

Chapter 51 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

Though I was awake, I didn't want to open my eyes. I didn't want to be in the place I knew I was. How long had I even been here?

There was no window, so I couldn't tell what time of day it was. All I knew, was that the man would be back with another bottle of blood at some point. Tears formed in my eyes.

I hadn't fought back the last few times, but he still pinned me to the floor and ground himself against me while squeezing the blood from the bottle. I hated how it made me feel, dirty and disgusting. Especially with the things he was saying to me while he did that.

How many times had it been now? Ten? More? I lost count. I just wanted to go home. I was starting to think I never would.

I heard muffled voices coming from somewhere. Opening my eyes, I got up and tried to track down where they were. As I got closer to the far wall, I could hear them more clearly.

"Please, master, I'm so sorry." A woman pled.

That voice. It never sounded like that in my entire life. My mother was in the other room. She sounded terrified and pitiful.

"Do you honestly think 'sorry' is going to get you out of trouble? I gave you and your husband a simple job. Take care of my property. And you stole them!" A man shouted and I heard a smack and the sound of my mother hitting the floor.

"I... I can't apologize enough. I know. Thom made me take them. He told me we could raise them for you and return them when they were eighteen. You wouldn't have to do anything. He made it sound like you'd be grateful." She whimpered.

"Funny. That was what he said you did, Verity. Right before I killed him. But, I won't kill you. You will get to live knowing you caused your husband's death and you will be punished every day for stealing my property. Now, tell me where you hid the other two." He growled.

"Thom's dead?" She wept.

“He was thinking of saving his own life, just as you were. Did you think that blaming him would cause me to let him live? You’re just as stupid as everyone warned me when I picked you. Stupid and selfish. You had money, a nice home, anything your greedy little hearts desired, all you had to do was take care of them for me until they were five. Was that it? You didn’t want to give everything up? You can’t tell me you loved them. Neither one of you is equipped to love anyone or anything that doesn’t give you something.”

Mom sniffled. “We wanted a family, but I couldn’t have children. It wasn’t until we were here that we realized what we’d done. Master, I swear. I’ll do anything. Please forgive me.”

“Where. Are. You. Hiding. Them. Verity!” He yelled.

“They left. They ran away after they found out we...” She stopped.

“Found out you what? Found out you sold their sister. Of course they did! You said you wanted to be a mother, but Thom told me what you did to Emily. Starving her, beating her, degrading her, letting vampires feed on her, and finally selling her to the highest bidder!”

“She was evil. I caught her biting her sister when she was five. I couldn’t just kill her. The other two would never forgive me. I kept her away from them. I kept them safe. They’re important and rare, too. It made her easier for your men to take her anyway, master. She probably knows where they are. That vampire used hypnosis to make us sell her. I just know he did. We were going to give them back once they turned eighteen. We were going to tell you where to find them and run. I swear.” Mom cried.

“What do you mean, ‘when they turn eighteen’? They turned eighteen three weeks ago. You stupid cow. Did you forget their birthdays?” He said in a snarling tone.

“No. You said May thirtieth and thirty-first. We kept it the same.”

“MARCH thirtieth and thirty-first, you idiot. That was when they would come into their full power. I was only able to track them because whatever you used to bind them started falling apart. Their power is more than you could ever imagine. You stopped me from being able to have them properly trained. It will take even longer to enact my plan now that they don’t know who I am. You will suffer for what you’ve done, Verity. You will beg for death long before I grant it to you.”

I wanted to stay there and listen to more, but familiar footsteps sounded outside the door. It was the man with the blood. I moved from the wall to the middle of the room.

I hated the idea of drinking blood, but I was starting to crave it. It was the only thing filling my stomach for so long. I was almost excited for feeding times now. Except for what the man would do to me.

Last time, he licked the blood from my face. It was disgusting and I couldn’t get the feeling of it off, no matter how much I scrubbed. He groped my chest for a while after I was pinned.

His hands were rough and he wasn't gentle with me at all. He told me his boss told him I was born to be a whore for vampires and he didn't see any reason I shouldn't be one for werewolves too. I knew what happened to female dhampyrs, but I thought I was safe from that future.

The door opened and the man stood there. He looked at me slowly, his eyes trailing up and down my body. It made me sick.

"Got a new plan for this feeding." He chuckled and closed the door behind him before crossing to me. "Get on your knees, bitch."

Terror ripped through me. I had no idea what he was planning, but the tone in his voice was frightening. I shook my head and stepped back, but he grabbed me and forced me down.

"You do what I tell you to or I will make you. You're prettier with tears in your eyes, you know?" He grinned.

I was already on the verge of crying before he said that. I worked as hard as I could to not give him that satisfaction. I wanted to keep some of my dignity.

He moved the bottle in front of his groin and grabbed my hair, pulling my mouth to it. The bottle hit my lips and teeth hard. I opened my mouth and he shoved it into my mouth until the flat top pressed hard against my mouth.

"Good girl. Once you get used to this, we'll try it with the real thing, then you can drink something other than blood." He laughed. "Now suck."

His grip on my hair was tight, but I managed to move enough to start drinking the blood. He reminded me of some of the vampires I used to feed. The memories flooded back. I put my hands against his legs to try and push away.

As I was struggling against him, I felt him stiffen and there was a sickening crack sound. The man fell to the floor and the bottle rolled away. I fell backward and tried to scurry away as quickly as I could.

A different man was standing over the man who had been feeding me. He wore an expression of disgust as he picked up the man and tossed him out the door. The man turned back to me and his expression softened.

"Emily, are you alright? He's dead. He'll never hurt you again, precious."

"My name is Echo." I said softly.

The man sighed. "That's the name Verity gave you. Your name is Emily. I've been looking for you since you were a very little girl. For all of you. You and Hannah and Johnathan. I'm here to take you home."

“My home is with Victor. Please, let me go home to him. I promise I won’t tell anyone anything.” I pled.

“No. Your home is with me. I’m Daniel. Your owner. I have been since you were a baby. You were stolen from me. They told me what they did to you. You should have been treated like the precious gem you are, not a buffet for every fanged piece of garbage who could scrape together the money. You never have to worry again. I’ll protect you and care for you. I have a lot of friends who are eager to meet you. You are as beautiful as your mother was.” He smiled softly.

“My mother?” I asked.

“Yes. A witch named Melanie. She left her coven for your father.” Daniel picked up the bottle of blood. “Drink this and I’ll tell you about them. Now that you’re looking a little better, I’ll get you more human food to eat. I promise, none of the other wolves will treat you like this one and the one who hit you. I killed him as well. No one harms my little sweet.”

He held out the bottle to me. I wanted to learn more, I craved the blood, but I was afraid of the man in front of me. He looked kind, but his words frightened me.

“Blood will help you heal faster. That’s why I have you on a strict feeding schedule. I just want you to be healthy, Emily. Then you can tell me where your sister and brother are. We can collect them before we head home. You never have to be without them again.” He promised.

I took the bottle from him gingerly and drank. It cooled the burning in my stomach. I still watched him carefully.

“Your parents were Melanie and Adam Williams. You are Emily Williams. Your father was a werewolf, your mother a witch. Her coven disapproved of her accepting the mate bond with a werewolf. The water witches said they saw great loss if they mated. Your mother didn’t care. She wanted to be with your father. Their love was immense. I still remember seeing them together. Then, she became pregnant with you three and they were ecstatic. It was too bad that the visions from the water witches was true. A supernatural triad with vampire blood. It drew the attention of the master of the territory. He is a man who always gets what he wants. They should have just given you to him, but they refused. It caused a war between the werewolves of the pack and the vampires of the territory.” Daniel explained.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Finish up your blood.” He smiled.

I did as he said and handed him back the bottle. He nodded his head and walked back to the door. Before leaving, he turned to me.

“They were killed. Your parents, your pack, and your mother’s coven, just for good measure. You were claimed by the master of the territory. You are the property of Master Daniel Darknight. And I’ve come to collect what I earned. Rest now. I’ll send human food to follow

your next feeding. Soon, you won't feel hungry for it anymore, but I can allow it for now. Goodbye, Emily." Daniel said and exited the room.

My stomach turned as I heard the locks clicking. I crawled back to the mattress and curled up under the blanket. I'd always dreamed that my parents weren't really my parents, but I never thought it could be true.

"Victor. Please. Hurry. Daniel Darknight is going to take me away. Gray. Please hide my sister and brother so they'll be safe. I need you two to help me. Please. Please. Don't give up on me. I want to go home." I whispered with a snuffle.

I laid there, curled up until I heard several sets of footsteps hurrying past my door. I could hear my ex-mother scream a little. My hearing seemed to be getting more sensitive, because I didn't need to be next to the wall to hear what they were doing to her. What they told her Daniel had given them permission to do to her.

Her screams and cries were hard to block out, even with my fingers in my ears. I shook with tears, not because I loved her, but because of how pitiful she sounded. This person who had hurt me, had given me to vampires, had been the one I feared for most of my life was crying, begging, and screaming.

I squeezed my eyes tight and begged sleep to take me so I wouldn't have to hear anymore. It made me even more afraid of what he planned for me, my sister, and my brother. He was a monster and I couldn't escape him.

Marius and Lila

Chapter 52 - The Vampire's Servant

[Marius]

I took Ricardo to the witch's house. He was one of the stronger men in my custody. He would be powerful enough to help find my daughter.

Victor had worked hard, but still hadn't found her. I needed to stay on top of him so he wouldn't give up. He'd used every one of his connections to cover the area in searchers.

I hated to admit, he didn't actually disappoint me. If I couldn't find her, I knew he could and he wouldn't stop hunting until he brought Echo home. His reputation as 'The Hunter' was solid.

He never gave up when he decided to punish someone. It wasn't just the hunting of his child. Victor had never allowed anyone to insult him. When I saw him kill over his choice of name, I knew he had it in him to be a powerful master someday.

Talia wasn't wrong to be proud of him. If he were my own childe, I would be too. When he tried to offer himself to the witch, I was grateful. The witch was persistent, though. I would do anything I could to find Echo before she was taken, sexually, against her will by a man who thought she was his right, just because she existed.

The house of the witch was set against where the edge of the forest met the edge of town. Ricardo struggled against my hold and I shook him a little to remind him that he had no control over his situation. He had as much control as I did.

I rarely indulged in the pleasures of the flesh, from the way the witch talked, she was expecting that from me. If Echo were not my childe, I wouldn't have accepted. If not for the fact that she was unable to save herself, like a full vampire would have, I wouldn't have accepted.

She was a fragile girl and I felt the urge to protect her deep in my chest. I ached thinking of what she may have been going through. Anger surged when I thought that she could have been safe if I'd just taken her away or insisted on her carrying my name.

My own shame was to blame for this situation. I wouldn't let it happen again. Damn my reputation, no vampire would harm any of my children again.

The boy was a powerful witch, and the other girl had the strength and confidence of a ranked wolf. Her ability to use her own form of mind control was impressive. I couldn't wait to see how Echo would grow in the future. She was already showing some remarkable talents.

I knocked at the door of the small house. It didn't take long for the witch to answer. She opened the door and grinned.

The witch was wearing her long, dark blonde hair in a ponytail. It cascaded over the shoulder of the lacy peignoir the nightgown underneath was silky and hugged her curves tightly. She has a suggestive smirk.

"Oh, daddy! You brought me my present. He's perfect. Come this way." She said beckoning us into the house.

She led us to a room in the back of the house. The floor was stone with a drain to the side of a table that was bolted securely. It was reminiscent of the room from Bellamy's dream, lit candles lined a high shelf that circled the room. There was a display of knives above a counter.

I moved Ricardo onto the table and started strapping him down. He struggled a little and I got to enjoy forcing him into the wrist and ankle cuffs. His eyes were rolling wildly in fear.

“He’s awful quiet. Normally, they’re screaming once they get back here. The room is soundproofed, it’s just weird.” She giggled.

“He has no tongue and has been muted otherwise by the witch I hold in my territory.” I told her.

“Mmm. Are you holding a light witch, or a dark one?” She purred.

“I don’t know what concern that is of yours, witch. Let’s finish this so I can find my childe.” I growled.

“My name is Lila. Remember it, daddy, you’re gonna be screaming it later.” She laughed.

I had honestly forgotten her name. The names of lesser beings rarely concerned me. I only recently learned Bellamy’s name because her connection to my broodmate and the Werewolf Association made her important.

She crossed the room and selected a dagger from the display of knives, setting it next to a bowl that was on the counter. Then, she went to a chest of drawers and began rummaging through the drawers. She pulled out a tray of surgical instruments that she laid out on a portable table and a set of bolt cutters.

Her entire personality seemed to shift. Lila was serious and professional. It was far more enticing than her playful flirting.

I leaned against the wall, watching as she prepared Ricardo to be her sacrifice. She murmured some words over him, while he whimpered. He harmed other humans in my territory and told them I ordered it. I was frightening enough outside of my territory; I didn’t need that sort of atmosphere when I was home.

