

Chapter 31 - The Vampire's Servant

When I got off the bus, I was met by Harmony and Valor. They were waiting nearby with Cam and Gray, but waited until they saw me to approach the bus. Harmony hugged me and, when she let go, Valor picked me up into a big hug.

“Love you, Echo.” He said as he put me down.

“Love you, too, Valley. I’m excited about school.” I smiled.

“That’s always the way until the work starts, then you’ll hate it like everyone else.” Val laughed.

Harmony giggled and slipped her arm through mine. “I love you, Echo.”

“I love you, Harmony. Are you feeling better?” I asked.

“A little. Are you really okay with the vampires?”

“Victor keeps me safe. He would never hurt me, or let anyone else hurt me. Are you really okay with the werewolves?” I replied.

She blushed. “Val and I stay at the pack house in our own rooms. Cam lives with his parents and Gray lives in another part of the pack house. He moved back there when he was eighteen, I guess. So we see him a lot.”

We started walking toward the school. I worried about hunters, but figured I’d ask Gray about them later. I needed to be sure my sister and brother were safe.

They all walked me to my locker, so I’d know where to find it. Then they took me to my first classroom. I was a little nervous about going in.

“Before I forget, we’re telling people you’re our cousin. That way we can explain why you look like us without the attention of an unmentioned sister. That will also explain how you know Cam and Gray. We checked in all of your classes with their friends and ours. There will be someone to look out for you in all of your classes. This one is really easy, so don’t be scared. Make sure you talk to your teacher when you get in.” Val said. “We need to head out. Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’ll be fine. Don’t worry.” I smiled.

They started to head off, but Gray stayed back. He waited for them to be a fair distance away before getting closer. It made me nervous.

“Trent told me about the hunters last night. Are you alright? Did they hurt you?” He asked.

“No. I hid. Victor and Rosalynn killed them. Marius had his people clean it up.” I told him.

He sighed with relief. “I’m glad you’re okay. I worried about you. Trent sent some good warriors to guard your home. Can I hug you?”

I was startled by the question. It was unlike him to ask. I liked it. Maybe I could learn to be comfortable with him if he asked for things like this. I nodded.

As he stepped closer, I found I didn’t have the same feeling of needing him away from me that I had before. I supposed that it was because he asked to get close instead of just doing it. It would make being his friend easier.

His arms slipped around my shoulders and he held me to him tightly. It was unlike when Victor hugged me. Victor wasn’t as warm as Gray. Gray was thicker and his arms felt heavy and solid around me. It was comforting in a different way than Victor’s hugs were.

I slid my arms around his waist and hugged him back. It made him squeeze a little tighter and his head dipped down as he breathed deeply. His breath tickled my ear and sent tingles throughout my body. I felt a soft moan leave my chest.

It startled me so much, I pushed myself out of his grasp and rushed into the classroom.

I walked over to the teacher to introduce myself. I needed to focus on what I was doing, not on the strange feeling I’d experienced when Gray was hugging me.

“Hello, I’m Echo Nightshade.” I said to the teacher.

He turned and smiled at me. He was tall and had dark hair and blue eyes. His smile was kind and I ended up smiling back.

“I’m Mr. Taylor. You’re in my Creative Writing class, too. I want you to go find a seat. We’ll go over the morning announcements and do attendance.” He explained.

I nodded and looked around the room. There were only a couple empty seats. One was in the back, next to a group of girls who were looking at me in a way that made me uncomfortable. The other was in the front next to a familiar blond boy.

Sitting in the seat up front, I heard a scoff from the back. I didn’t care. I had a friend in class and I needed something to keep my mind off the strange feelings the hug with Gray created.

“Hi, Sean.” I said softly.

He startled and looked up from the notebook he was writing in. Quickly, he glanced around the room. Sean shook his head and chuckled.

“You really don’t care what people think, do you?” He asked.

“Nope. What are you doing?”

“Just going over last night’s math homework again and double checking my work. I usually use this time to make sure I’m ready for my next class. Oh, Echo, these are some of my friends.” He pointed to the two people sitting next to him.

I waved and they waved back. There was another boy who was dressed in black with the side of his head shaved. He nodded to me. Behind him was a girl with blue hair and sparkly framed glasses. She had her eyebrow pierced and piercings all up one of her ears. They seemed like an eclectic mix of people.

“That’s Terry and Elise. She goes by Elle.”

“Echo’s a cool name. Like the nymph from Greek mythology.” Elle smiled.

“Or the NATO phonetic alphabet letter ‘E’.” Terry muttered.

“I don’t know what that is.” I said.

“It’s the names for the letters used by the military when they’re spelling things out. Like Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo.... And so on.” He replied.

“That’s cool.” I wondered if Victor knew about this.

“I guess.” Terry shrugged.

We sat and listened to the announcements. Mr. Taylor went over the information about state testing that was going to happen at the end of the month and the prom. I wondered if Harmony had remembered to grab her dress from the house before she left.

She bought the dress in hopes of Cam asking her to the prom and absolutely loved it. If she got it, then I would see if she wanted me to help her get ready. I would love that.

“What are you chewing your lip over, Echo?” Sean asked.

“I was just wondering if Harmony had her dress for the prom or if she would need help getting ready.” I answered.

“Harmony? Harmony Gale?” Elle asked.

“Yes, she’s my cousin.” I replied.

“Why did you sit here instead of with her friends?” She pressed pointing at the girls in the back of the room.

“I don’t know her friends.” I told her. “I know Sean.”

“Echo doesn’t care about being popular. She decided I would be her friend.” Sean chuckled.

“That’s cute. Can I be your friend too?” Elle asked.

“Sure. Terry can, too. If he wants.”

“Whatever.” Terry shrugged.

I was pretty sure that was him saying yes. Elle grinned broadly. It was nice to meet people who were friendly. School was already going better than I’d hoped.

“Harmony’s really nice, I’m glad you are too.” Elle winked. “So, I saw you hugging Gray Padua. Is he your boyfriend?”

Sean’s grip on his pencil got tighter. Terry watched me out of the corner of his eye. I almost laughed at the idea of dating Gray.

“No. Gray is just a friend.” I snorted.

That seemed to make Sean relax. I wondered why he was upset. Was Gray mean to him? I hoped not. I would have to tell Gray to be nice to Sean.

The bell rang and Sean started packing his things into his backpack. Elle and Terry said goodbye and headed out. I put my bag on my shoulder.

“Echo.” Sean said.

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for being my friend. Maybe we can hang out this weekend. See a movie or something.” He suggested with a blush.

“I have plans with Val and Gray this weekend. Are you okay with next weekend?” I asked.

He went from crestfallen to happy. I liked it when my friends were happy.

“That sounds great! Let me get you my number.” Sean said excitedly.

We exchanged numbers and went out to the hall. Harmony and Gray were waiting for me there. I waved to Sean and headed off with them.

“Who was that, Echo?” Gray asked.

“Sean. We ride the bus together. He’s one of my new friends.” I smiled.

“He’s in my science class. He’s really smart.” Harmony told me.

I pulled out my class list and we started walking to each of the classrooms. While we did that, Harmony talked about her friends and what living on the pack lands was like. She suggested a sleepover soon. I figured I could talk to Victor about staying over this weekend. I would spend Saturday with Val and Gray, then ride home with them to stay over Saturday night.

The next class I had was science. We planned to meet up again in the cafeteria for lunch. There was a morning break after second period and lunch was after fourth period. The last half of the day would all be classes.

My classes were interesting. I was seated near someone I knew in all of them. Sean was in my history class too. Val and Harmony were nice to him and I appreciated it. Some of their friends, who were also in the class weren’t as nice to him, but were nice to me.

I could tell they were being nice to me because I was related to Val and Harmony. Some of the girls glared at me until they heard I was Val’s cousin. Then they were nicer.

We went to lunch together and I heard whispers as I walked with Harmony while she grabbed her food from the lunch line. We sat at a big table that had a few people there. I saw Elle and waved her over.

She seemed shy as she sat with us. Harmony complimented her hair and Elle blushed. I really liked the blue color of her hair, too. Terry came and sat with us and so did Sean.

They probably always sat with Elle and used her to find their table. Both of them seemed surprised as they looked around and realized where they were sitting.

I opened my lunch bag and pulled out my food. It was a lot more than everyone else seemed to pack, but I was still recovering from not eating much while I was living at home. Some of Val and Harmony’s friends seemed uncomfortable with my friends.

Gray smiled at my friends and talked to them a lot. He seemed to really be interested in getting to know them. I was relieved at that.

“I didn’t realize we were doing charity work today.” One girl scoffed.

I raised an eyebrow at her. She had wavy, brownish blonde hair and brown eyes. Her face was a little rat-like. Harmony went from being friendly to having an angry look on her face.

“If you don’t like it, Melissa, don’t sit here.” Harmony said.

“If you don’t think you’re going to lose popularity for hanging out with geeks, then by all means, keep doing it.” Melissa glared.

I stared at the rude girl and looked back at Harmony. She laughed.

“I’m popular because people like me. You’re popular because you hang on to the right people. I’m not worried. Make your decision. I’m tired of having my lunch held up because you can’t mind your manners.” Harmony said dismissively.

She had the same look on her face that mom would get when she was dismissing me. I wondered if I got that look too. That was disturbing.

Melissa glowered, but sat down and started eating her lunch, pointedly looking away from my friends. They didn’t seem bothered.

Sean talked to me more about the stuff we’d gone over in history class. Terry put in a couple bits of information we weren’t taught. Elle rolled her eyes at him.

I watched how everyone interacted. Melissa kept batting her eyelashes at Val, but he was very curt with her. When she finished the little salad she’d brought, Melissa left. I was taking a little longer than everyone else. Eventually, it was just me, Val, Harmony, Gray, and Cam at the table.

“Um... I had a question.” I murmured.

Everyone turned their attention to me. It was a little embarrassing. Like when I had to ask about werewolves.

“What is it, Echo? I’ll tell you anything you need to know.” Gray smiled.

“What’s a geek?” I asked.

They looked at each other the same way Victor, Rosalynn, and Marius had looked at each other when I asked the other night about werewolves. This was something I should have known and they were shocked I didn’t. It made me feel even worse.

“A geek is someone who likes something that isn’t mainstream or they like a mainstream thing a lot more than everyone else.” Gray explained.

“Is being a geek bad?” I asked.

“No, Echo. Some people are just obsessed with it and there are social status things tied with it. A lot of popular people feel like you should only be friends with popular people. Geeks aren’t considered popular.” Harmony said.

“So.... Melissa is a popularity geek then?” I questioned, trying to understand.

Gray and Val snickered. Cam looked like he wanted to laugh, but managed to hold back. Harmony grinned.

“I never thought of it that way, but yeah. Melissa is a popularity geek. We should get moving or you’re going to be late for your next class.” Harmony giggled.

I packed up my things and we headed out to the hall so I could drop off my lunch bag in my locker and grab my backpack. I’d get this all figured out soon. Then I wouldn’t embarrass myself anymore.

After School

Chapter 32 - The Vampire's Servant

When the final bell rang, I was happy to have my first day of school over with. I wanted to go home and tell Victor everything. It would still be a while before he woke up though. At least an hour and a half. Then we had to test Val and Harmony’s blood.

