

Chapter 61 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

Victor explained how my communication ability worked a little more and why it was that I could communicate with Rex. He said that it was because of the bond with Gray and that I would learn to communicate back and forth as I healed and grew. For now, if I thought about a person strongly enough, I could press my thoughts into their heads.

I wandered out of the room with a lot more than I thought I would have. And a lot less. Victor wasn't going to give me what I needed. I understood. He said it wasn't time. I felt like it was, though.

After leaving Victor, I went to find Gray. The burning of hunger was still in my stomach. He was sitting in the game room with everyone else.

Bellamy was winning one of the shooting games against Cam, Val, and Dillon. Gray was on the couch with Harmony and Jean-Claude. They were talking about fighting moves.

I liked the comfortable feeling in the room. Everyone was getting along and having fun. They were all so relaxed.

Gray closed his eyes and sniffed, then looked directly at me. I felt like my body had caught fire. He smiled and stood up, crossing the room quickly to me.

He wrapped his arms around me and smiled down. I traced my fingers over his jaw and he shuddered. I felt almost breathless at having him so close.

"Echo." He whispered. "Are you hungry? Your fangs are out, angel."

I nodded, embarrassed that it was so obvious. I worried that he would think I was only there to feed on him. It wasn't my intention, not entirely.

"I'm taking Echo to the library. We'll be back in a few minutes." Gray said to the group.

Gray didn't wait for questions, he pulled me out of the room and down the hall. When we entered the room, Victor's sire looked over at us. She was curled on the couch, reading a book.

"I suppose you want me to vacate this room as well." She sighed.

“We can go somewhere else.” I offered.

Talia chuckled. “I see. You need to feed and he wants to have somewhere private.” She got up off the couch and walked past us, out the door. “I’ll head back to Victor’s office.”

Gray closed the door behind her and turned to me. His eyes darkened a little. I took a step back.

“Don’t be afraid, angel. I’m just excited to feed you again.” He murmured as he drew closer.

I have no idea why I was suddenly backing away from him. I wasn’t afraid. I wanted to jump on him and bite him. Something about the way he slowly stalked me, was making my heart flutter.

“Come to me, Echo. Stop moving away.” Gray said with a little growl in his voice.

It made me jump and scurry behind one of the big chairs. He cocked his head to the side and a slow smile came over his face. Gray sniffed and chuckled.

“Little girl, you don’t understand the game you’re playing.” He purred in a slightly deeper voice.

The tone in his voice made things in me tighten. A squeak escaped my lips and my legs told me to run. I took off from behind the chair, trying to get to the next one.

I managed to get behind it before he could grab me. I giggled.

“Damn. You’re almost as fast as a vampire.” He laughed. “Come on, Echo. Weren’t you taught not to play with your food?”

Folding my arms behind my back, I turned away from him and wandered slowly. I was focusing on the sound of him moving and his breath getting heavier. It thrilled me and I dodged as he lunged for me.

I ran around the room with Gray hot on my heels. He managed to grab my arm and pulled me against him. I turned and jumped up, wrapping my legs around his waist and sucking on the bite mark I’d given him.

Gray groaned and spun, pressing me against the wall. He kissed and nibbled down my neck, stopping and sucking on one spot that made me moan and made the fire in my body burn hotter.

My fangs slipped into his skin and retracted. I fed on him while his body rubbed mine in the most heavenly way. I wanted nothing more than for him to keep going. The feeding was over all too soon.

He pulled my chin, so I would look directly at him and started kissing me. His tongue played with mine while his body kept up its motion. I whimpered as I squeezed my legs tighter around him.

Gray's hands wandered my body. The feeling was blissful. His touch was gentle, yet firm. I felt entirely safe and like I was melting into a puddle.

His kisses stopped, hand on my breast. As he seemed to have realized what was going on for the first time.

"Echo, I'm sorry. You got Rex all riled up when you ran from me." He breathed.

"Don't stop, Gray. Please." I murmured.

"I can't. Victor's right. This isn't entirely you. I don't want you to regret it when I make love to you." Gray whispered and started trying to pull me off him.

It was like I was breaking apart. Neither one of them wanted me. I needed them more than I could have ever imagined I would.

Why didn't they want to keep going? I wouldn't be mad at them. I needed something from them so bad. Was it making love?

I remembered the things that Mr. Caine said. I thought of the way I felt when I thought about doing them with Victor. The idea of doing them with Gray made me groan with desire and rub myself against him.

That was what I wanted. What my body wanted. I needed to have Gray like that.

"Please, Gray. Don't push me away. Make love to me. Make me feel your love for me. I want it so bad. I feel like I'm on fire." I pled.

"Don't do this to me, Echo. Don't make this harder than it already is. I love you, but I won't do this until I know it's entirely you asking for it, and not whoever you are when you're feeding." He said softly.

Gently, Gray pried me off of him and set me on the floor. He kissed my forehead and left the room. I hated him and Victor a little for doing this to me.

I moved to the couch and plopped down, curling into the corner of it. Was I someone else right now? I felt like myself.

Maybe I was pushing them too far, too fast. I knew this was very different from how I was before, but I felt very different. I couldn't help it.

It was like no one else mattered right now. I loved my sister and brother. I even loved Marius. But all I really wanted right now was to be curled up in my bed with Gray and Victor.

Part of me was happy to spend time with everyone, but it warred with the part of me that resented not spending time with Victor and Gray. At least Marius had changed Victor's mind. I don't agree with how he did it, but I didn't want to lose Victor.

Maybe that was part of whatever wasn't me. Whatever made me more grateful than upset that Marius had threatened Victor. The part that told me to run from Gray, giving me a wonderful feeding.

Would that fade away? I could feel the heat flushing my face. Would I start feeling ashamed of what I'd done?

While I was deep in thought, the door opened. I could smell the scent of a werewolf, but it wasn't Gray or Harmony. I turned to see who it was.

Bellamy closed the door behind her and smiled slightly at me. I jumped off of the couch.

"Did you need something?" I asked. "I'm sorry I haven't been a very good hostess."

"Don't worry. You were a little busy with other things and you're healing. I... umm... I heard Gray and Victor talking in Victor's office. Talia didn't close the door all the way when she left. I heard you've been having some trouble. I know you barely know me, but maybe I can help." She offered.

"I don't really know how you could help. I don't mean to be rude. I just... don't think anyone can help me right now." I sighed.

"Let's sit down and you can talk to me. I promise very little judgement." Bellamy said.

I looked at the friendly expression on her face. It would be hard to talk to Harmony or Val about this. They were my sister and brother, but had different ideas about things.

Val had pressed me about the marriage stuff and why I'd marked both Gray and Victor. He kept asking me if I was sure it was what I wanted. I couldn't seem to explain it in a way he could understand. Or accept.

He kept trying to get me to move away from both of them. He wanted us to go live in our old house, now that our fake parents were gone. I didn't know how to make him happy. I was glad for Gray interrupting him, because I felt like I was about to start crying.

Bellamy and I sat on the couch. She rubbed my back a little and waited for me to start talking. She seemed really nice. Like the wolves I'd met on the pack lands.

"First, call me Amy. I prefer it. Then, I want you to tell me absolutely everything. I've heard some things from everyone, but I like to make decisions based on my own research. So, start talking." She insisted.

I did. I started at the very beginning. Some of my earliest memories. I told her the things I heard my ex-mother telling Daniel. I told her about all the vampires who'd fed on me, the things they did and said. I told her how Victor saved me and everything that had happened since I met him, including meeting Gray.

In the end, I even told her about my feelings and urges with both of them. More than just the feeding. How much I loved their arms around me, their mouths on mine, their hands touching me.

"Sounds like the mate bond has been pretty firmly established. Victor was afraid because he didn't want you to decide you only wanted one mate and end up leaving him behind. He obviously thinks you should be with Gray because you're both day creatures and he's a night creature. To him, it was inevitable that you would move on after spending all day with Gray and growing closer to him." Amy explained.

"I wouldn't. I don't need a lot of sleep. In the summer I'll have a lot less time with him, but in the winter we could have a lot of time. The nights are so much longer." I said.

"Yes, but Gray isn't bound by something like when the sun is up. He can be with you all the time, every day and night."

"I don't want that. I can't love Gray without loving Victor. I feel like my heart is breaking if I even try to imagine it." I sniffled.

"One day, my mate will die. He's nineteen years older than me, so I will have at least nineteen years without him. The thought of not having him with me is absolutely heart breaking. What will happen to you without Gray?" She asked.

I didn't even want to think of it. I would have an eternity with Victor, but only a lifetime with Gray. This must have been why Victor was so concerned. He must have thought I would give more love and attention to Gray because I would lose him sooner.

"I... I can't even think of that. Maybe there's a way. Maybe my mark can keep him alive longer, or he could become my servant and I could keep him alive like Silence keeps Drew alive." I murmured.

"There is a lot you three still have to figure out. That is just where I see the most concern coming from Victor. Do you understand him a little better now?"

I nodded. "I would never give one up for the other, though. I love them both."

"Good. That will help. Next is the way you're feeling. Those urges you were telling me about. It sounds, and smells, like you're becoming aroused with them. You need to take care of that. Find some privacy. Tell the boys to give you some time and go relieve yourself. I can assure you, that's what they're doing." Amy chuckled.

“I... I don't know how.” I whispered.

She pursed her lips and sighed. “I forgot. You're all sheltered and stuff. I like you, Echo. But I'm not going to explain that to you. Instead, I'll talk to Gray and Victor for you, since you might get embarrassed, and they can deal with it. Taking care of you is their job and they shouldn't leave you here with the female version of blue balls while they feel all proud of themselves for holding back.”

I was grateful. I had no idea how I was even expected to start that conversation. How do you tell someone that? I didn't even really know what I was talking about. The thought of telling them the same things that men had told me before made me feel like I was going to faint and cry all at the same time.

Amy hugged me. I felt more relaxed now that I'd talked to someone. I was more grateful than before that Marius had brought her here.

“Alright. You go say goodbye to your sister and brother, then head up for a bath. I'll go give those boys a piece of my mind. They've been deciding what you need instead of talking to you and that needs to stop. You aren't a child, you're a woman and you need to have control over your life.” She insisted.

“Thank you, Amy. I didn't realize how much I needed to talk to someone and have them really listen to me.” I said softly.

“Of course you didn't. For all that you've lived with your sister and brother, they were always separate from you. I'll be giving them a talking to as well. They're just as bad as Victor and Gray, trying to tell you who to love and how. I have four older brothers and two heart brothers. I would've kicked their asses if they had tried to tell me not to love Lucien or to pick someone else. You need to stop living your life only for other people, Echo. You need to do what makes you happy. You can't grow if you only think of them and their reactions.” Amy told me in a firm voice, pulling out of the hug.

She stood and helped me up. I was a little in awe of her. She wasn't much older than me, but she had the control and confidence that I craved. When I grow up, I want to be like Bellamy.

A Night for Education

Chapter 62 - The Vampire's Servant

I said goodnight to my sister and brother, promising to see them in school on Monday. When I went upstairs, I remembered I had plans with Sean tomorrow. I couldn't see him if I was still needing blood.

Picking up my phone, I called him as I was running my bath. I didn't want him to think I was avoiding him. It would make Monday very awkward.

"Hello?" He answered.

"Sean? It's Echo." I replied.

"You were gone all week. So were your cousins, Cam, and Gray. Is everything okay?" Sean asked.

"I was sick. I don't know what their excuse is. I'm sorry, I won't be able to go out with you tomorrow. I'm still not quite better." I told him.

"Don't worry. As long as you're taking care of yourself. We can go out next weekend. Instead of a movie, how about lunch and mini-golf? It's fun and we can talk." He suggested.

"I've never played mini-golf. Can you teach me?" I asked.

"Sure! It'll be fun. You get some rest and I'll see you Monday. You're gonna have a lot of schoolwork to make up." Sean chuckled.

"Oh, no. I hope I can do it all in time." I worried.

"If you need any help, just give me a call. I'm always happy to help a friend." He assured me.

We said our goodbyes and hung up. I was lucky to have a good friend like him, I thought as I stripped off my clothes and slipped into the hot bath water. It felt so good that I nearly fell asleep.

I was so tired, even though I'd slept all day. I knew I would have pushed myself to stay up late if Amy hadn't sent me away. I didn't even realize how exhausted I was.

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Once my fingers and toes were thoroughly wrinkled and the water started to chill, I forced myself out of the tub. I was ready to deal with whatever else could come at me now. I'd focused and centered myself so I wasn't teetering on the edge of some extreme emotion or other sort of disturbance.

I wrapped myself in a large towel and dried my hair carefully. Someone had brushed it while I was asleep, but it liked to tangle up because of how long it was. Maybe I should talk to Victor about getting a haircut. Not a huge one, just enough to make it manageable.

When I walked into the bedroom, I froze. Victor and Gray were standing there looking at me while I was only wrapped in a towel. I bit my bottom lip and felt as if my body burst into flame.

Their eyes scanned up my legs, over the tops of my breasts and shoulders. I could smell something thick and musky. I realized that was what arousal must smell like. They looked like they wanted to eat me. Goodness knows, I half wanted to drop my towel and let them.

Quickly, I turned and hurried into my closet, closing the door behind me. I pressed myself against the door and took a deep breath. I'd managed to control my urge to drop the towel in front of them. Part of me still wanted to know what would happen if I did. Another part knew I wasn't ready to find out.

