

Chapter 141 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

We arrived home in one piece. Thank goodness. Sean drove like a madman. Fenton seemed to make him very angry.

I understood Sean's anger. He made me angry, too. Cursing people just so they would suffer? What was worth that? What did he want so badly that he wasn't even ashamed of how he hurt people?

"Where are we? I know your parents couldn't afford a house like this, Sean. Are your parents well off, Echo? Is this where I find out some part of my family actually became successful?" Fenton laughed.

"This is my husband's house. I'll take you to meet him soon." I promised.

Sean looked at me like I had grown a second head. I was completely serious. I would feed him to Victor if he didn't help us. The door we fed Victor through could easily fit a cat.

"One of my descendants is at least respectful and successful." Fenton said happily.

We walked into the house and he hissed. I knew he could smell all the werewolves in the house. There were more werewolves than vampires in the house. I knew the one scent would cover the other.

"Our staff is mostly werewolf. As I said, I'm part werewolf. My father was a Beta werewolf in a pack back East." I explained as I walked through the house with the large cat.

"Where are you taking me?" He asked.

"To my office. I'll have the girls make you some salmon. Would you like that, Fenton?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"Lisa, would you get some salmon in a dish for this cat, please?" I called out.

"Of course, Mistress Nightshade. Would you like me to bring you some lunch?" She replied.

“Just some blood tea. Would you make something up for Sean? He hasn’t eaten since last night.” I said.

“Yes, Mistress Nightshade.” Lisa said.

I kept moving to the office. Fenton was an idiot if he thought he could behave like this and would be set free. There was no way he retained his powers in his current form.

He didn’t smell like magic. He smelled like a cat. I wasn’t going to let some cat kill my mate.

When I opened the door, Uncle Preston stood from where he was behind Victor’s desk. Val and Harmony were sitting on the couch. Gray was gone. I wondered where he was.

“Uncle Preston, Harmony, Valor, I want you all to meet the newest addition to our home.” I announced as I put the cat carrier on the coffee table.

Uncle Preston sat on the couch with Val and Harmony. They all looked in the carrier and back up to me curiously. I grinned.

“Come on, Old Man. This is my uncle Preston, my sister Harmony, and my brother Valor. You should recognize Harmony and Valor. Lila says they look just like Fenton Jr. and Mary Katherine. Preston is Grace’s grandson.” I told him.

“Echo, you’re acting weird.” Harmony whispered.

“Lila was right, she sounds like Mary Katherine too.” Fenton answered, pressing his face against the grate.

“Holy shit!” Val jumped when the cat spoke.

“Everyone. This is Fenton Aimes Sr.” I smiled.

They stared at me. Sean came into the room with Lisa. I cleared away the mess on the desk so she could set the tea service down. Sean sat in one of the chairs with his sandwich.

“Did you tell them?” He asked.

“Yeah. This is the best break we’ve had since yesterday when we broke the hidden things spell on the fae.” I giggled.

“I bet Hollis is still licking his wounds after that one.” Sean chuckled and dropped his glamour.

My smile widened as I saw his soft green skin and dark green freckles. I reached out to touch his hair. It felt like the tender shoots of young plants.

“Now I know what Rosario means when he says you feel good. My body feels like it’s really happy whenever you touch me.” Sean said.

“Good to know. Did you want to get Rosario? I think he’ll want to meet Fenton as well.”

“Not yet. He’d be too angry about what Fenton did to the fae. Killing a cat is a lot easier than killing the king of the fae.” He replied.

“You’re acting really strange, Echo. Why did you bring him here? Is he willing to remove the curse?” Val asked.

“No.” I said as I sat at Victor’s desk and poured myself some tea.

I added some cream and a little bit of honey. They used B negative. It worked really well. I sipped my tea and thought about what I was doing.

It almost seemed mad. Like this crazy idea that seemed to grow inside me. I would do anything to get my Victor back and this cat was in my way.

“Turn Fenton this way, Harmony.” I requested.

She did as I asked and sat back down. This wouldn’t be easy. He was probably expecting torture. I wouldn’t do that. I couldn’t it wasn’t in me, but I knew who could do it.

I picked up my cell phone and dialed. The line rang until Gray picked up.

“Hey, Echo. I was just running an errand. I’ll be home soon.” Gray said as he picked up.

“Actually, can you run by the pet store and get me a large kennel? One with smallish gaps. We have a guest and I want him to be comfortable.” I asked.

“Sure. Make sure Victor pays me back, those things aren’t cheap.” He chuckled.

“Of course. See you in a while.” I hung up.

Taking another sip of my tea, I sent a message to Marius letting him know I would need him to come by when he was up for the evening. He responded that he was going to sleep soon, but would come over when he woke up. I was glad for that.

“So you intend to keep me in a cage?” Fenton scoffed.

“Just until I know you won’t run away. If you promise to be good, I’ll have Sean put this dish of food in your carrier for you. A big cat like you must be getting hungry soon.” I said.

“Honestly, this is interesting. I wonder what you have planned for me. You seem too soft for torture... or you did earlier. This Echo might actually have the nerve to do it. I won't do anything.” He promised.

I nodded to Sean and he picked up the dish. I watched as he put it into the carrier and locked it up again. While Fenton ate, I finished my tea. It was enough blood to sustain me for a little while. I would have another cup in a bit.

We waited for him to finish and Sean to remove the dish before we continued. I had calmed down a lot and was ready for the next steps. I needed him to tell us what spells were used in the curse and how to break them.

“Fenton, what is it that you want? You said you didn't get what you wanted, or implied it. What could be so important that you would cast this curse on everyone and make them all suffer?” I asked.

“They suffer for interfering with my family. A question for a question. I answered one, now you answer one. Why is this so important to you?”

“Because my friends and family are affected by the curse. I don't like people suffering. What do you want, Fenton?” I pressed.

“I want you to let me out of this carrier.” He chuckled.

“You know what I meant.” I sighed.

“I need to know more before I'll tell you my motives, child.” Fenton said. “What are you? You smelled like vampires, werewolves, witches, and fae. I can't get a clear read on what you are.”

“I'm the Master of this territory. What spells did you use on the supernaturals here?” I asked.

“You can't be the Master. You're not a vampire.” He insisted.

With a smile, I let my fangs run out. His pupils went very large and he shook his head. I put my fangs away and poured myself another cup of tea.

“Answer my question.” I ordered.

“No. I won't give that away.” Fenton growled.

“Then I guess the game is over and you can just stay there until the cage is here. I almost forgot a litter box. I'll text Gray.” I shrugged and texted Gray.

I drank my tea and mindlinked Lisa to come get the tray. I had work to do. If Fenton wasn't going to cooperate, then I needed to get on what I did have. Every piece I took out of this curse weakened it. Maybe we could make it collapse.

Once the desk was cleared, I pulled the map back out and settled it there. Val, Harmony, Preston, and Sean gathered around and we looked at what we had so far. I pondered the eight points.

“A guard. What we need is someone to guard you while you wipe out the wards. Finn didn’t seem to be much use. Would another witch be useful? If these people can’t stop themselves from defending it, we don’t want to hurt them.” I said.

“It would be great if we could do a few at a time. With all five of us, we could take care of the five easiest to get to. The others may be more difficult with how the town has grown.” Val told me, he pointed to three areas on the map. “These are housing developments. I want to go investigate where the wards are exactly. Uncle Preston and Harmony may be the most useful here.”

“Right, with her vampire abilities, she should be able to charm people into letting her in.” I nodded. “Preston, can you teach the four of us how to dispel wards?”

“I can. I agree with Valor. If we could actually get eight witches in total, we could dispel all of them at the same time. But who would we use?” Preston hummed in thought.

“The five of us, my dad, Lila, and then we just need one more.” Sean suggested.

“No one in the local coven will help get rid of the curse. I already asked and everyone I talked to said no.” Val sighed. “They’re afraid of what could happen.”

“Lila won’t be able to help. My wards are reinforced against dark magic.” Fenton laughed. “You should just accept your fates.”

“Plus, it needs to be a family member. We need more relations.” Preston said.

“Thank you for your help, Fenton.” I called out. “Let’s call Bellamy and see if she has any witches in her collective who might be able to help us out.”

“That’s a good idea.” Val nodded.

“I’ll send her a text. I don’t want to wake up her babies or anything.” I said, picking up my cell and typing out a text. “Let’s move on to what we have on the other spells.”

I rolled up the map and set it aside before pulling up the spreadsheet of spells Victor had been working on. Preston moved beside me and I let him sit in the chair behind the desk. I moved to the other side of the desk.

“Can you go through this list of possibles from you and Lila and remove anything that doesn’t fit with what we already know?” I asked.

“Got it.” He said and got to work.

I heard the front door open and the sound of Gray struggling with something. Val came with me to help. I took the litter box and the cat litter from Gray. Val grabbed some other large bags from him, and we went into the office.

Gray started setting up the cage without question. Val was looking through the bags. There was a scratching post, two bowls, a couple fake mice, catnip, freeze dried chicken treats, a jingly ball, and a cat bed in the large bags.

We looked at Gray, who was quietly working on the cage. He got a lot of things for a cat. I thought it was terribly endearing. It was almost as if he was excited for it. Too bad our cat was literally, a grumpy old man.

Harmony was touching Sean's arm. She was rubbing her hand up and down. I raised my eyebrow at her when she caught me looking.

"He's all velvety and soft, like grass in the springtime. It makes me want to roll around on him." She giggled.

"Please don't." Sean said, brushing her hands away.

She pulled her hands back and wandered over to see if she could help Gray. That was better for everyone. Harmony could be a bit much sometimes.

My alarm on my phone went off. It was almost time for Victor to wake up. I turned off the alarm and wandered up to his room.

I knew he wasn't in there, but Finn and Talia were. I figured I was being useful, at least. They would enjoy the warm bed as much as Victor would.

In the room, I took a deep breath. It still smelled like Victor. I turned on the blanket and left, closing the door behind me.

Though I knew I shouldn't do it, I went down to the basement. The empty cell was open again. I remembered Finn telling me that he'd opened it in case we needed it.

I turned on the light and knelt on the floor to see inside the door we had for feeding Victor. He was laying on the floor near it. I hated seeing him on the cold floor.

Standing, I decided I would move him while he slept. I popped into the room using my ability and picked Victor up. It was harder than picking him up from his bed, but I was used to moving his weight.

Putting him on the cot, I covered his body with the blankets and sat next to him. When he was peaceful like this, I could almost imagine my Victor would be the one waking up. In reality, I knew it would be that animal. Not my Victor at all.

After kissing him on his forehead, I stood again and popped myself into the office. Gray was just finishing the cage and setting things up inside. I sat on the couch and tried to control my emotions. I needed to be strong for everyone. Especially Victor.

“Everything alright?” Val asked, sitting next to me.

“Yes. Finn and Talia will wake up soon. Victor was sleeping on the floor, so I went in and moved him.”

“That was dangerous, what if he woke up?” Val growled.

“Then I would have done what I could have to get him away from me and come right back. I’m not stupid, Val. I planned to be gone before his normal wake up time. I just needed to see him.” I said.

“Who is Victor?” Fenton asked.

“My husband. One of them, at least.” I sighed.

“Echo? Who were you talking to?” Gray asked as he picked up the carrier.

“Fenton.” I said pointing to the cat. “Didn’t you hear him ask who Victor was?”

“The cat meowed and you answered.” Gray said. “Are you able to understand him?”

I looked at everyone else. They stared back. I knew they could understand him too.

“Only my family can hear my words.” Fenton laughed. “You must seem insane to this wolf.”

“He says only family can understand him.” Val told Gray.

“I guess family by marriage doesn’t count. I’m ready to put him into the cage.” Gray smiled.

“Go ahead.” I nodded and watched my other husband handle my great great-grandfather.

The Traveler

Chapter 142 - The Vampire's Servant

[Talia]

I woke up warm. I hadn't thought Echo would actually come turn on the heated blanket without Victor being here. She was a very thoughtful and kind girl.

My pride in her escalated when she took over Victor's position so gracefully and adeptly. She knew she couldn't handle the vampire business, and turned it over to the lieutenants instead of asking Finn or me to help. She had us work on things that fit us far better than the political and legal sides of vampirism.

Finn stretched out and reached for me. We'd been indulging with each other a little bit. Finn hadn't found his Solus Amor yet and Zendaya didn't mind if I dabbled, as long as I was still hers in my heart. Which I was.

"Mmm. Talia. So soft and tiny." He murmured.

"I'm going to beat your ass if you don't let me go, Finnick. We can play before your bedtime. I want to go find out what Echo has managed. And Sean should be fully fae now. I wonder if he's something tasty." I replied, pulling out of his grasp.

Finn sighed. "You're no fun."

"I'll be plenty of fun once Victor is no longer in danger." I told him.

"Are you really sure it was okay to let Echo be named Master of the territory, Talia? I know it was her idea, but I wonder if she understands exactly what it means." He said, getting out of Victor's bed.

"I don't believe Echo cares what it means. She's very focused on saving Victor. She thought this might make the curse leave him alone. That it might confuse the curse, because she's a dhampyr and not as vulnerable as a vampire would be. They are much harder to kill." I climbed down from the bed and made my way to Victor's closet.

As travelers, Finn and I didn't tend to carry a lot with us. I had accumulated a few more things from staying with Bellamy, but I would have them sent to Zendaya when I moved on. For now, I was enjoying watching Bellamy's family grow.

We dressed quickly and went to the kitchen. Finn was feeding nightly so he would always be at his maximum, power-wise. He was drinking his blood, when an odd look came across his face.

"I don't feel like we need to find that person anymore. I feel like we have everything Victor asked for. Do you think Echo actually managed to find that person while we were sleeping?" Finn asked.

"I wouldn't put it past her. Echo will be an amazing vampire when she turns. She brought together so much and it seems like she's been the one to find everything. All she had to do was see how her life with Victor would be affected. And have no one there to reign her in. If Victor

had let her be part of everything sooner, I'm sure we would have already had this curse resolved." I chuckled. "He coddles her too much. She's a very capable young woman."

"And a little frightening. I didn't realize there was another small female in the world who was as scary as you. I'm betting you'll be best friends."

"That is something I am hopeful about. I want Echo to be comfortable with me and include me in her life. I'm not like those other mothers in law. My child's spouse will actually like me and not just pretend." I winked.

"Shall we go see what the kids have come up with?" He asked, offering his arm.

"You better rinse that mug or Echo's going to tear your head off." I laughed.

He took the mug to the sink and rinsed it well before we headed to the office. I opened the door and it was like all hell was breaking loose. The scene itself was strange.

Sean was green and being held back by Rosario and Valor. Harmony was standing behind the desk yelling at the corner where Gray was camped by a large cage that hadn't been there before. Echo was holding on to her sister and glaring in the same direction.

The cage held a large black cat who was sitting on a cat bed and making a clicking chirruping sound. Gray looked completely bewildered. Preston was standing behind everyone with an appalled expression on his face.

"I'll fucking skin you if you say something like that again!" Sean shouted.

The cat chirruped again and Sean started fighting even harder to get free.

