

The Vampire 260

Chapter 260: Healing a Soul

"That's the Uncle that I remember from so many years ago," Nyrielle said, a smile blossoming on her lips that revealed her own wickedly sharp fangs. "Welcome back Uncle Tausau," she said, withdrawing her power from the older vampire.

The technique she used was still incredibly crude and there was much that she didn't understand. She had spent nearly two centuries learning to understand the soul and how to destroy it. Her shadow claws could pierce to the core of a person's being, withering away the thoughts and passions that defined them one at a time just as easily as shredding their innermost self in an instant, leaving nothing behind but a tattered and broken shell of a person. She understood destruction very well.

This time, however, when she unleashed her darkness on her Uncle, it bore as much resemblance to her previous actions as a surgeon's careful ministrations did to the skillful wielding of a butcher's knife. While both might neatly separate flesh, the skill required by the surgeon was ten times greater and the results couldn't be more different.

In order to reignite the passions that once defined her Uncle's existence, she had precisely targeted and pierced portions of Tausau's innermost soul. Time had left much of the man's soul little more than a ground-down and withered husk but once she'd provoked him into revealing his true self to her, she was able to take action.

Instead of rending or excising the vulnerable essence of her Uncle, she'd guided tiny portions of the living energy she gained from Ashlynn whenever she fed on her Seneschal into those exposed and desiccated places in his soul.

What happened next was, at present, completely beyond her control. It was like watering a plant. She could only pour the water on the right spots. Whether the plant grew or not wasn't up to her. Once

Ashlynn had better command over her own powers, Nyrielle intended to work more actively with her lover to develop this unique magic, but for now, she was just happy that she'd achieved some small success with Zedya and now, with her Uncle Tausau.

"I, I feel like the man I was long ago," Tausau said, staring at his hands and pressing them to his chest as if he couldn't believe that the heart he felt beating beneath his palms truly belonged to him. "Nyrielle, no, your Eternity," he said, overwhelmed by the sensations flooding through him. "What is it that you've done to me?"

As he spoke, he couldn't help but stand, flexing his slender, disproportionately small arms and his dexterous fingers. The sensations he felt from his body were no different than before. He was still, he realized, softer than he had been more than a hundred years ago.

"Hunter's Focus. Envelop Me," he whispered, using sorcery long neglected to bring out the greatest acuity of his vision, hearing, and sense of smell. All of this, he turned on himself, until he understood his own state better than he had in years.

Just hours ago, the results he discovered wouldn't have troubled him. He would have passively accepted that his powers had grown weaker with disuse, even his sorcery couldn't bring back the edge he'd held in his prime. Now, however, these revelations provoked an extreme sense of disgust and self-loathing.

No wonder his niece had looked at him with such disdain when she arrived. He truly had fallen and time had eroded much, much more than his ability to feel. Now that he could feel again, however, that very disgust would drive him to make up for these deficiencies. Within a year or two at most, he silently vowed that he would regain the edge he'd lost.

"You said that eventually, I would understand how time would grind away at me," Nyrielle said, pulling him out of his thoughts. On her lips hung a smile that was far warmer and more genuine than would

have been possible for her just months ago. "You aren't wrong, Uncle, but the process isn't as irreversible as we've been taught."

"The gift I've given you is rare and precious," she said, her eyes hardening and her tone growing colder. If other vampires came to know the effects of drinking Ashlynn's blood, it would become much harder to keep her lover safe from those who would be willing to risk her ire for a chance to feel again. "I trust that you won't speak of this gift or how you obtained it."

"You have my word, your Eternity," Tausau said vehemently. Since his grand-niece had chosen to trust him with such a heavy gift, we wouldn't dare speak of it to anyone else. "I'll spill my blood and sign a pledge for you if you require it," he offered.

"Unnecessary," Nyrielle said, waving it off. As much as she knew Tausau meant what he said, there were still two people who could force the words from him no matter what he wished. It might technically be possible to resist the commands of his own sire, but Nyrielle didn't believe for a moment that Tausau had that kind of strength of will, even after she reignited his ability to feel.

As to the idea of resisting the orders of Bardas, the idea was so laughable that she never considered the possibility that Tausau could keep this secret from the head of his line. If Bardas commanded Tausau to betray her, no amount of ancient loyalty or lingering affection would stop him from turning his fangs on her.

"There is something else I require," Nyrielle said. Healing Tausau was only the first step. As much as she cared for the motley-looking man who had often visited her grandsire in her youth, there was a limit to what her affection would compel her to do.

On this journey, the warm energy that flowed into her with Ashlynn's blood was a finite and nonrenewable resource. Even though the bond she held with Ashlynn pulsed stronger than ever before

as her lover fought back against whatever sought to tear them apart, the bond was not so strong as to allow her to feed on her lover from a great distance.

When what she had gained from Ashlynn on their last night together was gone, there would be no more for many months until they met again in High Fen City. Expending that energy on Tausau had been a deliberate move to place the older vampire in her debt. And now, she intended to collect.