I took my time picking out my panties and what I would sleep in that night. I'd bought several types of pajamas when I'd gone shopping. Before, I just slept naked. When I moved in with Victor, I decided that I wanted to try to be more normal. I knew Harmony had nightgowns and little sleeping sets with pants or shorts.

Drew had teased me a little about my selections. He didn't like the cute ruffled gown that went to my knees. He said it made me look too innocent. He also didn't like the fuzzy pajama pants with the little tank tops. He tried to get me to buy something sheer and short, barely covering anything important.

Right about now, I was rather wishing I had picked one up. My face got hot at that thought. What on earth had come over me?

I pulled out the white cotton gown that had little ruffled cap sleeves and a ruffle around the bottom. After I slipped it on, I braided my hair and tied it with the elastic I had put on my wrist before I left the bathroom.

Looking around my closet, I realized all of my clothes were either cute or comfortable. I didn't have anything sexy or particularly revealing. I needed another shopping trip if I was going to get them more interested in me.

Quietly, I went to the door and opened it a little. I was a little curious about what they could be talking about. What exactly had Amy talked to them about?

"I disagree. I'm the obvious choice. I have over eight hundred years experience." Victor said.

"That doesn't make you a better choice. That just makes you experienced in old people sex. I should be the one to do it. You got all of her other firsts." Gray growled a little.

I blushed listening to them. Victor sounded annoyed, but not angry. Gray seemed to be getting angrier.

"Old people sex? You think relationships in the past were all virginal and modest? I've had more women than you've ever seen."

"And how many faked it?" Gray scoffed.

“Dear boy, I have never indulged with a woman until she was soaked and begging for me. Not a single woman has ever ‘faked it’ with me.” Victor snarled.

I peeked out the door. They were standing very close to each other, glaring. My heart fluttered.

“She needs experience, not youthful exploration. You know nothing about pleasing a woman.” Victor said with a smirk.

“I may not have all the experience you do, oh great undead man-whore, but I’m a werewolf. I have strong senses and I’m in tune with my mate. If you know so much more, then, teach me. We’re partners in this. Show me how to please our woman.” Gray shot back.

Victor took Gray’s hand and started stroking the area between his thumb and forefinger in a circular motion.

“This is one of the most sensitive spots on your body and the best place to show you. You’ll have the urge to put pressure directly on her, but you need to avoid that. Her body will tell you if she needs more. Move your finger like this. Not too much pressure, just enough. Like this. Feel that versus this?” He started moving his finger faster, back and forth over the spot on Gray’s hand. “Going back.... See how much better that feels?”

“Y-yeah. I feel the difference.” Gray whispered.

“When using your tongue, you’ll want to remember this motion as well. There can be more pressure, fast flicks, slow savoring, and suckling. It’s easier to hurt her with your finger than it is with your tongue, but she’s not ready for that yet.” Victor replied softly.

I squeezed my knees together as that tingling feeling rushed through me. Biting my lips together, I watched as Victor did a few more things to Gray’s hands, murmuring instructions intimately. I needed something so bad. That feeling was back and it was burning me alive.

“Enjoying the show, princess?” Victor asked as he continued stroking Gray’s hand.

A yelp squeaked out of me as I ducked back in the closet and closed the door. Why did I run? It wasn’t like they didn’t know where I was and I wouldn’t have to come out at some point. I felt so stupid as I pressed myself to the door and tried to calm down.

“How long was she watching?” Gray hissed as they got closer to the door.

“Long enough to get aroused by how I was touching you.” Victor chuckled. “Come out, princess. We’ve been properly chastised by Queen Bellamy and have come to take care of you properly. Let us make up for leaving you in such a state.”

I opened the door and they looked at me with that same hungry look as before. I nibbled my lip. They were there to take care of me. I wondered what that meant, as Victor and Gray each put a hand out for me.

Placing my hands in each of theirs, I exited the closet. Victor pulled my hand up to his lips and kissed it gently. Gray mimicked him.

“That’s a pretty nightgown, Echo.” Gray murmured.

“It suits you, princess.” Victor said, kissing my hand again and rubbing his cheek on it.

“Thank you.” I replied softly.

Victor pulled me against him, making me lose my loose grip on Gray’s hand. He slipped his hand to the small of my back and kissed me. I felt two more hands caress my shoulders and slide down to my waist as Gray’s mouth started kissing my ear and neck.

I moaned into Victor’s mouth as Gray’s hands moved to my stomach and started sliding up to envelop my breasts. His fingers toyed with my nipples as his attack on my neck continued.

My tongue played with Victor’s as his hand moved to caress my butt. He gripped it as he kissed me more passionately. I couldn’t keep up with all the feelings in my body. I was excited and scared at the same time.

Victor pulled back and I managed to catch my breath. He gripped my hips and turned me to Gray. Gray’s kisses went over my jaw and chin, ending up on my lips.

He nibbled at my bottom lip and I gave into him, opening my mouth slightly. It was all the invitation he needed to enter. His hands moved from my back to my upper arms and he held me in place as he kissed me.

I was so involved with the kiss that I didn’t fully notice what Victor was doing. He’d pulled up the bottom of my nightgown and started sliding his fingers into the top of my panties. I whimpered when he touched the sensitive skin there.

“Shh, princess. Keep kissing Grayson. Relax your stance a little for me.” He breathed into my ear.

A shiver seemed to run straight from my ear to where he was touching me. I did what he said. I stood with my legs slightly parted instead of pressed together.

“Good girl. I love you. I’m going to touch you now, princess. Keep your mouth on his. Grayson will keep you from falling. Trust us to take care of you, okay?” Victor murmured.

I nodded a little so he would know I heard him. His fingers went lower and I felt him spread me. I tensed as his finger explored me.

Gray growled slightly, reminding me I was supposed to be kissing him. I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled his mouth tighter to mine as Victor’s finger slid over something that made me weak.

His finger started going in the motion I'd seen him using on Gray's hand. It felt so good. I tried to press him to me a little harder. He picked up on what I was doing and added pressure.

With a groan, I kissed Gray as hard as I could, rubbing my body against his as something began to build inside of me. The tension, the fire, everything that had been growing with no apparent outlet started to boil over inside me. I couldn't hold it back.

Throwing my head back, I cried out as I lost all control of my legs. Gray held me to him tightly. He was kissing my neck again. This time, Victor was doing the same on the other side while his finger kept going.

I didn't know how much more I could take, when another wave of pleasure ripped through me. Suddenly, his hand dipped down further and I felt that finger probing, sensing the edges of my entrance. My hips bucked toward it without me intending to.

"Please. Please, Victor." I murmured.

"Of course, princess. Anything for you." He purred as his finger slid inside me.

There was some pressure as his finger pushed into me. I moaned and whimpered as Gray's head descended to the tops of my breasts. He kept going, peppering my breasts with kisses.

At the same time as he took the stiff tip of my breast into his mouth, Victor started curling his finger inside of me. It felt amazing. The cloth kept the tingling of the mate bond with Gray from making it too intense as he sucked and licked at one nipple while teasing the other with his fingers.

Gray groaned, creating a vibration that seemed to start at his mouth and end at Victor's finger. I felt my body gripping Victor and he also groaned against my neck, where he'd been kissing.

"I didn't think it was possible that I would enjoy watching him worship your body, princess. I want to see him taste every inch of your beautiful figure. I want to hear your cries as he drives you to your peaks and shatters you to pieces." Victor whispered.

I looked up at him and found his gaze entirely on Gray and my breast. He started pacing his curling and stroking with the movement of Gray's mouth on me. I began building up faster.

By this time, I wasn't standing on my own. They were pressing me against Victor's body and he was propping me up so I didn't slip to the floor. I felt entirely safe the whole time and that made it all the more appealing.

My whole body started to shake as I felt myself crest the highest peak I'd reached yet. I screamed their names as I felt my whole body tense and my back arched almost painfully. Gray pulled back and watched me the whole time.

Victor removed his hand from my panties and I watched as he lifted his fingers to his mouth and sucked them clean. Gray took me from Victor, picking me up and carrying me to bed.

He was sweet and careful as he tucked me into bed. I hadn't even realized that Victor left the room, until he came back in his pajamas and slid into bed next to me. Gray kissed me on the forehead and left my room, presumably to get his pajamas too.

"Are you feeling better, Echo?" Victor asked as he held me.

"I'm tired." I sighed.

"Of course you are, princess. As I understand it, that was your first time orgasming. Grayson and I will always take care of you. Let us know if there is something you want or need. I'm sorry we weren't understanding what you needed. We'll do better in the future. I promise." He whispered and kissed me gently.

Gray came back in the room and joined us in the bed. I snuggled down between my two mates, happy, and truly content for the first time in my life. I slipped off to sleep with the feeling of both of their hands in mine.

A New Morning

Chapter 63 - The Vampire's Servant

When I woke, I stretched my body. I still felt really good. I was in the position I'd been when I went to sleep, so it didn't seem like I woke up to feed on anyone. That was a relief to me.

I knew they understood and were accepting, but I still didn't like the idea of it. Part of it scared me. I never wanted to drink other people's blood, but Daniel had made that impossible.

"Good morning, princess. You're up early." Victor said.

"I have training and testing with Amy today. Then I need to see where our freezer is and call the butcher for more meats. I have to talk to Drew about getting more blood for the fridge, and I have to figure out how much work I need to make up around the house." I replied, crawling into his lap.

"Are you hungry, little one?" He purred.

"Yes. A little. I thought of going to cook some breakfast, but my stomach turned at the idea." I admitted.

“You know we don’t mind you feeding on us. It’s part of what we’re here for. Bite me, Echo. I want it as much as you want to do it.” Victor murmured, giving me a kiss on the cheek.

I moved to straddle him. Already, I could feel the pressure of his arousal. With only my panties and his pajama pants separating us, I could feel so much.

Rubbing my body against his, I licked the area I was going to bite. Victor groaned softly as my fangs entered him. He stilled my hips for a moment, then started guiding them back and forth over the bulge in his pants.

The feeling of it was amazing. I drank my fill and closed his wounds, but Victor didn’t stop. My breath came in soft pants as I felt myself building to a climax.

“My turn.” Gray said hungrily.

I was so close, I didn’t want to stop. Victor held my hips steady. I looked into his eyes.

“Time for you to finish, princess. Go to Grayson.” He whispered.

“I want to stay here, Victor.” I pouted.

“I can’t handle much more, Echo. I’m sorry. You need to go torment Grayson for a while. If you don’t finish, I’ll help you when I come back.” Victor promised.

I huffed and kissed him before crawling over to Gray and sitting on him the same way I was sitting on Victor. Gray sat up and caressed my face. I pushed him back into a laying position and started to lick his neck, preparing it for my bite.

“Oh, goddess. Please, Echo. I need it. Bite me.” Gray groaned.

My fangs slid into him and I started feeding while I felt the tingling of the bond where his hands touched my thighs. His hands slid up my body, encircling my breasts, bare under my nightgown. I felt the tingles rush through my body, right down to where I was rubbing myself against Gray’s bulging pants.

As I was sealing the bite, Gray pinched my nipples lightly, sending a bolt of pleasure through me and tipping me over the edge. I arched and moaned, grinding myself against him even harder. His hips rose to meet mine.

I rode Gray’s body while he fondled my breasts and muttered prayers to his goddess. Under my hands, I felt his abs tensing and relaxing as he moved. After another few moments, he quickly pushed me off him and dashed for the bathroom.

Victor was back in the bed. He smiled at me with a look in his eyes that made me want to pounce on him. I tried and he moved quickly, pinning me to the bed.

“You telegraph your moves, Echo. What were you planning, princess?” He chuckled.

I struggled to get free, growling a little. I arched my back and moved my legs, all to no avail. He wasn't letting me go.

“That was adorable. Are you going to start growling like a little wolf now?” Victor asked, kissing my face and pulling away when I tried to turn to his lips.

“Why are you teasing me, Victor?” I whimpered.

“Because you're cute when you pout and plead. Almost as cute as when you smile and bounce.” He murmured.

“You really think I'm cute?” I asked.

“The most precious and adorable creature I've ever seen, Echo.” Victor said.

“What about sexy? Do you think I'm sexy, Victor?” I pressed.

“I can barely contain myself around you, Echo. The way you bite your lip, your sighs, your moans, how you murmur my name, all the things I want to hear over and over again. Is that what you wanted to hear, my sweet princess?” He asked.

“And I want a kiss.” I demanded.

He laughed and kissed my lips. I craned my neck as far as I could, pressing my mouth against his. I moaned lightly as he pushed back, the passion of his kiss starting new fires inside of me.

“Echo needs to get dressed for training.” Gray said from across the room.

Victor sighed and pulled away. “That is true. I'll spend the day in my bed. Will you be there when I wake up, princess?”

“Yes. I want to be right next to you when you are finally awake.” I smiled.

“There's my favorite smile. Your happiness brightens even the darkest of nights, my darling little love.” He purred and climbed off me.

“One day I'm going to win that wrestling match.” I warned him.

“And when you do, you can do with me as you please. Until then, I'll be able to tease you mercilessly.” Victor said with a wink.

I laughed as Gray came over and helped me off the bed. I hugged him briefly before heading to the bathroom and my closet to get ready. I wondered if I was still not myself. I was feeling better

and more confident as time went on. Maybe I wasn't myself before and I was becoming myself now that I had them both with me.

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After I was dressed in some yoga pants, a tank top, and my sneakers, I went back into the room. Gray and Victor were standing near the door talking quietly. I was a little relieved that they were getting along better than before.

They turned to look at me. I felt a blush. The way they were looking at me reminded me of last night.

