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Rolling over, Rebecca gave up on her futile attempts to sleep in. All night her dreams had been plagued with visions of Eric kissing her, loving her, his warm rough hands roaming over her flushed skin.

With a cry of disgust, she tossed her pillow across the room, wishing she could have hit him with it instead of the wall. Swinging her legs out of bed, she climbed out of her small bed, padding bare foot into the connecting bathroom, her long t-shirt falling barely past her flexing buttocks.

Bending over the small tub, turning on the water she adjusted the water temperature to her liking. Leaving the water running she returned to her bedroom in search of a change of clothes. Just as she'd reached her small dresser the shrill sound of her phone on her bedside table grabbed her attention. Crossing to examine the caller I.D. she let out a grunt of disgust as the name: Daniels, Eric, flashed on the small lit up screen.

What does he want now?

She was tempted to let the phone continue to ring. It would serve him right to have to talk to her answering machine. After all; her answering machine would show him the same range of consideration that he deserved; none. Inhaling a steady breath her thin fingers curled around the black cordless phone and held it up to her ear.

“What?” her voice was less than friendly.

“Rebecca? What’s wrong? You sound upset.”

Rebecca was forced to bite down on her lip to keep from yelling into the phone, Upset? Try pissed off, wolf man! “I’m fine. Why are you calling me?”

“You left rather abrupt last night. I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

“You’re the reason I left abrupt last night, Eric.”

“That’s why I called. I wanted to apologize for the kiss. I can’t think why I would behave like that much less with you. So I’m sorry.”

Much less with you... What was that suppose to mean? Was he ashamed that he'd lowered his lupine self to kiss a mere human, as though she were beneath him? Seething with rage, Rebecca felt her volcano of anger overflow and explode.

“You know what, Eric? I’ll see you on Monday, but until then why don’t you go jump off a cliff!” stabbing one of the top buttons she disconnected the call. After slamming the phone back on its stand, she walked not two feet away before it rang again.

Storming back, she jerked the phone to her ear. “What?!” her chest rose and fell as her anger slowly drained with her outburst. Silence for the other end met her rage filled words. “Well? Did you call to talk to the street walker?”

“Actually, I called to talk to my extremely attractive date for tonight.” The teasing voice of Damon floated through the earpiece, causing her to wince.

“Oh, Damon it’s you…”

He chuckled softly. “At your service, so what was that about a street walker?”

Laughing nervously, she began pacing the length of her small bedroom. “I thought you were someone else. Wait, how did you get my number?” She asked freezing in midstride.

“After Eric ordered me downstairs last night, I went through his cell phone for your number. By the way do you know what you’re listed under in his contacts? “MY CURSE”,”

“Why did you call?” she asked, choosing to ignore his comment about Eric’s cell phone.

“Just to make sure you weren’t planning on backing out on our date.”

She had almost forgotten how she had agreed—well more like decreed that he could pick her up. When Eric had kissed her, she remembered feeling startled, confused and then desired; up until he had told her that she was inviting unwanted attention. Why shouldn’t she go out with Damon? She deserved happiness, even if for just for a while.

“Of course not, I’ll see you at eight.” Without any hindrance she agreed to meet him at the restaurant. Murmuring a quick goodbye, she hung up the phone, surprised that she was actually looking forward to tonight.

The excitement over her impending date quickly faded and was replaced with the icy feeling of fear, fear that had her heart squeezing tightly in her chest. How could she have forgotten? Damon was a close friend of Eric’s, did that mean he was a shifter too? In her mind she could see Damon teasing face turning cold as the form of a

terrifying wolf over took his handsome features as he lunged for her exposed throat, her hand flew to her neck as her eyes widened in terror.

Shaking her head, she pushed the gore filled thoughts from her head. Chances were that she'd never see Damon again after tonight anyway, she wasn't all that convinced that he wasn't interested in her beyond pissing off Eric. The idea of Eric's reaction to finding out that she and Damon would be together tonight was almost too much for her smiling face to take.

