

## The Vampire 95

### Chapter 95 95: Dining With The Frost Walkers

After touring the elaborate showpieces and preserved trophies, Ashlynn and the others were brought to an elegant spiraling staircase formed of solid ice. The staircase was guarded by four Frostwalkers at the bottom and four more at the top, each of them wearing brightly polished steel breastplates over a coat of shining silvery mail.

Unlike the troublemakers who followed Torsten at the welcoming ceremony outside the gates, these men radiated the calm stability of experienced soldiers and the halberds in their hands radiated an icy menace as wisps of frosty air streamed from the heavy blades.

"Little lord Hauke," one of the men said, touching the tips of his claws to his throat in salute. "Your father and the others await you and our guests upstairs."

"Thank you, Ernst," Hauke said before extending an arm to Ashlynn. "The steps may be slick if you're not accustomed to walking on ice."

"I'm sure she won't stumble," Nyrielle said smoothly, sliding in beside Ashlynn and wrapping an arm around her waist. "Shall we, my darling?"

"I'm in your hands," Ashlynn said, her face heating slightly in the chill air. At this point, she'd come to expect Nyrielle to stake her claim whenever they were around someone new. She'd done it when Ashlynn introduced her to Ollie and when she'd met Marcell for the first time. Now it seemed that her introduction to the ruler of the Frost Walkers would also occur in Nyrielle's embrace.

If Nyrielle was only doing it to claim her as property, Ashlynn might have objected but even though the vampire's hands could wander inappropriately at times, she never made Ashlynn feel like she was an object. Rather, she felt comforted and treasured, and Nyrielle's actions felt more cute than controlling.

At the top of the stairs, through an icy arched doorway carved to resemble two Frost Walkers crossing horns, Ashlynn got her first glimpse of Lord Ritchel's grand hall. Unlike the sad little feast Owain had hosted in the Summer Villa or her more private evenings dining with Nyrielle and a few of her handpicked advisors, the Frost Walkers had filled the vast space with hundreds of guests.

As they entered the grand hall itself, Ashlynn's eyes widened in awe. The sheer scale of the room dwarfed anything she had seen in human castles, including the great hall of Blackwell Castle. Massive ice pillars stretched towards a vaulted ceiling that at first glance, was completely open to the night sky.

Only when she looked closely did she realize that not only the ceiling but several entire sections of wall had been covered with thick sheets of crystal clear ice, offering not only an unobstructed view of the glittering stars, but the snow capped peaks of several mountains in the distance. Stepping into the great hall didn't feel like entering another room, it almost felt like entering another world.

As Nyrielle led her toward the high table at the far end of the grand hall, several Frost Walkers stood from the blocks of ice that served as tables and offered words of praise for Nyrielle. There was no scripting or choreography to the demonstration, and not every Frost Walker stood, but those who did cried out with praise that came from the heart, reflecting their personal experience with the Eldritch Lady of the Vale.

"Hail to Lady Nyrielle, Shield of the High Pass!"

"Hail to Lady Nyrielle, Slayer of human invaders!"

"Hail to the Blood Princess, Champion of the arena!"

The last one caused Nyrielle to pause, gazing at a stoop-shouldered Frost Walker whose fur had long gone gray and limp and whose horn barely gleamed in the light. Ashlynn blinked in confusion, looking from her lover to the gray-furred old woman.

Blood Princess? The others, she could understand, but why had she never heard Nyrielle mention such a title?

"Who are you, to remember something so old?" Nyrielle asked, shocking many when she stopped in the middle of the hall to speak to the old woman.

"I'm no one special, Blood Princess," the old Frost Walker insisted. "Call me Fabiene. I was a little girl in the crowd back then, no one important," she added, bowing deeply.

"But you remember," Nyrielle said, smiling at the old woman. "Would you like to join us at the high table? I'm sure young Ritchel won't mind," she added, looking at the towering figure of the largest Frost Walker in the great hall.

"Of course not," Ritchel said, his voice booming loudly enough to be heard in the farthest corners of the hall. "Trade places with Old Fabiene," he added, pointing to one of the other men at the table. "Old Fabiene," he said, turning to the gray-furred woman. "Please join us. I've heard my grandfather's tales of those days but you have seen them yourself. We would be honored to hear your tales of Lady Nyrielle's days in the Arena of High Fen."

"It's rare for me to meet someone who knew my Mistress before I did," Zedya added, appearing beside the old woman in a flash. "Let this servant help you to the high table."

"You, you don't need to fuss so much over this old crone," Fabiene protested as Zedya helped her join them in walking up the raised dais to the table where Lord Ritchel sat with his most senior advisors and hunters.

"Memories are treasures," Nyrielle said softly, gently touching the old woman's limp fur. "When no one is left to remember who a person truly was, then the person and their deeds might as well be myths. But since you're alive, and you remember, then I can be the Blood Princess tonight and everyone can hear your story," she promised.

Around the hall, several Frost Walkers roared their approval, slamming giant fists into their icy tables and stomping the ground in support of Old Fabiene. Others whispered to their neighbors, touched that an Eldritch Lady would be so kind to an ordinary old woman, simply because she remembered watching her fight long ago.

"Lord Ritchel," Nyrielle said when they finally reached the high table. "I apologize for disrupting your welcoming ceremony," she said, pulling a small silver box from the dark sash at her waist. "I hope you'll accept this humble gift as a token of my wishes to maintain our longstanding good relationship," she added, flicking the box open as she presented it.

The inside of the silver box was lined with rich, dark purple velvet and held five crimson crystals, each one the size of a grain of rice. When the box opened, a rich aura spilled from the container, bringing with it a feeling of strength and energy along with the faint sound of five beating hearts.

Five Blood Vitality Crystals, each one formed using Nyrielle's sorcery to offer a person a month of youth and vigor to a person in their declining years. While they wouldn't extend a person's lifespan by even a

day, a person like Lord Ritchel could accomplish a great deal with a month where he was restored to the prime of his life, and with the crystals Nyrielle was presenting, he could do so five times!

"Lady Nyrielle, or, should I call you Blood Princess tonight?" Ritchel said with a wide smile after accepting the silver box and tucking it into a pouch at his waist. "This gift is most welcome. Please join us. Paulus has taken charge of the arrangements tonight and I'm told that he's worked both hunters and cooks hard to prepare a feast for our guests tonight."

"Our cooks may not be as refined as your men, Blood Princess," the older Frost Walker said smoothly. "I've asked them to prepare the things they cook best so that you and your new Seneschal may see firsthand the things that delight our people the most."

Behind his smiling eyes and pleasant tone lurked a darker grin. He knew that Nyrielle typically ate only a few bites of anything she was served, content to taste something once or twice before moving on to the next. Little shocked her and even if she wasn't delighted by what she was served, it was beneath her to complain about it.

Paulus was far more interested in the young human woman that had become Nyrielle's Seneschal. For all that Lord Ritchel insisted that they treat her as one of the Eldritch, both because she was Nyrielle's Seneschal and because she was a Child of the Earth, Paulus didn't think any human who could still walk safely among their own kind belonged in Eldritch lands and he intended to prove just how much of an outsider she was tonight.

Gesturing to the servants waiting at the edges of the hall, several heaping trays were brought forward, each one bearing something that Paulus felt certain would provoke this little human woman into showing her true colors in front of the most prominent Frost Walkers in the High Pass.

When the food arrived, set on the table on large platters or giant bowls for people to dish themselves from, Ashlynn's eyes opened wide in genuine surprise.

"Is, is that what I think it is?" She asked, her voice thick with disbelief as she pointed at one of the plates placed almost directly in front of her.