

The Vampire 216

Chapter 216 216: Parting Kiss

"I'm sorry," Ashlynn said, once she was far enough away from the mighty waterfall that she no longer felt swept away by it. "Thank you," she added, standing on her tiptoes to give Nyrielle a gentle kiss.

While Ashlynn had meant for it to be a simple, brief kiss, Nyrielle seized the opportunity, plundering from Ashlynn's lush lips like a woman dying of thirst. Her fangs briefly pricked Ashlynn's tongue, adding a now familiar coppery flavor to a sensual kiss that Ashlynn could feel all the way to her toes.

Nyrielle's hands roamed along Ashlynn's supple curves as their tongues danced, paying no attention to the gazes of anyone in the small camp. At the moment, blood thundered in her ears, blending with the rushing sound of the waterfall and drowning out all considerations of the world beyond the woman in her arms.

Ashlynn clung to her lover's slender shoulders as she felt her face flush and her knees go weak. They had only been together for a short few months, just a fraction of the time she'd been betrothed to Owain, yet already her world had changed so much that she struggled to imagine life without Nyrielle by her side.

Now, they would be apart for as long as they had been together, perhaps even longer. No distance, however, could stop her from feeling an echo of Nyrielle's heartbeat within her own chest. Their bond went beyond shared moments, stolen kisses, and the words they said beneath the Ancient Oak. It was a pact formed of blood that bound them together for the rest of Nyrielle's life.

"Better now?" Nyrielle asked gently when she pulled back from the kiss. "I would hate to think that I would lose out to a waterfall, no matter how beautiful it is under the stars."

"The stars I see in your eyes will always be the most beautiful," Ashlynn said, her face heating in embarrassment at how entranced she'd become by the flow of energy that swirled through the air around the waterfall. "Can we..." she started, glancing at Nyrielle's luxurious carriage and motioning with her head.

"My darling is still so shy," Nyrielle said, taking Ashlynn's delicate hands in hers and guiding her into the softly lit interior of the carriage. In the light of the single lantern, deep, inky shadows danced across the vampire's features, reminding Ashlynn of the night they met when Thane helped her into this very carriage and her life changed forever.

"I'm going to miss you," Ashlynn whispered once the door to the carriage clicked closed behind her. Her hand reached out, tracing her fingers across Nyrielle's brow, brushing a strand of dark hair out of the way so she could gaze into the vampire's mesmerizing midnight blue eyes. "I'll work hard so we can reunite soon."

"Don't push yourself to finish early, my darling," Nyrielle said softly. "You should understand by now that visiting the Mother of Thorns is no easy thing. Instead of reuniting early, I would prefer that you make the most of the time that you have."

"I will," Ashlynn promised softly. Nyrielle had her own business to tend to before returning home and she would spend the next several months traveling across Eldritch lands. The two had promised to head to High Fen City when they were finished with the things they needed to do, but at the moment, neither woman could say for sure who would arrive first.

For now, however, while they still had a little time, they set aside concerns of the future to savor the little time they had left. Nyrielle pulled Ashlynn forward, running her fingers through Ashlynn's long, pale blond locks as her lips sought Ashlynn's.

Silk skirts rustled as they pressed close enough together for Nyrielle to feel Ashlynn's racing heartbeat through the fabric of their dresses as they surrendered to the desires that had become pent up within them after days of travel.

Outside the carriage, Zedya knelt next to Heila as the horned woman worked on repacking both Ashlynn's belongings and her own into a pair of sturdy rucksacks. The last leg of the journey into the Briar would only take a day but it had to be made on foot.

Given that, they could take only a few pieces of practical clothing with them along with the most important items to have on hand during their stay. The rest of their luggage would continue on with Nyrielle, out of reach until they reunited in the fall.

"I'm proud of you, little Heila," Zedya said suddenly, shocking the diminutive woman enough that she paused in her packing. "It hasn't been easy to reach the place where you are, but you've come a great distance in a short time. I can't see much of the timid girl who entered the High Pass left in you anymore."

"I still have a long way to go before I can call myself worthy of the treatment I've received," Heila said, her hands mechanically resuming their tasks while she struggled to remain humble in the face of Zedya's praise.

"Stay close to Ashlynn while you're in the Briar," Zedya said, her amethyst eyes twinkling mischievously as she moved to help the younger woman. "If I'm not mistaken, you may find an opportunity there to progress even further. If you can seize the opportunities in the Briar well, then Lady Ashlynn is certain to come to rely on your power in the future."

"An opportunity? What kind of opportunity?" Heila asked. "I've heard that there are rare and potent herbs that can only be found in the Briar, is there something I should keep my eyes out for?"

"It's not that kind of opportunity," Zedya said cryptically. "The witches don't like their secrets being spoken of too freely, but as long as you're at Ashlynn's side, the opportunity is almost certain to present itself. You just have to have the courage to grasp it when it comes."

"Heila," Nyrielle called, interrupting the horned woman's conversation with Zedya as she and Ashlynn emerged from the carriage. Both women had flushed faces and their dresses were slightly askew but anyone who noticed either detail pointedly ignored them.

"You take good care of my darling Ashlynn for me," she said. "You've shown yourself to be worthy of the faith Ashlynn places in you and now I'll do the same."

"Now wait jus' a spell," Jacques said, his thorny aura flaring when he heard Nyrielle's comment. "Maman will care for your Ashlynn plenty well. No one else was invited into da Briar wit her."

All around the camp, preparations to depart stopped as everyone turned a hostile gaze on the Sandbox Witch. For seven days, he'd said nothing about this and now he wanted to strip Ashlynn of the only companion who would remain at her side?

For a moment, Virve stepped forward, her hands dropping to the darksteel gauntlets at her waist. It took Captain Lennart's hand on her shoulder to stop her in her tracks while her mind caught up with her body's instinctive actions.

She'd seen Jacques's 'demonstration' of his ability to fight people from the Clan of the Great Claw who lived on this side of the mountains and even if she thought those gladiators had been a pale imitation of the soldiers of the Vale of Mists, she knew she couldn't defeat the Sandbox Witch.

If she thought she could thump some sense into him, she might have pressed forward anyway but even that was beyond her when she considered the capabilities he'd demonstrated at the House of Iron.

"I'm sorry, cher," Jacques said. "But if you want to study wit maman, you have to enter da Briar alone."