

The Vampire 165

Chapter 165 165: I Would Fight For Love

On the stage, a barrel-chested man from the Scaled Clan slid out onto the stage under the bright lights as the curtains raised. In the pit beneath the stage, the orchestra played a series of brief welcoming notes to gather the audience's attention before yielding to the master of the production.

"Patrons, honored guests," the man began, speaking in a rich, echoing tone that carried throughout the large theater. "Tonight, we are honored to entertain two very special guests. The legend herself, the Blood Princess, Eldritch Lady of the Vale of Mists, Lady Nyrielle, and her Seneschal, Ashlynn," he said, bowing deeply to the curtained box at the center of the top floor.

Word had already spread among the audience but several people had yet to hear who stood and turned to look, hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous vampire who spent ten nights in the arena, staking her territory and an eternity of service to anyone who could defeat her. Nyrielle, however, had no intention of appearing to entertain her fans when she had a delighted Ashlynn in her lap.

"Go," Ashlynn whispered, pulling back from her lover. "They adore you."

"Then they can adore you too," Nyrielle said, sweeping Ashlynn up off the couch and pulling her along to the railing of the private box. Spotlights instantly fell on them and Nyrielle pulled Ashlynn close, as if to declare to the audience that her Seneschal was spoken for.

"This is my darling's first visit to High Fen City," Nyrielle said. "Should you chance upon her in the daylight, I hope you'll all be as kind to her as you would to me," she said, smiling broadly at the audience and flashing her fangs.

She was still uncertain about allowing Ashlynn to explore the city without her, but her love had spent too much of her life in a cage built by parents who thought they could protect her from her own power and destiny.

In High Fen City, Nyrielle had significantly more faith in High Lady Erna's ability to keep order and if Ashlynn wished to go out to explore, she wouldn't refuse her. She only hoped that this little announcement would provide some added security should anyone have improper designs on her lover.

"Blood Princess," the man on the stage said. "In honor of your attendance, we've prepared a special rendition of our production. We hope that you and your Seneschal enjoy it."

For a moment, Nyrielle was afraid they'd attempted to graft some part of her own story in the arena onto this classic opera. If they'd done so, she likely would have left rather than endure some idolized version of her desperation to recruit the strength she needed to retake the Vale of Mists from the humans who burned Mist City to the ground.

Thankfully, there had been far too little time for the production company to implement such a sweeping change. Instead, when 'Sindila' took the stage, the audience was surprised to find the role played by a woman.

It was clear that the actress was both intimately familiar with the opera and at the same time, that she'd never played the leading man's role before. Somehow, the resulting performance, while rougher, was also more raw and genuine.

"One kiss, one touch of your lips,

To endure one thousand whips,

One fight, one beautiful night,

I'll spill their blood, and prove my love..."

As the music swelled and the story unfolded, Ashlynn settled back in Nyrielle's arms, listening to the performers on the stage and Nyrielle's whispered translation in her ear. In the darkness of the theater, the audience fell away and even the musicians faded from sight, leaving Ashlynn with the illusion that the performance on stage was just for her and Nyrielle.

"Through these iron bars between us,

No prison walls can screen us,

Each scar they mark upon your skin,

Is matched by pain I hold within,

Though they call our love a madness,

Only you can heal this heart of sadness..."

The actress playing the role of Mira poured her heart into her song, wrapping her love and dedication around the imprisoned Sindila like armor before his battle against the foreign champion.

When the actress on stage 'slew' the foreign champion, Ashlynn realized the path the story was about to take. Sindila would triumph over Ervig, gain the approval of High Lord Aspar, and wed her beloved Mira. Watching it unfold, she couldn't suppress a sigh of disappointment.

"What's wrong?" Nyrielle asked, sensing her darling's changing mood.

"I love you," Ashlynn said, turning to gaze into Nyrielle's midnight-blue eyes. "One day, I hope my parents will understand and that they'll approve. But if they never do, it changes nothing for me, because I don't need their approval to know my own heart or yours," she said, placing her fingers lightly on Nyrielle's chest, directly above her heart.