"Shut up, or I'm going to find out about muzzles for cats." Harmony growled.

"You know, male cats calm down once you get them snipped. We can make an appointment with the vet this week and have his balls taken off." Valor suggested.

The cat hissed and Valor laughed. "You'd try."

I looked to Finn, who seemed equally confused. They were all acting like they could understand the cat and were threatening it. The cat seemed to be responding.

"What is going on here?" I demanded.

The cat looked at me and chattered. Everyone froze and stared at him.

"You're so lucky she couldn't understand you." Echo muttered and shook her head. "No more giving him attention. He's trying to distract us from our work. If you think you can't ignore the

cat, then I want you to leave. I don't have the time or energy to deal with this. Harmony, look into that cat muzzle idea."

Finn and I crossed the room to her. She finally seemed to get Harmony calm and sent her off to find Cam. Echo straightened the map on her desk.

"Thank you for coming down as soon as you woke. Today, Fenton III died. We found that the being Finn was talking about was his cat. They called him The Old Man, but he's actually Fenton Sr. and we brought him home." Echo explained.

I looked at the cat again. That was the man who'd caused so much suffering? The one who made my child have to be caged like an animal. I growled.

"None of that, please. He knows he's valuable and enjoys taunting people. All afternoon Fenton has been whittling away at Sean's composure. It didn't really help that Sean's been angry since he found out who the cat was." Echo said. "He gave us a pretty good idea, though."

"Who, Sean or the cat?" Finn asked.

"Both, in a way. Sean commented on the Hearts' Forgetting spell and how it afflicted all supernaturals born, or living, inside the barrier for the Intruder spell. What if, instead of casting that spell on each group individually, he cast it as an area spell and used the same wards as the intruder? I'm guessing that was pretty accurate, because Fenton started insulting Sean and Rosario." She replied.

"This is great. Is he telling anything else?" Finn grinned.

The cat made a trilling sound.

"Obviously, he's not paying attention. Finn, if he were cooperating, do you honestly think I would have him in a cage?" Echo asked with an incredulous look.

"Oh, you have a point. Should've thought of that." He chuckled.

"Why are you keeping him, then? Why not just kill him? He's obviously not making himself useful." I scoffed.

"He's over one hundred and forty years old. We don't know if we can kill him. If we did, I don't know what it would do to the curse. It's not like he'd tell me if killing him would relieve any part of it. But we do know it will attack if we go after the wards." Echo said.

"The wards need to be our next focus." Preston added. "I'm pretty sure Sean was right. I looked over the list of possible spells, and it looks like a large chunk of what he did was that reversed Intruder spell and the Hearts' Forgetting spell. They line up with the bulk of the curse that we can map. If we take those two spells and the one we already dispelled out of everything, the only one left is the curse on Victor."

The cat started chattering again. Echo blushed a little and balled her hands into fists. She was glaring at the map.

“What’s he saying?” I asked.

“He wants to know why I’m not affected as the Master of the territory. He says that I must not be the Master if another vampire is affected. Simply, Fenton, I am the new Master. The old Master is no longer able to be with us. It’s not safe for him. Your curse may know how to kill him, but it doesn’t know how to kill me.” She replied.

He tilted his head and chirruped.

“Because I’m a dhampyr. We’re harder to kill than a human or a vampire. Now, either help, or be quiet. I need to focus on this. I was completely serious about getting ahold of a cat muzzle.” Echo said and focused on the map.

I shook my head. “That map isn’t going to get you the answers you need, Echo.”

My heart hurt for her. If I were in the same situation, I don’t know that I would be thinking as clearly as she was. The idea of Zendaya being locked in a dark cell, while I was struggling to overcome something I couldn’t physically attack, made me feel a little lost.

Victor’s turning had always been one of my greatest regrets. He was so broken and beaten when I found him in those woods, that I thought I was giving him a gift. I thought he would want to live.

I had no idea about what he had gone through. What he had lost. Not until I completed our bond and I got to see his life as it left him.

He became my most precious child. I tried to give him as much reason to live as I could. When he came back to himself, he tried to die over and over again. He would hide outside where the sun could take him. He ended up spending a few years in a cell to keep him from staking himself.

Victor begged me for death. He pled for death like one of Marius’ prisoners did. I was torturing him by keeping him alive.

When the integration process was complete, I saw him calm. He knew there was more out there for him. He craved the power to keep others from suffering.

In Victor’s old territory, he was known as a benefactor of the sciences. He made certain children were able to be vaccinated as soon as vaccines came available. He ran a program to make medical treatment for children free and his territory would lead the world in adopting new practices in medicine.

More than that, he tried to make our people more compassionate. The rules he created would kill a lot of the more sadistic vampires, the ones who loved tormenting the weak. In a lot of ways, Victor had made vampires ready for human consumption.

They were more than willing to work with us because we were focused on abiding these rules. Victor took little pride in that. Instead, he worked to keep improving lives for the humans who depended on him in his territory.

He was a model man and vampire. Only young vampires ever forgot about him. The older ones, the ones who knew him and knew of him, remembered. Now he had the title of 'The Hunter'.

It took a lot for vampires to give titles. It had to be memorable. Even the young ones knew of The Hunter. Even if they didn't know the name Victor Nightshade, they knew the title he'd been given. Victor never even knew he'd gotten the title.

I was proud of him, always. Where I would indulge with a few of my children like I did with Finn, I never did that with Victor. He was different, special. Like a true child, one I'd birthed and raised. I felt like a mother when it came to him.

That was why this curse had me so frustrated. There was nothing I could do to save him. It had to be how he felt watching over his human children as they died. I wouldn't stand by and watch him die like that. I couldn't.

Marius appeared next to me. He wrinkled his nose. My broodmate was always amusing to me. He thought very seriously of himself. I loved watching him loosen up the longer he knew Echo.

"What on earth is that odor?" He sneered.

"Cat litter." Gray answered. "It's gross."

"Why do you have a creature like that in here?" Marius asked.

Fenton hissed at Marius. I couldn't help but laugh when Marius hissed back. He really didn't like animals. Not natural ones, not supernatural ones. That's why his love for Harmony was so strange. He truly loved her, though.

After he'd seen her shift, he went on and on about how beautiful and stately her wolf was. He told me how much he was looking forward to her having pups. He said he would make sure all of them were protected from the first beating of their hearts until their last.

Echo finished explaining everything to Marius. He looked thoughtful.

"Is this why you wanted me to come when I woke?" He asked.

“I figure, you’ve tortured a lot of creatures. Some of them had to have been cat shifters. You would know more about that than I would.” Echo replied with the same dark look I’d seen Marius get when he talked about his... hobby.

Marius chuckled. “I learned a lot about torturing them while in their cat forms. Domestic cats may be different. I will have to search for more information. Are you certain? I would hate to have you stop me before I get started.”

“Echo. Don’t do this. It isn’t you. You wouldn’t allow someone to be tortured. Come on, angel.” Gray pled.

The cat made some sad mewling sounds. Gray looked at him with sympathy. If I hadn’t been looking at Echo’s face, I would have thought he was pleading as well.

“He just called you a weak little bitch. He isn’t a cat, he’s just living in the body of an animal who should have died decades ago. This is an angry, angry man.” She explained.

“He really did just call you a weak little bitch.” Preston added. “He’s been making fun of you a lot. Calling you an obedient puppy. Asking her how she trained you. Asking if you’re house broken. It’s most of what makes Harmony angry, since she’s a wolf too.”

“Did he mock my daughter?” Marius growled.

“No. He’s just been sticking to the people who can’t understand him.” Sean replied in an angry tone.

“Babe, I don’t care what a cat, or a human, thinks of me. You need to calm down. He’s probably grumpy because he wants belly rubs or something.” Rosario snickered.

Fenton chittered something at him. Rosario laughed.

“You understood that?” Echo asked.

“No. I just figured he would threaten something. I’m not scared of a kitty cat. I’m certainly not bothered by what he says, because it all sounds like cat sounds. I can see why Gray has a problem. It just sounds like you’re goofing off and treating the cat like it’s saying stuff when it isn’t. If not for the fact that Preston has been doing it too, I would have thought you four were messing with me.” Rosario answered.

“You mean you only believed us because Preston is answering back too?” Sean asked in a hurt tone.

“No, babe. I know you wouldn’t lie. It’s just a little ridiculous. He obviously didn’t have a choice of what animal to become, who would become a little kitty?”

The cat hissed and Rosario laughed again. It growled and hissed like it was threatening a fight. Echo started laughing, too.

“Rosario, would you stop riling him up? His threats are too funny. I need to be serious. Gray, you don’t understand me still. You have no idea what I’d do to save Victor. Torturing one cat seems like a relatively small thing in the long run.” Echo said.

Gray stood up. He had a scowl on his face as he stalked over to the desk and glared down at Echo. She met his eyes with a very serious a cool expression.

“The curse is making you like this. You aren’t like this. You’re my gentle angel. Don’t let the curse make you do something you’ll regret.” He hissed.

“It takes several weeks for the curse to manifest. I would do this for Victor. I would do this for you. I would do this for my family. You’ve never seen me when people I love are threatened. If you can’t handle this, you’re free to go elsewhere. Eventually, you’ll have to deal with the kind of person I really am, Gray.” She replied, coolly.

He turned and stormed out of the office. I turned back to Echo. She was watching him leave. Her head shook briefly. Like she was trying to shake a thought from it.

“Anyone else who has an issue with my decision is free to leave as well. If not, we have to figure out how to get enough witches of our family line to clear these wards all at the same time. If Fenton is right, the defenses will get stronger around the remaining wards if we only break five. Finn. Get me that family tree you were working on. We need a more complete family reunion.” Echo said and took her seat.

I could see Marius’ chest swell with pride. She was exactly the sort of vampire he liked. She was focused, driven, and unemotional. Where had this Echo been hiding?

In Her Eyes

Chapter 143 - The Vampire's Servant

We had few breaks and worked late into the night. Rosario and Sean had gone to Sean’s parents’ home for his game night. Echo had insisted that it would be best, because we would need Sean’s father and they had just lost a family member.

Echo made sure everyone ate and wandered off without having more than a couple bites of her dinner. I went to search for her. I found her in the basement sitting near the door to the little feeding hole.

She had the door open and was listening to Victor raging about people stealing his territory and his mate. Echo wasn't crying, like I expected her to be. Instead, she looked dazed.

"Echo. Are you alright?" I asked.

"ECHO! WHERE'S MY ECHO!" Victor roared.

"I'm right here, my love. Remember? You put me in here so I would be safe while you work. That's just the companion you put in with me. Remember, Victor? You didn't want me to be lonely, so you got me a friend." Echo said softly.

"The babies are safe. You are safe. I need papers. I need to control my territory. I need to make my territory safe so you can come be with me. You are mine." He started mumbling.

"Talia, would you get Victor some papers? He needs to run his territory." She asked in a choked voice.

I nodded and went to his office. There was a file of useless information. Profiles of vampires who were no longer in the territory. It would be enough to occupy him.

Quickly, I rushed back to the basement and handed the file to Echo. She slipped it in the feeding hole. Victor grabbed her hand. I could hear him kissing her hand.

My body tensed. I didn't want him to hurt her, but there was nothing I could do. I just had to trust that Victor wouldn't hurt her.

"Have you eaten, Amor? Are the babies making you sick?" He asked.

He thought she was pregnant. I remembered her saying that last night. My poor Victor. This curse was making him an idiot and now it had found his true heart's desire.

As much as he loved power, he wanted people to care for and he wanted a family. That was why Echo was such a perfect match for him as his Solus Amor. She would be able to give him that.

"I ate as much as I could, Victor. I'm not sick. I want you to focus on your papers and get your territory in order for me and the babies, okay? I'm going to go rest. Work hard for me. I love you." Echo whispered and pulled her hand back.

I saw Victor's hand pick up the file and Echo closed the little door. There was a hollow look in her eyes as she walked past me. She seemed so strong earlier, now she was showing just how affected she was.

"I hate lying to him." She whispered on the stairs. "I'm glad he's safe. The curse can't take him from me if he's locked up. He's safe."

Following her, I nodded. I knew she couldn't see me, but speaking seemed like I would be violating her privacy somehow.

By the time we reached the top of the stairs, Echo had rebuilt herself. She turned and smiled. I closed the door behind me and smiled back.

"Let's get back to work. We need to figure out what kind of spell Fenton could have cast on Grigori and how to break it. Everything will be fine. Don't worry about Victor. He's safe." Echo said and turned back to the office.

We worked for a few more hours, before Echo ordered some blood tea. I realized that she had only eaten the blood food earlier. It was like she was becoming more vampiristic.

We were reading through magic books while Marius was on the computer. Echo would have to go help him from time to time. He was searching through as much information as he could online about domestic cats.

Valor started drifting around one in the morning and Echo sent him to bed, along with Preston. Echo drank most of the tea and didn't seem to be feeling tired, as she went to make more once we ran out.

While she was gone, I looked up at Marius. "Are you worried about Echo?"

"No. She's doing just fine. We'll get the answers we need before the curse starts affecting her. I'm proud of her. This is the woman I knew was under that soft exterior." He grinned.

"You don't mind how she's changed? Did you know I saw her in the basement listening to Victor raging? She wasn't crying, she was just staring into space. By the time she made it back upstairs, she was like a completely different person." I told him.

"Talia, there is no reason to worry about Echo. She has been the Master of the territory for only a day. The curse won't turn on her for at least a few weeks. Right now, we need to focus on Victor." Marius said.

The cat sat on his cushion and chattered. I wished we had someone who understood him in the room. He looked happy with himself as he turned in a few circles and curled in a ball to sleep.

A few more hours passed, when Echo's alarm went off. She sighed and stretched. I looked at the clock. It was five in the morning.

"You aren't considering training after not sleeping all night." I said.

"Of course. I'll take a nap after training. There are a lot more books to go over. I'll only have afternoons next week, since I need to get my testing done. I have time to sleep in on Monday because I don't have a first period class. Gray can drive me to school. That means I can go to bed after training and sleep for about four hours. That's all I need." Echo explained.

“Go dress for training, Echo. I’ll meet you out there.” Marius told her and shoed her away.

“Marius. She’s going overboard. It’s one thing for a vampire to stay up this long, she’s still human.”

“She’s just serious about saving your childe, Talia. I’m going to go train with her. It will give me a chance to see how much work she needs.” He smiled as he headed out the door.

Echo may have been taking healing Victor more seriously, but it didn’t stop me from worrying. She needed to stay healthy in order for her to remain useful in this endeavor. I would talk to her about it later.

Finn and I worked on the books until Lisa came to get us for breakfast. She put some fish into the cage for the cat. He meowed at her and ate.

In the dining room, Marius was seated next to Echo on one side and Gray was on her other. It made sense. Her sire should be seated in a place of honor. I sat beside him.

Rosario came in, rubbing his eyes and alone. I knew Sean was going to be staying with his parents, but it was strange to see them apart. They were like Dillon and Jean-Claude. Always together.

