

## The Vampire 140

### Chapter 140 140: Jocelynn's Journey

This year, Jocelynn had come to truly despise carriages. Originally, she'd protested when her father and Bors Lothian arranged for Ashlynn's wedding to take place very early in the spring. Nothing was in bloom during her sister's wedding and the nights were cold and chilly when they arrived in Lothian March. It almost never snowed in Blackwell County but there had still been snow on the ground in some places during the long carriage ride from her home to Lothian City.

Now that she was making the trip in late spring during the height of the rainy season, Jocelynn understood all too well why her father had insisted that they either travel before the rains started or well into summer.

The carriage rocked and swayed with every rut in the road, and her bones ached from days of being tossed about like she was in the belly of a ship in a storm. Even the cushions had become her enemies, turning lumpy and misshapen after the first few days of travel. The whole carriage needed a good wash inside and out after a few days, and no amount of potpourri could cover up the musty smell that had invaded the perpetually damp carpet on the floor of the carriage.

The trip that had only taken ten days at the beginning of spring took fifteen now. Twice they'd been forced to wait in tiny villages while rainstorms pelted the land and once they'd been forced to backtrack to take a different road because a bridge had washed out on the route they were using and wouldn't be repaired for over a week.

The landscape had changed dramatically since they left Blackwell County behind. Jocelynn found herself missing the cool salty breeze that always seemed to blow in from the sea. It had been replaced by fresher, chillier air that carried the scent of fresh cut timber and wet earth that in her mind she'd come to associate with the untamed and uncivilized wilderness at the far edges of the Kingdom of Gaal.

The gentle rolling hills of home had given way to steep, rocky slopes covered in ancient forests that the common folk were still working to pacify. She'd lost count of how many logging camps and hunting lookouts they'd passed in the days since leaving Blackwell County behind and she'd long grown tired of playing the game where she tried to guess how many of the great trees that had been felled it would take to produce just one of the sailing ships in Blackwell Harbor.

Even the villages they stopped in felt different. Back home, every settlement had boats pulled up on the shore and nets hanging out to dry. Here, the tiny hamlets they sheltered in were surrounded by wooden palisades, and Eleanor had noticed more than one village where their wooden walls bore deep gouges from attacks by demons.

If not for the company of so many Templars traveling with them, she didn't know how she would have slept at night, especially with the strange noises that seemed to echo off the rocky hills after the sun went down.

"We're getting close to Lothian City," their guard captain had announced that morning providing the news that Jocelynn had been waiting to hear for so many days. "We'll be following an old demon road from here on. It's more comfortable and faster travel, but keep your eyes on the tree line. There haven't been any reports of demons striking this deep in more than a decade but..." His voice trailed off with an uncertain shrug and the way he fingered his sword hilt while speaking did little to settle Jocelynn's nerves

The time alone would wear on any young woman, but to Jocelynn, she felt like she'd become a prisoner in a shaking, leaky wooden box. Worst of all, the woman she shared a carriage with seemed completely immune to the indignities of travel!

Confessor Eleanor was the worst traveling companion that Jocelynn could imagine. Each time Jocelynn complained about some problem with their journey, the Confessor responded with a quote from scripture of some piece of 'advice' intended for young women of virtue.

"So long as one bathes in the light, they may thrive in any soil. When the strong are uprooted and placed in new lands, those who are mindful of the light will grow stronger wherever they arrive," Eleanor had said when Jocelynn complained that her body ached from several days of bouncing along the rough country roads.

"I'm sure I will thrive in Lothian March," Jocelynn said in a tone that Eleanor could only describe as petulant. "It's just getting there that's far too painful. How will anyone respect me if I look like a sodden battered cabbage by the time we arrive?"

"Peel away the outer leaves of the cabbage and the core is still good," Eleanor said patiently. "As long as long as you don't let things fester and rot within, then you will recover your splendor quickly enough that a moment of weakness will be quickly forgotten. Your sister made many trips to Lothian March after she was betrothed, didn't she? How did the travel affect her?"

As much as she took her duty to guide this young woman seriously, Confessor Eleanor never forgot why she had been sent to accompany her on this journey to the Lothian Summer Villa. The Inquisition only had a misshapen birthmark as proof of the accusation that Ashlynn Blackwell was a witch. Thus far, no one had ever spoken of seeing her perform any witchcraft.

Diarmuid had asked for a Confessor to collect information about the deceased Blackwell sister using 'gentler methods' than those available to an Inquisitor. Now, whenever the opportunity presented itself, Eleanor encouraged Jocelynn to talk about her departed sister.

The atmosphere in the carriage grew heavy as soon as Eleanor asked about Ashlynn. It was clear to her that Jocelynn had complex feelings about the matter, as any sister should. Making the decision to reveal her sister's witchcraft to her sister's husband couldn't be easy and the violence that followed would torment even the most devout followers of the Holy Lord of Light, to say nothing of a teenage girl.

As obvious as Jocelynn's emotional wounds were, however, Eleanor didn't have the luxury of allowing them to heal over before getting her answers. In fact, the more raw and tender those wounds were, the easier it was to discover the truth in unintended utterances and hasty responses. She just had to keep prodding and eventually, she was certain that the truth would slip loose.