

.Play Time

Chapter 41 - The Vampire's Servant

[Gray]

We arrived at Echo's place before lunch. She made a big meal. I was happy. It was like she knew werewolves needed more food.

After we ate, we took her to the grocery store. I never saw anyone shop with such focus. She was cheerful and polite when talking with people who worked there. In the meat area, she talked with the butcher about how much meat she would need for the coming weeks and he actually referred her to a proper butcher shop in town to place an order.

In the car, heading toward the house again, she explained that she needed to talk to someone in the kitchens at the pack house about how much meat she'd need for feeding three werewolves. I remembered that her trainers were coming soon. They would need a lot more than she was used to cooking for just herself.

Val and I helped her put the groceries away and followed her to the family room to play games. She was smiling so much the whole time. This was the Echo I wanted to see. The one who was happy and vibrant.

"I got your message about Sean and the ticket. I'm glad you figured something out. I was having a hard time. Is he really sure he's okay with giving up a ticket?" I asked.

"Yeah. I told him I would dance with him a little and that I'd take a picture with him to make his parents happy."

I didn't like that. Sean seemed to have a problem whenever I got a hug from Echo. I was worried that he was interested in her too. I didn't need another man competing for her heart. Fighting to win her while she was living with the vampire was hard enough.

We went back to playing and I didn't even notice time passing until Echo's alarm went off and she excused herself. When she was out the door, I told Val I would be right back and followed her. She did this when we visited earlier in the week too. I wanted to know what she was doing.

I followed her scent upstairs and thought she may have gone to her room for something, but I noticed Victor's door was open. Quietly, I approached the door and peeked in.

She was standing next to his bed, fiddling with something. An orange light lit up and I was able to see a control box for a heated blanket in her hands. I moved back to the stairs and headed down.

Val was in the entry way. He raised his eyebrow at me and grabbed my arm when I got close. I let him lead me to the family room again.

“What were you doing? Don’t give me any bullshit about being lost.” He growled.

“I wanted to know what she was doing when that alarm went off. I didn’t know if she would tell me if I asked. I wondered if it was something I could help her with, but it’s not.” I admitted.

There was no point in lying. I had nothing to hide. I wasn’t doing anything wrong.

Echo came back in the room with a snack for us. We ate and Val glared at me. I didn’t know what his problem was. On Monday he’d asked me to back off of Echo and give her room to breathe. She needed to figure out who she was outside of her parents’ house.

That clicked in with the resolve I had on Sunday to make her love me. As she became healthier and realized who she was, I knew Echo would feel the pull of the mate bond. I wasn’t used to being patient for things, but I’d wait for her. I’d wait as long as she needed.

It didn’t mean I was going to just let it go, but I needed her to know I wasn’t going to push. Val was keeping me in check and I was grateful for it. So I knew he was pretty frustrated that I followed her like that.

“Echo, what did you go do when the alarm went off?” Val asked.

“Oh, I was turning on the heated blanket for Victor. Vampires don’t get warm, so I make sure his bed is warm when he wakes up. I thought it would be nice and he really likes it.” She smiled.

“Does that mean he’ll be up soon?”

“Yes. I start it about a half hour before he wakes up.”

I felt a little disappointed in myself. I should have tried talking to her instead of following her. That’s one of my biggest issues. I want to be there as soon as she needs me and I act like a freaking stalker. I resolved to try and change that.

It wasn’t much longer before I could smell the scent of vampire get stronger. He would be down here soon. I needed some way to mark my territory.

“Echo, can I have a hug?” I asked.

“Sure, Gray.” Echo said and moved to give me a hug.

I rubbed my jaw against her hair as I held her, marking her with my scent. Not something anyone without a sensitive sense of smell would pick up on. Echo just thought I was being weird and giggled in a cute way.

She pulled away and moved to clear the table. Val and I started putting away the controllers and games. We got everything in order and turned to follow Echo.

Victor stood in the doorway. He looked at Val and gave him a tight smile and a nod. His eyes locked on mine and I fought to look away, when Echo came to the door.

His attention snapped from me to her and his nose wrinkled like he smelled something rotten. He looked at me again and tilted his head back a little. He was assessing me. I could tell.

“Valor, why don’t you go with Echo to help her get her things together. Grayson, I’d like to speak with you in my office.” Victor said.

“Sure thing.” I smiled at him.

Echo looked between us with a concerned expression. I wanted to assure her that things were alright, but I didn’t know exactly where he was going with this. It would be good for me to be able to talk to him and stake my claim.

Val walked past him, taking Echo’s arm and leading her down the hall. I followed Victor to his office. He didn’t talk to me or look at me. I didn’t like that it felt like he was dismissing me.

When we got to the office he waved me in and closed the door. Victor walked around the desk and indicated one of the chairs in front of it as he took his seat. I sat and stared him down.

“I know what your intentions with Echo are. You scented her. You believe her to be your mate and want me to... what?... back off?” He chuckled dryly.

“She’s meant to be mine. I appreciate that you saved her from her family, but, in the end, she will be mine. I want you to remember that. The moon goddess gave her to me and I won’t give up.” I told him.

“Echo doesn’t want you. She doesn’t feel anything for you, except friendship. Tell me the words she has to say to reject you properly so your goddess can give you a female that is... more fit for a wolf’s mate.”

“She’s not healthy yet. She can’t feel it, but she will. I’m not giving up until she’s healthy and telling me that she doesn’t want me. I can wait as long as I need to.” I smirked.

“True.” He nodded. “She’s not healthy yet. When she is, Echo may be different than you imagine. You can already see her vampire tendencies peeking through. She won’t always be this sweet, innocent, little girl. I’m prepared for that, are you? Are you really ready for a woman who won’t need you to protect her? A dhampyr isn’t a vampire, but they are stronger and faster than

wolves. Plus, they have the tenacity of a human. Even if you take her heart, she will always come back to me.”

“You love her.” I glared.

“I do, and I won’t lose to a jumped up pup who thinks he knows better than my centuries of experience.” Victor sneered.

“You better not touch her.” I growled.

“Let’s make a deal. I don’t want Echo to lose friends or feel like she’s being cornered into a relationship with either of us. I want this to be her decision.”

“What’s your offer?” I asked.

“Simply that we let Echo get healthy, we let her make her own decisions, and we wait until she’s eighteen before we try to get her involved in anything. When she’s ready, we act as properly courting gentlemen. No initiation of contact. We take her on dates and spend time with her. After some time, she can choose who she wants to stay with. I won’t mark her as my human servant until she makes her decision. If she chooses you, I won’t mark her at all. If she chooses me, you tell her the words she needs to say to reject you. Is this agreeable?” He smiled a little.

I thought about it. That would be a simple solution. He had an advantage over me, though, she lived with him. I grinned.

“I have a couple things I’d like you to agree to first.” I said.

“Of course. What would you like added?” Victor asked.

“Echo gives me hugs every day to soothe my wolf. I want that to continue. Of course, that means you can keep hugging her. I smell you on her every morning, so I know you are.”

He nodded.

“And I want to move in here. Echo gets to know you more because you’re in the same house. I’m at a disadvantage. Equal time would be more possible if I were here.”

“That’s incorrect. If you were here and at school with her, then you would get more of her time.” He replied sternly.

“I work four nights a week and don’t get home until after eleven. On Sundays I would have to be home for family dinner night. For things like a pack meeting, I would have to go without her. I could help with her training.” I offered.

Victor looked thoughtful. He was really considering it. I would only need to tell Trent I was moving off the pack lands. As an adult, I was in control of my living situation.

“Give me time to think on it. I don’t like the idea, but I understand your position. It will be better if Echo doesn’t know of this until we work it out. I don’t plan to keep it from her, but I don’t want her to worry about it while it’s still in the air. I’m sure you understand.” He said.

“Gladly. Is there anything else?” I asked.

“Don’t scent her again.” Victor replied with a deadly look.

I hadn’t been afraid of him until that moment. The air seemed to chill. I was surprised that I couldn’t see my breath. Rex was cowering in my mind. That was rare. He was practically fearless.

Looking away from his eyes was impossible. I couldn’t move. A slight whine started growing from my chest. I didn’t want to, but it was the nature of animals to bow to those more dominant.

My head shifted to the side and I bared my neck to him. I hated him so much in that moment. He was definitely stronger than me and he wanted me to know it.

There was a knock on the door and he smirked as he looked away. The invisible grip on my body released and I took a deep breath. Maybe I’d overstepped. I didn’t realize vampires could be like that.

“Come in, Echo. We’re just finishing up.” Victor called out.

The door opened behind me and I saw his face soften the slightest bit. If I hadn’t been looking right at him, I would have missed it. He really did love her. This was going to be a harder fight than I was expecting.

Meeting the Witch

Chapter 42 - The Vampire's Servant

Echo walked into the room and put her hand on my shoulder. I soaked in the feeling of her touch. It made my body feel warmer. She was the balm to whatever he’d just done to me. I needed her touch more than anything I’d ever needed.

I moved my head to rub my face against her arm, but saw Victor’s face and decided against it. If I scented her, he would kill me. I was pretty sure.

Instead, I stood. “We should get going. Is there anything else you need Echo to do before we leave?” I asked.

“No, thank you, Gray. This is Echo’s day off. She only has to do what she wants. Have a good night, princess. I want you to have as much fun as possible.” He smiled.

“Thank you, Victor. Will you be alright without me?” She questioned softly.

“I managed the last few hundred years, I think one night will be difficult, but I’ll survive.” Victor replied with a wink, making her giggle.

We turned to leave. I was nearly out the door when I heard him speaking quietly under his breath.

“Keep your paws off her tonight, Grayson. I’ll know if you touch her.”

I nodded and left the room. I followed Echo and Val silently. It wasn’t until I was out in the sunlight that I actually felt safe. I wouldn’t be taunting the vampire again any time soon. That wasn’t a healthy decision.

We rode to the pack lands and I felt better as we got further away. I hoped he actually thought about my suggestion. If I could spend time with Echo, I knew she’d fall in love with me.

There was no way she’d pick that bloodsucker after spending the same amount of time with me. Our bond would be stronger than anything he could do. This would work out perfectly.

When we arrived, Harmony ran out and hugged Echo like she hadn’t seen her in weeks instead of a day. Val grabbed Echo’s bag from the back of the car. He stood next to his sisters. Echo seemed even more relaxed. The connection she had with them was more than she had with me.

“The witches are here! They had time this evening to come help!” Harmony was saying to Echo and Val.

“Great. I want to get tested and find out more about witchcraft. I’m going to make sure no one can hurt us again.” Val replied to her.

“Let’s get Echo settled in my room, then we’ll go meet with them in the Alpha’s office.” Harmony said.

They went to Harmony’s room. I didn’t follow. Cam was giving me serious side eye. I knew he wanted to talk.

“What’s up, Cam?” I asked.

“What did you do? You smell like fear.” He said.

“I talked to the vampire.” I replied.

“You didn’t threaten him, did you? Trent is gonna be pissed if you did something to threaten his alliance.” Cam whispered urgently.

“I didn’t threaten him. He threatened me. I offered a compromise. He’s thinking about it. If he accepts it, I’ll move in with them. You’ll have to ride to school with Val and Harmony in the mornings.” I smiled a little.

“What?! You can’t move in with him. Vampires and werewolves aren’t meant to share the same spaces. You’ll never get the smell of him off you. People in the pack will stop trusting you. You’ll have to come home and decontaminate every week. Just give her up, man. Let him have her. She doesn’t want you.” He hissed.

“She doesn’t know what she wants. She’s sick. I’ll help her get better and we’ll be together. Her parents hurt her more than they hurt Harmony and Val. She needs me, not a vampire. If I’m not there, she might choose him. I won’t lose.” I growled.

“I think you’re the one who’s sick, man. I hate seeing you hurt yourself like this, but I can’t argue with you. It never works when you set your mind to something. I just want you to be open minded about giving her up if she doesn’t pick you. There are plenty of other females in the world. Maybe your next mate is a wolf. I don’t want you to lose that chance because you’re chasing after a girl who can’t be yours.” Cam sighed and rubbed his eyes.

We were standing in front of the doors. I couldn’t believe my best friend doubted me and our goddess so much. I’d show him, my brother, and that bloodsucker. Echo was mine. She would be mine once she could feel the bond.