Soon, the table was surrounded. The wolves brought out our meal and retreated to the kitchen to have their own. Echo ate a lot more than she had at dinner. I was relieved to see her having a full meal.

“Did you make much progress last night?” Preston asked.

“I finished one of the books, but there are a few more. Marius, make sure to thank Lila for me. All these books came from her, right?” Echo smiled.

“Of course. She is only too happy to help resolve this. I will give her an update later and pass on your thanks.” Marius responded.

“Echo, did you stay up all night?” Harmony asked.

“Yes, but I’m going to take a nap after breakfast. Don’t worry. I’m used to getting by on very little sleep. I’ll be fine.” Echo told her. “I need to get this curse taken care of so everyone will be safe.”

“We can work on reading some while you’re napping. We can work on it all day. I want you to go to bed at a decent hour tonight. You know Victor wants you to pass your tests.” Harmony requested.

“I will. Gray, I’d like you to sleep with me tonight. If you’re done being mad at me, that is.” Echo said, looking at him from the corner of her eye.

“I’m not mad at you, Echo. I’m mad at your behavior. It’s not right. This isn’t you.” He insisted.

“I’m sorry, Gray. This really is me. I need to keep everyone safe. I need to save Victor. If I could do that by being nice, I would. Fenton told us that he would never reveal what he did. He’s already been expecting torture. He knows he could just tell us everything and we would be more than happy to care for him and treat him nicely. He gains nothing by being this stubborn. He just wants people to suffer.” Echo explained.

“Then, I can’t sleep with you. Not unless you promise not to hurt him.” Gray said.

Gray had been like this about sacrificing someone to find Echo as well. He was really a moral person with hard lines of ethics. Not something I was used to.

Vampires tend to have more flexible moral standards. Echo was thinking like a vampire. She wasn’t doing anything unexpected, just abnormal.

Echo just nodded and returned to her meal. I could imagine that hurt her, but Echo acted as if she was fully expecting it. Marius, on the other hand, scowled at Gray.

When the meal was over, Echo went upstairs to shower and sleep. She promised everyone she would be down by noon. I decided I would stay up as long as Marius was there. I didn’t want him hurting Gray over this rejection.

Everyone, with the exception of Jean-Claude and Samuel, went to the office after the meal. Some sat on chairs, others on the couch, some on the floor or perched on the arms of the couch. I handed out magic books and everyone started reading, except Marius, who was on the computer and occasionally looked up to glare at Gray.

The cat chattered, chirruped, meowed, and hissed, but no one acknowledged it. I wondered what he was saying. It was probably not anything good. I could imagine he was taunting the people who could understand him.

To their credit, no one said anything or gave any outward appearance of being upset. I could see Harmony taking soothing breaths from time to time, but, otherwise, she just kept on reading. I certainly wasn’t prepared for the person breaking to be Marius.

“Why are you being so unreasonable with my daughter, wolf?” He snarled.

Cam looked startled. Harmony patted his hand.

“Not you, honey. Read your book.”

Fenton meowed and hissed. Marius glared at him and hissed back. His fangs were fully extended, he was angry.

“I’m not being unreasonable. I told her what I wanted. She refused. She told me what she wanted and I refused. There’s no middle ground here. Echo will hate herself at the end of this if she lets him get tortured. She’s not thinking straight because Victor is in danger.” Gray insisted.

“She’s thinking more clearly than anyone I’ve ever known. My daughter doesn’t balk at torture of bad people. Where, precisely, do you think Daniel Darknight is? He’s in my dungeons being tortured. At any point, Echo could have asked me to stop torturing him. She gets updates from me on if he’s said anything useful, but doesn’t care that he’s being tortured. You didn’t seem to be too upset about him.”

“What vampires do to other vampires is none of my business. That cat isn’t a vampire! He hasn’t caused the same destruction Daniel did!” Gray exclaimed.

“By the very nature of what he did, that creature did more harm than Daniel did. Consider, what would have happened if Fenton hadn’t forced Grace to go East to marry? She would have mated with Grigori. She probably would have given birth to dhampyrs of her own. Daniel would have been on the other side of the country and would never have claimed the children for his own. They would have been protected by their sire and their grandsire. I can tell you, no vampire wants to engage the High Council. The Prince would have been their grandsire. This triad wouldn’t have existed, but another would have likely occurred much sooner. That witch is the cause of all the death and destruction wreaked here and in the state where my children were born. And they are my children, cat. I may not understand your language, but I understood your tone.” Marius growled.

The cat growled back and hissed.

“He is our father. You were a sperm donating kidnapper, Fenton. I agree with Echo. Torture him, kill him, rid the world of his evil.” Harmony huffed.

“Sorry, Gray. You’re on the losing side of this fight. I’m with my sisters. You may think that’s a cute little kitty, but he’s a vile and evil creature. You can’t understand the shit he’s saying. Echo will never forgive herself if she lets him win. She will totally forgive herself if she lets him get tortured. She was tortured for years and never did anything wrong. That was also his fault. If Daniel hadn’t taken us, then the Gales would have never stolen us from him. Echo would never have been tortured like she was. This is really nothing to us.” Valor told him.

“Really? All of you are okay with this? Preston? Dillon? Rosario? What about you, Cam, you can’t be okay with this.” Gray argued.

“My entire family was wiped out by Daniel Darknight. That cat forced my grandmother to leave her home and a man who could protect her. Sure, I may not exist if that hadn’t happened, but she deserved happiness and she deserved safety. Most of all, she deserved to die from something other than a selfish vampire’s attack.” Preston scowled.

Fenton chattered. He moved close to the bars of the cage and chirruped. I was starting to understand his tones. He was asking questions. He was trying to get their attention. I turned to him.

“The entire coven was wiped out. That means your daughter and both of your other sons were killed along with any other descendants who were living in the coven at the time. This was your fault. You sent them somewhere unsafe and without protection. Tell us how to end this curse and you can be cared for by these children rather than hated by them.” I said.

He looked away, then turned back to his bed and curled up again. At least he was quiet now.

“It’s not my circus and not my monkeys.” Dillon snorted. “I’m just here to train Echo.”

“My people were left unprotected because of him. I won’t shed a tear. Maybe when they’re done, they can go collect my father for a little medicine of his own.” Rosario scoffed.

I planned to. Once this was over, I was going to end the life of that fae. He betrayed his people, he harmed his child, and he was a selfish ruler.

“Cam? Come on. You can’t agree with this.” Gray pled.

“Sorry, bro. He’s a bad kitty. Harmony told me some of the shit he was talking. I’m not on board with that little fuck getting away with anything. You’ve always been softer than me that way. You’ve always been the softest one in the group, man.” Cam shrugged.

Gray closed his book, set it on the coffee table, and left the room. I felt for the boy. It can be hard being the most moral person in a room. This was going to be a very difficult time for him. I hoped he could learn to deal with what was to come.

The Descent

Chapter 144 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

I woke from the most terrible nightmare. Fenton had broken free and turned back into a witch. He killed Harmony, Val, and Gray while they slept. When I finally found him, he was throwing a fireball that engulfed Victor in flames.

Tears were flowing down my face as I startled awake. I was alone in my cold bed. No one was there to comfort me. My heart ached.

Fenton wouldn't be happy until he'd destroyed everything. I couldn't let him win. I had to keep my family safe.

Quickly, I dressed and checked my phone. It was lunch time. Though I didn't feel fully rested, I wasn't feeling as sluggish as I had been. That was good.

I headed downstairs. I could hear everyone in the dining room getting settled. Before I could go in, I needed to be sure Fenton was still safely locked in his cage.

The office door was open a crack and I could hear Gray in there. He was talking to someone. It took me a moment to realize it was Fenton he was talking to.

"Please, just tell them what they want to know. They may think they're alright with torture, but they aren't. Not really. They will hate themselves for hurting you. All of you just got off on the wrong foot. Echo is a good and sweet girl. Valor lives up to his name at all times. Harmony is a friend to everyone with a kind heart and a loving spirit. You've known Sean his entire life. He's a smart guy with a lot of strength. Please. Don't make them do this." Gray pled.

My poor mate. He was really a soft and sweet boy. So different from my cool, commanding Victor.

"You're weak. At least I can have some pride in the first three. They are strong supernaturals who don't bow to weak emotions like sympathy when it comes to their enemies." Fenton answered. "Unlike the fae faggot. He may act strong, but the fact that he couldn't accept his fate as a witch with no affinity shows his weakness. Falling for the fae prince like some woman."

"That didn't sound like you were agreeing." Gray sighed. "Just tell them about the spell you cast on Grigori. You don't have to tell them how to break it, just the name. Please."

"You're an idiot if you think I would give away one of the few bargaining chips I have. This is futile. I should just pretend like I'm agreeable so you'll be embarrassed when they come back in here and I tell them nothing." Fenton scoffed.

I leaned against the wall by the door. I wanted to go in there and yell at him for insulting Gray like that. But I knew that would just make Gray more upset with me.

"None of them will ever figure out what spell I used and, soon, the vampire girl will start going mad. I control the descent. My sights are set fully on her, now." Fenton growled.

There was no fear in me at hearing that. I knew the curse had turned its focus on me. I'd already heard the whispers Victor had told me about. They were poking around in my head trying to find my weakness.

They wouldn't, though. I kept shutting them down. Victor didn't know what he was fighting. I did. That would be the difference in how it affected us.

His loves were me and his territory. He thought about both of us a lot. My focus was mostly on resolving the curse. It couldn't make me crazy passionate about destroying it. I knew that.

Something Fenton said was resonating with me. The descent. I had seen spells in the spellbook I was reading that had names like that. Maybe that was the name of the spell he'd used.

"Come on, Fenton. I really don't want you to get hurt. You need to give up on this revenge. Echo, Victor, and I are going to live a very long time. We can take care of you." Gray offered.

"None of you will outlive this curse. I'll destroy all of you. I don't care that she's my descendant. She's just some vampire whore, like Grace would've been if I'd let her go with the vampire. Can you imagine giving up the sort of power she had just to become a filthy bloodsucker?! It's indecent. It's against the goddess. It's against nature. And how they talked about her having his children. Disgusting. Vampires are dead. They just aren't smart enough to know to stop moving." Fenton replied with a hiss.

"I won't stop asking. I'm going to wear you down, Fenton." Gray muttered.

"Over my dead body, you flea-bitten mongrel. Don't you have a tree to piss on? Get out of my face. You stink."

I pushed the door open and entered the room. Gray was sitting in front of the cage. Books were piled on the coffee table. The room was empty, aside from him and the cat.

Gray didn't move as I crossed the room. He had to have smelled me and heard the door open. I ached for him. My poor sweet mate. He really wanted to save the jerk who kept calling him terrible things.

I draped my arms over his chest and kissed him on the cheek. Gray stiffened. I knew he was still mad at me.

"My sweet Gray. Please don't be mad at me." I gently kissed down his neck to his mark.

"Tell me you won't torture him, angel."

"I'm not planning to torture him." I replied. "That's why I called in Marius."

"You know what I mean, Echo. Don't let anyone torture him." Gray whispered.

I sucked on his mark, making him groan. Gray moved his head to the side, giving me better access to his neck. I pulled back and extended my fangs. I was so hungry.

My fangs pierced his neck and retracted. I started sucking at his sweet blood. My hands slid up and down his muscular stomach as I fed.

Glancing up at Fenton, he was watching with wide eyes. He had probably never seen a vampire feed in his unnaturally long life. I licked over the bite, sealing the wound.

Moving quickly, I settled in Gray's lap with my legs around his waist. I caressed his face while looking into his heavy lidded eyes. His arms went around me and he held me close. I rested my head on his chest.

"I love you, Gray, but I can't give up on doing what I need to do to save Victor and all the supernaturals in the territory. This goes beyond our home. If Victor ever gets out of the basement, he won't stop killing until he thinks this territory is safe and secured. You will be one of the people he kills first. I can't let that happen." I murmured.

"You'll be the one killing. You'll slip into madness just like every other bloodsucker who's taken up the mantle of Master. You're exactly the monster I thought you were. How disgusting that you're putting your lover in your husband's place while he's suffering. What kind of whore are you that you would flaunt your affairs in your own husband's house? This is what I was protecting Grace from when I forbade her from being with that vampire." Fenton muttered.

I wrapped my arms around Gray's chest and snuggled into him. I was going to take Rosario's stance on this. I didn't care what he said. He wasn't important for anything except the curse.

"What's he saying?" Gray asked, hopefully.

"That I'm a whore for replacing my husband with my lover. The same sort of stuff Fenton always says." I shrugged.

Gray growled. "You aren't going to tell him I'm your husband too?"

"I don't think he would actually care." I replied.

"Of course I care. Obviously, vampires are lacking and can't keep a woman satisfied. Especially if you had to go out to the pound to pick out a dog to rut with. If Grace had realized this, I'm sure she would have thanked me." Fenton laughed.

"So you just wanted to make sure your daughter was sexually satisfied? Was that what you wanted, Fenton? Did you secretly want to fuck your daughter? Is that why you rubbed up on me when we first met? Because you saw the object of your desire in front of you again? Did you check the witch you sent her off with to ensure he had the type of equipment to satisfy a woman?" I answered in a vicious tone.

"That's gross." Gray shuddered.

"I know, right? Let's go to lunch. You tasted a little low on vitamins and proteins." I said, climbing off Gray's lap and helping him stand.

“Twist my words and run away like a child. Go on. Giggle and snicker like you’ve won. In the end, I’m going to be the only winner.” Fenton scoffed.

“In the end, there will be no winner, because this isn’t a contest. I will end this curse and send you off to live with some old cat lady or something. Somewhere in town, so you can see the supernaturals thrive without your curse keeping them down.” I replied and led Gray out to the hallway.

He closed the door to the office and pulled me into his arms. I looked up at him confused. Why did he stop?

“Echo. That wasn’t like you, angel. I’ve never heard you say something like that before. Are you alright?” Gray asked.

“I’m not sure what you mean, Gray. I’m fine. I just want to get you fed before we get back to work.” I said.

“You don’t talk like that, Echo. Are you sure the curse isn’t having an effect on you?” He asked.

Squeezing him tightly, I thought about it. Was that unlike me? It was just the explanation that made the most sense and I knew it would put Fenton in his place after all the nasty things he’d been saying.

“You’re colder. Not just your personality, but your body. I’m worried about you, angel. I don’t want to lose you like we lost Victor.” Gray murmured and kissed the top of my head.

“Let’s get you fed. I’ll do my best to fight the curse, Gray. I don’t want to worry about your health while I’m trying to keep it from digging into my head.

I took him to the dining room and settled him in the seat next to me, then had Wendell bring a plate in for him. She asked about me and I told her I’d already eaten. Sean and Rosario were sitting close to each other. Val seemed to be more relaxed with Cam and was talking to him in a friendly way.

Everyone seemed to be eyeing Gray and me. I imagined that he had kept on with this anti-torture talk. Seeing us being so close when we were on different sides of such an important subject must have thrown them.

No one was really talking now that we’d appeared. I played with the silverware that was set in my place while I waited for the meal to be over. I was so distracted that I didn’t really notice the conversation had started up.