I didn’t even realize I’d let the flow of the other students take me nearly to the front doors until a familiar hand pulled me to the side of the hallway. It was Val. He had a slightly amused look on his face.

“You were all dreamy eyed, Echo. You need to pay attention or you might get swept away.” He chuckled.

“I was thinking and lost track of what I was doing.” I blushed.

“Come on. Everyone is waiting by your locker. I figured I would hang out here, just in case.”

“Was it that obvious that I was having trouble today?” I asked.

“It’s a lot of people and you’re not used to it. I know you get stuck in your head sometimes and I didn’t want you to end up hurt or lost. We’ve all been keeping an eye out for you ever since you were late to fourth period.” He admitted.

“Oh, goodness. I didn’t mean to be a problem.” I could feel tears in my eyes.

I thought I was doing well, but I remembered how often someone had found me in the hall and walked me to my next class. It was so easy to get distracted with so many things going on around me. Victor would be disappointed in me.

“Don’t cry, Echo. We’re all used to this, you aren’t. You weren’t a problem for anyone. We all love seeing you in school. Once you get used to it you won’t have to worry. Until then, we’re looking out for you. It’s because we love you, not because we have to.” Val smiled.

He put his arm around my shoulders and pushed into the crowd. People made way for him as he guided me against the rush of other students. I felt a little embarrassed as people looked at us curiously before heading on their way.

Soon, there were very few people in the hall and we were arriving at my locker. Val had been right, Gray, Cam, and Harmony were standing by my locker. The boys looked calm, but Harmony was looking around like she’d lost something. Cam kept pulling her back when she started trying to wander off.

“Look, Val got her.” He said as we closed the distance.

“I was so worried that you might have forgotten and went to get on the bus.” Harmony told me.

“I was distracted and wandered away. Sorry.” I admitted with another blush.

“Don’t be. We’re all here to help and keep you on track.” She assured me.

I opened my locker and pulled out my lunch bag. Everyone was chatting while I put it into my backpack. I closed the locker and put my bag over my shoulder.

We headed out to the parking lot. Gray and Val led us to two cars parked next to each other. One I recognized as Val’s, the other must have belonged to Gray. I followed Val to his car. I was fine with Gray, but I wouldn’t get in a car alone with him.

Harmony rode with us. I was happy to be with my sister and brother without anyone else around. Harmony and I sat in the back. She wanted to hold my hand while we drove.

“Are you really safe with the werewolves?” I asked.

“Yeah. They take care of us.” She promised.

“What about... hunters? Did they tell you about them?”

“Yes. They told us where to go if hunters attack. How did you know about them?” Harmony asked.

“Some hunters came to the house last night. I hid while Victor took care of them. It was scary.” I shivered.

“It sounds scary. Cam told me hunters don’t attack much anymore. In the last few months there have been fewer and fewer attacks. Some rogue queen made up a team of rogues that hunt the hunters. Cam and Gray are teaching us about werewolves. I guess they had classes about them in

their freshman year at their old school. The whole history up to now along with current stuff. That was something that came out in a newsletter from the Werewolf Association.” Harmony said.

“The Werewolf Association?” I asked.

“Yeah. Three powerful pack Alphas three powerful rogue Alphas head it. They help make rules and mediate issues. They try to make the country safer for werewolves and humans.” She explained.

“Like the Vampire Council does for vampires.” I nodded. “Marius is one of the heads of the Vampire Council.”

“I don’t know much about how the vampires work. You’ll have to teach me. I want to understand all of the supernatural people we’ll be dealing with.” She said.

“Me, too.” Val said from the front.

“I’ll do my best, but Victor hasn’t had much time to teach me. Everything I know, I learned from Drew and things I observed.” I told them.

“What sorts of things?” He asked.

“As they get older, vampires wake up earlier. Victor is over eight hundred years old and wakes up a couple hours before the sun goes down. He can also stay up until an hour or two after it comes up. It will make for lonely summers, I suppose, but the longer winter nights will make up for it. They also take less blood as they get older and they don’t need it as often. Drew said that vampires lose their memory for a while after they’re turned, but it comes back after a few decades. They don’t all have the same abilities. I don’t know what Victor’s abilities are. Marius has the ability to project the image and feelings of death into your mind. He can do a couple things that are secret. He’s really powerful with mind control, though. He told me I was the only person whose ever been able to resist it.” I explained.

“Will he try to mind control us?” Harmony asked.

“He might. It seems like a test he puts people through. He tried it from the moment I met him. It was annoying, but he hasn’t tried it since.” I admitted.

“I hope he doesn’t try it. I don’t like the idea of someone mind controlling me.” Harmony shivered.

“If Echo could resist him, odds are good we can too. Don’t worry, Harmony. Echo won’t let anything bad happen to us.” Val assured her.

“That’s true. I won’t let anything hurt you.” I promised.

We rode along quietly catching up while we headed to the house. When we arrived at the gate, I gave Val the code for opening it. Cam and Gray followed us in and we drove to the front of the house to park.

“This place is huge, Echo.” Harmony gasped.

“Yes, it provides a lot of room for many guests if we have them and there is always a sense of peaceful quietness.” I smiled and got out of the car.

Cam was at the other car door quickly, helping Harmony out of the car and fawning over her. I loved seeing them together. She deserved someone to care for her. He seemed to really love her.

“That’s what the mate bond can be if both people accept it.” Gray whispered from right next to me.

I almost jumped out of my skin. I hadn’t even seen him approach. Why was he always so close?

“You felt it earlier when I hugged you. Our connection. It can be like theirs, if you accept me.”

“You’re too close. I warned you about making this more than a friendship, Gray. It’s the only thing I can offer right now. You either accept being my friend, or you leave and never speak to me again.” I replied sternly.

He sighed and moved away. Had he thought I would leap into his arms after seeing my sister with her boyfriend? When I thought of someone taking care of me, it wasn’t Gray and I didn’t think it ever would be.

Gray seemed selfish to me and only wanted me because of some goddess’ promise. He didn’t know anything about me. He never took the time to actually learn anything, he only pushed over and over for me to be his.

“Cam and Harmony have known each other for a couple years. He knows a lot more about her than you know about me. He’s been around her more than you’ve been around me. I’m not going to accept whatever you think this is and give up my life. I’m not meant for anyone. Either accept that or leave.” I told him, heading to the door.

“What do you mean, you’re not meant for anyone? Do you think you don’t deserve love, Echo? You deserve everything. I’m sorry I wasn’t the one to save you. I wish I had been. Don’t push me away because of that. I want you to be happy. I know I can make you happy if you’ll just accept me.” He pled.

“Gray! Stop it. You said you weren’t going to pressure her. You won’t change her mind like that. Echo knows what she wants.” Cam scolded.

I was grateful. It was hard. This wasn't what I imagined my life outside my parents' house could have been. I had only my sister and brother to love when I was there. Now I had Victor. I could learn to love Gray, but it wouldn't be the way he wanted. It had to be my way.

"I deserve love, Gray. I'm just not meant to be with someone the way you want to be with me. You have to understand. I don't feel comfortable with how close you always are. I never had people this close before. I'm nowhere near being able to accept what you're offering and I might never be. I'm still learning to be myself. You're right. My parents messed me up. This is who I am, though. You have to accept that, because it won't change overnight." I told him, moving away.

"I'm sorry. I'll work on it. Please still be my friend. I just need your patience. I'll learn to accept whatever you can offer. You're my mate and I want to be part of your life in whatever way I can." Gray said.

"Let's just get inside. I can make a snack for everyone and we can work on our schoolwork until Victor and Rosalynn wake. We can talk about this some other time." I replied with a sigh.

It had been a good day. I wondered what got into Gray that he went from the calm, caring person he'd been earlier, back to the high pressure pushy person I'd met on Saturday. Maybe it was too much for me and him to be in the same place for the day. It was too bad that he'd gone back. I had started trusting him a little.

I unlocked the front door and waved them in. As he entered the house, Cam scrunched up his nose and got that distant look in his eye that Trent and Gray got the other night. He snorted and shook his head.

"What was that?" I asked.

"They were mind linking. The wolves can talk to each other in their heads." Val said. "Guys, that's rude. You should talk out loud."

"I was just surprised about the smell. I didn't realize that a vampire's home would smell like that." Cam blushed.

"Smell like what?" I asked.

"Like something old and not quite right mixed with blood. You can't smell it because your sense of smell seems to be like a human's." Gray explained.

I nodded. Maybe that would change as I got healthier. I wouldn't tell them about that. I knew vampires had sensitive senses of smell too and there was a scent to werewolves that I'd heard Victor complain about. I wondered what it would be like to have such a strong sense.

Leading them into the living room, I got everyone seated and headed to the kitchen for after school snacks. I'd made some jerky last week and piled some onto the tray with some round

slices of bread, cheese, deli meats, and fruit. I added some cookies and bottles of juice that had been in the fridge for the donors who ended up being hunters.

I settled the food onto the coffee table. Everyone was very polite and filled little plates with snacks, picking drinks and commenting on how nice the house looked. This was better. It was how I imagined having everyone here could be like.

A Second Test

Chapter 33 - The Vampire's Servant

Harmony and Val used to always complain about homework, but I thought it was fun. Maybe it was just because I had so many people to do it with. Everyone helped each other and had their own strengths. There was a playful undertone to the whole thing.

We were working for an hour before my alarm went off. I stood up and excused myself. Everyone went back to work.

I headed upstairs to start the blankets heating for Victor and Rosalynn. I went to Rosalynn's room first. She looked very peaceful while sleeping. I hoped that whatever was going on in her territory was able to be resolved.

Next, I went to Victor's room. I collected his clothes and turned on the blanket. I went to my room afterward to gather my clothes, too. It would make a small load of laundry.

Downstairs, I loaded up the washing machine and went back to the living room. There, I gathered the empty dishes and took them to the kitchen to load into the dishwasher after I made sure Victor had just loaded up the breakfast dishes, but not set them to wash.

When I returned to the living room, it seemed like everyone was trying to be quiet about something. It made me a little nervous.

"Were you all still hungry? I can make some more snacks." I offered.

"I think we'd just forgotten that you work here too." Val said softly.

"Oh. I just wanted to do a little picking up. I need to keep to my schedule or I'll have work pile up. I'd rather get it done sooner than later." I smiled and turned back to the paper I'd been working on.

Everyone seemed to accept that. I was glad. My work was very little compared to taking care of a house with two teenagers and two careless parents. This was the most I would have to do today. Tomorrow I had more work planned. Dusting and sweeping.

We were just putting our books and papers away when Victor came into the room. I smiled at him. I didn't need to be in work mode. It was a relaxed sort of day.

Victor smiled tightly. He had that look on his face that he got when talking about werewolves. He might have entered into an agreement with them, but that didn't make him really like them all that much.

I hoped that would change. My family lived with them and I was hopeful that they would spend more time with me. That would mean having Cam over. I was pretty sure he wasn't going to let Harmony come over by herself for a while.

Rosalynn came out from the entry way and nodded to me. She had her little bag in her hand. I had a little apprehension, but I knew it would be a simple procedure.

"Victor, Rosalynn, you remember my brother Valor and our friend Gray. This is my sister Harmony and her boyfriend Cam." I said.