"Very sexy." Victor murmured before coming over and pulling me into his arms. "No other woman can hold a candle to you, princess."

He gave me a swift kiss on the lips then spun me into Gray's arms. I could almost see the struggle Gray was having with Rex. I pulled his face down to mine and kissed him softly.

"You're beautiful, Echo. I've never seen anyone as beautiful as you are." He murmured against my lips.

"You two should head out. You don't want to be late. I can't imagine keeping an Alpha waiting would go unpunished." Victor said.

I pulled away from Gray and smiled at Victor again. "If I don't see you before you sleep, just remember that I love you and I'll see you when you wake up."

"Of course, Echo. Get moving." He told me and pushed us along.

Once we were out of the room, Gray took my hand and led me to the area behind the house where Amy, Dillon, and Jean-Claude were waiting. I hoped we weren't too late. They didn't seem to be upset with us at all, so that was a relief.

"Today, we'll start with testing Echo. I want to know where she is for her abilities. Once we get that hammered out, we can get a plan put together. After the test, we'll have a run and some sparring. Echo can watch." Amy said.

I let go of Gray's hand and stepped forward. Amy grinned and waved me over. I was excited to see what would come out in the test.

"First thing, I need you to run to that tree over there and back as fast as you can." She told me.

Amy pulled out a stop watch and told me to go. I ran as fast and as hard as I could. I was a little out of breath as I arrived back.

“You’re as fast as a young vampire when you push yourself. We’ll work on it so you can be that fast without pushing as hard. When we run later, I don’t want you to exert yourself that much. Got it?” She asked.

I nodded.

“Dilly has some weights set up over there. I want you to try to lift them. If you can do more, ask for more. When you can’t lift it, let us know. Don’t try to push yourself. You may be able to heal a lot of damage, but you’re still a living being. You could end up in a lot more pain than a vampire overexerting.” Amy explained.

“I understand. I’ll be careful.” I replied and headed over to the two tall men.

“Alright. Good to see you feeling better, Echo. Let’s try something light.” Dillon said.

I picked up the weight pretty easily. When I set it down he added little discs to it. I kept going until I couldn’t pick the bar up off the ground anymore.

“Nice. You’re one tough little cookie. Claude and I will make sure you can fight back if anyone tries to take you again. We’ll help you use that strength to protect yourself. Got it?” Dillon asked.

“Yes, sir.” I smiled.

“Awww. Never call me sir. I’m not that much older than you. Just call me Dil or Dillon. Okay, princess?” He grinned.

I glared and growled. “Only Victor can call me that.”

He put his hands up in surrender. “I get it. We all have our endearments from our mates. I’ll remember. No Princess Echo.”

“I’m sorry.” I sighed. “I don’t know where that came from.”

“Vampires are like that. You never really know what will set them off.” He replied. “I’ve spent enough time with Talia to know that. It’s something important to you so I will make it important to me. There won’t be another mix up. When you feel that anger starting, I want you to take a deep breath and count to five slowly. You aren’t ready to fight someone who wants to push it.”

I nodded. “I’ll do better in the future. Thank you for understanding.”

“You’re just the sweetest little thing. In definite need of a makeover, but sweet as sugar.” Dillon chuckled.

Jean-Claude looked at him from the corner of his eye. Dillon turned and smacked his shoulder.

“Enough from you, mister. If you don’t have something useful to contribute, you can go take your run early.” He warned.

They ended up in a staring contest, neither one seeming to want to give in. I backed off and went to where Amy was talking to Gray. She smiled at me as I approached.

“Dilly let me know what you were able to comfortably lift. This is great news. You should be able to train with us pretty easily. Normally, I would test your fighting skill, but you, and everyone else, told me you haven’t fought a day in your life. I’ll start training you like I would a little kid. Just on form and movement. Are you ready for a run?” Amy asked.

“Sure, I think that Dillon and Jean-Claude might be fighting.” I said quietly.

She looked around me and started snickering. I turned and saw Dillon and Jean-Claude kissing passionately. I had never seen two men kiss before. I wondered if Victor and Gray would ever kiss like that.

“NO.” Gray said suddenly from behind me.

“Never!” Victor shouted.

I looked around and saw that the back door was open. Victor was standing in the doorway with his arms crossed. The sun was only just starting to brighten the edges of the sky, but Victor shouldn’t have been risking it.

Suddenly I realized, they had heard me thinking that and I covered my face before curling down into a ball on the ground. I couldn’t believe that they heard my mind wandering about something like them kissing.

I really needed to get a handle on this. I didn’t want people to hear all the things I thought about them. Sometimes my mind wasn’t nearly as nice as my mouth.

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Amy ended up coaxing me into getting up and running. Gray didn’t tell her what happened and I was grateful for that. He seemed a little grumpier than before.

We ran a few laps around the property. I was slower than Amy and Dillon, but managed to keep pace with Gray and Jean-Claude. I was very proud of myself.

In the end, it was the most fun, and most exercise, I’d ever had. Getting out there and moving made me feel a hundred percent better, and it stopped me from thinking about how upset Gray and Victor might end up being with me. I really hadn’t meant for them to hear that thought, I’d just never seen anything as appealing as Jean-Claude and Dillon kissing.

We arrived back at the porch. Amy and Dillon were already there with glasses of water. I accepted one and sat on the porch. I definitely needed patio furniture.

Jean-Claude sat on the steps next to Dillon and leaned against him. They seemed very much in love. I looked over at Gray, but he was still scowling.

I wanted to make him smile. So I focused on him and thought about how much handsomer he was when he smiled. I thought about how I had trouble on the first day of school when he flashed that smile and I wanted nothing more than to see it again.

His lip curled up to the side and he chuckled a little. I bit my lip and watched as his smile grew and he looked up at me. I almost laughed at how easy that was. I always wanted my mates to be happy.

My life had changed a lot in the last few weeks, but all for the best. I still had my true family and now I had two more people who loved me and wanted me happy. I had a purpose, and I was getting more and more friends by the day.

A Simple Saturday

Chapter 64 - The Vampire's Servant

Amy made me some more pudding for breakfast. I managed to eat some eggs as well without getting sick. It gave me a lot of hope for the future of my meals.

Once I was done, I helped clear the table and got the dishes washed. There was still time before the butcher opened, so I started to inventory what I had in the freezers. It wasn't much after I pulled meats for lunch and dinner.

I made my list for the butcher shop and pulled out the duster. No one had done the little things, like dusting and mopping. I appreciated all they had done, though. It was a lot less work than I would have expected.

Before he went to sleep, Victor came to see me and gave me a big hug. He seemed a lot calmer and more relaxed than he had yesterday. That made me very happy.

"You don't have to clean today. It's your day off." He said.

"I wasn't here to take care of a lot of things. I need to get the house righted or I won't feel okay about just sitting around. I'll take breaks as I need them." I promised.

“Don’t overdo it, princess. You’re only starting to heal. I don’t want you to wear yourself out.” Victor told me.

“Can I work on the garden today? I really want to make it beautiful. And I’d like to get some patio furniture, too. If it’s okay.” I asked.

“Of course, anything you want.” He smiled. “The garden is all yours, princess. I can’t really enjoy it.”

“Thank you.” I said smiling back at him.

Victor kissed me on the forehead and let me go before heading up to his room. I didn’t like the sad tone he had when he said that he couldn’t enjoy the garden. It stayed on my mind as I worked on dusting the main areas of the house.

I was betting that Victor liked flowers. He loved beautiful things and I wanted him to be able to enjoy the garden. It was his after all.

After I dusted and called the butcher to place my order, I went to my room and opened up my laptop. I searched on the internet to figure out what I would need for the garden.

My parents had always bought the plants and tools that I’d need. This was my garden, though, and I wanted to make it one that everyone could enjoy.

Once I had my list prepared, I went to find Gray. He was working on his own computer in his room. I stood in the doorway and watched the serious expression on his face as he diligently typed. It was Gray in a way that I’d never really seen him before.

He’d always been lively, active, volatile, but this Gray was focused and dedicated. He reminded me of Victor a little. I loved watching him work as well.

“I can smell you there. What are you up to, angel?” Gray asked as he typed.

“I didn’t mean to bother you, but I was hoping to go to the garden center today and wondered if you’d be able to drive me. If you can’t, I can ask Amy. I just... wanted to spend some time with you.” I blushed and started picking at my fingers.

“That sounds great. I’ll be able to go in just a bit. I’m working on a report for Trent. He wants to know how everyone is and how everything is going. Why don’t you go get ready to leave and I’ll meet you in the entry as soon as I’m done?” He replied.

I nodded and left the room. I still hadn’t had a shower, if I was going to get dirty, I didn’t really want to get clean first. I changed into some loose jeans and a t-shirt. The outfit would be perfect for gardening. I planned to spend the day outside.

Gray came down the stairs soon after I had gotten to the entry. He smiled at me and my heart fluttered. I loved his smile. It was warm and friendly. He was a hundred times better looking when he smiled.

“A hundred times?” He laughed.

I blushed. “Sorry. I forgot.”

“Am I better looking than Victor when I smile, though?” Gray asked in a teasing tone.

“For a handsome boy, you’re very insecure, aren’t you?” I winked.

His eyes sparkled and he grinned wider. “So you think I’m handsome?”

“You know you’re handsome. I’ve seen the girls trying to flirt with you at school. I’m pretty sure you thought I would simply accept you because of your good looks.” I giggled.

“True. You were the first girl to ever turn me down on sight. I just couldn’t understand it. No one had ever been as cold as you were to me.” Gray said softly. “It was exactly what I needed to start knocking some sense into me. I’d always gotten whatever I wanted, and I thought I was owed your love because the moon goddess selected you to be mine.”

“I like the person you’ve become. If you had been like this from the beginning, I think I would have had a harder time being mean to you.” I admitted.

“It would’ve certainly saved me some heartache, but I think I needed it. I’m still learning to be the man you deserve, Echo. I hope you can be patient.”

I walked over to him and traced the area where I knew my bite sat. It was covered perfectly by his shirt. I looked up into his dark eyes and felt myself melt a little.

His love for me was in his eyes. I could see it clearly for the first time ever. Gray really did love me. It wasn’t just the bond created by the goddess. It was something almost tangible.

“Let’s go, angel. I’ll even help you in the garden today. I don’t really have anything else to worry about. You’re going to have to help me with my homework load from missing last week, but I’ll help you too. Sound like a deal?” He murmured.

“Deal.” I said and turned to the door.

Grayson’s arms surrounded me as he pulled me into a hug, resting his chin on top of my head. He rocked me side to side for a moment, then kissed the top of my head and let me go. I quickly grabbed one of his hands and kissed it before pulling him with me out the door.

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Apparently, the car Gray and Cam had driven over in last Monday was actually Cam's car. Gray had a big truck. He had to help me climb in because I had never been in a vehicle that tall. It felt like we were miles above the road.

I watched the landscape and homes go past as we drove quietly. It was actually hard to think of things to talk about. I didn't want all of our conversations to be about our relationship. There had to be something else to talk about... I just didn't know what.

"What are you thinking about so hard over there?" Gray asked.

"I don't know what to talk about." I replied with a blush.

"Same, honestly." He chuckled. "I want to talk to you about everything, but I don't want to seem self-involved and only talk about myself. We've talked a lot at school, but it wasn't as hard as this."

"I'd love it if you talked about yourself. I don't know a ton about you. I know about your brothers, your sister, your parents, your friends. You actually don't talk about yourself all that often. I know Victor's favorite blood type, but I don't even know your favorite food. I'm really not good at this, am I?" I sighed.

"I like pretty much all food, Echo. I'm a werewolf. Eating is what we do. I prefer my meats rare and I like meats more than veggies, but I'll eat anything that's put in front of me, really. I'll eat anything you cook for me." Gray said with a little smile. "What are your favorite foods?"

"I'm just happy to eat, Gray. I never thought about what foods are my favorite. I used to love my mom's pot roast and brussel sprouts. She made it once or twice a month on Sundays. I got to have leftovers from dinner and that was the one I looked forward to the most." I answered shyly.

He growled. The sound made me panic a little. I knew he wasn't mad at me. He would do that when we were talking at school too. He was mad at them. Rex was mad at them.

"They can't do that to me anymore. Don't be mad. I'm sorry I brought it up."

"No one will ever starve you again. I'll find out how to make that dinner for you and you'll get to try it fresh. I promise, Echo." He said, taking my hand in his.

"You can cook?" I asked.

"Yeah. Most wolves can. We take cooking class seriously. Not all of us are talented at it. Cam's really good. I'm passable. I may not make that dinner perfect, but I'll keep working at it until I make it even better than your mom did." Gray vowed.

I smiled and squeezed his hand. "It's good that Cam can cook. Harmony couldn't cook her way out of a paper bag. Her words, not mine. I tried to teach her and she still only barely passed her home economics class. She hasn't touched a pan since."

Gray laughed. "Sounds like they're perfectly matched then."

"That's what your goddess does, right? She makes perfect matches for wolves so they can be happy. I just have to wonder why she thought you might need someone like me. I'm not... I'm just not." I sighed.

He pulled into the parking lot for the garden center and stopped in the first parking spot he saw. Gray turned to me and gripped my hand tighter. He unbuckled his seatbelt and reached over to undo mine. Once I was free, he pulled me against him and wrapped his arms around me.

Gray inhaled deeply. I was starting to get used to him sniffing me. I relaxed in his arms.

"Don't ever say that. Don't ever believe that. You are everything. Imagine me going through life like I was before I had you. Some selfish, greedy, child who never even considered other people. I wasn't good enough for you. Victor made me better so I could be worthy of you. Trying to be better for you, made me a better person. I can never show you just how grateful I am for that, but I plan to try for the rest of my life." He said.

