

# 14

A half hour later, Rebecca found herself standing in front of the stove, smears of pancake mix on her cheeks as she worked to ignore Eric. He stood at the kitchen counter directly behind her. Despite her best efforts; it was impossible to ignore the heat of his eyes against her back. She felt hypersensitive. Every hair on her arms and at the back of her neck stood on end at knowing he was watching her so intensely.

Ignore him. She told herself. You're just going to make one last breakfast for Emma and Travis and then disappear.

It only it would be that simple. She knew with the way that Eric was watching her that it would be nearly impossible to slip away from him.

Reaching for the bowl of pancake mix, she moved to pour another into the skillet in front of her. When strong arms suddenly wrapped around her from behind, startling her, she jumped and poured a half of a pancake over the edge of the skillet and onto the stove.

“Eric!” she hissed out in anger as she set the bowl aside.

Without a word, his arm tightened around her, pulling her back tighter against his body. Even through the borrowed drawstring sweats she wore, she could feel his hard length stabbing at the curve of her buttocks. Instantly, her body warmed to the feel of his solid frame. Between her clenching thighs she could feel her clit pulse with need at his near proximity.

Wasn't last night supposed to get rid of this need of him? She trembled against the need to fight what she was feeling...craving in that moment. She had to get away; away from him and whatever he was doing to her mind and body. Fighting to ignore him, she shoved at his hands, but nothing happened.

“Eric, let go of me before I toss the rest of these pancakes on you.” She threatened, praying that her voice didn't shake.

With a chuckle, he rested his chin on the top of her head. “Go ahead. But know that if you do, you will be cleaning it off of me; one way or another.” His voice dropped an octave at the end of his words with meaning. Instantly the image of her tongue on his neck and chest had Rebecca's breathes escaping in harsh pants as her sheath rippled in reaction. Swallowing past her sudden tight throat, she reached for the spatula to flip the misshapen pancake.

“What makes you think I would be interested in doing such a thing?”

“You forget I can tell when you lie to me, Rebecca. The thought of your mouth on me excites you as much as it does to me. Just as you were so excited last night when I was between your thighs that you shuttered like you do now.” one of his hands shifted from around her stomach to slide down to her sex, cupping it through the thick material of her sweats.

“Eric!” she cried out with embarrassment as he caressed her so openly. What if the children walked in? Heart racing, she dropped the spatula to grip his wrist tightly. “Stop it.”

“If it weren’t for the fact that we aren’t alone; I’d have you on the counter right now.” a whimper escaped her lips. At the sound, she felt Eric’s embrace become tender. “Are you sore from last night? Perhaps I should give you a hot bath to ...soothe you.”

Knowing that he was looking for anyway to tease her, she pressed her lips together in a hard line. “Don’t concern yourself.” She hissed out. “I’m fine.”

“I want you to stay here today and tonight as well.”

Shoving her hair from her face, she turned to look over her shoulder at him. “Why should I? There can never be more than what last night was, Eric.”

“Oh, my little prey, it was much more than that.” he said with a firm nod. “And I intend to prove it to you by holding you tonight, kissing you, touching you. If you are so adamant about leaving and going to hide in your small apartment, don’t be surprised to find me there with you. Because I for one know that I am not capable of letting you go.”

Heart stilling in her chest, Rebecca found herself shaking her head slightly at his words. They were confusing and bewildering to her, but at the same time; they were almost...romantic? Just when she thought she had him all figured out, Eric went and showed a different side of him that surprised her.

Like a bucket of cold water dumping over them, a sharp knock at the kitchen door had Rebecca’s gaze springing away. Huffing out a breath she turned away from him. How easily he had nearly gotten under her guard with just a few sweetened words. Could she be more pathetic? Shaking off his hold on her, her head turned toward the door as another insistent knock followed. Moving away from the stove and Eric, she turned to look at him with a calm resolve that she prayed wouldn’t waver.

“Forget it, Eric. It won’t be happening.” She whispered, lifting her chin at him.

