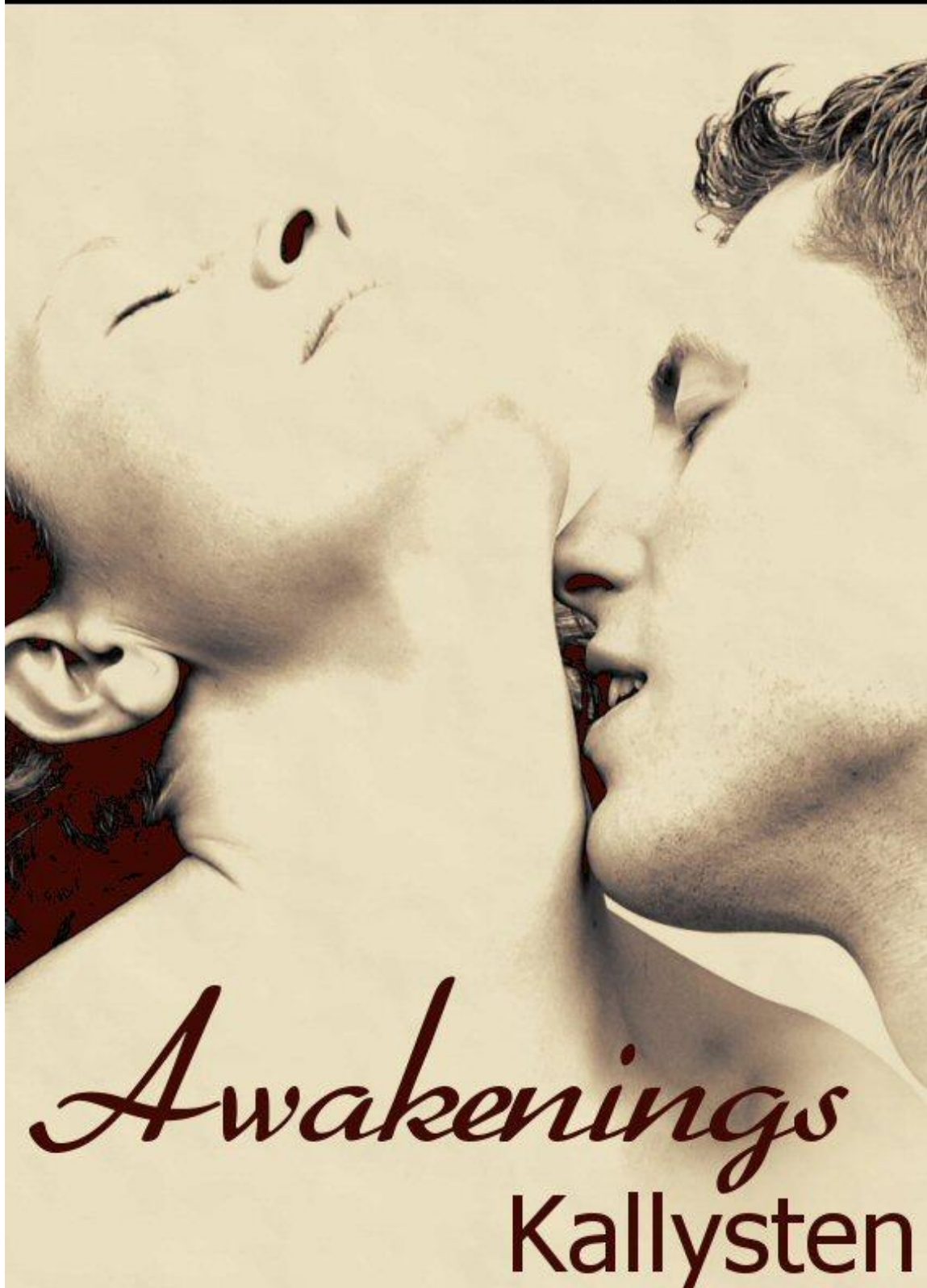


FREE STORY



Awakenings
Kallysten

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by Kallysten

(This story is set in the same universe as the novella Her Last Words and takes place directly after the first flashback.)

The villagers were cheering around her as Gabrielle left the town square and she remained very straight in her saddle. One of the lessons she had learned from her Sire was at the forefront of her mind at that moment; always, she had to remain in control of herself, and show the humans someone dignified, someone they could look up to, someone they could trust with their lives.