Ricardo grunted and struggled as she sliced into him. None of it seemed to phase her. Lila’s intent focus on her cuts made me lick my lips.

Even other vampires called me cruel. Seeing this woman working as diligently as I did, made me hungry for her. I wanted her blood. I wanted to feel that darkness inside of me.

I collected myself and continued to watch as she used the bolt cutters to remove Ricardo’s breast plate. He had long passed out from the pain and blood loss. I didn’t mind. He’d been subjected to enough tortures that my message was well understood by those under me.

She removed his, still beating, heart and carefully took it to the bowl, massaging it so the blood poured into her other ingredients. When she was done, Lila put the heart into a jar.

Returning to the corpse, she started removing other parts. Internal organs, eyes, bits of bone. I drew closer watching her scavenge the corpse for ingredients.

“You have some blood on your neck.” I murmured from behind her.

She shuddered. “You want to get that for me, daddy?”

Lila bared her neck to me. I put my hands on the table top on either side of her slim waist. Her arousal mixed with the scent of the blood.

I leaned in and licked her neck clean, making her moan invitingly. I hadn't been with a living woman since the one centuries ago that created my children. There was no temptation to ever do it again, until now.

Grinding my ever hardening length into her backside, I gripped her wrist and brought it to my mouth, licking the blood from her fingers as she whimpered with desire. I moved my other hand to press over her stomach, bringing her rear closer to me.

Sliding my hand down, I traced over the hem of her nightgown. She shivered at my touch. There was a little fear mixed into her scent. Lila had flirted with Death, and Death accepted her invitation.

“You're not wearing panties, you dirty little witch.” I growled.

“I-mmm-I normally work nude.”

“So you dressed up for me? What a shame. I would love to see this body covered in blood that I could lick off.” I told her before putting her fingers into my mouth, sucking and licking them clean.

My fingers trailed over the flesh between her legs. Like Talia said, I had to be willing to debase myself with the living if I wanted my daughter safe. At least this one didn't seem to have some idiotic romantic notion of what being with a vampire was like.

There were stories of vampire groupies trying to seduce vampires. None of them realized we weren't the same as the fictional tortured, romantic vampire in fiction. At least, not all of us. After being a vampire long enough, we lost the softer edges.

“Bend over, witch.” I ordered.

“Wait! We can't do it in here. The spell is sensitive.” She replied quickly.

I switched which hand was holding her wrist and pulled her out of the room. The next door I opened had a bed in it. That was good enough. I pulled her into the room and tossed her to the floor.

Reaching for my belt, I prepared to undo it. Lila scrambled up and put her hands over mine. I looked down at her with a raised eyebrow.

“Let me, daddy.” Lila purred.

“My name is Master Marius. You will address me as such or as Master.” I commanded.

“Yes, Master.” Her voice quivered.

I permitted her what she wished. The movement of her hands, one clean and the other stained red with blood, was mesmerizing. Soon, she’d freed me from my pants and was stroking me firmly.

Her lips slipped over my tip and she moaned. The vibration was thrilling. I gripped her ponytail and forced her mouth further down my shaft until she gagged. I loved the whimper that came with it.

Using the handle at the back of her head, I fucked her mouth, using her for my pleasure. The scent of her arousal filled the room. It was still tinged with a little fear. She had no idea how I was going to use her next, and it excited her more than it frightened her. It was charming.

This little witch, no stronger than a human, was so willing for me. She had to have known better than to entice a vampire. Then, knowing better and avoiding danger are two different things.

I pulled her off of me. I needed to have her. I would own this witch and ruin her for any man after me.

“Take off your clothes and get on the bed.” I ordered.

“Yes, Master.” Lila replied with a slight rasp in her voice.

She quickly removed the nightgown as she stood, pausing so I could look at her. I had to admit, her body was perfection. Her skin was pale, but warm. I reached out to trace down her face, neck, and chest.

Lila sat on the bed and licked her lips. I finished taking off the remainder of my clothing. Her eyes ate up every inch of my body.

Before death, I’d been a warrior and a hunter. Unlike some vampires, my body didn’t wither after the change. She got up on her knees and trailed her hands up my body, exploring every muscle and scar my skin held from my past life.

“Did I give you permission to touch me?” I asked.

“I’m sorry, Master. I just wanted to feel you.” She whispered.

“This isn’t about what you want, right now.” I grabbed her wrists making her gasp and sigh. “Get on your hands and knees, witch.”

I let her go and she did what I said, presenting herself to me eagerly. I traced over the curve of her ass and down between her legs. Her body called to me in a way I’d never experienced.

Getting behind her, I teased at her opening with the tip of my hardened length. When she tried to push back onto me, I pulled back and slapped her bottom. She squealed and the scent of her arousal got stronger.

I lined up and plunged into her. Lila yelped and moaned as I started moving in her. The sounds she made were as intoxicating as the heat and silkiness that squeezed me as I moved.

Stroking harder, my fangs started growing out. My fingers dug into her hips as I pulled her against me. I needed more. I reached forward and grabbed her hair, pulling her up against my body.

“Touch yourself, my dirty witch. Make yourself cum for me.” I growled into her ear.

“Y-yes.” She moaned.

I shook her. “What was that?”

“Yes, Master!” Lila yelped.

“Good girl.” I hissed.

I watched as she used her fingers to bring herself to orgasm, feeling the grip of her inner muscles on me. I groaned at the strength of those muscles around my throbbing member.

Pushing her back down, I pounded into her as she squeaked with each impact. I battered her internally for a while longer before I stopped again. She was close to another big orgasm. I pulled out, making her cry out in disappointment.

“Beg for it.” I ordered.

“Please, Master. I need it. I need it so bad. I’ll do anything, Master.” She pled.

“What do you need, witch?” I asked.

“I need your cock, Master. I need you pounding and breaking me. Please, Master, I need to cum!” Lila begged with tears in her voice.

I slammed back into her and she screamed with pleasure. “Oh, Goddess! Yes!”

A smirk crossed my lips. Her reactions were perfect. I couldn’t wait to spend the next few hours finding every way I could make her scream like that. I paused my motions.

“Tell me, witch, are you on birth control? I won’t be father to any more bastards.”

“I am, Master! I take it every day.” She whimpered. “Does this mean you’re gonna cum in me?”

“I intend to spend the next five hours making you scream. I just need to know how careful I need to be.” I informed her.

She squeezed her thighs together, intensifying the grip she already had on my body. I felt more wetness coating me. Lila was definitely eager for that to happen.

“It’s safe, Master. I promise.” She moaned.

I could taste the honesty in her words. If she had lied, this would have ended. I was sure that, on some level, she knew that.

Quickly, I returned to my earlier actions. The sounds of her squeals and squeaks filled the room. I could feel myself nearing my end.

Striking hard and fast into her accepting, warm, body was beyond pleasurable. Being with an undead woman wasn’t anything like this. Maybe my aversion to living women had stemmed from the first one being so frightened. I’d had to be so gentle with her, that there was little pleasure for me.

I pulled Lila’s hair, bringing her back up to my body. As the edge of my peak hit, I bit her neck and fed on her sweet blood. Lila threw her head back on my shoulder and screamed again. Her whole body shook as if electricity was shooting through it.

When I was finished, I released her and she fell to the mattress. She gasped and panted. I laid next to her and watched her recover. She was so much more responsive than a vampire woman.

“That was amazing, daddy. I knew you were worth it.” She giggled.

I raised an eyebrow at her. She seemed to still have no real fear of me. Even after I fed on her without preparation.

“I need to finish harvesting the ingredients from that body. Why don’t you have a shower and wait here for me to come back. There will be a lot more blood on me this time.” Lila winked. “Promise.”

I chuckled and shooed her away. Maybe I could find time to visit this one more. I had a lot of men and women in my cells who were slated for death. It didn’t matter how they died, just that they died. I smiled and headed in for a shower.

This would be an interesting time, if nothing else. In the end, I would know where to find my child and I would have passed the time enjoyably. It was entirely a win on my part.

Saving Echo

Chapter 53 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

We waited in the living room for Master Marius' call. We had moved our searches to older parts of town, sharing the information the dark witch had given us. The wolves picked up the scent of rogues in a few areas, but mostly found families or lone wolves who had no clue.

Some of the wolves we'd seen had joined the search, wanting to make Queen Bellamy happy when they heard that her territory would be expanding. The ex-pack rogues were especially excited when they heard they would have a chance to rejoin a pack. They would call in every day with locations of other rogues they'd scented.

Every night, we looked for Echo in those locations. Grayson was getting frustrated, but not as frustrated as Master Marius. He really didn't want to be the payment for this spell, if he could avoid it. He would truly do anything for Echo. It was a strange thing to see. He wasn't normally considered caring, but she was his only childe, living or otherwise.

Grayson and I paced. We were used to being out there looking for her as soon as the sun set. Finding Echo was the most important thing to both of us.

In the past few days, I'd coached him on how to think of Echo without thinking of himself. I would posit scenarios to him and talk to him about what the right, wrong, and nearly right answers were.

He had some trouble. His wolf was very possessive. I had to learn how to pull back on the possessiveness I seemed to have developed. I just kept reminding myself that this was for Echo. She deserved to be happy. Grayson would give her the care and love she deserved in life, I could pamper and care for her for the rest of existence.

I explained our connection to him. That she was, most likely my Solus Amor. He didn't understand how she could be mated to two people, I told him about her two lives.

Unlike normal vampires, dhampyrs didn't have amnesia from turning. If not for the fact that they would sleep like a lower level vampire, some might have forgotten about the constraints of the sunlight and died.

Grayson tried to get me to concede the battle for her heart since she was meant to be mine after life. I refused. The only way to ensure that he took my lessons seriously was to make him think he was still competing against me.

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The phone finally rang and I answered it on speaker. Master Marius seemed like he was on the move. The sound of wind racing past the receiver indicated that it was at a fairly fast pace.

“I have the location. I will meet you down the block from there. The witch gave me everything.” He said, then gave us the address.

“I’ll bring the car. I want Echo to ride home comfortably.” I offered.

“No. I’ll take her home.” Marius said.

My heart leapt to my throat. I looked at Talia. She smiled tightly at me.

“Marius. She’ll need her mates to heal. She can’t just be tossed into a new environment after something like this.” Talia told him.

“I will not be taking her to my home. Echo needs to be healthy in all respects. Pulling her away from her siblings will not help that process. After this, she may need them more than ever. Victor may keep her. If anything like this happens again, though, I will take her and her siblings. I’ll even take the wolf my other daughter is mated to. I don’t care who knows. After what I’ve just been through for that child, I will never let something like this pass again. I want you all to remember this. If my daughter is ever in danger like this again, I will take her to my home.” He declared.

“Yes, Master Marius. Thank you for giving us another chance.” I said.

“It’s only because you offered yourself up for the payment. If you hadn’t I would think you too selfish for my daughter. Get moving. I want her home before dawn.”

I hung up the phone and we all ran from the house. Bellamy contacted her rogues and took a diverted path, stating that she and her people would do recon around the house so we didn’t walk in blind. I was grateful that she was thinking of it. Grayson wasn’t as willing to kill as a vampire or a rogue.

Soon we arrived in the neighborhood. It was right next to the one we searched the night before. I couldn’t believe I had been so close and had no idea. I could see that Grayson recognized the area. He looked upset.

“We were so close.” He whispered.

“We would have ended up on this street tonight. Either way, we were finding her tonight, Grayson.” I assured him.

“Would you please call me Gray? I really prefer it.” Grayson growled.

“Gray is a color, you are a man. I will continue calling you Grayson.” I smiled.

“Ass.” He huffed.

The rest of our party joined us and we found Master Marius. He was settled the across the street and down a little. It was a perfect position to see the house clearly, but not be seen. There was a large tree at the corner of the lot the house sat on that caused the sightline to be blocked from there, but not from where we were.

It was a ranch style house. I could see where the basement windows were. There were shadows on the curtains, but they were closed and we couldn't see inside.

Bellamy finally came up, but there were no wolves with her. She had a smirk on her face. This seemed to be something she wasn't worried about.

“Okay, there are four entrances to the house if you count the garage, which we're not. There is a back door which seems to go in there, though that we'll take in the breach to make sure no one escapes that way. Sliding glass doors at the back gave us an idea of the people in there. I would say four wolves and one vampire. We found two more wolf corpses buried in the back. Then, there's the front door. I want to be the first one in the front. It will take some of the fight out of the wolves. Mercenaries still have to bow to a more powerful wolf than them. I need to arrange this so I only have to eat one heart. Four is just too many for me. I'll suss out which one is the leader and take him out myself. You three are on the vampire. Gray, I want you to sniff out the entrance to the basement and figure out where Echo is.” Bellamy instructed.

“Where are your pack wolves?” Marius asked.

“At Victor's house preparing for whatever medical needs Echo may have. She may be sick from only drinking blood. I want to be sure that we have everything we need for whatever injuries she may have. They're also cooking a meal for her. I have this covered, Marius. This isn't my first rescue mission.” Bellamy scoffed.

