

# 33

Running fast through the woods, Eric allowed his long strides to carry himself closer and closer to the scent of his mate. He'd run for the last day to get back to Ravenwillow and now he was quickly running out of time. He along with one of his trackers and two hunters had tracked Jason's scent far beyond his borders in Virginia to the deep forgotten forests of Massachusetts.

They'd found the charred remains of a building where Jason's scent ended, and found nothing. No matter how further they traveled in their wolf forms, Jason's scent had vanished and no other scent could be found. The whole situation concerned him deeply. As there was no established pack of shifter in the surrounding area, Eric was forced to be cautious on any shifters they scented around them.

Leaving his hunters and tracker behind, he had left orders that they continue to comb for signs of anything that could lead to Jason's whereabouts. He was desperate to discover what had happened to his friend and beta, but he'd already failed Rebecca several times over as her mate, he refused to let her face this night alone.

In his wolf form his long legs allowed him to cover more distance. He'd passed into his territory an hour ago was nearly at the lodge's property. He'd bade Damon to take her to the boarder of the property, to make sure she would be away from lingering members of his pack until he could reach her.

Her scent grew stronger with each powerful lunge of his legs. He knew he'd found her before his eyes had even spotted her. In the middle of a grove, the moonlight flowed down over the open area beside a flowing stream. In the mist of the silence and beauty of the night, he saw her. Never had she looked more beautiful to him.

Standing in the open with her back to him, he watched her shiver slightly as Rebecca allowed the flowing green, gypsy shirt she wore to fall to her ankles. When she unbuttoned her white blouse and peeled the material over her shoulders, the moonlight hit her naked skin, caressing it to his eyes. The soft material of her blouse slid down her arms before joining the discarded skirt.

Standing bare foot in only a pale pink, cotton bra and panties, her shaking intensified. Pausing, he wondered if the trembling of her body was due to the cool night breeze around them or from apprehension.

The thought of her going through this with no one to lean on, pained him. No longer would she feel hurt or fear around him. He'd made so many mistakes with his mate.

He'd underestimated her at every turn. His only excuse was that he thought he was doing the right thing, shielding her from the harsh reality that he had to face. But he had to face the facts when it came to his mate.

Rebecca was strong in mind, strong in heart and most importantly; she was strong in spirit. Rebecca wasn't a woman to run away screaming for her life. She'd survived a fucking werewolf attack, for goodness sake! She was made for him in every way. She deserved his respect and deserved the opportunity to come into her own strengths as a shifter. Most of all; her place was to stand by his side.

Note to self: grovel, grovel, and beg for her forgiveness...

Shifting to his human form, he stepped from the shadows of the trees and into the open space. Moving down the slight incline, he watched her shoulders stiffen as she heard him approach. Turning to look over her shoulders, he watched as need and happiness flared in her eyes at seeing him. The sight eased the tightness in his chest.

“Eric...”

Before she could say anything more, his hand cupped the side of her tilted face before lowering his mouth to hers. His free hand lowered to wrap around her waist, gently pulling her against his front as one of her arms reached up to circle around his neck while the other gripped his restraining hand.

Every word that he wanted to say to her, every emotion that he wanted to convey to her, he poured through his kiss. Finding the will to break the kiss, he sighed at the wondrous feel of completion at holding her once again. He never wanted to be without this and he would make sure he never was.

Lowering his cupping hand, he undid the closure of her bra at her back. Immediately, she stiffened with confusion. “Eric...?”

“Shh...” he whispered gently against her ear as she turned around to grab her loosened bra before it could fall. “I can smell your wolf. She's nearly ready to emerge. We can talk after this night. Tonight is about you, nothing else.”

Sliding his hands down her arms, he pushed the limp bra straps down, forcing her to allow it to fall to the ground. Smoothing a caressing hand over the tempting swell of her full breasts, he allowed his hand to drop to her waist before drawing her panties down until they pooled at her ankles. Carefully unwinding the ace bandage that still remained wrapped around her ribs, he toss it aside as well. Standing just as bare as he

was, Eric turned her to face him, his eyes focused on no other part of her other than her eyes.