After witnessing the way he'd reacted when seeing Damon standing close to her, holding her hand tenderly, she knew Eric was attracted to her on some level. This is why she was not missing her date for nothing. Nothing would please her more than watching him twist with envy, once he found out.

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Pacing back and forth across his office, Eric was unable to take his eyes off the phone that sat untouched on the cluttered desk. There was no lie he could tell himself for the reason why he'd dialed Rebecca's number. After their encounter last night, his wolf was unreasonable, causing him to crave her even more than usual. He was beyond restless, feeling as though he'd destroy anything he'd touch if he couldn't have her in his presence.

Hours earlier; in a moment of desperation, he'd called her. The sound of her irritated voice had startled him, but just hearing her still felt like a soothing balm for the worst of his tight, burning skin. She may just be a mortal, but she had the temper of a she-wolf, with jaws snapping at him for insulting her and God help him it made him want her more.

Never before had he been so connected to his wolf aside from shifting when their souls joined as one. Now he could hear his wolf's thoughts, his feelings and desires as his own, a torn part of him had begun to mend back together. What had caused this change in him, in his wolf?

Mate...the familiar deep rumbling voice echoed in the walls of Eric's mind.

He knew now that it was his inner wolf and the realization terrified him. The only reason a shifter's inner beast fully emerged was when their beast sensed their true mate near. She was the one person in the world that completed both man and beast, his true mate. A mate beyond worth or description. Could this explain his unexplainable mood swings? Was this what the mated wolves had meant? Had the

feeling of completeness and other stronger, indescribable emotions mean not just the finding of his destined female, but becoming whole with the wolf inside him?

Mate. The voice now growled through his mind once more.

What mate? Eric finally asked. Every second the thoughts of his wolf sounded—felt more as his own.

Our mate; Find her and claim her now. I do not want to be apart from our mate. His wolf whispered with a beseeching tone before a growl rumbled out. Find her.

Eric found himself scoffing, his head shaking with disbelief. This was ridiculous. He didn't have a mate and it certainly wasn't Rebecca, the forbidden mortal. Why would the fates be so cruel to him? Forcing him to wait for his true mate and then to present a fragile mortal to him, a woman that he would forever long for but would never possess.

She is ours...

She is not ours. Eric responded adamantly to his inner beast. Communicating with his beast felt strange, but a freeing rush coursed through him at the same time. It is forbidden to claim a human as a mate and even if it weren't you know the pack laws as much as I do.

Others have taken a human mate before, it is only impossible because you allow your stubbornness to cloud your mind. His wolf argued.

We are not bears! Eric yelled through his thoughts.

He refused to believe it. He would prove to his stubborn wolf that she wasn't his mate that was causing his basic instincts to go haywire, but the lustful idea of tasting the forbidden fruit that he was denied.

Snatching up the phone, he quickly redialed her number; after he saw her in person he'd be able to put all this disputable nonsense to rest.

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Where the hell is it?

In a panicked rush, Rebecca dumped the contents of her makeup bag into the porcelain sink, each item making a loud crashing sound on impact. Sifting through the

pile, she searched desperately for her lipstick. Go three years without a date and no use for makeup, much less lipstick and when you really need it, it's gone.

After Eric and Damon's calls, she had enjoyed her day off thoroughly, first with a long hot bubble bath and then by curling up on her couch with a romance novel and her favorite soap opera playing in the background, Then spending two precious hours making herself presentable for her date tonight, saving makeup for last.

Releasing a sigh of relief, her fingers closed around the thin cylinder shaped tube of scarlet red lip stick. Bending closer to the mirror, she very carefully brought the exposed tip of her lipstick to her upper lip. Her hand jerked off course when the startling sound of her phone erupted through the silence of her bathroom/bedroom.

Grabbing a tissue, she wiped away the smear of red across her cheek as she walked to the phone. Not bothering to look at the caller I.D. this time, she plucked up the phone, cradling it against the side of her face and her shoulder as she returned in front of her bathroom mirror.