“Alright. When do we go?” I asked.

“I told them to give me ten to get to you all and tell you what I'm doing. We have two minutes. I see they have no curtains or blinds open. They think they're safe. That's good. It will make this even better when we bust in there. They won't be prepared for the fight we'll be bringing to them. My guys are ready. Let's go.” She smiled.

We made our way toward the house and readied ourselves to breach the door. I felt a sudden lurching in my stomach. ‘I'm sorry, Victor. I love you.’

“Echo?” Grayson whispered.

I wondered what he had heard.

“Shh.” Bellamy hissed and kicked in the door.

There was a brief scuffle. The wolves didn't seem to want to bow before their queen, until she reached into someone's chest with very little effort and pulled out his heart. It only took two bites before the men realized who they were dealing with. The fighting broke off and they pointed in the direction Marius and Talia had already headed.

When I got to where they were, Marius had the vampire pinned to the floor. Talia was tying him up in special bonds made with treated strands of ash. The man was smirking.

"Where is Echo?" I demanded.

"I know no 'Echo'. This will not hold up in the high court. I've done nothing wrong. I was simply taking back my stolen property." He scoffed.

"Daniel Darknight. I don't recall selling you my children." Marius growled.

"What do you mean?" Daniel looked confused.

"Echo, Harmony, and Valor are the children of Master Marius. They cannot be your property as they were not purchased or given by one of their parents." Talia informed him. "I was surprised that someone would, not only steal the daughter of Death himself, but also the servant of the Hunter. You had to know you would be caught no matter where you ran."

I watched what little color he had drain from his face. I looked at the man who would claim my Echo as his property. When Echo's message with his name came through to me yesterday, I looked him up. He ruled his territory with an iron fist.

He had taken out the local wolf pack, stating that they threatened him and his people. No other packs had moved in. There was no proof to the contrary, so the Werewolf Association was inclined to believe him because of the tension between wolves and vampires.

There were stories about him that made me more than happy to serve him a final punishment. It was my right. He was in my territory and had stolen my servant.

"You said you know of no 'Echo'. If we find her on this property, then you will have lied to Death and The Traveler. There will be no high court for you. That is an immediate death sentence." I told him. "Would you like to change your answer?"

"Her name is Emily. Emily Williams. The people who stole her gave her that ridiculous name. She was mine! I had her and her siblings being nursed by Verity Sanders and her husband Thomas. They stole my property. Emily is mine!" He snarled.

"Echo belongs to Victor. I have granted her the decision of where she will spend her life. She chose him. You claim her, but didn't tell us how you got her." Marius grumbled.

"Victor! I found the door!" Grayson called.

“Go get my daughter. We’ll finish questioning him.” Marius ordered.

I left the room. Grayson waved me down the hall to a closet. In the bottom of it was a hatch that led to stairs. The faint scent of Echo washed over me. And the scent of blood.

We went to the first door and unlocked it. The cell was empty. The next was also empty, but the scent of blood and death hung in the air. It mixed with the scent of Echo’s father.

“It was Thomas Gale. Or Sanders, if Darknight is to be believed. Let’s keep going.” I said softly.

Grayson nodded and we continued across the hall. We unlocked the door and I was struck by the scent of Echo and her blood. I rushed into the room, followed by Grayson.

“Oh, goddess, no.” He whispered.

She was on a mattress and had a broken plate next to her. There was a shaky cut across one of the arteries of her neck. She was coated in blood as the wound continued to pulse.

I leaned in and licked over the wound, feeling it close with the added healing power of my saliva. Grayson pulled me away. He was growling.

“How could you think of food right now?” Grayson asked.

“I was closing the wound, you idiot. She has one more on each wrist. Let me seal them. Then you can carry her out of here.” I said.

He let me go. She had truly tried to make sure she would die. All that blood he’d fed her, may have healed her, but was wasted if she died like this. If we hadn’t found her, she would have died.

I felt tears form in my eyes at the strength of her conviction. She refused to be made to do anything she didn’t want to. Her decision that she would rather die than be subjected to the future that other female dhampyrs had forced on them, was reminiscent of the night I told her about them.

Her wrists healed as quickly as the wound in her neck, and I stepped back. There was still one cell to investigate. I was hoping Verity was in there and alive. It would give us another person to give an accounting of how the triplets actually came to be.

I was halfway across the room when I heard Grayson gasp and groan. I turned to see Echo in his arms. Her head was at his neck and was moving like she was drinking from him.

“Grayson?”

“She bit me.” He breathed.

“Mine.” Echo whispered.

“She marked me.” Grayson said with wide eyes.

He started looking at her neck and licking his lips. “Come get her from me. She’ll hate me if I mark her when she’s like this. I’m having a hard time controlling Rex.”

“Very responsible and selfless.” I replied softly and went to retrieve Echo from his arms.

A New Bond

Chapter 54 - The Vampire's Servant

Echo seemed to weigh nothing at all, as Grayson shifted her into my grasp. He appeared to be struggling with giving her up. I understood, she was his precious mate and had just marked him.

The reality of her marking Grayson set in. She was suffering severe blood loss. Nothing was seeming real to her. The craving for blood and their connection could have turned a feeding into a marking easily.

She would be upset when she woke up, no matter what. At least telling her that he fought to not mark her would help his case. Echo would probably be apologetic. At least, it would take the pressure off her. She wouldn’t have to choose, her blood depleted brain had already done so.

Echo’s arms came up and wrapped around my neck. I reveled in her touch. She was alive and would be for a long time. We turned toward the door. Grayson was leading the way.

“Victor.” She murmured and started kissing my neck.

“Echo. Stop that.” I told her, but she was beyond reason.

I felt her fangs slip into my skin. I froze. Vampires didn’t feed on other vampires. I’d never experienced this feeling in my life. It was like a line of pure pleasure coursing throughout my whole body.

With a groan, I tried to pull her off, but Echo held tight, feeding on me. I could feel a bond with her forming. She was marking me as hers.

“Grayson, get Talia.” I ordered.

“What’s going on?” He asked.

“She marked me, too. We need someone she can’t mark to carry her. Like you, I have the strong urge to mark her as well. This isn’t the time.”

“My Victor.” Echo sighed as she cuddled back down into my arms.

The bond firmed and I tried to focus on anything but her sweet soft skin and swanlike neck. Her scent was entrancing. I wanted nothing more than to breathe it in as I punctured her neck with my own fangs and felt them sink into her, like I wanted to sink other parts of me into her.

“Victor. Why are you standing like that? Take her to Marius so he can get her home.” Talia commanded.

“I can’t. She marked me, Talia. I’m having a hard time controlling myself. She marked Grayson as well. Neither one of us can be close to her for much longer. We need to get ahold of ourselves.” I explained.

“Give her to me. I’ll take her to Marius. I’m already bonded to my Solus Amor and she can’t bond with her own sire. We’ll get her home. You boys take your time and cool off. Find out who’s crying in the next cell.” She said, taking Echo from me.

I suppressed the urge to hiss at my sire as she took Echo in her arms. Echo whimpered, but didn’t make any other movements or sounds. It looked like she was pretty solidly asleep.

Grayson looked at my neck and his hand went up to his own mark. He appeared sad and a little disbelieving at the situation. I almost wished she had only marked him, but I couldn’t feel like that long, the joy of Echo claiming me edged it out.

“What does this mean? Wolves can’t mark more than one person at a time. I didn’t think vampires could either.” He said.

“Vampires have several ways of marking people in certain ways. We mark our servants by creating a strong blood bond, in which we bite ourselves, then bite them. They drink our blood while we drink theirs. It needs to be renewed every few centuries or so. Then there is a marriage mark. Where one vampire bites the other. This lasts for one hundred years and is often used to broker deals that combine territories. Dhampyrs, at full strength, can enter into marriage bonds. They have longer lifespans than any other living creature and become full vampires when they die. An eternal bond is the final mark we give. Where the marriage mark is given, then reciprocated. Usually, this is only reserved for our Solus Amor. No other marriage mark can be given once we’ve created an eternal bond.” I explained.

“Then, how were you going to make her your human servant?” Gray asked.

“I wasn’t. In the beginning, I had intended to do the blood exchange with cuts instead of a bite. That changed as I got to know her. I wouldn’t feed her my blood after I saw that she was blood adverse. I would have told her to stay on as my daylight servant and given her the reasons why. Her lifespan would be enough to not merit artificially elongating it.” I told him.

“So she can mark both of us?”

“So it seems. Probably because of her bond with you and the fact that she is more vampire than human. I’ll still be connected to my Solus Amor. If it turns out not to be Echo, then I will have to see out the marriage bond until its end, but I never have to act on it.” I said as we headed down to the last door.

“Then, we’re still fighting for the chance to be the one she lets bite her back.” He chuckled.

“That seems to be the case. Let’s finish this so we can get back to the house and see how she’s doing. You’re probably aching to see her again as much as I am.”

“Yeah. I just want to make sure she’s okay. Rex is calming down, though. I don’t know how he’s going to be when we see her again.” Grayson admitted.

“You can get through this. I’ll help as much as I can.” I told him, unlocking the final door and opening it.

The room was set up like the other three. On a mattress in the corner, a sobbing woman was bundled in a thin blanket. It smelled like Verity.

“P-please. No more. Please. I’m sorry. No more.” She begged.

I got close to her and put my hand on her shoulder, gently. She screamed and started crying harder. I could see she wasn’t wearing anything under the blanket. There were scratches and bite marks on every bare inch of her that I could see.

Stepping back, I took off my shirt. This distressed her even more, but it was necessary. I leaned down and handed it to her.

“Please take this and put it on, Ms. Verity. No one will hurt you anymore. We’re here to take you away.” I murmured to the frightened woman.

With a shaking hand, she reached out and accepted the shirt. She made a great effort to slip it on without showing her body. She was small enough that the shirt was like a short dress on her.

“Can you walk, or do you need me to carry you?” I asked.

“I.. I think I can walk. Please, Mr. Nightshade. I’m sorry for what I did. Don’t hurt me too. I was wrong to harm Echo. I shouldn’t have let the vampires feed on her.” She sobbed.

“I will forgive you. Her sire may not be as forgiving, but he won’t let what happened to you here, happen again.” I promised.

It was in that instant that I started making the connection. She wasn't Echo's true mother. For all that she was one quarter vampire, there was no shade of green in her eyes like the triplets had. They were actually such a dark brown that they looked nearly black.

If I had to guess, I would think Marion Bane was actually her sire, he was the first with black eyes. Queen Bellamy informed me of his death. That was good. I didn't want such a repugnant man in my territory.

I helped Verity to stand and guided her up to the main floor. The corpses of the wolves were being carried out of the living room by the rogues. I didn't know what Queen Bellamy's plan was, but I knew I didn't want to be there anymore.

"Victor." Marius said, entering the room from the hall.

"I thought you were taking Echo home." I replied.

"I did. She's with the wolves now. They're playing nanny and nurse to her as if she were their own wounded pup. I took Darknight to my dungeon. Who is this?" He asked.

"This is Verity. She was acting as mother to the triplets for most of their lives." I answered.

"You're the one who sold the blood of my childe?" He growled.

She whimpered and hid behind me. I put my hand up and he snarled at me. He couldn't harm me without harming Echo now.

"Master Marius, Verity will give us all information we wanted about how the children came into her care and why she did what she did. She was already warned by the council. We have no grounds to punish her further. Look at her face. Darknight let those rogues do whatever they pleased to her. She's been punished enough." I said calmly.

He looked at her. There were claw marks on her face and a bite on her jaw that had yet to heal. From the marks I'd seen when the blanket dropped, she was covered in them. They tortured her in every way they could imagine.

"Fine. Let me take you to a safe home with one of our council members, Verity. Their servants will take care of you and you will answer all questions honestly. Do you understand?" Master Marius asked.

"I understand, sir. I promise I'll be good. I'll tell you everything, just don't let Master Darknight have me back." She pled.

"He's been sentenced to death by me. He will never breathe free air again. You needn't fear him. If I find that you've lied in any of this, you will have me to fear. I implore you to speak only the truth." He stated firmly.

“Yes, sir.” Verity replied in a small voice.

“I’m taking her to the Prince for care. If anyone can help this woman heal, it’s Phoebe.” Marius told me.

He held out his hand and she took it. They vanished almost immediately. I looked to Grayson.

“Are you ready to go home, or do you need more of a run than that to calm your wolf?” I asked.

“I think I’ll be fine.” He said.

We went outside and started running for home. I wondered how long it would take for Echo to come back to herself. We’d make sure she’d never have to worry again. She would be told how we weren’t upset at being marked.

I knew she’d feel badly about it. We would reassure her with our actions as well as our words. We were hers now, and we would work together to protect her forever.

A Healing Time

Chapter 55 - The Vampire's Servant

When we returned to the house, I found it bustling with activity. The rogues were getting their orders for returning home. Marius was pacing in the entry way while Talia was trying to soothe him. I tried to mount the stairs to go see Echo, but they stopped me.

