

Chapter 151 - The Vampire's Servant

(Friday Morning)

As we wrapped up breakfast, there was a spring in my step. Everything had started falling together after Wednesday night. It was all beginning to work out.

Emmalyn did another reading focusing on the spell Fenton cast on the Master of the territory. She got the name of it, even though the counter to it was obscured. It was called Fixation.

She said this curse starts by burrowing into the subconscious of the target and ferreting out the things that mean the most to the target. Then it starts reaching out and making them paranoid or nervous about losing what they value. She said it was never meant to kill, but it often drove vampires to heights of insanity that they would endanger themselves.

On top of that, the curse had tendrils that would stretch out from its victim and attack those closest. It would make people behave in ways they wouldn't. It made them lose trust in their Master. I wondered if it was why Gray had started acting so jealous of Victor. Things with us were much better now, but I was really scared for a while.

The most important thing we found out was that it was not only tied to the title, but to Fenton's life. As long as the spell was active, Fenton was alive. Not the other way around. Killing him was impossible without breaking the spell first.

On Thursday, Emmalyn did a reading on me. She said I was fully in the grip of the curse. She could see it fading from Victor. When he woke last night, he acted like himself. We wouldn't free him until after the wards were down and we knew he wouldn't relapse. There was a tentative plan for Sunday night.

I couldn't wait to have him back. Though, it was unfortunate that he wouldn't be as safe as he was in the cell. He could be fed easily and couldn't be hurt by the sun or the curse. I wanted him to always be safe.

Fenton had been even grumpier because of Emmalyn's casting runes. It got worse when Gray brought home a laser pointer. Apparently, the cat part of his brain was a little stronger than the witch side of his brain. Fenton was not as amused as the rest of us.

I pulled out the ward map and took it to the living room. Gray helped me get it set up. We were assigning teams of two to each ward. Val had finished his information gathering and we found some lucky bits of news on the three wards that were in recently developed areas.

The first was in the event room of an apartment complex's club house. Val and Harmony charmed the manager into announcing a magic show for the children there. Val had been practicing Brian's summoning spell and bought a whole lot of candy that he was going to summon before doing his final trick, breaking the ward.

When it broke, there would be a bright flash of light. Talia would be his guard and would use her speed to make it look like she appeared in the bright flash.

Preston found that Rosario, the vampires, and the werewolves could be taught a spell to subdue a witch. We worked on it daily. It meant we didn't need to get more people.

The second was in a house that was currently for sale. Trent had one of the real estate agents in the pack get the code for the key box. Cam and Harmony would be going there.

Sean and Rosario were headed to the woods. Samuel and Preston were going to the theater. Amelia and Finn would go to the woods as well. Brian was taking the spot nearest his family home. Brandon would go with him. Emmalyn and Travis were headed to an alley in town. Gray and I got the last house in the newly developed areas.

We were really lucky, because we already had an invitation. That was why we were doing it tonight. The third ward was in a room in Melissa's house.

The decision that Gray and I would be the ones to go was a simple one. She would've followed Val around like a lost puppy. She would've gotten too close to Harmony as well and tried to pull her around so everyone could see that Harmony was there. Sean wouldn't go near her, not that Rosario would permit it anyway. And no one else had a reason to be there.

They were either adults or strangers. Having Gray there would mean that I was protected, and he was known for going to a lot of parties before he met me. He would know how to get us away from everyone else.

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When Brian arrived, I started telling everyone where they would be assigned, if they didn't already know. I introduced Brian to Brandon. They were curt and businesslike with each other. Emmalyn had been the same with Travis. I was surprised that the men had offered their help, but so very grateful.

Sean and Brian didn't talk to each other. It hurt my heart that they were like this, but I knew I couldn't get involved. I didn't know anything about relationships like theirs. I just hoped that they could get to a better place soon.

"What do you want us to do when we're finished? Just go home, or what?" Brian asked.

"I'd like everyone to meet here afterward. Just so I can make sure everyone got their part done safely. Would you be okay with that? I just need to know that everyone's safe." I replied.

He raised an eyebrow at me. Gray put a hand on my shoulder. I looked up at him.

“Did I say something wrong?” I asked.

“I think we’ve found the fixation the spell has on you.” Gray answered.

“We’ve all been watching you and listening to you, Echo.” Val said. “You’re obsessed with saving people and people being safe. You call to check up on us if you haven’t seen us for a while. You’re always talking about people being safe.”

“Even your focus on the curse has been with the bent of saving Victor, saving everyone, keeping people safe. These are all things you’ve been repeating over and over.” Talia said. “We were comparing notes.”

“I didn’t even realize it, angel. I thought it was because you loved Victor more. I didn’t even consider that it could be the curse. I’m so sorry, Echo.” Gray whispered, squeezing my shoulder.

“I’m always worried people aren’t safe. This is just me being myself. It’s not the curse.” I chuckled. “Having everyone check in isn’t being obsessed with safety. It’s just a good idea to make sure everyone completes their task safely.”

“Echo. You started cutting Gray’s meat at dinner last night, and you did it at breakfast too. You ordered a curfew last night and wanted everyone in before full dark. You’re acting like an overprotective parent.” Harmony insisted.

“You got out of bed to check on everyone late last night. I thought you might have had an idea on the spell, but you just wandered up and down the hall popping into people’s rooms.” Gray said.

I blushed. “I just wanted to make sure everyone was....”

“Safe?” Val asked.

I sighed. “You know, if you guys want to focus on that, fine. It’s not the worst thing to be obsessed with. I want everyone to meet back here after the wards are broken. Take the day to get ready. I know that everyone has to go to school for their yearbook thing, but I want you back home right after. We head out at seven-thirty. That should be dark enough for Finn.”

They all nodded and went off to do their own things. There was still a little time before Victor would go to sleep. I went to the basement and opened the feeding door.

“Victor?” I called out.

“Echo, my princess. How is everything going?” He asked.

“We’re breaking the wards on the two biggest parts of the curse tonight. Fenton’s being an ass, more than normal. He knows something is happening, but not when.” I said.

“You’re going with Gray, right? I only trust him to protect you. No one else.” Victor replied.

“Of course she is, Victor.” Gray answered from the stairs. “Still feel like tearing my head off?”

“Just a little. It’s definitely a good idea to wait until the end of the weekend. With how the urge has been dissipating, we can all be together again soon.” Victor said.

“Angel, you shouldn’t be down here. We need to keep up appearances for Fenton so he doesn’t cause problems with the curse. Come on. Victor needs to get ready to sleep.” Gray urged.

I reached my hand into the cell and Victor took it. He kissed it gently and squeezed it. He let me go and I closed the door before going to Gray.

He took my hand and pulled me along behind him. When we got to the top of the stairs, Gray took me in his arms and held me for a little while. I felt a lot better now. Just having an intelligible conversation with Victor was enough to make me feel a million times better.

All we had left to do today, was try to get Fenton to talk about the last spell and go to pick up and sign yearbooks. As soon as the sun set we would start removing the wards. It was just about making it to then without going crazy with nerves or boredom.

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Harmony finished the last bits of my makeup. She took a step back and looked me up and down. A grin spread across her face.

“You look like a teenage girl out for a night of fun.” She giggled.

I pulled at the hem of the short dress she’d put me in. It was dark red and left most of my body bare. The straps at the top were basically strings. The back was cut all the way below my hips. And the front was so low cut that my chest was almost fully on display.

It was tight and clung to my skin. That made the skirt feel like it was riding up when I walked. It didn’t even reach mid-thigh. She put me in the highest pair of heels I owned.

“This doesn’t feel right. Can’t I just wear one of the black dresses Bellamy got me?” I asked.

“No. They’re all too serious. You’re a teenage girl fresh out of high school and having fun. No one is going to be dressed like they’re going to a funeral. Lots of girls will be dressed like this. You’ll stand out if you wear anything more conservative.” Harmony insisted. “Come on. You’ll love the reaction from Gray.”

“You think he’ll like this?” I asked.

“He’ll hate it. It’ll keep him on his toes. Come on.” She said, pulling me out of my room.

We went to the stairs and I clung to the bannister as I made my way down carefully. Gray was staring at me. I blushed and fidgeted with the skirt.

“No. Go change.” He said, pointing up the stairs.

“Gray. This is gonna be how most the girls will be dressed and you know it.” Harmony scoffed.

“Harmony, you can’t actually be thinking of sending Echo out like that. Guys will be all over her.” Val told her.

“Gray will be there to scare them away. Come on, Val. She looks hot.” She sighed.

“I don’t want anyone looking at my mate in that... that... cloth. That’s barely even a dress!”

There was a low whistle from the stairs. I looked up to see Rosario and Sean coming down. Rosario was the one who whistled.

“Damn, Echo. You look like you should be dancing in a music video.” Rosario grinned.

“You don’t look comfortable.” Sean said.

“Everyone is fighting about my dress.” I told them.

“She looks fine.” Rosario stated.

“How would you feel if Sean was going to a party in just a pair of spandex shorts that left nothing to the imagination?! I don’t want her going out like that! Victor would agree. Go change.” Gray ordered.

“It’s only five minutes before we leave! It’ll take her that long just to get up the stairs in those heels. I think you should just quit fighting it and let her go out like that.” Harmony insisted.

Gray walked over and scooped me up. He carried me down to the basement and opened the viewing slit in the door. He turned on the light and positioned me a distance away.

“Victor. Tell Echo she can’t go out like this.” Gray said.

I saw Victor’s violet eyes in the slit. They trailed up and down my body slowly. He looked into my eyes heatedly.

“I don’t want you going anywhere looking like that.” Victor answered in a gruff strained voice.

“See. I told you Victor wouldn’t approve.”

“I don’t want to be in this outfit either. But we need to fly under the radar. Will most of the girls there be dressed like this?” I asked.

“Well, yeah, but there will be some who aren’t.”

“And they’ll be ignored. I can’t be ignored. There can’t be girls hanging all over you and they will be if you show up to that party without someone they see as an actual rival. Harmony told me how it works. Let’s go. You’re going to have to carry me back up. I can’t do stairs well in these.” I stated firmly.

“Watch out for her, Grayson. If anyone manhandles her, I want you to teach them about touching what doesn’t belong to them.” Victor growled.

“I definitely will.” Gray said, picking me up.

There were a few more comments as everyone met up. We were giving everyone twenty minutes to get where they needed to go. There was another thirty minutes between arriving and when we’d be doing the ward breaking. This was to give those of us who had cover stories time.

We all set alarms on our phones to let us know when to start. Gray took me to his truck and helped me up into it. The skirt rode up to my hip and he groaned in frustration, trying not to touch me inappropriately. At least tonight could be amusing.

Breaking the Wards

Chapter 152 - The Vampire's Servant

We pulled up to Melissa’s house. There were people meandering all over the lawn. Cars were parked up and down the street. We managed to find a spot and Gray helped me down from the cab of the truck.

I straightened out my dress and clung to Gray’s arm. He held on to me protectively. Harmony was right. Most of the girls I saw out on the lawn had dresses, or skirts and shirts, that showed off as much or even more than mine did.

Gray led me through everyone. He greeted a few who called out to him. We made it to the open front door and the house seemed to be teeming with people.

“I... I don’t know if I can do this.” I whispered.

“Yes, you can. I believe in you, Echo. We’re going to break this ward and I’m going to take you home. Then, I’ll peel you out of this dress and kiss every inch of your sweet body. I didn’t like you wearing it, but I’ve never felt more proud than I am with you on my arm.” Gray replied, his face so close to mine, I couldn’t resist kissing him.

He kissed me like a starving man. His hand went to my back and touched my bare skin. I moaned into his mouth and gripped his shirt.

A few people cheered and whistled. I pulled back and licked my lips. Gray’s lips curved into a small smirk.

“Let’s get you a drink.” He said, tugging me into the house and through the living room.

People were dancing to the pounding music. There were couples making out in every corner of the house. I looked around curiously as I followed where he led me.

The kitchen was quieter than the living room, but not by much. There were people playing games and making out again. It seemed like a party was just a way for people to get frisky in public.

Gray dropped my hand as he was digging around in a cooler. I glanced around a bit more. A boy who was making out with a girl caught my eye and winked. I took a step closer to Gray.

“Wow. You’re a hot little thing.” A boy came up to me and said.

He extended an arm to the wall behind me and leaned as he towered over me. Gray was a few feet away. I looked over at him.

“Aww. Don’t look away. It’s rude. We’re having a conversation. What’s your name, baby?” He purred.

“I’m Echo. I’m here with Gray Padua.” I told him, pressing myself against the wall, as far from him as possible.

Gray stood and turned to us. The guy glanced over and saw him. He smirked and looked back to me.

“If you ever want to trade up, I’m here. I’ll make you feel real good, baby.” The guy winked and sauntered away.

I went to Gray as quickly as I could manage on the teetering heels. He handed me a soda can and looked me over.

“Did he touch you? Do I have to kill him?” Gray growled.

“No. He just got real close. I want to find this ward and get out of here. How long do we have?” I asked.

He pulled out his phone. I opened my soda and took a drink. It was terribly hot in this house.

“Still have about thirty minutes. Let’s wander around and see if we can locate the ward.” Gray said.

Gray wrapped my arm around his as we walked around. There were a few people who recognized Gray and stopped us, so they could talk to him. I sipped my drink and smiled politely.

“Oh, Gray! I can’t believe you’re here!” A girl squealed and ran up to us.

She was taller than me and wore a gold colored dress. She had creamy brown skin and dark red hair cut short. The girl hugged him and Gray pushed her off with a strained smile.

“Chelsea. What are you doing here? Didn’t you graduate last year?” He asked.

“Yeah, but there was nothing else to really do, so I came to check out who showed up to little Melissa’s party. She practically begged me to come. You want to come upstairs with me and christen her bed with me? I’m sure that thing has seen more action in the last hour than it has since she got it.” Chelsea laughed.

“I’m here with my fiancée, and I told you, I don’t do that with anyone but the woman I’m going to marry.” Gray replied.

“Oh. Well, how is he then? I worked as hard as I could to get in that boy’s pants all last year.” She said with a smirk.

“None of your business.” I said firmly and pulled Gray away from that girl.

I was boiling mad. I found the first locked door and transported us in. I pushed him against the closed door. Gray looked confused.

“You are mine.” I growled and pulled his lips down to mine.

Rubbing my body against his, I moaned as he started kissing me back. We were doing the thing that Bellamy suggested, but I found myself even more wound up after than I was before. Gray was making sure to relieve me afterward, but it didn’t change the fact that I wanted him.

He pulled me up and turned to press me against the wall as I wrapped my legs around his waist. I groaned as he rubbed himself between my legs. I pulled down his shirt collar and started kissing toward his mark when something caught my eye.

In the center of the room was a faintly glowing light with a symbol in it. It was the ward. I gasped as Gray started nibbling at the crook of my neck.