"Hello?" she answered while concentrating once more on applying lipstick to her parted lips. Instead of hearing a return response, only silence greeted her. "Hello?" she repeated, seconds away from just hanging up.

"You sound like you're in a better mood."

The sound of Eric's smooth voice had chills racing up her spine, at least before her hard resolve fell into place. "What do you want, Eric?"

"I thought I'd treat you to dinner to apologize for my behavior last night. Interested?" he asked in a way that told Rebecca that he'd expected her to agree. His arrogance was so heavy that it seemed to float from the phone.

"No, thank you." As soon as the words left her mouth she could have sworn she heard a barely audible growl floating from the background.

Let him growl, he's not getting his way this time. She thought smugly

"Why not?" His voice rumbled out.

"I'm busy tonight, doing street walker things if you must know." She snapped, turning to her right, tugging open the third drawer of the mounted linen cabinet. Reaching beneath a neatly folded stack of towels, she withdrew a small, hidden box. Inside was

a collection of her most valued jewelry; all that she had left of her mother. Selecting a simple necklace she turned back to the mirror, still holding the phone to her ear.

“Is that why you’re upset with me?” when she didn’t answer, feeling his wolf becoming more anxious, causing him to pace around his desk before he continued, “I didn’t mean it, Rebecca.” She still didn’t answer. What should he say?

“Eric, why did you really call? Are you bored and just wanted to torment me on my day off?”

Rubbing a hand against the back of his neck, he slowly settled in the chair behind his desk. “Possibly,”

“Well it will have to wait until after my date tonight. Speaking of; I need to finish getting—”

Outraged; Eric leapt from his chair, nearly crushing the phone with his lupine strength. “Date? What date? You have a date?”

“Aren’t those all roughly the same question?”

A growl rumbled deep in his chest, while his wolf snarled at the idea of an unseen male courting his Rebecca. “Who is he?”

“Why do you care?” she asked uncaringly, while adjusting the simple oval, moonstone pendant necklace over the slope of her throat.

While gritting his teeth, his fist clenched tightly around the plastic phone as he fought his rising temper. “At least tell me his name.” So I know who to kill...

“Eric, I really don’t have time for this.”

“You’ll make time!” he bit out, sounding as though his words came out through clenched teeth. “Where did you meet this guy anyway? How do you know he’s not some psycho?”

Shrugging out of her terry bathrobe, standing in nothing but her red lacy bra and panties, she reached out for her folded purple blouse and black slacks on the edge of the sink. After pulling up her thin slacks, her eyes were drawn back to her reflection and her scars that seemed to illuminate against her pale colored skin.

Her hand hesitantly reached up to trace the white, raised scars that marred her soft skin, Scars from angry claws and lethal teeth, which had torn her skin like a knife

slicing through butter. One scar was a short four claw slash from the center of her collar bone, across the swell of her right breast. Turning slightly to the left, in the mirror she surveyed the second scar leading from the back of her right shoulder and sloped diagonally down to her right hip.

She could hear Eric's voice droning on about the dangers of being alone with strange men. Looking at the eternal brand on her skin, she knew she would never make the same mistake she did years before.

"I'm a big girl, Eric. I can take care of myself."

"I need to see you tonight."

"Not happening, Eric." Shaking her head at his persistence, she shoved her arms into her sleek blouse, buttoning it up as high as needed to conceal her wide scars. Pulling her hair out of the collar, allowing the chocolate strands to fall over her shoulders.

"Where is he taking you? Is it public? Just don't get in the car with him. I'm sure women like you prefer driving yourself, so he doesn't know where you live. Right?" his questions got reassurance; whether for Rebecca or him was undecided.

Unwilling to answer any of his questions about her date with Damon, she mischievously replied, "Oh look at the time...got to go!" without another word she quickly hung up and tossed it on her bed, Smiling impishly at how she'd hung up on him and envisioning him snarling in rage at being ignored.

Take that, wolf man! Looking at the time; she raced from her room, slipping her black heels on as she went. This was one date she refused to be late to, especially when it would annoy Eric endlessly.