His familiar cold gaze looked down at her as if he was preparing to fight. “One would think that you’d learned not to underestimate me.” As each word left his mouth, he took a several steps towards her until she found herself pressed against the fridge with Eric looming above her.

When the constant knocking finally ceased, Rebecca’s gaze shot to the side as Jason and Chris came striding into the house. Uncaring that they’d just let themselves in, their expressions were dark and full of foreboding as they sought out Eric immediately. Though both saw how close she and Eric stood, neither batted an eye at it. Instead, both forced a smile at her that didn’t quite reach their eyes.

“Morning, Rebecca.” Jason greeted.

Returning his tight smile, Rebecca shoved some space between her and Eric until she was able to move out from her trapped position. Hesitantly glancing away from her, Chris turned his concerned gaze back to Eric.

“Alp—Eric,” Chris stuttered out, glancing briefly back at Rebecca with worry, he stepped closer to Eric before continuing in a hushed tone. “We need to talk.”

Not blinking an eye, Eric responded coolly. “Let it wait till tomorrow.” His cold eyes returning to Rebecca’s stubbornly set expression.

“With respect, Eric,” Jason interjected with a meaningful tone to Eric’s name. “It can’t wait.”

Rebecca watched as Eric stood in silence, his lips pressed together so firmly that she was surprised that his whole face didn’t fracture from the intensity of it. It was obvious that whatever Eric’s fellow werewolves had come to discuss wasn’t for human ears.

Losing patience with the macho male staring contest that Eric was participating in, she hissed out. “Oh for goodness sake!” her outburst seemed to break the spell between the duo and Eric the second she’d uttered the words, drawing their startled gazes to her face. With a huff of exasperation, she strode closer to Eric. “It’s obvious you need to discuss business that you don’t want overheard, so I will just get Emma and Travis fed and get out of your hair.” She stated with a matter-of-fact tone.

If Eric’s scowl could deepen further, it did at her calmly spoken words. Turning back to the counter with enough time to simply grab the platter of pancakes, Rebecca slipped past the men and headed toward the dining room all the while attempting to

ignore Eric's stern gaze. Her heart shuttered in her chest a moment later as she was roughly jerked to a stop by a heavy arm coiling around her waist. Her body pricked with familiar awareness as she felt Eric press into her from behind, his hand pressing possessively over her lower stomach. With deliberate slow movements, Eric lowered his lips to her ear.

"Don't even think for a second that this is over, Rebecca." He warned in a low voice. "I don't plan on letting you out of my sights long enough for you to escape me for long."

Tossing him a stubborn glare over her shoulder, she shrugged off his arm before heading to the kitchen table. Placing the platter of pancakes beside the pile of plates and utensils that waited, she found her reluctant gaze returning to seek Eric out once more. She shook her head when she saw he appeared to already be arguing with Jason and Chris about something. His clenching hand slashed through the air with the force of his heated exchange with them.

It didn't take long for Emma and Travis to be drawn from their cartoons to the table by the scent of pancakes and breakfast meats. Waiting until both were seated with their plates filled and cups of milk in front of them, Rebecca reluctantly took her seat as well. Curiosity getting the better of her, Rebecca found herself studying the trio from across the large space to the kitchen. What was it that had them so concerned and Eric so upset? Taking a breath, she tuned out the idle chatter of the twins and focused her attention solely on the hushed voices that drifted from across the room. Despite their best efforts to keep their voices low, Rebecca was able to pick up bits of their conversation.

"Your scheme isn't a secret anymore, Eric. The elders know." Jason hissed out with a look of foreboding.

"How the hell is that possible?!" Eric's face flushed with anger, a low guttural growl surfacing from his lips. "And how the hell did you two find out?"

"You've got bigger problems than that, I'm afraid. Not only do we know, but the elders know and they're not happy about your little human either." Chris said, flashing Eric a knowing look.

Eric fisted his hands at his sides. The tips of his claws beginning to emerge from his curled fingertips. "She's got nothing to do with this!" he snarled.

“Are you ready to put your life on the line for her, Eric? Because that is what it’s come to.” Jason’s voice asked in a soft tone. His eyes were gentle with compassion and pity.

“What are you talking about?”

