

5

Leaping down from a low hanging rocky ledge, Eric's strong body flew over the soft earth and vegetation. The moonlight flashed and danced over his jet black fur with every flex of his muscles, each that burned with every movement that his lupine body took. Every ache and resistant movement only served to push him forward endlessly. Nearing the end of the dark, dense forest, smells and sounds assaulted his senses; declaring that he was coming closer and closer to having Rebecca in his grasp.

Stepping out from the cover of the heavy laden maple trees, his eyes feasted on the sight of the small collection of buildings of Main Street. He found himself stepping out into someone spacious back yard; the back of a small house hindered his view of the rest of the main square. Taking in his surroundings he spied a filled clothes line tethered between two trees, he quickly returned to his human form. The darkness of the night cloaked his bare form as he stalked across the cool grass covering the ground beneath his feet. Taking a pair of large black drawstring sweats from the white corded line, he quickly covered his nakedness. He highly did not doubt that Rebecca would appreciate him standing before her in nothing but his skin, nor would the town folk.

Moving around the side the simple one level home, he moved cautiously, making sure he was seen by no one. How would anyone go about explaining sneaking around in the dark with no clothing to speak of? Though most of the population of Ravenwillow was shifters, it was essential that human's remained ignorant to the existence of his kind.

Moving like a shadow in the night, Eric remained unseen until he stepped out beneath an illuminating street lamp. The main square was filled with people, families, friends and couples leaving the old fashion movie cinema, restaurants and local shops. Moving along the sidewalk, his nose fought to find Rebecca's scent trail as his eyes also searched for this all important restaurant that she was likely to be at. An unending variety of sounds and scents bombarded his senses making it impossible to locate his human's whereabouts.

How in the world was he to find her in a place like this? His wolf was becoming agitated and at any moment wouldn't be as compliant. But then, teasing scent from a distance, he caught it. The sweet, rich smell of his human that lingered beneath the lavender perfume she always wore. Uncaring about how many passing people he nearly plowed over, Eric took off. His wolf urged him forward, moving fast with hard desperation to reach her. With every stride he took, her scent intensified. Sliding to an abrupt halt he found himself looking up at the florescent lit word; "Divinity".

Satisfaction filled his chest, tonight he would lay down the rules to his wary doe. His wolf was more than ready to battle Damon for the right of her. Her resistance mattered little. For some inexplicable reason, his wolf recognized her as his one and only true mate and for the time being he was more than happy to treat her as such, at least until they both came to their senses. But he refused to tolerate her gentle eyes looking to another for comfort. He couldn't deny that his wolf as well as himself was hoping she would put up a fight against his claim on her. The chase was always just as sweet as the victory.

Fighting the heat behind his glowing eyes that signaled his form shifting, he shoved his wolf deep, preventing him from fully emerging as he longed to do. Striding through the bolstered doors, he walked around the wooden podium and past a panic stricken waitress that tried to prevent him with a stalling hand from entering the exquisite dining area.

Searching through a sea of faces his sharp eyes finally fell on Rebecca. She looked stunning—No, not stunning; beautiful, hauntingly so. Why had she never dressed like this for him?

Being around more brazen females, Eric couldn't help but notice how modest she dressing for her alleged "Date". Her blouse was far from enticing, the cloth was too loose against her torso with buttons done up to the slope of her swan-like neck, but the illuminating color made her pastel skin glow against the candle light. The dark slacks she wore fitted loosely to her shapely legs.

The musical note of her laughter filled his ears as she laughed at something her traitorous companion said. Just as he began to move toward their table to render Damon into little confetti pieces, Eric found himself halted by a tap on his bare shoulder. Turning his head, he glared down at a very nervous looking waitress as her shaking hand pushed her loose red curls behind her ear.

"Excuse me, sir; you can't be in here without a shirt or shoes." She softly remarked, her blue eyes hesitantly flickering at his nearly bare form.

"Mind your own business." He growled out, before he could take a step a body stepped in his path. Eric's anger filled eyes fell on the owner Paul Delagari. Paul narrowed his dark eyes at Eric like he was bug at a picnic.