Soon enough, the cheers and songs behind them were nothing more than murmurs fading in the wind, and Gabrielle focused more fully on her companion. Erik was attractive, and certainly she wanted to be able to look at her first Childe and find beauty in what she saw. She would spend a lot of time with him, and she had to choose right. Appearances were only part of it, though. She couldn't abide foolhardiness, and needed someone who wouldn't cower in fear when he was first confronted with demons. The latter, she wouldn't be able to judge until they rode into battle, but she thought herself a good judge of character and she intended to know before long what kind of man Erik was beyond his daring eyes and pretty smile.

He appeared surprised when she slid off the horse to walk next to him, but he easily let go of his hold on the animal to let her guide it.

"He's a fine mount," he commented before she could decide where to start. "There isn't one as fine anywhere around."

She frowned at that, wondering if he thought that being chosen by her would grant him access to things he would otherwise not have known. He quickly reassured her however, continuing on the same quiet tone that she realized was his way of filling in a too awkward silence.

"My father runs the village stables, so he'll be the one to provide you with additional mounts when you need them. He has a good eye for horseflesh, the merchants of the other villages say as much, but it might take him some time to get horses as fine as this one. He'll find them, though. The whole village will provide you anything you may wish."

Gabrielle refrained from pointing out that it was the whole point of the pact she had sealed that night, and merely nodded. It wasn't greed that had made him speak, she now realized, but simply loyalty to his village and pride in what his people would do for her. What *he* would do, too.

"Did you work in the stables with him?" she asked, barely mindful that she was implying that he wouldn't work there anymore.

"Yes, my lady, same as my two younger brothers. I've never been as good as they are, though."

She could hear more, behind his words, things that he would never say aloud, maybe not even think to himself, but that had probably lurked in his mind for years, now. By tradition, on her first

night in town only the young people who were interested in becoming vampires would have introduced themselves to her; Erik had probably seen her as a chance to do something different from what was expected of him by his family. That explained his audacity when he had first talked to her, but it didn't guarantee that he truly wanted to become her Childe, or even that he understood what it meant.

"They wouldn't be your family anymore, if I were to sire you."

She could see that her pronouncement had shaken him, but after a little while he nodded nonetheless. "I know, my lady."

"And you'd probably have to feed from them, sooner or later," she continued, unyielding.

It took him a few more seconds to reply, and his voice was more subdued. "I know that too."

"And before you know it, they'll be gone, every single one of them, and their grandchildren will look at you and wonder if you know who they are. They'll always remember you came from their village, but you'll never be part of them anymore."

She could see a building in the distance, dark against the slowly lightening sky. It had to be her new lair. She stopped, and her horse, well trained, stilled instantly. Erik took a few more steps before realizing she wasn't by his side anymore. He turned back and looked at her, his features difficult to read in the twilight.

"Think about what I said, Erik. There is no shame in turning back now."

What she kept quiet was how much she had wished, in the months after her own siring, that her Sire would have told her what she had just explained to Erik. It wouldn't have changed her mind about accepting to become a vampire, but it might have made the transition easier.

She started advancing again and Erik immediately fell into step with her.

"I'll help to keep them safe," he said, so quietly that she wasn't sure whether he was talking for her benefit or to himself. "That'll be enough."

They didn't share another word until they had reached the lair. Erik took the horse to the stable and quickly, efficiently took care of its needs. Gabrielle watched him, leaning against the heavy stone wall of the stable, and tried to figure out what he was feeling. She could discern no fear coming from him, but there was a certain nervousness to his movements. The overwhelming impression she was getting from him however was sheer determination.

The more she thought about it, the more she realized she had been very lucky to find him tonight. He would do wonderfully as her first Childe.

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"And these are your bed chambers."

Gabrielle preceded him inside the room, the flames of the torch she held casting changing shadows upon the walls. Erik hesitated for an instant before following. He had shown her the lair

the village had constructed for her, explaining minor details here and there even though she hadn't asked much at all. The truth was, as time passed he was becoming more and more nervous. He wanted what she was offering him, wanted to become a vampire and help fight the demons that had plagued his village for so long, but he was slowly realizing that he knew very little about vampires, only what was common knowledge amongst humans.

