

'Chocolat' and Chocolate Cake

Lily woke up on Wednesday morning with one thought in her mind—that night she would nally go through her rst shift. An eighteenth birthday was the most important event in werewolves' lives, so it was usually celebrated by the entire pack. Of course, Lily's birthday wasn't going to be treated with the same importance, but she was still excited for the day.

She would have to get through school rst, but after that she would see Amanda, Eli and Bella. She had no idea what they had planned to celebrate her birthday, but she couldn't wait to nd out. There was also the possibility of nding out who her mate was when she shifted that night.

If your mate was already eighteen, their wolf could sense when you were shifting. They could feel your pain through the mate bond, and they would be able to nd you and help you through your rst shift. A werewolf's rst shift was extremely painful and could last the entire night, but if your mate was with you, the shift was easier and quicker to get through.

Lily wasn't sure what to expect that night, because although she wanted a mate, she was nervous that he wouldn't want her. She had been rejected and turned against by almost everyone in her pack, and the thought of having a mate who did the same was unbearable. Lily had been through a lot, but she wasn't sure if she could get through the pain of her mate rejecting her.

The worst kind of pain that a werewolf could go through was when their mate died, which was why her dad had been completely destroyed and forever changed when her mom had been killed. Losing a mate was like losing a part of yourself because the bond between them was so strong and was ingrained in their very souls. The second worst kind of pain though, was when a werewolf was rejected by their own mate. The bond that formed between the two werewolves at the onset of the younger one's rst shift, was ripped apart when they rejected each other, and it created a physical and emotional pain that was apparently excruciating.

Because of that, Lily was terried that her mate wouldn't love her and want her as he should. Her father, brother and even Kyle had all made comments about how even her mate wouldn't be able to love someone like her, so it had been entrenched in her to expect rejection. It was hard to hear something over and over again, and not start to believe it.

Lily tried to push those thoughts aside as she got ready for the day. She tried to be hopeful for what her birthday would bring. Maybe she would nd a mate that would love and cherish her, maybe she would nally feel accepted. One thing she knew for sure was that she was going to have a great day with Amanda, Eli and Bella, so she focused on that instead. She knew that whatever they planned, she would love it. Lily loved spending time with them, so she didn't really mind what they did. She would be grateful just to spend her birthday with the people she loved, even if it was to simply watch movies at their house.

She showered and washed her hair, and wanting to look good for the special day, she put her dried light brown hair into a crown braid. She changed into a pair of high-waisted denim shorts and a white crop top. The bruises from where Kyle had grabbed her throat were purple and obvious, so she covered them with a light mint green scarf. It was a hot day, so the scarf would be uncomfortably warm, but she didn't want to risk Mrs. Montgomery or other teachers seeing them and calling her father.

She nished the outt with a pair of grey ankle boots she had found for ten dollars at her favorite thrift store. She looked in the small mirror over her desk and was glad to see that she looked good—beautiful even. Her green eyes were more cheerful than usual, and the dark circles under them weren't as pronounced as they usually were. The crown braid also emphasized her long neck, and the short loose strands of hair framing her face, gave her a soft and pretty look.

She was happy to see that her brother had left early, so she had the kitchen to herself. Sam went to a community college nearby, and he must have had an early class. Usually Lily couldn't make herself a big breakfast because Sam was always cooking breakfast around the time she had to leave for school, but luckily the kitchen was free for her birthday so she could make herself an omelet.

There was little in the way of vegetables in the fridge, so she settled for cheese and ham for the lling. It had been a while since she had more than a banana or apple for breakfast, so the omelet tasted especially delicious. She made a sandwich for her school lunch, glad she wouldn't have to get something out of a vending machine like she was usually forced to do. Lily cleaned up after herself but left all the dirty dishes her father and brother had left around the kitchen. It was petty, but she wouldn't spend her birthday cleaning up their mess.

After brushing her teeth, she grabbed her school bag and left the house with a full stomach and a smile on her face. The day had started off well and she hoped it would continue that way.

