

The Vampire 248

Chapter 248 248: To Be A Healer

For Ashlynn, the lesson Cecile gave her was different than anything she'd experienced from Nyrielle in admittedly sparse lessons on sorcery. Where Nyrielle's methods relied on simple will and a few words to shape the energy she needed, Cecile's lessons were much more precise with detailed instructions and specific words that needed to be used for each purpose.

The complexity of it was much greater, but one look at the men Cecile had healed to demonstrate the technique was all Ashlynn needed to understand the power of her methods.

"Cher," Cecile said, her voice commanding attention as she guided Ashlynn through her first healing attempt, "you gotta stretch yourself out like a tender vine. Think of your spirit like roots, diving deep into de earth. Pull up the life-energy, not from the hard ground, non, but from the living things dat grow. Dat's de true magic of healing."

"So I need wood energy," Ashlynn said, nodding in understanding. As the Mother of Trees, her greatest strength was supposed to lie in using the power of Wood, and she already had some experience reaching out to trees for help when she escaped from the shallow grave that Owain's knights buried her in. "Then, I should imagine the wounds healing in the same way grass grows after its cut or new branches grow after they're cracked."

"Watch yourself now, girl," the old woman cautioned, her tone sharp but not entirely unkind. "A broken branch, she don't repair herself. The tree, she makes a new branch, yeah? Better to think like the grass, we may walk on him but he's resilient and quick to recover."

"But listen close here. Your words, dey got power. Dey give de energy shape and purpose. We might not know how a wound knits together, but we know what helps; keeping clean, bandaging right, giving the body what she needs to mend."

As the old woman spoke, a clearer image formed in Ashlynn's mind of what she needed to do. Already, if she closed her eyes, she could feel the dense, lush vegetation outside the hut. Trees and vines, bushes and grasses, in this place, life was abundant.

"You stretch your senses out," Cecile explained, speaking softly as she felt Ashlynn's reach expand. "Like roots seeking water. Find de energy you need, tap into it, pull it close. Shape it with your will, with de words you speak. Do dat, cher, and remember what you seen me do," Cecile said. "Help dis poor man sleep, ease his pain, and heal his wound."

Feeling the energy around her, there was one source of energy that seemed both stronger and easier to grasp than any of the others. Focusing on that, Ashlynn repeated the words she'd learned from Cecile.

Energy poured into her like a flood, slamming into her body with incredible force as if she'd yanked a heavy iron kettle out of the hearth only to drop it on her own foot. Once she had the energy, she had to give it somewhere to go or it would crush her!

Focusing again, she imagined the form of a great willow tree, its silver-green leaves glistening with dew, dripping down onto the injured man like a healing rain. Each phrase in the incantation became harder to speak than the one before it as the pressure of the energy flowing through her seemed to press down on her body, forcing her to bear the weight of the magic she was using.

The moment she completed the incantation, it felt like a dam burst within her. Energy poured through her, raining down on the injured warrior. Unlike the first man that Cecile tended, this one suffered numerous smaller injuries, dozens of cuts and cracked ribs.

No sooner had Ashlynn begun to relax in relief than her magic connected with the injured man's wounds than she realized that the burden of healing hadn't ended. As each drop of energy fell on the injured man, for the briefest of moments, she felt the pain he felt. From torn flesh to bruised and broken bones, she had to experience each of them before she could blot the pain away.

By the time she finished treating the injured warrior, her dress was drenched with sweat and her body still shook with the memories of pain, even though she hadn't been injured at all.

"This," Ashlynn said with a shaky voice as she shot the other woman a glare. As supportive as she'd been, it seemed like Cecile still wanted her to give up, she was just being more subtle in her methods. "Is it always like this? Or does it get easier? Is there a way to handle the pain?"

"You can't take away a hurt wit' out knowing de hurt, cher," the Willow Witch said. "Dis was jus a little taste. You need to learn de rest too," she added. "Some of dem have been poisoned. Some infected. Some feverish. De words for all dat, you'll learn dem too, yeah?"

"Yes," Ashlynn said, standing up from the place she'd knelt on the floor. For a moment, her legs were wobbly and she had to steady herself on the wall of the hut, but she refused to be defeated by her first attempt.

One look at the man on the rush mat, sleeping peacefully with a calm, relaxed expression was all it took for her to push herself forward. The energy she'd used, unlike the power of sorcery, hadn't come from her. She'd drawn on the strength of nature. As long as she could bear up to the strain of using it, she could keep going without worrying about running out of energy.

It was the biggest reason why witches were so feared, and therefore respected among the Eldritch world. It was one thing to fight a skilled sorcerer, but to fight a witch was to fight the world itself, and there were very few people who possessed the strength to fight the world and win.

Finishing the healing took hours. Despite her earlier bravado, she quickly realized that after three people, she struggled to reach out for more energy and even when she succeeded, the pressure that built on her shattered her concentration, leaving her unable to give the energy shape or form.

Resting for an hour allowed her to recover enough to heal the ailing child, but after doing so, she felt even more drained than she'd been before taking the brief rest. It took over an hour of resting, eating a small meal of bread and water, before she could complete the healing of the people in the hut.

Wounds, like the ones suffered by the warriors, she found to be painful but also very direct and straightforward to heal. Even if they were extensive, the pain she felt crashed into her body all at once. Cleansing toxins from the body, however, was a much more delicate process and the words Cecile gave her made it clear just how slow and arduous the healing would be.

"Wise willow of the water's edge,

Pull this poison thread by thread.

By your power, sure and strong,

Purge all that which does not belong.

Through bark and branch let toxins fade,

Till only wholesome flesh remains."

The young woman suffering from a snake bite had spent so long waiting for her turn to be healed that the venom had spread throughout her body, seeping deep into her veins and viscera.

When Ashlynn removed the venom from her 'thread by thread' she felt as though she was drawing a thorn covered vine through the veins of her hand where she touched the bite, not once but several times over the course of a quarter of an hour until a healthy parlor returned to the young woman's scaly hide.

When she finished, however, Cecile wasn't done with her lesson.

"Come outside with me, cher," the old woman said, grabbing Ashlynn's arm with her scaly hand once again and giving the young woman no choice. "Now dat you've done it, now dat you've made your will felt, you need to see what dis cost," she said.

"Den, you can decide how you feel about payin' it," she said, roughly pulling Ashlynn through the door.

Outside, Ashlynn could dimly feel something looming. Something that hadn't been there when she started. Whatever it was, it felt cold and dead... and somehow, she couldn't shake the feeling that it was here because of her.