

The Vampire 245

Chapter 245 245: I'll Find A Way To Make This Work...

Before Ashlynn could relish in the moment of reunion with her parents, however strange the vision felt, she was grabbed forcefully and wrenched violently into a far crueler scene.

"So it's true," Owain spat, staring at the mark revealed when he tore her dress from her body. "You're a witch."

"No, no not this," Ashlynn whispered as her body began to tremble. "Anything but this."

Owain's face contorted into a mask of rage as blow after blow began to rain down on her body. This time, Ashlynn tried to fight back, but her body was weak, without any of the strength she'd gained as Nyrielle's seneschal.

Bones cracked under the force of Owain's fists and none of the lessons she'd taken from Thane helped her when she didn't possess a fraction of Owain's strength, much less the power she'd become accustomed to. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, she lay on the floor, broken and bleeding, her world fading to one of darkness and pain.

"Father, Mother, please. Please, you've sacrificed so much for me," she heard her own voice say, echoing in the darkness. "You've given me everything I could ever want."

"I'll find a way to make this work," her voice said, as if mocking her from the darkness. "I promise."

"I tried," Ashlynn sobbed. Her body twitched and spasmed in pain and her face was a mass of cuts and bruises, but in her emerald eyes, a spark of defiance burned. "I tried," she repeated, pushing herself up off the ground until she stood, swaying on her feet in the darkness.

With no walls or anything to cling to, her act of defiance didn't last long. Her muscles trembled and her legs shook, losing the strength to support her body and sending her tumbling back down to the cold, hard ground. Still, she refused to lie down. If she couldn't stand, she would at least hold her head up high.

"For two years, I tried," she said, tears welling in her eyes. "He courted me and I courted him. I thought he loved me. I thought... I thought I loved him," she finished in a smaller, quieter voice.

"We were married," she insisted. "He was my husband, and then..."

Before she could continue, the pain receded and she found herself standing beneath the Ancient Oak tree, dressed in a borrowed emerald green dress while she faced Nyrielle, holding a silver goblet filled with a mixture of both of their blood.

"As your Seneschal, I promise to dedicate my life to your service," she found herself saying. They were strong, powerful words that bound her forever to Nyrielle's side, not as a wife, but as a servant.

"That's right," Ashlynn said. That night felt mystical and magical. Romantic, like a wedding, but Nyrielle hadn't offered her love. The powerful vampire asked for her service, and offered her a chance to claim her revenge in return.

After reliving the brutal beating at Owain's hands, her desire for revenge burned hotter in her chest than ever before but that didn't mean she had forgotten what she said after swearing to serve Nyrielle.

"The whole of my heart belongs to you, from now until the end of our lives," Ashlynn repeated. No matter how badly injured she had been at the time or how clouded her mind had been, she would never forget the oath she swore. "I am yours and you are the only one I will give my heart to."

Maybe it was wrong of her to think of herself as married to Nyrielle after this ceremony. Their vows had been mismatched and neither of them knew the other well enough to speak of love. She'd given herself to Nyrielle because, at that moment, it felt natural. In the months since then, while there had been bumps along the way, they'd only drawn closer to each other.

"I love her," Ashlynn said. "And I know that she loves me. That's enough."

As soon as she spoke the words, the scene shifted again. This time, she found herself in Nyrielle's formal dining room, in the dark, underground levels of the ancient fortress where no light could find them.

"Your revenge on Owain is an opportunity for me," Nyrielle said as they dined on one of Georg's elegantly plated dishes. You, my darling, are the advantage I need to break the stalemate I've been trapped in for all these years."

"That was then," Ashlynn insisted, refusing to engage with the Nyrielle in this vision that had been formed from her memories. "I was wrong to push her away then. We barely knew each other, and she was honest with me. I didn't understand her then, not the way I do now..."

"I'll find a way to make this work," her voice repeated from the darkness as the vision faded away. "I promise."

"Nyrielle is different," Ashlynn insisted. "Everything about her is different from Owain. I'm not in any danger with..." Suddenly, her voice caught in her throat. She wanted to exclaim that Nyrielle would never hurt her, that she had nothing to fear from her vampire lover, but she didn't need a vision to remind her that she and Nyrielle were playing with fire every time she let the other woman feed on her.

"Even if it was dangerous," she said, clutching her hands into fists so tight that her fingernails bit into her palms. "She wasn't trying to hurt me. We were both scared afterward. Because she cares. Because she didn't want to hurt me."

"Ashlynn, my darling," Nyrielle's voice whispered from behind her.

When Ashlynn turned, she found herself somewhere that she didn't immediately recognize. She was standing atop a long, stone wall in the midst of an ancient cedar forest. Mist hung thickly in the air, mixed with an overwhelming scent of campfires numbering in the hundreds as a great army sprawled across the land.

In the darkness, it was difficult to make out all of the banners, but the flaming sword of the famed order of Templars was impossible to miss, as was the giant banner at the center of camp displaying Lothian colors.

"Is this... something that hasn't happened yet?" Ashlynn wondered. But, was it something that would happen or something that might happen?

"It's time, my darling," Nyrielle said, placing a pale, slender finger underneath Ashlynn's chin and lifting upward. "If I'm going to have a victory today, then I need your strength."

"Of course," Ashlynn said instantly. "I'll always help you."

"I know," Nyrielle said, a predatory smile forming on her lips as her eyes became deep pools of midnight. "You never refuse me," she said, opening her mouth wide to reveal her fangs before she struck like a snake, sinking her fangs into Ashlynn's neck and drinking deeply.

For a moment, Ashlynn went limp in Nyrielle's arms as pleasure overwhelmed her mind. Even here, on the eve of battle, some sensations were too intense to ignore. But the moment of pleasurable surrender was far briefer than normal before a pain even greater than she had felt at Owain's hands wracked her body. Her veins felt like they were on fire and her head felt like a clawed hand was crushing her skull.

"Stop," Ashlynn said, raising a hand to tap weakly on Nyrielle's shoulder. She knew that the moment things became painful, she was supposed to speak up, to ensure that Nyrielle didn't drink too deeply. It was something she'd witnessed herself when a young villager nearly died for failing to cry out. "My love, you need to stop or I'll die," Ashlynn cried out.

Still, the feeding didn't stop. Nyrielle's wings unfurled behind her and shadows gathered around her like a cloak, twisting and writhing as the vampire's power surged.

"Nyrielle," Ashlynn said weakly, her vision growing darker at the edges. "Please, you have to stop."

Moments later, her vision spun as the dark-winged vampire dropped her unceremoniously onto the cold stones of the ancient wall.

"Now," Nyrielle said with a dark smile. Shadows twisted in her hands, forming an oversized headsman's ax that glowed with a deep crimson light. "Now I have the power to slay my enemies."

"Now, you have to hang on, my darling Ashlynn," Nyrielle said, her voice colder and more impassive than Ashlynn had ever heard it before. "I have a promise to fulfill. You will see Owain's head severed from his shoulders before you die, and it will be your power that made it possible. Only then are you allowed to let go," she said before turning away from Ashlynn and leaping into the night.

"I'll find a way to make this work," her voice said, mocking her from the darkness once again. "I promise."