I walked behind Cam, thinking of how I would take care of her. She would never want for anything. I would get to see that bright cheerful smile all the time. Echo would never have to be afraid. I would protect her. It didn’t matter that she was strong. I’d be there so she wouldn’t need to fight as much or as hard to stay safe.

Cam led me to Trent’s office. My brother was talking to a woman in a flowing green dress. She had dark orange curls piled into a bun on top of her head. Her manner was calm and she smelled like the forest.

“Gray, come in. This is Missy. She’s the witch who could help us today. Missy, this is my brother, Grayson. His mate is the dhampyr you’ll be seeing today. Beside him is Cam. He’s mated to the half wolf you’ll be seeing.” Trent explained.

“And they’re all related to the witch boy?” She asked.

“Yes. Have you ever heard of anything like that?” He questioned.

“Oddly, yes. It’s a supernatural triad. They don’t happen often, and never with vampires involved. Normally, a triad is a witch, a shifter, and a fae of some sort. Vampire magic doesn’t mesh well with the magics of light witches, and all witches start off light. The darkness is

something that can grow as we get older and the darkness of the world overtake us. It's easier for the darkness to grasp some than it is for others." She said softly.

"Do you think that Valor will be influenced by the darkness in vampire magic?" Trent asked.

"I won't know until I see him and his aura. I'm excited about this triad. I can't imagine the power they'll have." Missy grinned.

"Excuse us." Harmony said from behind us.

Cam brightened and turned, taking her in his arms and kissing her gently. I looked away. It would only incite Rex. I didn't want him to get any ideas.

'Don't worry about that. The vampire can kill us before we blink. We're not Alpha enough to fight a master vampire. He's stronger than any of the vampires who live around here. We're gonna give his idea a chance, even if he doesn't accept our suggestion. The only way we're getting our mate away from him is to do it fairly.' Rex said.

I moved from the doorway and let Val and Echo through. Echo smiled at her sister and Cam. She didn't seem wistful, just happy. Echo didn't think of things like relationships for herself. I needed to remember that.

"Everyone, this is Missy. She's gonna be helping us out. Any questions before we start?" Trent asked.

"Will it hurt?" Val asked.

"It shouldn't. If this is a suppression spell like the vampires suggested, then it should be easy to remove." She smiled.

"And if it's not a suppression spell?" He pressed.

"Caught that. If it's not a suppression spell, there are only a handful of things it could be and some of them can be a little painful. But they would have been painful to place to begin with. First, I have to know, do any of you have a tattoo or small mark over your heart?" She asked.

They shook their heads.

"That's good. Those are the hardest to remove and are super painful." Missy told them. "So, who's going first?"

"I will." Val and Echo said at the same time.

He looked at her in surprise. Then they turned to Harmony. She was too busy with her mate to pay attention and probably hadn't heard the question. I snorted.

“I want to go first, Echo. You’ve hurt enough for me. Let me do this for you and Harmony. If it hurts, I would rather it’s me.” Val said.

“I’m used to hurting, Valley. Let me take care of this.” Echo smiled softly.

I didn’t want her to hurt either. I looked to Missy. She was snickering quietly.

“That’s how triads can be. They’re even closer than most multiples. They never want their siblings to hurt and they almost never fight. If they weren’t suppressed or bound, they would feel each other’s pain as well. They are three parts to a whole. Echo, vampire magic will be stronger with you. If the spell is whole, it would be more so on your sister or brother. Once I know what spell I’m working with, I can tell you how I will remove it. Right now, I’m just checking. I will check you all to be sure that you all have the same spell on you.” Missy assure my mate.

“If you’re just checking, then you can start with Val and Harmony. I can wait.” Echo replied and stepped back.

Val stepped closer to Missy and stood in front of her. He seemed to tower over the little witch. I moved to the side more so I could see what was happening.

Missy moved her hands around and muttered some words I couldn’t understand. She pulled back and smiled. Val looked hopeful.

“A binding spell. It’s a little worn down. Trent told me you were able to use some magic a while ago. That’s because one of the witches who bound you has died. Their magic was freed into the universe and can’t hold you any longer. This was placed by a water witch and an earth witch. That’s a powerful combination, but the water witch is gone. I’m an earth witch. I can unbind you. Once I take care of the spells on you and your siblings, I will test you and we’ll find out your element. I’m betting it’s fire. Most male witches are fire witches.” She said. “Now, who’s next?”

She did the same thing over Harmony and came back with a suppression spell that was fully intact. It was why she had no connection to her wolf at all. Then she moved on to Echo.

Missy looked at the space around Echo with an intent expression. She frowned and sighed before doing the same thing she’d done to the others. I stepped a little closer.

“Well. You’re certainly different. The suppression spell is the same as the one on your sister. The thing is, water and earth magic can turn dark easier than air and fire. The darkness of vampiric magic that is inherent in all vampires of a certain level of power had eaten away at it. You’re meant to be very powerful. This spell is in tatters. I can remove it very simply. The wounds to your aura are a cause for concern. If I saw anyone else with an aura like yours, I would guess they were dying. Maybe you were. It’s trying to heal. Let me get the scraps of the spell off, it will speed your healing. You said she has a mate?” She asked my brother.

“Yes. My brother Gray, right there.” He said.

“Good. You’ll need to spend time with the people you love and who your soul is connected to in order to heal faster. I can tell that she’s grown close to you already. The healthy parts are glowing. Stay still, Echo. I’ll help you first.” Missy said.

I watched as she drew a circle on her left hand with one of her fingers. She began picking at the air around Echo, putting whatever she grabbed into the center of her left palm. As she worked, the sweetness of Echo’s scent started fading. The lemon drop scent grew stronger and Rex started dancing inside of me.

The sweet scent must have been the spell. It had changed her. If it hadn’t been broken I wondered if I would have recognized her as my mate. I wouldn’t have realized who she was. The reality of losing the connection I felt to her made my stomach drop.

“There. All clean. I can’t expend too much energy trying to heal you. I have too much to do with your sister and brother. I’m sorry.” Missy smiled slightly.

“Thank you for helping me. I’ll be fine. Gray and Victor will help me heal.” Echo replied softly.

I wondered what she meant by that. Did she love him too?

‘It doesn’t matter! She included us!’ Rex shouted.

Carefully, I reached out to pull Echo over to the couch so she could sit while Missy worked on Harmony. When my hand touched her elbow I felt the familiar sparks of her skin against mine. I grasped her and Echo jumped with a yip.

“What was that?!” She asked.

“What?” I questioned.

“That sparky feeling. It was like static, but not as bitey.” Echo replied, rubbing her elbow.

My heart leapt. “That’s the mate bond, Echo. You can feel it now. Don’t worry, I won’t push it. You need healing before we can explore that. I’ll be right here when you’re ready.”

She looked at me like I’d grown a second head. My brother and Cam were looking at me oddly as well. I guess it was a little out of character, but, no matter how happy I was, Victor’s threat hung over me. I was that much closer to winning.

“Come, sit down. I don’t want to crowd Harmony and Cam wants to be right next to her. I won’t touch you if you don’t want.” I offered.

“No, that’s okay. I’ll learn to deal with this.” She said softly and followed me to the couch.

I sat with Echo next to me and felt more complete than I had in my entire life. She wasn’t touching me, but she was close and I was enjoying her new scent.

Chapter 43 - The Vampire's Servant

Cam was looking nervous as Missy rooted around in a hand bag. She pulled out several things and put them into a little stone bowl. She ground the things up while chanting something.

“I need a glass of water.” She said, turning to Trent.

He went to the table in the corner of the room and poured water from a pitcher into a glass before taking it back to Missy. She poured the powdered things into the glass and stirred them up.

“I know this doesn’t look appealing and it doesn’t taste the greatest, but it will release the suppression spell from your aura so I can finish removing it. I need to do this to make it easier on you.” Missy told Harmony.

Without even blinking, Harmony took the glass and downed it. She was always bold like that. I envied Cam a little. He looked shocked.

“That was terrible. What next?” Harmony asked scrunching her nose.

Missy laughed. It was a bright and cheerful sound. She took the glass back and settled it on the table before going back to Harmony and chanting under her breath as she seemed to be unhooking something from the air around Harmony. She got it off and chanted some more words while making a motion like she was molding something into a ball.

It got smaller and smaller until she was flattening it into the center of her left palm. I wished I understood witchcraft more. I didn’t understand what she was doing.

“It may take a little while, but you should start hearing your wolf soon. Last one. Valor, are you ready?” Missy asked.

“More than ready.” He answered.

Cam brought Harmony over to the couch and settled her beside Echo. She was staring around like she’d never been able to see before. She sniffed and wrinkled her nose.

“What is that smell? It’s like something old and musty and... bloody.” Harmony said, looking around.

“That’s Echo. She smells like vampires.” Cam replied.

I growled a little. How dare he say that! She didn't smell like vampires. She smelled like lemon drops and sunshine. There was now a warm, rich undertone to her scent that reminded me of napping in a meadow in the summer.

"She doesn't smell like vampires." I told him sternly.

"Yes, she does, Gray." Trent answered. "She just doesn't to you because you smell her mate scent. She has your scent on her as well, I'm sure Victor loved that, but she smells like vampire."

"Even after spending the day with humans and wolves at school, she smells like vampire." Cam insisted.

"I'll get used to it. I won't let that keep me from being around my sister." Harmony murmured to Echo and grasped her hand.

"You're warmer than you used to be, Harmony." Echo whispered.

"I was just going to say that you feel colder than normal."

"We have higher body temperatures. Vampires have lower temperatures. Let's let Missy focus on Val, children." Trent said sternly.

We quieted down and watched what was going on with Val. Missy had her right hand on him. Her palm over the center of his forehead. Her left was held away and she was chanting quietly.

She drew her hand down to his heart and pressed it firmly over it while continuing her chant. It was like the air was starting to get thicker and heavier as she went. Suddenly, it all cleared and she stopped chanting.

"There. All clear. How does that feel?" Missy asked.

"Like I can breathe. That's amazing." Val grinned.

"Let's get the tests set up so we can get your elements and I can start finding you a mentor." She smiled.

Missy set about working on the table. She set out a rock, a candle, and a small bowl she had Trent fill with water. The final piece was an empty jar. I looked over the selection quizzically.

"It's a jar of wind. A little magic given to me from an air witch. She gave me the instructions. The wind will stay in there unless he's an air witch." Missy explained. "Now, Valor, I need your hand we're going to use a drop of your blood on each of these."

Val held out his hand and Missy pulled out a pin. She held his hand over the rock and pricked his finger, then squeezed a drop of blood onto it. Nothing happened.

“It was worth a shot. Next.” Missy smiled.

She held his finger over the candle and dropped some blood onto the burned wick. A flame sparked to life. I’d never seen anything like it.

“Just as I thought. All done.” She said.

“No. I want to try the others.” Val replied.

“Witches only have one element, Valor.”

“Please?” He asked giving her an innocent, pleading look that worked on pretty much every girl I’d seen him with.

She sighed and shrugged, then moved his hand over the bowl of water and let a drop of blood fall. The water rippled, then swirled and Missy gasped.

“Dear Goddess. Those are opposite elements. I’ve never seen a fire/water witch.” Missy whispered before opening the jar and dropping some blood in there.

There was no reaction. I was a little disappointed. I wanted to see her face if he had three.

Missy started rummaging in her purse and pulled out a packet of seeds. She put one on the table and dropped some of Val’s blood on it. The seed quivered, then sprouted.

“I can’t believe it. Only fae witches have plant magic. I wasn’t even going to test it, but I brought the seeds along for some reason. The goddess must have guided me.” She murmured before digging through her bag again. “I want to test how light or dark your magic is.”

She pulled out a small bundle and unwrapped it, revealing a large cloudy looking crystal. Missy settled it on the table and took Val’s other hand.

“I need you to touch this with your unbloodied hand. Think of calming images. That will bring your true nature closer to the surface.”

Val took a deep breath and touched the crystal. Almost instantly, it glowed with the brightest light I’d ever seen. I had to cover my eyes.

“My head hurts.” Harmony whimpered.

“Try talking to it. That could be your wolf. She might be agitated. Ask her what her name is and tell her to calm down.” Cam said soothingly.

A movement from Echo drew my attention. She was rubbing her teeth with her fingers. I tried touching her, but she pulled away and started rubbing harder.

I was worried. I'd never seen her like that before.

"Echo, are you alright?" I asked.

Val pulled his hand off the crystal and hurried around the table. He knelt in front of his sisters and put his hand over their clasped hands. Both girls relaxed and seemed to calm.