"One day, you might regret me, Gray. You still have a chance at a mate like you. If I reject-" I was cut off by his mouth on mine.

The tingling feeling of his lips on mine was intense. He was a little rougher than normal, his teeth scraped my lips and he nibbled his way into my mouth. I whimpered against his mouth. I didn't think I would like it, but I did and I wanted more.

He pulled back and held my face in his hand, making me look into his eyes. "Never, ever talk about rejecting me again. You marked me. I. am. yours. End of conversation."

"Sorry." I whispered.

"It can't be a vampire trait. I know Marius would never try to give up something that was his. You and Victor have to stop trying to be noble and hurting the people who love you. Don't hurt yourself like that, angel. Don't hurt me like that." Gray said softly and kissed my lips gently.

"I won't. I'm sorry, Gray. I was only thinking that I might not be the best mate for you. I might not even be the best for Victor. I've never had anything like this before. What if I mess it up?" I replied.

"Never worry about that. We'll all figure it out together. You just be yourself. Learn. Grow. Love us. That's all you need to do."

I nodded. He was right. If I kept thinking of all the things my ex-parents had said to me, and instilled in me, I was going to end up hurting myself. If I gave up Victor and Gray, I could end up hurting them.

"Let's go get this shopping done. I want to get you back home. You need more rest."

“I can’t rest all day, Gray. I’ll get too behind on my work.” I protested.

“I’m going to start helping with your work. You taking care of one vampire was acceptable, but two vampires and four werewolves is pushing it. Especially since you’re still healing. No arguments. I’m helping.” He insisted.

“Fine.” I groaned and wiggled away from him.

Gray got out of the truck and ran over to my side to help me down. We walked to the store, hand in hand. It took a lot of pulling to get my hand back from him when I needed to grab a plant cart. I handed him a handbasket to carry the tools so I would have plenty of room for the plants.

We went to the garden tool section first. I picked up two sets of gloves and put them in the basket, then went to look at trowels. I got a few different sizes.

When I turned to put them in the basket, I started laughing. Gray had grabbed two gardening forks and tucked his arms into his shirt sleeves. When he saw me laughing he started waving them around.

“Rawr!” He growled.

“What on earth are you doing?” I snickered.

“I’m a T-Rex. I’m hunting cute little gardeners to nibble on.” Grey said, wiggling his eyebrows.

He took a step toward me and sniffed the air. I took a step back.

“This is no place to be playing, Grayson.” I scolded, trying to keep a straight face.

“I’m not ‘Grayson’. I’m the gardener eating T-Rex.” He growled and snapped his teeth.

I took another step back and widened my eyes. “You’re planning to eat me?”

Gray blushed as a heated look crossed his face. “Maybe a little. Just a few nibbles here and there.”

“Is there anything that can save me from you? A scarier dinosaur?” I asked, moving the cart between us.

“Only kisses can placate the hunger of the ferocious T-Rex.” He said with a fake roar.

I laughed again. “I only kiss nice dinosaurs.”

“I can be a very nice dinosaur.” He purred, pulling the cart behind him and advancing on me.

“Put the forks in the basket and I’ll give you a kiss.” I offered.

“Two kisses, one per fork.” He countered.

“Fine, just stop this. People are staring.” I whispered, having just noticed someone at the end of the aisle.

He looked around and saw there were people down the aisle watching us. I felt a blush creep over my face. I wasn’t used to being the center of attention.

Gray put the gardening forks in the basket. Luckily, we didn’t need much in that aisle and were able to head out to where the flowers were. I wanted to get this over with and head home.

Moon Garden

Chapter 65 - The Vampire's Servant

The rest of the trip to the garden center was uneventful. Gray saw a patio set that he liked and put it on top of the cart. When we got to the area where the live plants were, the boy working there told him to leave it by the checkout counter and he would ring it in with our other purchases.

There was a display of night blooming flowers for ‘Moon Gardens’. That was precisely what I was there for. What I had seen online was that this garden center had the largest variety of night blooming flowers that would survive in the climate we lived in.

A moon garden was a perfect idea. Victor could enjoy the flowers and they all smelled beautiful. It would make for some wonderful evenings on the patio.

When we got back home, I called Drew and asked him to deliver the blood. He told me how happy he was that I was back home and promised to bring the blood by in the evening. There wasn’t any in the fridge and I wondered where Amy had gotten the blood. When I asked her she told me that she used her own.

I was grateful, and a little disturbed. She explained that powerful blood was healthier for vampires and that she wasn’t bothered to donate so everyone would be healthy when searching for me. She said she didn’t mind giving me her blood, because it would help me heal faster and she wanted me in the best condition possible.

Amy, Dillon, and Jean-Claude, all came out to help in the garden. There were some tools in the nearby shed, they were older and not in great condition. I decided I would need another trip to the garden center to get newer tools in the future. That would have to wait, though. I had a lot of work to get done.

We started working on the reorganization of the plants that had started to overrun the garden. The landscapers had rid the area of most of the grass and weeds. All we really had to do was move some plants, fertilize, and get the new plants in.

I hadn't realized how much faster work goes with four werewolves. Before lunch, we had already started moving rose bushes and other daytime plants to one side of the garden. I wanted the night blooming flowers to be nearer to the house.

Amy made lunch and we all ate on the grass near the garden. Dillon told me the story of how he first met Amy when she was twelve and her training test results. Jean-Claude and Gray looked at her in shock upon hearing the story of her taking out a rogue with a weight disk.

It strengthened my resolve to be more like her. She was strong and skillful even at a young age. I wanted to learn to be like that. If I was going to actually be the mistress of this territory, I didn't want people thinking they could hurt those who were dear to me or even hurt me. I wanted to be strong.

We went back to gardening and nearly had all the bushes moved, when there was a shriek. I nearly jumped out of my skin. I turned around to see what had made that sound and saw Gray flopping his arm around.

"Get it off! Help me!" He shouted.

I rushed over and saw a fat spider clinging to his glove for dear life. It looked about as startled as he did. I stopped his hand from moving and delicately took his little passenger from him. With great care, I transplanted it onto one of the rose bushes and went back to Gray to see if it had managed to bite him somewhere.

Carefully, I took off the glove, looking over his hand and wrist for any sign of a bite. Nothing was there. He was hyperventilating the whole time.

"Are you alright, Gray?" I asked softly.

"Is it dead? Is it gone? Goddess, it was huge! That thing could have eaten a child." Gray said.

"Are you afraid of spiders?"

"Who wouldn't be? Creepy things." Bellamy shuddered.

"Bemy, are you afraid of spiders?" Dillon chuckled.

"I didn't see you rushing over to help when you saw it, Dilly." She snorted.

"Are all werewolves afraid of spiders?" I wondered.

"No." Jean-Claude responded with a smirk. "I didn't think any werewolf was afraid of spiders."

“Don’t you dare tell Lucien about this.” Amy warned.

“Of course not, Luna.” He replied, trying not to laugh.

I kissed Gray’s hand. “Don’t worry. I’ll protect you from them.” I whispered.

“Don’t make fun of me.” Gray said quietly. His eyes were downcast and he looked sad.

“I’m not. I can’t fight werewolves or vampires. I don’t even think I could fight a human, but I can make sure that spiders are taken care of. I can protect you that much, at least.” I told him.

“You really aren’t laughing at me?” He asked.

“No. I would never laugh at something like that, Gray. I’m sure you can’t help being afraid of spiders. Val is afraid of them, too. I know he wishes he wasn’t. He told me that it was a phobia. An irrational fear. You know that you’re bigger and stronger than them, but your mind still wants to run away. I understand.” I smiled slightly. “I love you. I can take care of the spiders for you.”

He moved his hand behind my head and kissed me. I wondered if Victor was afraid of them too. I couldn’t imagine he was. If he was though, I would be much more useful around the house. I’d gotten used to all the spiders in the basement a long time ago.

“I’ll take care of the werewolves, Victor will take the vampires, you just keep those creepy monsters away from me.” Gray chuckled softly.

“Deal.” I replied. “Now, we have more work to do. I promised Victor I’d be there when he woke up. Why don’t you take care of building the patio furniture? There will be fewer spiders there.”

“Are you sure?” He asked.

“Certain. Can you bring your truck around to the back so I won’t have to walk around the house to get the flowers?”

“Anything for you.”

Gray got up and headed toward the front of the house. I finished up with the plant he had been putting in and headed back to the, now, empty areas of the garden. Amy went to help with building the furniture, but Dillon stayed behind after scolding Jean-Claude for not being more sensitive.

I worked on mixing the soil with the fertilizer while they unloaded the flowers from the back of Gray’s truck. They were very fast. I finished just as they arrived with the last of the flowers.

Dillon helped me get each of the flowers planted while Jean-Claude put up the little white wire fence around each of the planting areas. I loved how everything was coming together. It looked beautiful.

Some of the plants I'd gotten were day blooming and would attract bees and butterflies. Many of the night blooming plants would open up in the late afternoon and attract hummingbirds. I really wanted to see them.

When Gray was done putting together the furniture, he called me over and asked my opinion on it. I thought it was perfect. Now there would be plenty of places for people to sit.

"It's getting close to when Victor wakes up. Why don't you head in and take a shower? You smell like sweat, dirt, and fertilizer." Gray said, wrinkling his nose.

I laughed. "I suppose I should. I certainly don't want to climb into Victor's bed covered in those things. He probably wouldn't forgive me."

"Go on, angel. We'll finish up here." He replied and shooed me away.

Quickly, I went to my room and stripped out of my clothes. When the shower was nice and hot, I climbed in and worked to wash all of the day's dirt down the drain. I washed my hair twice, just to be sure it was clean.

Once I was done, I went into my closet to find clean clothes. I pulled out a long, flowy, skirt and a top that looked good with it. I figured it was worth the laundry to be in something nice and comfortable.

My phone alarm started going off. It was time to start the blanket warming. That was timed out perfectly.

I went into Victor's room and set the blanket to warm, then I crawled up on the other side of the bed. I got under the sheets and blankets, moving Victor's arm to fold around me. I breathed in his scent as I curled up next to him with my head on his chest.

This felt just perfect. The very slight and slow beat of Victor's heart made me smile as I started to feel the gentle warmth of the blanket seep into me. I must have been more tired than I knew, because I found myself struggling to stay awake.

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[Victor]

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I woke to the weight of Echo's head on my chest. She was snoring ever so slightly. She must not have listened to me and wore herself out today. I stroked her back, reveling in the heat of her little body curled against mine.

Echo sighed and her hand started trailing up and down my stomach in the same pattern I was gently etching into her back. Every time I woke up with her beside me, I was grateful it wasn't some dream or travel to another reality.

Somewhere in the multitudes of reality, there was a place where Echo and I weren't together. I knew that as assuredly as I knew anything. There was a me who wasn't getting to experience her. Somewhere, there was a me that never would. I pitied him.

"Good evening, Echo. How was your day?" I asked.

"Mmm. Long. I got everything done, though." She sighed.

"I'm glad to hear that." I smiled.

She was always so dedicated to her work. It seemed like she was really coming back to herself. I hoped it wouldn't cause any problems for us. She was growing into such an interesting young woman.

"Victor?"

"Yes, princess?"

"Are you afraid of anything?" Echo asked, tracing over the lines in my stomach.

"I don't understand the question. I'm afraid of very little. Sunlight, true death, losing you... your sire becoming angry with me." I chuckled.

"Oh, I was wondering if there was anything I can protect you from. Gray is afraid of spiders. I got to save him today and it made me feel really good." She admitted.

I thought about it. I was definitely not afraid of spiders. I came from an era where things like that were just something that existed with you. I tried to think of if I had any simple fears, but vampires rarely did after they'd been alive as long as I had.

"You already protected me. You got the windows taken care of, you stayed with me, you came to me when Marius was punishing me, and even protected me from him on the first day you met him. All I need is you. I feel good and safe just having you around." I told her.

"I guess that's true." Echo sighed.

"Let me watch over you. That's all I need. Let me watch how you grow and change over the years. Don't ever block me out. Keep me forever." I murmured and kissed the top of her head.

"I can do that." She answered, her fingers now trailing along the edge of my pajama pants.

"What are you doing, my princess?" I asked.

“Nothing.” Echo giggled as her fingers slipped below my waistband.

Echo was never this forward. It shocked me a little, but I snapped out of it when I felt her fingers going lower. As she made gentle contact with my stiffening member, I took a quick breath.

“Did I hurt you?” She asked.

“No, Echo. We shouldn’t be doing this right now.” I replied.

“I’m just curious. You’ve touched me there. I just want to know what it feels like.”

I had never been so at war with myself. I desperately wanted to let her, but was it too much too fast? What if I lost control? I wanted her, but I was waiting until she was healed.

“Hands only. I love you, but I don’t want to get too caught up in things you aren’t ready for. When I say stop, you stop.” I demanded.

“Really?! Thank you, Victor!” Echo said excitedly.

I tried to think back to when I had ever had a woman as excited about just touching me. Excited for sex and everything that went with it, definitely. Even my wife hadn’t been as eager to just explore me.

Her hand made its way around me. She seemed to be trying to put her fingers all the way around it, but they didn’t quite make it. She gave up and started running them up the sides to the tip.

Echo traced the rim of my foreskin and gently swirled her index finger over the tip that had started pushing through. I could feel the wetness of her spreading my precum over it. I groaned as her finger slid over my tip again.