"Is there a problem?" his voice growled out, his bear-shifter temper shifting just below the surface.

“Stay out of this, Paul. I came to retrieve something of mine and won’t be leaving without it.” As Eric moved to step around Paul, he moved as the last instant blocking his path. Both males glared at each other in an unspoken battle of dominance.

“I will not have you causing problems in my place, Daniels. Look at yourself; you’re on the verge of shifting in front of over thirty humans. Whatever has you riled up, go shake it off before you retrieve what you’re after.”

Narrowing his eyes, Eric refused to be shoved aside like some submissive pup. “Get out of my way, Paul. Before I make you wish you had.” He growled, no longer fighting to restrain his inner beast.

“If that’s the way you feel, we could always include the elder council. I doubt they’d take kindly to you risking exposure of our kind. I believe a few of them are here tonight.”

Eric’s wolf snapped and growled at the challenging Alpha before him, but Eric knew Paul would follow through on his threat if Eric continued to be an issue. Growling threateningly in the back of his throat, Eric fixed Paul with a killing glare.

“One of these days you won’t be able to hide behind the elders, Paul. And when that day comes I’ll make you sorry for tonight.”

Spinning around, he held his shoulders tight as he exited the way he came. But; not before his eyes found Rebecca again. He nearly went feral at the sight of her red lips curving around a spoon that Damon held out to her, her eyes closing with delight at whatever she’d tasted. Snarling; Eric strode from the restaurant.

This wasn’t over; tonight he’d make that sneaky traitor eat his own heart for even glancing at Rebecca. With that thought in mind, Eric began pacing the parking lot, laying in wait for his unsuspecting prey.

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“Wow.” Rebecca gasped as she licked her lips after Damon had withdrawn his offered spoon from her mouth. “That’s incredible.”

“Told you this place was the best.” Damon grinned as he returned his attention to his plate. “So; tell me about yourself.” he inquired, seeking to spark a conversation with is quite date.

“Trust me there’s nothing remotely interesting about me you’d want to know about.”

“Are you purposely trying to prevent me from getting to know you, Rebecca?” he teased. Rebecca just smiled teasingly as she returned to her dinner. “You don’t want to tell me about yourself? Alright, why don’t we just skip that and cut right to you telling me about how you came to know about my kind?”

Rebecca’s heart stopped dead in her chest as heavy fear settled in her stomach. Forcing her bite of food down her constricting throat, she tried to slow her racing pulse. Looking fearfully at Damon’s smiling face she hesitantly looked around.

“Your kind?” her voice shuddered with apprehension.

His eyes locked, unrelentingly with hers. “You know that I’m a shifter; a werewolf.”

“W-What do you mean? I’m not sure I know what you’re—”

“Come now, Rebecca. Did you really think that such a secret like this would stay secret forever?”

Suddenly feeling like a deer in headlight, her destruction nearing closer and closer. Feeling anxious, she shot him a pleading look. “Are you going to hurt me? Is that why you asked me out? So you could expose what I know?”

Bracing his elbows on the table top, Damon clasped his hands together. “You misunderstand, Rebecca. If I wanted to hurt you, I wouldn’t have chosen to take you to a public place.”

Her heart began to race impossibly faster with fear. “I beg you, at least give me some time to get out of town, I swear I haven’t told a soul—nor will I ever. Please don’t kill me, I haven’t done anything wrong.” her words rushed from her lips coated with icy terror as tears filled her eyes.

Sympathy filling his eyes, Damon reached across the table clasping her hand, though she flinched at his touch. Tears streamed down her cheeks as Damon made soft cooing sounds of comfort while he brushed her fallen tears away.

“Shh. Calm down. No one is going to hurt you, I swear this to you.”

Her breath hitched with emotion. “Then; why did you...?”

“It wasn’t hard to see how you purposely ignored things that others would have questioned. I had to discover how you came by this information, before the others discover what I have. Because trust me, they would kill you without hesitation. If you

confide in me, Rebecca, I swear to you, I will do whatever I can to protect you from others that would seek to harm you.”