Her body began trembling more as her eyes widened with fear. “Eric...I don’t think I can do this...” she whimpered softly. Uncertain and terrified. This was his fault. He’d allowed her to think he wouldn’t be there for her with his thoughtless words. He couldn’t allow her to go through this thinking that.

Cupping both sides of her face, he bore his eyes into hers. “Listen to me, Rebecca, because it isn’t often that I apologize for anything.”

Her eyebrow rose at him with a ‘gee, you think?’ look. “There’s a bit of surprising news...” she jibed at him, fighting to keep the tremble from her voice.

Ignoring her comment, he pressed on. “I was wrong. Since I brought you here, I have been so fearful and prideful that I sought to keep things from you, things that I never should have.”

“What could you possibly be afraid of?” she asked, disbelievingly.

“Of losing you and your love that you have weakened me with. When Beth left me all those years ago, I gave up the thought of feeling anything for someone else. If I could go back, I would do it all differently. I would trust you, when I didn’t. I would tell you everything, when I withheld things. Please forgive me. Let me stand by your side and you by mine.” He pled, his eyes searching hers.

Rebecca’s hands settled on his chest over his pounding heart as he waited for her answer. Licking her lips absently, she raised her eyes to meet his. “What about Beth? She’s back and she would make a perfect mate for you other than a changed human like me.”

Leaning close, he pressed his forehead against hers, holding her gaze the whole time. “I already have a perfect mate and she is in my arms right now. Beth is my past and I would never choose her over you. You were right, I was wrong to introduce you as my help to her. But I was worried for your safety. Beth’s parents live within my pack and I feared they’d retaliate against you. I wanted to wait until you had safely transitioned before I introduced you to my pack.”

Softening against him, Rebecca sighed, pulling away from him. She appeared like she was about to say something more to him, but stopped as her body tensed. Wincing, she gripped his arms so tightly that her nails bit into his skin. At the bite of pain, he looked down to see her small rounded nails had begun to grow into deadly tipped

claws. Jerking his awing gaze up to her face, he found her eyes glowing brightly in the darkness.

It was time.

Shoving away from him, Rebecca stumbled to the ground as her legs gave out beneath her. Falling to her hands and knees, she panted as her bones began to painfully reshape from her human form to her wolf. She was fighting it.

Worried that she'd harm herself with her stubbornness to allow the change to happen, Eric shifted back into his wolf form. Moving toward her lowered head, he bumped her chin with his muzzle.

"Rebecca, you have to let this happen." He said through the mind link that all shifters shared.

Her eyes widened impossibly further as she heard his words in her mind. "H-How?"

"Your wolf wants to be freed, let her take over. She will know what to do." He urged gently.

"I..." she winched in pain as her hands began contorting and reshaping, slowly and painfully. "I don't think I can. What if I lose myself? What if I can't find my way back?"

"That's why I am here. I will never let you be lost. Accept her and let go."

He knew the instant that she'd done as he asked. Instead of the slow random shifting that had occurred when she'd fought against the call of her beast, now her imaged blurred with white mist around her as her wolf came forth. Before his eyes, Eric found himself seeing the birth of his true mate in all ways. Lying with her legs tucked under her, Rebecca lifted her muzzle toward his hovering one. Eyes going wide with wonder, she leapt onto her feet with a chuff of shock.

"I did it...?" she asked hesitantly, lifting a brown paw to look at it suspiciously. He felt his lips curl in a slight smile as she turned her head to inspect her long silky tail behind her.

"You did." Moving toward her, he nudged her toward a different direction. Stepping in front of her, he tilted his head forward. "Follow me. There is much I want to show you about being a wolf."

“Cool it, Mr. Daniels.” She said with air of superiority. “I got this covered.” She stated confidently, clearly taking to her new form quicker than he’d anticipated.