“Is this okay?” She asked.

“Yes.” I breathed.

Her hand gripped around the girth of me and she moved her hand up and down briefly. I was about to tell her to stop, when she started making her way down to my more sensitive bits. Her fingers trailed over the textured sack and she started kneading it with her hand. I arched at the feeling.

“Will you show me how to make you feel good, Victor?” Echo requested in the most adorable shaky voice.

I reached for her hand, placing it back on my painfully hard length and wrapping her fingers around me. Then I began moving it up and down. I closed my eyes, taking in the scent of her arousal while she stimulated me.

“It’s so thick, Victor. Is it going to hurt me?” She whispered.

The mere mention of being inside her had me surging. Her delicate innocent tone made feelings well up in me that I had no idea I could feel. I wanted to protect her, make love to her, hold her forever and never let her go.

“I’ll do my best not to hurt you, sweet Echo. I promise.”

“It’s okay if it hurts a little. I love you.” Echo murmured and kissed my chest.

I pulled her hand off me and rushed to the bathroom. She wasn’t ready for the mess I was about to make. I never thought hearing someone say they loved me could pull me over the edge like that. I shivered thinking of the power she had over me. At least I knew I had that power over her as well. My perfect little Solus Amor.

Figuring Things Out

Chapter 66 - The Vampire's Servant

After I cleaned up, I dressed for the evening. When I came back into the bedroom, Echo had made my bed and was waiting for me in the little sitting area by the bookshelves. She was picking at her fingers.

“What’s wrong, princess?” I asked picking her up and sitting with her in my lap.

“I made Gray a little mad at me today. I started talking about rejecting him. I know he worries that I’m going to pick you over him, but I wanted him to be happy. I just don’t know if I’m enough to make both of you happy.” She sighed, leaning her head on my shoulder.

“Echo. You’re ours. We’ll figure this out. I don’t want you to worry about this. If we’re feeling neglected, we’ll tell you. There is no reason for you to pick one or the other.” I assured her.

“What did he do?”

“He kissed me and told me to never say that again.” Echo blushed.

“Then he handled it a lot better than he used to. Shall we go downstairs?” I suggested.

She nodded and got up. I briefly mourned the loss of her in my lap, but I had work to do. This curse business needed to be dealt with.

When we got to the bottom of the stairs, Drew was coming out of the kitchen. He smiled brightly at Echo. I knew he had been worried about her while she was gone. When vampires worked closely, their servants tended to become closer. I let her go and she ran over to hug him.

Drew swung her in a circle and held her tight. Grayson came out of the kitchen and growled a little. I understood. It was hard watching another man hug my mate. At least, another man who wasn't related to her or connected to her in some other way.

"I'm glad you're safe again, princess." Drew said.

"Only Victor is allowed to call me that." Echo growled.

It was as if my heart swelled at that. He looked up at me in surprise. I smiled and nodded to him.

"Oh, well then. Looks like you figured out if he'd want that extra service I provide Silence." He chuckled.

She hit his shoulder with her hand and blushed. Not all vampires had intimate relationships with their servants, but some indulged. It was hard not to get close to someone who took care of you for centuries. In fact, it was almost natural to fall into that habit.

Drew left soon after and Bellamy called us into the kitchen for dinner. The table was beautifully made up with bowls of food set out nicely. It smelled fantastic.

"I made a mousse, soup, and some blood wine for all of you. Well, all of you except Echo. I made her some blood chocolate milk. Gray and I were the donors for the meal. We're all eating outside, since the table will only seat four. You four can have your meal in here. I'm sure Echo is eager to show you what she's been working on all day." Bellamy told us with a warm smile.

I pulled out Echo's chair and got her seated. She was looking over everything with interest. I had already talked to Bellamy about giving us some of her recipes before she left. I was growing more and more fond of blood foods and it would enable me to have meal times with Echo.

The food was marvelous. Echo ate happily. I was glad that she was having something other than blood. It meant good things for her progress in getting back to solid foods. That little bit of normalcy would go a long way toward her recovery.

"What have you been working on all day, Echo?" Marius asked in a sweet tone that didn't really suit him.

She grinned widely and launched into the details of her day, including the trip to the garden center and her search for the perfect flowers to plant. Watching her talking so animatedly gave me great hope for the future. It was almost as if she had never been taken.

While she was talking, Echo was calling Marius 'papa'. It seemed that she had accepted him as her father. It was good considering the only father she had ever known was gone.

He was taking to the role well. All of his focus was on her and her story. He asked questions and seemed genuinely interested in her responses. Talia had an expression of disbelief as she watched him interact with Echo.

“That sounds like a lot of work. Are you tired, dear?” He asked.

“I took a nap with Victor before he woke up. I’ll be fine until my usual bedtime.” She replied.

His gaze turned on me. I met his eye with a great deal of nervousness. Marius nodded to me slightly and returned to his meal.

I was relieved, to say the least, that he hadn’t found her napping with me to be a trespass. Echo was blissfully unaware of the tension between her sire and me. For that I was grateful. I didn’t want to worry her unnecessarily.

When we were finished with the meal, I helped Echo clear the table and get the dishes washed. Marius and Talia sat at the table quietly talking about the witch who had helped us find Echo. Talia wanted to talk to her about the curse, but Marius was insisting that he take care of it.

Echo didn’t seem to be paying attention to the conversation, or her hearing was still not as good as ours. Talia was teasing Marius about wanting to see the witch again. I didn’t dare laugh, but the look on his face told me he had never stopped seeing her.

After the dishes were in the dishwasher, Echo pulled me out of the house, through the back doors. The air was cool, but fragrant. The scent of freshly turned earth and flowers mingled with the scent of the wolves. For the first time, their scent didn’t make my stomach turn.

Grayson sat in a chair at the new patio set. I nodded to him and he nodded back in greeting. Echo led me, Marius, and Talia over to the garden. We walked the paths as she explained each group of flowers in her moon garden to us.

“And this area is all night blooming nightshade flowers.” She said indicating the area in front of us.

I stepped behind her and pulled her to me, crossing my arms over her waist and kissing her cheek. Echo leaned back against me. I was proud of her hard work and thoughtfulness. She thought of me again while making our home nicer. This time, out of love and not just being a dedicated servant.

“I love you, Echo.” I murmured.

“I love you, too, Victor.” Echo replied.

“Time to go, Victor. We have a lot of work to do. Echo can have more of your time later on tonight. We need to get things sorted as soon as possible.” Talia said softly from behind me.

I longed for more time to just be with Echo. There was still so much of our relationship to work out. So many things I wanted to experience with her.

Grayson came up beside us and held his hand out. I sighed and released Echo to him. She needed attention and rest. He looked pretty exhausted. I was betting they would go to bed earlier than they normally did.

Talia was right. I needed to get this curse business dealt with. I didn't want to risk dying after I'd found so much to live for. Echo was my eternity.

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Once in my office, Talia and Marius seated themselves in the chairs across the desk from me. Talia told Marius everything she knew about the curse. All the things she'd told me. I shared what Raven had told me about the previous Master and all the ones who had tried to take over since. His jaw set angrily.

"You need to step down as Master of this territory. Echo needs you. This means I can't take her somewhere safe. The next best option is you giving up the territory and moving to the edge of it." Marius said.

"Master Marius, I know that we can get this resolved. Raven said it usually takes a few months. I'm not giving up on this territory. I intend to talk with Queen Bellamy about accepting a partnership with me. I've spent a lot of nights dealing with vampires who were using the people here in any way they wished. It has already taken a great deal of work. I will not give up because of this curse. We just need to figure out how to break it." I told him.

"And if you don't? What will happen to Echo? She'll still have the wolf, but she'll go through eternity knowing that her Solus Amor is gone. You're dooming my child to an eternity of sadness." He growled.

"I would give everything up for Echo, but I want to show her the whole world. I want to give her everything there is to give. I want her to experience everything life has to offer. I can't do that if she's trapped here. This territory is ours. Hers and mine. If she knew about this, Echo would agree that the curse needs to be broken." I insisted.

"That may be, but it doesn't mean you need to be risking your life for it."

"As long as I can keep this territory heading in the right direction, I'll be here. If I feel the curse taking over, I'll give up the territory. Until then, I will keep working."

"Why are you being stubborn about this? We can break the curse without you leading. I could force you to give it up." Marius warned.

"If you do anything to my childe, Marius, I'm going to kick your uptight ass. I permitted him to be punished for hurting your daughter and I permitted him to enter into an agreement with you,

but I will not permit you to force a good man from his position of power. I will stay with him. I will help break this curse. The only thing we can do is resolve this or the territory here will never be fully functioning.” Talia said. “We need the help of that witch, but, otherwise, I would prefer if you keep working on your family. There is a lot that needs to be figured out about your children and their history.”

He huffed and nodded. I understood where he was coming from, but this territory needed me. There had already been a lot of positive changes in the vampires in town. Just knowing there was a Master taking care of them, was making them follow the laws and rules. Vampires tended to go a little mad without some guidance.

“I will question Lila on the curse.” Marius said.

“No. I want her here. You may forget things or overlook things. There is a purpose to having more than one person questioning. We think differently than you do. Would you contact her and get her to come tonight?” Talia asked.

“She can’t come tonight. It’s a full moon. There are spells that can only be done tonight.” He told her, with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Talia chuckled. “I didn’t know you knew so much about witchcraft, Marius. When did this happen? No lies, broodmate.”

“This doesn’t leave this room.” He growled.

We nodded emphatically.

“Last night she told me she wouldn’t be available because of the full moon. Lila has a lot of spellwork to do that can only be done tonight.” Marius stated coolly.

“So you have taken up with the witch!” Talia laughed. “I thought you would never loosen up!”

“This isn’t funny. Lila isn’t like most living beings. She’s as cold and deadly as I am. She focuses so intently on her spells and magic, that it’s like nothing else in the world exists. Aside from being very attractive, she’s creative... and flexible.” He said with that same heated look he had last night.

“Is that the thing that came up last night?” Talia pressed.

She was loving this. I just sat quietly. Vampires often indulged in gossip. I rarely did, myself, but being involved in this intimate talk between two of the most powerful vampires alive was a rare treat.

“Lila wanted to see me since she couldn’t see me tonight. I was resisting until she started sending the pictures.” Marius pulled out his phone and showed them to Talia.

He didn't offer it to me, it was a confidence between broodmates. I would accept it because adding pressure to a more powerful vampire was never a wise idea. I didn't get to my age by being foolish.

"Fine, contact Lila tomorrow about coming over tomorrow evening. Invite her for dinner. I'm sure a dark witch wouldn't mind eating whatever the werewolves are having. I'll let my pheata know to prepare enough for one extra human." Talia winked.

"Have either of you heard anything from The Prince about Verity?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Yes. She is giving every bit of information she can think of. We've already found two uncles who weren't in Darknight's territory when he slaughtered the coven and the wolf pack. One witch and one werewolf. They're coming here to see the children." Marius said. "They will stay at the pack house. Both said they wanted to meet all three children, but wanted to be involved in the training in the ones who were most like them. They said they would trust us to train Echo properly."

That made me a little angry. They didn't even know her and they were already setting her aside for her sister and brother, like she didn't matter.

"Victor. Calm yourself." Talia said gently. "They meant no insult by it. Echo is mostly vampire. They just don't know how to relate to that. Once they meet her, they will love her just like everyone else does."

"Unlike her sister, Echo doesn't use mind control to make people like her. It's just something about her. Even I couldn't resist it." Marius chuckled slightly.

"Has Darknight or Verity revealed what his plan was for the children yet?" I asked.

"Nothing yet. His sire is trying to get him released. He said that he didn't have any reason to think the sire of the children still existed. He was diligently insisting that Darknight thought it was my sire, like you and Rosalynn. I was fined by the rest of the high council, but I get to keep him until he talks or dies."

"Why did they fine you?" Talia asked.

"I revealed that I used my abilities to make Victor and Rosalynn misremember who the sire of the children was. I explained my reasoning, but kept Echo's involvement out of it."

"What do you mean, 'Echo's involvement'?" I questioned.

I knew the answer, but I couldn't let him know that I knew she was the reason he didn't just kill everyone involved. I was still grateful to her for saving all of our lives. She thought fast and saved everyone.

Marius explained what happened on the first day he'd met Echo. My nails dug into the chair arms as he talked casually about trying to influence Echo, to make her kneel down, make her offer her neck, make her fear him. He sighed at the end.

“She was so funny. Every time I tried using my mind control, she would briefly look annoyed, then slip back into her ‘good servant’ face. Then I just started trying to see how annoyed I could make her, but it was like I stopped existing if she wasn’t interacting with me. She’s going to be an amazing woman one day.” Marius said proudly.

“She already is an amazing woman, Master Marius.” I replied softly.

“It sounds like you both love her very much. I can’t wait to see how this all plays out. Anyone who can make you two smile as much as I’ve seen you smile in the last couple days, has to be amazing already. You’re both far too serious and strict. She’s softened you both up nicely.” Talia giggled.

I didn’t know how to answer that, so I just nodded, texted my supports, and organized my desk. Talon and Silence would come to be updated on our hunt for answers about this curse. I needed to get it resolved before it had a chance to harm my Echo.

I'll Stay with You

Chapter 67 - The Vampire's Servant

[Echo]

Later that night, Victor joined Gray and me in my room. I was hoping this was going to become a nightly ritual as they both started kissing and touching me. It felt heavenly. This time it was Gray behind me, touching in my panties, and sucking on my neck. The tingles of the mate bond made his touches all the more pleasurable.