"Her name is Mercy." Harmony grinned at Val, then at Cam.

"I'm hungry." Echo mumbled.

"Let's call that good. Gray, you were taking your friends out for pizza, right?" Trent asked.

I nodded.

"Afterward, you should take them up to our quarters for a movie. We have the little theater room up there and the kids are at mom and dad's tonight. I'm taking Lily out for the evening and we won't be back until eleven. That give you kids plenty of time for a movie." He offered.

I considered what he was offering. It seemed suspicious, somehow. I wasn't going to fight it, though. Sitting in a dark room with my mate sounded amazing.

"Echo? Would you like to watch a movie tonight?" I asked.

"If we can eat first. I don't know why I'm so hungry, but I need to eat something." She replied.

"Sure. We can go get something to eat. Are you guys ready to eat?" I inquired to the room.

"Gray, two of us are werewolves and the other is a teen male. We're always ready to eat." Cam chuckled.

I laughed. We stood. Val let go of his sisters' hands and we all started heading out.

"Gray, can I talk to you for a moment?" Trent said.

"Sure." I smiled.

"Valor, wait up, I need your information for getting you with your mentors." Missy called out.

She blew out the flame, poured the water into the empty glass, and loaded up her bag. When they were all gone, the room seemed empty. My brother moved to his desk and started straightening up.

He and his mate had a standing date night every Saturday. He was never late. Sometimes I would watch the kids for them, I loved my niece and nephew, but they would stay with my parents or Lily's parents a lot, too.

“What’s up, Trent?” I asked.

“I know you’re hopeful, since Echo can feel the bond now, but I want you to still consider letting her stay with the vampires. It’s just safer for her there. Victor really cares for her and I know he’ll protect her. We can stand up to younger vampires okay, but older ones may be a problem. They would be the ones coming after her.” Trent said.

“Thanks for your opinion, but I’m not giving up on Echo. She’ll still have his name. If I have to, I’ll petition to move packs to one better equipped to fight older vampires. I could probably get into one of the stronger ones. I’d be a good pack warrior.” I replied.

“Mom and dad would kill me if I chased you out of the pack for this. Just... just think about her and what she needs. I know you’re trying to be more soft and understanding, but I don’t think this is a healthy choice for you or for us.” He sighed.

“I’ll give her up if she doesn’t want me once she’s gotten to know me. I can’t force her to love me. I could just mark her and let the bond do the work, but I’m not that kind of asshole. Even if she grew to love me, I don’t think I could handle the resentment she would hold until then. I don’t want her to ever hate me. Until I know she’s making a decision because it’s how she really feels and not some residual thing from her childhood and being save by Victor, I’m not giving up. I’ll grow our bond the slow way.” I told him.

“You’re going to do what you’re going to do. You’re like an Alpha in that. Try to stay safe. Read some of these books I have on dealing with vampires, it might save your life sometime. You’re gonna deal with a lot of them if you keep after this girl.” Trent said, waving me off.

I headed out to find everyone else. I linked Cam when I was outside Trent’s office and he told me they were in the kitchens so Echo could ask her questions. I walked down the stairs as quickly as I could.

When I arrived at the kitchen, I saw Echo getting a folder from Frieda, the head chef, and munching on a cookie. I smiled. Frieda was always ready with a snack for anyone who wandered into her kitchen.

“There you are. Why are you going out for dinner when I have a perfectly good meal planned?” Frieda scolded.

“Echo’s never had fresh pizza. I wanted her to try it. We’re going to your son’s place.” I offered.

“That’s good. He learned well in my kitchens. Next time she comes, I’ll cook for her.”

“Thank you.” Echo smiled.

“You’re such a sweet girl. It’s a shame you’re not a wolf like your sister.” Frieda said softly.

“Frieda!” I gasped.

“It’s okay, Gray. I’m used to people saying it’s a shame I’m not like my sister. It just means that my sister is as amazing as I think she is. Not that there’s anything wrong with me. At least, not when Miss Frieda says it. Thank you for your help. These recipes will come in handy. Have a good evening.” Echo replied in a sweet voice.

“Let’s go. I’m sure everyone could use a break after the witchy thing.” Cam said and we left the kitchen.

Dinner and a Movie

Chapter 44 - The Vampire's Servant

We walked out to the front of the pack house and decided to walk to the pizza place. It was about a fifteen-minute walk to the center of the pack’s village. Gina’s was in the center of everything.

I led the way. Cam had Harmony’s arm wrapped around his as she was commenting on all the things she could smell and hear now. I couldn’t imagine coming into being a werewolf after spending so much time with human senses. She was handling it amazingly.

Pulling open the heavy front door, the scent of fresh pizza hit me like a wall of flavor. I couldn’t wait to eat and to see Echo get to try something new. She always looked so thrilled when I brought her things at school.

The hostess wrinkled her nose a little, but didn’t say anything as she led us to a booth far from the other customers and took our drink orders. Not a lot of wolves liked the smell of vampire. At least I knew why my brother and my boss started making me take showers all the time.

Hugging Echo every day would have gotten the scent of vampire all over me. I didn’t mind it though. I smelled like my mate.

“What toppings do you think we should get?” I asked Echo as she looked over the menu.

“Mmm. Lots of meat and I’m craving mushrooms.”

“Ew.” Cam said.

Echo blushed and studied the menu closer. I glared at my friend. He could be so insensitive sometimes.

“They make a stuffed mushroom appetizer. We can get two large all meat pizzas. That should feed everyone.”

“Cheese sticks! We need mozzarella sticks! Mercy wants them!” Harmony squealed.

Cam chuckled. “Of course. Mercy can have whatever she wants. I’ll always give you both anything you want or need.”

Harmony leaned in close to Cam and whispered something to him that made him blush before she pulled back and kissed his cheek. I’d seen my brother and his mate enough to know she just said something dirty. Mated female wolves were very forward.

With Harmony’s personality, the addition of Mercy must be bringing out some uninhibited behavior. I could imagine them being very strong. I could tell she wasn’t an omega. It was almost like she was a rank born wolf. I was amazed.

When our waitress came, she had a big smile on her face and flirted a little with Val. She went to school with us. A lot of the younger female wolves in our high school felt it was open season on the human staying with our pack. At least, until they found their mates.

Val and Harmony had been accepted into our pack the moment they came back and told us their parents kicked them out. It must be why she smells like a pack wolf and not a rogue. I wondered at it a little.

She wasn’t born in our pack or from a pack wolf. She should smell like a rogue born wolf, but she smelled like pack. I knew Trent gave a weird look to his Beta and Gamma when they swore her in. It must have felt like having another wolf added to the pack and confused him.

The waitress brought back our appetizers. Two large orders of mozzarella sticks, an order of stuffed mushrooms, and a combination platter with mozzarella sticks, chicken strips, and fries. Harmony loaded a little plate up with some of everything and put it in front of Echo with her mushrooms.

We dug into the food. Echo was so small, I was always surprised at how much she could pack away. Those lunches she brought to school were twice the size of a school lunch. I was a little jealous, the food smelled better than school lunch too.

It wasn’t too much longer before the pizzas were brought out. We were all talking about school and the homework we were all assigned for the weekend. Echo was the only one who’d already finished hers. I was impressed by her dedication.

Echo’s eyes grew large as the pizzas were dropped off. They were covered in meat and cheese. They smelled amazing.

I picked up a piece and put it on her plate before getting my own. When I looked back, Echo was picking pieces of meat off the pizza and eating them. I chuckled at how cute she was.

“Pick it up, like this.” I showed her.

Echo mimicked my movement and took a bite. She closed her eyes and made a soft sound as she chewed. I'd never seen someone relish a bite of pizza as much as she did. It made me smile.

She was eager, yet reverent with each new bite and each new slice. Echo managed three slices even after everything she'd had before. I saw Val and Harmony enjoying their sister's delight in the food that was basically a staple to us.

I wanted to be there for so many new experiences for her. For every new experience. I wanted to be the one to introduce her to everything that she'd missed out on.

When we were done, I paid and left a nice tip for our waitress. Though she was most attentive to Val, she paid attention to the rest of the table too. Being a waiter, I knew how important those tips were.

We walked back to the pack house. Harmony and Echo walked behind everyone, talking about dress shopping for the prom and making plans. Harmony wanted to try and find a dress that was the same as hers, but a different color, for Echo.

I couldn't wait for that night. Knowing that she was there with me. Dancing with her. Getting to see her all dressed up and made up. It was exciting.

At the pack house, I led everyone up to the Alpha's quarters and opened up the small theater room. There was a larger theater room in the pack house, but it was usually full of other people on weekends. Plus, I saw the movies at Echo's house.

There was no way they were watching something 'G' rated. They were probably watching an action movie or a horror movie. Echo wasn't ready for movies like that.

"Here are the movies we have. Why don't you pick something out, Echo?" Harmony asked.

"Oh, I'll watch whatever everyone else wants to watch." She replied softly.

"No, you never got to go out to movies or watch TV with us. You pick the movie, Echo." Val said. "Everyone will be fine with what you want to watch."

I liked that they were so intent on her happiness. She blushed in a cute way and walked over to the shelves of movies. Cam quietly argued with Harmony about what movie Echo might pick. Harmony pulled his ear down to her mouth and whispered something to him that made him stop complaining and take a seat.

Harmony sat next to him and cuddled close. I wished Echo would do that, but I was realistic. She wasn't ready for that, but one day she would be.

"Can we watch this one? Drew said I shouldn't, but I understand why. I want to though, if it's okay." Echo said quietly.

Val went over and looked at the box she'd picked out. The scent of his disturbance filled the air. He turned to us and showed the cover.

Cinderella.

Harmony covered her mouth. I looked at Echo as she looked like she wanted to hide somewhere. I caught Val's eye and nodded.

If Echo wanted it, we'd watch it. It was the old Disney cartoon, not the live action one. I didn't think it would be too bad.

He brought me the movie and I set it up on the big screen TV before heading to sit with everyone else. Echo was sitting between Val and Harmony when I turned back. I went to sit on the chair near Val. It gave me a clear sightline to Echo.

They took Echo's hands as the movie started. I watched as she stared at the screen intently. Through the whole movie, I found myself paying more attention to Echo than to the screen.

She smiled sometimes and there were times she frowned. She gasped when the stepmother locked Cinderella away so she couldn't try on the slipper. It looked like she might cry when the mice were trying to get the key up to save Cinderella.

I'd never seen anyone so invested in a Disney movie. When the movie ended. Echo was grinning with tears in her eyes. I wanted to hold her so badly, but her family was already there, telling her how much they loved her and hugging her.

I hated her parents for making her identify with that sort of story. I'd never let them near her again. I would protect Echo with everything I had in me. She was mine and would never suffer again if I could help it. I loved her more than I had ever loved anything or anyone.

"Do you want to watch another movie, Echo, or go to bed?" I asked.

"I'm pretty tired, actually. Sorry. Thank you for watching this movie with me. Next time, someone else can pick." She said.

"Until you're ready to watch newer movies, we'll let you pick." I told her.

"I better be ready by next weekend. I doubt Sean will want to watch a movie for little kids." Echo chuckled.

That needed to be fixed. I would have a word with Sean and let him know Echo was a little sheltered and needed to see something better suited for a younger audience. I would even give him money for the tickets so he wouldn't have to pay for something he didn't want to see.

"I guess we'll see what he decides." I smiled. "I'll walk with you guys over to Harmony's room."

We stood up and headed from the room after I put the movie away and turned off the TV. I walked next to Val as we headed to their rooms. Harmony and Val's rooms were right next to each other.

"That movie set you back a little." He whispered to me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The prince was the one who came to her house and freed her from her evil stepmother. Not some guy who showed up after she was saved by someone else. I have eyes. I can see how my sister is around Victor. She's falling in love with him. I don't think you should keep after her. It will just be harder for her to feel like she's stuck between the two of you and have to choose." Val said softly.

Why was everyone trying to get me to leave her? It was like the mate bond didn't mean anything to them. I was getting tired of having to defend myself. I hoped Victor accepted my terms. I'd rather be there after all this pressure.

"I love her. We're mates. That bond is stronger than some fairy tale. Everyone is trying to get me to leave her. I wish I'd been the one to save her and not Victor, but there's nothing I can do about it now. I can only move forward and let the bond grow. I know she feels something for him, but she's starting to feel something for me too. She felt the bond earlier. I promise not to pressure her and I'll give up if she chooses him, but she hasn't chosen yet. Not with all the freedom of a girl who knows she can have anything she wants." I replied.