Chris shifted around to Eric’s other side. “There’s been talk amongst the members of the pack, Eric. The elders believe that you’re not fit to lead anymore. You and your pups could be in danger.”

As the voices grew more hushed, Rebecca found her breakfast becoming devoid of taste, bite after bite as her inner thoughts swam. What was Eric’s scheme they were referring to? The elders knew? Knew what? Just as the thought arose in her mind, so did the answer.

They knew...

Sweat broke out over her body as her fork clutching hand shook. Had she been discovered? Did Eric know too? Had Damon betrayed her? Eyes flickering back and forth in the space in front of her, she thought back over what she could have done to give herself away, nothing came to mind. But recalling Eric’s behavior and his words this morning had her chest tightening with fear.

“It’s just a war you have no chance at winning....My little prey.”

At the memory of Eric’s voice in her mind, Rebecca barely noticed when her fork fell from her limp fingers to clatter against her plate loudly. Emma and Travis sent her a confused expression but both quickly turned back to their breakfast without a word.

How could she have been so naive, so stupid? Earlier, Eric had first sought for her to tell her more about her parent’s deaths. At the time she’d just dismissed it as idle curiosity, but now she saw he had been trying to glean what she knew of that night. She’d also thought that his countless offers for her to spend the day there was just some day-after attempt to spend more time with her. Could it be that he simply wanted her here when Jason and Chris arrived? Eric had warned her before that she didn’t know what he was capable of when it came to her. How ruthless would he be when it came to protecting his secret?

“I look forward to your execution. None of my kind will let you live now. Others will come for you and you will never know mercy from my kind.”

The haunting words of her attacker taunted her as her fear began to climb. She had to get out of there and run. With no where left to hide and no one to trust, she was now running for her life.

Shoving her chair back, she was surprised when Travis slid from his chair as well. At her questioning look, he grabbed his empty glass.

“I want juice.”

She'd almost expected him to hand the glass to her to refill for him as she usually did, but instead he rushed toward the kitchen and to the fridge before she could offer. Off to the side she could still see that Eric was arguing with Jason and Chris. It was time. She didn't care what Eric thought he was accomplishing with his head games with her, but she had to leave before ended up as the prey he'd named her earlier.

Taking a deep breath she looked at Emma one last time. The cute little girl had her head bowed over her syrup smeared plate as she drew a smiley face with her finger through the sticky syrup. Out of all of them; Rebecca knew she'd miss Emma the most. Tears burning her eyes, she stepped away from the table and headed for the door without a backward glance.

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“Your scheme isn't a secret anymore, Eric. The elders know.” Jason hissed out, his shoulders tense.

Eric felt everything in him freeze at the words of his beta. His interest in the missing shifters had been kept a secret for a reason. When he'd first expressed concern to the council of elders within his pack of the multiple disappearances of shifters from not only his pack but others as well, the elder's decision had been firm. He'd been forbidden from looking into the issue and told that if shifters were missing it was simply an indication that they weren't strong enough to survive amongst the pack. The reaction of the elders on the issue was the reason that he'd only trusted Mick and his long time friend, Mark with his secret interest.

“How the hell is that possible?!” Eric's face flushed with anger, a low guttural growl surfacing from his lips. “And how the hell did you two find out?”

“You've got bigger problems than that, I'm afraid. Not only do we know, but the elders know and they're not happy about your little human either.” Chris said, flashing Eric a knowing look.

Eric fisted his hands at his sides. The tips of his claws beginning to emerge from his curled fingertips. It was obvious that he'd claimed her body last night. Her scent clung to his skin as his did to hers. However he'd yet to give her the mating mark that would bind her to him. It wasn't possible that the two; let alone the elders, knew that she was his mate.

His wolf rose up protectively at the subject of his unclaimed true mate. "She's got nothing to do with this!" he snarled.

"This isn't just about her, Eric. You know how the elders and other shifters within your pack feel about humans. Are you ready to put your life on the line for her or hers too? Because that is what it's come to." Jason's voice asked in a soft tone. His eyes were gentle with compassion and pity.