“Dillon and Jean-Claude are with her, they’re finishing cleaning her up and getting her into her pajamas. They’ll let us know when someone can go see her.” Talia told me.

I looked to Grayson. He appeared as upset to hear that as I was. He let out a small growl.

Bellamy walked over and slapped him on the chest. “Don’t start. She’s in a fragile state and they said she hasn’t woken up at all. Neither one of them is interested in your female. This is what they were here to take care of. None of that possessive bullshit, Gray. She needs you caring, not posturing.” She scolded.

Shame and embarrassment crossed his face. He hung his head. I understood. The idea of another male touching Echo put me on edge as well.

“She didn’t wake up. We weren’t able to get any real food into her. Once she’s up, we’ll get her fed. With how much blood was on her clothes, it could be a while. For a wolf, I would say half a

day, for a human, more. I have no clue on a dhampyr. Did you want me to prepare her food with blood in it?" Bellamy asked.

"If Echo needs blood, I want her to know it will be there. I would rather not force her through hiding it. With the way you make it taste like there is no blood at all, I might see if she would be interested in trying blood foods. I would never lie to her about it." I told her.

"Good. Looks like the boys are done. Echo will need the two of you. I see those marks. Mates are important to healing, no matter the species. Even humans heal better around the people they love. Let's go." She smiled and waved us up the stairs.

We followed her up to Echo's room. She opened the door and I saw Echo laying in her bed. She looked like she did whenever I would check in on her in the middle of the night.

I hadn't realized how tense I'd been until that moment. Seeing her peacefully sleeping in her bed, it made me suddenly realize that I had to know for sure if she was my Solus Amor. I couldn't go on not knowing until her death.

She would be reported to be my bride to the rest of the council. Having the title of 'The Hunter' would be a bigger threat than just being Victor Nightshade, especially after this business with Darknight. No one would take her again after the revelation that she was Master Marius' daughter came to light.

"Bellamy. Talia said you can tell if she's my Solus Amor. Please. I need to know. I'll step back from my pursuit and help Grayson more if she isn't. Don't think that will free you of me, Grayson. Not all vampires have a Solus Amor. If I don't have one at all, I'll still be your competition." I smirked at him.

"I'll win. No matter how hard you work, I'll be working harder." He chuckled.

I turned to her. Bellamy had her lips pressed in a tight line. I knew she didn't approve of our competition. She wanted me to be friends with Grayson and share Echo's heart. Or wait my turn, for her to pass into her next life.

"I'll check. I can tell the strength of your connection, how close you are, to your mate. I could tweak the connection for a response, but I don't think you'll get much. She didn't react to being bathed or changed at all." Bellamy warned.

"Please. I need to know." I insisted.

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. When she opened them, they were focused near my heart. Bellamy looked closely.

"I see two connections. Both are strong." She said.

“One is the marriage bond with Echo. The other would be the connection to my Solus Amor.” I told her.

“Yes. I can see that one of these connections is new. It’s strong, but also delicate. The other seems well-worn. I’ll just tug the older one a bit.” Bellamy smiled slightly.

She reached out as if she was touching something. I felt a stirring in my chest that made me long for my Solus Amor. It made me need the comfort of her arms. Bellamy hooked her fingers around it and tugged toward me.

“No! Please, stop! Don’t leave me.” Echo whimpered.

I grabbed Bellamy’s wrist and stopped the pulling. When Echo calmed, I let go and Bellamy’s hand jerked forward. Echo started crying hopelessly.

Grayson and I hurried to her. He looked up at me with an upset look

“You really had to test it that hard?” Grayson hissed.

“I needed to make sure it wasn’t a nightmare or a coincidence. Get on that side of her in the bed. She needs us for comfort.” I told him.

He went over, took off his shoes, and crawled onto the bed gingerly. I got onto it from the side nearest the door. There wasn’t a lot of room for the two of us, but Grayson would be less comfortable in a room filled with my scent.

We laid on our sides, close to Echo. Her crying subsided as she reached out and grasped our shirts. She really was my Solus Amor.

“I’ll go grab you each a pillow from your rooms. Looks like you’re stuck there for the night. Lucky girl, having two mates.” Bellamy chuckled. “Just make sure you’re thinking of her. I know it’s easy to think of yourselves and think you’re thinking of her. I’ve done that with my own mate before. She’s going to be fragile for a while after all this. If I see either of you pushing her, I’ll kick your asses.” She finished seriously.

We nodded and she left. Grayson didn’t seem to know what to do with his free arm. It seemed like he wanted to touch her. I did, too.

“Just lay your arm across her middle.” I suggested.

He looked shocked, but did as I instructed. Echo relaxed under the weight of it. I laid my arm just above his and her grip on our shirts loosened. Echo’s hands went to our arms and settled on them.

I watched her face. She smiled a little and gave a quivering sigh.

“She’s beautiful.” Grayson whispered.

“We have to be better for her. Bickering will cause her stress. I’ll work on my issues with werewolves if you work on your issues with vampires.” I said.

“You’re talking like this is a forever arrangement. This is only until Echo tells you she chooses me.” He stated.

“We only just got her back and you’re reverting to your childish self, Grayson? That won’t win you Echo’s heart.” I chided.

“At least I’m not a cold, bloodsucker.” He growled.

Echo whimpered. A little frown furrowed her brow. It froze the snarl that was working its way out of me.

“Stop fighting.” Bellamy scolded from the doorway. “Didn’t you hear me when I said you need to think of her? Before they took her, did she seem to like the idea of you two fighting? Did she like it when you were upset? From what I understand, Echo didn’t like any conflict in her life.”

She walked in and put my pillow behind my head, then did the same for Grayson. Her eyes were on where our hands were. I looked down and saw that we’d both been gripping Echo around her waist. I relaxed my grip.

“You two need to work out your differences and stop fighting over her, at least until she’s healed. I’m here for another week. I want to see you two getting along better. This is your final warning.”

“Sorry, Bellamy.” We murmured.

“I’m going to call my mate and go to bed. I’ll let you off from training in the morning, Gray. I expect you at the very next one after she’s awake.” She said as she headed out the door. “Get some sleep.”

The realization of what staying by Echo’s side meant dawned on me. I was going to have to sleep here for the day. If she woke in a bed with only Grayson, Echo might think something untoward happened. She would know I wouldn’t permit it.

“Grayson, you need to sleep. I won’t have the option to stay awake at some point and she’ll need someone to explain what happened to her. I can wake you before the sun takes me for the day.” I told him.

“You’ll trust me?” He asked.

“I’ll have to. You won’t toss my body into the sun, will you?” I questioned.

“No. I need to think of Echo. If your marks are like ours, it would hurt her if you died. Even if they’re not, I’m pretty sure it would hurt her. I don’t want to do that.” Grayson said softly.

“Sleep. I’ll message my supports so they know that I won’t be available for a few nights.”

Grayson got comfortable and took a couple deep breaths before closing his eyes. I knew it would be hard for him to relax with the scent of vampire around him, but he fell asleep more quickly than I thought he would.

I watched them both sleep for a while. Having Echo back made me happier than anything else had in centuries. It put me at peace.

Pulling out my phone, I contacted Talon and Silence. They gave me their report for the night and I put Silence in charge of the territory while I was occupied. I trusted her and Drew more than Talon and Penelope.

I worked on other things I could do with my phone without calling anyone. I wanted to have things handled so I could focus entirely on Echo’s healing. Marius texted me that Verity had already started talking. He was passing relevant information to Bellamy and would fill me in when we could talk.

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After a couple hours, Echo started moving. I put my phone in my pocket and turned my attention to her.

She started rubbing her gums. It can take a little while to get used to fangs, but I didn’t know why hers were coming out. Maybe she was hungry.

I started moving away to go get her something to eat, when she was suddenly on me, pinning me to the bed. Her eyes were still closed. I realized it was her instinct taking over. Echo was still deeply asleep.

Her head dipped down to my neck and I felt her licking my skin. I knew what was coming. My body was reacting to the anticipation to having her bite me again.

Echo’s fangs slipped into my skin smoothly. She was a natural at feeding. Even asleep, she’d made sure the biting spot was numbed.

As she drew blood from my body, she sighed and moaned in the most enticing way. Her body writhed on top of mine. I groaned at the feeling of her on me, her scent so tantalizingly close.

“What the hell?!” Grayson hissed.

I looked over at him. “She’s hungry.”

“Your fangs are out.” He said.

“I’m controlling myself. Though, it’s not easy. I think she’s almost done.” I told him as I felt her pulling back and sealing the wound.

Echo laid her head on my chest and sighed happily. I couldn’t help but smile. Wrapping my arms around her, I held her tightly for a few moments. I needed to relieve the pressure I was experiencing from having my mate feed on me.

“Grayson. Take her off me. I need a few minutes.” I whispered.

He didn’t look happy about it, but he rolled her onto the bed. In the few moments it took me to get off the bed, I heard him whimper. Turning back, I saw Echo licking his neck, right over the mark she’d given him.

“Relax, Grayson. She’s about to bite.” I warned him.

“Oh, goddess, I want her to bite me.” He groaned.

As if answering his wish, I saw Echo strike. I made my way to the restroom to handle my situation while she fed. We hadn’t thought of this possibility. Darknight got her hooked on blood. Her body craved it. He must not have let her have anything else.

When I returned, Grayson was twitching and breathing heavily. I knew he was fighting his wolf, and went to pull Echo off of him. She had finished her feeding, and was resting on him like she had me.

He growled, then looked apologetic. “Sorry. That was Rex. Thanks. I didn’t know how much longer I could fight him.”

“Just keep reminding him of how angry she’ll be with you if she wakes up with a mark. She didn’t mark us intentionally. We can’t just mark her because she did it to us. That would hurt her more than it would help.”

“I do. He’s getting there. Thanks for taking her. I’m... umm... I’m gonna go to the bathroom. Excuse me.” Grayson mumbled and rushed from the room.

I placed Echo back in her bed and covered her up. She snuggled down under the blanket. I went back to my side of the bed and slipped in next to her, taking Echo’s hand in my own and watched her sleep more. Soon, she’d be awake and I would truly have my Echo back again.

Echo Awakens

Chapter 56 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

I was laying on something really warm and firm. It rumbled under me. It was like I couldn't control my body. Something in me told me to lick and I did.

A groan from under me made my body tighten. I felt the fangs in my mouth elongate and I bit into what I was laying on. There was a slight gasp and a moan.

I realized I was laying on a person. I was biting someone! No matter how much I tried to stop, I couldn't. I felt the fangs retract and my body swallowed the blood that gushed into my mouth.

"Oh, goddess, yes." A whisper sounded in my ear.

That was a familiar voice, but I couldn't make the connection to who it was. Strong arms encircled my waist. It was comfortable and familiar.

"I love you, Echo. Eat as much as you need, sweetheart. Come back to us. We've been waiting for you all day." The voice murmured.

After a while, I got the urge to lick again. I was done. Part of me was relieved. I didn't want to drink blood, especially from someone else. I didn't fully remember why.

The burning in my stomach wasn't gone. I was still hungry, but I stopped. Maybe it meant I was controlling myself better.

"Let me take her. You go take care of yourself." A cool voice said.

"Thanks. It's easier not to try and bite back now. Rex is calming down a lot. Maybe it's the blood loss." The first voice chuckled.

I felt myself being picked up and cradled gently. There was some noise like someone getting off a bed and I felt a warm hand on my cheek. It was such a caring touch, I rubbed my face against it.

"She moved for something other than feeding!" The first voice said excitedly.

"With luck, she's almost healed and will wake soon." The second replied.

The person holding me began to move. They sat down with me in their lap. I smelled something delicious and pulled myself up to start licking.

He chuckled as I prepared to bite. Whoever it was, they understood. He held me close, stabilizing me against him and giving me access to the place I would bite.

When my fangs slipped into him, he sighed happily. As I drew his blood into my mouth, my seat started becoming more uncomfortable. Something was poking me. I needed this blood too much to stop, though.

“My sweet princess. I miss your smile. Please wake up soon. I love you, Echo. Come back to me. Come back to your Victor.” He whispered.

Victor? I remembered Victor. I started pulling my mind from the hole it was sunk in. My Victor. I wanted to wake up. I wanted to see him.

Suddenly, I remembered the other voice. It was Gray. They didn’t seem as grumpy around each other as they normally were. There was no thinly veiled anger in their voices.

I licked the place I’d bitten. Now I knew exactly what was poking me. I blushed at the feeling of Victor’s erection.

“Victor.” I mumbled.

“Echo. Can you open your eyes, princess?” He asked.

I shook my head.

“Why not?”

“Because, well, because of what I’m sitting on. I don’t want to.” I answered quietly, with more blood rushing to my cheeks.

Victor chuckled. “Sweet girl. Don’t be embarrassed. This is something that can happen during feedings. Especially with your mate. You’re feeling something similar, but haven’t quite put it together yet.”

I didn’t think so. I didn’t know what to do. I knew that it couldn’t be as obvious as it was for him, but how did I tell?