All vampires had once been human, but they had died and been reborn with enhanced abilities. They were stronger and faster than humans, which were very useful skills to combat demons. They drank human blood to subsist, and it was said that they preferred the blood of virgins. Sunlight was dangerous to them, and one of the only two ways for them to die, the other being stabbed through the heart by a stake crafted of blessed wood. However, no one seemed to know how exactly the wood was supposed to be blessed.

"Are you changing your mind?" Gabrielle said, jolting Erik out of his thoughts. "It is still time."

"No, I'm not," he assured her immediately. "It's just..."

He faltered as he noticed that she was on the other side of the room, her back to him as she lit the dry wood piled up in the fireplace before slipping the torch into a metal hook on the wall. How had she known his thoughts were becoming hesitant? Could vampire read minds, maybe? Nothing but truth would do, if they had this ability.

"I just realized how little I knew about what it means to be a vampire."

"You wouldn't be just a vampire," Gabrielle said, slowly coming back toward him. "You would be my Childe."

He gave her a twisted smile. "I'm not sure I know what that means either."

Her hand rose to cup his cheek and Erik shuddered. It was the first contact she had offered him. Her fingers seemed a little rough; from fighting, he supposed. Her touch however was gentle, almost a caress.

"It means I will teach you everything you need to know, answer any question you may have. But I cannot do so until you awaken as a vampire."

He nodded, his understanding going farther than her words. There were probably many questions that would find an answer simply by his becoming a vampire.

She led him to the bed and made her sit on it next to her. He was trembling, just a little, and didn't manage to convince himself that it was because the room was cold.

"Close your eyes," Gabrielle murmured even as she closed the distance between their lips. He wondered, briefly, if it was with a kiss that she would make him a vampire, but already her mouth was drawing back. Tentatively, he rested a hand at her waist and tried to draw her back. She smiled and leaned in again, but instead of kissing his lips once more, she kissed the crook of his neck.

Then she bit.

He cried out, surprised, but before he could move the pain was vanishing behind a curtain of increasingly bright pleasure. His whole body was throbbing to the sensual pull of her mouth on his blood, and it was only when he felt her hand on him, cupping his cock through his breeches, that he realized he was hard. His second cry was one of pleasure that ended as a quiet, breathless moan. Feeling lightheaded, he closed his eyes, oblivious to anything that wasn't Gabrielle – her mouth on his neck, her left hand cupping the back of his head, her right hand rubbing rhythmically and finally making him see searing light behind his eyelids.

He wanted to protest when her lips left him and she eased him down onto the bed, but he couldn't manage to articulate a word, too tired suddenly to do anything but enjoy gently fading pleasure.

"Drink, Erik. When you awaken, you will be my Childe."

He barely had the force to do as she asked and with some difficulty he swallowed the thick liquid sliding on his tongue, its taste overpowering his senses. Everything turned black.

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The temptation to lie by Erik's side until he would wake was strong, and for a while Gabrielle indulged it, watching him sleep. She knew, deep down, that in truth he was dead; she was all too conscious of the void his heart had left when it had ceased to beat. But she also knew that he would regain life, a new life that he would spend by her side, calling her Sire each step of the way. The knowledge that she had sired him, that she had made him hers in such a profound way was staggering. She had felt for the first time like a true Master earlier that night, when she had accepted the cup of blood that had sealed the pact with Erik's village. But now that she had accomplished this primal act of vampires and made her first Childe, she realized she had been wrong. This was the true rite of passage, the passage from being a Childe to being a Sire.

She should have been tired, she had had a long ride to the village and an equally long night, but even though she could feel that the sun was far above the horizon already, she couldn't even think of sleeping; she was far too excited for that, and impatient for Erik to wake. With quick, efficient movements, she started undressing him, but as more flesh was revealed her gestures became slower, her fingers trailing over his golden skin. He had to have worked shirtless on more than a few sunny days. It was a pity that, with time, he would grow paler.

When he was finally nude, she shifted his position so that he lay in the center of the wide bed and drew a cover over him. She would be back before he'd wake, but she had other things to do in the meantime.