“Why?” her red, swollen eyes flashed suspiciously at him. “Why would you care what happens to me?”

Leaning back in his chair, Damon’s face turned very serious for the first time all evening. “I have known Eric all my life, Rebecca. Not once has he shown such protective and possessive emotions toward anyone, until you. Deep down I believe that you are Eric’s true one, he’s just too thick headed to admit it.”

“‘True One’?”

“I’ll explain later, first I need you to tell me everything you know, so I can figure out how to protect you. I’m not sure if you’re aware but half of the people in this place are shifters and many are ruling council members that would end your life with a snap of their fingers.”

“Is it safe to talk here?” her eyes widening with fear.

Nodding slowly, Damon folded his arms over the table. “Tell me.” He pled.

Taking an unsteady breath, closing her eyes, Rebecca took a moment to calm her rattled nerves. Slowly opening her eyes, Rebecca flicked her tongue over her suddenly dry lips. For years she’d dreaded this moment. The moment when a shifter discovered her story and made her paid for it.

“About five years ago, I was home from college on break the night it happened.”

“What happened?” His voice whispered as her eye began to glaze over in memory.

“When I met a monster...”

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Five years earlier

“Mom, you really don’t have to go to all this trouble.” Rebecca insisted frantically as she watched her mom working on; what seemed to be, a five course meal. “I’m only here for a few days. I would be happy with just a simple pizza.”

“Oh, hush.” Mary St. James scolded her daughter with a wave of her elegant hand, “I want to. Besides your father won’t complain about having a full stomach tonight.”

Shaking her head, Rebecca slid from her position on the kitchen bar stool at the kitchen counter. Coming up behind her; Rebecca watched as her mother vigorously stirred the contents of her mixing bowl.

Leaning her hip against the pale green kitchen counter, Rebecca found her eyes shifting out the pitch-black kitchen window. A heavy weight of weariness weighted heavy on her shoulders.

“Anything I can do?”

After the countless hours spend driving from her dorm in New York to her parents home in Ravenwillow, Virginia, more than anything; sleep was taking precedence over food. Not that it would stop her mother from her dominating plans of a large welcome home dinner for her only daughter.

Shaking her head, Mary concentrated on pouring her chocolate cake batter into her prized baking pan. “No. Go visit with your father until I’m done.”

Not bothering to argue, she grabbed her open soda can, left the kitchen, following down the short hallway leading into the family room. There her father sat in his regular seat in the dark leather recliner. His worn eyes rose from his spread out news paper, flickering gently over her face as his thin lips curled into a slight smile.

“Hey baby-girl, what’s your mother up to?”

“Cooking the Christmas feast for the White House.” She mumbled, taking a slip from her cola.

Her father’s hearty chuckled filled the air around them. “Never take a dog’s favorite bone. First rule of women that I learned my first year of marriage, baby-girl, your mother is going to do whatever she plans regardless of what you or I think. Best to just let her be.”

Letting out a deep sigh, she slunk down onto the couch. Tiredly rubbing her eyes, her body relaxed into the plush cushions. As her father went back to his evening ritual of reading his newspaper, they sat in silence, for how long; she didn’t know.

Releasing a tired sigh, Rebecca allowed her head to fall back against the back of the couch. Just as Rebecca had begun to drift off, a loud sound of banging on the front door; startled her awake. Seeing her father struggling to remove himself from under his spread out newspaper, Rebecca quickly rose from her relaxed position.

“I’ll see who it is.”

Walking up to the door, she rose up on her toes and gazed through the peep hole. On the other side of the door stood a tall man that she didn't recognize. His features hidden and shaded in the confines of his dark blue hoodie, his hands were shoved in his jean pockets as he waited. Keeping the chain lock, she leaned against the edge of the door as it opened.

“Can I help you?” his hidden face remained lowered as he remained silent. After receiving no answer, exasperated; she added, “What do you want?”