"Fine. Once she's better, if she tells you to bug off and you don't I'll burn your tail off. I may be a light witch, but I'll go dark to protect my little sisters." He warned.

"I'll accept that. You're just looking out for your little sister. I would do the same for my own sister."

He nodded and we walked on. Soon, we came to the door of Harmony's room. Val went over and hugged his sisters, kissing them on top of their heads before saying goodnight and heading to his door.

Harmony asked Echo to wait in the hall while she said goodnight to Cam in private and pulled him into her room, closing the door behind them. I was a little glad that the rooms in the pack house were soundproofed. That made me a little jealous.

I inched closer to Echo. When I was close enough, I reached out for her hand and she jumped when our fingers touched. I was excited that she was feeling the bond.

"Sorry." I mumbled. "Can I have a hug?"

"I... umm... I don't think that's a good idea." She said softly.

My heart dropped and I sighed. Of course she wouldn't there were too many new things. It was too much to ask.

"Is... is your wolf upset?" Echo asked.

"He was worried about you after watching that movie." I replied.

'Liar.' Rex growled in my head.

'Keep your opinions to yourself.' I told him.

"I guess I can give you a little hug. You won't sleep well if he's upset."

She turned to me and I hugged her happily. I know I lied and I'd feel bad about it later, but another hug was exactly what I needed. I would maybe see Echo in the morning, but I wouldn't see her until Monday if I missed her at breakfast.

"It feels weird with the buzzy sparky feeling. It kind of tickles." She murmured in my arms.

"Does it bother you a lot?" I asked.

"No, it's just strange."

This was the longest she'd ever let me hug her. I was so happy that I forgot I wasn't supposed to scent her again and rubbed my jaw over her hair. I felt her hands come up and push my chest. Reluctantly, I let her go.

"Goodnight, Gray." Echo said.

"Goodnight, Echo. Sweet dreams." I smiled.

Just as I was turning to leave, Cam came out of Harmony's room. It looked like he got a lot more than a hug, from the look on his face and the disheveled state of his hair and shirt. I grabbed him and pulled him with me. We were going to have our own sleepover. I needed to know everything.

Sunday Morning

Chapter 45 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

Harmony was holding me tightly when I woke up. I couldn't remember a time when I got to sleep in the same room, let alone the same bed as my sister. We were always close, but never got the chance to really be together.

There was some movement behind me. Val had snuck into the room before we fell asleep and laid down with us. His arm was draped lazily over us as he cuddled me from behind.

I thought about what the witch said and I believed her. We were three parts of a whole and I could feel that connection with them more than I had before. I wasn't trying to keep myself back from them. I was finally free to love them and I couldn't be happier.

"Good morning, Miss Wiggle." Val chuckled.

"Are you always awake and this full of energy in the morning?" Harmony groaned.

"I didn't realize I was wiggling." I replied, embarrassed.

I hadn't meant to wake them up. I was just so used to waking up and starting my day. I needed to learn to be less intense with my schedule. I wanted to learn to be more like Harmony.

"How are you two feeling this morning?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Hungry. Mercy is grumpy. She loves you, but the smell of werewolf and vampire on you had her feeling nervous all night." Harmony said.

"I feel about the same." Val answered.

"Maybe I should take a shower. I'm sure Victor would prefer if I didn't smell like werewolf when I went home." I told her.

"Why does he hate werewolves so much?" She asked.

"When he was alive, he was attacked by one. It nearly killed him. He would have died permanently if his sire hadn't found him. Plus, werewolves and vampires don't usually like each other." I explained.

"Does he regret becoming a vampire?" Val asked.

"I don't know. He seems to be happy now that his territory is coming together. It's not like he can change it without dying forever." I hated that idea.

Victor dying would kill me. I needed to have him with me forever. I felt safe and loved with him. I didn't want to lose him.

"You smell different now. This is so weird. You don't look any different from when you said that but now you smell... scared?" Harmony whispered.

“I can’t lose Victor, Harmony. He’s my best friend.”

“Mercy said you lied. It smelled bitter. Don’t lie to me, Echo. You need to always tell us the truth.” Harmony scolded.

My eyes widened. She could smell when I lied? That meant other werewolves could smell when I lied. I thought of all the lies I told over the last week.

“Echo’s falling in love with Victor, Harmony. I saw it while I was with her yesterday and on Monday. It’s okay to feel strongly about him because he saved you, Echo. I just don’t want you to confuse gratitude for something more. Especially with this whole mate situation with Gray.” Val said.

“I wish I could just be friends with him without that.” I muttered.

“Gray wants you to be healthy. He wants you to give him a chance. I want you to not think about relationships at all and work on becoming healthy and strong. You need to work on yourself before you can truly be happy with someone else. That’s why I keep turning girls down.” He admitted.

“I don’t understand how you can resist the mate bond. When Cam holds me I love the feeling of the sparks on my skin. It’s like happiness dancing over me.” Harmony sighed.

“I didn’t feel them until yesterday. I like hugging Gray, but I like hugging Victor too. I don’t feel like I need to love him because of it. The goddess made a mistake when she made me his mate. I don’t know him. How can I love him?” I asked.

“You don’t know Victor, either, but you’re falling in love with him. Mercy says ‘the goddess doesn’t make mistakes’. I know that Cam is perfect for me in every way. Gray needs to grow up a little, but he’s perfect for you too. I know he’ll give you everything you want and need. Victor just wants you to be his servant. He doesn’t love you like Gray does.” She insisted.

I pulled away from my sister and looked in her eyes. She was really serious about this. The smell of the room became stronger with forest and animal scents. She looked angry. It made me nervous.

“Sorry. Never mind. I don’t want either one if it’s going to make you mad at me.” I replied quietly.

“Harmony, it’s not our place to tell Echo where her heart should go. Maybe it wasn’t a mistake when they were babies. Can you really be serious about a spoiled brat like Gray being perfect for Echo? She would just become his servant in a different way. She’s not as strong as you. She needs time to come into herself. I say, no boyfriends until she’s thirty.” Val stated firmly.

“That’s such a dad thing to say. She’s not your daughter, Val. She can date when she wants to. I just want her to give Gray a chance. I don’t think she’s planning on even thinking about it. She’s

just shoving him into the friend zone and sealing the door. That's not fair to him and it's not fair to her. What if she rejects him before she has the chance to know him? She'll lose out on someone who loves her for more than just what she has in her blood." Harmony argued passionately.

I sat up and looked at both of them. They were acting like they were in control of where I settled my heart. I couldn't believe they were trying to decide my future without asking me.

Val seemed to be thinking of me more than Harmony was. It was like she was entirely on Gray's side. She was supposed to be on my side.

Getting off the bed, I gathered my things and went to the bathroom in Harmony's room. I needed to shower. I had to get the smell of Gray off of me. I wanted to go home.

Tears fell as I scrubbed and used Harmony's shampoo twice, just to be sure Gray's scent was off of me. I wanted to be happy, but I was letting too many things take over for me. Maybe I was mixing up gratitude and love.

Victor said he loved me, but maybe he was picking up on my own emotion. I couldn't be connected with a wolf and a vampire at the same time. They would never be able to get over their dislike of each other.

I wouldn't live in a battlefield. Maybe I should take Marius up on his offer and go live with him. Then I wouldn't have to think of love or men or anything but training.

My promise to Sean tugged at my mind. Right after the prom. I wouldn't let my friend down because of someone else's issues. He didn't deserve that.

Once I was clean and I was sure I could only faintly smell werewolf, I got out of the shower and dried off. After I was dressed, I brushed my teeth and steeled myself.

Taking a deep breath, I exited the bathroom. Harmony and Val were sitting on the edge of the bed, looking at the floor. When I was standing in front of them, they looked up at me. There were tears in their eyes.

"Echo. Don't leave us." Val whispered.

"We felt what you were feeling in there. We could practically hear your thoughts." Harmony said softly. "I didn't realize you were so hurt. I should have. I guess I was still wearing blinders. We made you doubt your heart. We tried to control your life like mom and dad did. We just want you to be happy. I think you can be with Gray, but it's really your choice."

"I want you to know who you are before you tie yourself to someone else. You never learned to live for yourself. We always had the freedom to make choices for ourselves. If you feel like you have to leave to do that, I understand, but we're stronger together. You have to feel that. Just give the trainers a chance and we'll do our best to get Gray to back off. I don't know how Victor

feels about you, but I know he cares. He wouldn't be doing so much for you if he didn't. Please, give us another chance to support you instead of trying to control you." Val pled.

"I don't want to leave. I just don't want anyone else to hurt because of me. I don't want to hurt Victor or Gray. If I left, maybe Gray could find someone else to focus on." I told them.

"That's not how it works, Echo. You have to reject him. You have to do it formally or he won't get a second chance. Please don't do that. The witch said you need your mate to heal your aura fast. She said it looked like you were dying, I don't want to stop your healing." Harmony said.

There was a way to make him not my mate anymore. I bit my lips together. Harmony was right. If I was going to heal quickly, I needed him. Victor may think I'm his Solus Amor, but my healing will slow if I'm not. I had to think of my health.

"I'll keep Gray for now. When I'm better, I might reject him. I don't feel the same things for him that he feels for me. I want him to be happy and he'll be happier with someone else. After what mom and dad did to me, I may not be meant for anyone in this life. I'm fine with that. Maybe I'm just supposed to be alone and figure everything out. I'd rather if we could talk about something else. This makes me sad." I replied.

"Let's go have breakfast, then I'll show you the herb garden and the flowers in the back. I know how much you love gardens." Harmony smiled.

"You'll love the garden here." Val grinned. "It's huge."

They quickly dressed for the day and showed me to a large dining room. We sat at an empty table. Soon, someone brought us all plates of food. It looked amazing. I was excited to eat. I'd been so hungry since Missy healed me. Even after eating all that food last night, I was full, but hungry.

"Dig in, Echo. You still have a long way to go before you're a healthy weight." Val said.

"You need to have all the vitamins and stuff you can get." Harmony nodded.

I ate my food. Savoring the thick, fluffy pancakes and perfectly cooked meats. There was fruit and eggs served with it and big glasses of milk to go with it. I loved every bite.

That was two meals I didn't have to cook or clean up after. I really enjoyed it. There was a relaxing feeling in knowing that all I had to do was eat and enjoy the company of my siblings.

What Val said was still on my mind. He was right. I couldn't be with someone if I wasn't whoever I was meant to be. I resolved to push harder to figure out who I was. That would be the best thing for everyone.

After we finished our food, Harmony guided us to the back of the giant house and through some big glass doors, to the garden. It was truly beautiful. I thought about the rundown garden back home.

I was working on plans for how to fix it. The landscapers just weeded it and trimmed it so it didn't grow out of control. I would make it something lovely that I could enjoy in the summer and on my days off.

With sunset getting later and later as the year went on, there would come a time when I would barely see Victor if I kept an eleven o'clock bedtime. Maybe that would be better. I was beginning to come to terms with my decision to only focus on my friendships and my health.

It felt right. I would add my garden and my training to my list of focuses. This was the best idea for everyone. They needed me to be stronger than I was.

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After an hour or two of wandering the gardens and talking more about the prom and school, it was time for me to go home. I was eager to be in my safe place again. I could start in the garden after I washed my clothes from yesterday.

Val and Harmony loaded into the car and we started driving to the house. They seemed a little sad, but we got to see each other on a Sunday. Something we never had before. I was happy to have gotten to spend a whole week with them and watched a movie with them like they always wanted.

We pulled up outside the gate. Val asked me for the code. I remembered the mail.

"Actually, I need to gather the mail from yesterday. I can walk to the house from here. Why don't you two head back? You still have homework to finish before tomorrow." I winked at Val.

"Rub it in that you finished your work early." He chuckled. "We'll see you tomorrow."

I leaned over and hugged him before getting into the car. Harmony got out of the backseat and hugged me before climbing in the front with Val. I looked forward to the walk to the house. The temperature was lovely.

I waved as they drove off. I went up to the road and set my bag down to get the mail. Maybe the next sleepover wouldn't be as trying or emotional. I was really happy that Harmony got her wolf and that we found out about Valley's powers. I just knew everything would get better now that we were healed.

"Good afternoon, Echo!" Mr. Martin called.

"Good afternoon. How are you today, sir?" I asked.