“I can smell your arousal, princess. I can smell it every time you feed. Grayson can smell it, too. That makes it even harder for us... literally.”

“Done. I’ll get her back to bed so you can take care of yourself.” Gray said.

“She’s awake, Grayson. Come take her off of me. I don’t think she has full control of herself yet.” Victor replied.

I felt myself being picked up and cradled in the warm arms again. I snuggled against him. It felt good to be cared for by these two men who loved me.

Why did they need to care for me, though? Why did I have fangs? Why was I so comfortable feeding off their blood?

“Good evening, Echo. Are you really back with us?” Gray asked.

I nodded.

“Why aren’t you opening your eyes then?” He chuckled.

“I’m embarrassed.” I whispered.

“Because you were feeding on us?”

“Because I can’t remember what’s going on. Why are you and Victor taking care of me like this? When did I get fangs?” I whimpered. “I’m scared, Gray.”

He held me tightly and I felt his lips on my forehead. “Don’t be afraid, Echo. Once Victor’s done in the bathroom, we’ll talk about it. Would you like something other than blood to eat? I can ask Bellamy to make you something.”

“Who’s Bellamy?” I asked.

“She’s the Queen of the Eaten Heart Collective. A rogue queen. She’s here to train you how to fight, but has mostly been spending her time helping take care of everything and searching for you. She had a team of rogue wolves trying to track you down. Marius was even searching and Victor’s sire Talia.”

“I haven’t gotten everything together for their visit. Oh, I’m sorry. I must have gotten sick.” I said.

It was the only thing I could think of. What did he mean, there were rogue wolves trying to track me down? Wasn’t I in my bedroom?

I opened my eyes to look around. It was my room. I looked back to Gray. There was something different about him. He was more handsome, somehow. I searched his face for some clue. My eyes were drawn to his lips.

The thought of what they might feel like pressed against my own made me blush. I’d never thought of Gray like that before. There was a feeling of longing deep inside me. Something in me wanted to taste those lips.

They curled up into a soft smile. I looked away. He caught me staring at his mouth. At least he couldn’t hear what I was thinking.

“Oh, sweetheart. You have to get better control of your abilities.” He sighed. “Don’t worry. I won’t hold it against you.”

Before I could ask what he was talking about, the bathroom door opened and Victor entered the room. He looked a little more worn than normal. That didn't stop him from smiling warmly at me.

I couldn't help but remember the kiss we'd shared. I longed to be in his arms like that again. It was more powerful than the urge had been before.

Victor froze and stared at me. Then, he looked at Gray. I didn't understand what was going on at all.

"We'll have to work on that." Victor said quietly.

He was in only his pajama pants. I suddenly realized that Gray was also topless with pajama pants on. My hand rested on his bare chest and I blushed deeply.

Gray carried me to the bed and set me down. Victor walked over and they turned to each other. It looked like they were having some sort of silent communication. Then, they turned to me.

I had never seen them quite like this. Standing side by side, topless. I noted the richer color of Gray's skin, his muscles were thicker, more robust, than Victor's. Victor was more elegant in his build. He had muscles, but they were more compact and trim. They were the same height, but there were no other similarities.

There was heat flooding my body while I looked at them. How many days had I spent in bed with both of them? I don't know that I would have trusted any other men not to do something to me.

The trust I had in Gray was strange. I was pretty sure I wouldn't have trusted him earlier, but, now, it was like I knew for a fact he would never do something I didn't want.

"Echo. Do you remember what happened to you?" Victor asked softly.

I thought about it. I remembered being dropped off and checking the mail.... Mr. Martin punched me. My eyes widened, then squeezed shut as I remembered I was kidnapped, forced to drink blood and listen to the screams of my ex-mother. Images flashed in my mind of the things that wolf had done to me. The things Daniel said.

"Did you see that?" Gray whispered.

"If he weren't already dead I'd kill him." Victor growled.

"You're safe now. We took care of them all. They won't ever harm you again." Gray promised.

"I... I tried.... He said we were leaving in the morning. I tried to think of anything to get away, but it was the only thing I could think of." I told them as I started to cry.

Killing myself was the only way to save me from the future I didn't want. I couldn't imagine being forced to be Daniel's wife. That was what he told me. He would mark me as his bride and I would belong to him by law.

Telling him the truth about my heritage was the only thing I could think of to save me. He thought I was lying when I told him Marius was my sire. He slapped me for lying to him.

I raised my hand to my face, remembering the sting. He called me Emily the entire time. I told him over and over that I had always been Echo and I wanted to keep that name. He just kept saying it was stupid and calling me stupid for keeping it.

He wasn't a nice man. I knew that had been an act after the way he talked to my ex-mother. The entire time, I'd thought of how much better even Gray was. He may have kept insisting that I was his mate, but he wanted me safe. He may have felt like I was his, but not like a belonging. The way Daniel talked, I wasn't anything to him but a tool.

"Echo." Gray whispered.

Gray got close to me and dropped into a crouch in front of me. He wiped a tear that had started to fall from my eye. I searched his face for his intention. All I saw was caring.

"I love you, Echo. I'm sorry we couldn't save you before you had to go through all that. I'll never let anyone hurt you again." He promised.

His hand settled over mine on my face. The warmth of his touch was enhanced by the buzzing feeling. The mate bond. It seemed less frantic than it had before. My eyes landed on a puncture mark on the curve where his shoulder met his neck.

I freed my hand and reached out to touch it. Gray stayed still and closed his eyes as my fingers met the scarred mark. I traced the bite.

"Did I hurt you?" I asked.

"No, Echo. It didn't hurt at all. It never hurt." Gray replied.

His lashes fell delicately on his cheekbones. I smelled something amazing, and it seemed to be coming from him. It was a smell that made me think of being safe and warm. Hot chocolate and fresh linen warmed by the sun.

I leaned in and kissed his lips gently. I remembered biting him and calling him mine. He was mine and it felt right. Like nothing had ever felt before.

Suddenly, I remembered doing the same thing to Victor. I pulled back and looked up at him. There was no expression on his face. He was completely blank. I hated that look, and reached out to him.

Victor seemed to consider it before kneeling in front of me. I traced the mark on his neck too. There were no sparks, like with Gray. Instead, it was as if contentment washed over me in a wave. When I touched Victor, I felt truly and purely content.

I caressed his face. He was my Victor. I wouldn't hurt him again.

"You didn't hurt me either, little one. Don't worry about us, we're fully grown supernaturals. You'll never have to worry about someone taking us from you. We just need to make sure no one tries to take you from us again." He murmured.

I leaned in and kissed him the same way I'd kissed Gray. Victor responded tenderly, taking my hand in his while our lips met sweetly. I finally had them back.

Pulling away, I smiled softly. Something in me was nervous about this, but there was something stronger that kept saying it was where I belonged. There was nothing more right and natural than loving and being loved by both of them.

Gray took my other hand and held it. "I can share, if it means you're happy, Echo. I didn't realize how you felt about him until now."

"Echo, it would be best if you mated with Grayson while living. I can wait for you." Victor said.

I looked at him, shocked. I could feel the pain in him that happened when he said that. He didn't want to be selfish. He wanted me to not feel pressured. It was strange to feel someone else's feelings in my heart, but I knew they weren't mine.

"Please, Victor. Don't pull away from me. I love you."

"And you love Grayson. I have to give up. I'll command too much of your attention. It wouldn't be fair to the pup." He chuckled in a way I knew wasn't because he thought it was amusing.

"I can feel what you're feeling, Victor. Please. It hurts to feel you in pain." I murmured. "Don't do this."

"Victor, we can learn to get along. We're already doing better than we were at the beginning of all of this. We should be willing to try, for Echo." Gray pressed.

"If she decides she only wants one of us, then would you just walk away, Grayson? If she decided one day that she only wants me, could you walk away? I don't think I could if I got invested in the relationship. Right now, she's just woken. This isn't entirely Echo speaking, and... it is. This is the part of Echo that lives on instinct. The part that told her to feed on us when hungry." Victor said, standing.

"I love you, Victor. I told you that. I whispered it when I was locked in that room. I held it in my heart ever since we kissed." I told him.

“And Grayson. You love him as much as me?” He asked.

“I’m just learning to love Gray. I realized how much I missed him when I was locked away. I started realizing that I was beginning to love him too.” I admitted.

“Did you say to yourself, if I’m saved, I’ll have them both? Or did you realize you’d have to choose?” Victor questioned, turning his back on me.

What had happened when I realized I was falling in love with Gray? I realized my insistence that I was using him for healing was just the only way my mind could wrap around wanting to be with him.

“I never thought I would have to choose. It just felt like everything was right when I thought of loving you both.” I said.

“Let Grayson mark you as his. Have him in life. I’ll be here for you when you pass into your other life, Echo.” He told me and left the room.

A Family Reunion

Chapter 57 - The Vampire's Servant

[Gray]

I couldn’t believe he just walked out on her like that. Echo looked like her heart was breaking. I could feel it as if it were my own heart breaking. Just like when I thought she was rejecting me at the restaurant.

“He’ll come around.” I told her, pulling her into my arms.

“What if he doesn’t, Gray? I loved him first. I don’t know how to deal with this. Do you think this isn’t really me? Will I change after I’ve been awake longer?” She asked.

“I feel the intentions of your heart, Echo. Your mind may worry about this later. I know you don’t like people to be sad, especially because of you. I won’t mark you until we know the truth of your heart and mind together. I can wait for you. I love you that much. Victor was teaching me how to be better for you.” I said.

It dawned on me that this may have always been his plan. Maybe he was teaching me so I would be a better mate in this life. It was his way of taking care of her.

That was the sort of selflessness I didn't think I could manage. I couldn't just walk away. I wanted to be there for Echo always. I wanted her in my arms like this, forever.

She wrapped her arms around my neck. I got up and sat on the bed, holding my mate as she cried softly for her lost love. I'd kick his ass for hurting her like this.

"Let's get dressed. I'll introduce you to the wolves who are here to help train you. Maybe Bellamy can make you some blood food to get you used to eating normal foods again. I can imagine you don't want to feed on me at school." I chuckled.

"Thank you for staying with me, Gray. Thank you for being patient." She replied.

"I wasn't patient, Echo. I was selfish and stubborn. I wanted you to be mine and I didn't even think about what you might want. I thought you were just confused because of what your parents did to you and because Victor was the one to save you from them. I'm still learning. I love you enough to do whatever you need me to in order to make you happy." I told her.

She turned her face up to me and kissed me again. I loved the feeling of her lips on mine. Echo opened her mouth a little and I felt her tongue touch my lips. I fell passionately into the kiss, granting her access and tasting her mouth for the first time.

Echo pulled back. "Was that okay? You just made me so happy, I wanted to kiss you."

"More than okay, sweetheart. I love your kisses. I feel like I've waited my whole life for the feeling of your lips on mine. Come on. Do you think you can stand?" I asked.

"I think so." She replied and turned in my lap.

The feeling of her sitting there was starting to stir up Rex. When her hips ground against me while she turned, I groaned. I couldn't help it; she was rubbing right on me. The kiss had already started blood rushing down there.

"Are you okay, Gray?" Echo asked.

She had no idea what she did to me. I wasn't going to kill our progress by telling her. Just kissing was a huge step, sex was far down the line.

"Fine, Echo. Go on. I'm here to catch you if you fall." I promised.

Carefully, she got up out of my lap. She lost her balance a little, but I was there to help stabilize her until she was feeling more comfortable. I guided her to her closet and told her I was heading to my room for a moment to get my clothes.

Outside of her room, I saw Victor's door open. He was fully clothed and looking at his phone. I couldn't help myself. I grabbed him by the shirt and slammed him against the wall.

“How could you do that to her? After what she’s been through? How could you be so fucking heartless? You made her cry.” I snarled.

He maintained a blank, empty look and stared at me silently. I knew he loved her as much as I did. I felt the intensity of his love while we were looking for her. I saw how he cared for her every time she woke up. I heard him telling her that he loved her.

“Are you finished? I have business to attend to.” Victor replied coolly.

“Why don’t you try being a man instead of a vampire sometime? She needs both of us. Do you really hate me so much that you won’t even entertain the idea of sharing her?” I asked.

“Why should I want to share her? Echo is my Solus Amor. My only love. I am not that to her. Until I am her Solus Amor, I should step aside. She will still be registered as my bride and Master Marius is claiming her and her siblings as his children. They’ll all be safe. When you die, I will step up and take my place by her side.” He said in a tone that made me want to smash his head in.

“Will she even want you if you abandon her now?” I pressed.

“Time heals all wounds. One day, Echo will realize I was doing what was best for her. Or, she won’t and the mark will fade, then she can reject me as her Solus Amor. You two can stay until we have her trained and educated in the world of vampires. After that, I’ll talk to Bellamy about having rogues live out in the guesthouse to guard me during the day and I’ll find a human servant to take care of me. You two can go have the life you were meant to, without me.” Victor replied and pushed my hands away as if I were a child.

