

“Get that stuff away from me.” Rebecca groaned in agony, from her fetal position on Damon’s couch. It had been two days since she’d fled from the pack’s lands back to the city of Ravenwillow. For some reason this morning, pain had begun to rack her body worse than anything she’d ever felt before. Taking a seat on the couch beside her, Damon reached out to help her up into a sitting position, thrusting the steaming mug of some sort of tea at her. God, it smelled awful. She’d been raised to always be grateful when someone went to the trouble of making one something. But there was no way that rule applied to this.

Grasping her hands, Damon forced her to take hold of the steaming mug. The foul liquid was a mud brown with a leaf and root or two swirling amongst the other contents. Gulping past the bile that rose in her throat at the smell, she attempted to pass him the mug back.

“There is no way in hell I am drinking that!” she exclaimed as she dry heaved at the smell.

Flashing a firm look, Damon’s hands held hers around the mug as he pushed it toward her mouth. “You will and you will now. This will help with the pain, just be the big girl I know you are and drink it.”

Unable to pull away, the rim of the mug was pressed to her lips, forcing the warm contents down, leaving her no choice but to swallow it. Instantly her stomach attempted to rebel but she was able to force it to calm.

When Damon pulled the mug from her lips, she made several gagging sounds as she tried to rid the taste from her mouth.

“What in God’s name was that crap, you dirt bag?!” she exclaimed.

Setting the mug aside on the coffee table, he grinned at her grossed out expression. “It’s an herb concoction that we usually give children before their first transformation. In the past in rare cases we’ve had to use it on the few human mates that shifters turn. The main ingredient is wolfs bane.”

“You’re making that up.” She groaned as another wave of pain hit her. Narrowing her eyes at him, she stilled. “Isn’t wolf’s bane poisonous?”

“To some; yes, but for shifters it can slow down a first time transformation. You are already a shifter, Rebecca. That’s why you feel this pain. Your bones are growing stronger and so is the rest of you. Once you transform tonight, it will go away. The tonic will dull most of the pain, but not all.” When she curled back onto her side, he crossed one leg over the other, resting his ankle on his opposite knee as his arm stretched along the back of the navy colored couch. “Eric called earlier. He wanted to know how you are doing.”

Pressing her lips together, she shook her head. “I can’t talk to him right now.”

Sighing, Damon scratched absently at his chin. “You won’t have a choice tonight.”

The heavy weight of sadness filled Rebecca’s chest at the thought of Eric. Even after everything that happened the day she left, fleeing to the seclusion of Damon’s hotel room, she missed Eric. She longed for his touch, his embrace, his kiss, and even the sound of his voice like a drug. But the pain at knowing he considered her inferior, an outsider; prevented her from going back to him. If he couldn’t see her as an equal, as his mate; what hope did they have?

Doubts and fears of what the night would bring her began to creep into her mind, making her stomach knot painfully. She knew the reason Eric hadn’t come charging after her was because Damon had told her that there was trouble at the lodge that had pulled Eric away from Ravenwillow. What would happen to her if he didn’t return when the moon rose tonight? How would she get through this without Eric?

“Damon, you once told me that if I ever needed anything you'd help me.” She stated, her voice shaking.

Damon nodded. “Yes and I stand by that promise. Do you want me to go get Eric on the phone for you so you two love birds can make up?” He teased with a playful smile.

“No.” she answered, shaking her head. Closing her eyes against the next wave of pain that exploded down her back, she breathed out, “I want you to kill me.”

She knew she’d shocked Damon with her request, but her fear of transforming, of losing what she was, terrified her. There was a slight pause before Damon finally answered. “Come again?” Damon’s features froze at Rebecca's haunting words.

“In less than a few hours, I'm going to be forced to become something else. I have no control over it. I can feel something pressing at my mind like a cool touch of a hand and I know what it is. I can’t do this if Eric won’t truly accept me. I can’t live my life

like this. What if I can't control it? I couldn't stand it if I turned into that monster that killed my family and nearly killed me. Don't let it come to that, Damon. I beg you. I want you to kill me."

Gripping her upper arms Damon jerked her back into sitting position before he shook her gently, "Are you insane?" When tears filled her eyes, forcing her to look away from him, he growled slightly before he released her.

"First of all; shifters—even newly turned shifters can change whenever they want. The full moon has no sway over that. It's more like a special occasion that we use and the lunar energy from the moon helps to draw out our beasts the first time. The shifter that attacked you did so of his own choice, not because the beast within him forced him to. Just because you become a shifter doesn't mean you have no control over your beast. It is part of you, it is you." He stated harshly, his fingers stabbing at his heart.