"Mate. I'm her mate." Cam told us with a slight growl.

Harmony rubbed his arm and he seemed to relax. I looked to Victor and Rosalynn. They raised an eyebrow and nodded to each other.

"Hello, I'm Rosalynn. I'll be taking your blood today. We'll take it to Victor's office for testing. I'll do Valor first so Cam will see the procedure. I don't want you concerned about what we'll be doing to your mate."

"Why will you take it to Victor's office?" Gray asked.

"Because Echo is uncomfortable seeing us drink blood." Victor explained.

I was grateful for his observation. He knew I had a problem and was already planning for ways to make this easier on me. I knew my sister and brother wouldn't be as patient as I was for the results. They didn't like waiting.

"I just won't look. It will be faster if you can test here." I said.

"Are you sure, Echo?" Victor asked.

"Yes. It's best we handle this quickly." I answered.

Rosalynn crossed the room and worked at cleaning Val's arm and finding a vein. Cam watched as the needle went in and blood filled the first tube, then the second. She removed the needle and

put a band-aid over the spot it had been in before she went to do the same thing to Harmony with a fresh needle.

When she had all the blood, Rosalynn returned to where Victor was standing. She handed him two of the vials after putting the needles into a bag. They opened one vial and I covered my eyes, so I wouldn't see it.

"That's odd." I heard Victor say. "Let's try the next."

"Yes. This will definitely be interesting to present." Rosalynn replied.

I could hear Cam growling a little. They must have been testing Harmony's blood. I waited for a moment longer before peeking out.

"You can uncover your eyes, Echo." Victor said softly.

"I have no idea how this is possible." Rosalynn murmured.

"It's not possible. There's no way this could have happened naturally. They're all definitely related, though. You can taste the relation in their blood." Victor responded.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Your siblings are definitely half vampire. But, where you're more than half, they are not. Valor is half witch. Harmony.... Somehow... she's half werewolf." Victor answered.

I looked at Harmony. Her hand covered her mouth. Cam was looking at her with a happy, but worried expression.

"She doesn't have a wolf, though. She was supposed to get it when she turned seventeen. Even at half, she would have a wolf." Gray said.

"There's something. After having the blood of all three I could taste it. A spell. Maybe a suppression spell. I'll have to talk to my witch contacts." Rosalynn said.

"Does this mean my abilities won't come once I'm healthy?" I asked.

"No. Most spells don't work on vampires. Valor is the true oddity in this particular test. Witches don't get involved with vampires. There has never been record of a witch/vampire hybrid. There have been werewolf/vampire hybrids before. Werewolves can breed with vampires more easily than humans, but not as easily as dhampyrs." Victor explained.

"I knew I was a witch." Val said softly.

I looked at him in surprise. He blushed a little. He'd kept this from us.

“I didn’t know about the vampire part. I was hanging out with my friends at the mall and a girl came up to me. She told me I was part witch and that I needed to use my abilities to strengthen them. I thought it was some weird pick up, but she just wandered away like someone was calling her. A couple months ago, I came home early on a Saturday....” Val told us.

Tears started forming in my eyes. He knew. I never wanted them to know, at least, not enough to know everything they did to me.

“I saw a vampire with Echo in the study. When I tried to go in and stop him, mom and dad stopped me. They threatened to sell her to the nastiest vampire client she had if I said anything or even told her I knew. They told me they’d make sure every vampire in the city knew she was unprotected if I called the police. I... I couldn’t do anything. So I looked into witchcraft. A book said there were different types of witches beyond light and dark. I didn’t know what kind I was, so I tried every protection spell, every seeing spell, every spell to call for help. Something had to work. I needed to find someone to save her, because I couldn’t.” His voice was strained with emotion.

I got up and hugged him tightly. Val squeezed me and apologized over and over about not being able to save me. I stroked his hair and held him. I never wanted them to see me like that, because I didn’t want them to hurt. I needed to protect my family.

“It worked. I’m guessing this spell session was about a month ago?” Victor said. “I was visiting a donor. She was a witch. She told me where to find my wayward childe and that he was hurting someone. I made the connection when I found out about Echo, but not that you were putting out spells to save her. You’re the reason why I was brought here when I was. They were already fielding offers to buy Echo. I knew they were charging for certain... services.” He looked disgusted. “I was compelled to buy her and take care of her. Normally, we would have given the warning without removing the child. I couldn’t leave her after meeting her. Something in me wouldn’t let her be unprotected.”

“So... my spells worked. I called you to save her.”

“It appears that way. I’ll make sure your sister has the best possible life. She said she wants to stay with me. I want that too. I hope you’ll both understand. This is why I refuse to give her up and why she refuses to leave.” Victor said.

Val looked at Harmony. She nodded. I looked down at him and he smiled.

“If you’re really happy, we’ll stop fighting this. As long as you’re safe and taken care of, we can relax.”

“Yes. Please let me stay here. I hate having to tell you no and see you be sad. I love Victor. He’s my friend and he’ll never hurt me. I’m safe and I’m happy.” I swore.

“Then, as long as we can see you and talk to you, we’ll leave it alone. What does the suppression spell mean for us?” Harmony asked.

“It might need to be removed before you can get your wolf. Val’s abilities will be better controlled and he’ll feel the connection with his magical types when he’s no longer bespelled. The feedings and starving were how your parents were suppressing Echo when the spell didn’t work on her. It makes a lot more sense if you consider how many foods could have kept her just healthy enough to be stronger than them.” Victor told her.

I let go of Val and stood away from him a little. I wanted to hug Victor, but it didn’t seem like a great idea with so many people around, especially not Gray. I would have to wait until Rosalynn was gone. When I had Victor all to myself again.

“We’ll see about getting a witch here to help train Valor. I’m sure that the pack would be willing to accept Harmony, since her mate is a member. I’ll start training Echo in the ways of vampires. I’d like to be able to have you all trained to fight.” Victor said.

“We can get Valor into training with the pack. Most females don’t train.” Cam replied.

“Don’t be mistaken, a vampire/werewolf hybrid is valuable. All three of them are in danger if they can’t protect themselves. It would be best to have Harmony train with the children if she has to. Your pack will have to get over the protective urges they feel around females.” Rosalynn explained.

“We’ll do whatever we have to in order to keep my mate safe. Does she need to change her name?” Cam asked.

“It might be best if she took Master Marius’ name. It would be an extra safety in having it. Valor should change his. Having a dhampyr witch as a warrior will make him more sought after than most males. It can probably wait until they’re eighteen. Until then introduce yourselves to any vampires as Valor and Harmony Aconitum.” Rosalynn said.

They nodded. We were still chatting when Marius walked in. He looked around the room and sneered at the werewolves. I couldn’t wait to see what he thought of my sister and brother.

Meeting Marius

Chapter 34 - The Vampire's Servant

“Have the tests been completed?” He asked.

“Yes, Master Marius.” Victor said and shared the results.

“Stand up so I can look you over.” Marius ordered.

Valor stood and walked over, looking down at our sire. He stuck out his hand. Marius looked him over and took his hand, staring directly into his eyes.

I felt a wave of annoyance wash over me. He was trying his mind control on Val. I bit my lips together.

Val smiled and shook Marius' hand. A smirking smile crossed Marius' face. I was relieved when the wave of annoyance passed.

"Very impressive. You're a handsome young man. I'll eagerly await the reports on your growth." He told Val.

Harmony had moved around the coffee table and stood next to Val. Marius turned to her. She swallowed nervously and put out her hand.

Marius took it and looked her up and down, stopping at her eyes. A slight growl came from Cam. I felt the annoyance again and watched my sister.

She also smiled as she moved her other hand to fully encircle Marius' thick hand. His eyes softened for a moment before he shook his head. I wondered at what had just happened.

"You're a powerful little thing. I wonder if Echo can do that once she's up to her full strength." Marius chuckled.

"What happened?" I asked.

"She can use mind control as well. She wanted me to like her. You must be a very popular girl and it never occurred to you why people seemed to like you immediately. No one has successfully used mind control on me since my sire passed on. Quite impressive."

I was proud of my sister. She was strong and impressed someone very powerful. Val had resisted the mind control too. It meant they were safer than before. No vampire could control them if Marius couldn't.

"I've promised to take Rosalynn home. Come with me, child. I'll tell you how this works and we can get you home. Victor, will you need me for anything else this evening?" Marius asked.

"No, Master Marius. I'm planning to work on cleaning up my territory this evening." Victor said.

"Does that mean Echo will be all alone?" Gray asked.

"The wolves that are guarding the property will move in closer to the house while I'm gone. Echo will always be protected and me clearing out the troublemakers from the territory will ensure that they never have the chance to try and hurt her. I will never let them harm her again." Victor vowed.

I couldn't help myself and ran to him to hug him. I pressed my ear to his chest while he stroked my hair and held me close. There was a growl from behind me. Like an animal.

Releasing Victor, I turned. Gray was standing, glaring over my head. I followed his glare and saw Victor staring him in the eye.

"Gray. Chill, man. She's just grateful he's protecting her. Echo hasn't had a lot of people hugging her in her life. If she's this comfortable with him, you should be happy for her. She'll never warm up to you if you keep doing this." Val warned Gray.

"I can't stop Rex from being jealous. Especially when he gets that smug look on his face." Gray growled.

"His face didn't change. He didn't even look at you until you growled." Cam said.

I walked over to Gray, drawing his attention from Victor. This wasn't his fault. His wolf was an animal I was betting his wolf's jealousy crossed over to Gray. He really was trying.

He promised he was trying hard. He stopped trying to push after our talk outside. He didn't even try to catch my eye while we were working.

I reached out and took his hand, stroking it like I'd seen Harmony stroke Cam's arm. Gray seemed to relax like Cam had. It was part of that mate bond that he was talking about.

"Stop being jealous, Rex. I'm your friend, too. When I'm comfortable around you I'll hug you more too. I promise." I said softly.

He covered my hands with his other one. His hands were so hot compared to the cooler temperature of Victor. I felt a little flushed as his hands warmed mine.

"I'm sorry. I keep reminding him. This is what you can offer. It's what we'll learn to accept. Thank you for not being mad at us." He murmured.

"While this is terribly entertaining, we should get moving, Rosalynn. I am still working to arrange training for Echo. This is only taking time away from my negotiations." Marius said with a scoff.

"Our pack is friendly with some of the light witches around here. I'll have Trent contact them. We'll find out about the suppression spell and see if it's affecting you even a little. I want you to be healthy and at full strength, Echo." Gray said as he stroked the back of my hands.

I pulled back nervously. It was weird how comfortable it started getting. I went to stand next to Victor again. Marius and Rosalynn left the room.

"Would you like me to make you some tea?" I asked Victor.

“No, Echo. Have fun here with your friends. I have to start getting things ready for my work tonight. Will you make sure I have extra towels in my bathroom?” He asked.

“Of course. Will you let me know when you leave and come back?”

“I’ll see you before I leave and in the morning. I want you to be rested for school tomorrow. No staying up after I leave.” He told me.

I nodded and he left. I looked around the room. Harmony was hugging Cam, Val was standing not far from me, and Gray was where I left him.

“I... I don’t know what else to do right now.” I blushed.

