

A mistake

July 17, 2007

Mistake made

Call it weakness. Call it being human. Call it what you will. Everyone makes mistakes. And sometimes those mistakes come back around to bite the one who made them. Of course this time, there are a few elements which don't fit into the usual human mistake category. The nature of the mistake should be enough to give both of the unusual elements away. In this case, the mistake was a bite.

Still shaking, Darian closed his apartment door and sunk to the floor, sliding down the old wood. Absently, he reached up and snicked the lock on the handle.

"I can't believe I did that!"

No one answered him. As of course no one should, considering that the apartment was empty. And messy.

“Ah well,” Darian mumbled, brushing his whirling emotions aside and beginning to pull himself to his feet. “At least I’m set for a little while.”

A quick reach turned on the lights, and another dropped his keys to the table next to the door. Darian stumbled to the bathroom and looked at himself in the mirror. Even though he could see no signs, he still turned on the tap and rinsed his face. A shiver went through him. Part of it was the elation of doing what he did. Part of it was the horror of losing control. He shouldn’t have done it!

Taking a deep breath, Darian closed his eyes. Opening them, he set his hands on the sides of the sink and stared himself down in the mirror.

“You can’t go back there. You hear me! That was stupid,” Darian shook his head. “You’ve gotta find a stable source.”

He held his own stare for a few moments to make sure the words settled in. Sure he meant it. And sure, he hadn’t exactly wanted to slip up tonight.

“No, that’s not being honest. You wanted to do what you did. You just know better! There. Better. Be honest with yourself Darian.”

With a nod of his head, Darian left the bathroom and grabbed a glass from the dish rack. Filling it with water from the kitchen sink startled a few palmetto bugs back down into the drain. The water settled his nerves a little. He checked the clock, then headed towards the bedroom.

“Maybe I’ll actually sleep tonight?” He hoped so. Darian had to be to work at six in the morning to start his delivery route. Which meant that if he got to sleep now, he’d have nearly 4 hours more sleep than he’d gotten in

almost a week. Tough to sleep through a night when you're hungry.

Setting the nearly empty glass on the upside down milk crate, Darian sunk down onto the bare mattress. A few moments had his shoes off. He almost took off the shirt, but caught a hint of perfume. The chill thoughts of the evening's conclusion flooded back to him.

Struggling to push the sense of dread aside, Darian fell asleep. Thoughts of the dark haired beauty ran through his dreams and he did not get the best rest. After all, it was his mistake.

Morning run

Darian rolled out of bed after the second snooze cycle, putting his hand through the bottom of the crate and sending the glass flying. With a grumble, he acknowledged that the glass hadn't broken. Perhaps a good sign. And he still had enough time for a quick shower and trek across town to pickup the morning's deliveries.

Less than ten minutes later, Darian was wheeling his bike down the stairs, helmet unstrapped but balanced on his head. Seven landings later, and he tore off into the near empty streets. An hour later and he'd be kicking off of cars and fighting for space. A job as a runner was brutal. But he didn't mind the work. And he didn't have to worry as much as his fellow runners about getting tapped by the plastic fenders and mirrors. He'd heal. They'd break.

Darian made it to work faster than usual. The morning air felt good for a change. And the man felt alive. As he set the bike against the door frame of the receiving room and looked at the punch card machine, it hit him. Of course he was feeling better than usual. Blood will do that to you. Blood of the strong will make it even better. Blood of that girl defiantly made things better.

He slumped against the wall and sighed. Why did he have to be so weak! Maybe if he'd have asked her first... But then he would have had to explain why. She was just so tempting. Strong and wholesome. So he bit her. Something one should never do.

"Yo! Darian! Ya gonna clock in or just stand there feeling sorry for yourself?" Darian looked up as his boss wheeled in his chair. Bernie lost the use of his legs to bus a few years ago. "Come on kid. You're early, so you get the long runs first. Twelve pickups and three drop offs."

Darian stepped over and reached out for the pack of slips. Bernie snatched it away as soon as his fingers touched the paper. "Not until ya clock yerself in."

"Sorry," Darian whined.

"Rough night kid? Girl problems?" Bernie asked while Darian found his card and ran it through the old clock. He set it back punched before responding.

"You could say that."

"Well, if you wanna talk about it; I've probably been through it."

Darian gave Bernie a critical stare. Yeah. Sure. You've been through this. Nope. "It's okay Bernie. As long as I don't run into her again, it should be okay."

Bernie gave a laugh that rocked his chair back and forth. "Must have been some mistake then? Huh Darian? Get going so you can get off early and get to class."

Nodding grimly for two reasons, Darian grabbed the first pack and tossed it on. Moments later he was settling into the pace that would get him across town on his aging Fisher in about forty minutes. Two reasons. First, it was the second worst mistake any vampire can make. Once you start hunting, really hunting, there's little chance to come back from it. It consumes you like fire to oil soaked wood. Second, it wasn't class he'd been going to in the afternoons. It was a second job.