“Gray. Stop. The ward.” I whispered.

“We’ll find it in a few minutes. Goddess, I missed your body.” He purred.

“No. Stop. The ward is here. It’s right there.” I said, pushing at him.

Gray groaned and let me down. I pulled my skirt down so I was covered again. He reached over and turned on the light.

It took a few moments for my eyes to adjust. I heard Gray gasp. Then I saw what he did.

“Holy shit.” He breathed.

There were guns, large knives, sharpened pieces of wood, and crossbows mounted on the walls. Silver tipped arrows sat on a work bench. There were jars of different things on a table. They all had labels. There was a strange looking thing sitting next to it that was covered in silver.

I approached the table and looked at one of the jars. It had a plant in it. I read the label. Wolfsbane. I didn’t understand.

“We have to break the ward now and get the hell out of here.” Gray said urgently.

“What is this, Gray?” I asked.

“It’s a hunter’s den. They were making silver bullets infused with wolfsbane. Those stakes on the wall are probably rowan and ash. Those are woods dangerous to vampires. Everyone will understand why we went a little early. We can’t risk getting caught by hunters, especially not you. I’ll text everyone now. Start working your magic.” He ordered.

I was shaking as I went to the ward. I took a calming breath. I needed to focus and get this done.

“I was able to get an answer back from almost everyone. We still have five minutes. They don’t think it will be enough to get a big enough response to worry about for the others. Let’s start. Then we’ll have you pop us out to the truck. I don’t want to risk coming out of this room.” Gray whispered.

The incantation seemed to take forever. My nerves were on edge. Melissa’s family were hunters. If she found out what we were, she might try to kill us like those men who came to the house did.

Soon, there was a bright flash of light and the ward disappeared. Gray turned off the light in the room and grabbed me, holding me to him tightly. I wrapped my arms around him.

“Let’s go, angel. I don’t want you here any longer.” He murmured and kissed the top of my head.

I closed my eyes and thought of the truck and where we’d parked. We appeared near the bushes by where we parked. No one seemed to notice us.

He picked me up and carried me to the truck quickly. After loading me in, he ran to his side and got in. I barely had time to put my seatbelt on before he turned on the truck and started speeding down the road. I hoped everyone else's wards had gone smoothly.

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[Amelia]

The evening was actually very pleasant. I was walking through the forest with the dreamy Viking, Finn. Goddess, why did he have to be a vampire?

Physically, he was exactly my type, though, I do like my men a little bolder and more boisterous. He seemed like he was like that when I first met him, but, lately, he's been a little shy. I wondered what happened.

We kept walking along. When I stumbled, he was there before I could even blink, catching me and getting me set to rights before he backed off again. This walk was longer than I'd thought it would be. And boring.

"So, Finn, what do you do for fun?" I asked as we walked.

"Travel." He replied curtly.

"Cool. I've always wanted to travel. Never seem to have the money for it though. You must be loaded. How old are you?"

"Eight hundred fifty-ish." Finn answered.

"Well. You've seen a lot then. Are you liking Oregon?"

"It's okay."

I stopped and turned to him. Exasperated. This was the most tedious conversation I'd ever had.

"Have I offended you or something? You've been all tight lipped and skittish. I thought you were going to be fun, but you're just an uptight vampire like all the rest. What on earth did I do to you to make you back off like this?" I demanded.

He looked shocked. I put my hands on my hips and glared at him. I couldn't manage to hide my shiver as I realized I was challenging a fucking vampire! He could drain me dry or snap me like a twig, or both!

"I... I don't know." He sighed. "I have no clue why I'm so nervous around you. I mean, I know, but I don't know, you know?"

I laughed. "I have no idea what you're trying to say."

He chuckled. "I don't either. I'll try to do better."

We walked along a little longer before I tripped and almost fell, but, like he'd been doing all evening, Finn caught me before I hit the ground. He set me down and turned around, kneeling on one knee.

"Climb on. I can see just fine and avoid all the stuff you keep stepping on." Finn said.

"Only known you a few days and already you're trying to get me to ride you." I snickered.

"Trust me, sugar, when you ride me the only thing coming out of your mouth will be my name and prayers to your goddess." He said, turning to me with a smirk.

I laughed and climbed up on his back, wrapping my arms around his shoulders. His hands gripped my thighs and I bit my lips together to suppress a moan. They were huge.

"I hope what they say about men with big hands is right." I purred in his ear.

"Oh, they don't lie, sweetheart. I'll be gentle with you, though. I know how fragile witches can be."

He started walking quickly through the forest. I loved it. Men didn't offer to pick me up. I wasn't huge, but I was thicker than my skinny little sister. We were the same height, but I was much curvier than she was.

It often got me the attention of boys and men as I made my way in the world. It was a blessing and a curse. My bawdy attitude often got me into situations I had to talk my way out of. In a couple cases, I had to fight my way out.

Finn didn't seem like the type to force me into anything, though. I wondered if I could manage a little private time with him before I had to go back home. He would be perfect for my last hurrah before I found my soulmate.

"There! I see it!" I pointed off to the side and he turned quickly.

We approached the ward. I was a little excited. Over the last couple days, I'd been acquainted with the curse, the story behind it, and the cat formerly known as Fenton Aimes Sr., nothing about it made me question this decision.

As we reached the place where the ward was, I unwrapped my legs from around Finn's waist. He squeezed my thighs before letting them go and crouching down so I could get off him. I let my chest rub slowly down his muscular back.

Finn groaned. "You're playing with fire, little witch."

“It’s because I like the heat so much.” I murmured. “How long until we go?”

He pulled out his phone and looked at the time. “Huh. No signal. At least the clock works. About ten minutes. I’d ask if you wanted to waste a little time with me, but I take a lot longer than ten minutes and once I start I don’t stop.”

I giggled. “I like this Finn a lot more than the uptight vampire Finn.”

“This is the real Finn. Trust me, you’ll never see the other one again, sweetheart.” He said.

I found a stump to sit down on and looked at my companion in the pale moonlight. He really was gorgeous. I licked my lips.

Finn stood near me, looking out for people approaching. His ass was as amazing as the rest of him. I was sure Emmalyn would be cool with spending a couple more days here. She liked everyone in the house.

My sister was hard for most people to read, but I knew her. She was excited about this and loved everything she’d seen so far. Everyone was enthralled by her ability. She didn’t get that as much at home. I was the only one who couldn’t cast runes in the family, so no one was ever amazed by her.

The ward started glowing brighter. That wasn’t supposed to happen.

“Finn, how long?” I asked.

“Five minutes. Why?” Finn turned to me with a worried expression.

“Because the ward started glowing. I think they’re going early. I’m gonna start. Watch my back.” I told him.

“With pleasure.” He purred.

I approached the ward and started the incantation. I was focused, until I heard a twig snap in the distance. Finn dashed off in the direction of the sound. I kept on working, until I heard a snap from behind me. I didn’t stop, but I turned a little to see what it was.

There was a witch standing not far behind me. She was building a fireball and looked distressed in the light of her flame. Damn it. Where was Finn?

“Please. Run. I can’t stop it.” The witch said to me.

I couldn’t answer. I needed to finish the incantation. I had to break the ward.

Suddenly, she threw the fireball and it seemed to slam against something solid and invisible. I winced, but continued. Something else hit the invisible thing. I realized I was surrounded by

witches. They were at different distances and attacking, but there was some sort of shield around me.

I chanted faster and, as I reached the last line, the ward broke and a blinding light flashed. The attacks stopped and I could hear weeping and muttering from all around.

“Finn! Where are you?” I called out.

Before I even finished the question, he was standing beside me, looking me over. I pulled his lips to mine. He was stunned for a moment, but then wrapped his arms around me and picked me up.

Never in my life had I ever melted, but I did. His tongue teased at my lips and I granted him entry into my mouth. I moaned as he kissed me passionately and wrapped my legs around his waist.

Finn pulled away and I whimpered, wanting more. He chuckled and kissed the tip of my nose. I looked up into his perfect violet eyes. That was my favorite color.

“We have to get back to the house before Echo freaks. I’ll come to your room tonight, Amor. I’ll give you everything you desire.” He promised.

“Sounds good. Do you know what that shield was?” I asked.

“A new ability of mine manifested when you were in danger. A magic shield. Thank the goddess for that.” Finn sighed as he started walking back the way we came.

“You believe in the goddess?” I questioned.

“Of course I do. Even vampires are creatures of the goddess.” He answered. “Let’s go home, Amor. We need to celebrate.”

I liked when he called me Amor. I was thrilled that he’d kept me safe. All my life, I’d heard vampires were darkness personified. Finn wasn’t that. Talia didn’t seem like that. I wondered how much more misinformation was out there.

Strange Friends in Strange Places

Chapter 153 - The Vampire's Servant

[Talia]

The feeling when everyone returned, unharmed, from breaking the wards was jubilant. Gray and Echo had gotten home before anyone else and had already gotten a call from Trent saying that the young wolves he had gathered in the pack house were finding their mates.

I was impressed with Valor's little magic show for the children last night. He juggled balls of flame and water, made a potted plant dance in its pot, and summoned candy for all of the children. They were stunned when we made it seem like he made me appear in a flash of light.

Everyone went to bed much happier, but not as wary as they should've been. It only took a few hours before the curse attacked Victor when we took care of the fae portion. I wandered and watched over the house.

Finn disappeared for the evening, but, from the sound of it, he was bedding his Solus Amor. It was hilarious watching him fumble once he realized who she was. He was never at a loss for amusing and cheeky things to say, but there was something about the girl that made him a nervous schoolboy. It was adorable.

Soon, everyone was waking up for training. The two additional witches didn't train with us. I figured Finn was planning on staying in Amelia's bed until he had to sleep.

Gray was progressing well. He was a quick learner. I enjoyed teaching him. I would watch Echo with Marius as well. He was so proud of her. She was always fighting hard and was very focused during training.

When we were finished with our individual training, we went back to the main area. Sean was showing off his wings. Echo hurried ahead of us. They were beautiful wings that really suited him more than butterfly or moth wings could have.

"Aren't you going?" I asked Gray.

"I'm still worried about finding all that hunter paraphernalia in Melissa's house. I didn't realize someone in my school could be a hunter. All this time, I thought I was safe, we were safe. Echo had nightmares about hunters all night. I don't know what to do." He sighed.

"We'll report them to Bellamy's rogue squad. They can go give them an ultimatum and track them from there. Don't worry, Gray. We'll take care of it. Go have some fun and enjoy this break. Things may only get worse from here." I told him.

"Fenton's going to focus all that released power on the part of the curse that has Echo, isn't he?" Gray asked.

"Yes. And on her supports." I replied. "Emmalyn said this curse has tendrils that branch out to those who support the Master of the territory. I think that's why you were being so unreasonable about the torture. You already had strong feelings about it, but you are a reasonable young man. I think you would have seen the light and understood."

“I don’t know about that. I do know I was having stronger feelings than I thought I should have. I was actually thinking of leaving. I’m glad she changed her mind. It was like I was suddenly free again. I wasn’t being inundated with thoughts of her being... well... evil.” He said, embarrassedly.

“Go on. Spend this happy time with her. We never know when the curse will take a turn. I don’t want you to miss out on this.” I told him, shooing him away.

Gray grinned and ran over to the other children. Rosario was now showing off his vines as well. Marius sighed.

“If you told me three months ago that I’d be here, father to a dhampyr, a werewolf, and a witch, I’d have thought you insane. Look at them, Talia. Perfect examples of what their people can be.” Marius sighed.

“So children was all it took to soften Death?” I chuckled.

“Only those children. Only for this family.” He murmured.

“How is your little witch?” I asked.

“Thank you for not telling the rest of the council that I’m dabbling with a dark witch. She wants to come see my territory. I want to take her. I want to keep her, Talia. I know she’s not my Solus Amor. I’m fairly certain I don’t have one. I want Lila to be mine.” Marius said.

“Then make her yours. There is nothing that says we can’t have relationships with living beings. Only that we cannot breed with them for the purpose of creating dhampyrs to sell. Go be with your witch. I’ll watch over your children.” I promised.

“I will. I’m going to go home for a few minutes. There’s a trinket, I’m sure Lila will enjoy, in my vault.” He smirked and disappeared.

I shook my head at my love-struck broodmate. Marius had always taken his vampire life too seriously. I was glad that he was turning a new chapter. He would be even more deadly with more than his reputation to defend.

As I headed for the children, I saw Rosario put his hand to his head and close his eyes tightly. I started running and managed to catch him as he collapsed. Sean was fretting over him as I lowered his body to the ground and looked him over.

“What happened? He was fine.” Sean insisted.

“It looks like the curse did something to him. But why Rosario?” Gray asked.

“Let me see.” I sighed and put my hands on him.

He wasn't unconscious, he was gone. Not dead, but not in his body. I could feel him tethered to it, but there was nothing to pull him back. It was as if he was stuck in whatever realm he was in.

"We need to get him somewhere comfortable. I can travel to where he is and retrieve him. It looks like the curse may have sent him to the realm of dreams. It's almost like where you go when you sleep, but a little different. More lonely." I said.

"He's alone? Please, Talia, please save him." Sean pled.

"Gray, can you carry him? He's too big for me to carry comfortably." I asked.

"Yup." Gray said and picked Rosario up off the ground.

I led the procession into the house and up to Sean and Rosario's room. We turned on a light and laid him down on the bed. I cleared everyone who wasn't important out, leaving me and Sean with Rosario.

"Please, tell me he's going to be alright." Sean whispered.

"He will be fine. I will travel to the realm of dreams to retrieve him. Don't worry, Sean. I'll bring your mate back." I promised and got onto the bed next to Rosario.

I held onto his hand and closed my eyes. I needed to make sure I wasn't dropped just anywhere in the dream realm, or it could take quite a long time to find him. I felt the tether and followed it, leaving my body behind.

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I arrived in an area of the dream realm I'd become familiar with quite some time ago. It was a long, dark, hallway. Doors would appear and disappear at random. These were the gateways into dreams. If I opened one, I would be granted access into the dreams of another.

As I wandered the hall, hunting down the scent of elf, I came across a woman marching in the same direction. It was rare to see anyone in the halls of the dream realm. I caught up to her quickly.

She turned to look at me. She was an older woman of African descent. Her hair was gray and cropped close to her head, but there was fire in her eyes. No matter her human age, she was full of the spark of youth.

"Hello, human. I am the Traveler, Talia. I'm searching for a boy. He's an elf. Have you seen him?" I asked.

"You're not Zombi or Lwa." She replied, staring at me as if she were looking into my soul. "I know ancient power when I see it though. Tell me, are you a catalpa come to make the elf ti bon ange?"

“Interesting words. You must be a practitioner of mystical arts. I am none of these. I’m a vampire. And you’re correct. I am ancient.” I smiled.

