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Gripping the edge of the doorway, Rebecca leaned her forehead against the back of her gripping hand before releasing a tired groan. It had been nearly an hour since Eric had stormed angrily from their room. Needing something to distract her from the startling information that Eric had given her, she'd decided to get cleaned up. Still unsteady on her feet, with her limbs feeling like wet noodles, she'd forced herself to get into the shower.

After a simple five minutes she found that taking a shower was the worst idea she'd ever had. Several times she'd gripped the towel bar inside the shower to prevent from falling on her face. With her head swimming and just a towel wrapped around her, she stumbled to the door, only to have the remaining strength to grip the edge of the door.

Once she was certain she wouldn't fall on her face, she pushed herself to exit the bathroom. Walking to the closet, she opened it to pull out a white tank top and a simple pair of jeans. Leaning her back heavily against the now closed, closet door, her eyes drifted around the quiet room. Where the dresser had once stood was now an empty spot, the evidence of her battle with Myra that night had been cleaned away.

Staring intently at that empty spot where she'd lain when Myra had crouched over her, ready to end her, Rebecca couldn't believe how close she'd come to dying. If it hadn't been for Eric; she would be dead.

Shaking her head, she fought to hold onto her anger with him. He had taken her choice from her. It was bad enough having to accept that you belonged to a temperamental and stubborn werewolf in some mystical way; it was worse to know that you would be changed against your will. Was it even possible for her to fight this?

Would you rather be dead? Her inner thoughts chided her.

With a strangled sound of frustration, she allowed her head to fall back against the door. Even after what Eric had done to her, she knew that she loved him. The stubborn bastard had wormed his way into her heart despite her many efforts to prevent him. He'd saved her life several times and how had she rewarded him; by yelling at him for risking everything for her.

She wasn't ready to admit that she was wrong in her anger at having her choice taken away, but she knew that she had to make things right with him. Feeling her

lightheadedness from being in bed for the last couple of days began to fade, she moved to the closed bedroom door.

Opening the door, she frowned when she found Chris lounging in a chair outside the door. With one arm slung over the back of his chair and his left ankle resting on his right knee, his eyes looked straight ahead; lost in his own thoughts he looked relaxed, as though he'd been there a while. Narrowing her eyes at him, she closed the door behind her with a loud bang.

Instantly, Chris's head snapped to her at the abrupt sound. Had she actually snuck up on a werewolf? A smug smile curled along the corners of her lips at the thought. Dropping both of his feet to the floor, Chris pressed his hands against his knees as he rose to his full towering height. For a minute he seemed to give her a look over, his eyes searching for something.

When his gaze strayed to the bare skin of her shoulder, Rebecca stiffened. She'd forgotten to replace the bandage over Eric's bite mark. She'd kept the ace bandage around her ribs mostly dry, but she'd removed the gauze from her shoulder. The wound was red and pulsing, displaying a perfect mold of Eric's fangs.

"Why are you out here?" she asked, nervously. Her hand reaching up to adjust her damp hair until it covered Eric's mark. Snapping out of his thoughts at her question, Chris shook his head before answering.

"Eric asked that I make sure that no one tries to bother you."

Wincing, she crossed her arms over her chest, glaring at him. "I don't need a bodyguard."

Shrugging, uncaring, he scratched at the back of his neck before replying. "Not my problem. You don't like it you can take it up with him. I just do what he tells me to."

"As his assistant?" she inquired with a raised brow. When she'd first met Chris, Eric had introduced him and Jason to her as his assistants, but after everything, she knew that it had been a lie.

"I'm his beta, his enforcer and so is Jason."

Sighing, she dropped her arms, shaking her head. "Do you know where Eric is?"

Chris nodded, his lips pursing in thought before he answered gruffly. "He's in his office."

“I need to see him.” she whispered, her eyes shifting from his, preventing him from seeing her need to find Eric.

