

Chapter 111 - The Vampire's Servant

Opal was waiting in the entryway when I arrived home. She was a little early, but I didn't mind. I had her wait in my room as I took another shower. I didn't want to go into a building full of vampires smelling like a dhampyr and like fae all at the same time.

It was like chumming the water for sharks. They wouldn't be able to resist and it could put them into a frenzy, at least, that's what Victor and Talia said. I wasn't going to risk it and washed myself diligently.

I called Gray into my bathroom to sniff me and tell me if I smelled like fae. It was a little bit of a mistake, as I ended up on the vanity with my legs around his head as he licked and sucked my body into a ball of pure bliss. Then I had to take another shower because I smelled like werewolf.

Eventually, I was able to make it to my computer chair and a smirking Opal started on my nails. She said blood red nails would go perfectly with my forest green dress. She stripped the fading color off my nails and cleaned them up to be repainted.

While she was working, Opal chattered about her master. Gareth was excited for the ball tonight. He was certain he'd garnered enough good will from Victor that he would be rewarded.

"Gareth is talking way more than he normally does. He's downright chatty." Opal giggled. "He keeps talking about the calls from Victor thanking him and how he's sure it means that he's going to be among the trusted vampires in the territory. Seating tonight has meaning. I really hope he gets a trusted seat. It would make him so happy."

"I don't know about the seating. Talia took care of all of that. I'm sure Victor let her know who to put where, though." I smiled.

"You don't seem as nervous as you did last weekend. Is it because you're going to be around vampires instead of humans?" She asked.

I shuddered. "No. Actually, being around vampires is the worst part of this. Being with Victor makes me happy. Knowing that I'll make him proud tonight makes me happy. Being around all the vampires actually scares me a little. I know I'll be safe, but some part of me is terrified."

"Gareth will watch out for you. I told him what a good and sweet girl you are. I also told him how much all the vampires in the house seem to like you. You know, other than Victor. I know you're not feeding them, because I haven't seen a single mark on your skin. It has to just be a part of who you are." Opal smiled.

With a nod, I turned my attention to her painting my nails. They looked just like the bags of blood in the fridge, but glossy. I liked how pretty they were.

She moved on to my makeup. Opal drew a cat eye on my lids. She used some mascara to bring out my lashes and added a little blush to my cheeks.

“We want to play up your paleness tonight. The more you look like a vampire, the better. That was the message I got, at least.” She said.

Opal went over my lips with a lip pencil and gloss. When she showed me in the mirror, it was perfect. I didn’t look as innocent as I normally did. The dark lip pencil and heavy eye makeup made me look almost imperious.

I mimicked Victor’s cold expression and gave myself chills. It was like a whole other person was looking back at me. She was serious, solid, sure of herself, and absolutely not anyone’s snack.

After I was done admiring myself, Opal started in on my hair. She straightened it until it was a glossy black mirror. I was amazed by it and kept touching it until she threatened to use the straightener on my fingers if I messed it up again.

She pulled a layer of my hair back and put it into an intricate knot. The lower layer was brushed down over my neck. Opal helped me get the necklace Victor had given me on. She smoothed my hair back into place.

“Go get your dress on. I can help zip it for you.” She offered.

“Could you help me with something else?” I asked.

“What do you need?”

“I have stockings to go with this and they attach to a belt thing. I’ve never used anything like that.” I admitted.

“Go get the pieces on and I’ll help you hook them up.” Opal winked.

I went to my closet and pulled out a strapless bra, matching panties, the garter belt, and the stockings. Bellamy told me if I wore all of these under my clothes I’d have a lucky night. Or I’d get lucky that night. She worded it weird and I didn’t fully understand, but I’d take all the luck I could get.

When I was finished putting them on, I went back into the bedroom. Opal looked at me with a smirk.

“Damn. No wonder all these guys are so hot for you. You have a killer body. Let me show you how to do this so you can wear it for them sometime. My Gareth loves when I wear nothing but stockings and a garter belt.” She laughed.

Opal showed me how the straps hooked into the tops of the stockings. She showed me how to unhook them as well so I wouldn't have trouble at the end of the night. When I was all strapped in, she took a step back and looked me over.

"You know, with that makeup and hair, you look like you're about to dominate some naughty sub." Opal chuckled.

"I don't know what that means." I said as I turned back to the closet to get my dress.

"Oh, honey. I need to teach you a thing or two." She grinned and followed me.

While she helped me into my dress and got it zipped, Opal told me about men who like to be treated poorly by women and women who punish these men by stepping on them, forcing them to do things, and even spanking them. She said she had a friend who had a man that liked to lick her shoes while she spanked him with a riding crop.

I was stunned into silence. I didn't think I could ever do something like that. Though, the idea of Gray on his hands and knees doing whatever I told him to appealed to me. I couldn't imagine Victor doing anything like that. I could imagine tying him up and doing whatever I wanted to him, though.

"You're going to chew your lip gloss right off if you keep chewing your lips like that." Opal warned.

"Sorry." I blushed.

"You're all set. Master Nightshade should be ready by now. I'll just pack up my things and we can head down." She smiled.

I nodded and put things into the little handbag I would be taking with me. I had some extra gloss and a pencil for touching up my lips, some tissues, my phone, and a little cash. Victor insisted that I always have some on me in case of an emergency.

Once Opal was all packed up, we went downstairs. Gray was in the entry with Victor. Victor was wearing a suit that looked far more stately than Gray's had for the prom. His hair was styled nicely and he was looking at his watch. I hoped I wasn't late.

When I reached the entry way, Victor smiled.

"You look like a real vampire princess, my Echo." He murmured and swept me into his arms.

Victor danced me around the entryway. I could see Gray watching us with a smile on his face. I loved them both so much in that moment. Neither one was angry or jealous. They were just happy to be with me and see me grow.

"May I cut in?" Marius asked.

I hadn't seen him. He must have just arrived. I smiled at him. Victor bowed and handed me off.

Taking a breath and refocusing, I followed Marius' movements around the open entry. He moved quickly and with purpose. I didn't lag or drag behind him, keeping up with each step, even in heels.

"Where did you learn to dance?" Marius asked.

"I didn't. I just follow where you go." I answered.

"You should have stepped on my toes at least a few times by now if you hadn't had any training. Not that I'm complaining. I had these shoes shined specially for this occasion." He chuckled.

"Have you always been able to do this?"

"As far as I know. I can do it in training too. When I'm watching the boys spar, I know who is going to strike and how." I told him.

Marius stopped. He stared at me and a grin started spreading across his face. I didn't understand why.

"Dillon, tomorrow I want Echo to spar in training. I think she may surprise you."

"Got it. Is this a vampires only dance, or can I take over?" Dillon asked.

"If any wolf is going to dance with Echo, it's gonna be me." Gray growled.

"No wolves. She already holds the light scent because of her wolf blood, no need to make it worse." Marius replied, wrinkling his nose.

"The car is here to take us to the ball." Victor said.

"Then I shall let you go. I will be traveling with Talia. We need to pick up the other Masters from the Council. Go with you Solus Amor. I shall see you soon, daughter." Marius told me.

"Travel safely, papa. I want to see you at the ball having fun." I smiled.

"Ah, sweet Echo. Fun for papa isn't really fun for anyone else." He laughed and handed me off to Victor.

We said goodbye to everyone. I gave Gray a little kiss, since I wouldn't see him for hours. Victor led me out to the car. It was the same limo, with the same driver, as last weekend.

"Thank you, Hugh." I said as I got in the limo.

"No problem, ma'am." He replied.

Victor settled in next to me. He looked a little grumpy. I didn't know what had changed.

"What's wrong, Victor?" I asked.

"You know the driver. I didn't like the way he spoke to you." He growled.

"He was the driver from last weekend and he was only being polite. Please calm down. I'm only yours tonight." I told him.

"We should just go back home. This was a bad idea. I don't want any other males looking at you. I only just managed to hold myself together just then." Victor admitted.

"Victor. We need to do this. No one is going to touch me, no one is going to take me from you. Everything will be alright. Talia says this is a good way to ensure that vampires know and respect you. I want that. Our territory needs to be safe for me. It's the only way you and Gray will relax." I explained.

"My territory." He growled again.

I froze for a moment, then looked at him. His eyes were glowing and he looked really angry. I couldn't help the fear that ran through me.

Part of me was actually afraid he might hurt me. No matter how much I told myself I was safe with Victor, in this moment, I didn't think I truly was. I moved away, and he grasped my arm, pulling me against him.

"My Echo." Victor snarled, lowering his head like he was going to bite me.

"Please, Victor. You're hurting me." I whimpered.

It was as if a switch had been flipped and my Victor flooded back into his body. He released me and looked at his hands like they had betrayed him. I reached for his face, but he pulled away.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry, Echo. Please forgive me." He whispered.

"Of course I forgive you. That wasn't really you, Victor. It was the curse. It was just a little bruise and it's fading already. I'm fine." I assured him.

"What if I don't come back next time? The urge to feed on you was overwhelming. I would have bitten you if you hadn't snapped me out of it." Victor said solemnly. "It's not safe for you to be with me. You need to go to Grayson's packlands. You need to be safe, Echo."

"I am safe. Now I know you aren't just possessive over me. I won't make that mistake again." I said.

“You were right, though, this is your territory as well. This is how the curse is going to try to kill me. It’s going to drive you away and make me possessive over everything that I perceive as mine until I make the wrong choice and end up dead.” He sighed. “If I’d hurt you over you saying this territory is ours, Marius would have hurt me. If I had killed you, he would kill me slowly and painfully.”

“You wouldn’t have killed me. When I tried to move away, you stopped me. I think the spell is conflicted. You love your territory as much as you love me. It can’t figure out how to make this work. That’s good. It means it could take longer to work.” I told him.

“You’re always so positive, Echo. I don’t know what I did to deserve you in my life.”

“I used to think I couldn’t fight the future, I could only try to make it bend the way that would help me most. Now, I’m fighting the future every day. You made me strong enough to fight the future that keeps trying to take you from me. I believe I can fight the future and win, Victor. I will win. I’m never going to lose you, I refuse.” I promised him.

“I love you, Echo. I’ll fight harder, too. We can win together.” Victor said and wrapped his arms around me.

I didn’t care if my hair or my dress got a little messy. Victor needed comforting from me. I would never let him suffer alone. I was his only love. I would always make sure he felt that love. No matter what it took.

The Vampire Ball Part 1

Chapter 112 - The Vampire's Servant

When we arrived at the ball, Victor helped me from the car. I had straightened myself out and everything looked okay. Victor wrapped my arm around his and led me to the door. A large man in a suit opened the door for us.

I thought the place was a restaurant, but it looked like there was a central area for dancing. Several tables were set in it, along with one long table at the head of everything. I tried to make sure not to look around frantically trying to see everything.

Tonight, I had to act as cool and commanding as a real vampire. I had to be the mistress of this territory. Victor was counting on me, so was Marius.

Putting on the cool demeanor I had been practicing, I scanned over the room. Pretty much every vampire was trying to get a look at us without staring. I gripped Victor’s arm tightly, while trying to seem like I wasn’t. I was managing to keep the panic from rising.

“I see Talon and Silence. We’ll speak with them first.” Victor said quietly.

He led me over to where they stood. It had been a while since I saw them. Silence was beautiful. Her hair was piled on top of her head, looking like strands of gold delicately balanced. She was wearing a deep blue dress that made her silver eyes seem to stand out even more.

“Master Nightshade. Mistress Nightshade.” She murmured and curtsied.

Next to her was Talon. He was as tall as Finn, but not as thick. His brunet hair seemed to have slivers of dark red in it that brought out his dark red eyes. I remembered the passage from Alpha William’s journal. Grigori had red eyes.

“Master Nightshade. Mistress Nightshade.” He bowed.

‘Victor, is Talon one of Grigori’s children?’ I asked.

‘No. He was made in a different brood by Grigori’s master. He came with Grigori to set up the territory. Upon seeing the resemblance, Talia questioned him. We have all the information we need from him.’ Victor replied.

“Talon, Silence, I’m happy you were both able to make it so early.” Victor smiled briefly.

“We felt it was best if the majority of the territory’s leadership was already in attendance well before you arrived.” Silence said.

“It was a show of our support. You are our master as much as theirs. We wanted them to see that we didn’t think ourselves more important than you.” Talon added.

It was customary for the guest of honor to arrive after everyone else. If anyone else arrived after we did, they would be turned away at the door. I didn’t know why they did that exactly, but I wasn’t going to argue the rules.

I looked around and saw that Marius was already there with Talia and two other vampires. He caught my eye and I nodded to him instead of waving. He smirked and nodded back.

“Mistress Nightshade, you look lovely this evening.” Silence smiled slightly.

“Thank you, Silence. So do you. I have been wanting to tell you how much I appreciate your cooperation in Victor’s investigation into his missing childe. You saved my life by being so agreeable.” I said.

“I was doing what had to be done. I’m happy that such a pleasant end to the situation was found.” She bowed her head slightly.

“As am I.” Victor smiled. “Please come with us. I see the High Council. I would like to introduce you to them.”

There was a wary look that passed from Talon to Silence. Vampires didn't naturally trust each other. Not unless they were related and, even then, it was a tenuous relationship. They were at ease with each other, but never fully relaxed unless the other vampire was their Solus Amor.

We walked over to where Marius and Talia stood with two other people. They were taller and both dressed in suits, even though I could tell one of them was a woman. She had short, dark brown hair and deep red eyes. I looked to Victor.

"This is Master Phoebe, The Prince. She was Grigori and Talon's sire. Master Phoebe, this is my Solus Amor, Echo Nightshade." Victor said.

"Marius' daughter. He's so proud of you. He showed me your photos this week. I swear I've never seen the man smile as much as he has been. Those photos hardly do you justice. Victor is a lucky man." She winked. "You must call me Phoebe. I can't have my friend's daughter treating me like an elder."

"Thank you, Phoebe. I appreciate it. You're very charming and you look quite handsome this evening." I smiled politely.

She laughed. It was a rich, happy sound that drew the attention of other vampires. The tension in the room was thick. They were nervous at having the Council there as much as I was at being around so many vampires.

"You seem to know exactly what to say. Did Marius coach you, or was that a natural response?" Phoebe asked.

"You weren't wearing a dress, I assumed you would prefer being handsome to being beautiful and that you would rather be charming than lovely." I replied.