“I thought I had seen it all.” The woman giggled. “Imagine that, a real life vampire. I have not seen your elf, I myself am looking for a wolf who messed with mojo beyond her understanding. Maybe that sniffer of yours can help us both.”

“I would be more than willing to have a companion while looking for my charge. I will also search for wolf scent. Come along, a leanbh. Let’s find our lost wards.” I replied. “What’s your name?”

“I’m Sookie. It’s nice to meet ya. I am curious how your elf got wrapped up in this, they don’t exactly exist where I come from. Your kind though - well, you hear stories, but you’re the first one I’ve met.”

We proceeded down the darkened hallway in amiable silence. The older woman was strangely comfortable in my presence which interested me. I suspected that she had encountered supernaturals before to be so calm. There was something about Sookie I couldn’t quite place. Almost as if she were as powerful and old as I was, despite her appearance.

“Did you hear that?” She asked suddenly, cocking her head to the side as she slowed to a stop. “It sounds like your young man may be getting more than he bargained for from the wolf.”

The hallway widened into a vast room. Some distance away, I could see Rosario. A young woman with bleach blonde hair was kissing him. I covered my mouth to stifle a laugh as I saw his face screw up with disgust.

He pushed her away and bound her arms above her head with his vines while wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. I wondered what all this was about. The girl sure was eager for him, the way she started writhing in his vines.

“You never, ever touch me without my permission. You are a disgusting little mutt. I would never take a mate who doesn’t know the basics of civility. Get it through your head. I. Am. Not. Your. Mate.” Rosario growled at her.

“Is that your wolf then?” I snickered.

“Yes, unfortunately.” Sookie frowned.

“I understand now.” the wolf giggled. “You’re one of those types. Don’t worry, daddy, I like a little degradation in the bedroom. I’m sure there’s a soft bed behind one of these moving doors if you want to go there.”

My eyes watered from the strain of holding in my laughter and I couldn’t help myself any more. I burst out laughing. It wasn’t just her words, but the look on his face when she said that.

“I swear to the Goddess, Talia, if you don’t get your bloodsucking ass out here, I’m going to be really pissed when I find you.” He called out.

“Who is Talia? Is that some whore you messed around with before you found me?”

A vine shot out and wrapped around her mouth and throat.

“You do not talk about my friends like that. I’ve only known you a few minutes, and I can recognize the type of manipulator you are. Now, shut up.”

“If you put her down, young man, I can get her back where she belongs.” Sookie called out.

Rosario released the wolf and my new friend took his place. She frowned at the she-wolf for a moment as her fist rose to her lips.

“Home.” She whispered, opening her palm and blowing a powdery substance into the girl’s face.

"What was that? Who is this? Did the curse do this, Talia?" Rosario asked.

"It seems so. Thank you for helping me find him, Sookie. That dust trick was interesting. What did you use?"

“That was a gift from Papa Legba to send the girl home. He pulled me from my dreams to tell me she had stepped through the veil after messing with my mojo bag. I don’t know how your young man here got pulled in, but I know it wasn’t a curse I set on the girl.”

"Sadly, we have a curse of our own to contend with. I believe it was trying to strip the master of our territory of one of her most powerful allies." I answered. "If we could just get the damned cat to talk without torturing him, then we could get somewhere. He’s the key to the whole thing.”

Sookie’s eyes glazed over, her head tilting to the side like she was listening to something. I watched her curiously as she nodded and hummed responses.

“I see.” She spoke, finally. “It seems I wasn’t sent just for the girl. There is a spell and oil that should do the trick, though they won’t work completely on an animal, mind. It should work well enough to make the thing talk. Ha! A talking cat, I just can’t imagine it.”

There was some hope, at least. No one had been able to figure out anything back home to make him talk. Most of the spells Lila came up with had ingredients that could kill the cat. If the spell could live past his death, then that would leave us at worse than square one.

“What sort of payment might you require for this information? I don’t know if you can take anything back with you, but if I can give it, I will.” I promised.

“Legba was clear, I’m to help you, but if you have a mind to gift me some of your blood, I wouldn’t be opposed.” She smiled, pulling a small vial from her pocket.

I reached out and took the vial from her. Taking a little time to flash my fangs so she could have a little thrill, I pierced my finger tip and let the blood drip into the container. When it was full, I licked my finger clean and handed the vial back to Sookie.

“I am expecting that, since we are from different realities, you won’t be able to use this to cast spells on me once we go back to our homes. At least, I hope not. Blood magic is very powerful and I am entrusting you to be the caretaker of my blood, leanbh.” I said.

“You don’t live to be my age - well not as a human anyway - by angering beings that can walk realms.” She chuckled. “Now to your problem. The list isn’t long, but it is very specific. I assume you can remember without notes?”

“Of course, you don’t get to be my age without having a good memory for the important things.”

“The oil is the simplest, you will need a conjure to prepare it. Boil calamus root, bergamot, mandrake, sweet almond, and the blood of the cat, family blood will do if you know his sire. Any oil will do to boil it in, I recommend coconut, good for the skin and fur. When you want to force him to do your bidding, you will rub him with the oil. Now, I can’t say rightly that you will have total control like you would a human, but it will bend his will just enough to talk. To get him telling you the truth you need to hollow out a large hot pepper, the hottest you can find. A bit of the beast’s fur inside with ground dirt dauber nest, master root, peppermint, and calamus root. Your conjure should pray over this stuffed pepper nine times exactly as I say. The cat’s name first of course – ‘You will speak the truth, you will hide nothing, and you will tell no more lies.’ If your conjure does this proper, your cat will be unable to lie on the ninth day.”

“For family blood, will descendants of the cat do? Also by conjure, you mean witch, correct? I want to be certain I don’t have to go hunt down another type of human in order to make this work.”

“So long as they are in the cat’s direct line, their blood will do, though you may need more than one descendant to make it as powerful as the sires. I suppose you wouldn’t have a hoodoo conjure handy, so any witch will do, but they must dabble on both sides. Controlling someone’s will isn’t light magic and a white conjure can’t work that magic.”

“I know just the witch to help with that, then. I’m sure she will enjoy learning a new spell. Is there anything else to be aware of with this spell?” I asked.

Sookie frowned for a moment, considering her words. “This magic is meant for people, while I’ve been guided to give you this spell, I can’t tell you how well it will work. Just that it will help. Your witch should know not to meddle with this magic again, lest she anger the Lwa. Our magic is ancestral and not generally meant for outsiders.”

“I’ll remember that. Thank you very much for your help, Sookie. You have given us a great deal of hope.” I smiled.

“It’s time for me to return to my proper place. It has been quite the thrill to meet you and your elf, Talia. I wish you luck with breaking your curse. Maybe our paths will find a way to cross again before I leave this life.” Sookie grinned just before vanishing.

I turned to Rosario and grinned. He looked a little bored, but I’m sure a couple old ladies chatting wasn’t exactly the most entertaining thing in the world for the boy. I held out my hand for him.

“Are you ready to go home?” I asked.

“So ready. I know this isn’t my real body, because I can’t feel my connection to the faerie lands, but I want a shower. That girl licked my vines, Talia.” He said with a cringe.

I chuckled. “Sounds like Sookie will have her hands full with that one.”

Taking his hand, I focused on home. Now we had a real chance to get that cat talking. He didn’t know what he was doing when he tried to send Rosario away. I couldn’t wait to get back.

Fixation

Chapter 154 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

After Talia made us leave the room, I went to the office. I needed answers. I trusted Talia, but maybe this would loosen Fenton’s tongue a little.

Gray followed me while everyone else milled around in the hallway, waiting for news. I slammed the office door open, which didn’t seem to faze Fenton at all. He just looked up at me with a bored expression.

“Why? Why did you do it?” I pressed.

“I see my focus on the elf has taken hold. Didn’t you like it? Banished to the dream realm with no hope of returning. I slacked his tether so no amount of trying could wake him. Unlike the sleeping beauty, true love’s kiss won’t break this curse.” He laughed.

“Answer my question.” I demanded.

“Simply, it was a three-fold win for me. I get to take Maeve’s youngest child, Sean’s love, and your strongest ally all in one attack. It was really too tempting to ignore. All that suffering. And

I'll keep on doing it. I'll take everyone you care for, everyone you depend on away from you. I'll keep you just sane enough to suffer." Fenton hissed.

"Why would you do that? What do you get from making me suffer? Why are you so bent on the suffering of others? It doesn't make sense."

"It doesn't need to make sense to you. My reasoning is my own. Enjoy what little time you have with your friends and family. In the end, it will just be you and me." He chuckled.

He was a beast. I couldn't believe he was only interested in making people suffer. There was no reason for it. Nothing I could give him that would make him take it back. No one was safe.

That wasn't right. Victor was safe. He was safe and sound in the basement. Fenton could have taken him and weakened me that way, but he took Rosario while he was outside training.

I turned and walked out of the office. I wouldn't get the answers I needed there. I needed to figure out how to keep everyone safe.

Something like the amulet that Grace gave Grigori, maybe. There had to be some way to keep his magic away from everyone else. I had an idea.

Quickly, I pulled Gray with me to the basement. Victor had to be awake still. I needed to talk to both of them.

"Victor." I said as I pulled open the viewing hatch.

He came up and looked out at us. I missed seeing his face, but I knew everything would be fine soon. I filled him in on what happened to Rosario and what Fenton said.

"I think I need to make sure Fenton doesn't know Rosario will be okay. If he thinks that part of his plan worked, then he may go slower trying to take everyone else. Just to make me think I'm safe before taking someone else from me." I suggested.

"That would be a good idea. You would have to make sure everyone else knows and Rosario stays out of the office. Can you do that?" Victor asked.

"I think so. I'll talk to everyone at breakfast this morning. I think this is going to be the best way. I just don't understand why he's only interested in the suffering of others. There doesn't seem to be anything but hate in him. He doesn't want anything else." I sighed.

"Sometimes there are just evil people in the world, Echo. Don't think on it too hard. He's not worth the time or the effort. We just need to keep working to keep him from hurting you." Victor said.

"I'll be right here, angel. I promise, I'll never leave you." Gray told me, wrapping his arms around me.

“I wish I could be out there hugging you too. I promise you the biggest hug when I get out of here Sunday night, princess. I can’t wait to have you in my arms again.” Victor murmured.

“Don’t worry, Victor. You’re safe. That’s all that matters to me right now. We need to go see how things are going with Rosario and make sure everyone gets fed.” I answered.

“That’s my girl. You go take care of our people. You’re right. I’m perfectly safe right here and you can always come see me.” He said.

Gray took me upstairs. I went to the office and closed the door. Lisa came out of the dining room as I was turning to go to the second floor.

“We saw Rosario being carried in from training and held off on breakfast. Do you think anyone will feel up to eating?” She asked.

“Yes. I’m going to collect everyone. Make sure to save some food out for Talia, Rosario, and Sean. We have no clue how long this will take and I’m sure Sean won’t want to leave Rosario’s side.” I replied.

“Got it.” Lisa said with a bright smile and headed into the dining room.

We went upstairs and started gathering everyone for breakfast. Emmalyn was in my room and said she was waiting, since the meal would be late. I headed to the room where Amelia was.

I knocked on the door, but there was no answer. I opened the door and covered my mouth.

Finn was sitting up in the bed with a finger over his mouth. Amelia was curled on his waist. Her curls were in total disarray, but I could see a little smile playing on her lips. I closed the door and turned to Gray.

“Well, we can change your sheets before you go back to your room.” I giggled.

“What do you mean by that? Why do I smell vampire in my room?” He asked as I headed down the hall. “Echo?”

“Finn kept Amelia company last night.” I told him and bounced down the stairs.

He groaned and followed me. “Only you would find that cute.”

“Not if they did it in my bed.” I laughed.

Gray huffed and followed me into the dining room. We sat in our normal seats. Since three seats were free, we had Dillon, Jean-Claude, and Samuel join us for the meal.

We were serving our food when Amelia and Finn came in. She had a very obvious bite mark on her neck. I looked at Finn.

He pulled her to sit next to him instead of sitting with her sister, like she normally did. Wendell served Finn's pudding. He proceeded to flirt with Amelia through the entire meal.

I took the chance to update everyone on what we knew and what Fenton had said. Leaving out the parts about him taking everyone away from me. I didn't want them to worry that something like what happened to Rosario could happen to them.

Gray told them about my idea about keeping Rosario from Fenton and pretending like he was still under the spell. Val and Preston liked the idea. Harmony grumbled because she wanted to rub it in Fenton's face that he hadn't won.

Quietly, I started working on my own plan to keep everyone safe. They could focus on everything else. I'd surprise them and they'd be so happy when they saw how safe they were. I was giddy with excitement.

We decided to take the day off from curse stuff. We'd been working so hard, everyone needed a break. I was more than happy to play games while I worked out my plan.

Cam took Harmony out for a date. Preston decided he would train Val in magic a little more. Samuel announced that he was needing to head back home. His mate was lonely and he was leaving before lunch.

Amelia went back to bed. She looked pretty tired. Emmalyn was spending the day in the library. Dillon and Jean-Claude joined me and Gray in the game room to play.

Talia came to the game room before lunch. I was happy to see her and pulled her to the couch with me.

"Tell me. What happened? Is Rosario okay?" I asked.

"He's fine. I have some wonderful news. I met a practitioner of some sort of mystic arts while we were in the realm of dreams. She gave me a spell for making Fenton talk. I'm going to go in the office to write it down. We'll hand it off to Lila tonight. She should be able to get it to work. Sookie told me that a light witch can't do it." Talia grinned.

"Sookie is the practitioner you met?"

"Yes. She looks how I imagined my Zendaya would have looked if she hadn't been turned. That elegant sort of aging. It was so interesting meeting a human that powerful. I'm going to head to bed after I write the spell down. Sean and Rosario will wait for lunch and come down. They needed some time." She said.

"I understand. Don't tell Fenton you were able to save Rosario. We're making him think that he won and Rosario is still in the realm of dreams." I told her.

“That’s a wonderful idea. I’ll pop in and tell them before I head to bed. Have a good day!” Talia smiled as she bounced up and headed for the office.

I continued watching the boys play their game and pulled out my phone. I was getting really good at researching things online. No one would mind if I worked while they played.

Time passed quickly and Wendell was getting us for lunch. I smiled at Rosario and Sean. Amelia looked a lot more rested. Emmalyn teased her about sleeping with Finn. Amelia didn’t seem ashamed. She grinned and joked right back.

I needed to keep them safe too. They would be safer if they left, but I didn’t want to be rude and just kick them out. I would just need to add them to my plan. Simple enough. The more the merrier.

When lunch was done, I excused myself from the games, letting the boys know I’d be back soon. I still had a lot of research to do on the second step of my plan, but I could do this right now.

