

Tuberose

A Short Story by Jessie Lo

The sheets clung to my body like ink to paper, as I lay there, my lover of two years beside me. I watch as his chest slowly rises then falls like long forgotten waves crashing against the shore. His heart plays a steady beat, a song meant only for me. Some time passes and he's awake, his lips caressing mine before locking into place. "Do you always smoke after sex?" "No, this just kills time." I answer. "It helps me relax sometimes." "Can I try?" "Gods no, this shit will kill you and I want you around as long as possible."

He laughs, my Nikolas, and sits up to grab a glass of what I hope is water. I take a moment, the liquid masked by his hand. There is no scent, its water. I'd sigh in relief if I could, as I take a long drag of the cigar in-between my fingers. If I were human this would have filled my lungs, slowly eroding them to ash. If I were human, perhaps sleep would mean something to me, rather than just letting this immortal body of mine "rest". Perhaps I would dream like I used to. What I wouldn't give to feel that refreshed again. To dream endless nights and feel the sun against my cold, dead skin. Ah...now I remember why I don't smoke often. This shit makes me think.

I take one last breath before dousing it, blowing out the smoke like a hot kettle over the heat of a stove. Nikolas looks at me, his body marked with scars amongst other things. My Nikolas was a young man of twenty-two with dull olive skin and thick brown locks. He always spoke his mind, his answers direct with honesty as sharp as the blades he wields.

We were a part of something much greater than the lives of our own. We were Hunters, protectors of man from whatever lurked within London. He was my protégée and I his mentor. He disliked me greatly at the start, barely listened and always talked back, not that it was much different as he is now. But I always knew that my lack of humanity was what bothered him. My heart does not beat, this body does not age. I have been like this for years now and his prejudice clouded his judgement. How could someone who hunts beasts be a beast themselves?

On a particularly dangerous sort of hunt, I had taken more than a bullet for him. Nikolas was young, inexperienced and reckless. He shot the beast with a regular bullet, but it held to no effect. Only silver would kill it and while I had taken a good beating protecting the boy, I killed the creature. Slit its throat from ear to ear with a silver blade of my own. Later that night he had come to me and asked what my first kill was like, what I had felt. I told him I felt nothing and to mind his own damn business. I was just another monster who fed on the living, who needed blood to survive. Being a Hunter was a respectable job, but it could never keep me fed.

Being a homosexual in London was not something people were vocal about, rather it was a crime against God. I was already unnatural, might as well become something worthy of the devil himself. In London, if you want to love a man as a man, you must do what I did and become a fairy. Pretty and mischievous and mythical to a degree. So, I dress as a woman, charge a fair price and in return for their pleasure, I get my fill of blood.

It is not a bad life that I live, but a fair one. If I keep to myself and become useful, then perhaps I can remain busy enough to see what happens next. It worked for the last hundred years, perhaps it will work again. "Amadeus, are you alright?" Nikolas asks, his hand pressed against my cheek. Perhaps I have been staring for too long, but my eyes cannot help but linger.

"Of course, *mon cher*." My dear.

His hand circles around the shape of my face. "You look pale, have you eaten?"

"Yes." I lied. I haven't eaten in days.

But my Nikolas is that of a sharp intellect, he knows I'm lying. I've taught him too well. When we became more than just partners, things started to change. He knew of my profession outside of Hunting. He knew of the lengths I had gone through on a weekly basis and he said nothing. I knew it bothered him greatly, no one wants to be with a whore. So, I stopped at the cost of my only source of blood and I wouldn't stoop down to rats and stray animals. I would just have to adapt like always.

Nikolas brought his arm to my mouth and pressed it against my lips. I slapped it, perhaps a little harder than needed. "What are you doing?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"You need to eat Amy."

I must have made a face, shown some form of weakness. My Nikolas brought me close and cradled my face like a mother to her child. Something in me gave in and suddenly I longed for a smoke.

"My first kill wasn't during a hunt. I wasn't even a hunter, just a boy, maybe twenty. He was a messenger boy and he was kind to me and...I was so hungry." I felt his grip tighten, but not out of malice. I felt...safe in his arms, safer than I had ever been.

I let his arm graze the surface of my lips once more, his blood calling to me. "I know you'd never hurt me...". To my better judgement I give in, barring my fangs. I close my eyes and let the warm blood rush in.