

The Vampire 57

Chapter 57 57: Time for Two

Nyrielle wasted no time in sweeping Ashlynn off her feet. In the vampire's powerful arms, the shorter woman weighed the same as a feather. Despite her outward confidence, however, Nyrielle felt an unfamiliar flutter in her chest.

For centuries, she had maintained careful control over her emotions, keeping others at arm's length. Even before she'd succeeded her grandsire, Torbin, she'd been marked as special because of her birth.

As a True Vampire, she was expected to stand above others, to be served by her progeny, and to command the people of the Vale of Mists.

She'd built walls around her heart, especially after the death of her parents. Those walls helped shield her from pain and loss over the centuries by keeping everyone away from her innermost self.

But with Ashlynn, those walls were crumbling. As she carried the young witch through the castle corridors, Nyrielle marveled at the warmth spreading through her usually cold body.

"I've prepared something for us tonight," Nyrielle said softly. She moved swiftly but unlike when Thane carried her, Ashlynn barely felt the sensation of wind moving around them as she floated through the ancient castle's dark corridors in Nyrielle's arms.

"Close your eyes," the vampire whispered, her lips brushing against the hair above Ashlynn's ear.

Suddenly, Ashlynn felt the air against her skin change. One moment the air was cool and slightly stale as they'd reached the portion of the castle carved into the bedrock of the cliff itself.

The next moment, the air was warm, moist, and smelled of primroses and cedar. Steam filled Ashlynn's lungs and a faint sheen of perspiration broke out on her skin as the warmth of the room enveloped her.

"You can look now," the vampire whispered.

Ashlynn opened her eyes to the sight of the most luxurious bathing chamber she'd ever seen. She had already considered the deep copper soaking tub in her own room to be a luxury greater than what her parents enjoyed in Blackwell County. Next to this room, however, her own bath looked like common fare.

A deep circular marble pool nearly ten feet across occupied the center of the warm room. Steps from two directions would allow bathers to enter slowly as their bodies adjusted to the heat of the scented water that filled the tub. Primrose petals floated on the water's surface and steam drifted lazily just above it.

The walls were paneled in rich cedar and a small fire burned on one side of the room, heating stones that could be added to the deep tub to help maintain the water's temperature.

An elegant silver tray held scented oils, soaps and brushes for washing along with tall silver goblets filled with chilled water.

"This is..." Ashlynn started to say but quickly found that words were inadequate to describe the luxury of this sauna and bath.

"This is a beginning," Nyrielle said, smiling as she set Ashlynn down on a simple cedar bench. "Allow me," she whispered against the young witch's neck before her fingers began to work at the laces of Ashlynn's bodice.

For a moment, Ashlynn froze like a deer confronted by a hunter. This was what she'd asked for, what she'd wanted since her first kiss with the vampire, but now that the moment was upon her, she didn't know what to do or how to act.

Her heart raced, a mix of excitement and nervousness washing over her. She'd never been this vulnerable with anyone before, not even in her brief time with Owain. She'd dreamed of it several times, of course, but in her dreams, Owain had taken her roughly, physically overwhelming her with strength and power.

This was different. It was tender, caring, almost reverent. Ashlynn felt both powerful and powerless under Nyrielle's touch.

As Nyrielle's cool fingers traced her skin, Ashlynn's mind whirled.

Rumors her sister had repeated of women having affairs with their own ladies-in-waiting flickered through her mind along with what little advice her mother had given her for her wedding night but none of it seemed to prepare her for the closeness and intimacy she felt as Nyrielle peeled back the outer layer of her outfit.

But as Nyrielle continued to undress her with such care and tenderness, Ashlynn felt her reservations melting away.

"There is no part of you that I did not see the night we met," Nyrielle whispered. "Nor any part of you that isn't beautiful. You can trust me," she said, pulling Ashlynn up to her feet to help her out of her shift.

Nyrielle didn't simply pull the garment over Ashlynn's head, rather, her long and delicate fingers traced along the other woman's supple calves and slender thighs, lifting the shift slowly as she rose higher.