Slipping into Victor’s room, I saw that Talia and Finn were sleeping. They would be first. I tucked them in and focused.

It worked out perfectly. It was so much easier than I thought it would be. I locked the master bedroom door and returned to the game room to work on my research a little more.

From time to time, Gray would tell me to watch him, and I would. He really loved showing off. I’d protect that.

“It’s almost dinner time.” I said. “I’m gonna go see if I can help out. I’m tired of being lazy. I want to do something.”

“If that’s what you want, angel. I just want you to be happy.” Gray grinned.

I went over and gave him a kiss before I headed out. I just needed to make a stop in my garden before I went to the kitchen. I was so happy to see that I had everything I needed in the garden.

Walking into the kitchen, Wendell and Lisa looked up at me and smiled. I returned their smile and put my bundle on the counter near the door.

“I came to take over dinner. Why don’t you two take Victor’s card and go out for dinner? You’ve worked hard and deserve a break. I’ll make sure the kitchen and dining room get cleaned up.” I offered.

“Are you sure?” Wendell asked.

“Of course. You already did the bulk of the work. It’s just a little more stirring and making sure everything goes on the serving dishes. I’m fully capable of that.” I snorted.

“Well, if you’re sure, I’d love to go out on the boss’ dime.” Lisa chuckled.

“Go ahead and sleep in tomorrow too. I’ll take care of breakfast.” I smiled.

“Wow. That sounds great.” Wendell grinned. “I love sleeping in.”

“Who doesn’t?” I winked.

They told me the instructions for the things they were working on before heading out the back door. Once they were gone, I grabbed my bundle and got to work. You would be surprised how many potions and spells are online.

I opened up the recipe on my phone and started putting together the potion that would help me with my plan. Everyone would be safe soon. Fenton wouldn’t be able to hurt them. No one would.

After dinner was finished cooking, I started loading up the plates, instead of letting people serve themselves. I knew what everyone liked and what they needed. It was also covered the fact that my plate was preloaded. I couldn’t give myself the potion. That wouldn’t be good.

Everyone filed into the dining room and sat in their places. Amelia looked around. She seemed disappointed.

“Where’s Finn?” She asked.

“He had some stuff to look into. Talia brought back a spell and they’re getting the ingredients.” I answered.

“Oh? I’d love to have a look at that.” Preston said.

“Tomorrow. Today isn’t the day for curse stuff. Today, everyone just needs to relax and recover from last night and this morning.” I replied with a smile.

“Of course. There will be plenty of time.” Preston smiled. “I just got excited.”

“New spells are exciting, especially if they come from the dream realm.” Emmalyn added.

Everyone ate and chatted happily. I enjoyed seeing them so cheerful. It was a nice change from the more sullen meals we’d eaten in the recent days.

Soon everyone was leaving the table to go do whatever. I cleared the table and started cleaning up. I hummed to myself as I scraped plates, pots, and pans into the garbage and started washing up.

Halfway through washing the dishes, I heard a thump from above me. I giggled and worked hard to finish up before taking care of everything. When the last inch of the counters was scrubbed, I was ready. It was time.

I walked around the house, finding everyone. They all looked so peaceful. I started moving their bodies. It wasn't very hard with my ability to travel. I covered them up and made sure they would be comfortable.

Taking care of them was important. If I was going to keep them safe, I had to make sure they were comfortable and well-cared for. I kissed Gray on the forehead as I tucked him in. He'd finally be safe. Fenton couldn't take him away from me now.

A Morning Interlude

Chapter 155 - The Vampire's Servant

[Marius]

When my alarm went off, indicating it was time for Echo's training, I got out of Lila's bed and dressed. Lila loved the necklace I gave her last night. A bloodstone may be the most popular stone for engagements, but I had a necklace with a large ruby in my vault which I thought would suit her more.

The actual proposal had been dicey. I'd never made an offer like that. No human, nor vampire, had ever been my bride.

"Mmm. Daddy? Where are you going?" Lila mumbled sleepily.

"I train Echo in the mornings. You should go back to sleep. You'll need your rest for when I return." I said, taking her hand and kissing it.

"Are you going to be long?" She asked.

"Training is an hour and a half. I rarely stay for breakfast, so I'll be back then." I informed her.

"I'll get up and get some work done. There are a couple potions that mix better at dawn anyway." Lila yawned and sat up.

Her blonde hair framed her body as the sheet she was covered with slipped down her chest. I felt pride in knowing she was mine. Lila was a powerful dark witch. A perfect match for me as Death.

She stretched and rubbed her eyes. I sat on the bed next to her and adjusted the ruby necklace so it would sit properly on her chest. It looked marvelous against her creamy skin.

“Are you sure you have to go? She can train with someone else for one day.” Lila pouted.

“You’re mine now, Lila. I’ll always come back to you.” I promised.

“You were really serious? I thought you were just playing a game.” She giggled.

I grabbed her chin and held it firmly in my hand, forcing her to look into my eyes. The amusement bled from them quickly, leaving surprise behind. She really hadn’t thought me serious.

“I would never joke about this, little witch. You are mine. I’m taking you home with me and I’m keeping you.” I told her gruffly.

Her eyes lit up with delight. She threw her arms around my neck and I released her face so she could kiss me. No one was ever happy to go to my home. This was definitely a first.

“Oh, Marius. I’m so happy. I was thinking this was going to be a terrible break up one day. I… I think I’m falling in love with you.” Lila whispered.

“Of course you are. There is no better match for us than each other. You were always mine. It just took me a while to find you. And you can choose to keep living, if you wish, or I can turn you. I’ll never pressure you.” I vowed.

“I think I’d like to live out the rest of this life, at least. We can talk more about it in a few hundred years. Stay with me. Call your daughter and tell her to take the morning off. I want to celebrate our engagement some more. I want you to mark me as yours.” She purred as she nibbled my neck.

I loved the feeling of her mouth on my skin. The heat and softness of her breath made me harden more quickly than I ever had before. I could spend a century, even a millennium, in bed with her and never tire of hearing her sigh and moan.

She bit down on my shoulder hard enough to draw blood. I groaned and pushed her back on the bed, burying my face in the curve of her neck and taking in the scent of her. Lila smelled of magic, old blood, and arousal. It was intoxicating.

With reverence, I bit down on her neck with my fangs extended. I marked her and took a little of her blood to seal the marking. She was mine forever. I would renew the mark until the day I died, or the day she said she didn’t want to be with me any longer.

When I pulled away, she whimpered a little. Lila always knew what sounds to make to drive me into a frenzy. I nearly forgot about Echo, when my phone started ringing.

I pulled it out and looked at the caller ID. It was Echo. She was probably wondering where I was.

“Hello, Echo. I’m sorry I’m late.” I answered.

“Oh! I was just going to ask if we could push off training. I’m not feeling great today and I was thinking of just taking some time to relax. You know, in case it’s something to do with the curse.” Echo replied.

“I need to come by to pick up a paper Talia called me about. She left a message about a spell she’d written down on your desk. I can come over later on, though. I want you to eat something and get some rest. Do you understand?” I asked.

“I could always just bring it to you. I can travel to where you are and hand off the paper. It’s no big deal.” She offered.

Something in her tone concerned me. Was something happening that she didn’t want me to know about? I didn’t like it.

“No. I’ll come to you, after I’m finished here, to get the paper. I want to see you and make sure you’re doing alright.” I insisted.

She sighed. “Yes, papa. But you need to know that the house is pretty empty today so you may not see anyone else.”

“Why is that? They should be taking care of you if you’re ill. Are the wolf girls there to take care of you?” I pressed.

“Umm... I gave them the morning off. I’ll be fine, Marius. I’m just taking the day to relax. It’s been an intense couple of weeks. Don’t worry about me. I sent everyone off. They’re safe now. I’m fine to be alone for a while. I promise.” Echo said.

“I’ll see you in a while. Rest.” I told her.

“Yes, papa. See you then.” She replied and hung up.

I tossed my phone aside and regarded Lila, who was looking bored and a little annoyed. I grabbed her arm and rolled her onto her stomach, twisting her arm behind her back and adding a little pressure. She hissed and sighed.

Bringing my hand up, I slapped her bottom, making her yelp and moan. I tried to enjoy myself, but kept thinking about why I was so concerned for Echo. It was like there was something in the back of my head crying out that I was needed.

The feeling didn’t go away as I took Lila roughly from behind. I made her beg and scream and cry for me, but nothing was taking away the feeling in my gut that something was wrong with my daughter. I’d never had such a torn focus before.

When I finished with her, I began licking over the crescent cuts my nails had made into her hips. Closing the wounds. I licked over each bruise to numb the pain, then I laid next to Lila and pulled her into my arms. Gently cooing to her and telling her how good she was.

If I was going to keep her, I couldn't use her and toss her away. I needed to show her I loved and cared for her. She wasn't just a tool for my desires.

Lila snuggled with her head on my chest. This was a feeling I could also get used to. I imagined having her in my bed when I woke up every day. Seeing her in my dungeons, torturing and killing alongside me. That would be amazing.

I knew of a room I was currently using for storage that would be perfect for her spell room. I would have my workers outfit it exactly to her specifications. She would want for nothing in my home.

"You were distracted, daddy." Lila murmured.

"I don't mean to be, little witch. I can't help but think something is wrong with Echo." I sighed.

"Do you want me to do a reading on her? Maybe it's the curse getting stronger. Maybe it found a gap in her armor." She suggested.

"I'd like that very much. I want my children safe." I replied.

"I'll go get everything ready. You get dressed again so you don't distract me with that gorgeous body." Lila giggled and got up.

She didn't wear clothing inside of her home. It was something that took me a little while to get used to. It would probably take my servants even longer.

I dressed again, this time for a normal day and not training. I was wearing slate gray slacks and a black dress shirt. My belt and shoes were of the best Italian leather. I went to the restroom to style my hair before heading out to the dining room. Readings couldn't take place in the spell room because the feeling of death in the room weakened the magic.

Lila was perched delicately on a chair. Her profile was that of an untamed goddess. My deadly little witch.

"Alright, I just need your blood for the reading. Focus on Echo and I'll be able to tell you what you want to know." She smiled.

Pricking my finger with my fang, I dropped some blood into the water. Lila watched as the blood dissipated into the bowl. She was intent and serious. Her eyes moved as if she was watching something.

I stood by silently. I'd mastered standing stone still millennia ago. Some vampires couldn't manage it. Phoebe was about my age and she couldn't stand still if her life depended on it.

"The curse has her. It found her weakness and is feeding on it. Marius, Echo is not in her right mind at all. She thinks she is and sometimes has moments of clarity, but she cracked yesterday. I see an attack on an ally. That's what did it."

"Talia said the curse attacked the elf prince and sent him to the realm of dreams with no way back. If not for her ability, Talia wouldn't have been able to save him. How has this affected my daughter?" I asked.

"She's fixated on safety. All I see when I try to hear her thoughts is 'safe'. Everything is so clouded. I can see her acting completely normal. Going through the house, interacting with others, doing chores she normally does, but... she's insane, Marius. There's nothing that can stop her either. With the ability the two of you share, there's nowhere she can be locked up for her own safety. I don't know what to tell you. The only way for her to get out of the grip of the curse is to either die, or no longer be the Master of the territory." Lila told me.

"Can you see what she's doing right now?"

She looked back into the bowl. I waited as patiently as I could. There was no rushing Lila's visions. If I tried, she might lose them altogether.

"It looks like she's fixing breakfast for everyone. She's in the kitchen working on something that looks like hand pies. She's filling the dough with breakfast meats and cheese. Echo seems very normal, and even happy, right now. I don't see anything indicating any trouble at all." She replied.

I felt some of my tension leave me. I knew Echo would take on some of her old duties at times because they made her feel happy. She would do it when she was stressed. Victor and Talia had told me that.

Remembering how content she'd seemed the first day I met her, while she was wandering the house and cleaning, made me smile a little. She knew her strengths and would play to them no matter her situation. Echo found a way to be in her element, even if she was in an entirely new situation.

The way she took over the territory so soundly and adeptly made me proud. She was definitely my daughter. I could see that in the way she behaved with utter authority and the way she controlled a room. She didn't even let that cat get to her like the others did.

"It seems that I have some time then. Come, my little witch. Let me show you what a gentle lover I can be as well. Something you never get to see." I chuckled and held my hand out.

"Ooo, daddy. I can't wait." Lila giggled and took my hand.

I pulled her to me and kissed her tenderly, yet passionately. My hands caressed her back and bottom as I pressed her into me. She melted as I nibbled her ear and proceeded to kiss down her neck.

Sweeping Lila into my arms, I carried her back to her bedroom and placed her on the bed gently. I took off my clothes and laid them over the back of the chaise in the corner. When I turned around, she had situated herself in the middle of the bed and was looking at me with anticipation.

Crawling onto the bed, I picked up one of her legs and nibbled at her ankle before working my way up. Licking at the back of her knee, tasting every inch of the gorgeous limb until I reached her thigh. Extending my fangs, I bit into her thigh and started drawing her blood.

Lila's breath caught before she began moaning. Feeding at the thigh is foreplay for many vampires. It increases blood flow to the nether regions and can stimulate the senses of both parties.

I could smell her arousal increasing and sealed the bite before making my way to her dripping center. I kissed a line from her mound to her opening, before kissing her as passionately as any lover. My tongue dipped inside her, tasting her sweet nectar.

She arched and I felt her muscles contract. My little witch had no idea of the heights I could take her to as I caught her eye and unleashed my hypnosis upon her. Her body stiffened, then began writhing as I continued my oral assault.

In the world I'd created for her, she was being treated to two of me. One teasing and caressing her upper body while I worked diligently between her legs. Her hands gripped the blanket beneath her and her body tensed.

When she reached another peak, I released her from my spell. Lila's head fell back and she moaned.

"I didn't realize you could do that. It felt so real. Are you some sort of sex god, daddy?" She asked breathily.

I chuckled, making her arch again. "You are the only one I have ever done that to. This is just for you, my little witch."

"I need you inside me so bad. Please." She begged.

"No begging, my dark queen. I'll give you everything you're due." I murmured and started kissing up her delectable body.

When I reached her breasts, I stopped to lavish attention on each one. Nibbling around it, licking circles around each tip before taking them slowly in my mouth. Her hands went to my hair and gripped as she moaned and sighed beneath me.

I began my slow push into her as I kissed up her neck to her jaw and chin, finally reaching her lips and pushing myself the rest of the way inside her. She was still a little swollen from the battering I gave her earlier and hissed as I planted myself inside her.

“I love you, Lila. You are my darkest dream come true. Your blood is powerful and piquant. Your body was made for loving. Your magic is wondrous.” I whispered as I began gently stroking in and out of her.

“Dear goddess, is there anything you can’t do with that tongue.” She breathed.