“You’re making a mistake. This isn’t selfless, Victor. This is just as selfish as the fact that I’m thrilled you’re stepping aside. What makes this different, was that I was willing to give up part of my heart to make her happy, and you’re going to exist as some martyr in your own mind without her.” I told him, turning to my own room.

I couldn’t argue with him anymore. We had until Echo was finished with her vampire education and the training to change his mind. I was willing to give up a lot for Echo’s happiness, but I knew she wouldn’t truly be happy without both of us in her life.

Quickly, I slipped on jeans and a t-shirt, then headed back to Echo’s room. When I arrived, she was dressed and standing by her bed. She had something in her arms. Moving closer, I saw that it was Victor’s pillow.

“Echo.” I murmured.

“I know he loves me. I could feel his heart breaking. Why would he leave me?” She whimpered.

“Be strong, my little sweetheart. He’ll change his mind. He’s just got selflessness mixed up with sacrifice. He just has to see how this would work. I have some ideas. We’ll get him to see that he needs to be with us.” I told her and put my hand on her shoulder.

Echo dropped the pillow on the bed and turned to wrap her arms around my waist. I stroked her hair and back.

“Am I being selfish, though? You don’t really want to share me with him. Why are you accepting this?” Echo asked.

“Because I know that having you in my life will make me happy no matter what else I have to deal with. Victor is only awake for a short while and it’s less time in the summers. That means I get you all to myself for those long summer days. As long as you love me, I’ll do whatever I have to so I can be near you.”

‘Gray. I’m here with Val and Harmony. We’re just pulling up to the house now.’ Cam linked me.

‘How did you guys know to come?’ I asked.

‘Victor called and said she was awake a while ago. I practically had to throw myself on the car to get them to take me too.’

‘I’ll bring Echo down. This’ll help her a lot. She’s dealing with some stuff.’ I told him.

‘I get it. Harmony was inconsolable the entire time Echo was gone. I bet Echo will be much better after seeing her sister and brother again.’ He replied.

“Harmony and Valor are here. Let’s go down and see them. Hiding up here and being sad isn’t going to change anything.” I said.

Echo nodded and pulled away from me. She took my hand and pulled me from the room. It was obvious that she was excited about seeing her family again.

When we reached the stairs, she held the banister tightly. I switched which hand she was holding so I could hang onto her waist and ensure she didn’t fall. She didn’t shy away from my touch at all.

At the bottom, I let her go. Cam told me about the argument the triplets has Sunday morning. I didn’t want to spark anything between them when they were just being reunited.

Bellamy opened the door when they knocked and stepped aside. Harmony and Val rushed in and pulled Echo into a hug between them. Cam stepped around them and stood next to me.

‘How did everything go today?’ He asked.

‘She mostly slept and fed.’

‘On blood?’

‘Yeah.’ I pulled the neck of my t-shirt aside and showed him my mark. ‘Echo needs to feed on blood right now. It gets me hard as hell each time.’

‘She marked you?! Holy shit, man! Congrats! Harmony has been so worried, that I didn’t want to pressure her. Maybe I can get my mark soon. Have you marked her back?’ Cam asked.

‘No. We’re waiting for her to feel better. She didn’t really mean to mark me. It’s the least I can do after everything she’s been through.’

‘That’s mature, man. I’m sorry I told you to give her up. I saw how hard you were taking her kidnapping and I realized you loved her as much as I love Harmony. I just didn’t want to see you hurt. This is the first time I’ve really seen her relaxed around you.’ He noted.

‘Echo is my entire heart. Now that I have her mark, I can really feel her as if she were a part of me. I can feel how happy she is to be with her sister and brother. Why haven’t you marked Harmony?’

‘Are you kidding? Her sister went missing, then she wasn’t allowed to come see her when she was found. None of that has been the right time to talk to her about it. Maybe I’ll talk to her tonight. I might wait for tomorrow.’

‘Take her out for a picnic. Somewhere nice. That field in the southwest corner of the pack land. The one with all the wild flowers. Lay with her and talk to her about everything. Let her vent to you. You need to make sure she’s entirely comfortable. That way, Harmony will be more open to what you’re saying. You might even want a few chill one on one dates before you bring it up.’ I offered.

‘Good call. Thanks, man.’

‘No problem.’

Marius walked into the room from the hallway where Victor’s office was. He watched the triplets as they hugged and talked. I watched him take a picture of them with his phone.

Bellamy stood to the side with a smile on her face. She saw him too. He was usually so stiff, but he seemed to soften just a bit there before putting on his grumpy vampire mask.

He cleared his throat, drawing the attention of the group. Echo grinned and hurried over, hugging him. Marius seemed startled.

‘I remember hearing you when I was rescued. Thank you for coming to save me, Marius.’ Echo said while hugging him.

‘Of course I came for you, Echo. You’re my child.’ He replied.

Echo pulled back and looked at him. “Marius? I thought we weren’t telling anyone that.”

“This vampire didn’t believe you when you told him you were under my protection because of that damned reputation I tried to shield. He told me he hit you.” Marius said softly and put his hand up to her face and gently cupped her cheek. “No one will ever hurt any of you like that again. I’ve already announced you and your siblings to the other members of the High Council. Your lives and existences will be claimed by me. The only caveat being that you entered a marriage bond with Victor and this wolf.”

It was the first time he hadn’t called me a pup or a mutt. It felt almost like acceptance. Oddly, I was thrilled.

“You did what?!” Val and Harmony shouted.

“Echo bit both men and they now carry her mark. It will fade after one hundred years unless reciprocated. Grayson already knows his bond with my daughter is incomplete. Victor intends to honor this union as well. He will take no other bride and will not claim another as his Solus Amor in the meantime.” Marius stated.

“You’re married, Echo?” Harmony said softly.

‘One of my mates treats me as if I’m the most fragile thing in the world and the other acts as if I have the plague. Some marriage.’ I heard Echo in my mind.

I wondered if Victor heard it too. He should know that she was upset. He should have to hear this stuff too. I hoped he was suffering a little.

It would make it easier to get him to join Echo and me. She needed him as much as she needed me and I wouldn’t let her go unfulfilled because I was a little possessive. We needed to get him to accept her and keep her around. As much as that made Rex growl in my head. This was a challenge I was up for.

Meeting Mercy

Chapter 58 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

I held on to Marius a little longer. As much as he had annoyed me when we first met, I never thought I would actually feel as close to him as I did. It had to be because I was healthier. I knew my other parents would never have come for me, but Marius had.

He stroked my hair gently. When I looked at him, there was something like love in his eyes. I promised myself I would never disappoint him. This was my father forever.

“You need to know about your abilities, Echo. We’ll discover many of them as you grow, but there is one that I am afraid you need to get under control soon.” Marius said.

“What is it?” I asked.

“You have the ability to communicate with others mentally. We can hear when you are thinking about us or whispering to us, even at a great distance. Victor and Grayson could hear you talking to them while you were gone.”

I blushed and buried my face in his chest. The last thing I said before I tried to kill myself was that I was sorry and I loved them. I said the same to Val and Harmony and asked Cam to take care of my sister.

On some level, I wanted them to hear me, but it was something I also thought was private. Why did no one ever talk back? Could I just not hear them? It didn’t seem like a useful ability if I couldn’t hear them too.

“How much did you hear?” I whispered.

“We heard you say that you loved us, every day.” Harmony told me. “We hoped you could hear us, but you never seemed to.”

“Maybe I can help with that.” The girl who’d opened the door offered. “I had to learn to use the mind link that pack wolves had. My brain doesn’t function the same. We can add it to her training.”

I pulled away from Marius and turned to her. This must be Bellamy. She was shorter than me and looked like a really nice person. There was something imposing about her, though. I definitely wanted her to like me.

She chuckled. “I see. That one didn’t even sound a bell, it was just in my head. This is kinda cool. Let’s move this into the living room. I’ll have the boys get some snacks for us. I know Gray has barely eaten today. He needs more food.”

Marius took my arm and guided me into the living room. When we got there, Harmony and Val came over and held out their hands to me. I let go of Marius and let them pull me to the couch.

I missed having my sister and brother with me. In the week that I had attended school, I’d gotten used to seeing them every day. No matter how hard Daniel pushed, I never told him where my sister and brother were.

We sat on the couch and they gripped my hands. I knew they were happy to see me. They were as happy as I was to see them. I didn’t realize that happiness had a scent, but I could smell it.

“I want to introduce you to the men I brought to help train you.” Bellamy said. “First of all, I’m Bellamy Deveraux. I am the Queen of the Eaten Heart Collective, and the Luna of the Lune Rouge Pack. Talia, Victor’s sire, asked me to help when Marius came to her about training you to protect yourself.”

I nodded. “I’m Echo Nightshade. Thank you for coming.”

It actually hurt a little to call myself that. I didn’t really know what my status with Victor was. He seemed to be willing to let me go and wait until my next life. I couldn’t reconcile the feelings I was getting from him with his actions.

The feeling of loss in my heart was a mixture of his and my own. Gray was helping though. I was surprised at how easy it was for me to trust him, now. It felt like he was an entirely different person than before. Maybe it was the bond we shared now, maybe he actually grew as a person. Either way, I was grateful.

Two men came into the room with trays of food and drinks they set down. They were tall. One was broader, like Gray, and the other slimmer like Victor. The comparison filled me with sadness. The slim one had blond hair and green eyes, while the other had reddish brown hair and brown eyes, like Bellamy.

“This is my friend, Dillon, and his mate, my cousin, Jean-Claude. Claude is also the future head warrior of Lune Rouge. Dillon is the head of our elite team. I am assigning them here for a couple months to help get you trained. Talia will be sticking around, until she feels like leaving. I’m sure she wants to see that Victor is safely settled in. I’m here one more week. I’ll give my assessment, set a training plan for you, and go deal with the local Alpha.” She smiled.

I pulled my hands from my sister and brother and stood, extending my hand to the two men. Dillon grasped my hand gently and Jean-Claude did the same. I smiled at them. I didn’t know two men could be mates, but they looked nice too.

“Eat something.” Bellamy insisted. “That little bowl of chocolate pudding is for you. It has some blood mixed in it. Victor asked me to offer you blood foods to help get you back on regular food.”

“Gray was going to ask about the same thing.” I smiled softly and picked up the bowl before sitting with my sister and brother again.

“Both of your mates want you to be healthy and feel normal. I’m sure drinking blood isn’t exactly how you planned to live your life. It would be best if we could make it so you were drinking as little as possible and eating more. I’ll start writing down my recipes for you. It will help you get back to normal.” She said.

I ate the pudding while Bellamy went over information about my training. She wanted me to get up around five in the morning tomorrow and test to see where I was at. I told her I had never fought before, but she insisted on me at least trying.

When I finished my snack, my stomach felt truly full. I set the bowl down. Marius was standing in the corner of the room looking at his phone with a smirk. Gray and Cam were sitting quietly with a distant look in their eyes. Bellamy started talking to her friends about plans for training and going for a run later.

“I’m so glad you’re safe, Echo.” Harmony murmured, laying her head on my shoulder.

“We worried about you the whole time. It was like we could feel your pain and fear.” Val said, putting his arm around the two of us.

“Can you still feel what I’m feeling?” I asked.

“A little. You were sad before you saw us. Then happy. It feels like the bond between the three of us is growing.” Val told me.

Harmony nodded. I didn’t feel it as much. I wondered why. Maybe because I was still recovering from trying to hurt myself.

To distract me from my thoughts, Harmony and Val started talking about the things they’d discovered about themselves since Sunday. Val had been working with water witches who were teaching him seeing magic. Harmony was doing a lot better in training now that she was connected to her wolf.

“Can I see your wolf? What does she look like?” I asked.

“I... I haven’t had my first change yet. Mercy refused until you were safe. She said that family is important for your first and that she wanted to see you and Val when she came out.” Harmony blushed.

“Let’s do it now! I want to see her!” I grinned.

She looked nervous and glanced around. “I have to be naked or it will shred my clothes.”

“Oh. Maybe you can wrap up in a towel or... I know! We still have some sheets from before I went shopping. Victor hates them and I can’t use them on beds for vampires, so you can use one of those. Please, Harmony.” I grasped her hand with both of mine.

“There are a lot of people here....” She murmured.

“We were just talking about a run. I’m sure your mate will want to be with you on your first change. Since you weren’t raised as a werewolf, you aren’t as comfortable with nudity. We understand. This is the safest mix of wolves you could change with. You could have your family around you, and Mercy was right. That is very important to us on our first shift. This is a big moment in your life. We’ll make sure you’re safe.” Bellamy said with a kind smile.

“While the sun is still up, so we can see you properly.” I insisted.

I needed something to distract me from Victor and the feeling of rejection. This was perfect. I really wanted to be there for the big things in my sister and brother's lives.

"Alright. Gray stays in the house until I'm changed." Harmony said.

"Cam was just telling me that. He understands your modesty. So do I." Gray replied.

"The other males will turn their back if any skin flashes. Even though they aren't into women, my boys are respectful." Bellamy said.