Slowly the dark hooded face rose. Upon seeing his eyes, her heart froze in fear as lifeless eyes that stared through her glowed with a devilish crimson hue. His lips slowly curled up into a spine-chilling smile, revealing sharp canines. “Just a taste.”

Before Rebecca slam the door closed, his powerful arm shot out, strong clawed fingers wrapped around the edge of the door. Hearing her father approach from behind she struggled to force the door closed. Tightening his grip around the door, Rebecca watched as he used the door as a battering ram into her face. As she was thrown backwards, her body crashing into a near end table and the large ceramic vase that sat on top. Pain exploded throughout her body as the sound of the metal linked chain snapping and hitting the hard wood floor. Screaming voices echoed around her. Struggling to move, the pain slowly made her world turn to darkness.

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The coppery smell of blood slowly drew Rebecca back into consciousness; she coughed as blood from her nose flowed down the back of her throat from her reclined position. Too afraid of what she would find if she opened her eyes. The house was quiet, too quiet. No sound of her mother’s soft humming or the sound of her father moving his newspaper around.

Steeling herself, Rebecca hesitantly opened her eyes. The front door was wide open, confirming that whoever or whatever had come to the door was now inside the house with her. Her heart began to pound faster than the hooves of a race horse. Pulling herself up into a sitting position, her ribs protested painfully at the movement. With much difficulty, using the fallen end table as leverage, she stumbled to her feet. Gasping in pain with her first step as broken pieces of the flowered vase crunched under her bare feet. Cutting and tearing at her tender skin as she carefully felt her way along a near wall in the pitch black room.

With her next step, her foot slid along the cold and damp floor of the hallway. Gripping the side of the entrance way, Rebecca caught herself before she could tumble to the floor again. Moonlight from the kitchen window flowed over the hardwood floor, not a foot away was a sight that caused Rebecca to shove her fist into her mouth to prevent her scream from escaping.

Just beyond the entrance way was long, dark puddle of blood leading from her mother's slashed arm. Her lifeless finger's hung open with her blood splattered palm facing up, the rest of her body hidden down the dark hallway. Before she even realized her tears coursed down her cheeks, the sound of heavy footsteps near her mother's lifeless body had her freezing in terror.

Slowly she edged around the book shelf at her back, hiding her body from view of the entrance way. The small sound of a foot hitting the pool of blood on the floor revealed the killer now stood in the entrance way, just a few feet from her. Slowly looking around for an escape route, she eyes collided with the dark, empty eyes of her father. Sprawled on his back, his blood soaked the floor beneath him leading from the deep clawed slashes along his throat.

This time; she didn't have time to cover her gasp of alarm. Following her cry was the sound of a low rumbling growl and the continuing sound of slow, but steady footsteps, coming closer and closer to her.

Covering her mouth to prevent the rising nausea from the stomach turning smell of blood and death, her eyes quickly swept toward the open door. Could she make it before her parent's killer figured out where she was? Before she could move a muscle, a deep and emotionless voice cut through the dark room, darkly caressing the walls around her.

"Don't run. I would catch you before you could take a single step. I want to take my time with you."

Moving around opposite end of the couch, Rebecca leaned her back against the cream colored fabric, hiding herself from the dark stranger's view as he slowly entered the living room. Several times she heard him sharply inhale, as a predator would while gaining the scent of its prey.

"Come out. I won't hurt you." His voice then turned somewhat gentle as if consoling a frightened animal.

Trembling, Rebecca remained hidden trying to assure herself that she was well hidden as he tried to coax her out into the open. "It doesn't matter, I will find you."

Looking at his reflection in the dark TV screen, she watched as he slowly circled toward the opposite side of the living room, his face turning every which way as his nostrils twitched erratically. Her eyes widened as they dropped to his hands. He held his hand loose at his side; fingers splayed in preparation. His fingers were longer than the average person, baring long and sharp claws. As he moved dark trails of blood dripped onto the floor from the frightening points of his claws.

Her heart pounded with a heavy beat in her chest. She wasn't brave by any means, but even she knew that she couldn't just hide until he found her. She had to run and get help before she ended up like her parents. Sensing her opportunity, her legs glided through the air as she rushed towards the door.