“We should probably head out so you can do your chores for the day. We’ll get things sorted on our end and let you know what’s going on. We’ll see you in school tomorrow. Make sure you get some rest.” Val said.

I didn’t want to ask them not to go. I hated the idea of being alone, but it needed to happen. They needed to go home for dinner and bed, Victor needed to go out, Rosalynn needed to go home.

Soon, everyone, but Victor, was gone. I went to the kitchen to pull out the ingredients for my dinner. Today had been good, though. I made new friends and got to experience school. It was a lot of fun and I would get to do it again tomorrow.

This time, I wouldn’t be as clueless. I would be sure of myself and I would focus on where I needed to go. I moved the laundry to the dryer and unloaded the dishwasher before I started cooking.

As I was sitting down to eat, Victor came into the kitchen. He was wearing a black t-shirt and black slacks. I smiled at him as he eyed my meal.

It was high in protein and iron. I made sure of that. It was one of the things that Victor and Marius told me I needed in order to be healthy.

I’d already started gaining some weight. Soon I’d be a little thicker, like Harmony and my face would become a little rounder. I knew that I looked almost exactly like my sister and I would be a paler version of her when I was healthy.

“You stay in the house tonight. I want you to take your bath and go to bed after you finish your work. Understand, princess?”

“You have to go?” I asked.

“I need to make this territory safe for you, Echo. I can’t have these disobedient vampires in my territory. I wouldn’t go if I didn’t have to, you know that. I’ll be back home before you get up in the morning.” He promised.

I nodded and he kissed the top of my head. I sat there, nibbling my food as I heard the front door open and close, followed by the locks clicking. Suddenly, the peaceful quietness didn't seem as comfortable anymore.

Once I finished my dinner, I worked on a lunch for tomorrow and did the dishes. When I was done, I picked a book from the library before heading upstairs to start my bath. Victor couldn't get too mad if I got wrapped up in a book and accidentally stayed up until he came home.

After I was done in the bath, I pulled out some fuzzy pink pants and a tank top that I would sleep in. I piled up my pillows and situated myself so I was sitting up and opened up the book.

In the beginning, it was hard to focus on the book. Any little sound made me jump. Soon, I was entranced by the story.

I don't know when I fell asleep, but the feeling of the book being pulled gently from my grasp woke me up a little. Victor stood next to my bed in his pajama pants with slightly damp hair. He must have just showered.

He folded my bookmark into the pages of the book I was reading and set it down on the nightstand. I smiled at him tiredly and he sighed, sitting on the side of my bed.

"I told you to go to sleep, not stay up reading, little one." He chided.

I wrapped my arms around his waist and held him tight. I knew I was scared, but not how much until Victor was there. I was so happy he was home.

"Don't leave me again, Victor. Please." I murmured.

"I'll stay with you until you fall asleep. I promised I would come home. I would never break a promise to you, sweetheart. I love you, Echo." He whispered, stroking my hair.

I sat up and tugged him to lay down with me, after rearranging my pillows. Victor laid with me and I snuggled into the curve of his body, with my head on his chest. I needed him to be close to me.

"I love you, Victor. Don't go away again. It's too soon for you to go away." I whimpered.

"Alright, Echo. I'll get someone to take care of this for me. I will have to take care of things eventually, but I'll give you as much time as I can. Don't cry anymore, sweetheart. I'm right here. I'll be here for as long as you need me." Victor said gently.

The peaceful quiet came back when he was there. The house felt happier, fuller, not empty and scary. I knew I should feel terrible about acting like this, but I couldn't I needed Victor. I needed him so badly that I ached when he was gone. It felt like my heart was empty.

Victor's Morning

Chapter 35 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

I laid with Echo until long after she'd fallen asleep. Her breath would catch in her sleep. I hadn't realized that leaving before she was in bed would cause her such distress. I would go back to waiting until she was asleep before I left.

The tear droplets of tears on her sooty lashes shone like diamonds in the lamp light. Somehow, she was more innocent looking than she normally was. Her creamy skin was tinged lightly pink and her lips were soft looking in her sleep.

How had I not seen how beautiful she was before? The raw vulnerability of her trust in me while she slept added to the sweet, gentle, prettiness of her face. She was a porcelain angel.

I shook my head. I couldn't have thoughts like that about Echo. She was my servant. My friend. My charge. Nothing more.

Reluctantly, I pulled her off of me and tucked her into her bed. Tucking her glossy, ebony, hair behind her ear, I felt a stirring in my chest. She shifted and the movement bared her swanlike neck. I licked my lips, remembering the taste of her blood.

It was sweet, tangy, and powerful. I craved it almost daily, ever since the test. Her sister and brother's blood had been a shadow of Echo's. That made it even worse.

I turned off the lamp and left her room. I needed to get my clothing gathered and cleaned. I'd been doing a small load of laundry almost every night so she wouldn't have to deal with all that blood.

The house was much quieter than it had been with just the addition of Rosy. I hoped she was getting the issues in her territory in order. I wouldn't call, because it was morning there. She'd probably only had a couple hours to work before she needed to sleep.

With the laundry started, I went to my office and began the paperwork. Only a couple of the vampires I'd met with tonight had issues that needed me to deal with them physically. Vampire politics could be very bloody, even deadly to some.

In the back of my mind, I was processing this strange attraction I was feeling for Echo. Every time she said she loved me, it felt like my heart soared. I kept pushing it away, she was a child. She needed me not to be someone who used her.

The hug she gave me was still on my mind. She was always good about keeping her physical needs in check, but it was like she couldn't help herself once she knew I was working to take care of her.

My jealousy flared when she held Gray's hands. I knew I shouldn't be jealous. He wasn't going to steal my Echo from me. She said she didn't feel anything for him. She was just being nice by being his friend.

I needed to get her sealed as my servant as soon as she turned eighteen. Then, even if he did manage to woo her, she would still always be mine. There was no other way.

The only way I could see to abate my possessiveness over her was to have her bound to me. We'd already been planning it before this started. It was already something she was expecting.

That didn't stop the guilt that ate at me when those thoughts started rambling around in my head. Echo wasn't a possession. She was a person. A sweet, caring, hardworking, angelic, beautiful, delicate, delicious, person.

I got up and went to warm some of the blood in the fridge. My fangs had come out. I must not have realized how hungry I was.

The O negative I drank felt flat. It didn't have the light zing that Echo's blood had. I sighed. I wouldn't drink from her. She was too traumatized.

The next time I knew I would definitely taste her blood was when I bound her to me as my servant. I could wait. In a couple months, she would be much better. She was already feeling comfortable enough to talk about feeding me.

At least, she would never have to worry about Helen again. I'd taken care of her myself. It turned out that her boyfriend had been one of the hunters. He'd been dating her to get the locations of vampires since the wolves had started hunting the hunters.

She told him where I'd lived. She'd endangered my Echo. I couldn't believe that she actually thought apologizing would save her. You can't send murderers to someone's house and expect 'sorry' to save your life.

I rinsed the cup I'd used and headed back to my office. Dawn was peeking through the covered windows. Echo would be up soon. I would make her breakfast again, but I was due to call Marius in ten minutes. With luck, his negotiation last night was successful.

Back in my office, I finished the last of my documentation. I looked at the time and picked up my phone. Before I could pull up my contacts list, the phone started ringing. It was Marius.

"Hello, sir. I was just about to call you." I said as I answered.

“No matter. I called so I could finish getting this settled. My negotiation was successful. I need you to secure an alliance to complete it. I want you to call that Alpha and get the ball rolling so I can get the trainers on their way to you.” He told me.

“What am I proposing?” I asked.

“An alliance with the Eaten Heart Collective. Their queen will come and train Echo for a while. She’ll be bringing Talia and two pack wolves who will continue the training once she has to return to her collective. She will create a training regimen for Echo and they will follow it. You’ll only need three bedrooms for them, though. The two wolves are mated.” Marius informed me.

“I’ll contact Silence and make sure we have donors that Talia will like.”

I remembered her type. She didn’t care about blood types. Only that her preference was young, strong, and attractive.

“No need. She will feed off the wolves that are coming. She’s grown quite fond of wolf blood in the last few months.” He said with disdain.

“I’ll make sure Echo knows and has everything set up. We’ll get more food bought to feed them. I know werewolves eat more than normal humans.”

“Good. This rogue queen is important. She’s a member of the Werewolf Association. Our relationship with them is fragile still. Creating and keeping this bond will serve the Vampire Council well in the future.” Marius warned.

“I’ll make sure to treat them with the utmost respect and dignity, sir. Echo will be on her best behavior. As long as they’re friendly, she will definitely be as well.” I smiled.

There was one thing I knew for sure about my Echo, and that was how much she wanted friends. If these wolves were willing to be friendly, then she would accept them easily. My Echo was a sweet girl, no matter the circumstances.

“I’ll let you get to your arrangements. Contact me after you’ve heard back from the Alpha. Don’t let me down Victor, or I’ll take Echo to my home to be trained. I’ll not have her unprotected.” He growled and hung up.

My heart climbed into my throat. I couldn’t let that happen. He couldn’t take my Echo away from me.

I dialed Trent’s number. It took a few rings before he picked up. I was a little worried that it was too early to reach him.

“Hello?” He answered.

“Alpha Trent. I’m sorry about the early hour. Did I wake you?” I asked.

“No. I was just getting in after training. Valor joined us this morning. He’s already showing some promise as a warrior.”

“Male dhampyrs excel in battle. That is why they are sought after. Have you gotten Harmony into some form of training?”

“She was training with the teens, but we may need to move her up to the warriors. The report I got from the trainer there was that she is too fast for the ones without wolves. There isn’t anyone in that level who can spar with her.” Trent chuckled.

“Good to hear. I have something I needed to ask. I hope you’ll bear with me. I don’t know how open to this you’ll be. For now, I just want you to think about it and we can talk about it more when I’m up for the night.” I began.

“This alliance is important to me and my people. How can I assist you, Master Nightshade?” He asked.

“Have you heard of the Eaten Heart Collective?”

The line was silent for a while. I could hear him breathing, so I knew he was there.

“I can’t help you if you’ve made an enemy of that collective. I’m sorry, Victor. The queen there is deadly and her collective has the backing of all three of the most powerful packs in the region.” Trent said tersely.

“I wasn’t aware of that. I haven’t made an enemy of them. I was actually wondering if you would be interested in allying with them.” I offered.

“You can secure an alliance with the queen of the Eaten Heart?” He pressed.

“The queen is coming to see me and I understand that she is interested in an alliance with you.”

“Absolutely. Allying with her is allying with Lune Rouge. They’re the most powerful pack in the region. It would be in the best interest of our pack to accept an alliance. We’re far enough out that most of the pack Alphas ignore our existence. This is precisely the sort of inroads we need to securing our safety. Thank you for bringing this to me. Let her know we’ll accept.” Trent sounded like he was smiling.

“I’m glad that this will work out for your pack. I’ll let you know when the projected arrival date is for the queen. Any tips on dealing with her?” I asked.

“Don’t become her enemy. I heard she’s tiny, but terrifying.” He warned.

That sounded like Talia. It would make sense that she made friends with someone who was like her. And now I would have two of them in my house. I nearly sighed.

“Thank you for that warning, Alpha Padua. I’ll let you get on with your day.” I told him.