“I just want you all to keep an eye out.” Gray was saying.

“Just because you disagree with Echo, doesn’t mean the curse is taking her over.” Val sighed.

“It’s not just the disagreement. Forget about the torture stuff altogether. She’s really not acting like herself. Last night, she barely ate anything at dinner. She’s been drinking blood tea, which she never did before, and today, instead of having lunch, she drank my blood. Her temperature is lower than it’s been in weeks.” Gray replied in an exasperated tone.

“Echo? You’ve been having more blood than normal?” Harmony asked.

“I get sleepy when I eat normal food. I need to be awake this afternoon. If you don’t want to feed me, Gray, I can just have blood from the bag.” I scoffed.

“It wasn’t that I didn’t like feeding you or didn’t want to. You know I love feeding you, Echo. I don’t know why you’re not more worried. You’re changing.” He insisted.

“We’ll keep an eye out. If she does something uncharacteristic of what we know of her, we’ll talk to you and Talia.” Preston said. “It’s a small concession.”

Everyone around the table agreed. I didn’t like it, but it would give me one less thing to think about. I could just do what I wanted and they would let me know when I was acting weird.

“I want all of you to focus on finding a spell with a name like ‘The Descent’. I think that’s what the name of this spell is. I heard what Fenton was saying while Gray was trying to convince him to just tell us what we want to know. He said he controls the descent. The way he said it though, it was like he was naming something.” I told them.

“Like the descent into madness?” Dillon asked.

“I think so. That’s what all of the accounts from the other Masters seemed to be. They all go crazy in different ways. I think it plays on your desires and the things you hold dearest in your heart. From what I saw of Victor’s descent. He started becoming more possessive of me and his territory. At first it was little things, then it grew larger until... until he was gone and all that was left was the madness.” I said softly.

Gray’s hand moved to cover mine. He was very warm and it made me feel better when the heat of his body seeped into mine. I grasped his hand and smiled at him.

“Please don’t be mad at me anymore. I don’t want anything to tempt the curse.” I murmured.

“I can’t condone torture, Echo. I just can’t.” He sighed.

“Then work on convincing him until Marius is finished making his plan. I’ll give you that long to get him to agree. Just, stay with me, by my side, until I actually do the thing you don’t want me to do. Please, Gray. My Grayson.” I pled gently with tears in my eyes.

Gray looked at me like he was trying to decipher something. In the end he nodded and squeezed my hand. I grinned. With luck, I could get more out of Fenton if he thought he was speaking to someone who couldn’t understand him.

I was sure Gray would understand if he ever found out. For now, it was best to keep him in the dark. The last thing I wanted was him accusing me of using him. I really did want Gray to forgive me, but I also wanted all the information I could get from Fenton.

“We’ll make sure the room is cleared when you’re trying to convince him. That way he doesn’t feel compelled to just insult everyone. I can stand outside the door and I’ll link you when he accepts. He’ll get suspicious if we all don’t go in and study the magic books. We’ll hammer out times. Probably after dinner. We can say you finished early so you could try to talk to him. I want you to have every chance possible to block his torture, Gray. This is the only way I can think to do it. You know I won’t give up on saving Victor. I need Fenton to talk.” I said.

He grinned and nodded. I was so happy that he liked my plan. I would keep everyone safe. No one else would be taken from me.

Taking a Small Break

Chapter 145 - The Vampire's Servant

We didn’t get much of use after dinner. Just more about how Fenton believed he was going to win. How I was going to fail and go insane. And more insults about me, my friends, and my family.

Everyone else headed to bed at eleven, but I stayed up until one in the morning working on reading through the spell book. Amy was contacting all the witches and covens in her collective, looking for people who might be descended from Fenton. I had a great deal of hope.

When I finally went to bed, Gray was there. He was sleeping and looked very peaceful. I got into my pajamas and crawled into bed next to him. His arms went around me almost instinctively and I started drifting off to sleep.

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Morning came and I was so ready for training. Marius and Talia both commended me on my pace during the morning run. I was a little way behind them, but I didn’t mind. I was thinking of other things while running.

Mostly, I was thinking of what kind of spell would be cast on one person but keep on after that one was dead. Preston told me that most spells would wear off once the person died unless it was cast on a family.

The spells tied to the wards kept the other two spells focused on the area. Preston was pretty sure that this spell was cast on the title of ‘Master of the territory’. He said it was rare, but there was

precedence for it. In one town, the local coven had cast a spell on the title of mayor. Anyone accepting the title would be unable to use the office for selfish means.

He thought it was amusing because of how often people got involved in politics for selfish reasons. The more power the position had, the more it took to cast the spell. A coven could cast it on a mayor, but it would take several covens for a governor and still more for a senator or president. No one could get that many covens to cooperate for a spell like that. Sadly.

Learning to fight with Marius was a trial. He really didn't hold back and I was learning more about the tricky things he would do in a fight. He told me that he would sometimes use his mind control to make his opponents disoriented and then he would attack. He couldn't do that to me, but it gave me ideas.

By the end of training, I was a little tired and had a few bruises. That made Gray growl at Marius. I was healing a lot faster than normal, though, because most of my bruises looked old by the time we went in for breakfast.

After I had eaten my pudding, and a few other things Gray had put on my plate, I went up to shower and change. Gray, Harmony, and I would be going in to school a little later, since we didn't have a first period class.

We spent our morning in the office with Preston and Talia. Marius had left to do more research and work on his torture plan. I was grateful he was coming to help train me every morning. I wanted to be stronger, to keep everyone safe.

Harmony, Preston, and I had to work to ignore Fenton. He was still trying to distract us and get under our skin. We had successfully ignored him for most of the morning. Until Lisa came in with his food.

She had something a little different this morning. It smelled like real food and not raw fish. Lisa smiled at me.

"I thought it couldn't be healthy for him to just eat fish all the time, so I went online and looked up recipes for homemade cat food. I hope you don't mind." She said.

"I appreciate it. Keeping him healthy is important." I replied, turning back to my work.

She opened the smaller slat in the cage where we would put in Fenton's food without risking him escaping. I glanced over as he approached the bowl and sniffed it. He started eating and I was relieved.

"You may do a lot wrong, but at least you keep your n****r in line." Fenton said.

Preston and Harmony gasped. I didn't know that word. From the angry look on Harmony's face, though, I could tell it wasn't good.

“How dare you!?” Harmony shouted. “After she went through the trouble to make you something other than fish. You can’t talk about her like that!”

“Harmony, it’s alright. I couldn’t understand what he said, but I’m used to that. You don’t grow up in a rural area without hearing some bigoted bullshit. I’m going to do my other work now.” Lisa told us and left the room.

“In my time, that wasn’t as offensive as it seems to be now. I’ll have to tuck that away for future use.” Fenton chuckled.

I sighed. He was really trying to break our focus in any way that he could. Harmony was really easy to anger, she’d always had the hotter temper among the three of us. She got really offended on behalf of others too. She blew her top the first time Fenton called Sean a slur.

One thing that actually upset him, was that the only time I rose to his bait was last night. He would always stop laughing and yell at me. He had no idea what sort of environment I had been raised in. Yelling didn’t fluster me, it only made me work harder.

“Aren’t you going to defend your little servant girl?” Fenton asked incredulously.

“She’s not bothered, I’m not bothered.” I replied and focused on my work.

“How can you not be bothered?” Harmony asked.

“I don’t know that word or what it means. I only know that you find it offensive. If I take the time to learn, I will also find it offensive, I’m sure. Right now, that word is not nearly as important as a word I heard yesterday. A word I’m intent on finding. If you keep letting him rile you up like this, I’m going to have to ask you to work in the library, Harmony.” I said, curtly.

“More like a vampire every day.” She muttered and returned to her book.

I smiled. That may be an insult to some people, but it wasn’t to me. It just made me happy. I needed to be more like a vampire in order to run this territory and this team.

An hour later, Gray said it was time to go to school. We would only be there for an hour and a half. I was looking forward to finishing my test and coming home.

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The test had been pretty easy. A lot of the stuff had been covered in the test prep we did in the last week of school. If all the exams were this easy, I knew I could pass them and make Victor proud.

I sent Gray in, alone, to try and get Fenton to talk. He was more forthcoming than he had been last night. He said that, even if we did find the spell, we wouldn't be able to break it without him. Then he devolved into more name calling and mockery.

Once everyone was home, we went into the office. Harmony, Cam, Sean, and Rosario decided to take their books into the library. I felt that was for the best. Preston was pretty good at ignoring Fenton and I didn't let him under my skin.

When the alarm to heat the beds went off, I went up to Victor's room and turned on the blanket for Finn and Talia. Today was the first day Victor would need to be fed. I went down to the kitchen to see what we had for him.

The bags of blood were all negative types. No AB negative, though. That was rare and the donors who had it made more money as live donors than as bag donors. I wanted Victor to have what he liked. I wanted him healed as soon as possible. My blood was more powerful than a regular human's.

I pulled out my phone and dialed Drew. It seemed to take forever for him to pick up. I had to reach him though, I needed to talk to Silence about drawing my blood for Victor.

"Echo! I haven't heard from you in weeks! How's school? How are you? How's Victor? I heard about the curse. Do you need something from me?" He asked as soon as he picked up.

"Hey, Drew. I'm fine. School is fine. Victor is safe. I need to talk to Silence." I said.

"You know she's not awake yet." Drew replied.

"I need to come see her as soon as she can have visitors. Please." I told him.

"I'll call you once she's up and ready to see people. You sure it's not something I can do for you?"

"You could, but I wanted to check in with her. I'm the Master of this territory now. I need to be kept informed of how the vampires are doing. I worry about falling out of the loop. Everything will be fine, Drew. Trust me." I promised and hung up.

I told Lisa and Wendell that no one was to feed Victor and I'd be doing it later. They were to tell anyone who wanted to feed him what was going on and that they were to speak to me. The girls nodded and said they would take care of it.

All I had to do was go back and work on the curse until I got the call from Drew. That was easy enough. All I wanted to do anymore was look through the books and try to break this curse. It was my responsibility to save everyone, to save Victor.

While I was heading into the office, Gray came out. He had a concerned look on his face. I went to him and took his hand.

“What’s wrong, Gray?” I asked.

“You’re getting too wrapped up in your work. I know you can’t feel what Victor and I feel, because you don’t have our marks, but I can feel what you feel. I know that you’re strained. Come with me. We’re going to de-stress you.” He said and pulled me back to the kitchen and out the back door.

For all that I’d had them use light tinting on the windows, it was still much dimmer than it was outside. I squinted at him in the early afternoon light. Gray ran off and returned with some trimming shears for the garden.

He pulled me over to my plants and dropped my hand. I looked at him confusedly as he handed me the trimmers. Gray smiled.

“Thirty minutes in the garden. Then you can go back to poring over your books.” Gray told me.

“Gray, I have a lot of work to do.” I sighed.

“Rosario said your garden has been sad since you haven’t been out here much. I know you don’t want your plants to be sad. I bet they’re happy to see you.” He winked.

I turned to the garden and started walking through the rows, clipping dead flowers and unruly branches. It was actually very refreshing. This was something I was used to and could do with confidence.

In the search for the answers, I felt nervous. Like I could mess everything up. I worked even harder to look confident because of it. Everyone responded well to it, too.

While I worked, plants with vines would reach out to me. Branches would reach to be nearer to my hands. I stroked the leaves of the plants gently. It was very relaxing.

I worked in the garden until my phone started ringing. It was starting to get dark, the sun was barely even visible above the horizon. That had to have been more than thirty minutes.

“You lied to me.” I grumped at Gray.

“I tried to get your attention, but you were into what you were doing. I think you needed the break more than you realized.” He replied with a soft smile.

Drew’s name showed up on my phone screen and I answered it. I needed to get blood for Victor. Then I could go back to searching for answers.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Mistress Nightshade, this is Silence. How may I be of assistance this evening?” Silence asked on the other end of the line.

“Silence, I need to speak with you privately. Do you have time to meet with me this evening?” I replied.

“I have an hour before I start interviews for a few prospective donors. Can you get down here in that time?” She inquired.

“I can be there in less than five minutes. Just stand in a clear area.” I told her.

“I’ll see you soon.” Silence said and hung up.

I handed the shears to Gray and headed toward the house to wash my hands. He ran to put them away and met up with me in the hallway as I was coming out of the powder room downstairs.

“What’s going on?” Gray asked.

“I need to meet with Silence. I’m going to use my ability to travel over there and I’ll be home as soon as I’m done. Make sure no one goes to feed Victor while I’m gone.” I told him.

“Do you want me to go with you?”

“No. This is vampire business. I need you here looking after Victor and reading through the magic books. Please, Gray.” I smiled and took his hand. “Can you do that for me?”

He looked at our joined hands and sighed. There was a little sadness in his eyes. I didn’t know what to say to make him feel better.

“I will. Will there ever be a time when you do things like this for me, though? It feels like you’re always focused on Victor. Even when the curse wasn’t affecting him as much, I was like an afterthought. When do I get to be your focus?” Gray said softly, looking away from me.

“As soon as I’ve fixed Victor. I remember you saying we’d go on a honeymoon after our wedding. That will be just you and me. No Victor, no Val, no Harmony, and no curse. I love you, but I have to focus on other things right now.” I told him.

“Tell me why you’re going to see Silence and I’ll trust that you’re telling the truth. That you’re not just blowing smoke up my ass until you can have your Victor again.” He insisted.

“I’m going to have her draw some blood for me so I can feed it to Victor. He needs powerful blood to help him heal. I have powerful blood and it’s his favorite type.” I answered.

“Why can’t you just ask Silence to supply you with some powerful blood? Why does it have to be yours?” Gray pressed.

I sighed. “Silence may not have anyone as powerful as me. It’s not like she’s taking all of my blood, Gray. All we need is two bags. That should last more than enough time to get Victor back.

One bag is about three cups of blood. That's six feedings right there. No risk to me. No waiting while Victor tries to heal using human blood. I know this will work, Gray. I can feel it."

This was taking too long. I didn't want to keep Silence waiting. I needed to get going. Gray still looked upset, but there was nothing I could do. No argument was getting through to him.

"I'll see you when I get back. This is really only a small thing, Gray. I promise, everything will go back to normal once I figure out the curse." I said.

He turned away from me. "Sure.... Normal.... I guess I shouldn't expect more. I'll do what you wanted. Have a nice visit with Silence."

Gray walked toward the office. I wanted to stop him and talk more, but I was torn because I also wanted to go take care of this blood situation. I'd figure it all out and talk to him later. Gray would understand. I'd make him see that this was the right thing.

Hearing Things

Chapter 146 - The Vampire's Servant

I appeared in an office that was very nicely decorated. There was a stately desk with two leather armchairs in front of it. Behind the leather office chair were some wood paneled filing cabinets.

The room was done in rich cherry tones with lighter pink and forest green accents. It felt very inviting. Silence was standing nearby, looking at me curiously.

She was regal in her nice suit. She looked like a very serious business woman, just a step down in elegance from what she looked like at the ball. Her hair was done up in a severe bun and she was wearing just a light amount of makeup.