“Oh really?” he asked mockingly, moving to circle her smaller frame. “I’d like to see that.”

“You asked for it.” slapping his side with her tail, Rebecca raced forward, his eyes following her until she disappeared from sight. With a smile of pride, he followed after her.

Under the light of the full moon they ran together. He’d pursued her like the prey she was to him. Just when he thought he’d caught her, Rebecca would dodge out of his reach, sending him into a tree or over grown bush. When the moon sat low in the sky, they found themselves at the base of the falls, near the edge of the deep pool.

Exhausted, Rebecca’s wolf receded, leaving her lying naked along the bank beside him. Following suit, he allowed his ecstatic wolf to retreat as well before pulling her against his pounding heart.

Relaxing against the soft grass beneath her, Rebecca shoved a hand through her hair, sending the waves of soft brown hair fanning across the ground. “You lied to me.” She mumbled sleepily.

Looking down at her in confusion, he shook his head. “I don’t understand. What did I lie about?”

Jabbing her thumb over her shoulder at the water fall and the deep pool, she raised an accusing brow at him. “You said the only way down here was to jump. Apparently there was another way.”

Smirking, he stretched out on his back with a sigh. “I suppose I did.”

Moving onto her stomach, she braced an arm over his chest as she leaned closer to him. “That will be stopping, Eric.” she commanded with a firm voice. “You can’t lie to me anymore and that includes keeping things from me.”

“How will our life be interesting if you know everything?” he teased with a blank look.

Skimming her lips over his, she rose up to smirk down at him. “I have ways to keep plenty of interesting things in our lives. Which from what I remember, is going to be a long time.”

Covering her hand that rested over his chest, he leaned up to place a slow, deliberate kiss on her lips. “It will never be long enough, my love.”

Rebecca smiled warmly down at him, before lowering her head to press against his chest. For a moment they simply laid there, holding each other. Eric wanted to remember everything about this moment for when he was grey and much wrinkly version of his current self. He would never be happier than he was in this moment.

He felt Rebecca shift away from him with a gasp. “Eric, why the hell is your chest glowing?”

Snapping his eyes open, he looked down to see the binding thread emerging from his chest. With his heart full of joy at a second chance to fully claim her, he sought out her gaze. She started as if hypnotized at the rippling thread appearing like mist before her eyes.

“What is it?”

“It is the binding thread; it only emerges for a true mate. The first time mine sought you, I denied it. This time, it is your choice. Do you accept me, Rebecca? As your true mate?”

Her lips parted to answer, but her hand flew to her chest as she sat fully up. “My chest,” she gasped. “It feels like it’s on fire.” Letting her hand fall, Eric watched in wonder as bright light emerged from the center of Rebecca’s chest, her own binding thread.

Both of them stared at each other in wonder as the two threads coiled around each other until the threads became as one. With an explosion of heat, the threads disappeared, leaving both of them gasping at each other at what they had just seen. Rebecca was the first to recover, crawling over him; she straddled his hips to lean over his chest. Cupping the edges of his strong jaw, she lifted his face slightly as her lips claimed his. Her kiss held heat, passion and need. Need for her mate, her true mate.

“You have some explaining to do, Eric.” she moaned out against his mouth as his hands reached up to grip her hips. Rolling them until their positions were reversed, Eric grinned down at her after breaking away from her siren lips.

“Later.”

With a nod, she agreed. “Later.” She whispered as his lips crashed down over hers.

Eric sighed with contentment against her mouth. Nothing would take her from him now. She was his! More importantly, she had claimed him as well. Not because she was his mate, but because she loved him.

The world fell away in that moment. The night stilled around them. The fate's giving them that moment of perfection. Troubles of tomorrow would continue to come. War was brewing, death and destruction would come to both sides. But for some reason the nagging fear of the future held no power for Eric's mind as it once had. He didn't know what future they would be facing in the morning, but he did know that as long as Rebecca was by his side, nothing would stop him or tear him from her. His Rebecca.

His true mate.

His heart.

His salvation.