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Eric's elongated claws bit deep in the armrests of his brown leather recliner. Staring at the far empty wall, his sport's program playing on the widescreen in the corner was all but forgotten. At this very moment; Rebecca was on her date with some unknown man. He didn't want to think about it. He didn't understand why he felt such rage at the thought of Rebecca with another man. He supposed somewhere he'd become possessive of his human. He was more than willing to deny that she was anything to him. She wasn't his mate. He couldn't explain why she had his wolf all riled up.

However that didn't mean that he would willingly step aside and let another have her. He couldn't stand the thought of her sharing her warming smile and laughter with

another male. With every image of her with someone else that floated in his mind, he could feel his beast rising higher and higher to the surface. If he didn't get more control over his emotions, Rebecca would find an unrestrained werewolf crashing her beloved date.

Rebecca may just work for him, but somehow he'd imagined her as a permanent fixture of his home. His children loved her and though he wouldn't admit it; he loved the fire that would flair in her eyes when her temper rose. She had somehow wormed her way into his mind and he wasn't beginning to see her as a simple human nuance any more, she was simply...his.

What did that even mean?

Just as he was seconds from leaping to his feet and searching out his wayward human, the phone hanging on the kitchen wall began its high-pitched ringing. Striding quickly from the living room, he nearly jerked the entire stand off the wall with his urgency. Jerking the phone to his ear, he answered with bated breath. "Rebecca?"

"Rebecca? Have you been holding out on us, Alpha?" Chris's voice floated out with mischievous waves.

Sighing heavily, he pinched the bridge of his nose. "This better be good."

"Actually; I just wanted to tell you about an interesting development that I just discovered as we speak."

"Is it about work?"

"No..." Chris said hesitantly.

His breath huffed out with irritation. "Is it about Pack business?"

"No."

"Good night, Chris." Pulling the phone away from his face, Chris's rushing voice assailed his lupine ears.

"Wait! Wait! Wait! You'll want to hear what I have to say!" rolling his eyes, Eric pulled the phone back to his ear, waiting patiently for his Beta to continue speaking. "Anyway; I stopped in Divinity, the old Italian restaurant in town and I saw Damon all fluffed up for a date."

"Damon has dates all the time; it's really not that special." He mumbled undaunted.

“And when I casually chatted him up about who he was meeting he—very smugly might I say—told me he had a date with—and I quote, ‘Eric’s human’.”

All at once, Eric felt everything inside him go still. Deep inside his wolf rose up, growling dangerously at this new information of his rival. Damon? Of all the shifters and humans, she’d chosen Damon, the Casanova of all the wolf packs? Or should he say; former Casanova, because after tonight there would be nothing left of him to attract the most desperate of women.

“I guess she’s not as off limits as you said.”

Snarling loudly into the phone, he felt the plastic crack under his harsh hold. “Call the Alpha of the Black Cliffs pack.”

“May I ask why do you want me to call Damon’s Alpha?”

“Because he’s going to need a new second Beta after I tear him limb from limb.”

Completely shattering the cordless phone beneath his hands, Eric ignored the sound of plastic crunching under his bare feet as he walked across the tiled floor and out onto the porch. Gazing out over the spacious yard that led into the luscious forest that surrounded the back of his property, the scents of forest delimited the air around him, the chirping of the insects and the rustling of meager wildlife called his inner beast to the surface. It was then that he freed the untamable wolf inside him.

Eyes glowing in the darkness, flames licked under his tight skin as he allowed the change to overtake him. Mist shrouded his body as his human form blurred. His body shrank, melting his human form away as bones broke and reshaped. His nose and lips morphed and extended into a black, fur covered muzzle. As the searing heat faded from his changed form, his powerful legs propelled him forward. In the form of the wolf, he navigated quickly over the earthy forest floor.

Darting over fallen logs and around heavy underbrush, the primal nature of his wolf became unbearable and undeniable. The instinct to reach his mate and destroy all that kept her from him was in the forefront of his mind.