Victor didn’t focus on my chest as much as Gray did. He touched me there, and was wonderful at it. He seemed to be more focused on watching Gray’s hand. Victor pulled my nightgown up and kissed and licked over my stomach. From time to time, he would pull back and watch my face while his fingers trailed over my thighs. He worshipped my whole body while Gray focused in one spot.

Where Gray was silently attending to one spot, Victor murmured things to me. He told me how beautiful I was, how much he loved me, how soft my skin was. Each bit of praise was followed by a kiss somewhere. I felt my whole body heating when he pulled my nightgown up, over my chest, and gently teased the tip of my breast with his tongue. Gray held me still as he watched me try to writhe in his grasp.

They didn't stop at the first big one this time. They kept going until my legs were too weak to stand and I could barely breathe. This time, Victor carried me to the bed. I held onto him tiredly. He laid in the bed with me, giving me kisses on the cheek and ear. I moaned a little as he nibbled the outer edge of my ear.

"I can't stay with you tonight, princess. Will you forgive me?" Victor asked.

"You have to work. I understand. You took time off to look for me and take care of me. I can't make you take more time for me. Once everything is settled, you'll have more time for me." I smiled.

"I don't like how that sounds. It's not that I don't have time for you, sweetheart. I love you and want to be with you every moment of the night, even if you were sleeping." He said.

I put my hand on his chest and turned toward him. He was looking at me so tenderly. I knew what he was saying was true, but I was fine. He was working hard and I loved his dedication to his territory. I wanted him to keep being the kind of leader I admired.

Victor had given up so much of his work to take care of me and to find me. I didn't feel bad, because, now, I knew he wouldn't have been able to give his territory the attention it needed if he wasn't involved in finding me and making sure I was alright.

"I love the leader you are and how hard you work for your people. I admire everything about your dedication to them and to this territory. You set aside your dislike for werewolves to make alliances that would benefit the vampires you rule. You were my hero because of your work ethic and sense of honor. I admired you before I loved you and I'll continue to love and admire you no matter how caught up you are in your work." I told him, rubbing circles on his chest with my hand.

"How did you end up being so perfect for me? It's like you understand me completely and you just accept me. You never try to change me." He sighed.

"Why would I try to change you, Victor? If you need to change, you'll do it. I'll point out things that aren't good, and trust you to make the changes that need to happen. If you get out of hand, I'll just tell my papa and he'll make sure you make the changes." I winked.

He managed to get paler than before. There was a chuckle from the door. Gray was leaning against the door frame in his pajamas. My eyes trailed slowly over his body. I could only think of the fact that he was all mine as well.

"I guess you have a good reason to listen to her now." Gray teased.

"You think you're safe from him just because you're not a vampire? At least he likes other vampires. The only werewolf he likes is Harmony. You can trust that my mind control and hypnotism are nothing compared to his." Victor turned and smirked at him.

Gray shivered. “Yeah, Talia told me what Marius can do. I guess I should probably listen more to Echo’s suggestions too.”

“I would think that you two would listen because you love me.” I huffed. “Not because you’re scared of my sire.”

“We will listen because we love you. Your sire is just a touch more incentive to take it seriously.” Victor smiled. “I need to go now that Grayson is here. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

I let him go. He gave me a gentle kiss before getting out of bed and heading toward the door. Victor stopped and looked at Gray.

“Don’t do anything she’s not ready for.” He ordered.

“I won’t don’t worry, dad. We’re just going to cuddle and sleep. Promise.” Gray smirked.

Victor shook his head and left the room, closing the door behind him. I would miss having him with me, but I knew it was for the best right now. He had things to take care of.

Gray got into the bed on the side he’d been sleeping in. I rolled to put my head on his chest like I did with Victor. It was so different. Gray’s body was thicker and the heat of his skin warmed me. I could imagine he would be wonderful to cuddle with in the winter.

I traced over the muscles in his stomach lazily. It reminded me of earlier with Victor. They were so different. I wondered if they were different down there too.

Nibbling my lip, I started moving my hand lower. Gray held his breath as I started tracing the waistline of his pajama pants. Like Victor, he didn’t say anything until I started moving my fingers into his pants.

“Echo. I don’t know if you should be doing that.” He whispered in a husky voice.

“Just touching, Gray. I’m ready for this, don’t worry. I want to feel you, like you felt me.” I replied.

“Oh, goddess.” Gray sighed.

I slid my hand lower until I reached my goal. He seemed just as thick as Victor, only a bit longer. I moved my hand over the hot, silky, skin. When I reached his tip, I could feel the difference. Where there was a bulge, but the continuation of skin on Victor, there was an abrupt ridge on Gray.

My fingers wandered over it. Gray groaned as I followed the slope of it to the very top. The tip was damp and I rubbed my finger in circles around it.

I went to explore the other areas, like I had with Victor. I wanted to know everything. Already he was reacting differently. Victor barely moved and seemed like he was focusing entirely on the feeling of my hands. Gray was writhing and thrusting. He whimpered a little when I started going back down to feel his sack.

When I grasped it and started kneading him, Gray started panting a little. He spread his legs and his hand started stroking my back and pulling me closer to him.

“Do you like that, Gray?” I asked.

“Yes, I love when you touch my balls, Echo. Fuck, it feels so good.” He moaned.

“Is this how I make you feel good like you do to me?”

“Almost. Sit up and give me your other hand.” Gray said.

I did what he said. Gray put my other hand on his hard length. He showed me how to stroke it. He liked it differently than Victor. More pressure, a little faster motion. I continued to knead him as I went.

“Oh, angel. Your little hands are amazing.” He groaned.

That made me smile. I loved making them feel as good as they made me feel. It made me focus more on touching him and making him moan. After a while, Gray stopped my hands.

“I have to go, angel. This is the messy part, and I don’t think either of us is ready to deal with that.” Gray murmured.

I pulled my hands from his pants and he hurried off to the bathroom. Sitting on the bed, I assessed how different my mates were. Gray was rougher and liked stronger touches and kisses. Victor was gentle and preferred soft touches. Where Victor liked watching me with Gray, Gray actually growled softly the entire time he and Victor were touching me together tonight.

They both had different focuses and methods when touching me, too. It was strange. I had never thought anyone would love me like this, now I had two very different men who loved me. They wanted me and they wanted my happiness.

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Gray came back in the room and gathered me to him when he got in the bed. I had so many questions, but I didn’t know what to say to him. I just wanted to know everything.

“That was amazing, angel. Thank you.” He whispered. “I love when you touch me.”

“Thank you for letting me. I want to learn everything I can. I... umm... have a question.” I replied.

“What’s your question, angel?” Gray asked.

“I did something like that with Victor earlier and they felt different. I was wondering why. And if that was alright, or if I need to do something else the next time.” I said.

“Oh, goddess. The next time.” He moaned. “I can’t wait for the next time, angel. To answer your other question, each man is different there. Some are bigger, some are smaller, some bend in different ways. Is... uh... is he bigger than me? I mean, he’s seen me naked because I’ve shifted in front of him, but I haven’t and... it’s a guy thing, you know.”

“I don’t know how to answer that.” I blushed.

“We should change the subject. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you.” Gray chuckled nervously. “What do you want to do tomorrow?”

“Dillon wants to take me shopping. He said something about a makeover this morning, then I heard him and Amy talking about my clothes and he told me he wanted to go shopping and buy me new stuff.” I sighed.

“You don’t like shopping?” He asked.

“It’s not that. I just never really went shopping with anyone, except Drew. He didn’t like anything I picked and told me I shopped strangely. It was difficult. I didn’t want to cause problems and this seems like a pretty big hassle.” I admitted. “What if he gets annoyed with me?”

Gray hugged me tightly. “He won’t, angel. Just do what he says and try on all the clothes he picks out. Dil is cool. Is Claude going, too?”

“Dillon said that Jean-Claude is useless in stores and just gets bored and starts huffing and sighing.”

“Maybe he can show me some of those bear fighting moves. You know he’s been trained by werebears for like eight or nine months? It’s so cool.” He laughed.

“Werebears?” I asked.

“Yeah. There are a lot of different types of shapeshifters in the world. Bears, wolves, foxes, lions, tigers, even deer, elk, and moose.”

“That sounds like a lot.” I replied.

“There are millions of shapeshifters out in the world.” Gray said.

“How many vampires are there?” I asked.

“I have no clue. It’s something vampires keep quiet. I would probably say at least a few hundred thousand, maybe one million, not much more than that. They had a hard time early on. Nothing like witches, but there were hunts in Europe for vampires and werewolves forever ago. For the witches, it’s more recent history. There was a woman killed for being a witch back in the fifties or sixties. If you take into account all the people that consider witchcraft to be evil, they get more discrimination than wolves do. Not everyone is cool with vampires either. A lot of people think they’re evil too. We’re all monsters to the humans. That’s why hunters still exist and there are some businesses that are anti-supernatural.” Gray explained.

“Hunters hate you just for being a werewolf. They hate Victor just for being a vampire. Does that mean they hate me too?” I wondered in a soft voice.

“I promise, angel. I will never let hunters get you. I’ll keep you safe forever.”

“For the rest of your life.... Not forever, Gray. I could live forever, but I’m going to lose you one day.” I sniffled.

“Shh, angel. Echo. I love you. You are my happy ever after. I’ll talk to Victor and we’ll figure out how to keep me alive. I don’t want you worrying about this. We have years and years to figure it out.” He whispered, stroking my hair.

I cried. The idea of losing either of them tore my heart in two. I loved both of them so much. Gray held me while I cried and he tried to soothe me. The door opened while I was sobbing into his chest.

“What happened?” Victor demanded.

“She remembered that I won’t live forever.” Gray replied quietly.

“Princess. If Gray wants to stay with you, I can show you how to make him into your servant. If he is fine with having an unnaturally long life, we can make that happen. Not everyone is fit for that sort of life. Let’s wait and see when you’re older. Werewolves age slowly. He doesn’t have to decide for decades yet. Don’t be sad.” Victor insisted.

“W-what if he d-doesn’t want that?” I cried.

“I do want that. We’ll figure out how to make me your human servant. I’ll stay with you and Victor. I’ll take care of you both during the day. Please stop crying.” Gray pled.

“Y-you’re only saying that so I’ll stop crying.”

“Echo, I swear. I’m saying it because I want to be with you, not because you’re crying. I just hate when you cry. I always want you to be happy with me.” Gray said softly.

I felt movement behind me and Victor's body pressed against mine. He rubbed my back making soothing sounds. This was how I was going to be happiest. Having both of them with me. Never being alone again.

"Mark me." I said softly. "I want you both to mark me."

Fighting Urges

Chapter 68 - The Vampire's Servant

Both men stilled. Gray was barely breathing after the sharp inhale. I started to get worried, neither moved for quite a long time. I looked up to see them mouthing words to each other.

"You don't want to. Neither of you want to." I sniffled.

No one wanted to really keep me. If they didn't mark me, my mark would fade and I'd be all alone again. Victor could leave me. Gray would probably choose to leave me too, after he wasn't stuck in a marriage with me anymore.

They weren't going to mark me. They were just planning to keep me until this marriage was over. The thought repeated over and over, mixed with the times vampires had told me they wanted me, times my parents told me I was worthless and bothersome, and times when I questioned why I kept choosing to live if I was such a pitiful, evil creature.

I wouldn't live like this. I couldn't just let them pretend to love me. I moved quickly, getting up and jumping off the end of the bed. I went to my closet and grabbed some clothes and my backpack. I slipped some jeans under the nightgown and made sure to grab my bra. I could put it on later.

When I turned back to the room, Victor and Gray were standing in front of the closet door. My tears had turned to anger. I didn't want to see them. I wanted to leave and never look back.

"Echo, please. Listen to us. We didn't mean to make you think we didn't want to mark you." Gray pled.

"It's quite the opposite. We've wanted to mark you ever since you marked us." Victor said.

I tried to push past them, but they stopped me. Of course, they would lie. They would say anything. They would use their strength to stop me from escaping the torture they were putting me through.

"If you don't let me go, I'll scream for Marius. I know for a fact that he will hear me." I warned.

They stepped back and I walked between them. I couldn't listen to their excuses. I wouldn't let them lie to me more.

"Echo. The reason we're hesitating is because you have only just come back to us. We love you and want to care for you, but it's difficult fighting the urges we have." Victor told me.

"It would be better if we could wait until school's over. Wolves in our school go unmarked or transfer to the pack school. It makes the humans panic when we show up with marks on us. The mark you gave me is easily hidden, my mark for you would be much harder to hide." Gray explained.

"You're just saying this so I won't get Marius to punish you both." I replied, unmoved.

"I'm afraid of him, but not nearly as afraid as I am of losing you." He said softly, taking a step toward me.

"Where are you planning to go, Echo?" Victor asked.

"I'm going to stay with my sister and brother. I know they really love me and they want me to be with them. I won't stay here if you two don't want me. Val was talking about taking over our old house. We'll go there." I answered.

"Echo, you're not thinking straight. Please, don't make a decision like that when you're upset. We want you. We want to be with you. Victor will show you how to make me your servant. Then I can always be with you." Gray insisted.

"His wolf will live as long as he does. He'll live as long as you keep renewing your bond with him. This is something that needs to be planned for and arranged. Not something that can be decided on a whim. Telling us you'll leave if we don't do what you want is manipulative. You have to see that. This isn't something you can control entirely. We've told you repeatedly how much we love you." Victor added.