“We have the rest of time to find out.” I purred.

Lila’s body contracted around me. I groaned at the sensation. This was the first time I had been gentle with a female since the last time I was with a human. It was intoxicating to feel every minor change in her as I brought her to her peaks.

She pulled me closer to her and my body slid over hers with each stroke. Every movement transferred her scent onto me. I moved a little faster, feeling my end coming. The scent of my witch surrounded me and I was having trouble containing myself.

Finally, Lila cried out and her body began milking me. I couldn’t hold back any longer and released into her. I bent my head down and bit her neck. She arched again as another large climax hit accompanying my bite and I licked over her skin.

“Goddess, Marius. I didn’t know it could be like that. It’s always been good, but damn.” Lila panted.

“This is one of the many advantages to being mine, my dark queen. I must go deal with my child. You should eat something. You’ve lost quite a lot of blood this morning.” I chuckled.

“Right.” She giggled.

I got off the bed and dressed. Lila wrapped her arms around me as I was buckling my belt. I pulled her arms from me and turned, placing a light kiss on her forehead.

“Go on. I have work to do.” I said.

“Yes, daddy.” Lila winked and sauntered out of the room.

Trapped

Chapter 156 - The Vampire's Servant

[Gray]

I woke up with a pounding headache and some nausea. It felt like what my human friends described as a hangover. It took a lot to get a werewolf drunk and hangovers were uncommon among us.

Groaning, I rolled over and put my arm around Echo. I had no clue what happened last night. I remembered talking with Val in the TV room while Dillon and Jean-Claude played a fighting game. Then he just keeled over. It was only moments before everything went dark for me.

I sniffed and froze. That wasn't my mate. I drew my arm back slowly.

"Mmm. Cam." Harmony murmured and rolled over, wrapping her arms around me.

"Umm, kitten? I'm over here." I heard Cam say from nearby.

The room was pitch black. I tried looking around, but there wasn't enough light to make out anything. Harmony stiffened, then pushed me away.

"Who the hell are you?!" She shouted, making my head feel like it was bursting.

There were groans from all over. It seemed like I wasn't the only one with that headache. I scooted away and bumped into someone else.

"Watch out." Val groaned.

"Could you all talk a little quieter? I haven't had a hangover this bad since I was in my twenties." Preston muttered.

"Does anyone know where we are?" Sean asked.

"I don't know, but it sounds like the gang's all here." Dillon chuckled, then groaned.

"Echo? Where are you?" I whispered.

There was no answer. I sat up and started feeling around. I came across a set of legs that were too thick to be hers.

"Go any further up and you'll have to buy me dinner." Amelia giggled.

"Sorry. I'm looking for Echo." I told her as I felt around and got a thinner pair of legs.

"Not Echo." Emmalyn hissed.

"Val, can you make a little fireball at your finger tip?" Preston asked.

“Yeah.” Val answered.

A light flickered behind me and disappeared. I searched for Echo in the little flashes. Everyone was here except her.

“I can’t keep my flame going.” Preston said with exasperation.

“Me, either.” Val said.

“Keep trying.” I instructed. “We can use the little flashes of light to get an idea of where we are.”

“Is it the curse?” Harmony asked.

“Fenton said he would take away everyone who supported Echo until it was only the two of them. I thought we’d have time.” I murmured.

“You never told us that.” Val growled. “You mean my little sister is all alone with that cat?”

“The vampires aren’t here.” Emmalyn stated. “That means she might have them still. She’s probably not entirely alone. We need to figure out how to get out of here. And how to get home.”

“I tried contacting Echo, but I’m not getting an answer.” Sean said.

“I tried too.” Harmony sighed.

“So we can’t reach out to anyone?” Val asked.

“Lisa, are you at the house?” I asked in my link.

No answer. Damn. Of course, for all I knew it was the middle of the night and she was sleeping.

I had no clue who was taking over for the guards this weekend. Travis, Brandon, Chris, and Justin all left after we got back from breaking the wards. Echo had met the new guards, but I didn’t know who they were.

“No answer from Lisa.” I said.

“None from Wendell, either. It looks like we had the same idea.” Cam chuckled.

In the corner of the room was a cot and in another was a toilet and sink. By the door was a smaller door. It reminded me of the cells in the basement. In the door was a little slat for someone to look in. I had an uneasy feeling.

“Is anyone here familiar with the cells in the basement?” I asked.

“No. I never went down there.” Val answered.

“I did. I wanted to check it out. Are you thinking we’re in the basement, Gray, because I agree, this looks like the cells in the basement.” Dillon said, standing and looking around.

“At least we don’t have to worry about how to get home.” Rosario chuckled.

“Echo wouldn’t think to look for us down here. It’s kind of the perfect hiding place. We can’t hear anything, so we wouldn’t know when she came down to see Victor.” I muttered. “Damn. I can’t think of how to get us out of here. We should be able to reach someone once they’re awake, but I have no idea when that will be.”

“What if he somehow blocked communications. If he could send me out of my body, he could probably make it so we can’t contact anyone.” Rosario replied.

My cellphone wasn’t in my pocket. Somehow, he’d gotten my phone away from me. That was a crafty cat.

“Does anyone have their cellphone?” I asked.

Everyone patted their pockets and shook their heads. He must have thought of that. I was at a loss. It felt like there was nothing I could do.

Suddenly, the small door opened and a tray piled with food slid in. A familiar scent wafted in with it.

“Echo!” I shouted.

Everyone groaned and many grabbed their heads. My mate’s upside down face appeared in the small doorway. She smiled at me.

“I made breakfast. I hope you all like it. I wanted to do something that wouldn’t be too messy” She replied.

“Let us out, angel.” I told her gently.

“Oh. I can’t do that. You’re safe right now. Fenton has no idea where you are, so he can’t get you. I’m going to tell him that everyone left me when I couldn’t protect Rosario. I’ll even cry to make him think he really hurt me. Don’t worry. This is only until I break the curse.” Echo promised.

“Echo. You can’t keep us in here. There’s no privacy for the girls.” Val insisted. “Girls need privacy.”

“Well, I couldn’t put the boys in with the vampires because Sean and Rosario are fae. They can control their hunger in a space like the house, but it would be much harder in a cell.” She reasoned.

“Let us out of the cell, Echo. Then this won’t be a problem.” Preston said.

“But, you’re safe here, Uncle Preston. No one can hurt you and Fenton can’t take you away. You just don’t understand, but that’s okay. I can keep you safe for now.” Echo answered.

“What would Victor say?” I asked. “He probably doesn’t like this anymore than we do.”

Echo’s face disappeared and I could hear metal sliding against metal. She was actually going to ask Victor. That meant it was possible to talk her into letting us out.

“Echo! Let us out of here.” Talia shouted.

“So much for our thought that the vampires are with her.” Emmalyn muttered.

“Princess, why did you lock Finn and Talia up? Does Grayson know what you’ve done?” Victor asked.

“Unfortunately, Talia and Finn aren’t the only ones she’s locked up.” I said, moving toward the food hatch.

“Echo, did you lock everyone in the cells?” Victor pressed.

“I’m keeping everyone safe. Fenton couldn’t get you because he didn’t know where you were. That’s why he went after Rosario. If he can’t find anyone, he can’t attack them. It makes perfect sense.” Echo insisted.

“Angel. Listen to yourself. This isn’t you. This is the curse talking.” I pled.

She sighed. “You say that whenever I make a decision you don’t like, Gray.”

“He’s right this time, princess. This isn’t you. You’re smarter than this. Locking everyone up makes it easier for us to get hurt.”

“Listen to Victor. It’s pitch black in these cells. Someone could have gotten injured.” I told her.

“None of you understand. I’ll turn on the light in the cells before I head up to get to work. When I come back with lunch, I hope you’ll all have had time to see that this is the best option.” Echo replied.

“Can you leave the hatches open so we can talk to the vampires?” I asked. “That way we can all understand together.”

“Okay!” She said cheerfully.

I could hear her footsteps retreating and the light in the cell came on before I heard her start up the stairs. I picked up the platter of food and it got passed around. There wasn't enough food to feed five werewolves, even if no one else ate.

Sitting on the floor by the hatch, I ate the two pies I got. It was something, but we would be seriously weakened if we didn't get more food today. Rosario came up to me and handed me his second one.

"You're going to be our best chance for getting Echo to see that she has to free us. I can go on half rations." He said.

Emmalyn and Amelia gave theirs to me as well. Preston came to hand his over and I started directing them to Val and Harmony. If I couldn't get through to Echo, they should be able to. We were the only ones who really knew Echo.

"Is there anything you earth witches can do?" I asked.

"There are sheets of metal behind the wall. I can't do anything with metal." Emmalyn said.

"I can, but it takes a while." Amelia answered. "If Emmalyn can take care of the stone, I can work on the metal, but it could end up taking a lot of energy and a few hours."

"Amelia! Are you alright, Amor?" Finn called out.

"I'm fine, Finn."

"She only opened the viewing hatch on our cell. Is anyone in your side small enough to get through the food hatch she opened?" Talia asked.

Harmony and Emmalyn were pretty small, but Sean's frame was thin. I had each of them try. Harmony and Emmalyn couldn't get their chests through. Sean's shoulders were too broad. We were seriously stuck.

"Can you contact Marius?" I asked Talia.

"No. Broodmates need to be closer together to speak to each other than sires and children. Val, Harmony, can you reach him?" She questioned.

"We can try." Val answered.

I watched as they closed their eyes and tried to focus on speaking to Marius. They opened their eyes at the same time and looked disappointed. No luck.

We had to work out how people could use the restroom when Jean-Claude revealed that he had a full bladder. This wasn't going to be great as time wore on. Eventually, Victor and Finn had to go to sleep.

Cam tried contacting Lisa and Wendell again. Still nothing. I wondered if Echo had sent them back to the pack lands. That would be too far for us to reach through the mindlink.

Emmalyn focused on trying to get the cement to move. She seemed to be having a lot of trouble. Sweat poured down her face as she kept her hands on the wall near the door.

“I don’t know why it’s not listening to me.” She sighed. “It’s like the earth in the cement can’t hear me.”

“Damn it.” Talia growled and I heard a thunk as she probably punched the door.

“What?” I asked.

“Marius had these cells built. That’s why we can’t reach anyone. The metal is most likely iron lined in silver and there’s probably rowan and ash mixed into the concrete. There’s most likely something to block witch’s magics as well.” She told me.

“Why did Marius have to be so good at this?” I groaned.

“My broodmate has had to figure out how to keep practically every type of supernatural being from escaping his dungeon. I’m betting I wouldn’t be able to get through the feeding hatch either. He would have had it built so only the tiniest creatures could fit through. Marius has special cages for them.” Talia said. “We’re stuck here until she lets us out or someone comes to save us.”

I sat heavily on the floor with my back against the wall. I thought of how we could get out. The doors had never burned me. I’d touched them.

Standing, I walked to the door and punched it. There was no bend or dent and it felt like my hand had broken in several places. I cursed loudly while cradling my broken hand.

“There’s silver all around you, Gray. Even if the door isn’t silver, you’re weakened by it. Sit in the center of the room and maybe your wolf will be able to heal you.” Dillon ordered.

Crossing to the center of the room, I sat down and started feeling the tingle of healing. It was slow, but faster than a human. I looked around at everyone.

None of them looked hopeful at all anymore. Harmony was curled up in Cam’s arms. Dillon and Jean-Claude were murmuring quietly to each other. Probably unable to mindlink. Val, Preston, Sean, and Rosario were talking about different approaches to use on Echo. Amelia was sitting with her arm around her sister.

How had this all gone so wrong? How did I not see that Echo was this far gone? Emmalyn had said she was fully in the grip of the curse, but she never seemed this bad.

I put my head in my undamaged hand. How was I going to get through to her? Echo didn't see anything wrong with this at all.

All we could do was sit and hope someone would come save us. Who was there to do that, though? Maybe my brother when I didn't call or show up to the family dinner? Maybe the girls would figure it out and come down? Maybe Marius would come by and ask about the empty house?

He would have come for Echo's training this morning. That means he didn't figure it out. Damn. That was one chance gone.

It felt like hours before my hand was healed. We heard the door at the top of the stairs open. A couple people tried calling for help, but the response we got was Echo's frustrated sigh.

"I brought you lunch. I just knew you all were going to be naughty. It's a good thing I sent Lisa and Wendell back to the pack lands. They could have heard you. Then you wouldn't be safe anymore." Echo chided.

"Did you bring enough to actually sustain the werewolves this time?" Cam snarled.

"Back the hell off, man. She's doing her best." Val growled back at him.

"I read that there could be nausea when you woke up, so I didn't want to give you too much food this morning. I have a lot more now. I just need you to slide out the other tray." Echo said.

I took the platter from Dillon and slid it out through the hatch. A tray of sandwiches came in followed by a tray of fruits and a tray with bottles of water. I started handing out food to everyone. She definitely made enough for everyone.

"Angel, why don't you let me come out and help you with everything. This can't be easy all alone." I crooned, catching her hand and squeezing it gently.

"I can't do that, Gray." She replied, pulling her hand from my grasp. "It's not safe."

"I can stay hidden. Fenton won't know that I'm in the house." I suggested.

"Listen to him, Echo. This is the best option for you." Talia added. "Victor would want to know you're safe."

"The wolves who guard the perimeter are still there. Victor doesn't need to worry. I have to go, Marius will be here at some point and I—"

"What is going on here, Echo?" Marius demanded. "Did I just hear Talia in that cell?"

"Marius!" Talia exclaimed.

“I’m keeping her safe, papa. I’m keeping everyone safe.” Echo told him.

I got down on the floor to look out the hatch and saw Marius come down the stairs. He strode over to the door of the other cell. I got excited. He was going to free us.

Echo stepped behind him with a disappointed look on her face and put a hand on him before they both disappeared. Then she reappeared outside the door.

“Really, papa. Now I have to keep you safe as well.” Echo sighed as she turned from the doors.

“Echo! Let me out of this cell this instant!” Marius shouted. “How did you even do that!? Vampire abilities aren’t supposed to work in these cells.”

“You forgot, papa. I’m not a vampire. I’ll bring some blood when I come back with dinner. See you later.” Echo said, and closed the door at the top of the stairs.

“Well, that worked out.” Talia snickered.

“Shut up.” Marius muttered.

I had no idea what we were going to do now, but I would keep working on getting her to let us out. There had to be some way to reason with her. Something of my Echo had to remain.

Planning for Freedom

Chapter 157 - The Vampire's Servant

“Gray. Marius and I need to sleep at some point. I was thinking we could sleep now, since she won’t be back until about dinner time. That way we’re not leaving you when you might need us.” Talia said.

“We can work on a plan to get out of here. We need a plan for what to do once we are out though. We can’t let Echo keep that title. There’s no telling what she’ll do next time.” I replied.

