

The Vampire 85

Chapter 85 85: Traveling With A Vampire

"How would you like to pass the time?"

As soon as Nyrielle spoke the words, Ashlynn's pulse quickened and her breath caught. For the past several days, Nyrielle had collected her from her training each day to bathe with her before sunrise. Several times, she'd felt Nyrielle holding herself back from feeding on her because if she did, Ashlynn would lose the last days of her blossoming period.

Now that the period of rapid growth had ended though, there was nothing to hold her back. More than that, however, Ashlynn herself had come to miss the feelings that coursed through her body and melted her mind when Nyrielle sank her fangs into her tender flesh.

"You've been holding back," Ashlynn said, pulling her pale golden hair away from her neck. "You don't have to hold back anymore," she said, her voice trembling slightly in anticipation and eagerness.

The single lantern in the carriage cast deep, inky shadows that danced flowed across Ashlynn's pale flesh like water, offering enticing glimpses of the deep valley of cleavage beneath her slender neck while the soft golden glow of the lantern light highlighted her full and supple curves.

The simple, earthy brown of Ashlynn's dress spilled over her body like a decadent sauce over a savory morsel, tantalizing and tempting Nyrielle until her fangs began to show and her heartbeat quickened at the tantalizing sight of Ashlynn offering herself up for Nyrielle to feed.

"Come here," Nyrielle said, a hint of power spilling from her lips as her midnight eyes darkened. She reached out and traced a sharply pointed nail along Ashlynn's neck until she reached the point of her chin, pulling the young witch forward until their lips met.

For a moment, a sharp pain flared in Ashlynn's lower lip as Nyrielle gently pierced her skin, releasing a thin rivulet of coppery blood into their mouths as their tongues danced over each other. The kiss sent shivers all the way down Ashlynn's body until her toes curled in her soft shoes and her arms lost the strength to prop her up as she leaned into the kiss.

Pulling Ashlynn fully into her lap, Nyrielle's fingers gently caressed the young witch's sides, tracing up to her full bust before cupping her face and holding her in the kiss as she drank from Ashlynn's lips like a drowning woman.

How long the kiss lasted, Ashlynn couldn't say. Long enough for her body to tingle and her face to grow flush, but short enough that when Nyrielle pulled back she found herself almost lunging after her, eager for more.

"Ah, ah," Nyrielle chided, placing a slender finger on Ashlynn's swollen lips. "Just a taste. That's all I can allow myself on this trip. You're too intoxicating my dear," she said with a twinkle in her dark, midnight blue eyes. "Any more and you'll be too weak to face the dangers ahead."

"Is the trip really going to be that dangerous?" Ashlynn asked, wrapping her arms around the vampire's slender waist. As much as she wanted to pout about how brief the kiss felt, she could feel a familiar coolness settling over Nyrielle when she mentioned dangers ahead.

"There are only a few weeks of spring left," Nyrielle began, looking out the window of the carriage as the dark forest of the vale sped by in the night. "The nights are growing very short."

Within the vale, the horses were familiar enough with the ancient roadway to travel at night, and Zedya's excellent night vision allowed her to lead the train of carriages and wagons toward the border of the vale.

Once they reached Orava, the village at the edge of territory claimed by the Vale of Mists, Nyrielle and Zedya would retreat to a pair of secured boxes lined with thin sheets of darksteel that locked from the inside. To Ashlynn, they resembled coffins, but Nyrielle referred to them as 'daybeds' and claimed they were a necessity when traveling far from home.

As much as Ashlynn had hoped to spend some time in a village that was mostly populated by members of the Clan of the Great Claw, they would only be staying long enough to swap out horses and drivers before they headed further up the mountain and into the pass.

"Do you expect trouble on the road?" Ashlynn asked, looking into the other woman's eyes from a few inches away.

"Not on the road, no," Nyrielle said, turning away from the window to meet Ashlynn's gaze. "Lord Ritchel and I have a long standing agreement to secure the road between our territories. There are way stations along the way where we can stop to rest the horses."