“Goddess watch over you, Master Nightshade. Have a good rest.” He said and hung up.

I called Master Marius and let him know that Trent had been eager for the alliance. It would mean one less thing for me to do when I got up. He was pleased. Thank goodness. I needed things to go my way.

After I hung up, I looked at the time. It was still early enough that I could see Echo off to school. I put the phone on the charger and headed to the kitchen.

Echo was rinsing her dishes from breakfast and loading them in the dishwasher. She went to the fridge and pulled out her lunch before turning to the doorway and smiling at me. Her smile made me smile.

“Thank you for staying with me last night.” She said softly.

“Of course, princess. I wanted to say goodbye and wish you a good day at school.” I told her.

“I hope you have a good rest. I’ll be home on time. I’m taking the bus home today.”

She walked over to me and I hugged her, kissing her on top of her head. She smelled so sweet. I had to resist sniffing her like some wolf.

“Go on, sweetheart. I’ll see you when I get up.”

Echo let me go and headed out the front door. I locked the door behind her. I would miss her. This was the right decision, though. Echo wasn’t properly socialized. She needed to learn how to be around people.

I wandered around the house and found myself in the library. I’d pick out a book to eat up time until I had to rest. It would be a good way to pass the time.

In my room, I turned on the heated blanket and got in bed. It had been years since I just laid in bed and read. When I felt the sun tugging at my consciousness, I marked my page and got into a comfortable position.

When I woke up, Echo would be home. I couldn’t wait to see her again. Maybe we could play one of her games and have milkshakes. That would be perfect.

The Flying Dhampyr

Chapter 36 - The Vampire's Servant

[Gray]

I decided not to wait for Echo today. If she was still mad at me, I wasn't going to want to see it. I know, it's childish to hide from someone because they might be mad, but I loved her more than I'd loved anyone or anything before.

Cam was with them, with Harmony and Val. He was going to tell me how she looked. That would be what would dictate when I went to see her. If she wasn't mad, I wanted to see her during our free period. If she was, then I would wait until lunch.

It was my own fault. Seeing Harmony and Cam, being close to Echo, all of it made me and Rex start thinking of the bond. It made us start thinking of having our Echo all to ourselves. I wanted her to accept the bond so badly.

When she hugged me yesterday, I got to really smell her scent for the first time. The sound she made was so cute. I wanted to kiss her and hold her and protect her from any hunters that might come.

Those bastards scared my little mate. I wanted to tear them apart, but the bloodsucker got to them before I could. He was her hero again. I was falling behind.

I needed to figure out a plan to put me ahead of him, somehow. Echo needed to be able to depend on me to help save her. I floated the idea of taking some shifts on the weekend guarding Victor's property, but Trent shot me down.

Instead, I'd look for opportunities at school and during the times that she and I hung out. I would be there for her in whatever way she needed me. I even had spare school supplies for the classes we were in. If she needed a pencil, I'd be there.

It might seem ridiculous, but I needed to find a way to make her love me. I couldn't force Echo to do it. I couldn't kidnap her and keep her until she gave in to the bond. I couldn't go back in time and be the one to save her from her parents.

I wished that I could. I would daydream scenarios where I found out about her and rode to the rescue. Where Echo was so grateful that she hugged me like yesterday... or like she hugged Victor yesterday.

"There's the grump." Cam snickered as he took his seat next to me.

"I'm not a grump. I'm just a little less than happy this morning." I grumbled.

“You’ve been less than happy since we left Echo yesterday. You shouldn’t have tried to push it.” He chided.

“I know. She won’t rush into my arms like Harmony did with you. I just want her to love me.” I sighed.

“She will. The bond is already growing. This morning she asked where you were. She looked a little sad that you weren’t with us.”

My heart leapt. She wanted me to be there waiting with everyone else! She missed me! It was more than I could hope for after how I acted yesterday.

Home room went by quick. There was another announcement about the prom. I would ask Echo if she wanted to go. I knew she hadn’t been to any dances, so it would be a fun experience for her. She and Harmony could go dress shopping.

It would be a perfect opportunity. I would pick her up and take her to an event that she hadn’t gotten to experience before. She would see me in a suit and all polished. I would show her how to dance fast, then slow. The entire night I would have her near me or in my arms. The bond would grow. Maybe, I’d even get a kiss.

I was practically floating on air when the bell rang and I headed out to Echo’s classroom. I would ask her today, before anyone else got the idea. She was standing in the hall, talking to Sean.

He was a nice enough guy, for a human. The way he looked at Echo made me uncomfortable. She was pretty, though, so I could forgive him for some of it.

Today, she was wearing a green dress with little white flowers on it. It buttoned from the top to the bottom and she was wearing white flats with it. She probably had never worn heels in her life.

Her hair was down and framing her face and body like an ebony sheet of velvet. It looked so soft and silky, I wanted to run my fingers through it. One day, I would.

“Hi, Echo.” I said with a smile.

“Hi, Gray. I’ll see you later, Sean.” She replied, dismissing her other friend.

He gave a little wave and scurried off to his next class. I looked around, but didn’t see Harmony. Echo seemed a little nervous.

“Harmony had to go meet with the guidance counselor during first period. She said she was changing her plans for after graduation and needed to talk to him about the community college.” Echo smiled.

“You... you want to see something kinda fun?” I asked.

She brightened and nodded emphatically. I loved seeing her like this. She wasn't closed off, or pulling away. I just needed to relax and she would open up even more.

I led her to the back of the school. Not many people came out here. It was away from the track and the sports fields. Most people hung out in front of the school or in their cars. This was the perfect place to get to know her better.

Behind the school was an old swing set. The story was that the senior class, a couple decades ago, raised the money to have a swing set after a bunch of them started getting nostalgic for their younger school days. They dedicated it to a kid who'd died in elementary school.

Echo's eyes lit up as she saw the swing set. She grabbed my hand and bounced next to me. She was so beautiful when she was happy like this.

“I never got to swing before. Val and Harmony had a swing set, but I wasn't allowed to touch it.” She said.

I turned to her and pulled her into my arms. That was one of the saddest things I'd heard, but she said it in such a chipper voice. It was like she didn't regret it. It was only a fact for her.

“Um, Gray. Why are you hugging me?” Echo asked.

“I'm sorry. That was so sad, I thought you might need a hug.” I said softly.

“No. It was so sad, you needed a hug. Victor's told me that before. He said some things I say are so sad that he needs a hug. I'm okay with this. You can hug me if you need it.” She replied and put her arms around my waist.

Apparently he wasn't as cold as he seemed. Anyone who could hear what she went through and not want to hug her is inhuman. I held her for a little longer and let her go. I wasn't going to hog up all of this time.

“I want to show you a bunch of new things and take you to do things you never got a chance to. Come on, for now, I'll push you on the swing.” I smiled down at her.

She got the biggest, sweetest, grin and took my hand, pulling me to the swings. I held one steady for her so she could get on, then pulled it back and let it go. Echo giggled happily as the wind flew through her hair.

I pushed her for a little while and just enjoyed being with her in an unconstrained way. There was nothing pulling her attention away from the moment. There was no pressure from me. Rex was calm with all the time we were having with our mate. He liked that we were touching her so much.

“Can I jump out? Val used to do that. It looked like he was flying.” Echo said.

“Sure thing. Just remember to bend your knees when you land.” I called out.

She prepared to jump, and leapt out of the seat at the height of the next swing. Her hair trailed behind her as she jumped, but something was off.

I saw that she let go of the chain a little too late and wasn't angled to land on her feet, but on her back. As quickly as I could, I ran to catch her before she hit the ground.

Echo fell into my arms and immediately wrapped her arms around my neck. She was shaking. I held her tightly to me.

“You saved me.” She murmured.

Rex leapt inside my head and did a happy dance. I buried my nose into her neck and took in her scent. Echo giggled and squirmed in my arms.

“That tickled. Why do you sniff me when I'm close to you, Gray?” Echo asked gently.

“Werewolves are like that. We use our sense of smell more than our other senses. The scent of our mates calms our wolves. I was just calming Rex down.” I explained.

“Was he upset?” She whispered into my neck, sending chills through my body.

“No. He was excited that we caught you and happy that you were safe. He was dancing in my head and I wanted him to chill. I hope you don't mind.” I replied.

“Is it very uncomfortable?”

“It can be. Are you alright?”

“My finger got caught in the chain and I didn't realize it until I jumped.” She responded, holding her hand in front of our faces.

“Can I kiss it?” I asked.

She held her finger in front of my lips and nodded. I shifted to holding her in one arm and steadied her hand with the other. I looked at the finger. It was a little red and swollen.

Tenderly, I kissed it, feeling the sparks of her skin against mine. I looked at her face as she watched me tend her injury. A faint blush tinged her cheeks.

I let her down on her feet and she straightened her dress and hair. I loved her no matter how disheveled she looked. Echo was always beautiful to me.

“Would you like to go to the prom with me? I know you haven’t gotten to go to dances or anything where you get to dress up. We can go with Harmony and Cam for dinner and I’ll buy you a flower to wear.” I offered.

Echo nibbled her lip. “I would have to make sure it was alright with Victor, but I would really like to go. Are you sure you want to take me?”

“More than anything.” I smiled.

“You know this doesn’t mean I’m your girlfriend. We’re just going as friends.” She replied sternly.

“Absolutely. Just friends, dressing up, having fun. I swear.” I promised.

“Alright. I guess that will be fine.” Echo smiled.

“Can I have another hug?” I asked.

She nodded with a giggle and I hugged her, picking her up and spinning her a bit. Echo held on tightly and Rex leapt and danced with joy. I was so thrilled that she accepted. I was steps closer to finally having her for my own.

“Want to go back on the swings? We can twist them up and spin around.” I offered.

“Yes!” Echo laughed and we went back to the swings.

We played like kids until just before the bell rang for second period. I grabbed Echo’s backpack and we headed into the building. I couldn’t wait for lunch, when I would get to see my mate again.

Victor's Awakening

Chapter 37 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

I woke with pressure on my chest and the scent of Echo surrounding me. It was how I always wanted to wake up, ever since the first time I woke with her in my bed. Gently I stroked her back, letting her know I was awake.

“Today I learned something new about vampires.” She murmured.

“Mmm? What did you learn, Echo?” I asked.

“I learned that your heart beats just a little while you’re sleeping and more when you’re awake.” Echo said softly.

“I didn’t know it beats while I’m sleeping. You taught me something I didn’t know about vampires. Even after over eight hundred years, I’m still learning new things.” I chuckled.

“How old are you, Victor?”

“Oh... I guess around eight hundred and eighty something. I would have to look it up to know the exact age.” I answered.

“We should have a party for your nine hundredth birthday. That will give me time to learn all sorts of things I can make for you and your guests.” She said with a nod.

She was so adorable talking about something that was around twenty years from now like it was only a few months away. I traced the bumps and grooves of her spine and ribs. My poor little friend. I hoped she would be much healthier soon. I wanted to see a healthy and fully able Echo.

“I think that’s a wonderful plan, Echo. This whole region should be in order by then, and we should have plenty of time for a party.” I told her. “Why were you resting here? Are you alright?”

