

## The Vampire 120

Chapter 120 120: Connected

Warm golden light spilled from crystal chandeliers and lamps along the wall to fill an opulent ballroom with enough light that the elegantly dressed guests had to remind themselves that they were deep underground.

A long banquet table occupied a raised platform at one end of the hall, serving as a gathering spot for some of the most powerful people east of the great desert. Torbin, the Eldritch High Lord of the Vale of Mists, stood at the center of the banquet table, smiling with pride as he gazed upon his many guests.

Torbin's once black fur had long turned a shocking shade of white and his eyes had taken on a distinctly red hue as he aged, yet those were the only signs that any time had passed for the three hundred-year-old vampire who had united the Horned Clan and the Clan of the Great Claw in the Vale of Mists.

Next to him, a young Nyrielle did her best to endure the crowded and boisterous environment. She remembered this night well, and while she had never come to enjoy crowded festivities, she enjoyed any chance she had to relive the days when her parents and grandsire were still alive.

Thane had once told her that human dreams could be wildly varied, composed of impossible things that hadn't happened before and likely never would. Dreams of journeys to fantastical places or sensual dreams with people who would never consent to indulge in carnal desires with the dreamer.

Those dreams stopped when a person died. The dreams of vampires no longer contained infinite possibilities, and for Nyrielle, they never had. Instead, when the sun rose, it disturbed a vampire's precarious balance between life and death, pressing upon them until they experienced what humans referred to as 'seeing their life pass before their eyes' in the moments before death.

It was no surprise to dream of another banquet from another time after an evening spent feasting with the Frost Walkers, but Nyrielle was grateful to Ashlynn for the hours of comfort before she slept for the day. Without them, she feared that she would be treated to memories of time spent with her fallen progeny to remember again how badly she failed them.

"You look bored," Torbin said, smiling at the child he considered to be his granddaughter. Even though she was born of humans and he was Eldritch, she had been born to his progeny. Other distinctions didn't matter as far as the old bear was concerned. "You know we have a special guest tonight."

"I know," Nyrielle said, offering her grandsire a better smile than the half-hearted one she'd given him that night. He'd worked hard to make this arrangement, inviting one of the other three True Vampires to come and mentor her. When she was young, she hadn't understood how different she was from her parents or her grandsire and she'd resisted the notion of needing a tutor.

Now, she just wanted to see that large, proud smile on Torbin's bearish face and the twinkle in his red eyes.

-BOOM, BOOM-

The sound of the doorman's staff striking the ground brought Nyrielle's attention to the large, gilded doors of the ballroom. In a moment, High Lord Rasko would enter the ballroom, dressed like the groom at a wedding coming to meet his bride rather than a tutor coming to greet his student.

"Presenting, Baron Iarlaith Willowcreek, his wife Orla, and their guest, Lady Ashlynn Blackwell!"

At the beginning of the announcement, Nyrielle had started to frown. In her memories, her parents had long discarded the titles they once held. The Barony of Willowcreek no longer existed, or at least, it had passed from her family's hands and they treated it as a dead land that no longer mattered to their lives and futures.

When the doorman announced Ashlynn, however, Nyrielle couldn't hold herself back, jumping to her feet and knocking the chair behind her over in the process.

The heavy gilded doors opened wide, admitting a trio of people who couldn't be more familiar to her, but at the same time, could never have been present in the same place together.

Baron Iarlaith had inherited his sire's stark white hair though his face, with its delicate and refined features, remained as youthful as the day he'd arrived in the Vale of Mists to seek refuge among Torbin's people. Despite abandoning his title, he carried himself with the practiced grace of nobility and wore fitted breaches and an elaborately embroidered tunic that had gone out of fashion among humans decades ago.

Tonight, his pale skin seemed to glow in the golden lamplight. The dark green and copper embroidery of his formal outfit contrasted sharply with his bone-white skin, but in Nyrielle's memories, he'd always said that it didn't matter whether something 'suited' a person or not, only that they liked it.

Next to him, Lady Orla stood at her husband's side, her own white hair elaborately styled and adorned with sapphires that matched her striking blue eyes. Like her husband, her skin had taken on the same pale shade as Torbin's white fur, transforming her from the warm summer maiden she'd been into a cool, ethereal beauty who continued to enchant anyone who gazed upon her.

As striking as her parent's entrance was, however, Nyrielle only had eyes for the woman who entered on her father's other arm, somehow managing to stand just far enough apart to avoid the appearance of intimacy as Iarlaith escorted her into the hall.

"I told you we had a special guest," Torbin said with a smile. "Go to her, you don't need to hold yourself back for appearance's sake. We're here to celebrate your union after all."

Much like High Lord Rasko in her memories, Ashlynn had arrived at the banquet dressed more for a wedding than for a simple ball. White satin and lace flowed from her hips in a voluminous skirt while the rest of the dress hugged her slender waist and generous chest, with a plunging neckline that exposed a deep valley of cleavage.

In a blink, Nyrielle appeared next to her, casting a confused glance at her father and mother who seemed delighted by the flustered expression on her face.

"Look at her," Iarlaith said, leaning over to his wife as if to be discreet, though he didn't lower his voice at all. "It's like we don't even exist anymore."

"Hush you," Orla teased, her sapphire blue eyes twinkling with delight. "You looked at me the same way once, or have you forgotten?"

"Ashlynn," Nyrielle whispered, stepping close enough to the other woman to reach out and take her hands. "How are you here? You, you shouldn't be able to be here. This is a memory, you haven't even been born yet..."

"Does it matter?" Ashlynn asked, pulling Nyrielle toward the dance floor. "Didn't I say to let me comfort you this time? So let me comfort you..."

At the side of the grand hall, musicians began to play a slow, enchanting song. The lights overhead dimmed and Nyrielle's world shrank until it was only her and Ashlynn on the dance floor and just her parents and grandsire in the audience.