"She's smart and observant. I've been told by several brownnosers that I look beautiful this evening. Verity didn't tell me how wise you are."

I worked to keep a frown off my face at the mention of my ex-mother. Marius had told me that she was staying with the Prince until she was healed. I hadn't quite made the connections.

"I hope she's doing well. Has she given any more information that might help us understand why Daniel felt he had a right to me and my siblings?" I asked.

"Don't think that she's just lazing about my manor and doing as she pleases. Verity is physically healed, but mentally unable to support herself. She is forced to live in my dungeon and comes out at night to clean. I refuse to have her walking about in the daylight. She will stay with me until she has worked as you did. Though, I can't bring myself to make her feed vampires because of what the wolves did. That might break her mind even more. She hasn't given me anything useful in a while." Phoebe answered.

“This is Master Felix, The Angel. Master Felix, my Solus Amor, Echo Nightshade.” Victor said, moving on.

Felix was very pale with white-blond hair and golden eyes. He smiled slightly, but seemed more interested in his drink than he was in me. I didn’t think he really wanted to be there.

“Thank you for coming, Master Felix. I understand you must have a busy schedule; it means a lot to us that you’re here.” I told him, bowing my head slightly.

“You’re welcome, Mistress Nightshade.” He replied and turned to find another drink.

“Just ignore him. He’s moody.” Talia chuckled. “He honestly didn’t have anything better to do, but didn’t want to seem eager for free food and drink.”

“Talia.” Master Felix growled.

“We’re glad for your presence no matter the circumstance. I believe they’re signaling the start of dinner service. We should go to our seats.” I smiled.

“A good hostess and polite. Marius has taught you well.” Master Felix said.

“This was not what I taught her. Echo was made to support a leader. Anyone can see that my daughter is a natural at this. I didn’t need to teach her any part of it.” Marius huffed.

Victor led me to the long table at the front of the area. Behind the table was a small stage where a band with stringed instruments played softly. I liked the sound of it and the way the music seemed to fill the room, without being too loud.

At the table, we found the two seats at the center had cards with our names on them. Marius sat to my right and Talia sat to Victor’s left. Phoebe and Master Felix sat next to Marius while Talon and Silence sat next to Talia.

As the vampire guests found their seats and turned to us. I noticed some surprised looks. Marius had explained how seating went. The head table was for hosts and honored guests. The side people sat on meant that they supported the person at the center whose side they were seated on.

To all the vampires in the room, I had the support of almost all of the High Council. It made me the most powerful person in the room, who wasn’t on the Council itself. Victor picked up my hand and kissed it.

“They were allowed to sit wherever they wanted. Talon and Silence were instructed to take whichever seats the Masters didn’t take. You won them over in just a short while, my princess.” He murmured.

“I don’t know how. I just introduced myself.” I shrugged.

“No, you saw them. You always see everyone. Who they really are. It’s what makes you so special. Even though you didn’t know me, you trusted me to keep you safe. You could tell Master Marius was trying to do something when you first met him. You saw Grayson’s arrogance and pride. The things he had to learn to get over in order to deserve you. Once you saw him again, you marked him as yours because you knew he wasn’t the same boy you left behind.” Victor said quietly.

I focused on the food that was served to me and tried not to blush. It happened whenever Victor complimented me and my abilities. I felt the familiar rush of heat in my cheeks.

Marius chuckled next to me. “He’s in awe of his powerful little Solus Amor. Enjoy it. One day he will have seen everything you can do and will no longer be amazed.”

“I will always be amazed by my Echo.” Victor replied. “Every evening I wake up amazed that she is with me. Every time I see her do something I wouldn’t have imagined the meek little girl I first met to do, even if it’s the twentieth time she’s done it, I am amazed. Echo is growing into the most amazing woman I could ever imagine.”

“As you should be. I will be watching and if I ever see you acting anything less than amazed by her, we’ll have a... talk.” Marius smirked.

“That will never be needed, Master Marius. I promise.” Victor said.

“Call me ‘Marius’. You’re engaged to my daughter. You deserve the privilege.”

“Thank you, Marius. I need to make my speech now. If you’ll excuse me.” Victor told him.

I had barely realized that the first course had been completed. I was so busy trying to make sure I was using the right utensils and eating properly, while also trying to make sure I monitored Marius and Victor’s conversation. I didn’t want Victor to get angry in front of everyone. Marius would be lenient in private, but his public image was important to him.

Victor stood and guided me to stand next to him. He didn’t need to call attention to himself, because every vampire there had been watching us. Trying to decipher the new Master.

“Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all for joining us tonight. I am proud to be Master of this territory. It only took a few deaths to bring it to heel.” He said.

There was a chuckle from the vampires around the tables. They had odd senses of humor. I smiled slightly and looked again to Victor.

“In the last month, we have started healing this territory. We found and dealt with vampires who were breaking laws that the Council takes very seriously, including feeding on children.”

The audience gasped. I realized most vampires would actually not break that law as I heard some of them saying to their tablemates that the vampires who died deserved it if they were feeding on children. It made me feel a lot better about the people surrounding me.

“In the next several months, I would like to have a new daylight servant agency up and running in the area. It’s important that the needs of the vampires here are taken care of. I would also like to announce an alliance I have formed with the local werewolf pack and the largest rogue collective in the region. This alliance will help everyone. It will create a safer place for all of us to live. I intend to enter into a similar agreement with the witches’ coven and the fae.” Victor told them.

There was a smattering of applause and some grumbling. I understood. They were at odds with other supernaturals for most of their lives, it would be hard to change.

“I want to thank my sire, Talia the Traveler, for her continued support of my goals. I would also like to thank Master Marius Aconitum for his support in how I choose to grow this territory. I would like to thank him most of all for granting me the blessing to propose to my Solus Amor, his daughter, Echo Nightshade. The greatest sign that I was meant to be here came in the form of this young woman.” He stated and kissed my hand. “My Echo has been waiting here for me for most of her life. And now we start a new life together.”

“What of the curse, Master Nightshade?” Someone called out from the back.

“We are close to getting the curse broken. As you can see, I am in top mental and physical condition. Do not worry, I fully intend to free the territory from this curse as quickly as possible. Should anything happen to me, though, my Solus Amor will remain here to find a resolution. She will be in the care of her father, so I don’t recommend anyone trying to hurry me to my final rest in order to gain the last living dhampyr of her level.” Victor chuckled. “Unless you want to tempt Death.”

Marius stood up beside me and took my other hand. He looked around the room in a defiant way. As if he were challenging someone to try it.

“Are there any other questions before we finish our meal?” Victor asked.

There was a person asking if any laws were going to be changing. Victor told them his territory would follow all the laws of the Council. There were a couple more questions about how everything would be changing with the alliances and who would be in charge of the new daylight servant service.

Victor surprised me by naming Grant and Gareth as the ones he was intending to tap for this service. Both men were seated at one of the tables directly in front of us. They bowed and accepted the position.

We finally sat and were served the next course. I looked around and saw an older man looking at me. He nodded his head at me and returned to his meal.

I wondered about him and decided I wouldn't approach him without either one of the Council members, Finn, or Victor beside me. He was the only one still interested in me after the announcement that I would be cared for by Marius if something happened to Victor. It was cause enough for concern.

The Vampire Ball Part 2

Chapter 113 - The Vampire's Servant

After the meal, Victor drew me away from the table. We spoke with Gareth and Grant briefly and Victor made an appointment with them to come to the house and be briefed on what they would need to do to start the agency for daylight servants. I thanked both men for sending their servants to help us last week and told Gareth how wonderfully Opal had done today.

"She can be a little forward at times. I hope she didn't make you uncomfortable." He said with a slight smile.

"Speaking with Opal is always educational for me. I truly enjoy her company. Perhaps she and Penny can come with the two of you and I could make dinner for them. I would love to see them in a more relaxed environment." I replied.

"That seems like an excellent idea, Echo. The servants of our higher ranked vampires are just as important as the vampire themselves. Our relationships with them keep the homes of their masters running smoothly." Victor answered.

Vampires didn't tend to give a lot from their expressions, but I was pretty sure both of them got excited about being called 'higher ranked'. Their eyes started glowing a little. I knew that meant they were feeling something strongly. I chose to think it was happiness.

We talked to them for a little while longer before they excused themselves. More vampires would come up to talk to Victor and me. No one tried to get close to me. Vampires didn't often touch each other upon meeting, so no one tried to touch me until a young vampire came up with his sire.

He stuck his hand out and I felt a little badly for him. Victor looked at him as if he were an idiot, then raised his eyebrow at the sire who seemed disappointed. I smiled slightly at the embarrassed vampire.

"You must not be very old." I said sympathetically. "Vampires don't shake hands with other vampires. It's okay. I'm having trouble getting used to it too."

I wasn't telling the truth, but it seemed to make him feel better and he smiled brightly. I smiled back. He had to be very young.

"I only just got my mind back. My apologies if you took it as an insult." He bowed.

"It can be hard to get over your old habits when you truly start your second life. We will not take it as an insult." Victor replied. "I'm glad you were able to make it tonight, even though your memories haven't fully integrated yet."

"I wanted a chance to meet the Master of the territory. Thank you for allowing me to come meet you."

"Of course. If you'll excuse us, I see someone I need to introduce my Solus Amor to." Victor said politely before pulling me away.

To my surprise, he was taking me to the older man who had been staring at me. When I say that the man was older, he was the only one of the vampires who didn't look younger than my parents. He looked like he could be the father of some of these vampires, age-wise.

The man was as tall as Victor and had salt and pepper hair. His eyes were the same bluish green as the aquamarine in my ring, which was sitting at home. He turned to us and bowed deeply.

"Master and Mistress Nightshade. I'm pleased you decided to come see me." The man smiled.

"Echo, this is Dennis Lyons. He's the vampire who used to be a dhampyr that wanted to meet you." Victor explained.

I nodded my head to him. "Mr. Lyons, it's a pleasure to meet you."

"Please call me Dennis. I know I look like an old human, but I'm a vampire in your territory. There's no need for honorifics with me." He assured me.

"If I might ask, how old are you?" I questioned.

"Well, I was three hundred when I died and I've been a vampire for four hundred years. As soon as I was free I got as far from my old master as possible." Dennis said.

I put my hand over my chest. My heart hurt for him. I could understand a little. I wanted nothing more than to get far from my parents when they sold me to Victor. My past couldn't have been more terrible than his was, though.

"How long have you been in this territory?" I asked.

"I actually came out here shortly after this place was settled by humans. I was the night bartender at the saloon when it was built. This is my restaurant. It stands where the saloon used to. I bought the property and kept a business which would cater to vampires, but also be open to humans,

right here. I also own 'The Neutral' which is an all species club and has been a neutral territory in the region for decades." He said.

"Dennis is one of the oldest vampires in the territory." Victor said.

"I'm only about four hundred." Dennis chuckled.

"You were a living vampire. The treatment of dhampyrs was appalling. You were as much a vampire as any of us." Victor insisted.

"You won't convince him otherwise, so it's best to just agree with him." I said softly.

"What about you, Mistress Nightshade. You were raised by your parents. You're just learning to be a vampire. How is that going for you? Is it a huge culture shock to go from human to vampire?" Dennis asked.

"Um... well... I wasn't raised by my parents. My siblings and I were kidnapped and our parents were killed. They were raised human and I was raised as their servant." I admitted.

A sad expression crossed his face and he looked away. "I was hoping you'd had a better life than we did. At least you found your Solus Amor while you were alive. You can have the life all female dhampyrs deserved."

I reached out and took his hand, drawing his attention back to me. "Will you be my uncle, Dennis? I have a werewolf uncle and a witch uncle. I would love to have a dhampyr uncle as well."

He looked down at my hand on his, then up to Victor. Dennis smiled warmly at me and put his other hand over mine. Victor's grip on my other hand tightened.

"If Master Nightshade and Master Marius are okay with that, I would love it. My Solus Amor rejected me while I was still alive. I'm all alone in the world. No sire, no children. Are you sure you want me for an uncle?" He asked.

"Echo doesn't make this offer lightly. Whatever she wants, Marius and I shall give. She is in the unique position to get to make her family. Echo can sense other people's motivations and their true intentions. If she wants you for an uncle, then she senses that you are a good fit in her family. Please accept. It would mean a lot to her." Victor said.

"Then I will. Thank you for that, Echo." Dennis replied with a gracious smile.

We left him and were walking around greeting other vampires. It was getting a little boring. They always said the same things and asked the same questions. I started looking around a lot more.

The table we'd sat at and the trusted vampires' tables had all been cleared. Several people were dancing to the gentle music that played. I noticed that some men didn't wear ties, their collars were open showing their necks.

They were using this ball to socialize and find someone to love. That was wonderful. I knew it would make them happier and it would be easier for Victor to control them.

After a while, I excused myself to the restroom. I was a little glad for the garter belt because I didn't like the idea of wrestling with pantyhose in a bathroom stall. Victor told me to hurry back and I promised I would.

Once I'd finished, I got myself put back together and sat in the stall for a little longer. These heels weren't as high as the ones last weekend, but they still weren't easy to deal with. I was so used to being barefoot unless I had to put shoes on.

The bathroom door opened as I was scrolling through my phone and I heard voices. I decided to wait until they were gone to leave. I didn't want to be cornered without anyone to protect me. I still wasn't up to fighting.

"So, what do you think of the new Master? He's so handsome." One woman said.

"Mmm. And deadly. He started killing as soon as he arrived. Have you ever heard of anything more attractive than a man who kills with such impunity? He knew just how to bring this territory into line." The other giggled.

"Too bad he's taken. I wouldn't have minded a night with a man like that."

"There's no way she's his Solus Amor. No dhampyr has ever found their mate before their death. He's just using her for her connections. Did you see how much of the Council backed her? Having Death for your sire certainly has its perks. He'll be looking around as soon as the shine wears off." The first chuckled.

"Do you really think so?"

"Lacey, I think we should test how much of the shine is left on her. She's been clinging to him all night long. I bet he could do with some other companionship, some real women. She barely speaks, and, when she does, her voice is all soft and gentle. A man like that needs a woman who can take charge. What man could resist both of us?" She asked.

"Hmm. We'll have to be subtle. If we anger Master Marius, we could end up in his care." Lacey replied.