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Nobody at school remembered or cared that she was a year older, which wasn't that surprising, but at least the bullying hadn't been any worse than usual. Jessica had tripped her again when she was leaving her Biology class, and there had been a few mean and catty comments from other students—human and werewolf alike. However, they were the same things Lily had had to deal with for the last nine years, so it was nothing she couldn't handle.

Unfortunately, Kyle must have thought that she had gotten off too easily for the day and decided to humiliate her in front of the entire cafeteria. Lily didn't ever eat in there, but she had to walk through the cafeteria to get to the tables and benches that were outside near the school elds. Very few people ate out there, so most of the time she could enjoy her lunch in peace.

Lily was walking through the lunchroom, on her way to the exit doors that led outside, when Kyle stepped in front of her. She tried to walk around him, but he put his arm out in front of her to stop her from leaving.

"Where do you think you're going Mutt?" he sneered at her. "You don't feel like spending your birthday alone do you?" he said loudly, getting the attention of the cafeteria.

Lily was taken aback by the fact that he knew it was her birthday, but with the way he was looking at her, she couldn't be glad that he had remembered it. Besides, his actions on Monday had seemed to remove her crush from him permanently and replaced it with fear. His blonde hair and blue eyes usually gave him a cute surfer look, but now, with him towering over her looking at her menacingly, he looked anything but cute—he looked dangerous.

"I just want to go outside," she said quietly, hoping he might just let her by.

"Are you sure? I mean surely you have some friends you can eat lunch with. Even a mutt like you has friends, right?" he said cruelly, knowing full well that she didn't have anyone at the school who she could call a friend.

The students in the cafeteria laughed, obviously enjoying Kyle's mocking of Lily. She had to ght the tears from forming and the embarrassment from his words, and their laughter made her cheeks redden. Luckily, Kyle didn't stop her as she moved past him this time, and she ran to the exit doors with his scornful laugh ringing after her.

She blinked back her tears, hating Kyle for being able to affect her so intensely. He always managed to cut her with his words, leaving her feeling dejected and gutted. She wished he no longer had that effect on her, especially after the way he had hurt her on Monday, but it was clear that he would always have the ability to destroy her with his words.

She ate her sandwich alone, feeling the absence of other people at her table now that Kyle had pointed out her lack of friends. She had grown used to eating lunch alone and having no friends at the school, but it didn't mean that she liked it. It was hard to have no friends in a place where she spent so many hours of her day. After lunch, her day didn't feel so great anymore, but she kept on reminding herself that she would be seeing her favorite people in the world soon enough. It was the only thing that got her through the rest of the school day without bursting into tears like she wanted to.

Her mood lifted as soon as she walked out of the school building to nd Amanda's car in the parking lot. Amanda, Eli and Bella were all sitting in the car waiting for her, and when she saw them, she felt so lucky to have them in her life.

She skipped to the car, everything that had happened in the school leaving her mind, as Eli and Amanda got out of the car to greet her. Lily had waited until most people had already gone before leaving the school building. She didn't want to risk Kyle or any of her pack mates seeing them. It was hard to hide how close she was to the family, but they did their best to keep it under the radar and keep Alpha Mason's attention off of them.

When they were out together, they only went to restaurants that werewolves typically didn't frequent. It was easier than you would think because werewolves tended to all go to the same few restaurants in town. On the rare occasion that they were spotted by their pack mates, they could always explain it away as Amanda and Eli treating her to a meal for babysitting Bella.

"Hey," Lily greeted them cheerfully.

"Happy birthday, sweetheart," Amanda said as she pulled Lily in for a long hug.

"Hey birthday girl," Eli greeted her, pulling her into a side-hug once his wife had released her.

"Happy birthday!" Bella cheered from the car, making Lily's smile even wider.

"Hey Pumpkin." Lily reached through the open car window and rued Bella's hair affectionately.

"Did mom and dad tell you that we're going to go bowling?" the small girl asked when they were all in the car.

"No, they didn't," Lily replied with a chuckle. "That sounds like fun," she said enthusiastically.