"Mistress Nightshade." She said with a slight bow.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Silence. Thank you for seeing me on such short notice."

"Please, have a seat. I'll have Drew bring some refreshments. Is there anything you'd like?" Silence asked.

"Blood tea, please." I smiled.

"I didn't realize you were drinking blood still. I thought you had gone back to human food." She replied.

“I have blood foods added to my menu. It helped me heal a lot and aided my recovery from malnourishment. Thank you, again for helping Victor save me.”

“No problem at all. It made me realize how complacent I had become in my position. As a lieutenant for the territory, I am finding my stride with the added work and starting to realize there was just not enough to keep me occupied before.” Silence said.

She smiled tightly. I knew this had to be uncomfortable for her. Talking to humans about vampire business wasn't something vampires did.

“I didn't know if you were aware, but Talia named me Master of the territory recently. That's part of the reason I had Victor's work split between you and Talon. I'm not as adept at knowing what is right and healthy for vampires. I want to keep the territory in good shape for Victor's return.” I told her.

“So he really has been taken by the curse?”

“Yes. But this should stay between us and Talon. I don't want any revolt from the other vampires if they found out a dhampyr was in charge of the territory.” I replied.

The door to the office opened and Drew came in with a tea service. He settled it carefully and poured tea for both of us. I added sugar and cream to mine and sipped it. O positive.

I could see why Victor liked negative types better. They didn't have that thicker flavor. They were just smoother.

“Is there anything else I can get for you, Mistress?” Drew asked.

“No. Go work on cleaning up. We have guests coming this evening.” She said, shooing him away.

We sipped our tea for a little longer. This room was more peaceful than my office. There was no cat in the corner being obnoxious. No shuffling of paper and sighing. No feeling of barely contained urgency.

“How is the territory doing?” I asked.

“All vampires seem content. The daytime servant agency has a building not far from here. They're figuring out the best way to vet humans before sending them out to vampires in need.” Silence answered.

“Good. I'm glad it's coming together.” I smiled.

“Why are you here, Mistress Nightshade? What can I do for you? I can't imagine you came here just to chat about the territory. You gave me and Talon the work of caring for the vampires

because you knew you weren't fit for it. You can't be second guessing yourself." She sighed. "I could have told you all this over the phone."

"I'm not. I just wanted an update before I moved on to what I'm really here for. You do blood draws here, correct?" I asked.

"Yes." Silence said hesitantly.

"I want my blood drawn. I need to take the blood back for Victor. I figured this was the safest way to get him my blood." I told her.

"Oh. Yes, Drew can draw your blood and give you the bags. We will assist Master Nightshade in any way we can and would be more than happy to help in this manner. As much as I like you, and goodness knows Drew is half in love with you, I would rather have an elder vampire running this territory than a dhampyr who isn't even old enough to drink." She replied.

I understood that. Vampires respected age. There were no vampires my age and my lack of experience wouldn't lend to any sort of confidence.

"Frankly, I was thrilled when he announced that he had been named Master of the territory. His declaration of you as his Solus Amor at the ball turned heads. No one has found a Solus Amor here in a century. Everyone was hopeful this would ring in a new era for the place." Silence said.

"With luck, we'll have this curse broken sooner rather than later and people will find their mates. We've already broken a portion of it and we have an idea how to fix other parts. We're just waiting on everything we need for it." I confided.

"And we'll be able to leave this place? Not that I want to quit my position, I would just like to go visit my sire. I haven't seen him since fifty years before I moved here. I've warned him away from this territory, because I didn't know how quickly the curse would trap us. I tried to leave a decade after I moved here and I nearly drained Drew after we crossed the state lines into Nevada." She told me.

"I promise. I will break this curse and you will all be free to come and go as you please." I said.

"I'll hold you to that, Mistress. Drew is waiting for you in the hallway. He will take you to our blood drawing room. It takes about twenty to thirty minutes and he'll want you to have a snack and rest before you leave." Silence replied, standing behind her desk.

I set the tea cup down and stood as well. She swept her arm toward the door and I went out into the hall. Drew was standing there, as she said he would be, and guided me to a room in the back with a small bed with an adjustable base.

He worked quietly and diligently. It was like an entirely different side of Drew. I liked it a lot more than I thought I should. Drew was fun, but I liked knowing he could get to business too.

Soon, I was sitting in the bed with a needle in my arm, watching my blood flow into the thick blood bag at the foot of the bed. I was relieved that it was so easy to care for Victor while he was safely tucked away. I knew he would be grateful. Once he realized I kept him safe, Victor would be so happy with me.

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[Gray]

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I turned in time to see Echo disappear. She didn't even hesitate. All she ever talked about anymore was the curse and Victor.

Normally, I didn't care. I was confident in our relationship and her dedication to me. But, when she didn't tell Fenton I was her mate it pissed me off. Echo hadn't denied our relationship since before she was taken.

After a week of feeling like she loved Victor more than me, I had realized that her love for each of us was equal, but different. It felt like I was a child in our relationship. I was a lot more impulsive than Victor.

He was trying to seduce her at the same time I was, but Val focused on me. Sean and Harmony had a quiet word with me as well. No one told Victor to back off.

I felt guilty about being mad at him when he was locked up in the cells, but last night, I kissed Echo when I woke up before she did and she called me Victor. He was always on her mind and she treated me like an idealistic boy. She didn't care about what I had to say.

Everyone was against me because I didn't want them to torture the cat. I didn't care that he was actually an asshole witch. No one deserved to be tortured, especially not someone so much weaker than everyone else.

I paused at the door to the office when I heard someone saying my name. Where they talking about me again? About how weak and whiney I was, obviously.

"I thought wolves were supposed to be tougher than that." Finn scoffed.

"He's a pack wolf. They have more conservative ideas than rogues do. Bellamy agrees with the torture. She says if the cat won't talk, we need to make him." Talia said.

Fenton made some sounds.

"It's not getting him to talk. It's getting him to talk about the things we actually want to hear. Not his hierarchy of women in this house who look good enough to be in his bed, if he were

human. Not his opinions on homosexuals, other supernaturals, and people of color. And certainly not his insistence that we will fail at our endeavor.” Preston muttered.

There was some shuffling. I leaned against the wall. I wanted to hear what people were saying behind my back. It sounded a lot like the things they said to my face. I couldn’t help it if I was more moral than everyone else here.

“He was just like this when we found out Lila’s spell would require a sacrifice.” Talia chuckled. “Just as against the whole situation, even if it meant losing Echo, he didn’t want to sacrifice another living being.”

That made my ears perk up. I didn’t remember them saying anything about a sacrifice. Only that Lila could take care of getting the spell cast.

“What do you mean, even if it meant losing Echo?” Preston asked. “Sacrifice is never the only option, for dark witches it’s just the easiest. What happened?”

“The vampire who killed your family kidnapped Echo. He had a dark witch make a spell to help hide him while he had Echo. He planned to get all of the triplets, but we were closing in and he decided to run. If we hadn’t found her when we did, Echo would have been half way to the east coast before we realized where they were taking her. Once she was in Daniel’s territory, it would have been a lot harder to claim her. He would have worked to impregnate her, even using fertility spells. If she was with his child, Victor’s claim that she was stolen would have had less impact. Echo would never leave a child to be raised by vampires after what she went through, she would have stayed with Daniel.” Talia explained.

My stomach clenched. She was right. Echo would never leave an innocent child to suffer what she did. She would’ve wanted to ensure the baby was okay.

“How do you know that was his plan?” Preston asked.

“He’s proven quite talkative while in Marius’ care. My broodmate finds the most effective ways to get what he wants to know. Daniel pleads for death daily. Marius has sentenced him to two thousand years of torture. No one has heard of him giving such a sentence before. Not even Daniel’s sire can get him to lessen it.” Talia chuckled.

“I disapprove of using death magic, but I would hate to know that Echo was suffering like that. I will make an offering to the goddess for the soul of the man sacrificed.” Preston murmured.

“Don’t bother. He was a very bad man. Marius doesn’t often take prisoners who don’t deserve it.” Talia answered.

“I’ll still do it. As a light witch, I can’t just stand by and not do anything for a life taken for magic.” He replied.

I opened the door and glared at Talia. She didn't seem bothered. Talia looked at me with a bored expression.

"Does Echo know someone died for her? Why don't I remember any of this?" I demanded.

"Echo doesn't know, but I'm sure she would prefer it to the fate she would have had. You don't remember because I erased it from your memory. I can do it again if you like? You never have to know." Talia offered.

"What the hell makes you think I don't want to remember something like that? I stood by like an idiot while you sentenced a man to die. It's as bad as torturing Fenton." I growled.

The cat made some noises like a growling hiss. I didn't know who he was talking to, and I didn't really care. Talia had just erased my memory like it didn't even matter.

I turned to him and Rex growled through me. I knew my eyes had changed to Rex's wolf eyes and that my teeth were more pointed than normal. I was pissed off, Rex was pissed off. Neither one of us like being manipulated.

Fenton arched his back and looked like one of those black cat Halloween decorations. At least he was taking this seriously. Maybe I should just give him a good scare.

When I took a step toward the cage, Talia moved to block me and Finn's hand came down on my shoulder. I snarled at them, but they didn't react. No one took me seriously.

"He knows you won't hurt him, Gray. You've already shown that you won't accept torture or murder. Do you honestly think he'll take you seriously? You have no credible threat, Gray. He's just winding you up." Talia said coolly.

"Then why are you stopping me?" I hissed.

"Because we don't want to risk your wolf doing something if you let him out much more. Your human side may be sympathetic, but your wolf is an animal. There's a threat to his mate, he wants to remove it. You will regret what your wolf does if you let him loose around that little kitty." Finn answered.

'Let me loose. He might say something before I eat him.' Rex insisted.

'No. We need him alive. 'Might' isn't good enough. We need more.'

'You keep saying Victor is your friend. We love Echo. This bastard is keeping a secret that endangers both of them. Echo is the Master of this territory. The curse is coming for her. Every minute that we spend pussyfooting around, is a minute closer to losing her the way she lost Victor.'

He had a point. I was torn. I wanted to save Echo, but I didn't want it like this. Not with torture. If he were something more imposing than a cat, I might have felt differently. They were right, his form was what was making me like this.

I pushed Finn's hand off my shoulder and let out a huff. I didn't need to be part of this. I'd find some other way to help Echo. I turned and stormed past Finn. He let me go.

Fenton chattered in his cage. Something in the tone of it sent Rex into fits. He insisted we turn around and bite Fenton's head off. I looked to Preston. He was glaring at the cage.

"What did he say?" I asked in a low rumble.

"You don't need to know that, Gray. Go for a run. Let your wolf out outside. Calm down and come back with a cooler head." Preston replied.

I left the room and ran outside, stripping off my clothes. I needed a run anyway. I needed to clear my head and figure out my priorities. I needed to figure out where I fit in this house, in this relationship.

Finding Witches

Chapter 147 - The Vampire's Servant

[Bellamy]

I watched as Lucien laid on the floor of my office. Light music played as Lunette and Étienne crawled all over him. They had started giving 'kisses', which were just slobbering raspberries they blew on people's cheeks.

Lucien picked up Lunette and made her fly around over him. That was a mistake, she was a bit drool-y because of a tooth coming in. I watched as a gob of drool dropped onto his forehead.

She squealed and giggled as he tried to wipe it off on the sleeve of his shirt, waving her around in the air. Étienne pulled himself up to stand, using Lucien's shirt, and started bouncing around like he was dancing, then lurched forward and started mouthing Lucien's ribs.

I was enjoying this family time before the nannies came to take the babies for their afternoon nap. I was sitting on the couch, relaxing after a few hours of paperwork. Jean-Claude and Dillon had chosen seconds in command of their sections and I was just completing a survey of the warriors, plus the reports from my anti-hunter squads.

“Are you just going to watch while they slobber me to death, chouchoutte?” Lucien chuckled as he set Lunette down on the side opposite her brother.

Immediately, she mimicked her brother and started slobbering all over Lucien’s shirt on the other side. I started laughing as he groaned in disgust. I couldn’t help it they were all so adorable.

“You’re laughing while I suffer at the hands of our children? What an evil wife I have!” Lucien said in mock misery while pressing his wrist to his forehead.

“You’re the one who decided to play on the floor with them.” I giggled. “I suppose I can come save you.”

I stood and swooped quickly taking Étienne and Lunette off him and spinning around with them in my arms. They hung on and squealed. I danced them around the office while Lucien got off the floor.

He came up and slowed my movements, kissing me gently and taking Lunette from me. I positioned Étienne so that it was easier to hold him against me and we both danced with the babies.

There was a knock on the door and it opened a little. I stopped moving as much, but kept dancing Étienne around as I turned to see who it was. Evan stepped in.

“Sorry to bother you, Queen Bellamy, but Hannah and Miriam are here to take the babies for their naps. I also have a couple witches here to see you. It’s about the request you sent out to the collective.” She said.

The nannies stepped in behind her and approached to take the babies. Lucien and I gave Étienne and Lunette each a kiss and got our slobbery raspberries in return. We waited until the babies were gone to wipe the spit off our faces.

Evan smiled and waved at the babies as they went by. She didn’t really like kids, but she was always sweet to mine. I appreciated the effort she made, though.

She went back the hallway as we straightened ourselves up. I saw there was even more drool on Lucien’s shirt. I went to one of my file cabinets and pulled out a fresh shirt. They were there for if I happened to tear his shirt in some of our more passionate meetings, but I was finding them useful in this instance as well.

Lucien just finished pulling the new shirt on when Evan returned with the witches. I quickly tossed the soiled shirt into a hamper I had in the corner of the room.

“Queen Bellamy, this is Amelia and Emmalyn Grove. They’re members of the collective in good standing.” Evan said with a slight bow.

The girls bowed. They were both only a couple inches taller than me. Amelia had tight blonde curls that were piled on top of her head. She had warm, brown eyes and a spray of freckles across her nose. She actually looked like a girl version of Echo's friend Sean, if a little on the chubby side.

Her sister was fairly different. Though she had the same spray of freckles, her hair was orange and stick straight. It fell like a waterfall from behind her headband, highlighting her thin frame. She wore thick glasses and had piercing blue eyes.

"Thank you both for coming. You understood the requirements?" I asked.

"You're looking for relations of a witch named Fenton Aimes who lived in the early twentieth century. We're descendants of his sister, Wilma Aimes. Will that do?" Emmalyn asked.

"We're trying to break the wards of an intruder spell Fenton cast around the town he lived in." I explained.

They looked at each other apprehensively. I knew witches couldn't mindlink, but they seemed to be communicating. I waited for them to respond.

"We can't help you with attacking a town. If you have a problem with someone there, you're going to have to figure out another way to deal with them. I'm sorry if this upsets you, but we're light witches. We can't harm anyone unless it's in defense of ourselves or others." Emmalyn replied.

"Oh! It's not so we can attack anyone. Are you not aware of the curse that Fenton cast?" I asked. "We're trying to free people from his curse. They can't leave the state without losing a portion of their power. For vampires, it makes them feel like they're starving all the time. For werewolves and other shifters, it makes them lose their connection to their animal. And for witches, it weakens their powers and affinities."