Just a few more steps...Rebecca assured herself.

Her hope was short lived as a large hand tangled in her long hair, jerking her flight to a stop. Sharp claws dug into her scalp as he jerked away from the door, throwing her a short distance away. Landing on her injured side, she cried out. Her hand cover the painful area as she found a large piece of wood from the end table she had crashed into earlier, lodged between her ribs.

As her attacker slowly approached her, rolling onto all fours, she quickly tried to crawl away. She screamed in pain as five sharp claws thrust through the fabric of her shirt and deep into the soft muscle of her shoulder. As he tugged her back, his claws ripped down her back, leaving behind five deep slashes as her blood quickly began soaking her shirt. Grabbing her by her neck, her attacker lifted her entire body off the floor before pinning her to against a nearby book shelf.

"Shh. It's alright." He murmured when she cried in pain and terror as he ran the back of his free bloody hand along her cheek. "This is how it's supposed to be." His lips curled into an almost frightening smile.

"What?" she gasped in fear. Pulling his hand away, he shoved the dark hood away, revealing his dark face to her. Her eyes fell on his with dread. His eyes glowed with a yellow hue as something moved beneath his skin. Suddenly his face seemed more animal, more monster than human. His teeth grew to sharp points as he grinned down at her maliciously.

His lips curled in amusement as he gazed down at the cold body of her father. "You're prey, every single one of you. It's time you vermin accept that."

Beyond terrified, Rebecca struggled against his hand that currently was wrapped around her throat. A loud growl erupted from between his parted lips, making her eyes

go wide in fear at the frightening sound. “Your parents died too quickly. I never got the chance to enjoy their screams. But I am going to take my time with you.” His voice hissed out, his hand tightened around the fragile column of her neck. “I’m going to slice you up into ribbons as you cry for death. But I won’t give it to you too quickly. I want to watch you beg, beg for your miserable life.”

While his dark words dripped from his lips, Rebecca reached behind her, her slender, shaking fingers slid around her father’s silver letter opener. Before she could draw her tightly clenched hand back, he struck. Had it not been for his other hand around her throat she would have fell to her knees. His sharp talons had slashed diagonally across her chest from the left side of her collar bone to the underside of her right breast. His lips curved in satisfaction as he watched her life’s blood began soaking through her the tears of her top.

Flexing his blood coated hand, he prepared to strike again. Not wasting anytime; she lifted her fisted hand, thrusting the letter opener deep into his chest as she could. The feel of the slightly sharp object in her hand embed in his chest made Rebecca sick with revulsion.

Jerking away from her, he released a howl of pain before he turned his anger eyes on her. Wrapping his lethal hand around the handle, he jerked the meager blade from his chest with slight annoyance.

“You’ll pay for that.” He growled low in his throat.

Before he could move, the sound of loud sirens outside the door exploded around them. Sliding to the floor, the pain and the intensity of her injuries suddenly drained all the strength from her. From outside she could hear car doors slamming as someone approached the porch.

“Police! Your neighbors reported sounds of screaming and a struggle, Is anyone hurt?”

Smirking at her, his eyes glowing once more. “This isn’t over.” He promise viscous snarl.

“Last warning! We’re coming in!”

Glaring coldly at him she remained silent, if she was to die it would be on her own terms; not his. “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.” his dark laughter echoed around her. Slowly his body began changing. The sounds of his

bones snapping and reshaping startled her as his face also began reshaping. Until the man no longer stood before her but a large, snarling brown wolf.

As two officers rushed through the open door, their guns and flashlights drawn and pointed. “Shit...” one officer murmured his eyes darting over the bloody carnage in the living room.

“Look out!” the other shouted as the wolf charged past them. Holstering his gun, he knelt beside Rebecca. “Call 911! Now!” he shouted to his partner. As his partner rushed out, the remaining officer tried to give what comfort he could.

“Hang on, we’ll get you help. Hang on...” This time she welcomed the dark unknown that followed part of her prayed never to awaken again.