She paused when she reached Ashlynn's waist, her fingers briefly cupping the witch's shapely buttocks before she brought her lips to brush against the mark of the witch on Ashlynn's hip.

"Even without this," Nyrielle whispered, "you are precious and extraordinary."

Ashlynn shivered, her knees growing weak at the combination of intimate touch and sincere praise.

"Too, too much," Ashlynn whispered, placing her hands on Nyrielle's shoulders and drawing the vampire upwards before she could tease her more. "If you keep doing that, I'll fall."

"Good," Nyrielle whispered, lifting the shift over Ashlynn's head with one hand and wrapping the other arm around her. "I want you to fall."

"That's not what I meant," Ashlynn pouted, holding onto Nyrielle to steady herself. Once she'd taken a few deep breaths to steady herself, inhaling the other woman's intoxicating fragrance, she stepped back and looked deeply into the vampire's sapphire eyes.

"My turn," Ashlynn said, standing on her tiptoes long enough to place a gentle kiss on the other woman's lips. Before Nyrielle could take advantage of the kiss, however, Ashlynn gently turned her around and began unlacing the other woman's dress.

She worked her way down from delicate, sculpted shoulders to slender waist, tracing along the vampire's pale alabaster skin as she went. While Ashlynn had always thought of herself as fairly pale, having spent much of her life indoors, with her hand next to Nyrielle she realized how stark the difference was between skin that still carried the healthy blush of life and that which didn't.

The observation was secondary, however, as she returned to Nyrielle's shoulders, gently moving down each long and slender arm to free it from the tight lace sleeve of the other woman's dress.

Finally, returning to Nyrielle's slender hips, Ashlynn knelt on the warm marble floor, sliding the lace dress down legs that felt like they'd been carved of marble themselves until both women stood naked in the bath.

"You're beautiful," Ashlynn whispered, standing up and gazing at the lithe beauty before her. "Perfect in every way and too beautiful to be real."

"I can't be perfect," Nyrielle teased, pulling Ashlynn toward the steps leading into the bath. "If I'm perfect, then you would have to be less enchanting than I am and that's impossible. You're far more intoxicating than I can be without sorcery."

The water, when Ashlynn stepped into it, was hot enough to be slightly uncomfortable until her body adjusted to the heat. Nyrielle, however, eased her into the pool one step at a time until both women sat on a ledge at the pool's edge.

The entire room felt like it had become part of some dream, cloaked in mists and warm enough to leave Ashlynn slightly lightheaded. The most real thing to her, the thing that she felt she could count on more than anything else, was the beat of Nyrielle's heart, echoing in her own chest, matching hers as both women's hearts beat faster.

"Let me," Nyrielle whispered, taking soap and a soft brush to wash Ashlynn's back.

The bath wasn't truly necessary for cleanliness, Ashlynn had washed almost as soon as she'd woken up after her trip to the villa and Nyrielle had bathed recently herself.

The important thing, to Nyrielle, was that she had an opportunity to soak in the warm water long enough to raise her own body temperature to something that resembled a living human's. As much as she knew Ashlynn tried to become accustomed to the chill touch of a vampire, that slight hesitation was something she didn't want interrupting their night.

Instead, as soap and bubbles made their skin soft and slick, Nyrielle wanted to melt the differences between them as much as she could, until they could become lost in each other's touch.

Slowly, the caresses became less one-sided as Ashlynn picked up a brush and bar of soap for herself, tracing her fingers over Nyrielle's warming skin before their bodies became entangled, sliding over each other in the warmth of the bath.

Several times, their lips sought each other's, tongues dancing as their hands explored the slippery softness of the other woman's body.

For a moment, the tips of Nyrielle's fangs hovered just above Ashlynn's neck as the vampire traced her tongue over the strong, steady pulse in the young witch's neck.

"You can," Ashlynn said, tilting her head slightly and pulling her hair out of Nyrielle's way.

"Not here," Nyrielle said, pulling back and gazing deeply into Ashlynn's emerald eyes. "The night is still too young for that," she whispered.