"As the snows descend the mountain, Lord Ritchel's men take over responsibility for the way stations, though travel through the winter storms is limited. As the snow melts, our people take over. Now, all but the final way station on our journey are under the control of the Vale of Mists."

"If his men were in charge, would we need to guard ourselves against them?" Ashlynn asked. In the kingdom, any way station along the highways would be the responsibility of the local lord but the king's

law was supposed to protect travelers, even when they were passing through the territories of their most bitter rivals.

Now, however, Ashlynn had to remind herself that even though both Nyrielle and Ritchel were Eldritch Lords, they didn't belong to a single kingdom. Any agreements between them were agreements between sovereigns and they were effectively preparing to visit a foreign country. If that country turned hostile, attacking travelers might be seen as a valid tactic.

"It depends," Nyrielle said. "Ritchel is getting old. He's training his son, Hauke, as his successor but there are a number of contenders buzzing around who might want to prove themselves by causing trouble."

"Now that it's almost summer, there's an awkward balance between Ritchel and I," Nyrielle admitted. "The Frost Walkers are at their weakest during the warm summer months, but I'm also the most limited by daylight."

"That's why he's willing to let you pass through his territory, even though he's weakened by the warming days," Ashlynn realized. "If you did fight, he would only have to wait you out in order to claim victory."

"Exactly," Nyrielle said, giving Ashlynn a gentle squeeze along with a smile that concealed her fangs. "But just because he doesn't want a fight, doesn't mean he won't test me. Or, more accurately, doesn't mean he won't let Hauke or one of Hauke's rivals test you," she said, poking Ashlynn's full bust gently with a finger.

"Should I be worried?" Ashlynn asked. Thane had mentioned on several occasions that she might have to fight with the representatives of other Eldritch Lords but she hadn't expected to do so on her way out of the Vale of Mists. She'd only been Nyrielle's Seneschal for two months and it felt far too soon to take on such heavy responsibilities. "Won't they go after Zedya instead?"

"Unlikely," Nyrielle said with a shake of her head. "Zedya has long established her power and the Frost Walkers aren't well suited to counter it. You're the new element that everyone is going to be curious about."

"How would you like me to handle a challenge?" Ashlynn asked, looking across the carriage at the place she'd set her sword. The idea that she might have to fight made her nervous, but after so many evenings spent training with Thane, and particularly after her duel with Broll, she wasn't as hesitant about fighting as she would have been two months ago.

"It depends on who challenges you and why," Nyrielle said. "You should be prepared for someone to test you. How would you handle it if Hauke came after you?"

While Nyrielle had her own ideas about handling things, at the moment, she wanted to hear Ashlynn's thoughts on how to handle things. She might not say it aloud, but one of the concerns that weighed most heavily on her wasn't that Nyrielle would be challenged, but that someone would do it during daylight hours when she was unable to do anything to help.

Since that was a very real possibility, she needed to know how Ashlynn would handle herself if there was no one else she could turn to for guidance.

For several minutes, Ashlynn sat in silence, considering Nyrielle's question. The only sounds in the carriage were the clattering of horse's hooves on the ancient stone roadway and the creak of the carriage on its springs as it rolled through the night.

Nyrielle's question wasn't that different from the questions her father asked when she was preparing herself to become Owain's wife. As the Count of Blackwell County, Rhys Blackwell often handled

disputes between powerful factions, whether they were the merchant guilds or his subordinate barons and knights.

This, however, was different. The Eldritch respected strength far more than wealth. Finding ways to balance the scales with trade agreements, concessions of territory or payments of gold wouldn't just struggle to gain acceptance, they would mark her as a human trying to resolve things the human way.

If she wanted to present real solutions, they would have to be ones that the Eldritch could accept. Finally, after several moments of quiet contemplation, she turned her emerald gaze back to Nyrielle and drew a deep breath.

"I think there's only one way to handle Hauke," she said firmly. "Will you tell me if I'm wrong?"