"Our mother told us there was a city in the state we should never go to, or we wouldn't be able to leave Oregon. He's the one who did that?" Amelia asked. "We have to help, Emmy. We can't just let this stand. That's some dark magic shit."

"Queen Bellamy, may I do a rune casting before we decide?" Emmalyn requested.

"A rune casting?" I questioned.

"I'm an earth witch with the ability to read runes and a special affinity with crystals. I bring them with me everywhere. I'd like to do a reading to see what is truly going on. Not that I don't believe that you believe this story. It just sounds a little out there. No one has ever reversed an intruder spell. It would take a lot of energy." Emmalyn explained coolly.

I stepped aside and indicated the coffee table, which was clear at the moment. I wanted to see what a rune reading was like. I had been down to Sit a Spell, a potion and herb shop with a

teahouse run by a local witch, a couple times and had my tealeaves read. I'd had readings from water witches, but I had never seen an earth witch cast runes.

Emmalyn sat in one of the chairs and scooted forward. I dragged Lucien to the couch so we could watch. Amelia sat in the chair next to her sister and Evan watched from where she was standing near the door. She didn't trust witches much.

We watched as Emmalyn pulled out a bag from her purse. She opened it and removed a red silk cloth which she spread on the table. Then, she dug around in the bag and pulled out a beautiful looking stone and laid it on the cloth.

It had something carved in it. I wanted to reach out and touch it, but I was pretty sure that would be frowned upon. Instead, I just watched closely.

She pulled out five stones in total and arranged them in a pattern. Emmalyn studied each one carefully. She nodded.

"From what I see, you are correct. Fenton Aimes went dark, rare for someone of our family line. I see a powerful triad, a lost king, and a dark queen involved at this point. I would assume you are the dark queen, unless there's a more powerful female involved." Emmalyn murmured.

"Talia. She's an ancient vampire. One of their Master Council. She's a lot darker than I am." I told her.

"Mmhmm. Okay. I see where you would benefit from having us. We can break the wards, but we cannot end the curse." She said, picking up the runes and putting them back in the bag.

"Can you do another reading? Can you see how to break the curse?" I asked.

"I'm sorry. I can do another reading when we arrive, but I can't right now." Emmalyn said.

"Why not??"

"She's recovering from the flu. Emmy can't read runes when she's sick. They don't speak to her properly. We can get our things together and head out. It's only a few hours drive. We can be there by dinner time." Amelia said.

"Will you be alright to help?" I asked Emmalyn.

"Yes. I'm just a little weak still. Don't worry. I can easily break a ward, even sick. We'll take care of it. Like Amelia said, we need to do this. We can't have it on our conscience. One of our family members did this. No light witch worth their salt would let it stand." Emmalyn said curtly. "We'll head out as soon as we pack."

"Evan, get them the address and contact information for Mistress Nightshade. I'll call and let them know you're on the way." I told them.

The women followed Evan out of my office and I grinned at Lucien as the door closed. This was just the break everyone was hoping for. He knew how excited I was to get my territory free of all curses. This would make everyone in my territory free to move around as they pleased, and that would bring in even more people.

None of the Hallowed Moon Pack had been able to participate in the national mating conference. From what Trent told me, there were more chosen mates in his pack than average. No one could get out to meet their perfect match if they were outside of the state.

I wanted to give that to them. A chance to check surrounding areas and anywhere in the world where wolves and other shifters lived. This was part of the goddess' plan for me, I could feel it.

Getting up, I went to my desk and picked up my phone. It was late enough in the afternoon that Echo should be home from school. I dialed her number and she picked up quickly.

“Amy! Any news?” She asked.

“We found two witches who are descended from Fenton's sister. They said they should be able to do what you wanted. They're heading out within the hour and should be to you this evening. Do you have somewhere to put them?” I asked.

“Yes! Gray has been sleeping with me the past few nights. If they're okay sharing a room, I can put them in his room, otherwise, Gray and I could sleep in Victor's room at night and we can put one in my room and one in his. Either way, I've got this. Thank you so much, Amy!” Echo squealed.

I laughed. “I'm glad you're so happy. Let me know if you need anything else. I'll talk to you later.”

“I have to tell everyone and have the girls get the rooms ready! Bye!” Echo said and hung up.

She was certainly cheerful today. I supposed with the week being nearly over, she was excited to be focused fully on the curse. I couldn't imagine having to deal with everything if Lucien were locked away. At least she had Gray to lean on.

Lucien came up behind me and wrapped his arms around me. I leaned against him and he rocked me in time to the music that was still playing. His hands slid down and cradled my stomach.

Soon, our family would grow even larger. With how Lucien doted on our current children, I knew our next litter would be just as spoiled. He had so much love to give and he was just as excited as I was when we heard two little heartbeats at our last doctor appointment.

“Chouchoutte, you remember when we found this desk in that antique shop?” Lucien purred.

“Of course I do, mon saucisson. It was one of my favorite days of our honeymoon.” I murmured.

“Mmm. Mine, too. I was thinking, maybe we should check out a few shops in town. Pick up furniture for some of the other offices.” He suggested.

“You are a dirty old man, Lucien Deveraux.... When do you want to go?” I giggled.

“Right after I make love to your delicious little body.” Lucien said, turning me to face him and sitting me up on my desk.

His hands slipped under my skirt and he drew off my panties slowly, his fingers tracing the outside curve of my legs sensually. I bit my lips together. I could see how much he was restraining himself. That made everything he did that much more intense.

Lucien sat in my chair and pulled my hips to the edge of the desk. He pulled my skirt up and lowered his head. The feeling of his lips kissing my thigh, drawing ever closer to my center, was wonderful. I loved how tender he was.

When he finally reached his goal, his tongue darted out and licked from my opening up to my clit where he sucked, nibbled, and teased, making me squirm. He slipped a finger inside of me, stroking my g-spot as his tongue danced over me.

I could feel my climax building. To think, this time last year I was hunkered down in a cottage on the edge of the pack lands, riding out my heat. Not knowing that this divine Alpha was out there waiting for me to find him.

If not for Kyle’s stupid blind desire and a group of vampires with very low impulse control, I might not have ended up with Lucien. I could only imagine how I would have reacted to knowing he was the Alpha who banished my parents. If we hadn’t bonded before I found out, I would have missed out on my perfect match.

My back arched and my arms flew up, knocking a pile of papers onto the floor. I’d have to get those... later. Now wasn’t the time to think of the mess we were making.

Lucien stood and freed himself from his pants. Gently, he started the slow press into me. I knew he did this just because of how impatient I could be. It always made him laugh when I groaned in frustration. Not this time, though, this time I was savoring him.

He reached down and pulled me up to his chest once he was seated fully inside me. Lucien looked into my eyes and smiled softly. I knew he was as grateful for finding me as I was for finding him. Even when he didn’t say it, I could feel it in the way he smiled at me.

“I love you, Bellamy, my perfect little Queen.” He murmured as he kissed my neck and nibbled my mark.

“I love you, too, Lucien. Forever, my amazing Alpha.” I replied with a happy sigh.

Picking me up, Lucien turned and pressed me into the wall. He moved slowly and firmly inside of me. There was no frenzied need, no driving toward release.

My legs wrapped tightly around his waist as my hips moved to meet his thrusts. His lips left my neck and he kissed his way back up to my lips. Our tongues danced together.

Soon, I was reaching my climax and, by the strained sound of Lucien's breathing, he wasn't far behind. I arched as my body squeezed around him. Lucien thrust a few more times before holding himself firmly inside me.

I felt him filling me. He thrust gently a few more times, ensuring that he'd gotten it all out. Lucien returned to my chair and sat us down. I leaned my head in the crook of his neck while he stroked my back.

It wouldn't always be like this, but I planned to enjoy it while it was. I loved Lucien with every fiber of my being. I finally felt whole. I finally had everything I ever wanted. A large territory, a mate I loved, a growing family, and people who cared about me. I thanked the goddess again for granting me everything my heart desired.

Interludes

Chapter 148 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

Everyone in the office was looking at me. Of course, I had been so excited I forgot myself a little. We'd finished the magic books on Tuesday.

A few had ripped out pages. Some were torn and others were more precisely cut. Lila said that she did the more precise ones, Fenton must have torn out the others. She couldn't remember what was in them, so she was working on spells to bring back lost things in hopes of finding what he took.

Preston was looking at me, hopefully. Harmony and Val stared in shock at my outburst. Fenton was always staring at something, this time it just happened to be me.

I ran out the door and called to Lisa, Wendell, and Gray. They all appeared rather quickly. Werewolf speed was wonderful.

"There are two witches coming from Bellamy's collective. They can help us break the wards. Gray, I need you to gather everything you might need for the next few days and take it to Victor's room. I'll do the same. Since Finn and Talia sleep during the day, we can use it at night.

Wendell, Lisa, I want my room and Gray's room cleaned and prepared for guests. Do any of you know where Sean and Rosario went? We need to talk to Sean's dad." I said.

"They packed up a little food and were doing a picnic for lunch. That was a couple hours ago, but they haven't brought back any of the containers they took. I would have to assume they're on the property, probably enjoying the nice warm weather we're having." Wendell smiled. "Maybe they are taking a nap in the sun."

"They're not werewolves, Wen." Lisa scoffed.

"That doesn't mean they don't like naps in the sun. It's so cozy and comfy. I'd love to have a picnic, then curl up with my mate to nap in the sun.... If I ever find him." Wendell sighed.

"We'll get this curse taken care of, then you can go to the next national mate gathering. I'm sure you'll find him." Gray told her gently.

She beamed at him. I was so proud of how he handled that. Sometimes he fumbled a bit, but he was always kind-hearted and sweet.

The girls went to start pulling their supplies out to clean as Gray and I headed upstairs to gather our things and move them to Victor's room. I was always wearing Gray's ring and Victor's necklace now, so I didn't have anything valuable in my room.

I grabbed the charger for my phone, a pair of pajamas, underclothes and outfits for the next few days, and my backpack before heading to Victor's room. Gray came in while I was setting my things up on the dresser in Victor's closet. I helped him find space for his own things.

Ever since Monday, Gray had been a little more subdued than he normally was. When I asked him if anything was wrong, he told me he was fine. He was less urgent in his attempts to get Fenton to talk. Maybe he was just resigning himself to the fact that he couldn't save Fenton from the repercussions of his decisions.

"Gray. Thank you for moving in here with me. I really appreciate it. We'll have this all sorted soon and things can go back to normal. I promise." I said.

"Yeah, okay." He mumbled and turned to leave the closet.

I grasped his hand and he turned back to me. I knew he was sleeping, so I didn't know why he looked so tired. I stepped closer and reached for his face, but Gray moved away from me.

"Did I do something wrong? Are you mad at me?" I asked.

"Don't let Marius torture Fenton. If you love me as much as you say you do, you'll do this for me. I couldn't stop the last one. Let me stop this one. Echo, you don't have to do this." Gray whispered.

The problem was, Marius was coming tonight for his first session with Fenton. With our only leads being torn pages, we needed what Fenton knew in order to break the curse entirely. I couldn't keep everyone safe with him keeping his secrets.

"You just don't understand, Gray." I replied.

He groaned in frustration and pulled his hand away. "I understand. I understand that you would rather harm another person than try to work with them. You went straight to torture. You barely talked to him!"

"How do you know anything about what happened? You were gone. You're always gone when I need you, Gray. Always off licking your emotional wounds or whatever instead of helping me keep everything safe! You don't even really think of this as your home! I know you still call the pack your home. I hear you whispering to Cam about how different it is here from 'back home'!" I hissed.

"I don't know why you're being quiet, Echo. They're not sleeping. They're dead. You don't have to be quiet. You can't wake the dead with a little shouting! Yeah, I think of the pack as home. They actually love me there. I'm just a warm body and a quick meal to you! You say you love me, then you don't respect my beliefs and requests! If Victor asked you not to torture Fenton, I bet you would have jumped all over that! Everyone knows you don't take our relationship seriously. None of them take me seriously because of it. I'm not just some blood bag himbo for you to use as you see fit!" Gray shouted.

Tears welled up in my eyes. I didn't realize he felt like this. I couldn't stop the torture. I had to save Victor. There was no other option.

"I-I don't know that word." I stuttered a little, my voice small.

"I said a lot of them. But I'm betting the one you mean is 'love', because you certainly don't act like you know what it means." He scoffed and turned away.

"Please, don't leave me." I whispered. "I'm sorry."

"Tell me you're not going to torture Fenton." Gray insisted.

No matter how much I wanted to say that, I couldn't lie to him. I would use whatever methods necessary to save Victor. I know I would do the same for Gray. I felt a knot in my throat.

"That's what I thought. I'll keep my stuff in here, and sleep in the TV room." He huffed and walked out of the closet.

I wrapped my arms around myself. Had I really gone too far with this? I didn't know what to think.

On one hand, I needed to save Victor. On the other, I had to consider Gray's feelings and I hadn't. What was the right answer here? Was there one?

It seemed to me that I couldn't do one without spurning the other. I couldn't think of a right answer here. I tried to shake myself out of it. I needed to find Rosario and Sean. I could fix everything once I knew the people I loved were safe from this curse.

Wiping my eyes. I took several deep breaths and left the closet to go find out where Sean and Rosario were. At least they agreed with my decision. Gray was the only one who didn't agree with it.

I pondered over everything as I walked down the stairs and through the kitchen to get to the backyard. I didn't even know where to start. They were definitely in the wooded area somewhere.

When I got to the tree line, I put my hand on a tree and tried to look around. I sighed.

"Where should I start looking for them?" I whispered.

A small surge went through me, starting at my hand and traveling up my arm. I looked over at the tree I was touching. The branches seemed to be waving to another tree. It wasn't the wind, because there was only the slightest breeze barely rustling the leaves.

"Thank you." I told the tree, stroking the trunk.

I'd never thought of using my magic like that. I went from tree to tree, guided by the forest itself in my search for Sean and Rosario. My sad mood was lifted by finding this new way to use my affinity.

After several minutes of following the trees, I ended up behind a large oak near a small clearing. I could see a blanket spread on the ground, but it took a few moments for my eyes and brain to register exactly what I was seeing on the blanket.

It was Sean, he appeared to be naked, except for vines crisscrossing his body, and in his pixie form, without the wings. I would have covered my eyes, but I was curious. I'd only seen Victor and Gray naked.

He was on his knees and his legs were spread. It looked like vines were wrapped around his thighs. Behind him, he was bound at the wrist and elbows and his arms were being pulled up behind him until he was bent over. I realized the vines were hanging over the branches of the trees nearest the blanket.

Rosario was behind him, doing something that was making Sean moan. The sounds were muffled because of the vine acting as a gag. I stayed behind the tree so they wouldn't see me.

"All done. Are you sure they're not too tight?" Rosario asked.

Sean nodded.

“Goddess, I’m so glad you’re willing to try these things with me. I’m going to lift you up now. Let me know if it hurts too much.” He said.