She would have had little to request if she had not sired anyone that night. The villagers had built a nice lair, spacious, safe and comfortable. But having Erik with her would change everything. Sitting in the common room, Gabrielle made a mental list. When the two village council members who had greeted her the previous night arrived, she was ready to demand. Weapons to train and to fight, a horse for Erik, clothes, more furniture for the common room, a board and pieces to play Stones and Water; all of her requests were noted down on a piece of parchment, with the two humans conferring ever so often over who in the village would be best suited to fulfill them.

Neither of them ever asked about Erik, but the simple fact that two of them had come showed they believed he was a vampire now. Gabrielle accepted a blood offering from each of them,

one for herself, one in Erik's name. It was late afternoon when they left the lair. Gabrielle was more wound up than ever.

When she returned to the bedchambers, she tried to keep her eyes off Erik, but even as she added wood to the fire, undressed, washed off the dust of the travel, her gaze returned to him, over and over again. Her Childe. She wasn't getting used to the idea. She was beginning to think she wouldn't get used to it for quite some time.

Droplets of water still clinging to her skin, she slid between the covers and close to Erik so that her body touched the length of his. The cover was heavy on them, and unnecessary. With no need for heat, covers, just like fireplaces, were superfluous. Still, Gabrielle had yet to meet a vampire who didn't crave heat, or the illusion of it.

At first, she did little more than stroke her thumb over his heart in her regular pattern that unconsciously echoed the beat he had lost. But as time passed, as the sun slowly descended and brought the hour of Erik's awakening closer, her fingers trailed from his collarbone, over his chest and down to his thighs, slow caresses in soothing repetitive patterns. Right on the edge of her memory, she could remember awakening from her mortal life and into a new one and feeling a little lost at the incredible changes that had come upon her. Her Sire had given her an anchor with his touch and his blood. She intended to offer Erik the same things.

The first sign was a slight trembling beneath her fingers, so faint that for a moment Gabrielle thought she had imagined it. But the tremor intensified as she continued her unhurried discovery of Erik's body, her hand finding new interesting places to explore. As light as her touch was, he shivered when she ran a single finger along his hardening cock from root to tip, and she heard him take a shaky breath. He was awake.

She brought her hand up to his mouth and pressed the inside of her wrist to his lips.

"Your first bite," she murmured, leaning in closer to him. "You may take as much as you wish."

For the brief moment it took Erik to comply, Gabrielle remembered once more her own beginnings, and the overwhelming hunger that had consumed her in her first instants. She could easily imagine that it was the same for Erik, especially when he bit deep and pulled hard on her blood. She allowed him to take as much as he needed; she wouldn't always grant him so much, but this one time, it was traditional.

"Sire."

She had expected the word to pass his lips once he had finished feeding, but to actually hear it sent a jolt through Gabrielle. She smiled.

"Yes, Childe."

As gently as she had before while he was still stirring, she trailed her fingertips over his skin, slow, sensuous patterns with no beginning or end. She had had many lovers before him, some humans, some vampires, but she was intent on discovering what Erik liked and what would make him tremble. Each touch was a learning experience and she watched his face for any reaction as well as felt the involuntary shudders that shook his body against hers.

His nipples hardened instantly when she flicked a nail against one nub then the other and traced each areola lazily. His stomach rippled when she brushed her knuckles against it; ticklish. The barest pressure was sufficient to make him spread his thighs just enough for Gabrielle to explore the underside of his balls with a single finger that soon traveled up the length of his hard cock and straight to the tip. It wasn't nearly enough contact, she was perfectly aware of that, but aside from a few noises deep in his throat, Erik let her do exactly as she pleased, remaining as still as he could probably manage.

"Good lad," she murmured, close enough to his skin that her words had to be tickling his cheek.

He shivered at the praise, and minutely turned his face toward her until his lips brushed against hers. She allowed the chaste contact for an instant before deepening the kiss, and slid her tongue past his lips even as she wrapped her hand fully around his cock. He moaned in her mouth before tentatively reaching out to touch her tongue with his own. At the same time, he thrust up and into her fist, but by tightening her hand she let him know that she wouldn't be rushed.

She took her time exploring his mouth with her tongue, hunting down every last trace of her blood. It always felt strange to discover her own flavor on someone else's lips, but in this case it was also intoxicating and it made her want more of him without any more delay.

Pushing back the covers, she sat up and astride his thighs, still firmly holding his cock in her tight hand. Erik's eyes widened as they traveled over her body and his tongue came out to touch his bottom lip.