“Pretty good.” He grinned and sniffed a little.

“You’re not getting sick, are you sir?”

“Allergies. The price of this beautiful spring weather. Hmm. That’s odd.” Mr. Martin pointed at a van that had pulled up down the road a little.

“Maybe they’re looking at a map.” I said as I evaluated the van.

When I turned back, something hit me hard and everything went black.

A Lost Servant

Chapter 46 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

I woke to a cold bed and the scent of wolf outside my bedroom door. Echo should have been home by now. The wolf I was smelling wasn’t Grayson.

Flying out of bed, I unlocked my door to find Brandon, one of the guard wolves, pacing in the hallway. He was clearly upset. I went to Echo’s room and threw open the door. She wasn’t there.

“Where is my servant?” I asked sternly.

“She was getting the mail after being dropped off just after noon. The man who jogs every day talked to her for a bit. A van parked a little way down the street. I started walking out to see what was going on, when he punched her and picked her up, running to the van. I never could tell before, but once I caught up, I smelled it. He was a rogue. The van drove off. I ran after them for as long as I could, but the passenger started throwing powdered wolf’s bane out the window. I memorized the van and its plate, but I couldn’t catch up. I called Alpha Trent and he has people on it.” Brandon explained as my anger grew.

“You let someone take Echo.” I growled.

I was furious. These wolves were supposed to take care of her while I slept and they let someone take my Echo from right in front of our home. She trusted them more than I had, but they failed. I failed. I failed to keep her safe.

“Sir, I swear, I did everything I could. We’ll find her and return her to you. I promise. When we find the rogues, we’ll tear them apart for taking her. We all like Echo. We don’t want her to be hurt. I’ve been kicking myself for not moving faster or sensing the danger sooner.” He told me.

“I need to call Marius. It would be best if you weren’t here when he arrives. He already doesn’t like wolves and Echo is like a daughter to him. Go to Trent and figure out what’s going on. Report to me via phone. I can’t leave here until full dark.” I ordered.

“Yes, sir. I’ll leave right away.” He bowed and ran down the hall.

It had been hours. What must those rogues be doing to her? Why did they take her? Was it because I created an alliance with the Hallowed Moon Pack?

Marius would take her from me over this, I knew it. Keeping it from him would be deadly. I checked in the room he would sleep in when visiting, and he wasn’t there. He’d not come to visit since Tuesday.

If I could get her back without him finding out, he would be less likely to take her from me. He was one of the most powerful vampires I knew. I needed that sort of strength. Talia.

I pulled out my phone as I headed to my office. I had the number for the place she was staying and her cell number. I knew she wasn’t supposed to come for another week, but I needed her now. I needed to save Echo.

Once in my office I dialed her cell number and waited as it rang. It felt like the phone rang forever before it was picked up by her voicemail. Damn it. She could be sleeping for all I knew.

Quickly, I dialed the number of the place she was staying. I was hoping she had left her phone somewhere and was actually awake and wandering around like she tended to. The line rang three times before it was picked up.

“Lune Rouge, this is Alpha Lucien.” A powerful male voice answered.

“Alpha, this is Victor Nightshade. I’m the childe of Talia. I’m trying to reach her, but she’s not answering her phone. It’s an emergency and I need to speak with her as quickly as possible.” I said.

“She’s with my mate and children. She probably turned her phone off. I linked and she should be here soon. Is this emergency something that will endanger my mate while she’s there?” He asked.

“I don’t believe so. It does have to do with rogue wolves. I don’t know if she would consider them dangerous as she’s a rogue Queen.” I told him.

“How many?”

“At least three.” I responded.

“Three is no concern for my Bellamy. Are you needing them there sooner? I need to know so I can get everyone prepared while you speak to Talia.” Lucien said.

“You’re very obliging for an Alpha wolf.” I observed.

“Talía is a dear friend to my mate. If not for her, Bellamy would have probably died before I got the chance to meet her. I love my mate dearly and that love extends to those who helped her live and grow into the woman she is. Now, tell me so I can get things moving.” He insisted.

“I will need them sooner. Some rogues have taken the girl they’re coming to train. I don’t know what they intend to do to her. It’s been about five hours since she was taken. Every minute she’s gone means a higher chance they could kill her.” I told him.

“No. If rogues took her, instead of killing her right there, they want something from her. There’s a good chance you’ll find her alive. The fact that it was several and not one means it’s not an obsessed ex-pack looking for a forced mate. They may just be waiting for evening to contact you for a ransom.” Lucien assured me.

“I hope it’s just that, but I need her able to protect herself. The wolves who were supposed to take care of her failed. I need Echo to be safe. I took her from a horrible situation, I promised her she would be safe with me.” I admitted.

“You feel like you failed her. I get that. You care for the vampires in your territory, I care for the wolves in mine. There are those who need us more than others and when you can’t keep them protected it feels like a failure as the person they look to. I’m sure she won’t see it that way. You may be a vampire, but you’re just a man. You aren’t all powerful. This isn’t something you could have stopped, they took her in the middle of the day. Here’s Talía.” He said.

For all that his talk was making me feel better, I was still hurting. I didn’t know where my Echo was. She could be... they could be... I didn’t want to think of the things rogue wolves could do to a defenseless girl.

“Victor. Lucien just filled me in. Did you call Marius?” Talía asked.

“No. I didn’t want him to get angry and take her from me.” I answered, feeling like a child.

Talía sighed. “You never grow up, do you? I’m calling Marius to bring me to you. Bellamy and the boys will come up in their vehicles. It’s a few hours out to your home from Lune Rouge. I want to try and find the girl quickly. Marius told me she is more than half vampire. You know that doesn’t happen unless one of her parents was a full vampire and the other was a half vampire. She is unique and rare. We need to keep her safe.”

“I know she’s one of the last dhampyrs with that amount of vampire blood. The others have all gone on to their second lives. Echo is important to me, Talía. I... I think she’s meant to be my Solus Amor.” I admitted.

She gasped. “Oh, Victor. We’ll save her. Bellamy can find out if she is. She doesn’t like to do it often, but my pheata will do this to help us out. You need to know one way or the other. I’ll call

Marius, now. You prepare for his wrath. Get your groveling pants on. He told me the reason he wanted me to train her. You lost his daughter. He's going to want to rip your head off."

"I know. Thank you, Talia." I said.

"You're my dearest childe, Victor. Be safe until I arrive. Get all the information you can to placate my brood mate. I'll see you shortly." Talia told me as she hung up.

Talia didn't know that I already knew Echo was Marius' childe. At least she didn't before I confirmed it. Damn it. I was so distracted, I didn't think about concealing that fact from her.

I called Trent. He was yelling at someone when he picked up.

"I don't want to hear it from you! Find her!" He shouted. "Sorry, Victor. I'm working on it, but things aren't going great. Our guy at the DMV found the car plate, but it's registered to a blue sports car, not a dark red van. The plates were stolen a couple days ago, I guess."

"Brandon told me about what happened and that you were on it. I was hoping for some news. Anything on who could have taken her or why." I said.

"The rogues weren't ex-pack at all. Rogue born wolves have a different scent. They knew the property was guarded by pack wolves. That means they've been watching. Brandon said that the jogger always comes by at the same time, but today he was jogging early. He had never seen the van before." Trent informed me. "I need you to know, this isn't something that's easy to keep quiet in a small pack, or a family."

"Grayson knows?" I asked.

"And so do Harmony and Valor. They want to try and use their connection to find her. I don't know how they would do that. I contacted the witch who helped us yesterday. A water witch showed up to help a couple hours ago, but they haven't been able to connect to her. She thinks Echo may be blocked from them for some reason." He told me.

That wasn't good. He'd really put everything he had into finding her in the last few hours. If we didn't find her soon, I would tear this entire territory apart.

"Victor?" Grayson said over the phone.

"Gray, I told you to get out of here." Trent scolded.

"No. I heard Victor on the phone. Did he find her? Does he know anything?" He asked.

"Nothing more than we do. Go help Harmony and Valor."

"Victor. Please, I need to be out there looking for her. Let me come help you. The witch cleaned her aura. Our bond is stronger. I need to help." Gray pled.

“Send him, Trent. You have her siblings to work that connection. I’ll have their mate bond to help me. We need to find her before something bad happens to her. Echo has suffered enough in her life. We can’t let her suffer anymore. I need to go. Marius and my sire will be here soon to help.” I replied.

I hung up the phone and went out to get some blood. I needed to be at my full strength if I was going to find my Echo and bring her home safely. The blood tasted flat and dull. It echoed my own feelings.

Turning, I was met with the angry glare of Master Marius. I almost choked on my drink. Setting the glass down quickly, I bowed deeply and stayed there.

“Stand up, finish your drink, and find my childe.” He growled.

I drank as quickly as I could, rinsed the glass, and followed him to my living room. Talia was looking around the room appreciatively. Everyone loved how Echo had decorated the house.

My pride in her fell flat in my chest. She wasn’t here to see someone else enjoying her hard work. Echo loved seeing that.

“Tell us everything, Victor. We’ll help find her.” Talia said softly.

She was as small as I’d remembered, not even five feet tall, with copper colored hair, a catlike mouth, and the same violet eyes as me. I wanted to fall into her arms, as if she were my own mother. Talia was a caring and loving sire. Very different from others.

I kept my composure and entered the room, bowing to her slightly. I wouldn’t let everything going on make me behave disrespectfully to my sire my first time seeing her in three decades.

Quickly, I told them everything I knew. I started with the information from Brandon. Trent’s report was next, then what I’d learned from Gray and that he was on his way.

Marius looked disappointed, but I was going to do everything in my power to find Echo and see her safely home. She was more important to me than his disappointment. Even if I couldn’t keep her, I needed her safe.

A New Alliance

Chapter 47 - The Vampire's Servant

After I finished telling them what I had, Marius stormed out of the house. He was, understandably, frustrated. I sat in one of the chairs. I couldn’t follow him, the sun was still out.

Talia came and stood next to me. She pulled me over to rest my head on her chest and held me there. Vampires found a lot of solace in their sires. It was comforting to me to have her there.

“We’ll find her. This wasn’t a failure on the part of anyone. I know you want to blame yourself, but you need to blame the rogues who took her. This feeling will just distract you from what you need to do to find Echo.” She murmured.

“Marius is going to take her, isn’t he?” I asked.

“I wish I could tell you he won’t, but he’s not easily predictable. I can tell him to leave her here or others will find out their connection. He may be past caring. I want to be there for you on this, Victor, but she’s his child, not mine.” Talia said in a soothing tone.

“I think I travelled the other day. I was in my bed and I could feel and sense everything as if it were real, but it wasn’t.” I told her.

“We’ll test your abilities when you’re not as stressed. Is that why you think she’s your Solus Amor?”

“She was there. I made love to her. It felt right. It felt like it was what everything was building to.” I sighed. “Maybe it was a fantasy.”

“I don’t think you would confuse a fantasy with travelling. You’ve never been a fanciful man, Victor. Even when you came back, you were always like you are. Stern, strict, protective, and solidly planted in reality. If you think this was your abilities growing, then I’m sure it was.” She assured me.

I wrapped my arms around her little waist and held her. Talia stroked my hair and hummed. It was the comfort I needed to get me out of the emotional hole I was working myself into.

She pulled away and kissed the top of my head before letting me go. I released her and stood, righting myself. Talia smiled.

“I will go see where Marius went. He was probably trying to pick up the scent of the rogues. He doesn’t realize how much harder motor vehicles have made tracking through scent. You stay here until it’s dark and then come find us.” She said.

“Yes, Talia. I’ll reach out to Trent and see if he has anything else. Thank you for coming quickly and for helping me calm down. I’m of no use to Echo if I can’t think straight.” I replied.

Talia nodded and left. I was alone in the house. Being alone had never bothered me before, but I found myself feeling desperately lonely.

I headed to my office and called Trent again. He didn’t have anything new. I figured he wouldn’t, but I wanted to check. I turned my chair so I could watch the light fading from the pale windows.

A few minutes later, a familiar scent made me steel myself. The pup was in my house. It grew stronger as he neared my office.

The door opened and I turned to see him in the doorway. Grayson looked as bad as I felt. There was a desperate air around him.

For all that he was a thorn in my side, I could tell he truly cared for Echo. I shouldn't have been cruel to him earlier. He was a child. If Echo was my Solus Amor, I'd have her eventually. She was his mate. Someone for him to spend this lifetime with.