"Of course we'll be careful. And, if nothing else, we might even try for Master Marius. I can imagine he's going to be amazing in bed with how powerful he is. Bedding one of the High Council will certainly give us all sorts of opportunities." The first laughed.

“Let’s get out there. I don’t know where Mistress Nightshade went, but, last I saw the Master, she wasn’t glued to him. Someone else might be trying to worm their way into our territory.” Lacey said.

I listened to them as they left, shocked. They were going to try and tempt Victor away from me? They didn’t think I was vampire enough to keep him.

Quickly, I washed my hands and fixed my makeup. I wasn’t going to miss this. I wanted to see what Victor would do. He was mine and I wanted to make sure he wouldn’t chase after any other women just because I wasn’t there. I didn’t doubt him, but I had already seen Gray turn down girls at school. I hadn’t seen Victor.

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As quietly as I could, I made my way to where Talia was standing. She was talking to a few vampires. From where she was, I had a clear view of Victor. I grabbed a glass from a passing server and sipped it as I watched him.

The two women were beautiful. I thought they were probably more beautiful than I was. One had a trim figure and black hair. I could only see her from the back. The other had dark red hair and a curvier figure with larger breasts and more defined hips than her friend had.

They were talking to Victor and slowly moving a little closer to him. Both women wore their hair up and kept touching their necks as they talked to him. That didn’t make sense to me, vampires didn’t feed on other vampires.

“They’re flirting.” Talia said in an angry tone. “Vampires bite during sex. It’s why the single ones aren’t covering their necks. It shows that they’re available. Those women shouldn’t be flirting with him.”

“Victor won’t do anything.” I assured her. “He loves me and I trust him.”

“You’re not feeling jealous?” She asked.

“Surprisingly, no. I’m more curious. They just looked like they were talking to him and touching their necks from time to time. I don’t know a lot about vampire habits and things like that. It’s like I’m learning.” I replied.

“Why would you need to learn how to flirt, Echo?”

“Sometimes I want to make Victor know I desire him without having to say it. Amy flirted with Lucien a lot and he flirted back. They’ve been together for almost a year. They do it because they like it and it makes the other one happy. With everything going on, I haven’t had a chance to really figure out what my relationship with Victor will be like.” I explained.

“So you want to watch him turn down those women?” Talia questioned.

“No. I want them to think they’ve won and then I want to go take my Solus Amor away from them. I want to prove I’m strong enough and that Victor’s love for me is stronger than their sex appeal.” I growled a little.

“So you are jealous.” She giggled.

“Maybe just a little bit.” I laughed.

One of the women touched Victor’s arm. He shooed her off of him. He looked annoyed. The women didn’t seem to be heeding his expression much.

I handed Talia my glass. “He’s going to start getting angry if they keep touching him. This isn’t the place for that.”

She nodded silently and followed behind me as I made my way over to him. I was stopped a few times by vampires who wanted to introduce themselves. I couldn’t be rude to them, or I risked showing that I was affected. Marius told me I had to reign in my emotions tightly tonight. So I smiled and thanked them for coming.

When I finally reached Victor and the women, they were talking intimately with him and each had a hand on his arms. He looked livid. I glanced over in Marius’ direction. He had a raised eyebrow, but was watching the whole thing.

‘Those women are still touching him, even though they know you are his Solus Amor and you are standing right in front of them. They’re challenging your claim on him. Because you are unmarked, they believe he is unmarked as well.’ Talia told me mentally.

“Echo. You’re back.” Victor smiled and brushed the women off his arms.

“Sorry I took so long. I needed a drink and then found it hard to get over here without greeting every vampire on the way. Who are these... ladies?” I asked.

“Lacey Black.” The red haired one said.

“Chantel Schade.” The black haired one smiled.

“I’m Echo Nightshade.” I told them. “But you already knew that.”

I caught Victor’s eye and raised my hand up to my chin, then trailed my fingers down to my collarbone. His eyes followed the path of my fingers as I slid them back and forth along my collarbone. I smirked at the women.

“Victor, would you take me over to dance. I’m terribly bored.” I sighed.

“Anything for you, princess.” He breathed and stepped forward.

His fingers brushed over my collarbone as he reached for that hand rather than the one that was at my side. He kissed my hand and pulled me toward the area where others were dancing. I turned back to the women and smiled.

“Looks like I’m still pretty shiny.” I winked before being swept into Victor’s arms and spun around the dance floor.

I focused entirely on him while we danced, but his eyes were on my neck. I hoped I didn’t push him too far. I totally forgot that the curse had him acting differently.

“Victor, are you alright?” I asked.

“You staked your claim on me in front of every vampire here. How could I be anything but elated?” He chuckled.

“I heard them in the bathroom saying that they were going to see how much you actually wanted me. I knew you wouldn’t go with them, but I wanted them to know you were mine. Only mine.” I growled a little.

“Your jealousy is enticing, Echo.” Victor purred.

“I’m not jealous.” I insisted.

“Vampires manifest differently than werewolves. You feel it like a wolf with Gray. The anger is more consuming. Wolves are very different from vampires in this. We don’t feel that level of jealousy. Instead, we rise to the challenge and enjoy showing our rivals their worthlessness in the eyes of our mates.

Everyone was watching those women to see what would happen. Even if they didn’t look it. I’m sure that the ones who stopped you from getting to me sooner were enjoying the show. You made sure those women saw that all their shameless flirting wasn’t worth even a glance from me.

Now, who showed you how to touch yourself like that, princess? If we weren’t in the middle of public, I’d throw you up on a table and take you right here after that display.” He murmured heatedly.

I could feel myself getting aroused by the way he was talking. I swallowed and bit my lips together. Victor’s arm tightened around my waist.

“I was just watching them, Victor. They were touching their necks the same way.” I told him.

“No. They weren’t nearly as sensual and tantalizing as you were, my love. I can’t wait for this evening to be over so I can take you home and worship your sweet little body.” He whispered.

I whimpered in response. I wanted that too. I wanted that more than I wanted anything else.

Chapter 114 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

Unlike last weekend, Echo was fully awake when we arrived back at the house. I spent most of the ride with my mouth on her neck and my hand up her skirt. She chanted my name like a mantra. I loved the sound of my name on her tongue.

When those women had started talking and flirting with me, I was appalled. I knew it was common for some Masters to dally with the vampires in their territory. Some always presented themselves to be available. Those women weren't the first to try and catch my eye, just the most persistent.

I couldn't forget the expression on Echo's face as she approached. I'd worried that she might be upset, but she looked regal and authoritative. When she caught my eye, her eyes glowed.

They had never looked more beautiful. The golden amber color ringed by emerald green shone like rare gems. I almost hadn't caught the movement of her hand as it alighted on her perfect little chin and started its path down her swanlike neck. The neck I'd kissed dozens of times. The one I thought of sinking my fangs into on a daily basis.

My desire for her grew considerably. Those women couldn't hold a candle to my perfect princess. They were nothing next to her.

Once we were at the house, I pulled her from the limousine and guided her to the door. Grayson opened the door for us and took her into his arms, kissing her passionately. I permitted it, because, tonight, I was going to give my sweet Echo her next 'first'. She was ready physically, I was ready in every other way.

"Give us some time, Grayson. We'll sleep in my bed tonight." I said.

"Sure thing, Victor. Text me when you're ready for me." He replied and gave Echo one more kiss before he departed.

I guided Echo up to my room. After I closed the door, I went to Echo and unzipped her dress as she let her hair down. She stepped out of the dress as it pooled on the floor and turned to me.

Nothing had prepared me for seeing her in her underclothes. The black bra and panty set was made more seductive by the lacy garter belt strapped into her stockings. She was still wearing her heels, which made the outfit even more enticing.

“Don’t move.” I said, quickly taking off my clothing, not caring where it fell.

“You’re making a mess, Victor.” She giggled.

“I don’t care.” I replied, taking down my underwear.

“Oh.” Echo breathed.

“Tonight, I take my first with you, Echo. Do you understand?” I asked.

“Yes, Victor.” She blushed.

I picked her up and put her on my bed before tearing off her panties, making her yelp deliciously. I crawled up after taking in the sight of her for a little longer. She was all mine.

“Shouldn’t I take my shoes off, at least, Victor?” Echo asked.

“No. I want you just like this.” I told her as I started kissing over her collarbone.

My mouth found every bit of her fragrant, soft, skin. I worked my way slowly down her, listening to her moans and sighs as I kissed and nibbled her body. Soon, I was between her legs, my tongue seeking out every spot that made her breathe heavily.

I licked and sucked as her honeyed juices flowed from her. My fingers sunk into her, moistening them for the next leg of their journey. Echo moaned and arched as I rubbed the sweet spot inside her.

“Relax, my sweet Echo. I’m going to start now.” I said softly.

Echo nodded vigorously and whimpered a little as I pressed into her backside. We’d been going this far for the last week. Two fingers, loosening her, making her moan more. She told me that she loved how I touched her. I knew this had to have been a little uncomfortable for her.

My fingers worked, scissoring inside of her, while Echo writhed on the bed. I loved watching her as I did this. Grayson often manually stimulated her while I did. This time, I used my mouth on her and Echo responded beautifully.

When it felt like she wasn’t resisting as much anymore, I pulled my fingers from her and pulled the lubricant from the nightstand drawer. I would make certain that my Echo didn’t hurt too much from this. I used a lot of it to make everything as slippery as possible.

I pulled Echo’s legs up and had her wrap her arms around her knees. She looked so beautiful in this position. I wanted her to watch as I took her this way. I wanted her to always watch me.

“Just breathe, this may hurt a little, but I promise to make it all better, my love.” I murmured as I pressed into her.

Echo squeaked a little and tensed, she had panicked a little. I reached down and started rubbing her sweet spot. She relaxed and sighed. I pressed in again.

This time, I managed to get further in. She was tight and her body shuddered a little. I groaned at the feeling of her on my bare flesh. I pushed further, taking small strokes in and out until I was fully sheathed in her.

I looked up at her face and there were tears in her eyes.

“Did I hurt you too much, Echo?” I asked.

“It’s so big, Victor. I don’t think I was as ready as I thought.” She whimpered.

“I’m sorry, precious. Do you want me to stop?”

“No. I love you. I want this for us. Just give me a moment.” Echo said in a shaky voice.

“Maybe we should stop and we can try again some other time.” I suggested.

“Please. I want to be able to have you and Gray at the same time, Victor. I feel like this will make the three of us much closer. I know you’ve been waiting for this so patiently. Let me try. It’s not hurting as much now. I think you can move.” She told me.

I nodded and started moving gently in her. Echo moaned and bit her lip as I moved. I smiled. She was so amazing.

Slowly, I increased my pace and my strength. She was responding perfectly. Her muscles grasped me as she chanted my name. I showed her how to rub herself to make it feel even better.

Echo’s ankles rested on my shoulders as I watched her pleasure herself while I made love to her. Nothing had ever felt as good as this. Buried in my little love was where I felt whole and entirely sane again.

Soon, I felt my end nearing. I wanted to be with her like this again tonight, so I made the decision to pull out. I managed to make it to the bathroom to finish myself. It was a little disappointing, but ensured I wouldn’t lose the chance at a second round.

I cleaned myself up and brought, a warm, wet cloth with me so I could clean Echo. She was looking away from me as I reentered the room. I sat on the bed next to her as I cleaned her up.

“This should soothe any residual pain, my love.” I murmured.

“I thought I did something wrong. You just left.” She sniffled.

“You’ve never done anything wrong, my sweet princess. I just thought you might like to be with me and Grayson at the same time and didn’t want to make a huge mess.” I explained.

“Really?” Echo asked, turning to me.

“Of course, princess. I know it’s something you’ve really been wanting. Now that you’re all clean, we can undress you and have Grayson come in. We can make love to you together, for the first time. Would you like that?” I asked.

She nodded. I smiled. She was always thinking of how to make the three of us bond. I’d heard Grayson ask her about it once, why she wanted the three of us to bond so much. Echo said that she loved both of us and she wanted us to love each other too. Even if we never kissed each other.

He had chased her down the halls, trying to tickle her, as he had started doing whenever she mentioned us kissing. Of course that had ended with them ducking into an empty guest room, because wolves get aroused by chasing games. I remembered being amused by it at the time, now, it made me a little angry.

I picked up my phone and texted Grayson. I would do everything I could to bond with him, in hopes that it would counter the curse. Even I got scared when I started thinking negative thoughts about him. I didn’t want to hurt him, the boy was my friend and he was important to my Echo.

Echo unhooked her bra as I pulled off her shoes. We worked on the clasps for the garter belt together. By the time Grayson arrived in the room, she was entirely undressed and I was collecting our clothing from the floor.

Grayson closed the door behind him and surveyed the room. He’d brought a robe for Echo so she could get to her room in the morning. I considered what we might need to do in this room to make it usable for everyone.

If I took down the wall between the walk-in closet and the guest room next to us, I could have that outfitted as a dressing room with zones for each of us. My bathroom was the largest in the house and had a double vanity that was very long and could easily hold all of our products.

My bed was larger than either of theirs, but I might consider special ordering a frame that could hold two queen mattresses instead. In case children decided to come in at night and to ensure Echo would have space when she eventually did become pregnant.

While the construction was happening, I could move Grayson in with Echo, since the room we would be taking over was his bedroom currently. I would move to one of the guest rooms, as not to have my rest disturbed by the workers. Once the curse was broken, we’d talk about it. I wanted to ensure I was making the right decisions while the process was ongoing.

“Victor?” Echo said.

“Yes, princess?” I asked.

“You were just staring into space. Are you alright? We don’t have to do this tonight if the curse is still affecting you.” She replied.

“What do you mean ‘still’? What happened?” Grayson questioned.

“I had some trouble controlling myself earlier and became possessive, first of my territory, then of Echo. It was a momentary slip, princess. I promise, I am in full control right now. Why don’t the two of you get started? I’ll be back in a moment.” I told them, slipping my robe on.

“Where are you going, Victor?” Echo asked.

“I need to see Dillon for a moment. I won’t be long, I promise.” I smiled.

Grayson was already undressed and crawling into the bed with Echo. I knew he would take care of her while I was away. I looked at them one last time, they truly were a beautiful couple. With her pink cheeks, Echo looked like a heroine on the cover of a romance novel. I put on my robe and left the room.

I went to the wing of the house where Echo had put Jean-Claude and Dillon. She made sure the wolves were all fairly far from my bedroom, so I wouldn’t be uncomfortable. I knocked at their door and waited.

