

LETTING GO

Lorens gave a heavy sigh, running a hand through his sandy brown hair as he looked down at the city. Everything he knew was collapsing and burning around him and he didn't know what to do about it. Well, more like there wasn't anything he could do other than go along for the ride and try not to drown. A flash of anger led him to kick a nearby rock and he watched as it sailed well out of sight before coming down, the sound of shattering glass and a scream reaching his ears. Oh, right, damn it, he was a vampire now complete with all those wonderful side-effects. He raised a hand to the bite marks along the side of his neck, scabbed over and still slightly raised. He remembered bitterly how he had gotten them, hating them with every fiber of his being. Though every other injury, even complicated things from before he was turned, had repaired themselves, those bite marks remained. It was a permanent physical reminder of that terrible day, one he would never forget regardless of any momento and however much he wanted to.

Vampire...it was a hard word to associate himself with. The vampires of lore and even the ones at the borders of the true world always seemed to be so suave and cool, exuding a confident aura and charm that drew everyone in. He was nothing like that, too gangly, awkward, and full of too many health woes. Even as whispered stories spread through the village of vampires lurking nearby, he had never given it a second thought. On the off-chance the stories were true, there were far better targets than he, surely. And yet, here he stood, facing an eternal existence full of a thirst for blood and countless other things he had never anticipated.

He simply could not wrap his mind around the new reality that he of all people had become a vampire though he had to admit, it had been immensely helpful. Lorens had always been sickly, barely able to survive and certainly unable to live. He had been a sickly wraith, a bane in the village more tolerated than accepted. Now, for the first time in his twenty seven years of life, he was able to run and jump, be free. He was strong, agile and sharper of mind with senses that seemed unreal. Having heard all the stories hadn't prepared him for what it would be like to actually be one. On the downside, he could not stay out long in the sun without getting a horrible sunburn, not that he ever had been able to before what with all the medications he had been on. Really, that wasn't a downside since he'd never really been able to tolerate the sun in the first place. Of course, he also now required blood and, being so young, he was reliant strictly on human blood. He was certainly lucky to live in a village large enough that there were those society would not miss. It sickened him initially to think that he had been one of those people.

His first feeding had been an abusive drunkard who often prowled the streets, harassing everyone who came his way. Lorens had expected it to be hard, to feel hesitation about it, but the instincts were there now and it had been easy. There had been no regret from draining the man dry, still was none. Even if he hated to admit it, being a vampire came natural to him. The hardest thing to accept was the harsh, abrupt way his human life had come to an end.

It was early morning, just after the sun had risen and before it had fully woken. The light was wonderfully soft, temperature mild, and a pleasant breeze ran through his hair as Lorens sat in the forest at the outskirts of the village. He was happy to simply enjoy the beautiful surroundings and the serenity. The village had grown even in his short lifetime and Lorens relished the chance to escape and forget how society looked

down upon him. Here in the forest, he was not judged and found lacking. The nature around him could not care less who or what he was or, really, that he was there at all. Though that had the possibility of seeming morbid, Lorens took it as a comfort. He came to the forest every day he could, even days when he shouldn't.

"My, my, you look tasty," a female voice suddenly whispered in his ear and the startled Lorens looked up into the crimson eyes of a woman who was giving him an almost lecherous grin that showed sharp fangs. The woman was skinny, almost skeletal, with thin, dirty blond hair which fell in ratty strands that hadn't seen water or shampoo in far too long. Her clothes were admittedly of a quality most could not afford but far too big and reduced to little more than rags. She reminded him almost of a broken doll that had been tossed aside and gone mad. All of these were details Lorens picked up on later when the scene played over and over in his mind. At the time, all he could see were those feral crimson eyes, holding little humanity or sanity, and the sharp fangs that were tipped red. A feral vampire...

Before Lorens could so much as make a single movement let alone say a word or try in any way to defend himself, the woman had picked him up, almost cradling him to her chest as one would a young child. He barely had time to register that before she dug her fangs deep into his neck. Lorens cried out at the sharp pain that echoed throughout his body, coursing through his veins as surely as his blood. He could feel that blood fleeing his body, humanity right along with it, as his vision faded until he had seen nothing but black and his human life came to an end.

He had woken in the forest where he had fallen, completely alone or so he had first thought. There had been a young girl near him though he could tell from her eyes that she was the same as he now was and far older than her form belied. She explained the vampire had once been her sire but had gone mad and was attacking everyone she ran across. The girl, seeming perhaps scarcely eleven physically, assured him that the woman would never come back here again but, really, what did that matter? She seemed to have meant there to be some level of comfort to the words but the mere idea of that was absolute absurdity. The damage was done to him and now he was stuck, unable to go back to his old life but not yet willing to step into his new identity. He was alive but not, intact but not, stuck at a crossroads where both paths seemed to lead straight off a sharp cliff into a terrible abyss.