With a slow nod, he moved out of her way, waving a hand toward the stairs. “Let's go. I'll take you to him.”

Moving past him down the stairs, she felt her mind fill with doubt. Would the other shifters look at her strangely now? Did she need to be worried? Her chaotic thoughts had her steps faltering until she stopped half way down the stairs. When Chris came up behind her, his hand pressed against the side wall as he leaned down toward her.

“Is something wrong?” His voice was actually filled with concern and it gave her something to hold onto in the mist of her uncertainty. Clamping her lips together, she closed her eyes. She refused to tell him that she was scared to be around anyone after that night. She wasn't a victim, hiding in fear from the unknown.

Pushing her shoulders back, she opened her eyes before shaking her head at his concerned question. “I'm fine.” she responded curtly.

Taking a calming breath, she forced her legs to move once more, never stopping or looking back.

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Sitting at his desk, Eric stared down at the blue prints of another commissioned house he'd been asked to design. He was supposed to be making the final changes to the floor plans but he found he couldn't focus. Most of the pack had left the lodge or made themselves scarce. He didn't doubt that many of the pack members that still remained under his leadership were cautious of his decree at the Gathering. Many feared that he'd seek revenge against others because of Myra's actions toward Rebecca and he was too angry with the memory to tell them otherwise.

Shoving the blue prints aside, he growled with frustration. He needed to clear his mind. Rising to his feet, he left his office to go to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Returning a moment later to his office, he'd nearly closed the door behind him, before he paused. Standing at the window against the far wall of his office, he saw the familiar lithe figure of the woman that had haunted his thoughts for the past eight years.

“Beth...” he breathed out with a ghostly voice.

Glancing over her shoulder at him, Beth's finely shaped lips curled into a friendly smile. "Hello Eric." turning around to face him, she rubbed idly at her elbow as she felt his shocked expression.

Taking the few steps toward his desk, he carefully set his mug down on the desk. The sunlight streaming through the open blinds made her tan skin glow. She had to be an apparition. Why would she be here?

"Beth?" he repeated, his eyes narrowed while he studied her with a distrusting eye.

The years hadn't changed Beth overly much, her jet black hair that once fell to her small hips was now cut in a short bob that framed her face. Dressed in a simple t-shirt and jeans, she still wore the facade of girl next door well. He'd once found her pretty; not beautiful that made drove every thought from his mind like Rebecca did, but now; he felt nothing but emptiness.

His expression hardening, he took a step back as he crossed his arms over his wide chest. "Well, this is a surprise. But I must say not a welcomed one." He stated, bitterly. Unlike Rebecca, Beth didn't flinch at his harsh words. She didn't expect him to be gentle with her feelings. Good. After all these years; the last thing he had to offer the mother of his children after she'd abandoned them all without a word was kind words.

Meeting his glaring gaze, Beth's expression remained cool. "I don't expect you to welcome me, Eric. Especially after what I did and left you do deal with the consequences."

He scoffed. "That's an odd way to phrase what you did, Beth. You left me. You left your pups and you did so without a backward glance."

Beth rapidly blinked as her eyes watered at the mention of Emma and Travis. Clearing her throat softly, she asked. "How are they; Emma and Travis?"

Brushing her question aside, he leaned his hip against his desk. "Why are you here? You no longer have a place here, you know that."

"I've come to plead with you to rejoin the pack." Her melodic voice matched the pleading note in her eyes.

“You think you can just walk out on your family without a word?” When she looked away from him with a sigh, he growled in anger as the memories of the past were brought to the surface. “Just answer a question for me that I have asked myself since that night you ran off. Why?”

Seeming to steel herself against his angry gaze, she pressed her lips together before nodding slowly. “The night I left, I met my true mate.”

Eric frowned. He knew more than anyone the pull of a true mate; undeniable and phenomenal.