“I would ask who it is, but I can already smell you.” Dillon called out. “Just a minute.”

Something bumped my foot, and I looked down. It was one of the little vacuum robots I’d gotten Echo. I almost forgot they existed. I took a step back and it proceeded on its way. Echo had named them. I thought it was adorable.

The door opened and Dillon stepped into the hall. He was wearing only shorts and the scent of his mate was all over him.

“I thought this might actually be important, so I’m gonna be pissed if you just wanted to shoot the breeze.” He said.

“I need you and Talia to train Grayson how to subdue me. If I attack him, I want him to be able to defend himself. Talia is far older than I am, if he trains with her, he can do it.” I insisted quietly.

“The curse is making you want to hurt him?” Dillon asked.

“It makes me want to hurt anyone I perceive, in even the slightest way, of being a threat to my territory or my relationship with Echo. I think Grayson may accidently bear the brunt of it as things progress.” I admitted.

“Thank you for letting me know. I’m gonna have to tell Talia and Finn about this, too. They need to know how this is developing. You can’t fight it alone and you don’t have to. Unlike the other Masters, you have a support system. Lean on us more.” He told me.

“I will. I’ll do anything to survive this and to make sure everyone else does as well.” I said.

“Good. I’m gonna go talk to Talia and Finn. You go back to your room. Try not to kick Gray’s ass until we get him trained more.” Dillon chuckled.

I nodded and headed back down the hall. All I could do was done. I would give my best effort to stay in control.

When I entered my room, Grayson was on top of Echo. He was grinding against her as they kissed. I closed the door and crossed to the bed.

They looked up at me and smiled. I didn’t feel the pain or jealousy that the curse would sometimes inflict on me.

“Are you two ready?” I asked.

“I think our Echo is more than ready. She’s been begging for me for the last few minutes.” Grayson chuckled.

Echo turned red and swatted at him. “Liar.”

“I would never lie about how you whisper ‘please, Gray’ with that tone that lets me know you need me so bad.” He purred and bent down to nibble her neck.

I shook my head. He really loved teasing her about how much she desired him. I knew she liked it too from the scent of her arousal increasing.

They moved apart and Grayson rolled off of her. He put his hands behind his head and smiled lazily. I could see that he was just as excited for this as we were.

“So, how do we do this?” He asked.

“You stay like that. Echo climb on top of him.”

“Wait, I need a condom.” Grayson said and quickly grabbed one from the nightstand.

Once he was ready, Echo climbed on him. I took the lubricant out and climbed up behind her. Grayson spread his legs so I could get in close, without straddling him.

She was already perched with the tip of him at her entrance. I pulled her hips back, driving him slowly into her. They both groaned with pleasure. I readied her for me and worked on sliding myself in. She was so much tighter than normal with both of us in her.

Echo arched a little as I finished sheathing myself into her body. I reached forward and gripped her hips. She let out a shaky breath.

“Are you alright, my love?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, Victor. I feel so full and happy right now.” Echo moaned.

“I’m going to show you how to move. I want you to pay attention. Afterward, you’ll be in control of this. I want you to decide how hard, how fast, and how much you take.” I told her.

She nodded and I proceeded to move her up and down our shafts. I showed her how to roll her hips in just the right way. Grayson’s hands ran up and down her thighs.

When I felt she had the right rhythm, I let her go and watched as she momentarily fumbled the movement before finding her stride. I was proud of her for picking it up so quickly. That pride turned to passion as I felt her already tight body squeeze me further.

Echo sat up a little and moved her hair to the side, revealing her neck. She took Grayson’s hands and placed them on her breasts. My Echo may have started out as a total innocent, but she was growing by leaps and bounds every day.

My thoughts were cut short as she started moving more quickly and solidly on me. I groaned at the feeling of her surrounding me. My body wanted to move, wanted to pin her down and fuck her relentlessly. I shook my head. That wasn’t the type of lover I was.

As if she somehow heard me, Echo sped up even faster, started moving even harder. Her sweet moans filled the room as she rode us ruthlessly. Her body taking what it wanted from us in the exact way it wanted.

My hands had never left her waist until now, when I slid them around to reach for her sweet spot. She threw her head back against my shoulder as I rubbed and manipulated her. I could see down the line of her body to where Grayson pinched and massaged her nipples.

Watching her, feeling her, was all too exciting and I felt my end nearing far sooner than I wanted it to. The look of concentration on Grayson’s face told me he was facing the same issue. At least I wasn’t alone in that.

A few strokes later, Echo arched hard and made a sound I could only call a howl. Her body massaged me as she pushed to keep moving. Grayson grunted and I could almost feel him pulsing his release inside her. It was all too much for me and I finished as well.

I wrapped my arms around Echo to still her. I pulled her off of Grayson and she sat in my lap, still encasing me. Gently, I kissed her shoulder.

“Please bite me, Victor.” She begged.

“Only a few more weeks, sweet Echo.” I murmured against her skin.

She sighed. I knew how much it frustrated her, but I needed to stay strong on this. Just a few more weeks until she was out of school and wouldn’t have as many people paying attention to things like bite marks.

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After we cleaned up, the three of us lay close in my bed. I stroked Echo’s hair, while Grayson kissed each of her fingertips. I couldn’t think of anything more perfect than what we had right then.

“Don’t worry, Victor. We’re going to save you and no one will ever break up our family again. You’ll be right here with us forever.” Echo murmured, reaching up and caressing my face.

I held her wrist and turned my face so I could kiss the palm of her hand. Her eyes were glowing again. I felt my heart twist with the love I felt for her.

“I believe in us, princess. Love will win. I’m never giving up.” I whispered.

She smiled and started drifting to sleep. Today had been a long one for her. She had still been upset when I went to bed in the morning, then she had lunch with Maeve and getting ready for the ball. I was so proud of how well she had done. As usual, Echo was perfection.

Game Night

Chapter 115 - The Vampire's Servant

[Sean]

Dinner and game night went perfectly. Rosario got along well with my parents. My dad really liked him and my mom was half in love with him. He even volunteered us to do the clean up afterward. I didn’t mind, it meant more time just being with him without his glamour on.

My game group was made up of Terry, Elle, Mel, and Keith. Mel went to a private school now and Keith had moved across town and went to the other high school. They both remembered Rosario and were impressed that we were dating.

I had to remember to address him as a girl through the night. He played a male human sorcerer, which actually made it easier if I slipped up. Everyone loved the adventure and Rosario really got into it. He told me fae were huge on rules, so he’d read the entire rule book at the game shop today. I shouldn’t have been surprised.

At the end of the night, we saw everyone off. My parents were always in bed by the time game night was over. I'd worried tonight would be different, but it wasn't. Rosario stayed behind because I wanted to talk more.

We finished putting everything away and sat on the couch in the basement. He dropped his glamour and laced his fingers through mine. I loved how his hands felt. They were calloused in some spots from his training with weapons and soft in others. The muscles in them were strong and I felt really good when he held my hand in his.

"What did you want to talk about, babe?" He asked.

"I still haven't decided about helping with the curse. My dad says it could make people angry at me, especially if we fail. I really want to help, though. I want to try and save everyone." I said.

"You want to be the hero in this story." Rosario chuckled.

"A little. But it's only a small part they want me to play. They just need me to get them into Uncle Fenton's room." I sighed.

"You can be more. We need all sorts of minds working on the curse. I've been working on this puzzle on my own for a while. I wanted to formally approach them about becoming official. We can do it together." He smiled.

I leaned against him. He smelled like the forest. It reminded me of when my dad would take me to the family property.

Since no one was cultivating it, the surrounding woods had encroached on the land. I never knew why we would go there, but dad told me earlier today that he had been taking samples from the burned out house to try and figure out the curse.

He'd been working on it since he was a teen. He wanted to break it and restore our family's good name in the region. That was what he was always working on in his workshop. I honestly thought he was just hanging out and watching TV in there or something.

"Tell me everything. The curse, the Master of the territory, Echo, the fae, all of it." I insisted.

"It could take a pretty long time to go over all of that." Rosario said.

"We have all night... unless you have to get home." I murmured.

"Let me text my mom so she doesn't worry. I'd love to stay with you all night. Maybe we could even fool around a bit." He winked.

I laughed a little. I was really happy he wasn't upset with me about how everything went down last night. He pulled out his phone and send a message. It wasn't even a minute later that the response came through and he snorted.

“She says to have a good time... but not too good.” Rosario told me.

Shaking my head, I chuckled. I didn't know how cool with it my parents would be, but I'd deal with that later. For now, I was just eager to know what was going on.

“I'll start with the curse, what we didn't cover in the brief talk we had with you, then we can move on to your other questions.” He said.

Quietly, I listened to everything he knew about the curse. The effect it had on the supernaturals in each area, the cause, my family's involvement, and what the first Master of the territory had done to try and relieve it. When he was done, I nodded silently for a moment.

“My dad says that it was several curses combined and rooted into one. He's been working to untangle them. He said he was pretty close to naming at least one of them. I talked to him about giving the information he has to Echo. He wants to meet her first.” I told him.

“That would be great. Everyone loves Echo as soon as they meet her. I'm sure your dad will give everything he has over.”

“Tell me about Echo. Why is she living with the Master of the territory? What really happened to her parents? How is this whole thing connected to her relationship with Gray?” I asked.

“I can only tell you what my mother told me. She has people everywhere and Echo has told me a few things over the last couple weeks. The first thing you have to know is that Val and Harmony aren't her cousins. They're her sister and brother. They're triplets.” Rosario explained.

“Wow. That explains why the girls look so much alike. Are they dhampyrs too?”

“They're hybrids. So yes, and no. Echo is more vampire than they are. Harmony is half werewolf and Valor is half witch. They all have some characteristic of all three species, but Echo is the most valuable. At least, to the vampires. To the witches, Val is the most valuable, and to the werewolves, it's Harmony.” He said.

“Oh. That sounds complicated.” I hissed.

“All three are most important together. That's why a vampire killed their family when they were little. He gave them to two people to raise and those people ran off and hid here from him. We believe that the husband was a witch without an affinity.”

“Like me.” I noted.

“Not like you! This bastard was nothing like you. He let vampires feed on Echo for money. He treated her like a servant and beat her horribly when she was little. Not nearly as badly as his wife did. Echo heals like a vampire. There aren't any scars from what they did, except the ones on her soul. The witch got someone to help him create a spell to suppress their abilities and make them untraceable. They were raised together until about a month ago.” Rosario told me.

“What happened a month ago?” I asked.

“Victor came to town. He was looking for a vampire who stole money from him and ran off. Victor doesn’t like being insulted. This was a pretty big insult to him. He’d been hunting that vampire for fifteen years. When he found him, he found out the guy had been feeding on a child. On Echo. Victor hunted down every vampire who fed on her and killed them all, then he went to her house and bought her from her fake parents.” He explained.

“Bought her? They sold her?”

I was angry for my sweet friend. I had no idea her life had been like that. She seemed so happy and excited for everything, I thought she’d had a peaceful, sheltered, life.

“Yeah. He intended for her to be his daylight servant until she was eighteen. I guess the kidnapers got the date of birth wrong when they made fake documents for the kids, though. Echo was already eighteen. It didn’t really matter, I guess, because once he knew she was his Solus Amor, he would keep her forever. She met Gray a while after and he started pursuing her, he sensed she was his mate. Echo didn’t even want him in the beginning.” Rosario chuckled.

“What changed?” I asked.

“You remember the week everyone was sick?” He questioned.

“They weren’t really sick, were they?”

“Echo was kidnapped, again. The guy who killed her parents was able to track the triplets down. I guess he’d already started getting close. The suppression spell weakened when they turned eighteen. It took a week for Victor and Gray to find her. The vampire had been giving her only blood, no food, no water. Echo had never drank blood before that. It healed her faster. It made her smell more like a vampire. That’s where I came in.” Rosario said.

“What does that mean?”

“When she got off the bus the Monday after the kidnapping, I smelled that she was a vampire. I was really confused and tried to talk to the other fae about it, but they started to bully her. I didn’t mean for it to happen. I felt really terrible, because she seemed nice.” He admitted.

“It wasn’t your fault. You couldn’t have known they would do that.”

“No, I should’ve known the trolls would’ve done it. I should’ve known better. That was how she came to know my mother. Echo got some nasty notes in her locker and took them to my mother, the leader of the human world fae in the area. She didn’t want to get the school involved, but wanted the issue resolved. My mom gave me an earful when she got home from meeting with the other parents and all the kids had pointed me out as the one who told them she was a vampire.” Rosario chuckled. “I had to become the liaison or mom would’ve sent me to stay with my father for a week.”

“Why would she do that after what he’s done to you?” I asked.

“All this.” He motioned to his chest and the scars hidden under his shirt. “Is because I’m different. I’m strange even by fae standards. My dad hated everything I did. He never understood me and choosing a female form for a glamour just made it worse. He may not care that I’m gay, but he hated that I chose for humans to think I was a girl.”

“You were little. You made a choice based on what a child understood. You just wanted someone to treat you nice and everyone is nice to little girls. I remember how cute you were. You got all the good valentines every year.” I chuckled.

“I’m so glad I found you, Sean. You never made me feel bad for my choice. You’ve always just accepted me. How did I get so lucky?” Rosario smiled.

“The goddess wanted you to have someone who could make you see the world around you. That was me. Someone who has an open mind and can love you no matter what strange things you do.” I kissed the back of his hand.

“Mmm. I didn’t know you believed in the goddess. It will make everything much easier on you. I just have one request, one small change I need you to make so you can be absolutely perfect.” He purred and nibbled my ear.

My stomach dropped. He thought I needed to change something. I knew I wasn’t good enough on my own. I hoped it wasn’t too hard to change, because I wanted to be with Rosario forever.

“Wh-what is it?” I asked.

“Stop thinking you’re not good enough. Stop thinking I’m looking for reasons not to be with you. Quit with all the half jokes about me being crazy to be with you. All night, you acted like you didn’t deserve me. Sean, I don’t deserve you. You’re good enough, you’re smart enough, you’re everything to me. I love everything about you.” He implored. “Please stop trying to write us off as a fluke or insanity. We’re everything we were meant to be and I will never regret loving you.”

I couldn’t think of what to say to that. I hadn’t realized I’d been doing it, but he was right. I didn’t really think I was worthy of him. Rosario was perfect in every way. He was gorgeous, intelligent, and sweet.