I watched as Sean was raised off the ground several feet, until he was standing, leaned forward. It looked painful, but he didn’t seem to mind. I licked my lips and wondered what it felt like.

If I interrupted them, they would be upset and embarrassed. I figured I could wait until they were done with whatever this was. If they were doing it publicly, they had to expect someone would see.

The vines around Sean’s mouth released him and he let out a groan. It didn’t sound like an unhappy groan. Rosario started stroking Sean’s behind lovingly.

“Wh-what are you going to do now?” Sean asked.

Rosario drew a vine across Sean’s butt and whipped him lightly with it. It didn’t make more than a light slapping sound. Rosario groaned this time. His large hand massaged the cheek he had hit with his vine.

“Mmm. More.” Sean moaned.

“You’re sure? Even after what my dad did to you?” Rosario asked.

“You’re not your dad. You won’t hurt me, and, if you do, you’ll stop when I tell you to. I trust you. You’re my mate.” Sean replied matter-of-factly.

This time, Rosario whipped him a little more vigorously. The vines which had been gagging Sean were now wrapped around his throat. It looked like Rosario was really concentrating on what he was doing. He was probably having to keep track of all those limbs so he wouldn’t hurt Sean.

Sean writhed and moaned as the vines hit his bottom. The vines which were crisscrossing his body rubbed across his skin. I couldn’t help but notice his erect member being embraced by a knotted vine. He wasn’t just tied up; he was elegantly trussed. Every vine on his body, every knot, every loop, served a purpose.

“I can’t stand it anymore, Sean. I need you. Beg for me.” Rosario commanded.

The vines around his neck loosened a little. Sean panted and caught his breath.

“Please, my prince. I need you inside me. Oh, goddess, please take me, my prince. I need it so bad.” He pled.

“What do you need, pixie?” Rosario growled.

“I need your big hard elf cock in my pixie ass, my prince.” Sean moaned.

One of Rosario’s vines pulled something from the basket that I recognized as a bottle of lube. I turned away at that point.

That just seemed too intimate for me to watch. I’d wait until they were done and pretend to have just found them. No one else needed to know the things they were doing.

I tried not to listen, but it was hard to ignore the sounds of the vines creaking over the branches, Sean’s breathy moans accompanied by Rosario’s lustful grunts. How long had it been since I’d been with my mates? I ached for them so badly.

The longer they went on the more I ached. I needed to relieve the tension. I slipped my hand into my pants and started stroking my clit, thinking about all the delicious things Victor and Gray would do to me once we dealt with this curse and were free to be together again.

Biting my lips together, I quickly reached my climax. I kept going, chasing another as I heard them winding down in the clearing. I needed more. I needed Gray.

My next climax crashed over me at the thought of being with Gray again. It had been nearly two weeks since the last time we were together. When I had this idea, I never knew it would go on so long. I thought I was stronger than this.

Pulling my hand from my pants, I made a new resolution. I would try the thing that Amy suggested. Maybe it would make Gray feel better and he wouldn’t be mad at me anymore.

I waited a little while, listening to Rosario and Sean cuddle and kiss. I missed that most of all. The sex was always amazing, but I missed snuggling with my mates, being consumed by their love and care. I didn’t like having to be in charge of everything.

After a while, I decided it was time to bring them into the house. I was being creepy for far too long. I spotted a thin branch on the ground and stomped on it, making a cracking sound that sent them searching for their clothing.

“Sean. Rosario.” I called out.

“We’re over here.” Sean responded.

I stepped out from behind the tree. Both were dressed, which wasn’t possible in the time I’d given them. I noted the discreetly bulging basket. They must have decided to use glamour instead of dressing. I nearly smiled.

“I need you back at the house. Sean, we need to call your dad and tell him our plan. Do you think he’s had enough time?” I asked.

“Probably.” Sean said nervously.

His hands were in his lap, trying not to look like he was covering himself. I almost sighed and told them I knew they were naked, but it felt like that would be rude. Instead, I nodded.

“I’m going to head back to the house. Come to the living room after you’ve put your things away. I don’t want Fenton overhearing anything to do with the wards from this point on. He knows enough.” I said, turning away from them.

“Sure thing, Echo.” Sean called out.

I headed back to the house. I needed to change my panties before they caught scent of what I’d been doing. That would be terrible.

/Gathering Strength

Chapter 149 - The Vampire's Servant

[Valor]

The house was buzzing with excitement. Echo announced to each of us outside of the office that there would be no talk of the ward breaking around Fenton. She set me, Harmony, and Sean to learning how to break wards. She was training at different times with Preston.

The only one who didn’t seem to be getting caught up in the excitement around us was Gray. He’d been getting increasingly sulky over the last few days. I kind of felt bad.

Gray was a good guy, but I kind of went into overprotective mode when I moved into the house. After Echo told me off a few times, Harmony did the same. She was pissed that I barged in on her making out with Cam and told him to get off her.

It was like my mind couldn’t wrap around my sisters being able to make these decisions for themselves. They were so small and Echo had only just started coming out of her shell when this curse stuff made her all cold again.

I hadn’t even realized how cold Echo had always been before. Not until she started opening up. I never realized how closed off her smiles were, how quick and light her hugs were, how her smiles never seemed to reach her eyes.

Now that I knew the difference, I think it hurt more to see her turning into the girl she’d been before Victor saved her. She was never light-hearted until after she started living with him. He gave her the security and safety to be truly happy.

That made me feel worse for Gray. If Echo was growing cold again, then he was losing out on the amazing girl she was turning into. I knew how much he cherished her, but she was already opening up when I first met Victor. She wouldn't have cried in front of me like she did that night.

I wanted to try and help them, but it was even harder since he was so against the torture thing. I was betting Fenton would start talking shortly after it began. It was one thing to be told you're going to be tortured and another entirely to actually be tortured.

Sean's parents, Brian and Hope, were coming over for dinner tonight, so there would be no talk of the torture. We were entirely focused on getting Brian to agree to help with the wards. Echo wanted to wait to talk to him until the witches arrived.

Preston and Brian were getting along great. Echo had told Brian our relationship to him when he got there and introduced them. Hope looked very happy. She started telling us we could call her Aunt Hope.

She was worrying over Sean. Like Echo, Hope had noticed the differences. Sean told us when he came home from his parents' house, that he didn't want to tell them so close to losing his great uncle. I could understand that. He wanted to protect his family from even bigger changes after losing someone.

We were all in the living room, except Samuel, Dillon, Jean-Claude, and Gray. They were off somewhere probably talking about wolfy things. Samuel had been very keen on getting to know me and Harmony, but he only ever watched Echo. I guessed he was feeling left out with the whole curse situation, but he never made a stink about it.

"Valor, pay attention." Preston said.

I turned my attention back to Brian. He was showing us an original spell he'd created when he was my age. I thought it was pretty cool. Preston said witches without affinities were innovators.

The air in front of Brian shimmered and shuddered while he waved his arms and chanted. Suddenly, a Twinkie appeared out of nowhere. I laughed.

"You need to have a stash you pull from. I would hide snacks in the garage and make them appear when and where I wanted one. It's like an item summoning spell, but with fewer steps. It took a lot of work to figure out where I could cut corners." Brian chuckled. "Once you are comfortable with the spell, you don't even need to do the chant."

He waved his hands and the air shimmered before another Twinkie dropped onto the coffee table. That was so cool. Being a witch could be a lot of work with remembering all the spells, the chanting, the conditions, and the repercussions of each spell.

Witches with affinities tended to rely on their affinities and potions. Spells were kept in spell books and were accessed only rarely. Some witches kept particularly useful ones memorized. This looked like one I would want to memorize.

The buzzer in the hall went off at the same time as Echo's phone. I stood when she did and she gave me a look. I smiled at her.

"I'll get the gate and the door. You go take care of the vampires." I said.

"Are you sure? I can just let them in and run up." Echo offered.

"I'll let them in and get the door. Take your time. You don't have to do everything. Go on." I shooed her away.

Right as I got to the intercom, it buzzed again. They certainly were impatient. I sighed and hit the button.

"Hello?" I asked.

"This is Amelia Grove. We're the witches from the Eaten Heart Collective." A friendly voice chirped.

"I'm opening the gate. Park next to the other cars and come to the door." I told her.

"Got it!"

I pressed the button for the gate to open and went to look out the peephole. I saw a car in the distance roll past. I felt something poke me in the ribs and I jumped.

Echo laughed at me. "What are you doing?"

"Watching to see when they get here so I can open the door." I explained.

"There's a board in the porch that makes a slight clicking sound." She smiled.

She raised a finger and, after a few moments, I heard a click. Echo reached in front of me and opened the door as a pretty, blonde, girl was reaching up to knock. She looked startled before she smiled.

"Hi, I'm Amelia. This is my sister, Emmalyn. We're here to meet Mistress Nightshade." The girl said.

"I'm Echo Nightshade. Thank you so much for coming. I'll show you to your rooms. Dinner will be served in a few minutes if you're hungry." Echo replied.

“Starved. We didn’t really have lunch because we were meeting with Queen Bellamy’s assistant and going through the vetting process to be able to see her without an appointment.” Amelia explained.

“Great. Please follow me.” Echo directed with a brief nod.

I watched the girls head up the stairs. I wondered what their affinities were. This evened the numbers in the house a little more. Four witches, three vampires, two fae, one true dhampyr, and six werewolves. I wasn’t counting the six other werewolves who lived on the property, though.

Victor didn’t really count, since he was locked up in the basement. I wondered how he was doing. Echo came home with blood for him on Monday night. She said only Victor was to have that blood, so it must be special.

When I wandered back into the living room, Uncle Preston was showing off some of his fire magic. Brian looked amazed. Not living with witches would probably have kept that wonder in him.

Cam was in a corner of the room with Harmony. He had his arms around her and was whispering something in her ear. I felt my spine stiffen.

He was being dirty with my little sister. I started over there, when Harmony caught my eye and glared. She shook her head at me.

I turned and left the room. Even though Gray was sleeping with Echo, he was at least respectful enough not to slobber all over her right in front of me. Cam didn’t even care who saw him. He just repeated that Harmony was his mate and he wasn’t doing anything wrong by wolf standards.

Standing in the entryway, I tried to get myself under control. They kept arguing that they never told me what I was and wasn’t allowed to do with the girls I dated, but they didn’t understand. It was because I was a guy that I knew what those boys were after. They shouldn’t be touching my sisters until they were married and I knew they would take care of Echo and Harmony forever.

“That looks like some heavy thinking.” The blonde girl said as she stood on the stairs above me.

“Some thoughts take a little extra effort.” I chuckled.

“You looked like you were trying to make someone’s head explode.” She giggled as she made her way down to where I was.

“I’m a light witch. That sounds like something a dark witch would do.” I replied.

“I didn’t meet you properly. I’m Amelia Grove.” She grinned and stuck out her hand.

I took her hand and shook it. Normally, I would have done something like kiss the back of her hand and flirt a bit, but if she was here then she was related to me. It didn't matter how distantly, that was gross.

"I'm Valor Gale." I said.

"Where exactly do you fit in all this, handsome?" Amelia winked.

"I'm Fenton Aimes' great great-grandson, and Echo's older brother." I told her.

"Oh." She looked disappointed. "Are there any cute boys here who aren't related to us?"

"I'm not one to ask about cute boys. Most of the guys here are either related to you or dating someone related to you. Or gay. It's really just the guards and Finn who are single." I explained.

"Oh! Guards. You mean like that hot guy who was walking by the fence? I'll take a couple of those." Amelia chuckled.

"Are you always like this?" I asked.

"No. I just finished college and I'm about to do my soulmate search. I want to have a little fun before I try settling down." She replied. "Here comes Emmalyn. Hey, Emmy. This one's related to us."

"You said you wouldn't embarrass me, Amelia." The other girl sighed as she came up to us. "I'm Emmalyn Grove."

"Valor Gale. Come on, I'll introduce you to everyone in the living room. Again, they are either related to us or dating someone related to us." I reiterated.

"You're not a lot of fun, you know." Amelia scoffed.

"I didn't think you would find it funny if I let my werewolf sister maul you because you flirted with her mate." I shrugged and led them into the living room.

"She'd try." Amelia muttered.

When we got into the room, I introduced everyone. I told everyone how they were related to us as well. Echo joined us shortly after. I went and stood next to her.

"Where'd you disappear to?" I asked.

"I went to see if Victor woke up normal. He didn't. Tomorrow we feed him again. Talia said it would be best if we fed him a little more often. She thinks he was able to be in control for as long as he was because Victor fed off me. I had some hope." Echo whispered.

“I’m sure it will work. It’ll just take a little bit. You aren’t failing. You’re doing great.” I said quietly.

“Thanks, Valley.” She said and hugged me briefly.

We started visiting with everyone else. Both Amelia and Emmalyn were earth witches. Emmalyn had a special affinity for crystals and Amelia had an affinity for minerals including iron.

That could be a deadly one if she ever decided to go dark. I could see being able to do things with the iron in people’s blood. I didn’t say anything, but I respected her a whole lot more.

After a while, the scent of vampire got stronger. It was different for everyone, I guess, because Sean told me they smelled like old books to him. They smelled a little like that mixed with something like blood.

I looked up as Finn sauntered in. He scanned the room, taking everything in. His eyes stopped on Amelia and he slowly looked her up and down. He quickly glanced over Emmalyn, Brian, and Hope, but his eyes went back to Amelia.

She didn’t seem to notice. Echo smiled at Finn and looked around.

“Where’s Talia?” Echo asked him.

“Downstairs with Vic. She wanted to take him some new papers to distract him. Who’ve you got here?”

“This is Brian and Hope Flowers. They’re Sean’s parents. These girls are Emmalyn and Amelia Grove. They’re here to help us with the curse.” She replied.

Amelia looked up at Finn. “Fuck. Where were you hiding your giant?”

Emmalyn snorted.

“You’d be surprised by the... small... spaces giants can fit in.” Finn replied with a wink.

“Are you offering to show me? Or do I just have to guess?” Amelia purred, walking toward him.

Finn sniffed the air and his eyes dilated as they settled on her. He shook his head, turned and walked out of the room. Amelia started laughing.

“I didn’t realize I’d scare him off. Who was that? Don’t tell me he’s related to us too.”

“That was Finnick, Finn. He’s normally more friendly. He must have been called away by Talia.” Echo shrugged.

“Hmm. Finn. I like it. He looks like a Viking.” Amelia said.

“I think he was back when he was alive.” I answered.

“Why do you have more witches from our family coming? Why did you ask us to dinner, Echo? It can’t just be for a family reunion.” Brian asked. “I’ve waited for answers for this long. I’m tired of it.”

Echo sighed. She stepped away from me and took a calming breath. I knew she was preparing for the worst. I wished she would lean on me more to help out.

“We’ve found out about some wards which exist and are anchoring two parts of the curse to the area. There is something defending the wards and they can only be removed by members of Fenton’s family. If we remove them one at a time, the protections on the others will get stronger. We need to remove all eight at once. Sean, Harmony, Val, and I have been learning how to break a ward. With Preston, that gives us five witches. We need eight. Now Amelia and Emmalyn are here. We were hoping you would be our eighth, since you have been trying to break the curse on your own for so many years, we wanted to give you a part in breaking it. You’ll have someone guarding you and it shouldn’t take long.” Echo explained.