They hadn't gone bowling in years, but from what she could remember, Eli was ridiculously good at it. Thank goodness her right hand wasn't the one that was broken, otherwise she wouldn't have been able to play. As it was, she would struggle a bit and would probably lose, but at least she would be able to take part. She had seen Amanda and Eli's attention icker to the cast on her hand, but they obviously didn't want to spoil the mood and her day by bringing it up. They knew it was her father, but there was absolutely nothing they could do to help her especially since it would mean putting Bella at risk if they angered their Alpha.

"Afterwards we'll go back to the house and order Chinese," Amanda added. "We've got your favorite movie waiting for you."

"Chocolat?" she asked. The movie had been her favorite since the rst time she had watched it two years ago.

"Yep. We might just fall asleep watching it, but we'll try to get through it for you," Eli said teasingly.

"Oh shut up! Chocolat is a great movie and you know it," she scolded him.

"Eh it's a little too artsy for my taste," he replied.

"Well too bad Mr. has to have explosions and car chases to be a good movie. You'll just have to suffer through it."

"That might be a bit too long to be his new nickname," Amanda joked.

"Nah, I think it's got a nice ring to it," Lily said with a laugh.

Eli and Lily debated the merits of non-action movies the whole way to the bowling alley, but she was no closer to convincing him that a movie didn't need gun ghts to be considered good.

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Two rounds of bowling later, Lily had learnt that Eli was probably the most obnoxious winner in the world. He was doing a victory dance after winning the second game, just like he had the rst. Bella and Lily were laughing at the man's ridiculous dancing, but Amanda was glaring at her husband grumpily. Amanda was as sore a loser as her husband was a winner.

"I am the champion!" Eli cheered loudly, making Lily laugh harder.

She didn't even care that she hadn't won the game—watching Eli pump his st into the air like he was Rocky was better entertainment than winning would have been.

"Yeah, yeah," Amanda said glumly.

"Daddy stop making mom mad," Bella scolded her father.

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry, honey. You know I love you," he said to his wife, gazing at her in adoration.

They were so sweet, and Lily couldn't help but feel a little bit jealous of their relationship. She desperately hoped that whoever her mate may be, he would look at her with that same adoring gaze. Her rst shift would start in a few hours, so if her mate was somewhere close by, she might be able to nd that love soon. The thought sent excitement and anticipation through her body.

She was still thinking about the possibility of meeting her mate as they piled into the car and drove to Amanda and Eli's house. It was an adorable cottage-like house that Lily had always thought looked homey and cute.

"I'll order the Chinese food," Eli said, when they were inside. "What does everyone want?"

"Sweet and sour chicken for me," Amanda replied.

"Can I have that yummy one with all the veggies?" Bella asked.

"Vegetable Chow Mein for Bella," Eli acknowledged. "And you, Lily?"

"Can I have the same as Bella, please?" she asked politely.

"Of course. I'll call in the order. You guys can go set up the movie so long," he said.

The three girls went to the living room and Amanda turned on the tv and selected Chocolat from the Apple Tv library. Lily sat down on the couch and Bella hopped up and put her head in Lily's lap like she always did when they watched movies. Lily stroked Bella's hair while they waited for Eli to nish ordering. Amanda pressed play when her husband walked into the room and settled himself next to her on the second couch.

Lily was so engrossed in the movie, that she didn't even notice the doorbell ringing or Eli getting up to grab the food. She thanked him when he handed her the meal though. They carried on watching the movie as they ate and when it was over, they took their leftovers to the kitchen.

"Lily, won't you take Bella to the dining room for a second," Amanda asked her.

"Umm, yeah okay," Lily replied, a bit confused.

She did as asked and sat at the table with Bella. A minute or two later, Amanda and Eli entered the room singing 'Happy Birthday'. Amanda placed a chocolate cake with lit candles on it in front of Lily, while Bella joined in the singing. Lily felt tears with lit eyes, but this time they were happy tears. She felt so lucky to have these three people in her life.

She blew out the candles when the song was over and wished for the only thing that she needed besides the family she had in that room—a mate who loved her.