“It was a long day. I did my homework and just wanted to be with you, so I came to lay down with you until you got up.” She explained.

“We can rest here as long as you want, sweetheart. I have no pressing business at the moment.” I said gently.

I loved having her head resting on my chest. The warmth of her body combined with the heat from the blanket. I never wanted to move.

Echo climbed under the blankets and cuddled in close to me. Her hands were a little chilly which ignited me further. I could feel each of the little digits as they trailed up and down my bare stomach. I closed my eyes briefly, experiencing the feeling of her touch without my other sense distracting me.

I opened my eyes and looked down at her. She was so calm and relaxed. I caressed her cheek, turning her face up to me. Her lips parted slightly and I couldn’t help but think what it would be like to kiss them. She seemed entranced by my own lips.

I bent my head down, stopping just before our lips met. I couldn’t push myself any further. I gazed into her beautiful eyes.

“Victor.” She murmured softly.

I started to pull back, but Echo chased me, planting her lips against mine. Surprise overtook me. I hadn't meant to kiss her, but the draw of her being so close had made me act without thinking.

Her lips moved against mine. I opened my mouth and let my tongue tease against her lips. She opened her mouth to me and our tongues danced together. I rolled until she was on her back and my body covered hers.

Echo's arms locked together behind my neck. She moaned in a way that made my chest tighten. I used one arm to hold me up while my other hand made quick work of the buttons on the front of her dress.

I slid my hand over the smooth expanse of her stomach while kissing her deeply. Slipping around to her back, I opened the clasp of her bra and glided my fingers up, under the cloth, and around to the front. My fingers traced over the swell of her breast until they found their goal.

Rolling her pert nipple between my fingers as Echo writhed beneath me, the scent of her arousal was thick and heady. I moved my leg between hers, coaxing them apart, then moved my other to join it. Rubbing myself against the smooth cotton triangle between her legs, I felt myself firm further.

"Victor, please. I love you. Make love to me." Echo murmured against my lips.

The reflection of my glowing eyes shone in hers. I was too far gone for reason. I needed her so much.

I started kissing down her body, pausing to pay tribute at the tip of each breast, watching her writhe and moan under me. A blush spread across her face as she realized I was watching her. She was so beautiful.

Going lower, I knew what I wanted. I wanted to taste all of her. I wanted her a whimpering mess before I gave her what she begged for.

Peeling off her panties from her damp core, I finally saw all of her. Every sweet curve and divot. She was an artwork, a goddess, and all mine.

There was more pink as her body blushed under my gaze. I looked up and saw she was covering her face. My sweet, innocent Echo.

I lowered my mouth to her mound and kissed it, making her gasp. I would be the most tender and gentle lover for my sweet Echo... this time. My tongue found her tender button and I swirled and sucked it making her arch and squeal.

My finger traced her damp opening, slowly making its entry. I wouldn't go too fast for her. She was untouched in this way. I would never do anything to harm her.

Gently, I rubbed her while I licked and sucked. The sounds she was making filled me with desire, but I knew I had to stretch her a little, or it would be painful.

After she reached a peak, I slid a second finger in to join the first. She whimpered at the added pressure, but sighed and relaxed as I started moving them gently inside of her. I loved watching her react to my touches.

“Please, Victor. I need you.” Echo sighed.

“A little more, princess. I want you to cum for me one more time.” I purred.

I felt her tighten around my fingers. She was aroused by me saying that. I loved it.

Just a little more and I could feel her release. I was so hard I thought I would explode. I’d never slept with a human before. She was so different from the vampires I’d been with, so pure and soft.

Removing my fingers from her, I brought them to my mouth so I could taste her sweet release. Echo watched me with heavy lidded eyes. As I climbed back up to her soft, pink, lips, I pulled down my pajama pants. It was a bit of a trial to do it without seeming clumsy.

Tenderly, I took her lips again. With one of my hands, I guided myself right up to her entrance. I pulled back.

“This is the time for you to change your mind, Echo. After this, I won’t be able to stop. Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yes, Victor. I’m more than sure. Make love to me.” She whispered. “Be my first and only love.”

With a groan, I pushed into her warm body. I felt her encase me slowly. I didn’t want to rush things and hurt her. Echo was important to me, I would never hurt her.

She whimpered a little, but soon the whimpers turned to moans as her body adjusted to the addition of my own. I kept my strokes slow and gentle for her. The feeling of her silken grip on me was maddening. I could feel the urge to take her roughly building in me and fought it.

Slowly, I brought myself in and out of her sweet body. Echo murmured my name lovingly whenever I stopped kissing her. This was what I needed, what I desired, love and pleasure. The way she always looked at me with such caring and sweetness. I needed Echo in my life in so many ways.

I could feel my end nearing. I wanted to finish in her so much, but I knew the risks and neither one of us was ready for a baby. One day, not today. I managed to pull out just before I finished. The climax was amazing.

“Next time, will you bite me, Victor?” Echo asked.

“Not until you’re eighteen, sweetheart.” I murmured, kissing her neck.

“Not even if I really, really want you to?” She whimpered.

“Do you really, really want me to bite you, Echo? Will that make this better for you?” I asked.

“Yes. Please, bite me, Victor. Before this feeling is gone.” She pled.

I ran out my fangs and sunk them into her pure, soft neck. Echo moaned and arched again. The taste of her sweet blood flowed across my tongue. It was the perfect ending.

-

“Victor? Are you alright?” Echo asked.

I opened my eyes. She was resting on my chest like before, but it seemed nothing that I’d just experienced had happened. Echo sat up and looked at me with a concerned expression.

“Your heart beat slowed, then it started going really fast. I didn’t know what to do. You weren’t moving or responding to anything, when it slowed back to normal I hoped you’d wake up. What happened?” She questioned worriedly.

“It sounds like something that my sire can do. I thought I was awake. I must have been travelling.” I chuckled and sat up.

It wasn’t real. In some other reality, I’d made love to Echo. It was too good to be true.

“I don’t like it. I was scared.” Echo said softly.

I reached out and caressed her cheek. It was soft and warm. I leaned in and hesitated for a moment.

“I’ll try not to do it again.” I whispered and kissed her lips gently.

Echo didn’t react to the kiss like she had in... whatever just happened.... Instead, she pushed me back and started climbing out of bed. She didn’t say anything until she was standing off to the side of the bed.

“I don’t know why you kissed me like that, but please don’t do it again.” She murmured and left the room.

I stared after her. I messed up. The travelling thing had thrown me off and I got stuck in my feelings. I needed to talk to Talia. I needed to apologize to Echo. I really needed to fix this whole thing. I couldn’t lose her because of this.

Chapter 38 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

In the hallway, I paused. I didn't know what to do. He kissed me and it felt so good and so perfect.

He'd been so close and all I could think about was feeling his lips on mine. I raised my hand to my mouth. I realized, I made him kiss me.

It made sense that I would have the ability to influence people if Harmony could. Victor was going to hate me when he realized I'd made him kiss me. I didn't want Victor to hate me.

Tears started welling up in my eyes and I knew I had to do something. I went downstairs and gathered my things into my backpack. I needed to prepare the tray for whoever was feeding Victor tonight.

I went to the kitchen and started to get to work, hoping that would take my mind off it. Maybe everything would be okay and go back to normal. I just needed to act like I normally did and it would be fine.

The buzzer for the gate went off. I went out and hit the intercom.

"May I help you?" I asked.

"Silence sent me. The password is rosewood." A voice on the other end said.

"Come through to the house and knock on the front door." I answered.

I buzzed him in. A male made me as nervous as a female now that I'd had the experience with the hunters. I needed to figure out how to calm myself.

Victor came down the stairs dressed in slacks and a button down shirt. I smiled tightly. I hoped he wasn't too mad at me.

"The donor is here if you want to wait for them in the living room." I said.

"Thank you, Echo." He replied and walked past me into the living room.

He hated me. I knew it. I had to apologize, but it would have to wait until the donor was gone.

There was a knock at the door, pulling me from my thoughts. I answered it. And a man stood before me. He was young looking with light brown hair and blue eyes. I didn't get a bad feeling from him.

"May I have your name, please?" I asked.

"Branson. And you are?"

"Echo. Please come in. My master is waiting in the living room." I said.

He entered the house and followed me to where Victor was waiting. He introduced himself and I wandered back to the kitchen. I pulled out the meat I'd had thawing in the refrigerator, then organized the snack tray and carried it to the living room.

"Have something to eat before you go." I said, setting the tray on the table.

Victor sat in a chair and I sat on the ottoman near the coffee table. Branson ate very little, grabbed an apple juice and stood. He seemed nervous.

"I don't normally sit around after this. I hope you'll understand. Thanks for the snacks. I need to get going. Have a good night." He said quickly and hurried off.

Once he was gone, I started picking up. Victor sat in the chair and watched me. When I glanced over, he looked away. I needed to figure out how to fix this.

"When you're finished, Echo. I need to talk with you." Victor said.

I nodded and carried the tray away. I worried as I packed everything away for the next time it was needed. What if he told me to leave? What if he didn't want me anymore? Where would I go?

After everything was put away, I had nothing else keeping me from talking to him. I wanted to run away. I wanted to go to my room and not come out again. I shook my head. I needed to do this.

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When I entered the living room again, Victor indicated the chair near him and I sat there. I couldn't look at him. I was so ashamed of what I'd done.

"Echo, I am extremely sorry. I don't know what came over me. I shouldn't have kissed you like that." He said.

I stared at him, startled. Of course he hadn't realized I made him kiss me. That made it even worse. He thought he did this to me.

“It wasn’t your fault, Victor. I figured it out after I left. I didn’t mean to make you kiss me. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me. I won’t do it again.” I promised.

“You... you think you did this? Don’t. I was the one at fault for this. I’ve been... having feelings for you, Echo. I’ve been trying to control them, because you’re my friend and you’re still healing from what your parents did. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before.” Victor replied softly.

My teeth itched. He had feelings for me? The same feelings I’d felt growing? He thought of me the same way?

“What should we do?” I asked. “I thought you didn’t want me. You told Rosalynn you didn’t want to marry me. You told me you didn’t want to have babies with me. Now you do?”

“I don’t know. Pushing the feelings aside was easier when Rosy was here. I had other things to focus on. When we’re alone, though, I keep thinking of how I want you, how I want to keep you, how I want to love you. I keep telling myself you’re my friend and servant, but that only keeps the thoughts away for a little while.” Victor said with a sigh.

“Maybe... maybe we could be friends who kiss sometimes?” I asked.

Victor chuckled. “That may not be the best idea. I want to do more than kiss you, Echo. I need to deal with these feelings. Kissing you might only make them stronger.”

“I don’t think I can stop feeling like this, Victor.” I admitted.

“Nor do I, Echo. Let’s just not give into it, and forgive each other if we do. It’s something we can explore once you’re an adult. I love you and I want to take care of you, but I won’t do anything to harm your progress. And Master Marius is also a concern. Right now, he seems overprotective. I don’t want to risk angering him.” Victor said.

I nodded. Making Marius angry wasn’t healthy. It was only a little under two months before I was eighteen. I could wait to explore this more. I needed to be healthy and strong before I would be good enough for a relationship anyway, and I didn’t want to lose my friendship with Victor over this.