“I can take the title.” Talia offered.

“You’re powerful, but that could still be dangerous. Only the council could stop you if you went insane. We can’t risk that, Talia.” Marius answered. “We need someone who will not be a danger to everyone here, especially not to Echo.”

“How are you not mad at her? I’m one of her best friends and I’m a little mad.” Sean asked.

“Because I’ve been around longer than everyone in your cell combined. Even Talia isn’t angered at Echo.” Marius scoffed.

“She truly thinks this is the best way to keep everyone safe for the duration of the curse, Sean. Echo values every person she put in these cells. She’s worried that any one of us could end up attacked.” Talia said.

“She’s only known us for a few days.” Emmalyn replied, disbelieving.

“You’re family. She values that as much as friendships. If she didn’t think she could get you out of here safely, she would have put you in here with us to keep you safe. That’s just how Echo is, and she likes you both.” I explained.

We ate our lunch in relative silence once the vampires went to sleep. I promised them an update when they woke. There were a lot of random suggestions, but nothing seemed to work.

No matter how insane Echo was right now, she was also smart enough to see through things like others were suggesting. We slid the trays back through the slot. We needed Echo to think we were being compliant until we could find a way to get free.

I told the girls to sit on the cot. They all looked uncomfortable. I knew it had to be nerve wracking to be locked up with all of us guys. I wondered if we could use that to our advantage.

“I think I have an idea that would work.” Jean-Claude said.

Dillon looked proud of his mate, but, until I knew what it was, I wasn’t going to trust that it could work. I nodded to him.

“Well, Echo is the only one taking care of us. Cooking enough food for five werewolves takes a lot of time and resources. Why don’t we ask Echo to take Dillon and me back home? The cat barely saw either of us. We could ask her to take us to Bellamy’s office and offer to come get our things once the curse is resolved.” He suggested.

That could work. She wouldn’t see it as a way for them to get out and release us. They were asking to be taken hundreds of miles away. It would make sense in her mind that they were just trying to make things easier on her.

No one could seem to object to that. Going home would be safer for them and safer for us. I didn’t know how long Echo was planning to keep us here.

“Sounds like we have a plan to get someone out. Then what?” I asked.

“We can contract Trent and have him come with his warriors. It needs to be more than a few people if they’re going to make it past Echo. I can give them the code for the gate, so they don’t have to let her know. The more surprise we can have, the better this will work.” Dillon said.

The rest of the afternoon was spent preparing what Dillon and Jean-Claude would have to do, once they were free, to free us. I was glad this wouldn't take too long. I didn't like the idea of being locked up for longer than a day or two.

With the revelation of hunters in our town, I didn't like the idea of leaving Echo unprotected. Echo was the one who was the least safe of all of us. She didn't even realize it.

We went over the options we knew of for Master of the territory. If we could select a vampire, give them the title, then lock them up, it would be best. Victor's supports wouldn't work, because each had a business to look after.

Harmony and Val both offered, but they were actually less vampire than Echo was. I didn't know how it worked, but I was concerned that the curse was aimed more toward a vampire and they may not have the strength in the face of it. Echo wasn't full vampire and it took her faster than it took Victor.

I chuckled. "We could always give it to Daniel Darknight. He's already locked up in Marius' cells back in his territory and we know there's no way he can get out."

Preston grinned. "That bastard would be tortured even more by having a fixation he could do nothing about. Do you think they'll agree?"

"Maybe. It takes care of the problem, unless there's something about being Master of a territory that we don't know about. Does anyone know anything about them?" I asked.

Everyone looked around, shaking their heads. That sucked, but we only had an hour or two left of Marius and Talia's sleep cycle. They could tell us if it was a bad plan.

"Do you think you two could do that pushing thing you did for Victor?" I asked Val and Harmony.

"It took all three of us focusing on him at the same time. I don't know if we can." Val answered.

"If you and Victor held Echo and focused on her, you could make up for her." Emmalyn said. "There are two powerful triads in this house. You, Victor, and Echo make up one, Val, Harmony, and Echo make up the other. She's marked you and shares her strength with you."

"It's worth a shot." Harmony shrugged. "I don't like my sister like this and I'd do anything to get her back."

"Same." Val nodded.

We were all set. We just needed to run our ideas past the vampires. With luck, we'd be out of the basement before midnight.

There was some scattered chitchatting. I never realized how tedious being locked up could be. Having other people there made it easier, though.

A while later, the scent of vampire increased and I breathed a sigh of relief. That meant Echo would be down in a few hours with dinner and our plan could begin.

Quickly, I relayed the idea for escape to Talia and Marius. They agreed that it should work. If nothing else, Echo would see them being hundreds of miles away as being safe.

“We just need to figure out who should get the title of Master.” Talia said.

“Gray had a good idea.” Preston said from beside me.

“It was really a joke, but the more I think of it, the better it sounds.” I replied.

We shared my idea for giving Daniel the title of Master. This elicited a dark chuckle from Marius. Talia snickered.

“The curse would drive him mad. His obsession with my children would be magnified. That is an amazing idea, Grayson. I didn’t realize you had it in you to be so cruel.” Marius said. “Maybe there is some hope that you will be a strong mate for my daughter.”

“Thanks... I guess.”

They couldn’t name a new master while they were locked up in the cell. One thing I could say for Marius; he was proud of Echo even when she was crazy. Something occurred to me.

“Marius, what about your phone. She didn’t have time to get it from you before she locked you up.” I told him urgently.

I could hear him patting his pockets, then he groaned. My hopes were dashed. I knew that sound.

“It must have fallen out when I was with Lila this morning. I hadn’t even noticed.” He sighed.

“It’s okay. It was a long shot, anyway.” I answered.

We turned the conversation away from the escape and after plans. Instead, we worked on making it seem like we’d accepted Echo’s decision. The blankets we’d been sleeping with were folded and used as cushions to keep us off the floor. It made everything a little more comfortable.

I looked over at Val. He ‘d been pretty quiet. He didn’t even yell at Cam when he started cuddling Harmony.

“What’s going on, Val?” I asked.

“Echo used to spend every Sunday locked in the basement with some food for the day. Our fake parents called it her ‘day off’. I’m just wondering how bad it was for her if being locked up with everyone is so hard on me.” Val replied softly.

“She was probably grateful to not have to work or hear the hateful things they would say to her. I can’t imagine it was easy for her the first time it happened. I remember her shaking on Saturdays. I always thought it was because she didn’t want to be locked in the basement. Maybe it was that and feeding the vampires.” Harmony whispered.

Every time I heard something like that, it made me angry. I couldn’t believe someone would hurt Echo so badly. She was so good and sweet.

After a while longer, I heard Victor join the conversation in the other cell. Finn called out for Amelia. I moved away from the door so she could sit next to it and talk to him.

I heard him calling her ‘Amor’. Victor had called Echo that when he was crazy. Most of us had already guessed that they were mates, but it seemed that they were keeping it a secret, because neither one announced it.

They would when they were ready. I was sure of it. They were well matched.

-

Echo came down some time later with trays of food. Amelia moved away from the door and I had Dillon and Jean-Claude take her place. They needed to catch Echo’s attention before she left for the night.

They waited for the first tray to slide in. She’d put blood in for the vampires first and talked to Victor for a moment. I prayed to the Goddess for this to work.

“Echo! We needed to talk to you about something.” Dillon called out.

“What is it?” She asked warily.

“Jean-Claude and I were thinking that we had only come to train you and you’re already advanced enough to train with vampires. We would have been taking our leave soon. Instead of having to care for and feed five werewolves, you could take me and my mate to Bellamy’s office. We can come get our things once the curse is broken. That way you know we’re not just going to turn around and let everyone out and you know we’re safe. There’s no way that Fenton’s curse could reach us all the way in Lune Rouge.” Dillon explained.

Echo slid a second tray in, but was quiet. I knew she was thinking of what could happen. I was hopeful that she wouldn’t come to the same decision.

“What’s to stop you from borrowing someone else’s car and coming back?” Echo questioned.

“We can make the promise to you that we won’t. There’s a lot of work for us to do. We did this as a favor to our Luna. She’ll be thrilled to have us home, because she doesn’t want to keep doing our work and she’ll know that you’re able to protect everyone.” He replied. “This will make things so much easier on you.”

“Alright, just promise you won’t come back until after the curse is lifted.” Echo insisted.

“We promise not to return until the curse is lifted.” They said in unison.

“Reach your hands through the door.” She ordered.

They did and they were gone in an instant. We all grinned at each other. Harmony and Amelia did a little giddy dance. It worked. Now it was all up to the guys to get the reinforcements.

Echo returned a few minutes later and sent in the tray with waters. She sat on the ground next to the opening she’d just slid the tray through. I put my hand out and she took it gently.

“Angel. I miss hugging you.”

“I’m not letting you out, Gray. It’s not safe.”

“I understand. I’m not asking you to. I’m just letting you know that I miss you.” I said softly.

“I miss you, too. Everything will be fine. You’re safe for now.” She whispered and squeezed my hand.

She let me go and stood. Soon, I’d have her back in my arms. We just needed to wait a little longer.

Cleaning Up

Chapter 158 - The Vampire's Servant

[Melissa]

My room was disgusting. I’d pulled my blankets back last night to find used condoms in my sheets. There were more on the floor and cups everywhere.

I had cleaned it just enough to sleep and spent most of the day cleaning every room people had been in. It was one of the things I had to do to get my parents to agree to let me have a house party. I would clean the whole mess, no matter how long it took.

Starting with my room, then moving on to my brother Alex's room. Mom and dad had locked their room and the workroom up, so I only had to get all the other rooms set to rights.

Every time I went through the living room and kitchen, I picked up more cups, bottles, and cans. It was how I was going to get them mostly decent. I finished my room and Alex's by lunch time. My main focuses next were the halls and bathrooms upstairs.

Someone had brought a keg later in the evening, so I was dealing with a lot of cups of beer and some vomit around the toilets and in the sinks. Who the hell did that? It was so gross.

Was it worth it, though? I would say yes. I ended up making out with a couple of football players when we were playing spin the bottle. Lots of people, especially popular people, showed up.

It was a party worth being talked about. I was betting people would still remember it at the five-year reunion. A few of the popular girls had ended up dancing on the furniture and Kylee Tate got caught making out with some geek in a closet.

I grinned as I thought of it. They had kissed during one of the games of spin the bottle and disappeared soon after. Even if she somehow forgot about it, he would remember it for the rest of his life. Kylee was one of the top five hottest girls in school.

Though I was pretty hot, I didn't make the official list. It was Harmony Gale, Rosario Adair, Kylee Tate, Gemma Hightower, and Pansy Klein. That new girl who was hanging out with everyone in the last few months, Echo, had almost beat Pansy out, but not many people knew her.

I couldn't believe someone could come in and push me out of my group like that. She brought Sean, Elle, and Terry into the group. If not for her, Rosario wouldn't have started dating Sean.

More than anything, I wished I had seen him first. He stopped wearing his glasses in the last week of school and I realized, he was actually hot. It was more than just him being a good boyfriend, he was a legit cutie.

"Mel, stop treating my decorations so rough. Make sure they go back where they were before your party." Mom scolded.

"Sorry, mom."

I went back to arranging her porcelain figures on the shelves in the hall and stairway. I'd gone through and wrapped them carefully before putting them into mom and dad's room last night. I wasn't going to go try to find these old collectables with the money I saved. I made sure they were safe.

When the hall, stairs, and bathrooms were done, I went to the kitchen. I wanted to get it cleaned before dinner. Mom and dad said they'd order pizza tonight because of all the cleaning that needed to get done.

I opened cupboards to collect garbage, dumped out the coolers of melted ice and carried out the empty keg from the breakfast nook. At least there had been some benefit to all dad's training. I was strong enough to carry the huge metal container, at least, while it was empty.

My hard work was paying off. I had gotten to the point of sweeping and mopping the floor. My whole body ached from working nonstop. I just didn't want to have to do anymore cleaning tomorrow.

All I would have left was the living room and the family room once I was done with the kitchen. With luck, I could have it all done by midnight, then I would just sleep in tomorrow. Thank God for summer break.

After school, I would do what my brother did. Intensive training for a year, then college while I started my first hunts. Just like mom and dad did. They actually met in the training camp.

Maybe I'd meet some hot guy and come back with a boyfriend. Mom and dad hunted for ten years before settling down with each other and having Alex. He was home recovering from a hunt gone wrong near La Grande.

He told us that rogue werewolves had started hunting hunters. It worried my parents. Most of Alex's hunting party hadn't come back from that attack.

I didn't know why those monsters were fighting so hard to live. They were freaks of nature and abominations. Who would honestly want to live half their life as a wolf? It was so gross. Think of the fleas and stuff.

They were animals. Not real people. That was how I was able to deal with it when my dad and brother would tell stories of the wolves they killed.

If I ever saw one, I would do the right thing. They didn't deserve to live. I mopped the floor while daydreaming of meeting a hot hunter boy. We would be a force to be reckoned with.

I dumped out the mop water in the utility room and grabbed some bags before heading into the living room. I was glad we had leather furniture and I was able to just wash off foot and shoe prints from the cushions.

"Melissa!!" My dad shouted.

Jumping, I rushed to where he was. He was in the family room. It was still a disaster.

"I'm sorry, daddy. I haven't gotten to the family room yet." I panted.

"That's not what's important." He growled before heading to the doorway and calling for my mom and brother. "Sit."

I sat on the couch. He paced like a caged animal. I wondered what had happened.

My brother came in and looked around the room with disgust. I hadn't touched anything in this room at all yet, but I planned to get it done next. He sat on the couch next to me heavily.

Alex was about 5'11 with toned muscles and a haughty resting expression. When I was young I always wanted to marry a boy just like my brother. All the guys I'd dated had been like him to some degree. That was one of the many reasons I didn't even look at Sean until he was with Rosario.

He wasn't strong and arrogant. He was smart and polite. I hadn't found that attractive, but then I started thinking that maybe that was why I couldn't find a guy that I liked enough to keep. Maybe I needed someone different.

"Mitchell? What's going on?" Mom asked when she came in.

"Sit down, Sarah. You need to see this." Dad said, shaking his head.

Mom sat between me and Alex, holding each of our hands. Mom was the cement that kept our family all together. She taught us how important family was from a very young age. She lost three of her older brothers in wolf hunts. She wouldn't let us leave the house without resolving our issues.

She always said that we never wanted to regret the last interaction with anyone in the family. I loved that about her. She was the reason I knew Alex wasn't really upset with me about the mess, he was just really organized and hated disorganization.

"I was looking over my videos from last night, just to make sure no one got into the workroom. We have a problem." Dad said sternly as he turned the TV on.

I could see the door to the workroom on the screen. A few people tried the door before moving on down the hall. I saw Gray being pulled by that girl, Echo.

