

## A Gentle Echo

[Echo]

I woke up excited, a rare thing for me. Today, Harmony had a date with the boy she'd had a crush on for the last two years, Cam. I was going to help her get ready for the date.

He was taking her to lunch, then the zoo, and the botanical garden. It was a perfect first date plan. I crossed my fingers he'd ask her to the prom. She'd be over the moon!

Pulling out my sweat pants and a t-shirt, I dressed and headed upstairs to cook breakfast. Saturdays were late days for the family, so I didn't have to have it done until eight-thirty. I liked being able to sleep all the way until seven on the weekend. It made up for the week when I'd only get three or four hours of sleep.

I was allowed to eat more on Saturdays, too! Three meals, and lots of water and juice. It easily made Saturday my favorite day of the week. Though, Sundays were a close second.

On Sundays, my parents locked me in the basement with some food. I didn't have to cook or clean all day. I could just rest and read.

Harmony bounced into the kitchen just as I finished setting the table. She had a huge grin on her face. I loved seeing her happy. My sister and brother were my whole world.

"Today's the day, Echo! I'm so excited!" She smiled and did a little dance.

"I'm excited for you!" I returned her smile.

Valor, our brother, walked in the room and threw his arms over her shoulders. He was taller than us, even though he was the same age. Val was nearly six feet tall with wavy dark brown hair, almond shaped hazel eyes, and a dimple in his left cheek.

Harmony and I didn't get dimples, but she had the same hair color and eyes. Mine were a little darker. My hair was practically black, my eyes a greener sort of hazel than theirs. Val and Harmony were more tan than me, because I wasn't allowed to leave the house. Otherwise, you could totally tell we were siblings.

We were triplets. Harmony and Val were fraternal twins, and I was Harmony's mirror image twin. They even had the same birthday. Since I was born three minutes after Harmony, my birthday was the 31st of May and theirs was the 30th.

"Hey, little sisters. Are you ready for your day?" He asked.

"Cam's going to be here at eleven. Mom's letting Echo help me get ready after she's finished her morning work."

"I did a lot of it last night. Val, your laundry will be on your bed when you're done with breakfast." I told him.

"You're the best, Echo! Thanks for grabbing it last night. I really wanted to wear my favorite shirt to the movie tonight." He winked.

"Maybe mom and dad will let you come to the movie this time, Echo." Harmony said hopefully.

"Maybe." I replied.

They wouldn't. I had to work tonight. It was part of the way I earned my keep. I cleaned the house, took care of everyone, cooked all the food, and fed vampires. Mom and dad said it was the least I could do to make up for being evil.

It made them happy and kept me near my sister and brother, so I didn't mind. Though, I was a little scared when Mr. Springer asked about biting me somewhere else. Mom told me it would happen eventually. At least he was the gentlest of the vampires.

None of the others thought to ask. I heard mom and dad talking about offering it to one of the others once Mr. Springer stopped coming. He'd been willing to pay double so it must be a really important thing for them.

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Once our parents came into the kitchen, I left to clean their rooms and fold Val's laundry. After I finished Harmony's room, I pulled out the dress she was planning to wear to make sure there weren't any loose strings or stains. It was perfect.

I went to her vanity and set out the makeup I would be putting on her and the jewelry that would look best with her dress. Harmony came in to get her towel and go take a shower. I headed to the kitchen to clean up and eat my breakfast.

Eating meat was rare for me. There was almost none left over after meals normally. But, today, there was bacon, sausage, and eggs. I poured some milk and grabbed an orange from the fridge.

Sitting down for the first time in two hours, I relished the moment and chewed my food carefully. The memory of my Saturday meals made it easier to get through a week of nearly nothing. I took my multivitamin with extra iron, like I did every day, and finished off my milk.

After breakfast, I rinsed my dishes and started the dishwasher, then pulled out the meat for dinner. Dad wanted to barbecue, so I needed to have a selection. He liked making a little of everything. It meant I would get to eat some, too. I loved barbecue days.

I went back to Harmony's room when she called out to me. She was in her dress and needed me to zip it up. Then she sat at the vanity while I brushed and styled her hair. It was shorter than mine because she was allowed to go to salons.

I'd made the mistake of asking mom if I could get a haircut when I was ten. She shaved my head. It wasn't a great look for me. All of my clients complained. I never asked again. Now, it was nearly three feet long.

Harmony's hair went to the middle of her back. I loved helping her style it. I only ever tied mine back or put it in a braid. Moving to the front of her stool, I started applying the eyeliner and eyeshadow she liked and a little lip pencil with gloss. She preferred it to wearing lipstick. Her skin was flawless, so she never wore concealer or powders.

Once I was done, I stepped aside and let her look in the mirror.

"It's amazing. You always make me look so pretty, Echo." She gushed.

"You're already pretty, Harmony. I just polish you a little so you can shine like you're meant to." I smiled back.

"I love you, Echo." She whispered.

"I love you, too, Harmony." I whispered.

Mom and Dad didn't like us saying that, so we were always quiet. It was ten-thirty before we finished everything. I went to the basement to wait for mom to call me out. I was to always be in the basement for thirty minutes before company came.

I decided to prepare my outfit for my client while I was there. Mom and Dad didn't like buying me clothes other than my sweats and t-shirts, but my clients wanted me to look nice while they drank my blood. My hands shook while I looked through my options.