The girl stayed with him, teaching him everything he needed to know and gently guiding him when all he wanted to do was give up, be free of everything. Always in the back of his mind, however, was his lover, the woman who paid no attention to his disabilities, how fragile his body was and how fleeting his life may end up being. She had said time and time again when he had fallen flat on his face or ended up having to see the medic for the thousandth time or been ridiculed the millionth time that she loved him for who he was, his heart, not his body. That and the girl's gentle reassurances and sometimes quite literal slaps back to reality kept him going. They were reminders that there was a life after his human life had been ground to a screeching halt. The world was open to him now, he could leave this village and never look back but...not alone, he hoped.

After a week of her aid, the girl moved on, far from the sort to put down roots anywhere. The two bid a fond farewell and Lorens had gone back to the village. With the help of little Eliza, Lorens had

begun to look positively towards the eternity that awaited him. And yet...he didn't even like to dwell on how his homecoming, if one could call it that, had gone. Vampire hearts did not beat but they surely could break.

"I love you but I will not be stuck with eternity, will not be turned. Take me as I am or don't at all."

The words still echoed in his mind, breaking his heart into smaller pieces with each echo. The potential life he had entertained while training to learn his new body and master his cravings had shattered the first time, already ground to dust and scattered. She had worn such a haughty expression as if thinking that he would instantly pull her into his arms and confess his undying love. But...undying...that was closer to the truth than she seemed to realize. He would never age, never die unless actively killed and that would be hard to accomplish. He was now undying, destined or doomed to eternity but she was very mortal, extremely fragile. The world was growing daily, new realms being discovered and bringing with them new diseases to add to the countless other potential methods for life to be cut short. Even if she avoided that multitude of ways and no tragedy befell her, the reaper would take her eventually, such was the human fate. What was given life must also have it taken away.

He had been frozen for a few endless minutes before she stormed off, angered by his lack of decision but how could he be so flippant about such a huge choice? He knew people said it was better to love and lose than never love at all but he highly doubted those people were immortal vampires for whom forever truly was until the end of time. Anything he did with her would be tainted by sorrow as long as she clung to her humanity. Anything he got used to, began to crave at any point, would be lost forever in time. He didn't know if he was strong enough.

After a short internal debate, he ran to her house, feeling a rush from being able to run now. He was strong, full of vigor that he had never known. He felt like a new man but as he watched her eyes light up like gems, he felt that same, deep love well in his chest. All that mattered was being together, the sweet time they would have. He was now able to treat her like she deserved, be the man she had always wanted.

She had moved into his house today as it was far larger, her scent and her things along with her. Everything that was "he" was now "we" and it was a hard adjustment, a careful balance. Now she was with him every day, always there when he woke and when he fell asleep. It was a blissful period as he explored all of the advantages of his new state while being with his beloved all the time. However, there were also problems concerning the more negative aspects of his new existence. She refused to accept them and it was a careful balance to hide his vampiric needs while catering to them as best he could. There were days he could not hunt as she did not let him out of her sight at all. He had never known hunger like that before and never wanted to again. It had also taken a severe sunburn to get her to accept that he could still not be in the sun though she still refused to accept what he was.

She had walked in on his feeding today, seen him draining dry one of the town drunkards. He had never felt guilty over his required sustenance, not since that initial spark back in the forest as he had wrapped his mind around what he now was. However, as she gave him a look of horror before running out, he felt like dirt, no, less than dirt, even though he had done nothing wrong. She had always pretended he was human, ignored every sign that he was not and he simply had to walk around her, delicately dance on eggshells. Now she couldn't pretend anymore, had to come to grips with what was needed for them to be together forever. Hopefully?

She hadn't accepted it and was still just as stubborn as ever. There was now a five year age difference between them, still a narrow margin but one that was noticed as the comments of how young he looked for his age had started. Because he looked so different and vampires were not generally publicly accepted yet, he had taken on a new identity, already starting to weave a web of lies, a web that was his alone to bear. He only hoped he could survive it.

He had proposed today and she gladly accepted. It was a bittersweet proposal for him as it was partially so that he could claim her as much as she had claimed him. She had woven herself completely and potentially irrevocably into his life and heart. He had begun to make a scrapbook of memories. Much to her chagrin, he saved as many things as he could, refusing to let even minor, frivolous things go simply because she had touched them. As much as she made it clear she hated it, she still refused to alleviate it so time still marched on while he was still so very frozen.

It had been fifteen years now and they were forced to move as he could no longer pretend to simply age well. She had been the one to propose it, likely due to one too many comments on how poorly she had aged in comparison. Her insecurities abounded and though she spun it as though the move was for him, he knew better. He could also see the glimmer of regret in her eyes but it was too late now. Even if he turned her, they could never again be together in public as a couple. It was too late and things simply had to play out.