Each stride took him deeper into the woods and nearer to town, nearer to her. The moonlight filtered through the towering trees, the light sung through the darkness against the softness of his pelt. The exhilaration that came from running free in his

true form couldn't compare to happiness that filled his heart at knowing Rebecca would be his tonight.

Too long had he been alone. Simply existing in hopes that he would find the female meant to complete him and it had turned out that she found him instead. Pack law be damned! He didn't care if she was human or that she was forbidden to him. No one had the right to hold his mate from him, not even himself.

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Walking through the propped open doors of the local Italian restaurant; Divinity, the entrance opened up into a wide and welcoming environment with vaulted ceilings and polished columns. Circular tables covered in white tablecloths, accompanied with large tea candles and small vases filled with flowers were spaced across the white marble floor. At the end of the entrance archway was a long red oak bar. Soft classical music played in the background as mouth watering scents floated in the air around her.

Rebecca found her hands going to her waist, making sure her blouse wasn't wrinkled and displayed as less skin as possible. Who was she kidding? She wasn't built for this "dating" thing. Her idea of a good time was cuddling up on the couch watching a movie with her nose tucked in a perfectly steamy romance novel. Why had she ever agreed to this in the first place?

"Rebecca!"

Hearing her name called from across the spacious lobby, turning her head her eyes fell on Damon as he stood from his seat, one arm raised in the air, waving her towards him. Navigating around nearby tables and moving patrons, she made her way to him with a nervous smile on her face.

Walking around the table, without a word; Damon lifted one of her hands to his lips. After brushing a soft kiss over the top of her hand he still retained possession of her hand even after raising his head. Damon was obviously taking this date more seriously than she was. Dressed in a royal blue silk shirt; the first two buttons undone, displaying his muscular chest to her eyes. His dark blue dress slacks had to have made specifically for him only.

"I can tell that this was a bad idea." Her eyes jumped to his in surprise.

“What do you mean?” her hand shot her the gaping collar of her blouse, fearful.

“Look at you.” he indicated with an open hand, a soft smile on his face. “You’re breathtaking. How am I supposed to eat anything tonight with a sight like you before me?”

Laughing softly, she shook her head in disbelief. This man was unbelievable. “Isn’t it a little early in the evening for you to be throwing lines like that out?”

“You misunderstand me. I only speak the truth where you are concerned.” Turning he pulled out a padded chair for her, waiting for her to be seated comfortably before he returned to his seat. Almost immediately a waitress came and took their orders and left them alone once again. The look in Damon’s eyes as he ordered their wine and his food as well as his teasing words were not missed by Rebecca. He may be attracted to her as a woman, but he clearly had his sights set other where.

“So why did you ask me out?” she asked folding her arms over her cool plastic menu.

“Do I really need a reason? You’re a beautiful woman. Why wouldn’t I want to ask you out?”

Rolling her eyes, Rebecca leaned back against the soft cushion of her seat. “Oh come on. You really expect me to believe that? I saw the looks you were giving that waitress. You look like you could have tackled her to the floor and licked her skin off.”

A chuckle rolled through his chest, “Nothing that drastic, I promise you.”

“So, Why then?”

“Why not let us enjoy the evening and if you still want to know when I take you home I’ll tell you.”

Leaning closer, her eyes narrowed suspiciously at his smiling face. “Are you hoping to distract me?”

Also leaning closer, his firm lips curved teasingly. “Only if you want me to,”

Smiling at him, she couldn’t fight the soft laughter that escaped her red colored lips. As his hand reached toward her face, she froze. Only did she relax when he was simply tucking a long strand of hair behind her ear. His hand lingered a few seconds more to caress the side of her face.

“So; tell me about yourself.” his eyes flashed questioning at her as he settled comfortably against the back of his chair.

She shrugged her shoulders, indifferently. “There’s nothing interesting to tell.”

“I should warn you, I can always sniff the truth out.” He flashed his white teeth at her in a teasing grin.

“You’re welcome to try. But I think you’ll find I’m more stubborn than even Eric.”

A look of confidence flooded his features as his lips curved into a wolfish grin. “We’ll see about that.”