“I’ll try my best. Can you keep reminding me, though? Sometimes I forget that I’m good enough to deserve you. You’re everything I ever dreamed of, Rosario. What can I have possibly have done to deserve the man of my dreams?” I whispered.

“Just being yourself was enough.” Rosario murmured and started kissing down my neck.

“W-wait. I still needed to talk to you. If you do that, we’ll get carried away.” I stammered.

“Goddess, you’re adorable. Kiss me to hold me over for a little while longer?” He requested.

I turned my head and kissed him. His hands went to my hair as he deepened the kiss. I basked in the feeling of being desired and playfully rubbed my tongue along his.

Rosario growled. Before I knew it, I was laying on the couch with him above me. He ground himself into me as our tongues battled for dominance. The taste of him was intoxicating. I couldn’t get enough.

It was the feeling of his hand tugging at my zipper that broke me out of it. I needed to get in control of the situation. I put my hands on his chest and tried pushing him away. It was like trying to push a boulder.

I tried nipping at his tongue, but that made him kiss me more passionately. His hand finally won the struggle with my zipper and slipped into my pants. I moaned as he grasped me and started stroking.

My brain seemed to shut down and I was living for that moment entirely. I couldn’t get enough of his kisses, his hands, the groans that came from him as he touched me. I grasped his shirt and pulled him tighter against me.

Rosario started kissing my chin and jaw, slowly heading down my neck. I didn’t want to make him stop, but I had to. I didn’t feel entirely comfortable doing this with my parents in the room above us.

“Please, Rosario. You said just a kiss. We still need to talk.” I gasped.

“How can you expect me to talk when you look so delicious? I want you so bad, Sean.” He sighed as he slid lower.

“Rosario. Can you do this for me? Please? Just talk to me a little more and then we can fool around. I don’t want to go too far tonight, but I want you as much as you want me. I promise.” I groaned.

“I’ll let you think that, but you have no idea how much I want you, Sean. When I thought you might reject me last night, my heart broke.” Rosario said, pulling away.

He removed his hand from my pants and I was finally able to think again. I felt embarrassed at how I’d acted last night. I was just so overwhelmed and it felt like everything I feared was coming true. My friends didn’t really like me, my boyfriend only wanted to use me. I couldn’t think past the feelings that were overwhelming me.

“Forgive me for last night. Please. I just got emotional because I was scared.” I murmured.

“I’ll always forgive you. Just don’t hurt me too much in the future. I don’t think I could handle it.” He whispered.

“I’ll try my hardest to never doubt you again. Now, can we sit up? I think talking like this will make it more difficult to think.” I chuckled.

“I don’t know. I’m thinking of a lot of things right now.” Rosario grinned.

“You’re not thinking of the right things.” I laughed.

We sat up and kept talking. He answered all of my questions. Everything I ever wanted to know about supernaturals. We would take breaks to make out and ended up falling asleep somewhere near dawn. I leaned against his chest and snuggled into the curve of his body. This was absolutely perfect.

When I woke up, I would let him know that I would help with the curse. I wanted to save my friends and my boyfriend from what my great-great grandfather did to them. It was the best way to show them how sorry I really was.

A Rude Awakening

Chapter 116 - The Vampire's Servant

[Gray]

Last night had been pretty perfect. I never thought it could be like that. Echo was sensual and glorious. Her eyes were glowing the entire time she was with both of us. I was reminded of just how beautiful her eyes were when they were all lit up.

There was a shift in the bed and I opened my eyes to see what was going on. Victor was on his hands and knees over Echo and he was glaring directly at my face. Rex started going mad with the waves of anger rolling off Victor.

“Mine.” He growled.

I swallowed hard. Defending myself from a prone position would be difficult. I had to make sure Echo wouldn’t get hurt. She still appeared to be sleeping.

Carefully, I moved toward the edge of the bed. If he followed me, then we could be far enough away that she would be safe. I wished I had a pack link to one of the other wolves... then I remembered. I had one to the guys walking the perimeter.

Quickly, I linked Justin to go get Dillon and Jean-Claude and send them to Victor’s room with an emergency warning. There was nothing of him in his eyes. He was a vampire acting on instinct.

The edge of the bed was near. Victor had followed me, climbing over Echo and stalking me. I lowered myself to the ground and crouched, still moving away from him slowly.

I was ready when Victor sprung at me. I managed to keep my feet as I defended my neck from him. He scratched my forearms deeply before jumping off of me. Rex worked to heal me as I kept a careful eye on Victor, waiting for his next move.

The wait wasn't long. He launched at me again and started punching and grappling. I didn't want to hurt him, but I had to make sure I didn't die. I managed to shift into my half wolf form, it could take more damage than my human body, and started fighting back as best I could.

Victor was fast, he was strong, and he wasn't pulling any punches. I felt a crack as he hit me in the ribs. I knew Echo was awake now, there was no way she could have slept through this, I could hear her crying.

"Stop, man. Your mate needs you." I said softly.

"You touched what was mine. You'll die for it, wolf." Victor growled.

"She's crying. What if something else is hurting her? Are you going to kill me while something else hurts your mate?" I asked.

Victor snarled and went to Echo. She looked scared of him for a moment. I tried to implore her with my eyes. She needed to distract him until someone could get there.

"V-Victor. Help me. It hurts." She whimpered.

He looked her over, trying to figure it out while Echo cried. At least feral Victor wasn't as smart as real Victor. It did the job, though.

Talia, Finn, Dillon, and Jean-Claude busted into the room. The vampires were on Victor fast. They held him while Dillon picked up Echo and got her out of the room quickly. Jean-Claude came to me and put my arm over his shoulder as he guided me out of the room. He closed the door and the sound of Victor's shouts and threats were muted.

"Looks like you took quite a beating." Dillon said.

"Nah. He was toying with me. Giving me hope that I could beat him before he killed me." I told him, breathing shallowly.

"He cracked some of your ribs. Can you shift back to your full human form or all the way into Rex? That could speed the healing process." Jean-Claude suggested.

I opted to go to my full human form. If I let Rex out, he would run right back into that room. I didn't want to die because my wolf was insulted.

Once I was human again, Jean-Claude picked me up and carried me to my room. I tried to tell him I could walk, but he insisted it would be easier on me physically if I didn't move too much. It was really awkward being carried, naked, to my room.

Dillon followed us, carrying Echo, who was holding on to him and crying her eyes out. He rocked her and hushed her. When we got to my room and Jean-Claude set me on the bed, Dillon let Echo go.

She helped me get covered with my blankets and held my hand. I assured her that I was alright, but Echo was blaming herself. I could see it.

"This must be why he came to ask me to train you to subdue a vampire. I think Victor's been keeping the progression of the curse from us for a while. You don't go from one small outburst to trying to kill a man literally overnight." Dillon sighed.

Jean-Claude rummaged in my drawers and pulled out a t-shirt he tossed to Echo. She slipped it on. I was still in a lot of pain, but I could appreciate how good she looked in my t-shirt.

The cuts on my arms were healing more slowly than they should have. Blood wasn't streaming out of them anymore, but they were painful. Echo took one arm and started licking the wounds on it.

"This really isn't the time to be feeding, Echo." Dillon said.

"She's healing me. Let her do what she wants. Echo is never selfish."

"Yes, I am. I've been selfish this whole time and done what I wanted, when I wanted. I put you in danger with my desires. I shouldn't have done that. I didn't realize.... What happened, Gray? Why was he like that?" She asked.

I explained what had happened. Echo started shaking. I realized she hadn't washed her makeup off last night and it was now streaming down her face, in the places it wasn't smudged.

"Angel. Don't cry. Jean-Claude, can you take her to her room to clean up her face? I don't have anything for getting makeup off."

He nodded and approached the bed.

"Echo, go with Jean-Claude. Get cleaned up and dress for the day. We'll go sit outside until Victor is asleep." I offered.

"But, your ribs." She whispered.

"He's a werewolf. They're probably mostly healed. He'll be fine. Go with my mate." Dillon urged her.

Echo climbed off my bed and left the room with a lingering glance back at me. I hated sending her away, but I was having trouble with the pain and didn't want her to see me weak. I breathed a jagged sigh of relief when she was gone.

"I thought I was going to die." I muttered.

"Sorry it took so long. I wanted both vampires with me when we went in there. I'm good, but not fighting an eight-hundred-year-old vampire level. Four or five, maybe, not eight. You did good. We'll start having you train with Talia. I don't want anything like this to happen again." He replied.

"We need to break this curse. This time he waited until I was awake. Next time, he may not. I haven't been this scared of him in weeks. Don't tell Echo. I don't want her to be more afraid. If she hears I was scared, she'll become over protective and that could turn him against her. He registers her as important. We were able to distract him with her." I said.

"With luck, Echo's friend will change his mind. I'm looking for ways in to that nursing home. We need to get this figured out. This outburst means there's even less time." Dillon told me.

There was a knock at the door. Dillon went to answer it. I could see Finn right outside the door.

"Victor's mind has come back. He would like to see Gray." Talia said.

"I'm not sure that's a great idea." Dillon replied.

"Let him in, Dil. I want to talk to him." I told him.

Dillon moved from the door and waved them in. Talia came in first, followed by Finn and Victor, who was looking down at the floor. His eyes raised to look at me and he seemed distraught. Victor rarely showed emotions on his face, so this was definitely different.

He came closer to me, flanked by the other vampires. They were ready to grab him if he came after me. I winced as I sat up in the bed.

"I'm so sorry, Grayson. I was watching Echo sleep and you moved. I was suddenly filled with rage and it was like I was pulled from control of my body by the anger. I wanted to kill you, but I didn't want to kill you. I pulled back as much as I could. All I could do was watch." Victor explained.

"I'm not going to say it's okay, because it's not. It will be, though, and you can make it up to me. What's the plan now? We have to make sure everyone stays safe." I said.

"Over the last two weeks, Marius has had people in the basement preparing a cell for Victor. When he isn't capable of pulling back, he will go live there. Even if we have to force him in there. We will have to ask that you don't sleep next to Echo from this point on. Even if he isn't

in the room, Victor will start to have the urge to come after you. You and Echo will have to confine your relationship to the hours when he's sleeping." Talia told me.

"I didn't realize you were preparing something like that. When has that been happening?" I asked.

"While you're at school, mostly. Marius' workers are efficient and don't goof around. They have a timeline and the price of not delivering on time is quite dear." She informed me.

"Are you feeling better, Victor?"

"I feel like myself, but terrible for hurting you and scaring Echo. That was really smart, distracting me with her, but it was dangerous. My anger didn't decide to focus on her part in you two being together, next time it might." He warned.

"We'll do our best to keep you from seeing us together like that. Why hadn't you told anyone it was getting bad?"

"I, honestly, thought I had a handle on the situation, Grayson. There were some times when it was a strain. In all, until last night, it wasn't too bad and I thought I was in control. You can trust that I would have done something immediately if I had realized.... Is Echo afraid of me now? She looked so terrified." Victor whispered.

"She's upset, but I don't think she's as scared of you as she is scared for you. Victor, Echo loves you and doesn't want to lose you. You can't pull this stoic hero shit. You need to tell us when it's getting bad. This curse doesn't fuck around and you can't either." I insisted.

The door opened. I knew it was Echo coming back. She wouldn't want to stay away too long if one of us was injured. It wasn't in her nature.

Victor turned to the door and I saw her run and throw herself into his arms. She must have felt his fear. Neither one of us wanted to lose her or her trust. I knew she would want to show him that she trusted him.

He held her tightly and kissed the top of her head while whispering apologies. They looked like the perfect vampire couple. Pale, beautiful, and totally in love. I knew my place and it was with them, throwing off the perfect symmetry of their icy love.

"You shouldn't be in here, Victor. I need to take care of Gray. You hurt him very badly." Echo said.

"I needed to apologize, princess. I couldn't go to sleep knowing that Grayson thought I really wanted him dead." He replied.

"Gray didn't think that. He knows the real you likes him. I know the real you likes him. This isn't something you should worry about. Go get cleaned up, have some blood, and rest. I'll be

there when you wake up, I need to take care of Gray right now.” She told him, kissing his hands. “Please, be good for me, Victor.”

Victor chuckled. “I’ll always be good for you, sweet Echo. I will do as you say. Will you take care of me like this if I ever get hurt?”

“Of course I will, Victor. I love both of you and I’ll take care of both of you. Don’t worry. I don’t have a favorite. I don’t pick sides. Go on.” Echo shoed him away.

Once he was out of the room, she climbed into the bed with me and pulled the blanket away to look at the large bruise that had formed on my ribs. She ordered me to lay down and asked Dillon and Jean-Claude to guard the door until Victor was in bed.

Echo started healing the wounds on my other arm. She stroked my stomach as she licked the slices in my skin. The pain finally went away there, making me more aware of the pain in my chest. I couldn’t help but whimper a little.

“Shh. I’m here. I’ll see if I can help you heal your ribs too. Fae magic might work a little on werewolves. I’m sure you’ll take all the help you can get.” She smiled.

There were tears forming in the corners of her eyes. I hated that she was hurting emotionally, but I wouldn’t focus on it because she wanted me to focus on the healing she was doing for me. She wanted to be my hero. I would gladly let her.

Echo started tracing her little fingers over the bruise on my ribs. I almost couldn’t feel her over the pain radiating from them. Even shifting hadn’t sped my healing by much. I wondered why. I should be mostly healed.

She focused on my chest, not talking or smiling at all. Just staring intently while her fingers slid back and forth over my skin. The pain started to go away. I could breathe a lot easier.

Suddenly, Echo fell over. I managed to pull her arm so she would land next to me. I looked her over. She didn’t seem to be injured, just unconscious. I wasn’t entirely healed, but Rex said it would only take an hour to finish the rest.

Carefully, I tucked her into the bed next to me and arranged her to cuddle on my chest. It didn’t hurt nearly as bad, and I was more than willing to suffer a little for her. My Echo was amazing and worth any bit of pain that I would have to suffer to keep her near me.

I drifted to sleep with her in my arms. I knew everyone in the house would keep us safe from Victor if he took another turn. When I woke up, I planned to throw every bit of my mental faculties into getting that curse resolved. I couldn’t let my friend suffer in a cage in the basement.