He could probably use some mentoring to be the man Echo deserved. I'd have to set aside my own jealousy to train him right. My Echo deserved the best.

"Sit down for a bit, Grayson. I need to stay in until the sun is down. We can work on other things until then."

"How can you think of anything else when she's missing? Some fucking mutt punched her and carried her away. She's probably terrified." He growled.

"How will focusing on things I can't do help her? How will spiraling into my own feelings get Echo home faster? Who will it help? Instead, I'm going to look at a map and think of the places a person could go to hide her. Then, I'll call my supports to start organizing vampires to help with the search. My sire and Master Marius are already out there doing what they can. It's been hours, Grayson. We've lost a lot of time because of the sun. They were organized. They knew the best time to try for her was daylight so I couldn't track them immediately." I said.

"I couldn't do anything. I was at the pack house pouting about not getting to spend the morning with her when they took her. Val's going nuts. He blames himself for not sticking around and making sure she got into the house. What if we don't find her?" Grayson's voice quivered.

How could I have seen him as a rival? He was just a boy in love. One who'd never experienced any hardship or true loss.

"I tracked Paul Springer for fifteen years. I gave up my territory and traveled the world looking for him. That was only for a small slight. I will hunt for Echo until the stars grow cold, and you'll be there with me. We're going to find her, then you'll be competing against me, remember?" I smirked.

"Seriously?" He scoffed.

"Yes, though, I have to say, it won't be much of a competition. You're selfish, entitled, childish, and annoying. You'll really have to change if you have any hope of winning Echo from me."

He growled again and sat in the chair across from me. I wouldn't use my abilities this time. I would let him meet my eye.

“Echo needs someone who’s capable of feeling things. You’re too cold for her.” Grayson said.

“Then you won’t be needing me to teach you how to actually be competition? You’re absolutely certain that the mate bond is enough to keep her? She’s not as simple as an animal giving into urges that are forced on her. You should have realized that when she didn’t fall into your arms at your first meeting. If you really want a chance, you’ll accept my offer. You stay with me and I’ll teach you how to be the man Echo needs.” I offered.

Grayson looked doubtful. This was killing me. I would do anything to see my Echo happy. If I couldn’t have her in this life, I’d make sure that Grayson was what she deserved. She wasn’t a prize, she was a gift.

“Stay with you? Like what I suggested, or is it just until we find Echo?” He asked.

“Until Echo makes a decision. You stay here as a personal guard to my house. I will teach you how to be a real man instead of a greedy child. Agreed?” I raised my eyebrow.

“Agreed. I’ll let my Alpha know.”

“Good. The sun has set. Let’s go find our girl and get her safely home in time for school tomorrow.” I said.

“You think we’ll find her that soon?”

“I have to believe that we’ll find her before any other terrible thing can happen to her. Having faith in your ability is key. No matter how long it takes, I will find her.” I vowed.

“And I’ll be right beside you when you do. Echo is the most important thing in the world to me. I’ll never give up.”

I nodded. “I know you won’t. You haven’t yet.”

I put my hand out and he took it. We shook hands firmly. A new alliance in the name of our shared love.

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It was nearing dawn. I’d gotten some of Echo’s clothes from her bag and her pillow cases to use for scent for anyone who didn’t know her smell. The wolves could discern her scent from a vampire, because, they said, she smelled more like fresh blood and we smelled more like old blood.

I had a dozen vampires searching for her. Bits of her scent were picked up all over town. We would call the locations in to Trent and he would put them on a map. We excluded places she went to often, the grocery store she liked, and the school.

Drew was on the pack lands working with the wolves to pick out places he'd taken her in the past weeks. Her scent was faint in those places, but moving in a vehicle could cause a faint scent as well.

I was impressed by the tracking ability of the wolves even after so many hours had passed. Grayson was exhausted, but still by my side, focusing on Echo and trying to pick up the slightest hint of her mate scent.

"We need to head back to the house." He muttered.

"You need sleep as well. Are you okay with missing school?" I asked.

"Yeah. Trent's calling me in sick until I find Echo. My parents understand. They would do the same if their mate was missing. I have good enough grades and, if I have to, I'll take the GED. Nothing is more important than finding Echo." Grayson said, turning to me.

"Try to keep up with me, pup." I told him as I began running toward the house.

We weren't so far that it was a concern. I knew we could both run it and be back before the sunlight crested into the valley. We were both fast enough.

I reached the house and left the door open while I stood in the entry and waited for him to arrive. Wolves were much faster than humans, but not faster than vampires of my age. I knew he couldn't keep up with me.

I was met in the entryway by Talia, Marius, and three werewolves. Two of them definitely smelled like pack wolves. The third one made me take a step back.

The scent of rogue was in my house, mingled with the scent of pack. I knew she was a rogue Queen, but I didn't realize how much of a physical reaction I would have. She didn't look imposing, but the power radiating off of her was immense.

She was only a few inches taller than Talia, with oddly colored hair that looked like bronze with slivers of red. Her eyes were a warm brown and her figure modest in the jeans and t-shirt she wore. She looked like a child.

Behind her were two males who were about the same height as me. One was blond and thin with green eyes. The other had hair nearly the same copper color as Talia's, with eyes like the Queen's and a thicker, warrior's build.

They all looked tired. I walked over to the kitchen and, in the butler's pantry, found the journal where Echo wrote down her plans for the house and her schedule. She'd written down the rooms for each of our guests.

I reentered the entry just as Grayson came puffing in. He was suddenly on alert. I knew this was his first time meeting the other wolves, but, as soon as he saw the Queen, he bowed as deeply as I had when I'd seen Marius a few hours ago.

“Queen Bellamy. I heard you were coming. My name is Grayson Padua. I'm the youngest brother of Alpha Trent Padua. Thank you for visiting our territory.” He said in a strong, formal manner.

It was the first time I'd seen him truly act like a man and not a child. I was impressed. That meant he could be taught.

“Please stop bowing. Call me Luna Bellamy or just Bellamy. It's easier on pack wolves.” The Queen said in a sweet voice.

“I apologize for my rudeness and lack of introduction. I realized how tired you all were and thought Echo would want me to use her plan for sleeping arrangements. I didn't want to throw her off when we get her home. This is her plan for what rooms people will be assigned to. Grayson, I'll have you in the room next to mine for the time being.”

“We're not offended... at least, most of us aren't offended. Marius is always offended. That's just how he is.” She snickered.

“Shall we stick to the matter at hand?” Master Marius grumbled.

“Right. The wolves of Hallowed Moon will continue their search while I sleep. We've cleared a lot of the city, but scents will get muddled as humans wake for the day. We have Valor working with the witches still. The hope is that whatever is blocking her will fade soon and we can get a location that way.” I said.

“Show everyone to their rooms, get cleaned up, and rest. You do nothing, but feed, sleep, and find Echo.” Marius growled before turning and going to his room.

I looked at Talia. She shrugged slightly. I guided them up the stairs and to their rooms.

Before I turned to take Grayson to his room, Talia reached out and squeezed my arm reassuringly. We'd find her. We had to. I gave her a slight smile and went to settle the wolf. I needed rest if I was going to be useful.

Feeding Time

Chapter 48 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

I woke up with a headache. Normally, after getting hit, I didn't fall unconscious and never hurt for longer than a few minutes. I'd always healed fast.

Looking around, I started to grow terrified. I was in a stone room with a bare bulb high in the ceiling. In the corner was a sink and toilet. I was laid out on a mattress with a blanket that was not quite thick enough to fight off the cold of the room.

The door looked normal. It wasn't a cell door with bars, but it also didn't seem to go up to anything. There was no way this room was above ground. It had the scent and the feel of a basement. There were no windows to confirm it.

Tears welled up in my eyes. I didn't remember what happened, only an impact. What had I done that got me put here? This wasn't Victor's basement. It wasn't the one at my parents' house.

I got up off the mattress and went to the door. Testing the handle, I could feel that it was locked. I needed to get out. I needed to go home.

Regret washed over me. There were so many things I still had to do and learn. Why was I in this place? I wanted Victor. I wanted Gray. I wanted my siblings and friends.

I started heading to the mattress again, when there was a rattling at the door. I stayed back from it, out of arms reach. A man entered the room.

He wasn't familiar. He was a little taller than Victor, with dark hair and eyes. His frame was lithe, but muscular. In his left hand, he held a sports bottle.

"Good, you're actually awake. Sorry Matt hit you so hard. He thought you could take a punch since you're part vampire and wanted to make sure he knocked you out. He's lucky you aren't human. That hit would've killed you." The man chuckled.

"Please." I said softly. "Let me go home. I won't say anything about this to anyone. I'm only seventeen. I have school on Monday. My guardian will be worried about me."

"Don't try that, kid. I know the truth. Your master is probably looking for you, but he won't find you. The boss has this place spelled up. Nothing can find us unless we want it to. Now, the boss wants you fed. You can come take it easy, or I can force it. I'm not above either option." He said.

I looked at him, but he only had the bottle in his hand. There didn't seem to be any food anywhere. I glanced from the bottle up to his face.

He popped the top and held it out to me. I inched closer. Through the nearly see through top, I could see something red and thick. The scent of blood hit me and I backed off, shaking my head.

"No. Please. I need real food. I'm only part vampire. I don't drink blood." I told him.

“You either get over here and drink or I come over there and make you. The boss says you’re on a feeding schedule as soon as you wake up. I’m not gonna be the man to piss him off.”

I kept backing up. I wasn’t going to do that. I couldn’t drink blood. The thought of it made my stomach twist.

He sighed and advanced on me. The door was wide open. If I could get to it, I could lock him in and run. I didn’t know where I was, but anywhere else was better.

When he was far enough from the door, I bolted to the side and tried to run past him. He was much faster than I’d expected and was in front of the doorway in a matter of moments. I yipped and tried to change direction, but I wasn’t fast enough.

His hand grasped my arm and I found myself pinned, with my back against the wall and his arm holding my shoulders and chest down. I wiggled and tried to get free, but couldn’t budge him.

“That was a bad choice, kid. You’re not as fast as a vampire and nowhere near as fast as a rogue wolf.” He growled.

A whimper escaped me. A rogue wolf attacked and nearly killed Victor. I didn’t want to die. I wasn’t ready to be a vampire.

“Open up, bitch. I won’t tell you again. I’ll shove this thing into your mouth.”

The sharp edge of the stones in the wall was burying into my back. I didn’t have a choice. I couldn’t escape, I couldn’t fight back. I opened my mouth.

He put the spout in and started gripping the bottle tighter, spraying blood into my mouth. At first my throat didn’t want to work and I choked a little. He growled at me and I focused on swallowing the blood he was squeezing into my mouth in strong streams.

Soon, the bottle was only giving blood tinged air when he squeezed. I was barely able to control my stomach. It roiled with the heavy liquid. I hated it. I hated him. I hated whoever his boss was.

“Good girl. I’ll be back in a few hours with your next meal. Don’t fight me next time. I will wrestle your ass to the ground and do this all over again. Boss doesn’t care how we get it in you, just as long as we do.” He told me.

I nodded, not trusting myself to not throw up if I tried to speak. He looked satisfied and released me. I fell to the floor without him holding me up against the wall anymore.

“There’s a cloth by the sink. Clean yourself up. You got your food all over your face.” He said before he closed the door.

I sobbed, feeling so violated. It took a few minutes before I was able to pull myself off the cold floor and make my way to the sink. I ran the water until it was hot and washed my entire face. I didn't want even a speck of that blood on my skin.

When I finally felt clean again, I made my way back to the mattress on the floor and bundled up under the blanket. None of the things anyone had ever done to me had made me feel so disgusted. My tears hadn't stopped since he left.

Was this my life now? How long before they came in to make me do other things? I curled into a ball, crossing my arms over my chest.

Someone found out what I was. Victor told me what they do to female dhampyrs. I thought I was safe with him. I was too trusting of other people.

The memory of what happened flooded back to me. Mr. Martin must be the Matt person the man was talking about. He hit me. He took me from in front of my home.

"Please, Victor, please come save me again. I'll be better this time. Please find me." I whispered.

I drifted into a fitful sleep. Crying had left me exhausted and I didn't have any reason to have to live in this reality when I could slip off into my dreams. I could only hope that my dreams would be happier than the real world.

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I was awakened by the sound of the locks on the door being thrown. Quickly, I sat up. It couldn't be time again already, could it? I didn't want to drink more blood.