"No. You told me you wanted Gray to mark me. You already tried to leave me. Now, you suddenly want to wait until after school. Then what? Then wait until I've finished college? Wait until after I've given you both children? Wait until they're grown? How long to I have to wait for you two? Because all of this feels like you're trying to run out the clock until you can leave me!" I shouted.

I glared at them. They both looked stricken. Victor recovered first and I saw that cold look come over his face.

"You've decided you'll leave first then? I made a mistake, trying to think of your health and future, and you decided that meant I already had one foot out the door. What makes you think that I'd give you up forever? I told you I would wait for you." He hissed.

“I heard you. You were ready to leave me because I loved Gray too. I know you all think I can’t hear you when you’re whispering, or in other rooms, but these walls aren’t exactly soundproofed, Victor! And I heard you tell Rosalynn that you didn’t want to marry me!” I yelled.

“I never tried to give you up, Echo. I fought for you since the moment I met you. Why do you think I would ever give you up? You can ask Cam. Everyone, my brother, my friends, Victor, even my parents were telling me to have you reject me and move on. I wouldn’t give up then, and I won’t give up now.” Gray stated firmly.

This was all too much. There was so much hurt and anger inside of me. I just wanted to run away. I didn’t want to be here anymore.

I turned away from them and headed for the door. It opened before I got there and was faced with Amy and Talia. They crossed their arms and leveled the same disappointed gaze on me.

“You boys get out. We’re going to talk to Echo.” Amy said.

“No. I was leaving.” I told her.

“You are staying. Victor, take Grayson to your office.” Talia ordered.

“Yes, mistress.” He replied quietly and pulled Gray past me.

The door closed behind them and I was left alone with the women. I felt my anger grow. How dare they stop me from leaving! I didn’t want to stay there.

“I’m sorry I didn’t keep a better eye on you, or I would have seen what was going on, Echo.” Talia sighed. “I thought you wouldn’t have this problem.”

“Let me leave.” I demanded.

“You’re no match for us, Echo. Sit your ass down.” Amy growled.

That dangerous feeling I got before came back. She was actually threatening me. I snarled and stepped forward. Talia grabbed my arm and stopped me.

“You had better start thinking more clearly. That would not have ended well for you.” She warned.

I bristled at being stopped and turned my attention to the tiny vampire. I knew she was old, but she was so small, she didn’t seem that scary. Her eyes started glowing as she glared at me.

“I can hear what you think of me, Echo. That is a dangerously stupid thought. Go sit down before I make you.” Talia commanded.

“I want to leave.” I said.

“You need to center yourself. We’ll let you leave tomorrow, if it’s what you still want.” She told me.

Though I wanted to fight, I decided to do what they said and sat on the bed. Talia brought my computer chair over and sat in front of me. Amy stood to the side like a guard.

“I didn’t think you would be affected, but you’re acting like a young vampire. For the first month or so of a young vampire’s second life, they feed primarily on their sire and humans. Not werewolves. We learned from Mr. Darknight that you were fed blood donated by the rogues who worked for him. It was a quiet way to get the blood that wouldn’t alert the Master of the territory.” Talia explained. “Werewolf blood can make vampires a little more impulsive and more easily angry. Combine that with the... issues... you would have inherited from feeding on Victor and it means you’re more likely to act in a childish fashion when you feel slighted.”

“Add the possessiveness that comes from marking a werewolf, and that means you’re more likely to lash out at what you perceive as attacks on your relationships and people encroaching on your territory. Namely, Gray and Victor. Even now, you’re growling a little while we talk about them.” Amy added.

I covered my mouth. She was right. When Amy said that Gray would be eating with the other wolves earlier, I started getting angry. I worked even harder to be cheerful.

“When a young vampire drinks from their sire, they end up sharing some traits. You got Victor’s temper. You weren’t going to let go of whatever started this argument until you got what you wanted or were sufficiently distracted.” Talia said.

“Drinking from werewolves makes you more volatile and emotional. Meaning it was only a matter of time before something made you really go off. Having a bond with an alpha blood wolf, means you would experience these feelings a little more intensely. The mate bond wants to be completed. It would push you to feel the things that would make you want to complete it.” Amy explained.

“So... none of this has been me? It’s all been what I got from them?” I asked.

“No. The overly emotional, easy to anger, childish tantrum parts are because of the blood and the added bond. I want to work with you on learning to calm yourself. Marius said you kept your temper when he was bothering you, this part isn’t you. The part that loves them. The part that was scared of losing them. The part that hurt. Those are all you. The part that turned your hurt to anger, was them.” Talia said.

The anger had been leaving me. As I started to understand that it wasn’t me, I started to control myself more. I started to realize what I’d done and told Talia and Amy everything. I was in tears again by the end.

“We heard a lot of the fight. You can get quite loud when you want to.” Amy snickered.

I picked up that she wasn't just talking about the fight. The heat of embarrassment replaced the heat of anger I'd had earlier. I hid my face in my hands.

"Don't be ashamed, if I had two mates I'd never leave my room." She laughed.

"If you had two mates I doubt you would be able to leave your room." Talia snickered.

"What exactly are you trying to say?" Amy asked.

"Like you wouldn't try both at once. I can imagine you would suffer a lot of mating related accidents." Talia chuckled.

Amy blushed this time. "I never thought of that. Yeah. I would totally do that. Two men, goddess, you're a lucky girl, Echo."

"They're going to be mad at me for what I just did." I whispered.

"You wanted them to mark you because you were feeling insecure. That isn't on you or them. It's on the people who made you believe that you weren't worth love. They love you and they're perfect for you. Seeing you and Gray together made me miss my Lucien. He makes you more lively. When you're with Victor, you're almost vampire-like." Amy said.

"Yes, she reminds me of my Solus Amor when she's with Victor. My Amor is sweet and tender. It helps me unwind after I've had to be someone's punishment." Talia smiled. "You soothe him, Echo. I have never seen Victor as happy as he is with you. You know he didn't smile for over two hundred years. Not since his last servant asked to be released from his bond."

"He's lost a lot of people that he cared about." I sighed. "That's why he is trying to think of my health and my needs so much. So I'll stay with him."

"It's the nature of being a vampire. Some of us don't associate with 'lesser beings'. I can't help myself. I know one day my friends will pass on, having my Solus Amor is helpful. You'll see that in the future. Knowing that Victor is always there will soothe you." Talia told me.

"I just worry about losing Gray." I sighed.

"Victor is right. You can make him your servant and he will live as long as you renew the bond. If you have a true death before the bond ends, it will end immediately. He will live until his life would have naturally ended. It's like a pause on their lifespan." She explained.

I yawned. I was exhausted. Crying had worn me out.

"You need rest. Go to bed. Sleep on your own tonight. In the morning, make your apologies. We'll talk to them and make them understand." Talia said.

"I want to fix this tonight." I replied.

“You’re still being affected by Victor’s blood. It would be best if you were only battling one outside influence. Dillon has big plans for you tomorrow. Bellamy will go with you two. She hates shopping, but she will help keep you safe in the places he can’t go.” She smiled.

“Alright. That makes sense.” I said.

I took off my jeans and slipped into bed. When they left, I pulled Victor and Gray’s pillows to me. I missed them.

“I’m so sorry. I love you both so much. I was so afraid you didn’t want me that it made me want to push you away. It wasn’t fair to you. I’ll be better in the future. I won’t hurt you again, I promise.” I whispered, focusing on Gray and Victor.

With luck they heard me. Just saying it made me relax even more. Soon, I was drifting off to sleep with the scent of my mates around me, and a cold bed. I deserved it, though. I should have realized what was happening.

Friends and Forgiveness

Chapter 69 - The Vampire's Servant

I woke with my face pressed against something cool and firm. It felt good on my face. Like the cool side of the pillow, but better. I wrapped my arms around it and held on tight. It smelled like Victor.

“Good morning, princess.” Victor whispered.

My eyes flew open. “They said I would sleep alone last night.”

“After Bellamy was in bed and Talia had turned in to read for the night, we came to lay with you.” He replied.

I felt a hand stroking my back. The heat of Gray’s skin seeped through my nightgown and into my skin. I was a mix of happy and worried.

“We heard you apologize. They explained what happened. I’m so sorry, angel. We should’ve realized that you weren’t being yourself. We should have seen it.” Gray murmured from behind me.

“If I couldn’t see it, I don’t see how you two could have. I feel much better today. I’m not angry or weepy.” I offered.

“You haven’t fed on me in twenty-four hours, princess. That helps. Today, Bellamy said she will be feeding you human blood. I expect that you will feel a lot better soon. The effects of the werewolf blood will wear off and you will be yourself again, mostly.” Victor said.

That made me happier. I wanted to be myself. I didn’t like the feeling of that anger. It wasn’t as easy to contain as my normal anger.

They wrapped me up in a hug. I never felt as happy and safe as I did in their arms. It was good that we all made up. I never wanted to fight with them.

“We should get up. We have training this morning, then you’re going shopping.” Gray whispered in my ear.

I groaned. I didn’t really want to get out of bed. I wanted to cuddle with them for longer. I knew I had to, though. I couldn’t go through life being weak.

Victor promised to have breakfast with us after training. He left to go to his office and work more. I’d heard them all talking about some curse. I hoped they got it fixed.

Once I was changed, Gray and I headed to the yard to meet up with everyone else. We started with a run, like usual. When we got back, Dillon and Jean-Claude tied a pad to a tree. Talia came out and worked with me on my form while the others did their training.

I would hear Gray curse sometimes and knew he’d gotten hit. They really fought during their sparring. If they didn’t heal as fast as they did, they would have looked truly dreadful. After they fought, I always hated seeing Gray. He was usually bloody and bruised, by the time we finished breakfast, he would look almost normal again.

They told me the worse the damage was, the longer it took to heal, but bruises and small cuts could heal within an hour. Talia explained to me that I healed like a werewolf when I was unhealthy, but I’d heal much faster as soon as I was healthy again.

I made sure to let Talia and Amy know that I had apologized to Victor and Gray. They smiled and nodded. I was glad I didn’t have people upset with me anymore.

Victor ate with me, Gray, and Talia in the kitchen. I really should have gotten a table and chairs for the dining room. I added that to my list of things to get done as soon as possible.

“I want you to buy whatever you want today, princess. Don’t worry about the cost. I have more than enough money to cover whatever you want.” Victor said.

“You spoil her too much, Victor.” Talia chuckled.

“She deserves everything. As long as I can give it to her, I will.” He replied with a wink.

“I’d give you money for shopping, but it looks like Victor has it more than covered. Here’s a little cash, so you can tip at whatever restaurant you go to. Cash tips are better than credit tips.” Gray said, holding out some money from his wallet.

“Grayson, you don’t make a lot, let me handle the financial caretaking of our mate. You save your money for taking her out during the days. I expect that you will take her out on dates to places I would never be able to take her to. It would be a favor to me. I would prefer it if your financial focus was on that. Credit tips are fine, she can just tip more to make up for it.” Victor told him.

“I’m going to assume you didn’t mean to insult me for not being as rich as you.” Gray scoffed and put the money back in his wallet. “Fine. I’ll take her to do a ton of stuff. Every night, you’ll have to suffer while she tells you how much fun she had with me.”

“That would not cause me to suffer. I would be able to see her smile and hear her laughter as she told me about everything she enjoyed. The time while she’s alive is all yours. One day, Echo will pass into her second life and I will have her all night while you sleep. You’ll have to do a lot better if you want to make me jealous.” Victor laughed.

“I’m taking her to the prom. It’s at night, when you’ll be awake, but she’s going with me. It will be Echo’s first dance and she’ll be all dressed up for it.” Gray grinned.

Victor scowled and focused on his food. Talia was giggling. I sighed and shook my head. They were better, but nothing could seem to get them to stop antagonizing each other. At least they weren’t really fighting.

After breakfast, I cleaned up and got ready to go out. I was nervous about the trip still. Amy and Dillon nearly dragged me out to their SUV.

It wasn’t that I didn’t want to go. I just kept remembering things that I needed to do. There really wasn’t enough time for this. They both growled at me when I said something to that effect and I stopped trying to change their minds.

They chatted happily as we drove into town. I watched out the window. There was so much of the city that I hadn’t seen. The mall was on a long list of places my sister and brother talked about, but I had never seen.

We parked in the ocean of cars that surrounded the huge building. I started getting nervous. I’d only had a week in a school and that was so much smaller than this. I was afraid of getting lost and never going home again.

Dillon and Amy wrapped their arms around mine and smiled at me. They were so comfortable and calm that I managed to calm down, too. They pulled me to the entrance. It was made of glass and metal. I had never seen anything quite like it. It was almost like a greenhouse.

Once inside, Dillon led us up some moving stairs to a place called Maia Hair. I looked around as we entered. There were shelves full of pots and bottles. Through the archway, I could see a couple women with cloths draped over them getting their hair cut. I started to panic a little, remembering the only haircut I'd ever gotten.

"Shh. Victor called in a favor from one of the vampires in the territory. This stylist wouldn't dare do anything to you except make you prettier than you already are." Amy whispered.

"We're here to see Opal." Dillon said to the girl behind the desk.

"I'm Opal! It's so nice to meet you! Who am I taking care of today?" She smiled and stood.

She was a little taller than me with golden blonde hair, with a dark pink stripe, pulled back in a bobbing ponytail. Opal was slim and dressed in a form fitting black outfit. Her ears had a lot of piercings and she even had some piercings in her eyebrow. She was very pretty. There was something very lively and engaging about her.

"This is Echo Nightshade." Dillon said, pulling me forward.