"I've never seen someone change under a sheet. This is going to be pretty fun." Dillon grinned.

I stood up and pulled Harmony up to my room. I went to the linen closet and pulled out the sheet before returning to her. She was mostly undressed.

"Wrap this around you once you're undressed. I picked the color that would look best on you." I smiled.

"You're always thinking of how to make me pretty. I can't wait for the prom. We need to get you a dress. I'm going to help you with your hair and makeup this time." She said as she pulled off her under clothes and wrapped the sheet around her.

It dragged behind her as she walked down the stairs. I directed everyone out to the back. The front of the house couldn't be seen from the street, but I wasn't going to risk it.

Cam took Harmony in his arms and told her how beautiful she was in the sheet. She turned red again. It made me laugh.

Marius joined us as we went to see Harmony's first change into her wolf. He stood near me, but didn't try to touch me. I took his hand and Val's hand.

"You're touching me a lot more than you used to." Marius muttered.

There was something in his tone that made me feel like he was trying to be grumpy. Marius liked that I was touching him more. It made me smile.

"Of course I am. You're my papa now and I love you." I told him quietly.

Bellamy's head snapped in our direction. She was looking for his reaction. I looked from under my lashes at him to see what his reaction was. Of course, it was that smirk.

"Just... never call me 'daddy'." He whispered.

Bellamy and her friends started laughing. I didn't know why. It must have been something that happened before I met them.

“Ready, Harmony?” Cam asked, caressing her shoulder.

“I rather thought the first time I was naked with you there would be fewer people around.” My sister joked.

Cam turned red as a heated look came across his face. It was like he had just realized she was naked under the sheet. He kissed her passionately. Seeing that, made me wish Gray and Victor were with me.

He stepped back. “The first shift is the hardest. Your body will want to fight your wolf. Just relax and let her come out. I’ll be right by your family.”

“Alright. Here I go.” She said, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly.

“Get down low so you don’t fall.” Cam advised.

Harmony crouched low and started shaking. I got nervous. Maybe this wasn’t the right time.

There was a cracking sound and she whimpered. I felt pain in my body. Val gripped my hand tighter and I glanced over at him.

He was concentrating hard on our sister. Every time there was a crack, I felt a new pain. Val winced like he felt it, too. I hoped we were taking some of the pain from her, rather than just feeling what she did.

It took a few minutes, but, soon, there was a large wolf with fur the same color as Harmony’s dark chestnut hair and the same hazel eyes standing where she’d been. I stared at my sister’s wolf. She was as beautiful as Harmony.

I let go of Marius’ hand and pulled Valor over to our sister. We stopped a foot away and I tugged him down so we could sit on our knees. Mercy came over and put her head down on my shoulder right next to Val’s arm.

We hugged her back. Mercy was as much our sister as Harmony was. Her fur was soft and thick and she smelled like plants in the spring.

“You’re so pretty, Mercy.” I murmured.

“The most beautiful wolf ever.” Val whispered.

Something came up next to me. I felt a rumble in Mercy’s chest. I looked over and saw Marius looking down at her fondly.

“You are the most attractive wolf I have ever seen, Mercy. Your strength is amazing. You don’t even smell as bad as most werewolves.” He said.

Bellamy chuckled. “High praise from you, Marius. This confirms what my information said. She was meant to be the future Beta of the Forest Song Pack. She isn’t just ranked blood. Mercy is a ranked wolf.”

“I would have been great at the Beta’s mate’s job.” Cam said softly.

“Cam. Why don’t you change? This property is about fifteen acres, it’s big enough for a run. You notified the guards like I told you to, right?” Bellamy asked.

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll get Gray and we can change.” He replied.

Wolves' Run

Chapter 59 - The Vampire's Servant

Cam went into the house and, a couple minutes later, two wolves came out of the back door. I had been admiring Bellamy, Jean-Claude, and Dillon’s wolves when the scent of sun-warmed linen became stronger. That was the part of Gray that was his wolf.

A large black and gray wolf trotted up to me. He had Gray’s eyes. I dropped to my knees and wrapped my arms around his neck. This was my mate. He was a handsome wolf.

“They’re at least twice the size of normal wolves.” Val said to Marius.

“Note that Bellamy is much larger. She’s smaller than her mate, but that is how you can spot the difference between ranked wolves, Alpha wolves, and standard wolves. Grayson is Alpha blood, so he is as big as a ranked male. Dillon and Cameron are both standard blood wolves, and the smallest. Jean-Claude is a ranked blood male and as big as Mercy, who is a ranked female. It’s a way for wolves to identify their leaders in wolf form. It makes them more intimidating to their enemies.” Marius told him.

I pulled back from hugging Gray and he licked my face. I giggled and kissed his muzzle.

‘Rex. I’m Rex, not Gray.’ I heard in my head.

“Rex. I could hear you!”

‘Of course you could. You’re my mate. This is the only way I can speak. It’s harder to talk to you, but will get better when you let me mark you.’ He replied.

“I’m not ready yet. I need to figure out what’s going on with Victor.” I admitted.

'He gave you to us. You should be with us. You're ours.'

"Stop that. I don't like it when you talk like that. Gray's doing so much better. Don't ruin his hard work. If you love me, you'll learn that Victor is mine as much as you are and respect that. I worry about him as much as I worry about you and Gray. Don't force me to choose, Rex. You won't like my decision." I warned.

"There's the fire I knew you had." Marius said from behind me.

I turned to look at him and Rex growled a little. He raised his eyebrow at Rex and rolled his eyes.

"You can't intimidate me, wolf. A child like you is no match for a vampire of my years. Now, go run with your people. We'll wait here for you to get out your frustration. Make sure you come back with better manners. My daughter will not be cowed or controlled." Marius warned.

Marius helped me stand and guided me back to the patio. I needed to talk to Victor about furniture for it. There were only some built in benches, but I could imagine that this would be a great place to be able to hang out.

The wolves all ran off, taking my sister with them. I was so proud of her. I wanted to get better at talking mentally to other people, so I could actually meet Mercy.

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[Gray]

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I couldn't believe Rex had almost ruined everything. I was working so hard and learning to not act like that. It was like he didn't care that our mate could still reject us, even though she marked us.

It wasn't common, but rejection before the bond was sealed was something that could happen. It would be even more painful than the normal bond breaking. It would hurt her more than it would hurt me, though. I never wanted Echo to hurt.

We ran with everyone. Mercy was fast. Faster than me and Cam. She seemed almost wild in her running. She bounced off trees and flew off of outcroppings.

I remembered when Rex came out for the first time. It was like that for us. The excitement of being free for the first time and the feeling of flying through the forest. This wasn't as big as the place I'd had my first run, but it was a good size and beautiful.

Rex and I wandered away from the group and found a stream. We needed a drink after trying to keep up with them all. I drank, then sat by the stream and listened to the water rush past. The breeze in the trees making it sound like the ocean's waves.

Suddenly, something landed on me, pinning me to the ground. I tried to get up, but there was a growl from behind me. The scent of Harmony and Mercy reached me before I tried to fight back.

'What are you doing?' I asked.

'You nearly messed everything up. Do you know how hard I was pushing for Echo to pick you? I didn't hear your side of the conversation, but you can't pressure her. I'm her sister, so it's different for me. If you push, she'll back out of whatever your arrangement is.' She replied, getting off of me.

'I didn't do anything! It was Rex. I have been letting her take the lead in everything I can. I wanted to make her love me. She marked me and Victor said she should let me mark her back. Rex took that as him giving up. When I talked to him, it seemed like he was giving up as well. Rex became more possessive.' I explained.

'He hasn't given up. If you think that Victor will ever give up on my sister, you're wrong. He's stepping back so you make a mistake and he can show her that he's a better fit for her. Right now, she's upset with him for it, soon, she'll start sympathizing with him.' Harmony told me.

'Why are you fighting for me so much?'

'Cam loves me. It's just the most caring and protective love I've ever felt. I want that for Echo. She deserves to be cared for and safe. I think she will be with you. Just look what happened? We left her here thinking she'd be safe and she was taken.'

'You can't blame Victor for that any more than you can blame Val for it. There was nothing to indicate that there was anyone after Echo. They thought everyone who knew about her was dead.'

'I can blame him. If he'd just given her back to us, then she wouldn't have been taken.' She insisted.

'No. The vampire would've just known where all three of you were. He wanted all of you, not just Echo. She kept asking me to keep you safe. That was why Trent was keeping you and Val on the pack land. He would probably have left as soon as he had all three of you. We wouldn't have had a chance to save anyone.'

'That doesn't make sense. Trent told us why someone would take Echo. Why would they want a witch and a werewolf?' She asked.

'You're only half werewolf. Hybrids are always stolen from their mothers. Victor told me that they're used as warriors. Witches and vampires don't spend time together. Their magics are at

odds with each other. So a half witch, half vampire would be a valuable being to have. I may hate the people who raised you for what they did to Echo, but I'll always be grateful that they ended up saving all of you from whatever that leech was planning to do to you.'

'You have to beat Victor for Echo's heart. I don't want to be away from my sister. I want her to come live with us with the pack.' Harmony admitted.

'You and Val miss her. Everyone understands. This is just how life worked out. I know you can come over whenever she has free time and she will come visit when she can. You can talk on the phone, since you're switching to the community college, you two could take classes together and study together. Echo will always make time for you, but controlling her life isn't going to get you any closer. How do you think she'll feel when she figures it out? What if you slip up and say something that makes her think you're trying to run her life? If you want her to have the same love you do, stop trying to control her. It'll make her more likely to run from me. Let me take care of this.' I explained.

'Gray, you're her mate. She has to love you.'

'Victor is her mate, too.'

'Just because she accidentally marked him too?' She asked.

'No. She's his Solus Amor. That's what vampires call their mate. She was born to love us both, she just wasn't supposed to meet him until after she'd become a vampire.' I told her.

'I thought she was just mistaking gratitude for love, if she's his mate too, how does this work. No one can love two people at once. Not the way they deserve to be loved.'

'If anyone could, it would be Echo. I love her. I want her to be happy. If she can only be happy loving both of us, then I'm willing to take a step back to make room for him. The problem is getting him to be okay with it. I'll do anything for Echo.'

'I don't know if this is a good idea for you, or for her. I won't stand in your way, but I'm going to keep telling her how much better you are than him.'

'I can't stop you, but I can ask that you don't push her too hard. Echo only had love from you and Val. She's learning more about herself and trying to be comfortable. She kissed me today. I'm afraid pushing her will make her stop being affectionate. Please, don't make her fall out of love with me.'

'If she really loves you, Gray, this won't harm it. If it does, I'll get on my knees and take full responsibility. I'll tell her that you had nothing to do with it and that it was all my own decision. Now, let's go. Mercy wants to try hunting something. It sounds fun, and a little gross.'

'Alright. Rex would like that too. Plus, your mate is probably starting to get worried.' I chuckled.

‘Yeah, he’s been trying to mind link me. I told him I was busy and blocked him. He’ll understand.’

‘You have a lot to learn about being a werewolf, Harmony.’ I sighed.

Cam’s wolf, Brut, was hunkered in the bushes watching us. He had been for a while. The possessiveness wasn’t just reserved for ranked wolves and idiots. Every male who found his mate, but remained unmarked, had it to some degree.

I nodded to him as I stood and ran off, leaving Mercy behind. I wasn’t going to get in the middle of whatever was about to happen. I just hoped he didn’t push it too far, she was bigger than him and not as in control as we were.

We hunted for a while. There was much, so we ended up chasing squirrels and birds out looking for evening meals. It was fun, but I wanted to head back to the house and see Echo again.

After I let Cam and Harmony know where I was heading, I took off for the house. When I arrived, only Marius was on the porch. He stood and picked up a bundle.

“Echo wanted you dressed before you came back in the house. Here are your clothes.” He said.

I shifted back and went up to retrieve it from him. Marius handed me the clothes and returned to his seat. I put on my clothes and sat next to him.

“Victor told her to mark me back. She wants both of us, but he says he’ll wait until she turns. Can you help me? Echo needs both of us still. I don’t want her to suffer because he thinks he’s doing the noble thing.” I told him.

“You want me to convince him to share her with you? You don’t seem to understand. I’m not here for your relationship with my daughter. I am here to ensure that she is happy. She can be that without either of you trying to slip into her bed.” Marius replied.

“I’m not trying to sleep with her. Echo’s barely started being affectionate with me. I’m not going to push it. I’m not talking about getting her to sleep with us. I want her happy, too. Marius. She’s found her mates. We can make her happy and care for her in ways that you can’t. I don’t know what it’s like for vampires or dhampyrs, but, for wolves, I know that it’s painful to feel like you’re being rejected by your mate, even if that’s not what’s going on. Echo feels like Victor is rejecting her. He was cold to her. It broke her heart. I felt it. I can feel how much she loves him. It’s more than she loves me. This will only hurt her more. Please. Talk to him. He won’t listen to me.” I pled.

