

The Vampire 250

Chapter 250 250: The Real Test Begins

The battle began with the blaring of horns and balls of flaming sorcery hurled by the Inquisitors of the Church. Torrents of arrows were unleashed from both sides and the invaders charged forward with ladders to scale the walls and a giant covered battering ram to assault the gates.

It wasn't long before Ashlynn and Heila lost track of the battle. The first wounded to arrive had been badly burned by the flames of the Church and only a witch's purifying magic could extinguish the flames. The smell of singed hair and burned flesh filled the healer's tent as the two witches began their gruesome work.

"I can't purge the flames without the help of the Ancient Oak," Heila said after her second failed attempt. "Drawing on the cedar trees, it's not enough to push back against this sorcery."

"The Ancient Oak will understand," Ashlynn said, finding herself in the same position. Perhaps, if she was more skilled, she could find a better way but her abilities were limited by what she'd been able to learn from Cecile. "But as mighty as the Ancient Oak is, its strength isn't limitless. Only call on it for aid to resist the Church's sorcery."

Both women worked as quickly as they could, sending soldiers back to the battlefield as soon as they had recovered enough to fight. Doing so took a greater toll on the witches, but what choice did they have?

As the day wore on, the variety of injuries they encountered grew greater. Arrows that pierced through gaps in armor, helmets caved in leaving even the mighty members of the Clan of the Great Claw staggering and confused until their head wounds could be treated. The tide of suffering seemed never-ending.

By midday, Heila had collapsed and needed to rest. An hour later and Ashlynn herself succumbed to the toll of feeling the horrific injuries inflicted on the brave warriors who clung to life long enough to reach the healer's tent. Not everyone fighting held on long enough for Ashlynn or Heila to reach them.

The two women moved to working in shifts, one healing, the other resting, until a familiar flame-haired figure found his way into the tent.

"Ollie!" Ashlynn cried, jumping to her feet despite the fact that she'd only just begun to rest. "Ollie, you..."

Ashlynn trembled at the sight of him, momentarily too stunned to reach out and touch the young man who said he wanted to become her protector. His coat of mail was ragged and torn and the gambeson beneath it was stained with a mixture of his blood and the blood of his enemies.

All of these things were to be expected and she'd seen many soldiers in a similar state. What she hadn't seen from anyone brought before her was an arm that had been sheared clean off. The links of Ollie's armor looked like they were nothing more than threads cut by a knife. The edges of the cut were impossibly smooth, and the damage to his arm was equally precise, as if a great butcher's cleaver had cleanly hewn his arm from his body halfway between the elbow and shoulder.

"Ollie, what happened," Ashlynn said to the pale-faced young man. Only a miracle of quick thinking on the part of the soldiers who brought him here had saved his life, lashing a belt around the stump of his arm, but if she didn't act quickly, he wasn't likely to survive much longer."

"I, I found him," Ollie said weakly. "Sir Tommin. And. His Holy Light Sword," he said, closing his eyes against the pain. "I, I failed to even. To even..."

"Hush now," Ashlynn said, her emerald eyes growing cold and hard. She still needed to collect a debt from Sir Tommin for helping to bury her in a shallow grave. Now, it seemed he owed her even more. Retribution, however, would have to wait.

"Help me, Heila," Ashlynn said, summoning the other woman to work with her. "The Sovereign's Restoration," she said, ensuring that the other woman understood what she intended to attempt.

"But, my lady, that..." Heila started to say, only to cut herself off. If Ashlynn intended to go so far for Ollie, then she could only accompany her.

"O Ancient One of branch and bole,

Whose power makes the broken whole..."

Both women chanted in unison, their voices blending together as they reached out for the power stored deep within the Ancient Oak.

"Who draws life's essence from the land,

Now place that power at my command."

Energy surged between the two women as a deep, rich emerald light enveloped Ollie. The invocation did nothing for his pain, and the instant their magic touched his severed arm, both Ashlynn and Heila staggered as a white-hot, pulsing, throbbing pain filled their arms. Their right arms went limp, dangling uselessly at their sides while pain clawed at their minds yet still they pressed on.

"Through channels carved in earth and bone,

Let flesh and sinew now be grown."

Tendrils of emerald light snaked their way along Ollie's body, flowing like roots that twisted around the stump of his arm before extending further, slowly taking the form of his severed limb. Outside, the sound of branches shaking filled the air and the fluttering of leaves drowned out the distant sounds of battle.

"Your might that splits the mountain stone,

Now shape anew this flesh and bone!"

With a final cry, the powerful presence of the Ancient Oak descended into the healer's tent, its roots pulling new flesh and bone from the stump of Ollie's arm like a branch regrowing from the point where it had been cut.

Ollie screamed in pain, his mind no longer able to endure the agony of powerful magic rippling through his body to restore his missing limb. That same pain drove Ashlynn and Heila to their knees before Heila fainted dead away, collapsing to the ground in a heap and drawing only ragged, shallow breaths.

Ollie didn't fare much better, succumbing to the pain of the healing, but when Ashlynn pulled herself over to the stretcher he lay on, she found his arm, complete and whole. A line could be seen where his flesh was tender and new like a newborn babe's, never touched by the sparks of the hearth or the light of the sun. But he was whole and complete.

Outside the tent, a loud crack echoed like the sound of a lightning strike, followed by a deep groan and then a loud crash.

"What, what was that?" Ashlynn asked one of the servants assisting with the wounded.

"My, my Lady Ashlynn," a horned soldier said, stepping into the tent. "The Ancient Oak, it, it..."

"Take me to it," Ashlynn said. She was too drained to stand, but the sound already filled her with dread. Restoring a lost limb went far beyond any normal healing. It was a true miracle of witchcraft that could be accomplished by nothing else.

Even among the famed Holy Healers of the Church, only the most legendary figures were rumored to have possessed such an ability and it had been so long since it had been seen that it was regarded as a myth by many spiritual scholars.

When Ashlynn exited the tent, the sight of the Ancient Oak that greeted her stole most of the remaining strength from her body. The massive trunk of the ancient tree looked like it had been cleaved in two,

with a third of the tree snapping off and tumbling to the ground. Dead leaves littered the ground and the sacred aura of the tree felt distant and withdrawn, as though it refused to offer up any more than it already had.

When Ashlynn chose to risk such a powerful invocation, she did it in the belief that she could restore the Ancient Oak in the same way that she'd restored the cypress tree. Now, however, it appeared that in order to heal an injury that was impossible to heal, she would have to inflict an even more impossible-to-heal injury on the Ancient Oak who made it possible.

"I'm sorry," Ashlynn said, falling to her knees in exhaustion. "If we survive this, I'll make it up to you, somehow."

"I'll find a way to make this work," she heard, her own youthful voice echoing in her ears. "I promise."