"What are you talking about?" he said, attempting to appear nonchalant at the mention of Rebecca.

Chris shifted around to Eric's other side. "There's been talk amongst the members of the pack, Eric. After the past few months there has been a small shift amongst the pack members. Like the elders, many of the pack members are displeased with your decision to unite with the Alpha of Darkwood Springs and your refusal to take a mate amongst your pack. Others believe that you're not fit to lead anymore and you know what could happen if others became brave enough to strike out at you. You and your pups could be in danger."

The thoughts had Eric snarling with rage. No one was laying a claw on his children or his mate. He was the Alpha! He'd earned the title through bloody battles and his unyielding strength. It was time for the elders and his pack to see that he didn't hide behind old traditions.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw his son, head toward them and then straight to the fridge with a look of innocence shining around him. He'd once thought that nothing would come between his loyalty to his pack. Now he knew that nothing would stop him from protecting his family; his children and Rebecca; his mate. If the elders wanted to engage in a power battle with him, he'd leave them broken and bloody in the end as well as any others that got in his way.

"Eric," Jason began, holding out a beseeching hand to him. "At least let us get you and your pups to the lodge. There we can protect them better than you could here. One of us can stay behind and watch after Rebecca in case someone tries to target her, but your home isn't built to be defended like the lodge is."

“Rebecca stays with me.” he whispered harshly. With his eyes glowing, his wolf echoed in his voice, making it deeper, rougher and terrifying.

Once again he sensed movement from behind him. Turning this time, he spied Rebecca. With her head down, she seemed to be quickening her strides as she entered the kitchen and headed for the door. Did she think she could slink away from him now? Even if it weren't for the fact that she was his true mate, he wasn't about to let her out of his sight with his own pack turning against him. A frail human favored by a shifter was an easy target should anyone wish to strike out at him.

Shoving past his betas, he reached Rebecca before she was half way across the kitchen. Encircling her wrist, he was surprised when she fought against his hold, refusing for her steps to be halted. Transferring his hands to her upper arms he jerked her against his chest, preventing her from pulling from him.

“Stop this.” he bit out. “Where the hell do you think you're going?”

“Let me go, Eric.” she whispered with a dark tone. Her voice was lethal and sharp. She expected him to obey her, not that he had any intention of doing so.

The look she gave him had every muscle he possessed locking up. Almost instantly the smell tainted scent of fear and desperation wafted from her pores. She was afraid of him? Why? Though his beast demanded in the back of his mind that he reassure her and do what he had to make her feel safe once more, he knew now was not the time. If Jason and Chris were correct, every second they stayed here was like walking around a firing range with a target on their backs. They had to get out of there and get to the safety of the lodge. Once they were all safe, he intended to explain everything to Rebecca. He would tell her what he was and what she was to him.

Hardening his features, he shook his head. “You're not going anywhere unless I say so. Keep fighting me and you will see just how ruthless I can be.”

Still squirming and fighting his hold on her arms, her eyes narrowed on him. “Then don't say I didn't warn you.”

Before Eric could discover what she was planning, pain exploded through his groin and throughout his whole body. Instantly his hands fell away from her to cup his aching balls that her knee had just kissed hard. When she spun away toward the door, he snarled, not bothering to conceal his wolf's reaction. Brushing the pain aside, he straightened and went after her.

Before she could grasp the doorknob, he grabbed her from behind. His arms wrapped around her chest like two steel bands, pinning her arms to her sides as he lifted her kicking feet off the floor. Backing away from the door, he snarled.

“Don’t ever do that to me again.” he hissed at her ear, rage coating his every word.

Carrying her back toward the kitchen, he ignored the confused looks from Jason and Chris. Setting her down on her feet but still holding her tightly, he was just about to rail at her when something had him shutting his mouth. The air around them suddenly felt thick and clouded. Something was wrong. Looking to his betas, he saw that they sensed it too. With a wary look, Chris approached the widows by the sink. Instantly his body shot ramrod straight. Jerking around he shouted, “Get down!”