The man entered the room again. He had the sports bottle in his hand again. A stifled sob escaped me.

"Crying isn't gonna work. You gonna come drink, or do I gotta make you drink again?" He sighed.

"Please. I don't want it. I don't drink blood." I whimpered.

"Is that your final answer, girlie?" He asked.

I bit my lips together. He gave me a disappointed look and advanced on me quickly. I had time to pull my arms from the blanket to try and fight him off, but ended up with him sitting on my hips and holding my arms above my head in one hand.

He pulled the spout open with his teeth and put it to my lips. I kept them sealed. The man growled and his grip on my wrists tightened making me cry out. He used that opening to get the bottle tip into my mouth and start squeezing.

No matter how much I struggled or fought against it, the blood made its way into me. I ended up drinking it all again. I needed to make this stop. There had to be a way to get him on my side. Some way to make him see me as a real person.

The man pulled the bottle from my mouth and smirked. “We can keep doing this all you want, kid. I’m always gonna win and you’re always gonna drink. You should make this easier on yourself.”

“I’m not a full vampire. I need real food.” I told him, my voice quivering.

“The boss knows more about you and your kind than I do. I’m gonna listen to the guy who pays me and not the girl who lies to me.”

“I never lied. I swear. I’m not my master’s human servant. He’s taking care of me until I’m eighteen, I just work around the house to pay him back.” I said.

“Not gonna give it up. I get it. You think lying is gonna keep the boss from doing you. Nothing stops him from what he wants.” He snickered.

“My name is Echo Nightshade. Victor Nightshade is the master of this territory. He’s going to come for me and it’ll be easier on you if you let me go.” I told him as firmly as I could muster.

He laughed and got very close to my face. “The only vampire I answer to is the one who pays me. I ain’t afraid of your master. You keep forgetting, he has to find you first.”

“Please. I’m... I’m the mate of a werewolf. My mate is the brother of an Alpha. A whole pack of werewolves is looking for me too.”

“You’re good. That didn’t smell like a lie either. Doesn’t matter, though. I don’t give a fucking damn about pack wolves. They’re house pets, disconnected from the world. Too bad for your mate, sweetheart. Once the boss marks you as his, your mate can find another. He’ll forget about you, the vampire will forget about you, and all you’ll have left is the boss and whatever he allows you to have. I’ll be back in a few more hours with your next meal. Don’t fight me again... or do, I like pinning little girls to the floor and watching them squirm beneath me.” He chuckled and got up.

A shiver went through me. There was no appealing to men who didn’t fear anything. I was nothing to him. Not even a person. Just a possession.

It made me think more of Gray. I’d been so harsh to him and planned to use him for my own purposes. He really wanted me to love him, but I didn’t even consider his heart.

Guilt washed over me. Maybe I deserved this. I didn’t deserve to have love from either Victor or Gray.

I curled up in a ball again. My heart felt empty. All I wanted to do was hide away from everything, my thoughts, my memories, all the hope I foolishly had for the future.

“I’m sorry, Gray. I’m sorry I didn’t give you a real chance. I’m sorry I didn’t reject you right away. I hope your next mate is a better person than me. I knew I wasn’t meant for you.” I murmured as I stared at the lines of the stone walls.

Searching for Hope

Chapter 49 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

Echo had been missing for two nights. When I woke the third night, I was warm and, for a moment, I thought maybe someone had found her while I slept. But then I smelled wolf. Grayson had been in my room.

I hadn’t thought to lock my door when I went to sleep. I was grateful that he hadn’t decided to do something to me. We’d been bonding more while we were out searching.

His attitude made more sense when I found out he was the youngest child for much of his life. He’d been spoiled a little more than the elder children and given what he wanted when he wanted it. When Echo didn’t fall in love with him immediately, he started to obsess.

We’d been talking and I was teaching him how to be patient with Echo. I kept explaining to him the things she didn’t understand and how to be gentle with her. She needed a lot more caring than he realized.

After I dressed, I went down to the kitchen. Bellamy was plating a meal for everyone. She turned and smiled at me.

I was surprised at the way she glided into life here like she’d been here forever. She acted like this was her house and her kitchen. It was easy to talk to her and understand her. Bellamy didn’t play games.

She had set aside her political duties to make sure everyone was focusing on the search and had even called in a team of rogues to work on tracking. Tonight, we were actually trying something based on her suggestion. We’d called in a dark water witch to help with the search. All the woman wanted was a few ingredients for spells that were hard to come by willingly.

“Victor. Sit at the table, I made food for you and Talia. I used my own blood so that you would both have the added power. This will be a trying night. Did you sleep okay?” Bellamy asked.

“I sleep the same no matter what. Thank you for asking and for the food. I really appreciate everything that you’re doing for us.” I smiled tightly.

“Stop with the sad smile. We’ll find her. Echo is going to be safe. We’re going to train her, and everything will be fine.” Bellamy assured me. “Don’t make me have to kick your ass. Now, get that indifferent asshole look on, Gray is nearby. Don’t want him to know you actually feel, do you?”

I chuckled. She saw right through me from the first time she met me. Talia was proud of her little friend. I would often see her looking on like a doting parent.

Sitting at the table, I was soon joined by Talia and Grayson. Bellamy put plates and bowls down in front of us, before returning with plates for her and Grayson.

“Where are your friends?” I asked.

“They went out for dinner before they start the search tonight. I’m in contact with them, if we find anything out I can reach them.” She assured me.

“I don’t know how you can act so calmly about this. I barely slept I just keep thinking of what could be happening to her. Of how scared she must be. Of how I could have stopped this.” He said with a small growl.

I rolled my eyes. “Were you prepared to fight at least three rogue wolves? Could any of us have known someone would take her? I killed everyone who knew who she was, Grayson. The only ones who knew were me, Rosalynn, Marius, the leaders of your pack, Talia, and you. Her siblings only found out the full truth recently. No one could have told anyone.”

“What about her parents? They knew something.” Grayson insisted.

That thought hadn’t crossed my mind. They were so terrified that I didn’t think they would try anything. What if they had told someone else in hopes of some sort of vengeance? My taking Echo had lost them their other children.

I looked to Bellamy. She didn’t seem to have considered it either.

“What’s their address? I can send my rogues over to collect them for questioning.” She said urgently.

Quickly, I told her and she got that distant look in her eyes that told me she was in a mind link. She nodded to me when she was done. I worked on eating the food she’d prepared, but my stomach was not happy. I knew it wasn’t that the food wasn’t good and prepared with enough blood. Talia was eating just fine. It was that I wanted to be the one to find them. If they did this, I would end them.

Grayson helped Bellamy clean up while Talia and I went to my office to pull together the things the water witch would need. A water witch found Echo once before. I knew that this had to work.

Suddenly, there was a twisting feeling in my stomach. I knew I wasn't used to blood foods, but they shouldn't have caused that reaction. Talia was by my side immediately, guiding me to sit in a chair.

'Please, Victor, please come save me again. I'll be better this time. Please find me.'

I could hear Echo as if she were in the room whispering to me. The fear and pain in her voice made my heart drop. Wherever she was, she wasn't safe. She needed me and I couldn't find her.

"What happened, Victor?" Talia asked.

"I heard her. I heard Echo. She's begging me to come save her again."

"Can you reply?"

"No. I tried last time I heard her and she couldn't hear me, or, at least, she never told me if she did. I'm sure she would have said something." I replied.

"Did you ever tell her that you heard her?" Talia pressed.

"No. I was waiting for her to get healthier. I haven't marked her as my servant. Marius, Rosy, and I think she has the ability to communicate with people without that connection." I told her.

Talia rubbed circles on my back while I tried to pull myself back together. Every night I didn't know where she was or what was happening to her, I felt myself falling apart more and more. I looked up at Talia, knowing I wasn't wearing my usual mask to hide my emotions.

She traced a finger around the line of my hair and over my cheeks. A sire could soothe their children, though many preferred to control their people through fear. Talia was frightening, but mostly to her enemies.

"You're not doing well, my Victor. This is far worse than you should be."

"I love her, Talia. I miss seeing her every day. If a vampire has her, he could be doing terrible things to her. It feels like my heart is torn out each morning when I go to sleep without her here and each evening when I wake up knowing that she isn't going to be here. I only made her my daytime servant so there would be something to occupy her while she figured out what to do with her life. I offered to make her my human servant so she wouldn't feel pressured to find something fast." I explained.

"When you said you thought she was your Solus Amor, I wondered it could just be the pheromone of the female dhampyr. This isn't normal. Every male I've seen affected by that has

gone back to normal within one sleep of the female leaving. I don't know what this is. You're acting like a werewolf with a mate. I love my Solus Amor, but I only see her every century. I don't ache and pine for her like this. You remind me of Gray out there." She murmured.

I scoffed. "Grayson thinks that Echo belongs to him because she's his mate. I'm nothing like him. He's childish and selfish."

"Whenever you aren't watching yourself because Marius is here, you call her your Echo. You hissed at Grayson when he tried to go in her room yesterday. He was just trying to help with chores. You two fight like cats and dogs, until you both remember that Echo isn't with you, then you get sad together and start acting like friends. Or friendly rivals, at least. You are the vampire version of that pup. You may seem cool on the outside, but you're just as broken and emotional as he is." Talia scolded.

I tried to look away, but she grabbed my chin and made me look into her eyes. I didn't try to pull away. That would only make her angry.

"Victor. Set your emotions aside or you won't be able to focus on Echo. If you love her, you need to put yourself into the mindset you had while hunting Paul. We need to find the bastards who took her and make them pay for the disrespect they showed in taking your servant. You may have lost your reputation as 'Victor Nightshade of the council', but you are known to all vampires as 'The Hunter'. All children behave more respectfully in case their sire takes a page out of your book. How fearsome do you think you are sitting here all teary eyed?"

That shocked me. I thought I had lost my reputation, but I had gained another. She was right. This was an insult to me. They had to know she was my servant. They took her in the middle of the day. If hunters had found out where I lived, who's to say that rogue wolves couldn't?

"I'll find them and destroy them." I growled.

"There's the man I know. Focus on that anger, not on the loss. The witch will be here soon. Let's finish gathering the things she'll need and get out to the kitchen." Talia said, stepping back.

We got everything together and left for the kitchen. Bellamy was sitting at the table with Grayson. He looked upset and she had a pitying expression on her face.

Of course she would feel badly for him. They were both wolves and understood each other. When she saw us, Bellamy got a concerned look. She rushed over to us.

"The parents are gone. The neighbors haven't seen them for a couple days. Their cars are still there and there aren't any signs of a struggle in the house. It looks like they were packing to run. Whoever has Echo might have them too. Or, they could have gone willingly. Either way, they're high on my suspect list." Bellamy said quietly.

"Are your rogues trying to track them?" I asked.

“Yes. There is more of a scent. Rogues. Probably the ones who took Echo. My people are on it. This could be the break we need.”

“Victor heard Echo.” Talia said.

Grayson jumped up and hurried over. “You talked to her? Is she alright? No, stupid question. Does she know where she is or who took her?”

“I can’t talk back to her. I can only hear her. The positive is, we know that she’s alive. She sounded hurt and scared. I don’t know why I can only now hear her. Maybe they kept her drugged or she was sleeping at night.” I offered.

“Damn it. I wish I could hear her. I didn’t feel the pain of losing her, like I would have if she had died. Our bond was getting stronger. I definitely would have felt it. That was one of the things keeping me going. What did she say?” He asked.

I looked at him. He had a hopeful expression. I understood. This was actually a positive. Maybe she would get strong enough that we could communicate.

“She wants to be saved. That was all. She can’t save herself. We’re going to work even harder to find her and grant that wish.”

The Dark Witch

Chapter 50 - The Vampire's Servant

The buzzer went off in the entry and Bellamy went to answer it. She came back and told us that the witch was here. Talia called Marius so he could be there.

I set out the map and went upstairs to get Echo’s hairbrush. Having something from her might help. When I returned, I saw a tall, willowy woman with dark blonde hair standing off to the side. She was wearing black pants and a deep purple top. A flowing black cover went down to her knees.

She was taking in everything going on around her. Marius had arrived and was making insulting, off-hand comments about wolves. Bellamy looked bored, but Grayson looked like he was about to get himself in trouble.

“Master Marius, welcome back.” I said, turning their attention to me.

“Why wouldn’t I be here? I come every night and watch you fail to find my childe. I grow less impressed with you every time I have to leave without seeing her again.” Marius sneered.