“Can I have one more kiss before we go back to how we were before?” I asked shyly.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea.” He replied hesitantly.

“Please, I didn’t get to kiss you back. Just the one.” I promised.

He looked at me thoughtfully. I nibbled my lips nervously. His gaze dropped to my lips and he nodded.

I stood and stepped closer to the chair. Victor looked up at me and stood as well. I was giddy with the idea of getting to kiss him again.

He took me in his arms and I tilted my head back. Victor lowered his head and his lips touched mine. It was tender and sweet. I kissed him back, opening my mouth a little and felt him to the same.

Victor's tongue touched mine and I pulled away a little. It was surprising. He started to let me go, but I pulled him back. He growled softly and started kissing me more vigorously.

This time, when his tongue touched mine, I pressed back. It felt so perfect and right, unlike anything I'd ever felt before. It was like that was where I belonged. Standing there, in his arms, his lips on mine.

It felt like it went on forever and like it ended too soon. When we stopped kissing, Victor rested his forehead against mine. I felt more complete than I had in most of my life.

"I love you, Victor." I whispered.

"I love you, too, my Echo." He replied

I hugged him tightly, resting my head on his chest. Victor swayed with me in his arms. We would be fine. We would be together one day. Until then, we would learn more about each other and I would get healthier. I would also learn to be more comfortable with the more vampiric side of his nature.

"This is a cozy scene." A deep voice said from behind me.

Marius. How much had he seen? My nerves ran wild. Victor squeezed me one last time before letting me go.

"Master Marius, how can I help you?" Victor asked politely.

"I came to make sure you had everything you needed to prepare for the arrival of Talia and her entourage. They will be here in a week or two. You need to be prepared." Marius stated.

"I'll go make some tea for your meeting and have my dinner." I said, pulling out of Victor's arms and heading to the kitchen.

I pulled out the kettle, filled it with water, and started it heating it. While that was warming I retrieved the meat for my dinner and started preparing it. With luck, Marius hadn't seen or heard too much.

When the water was ready I brewed the tea and added the blood before putting it in the tea service and carrying it to Victor's office. I stood outside the door briefly before opening it. Steeling myself for whatever might happen next.

Marius was sitting back in one of the guest chairs while Victor was typing something on his computer. He glanced up at me and smiled like he always did. I felt myself blush a little.

I settled the tea service and poured the tea. Marius took his cup gratefully and Victor nodded a little when I set his cup down. I stood to the side of the desk.

“Is there anything else you’ll need me for?” I asked.

“I don’t think so, Echo. Master Marius?”

“Nothing I can think of. Victor can go over the requirements for your trainers, they’ll be here in a week or two.” Marius said.

“I’ll go cook my dinner, then. Have a good visit.” I smiled and left the room with a bow.

It didn’t seem like he’d seen or heard anything. There was no smirk or scolding. I had to believe that the situation was actually private. That was good. I didn’t want Marius angry with Victor.

I finished cooking and sat down to eat. I wondered about the trainers that Marius mentioned. I was a little jealous that Harmony and Val were already training. They told me how much work, and how much fun it was.

Soon, Victor came into the room. He smiled tightly and sat at the table with me. I saw him eye my food, like he always did. He was making sure I was eating healthy.

“We’re going to be hosting some werewolves and my sire. They will work on setting up a training regimen and getting started with you. Once I’ve gotten things more settled in the territory, I’ll take over your training.” He informed me.

“Alright. What do I need to do to get ready for them?” I asked.

“We need three guest rooms prepared for them. One is an Alpha wolf and she will need the best we have. Talia doesn’t generally mind where she sleeps. The other two are mated to each other and will want privacy. We’ll need a lot of food. Werewolves eat more than humans. You’ll have to cook a lot of food for their meals.” Victor explained.

I nodded. “I can see if Gray and Valor will take me shopping on the weekend. We may want to consider getting a second freezer and making an order with the butcher shop for a lot more meat. I won’t be here to prepare lunches, so having something they can throw together easily will be a good idea as well.”

“That sounds good. I’ll have to see about driving lessons for you so you can run errands on your own.” He said.

I smiled. I wanted to learn everything I could and being more independent would help a lot.

“Harmony wants me to come have a sleep over Saturday night. Would that be okay?” I asked.

“As long as you’re home before I get up Sunday, I have no problem with that.” Victor said.

“And... Gray asked me to go to the prom with him. Would that be okay?”

Victor inhaled sharply. I prepared for him to say no. I would understand. Gray thought I was his mate and Victor was in love with me. It could be hard for him to let me go.

“Who else is going?” He asked.

“We’ll be with Cam and Harmony. I’ve never been to a dance or anything, so Gray wanted to take me so I could experience it.” I admitted.

He looked thoughtful. “If you really want to go, I won’t stop you. There are a lot of things that you haven’t gotten to try. I want you to do everything. Just remember not to give him too much leeway. He’s a werewolf and they instantly fall in love with their mates. He’s trying to make you love him too.”

I thought about earlier today when Gray caught me and held on to me. It felt almost as safe as when Victor held me. It was that bond, Gray was talking about, growing.

That couldn’t happen. I didn’t want to hurt Victor. I was also not wanting to hurt Gray. He seemed like he was more genuine than he’d been before and like he really just wanted to be my friend.

“I’ll be careful.”

“Good. I love you and I don’t want to lose you to him.” He admitted softly.

“You won’t. I already told you, Victor. We’ll be together forever. I’m never letting you go.” I smiled.

He took my hand in his and kissed it. It reminded me of the gentle way Gray had kissed my hurt finger earlier. I really needed to be careful. How could I get Gray to stop loving me?

A History

Chapter 39 - The Vampire's Servant

Victor and I had a better night than we’d ever had. There was a happier and calmer feeling than before. We’d talked about the growing feelings we had finally. I knew he felt what I did. He was more than my friend.

After I ate and we cleaned up together, we went to the game room. Victor wanted to try the games I told him about. I was excited to play with him. It wasn't something we'd ever done before.

I showed him the sports games. I thought he might like the tennis or golf and I was right. He saw the boxing game and told me to put it on. It was one of the ones where you used the controllers to move your character's hands.

He watched me play against the computer and not do very well. Victor had me stop and showed me how to square my body and punch without over extending. The feeling of his hands on my body sent tingles through me.

"Echo, you must focus when you fight. This may be a game, but it's a good start to your training. I want you to practice every day." He murmured into my ear from behind me.

I nodded, not trusting my voice to be strong. I needed to get used to him being close. Ever since Marius left, Victor had been closer to me or touching me. I almost giggled at how he seemed to be petting me.

We played for a little longer, but I was starting to get tired. I didn't want the day to be over so soon. It felt like I'd go to sleep and wake up to realize this was all a dream. I wanted it to be real.

"Victor, do you want to watch a movie with me?" I asked softly.

"When is your bedtime?"

"In an hour and a half. We can just watch a short one." I offered.

"I suppose we could watch a short movie and if it goes past your bedtime a little, it should be fine. I don't want this to be a nightly occurrence. Understand?"

I grinned and put the controllers away before picking out a movie and setting it up. It was a musical that Drew picked out. He said he thought older movies and kids' movies would be the best place for me to start.

Sitting with Victor on the couch, I started the movie. It was called Gigi and about a young girl in France. Gaston reminded me of Victor. Cool and a little bored with everything. I watched the movie happily. I didn't look away until the end card flashed.

When I looked at him, he was watching me with a smile. It made me blush.

"Did you like the movie?" I asked.

"It was... cute. I remember Paris around that time. You seemed to like it. You smiled through almost the whole thing." He said.

“I liked the story and the music.” I admitted.

“It’s getting late, princess. Time for you to get ready for bed.”

I got up and stretched. I was more than ready for bed. Victor slipped his arms around me and hugged me close. I relaxed in his embrace.

“We’ll need to teach you how to behave in vampire society. The rules are more simple and obvious than those of turn of the century high society. I’ll make sure you’re ready before we attend any functions.” Victor whispered.

“I’ll to my very best. I promise not to embarrass you.” I swore.

He chuckled. “You could never embarrass me, Echo. You’re learning. If you commit a faux pas, it’s my fault, not yours. I will make sure you know as much as possible. I never want you to feel like you embarrass me. You are the sweetest person I’ve ever met.”

“Even when I’m mean like I was to Gray the other night?” I blushed.

“I thought that was amusing. He was pressing and you were loaded down with a lot of new information. Wolves tend to think that the moon goddess is infallible. Maybe you were meant to be his mate before everything happened. It wouldn’t be her fault if your future was changed by someone else. The more I’m with you, the more I think you’re meant to be mine.”

I pulled away. I didn’t like it when he said it like that. It was like when I was around Gray. That same pressure.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Don’t take that as anything bad, please. I just feel a pull that makes me think you’re meant to be my Solus Amor in your next life. Whatever made you what you are, connected us to each other in an undeniable way. It’s not something we can test without you dying. I want you to live and have a life. And children.... If you want.” Victor replied softly.

“I don’t want to talk about this right now. I’m not healthy yet. That should be our focus right now. Remember? We’re going back to how we were before. We’ll deal with the relationship things later. I might not be as ready for this as I thought.” I told him.

“I’ll respect that and we’ll leave this to later. I just wanted to say it out loud. You’re very dear to me, Echo. I love you in a way I haven’t loved someone since I was alive.”

“You loved someone when you were alive?” I asked.

“I was married. It was a very long time ago. Our families had been friends since our grandparents were children. I fell in love with her as a child and we were married as soon as we

were considered adults. I was married to her for seven years before I lost her. We had three children.” He said in a wistful voice.

“What happened, Victor? Why didn’t you stay with them?” I pressed.

“They died. Emma always had hard times with pregnancies. We had several stillborn children. We only had those two living children. Our youngest son, Isaac, got sick. We were hopeful that he would recover, but he didn’t. He was only three. Isaac was the brightest light of my life at the time. He had his mother’s smile and friendly manner. A couple years later, our oldest, Elias, slipped and fell. He hit his head hard. Elias was adventurous. He was always trying to help out around the house and talked about when he would grow up and take care of us.

Emma wanted to try for another baby. I wanted her to be happy... I always wanted her to be happy. I took on more work around the house and made her rest through the pregnancy. I learned to cook for her. You remind me of Emma a little. The brightness of your smile and how you care for people. I haven’t thought about them for years.” His voice was strained and I could see tears forming in his eyes.

“Then what? How did you lose her?”

“She died in childbirth. I named our daughter Emma. After her mother. I vowed to care for her and make sure she lived longer than her brothers. She was so small and perfect. I carried her with me when I worked. Other men said I should find another wife or give my daughter to my parents until she was grown. I refused to give up my little Emma. She was the last thing connecting me to my family and to life itself. I felt like I would die without her.” Victor whispered.

He sat heavily on the couch. I sat next to him and took his hand. I had no idea that he’d lost so much in his life. He never seemed like it.

“She was two when she got sick. A childhood illness that is now vaccinated against. Something no one fears anymore. The same one that took Isaac from us. I did everything I could think of. I gathered what little money I had to buy medicines that did nothing for my daughter. She died in the same bed her mother and brothers died in. She took her last breath in my arms. There was nothing that could have saved her. I buried her with the rest of my family and felt the world shaking me loose. I wandered aimlessly around the woods near my village and was attacked by a rogue werewolf. I wanted to die. I was welcoming my death as I felt my life draining away.”