Before the words could fully leave his mouth, the windows of the dining room and kitchen exploded, raining glass everywhere. Jason and Chris moved to shield Travis that had frozen in fear before crumbling to the floor. Shoving Rebecca down, he pressed her against the side of the fridge, shielding her from the direction of the window. Gunfire rang through the air mingled with the terrified cries of his mate and his children. Instantly, Eric felt ice shoot through his veins.

“Emma...Where’s Emma?!” his sharp gaze looked everywhere for his precious daughter but he couldn’t see her. Chris was struggling to hold Travis still as the young boy fought to flee from his pinned position on the glass littered kitchen floor. Jason looked everywhere but he couldn’t see anything either.

“Daddy!” a small voice screamed. Head shooting toward the voice, he saw Emma cowering beneath the dining room table. Her small body shook as tears flowed down her reddened face. His gut twisted at seeing his daughter trapping right in the middle of the line of fire.

Our pup! His wolf cried in fear as he fought to get to his offspring. Before Eric could spring forward to protect his daughter, Rebecca shot from his shielding body and ran through the line of fire.

“Rebecca!” he yelled over the loud gunshots. He managed to snag her ankle and bringing her to the floor just before she used her other foot to kick him across the face, forcing him to let her go. He watched with terror as his mate scrambled to her feet and rushed through gunfire to get to Emma. Bullets struck the walls and the kitchen counters all around her as she rushed forward. Flinching and ducking her head as she ran, Rebecca threw herself on the floor, sliding through the mess of shattered dishes

and glasses until she reached Emma. Emma instantly launched into Rebecca's arms, wrapping her small arms around Rebecca's neck as she continued to wail.

When bullets pinged off the tipped over chairs and the table; inches from two females, Eric felt his hold on his wolf slip. Shooting across the distance, with one hand he threw the table toward the shattered windows, shielding his women as he reached them. Grabbing Rebecca by her waist he jerked her up into his arms and with her; Emma as well.

"Get out now!" he shouted to his betas as they rushed toward the door, Chris holding Travis in his arms as they ran. Following behind them, Eric shot out of the front door, leaping from the porch in a single jump. In the distance he could see the camouflaged forms of several men with rifles moving to chase them.

"Get to the lodge now!" he ordered as Jason and Chris rushed to their truck, shoving Travis in the back seat.

Rushing to his hummer, he opened the driver's side door and all but tossed his daughter and mate into the passenger seat across the space. Leaping into the seat, he jerked the keys from the visor above. His hummer roaring to life, he slammed on the gas, sending them flying over the drive way at a break neck speed. Spraying gravel behind him, he kept his gaze on his betas that followed close behind him as they sped down the road. Never when he looked back did he see anyone following them.

Glancing at Rebecca, he saw that she held onto Emma like she was a lifeline as his daughter did the same. Emma continued to bury her face against Rebecca's neck, wailing like a wounded animal. His wolf reacted strongly to the sound of his child's distress. Accepting that he couldn't comfort Emma while they were still in danger, he turned his attention to the dazed expression on Rebecca's face. Was she in shock?

"Put a seat belt around you both." He ordered, hoping his hard tone would shake her out of her shock.

Nodding, Rebecca reached out with her free hand, jerking a seatbelt around her and Emma as she pressed them back against the seat. With her movement, another scent joined the collection of fear and adrenaline in the vehicle. Blood.

Stilling, his sharp gaze looked over his daughter's shaking form. It wasn't Emma—it was Rebecca. "Are you injured?" when she didn't respond, he snarled loudly.

"Answer me, damn it!"

Flashing her eyes at him with anger at his harsh tone and language in the presence of his daughter, Rebecca responded, "I am fine. Don't worry about me."

Don't worry about her? In what universe would that even be remotely possible? He nearly lost her several times when she's charged into a rain of bullets to protect his daughter and she said not to worry? Panting he fought to keep his temper under control. He wanted to rail at her, shake her and hold her close till the image of bullets striking around her disappeared from his memory.

Someone had attacked his family in his home. No one came after his family and escaped unscathed. This wouldn't go unpunished. The peace seeking Eric was gone. The calm and yielding Eric was gone. He was out for blood now.