

The Vampire 215

Chapter 215 215: Powerful Pull

After spending seven days and nights traveling across the High Fen, Ashlynn and her companions finally arrived at the edge of the cliff that marked the end of the White River and the entrance to the Briar.

In the starlit darkness, their small circle of wagons had been arranged to block the cool mountain winds that swept down from the east. The breeze carried traces of snow and ice even now that summer was almost upon them. In the distance, the frozen peaks loomed as darker shadows against the moonless sky.

Lanterns hanging from the wagons cast pools of warm light that pushed back against the darkness, but even their glow seemed minuscule when Ashlynn looked out over the vast, mist-covered darkness below the towering cliff. Next to the dizzying height and the thunder of water pouring over the edge, everything felt smaller and less significant, as if it could be swept away at any minute.

Nyrielle had told her what to expect, but words didn't do justice to the awe-inspiring force of a mighty river spilling off the edge of a cliff and tumbling hundreds of feet through the air into the lake below. The sound of churning water made conversation all but impossible within a hundred paces of the cliff's edge and a cold mist drifted through the night air like tiny raindrops attempting to return to the sky.

"Sights like dis are someting special, ain't dey, cher?" Jacques said lightly as he came to stand next to Ashlynn looking over the edge of the cliff. "It's better in de morning, I promise you dat."

Over the past several days of travel, Ashlynn had come to a tentative understanding with the reptilian witch. He didn't encroach on her personal space and he didn't seek her out on the occasions that the group had stopped to rest or while they took ferries along the few navigable stretches of the mighty river. Unless Ashlynn herself sought out his company, he left her alone.

Still, completely ignoring him would have been both difficult and rude. Instead, on the occasions that they spoke, Ashlynn did her best to keep it to topics that felt neutral rather than personal. She asked about the plants growing in the area and the wildlife that she'd never encountered before.

Jacques' connection to plants was incredibly deep and he was happy to keep their discussions to lighter topics adjacent to witchcraft as long as they didn't delve into the mysteries of the craft itself.

Jacques himself had been surprised how 'hands-on' her knowledge of plants turned out to be. When he learned that she'd been raised as a noblewoman among humans he had assumed she lived a pampered life similar to the children of powerful merchants. His opinion of her had dropped even further when she and the diminutive Heila seemed so insistent on building relationships with vapid social-climbing women in High Fen City.

Learning that she'd tended a personal garden in her youth and that she had made an extensive study of botany came as a pleasant surprise to the thorny witch. With that as a basis of comparison, their conversations became more of a lopsided exchange.

Without samples of the plants she was familiar with, it was impossible for him to learn as much from her as she did from him, but they still both gained a better understanding of the ways life took shape on their respective sides of the mountains.

"It's not the sight that drew me," Ashlynn said, shaking off the memories of their journey and shivering slightly as a sudden gust showered them with a burst of chill water droplets. "You feel it too don't you? There's so much energy flowing from the waterfall, I feel like my heart is going to beat out of my chest just being buffeted by the edges of it."

"Ah, I know de problem, cher," Jacques said lightly. This waterfall was just the beginning of the power that flowed through the Briar and he'd long become accustomed to its forceful presence but he wasn't so old that he couldn't remember what it was like to be a young witch overwhelmed by the force of nature before them.

"Jus' come away from de edge," he suggested gently. "Best to be far enough away dat de spray don't reach you. Simple logic works de best, non? Don't make it so complicated like you have to learn to deal with all dis at once. Jus' back away from it."

"That's... not so easy either," Ashlynn admitted, lowering her head in embarrassment. The power she felt flowing from the waterfall was bright, and vibrant, and it called out to her as if to encourage her to step into the White River and fling herself over the cliff along with the rushing water.

For a moment, her head spun and she felt like, if she could just meld with the energy of the river, she wouldn't plummet to the turbulent waters below. With that much energy at her fingertips, surely she could take flight, soaring on the night wind like a bird or... or like Nyrielle when she unfurled her raven wings.

"Ma Belle, Nyrielle," Jacques called back toward the cluster of wagons. "Ma petite Ashlynn could use a rescue from an enchanting beauty. Dese scaly hands of mine ain't for touching her," he said, positioning himself between Ashlynn and the edge of the cliff.

If they'd been alone, he would have carried her away himself, but over the past several days he'd learned that Ashlynn's lover could be just as prickly as he was, if not more, when it came to people touching the young witch. Since he couldn't carry her away, the only thing he could do was act as a shield against the powerful pull of the waterfall and place himself in a position to catch her if she succumbed to its pull before Nyrielle arrived.

"Ashlynn," Nyrielle whispered the moment she appeared next to her lover. Her voice was thick with barely restrained desire as she inhaled the scent of her lover mixed with the cool night air.

"Come. We still have a little time left before the others will be ready to depart. Spend it with me before we have to say goodbye," she said. Sliding between Ashlynn and the powerful pull of the waterfall's energy, she wrapped her arms around Ashlynn's waist and gently lifted her off the ground, carrying her back to the circle of wagons that was preparing to depart.

Tomorrow would be the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year and the shortest night. They had only a few precious hours to say their farewells tonight before the caravan rolled out again and neither woman wanted to waste them.