

Homemaking

Upon waking, I stared at the basement ceiling. It was like being in a box in the ground all over again. It was a box in the ground, just with more box over it. I suddenly wished Springer was alive again, so I could kill him a little slower. Two more hours, at least, until I could leave.

The door at the top of the stairs opened. I squinted to see if there was a clue as to who it was. Then the scent of her hit me.

"Victor? Are you awake?" Echo called out.

"Yes. Do you need something?" I asked.

"I bought blackout curtains today and Drew helped me put them up. You can come upstairs if you want. Just not any farther than the rst oor." Echo replied.

I felt a smile cross my face. No more basement. At least, not tonight. I was thrilled that she'd thought of it and bounded up the stairs.

If I'd been thinking, I would have worried about a trick. Thank goodness she was as good and sweet as she seemed and I didn't get burnt to a crisp. She was grinning when I exited the basement.

"You seem as excited to leave your basement as I was to leave mine." Echo laughed.

"Neither one of us should ever have to live in a basement again." I chuckled.

I followed her to the kitchen, where Drew was pulling dishes out of the dishwasher and putting them in cupboards. Echo went to the counter and resumed cutting up vegetables. She must have been working on it and decided to check on me.

The feeling of pride I had in her was immense. She was thoughtful and intelligent. A perfect servant. I was hopeful that she would choose to stay with me and I couldn't wait to see what she would do with this house.

"There were no dishes, utensils, or pans. I had to buy everything, including some gadgets and small appliances. Blender, microwave, toaster, you know like that." She said as she sliced.

"And the curtains." I added.

"Yes. Oh! Drew taught me about the difference in types of sheets. I didn't realize there was one. I also got stuff for cleaning the house. Tomorrow, we're headed to the furniture store and I have someone coming at three to give a quote on tinting the windows. I still plan to get more curtains, but I was thinking an extra dark tint on your windows might be better than paint, which can ake off. What size bed do you want in your room?" She asked.

I smiled. She was much more talkative now. Drew was pretty good at getting people to relax and open up. He's managed to get Springer to talk about a few other things before I killed him. I knew he was the best option for helping her relax. Echo just needed to see that she was safe and actually in charge of her life.

"King size. I like to sprawl." I winked when she turned to look at me.

"Okay. We'll buy a whole bunch of stuff tomorrow and you'll really regret giving me that card." She giggled.

"I don't think I'll ever regret giving you anything, little one." I smiled.

Drew dropped a dish that clattered onto the oor. Echo looked relieved that it didn't break and turned back to her work. He stared at me.

"You have no idea." He whispered.

Echo didn't seem to hear. We weren't able to talk mentally, since he wasn't my servant, but I could hear very well. And, depending on how much vampire was in Echo's blood, she could, too.

I shook my head, telling him I didn't want him to say anything else and he turned back to the dishes. I had no idea what he was about to enlighten me on, but I didn't want to upset Echo. I'd given her some work that was close to what she had experienced before, and she was adapting well. Everything else, would have to wait.

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In two days, Rosalynn would come and test Echo to see what her bloodline was and how much of it was vampire. But all of the facts were already pointing to her being at least half.

The question was, how. Her father was entirely human. Her mother was about a quarter, but that was baseline for the descendants of vampires. It would never drop below one quarter. No matter how diluted the line. I was betting her sister and brother would be a quarter as well.

It was entirely possible that was what her parents meant when they said she'd stolen from the other two children. They were probably under the impression that the other two would have been half or more, but she absorbed it from them somehow.

We tried to look into their birth after I spoke with the last three vampires on my list. But it was like the family had just appeared, fully formed, in town almost sixteen years ago with three two-year-olds.

It meant they were running. But why? If her sire came for her, they would've been compensated. Even more than I gave them.

One of the vampires had been old and experienced enough to know what she was. He offered the family seven hundred thousand dollars for her. She was worth exponentially more. Her parents' greed was a boon for us.

If he had gotten her, and decided to sell, he could have made up to a billion dollars. The conditions for breeding with a human are fragile and have to be exact. It happened so very rarely, that the babes ended up on the auction block rather than being raised by their mothers.