“We have a new lead that Queen Bellamy’s wolves are working on, and this witch is here to render her assistance.” I told him, indicating the woman.

“My name is Lila. Can we start?” She asked.

“I’ll head out to meet with my team and join the search. I’m not a fan of dark magic.” Bellamy said as she turned to the doorway.

“A dark witch held Bellamy for a few months when she was a child.” Talia explained.

“Must have been an empowerment spell. It’s easier with fae royal children and young alphas. I would never do that. I may be dark, but I’m not ‘kill a kid’ dark. I’m going to fill my bowl and start my spell. Who am I using?” Lila asked.

“Me.” Marius said.

“Okay, handsome. Just wait by the table for me and I’ll be there in a minute.” She replied giving him a long look up and down.

He appeared to be deeply insulted. Grayson growled a little more. Probably at the nonchalant tone she was using.

Lila filled the bowl and brought it to the table. I handed her the hairbrush. She nodded and shooed me away.

Without a word, she started mixing ingredients into a stone bowl and crushing them together while chanting an incantation. She pulled a long strand of Echo’s hair from the brush and let it fall in a circle around the edges of the bowl. Then she added the powdered plants.

She looked into the bowl, like she was watching something. I watched her eyes flick around the bowl as if she were following movements. She winced a little.

“The wolf who punched her is dead.” Lila murmured. “He displeased the man he was working for. He almost killed her with the hit and she’s been healing for the last few days. That may be part of what was blocking her. I also see a spell surrounding them. I can’t see any faces. I can’t make out where they are. There’s no girl in the room. This is the past. I’m blocked from seeing the present. I don’t know if this will work. Give me your hand, cutie.”

Marius gave her a deadly look. “My name is Marius Aconitum. You may call me Master Marius.”

“Sweetheart, I don’t call any man ‘master’ outside of the bedroom. I’m the only one who was willing to even try this. You can either do what I say, or I can leave.” She smirked.

“I like her.” Talia laughed. “Go on, Marius. This might help us find your daughter. Debase yourself with the living one more time for her sake.”

He huffed and took Lila's hand roughly. I was expecting her to jump or ask him to let her go.

"Mmm, baby, you know just how I like it. Enough playtime, though. We need to find your kid." She purred.

It was a struggle not to let my jaw drop. Anyone could easily sense the danger around Marius, but she didn't seem to care. Talia looked like she was about to start crying with laughter. I could imagine this story would've been making the rounds in the High Council, if not for the secrecy involved.

Lila picked up a crystal on a chain and dipped it into the water before bringing it to the map of the city. She started swinging it around in a circular motion. It only took a few moments before the crystal planted itself on the map.

A thrill went through me. We knew where she was! I looked to Grayson. He closed his eyes and started sniffing the air. I wondered what he was smelling when the scent hit me.

It was a mix of fresh turned earth, rich and warmed by the sun, and zesty lemon. I looked around for the scent's source, and it seemed to be coming from the bowl of water.

"Echo." He whispered.

That wasn't Echo's scent. Not the way I knew it. She always smelled a little tart and mouthwatering. The appeal of a dhampyr.

"What was that, boy?" Marius growled.

"I smell Echo." Grayson said.

Lila focused on the water in the bowl. "Keep holding my hand, honey. Your connection is breaking through the spell. Come over here, wolfie. Put your hand on my shoulder."

Grayson did as she ordered. The smell grew stronger. I moved closer to them.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"She's in a room. Like a cell. The walls are stone. She looks confused and scared." She murmured.

I wished I could see what the witch was talking about. I wanted to see Echo.

"Someone came into the room. He has a bottle. I can't hear them." Lila said with a frustrated tone.

My arm brushed hers as I leaned in. I knew it was futile, but I missed seeing my Echo so much.

“Put your hand on my shoulder, now.” She ordered.

I did what she said with no hesitation. If it helped find Echo, I would do whatever the witch wanted. The smell was powerful now.

“It’s like she’s standing right here.” Grayson whispered.

That smell was Echo? It was perfect, delicious. The scent of blood washed over it.

“What happened? I smell blood.” I said.

“She tried to run and he caught her up against a wall. He’s forcing the bottle into her mouth and she’s choking on whatever’s in there. It’s blood. She coughed some up. He’s leaving. She’s whispering something. ‘Please, Victor, please come save me again. I’ll be better this time. Please find me.’ Who’s Victor?” She asked.

“I am.” I told her. “This was not even an hour ago. I heard her say that.”

“I can feel that you’re bonded with her. That was what made the connection strong enough that I could hear. Let me try scrying again.” Lila said and dipped the crystal back in the water.

I focused on Echo. On the sound of her voice. On the feeling of her in my arms. On the new scent that I knew was hers.

The crystal pinpointed a different location. That didn’t make sense. Had they moved her?

“That’s not it either.” She sighed.

“What do you mean?” Marius asked.

“There’s a magical deflection spell. It’s used to mess with location spells. Whoever has your girl assumed you’d use some sort of location magic. This was crafted by a dark witch. Someone died for this spell. It’s powerful if all of these connections to her are still throwing me off. Most of all, I know that she’s not there because those are all new construction with no basement. This is an older house with a stone basement.” Lila explained.

“Can we break it somehow?” Grayson asked.

“Only with a death. If you all have someone I can sacrifice for this spell, then I’m more than happy to cast it.” She offered.

“We can’t do that! You can’t just kill someone for a spell! You said you weren’t ‘kill a person’ dark.” He said indignantly.

My eyes rolled and I met Marius’ gaze. He was as unimpressed as I was. We were vampires, we’d killed people for less. Grayson didn’t realize the darker side of being supernatural.

“I said I’m not ‘kill a KID’ dark, scruffy. It’s the nature of being a dark witch. We dabble with darkness and are more powerful than light witches because of what we’re willing to do in the name of that power. A human sacrifice here or there isn’t a bother. You kill other wolves. What’s the difference?” She scoffed and shrugged his hand off her shoulder, maintaining her grip on Marius’ hand.

“Echo wouldn’t want someone sacrificed so we can find her.” Grayson muttered.

I scowled. “That man is forcing her to drink blood. Echo is blood adverse. She hates it. Hates watching people drink it. She even cringes a little when we drink the blood tea she makes. That’s the only reason I didn’t have her drinking blood to heal. I was more than happy to let her heal as slowly as she needed to keep from having to do something she would hate. You don’t know anything about Echo! She hates basements. She’s afraid of being alone. She’s brave enough to step forward and take pain in the place of another, but terrified of being hurt at the same time. She doesn’t want to be where she is and she thinks it’s somehow her fault. If she never finds out, then she can never feel upset about it. I’ll do anything to find Echo.”

“I’ll do anything too, except killing someone!” He shouted.

“Then you don’t deserve her. Echo deserves someone who values her life over all others.” I replied and let go of Lila’s shoulder.

Grayson growled as he glared at me. I caught his eye and started using my hypnosis on him. He went pale and whimpered.

I snarled at him and he began shaking. I could smell his fear. He wasn’t anywhere near as frightened as he should have been.

“ENOUGH!” Marius shouted, making me look away. “I have several prisoners slated for death back in my territory. How long do you need to make this spell?”

“Forty-eight hours from the time I can get back to my home and start mixing it. Normally, it’s longer, but I can use my proofing oven to speed it up.” Lila said cheerfully.

“Let me give you my phone number, you can call me when you’re ready and I can bring the sacrifice to you.” Marius told her.

“Mmm. And can I get you to bring me other things?” She asked.

“Do you need something else for the spell?” He questioned back.

“Only my payment. I’m not working for free, sugar.”

“What payment do you require? I’ll pay whatever you want.” Marius stated firmly.

A slow smile spread over her face. “Five hours of your life.” She requested.

“I don’t understand.”

“Five hours of you doing anything I want, daddy. I have enough money, and I do love to dabble with darkness.” Lila licked her lips.

Marius looked to me, then to Talia. He had said he would pay whatever she wanted. I couldn’t just stand by and not say anything. I would also pay anything for Echo’s safe return home.

“Will I do instead?” I offered.

“No. Only him. He’s powerful and ancient. I like older men. It’s up to you, daddy. Is she worth it?”

“Payment after service. I want to get what I’m paying for first.” He growled.

“Payment at time of service. It will take forty-eight hours to prepare everything else and another five hours for the spell to be ready after I’ve mixed all the parts. When we’re done, I’ll tell you where she is. Trust me, daddy, you’re going to like it. Maybe I’ll even call you master... if you’re a very good boy.” She giggled.

He shifted so slightly that any human might have missed it. He was uncomfortable. I glanced at Talia who was watching with a mixture of horror and glee.

“Agreed. I’ll walk you to your car and we can exchange information.” Marius said resignedly.

“Awesome! Let me just get my stuff together.” Lila grinned and started packing away her items after emptying the bowl of water into the sink.

After they left the room, Talia burst out laughing. I couldn’t help myself and chuckled, more from relief than anything else. It would only be a couple of days before we had Echo back home.

“She’s going to be mad at all of you.” Grayson muttered.

“She never has to know. This person would’ve died anyway, and I can almost guarantee it would have been far more painful and far less important than being sacrificed so we can save Echo. If you’re going to be involved with vampires, you have to learn that we have different morals and ethics than humans and werewolves.” Talia said, suddenly serious.

“Grayson, they’re feeding her blood. That means they know she needs it. Werewolves don’t know that about dhampyrs. Only vampires do. That means the wolves are working for a vampire. All of those bad things you thought about my relationship with Echo are what that vampire most likely intends with her. It will take a lot of time and a lot of blood to get her healthy enough to be considered ‘viable’ for breeding. We’re cautious by nature. He’s waiting for the search to die down before moving her out of the city. We need to make sure everyone keeps looking until this spell is done. If he leaves with Echo, we may never see her again, or she might be... used, when we do. I can’t let that happen.” I told him.

“Echo doesn’t deserve that. I can’t condone killing for a spell.” He said softly.

“Come here, Gray. Let me tell you a secret.” Talia smiled.

Talia got him to bend down and look her in the eyes as she spoke. The worry and tension in him seemed to go. Much like Marius’ ability to change memories, Talia could erase small pieces and fill in the gaps. Not huge chunks, but enough that Grayson would forget about the ingredients for the spell and all talk of them.

He stood up and turned to grin at me. I smiled tightly. He seemed excited.

“Alright, so we keep going and pretend we’re not going to find her in a couple days. I can do that. I won’t tell anyone.” Grayson said.

“Good man, let’s go start our search. Everyone will expect to see us out there. And thanks for turning on the heated blanket for me today.” I smiled a little.

“No problem. I was just trying to think of what Echo would want, and I was having trouble sleeping. I remembered her doing that on Saturday. I’ll take care of it until she’s back to do it herself.” He replied.

Talia decided to stay behind. We were keeping one person at the house in case a ransom demand came in. It was what everyone expected.

Grayson and I headed to the older part of town. Echo had to be in an older house with a basement. We used our noses to explore the basement windows of every house we saw.

After a few hours, we were walking down the street when Grayson stopped moving. He got a distant look in his eyes. I wondered if Trent had found something. Maybe Marius wouldn’t have to be the witch’s payment after all.

“Echo.” He whispered.

“What? Do you smell her? What’s going on?” I asked.

“I heard her. Like a mind link. She said she was sorry for not giving me a chance and for not rejecting me sooner. She said she hopes my next mate is a better person than her. I tried to link back to her, but it was like talking to a wall. Victor. Why’s she saying that?” Grayson asked.

“Because the vampire intends to mark her. It must have been revealed to her. Don’t worry. We’ll find her before that can happen. Then you just have to worry about fighting me for her.” I winked, trying to keep the conversation light for him.

“I think I can win against you. I don’t know about the other guy. If he marks her, what happens? Is it the same as if I marked her?”

“Since she is a living dhampyr, she will be bound to him even after her death. She will lose her bonds to both of us until his death. If she marks him as well, then she will die a true death when he does. Even if we killed him, she wouldn’t be free. A vampire’s mark goes beyond traditional death, sharing marks is an eternal bond.” I explained.

“We can’t let that happen. Will we make it in time?”

“We have to. Ask your moon goddess for help. We’ll need all the help we can get.” I sighed.

“Let’s get a few more blocks searched before we head home, Grayson.”

“Sure thing, Victor. Let’s find our girl.” He grinned.