"The servant of the Master of the territory, right? My master had me come in on my day off to take care of just you. Don't look so worried. I would do anything for my master. Have for the last sixty years, at least. He really wants to make your master happy. I heard he killed like a dozen vampires since he got here. Some of the older ones and everything." She said with a grin.

I nodded silently.

"Oh, sugar, don't be shy with me. I'm gonna be your personal stylist for as long as my master and I are in this territory. Come this way, what are we doing with your hair today?" Opal asked.

"I... I don't know." I murmured.

"Opal. She needs half of it cut off, at least. Layers would be nice. She wears it up a lot, but wants it to be cute if she wears it down." Dillon said.

"Got it. You two can have a seat over there if you want. We should be done in about an hour or so." She told them and led me into the back.

During the next hour I was washed, snipped, and fluffed. Opal told me all about her master. He was called Gareth and was nearly two hundred years old. She was actually the great-granddaughter of the girl who turned his marriage proposal down when he was human. She said she had a crush on him since she was a girl and saw his picture in the family albums.

I thought it was a sweet story. She saw him in a bar one night and thought it was a coincidence that he looked so much like the man she'd been in love with since she was young. She asked him to dance and he ended up driving her home that night. They started dating and she found out he was a vampire six months into their relationship.

Opal didn't want to be a vampire, but she wanted to stay with him, so he offered to make her his human servant. She called him master in front of other people, but they were still very much in love. She showed me the necklace of engagement rings he'd given her. It wasn't possible for her to marry him, because he was legally dead and she should be a little old lady, but he gave her rings for every ten-year anniversary.

Listening to her talk about her master was soothing. Almost like an insight to the future for me and Victor. I relaxed more and more.

She told me the salon was actually owned by a woman who only hired supernaturals or vampires' servants. The owner even helped with getting them through cosmetology school. Opal told me I should try it, but I didn't feel it was a good fit for me. I just wanted to take care of the house and Victor. I didn't need anything else. I told her maybe in a few decades.

"Alright, sugar. Are you ready?" Opal asked, as she removed the cloth covering me.

I nodded and she turned the chair so I could see myself in the mirror. My hair looked better than it had the last time it was that length. It was shiny and framed my face perfectly.

"Thank you so much, Opal." I replied.

"Next time you come in, it's your turn to talk." She laughed.

"How much is this?" I asked.

"Free. You're the servant of the Master of all the vampires in this city, and further. The owner said anything you ever need is on the house. I don't really need the money. My master and I are pretty well off and I get decent tips normally. Go on, your friends are waiting." Opal grinned as she helped me out of the chair.

I went out to the waiting area to meet Amy and Dillon. When I got there, I smiled happily. Harmony was sitting with them! She bounced out of her chair and started looking me over.

"Oh! Echo, you're so pretty! This is the perfect haircut for you! You look amazing!" She smiled back and hugged me.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"Gray called last night and said you were going out shopping with Amy and Dillon. He asked if I wanted to go with and we could find you a dress for the prom while we were out. I thought it would be perfect. Are you okay with me joining you?" Harmony asked.

"Of course! I really want to shop with you." I grinned.

She looped her arm around mine and we followed Dillon and Amy out into the mall. I didn't really know what to expect for the rest of my day, but I was thrilled to be spending it with my sister. This was going to be a wonderful day.

Shopping with Friends

Chapter 70 - The Vampire's Servant

[Bellamy]

After Echo's haircut, I wanted to get the required shopping finished as soon as possible. Victor wanted to make sure both girls had the nicest dresses at the dance. My senior prom was only a year ago and I remembered how much all the girls had watched the others and admired their dresses.

What he hadn't thought of was the fact that there would need to be a party to formally introduce him to the vampires of his territory and that he would have business to attend to with Echo in tow. She needed more than one dress and several suits. With the list of things Dilly and Harmony were talking about while we'd waited, this was going to be a very long shopping day.

I led them to a store I was familiar with. We had one back home. It was welcoming to anyone who had the money to shop there. I'd bought quite a few outfits for my more formal occasions. Because of Lucien's impatience and affinity for tearing clothes, I'd become quite the regular customer. He loved me in business attire, until it got in his way.

When we got to the shop, Harmony froze. I turned to look at her. She seemed a little nervous.

"We can't shop at Southland Song. I can't even afford socks from here." She said in a hushed voice.

"Victor's footing the bill for the shopping today. He wants you both to get dresses for the prom and anything else you want. This isn't the only store we're going to, just the first." I told her.

"I already have a dress." Harmony said.

"Yes. We know. Victor was insistent. You have to have a dress as nice as Echo's. Come on. Time to learn what it's like to be rich." I laughed and headed into the store.

Two sales clerks were tidying up. I saw one of them look up and sigh. I can imagine seeing four young adults coming in was probably not on her list of happy work days. Normally, they would just be browsing, but I knew she would change her tune once she knew we were buying.

She walked up to our group. Her nametag claimed she was 'Anya' and she was dressed in an outfit she had obviously bought here with her discount. The clerks all worked on commission along with hourly. They could make quite a lot of money, especially today.

"Welcome to Southland Song. I'm Anya. Is there anything I can help you find?" She asked in a hospitable tone, with the look of someone who just ate a bug in polite company.

"Hello, Anya. I'm Bellamy. Today we're shopping for these young ladies. They both need a formal dress. This is Echo, she is our priority today. She will need four dresses, including a nice little black dress, and four suits for business situations. Both girls will need shoes for their dresses, but Echo will need several different sets of heels in varying heights and some comfortable flats. We will also need purses for the girls to carry." I told her.

"That's quite a list. Are you sure this is where you want to shop for it? Our prices can be quite... high. It doesn't look like you normally shop in establishments like ours." Anya smiled a little as she scanned us derisively.

"This is where the Master vampire of the territory wants these items purchased. He's sent us with his card to pay for everything. If you aren't wanting the commission, then please get your associate. I have very little patience for this female backbiting and blatant classism." I replied in a cold, steady tone.

Her eyes widened. "Yes, ma'am. Sorry. Being located in a mall means we often have people in here who aren't able to afford it and they generally prefer if we tell them ahead of time."

"Don't lie. It's unbecoming." Dilly smirked.

"Let's get this thing going, I don't want to be here any longer than I have to." I sighed.

Anya whisked the girls away and pulled her colleague in to help get together dress and clothing options. Dilly and I sat in the chairs outside the dressing rooms. These women were experts in style and fashion. We entrusted our girls to them.

"So. How are you sleeping?" Dilly asked.

"Terribly. This is the first time I've been away from Lucien since we married. The first time I've ever been away from the pups. I'm so fucking homesick, Dilly." I whispered.

"You call him three times a day and were spending all afternoon on speaker phone with him, just to hear him breathing while he worked. You sleep with your phone plugged in and on the line with him, just so you can be there for their bedtime and hear if they wake up in the night." He groaned.

"Maybe I should see if he can come up for the next week. I'm sure my uncles would be fine with watching the babies. It was hard enough hearing you and Claude every day. Now I have to hear Echo, Victor, and Gray every night." I shook my head.

“Lucky girl, though. They’re both hot as hell.” Dilly chuckled.

“I’m partial to my Lucien, but, yeah, I’m not blind. What on Earth was the moon goddess thinking, though? Could you imagine having to share Claude with another man? I couldn’t share Lucien with another woman. I’d kill her.” I said with a slight snarl.

Just the idea of having to share my mate made my blood boil. I absolutely had no idea how Gray was able to handle having to share his mate. He would always change the subject when I asked him. I knew Dilly was far better at getting information than I was.

“Apparently, Echo kept trying to reject Gray. He said that she said she ‘didn’t need a puppy’ or something. That boy is almost as stubborn as you. He wouldn’t give up. This is just part of him not giving up. She’s never going to be entirely his, he just wants to own a part of her. That’s kind of sad. He should have let her reject him. Then he would have had a mate that was entirely his.” He replied.

“Not every wolf has a second chance, Dilly. He wasn’t staying with her in case he didn’t. Gray started falling for her from the moment he saw her. Just like Victor probably did. Honestly, I think she needs them both. She never got much love as a child, she should get double the love as an adult. You were lucky. You had people who cared for you. Can you imagine being forced to work like she did for as long as she did, and only being able to have tiny flashes of love and caring? I’m surprised she’s not a monster or a frightened little mouse. She’s somehow human after all of that.” I told him.

“You just know you couldn’t go through it yourself.”

“Neither could you. You get all growly even now. If my cousin didn’t find it so adorable, he’d probably be pretty upset by it.” I chuckled.

“Here they come.” Dilly said, shushing me.

Echo and Harmony came out from the fitting room in long dresses that were cut up the side. They had a sweetheart neckline that dipped a respectable amount, but not so much that they were showing off a lot, and a fitted bodice. In these dresses, you could see the difference in Echo and Harmony even more.

Harmony’s dress was a crimson that reminded me of home. Echo’s dress was a deep sapphire blue. Echo was slimmer than Harmony, she wouldn’t plump as quickly as a werewolf. I figured it would take a long time before she was looking fully healthy.

“Those are perfect.” I smiled. “What do you think, Dilly?”

“Very sexy. I think those boys won’t know what hit them.” He winked.

“It’s so expensive.” Harmony whispered.

“I think you should ask your sister what she thinks, Harmony.” I said, nodding to Echo, who had caught sight of herself in the mirrors.

The shop didn’t have mirrors in the dressing rooms. It was part of their strategy. The best lighting was around the mirrors outside and the associates could help guide the shoppers with honest critiques and praise.

She was staring like she didn’t recognize herself. Her brow wrinkled as her fingers trailed over the lines of the dress. Echo looked like she was trying to memorize every inch.

“Oh, Echo, you look beautiful.” Harmony said softly.

Echo turned around and smiled brightly at her sister. She walked over to her and took her hands.

“You look beautiful, too. I hope you’ll let me buy you that dress. Cam will love it.” Echo told her.

“Only if you buy that one. I think Gray will love it, too.” Harmony replied.

“We have more dresses for you, miss. If you’re ready.” Anya said.

Echo turned and nodded. She let herself be led off to the back again. Harmony watched her go and sighed.

“What’s wrong, Harmony?” I asked.

“We should have had more time. More of this. It was what I always wanted. Now, knowing everything I know, I wish our parents hadn’t died. That the people we saw as our parents had learned to love Echo, too. Maybe then... I don’t know. She deserves so much. We didn’t do enough for her, we never reported them.” She sniffled.

“I heard that they said if you reported them, then the three of you would be split up. This isn’t your fault. You just wanted to be with your sister.” I told her.

“I should have done more, but they punished her when we said anything about how they treated her. We learned quickly that the best way to save Echo from pain was to stay quiet.” Harmony said.

“Go get changed, you can buy all your accessories here, too. Victor knows the two of you haven’t had time to get to know each other, and he wants to make sure you understand what kind of a man he is. He’s hoping that this will make you a little more willing to actually talk to him, learn about him. He’s a really good guy. He really cares about her.” I smiled, hoping that she would relax a little more.

“He’s taken care of my sister. I appreciate what he’s done, but I think Gray is better for her and she should choose him.” She said firmly.

“There is no choosing, Harmony. She wants them both and they both want her. It’s as simple as that. You need to back off your sister’s love life. This isn’t something anyone but them can control. It’s not your place to even try.” I explained.

“I just can’t believe that. No one is meant to have two mates. I don’t even know how that would work.” Harmony sighed.

She turned back to the changing rooms, shaking her head. I got where she was coming from. This was a strange situation. Even Aurora was having trouble with understanding, and she was one of the freest thinkers I knew.

I crossed my legs and looked at Dilly. He looked thoughtful. His lips quirked up into a smile.

“Figured out how it would work?” I chuckled.

“Bems, I’ve been thinking about it ever since that girl woke up. The way she is with Gray. I would say he was definitely her only mate, but in the garden last night.... That was true love. It was radiating from Victor and Echo.” Dilly said.

Echo came out again in another dress. This one had a little volume to the skirt with a wide, V-shaped, neckline and sleeves that went off the shoulder. This dress was a deep forest green that brought out the green in her eyes. She looked like a princess. I couldn’t help but smile.

Victor would love that dress. I could tell that Echo liked it. She was looking at herself in the mirror and swishing the skirt around.

“You look great, Echo. Do you like that one?” I asked.

“I love everything I’ve seen. Are you sure I need so much?”

“Absolutely.” I replied.

The rest of the time, she blushed at compliments and tried on everything the women gave her. I realized that she had so little positive attention, that it was making her nervous. I couldn’t imagine having lived like that. She had very little knowledge of just how pretty she was.

We got her new clothes from the skin out and new shoes, along with some accessories in that store. The total would have made Lucien cry. I could imagine that Victor wouldn’t even flinch.

After we were done there, we went to more trendy shops. Echo offered to buy things for her sister, and Harmony started agreeing. Once they’d spent that terrifying amount at the one store, it seemed like she didn’t have any qualms about prices anymore.

We had a pleasant lunch at a restaurant in the mall before we completed our shopping for the day. Echo was able to eat some solid foods, but I put blood into her drink after her fangs started peeking out.

Dilly was pleased with the makeover. Harmony and Echo looked really happy. I was glad to see Echo so relaxed, especially after the issues last night. It meant that I could focus on my work instead of their relationship. Echo would finally be able to focus on what I was teaching.

Now, all that was left was to negotiate the alliance with Hallowed Moon and see if I could get Victor to ally with me. Having the Master of the territory on my side would help my collective and my pack exponentially. Luckily, helping him with his mate would get me in just the right position to approach the union as one between friends.