Hope gripped Brian’s arm. He patted her hands and looked to Sean. Echo looked hopeful.

“Yes. I want to break this curse. I’m glad you asked for more than just my notes. I’ve wanted to break this curse since I was a teen.” He answered.

“Thank the goddess.” Preston sighed.

Talia walked into the room. Brian stiffened before nodding to her. She nodded back and looked around the room. Her eyes settled on Amelia.

“I am Talia, the Traveler. Thank you for coming to help with this curse.” She said. “You seem to have flustered my child. He refuses to come into the room.”

Amelia’s eyes widened. “Wow. I was just flirting a little. I didn’t know he was so timid. He honestly seemed to be cool before he freaked.”

“You’re something Finn never thought he’d see. It will take him a little while to cope with what he’s feeling. For now, I would like to know everything about you.” Talia smiled and held out her hand to Amelia.

“Umm. Sure. Come on, Emmy.” Amelia said.

“No. Just you. I promise no harm will come to you. Come to the library with me.” Talia urged.

There was a rattling sound and we all turned to Emmalyn. She pulled a crystal out of her purse and looked at it. She looked back up with a calm expression.

“Go, Amelia. I’ll be fine. We’ll see you at dinner.” She replied waving her sister off.

Talia pulled Amelia out of the room. I was confused, but figured we'd find out about it later. The group quickly turned back to briefing Emmalyn and Brian about the wards.

Finn came back into the room and seemed a little agitated still. He contributed bits and pieces, but kept looking at the door. This was the first time I hadn't seen Finn being relaxed and joking around. I couldn't wait to find out what had happened. What on earth could have made a vampire of over eight hundred years look like that?

Dinner and a Show

Chapter 150 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

We went into the dining room when Lisa came to get us. I sat at my usual seat and waited. Talia brought Amelia in with her. They were chatting and smiling like old friends.

Finn stiffened as he heard their voices. I wondered what had gotten into him. Amelia sat next to her sister. Finn gazed at her with a look I very much understood. He was in love with her.

"Amelia, are you dating anyone?" I asked.

Finn's gaze swung around to me. He seemed shocked.

"Nope." She answered cheerfully. "Just living my life to its fullest before I cast my soulmate search."

"What about you, Emmalyn?" I asked.

"No. I don't date." Emmalyn responded coolly.

Gray walked in the room. He looked around before seeing that his spot was empty. Samuel, Dillon, and Jean-Claude were eating outside this evening. We had just enough chairs for everyone after taking most of the chairs from the kitchen. The girls would just eat later.

I looked at Gray with hope. He didn't look very happy to see me. I had to make him feel like I acknowledged him. Like I really saw him.

"Gray." I said, standing and holding out my hand.

He looked down at my hand and back up to my eyes. My hopes were granted as he walked over and took my hand. I smiled at him.

“Gray, this is Brian and Hope Flowers. Over there are Amelia and Emmalyn Grove. Everyone, this is my husband, Gray Padua. He’s a werewolf from the Hallowed Moon Pack.” I explained.

“I thought your name was Nightshade.” Amelia said as we settled in.

“That’s her other husband’s name.” Gray muttered picking up his plate and dishing some food onto it.

His expression was still angry. I thought this was what he wanted. I thought this was how I could make it right.

“I’m going to add Gray’s name as soon as we get this curse settled. Victor has the connections to get my name changed quickly.” I replied.

Gray looked at me, a little shocked. Then he smiled and took my hand again, giving it a loving squeeze. I had been talking to Harmony about how I could make Gray feel like I valued him more and she suggested hyphenating my last name to be Nightshade-Padua. I was so happy it worked.

“I love you, Gray. I can’t wait to have your name too.” I smiled.

“Thank you, angel. I love you, too. I’m sorry I’ve been hard to deal with. We can talk about it later. I want you to eat your dinner. You need to be strong and healthy if we’re going to beat this curse.” He murmured and dished some food onto my plate.

While we ate, everyone got to know each other better. Amelia was bubbly and playful. Emmalyn was a little cooler and more businesslike. She still had a sense of humor, it was just harder to make her laugh. Brian and Hope worked to get along with everyone and I saw how they doted on Rosario and Sean.

Hope was extremely proud of her son. She kept talking to us about the groups on social media that she’d joined to learn how to support her son and kept calling herself a ‘glitter mom’, which made Sean blush.

I could tell he was happy, though. His parents may be embarrassing, but they loved him a lot. Rosario was telling them how he could bespell them to always see through the fae glamour that hid his neighborhood. They would be accepted as honorary fae, since their son was Rosario’s mate.

The plates were being cleared. Hope complimented Wendell and Lisa on their cooking. I could tell they were both pleased. We always let them know how grateful we were for their help.

“So, I haven’t seen the Old Man around. The ladies at the home said you took him. Is he doing okay with all these people and werewolves around?” Brian asked.

Sean looked at me with wide eyes. We hadn't expected him to ask after the cat. Gray squeezed my hand.

"You have to tell him." He whispered.

"Brian. I'm sorry. The cat is in a cage in my office. He's being fed well and has lots to entertain him. He's just not safe to be allowed to roam free." I answered.

"Echo." Gray said in a warning tone.

I bit my lips together. He'd be mad at me if I didn't tell Brian the cat was Fenton. I would just not tell him about the torture plan.

"To be fully honest, Brian, the cat isn't what he seems. He's actually Fenton Sr. and we're keeping him locked up in hopes of him telling us what curse he placed on the Master of the territory." I admitted.

"What? How?" He asked.

"You have a witch in a cat's body? That's so cool!" Amelia exclaimed. "And you can understand what he says?"

"Only people related to Fenton can understand him. He's quite talkative." I replied.

Harmony scoffed and nodded quietly. Brian looked shocked. I didn't know what else to say.

"Can I see him?" Brian asked.

"Me too!" Amelia grinned.

Finn seemed alarmed for a few moments, but calmed down quickly. Talia put her hand on his arm and he nodded to her. I knew that vampires could talk mentally with their sires, but it was still a little strange.

I stood and they followed. Emmalyn hadn't said anything, but she was hot on our heels heading toward the office. Hope stayed back, saying she never liked the cat anyway and wanted to talk to Rosario and Sean some more.

Opening the door, I heard Fenton groan. He was probably expecting Gray to come in. He seemed surprised when I led in my little witch procession.

"Here he is. Fenton. You remember Brian. This is Emmalyn and Amelia. They wanted to see you." I said.

“So you told him who I am. I didn’t expect to see you again before I died, Brian. At least I can tell you how much of a disappointment you are. Letting your boy be gay with that elf. Letting him become fae. Never becoming a witch worth anything.” Fenton grumbled.

“Wow, you weren’t lying. He sounds like my grandfather did. Same tone and disappointment that I never manifested an affinity.” Brian scoffed.

“I suppose she’s gotten you to agree to try and talk me into revealing my curse. I’m not going to do it. So you can go.” Fenton huffed.

There was a clattering sound and I looked over to the couch. Emmalyn had spread a cloth over the coffee table and was pulling out stones and arranging them on the cloth. I watched her as she focused on the stones in front of her.

“He powers the spell. That’s why he’s still alive. The other spells are powered by the supernaturals trapped inside them. He’s very angry about a loss. It sparked his own madness and his descent into the dark arts. He’s never been accepting of other species and sees them as abominations. This enabled him to use them. He even sees humans as lesser beings. His belief that witches are the supreme species powers his hate and madness.” Emmalyn said solemnly.

“What are you doing? Stop that!” Fenton growled.

“Or what, you’ll cough up a hairball?” She scoffed. “You’re torturing that poor cat. He’s still inside there. All he wanted was to hunt mice and live a happy life. You took that from him.”

I froze. The real cat was still in there? I had no clue. I couldn’t let Marius torture him. That cat was innocent.

“I made sure he had years of good treatment. He was cared for, fed fish, and brushed often. He’s had a better, and longer, life than he ever would have as a barn cat. It’s not like I wanted to be in here.” He said.

“That’s true. The spell he used required so much magic, that he had to be put into a being who didn’t have any. Even humans have a little bit of magic. He maintains control of the spell from the body of a creature who has no magic at all.” Emmalyn answered.

“The cat can feel everything he can?” I asked.

“Yes. I’m sorry, but, if you go through with your plan for this evening, you’ll be hurting that cat as well.” Emmalyn replied softly.

Amelia looked at me with watery eyes. She was obviously feeling like I was. That poor kitty didn’t deserve torture. I sniffled and straightened my back.

“Can you see the name of the spell he cast on the Master of the territory?” I asked.

“Not in this casting, but I can do it again in a few hours. I know you’ve not second guessed your decision until now, but I can also tell you that you would regret this decision.” Emmalyn told me.

“You’re going to go all soft because there’s a stray cat involved? I can’t believe you’re so weak!” Fenton taunted.

“Is there anything else you can see Emmalyn?”

“The curse will hit a shifting point soon. Two masters can’t each hold the curse in full. As it lessens on one, it increases on the other. You may not realize how much stronger it’s grown in you.” She said.

“I’m fine. My primary focus is destroying this curse. The curse hasn’t changed me, or I wouldn’t have cared about the cat. I’ll call Marius. I can’t let him hurt an innocent animal.” I replied.

“I guess I have two disappointing descendants.” Fenton spat.

“I think disappointing you is one of the greatest compliments out there. I never want to be someone you’re proud of.” I snarled.

“What did he mean about my son turning fae? That was a figure of speech, right?” Brian asked.

I’d forgotten about that, and about Brian being there. He clenched his jaw and focused his gaze on me. I blushed.

“SEAN!!!” He roared as he stormed out of the office.

Emmalyn scooped up her stones and cloth, shoving them into her bag as she rushed to follow us out to the dining room. Everyone was still having dessert when we came in.

Sean’s smile faded as he saw his father’s face. He gripped Rosario’s hand and looked at his mother, then me. I mouthed ‘Fenton told’ and saw his expression drop into one of sadness and resignation.

“Is what that cat told me true? Did you become fae?” Brian seethed.

“Oh, Sean.” Hope gasped.

He stood up and looked at his parents. Sean didn’t seem frightened or worried. He seemed like he was calm and prepared for whatever happened next.

“Mom, Dad, I’m a pixie now. That’s why I seem so different physically. I didn’t want to tell you about this so close to losing Uncle Fenton. I was planning to wait a month or so. Don’t be upset. This was the Goddess’ plan for me. I’m happy with who I am.” Sean insisted.

Rosario stood beside him. “He’s still the same Sean. He hasn’t changed who he is, just what he is. He’s still the smart, kind, boy you raised. Don’t be mad about this, please.”

“Sean, how could you do this to yourself? I know it’s hard being around everyone with all these amazing powers and abilities, but you didn’t need to change. Your friends would have loved you anyway.” Hope said.

“Mom. I didn’t do this because everyone is so powerful. I did this so I could feel comfortable in my own skin. I did this so I could have the life I was meant to have. So I could stay by Rosario’s side for his life.” Sean told her.

“Hope, come here.” Brian said solemnly. “Sean. We need time to process this. I’ll still help with the curse. I made a promise and I stick to my promises, but I think it would be best if you canceled your game night this weekend and stayed here.”

“Dad.” Sean whispered. “Please.”

Brian raised his hand to stop him. “Do you think I told you not to let anyone bite you because I’m overprotective? I wanted you to stay human. I wanted you to be safe. If I had known you could turn fae, I wouldn’t have allowed this relationship. You’re in more danger as a fae than you are as a human. You may be stronger and more powerful, but now you’re something people hunt. I can’t believe you would do this and keep it from us.”

“You just said you would have forbidden my relationship! When have I ever been such a bad kid that I deserved my happiness taken away?! You didn’t talk to me. You decided for me. You don’t care about what I want. You only care about what you think is right. If you opened your eyes, you would see that I’m happy. We’re safe because Talia got rid of the portion of the curse that hindered fae. I told you, this is what the Goddess wanted for me. She told me herself!” Sean shouted.

“I don’t care what the damned Goddess wanted for you! I wanted you safe. Now I’ll worry for the rest of my life if you’re going to be safe after I’m gone. What if hunters come after you? What if there’s a fae war?” Brian questioned.

“We haven’t had a war in two centuries. A lot longer than humans. Sean is perfectly safe as a fae. Hunters can’t find our home now that our glamour is working again!” Rosario replied defensively.

Gray whistled and made them jump. I looked over to him, along with everyone else.

“Brian, Hope, you should head home and deal with your emotions on this. Give it two weeks, then have dinner with Rosario and Sean. Think about the things you really want to say, not the things you’re feeling. You can reach Sean on his cell if there’s an emergency and you will see him next week at Fenton III’s funeral. I expect that you will all act like adults at the funeral and make it about his life and not yours. Rosario, take Sean for a walk in the garden. Come back when you’re both calm again. This is the end of your argument.” Gray stated coolly.

They all nodded and left. Everyone breathed a little easier. None of us really wanted to be in the middle of that fight.

Everyone decided to go to the living room for dessert and coffee instead of staying in the dining room. The feeling in the room had gotten tense and I didn't think we could get it cheerful again.

I hadn't realized that Amelia was on the case. She worked really hard to get people to cheer up. She made sure to flirt with Finn a lot, which made him uncomfortable and everyone got a little chuckle. Talia was the most amused.

Quietly, I got up and went to the entryway. I called Marius and let him know I couldn't allow him to torture the cat. He was disappointed, but less so when he found out why.

"You are a good and gentle girl, Echo. Even I try not to torture the innocent. Even though this is a simple animal, you are showing the compassion that I feel makes you the gem that you are." He said.

"Thank you, papa. I just couldn't do it. He's rubbing it in, too. I'm going to end this curse and I'm going to save that cat. Even if it means I have to kill it. I won't make it suffer with Fenton inside of it anymore." I vowed.

"I like that. Let me know if you need me to help. I'll see you in the morning for training. Get some rest, daughter." Marius said and hung up.

"Now you're planning to kill him?" Gray asked from behind me.

I startled a little. I hadn't heard him or smelled him. I turned and Gray looked really upset.

"He's not going to be tortured, but I may have to kill him to end everyone's suffering. Can you be okay with that, Gray? Please." I murmured.

"You're really not going to let Marius torture him?" He brightened.

"No, I'm not." I replied.

He rushed over and picked me up in a hug, spinning me around. I held on tight, because I didn't want to go flying away if he lost his grip on me. He stopped spinning and held me tightly against him.

"Thank you, angel. Thank you so much." Gray whispered as he kissed my face all over.

As much as I wanted to tell him, it was because of the cat, I couldn't. Gray was just so happy and I wanted him to be happy with me again. I caught his lips and kissed him deeply. Gray growled amorously and his hand slid down to grip my bottom. I missed his kisses so much. I melted into his arms and enjoyed my first kiss in a very long time.