A Clearing of Dust

Chapter 117 - The Vampire's Servant

My phone was ringing. It pulled me from my dreamless sleep. It had to have been over an hour, because I felt completely fine now. Echo was still completely out.

Carefully, I moved her so I could answer my phone. I looked at the caller ID. It was Sean. Finally returning my messages, I guess.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Hey, Gray. I was trying to reach Echo, but no one answered her phone.” He said.

I looked at the time. It was about ten in the morning. It had been much more than an hour. Victor would have gone to sleep around seven thirty.

“Yeah, her phone is probably still in Victor’s room.” I muttered. “Let me get her up, wait a sec.”

I shook Echo a little. She snuggled tighter against me. I chuckled.

“Echo. My angel. Time to get up. You have a phone call. Come on, sweetheart.” I murmured.

“OH! Gray! I’m sorry! Did I hurt you? I didn’t mean for that to happen. I just lost control and fainted. Are your ribs alright?” She asked, sitting up and looking frantic.

“Hush, angel. I’m fine. You healed me enough that Rex was able to take care of the rest while we slept. You have a call. It’s Sean.” I told her.

She took the phone from me and put it on speaker. I sat up with her and looked at the phone. I wondered what was up.

“Hi, Sean.” Echo said.

“Echo. I’m so glad you took the call. I’m really sorry about Friday.” He told her.

“I appreciate your apology, but you already texted me about this. You didn’t need to call.” She smiled at the phone.

“I’m calling because I want to help with the curse. I want to help more than just getting you in to see my great-uncle. I talked to my dad. He’s been studying the curse for years and he said he’ll give you everything. He just needs to meet you. Will you meet with my dad so we can get you all his stuff?” Sean asked.

“Yes! When? Can we do it today? I am free all day.” Echo bounced as she talked.

“Not today. He says it’s the full moon and he has a lot of work to do. I never even paid attention. On full moon days and nights, dad is usually in his workshop.” He muttered.

“If he’s doing spell work it makes sense. Witches can create more powerful spells on the full moon. When will work for him? We need everything we can get as soon as possible.” She insisted.

“Did something happen? Are you safe?” Sean questioned.

“The curse on Victor progressed. I don’t know how much longer we have. Please, Sean. We need to save Victor. You can meet him after and you’ll see that he’s worth it. Victor is the best vampire in the world. He saved my life, Sean. He loves me and I love him so much, I don’t know what I’ll do if we fail.” Echo sniffled.

“We won’t fail, Echo.” I murmured.

“He’s right. We won’t fail. Tomorrow, after school. Dad gets home from work around five and we have dinner at five thirty. Can you be here at six in the evening?” He asked.

“Yes. Gray can drive me over. I promise, I’ll be there on time. When can we go see your great-uncle?” She pressed.

“Next visiting day is Tuesday. They do Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday for family visits. Just take today to rest. It sounds like you had a busy night last night.” Sean said.

“It was a little bit of a crazy weekend. I think I would feel really weird about not being busy today, though. It seems like every day has been so full of things, that having nothing to do is almost lazy.” Echo sighed.

“Why don’t we go out and pull weeds in the garden today? We can have lunch outside and you can have something to do, so you don’t feel lazy.” I offered.

“That sounds wonderful, Gray.” She replied and kissed me.

“Does... does Gray live with you?” Sean asked.

I chuckled. “Yes. I moved in a couple weeks ago.”

“So that’s why Rosario said I could reach her by calling you.” He said.

“I told you so.” I heard a man in the background say.

“Hush, I’m on the phone.” Sean hissed.

“I guess I’ll just have to find some other way to keep my mouth busy.” The voice said, sounding much closer to the phone.

Sean moaned. “Stop, Rosario. I have to go, Echo. I’ll see you on the bus tomorrow.”

“Bye, Sean. Bye, Rosario.” Echo giggled.

“Bye, Echo!” The man’s voice said and the line hung up.

I stared at the phone. Was Rosario a guy? I closed my eyes. I thought Sean had a crush on Echo, but he was actually gay. I couldn’t believe I’d embarrassed myself so badly. It just seemed like he was always looking at her when we were together.

“Shit.” I sighed.

“Are you alright? Do you hurt?” Echo asked.

“No. Just realizing what an ass I was to Sean because I thought he liked you. This was why you said you weren’t his type and neither was Rosario.”

“I didn’t realize Rosario was a boy. I found out on Friday.” She explained.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I whined.

“Because it wasn’t my place to tell you. Rosario was revealing that to people he was comfortable with when he was comfortable doing it. Sean asked me not to tell anyone he was gay because he was afraid of losing friends over it.” Echo said softly. “Why would someone not want to be Sean’s friend because of who he loved?”

“There are some people in the world who think love should look a certain way. They’re the people who can’t stand something being different. Like my grandfather and his belief that vampires and werewolves shouldn’t be together. I will totally still be Sean’s friend. He deserves love and happiness. Just like anyone else.” I told her and kissed her gently.

She dropped my phone and straddled me, deepening our kiss. I wrapped my arms around her waist and held her to me. Echo’s arms slid around my neck and she kissed me desperately.

I loved Echo so much. I knew she was kissing me for the reassurance, not to try and get anything going. I also wasn’t surprised when she kissed down my neck and I felt her fangs slide into my skin.

A groan rumbled in my chest. Normally, Echo didn’t feed on me anymore, but it felt so good when she did. I almost found myself craving her bite.

When she was done, Echo licked over the bite and laid her head on my shoulder. She seemed to be really down. I didn't like that. I loved my smiling, happy mate. When she was sad or upset, I wanted to do anything I could to fix it.

"Do you think Victor would kill me if I tried to kiss him instead of you?" I asked.

Echo giggled. "I think he would do that even if the curse was broken."

"Don't be sad. It's only a couple more days and we will have even more than we had before. You need a break from all the lessons and all the information gathering. Without a break, your mind won't work as well as it could. We could miss something if you're not rested." I told her.

"I wouldn't want that. I'll do my best, Gray. Let's go with your idea. We can start in the garden. I need to dust, it's been a week. When's the last time I washed the bedding?" She wondered.

"No working. You washed the bedding on Tuesday. I'll see if Dillon and Jean-Claude will dust. I want you only relaxing. Gardening makes you feel better, or I wouldn't even let you do that." I grumbled.

"Cleaning relaxes me, Gray. Let me do my work today. Maybe it will help me think." Echo insisted.

"Fine, but I'm working with you. You're not doing this alone anymore. This is your home, Echo, you're not a servant here." I kissed her hand.

"I know, Gray. After years of being treated so poorly, I'm finally somewhere that I'm appreciated. I'm taking care of my home and the people I love." She smiled.

I agreed to let her clean instead of forcing her to relax today. Echo went to change into clothes for cleaning and told me to wear clothes that were older. I picked out some jeans that had rips from playing soccer with my friends and an old t-shirt that was a little tight on me.

Echo met me in the kitchen. She had thrown together a big sandwich for me and was snacking on a banana and a glass of milk. I would have gotten on her about her food, but she fed on me earlier and wouldn't need as much.

Dillon and Jean-Claude came in and sat with us. I thanked them for watching over us until Victor was asleep. Dillon told me my new training regimen would start in the morning and I'd better be ready to really work. I didn't doubt that it would be difficult, but I looked forward to it.

While we were still talking, Echo finished her food and popped up. She left without a word. I heard her go upstairs.

"Where's she going?" Dillon asked.

“Echo wanted to clean today. I guess she just decided to get started. I’ll be helping her out.” I told him.

“Your ribs are feeling okay then?” He pressed.

“They’re fine. I won’t overwork myself. It’s just some cleaning. Not like I’m going to go work in the fields.” I laughed.

“If you’re sure. We’ll be going into town for a while today, but we’ll be back for dinner.” Dillon smiled.

They took off soon after that. I rinsed my plate and cup before I went up to see what Echo was doing.

I found her in Victor’s room, stripping his bed. Looking around, I saw he was on the couch, covered with a light blanket. Why did he decide to sleep there?

“Need any help here?” I asked.

“Nope. I got him moved just fine. Go on, I don’t want his room to smell like werewolf. This needs to be his sanctuary now more than ever. Go to your room and strip the sheets and blankets from your bed. I can wash your sheets after his blanket goes in.” She told me without looking away from what she was doing.

“You moved him!?”

“Of course. How am I supposed to take care of his sheets if he’s on them?” Echo chuckled as she sprayed the mattress with something in a bottle.

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That day I learned a lot about Echo which I had no clue about before. First, she was a demon when it came to cleaning. Second, she didn’t believe in regular breaks. And, finally, that I was woefully unprepared for working beside her.

Echo would set me to chores which, I realized, she didn’t think I could mess up. By the time she was putting all her cleaning items away, Echo had cleaned all the bathrooms that were in use, washed the bedding on my bed, Victor’s bed, and her bed, plus the sheets for Dillon and Jean-Claude.

She dusted every common room, wiped down all the leather furniture, washed every surface that was touched, mopped most of the main floor, and cleaned Victor’s entire office. She was fast, efficient, and diligent.

I realized this was Echo in her element. The place where she knew the most about what was going on. I couldn’t imagine what she would do when she knew more of the world. If she had

been raised normally, she would run our school. Probably be student body president or something.

When she announced it was time for her to get cleaned up and go to Victor, I was relieved. I was exhausted. I don't think I ever worked so hard. That reminded me. I went up and got my cell phone so I could tell my boss I would be late for work tomorrow night.

I stripped off my clothes and took what had to have been the best shower I'd ever had. The hot water seemed to wash away years' worth of dirt and pain. I wondered why I was feeling so exhausted.

'Rex, are you okay?' I asked.

'Tired. That healing she did, exhausted me. Then she fed on us. Sorry I couldn't make you as powerful as you normally are.'

'Don't worry. You did a lot. Healing broken bones is a big job.' I said.

'It was like she was sucking out my power and applying it faster and better than I can. We need to be careful. I don't know how much of that kind of healing I can handle.' He warned.

'I'm going to learn how to fight him. We'll get stronger, much stronger. I'm glad you're talking to me again.'

'I was just upset about not having our mate to ourselves. I watched. I saw how much she needs us and him. We can share without getting less from her than he does.' Rex told me.

'Echo would never give us less, Rex. She loves us as much as she loves him. She has more love in her than anyone I've ever known.'

'Just tell me you weren't serious when you were talking about kissing him earlier.' He pled.

I chuckled. 'Of course not. Even Echo knows I wasn't serious. I just needed to get her out of her funk. I think she's even more beautiful when she's happy. I wanted to make her smile.'

'Good. Because that's not happening.' Rex laughed.

'Totally not happening.' I replied.

I finished drying off and got dressed again. When I headed downstairs, I could hear Echo and Victor talking. He was trying to convince her to go to my pack lands again.

Echo would never accept that. She wanted to be with Victor as much as possible if she ran the risk of losing him. I understood. I wanted to be with Echo as much as I could be back when I thought she would reject me. It wasn't just because I was stubborn, but because I loved her so much right from the beginning.

No matter what happened, I wanted to make sure Echo had the life she deserved. She deserved both of us. She needed two people to give her the love she missed out on for most of her life.

I went to the kitchen to help set the table for dinner. Dillon and Jean-Claude were cooking that night, so Finn and Talia were cleaning up. Echo hated it when Finn was on clean up. He broke several of her plates last time. I was sure he'd be more careful after the angry rant she'd gone on.

One day, my Echo would be the woman she was meant to be. I would make sure Victor was there to see that day. No matter what I had to do to ensure it.

A Second Curse Team

Chapter 118 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

I barely paid attention in school. I was entirely focused on getting over to Sean's house and meeting his dad. I needed to save Victor.

"Earth to Echo." Harmony said, poking me.

"Sorry. I'm super distracted today." I smiled tightly.

"Yeah, I noticed. You need to eat your lunch." She told me.

I sighed and started eating. Terry and Elle were sitting at a different table today and most of Val and Harmony's friends were still all with their friends. Rosario took this time to update everyone on the curse.

We were starting our own curse team. Something where we didn't have to get approval from the vampires before doing something or pursuing a path. I wanted to let Victor know, but he had tried to exclude me from the hunt for clues before. I couldn't imagine him approving.

Sean pulled out a sheet of paper and plotted out a timeline with the information we had. Gray knew a lot more than I did, because he was always wandering around the house and hearing things. He didn't do it on purpose, he just happened to be places when people were talking about things.

Another paper came out of his bag. It was a Venn diagram with all the species affected by the curse and where there was overlap in the effects. I started really seeing how it all fit together.

"He stole love from everyone." I murmured.

“What?” Gray asked.

“Werewolves can’t find their mates until they’re eighteen. Love spells don’t work. Soulmate spells don’t work. No vampire has found a Solus Amor in this territory until Victor found me. He and I didn’t even recognize each other as that. Some of the fae who needed to conceal themselves more never got their ability to use glamour back, making them need to go back to the forest. Some of their true mates were still able to use their glamour.” I said.

“Like my father and mother. My father can’t use glamour at all. He prefers being in the forest anyway, but he hasn’t really been able to live with my mother again because we can’t obscure our neighborhood from humans anymore. No fae has been able to walk our streets safely, without glamour, in a hundred years.” Rosario stated.

“He took love from everyone else like he did from Grace and like death did from him. He loved his wife, but she died. That must have torn him up.”

“Lila said he went dark after losing his wife. Grace would have been about five when she died. Her entire life changed. Her father changed.” Gray said.

“I know that feeling.” I sighed. “I was five when I stopped being a child to my parents and became an evil creature.”

Gray put his arm around me and hugged me to him. I felt so bad for Grace. Five years old is not old enough to understand why everything changed. I didn’t know why they decided I was evil, only that I lost everything except my sister and brother. They became the only light in my life.

I endured a lot. I worked even harder so I wouldn’t be punished, because I saw how much it hurt them when I was hurt. All I wanted was to stay with the people I loved. I wanted that now as well. I wanted to stay with Victor and Gray.

The bell rang for the end of lunch. Sean packed up his things and smiled at me. I smiled back.

“Everything will be alright. We’ll figure this out. We’re going to win.” He told me.

“We have to win. There’s no other choice. I can’t live without Victor.” I said, putting the lid on my lunch box.

“Then it’s what we’ll do.”

The rest of school seemed to either drag, or go by in a flash. It seemed to go slower the closer it got to being over. I practically flew to my locker and out to the bus.