She tried the handle before grabbing him and disappearing. I don't mean wandering out of range of the camera. They were there, then they weren't.

"Holy shit." I gasped. "Where'd they go?"

Dad typed some stuff into his computer and the night vision view of the workroom came up. They appeared by the door. Echo pushed Gray against the door.

"You are mine." She growled before pulling him into a kiss.

He turned and pressed her into the door. Dad paused the video as she opened her eyes. They were glowing. Not like light reflecting or the night vision feedback, but actually glowing.

"What is she?" I asked.

“She’s one of your guests. You tell me.” Dad pressed.

“I thought she was human. She eats solid food, but a lot of it. Not as much as the football players and other athletes. She’s pale and pretty quiet.” I answered. “Maybe she’s a witch of some sort. Gray, the boy she’s with, didn’t seem surprised. He must also be something. From his size, attitude, and the amount he eats, I would say some sort of shapeshifter.”

“I would guess a werewolf, but they never go to school with humans.” Alex added.

“There were a few kids over the last couple years who transferred into your school. I’m betting they’re all supernaturals of some sort. What’s the girl’s name? I can check with our old ledger of witch surnames.”

“Echo Nightshade.” I replied dutifully.

I’d had a crush on Gray when he first moved into the school. He was so big and strong. He definitely had that arrogant air about him. Was it because he was a werewolf? Maybe he was a ranked wolf then. I could imagine the ones who were slated to take over were like that.

“Did you say Nightshade?” Alex asked.

“Yes.”

“She’s the human servant of the Master of the territory. She’s probably a witch, but the vampires claim their servants by changing their surname to match their master.” He told me.

“Can witches teleport?” I asked.

“I’ve never heard of a spell like that. She didn’t seem to use one before they did it. Watch this, though.” Dad said and started the video again.

We could hear everything they said. Gray knew what it was, but Echo didn’t. They talked about ‘going early’ and contacting others. I didn’t know what they meant.

She stopped in the center of the room and started chanting in another language. After a minute or two, there was a bright flash of light. Gray grabbed Echo and pulled her to him. She wrapped her arms around him.

“Let’s go, angel. I don’t want you here any longer.” He murmured and kissed the top of her head.

After a few seconds, they disappeared. Dad stopped the video and turned to us. He had a look on his face that I didn’t like. I couldn’t believe I brought supernaturals into the house.

“I’m so sorry, daddy. I didn’t know.” I whispered.

“It’s not your fault, baby. They blend in with humans so they can choose their victims and hide in plain sight. I’ll contact some of my friends who are experts in witches to figure out what spell she did in there.” Dad said as he turned back to the computer.

“I’ll get together a party.” Alex said. “They know we’re hunters and they know where we live. This is too dangerous to hope they’ll keep it secret.”

“It’s been a few years, but I’m up for hunting a couple teenaged abominations.” Mom smirked.

“Let me go, too.” I requested. “I want them to be my first hunt. They tricked me into thinking they were human. I ate lunch with them. They were probably laughing at how stupid humans were the whole time.”

“Mel, baby, you’re too young to hunt.” Dad sighed.

“I think it’s a marvelous idea. We can lead the hunt as a family. I was about her age the first time I hunted, Mitchell. My family was always a little tougher than yours.” Mom said.

“I can help. I have the student directory and I know who all their friends are. I can find out where they live. I didn’t even know there was a pack here.” I muttered.

“Go get your yearbook and your student directory. We’ll get the family room all cleaned up while you’re gone. You did a great job on the rest of the house.” Mom replied, patting my hand.

I got up and dashed off to my room. I’d gotten a lot of people to sign my yearbook. I was rather proud of it. Now, it would serve a new purpose. I would hunt down those freaks and wipe them out.

After digging out the student directory and the yearbook, I grabbed my cellphone. I could make some phone calls and text some people to gather all the information I needed.

By the time I got downstairs, Alex was on his phone with some fellow hunters and the family room looked like it normally did. I was relieved to have a little less work. I could focus all my attention on the hunt.

This is what I lived for, what I’d always looked forward to. Ever since I was a little girl, I knew I’d be fighting by the side of my family against the monsters. I smiled at my mom and sat down with her on the couch, opening the yearbook.

“Echo looks a lot like this girl, Harmony Gale. She has a twin brother named Valor Gale. I think they’re related to her. I think they said cousins. That has to mean they’re witches, too. Their address is in the directory, but hers isn’t. She came in for the last two months of school. She’s not in the yearbook either.” I told my mom.

I couldn't believe I spent so much of junior high and senior high chasing after a witch. They were probably all supernaturals. They probably laughed at me too. Stupid human chasing the approval and friendship of the beasts.

That wouldn't be me anymore. The only thing I wanted now was their blood. I wouldn't be laughed at again.

"I know that Harmony's boyfriend is Gray's best friend. With the way wolves stick together, I bet he's a werewolf too. I think their entire group of friends is something like that. A werewolf or a witch." I said.

"You're thinking like a hunter now. I'm so glad to see you taking this seriously." Mom smiled.

"You have no idea how seriously I'm taking this, mom. These creatures pretended to be my friends, then they shunned me after I made a little mistake and spread rumors about me. All I was to them was a form of entertainment. If they had ever been real friends to me, I would have some trouble with this decision. I want them all dead." I growled.

Mom laughed. "That's my girl. Let's order some pizza and start making our plan for wiping those things off the face of the earth."

This is what I was meant for. What I was born to do. I was going to kill Echo Nightshade and her cousins, then, I'd kill Gray and Cam for good measure. Those monsters would pay for what they did to me.

Released

Chapter 159 - The Vampire's Servant

[Gray]

Val and I were pacing. It had to have been hours since Dillon and Jean-Claude went home. I understood that it could take a while to put together a plan and a team. That didn't mean I had the patience to wait.

Harmony and Cam were sitting on some blankets in the corner watching us. Rosario was leaning against a wall. Sean was sitting on the cot with Emmalyn, talking about witches and where science intersects magic. Preston was still trying to get his magic to work and Amelia was still talking to Finn.

Finn was asking her about what places she'd always wanted to see in the world. He was promising to take her traveling if she would stay until the curse was over. Amelia seemed pretty excited.

The door at the top of the stairs opened quietly and I heard quick, soft footsteps coming down. I could smell more wolves.

"Amelia, get up. I think the cavalry is here." I whispered.

She jumped up and moved away from the door. No sooner had she gotten a few steps away, did the door swing in and my brother stood there with a smile on his face.

"It seems they were telling the truth. My little brother got himself locked up by his mate." He chuckled.

I snorted, then rushed over and gave him a brief hug.

"You're just jealous. Lily would never think to lock you up for your own safety."

"I'm an Alpha, she knows the safest place for me is by her side and leading our pack. Seems to me that you need to teach your mate where you belong." Trent smirked.

"As touching as this reunion is, we need to get Echo in her right mind. Would someone be so kind as to open our door as well?" Talia called out.

Trent went to their door and opened it as well. Victor came out and shook his hand. Val and Harmony were by my side. We had to go find Echo, but it didn't take long.

From upstairs I heard scuffling and fighting. Echo must have come out from wherever she was and seen Trent's warriors. Victor and I rushed up the stairs followed by Val and Harmony.

When we got into the entryway, Echo was trying to fight three guys I knew to be some of the pack's top warriors. She was managing to hold her own until she saw us. She screamed 'NO' before rushing at us.

One of the warriors grabbed her around the waist and held her while she kicked and flailed. It seemed Echo couldn't focus on her fighting in the state the curse had left her in. We hurried over.

"No. Run away. It's not safe." She pled.

I took her from the warrior and she stopped squirming. Victor stood in front of Echo and wrapped his arms around both of us, sandwiching her between us. I nodded to Val, who nodded to Harmony, and they took Echo's hands.

“Shh, princess. Everything is going to be alright now. We have you now. You’re not alone anymore.” Victor murmured.

“That’s right, angel. We’re stronger and safer together. Let us stay by your side.” I whispered.

“Echo Nightshade.” Marius stated firmly. “You are not fit to be Master of this territory any longer. I strip you of your title.”

“No! Don’t give it back to Victor. It’s not safe!” Echo cried.

“Don’t worry, Echo. We’re taking it to a Master who deserves everything that goes with this title. Come on, Marius. We’ll return soon.” Talia said.

Looking over, I saw Marius take Talia’s hand and they disappeared. I focused on Echo. We needed to push back the effects of the curse.

“Think of Echo how she was. Think of her being herself again. Think of her before the curse got her.” Val instructed.

I did. I thought of her sweet smiles, the way she worked so hard when we’d cleaned together, the innocent expression on her face while she slept, and the way she always looked so serene in her garden. Most of all, I thought of her wrapped around me in that little red dress.

All of the times we were together, stolen kisses, the way she felt in my arms in every instance that I could have her there. The playful glint in her eyes when she did something naughty. The way she loved me, and Victor.

A wind rushed around us. It mingled the scents of me, Victor, and Echo until they became one. The way we all smelled together was amazing. It was rich and textured. It smelled like home, like my true home.

I looked into Victor’s eyes and he smiled. He was my friend, the only one I would share my most precious treasure with. Really, more than a friend. He was almost like another brother to me.

He squeezed us tighter, as if telling me I was just as important to him. I nuzzled Echo’s hair. She whimpered and squirmed. Victor kissed the top of her head.

The wind died down. Now was the moment of truth. We’d soon find out if it worked.

Victor released us and stepped back. I released my grip around Echo’s waist and she started to slip down. I swept her into my arms. Victor stepped in to examine her.

Echo was laying in my arms. Her eyes were open and moving quickly back and forth. Tears started forming.

“No one will ever forgive me for locking them up.” She whispered.

“Everyone understands. It wasn’t you. It was the curse, Echo. Trust me, we all had a lot of time to talk about it today.” I chuckled.

She covered her face with her hands and groaned. Victor smiled and pulled her hands from her face, wrapping her arms around his neck and hauling her into his arms where he hugged her tightly and kissed her passionately. Val scowled. If he was already mad, I might as well get mine too.

When they pulled away, I stepped in next to them and drew Echo into my arms the same way Victor had and kissed her as well. Echo moaned gently as I kissed her. The real Echo had missed me. Missed us.

“Sorry to interrupt your mauling of my daughter, but I need the spell for Lila.” Marius said behind me.

I hadn’t realized he’d returned. Setting Echo down, I turned to him and smiled a little. He quirked his eyebrow. I guess being locked in the same basement hadn’t been as much of a bonding experience as I’d thought.

“Papa. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me for locking you up like that.” Echo murmured.

“Never apologize for that. You were doing what you thought was right and you taught me an important lesson about letting my guard down. Could you get me the spell?” Marius asked.

“Oh! Yes. And the things I’ve collected for it.” Echo smiled and turned to the office.

She came back a few moments later with a little bin and handed it over. Marius looked through it. He held up a zipper bag with some fur in it.

“I convinced him to let me brush him. It was the best way to get his hair. We had some of the ingredients in the garden and woods out back. There’s some stuff I couldn’t find and I figured Lila might have them in her magic room or she could tell me where to go to collect them and I could get them.” She said.

“It seems you weren’t just walking about the property going mad while we were locked up. Very good thinking.” Marius praised her.

“Fenton said he would keep me just sane enough to suffer. The part of me that wanted everyone to be safe was appeased, so I was actually quite sane until I would go down there. If I were sane, I would release everyone, so the spell clouded my mind as soon as I went near the door to the basement.” Echo admitted. “Since I couldn’t save everyone, I decided to work on the curse.”

“So you were entirely lucid once we were all locked up?” I asked.

“More so once Marius was locked up as well. Fenton asked where everyone was, because he couldn’t feel or smell anyone in the house anymore except me and him. I told him he got what he

wanted and they were all gone now. He was pretty mad that I didn't seem more upset about it." She smirked.

"Lila is waiting on this. I'll let you know how it goes."

"You'll need blood from everyone who's descended from Fenton. Now would probably be the best time. I think everyone will want some space." Echo replied.

We wrangled everyone together and got the needed blood. Marius left after hugging the triplets and shaking my hand. I was shocked. I honestly didn't think he liked me.

Harmony and Cam went off for a run. Rex only wanted to be with Echo. They hadn't had a lot of time to bond. I felt a little bad about it. He acted up once and ended up being banished unless I brought him out to work off my frustrations.

I followed Victor and Echo to the office. He sat behind his desk and started looking through the papers piled up there. Echo settled onto the couch. She sighed happily.

Fenton started meowing and chattering. She just ignored him and curled up. My brother knocked on the door and stuck his head in.

"Princess. Would you please go take my mattress back to my room? I don't know that we can get it out of the cell without your ability." Victor requested. "I need to talk to Trent anyway."

"Yeah. I'm sorry, Victor." She said softly.

"Don't worry about it, Echo. Everything will be alright."

Trent caught Echo before she left the room. "You missed family dinner this week. You better be there next weekend. We're doing it late because everyone wants to meet Victor. I'm hoping all three of you can make it."

Echo looked at Victor. He smiled and nodded.

"I'll make up some blood foods for him so he can eat with everyone else." Echo answered and headed out of the office.

Trent crossed the room and shook hands with Victor. He sat in one of the chairs across from Victor and they started talking. Another knock at the door drew my attention.

I answered it to find Sean there.

"Can I talk to you in the hall?" He asked.

After letting Victor know where I'd be, I closed the door. Sean looked a little nervous. I can imagine he was still a bit skittish after being locked up.

“Rosario wants to go stay with his mother for a couple days. I was going to go with him. He said he lost the connection to the fae lands twice in two days and he wants to go renew his connection to their territory. He told me the hoodoo lady in the dream realm said the spell will take nine days, so we’ll be back before it takes hold.” Sean said.

“It’s really for that reason and not because he doesn’t trust Echo anymore?” I asked.

He sighed. “We’re both a little on edge. I know you guys pushed back the effects of the curse on her, but we need a little space from everyone after all that. It’ll be good. I’ve never been to the fae lands as a fae. Rosario says I’ll get strength from it and I can be inducted into the community. It’ll be nice to feel like I belong somewhere again.” He replied.

“Your parents will come around, Sean. They just need time and space so they can feel their feelings and understand that you’re really who you’re meant to be now.” I told him. “You’ll always have a place here. You’re Echo’s family and one of her best friends. She wouldn’t have tried to save you if you were anything less.”

Sean chuckled. “You know, I used to have the biggest crush on you. Now I see what a good boyfriend you are and it brings back those old feelings. Echo deserves you. You’re a good man.”

“I... umm... I don’t really know what to say to that. Thanks, I guess. You’re not really my type, but I’m flattered that you thought I was someone you would want to date. You’re a good guy too. If I were gay, I’d probably be sad I missed out on a guy like you. Rosario is a lucky man. You’re going to be a great support to the leader of the fae.” I smiled.

