, to share my strength with you, and to treasure you as the first among all who serve me," she said formally. "More than that, I promise you a place in my heart that none can take from you. From now until the end of my life, you are mine and I am yours," she finished, passing the goblet to Ashlynn.

"Do you want help with the blood offering?" Zedya prompted, uncertain whether or not the injured witch had the strength to complete her part of the blood pact.

"I can do it," Ashlynn insisted, taking the silver dagger and cutting deeply into her own palm. While Nyrielle's magic and the magic offered by the Ancient Oak strengthened her and stopped her from feeling the pain of her existing injuries, they did nothing against the pain of cutting herself deeply enough to bleed into the goblet.

Squeezing her eyes shut for a moment, Ashlynn gritted her teeth and pushed on with the ceremony, opening her eyes and squeezing her hand into a fist to drip blood into the goblet.

"As your Seneschal, I promise to dedicate my life to your service," Ashlynn said, imitating the oaths knights offered to their lords to structure her promise. "I will go the places you can't, walking in the light while you shelter in darkness. I will be your hands, your sword and your shield to use as you see fit," she said, hesitating before she added something that belonged to a wedding vow more than it belonged to a knight's oath.

"The whole of my heart belongs to you, from now until the end of our lives," she said, a smile forming on her split lips for the first time since this nightmare began. "I am yours and you are the only one I will give my heart to."

With a smile on her own lips, Nyrielle raised the silver goblet to her lips, taking the smallest sip she could and allowing the mixture of her and Ashlynn's blood to meld with her own. The greater portion of blood, she left in the goblet for Ashlynn. After all, the more of her blood the young witch was able to absorb, the more she would benefit from it.

Ashlynn took the goblet with trembling fingers, raising gently to her split lips before tilting it up and drinking the viscous, metallic-tasting liquid. Moments later, fire erupted within her belly, racing to her heart before flowing out along her arteries until every inch of her body felt like it had been enveloped in flames.

The sensation lasted for only a moment before it overwhelmed her. The darkness that she'd fought off for so long finally claimed her vision, pulling her into blissful unconsciousness.

Nyrielle moved with inhuman speed, gently catching Ashlynn before she could fall to the ground. For a moment, she feared that it had been too much for the young witch to bear but when she caught her, she felt the other woman's heartbeat, stronger than it had been all night and drawing stronger as she assimilated the strength she'd been given.

"Rest now," she whispered to the sleeping woman. "I'll take you home," she added, turning back toward the abandoned carriage where Thane waited to bring them the rest of the way into the vale.