"Secondly; your mate will be there to guide you. Whatever argument you too had, won't even matter after you transform. Eric is bull headed, you knew that going in. It's your job to give him a kick into reality when he gets out of line." He said with a light teasing note.

"So, you're saying you won't kill me." she stated emotionlessly

Releasing a fake sigh of regret, Damon released his hold on her to lift a hand up to his face as though to examine it. "Well, you see I just got my nails done." Damon teased, before lowering his hand. "What's the real problem, Rebecca?"

"What if I can't control it? I can't go to Eric for help, he doesn't want me anymore and I don't know what to do."

A silent pause swept between them as Damon fought against his need to comfort her. According to pack law—he wasn't allow to interfere between Eric and Rebecca; at least, not any more than he already had. More importantly; Rebecca's first change was a sacred thing. It was meant to be shared between mates, not friends. He wouldn't be allowed to be there with her when the time came. But what could he do? Without direction she could hurt herself or even die.

Groaning, he knew he didn't have a choice. Deep down, he knew that Eric would move heaven and hell to be there for Rebecca tonight. But even if he wasn't; this was something Rebecca would have to face on her own, with or without her mate. Turning to look out the window, he saw that the afternoon sun hung low in the sky. Dusk would be upon them in just a few hours. He had to get her back to the lodge where she could transform safely.

Patting her knee, he rose to his feet. "Get ready to go, Rebecca. Dress in something that's easy to remove."

Giving his retreating back a quizzical look, she asked. "Why?"

Turning back to look at her over his shoulder, he replied, "It's time."

* ~ * ~ *

An hour later, Damon had quickly gotten some food forced into her and ushered her to the car. It was a long drive from the heavy populated section of Ravenwillow, and the sun had already begun to set. With each second, she could feel the pain of her muscles and bones fade to an icy burning. Fear sought to choke her, but she fought to remain calm. She had Damon with her; he would never let anything happen to her. It would be fine.

Rebecca found herself taking in an unfamiliar sight as Damon carefully pulled off the back road he'd taken into a heavily wooded area. He'd told her that he would bring her back to the lodge, but this looked nothing like the familiar forest that surrounded the property.

"Where are we?"

"This is the wood toward the back of the lodge's property."

"Why didn't you take me straight to the lodge?" she asked, concerned. She didn't like how Damon wouldn't meet her gaze. What wasn't he telling her?

"I don't want to risk some resentful member of Eric's pack thinking they can take a run at you. This part of the wood will offer you the seclusion you need."

"This was your idea?" she asked, hesitant to get out of the car as she fearfully took in the sight of the darkening forest in front of them.

"It was Eric's idea."

"Will you be with me? When it happens?" she asked, turning back to look at him. This time, he met her gaze with a sad look.

"No. I cannot. This is one of the most sacred of our laws, Rebecca. This is something you must face on your own. It's too personal for me to be a part of. Your wolf will know what to do. I have no doubt that Eric will be close by, ready to be at your side when the moon rises."

Shaking slightly at the finality that his words held, Rebecca undid her seat belt. Opening her door, she shifted to get out of the car, but froze. Reaching out, Damon's hand settled on her back in comfort.

"What is it?"

"What am I suppose to do?"

"Start walking into the forest until you find a place within the forest that feels right to you and your wolf. You will feel it deep inside when you get there. After that; when the moon is at its highest, you will feel your wolf rising. Don't fear this. Accept it and let her come forth."

Releasing a shuttering breath, she nodded. "Anything else?"

"Be certain you're naked."

"What?!" she exclaimed, unsure if he was teasing or not.

"Just a little piece of advice for you to remember," he said with a grin. "Now; this is the part of the evening where I kick you out of my car and leave you in the middle of the woods." With a shooing motion, he motioned for her to get out.

With a look of uncertainty, she climbed out of the car, slamming the door closed. Not a moment later, Damon's engine roared to life, his headlights turning on as he slowly put the car in reverse and back onto the road. With a final wave, he disappeared down the road, leaving Rebecca standing at the edge of the tree line with a heavy stone sinking in the pit of her belly.

Turning to look in the distance, she saw the last of the day's light was quickly fading. Steeling herself, she turned back around, looking straight ahead. Inhaling a steady breath, she took the first step.