She had apologized today, twenty years later, far too late to be meaningful or have any real effect. It had taken her getting too old for them to truly be together to accept what he had been telling her for twenty years. Now they were stuck in the roles of mother and son until that changed again. Now she could see the march of time that was pulling them apart but it mattered little at this point. She was being swept away towards the inevitable end however much she dug her claws into him., all because she had not let him sink his fangs into her. Their entire home was filled with her scent, with her

very being; very few things were his alone. Nearly every part of his routine, his very existence, aside from the vampiric, of course, revolved around her. How could he let go when she inevitable ran out of time?

It was when someone made an absent comment about how handsome her grandson was that she broke down in tears like he had never seen before. As he tried to offer comfort, noticing with chagrin how differently she fit in his arms, she sobbed, words all but incoherent. It broke his heart, scarred as it had become, and he tried to do his best to soothe her even as he was forced once again to face the fact that his time with her was running out. The Grim Reaper grew closer every day.

The grains of sand in the hourglass were coming to a stuttering end. She was nearly ninety now, no longer able to walk or breathe on her own. The look in her eyes told him everything he needed to know; today was the last day. They had never said goodbye when they separated for any time since there would always be a hello to follow. Today was the day for goodbye, where there would be no more hellos, at least, not any that would be shared. He asked her what she wanted to do that day and spent the day cuddling her close, peppering kisses along her frail, wrinkled skin and lips that had long since gone thin and dry. As he did, he took in every detail, committing it all to memory; her smell, the weight, however diminished, of her body in his arms. After today, it would all simply be memory.

In those final moments, she told him to move on with his life, to find someone to spend eternity with. She apologized for her selfishness but it was far too little far too late. Vampires were meant to heal nearly instantly from all wounds but he didn't think they were any stronger than humans when it came to emotional wounds. In fact, he was quite sure they were weaker in that regards. He was, at least, still so very weak however his body had grown strong. How could he simply move on and find someone else when she had been an integral part of his life, had been his life since he was twenty five? She had woven herself so thoroughly into his heart that there was no way to simply extract her, to find the sweetness in the memories. To extract her would be to leave nothing left of his heart. He wouldn't have to move on, he would have to build anew. He wasn't sure how he could manage that, if he could manage it...

He stared almost blankly at the polished granite stone in front of him, finding all of his tears had already been cried, taking everything he was and leaving nothing behind. Everything had died the moment she had drawn her last breath. He hadn't fed in the five days since she died but the resultant pain hadn't even been enough to overcome his grief. He was so very empty inside, heart left with such gaping holes that it had withered and died. How could he move on when there was nothing left? He had imagined so many times ever since he had run back to her on that fateful day what it would be like without her but he hadn't been able to imagine it. How could he live again? Typical of her, selfish to the end...maybe death would be preferable....

Lorens packed up his things and left that same day, having already pictured, in more vivid detail than he thought possible, how things would end even if no tragedy struck them. His heart was not strong enough to reform. It could recover from leaving her, eventually find someone else, but not to love and lose, to wrap everything he was in someone who he had to watch grow old and die, at best. The possibility of her being struck down in some sort of calamity was just as real if not quite as painful. Regardless, he couldn't handle the notion of giving everything he was to someone only to lose them to something he could do nothing about. If his pleas fell on deaf ears, as he was sure they would, he would be powerless, simply a rock in a fast-moving river. There was nothing Lorens could do about his new undead state but make the best of it. He wouldn't live his life pining for the humanity he had lost, would not cling to it. His body had moved on from humanity, so too should his heart and if his, well, now ex-lover didn't want to walk the path with him, he would move past her.

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*Lorens stared at the gravestone, amazed by just how impassive he felt. It had taken some time to get over her but every passing day had made him realize just how one-sided things had been, understand just how miserable eternity would have been if he had stayed. He had loved her with everything he was but that feeling had never been returned. Surely if it had been, she would have been willing to go into eternity with him. Their relationship had never been as deep as he had imagined, deluded himself into believing, really. She had needed to be needed and, weak as he had been, he was the perfect target. He remembered the scenes that had played out in his mind; even then he had known and had the good sense as to leave.*

*Suicide, those who knew had said. She had been afflicted with a terrible wasting disease, however common it was as it was something every human had to bear. She had elected to take her own life rather than try to fight it or simply live with it. It was rather pathetic, really. She had missed his father terribly, they told him as he masqueraded as his own son. There was anger at first, pure rage as she destroyed nearly everything that reminded her of him but that anger had given way to sorrow, pining, and regret. She loved him more after he was gone than she ever did while he was there.*

*Love, the thought made Lorens curl his lips into a bitter smile. She had never loved, such was her nature. Looking around for where his young son had wandered off to, Lorens left the place he had grown up in for the last time.*