Sean and Rosario sat in the seat I usually shared with Sean. I sat behind them. They seemed to barely notice me. They were scooted close and were murmuring to each other.

“Ugh, I don’t even know what she sees in him.” The person behind me muttered to their seat mate.

“Maybe it was a dare or she’s messing with him. I can’t believe she’s really dating him. He’s such a geek.” The other scoffed.

Rosario and Sean didn’t even seem to register it. They were actually the talk of the school. No one could seem to believe that they were together. I heard it all over. People asked me if I had any idea how it happened.

I turned to the two girls behind me. They looked pretty normal and didn’t sit with us. They looked a little younger. Probably ninth grade or so.

“Rosario would never date someone on a dare or just to mess with them. She and Sean are in love. You can’t always choose who you love and they may not always be exactly what others find attractive, but your happiness will always outshine the words and thoughts of others. If you really knew them, you wouldn’t be able to question it.” I told them.

“If I ever fall for a geek, I hope someone slaps some sense into me.” The first one snorted.

“You’re dating Gray Padua, like you have any room to talk. One of the hottest boys in school follows you around like a puppy.” The second one said.

“And I wasn’t popular or well-known at all. There were all sorts of girls who wanted to date Gray, but he picked me. When you’re older, I hope you find a relationship that will help you see that popularity and attractiveness aren’t what’s important in a partner. A real connection and love are. If you just look at Rosario and Sean, you can see that they have that.” I smiled.

“Whatever. She’s probably a secret geek or something.” The first waved me off and changed the subject with her companion.

I shrugged and turned back in my seat. Sean and Rosario were watching me. I blushed a little.

“Thank you for that. No one else defends us and we had just decided to ignore them.” Rosario whispered.

“People should mind their own business when it comes to the relationships of others.” I huffed. “They aren’t involved in the relationship. They don’t know what you’re going through or what you do for each other that makes this work for you.”

“Speaking from experience?”

“No one wants to hear about my struggles with having two mates.” I sighed.

“I most certainly do.” Rosario chuckled. “Your mates are handsome and they both seem to love you a lot. I want to know everything.”

“Everyone always wants to hear the hot, sexy, fun stuff. I don’t kiss and tell.” I winked.

“Echo. If you want to talk about the hard, unsexy stuff, I’m here. I may not have much advice, but I’m always willing to listen.” Sean said.

“Thank you. I really appreciate it.” I smiled at him.

“This is my stop. I’ll see you tonight, Echo. Don’t worry. My dad is a big softie. He just wants to know the person he’s handing all his work over to.” Sean told me as he stood.

“Okay. I’ll try to remember that. I’ll see you in a little while.” I told him.

“See you then.” He smiled and left the bus.

I moved to sit next to Rosario. He smiled at me too. I didn’t know if it was the glamour or just happiness, but he looked like he was glowing.

“Everything’s going okay with you two, then?” I asked.

“More than okay. We spent Saturday night together and most of Sunday. We talked about everything. Not just the curse and all the things Sean didn’t know about, we talked about relationship things, too. He’s so scared of being abandoned, that he pushes people away when it looks like it could happen.” Rosario said.

I took Rosario’s hand in my own and squeezed it tightly. All relationships were hard, but Sean’s worries could end up making his even harder. I felt badly that their relationship had a rocky start because of me.

“You know I’m always here to talk. You don’t have to try and deal with everything on your own.” I offered.

“I guess you’d be the expert in unconventional relationships.” He chuckled. “You know you can talk to me about the hard things, too. I don’t want you to think I’m only interested in the fun stuff. I can imagine that’s all anyone else focuses on.”

“It really is. Every supernatural who finds out I have two mates asks about things like sleeping arrangements, jealousy, and intimate details. Never the struggle of trying to make them each happy. Never how hard it is to see one pulling away and having to push the other away. Victor almost killed Gray yesterday and I’m supposed to act like it doesn’t affect me. I see him turning into someone I don’t know and.... I’m so scared Rosario. I keep saying we’re going to break this curse, but I just don’t know.” I admitted.

“I bet it feels like people are just saying what they’re supposed to, not being honest with you, when they say we’re going to beat this curse. I honestly believe that we will beat it. You have me and Sean working on this. We’re getting so much information. This is the most anyone has ever put together in such a short time. You’re responsible for most of it. I think you were exactly what

we needed to break this curse. As for the rest, this personality change isn't permanent. Victor will go back to being himself as soon as we break the curse. Please believe me." Rosario assured me.

"If we break the curse." I sighed.

"No. When we break the curse. Don't give up. Never give up. Victor needs you to believe in us and to believe this curse will be broken. If he senses that you're giving up, he might give up. That won't help anyone. Just stay strong for a little longer. Come talk to me or Sean when you need to be weak. We're here for you."

"Thank you. I'm afraid to talk to my sister and brother about it, because neither one of them really approves of my relationships." I told him.

"They need to grow the fuck up and stop trying to control your life. Over the last couple of weeks, I've watched them baby you. You never seem to even blink at it. You need to get mad. You need to put them in their place." He insisted.

"I don't mind them taking care of me, like today when Harmony reminded me to eat. I just wish I could talk to them more about things like what's going on with Gray and Victor. I love my sister and brother. I miss being able to tell them anything."

"Maybe I can help you with that one a little. It sounds like you need a sleepover. Have them come to your house and stay the night. Let them see how your relationship with the guys works." Rosario offered.

"You really think that will work?" I asked.

"Couldn't really hurt. I've seen you with Gray and I've seen you with Victor. Your love for them is obvious. I think maybe Val and Harmony just need to see it. Plus, you've only been around them at school. Maybe part of their objection is that you're living away from them." He suggested.

I nodded. That made a lot of sense. I had never lived apart from my sister and brother, and now I'd lived away from them for a month. They only saw me at school and that would be ending soon.

A pang of regret shot through me. I was free, but I'd cut off my major family. I knew Cam wouldn't want Harmony to leave him in the pack lands. There were enough rooms in the house that I could put all three in their own rooms.

Excitement at the idea raced through me. I could have my family and the men I loved all in the same area. My sister and brother would be able to see how happy I was and I would be able to take care of everyone I loved.

"I think this is your stop, Echo." Rosario said.

“Thanks!” I grinned and hugged him briefly before getting off the bus.

Gray was waiting for me at the end of the driveway and drove me up to the house. I’d made another big decision today that I wanted to clarify with both Gray and Victor before bedtime tonight. It was only fair that I talked to them a little.

We pulled into Gray’s parking spot and he turned off the truck. I unbuckled and turned to him. He smiled and leaned in to kiss me. I accepted it, because I didn’t know if he was going to be mad at me after this.

“Gray, can we talk for a moment?” I asked.

“Sure thing, angel. What did you want to talk about?”

“With the way the curse is progressing and the changes that we’ve had to make to how we spend time, I’ve become worried. I don’t want to make Victor angry and I don’t want to make you sad.” I told him.

“O...kay.... What are you saying exactly here, Echo?” Gray questioned.

“I... I think it’s best if I don’t make love to you or to Victor until the curse is broken. We can still have kisses and cuddles, but I feel like you’ll start to feel bad if I only make love to you hurriedly in the day time with no time for anything else. I think Victor will feel bad about excluding you, even though he knows it isn’t safe. I love you both too much to watch either of you be hurt.” I said.

He nodded. “I understand. You don’t want to incite Victor and you don’t want to hurt my feelings. We already decided that you wouldn’t sleep with me. I just didn’t realize I would be cut off in other ways too.”

“It’s not because I don’t want you, Gray. I just don’t want you to die. This will make it much easier. And I’m going to shower and change before seeing Victor in the afternoon, so I don’t smell like you.” I informed him.

“I hate that you’re washing off my scent every day. I think that hurts more than not being with you. Scent is important to werewolves, but I understand. As much as you don’t want me to die, I really don’t want to die. We’ll do it like this, but once that spell is broken, I’m not letting you out of the house unless you’re covered in my scent.” Gray told me.

“Deal.” I grinned.

“Let’s get inside. We have school work to do and now you have even less time for me in the afternoons.” He winked.

“I love you, Gray.” I murmured, caressing his cheek.

“I love you, too, angel. Don’t worry. This will all be over soon. Tomorrow, we’ll get everything we need. I just know it.” Gray smiled.

I hoped he was right. I wanted to be able to be with my mates again. My whole body ached with wanting them. It would have to wait though. We had a curse to break. If nothing else, this was one heck of a motivator.

Sean's Family

Chapter 119 - The Vampire's Servant

Before Victor woke up, I showered and changed my clothes. We’d gotten our homework done quickly. Gray and I were finishing up projects that were due at the end of the week. Next week was all testing, then we’d have graduation and school would be over.

It was a relief to know that we’d be able to completely focus on the curse soon. I wanted this whole thing to be over so I could ensure that Victor didn’t die. I couldn’t live without him. Well, I could, but I didn’t want to.

When I went into his room, I noticed Talia sitting on the couch. She nodded to me. I walked over and sat in the chair next to her.

“What are you doing, Talia?” I asked.

“I’m here to make sure he doesn’t get violent. Go about your business. I’ll just be here until he’s awake and I know you’re safe.” She told me.

I nodded, relieved to have the safety net, and headed back over to Victor’s bed. I turned on the heated blanket and laid down next to him. He was so peaceful and still, like he usually was. I pretended for a moment that he was normal again. That I wasn’t losing him.

After a while, he started moving. Victor rolled over and put his arm around me. I tensed a little, because I didn’t know if it was really him. I hated myself for that a little, until he spoke.

“Mine.” He whispered.

The nature of his voice was a little more guttural. Where he hadn’t had an accent before, one crept in, I knew it wasn’t him. I worked to hold back my tears. Yesterday, he’d woken up totally normal. I never knew what to expect.

“Good afternoon, my Solus Amor.” I replied. “Did you rest well?”

“You are mine.” Victor said.

“Yes. I’m yours, Victor. No one is going to take me from you.”

“You don’t wear my mark.” He growled. “No one knows you are mine.”

“You decided to wait, remember? Just a couple more weeks. Then you will mark me. Remember how much we were looking forward to it. Only a little longer, my love.” I murmured and caressed his face.

“Then you’ll only be mine.” Victor stated firmly.

“Then your mark will show everyone that I am your Solus Amor. This was your decision. We have to wait because you decided it.” I reminded him in a soft, calm voice.

He grunted and started kissing my neck. I moved my head to the side, to give him access. Talia told me yesterday that I must not seem resistant or he might get angry at me.

Victor started sucking on my neck and I felt him move his arm. I knew he was going to scratch me before he did it. There was no pain, only pressure before he began sucking at the cut.

Even though he wasn’t in his right mind, Victor was gentle. He held me firmly and lovingly. I felt almost safe as he fed on me. I was fine with it. He needed blood and it made sense that I would feed him.

After a couple minutes, he pulled away and started licking the wound closed. I stayed still, waiting for what would happen next. He held me for a few moments longer.

“I’m so sorry, Echo. I couldn’t make it stop.” Victor whispered.

“It’s alright, Victor. You didn’t hurt me. You were very gentle.” I assured him.

“I hate this. I’m trapped behind my eyes, unable to control my body. What if I had tried to hurt you?” He asked.

“Then Talia would have stopped you. She’s sitting on the couch over there. She was there when I came in. Don’t worry. I was safe.” I told him.

Victor looked up and over to the corner. I followed his gaze. Talia wiggled her fingers and stood.

“Get dressed, Victor. We have much to do tonight.” She said and she walked out of the room.

“Victor. I wanted to tell you something. Is it safe? Are you completely in control?” I asked.

“I am. What’s going on, Echo?”

“I wanted to let you know that I will not be making love to you or Gray until this curse is resolved. I don’t want to risk making you mad or making him feel less loved, because I’m doing things with you that I’m not doing with him.” I explained.

“That’s certainly a motivator. I agree with your decision, even though it pains me. I know you didn’t choose this lightly. You had to have wracked your brain for any other solution. I know you love what we do with you as much as we do.” Victor said.

I blushed. “Of course I do. I love you both and you make me feel so good. Why wouldn’t I want that all the time? But we can’t or it could make this all much harder. I promise to shower and change after school every day, so I don’t smell like anyone else and I’ll confine my moments with Gray to times when you couldn’t possibly see them.”

“I love you so much, princess. You’ve given up a lot for me.”

“I was hoping to talk to you about getting something back, though.” I told him.

“What did you want, Echo. Name anything and I’ll move the heavens and Earth to give it to you.” He whispered, kissing my hand and all the way up to my shoulder.

“I want my sister and brother to come stay with us. We need to learn what we can do together and we rarely see each other outside of school. They can train with me in the mornings and we can experiment with our abilities in the afternoon.” I said.

He was quiet. I could see the thoughtful expression on his face. I was ready for any argument he could throw my way. I was ready to fight everyone for this.

“I worry about them here with the curse growing.” He sighed.

“Don’t. The other you is concerned with things that threaten your territory and our relationship. My siblings are neither. They can’t change my mind about loving you.” I insisted.

“You’re right. See if they’re amenable to the arrangement. We have more than enough room. Are you okay with having that many more people in the house?” Victor asked.

“Yes! I would love to have them here. Are you okay with Cam coming too? I don’t think he’ll be okay with Harmony being here without him.”

“Of course. Anything to make you smile. Can I get up now? Or are we spending the afternoon in bed?” He purred.

“Get up. You have a lot of work to do and I have to meet with Sean’s parents.” I told him and kissed him on his lips.

Victor held me to him for a while. I loved the feeling of his arms around me. It was really him and that made me feel safe.

I left so he could get ready. Gray was changing into his work clothes, which he normally did in the locker room at the restaurant. He said this way he would be able to just clock in and get to work.

Before we went to Sean's I checked in with everyone else and let them know my sister and brother may be coming to stay with us. They all seemed concerned, but I knew it would be alright. This is what had to happen. It was the only way to ensure that we got time to explore our abilities.

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Gray and I pulled up to Sean's house around six. He was a little antsy about me meeting Sean's dad on my own. He even tried to argue about how I would get home, until I reminded him that I only had to want to be home and I would be there.

"Are you sure you don't want me to come in with you?" Gray asked for the fourteenth time.

"Gray. I'm not a child. I can meet with them on my own. Sean will be there and I can just go home if I don't like what's going on." I chided.