He looked at me in an assessing way. I didn’t meet his eyes. I’d learned from doing it to Victor that meeting their eye was how they got you.

“I have no Solus Amor. I don’t know what it is to have one close off from you. I know that we are not as... attached... as wolves. Echo isn’t like a vampire in that. I could see their relationship

growing even before the bond was formed. I have to believe you if you say Victor is harming my daughter. Perhaps I have been closeminded. You do not plan to make her choose between you?" He asked.

"There was never supposed to be a choice. I've been thinking. Forest Song is on the other side of the country. Cam and Harmony would have met at the national mating conference. I would have come for the wedding, as Cam's best friend. That would be how I would've met Echo. She would've been healthy and felt the bond. I would've joined her pack and become her husband. After a lifetime together, I would pass. She would go on. I have no idea how long it would have been before she found Victor. Maybe before she died, maybe after. We weren't supposed to have her at the same time, but we have to accept the things we can't change. Life threw us together at the same time. I don't want to have some weird relationship where we all share a bed or anything like that. But we can share a home and a love. Help me give her what she needs to be truly happy." I requested.

Marius looked out over the dark yard. He seemed to be thinking it over. I waited patiently.

"Fine. I will speak with Victor. Echo deserves to be without worry. She will make her own decisions about what to do with both of you, but you can never make her choose after this. You cannot change your mind about what you want. I do not play games. Go. She is making a meal for all the wolves. I need to think on what I will do to Victor as punishment for harming Echo." An evil smile crossed his face.

"I-I didn't mean it like that!" I insisted.

"Of course you didn't. Run away, little wolf. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. Your name will not be mentioned." He said, shooing me away.

I got up and walked into the house. There was no arguing with vampires. I was quickly learning that. They didn't change their minds easily. I hoped I wouldn't regret changing his.

The Vampire's Curse

Chapter 60 - The Vampire's Servant

[Victor]

Talia sat, curled up, with a book on the couch in my office. She was reading something she brought from Queen Bellamy's personal library. It was the first night she'd had to relax and she insisted that she was going to read the whole thing before going to sleep again.

I was working through the list of vampires that Bellamy had brought me. They had sworn themselves to her collective. I was on the tenth one. He was still laughing from when I told him I was the new master of the territory.

“I’m sorry, Master Nightshade. I’ll swear loyalty to you if you make it through the year. Until then, I’ll stick with a leader who I know will live.” He chuckled.

“What do you mean by that? I’ve lived over eight hundred years. I’m not some child who thinks that he’s invincible because of vampirism.” I insisted.

“Sure. I know who you are. I was in Europe when you took your place in the council and started enforcing the laws against feeding on the weak. I heard all about your tireless hunt for your childe. Even word of your hunt for the people who stole your servant has made it here. I’m sure you found her, or you would still be hunting until you did and killed whoever took what belonged to you. No master can hold this territory. Not even someone as formidable as you. I will honor my word. If you call me again this time next year, I’ll swear my loyalty. You won’t find any of us who have been here for as long as I have that will before then. I moved from that city for a reason. You really should do your research.” Raven informed me.

“Why can’t anyone hold this territory? Why did you move? I can’t right this territory without information. The others I spoke to just laughed as well. None of the vampires in the city are older than a few hundred years and Silence told me that none of the original vampires who founded this territory reside in the seat. She said you were all afraid of something, but no one would tell her what.” I told him.

“Oh, Silence is still there? She moved into town a decade before I left. None of the younger ones know. Did you know that dozens have tried to take over the territory? There were even some foolish enough to try it after Grigori met the sun. All ended up the same. Dead. Either meeting the sun themselves, staked, burned, or just plain disappearing within months. My advice, revoke your leadership of this territory and get the hell out. It hasn’t gotten its hooks into you yet. None of us can leave. The originals from the founding. We’re all stuck in the bounds of this territory. Run, Master Nightshade. Take Death and the Traveler with you. Don’t let them get stuck here, too.” He hissed.

“You’re all trapped?” I asked.

“The further we get from the territory, the weaker we are. Some think that our lives are what is powering the curse. I’m not joking. I’m not being untruthful. I am trying to scare you away. I’ve seen too many good men and women die because of this. I’m already saying too much. I’ll feel the brunt of it later. Don’t stay. There are other territories. Let this one go.” Raven pled softly.

“I’ll figure out what’s going on. There has to be something else. Stay safe. I’ll take care of this and call you when it’s all resolved. You can either swear your loyalty or leave.” I promised.

He groaned. “I thought you might be smarter than that, Master Nightshade. I’ll attend your memorial. Just like I did for the others.”

Raven hung up on me. All of the vampires who were in Bellamy's territory were around my age. Some were younger. Raven was seven hundred and twenty. He was a strong vampire. A grandchild of the Angel. One of Rosalynn's children was here as well. She was five hundred and sixty. They'd all been here since the territory was founded.

I looked up at Talia. She was entirely focused on her book. I cleared my throat and she glanced at me lazily.

"What, Victor? Are you finally ready to tell me why you're so grumpy this evening?" She asked.

"No. Is there a rumor of a curse on this territory?" I questioned.

"Rosalynn brought you the archived letter from the original master. You have his journals. You accepted this post without finding out anything about it?" Talia scoffed. "Really, Victor. I expected more from you."

"I was granted this territory by the council. I asked for a territory, not this one." I told her.

"Well, there's a curse. It's part of the reason Bellamy wanted to come here. She's already broken a few curses, she wanted to see if she could break this one. The thing is, no one knows anything. None of the older vampires are talking, not even to me. None of the other supernaturals seem to know anything about it. Bellamy talked to Trent. He said that something happened a hundred years ago that changed how werewolves in their pack found mates."

"What do you mean?" I pressed.

"The wolves in the Hallowed Moon Pack don't find their mate until a year after they get their wolves. It's the same for the other shapeshifters in this region of the territory, if our research is correct. Love potions don't work here, either. Nor do spells of infatuation or visions of soulmates. All wolves who have gone to the national mate conference, have had to move back here with their mates within a few months because they got sick. As long as they stay within the bounds of the territory, they're fine. It doesn't affect anyone born or raised further out. Whatever it is, it's most highly concentrated here in the vampiric seat of the region." She explained.

"And you didn't feel the need to tell me this earlier?" I sighed.

"We were a little busy finding your Echo. That was our biggest concern. Since she was raised here, I think she would be affected. It was the reason I worked hard to convince Marius not to take her from the region. Yes, much of it was for your benefit, but I don't think those children can leave the territory either." Talia admitted.

"Land can't be cursed. People can. The curse is either broken or dies with them."

"Unless the curse is on a family, then the curse lives as long as the line does." She added.

“So we find what family this curse is attached to and either break it or kill them all. Simple. All we need to do is find out the parameters of the curse and the thing that will break it.” I said confidently.

“Well, you have a relationship to witches in the region now. Exploit that. If the vampires can’t tell you and the wolves never knew why it happened, then the witches would be the ones to ask. They would have to have some knowledge of the curse.” Talia suggested.

I nodded. That was a good idea. I would contact the light witches and some of the dark witches. One of them had to have some connection to it.

Quickly, I put together a list of what I knew about the curse. This would need to be resolved to make my territory thrive. That was my primary focus as of now.

The door to my office opened. I looked up to see Master Marius enter. He was silent as he crossed the room and sat in the chair directly across from me.

“Master Marius. How can I help you tonight?” I asked.

“I’ve heard some disturbing news, Victor.” He replied.

I looked into his eyes. It wasn’t the challenge to vampires that it was to werewolves. It was a sign of trust, especially with the high council.

Suddenly, I was in a dank room strapped to a table. A dark figure came in and picked up a knife. I couldn’t move, couldn’t speak, couldn’t do anything but watch as the knife sliced into my body and started flaying my skin.

The pain of it ripped through my body. The shadowy figure was working quickly and diligently. Vampires don’t faint. We don’t lose consciousness until the sun takes us to rest. Aside from a very powerful potion, there was nothing to give me the release of unconsciousness.

Once my abdomen was open, the butcher started removing pieces. There was a giggle of sadistic glee. Master Marius stood behind the butcher and watched as she removed every piece of me that she could, leaving only my heart so I wouldn’t die.

I felt every slice, every tug, everything. I couldn’t scream from the pain, I could only watch and feel. It was excruciating.

The woman set aside the knife and picked up a plastic bucket. I suddenly recognized her. It was the witch, Lila. She smiled wickedly as she began pouring ash chips into my hollowed out abdomen.

No one knows exactly why ash trees are so effective against vampires. Our abilities seem to fade when we come into contact with it. Our fangs recede, our strength is diminished, and we are unable to hold someone with our gaze or control their minds.

With the addition of the ash chips the pain became several times more intense. I started screaming as she began sewing me back together. When the stitch work was done, she stroked my abdomen and listened to me plead and beg for death.

After what felt like hours, she pulled out an ash stake and a mallet. I thanked her as she started pounding it into my chest. The sweet, soothing, darkness of death overtook me and I cried with happiness.

When my vision cleared, I was in my office. Talia was watching me from the couch. Master Marius sat across from me with a sadistic smirk. I'd heard about his ability, but never felt it before.

It was terrifying. Everything felt so real, I had to pull up my shirt to be certain I was really in one piece. My entire body was shaking.

"This is how you will die if you harm my child again, Victor. You learn to share with that wolf, or win her entirely for yourself. Giving up is disgraceful." He sneered.

"I don't understand. How did you know about that?" I whispered.

"You gave up your Solus Amor?! Victor! How could you?" Talia scolded. "They are rare and precious. Have you learned nothing in all your years!?"

"It was for her. I didn't want her to think she had to choose, so I said I would wait. I want her to be sure of me as her only love. I don't know how that can happen when she loves someone else at the same time." I replied.

"You were cold to someone who lived a frigid life without love. You've broken my daughter's already injured heart." Marius said.

The door flew open and Echo raced in, trailed by Grayson. He looked apologetic.

"I couldn't keep her out. I tried." He panted.

"Victor." Echo murmured and rushed to me, pulling my head against her chest and holding me.

As she started to stroke my hair and cuddle me, I felt the dread and pain that was leftover from the vision begin to fade. I wrapped my arms around her waist and pulled her into my lap. I needed her so much after seeing my death.

"Let this serve as your warning, Victor. I am not a kind, soft, or patient man to anyone but those children. If I see that sad look in her eyes again, you will regret putting it there." Marius growled.

I met his eyes again. Every part of me screamed not to, but I had to show I believed him. I gripped Echo tighter against me as I met his eyes.

“I understand, Master Marius. I won’t mess up again.” I promised.

“See that you don’t.” His cellphone buzzed in his pocket and he pulled it out. After a few moments looking at the screen heatedly, he focused on us again. “I have another matter to attend to. When I return tomorrow, that child better be smiling like she used to.”

Marius stood and disappeared. My entire body relaxed now that he was gone. Echo started kissing my cheek and wiping around my eyes.

Grayson stood, looking nervous, against the wall. Talia stood and walked over to the desk. She rested both of her hands on it and leaned toward me.

“You have made a deal with Death, Victor. I can’t save you from the repercussions of this. Don’t disappoint him. I’ve never seen him like this before.” She warned. “Come on, Gray. Let’s get you fed. Victor and Echo need time together.”

He didn’t resist as she pulled him from the room. The door closed and I was left in a silent room with Echo in my lap. Her kisses neared my mouth as she worked to soothe me.

“Echo. I’m sorry. I was trying to let you be happy.” I murmured and turned my face, meeting her lips with my own.

She sighed softly as I deepened the kiss. I hadn’t fully realized how my decision was affecting people other than me. Echo was worried and had come to save me. It was dangerous for her to go against her sire, but, it seemed, Master Marius was turning into a doting father. A frightening, doting father.

Her mouth was sweet and I hadn’t fully accepted how much I missed having her near me. I was already working on shutting that part of myself down. I didn’t want to miss her as much as I knew I would.

Echo’s arms wrapped around my neck and she began kissing me more vigorously. She shifted herself so that she was straddling my lap and pressing her breasts against me. I groaned into her mouth as she began moving her hips.

As I had told her, the shared arousal was a big part of being joined. Once she started to feel me rising against her, her body responded. She started grinding harder against me. I wanted to give her the release she craved, but it was too soon since she’d woken up.

I stilled her hips and she made the most adorable pleading whimper. I wanted to hear more of that. I could just imagine her, in my bed, begging for me to pleasure her.

Pulling back, I looked into her heavy lidded eyes.

“Please, Victor.” She whispered.

“What are you asking for, princess?” I asked.

“I don’t know. I just need something.” Echo replied.

“I know what you need, Echo. I just can’t give it to you yet. As soon as it’s time, I’ll give you exactly what you desire. Until then, you should go eat with everyone else.”

“Food makes me feel a little queasy right now.” She murmured as she leaned in and started licking my neck.

I groaned softly as her fangs slid into my neck. It was a good thing I fed as soon as I came downstairs. It would be a longer recovery for her than I originally thought. I wouldn’t leave her alone again.