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My entire life was spent telling myself, 'I'm happy'. It's given entirely to taking care of my family and living for their big moments. I've never gone to school, never had a vacation, and only rarely get to see the sun. I might as well be a vampire myself. I was already evil enough. All I needed was to die.

I didn't know what would happen to me once Val and Harmony were out of the house. Both were going to college. I'd already passed the homeschool exam for a degree, but I wasn't going to college.

The thought of my future terrified me. There were only a couple months until our eighteenth birthdays. Then another two months before they'd leave me.

Dad and Mom talked about travelling for a year once they were away at school. Would I stay here? They wouldn't want to take me with them.

If I stayed, then I wouldn't know what to do with myself. Cooking for one, cleaning for one, never having anyone to talk to. I hadn't been to a grocery store since I was six. I didn't have any money.

Maybe I'd leave home when they did. Run away and be evil somewhere else. My parents wouldn't have to worry about feeding and clothing me, and I wouldn't have to worry about hurting Val and Harmony.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Focus on now. Later will happen when it happens. I can't ght the future, I reminded myself.

I pulled a royal blue wrap dress out. It played well with my paler skin, versus Harmony's darker tone, so she gave it to me. The dress had short sleeves and opened more around the neck. It would be easier if my client tonight was a messy eater. I would braid my hair, to make access to my neck easier, too. After ten years of this, I was an expert.

When Harmony left on her date, my mom called me up and I started on my afternoon cleaning. I needed take care of the garden in the back. I weeded in the front last night. The back garden had vegetables instead of owers.

Valor sat outside, pretending to sunbathe, and talked to me while I worked. He told me about school. His last basketball game with his friends, the girl he was thinking of dating, and the math test he had coming up. Val hated math. I helped where I could, but I wasn't much better at it.

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At four, Harmony texted mom that she was heading home and I went back to the basement. I'd started the meats marinating at two and gotten all my work done, so I was happy for the break. I lay in my bed and thought about all the tasty things I'd get to eat tonight. I made a pineapple upside down cake for dessert. It was one of mom's favorites.

If I was very good, they'd give me leftovers from dinner tomorrow. Mom was making a roast with mashed potatoes and garlic roasted brussels sprouts. It was one of my favorite Sunday dinners. I planned to be very good.

We had dinner at six-thirty. I ate in the kitchen while everyone else ate in the sunroom that opened to the patio. From where I sat, I could hear their conversation. Harmony was telling everyone about her date. They'd held hands while they walked in the zoo and gardens. He'd kissed her under an ivy covered gazebo and asked her to be his girlfriend. It was perfect.

Our parents raved over how polite he was and how well-mannered. They really liked him and hoped her relationship would be successful, like theirs was. Val knew him from the basketball team and told a couple stories about Cam that I'm sure would have embarrassed him, if he were there.

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When dinner was over, I cleaned the dishes, both tables, and the grill, then went to see Val and Harmony off. My dad used to take them to movies when I worked, now they went together. I always had to see them off, they used to refuse to go unless I told them I didn't want to. Now, it was just tradition.

Neither of my siblings knew what I did on Saturday nights. It was better that way. They both felt guilty enough for not being able to treat me like a normal sister.

I stood in the living room as they got money from dad, then put on their shoes and jackets. I always felt better when I knew they'd be gone while a vampire was in the house. Harmony turned to look at me and frowned.

"Can't Echo go with us this time? I really want her to come with." She asked.

"No. Echo stays home. Go on, you'll be late." Mom said.

"If Echo's not going, I'm not going." Harmony asserted crossing her arms.

"Echo." Dad said.

He was giving me permission to speak so I could shut her down. I wanted to go with them. I didn't want to get bitten tonight. But I had to and I wouldn't let my sister put herself in danger. I never wanted a vampire near her.

"You and Val have been looking forward to the movie, Harmony. Please go and have fun. Mom and Dad have their own movie night tonight and I really want to read the book you bought me." I smiled.

"I'll stay home and we'll read together. Mom and Dad can go out to a movie. Val can invite one of his friends and give them my ticket." Harmony insisted.

Mom's eyes narrowed at me. This wouldn't be good if I couldn't get them out. I would be punished harshly for not trying harder.

"How about next weekend? That way Mom and Dad have time to pick a movie to go out to." I suggested, really wishing for her to accept it.

She looked like she was going to argue again, but nodded instead. I almost sighed in relief. The sun was starting to go down and I still had to get ready for the vampire.

After Harmony and Valor left, I turned to go downstairs. My entire body felt heavy. Every Saturday night, I felt like I died a little. One day, one of my clients would kill me. Sometimes, I prayed for it.

"You better think of a way to get them out of the house next weekend." Mom warned.

"I'll become sick on Friday night. It will last until Monday. During the week, I'll make sure to work extra hard and on Monday, I'll do any work I normally do on Saturday." I said.

"Good. Go get ready. You have a new client tonight and I want you properly cleaned and dressed. Silence says he's very old and very rich." She grinned.

I nodded and went downstairs. A hot shower helped chase away the chill of selling myself to a 'very old' man. I knew he probably didn't look it, but I was still worried.

Mom told me most donors were condent, but my clients liked how scared I was each time. So I had that going for me. Most vampires liked the avor of fear and I was terrified.