Though we could breed with other supernaturals, it was rare. Hybrids were the most common product of these couplings. Any who wanted vampire children, needed someone with human or vampire blood. So dhampyrs of any level were sought after. Only those of Echo's level were in enough demand that they were worth paying for.

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I hadn't realized how long my mind had wandered until the buzzer for the gate rang. Drew and Echo were leaning against the counter, eating large bowls of spaghetti. It smelled amazing. Unlike most vampires, I loved the smell of garlicky foods.

Putting up my hand, I headed toward the hall. They resumed their meal as I went to answer the buzzer. In the entry, I hit the intercom button to the gate.

"Yes?" I asked.

"Silence sent me. The code for the day is sherry." A female voice said.

"Pull up in front of the house and knock at the door. Someone will greet you." I told her and opened the gate.

Echo walked into the entry and smiled. "I'll get it. The sun's still up. I know you hate the couches in the living room, but it's not as bad as the rest of the furniture. You should feed in there."

"You are excelling as a daytime servant, little one. I shall await her in there. Thank you." I bowed.

Echo's smile grew brighter and she bounced a little at the praise. She'd rarely gotten praise in the time Gage was watching her. I wanted to make sure she knew she was appreciated.

I went to the living room and stood near the replace. The room smelled cleaner. Echo must have been cleaning before she started making dinner.

There was a knock at the door and I heard her answer it.

"What's your name?" She asked.

Her mother had done the same thing. I realized, the only time Echo must have seen someone answer the door was when her mother was greeting vampires. The story of being not be invited in was true, we couldn't enter anywhere we were unwell, but we didn't go ying out if the welcome was rescinded. Instead, we were compelled to leave, often in a great deal of pain. That wouldn't work on a human.

"My name is Helen. I'm here to feed your master." The woman answered.

"I'm Echo. Welcome to our home. My master is in the living room. Please follow me, and excuse the furnishings, they're temporary." She replied graciously.

A few moments later, they entered the room. I could smell the woman's scent along with vanilla. Not the chemically created vanilla from perfume, but vanilla extract. She'd been doing this a while. We hated perfume, it ruined the avor of the blood when we took it from the neck.

"Master, this is Helen. She is your donor tonight. Will you be needing me or shall I return to the kitchen?" Echo stated.

I turned. Echo was slightly bowed and the woman looked a little annoyed. Most humans took issue with human servants. She had taken on the role on perfectly. I was impressed.

"Return to your meal, Echo." I said. "Helen, thank you for coming."

"No problem, sir." Helen smiled.

Echo turned and left the room. I walked to Helen and took her hand, guiding her to the couch. She was 5'6" with short blonde hair that framed her face. A pixie-ish features, big blue eyes, and a trim gure. She sat and the furniture instantly made her look less attractive. How I hated the hideous gray furnishing. I joined her and leaned in for my meal.

Silence had been sending me donors free of charge as thanks for dealing with her issue and payment to reprimand some donors and buyers who had been taking advantage of her lax rules on extras. She was sending me mostly Rh negative donors, which were my favorite. I appreciated the consideration.

I didn't need as much blood as a younger vampire. Being over eight hundred years old has a lot of perks. My meal was done relatively quickly.

As I pulled back, Echo entered the room with a tray, which she sat on the plywood coffee table. On the tray was an assortment of meat, cheese, fruit, and crackers, with three bottles of different juices. She knelt in front of the table and smiled at Helen.

"Please, have something to replenish you before you leave." Echo said softly.

Helen laughed. "No one has ever brought me a snack after. I usually keep stuff in my car. Thanks."

"I remember what it was like post feeding, and I didn't have to drive anywhere. Master, Drew would like to speak with you in your oce. I'll take care of Ms. Helen until she can safely leave." Echo replied.

I stood and bowed to Helen. "Thank you for your donation. It was lovely. Please, have a good night."

"Sure thing. You can request me anytime. Have a good night." She said, but her eyes were all for the food on the tray.