"I just worry about you. This is the first time you're doing something like this alone and I don't like not knowing what's going on. What if they put another curse on you or cast a spell or something?" He pressed.

"Now, stop. This is Sean's family. Why do you think they would do something like that? You can't decide they're like Fenton Aimes without ever meeting them. That's like someone deciding all werewolves are bad because of the one bad one they met." I scolded him.

Gray had the decency to be embarrassed. He sighed heavily. I put my hand over his on the steering wheel.

"I'm going to be alright. Trust me, Gray. Even if you don't trust anyone else." I pled.

"I trust you, Echo. I'm sorry. I'm just on edge." Gray smiled tightly.

"Go to work and be the best waiter there. Okay? When you get home, I'll tell you all about it." I offered.

"Promise?" He asked.

"Absolutely." I smiled.

I got out of the truck and waved to him as he drove away. I knew he would worry, so I planned to text him when I got home. I kept telling myself that everything would be fine. This was just a formality before I was given everything I needed.

After ringing the doorbell, I waited. The neighborhood was quiet. I was surprised that there were no kids out playing, but that could easily be explained by the time. Maybe they were all eating dinner.

The door opened and Sean smiled at me. It was nice to see a friendly and familiar face.

“Hi, Echo. My parents are in the living room. Come with me.” He said.

I followed him through the house. When we came to the living room, I saw two people sitting on the couch, deep in conversation. Sean cleared his throat.

“Mom, Dad, this is my friend, Echo.” Sean announced.

They stood. Sean’s dad was the same height as him and had dark brown hair and hazel eyes. He reminded me of a smaller, slither, version of my brother. I stuck out my hand and he accepted it.

“Brian Flowers.” He said.

“Echo Nightshade.” I replied.

Next to him was a blonde woman with the same freckles Sean had across her nose. If Sean were a girl, I felt like he would look just like her. I offered my hand and she accepted it.

“Hope Flowers, Sean’s mom. Did you find the place okay?” She asked.

“Yes, thank you.” I smiled.

“Before we sit. I want you to drink this.” Mr. Flowers said, handing me a little bottle of something green.

“Brian. I don’t think that’s a good idea. She won’t lie.” Mrs. Flowers scolded.

“She’s part vampire and I learned never to trust a vampire.” He responded.

I blushed. I hadn’t quite prepared for this. I knew people didn’t trust vampires, but I didn’t ever expect them to treat me like one. You would think with my experiences so far, I’d have learned my lesson about that.

“What is it?” I asked.

“It’s a truth potion. The effects last about three hours, but it makes it impossible for you to lie. I promise it is nothing more than that.” Mr. Flowers told me.

“Dad, don’t make my friend take that. She’s a really good person. I swear.” Sean pled.

“It’s alright. I can take that potion. I trust you, Sean and I trust your family. It would be very stupid to invite the Solus Amor of the Master of the territory here just to poison me. Everyone would know who did it.” I chuckled and held my hand out for the bottle.

Mr. Flowers handed it to me and watched as I opened it and drank the contents. It tasted terrible. I managed not to make a face, though.

“Thank you for doing that. Please, have a seat.” Mr. Flowers said.

I took a seat in one of the arm chairs. Sean’s parents sat across from me and Sean sat next to me. I looked around a little.

The room reminded me of the living room at my old house, except it was filled with pictures of Sean and his family. There were school photos for Sean and a girl, I assumed was his sister, covering the walls.

It was a really warm and friendly feeling. I hoped that my house would be like that one day. I wanted to have pictures of the kids all over with family trips and holidays. All of the things that made people smile.

“So, Echo. Why are you trying to break the curse?” Mr. Flowers asked.

“Because it’s unfair to the supernaturals who live here and it will kill Victor if I don’t.” I answered.

“Who is Victor?”

“The Master of the territory, a vampire, and my husband.” I replied.

“Husband?” Sean asked.

“I bit him. By vampire law that makes him my husband. In a couple weeks, he’ll bite me back and we’ll be bound to each other for eternity.” I said softly.

It wasn’t just that I told the truth, I was compelled to tell the truth. I had to respond. I sighed internally. Only three hours. I could surely avoid questions at home for that long.... I hoped.

“Did you become friends with my son in order to break the curse?” Mr. Flowers pressed.

“No. I wanted to be Sean’s friend because I always wanted friends.” I answered.

“What will you do with the information I give you tonight?”

“I’ll take it to Finn. He’s Victor’s broodmate. Finn will decide what to do with it. We’ll use it to try and break the curse.” I admitted.

“Have you ever lied to Sean?” He asked.

“Little white lies, a couple misleading answers, few outright lies. I prefer to be honest when I can, but I’ll lie if I feel like it will save me.” I told him.

“What will you do after you break the curse?”

“Start my life with my mates. Help stabilize the territory. Go see my sire’s home. Travel.” I replied.

“You won’t wage a war on witches? You won’t come after our family?” Mr. Flowers asked.

“Sean is one of my best friends. I can’t blame you for what your ancestor did. My brother is a witch and I would never back a war against them. Plus, I’m part witch. That would be like fighting my own people.” I said.

He nodded. It looked like he liked my answers. He reached below the coffee table and pulled out a dozen large notebooks. I sat up a little straighter.

“I’ve logged every trace of every ingredient I could find. Every spell those ingredients could make. Every spell that was remotely similar to what he did to any of the people. He did a Heart’s Forgetting spell. I’m assuming that was cast on Grace and the vampire. My work last night revealed that.” He explained.

“Thank you, thank you so much! I can’t even begin to tell you how much this means to me. I was starting to think we wouldn’t break the spell and that we were just going around in circles until the curse took Victor from me altogether. I can’t lose him. I’ll do anything to save him.” I sniffled.

“Why are you so attached? You’ve only known him for a month.” Sean asked.

“Victor is the other half of my heart. He saved my life. He gave me everything, including love. He cares for me like no one ever has.” I admitted.

“Then what is Gray?” He pressed.

“Who’s Gray?” Sean’s mom whispered.

“He’s my other husband. The other half of my soul. The one that makes me whole in spirit. He’s the fire to my ice. He melts me and gives me life.” I said softly.

“Sounds like you love them both very much.” She replied.

“I do. I can’t live without either one of them. I’ll end up too cold with Victor, and burn up with Gray. Together, they keep me perfectly centered.” I smiled.

“Did you need anything else? How are you getting home?” Mr. Flowers asked.

“I can travel to places I’ve been before. That was my plan. It would get me home faster than a car.” I told him.

“A vampire ability?” He asked.

“Yes. From my sire. Is this everything? Did you need anything else from me?”

“Would you like to have some dessert before you go? I made an apple crumble.” Mrs. Flowers offered.

I smiled. “Yes, please.”

We were planning for this to take much longer than it did. I could have a little dessert to reward myself. I did a good job and I earned it.

Truthfully Home

Chapter 120 - The Vampire's Servant

When I popped back home that night, all of the vampires were eagerly awaiting me in Victor’s office. I handed the notebooks off to Talia. She glanced in them briefly.

“We’re going to have to have Lila decipher these.” She told us. “I’ll call Marius so he can take them to her.”

I still hadn’t met Lila. Victor told me the part she played in finding me, but I still hadn’t had the chance to thank her. I figured I would when this was all over.

“Do you think there will be good information there?” I asked.

“Of course. These are all very carefully written and documented bits. I’m sure that Lila will find something.” Talia replied.

Victor pulled me into a hug. I wrapped my arms around him and squeezed tightly. We were one step closer to saving him.

“Tomorrow you meet with Fenton Aimes III, right?” Finn asked.

I pulled out of the hug and turned to him.

“Yes. Sean is borrowing his mom’s car to drive us there. I didn’t want Gray to be late for work again.” I told him.

“Good. All you have to do is figure out who it is who knows more about the curse. Try to get as much out of him as you can. I can’t imagine it’s him. He was an infant when the curse was laid.” Finn said.

I nodded. “Right. Unless his father knew something, he wouldn’t know anything.”

“Exactly.” He smiled.

“You should go relax, Echo. You’ve gotten a lot for us. I’m sure you’re exhausted.” Talia said.

“No. I’m scared and I’m nervous. I want to read those notebooks and see if I can figure anything out, even though I don’t know a lot about magic. Most of all, I want to take Victor to bed right now. I know I shouldn’t because of the curse, but I really want to.” I admitted.

They looked stunned for a moment. Victor gripped me from behind. I blushed. I hadn’t meant to say that.

“Mr. Flowers gave me a truth potion. Sorry.” I said softly.

“So you have to tell the truth?” Talia asked.

“Yes. And I can’t even filter out how much of the truth I want to share.” I sighed.

They were silent for a little while. Finn got a smirk on his face. I didn’t like that at all.

“What do you really think of me, Echo?” He asked.

Talia giggled. Victor squeezed me.

“You don’t have to answer that.” Victor whispered.

“No. I do. It hurts not to say it. I think you’re incredibly needy, Finn. You feel lonely, even though you choose to wander. You seek any attention you can get because it makes you feel like you’re seen by others. If you weren’t so needy, you might actually be nice to be around, but it seems like every action you take around people is to make them laugh, or be so irritated by you that they react. You don’t even really care about the reactions, as long as they involve you getting attention.” I told him. “It’s really sad.”

The smile had fallen from his face half way through what I said. Talia was biting her lips together to keep from laughing and I could feel Victor shaking behind me. I really hadn’t wanted to call him out like that, but he asked after knowing I had to answer.

“Do me next!” Talia laughed.

“Please, don’t.” I sighed.

“What do you really think of me, Echo?” She snickered.

“I think you’re bored. You’re very old and there’s little to entertain you anymore. You like your frightening reputation, but it doesn’t amuse you like it used to. You care deeply for Victor and Finn. You want them to heal their relationship because you know how important broodmates are to each other. Like real sisters and brothers. You like the wolves because they’re hard to predict with absolute accuracy, unlike vampires. Traveling is your way of relieving the boredom, but you stay here for more than just the curse. You love Bellamy and want to be around her because you feel guilty, but I don’t know why.” I said.

“Nailed it.” Talia grinned. “You just missed out on one thing.”

“The fact that you’re sad as well? No, the spell just let me stop talking before I had to talk about how lonely and sad you are as well. You want to be with people who love you, but your Solus Amor isn’t here, so all you have are your friends and your children.”

“That’s enough. Echo is a person, not a toy. Stop playing with her.” Victor growled.

“You are lucky I know it’s the curse making you emotional, Victor. It’s never safe to growl at your sire.” Talia warned.

I wanted to leave, but Victor still held me and I didn’t want to risk the curse getting possessive if I pulled away. So I waited. He moved me with him when he moved to a chair and sat me in his lap.

It was as if I didn’t exist. They talked to each other and pretended I wasn’t there. I assumed it was the curse making him need me so much. I wouldn’t object. It was best if he didn’t get upset, and I really didn’t have anything else to do.

Marius arrived to pick up the notebooks for Lila and glanced over me before pretending I wasn’t there. I stole a look at Victor. His eyes were glowing a little and he had a slightly angry expression on his face, even though he was talking normally.

I was nervous and shifted uncomfortably, making Victor grip my hip and pull me tighter against him. I put my hand on his chest and my head on his shoulder. His grip relaxed.

The rest of the night, I was curled in Victor’s lap. The positive was that I got a lot more information for our curse team. It would help as we investigated everything on our own.

When it was time for me to go to bed. I stroked Victor’s chest and asked if I could go sleep. He stood, scooping me into his arms and carried me to my room.

After the door to my room was closed, he set me down. I stared at him for a moment before I went to my closet. Victor stayed out in my room while I changed into my pajamas.

I walked back into the room and he looked at me. He had that expression on his face that told me it wasn't really Victor. I bit my lips together and walked over to him.

"Take that off." He growled.

"It's time to sleep, Victor. I need to wear my pajamas. You don't want someone seeing me naked if there's an emergency, right?" I asked.

"You're mine."

"I know, Victor. You wanted me to go to school. I need to sleep so I can go to school. Remember?" I asked gently.

"School is pointless. You have me to care for you. You don't need school." Victor replied.

"It distracts me from being without you all day, Victor. I need rest so I can pass all of my classes and make you proud of me." I smiled.

I was glad the potion had worn off. I didn't want to agree with him. I'd never seen a point to me going to school aside from seeing my sister and brother. I was pretty sure telling him I wanted to go to school so I could be around other people would have angered him too.

"Fine." He grumbled. "Get in bed."

I did as he said. Victor sat on the edge of my bed. He held my hand and caressed my cheek.

It wasn't fully Victor, but it wasn't not Victor either. The curse must be integrating into his personality. Soon, he would be a blending of both and I wouldn't even see the real Victor for tiny bits of time.

"Don't cry, princess. I'm still here. I love you." Victor whispered.

"Is this going to be what it's like now? Are you going to own me like a possession?" I asked.

"I'm sorry. I needed you. The idea of you taking a potion upset me. It let the curse in. Having you with me helped keep the curse calm. You're doing amazingly at keeping me from overreacting. Thank you for working so hard. I'm very proud of you." He said softly.

That made me smile. I wanted Victor to be proud of me. It was hard being exactly what I needed to be, but little moments like this made everything much easier.

"I don't like how the curse is changing you. It's like dealing with a mix of my mother and Gray. I'm walking on egg shells to keep you from being upset and you keep telling me that I belong to you. No one even talked to me this evening because they were concerned that you would get upset about them talking to me." I admitted.

“I’m trying to fight it, Echo. Trust me, I hate the thoughts that I have as much as you do. I love everything about you and I want you to talk and smile. I don’t want to make you feel alone in your own home. It’s like I took you from one prison and just exchanged it for another.” Victor sighed. “It’s not fair to you.”

“We’ll fight together. I’ll keep trying to calm you, you keep fighting the change.” I told him.

“You know what’s happening? It’s becoming a part of me. Soon, I won’t know what I was fighting or why. Will you stand by me, even when I’m not myself? You can leave now, while I can fight the urge to come after you.” He offered.

“I’ll be by your side forever, Victor.” I promised.

He leaned in and kissed me. It wasn’t his normal kiss. There was something needy and desperate about it. I could feel his concern and fear. This curse would have to find another way to get my mate from me. I was never letting him go.

After Victor left, I pulled out my computer and started typing up everything that I remembered hearing. I emailed it to Sean, Rosario, Val, and Gray. We could add it to our information tomorrow.