“What about you, though? I worry about where your place is in all this with Echo and Victor. He’s going to be Master of the territory again one day. She’s going to be on equal footing with him. But, what are you? Where do you find your place to shine?” He asked.

“I’m Victor’s friend, Echo’s mate, and liaison to the wolf pack. I don’t need power. I just need a place to belong and I belong with them. I’ll be here for a very long time. I’ll watch my family care for the pack I grew up in. I’ll support that growth here. You’ll see. I know you’ll have a long lifespan now that you’re fae. We can all be friends for the rest of your life.” I answered. “Don’t worry about me. You’ll see. Everything will work out.”

“If nothing else, We’ll be back after Uncle Fenton’s funeral. Text me every morning. If you don’t, we’ll rush over to save you from the cells.” Sean winked.

“I don’t think she’ll be doing that again, but I will check in with you so you know we’re not trapped again.” I laughed.

“See you later.” He said and headed down the hall.

The door behind me opened and I turned to see my brother. He patted my shoulder and smiled.

“You better not let her lock you up again or I’m gonna have to tell dad. You know he’ll tease you mercilessly.” Trent chuckled.

“She drugged me. It’s not like I had the option to fight back.” I scoffed.

“Keep in contact with me. I was already starting to worry when you didn’t check in this afternoon. Next time, I’ll come straight over. I would have tried calling and just assumed you were busy with your mate. I had no idea the curse could get so bad.” He said.

“It’s going to get better now that she’s not the Master of the territory anymore.” I replied.

“Victor’s going to get the title back, right?” Trent asked.

“Yes. As soon as the curse on it is gone. We have a placeholder for the title right now, but Victor is still the Master in every other way.” I promised.

“Okay. See you next weekend. May the Goddess watch over you.” He said, pulling me into a hug.

I hugged him back. It wasn’t the same as being hugged by Echo and Victor. I found it amusing that I’d grown so accustomed to it, that singular hugs were still odd unless they were given to me by Echo.

My brother left and I went into the office. The scent of vampire mixed with cat. I saw Victor regarding Fenton. Fenton chattered at him. Sometimes, I really wished I could understand what he was saying.

“Anything interesting?” I asked.

“Only the cat making threats.” Victor answered.

Fenton got real quiet and looked at him with wide eyes. Victor must have guessed correctly. He turned back to his work and I sat on the couch waiting for Echo. She didn’t take much longer before she came in and curled up next to me on the couch.

Suddenly, it was like the times before Victor and Echo were taken by the curse. With the exception of the cat in the corner. There was a certain level of peace that came with it. With luck, the next week and a half would be just like this.

Secrets and Apologies

Chapter 160 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

By Monday night, Lila had the oil prepared for us to put on Fenton. After much discussion, we decided to use Gray's goodwill toward Fenton as a cover.

He came into the office with the bottle of oil and said it was supposed to make the cat's coat healthier. He talked Fenton into letting him rub the oil on his fur and brush it through. I was impressed.

We locked the door and Gray used the whole bottle on Fenton. I managed not to smile as he let Gray get the spell on him. Victor watched curiously. We both behaved as if this were a minor thing and held no real importance.

When he was done, Gray put Fenton back into the cage and gave him some cat treats. Fenton ate them mumbling about how this didn't mean he liked Gray. I laughed at him, like I normally did and unlocked the door.

The rest of the week went smoothly. Marius told me that Daniel was feeling the full force of the curse rather quickly. I was assuming that Fenton had doubled down on it because I wasn't seeming affected.

It was good to know everyone was actually safe this time. We needed to break the curse though, because Victor needed to properly hold the territory if anything happened. If someone challenged him, he would be strengthened by the vampires who were sworn to him.

This was important, because anyone the challenger turned to his side would strengthen him. Victor needed to have something backing him to get anyone else to change their mind. No one had challenged yet, but I didn't want to risk it.

Emmalyn moved to Samuel's old room so I could have my room back. Finn started sleeping in Amelia's room. They were growing closer by the day. I was so excited that he found his Solus Amor.

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On Thursday, we'd been watching a movie together. Me, Amelia, Finn, Victor, Talia, and Emmalyn. They were okay with watching movies I could handle.

We were watching Beauty and the Beast. I loved the music and all the cute characters. I kept seeing Emmalyn looking over at me and smiling a little. I supposed it was a little silly to be a grown up and only able to watch kids movies.

When the movie ended, I grinned at Victor. He was looking at me with a loving gaze. He always did that after we watched movies. He said it was because he loved seeing me enjoy myself.

“You know, judging by the clothes, that was set in the seventeen hundreds. I was actually in France right around then. I was in the court of the king and I told him some shit was brewing ahead of the revolution, but he didn’t listen to me. I tried to get him to see that what he was letting happen to the people wouldn’t stand.” Finn said to Amelia.

Her eyes lit up. “You were really in the king’s court? How did you get out safely?”

“I used my charm and quick wits to sneak away before all hell broke loose.” He smirked.

“I don’t know why you insist on lying, Finnick.” Victor scoffed.

Talia chuckled. “That’s such bullshit, Finn.”

“What do you mean? I’m not lying!” Finn insisted.

“You tried to charm your way into the court and ended up in the dungeon.” Victor chided.

“How do you know?!”

“I was there. I was the one who suggested they put you into the deepest, darkest cell they had.” Victor grinned.

“And I was the one who had to sneak in while the palace was under attack to get you both out.” Talia snorted. “I can’t believe you forgot. Rosalyn still remembers the pains we had to go through to save you both from an untimely end.”

“I remember. I was very grateful to Rosy and I never forgot how she saved my hide.” Victor said.

Amelia started giggling. Emmalyn and I joined her. He was trying so hard to show off. If he could have blushed, I think Finn would have.

“Thanks for ruining it, guys.” He pouted.

Amelia wrapped her arms around him and squeezed him. Finn put his arm over her shoulder. I looked away. It seemed like a bit of a private moment.

“Have you decided when you’re going to mark Echo?” Finn asked.

I glared at him. That wasn’t really anyone’s business. Though, I did hope Victor and Gray would mark me soon. I wanted to know they were entirely mine and I was entirely theirs.

“Probably before you mark Amelia.” Victor answered with a cold glare.

“Mark me? What? What the hell is he talking about, Finn?” Amelia questioned, pulling away from Finn.

“Finn. You didn’t tell her she’s your—.” I started, but he put his hand over my mouth.

“It wasn’t the right time.” He whispered.

“Tell me right now.” Amelia demanded.

Finn sighed. “I wanted you to get to know me first, sweetheart. I didn’t want to just spring it on you. Witches and humans aren’t the same as vampires, fae, and shapeshifters. You don’t feel it when you meet your soulmate. Not unless you’re doing a spell. I feel it, though. I feel the bond I have with you. You’re my Solus Amor, Amelia. My only love. I can wait until you’re ready for me. I still want to take you to every place you’ve ever dreamed of going. You don’t even have to accept the mark. Let me be with you, that’s all I need.”

“You were just going to let me get attached to you and feel guilty about leaving you one day, then spring this on me?” She asked.

“You’re wrong to say we don’t feel it. When you’re with your soulmate, you feel it deep inside, Finn. My sister may have been in a little bit of denial about it, but she’s known in her heart for the last few days that you’re ‘the one’.” Emmalyn said. “Amelia, don’t hide from it. You just asked me yesterday to cast runes for you and we saw that he was meant for you. You insisted I must still be sick.”

“My soulmate can’t be a vampire.” Amelia said, standing up. “I’m not a dark witch. I can’t be a vampire’s soulmate.”

I could practically see Finn’s heart breaking. I was pretty sure Amelia was feeling the same pain. It was hard to deny a part of you. I felt the falseness of my words back when I first denied Gray.

“Amelia. I’m not dark or evil and I’m Victor’s Solus Amor. You don’t have to be either of those things to be with Finn. I don’t think he could be evil if he even tried.” I told her.

“I… I just can’t do this right now. I need time to think.” She muttered and walked out of the room.

“If she rejects me over this, you are no longer my brother, Victor.” Finn growled, getting off the couch.

“Wait for me, Finn. I know you’re truly my sister’s soulmate. Let’s talk about this. Maybe I can help.” Emmalyn offered, following him.

Talia sighed as they left. Victor looked pretty shocked. He probably hadn’t even considered that Finn hadn’t said anything to Amelia yet. I knew he wouldn’t try to ruin their relationship on purpose.

“I know you didn’t mean to. I’ll try to deal with this, you focus on other things. We’re in a holding pattern for now. It’s the best time to work out any issues people are having. Why don’t

you two have some alone time? You're still catching up on all the time you missed." Talia said and left the room.

I climbed into Victor's lap and hugged him. I knew he felt really bad about that. I was hopeful that Gray was having a good night at work. He'd come home really happy the last couple of days, so there was a decent chance he would tonight.

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[Gray]

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My section at work was nearly full. Mostly vampires, but the occasional human table. I'd recently become very popular with the vampires in the territory.

It all started last week when some vampires noted that I smelled a little like vampire. I told them I lived with the Master of the territory and they asked me to pass on their regards to Victor. I said sure, and they left without tipping, like vampires do.

When I got home that night, I told Talia about it. I guess she said something to them, because they came back and thanked me for passing their regards to her as well and then each handed me one hundred dollars. I was baffled.

They told me that she had informed them that tipping in restaurants was a thing and they had committed a big faux pas by not doing so. I told them it was really too much and they insisted I keep it as an apology.

Apparently, they had told other vampires and soon they were all coming into the restaurant and requesting to be seated in my section. Pierce told me they would leave if he said I wasn't working, so it worked out that the weekends were still bustling with human customers and the weekdays were full of vampires.

In the past two weeks, the restaurant had seen almost quadruple its normal income. I was benefitting more than anyone. They would always leave large tips on their relatively small bills and always in cash. I was pulling in a couple thousand in tips per night.

At this rate, I would be able to afford to rent a beach house for my honeymoon with Echo. I was thrilled and started making plans for a week long adventure with her. It was going to be amazing.

I was at the server station, pulling drinks for one of my tables, when Pierce came up. I nodded to him and put my drinks on a tray. He stopped me and took the tray.

"You have a four top just seated. Another one who requested you specifically. Which table are these going to?" He asked.

“Umm. Seven. Is it more vampires?”

“No. All human this time.” Pierce answered.

Quickly, I peeked out into my section. My blood ran cold. It was Melissa and, by the looks of the people with her, her family.

If I told Pierce they were hunters, things could get dicey. I knew most of the people in my section could hear the conversation we were having, because they were vampires. I wondered what they were doing here.

“Cool. I’ll grab them some waters and get right out there.” I replied with a smile I hoped he couldn’t tell was fake.

After pulling the waters, I picked them up and took a deep breath. I needed to not act suspicious. Bellamy would be taking care of them as soon as she could.

I approached the table and started settling drinks in front of people. They had menus already and were looking over them, rather than paying me much attention. I was used to this.

“Thank you for choosing Carroll’s. I’m your server, Grayson. Can I get you something other than water to drink tonight?” I asked.

“Gray! I’m so glad you still work here. I was hoping to see you tonight.” Melissa grinned.

“Melissa, I didn’t recognize you outside of school. Your party last weekend was pretty cool. I went with Echo, but I didn’t see you before we had to leave.” I smiled.

“Oh, I was buzzing around seeing to all of my guests. A couple people mentioned you were there. I’m glad you made it. I didn’t think any of you were going to show up after the misunderstanding with Sean.” She replied.

I nodded politely. ‘Misunderstanding’ my ass. She knew exactly what she was doing when she tried to steal him from Rosario. I wasn’t going to let on.

“Everyone else was still pretty upset, but Echo thought we should still make an appearance. You were a big part of our high school experience.” I told her.

“I’m Mitchell Hearne, Melissa’s father.” The older of the two men said, holding out his left hand.

I took it without thinking and tried not to wince as his silver ring made contact with my skin and started burning. I shook his hand as quickly as I could and let go. The sting in my hand was harsh.

“What can I get you to drink tonight, Mr. Hearne?” I asked.

Going around the table, I took their orders. Luckily, my left was my non-dominant hand and I was still able to hold my pad in it. I went back to get their drinks.

While I was behind the server station, I looked at the burn. It wasn't much, but it hurt like a bitch. I got a little bandage to put over it and took the drinks back to the table.

During service, I was polite and businesslike. They seemed like genuinely nice people. I was betting it would be a lot different if they knew I was a werewolf.

Melissa asked a lot of questions about Echo, Harmony, and Val. I answered as if I didn't live with them. It felt like the family was really intent on my answers.

When I was dealing with a nearby table of vampires, I felt a presence behind me and turned. It was Melissa's brother, Alex. He wore a bored sort of expression and asked where the restrooms were. I pointed them out. They were back near the office.

He thanked me and headed in that direction. The vampires seemed disturbed. I quickly took down their names and told them I would pass their regards on to Victor and Talia. This seemed to pull them from their grumpiness.

They left three hundred dollars on the table as a tip and I worked to clear it off in preparation for more diners. I didn't even hear Melissa come up behind me.

"Wow. Maybe I should become a waitress. Did you seriously just make a three-hundred-dollar tip?" She asked.

I spun around and saw a few vampires pulling more bills out. I guess they were wanting to make more of an impression than my last table. Melissa was uncomfortably close.

"Is there something I can get you, Melissa?" I smiled.

"We were thinking of some dessert and were hoping to see the menu again. I was also wondering, well, I went to apologize to Sean and his parents said he was staying with Echo. Which I thought was a little weird, then they revealed that they were cousins. You probably knew that. I was just hoping I could get her address from you." Melissa said in a friendly tone.

Major red flag. I couldn't give my address, or Echo's address, to hunters. That wouldn't be very safe at all.

"Just give me your cell number and I'll have Sean text you. I can send it to him after work tonight. I'm sure it would be awkward for him if you just showed up unannounced." I replied politely.

"Oh, I was hoping to apologize face to face. I couldn't find Rosario's address in the school directory, so I couldn't apologize to her either." She said disheartenedly. "I really don't want

their last school memories to be about this disagreement. I wanted to make up with them before I left town.”

“You’re leaving town?” I asked.

“Yeah. A year abroad. I’m so excited for it, but I wanted to wrap up loose ends before I left. I have a lot of making up to do.” Melissa admitted.

“I wish I could help more.” I shrugged. “I need to tend to my tables, sorry.”

She turned back to her table and sighed. I felt a little bad for her. She may be a hunter, but she was trying to make up for her mistakes.

The rest of the night went pretty smoothly. Melissa’s family finished their desserts and left a decent tip. By the end of the night, I made a good amount of money in tips and decided I would talk to Sean about calling Melissa. I wouldn’t pressure him, but an apology might help him heal a little more. It gave me a lot of hope for the future.