“I won’t apologize for finding my true mate and falling in love, Eric.” Beth added, her soft voice growing firm. “Be honest, Eric.” she began, taking a hesitant step toward him. “You knew I wasn’t your true mate from the beginning. I was just your friend and it easier to pick me as your mate with our families being so close.”

Rubbing a tired hand over his face, Eric released a pent up breath. “You’re right. I knew you were not my true mate. But I am not angry that you broke your vow to me; not anymore at least. I am angry that you left your children with a backward glance.”

Narrowing her eye at him with disbelief, Beth shook her head at him. “You think that was easy for me? You think it was easy for me to stay away from them all these years? I wanted to take them with me but after I found my mate in Victor, I couldn’t. I knew as Alpha you wouldn’t and couldn’t let me go without losing face. My choice was to leave secretly or have Victor challenge you as he wanted to. To protect you, the children, me and my mate, I accepted what was happening and I made the hardest choice of my life.” Her voice hitched with emotion. “I left.”

Releasing a sound, half growl and half sigh, he rubbed a frustrated hand over his face before meeting her sad eyes once more. “Why are you here now?” he asked gruffly.

“I came to plead with you.”

“For what?” he scoffed at the idea that a simple apology would make the past eight years of pain and not knowing go away. “If you want forgiveness for embarrassing me, you wasted your time.”

Ignoring his mocking tone, Beth stepped closer to him until she stood but a foot from him. Looking up at him, her eyes pleaded with him to understand. “Victor and I wish to rejoin the pack.”

Eyes widening at what she was asking his breath burned in his chest. The pack would never accept her back into the pack. As Alpha it would be his job to deal out punishment for her betrayal from all those years ago. “Beth.” he breathed out, shaking his head in denial. “You know our laws. You betrayed your pack and your mate. I may not have marked you, but others knew you were mine. If Victor and you try to return I cannot guarantee your safety. If justice is demanded for your crime, I would be forced to challenge your mate. This isn’t just about you anymore; I have to think of our pups and my true mate.”

Instead of disappointment at his words, she smiled warmly up at him. It was the same smile she’d given him as children. “I heard you found her. I am glad.”

Heart growing heavy, he shoved away from her to spin around and face her. “Save your words of congratulation.” He bit out, rubbing furiously at the back of his neck in anxiety. “You don’t know what you are asking.”

Closing the distance that separating them, Beth nodded solemnly. “I do, which is why I came alone tonight. I want to be a part of Emma and Travis's lives more than anything, Eric. I will do what must be done to make right how I wronged you. I want to see my mother and live my life within the pack.” Slowly dropping her gaze, she sank to her knees before him. “I will face any punishment you as Alpha see befitting.” Tilting her head to the side, smoothing her hair away she exposed her neck, her gentle eyes rose to his, waiting for his decision.

Bending at the waist, Eric gripped her upper arms, lifting her to her feet. Startled, she watched him for a sign of what he planned to do. If in his shoes, any other Alpha; hell, even any other man, would have lashed out at her without mercy. But despite the pain of the past, Beth was his friend. He remembered how she’d sat with him at the falls the day Senan had slain his father. She’d only been thirteen at the time and still she’d known exactly what to do to take his sorrows away. How could he return her years of friendship back to her with spiteful vengeance?

Groaning, he pulled her into his embrace, hugging her. She stood stiffly in his arms with her hands held up in defense before a shutter moved through her body. With a soft sob, Beth wrapped her arms around his waist, returning her childhood friend’s embrace.

Pressing his cheek against the top of her head, Eric sighed. “Don’t expect others to be as merciful as I, nor as forgiving.”

Pulling back, she raised her surprise filled eyes to his; her lip trembled, “I’m really sorry—”

“Don’t.” he cut her off, shaking his head at her. “Wallowing in the past won’t help. I’ll see what I can about minimizing your exposure.”

Overfilled with joy at his words, a smile crossed her face before Beth threw tightened her arms around his neck, causing Eric’s hands to grip her shoulders to steady them both.

“Listen to me Beth...”