For the past several weeks, Ashlynn had thrown herself into her new life in the Vale of Mists and now in the Eldritch nations. She'd trained to exhaustion, studied until her mind grew fuzzy, and fought battles that a younger Ashlynn would never have dreamed of.

All of it had kept her too busy to think about the family she'd left behind and the pain they must be suffering, believing she was dead. Now, however, without the pressure of adapting to her new life, in this moment of rest, the deep sorrows of cruel separation came back like a flood, pulling tears from her eyes that she'd never given herself time to shed.

"I promised you, didn't I? In the autumn or winter, when the nights are long, we can find a way to visit them," Nyrielle said, brushing a tear away from Ashlynn's watery eyes. "This distance is only temporary."

"It should be," Ashlynn said, biting her lip and looking back toward the stage. The opera had entered its final act and Mira was encouraging a wounded Sindila to escape before Ervig arrived to finish what the champion had started.

Strangely, at the moment, Ashlynn related more to the wounded Sindila than she did to the beautiful Mira. She might not know who had betrayed her, revealing her secret to Owain Lothian, but she knew that even if she had been pushed to the brink of death, she would claw her way back to have her vengeance. Perhaps even Nyrielle couldn't convince her otherwise.

"Promise me something else," Ashlynn said as a dashing and handsome Ervig entered the stage to duel the wounded Sindila. As handsome and charming as he was, he took the stage in a manner that radiated dominance and oppressive physical might, moving in a way that was painfully similar to the way Owain had stalked her in their bridal suite before unleashing his rage on her fragile body.

"Mine by law and mine by right,

Mine to savor and my delight,

What fool dares to steal my bride?

Your blood will flow, a receding tide,

Let her weep, let her rage,

She'll learn to love her gilded cage..."

"Promise me that you'll let me kill them with my own hands," Ashlynn said, her eyes haunted by memories of the beating she suffered at Owain's hands before she fed those memories to a cold burning rage. "Owain, Tommin, and whoever betrayed me to him. Don't claim my vengeance for me."

"I wouldn't dream of it my darling," Nyrielle said, tightening her hold on the young woman in her arms. "Would you like to leave early? I didn't think this would disturb you so. I wanted to share a night of beauty with you but..."

"It's fine," Ashlynn said, placing a finger on Nyrielle's lips. "It is beautiful, and it's sad at the same time. Life can be beautiful and sad."

"Then take this time to be sad," Nyrielle said, pulling Ashlynn close as the opera reached its climax. Aspar discovered Mira lovingly tending to Sindila's wounds and laid down an ultimatum that as long as he was the High Lord, Sindila would never be worthy of Mira's hand.

"If I were Mira, and you were injured," Ashlynn said. "I would fight my father personally instead of forcing you to bear the burden."

"Even if it was hopeless? Aspar is much stronger than Mira," Nyrielle said. "Would you risk yourself rather than wait for me to recover?"

"In the other ending, Mira defeats Ervig and Aspar," Ashlynn said. "She's not weak and neither am I. If you're hurt and unable to fight, then I need to be strong enough to fight in your place. Aren't I your Seneschal?" Ashlynn said, interlacing her fingers with Nyrielle's. "We face our enemies together. I just need to catch up to where you are."

"In time," Nyrielle agreed. "Until then, forgive me for coming to your rescue," she teased, nibbling on Ashlynn's ear to dispel the somber mood that had enveloped them. "I will always come for you, no matter what. Whenever you need me, I'll be there."

"I know," Ashlynn said, turning in her seat to face Nyrielle. "And right now, I need you," she said, leaning in to seal her lover's lips with her own. Music swelled and on the stage, the final fight between Aspar and Sindila had begun but neither woman in the private box laid eyes on it.

The opera had stirred up too many feelings for Ashlynn and no ending on the stage could give her the comfort that her heart desired. But what a performance couldn't do, Nyrielle could, embracing Ashlynn tightly and becoming her anchor against the storm of emotions that raged within her heart.

Before the lights in the theater could brighten, a greater darkness filled the private box as Nyrielle gently lifted her lover and carried her out into the night. What came next belonged to them alone and she had no intention of allowing anyone to interrupt.