I couldn’t help but start tearing up as Victor told his story. I shook my head. I didn’t want him to be dead.

“Talia found me. I couldn’t tell her to let me die. I could only watch as she turned me. It was thirty years later that I remembered my life. The pain had dulled. I visited their graves one final time before I let them go and accepted my role as a vampire. There had to be some reason that Talia found me before I died. I believed that so hard, I made it true. I became high ranked in the Council. Passed laws to make children safe in honor of my own lost children. There were too

many ways for parents to lose their children. Vampires would be one cause taken off that list.” Victor stated firmly.

I hugged him tightly. Victor rubbed my back. It was so sad that I needed a hug. Nothing I had gone through had been as bad as losing everyone he loved.

“Maybe you’re right and I was meant to be that thing you said.” I sniffled.

“My Solus Amor. It means ‘Only Love’. Most vampires don’t get one, but I heard some can sense theirs when the partner is still alive. I don’t know what it feels like. We can ask Talia when she gets here. Her Solus Amor was alive when they met. We can still be together even if you’re not. I still love you and that won’t change Echo. Now, we’ve talked long past your bedtime.” He chided me lightly.

“Will you lay down with me until I fall asleep, Victor?” I asked.

“Of course, princess. I want you to get some rest. That will be the best way to get you to sleep.” He smiled. “Go get ready for bed and call out to me when you’re ready to sleep. I need to go take care of something real quick, then I’ll come up.” Victor smiled.

I nodded and hurried up to my room. I wouldn’t take too long. I wanted to be Victor’s only love. I wanted to never leave him alone again. Maybe we could have babies when I was older and he’d get to have happy healthy babies to take care of.

When I was changed into my pajamas, I opened the door and called out for Victor. I was only just climbing into bed when he arrived. He crawled into the bed with me.

I pressed my head into Victor’s chest, holding him tight. I would never let him lose someone he loved again. I would learn to fight and take care of myself so that Victor wouldn’t have to worry about me. He wouldn’t lose me.

Drifting to sleep, I soaked in the comfort of Victor’s arms. I felt safe again. Sometimes, I just wanted to be held. I was so glad Victor wanted that too. He rubbed my back comfortingly until darkness overtook me.

Preparing for the Weekend

Chapter 40 - The Vampire's Servant

The week went well. Victor and I fell back into our old patterns. He ordered a freezer and couple little vacuum robots for the house. Drew came to accept the orders and get them set up. If I left

the doors open, the one upstairs would get all the floors. It made for even less work around the house and they were cute.

Gray was always coming up with fun things to do on our free period. We even left school once and went to get milkshakes. He brought me treats from his pack house or brought board games in his backpack.

I just kept trying to only be his friend. We'd come to an agreement where I was giving him one hug a day to help keep Rex calm. He never tried to make it more than a hug, so I was fine with it.

It was Friday and I was excited for the weekend. Gray and Val would be coming to the house at lunch time and we would leave for the pack house after Victor was up for the night. I would sleep in Harmony's room and we would be eating at the big dining room in the pack house.

We had the plan to go out and do the shopping I needed as soon as we finished eating lunch. It would be great to have everything in order for the people who were coming to train me. I wanted them to like me so they would train me the best they could.

At the free period, Harmony, Gray, and I went out to the big field to hang out. We sat in the grass in the warm sun. Gray pulled out a big bag of trail mix he'd brought from home and we all snacked on it.

"How have you been feeling, Echo? Any stronger lately?" Gray asked.

It had been about two weeks since I started eating regular and healthy meals. I didn't know how long it would take before I was healthy. I didn't even know what that would feel like.

"No real changes, that I've seen, yet. It's only been a couple weeks. It might take more." I shrugged.

"Maybe you're just not getting enough of something you need. It can be like that for wolves when we're healing. What could you be missing?"

"I have a lot of protein and iron. I'm taking a multivitamin on top of everything else I'm doing. I just don't know what could be missing." I sighed. "I want to be better. I want to be healthy."

"Could... I mean.... Is it possible that you need blood because you're part vampire?" Harmony asked.

I put my hand over my mouth in shock. "Like human blood?"

"It could be what you're missing." She replied.

"But she doesn't... you don't have fangs, right, Echo?" Gray inquired.

I shook my head vigorously.

“She can’t need blood, because she would have fangs if she did.” He said.

“She doesn’t need fangs to get it from a blood bag or a cut. Humans invented tools for a reason. We don’t need to have fangs and claws to get our meals and fight.” Harmony told him.

“You’re just mad that they put you with the young warriors and they keep beating you in fights.” Gray chuckled.

“I want to go back with the teens, Echo. I hate fighting with the young warriors.” She grumbled.

“They all love her and apologize before and after sparring with her. She uses that mind control without even thinking. Even the head warrior likes her, and he doesn’t like anyone. Trent almost did what she wanted and moved her back to the teens, but then he told her she either trains with the warriors or not at all.” He smiled.

“You’re proud your brother was able to resist her.” I laughed.

“My brother is the strongest and best Alpha ever. He took over the pack at twenty-one and made some amazing changes. We’ve become more powerful since he took over. Dad and mom are super proud of him.” Gray beamed with pride.

“I’m glad you’re not mad about him using your interest in me to make that deal with Victor. I was impressed that he put your people above his relationship with you.” I told him.

“I was mad, but it gave me the chance to be your friend, so I got over it.” He said.

I was glad the subject had been changed. I didn’t like the idea of drinking blood. I’d rather heal slow than do that.

“You work tonight, right?” Harmony said to Gray.

“Yeah, Tuesday through Friday until summer.” He nodded.

“Do you like it?” I asked.

“It gives me money of my own to spend. It’s not easy, and sometimes it’s not fun, but having that little extra bit of freedom makes it worthwhile.” Gray said.

“I just spend Victor’s money.” I blushed.

“Yeah, but you’re his servant. He needs to take care of you and he lets you use his card instead of paying wages. I’m sure if you needed cash for something, he would give it to you.” Harmony replied.

I thought about it. He would. Victor would give me almost anything I asked for. That didn’t exactly make me feel better.

The rest of the break was spent chatting about things. I learned that Gray was the youngest son in his family with three older brothers. He also had a little sister who was six and he loved dearly. The way he looked when he talked about her made me smile.

Gray's only stress, at the moment, seemed to be that he couldn't get ahold of a second ticket with the prom being so close. They had sold out completely and no one was selling theirs. I told him not to worry if he couldn't find one. I was happy just to help Harmony get ready for it.

Everything had become a lot more comfortable at school. Sean would sit with me on the bus to and from school every day. He and his friends would join us for lunch and he was teaching some of the kids in Harmony's group about his game. They seemed to be trying to figure out a time to set one up of their own.

I loved that everyone was getting along. The school work wasn't as bad as I'd been afraid of. As long as I made sure to do it all quickly it didn't pile up on me. When I was stuck I would call someone or wait and ask Victor for help.

My life was becoming what it should have been. I had friends, family, and love. I was actually becoming successful. I couldn't believe it was as simple as putting myself out there. People truly wanted to be my friends and I was able to pay attention to them.

Drew was especially proud of me. He called just last night to see how I was doing since we wouldn't see each other daily. He told me about the hunters and how they were connected to Miss Helen. I was glad that she was gone and I would never have to see her again after she risked my Victor.

Before I got on the bus to head home, Gray ran out to see me. He usually headed straight to work on the days he was working. I was surprised to see him as I was in line to get on the bus.

"I wanted to ask you something." He said as he got to the line.

"What, Gray? You're going to be late for work." I replied.

"I was thinking tomorrow, instead of having dinner at the pack house, I would take everyone for pizza at a place I know. Do you like pizza?" Gray asked.

I grinned. "Val would sneak me some when they went out. I've never gotten to have it fresh."

He got that look in his eye and looked around. There was a slight high whining noise. I realized I'd made him sad again.

Before he could ask for a hug, I wrapped my arms around his waist. He held me tight. I was beginning to learn to be more assertive with this. It would stop him from getting weird.

"I'm sorry. You looked so happy. I don't know why it hurt so much." He murmured.

“It’s alright Gray. My first memory of going out for pizza will be with my friends. It will be a happy memory and I’m looking forward to it. You should, too. It can be your first pizza memory with me.” I told him and let him go.

“I like that. This will be my first pizza memory with you. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Gray winked.

“See you then.” I replied and went to get on the bus.

People had walked around me and Gray to board the bus and find their seats. Sean wasn’t in our spot yet, I hoped he didn’t miss the bus. I was focused on the planner where I noted my schoolwork when he arrived.

“Hey, Echo. I almost missed the bus.” He chuckled.

“Are you alright?” I asked.

“Yeah. I was trying to deal with an argument between Elle and Terry. They’re going to the prom together and can’t decide on a theme for their outfits.” Sean rolled his eyes.

“Is there supposed to be one?” I worried.

“No, not really. A lot of couples go with colors, but you know Elle and Terry are extra and want to do a cosplay of some sort.”

They’d mentioned cosplay before Gray told me it was dressing up as a favorite character like on Halloween. I thought it was a fun idea. I couldn’t wait to see what they decided.

“Did you help them settle it?”

“I wish. This will probably be a thing all the way until the night of. They were this way for the sweetheart dance on Valentine’s Day.” He replied.

“Are they dating?” I asked.

“Yes. Ever since last year. The tension between them was so high I was getting frustrated. So I set them up. They thought we were going to go do a group thing, but I never showed up. It worked, though.” Sean grinned.

“That’s a lovely thing for you to have done for your friends. Are you going to the prom?”

“My parents made me buy two tickets, even though I don’t have a date. My sister went last year and they have the pictures. They really want pictures of me with a date. I don’t really know what to do. They just don’t get that I’m not able to find a date. Everyone I’ve asked has turned me down.” He sighed.

“I’m supposed to go with Gray, but he can’t find a second ticket. He thought he was just going to go with friends so he only got one. Can I have the second ticket and I’ll take a picture with you at the dance? I’ll even dance with you so you aren’t bored. As long as you’re okay with me being bad at dancing.” I smiled.

“Really? That would be great. My parents would be extra surprised if I took a picture with a pretty girl.”

“I’ll talk to Gray. We can either meet there or we can meet before for dinner.” I offered.

“I’m supposed to have dinner with Terry and Elle. We can just meet there. This is so great, Echo. Thanks.” Sean said and hugged me.

I laughed. I was certainly getting all my hugs for the day. It was nice to have such good friends.

We talked about his game more and planned for the movie we would go see next weekend. It wasn’t long before we got to his stop and parted ways. I texted Gray about finding a ticket. He didn’t respond, but I figured he was either working or on his way to work, so I didn’t worry.

When the bus stopped to let me off, I was excited to be home. I could see Travis walking along inside of the fence. I’d learned the names of our weekday and evening guards. It made me feel better about them.

I paused as a jogger went past. He jogged down our road at this time every day. His name was Mr. Martin and he seemed pretty nice when I’d spoken with him on Tuesday after school.

My world felt so huge and so small all at the same time. Everything was moving forward and I was truly happy with it all. It was finally falling into place