"Can I..." he murmured, and hesitated until she raised a questioning eyebrow at him. "Can I touch you?"

A short nod was enough of an answer, and Gabrielle started stroking his cock in long, leisurely movements as she waited to see what he would do. His right hand was trembling as it hovered above her arm, then slid over her chest, always a hair short of making contact, as though he were afraid to burn himself by touching her. Grabbing his wrist, Gabrielle pulled his hand to her mouth and placed a wet kiss in the center of his palm. She then guided his fingers down her neck, against those almost faded scars that had made her what she was, and lower still until he was cradling her breast in his palm, a little too gently, maybe, but he would have time to learn what she liked best.

Letting go of his hand, she briefly rested her own against his chest as she raised herself to her knees and guided his cock to rub against her folds before pushing past them and inside her. He let out a shaky breath as she slowly sank onto him; his eyes were shining in awe.

With her hands trailing fluttering touches over his chest, neck and arms, she established a slow tempo. She took him just a little deeper every time she lowered herself onto him, sending ripples of growing pleasure through her body. And every time, she rose a little higher on the upstroke and made her desire for him more intense. He followed her lead and started moving his hips in counterpoint to her while his fingers caressed any inch of her he could reach. But as time passed, she could see the need growing on his face, just like she could feel it in his touch when he closed his hands at her hips to try to accentuate her movements.

She shook her head, smiling lightly. "My game, my pace. You will find release for me, lovely, by me, and not until I tell you to."

A fleeting frown marred Erik's features, and Gabrielle wondered if it was the command or the endearment that had brought it forth. It hardly mattered either way.

"I am your Sire," she continued just as softly, but punctuated the last word with a harsher thrust of her hips down. "You will obey me in this, as you will in everything else. Do you understand?"

She kept the same rhythm as she waited for his answer, sliding easily onto his cock until he filled her just perfectly, then rising again, just on the edge of losing him. His mouth moved wordlessly for a few seconds, but he finally found his words.

"Yes... Yes, I understand. But please, please..." His voice broke on a half sob. "I can't... Please, Sire, I can't do as you ask..."

Gabrielle's smile hardened a little as she gradually increased her pace, riding him harder with both hands on his chest for support. Erik closed his eyes as tightly as his hands closed on her hips.

"I'm not asking you for anything, Erik. I'm telling you what to do. And I know you're not going to disappoint me. Not now."

She didn't know whether it was the utter confidence of her tone or his desperate need for release that spurred him into action, but he stopped trying to arch into her to reach his own pleasure, and instead fumbled with slightly trembling hands to increase her own. His fingers returned to her breast and, a little less gently than before, massaged, stroked and pinched until Gabrielle started losing her own rhythm into that of his caresses. Biting back a moan, she took hold once more of his hand and led it to the apex of her legs. She hissed in pleasure when he pressed his thumb hard against the aching nub there; he took that as his cue to repeat the action, again and again, senseless pleas falling from his lips as he did.

She waited until she was on the edge herself before granting him permission in a whisper – "Now, Childe". Erik's hips snapped up, pushing him deep inside Gabrielle one last time as pleasure finally broke through and rippled through her, making her moan his name as she threw her head back.

Both their bodies were shaking when Gabrielle lay down against Erik. He was breathing hard beneath her, trying to catch a breath he didn't need anymore. She knew she would miss the involuntary reflex when he finally outgrew it. Then again, it had taken her decades to learn not to breathe, so she probably would have time to enjoy this quirk in Erik.

She started sliding to rest on her side next to him, but his arms tightened ever so slightly around her, holding her where she was. She tensed at that, unwilling to let herself be dominated in any way, but Erik's murmured words appeased her.

"Please. Stay."

She allowed herself to relax again, her head nestled in the crook of his neck, her lips barely brushing against the healing scars that made him hers. They wouldn't be able to remain like this for long, the night was only starting and there was much to do still, but for a little while, it couldn't hurt to simply enjoy the feel of her Childe beneath her, and the gentle, almost timid glide of his fingers up and down her back.

A question slowly made its way to the forefront of her thoughts, and Gabrielle almost asked it aloud before thinking better of it. She didn't need to know whether Erik had loved other women before her. He had been reborn this night, as her Childe and lover, and that was really all that mattered.

the end

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