He wouldn't have had to take it if he'd not used the money from his parents this semester to pay for classes. Ironical, of course. Taking a job, rather than going to class. And if you hadn't paid for the classes, you could go to them. Darian would try and play it off when he saw his parents over the summer. If he saw them that was. Going to be kind of hard to hide being a vampire to the people who raised you.

Darian tried to get his mind off the situation and back on the ridding. Traffic was starting to build to the morning rush hour. And some of his pickups weren't places he'd been before. Darian was usually never up early enough to do this route.

It was tougher than usual, pushing aside the wreck of his life. Blood cost money. He didn't want to be a vampire. Hadn't had much choice in it. That or die. And after two months death looked to be his life. They guy who turned him tossed a card his way from a fish shop on the east side. Finally Darian checked it out and got the price list. The price list for little bags of red stuff. Take the mark-up for medical equipment and supplies, then jack that up by a factor of four, and you have an idea how much the little baggies cost.

And there you have it. No money, two jobs, skipping class, and hungry.

Darian had to make a quick move to the sidewalk to avoid an sewer drain. Just as quickly, he hopped back down to the street. A car tire would make it over that hole, but not his knobbies. And sidewalks were worth a \$90 ticket if a cop saw you. Try telling that to the cars that think you should be up there with the pedestrians. And then pass them at the next stop light.

So why did you go to that pool hall last night Darian? Were you hunting? Be honest.

Not really. Honest. Darian went to get a drink and play a little pool. Something he'd not done at all sense coming back this semester. Bernie and the group went, and he decided to tag along. They left him to finish up on the table by himself. He could have gone with them to the club, but he couldn't pay for the cover. Darian literally ran into this sweet raven haired girl. Somehow they got talking and somehow he was walking her to her car. Something about going to the jazz club near campus.

And then he was kissing her neck. And she was pushing away. Next thing he knew, his teeth caught on her skin. A part of him screamed to stop. But he sunk his teeth in, sipped her strong blood. And fled.

Hunter. Coward.

What if she called the cops? What if they asked about the pool place? Darian had been there for almost two hours. Sure, his name wasn't on the table. But Bernie had paid for it with his card. It would take them one phone call to get him.

So, did biting someone count as aggravated assault, or battery? How about sucking their blood while you were at it. Cannibalism? Heck, it was L.A. after all. Vampirism is probably in the books. Something he'd have to google for later.

Maybe she wouldn't say anything. Wouldn't it be rather difficult to say tell someone that some guy you were trying to pickup just sucked your blood and left you in the parking lot?

Darian took care of the first two stops. Both pickups from law firms. The next was a brokerage. A quick five minute zigzag three streets over brought him to a signature drop off and at least a five minute wait for the documents to be copied and returned to him. Then he spun off to a few stores. A design firm passed him a heavy package.

"Plates," said the manager. She frowned "They should have been out two days ago. Hope you guys get them there by close today."

"Don't worry ma'am," he replied, packing them away safely in his pack.

Darian shivered and pulled aside to get out the seventh stop, a drop off slip. He'd forgotten the street number in his musing. The number settled into the front of his mind, and he located it by sight halfway down the current block. Darian stopped back onto the pedals and hopped back off the curb behind a Jeep.

What would be worst? Being brought in on charges for his mistake? Or running into the girl again?

The very thought of seeing her again sent shivers along his spine. And at the same time terrified him.

Darian wheeled into the music store and set his Fisher against the counter.

"Dropping off. Need a signature from the manager," Darian said to the pair of clerks. One was yawning for coffee and the other was sitting cross legged on the floor polishing a horn.

"Hang on a second," said the kid, still in full yawn. After taking a breath, he picked up the nearest phone and tapped a few buttons. "Jerry, get up here. A delivery for you...." He hung up the handset and looked down at the bike. "You ever heard of a kick stand? That's going to leave rubber marks on the wood."

"You ever seen a kick-stand tension spring break while riding? That tends to leave a mark on the concrete. A red one." Darian snapped back. Blood was obviously still on his mind.

A large man stamped up the stairs towards the back of the store and walked forward carrying a box of supplies. He set them on the counter and

noddod to the clerk. “Go ahead and start stocking these reeds.” The man turned to Darian, taking in the unstrapped helmet, offending bike and sweat. “Can I help you?”

“Delivery. Need a signature.”

“They could have signed for it,” he huffed. “Darn shipping and receiving clerk didn’t show up for work this morning and we have a tone of stuff to get out today.” He accepted the folder and signature form. Signing with a flourish, he passed the form back and kept the hardened folder. Darian heard him cursing as he took off through the door. Sometimes they do that. Probably an unexpected bill. It was always fun to deliver some of those late “pay now or else” notices from firms.

The last few stops all seemed routine. But the whole route was fresh for Darian. Defiantly good to get a change of scene. Feeling good again, he pedaled hard back to the shop. If he made it back early enough, Bernie may even give him an extra route for the morning. Not likely that. He could always hope for someone to call in sick.

Darian got back just after nine. Which gave him an hour and a half to get to his next job. It could be worse. The first one he’d applied for was cutting fish in the markets. This one was as a prep cook for a rather bad restaurant. At least he would smell better when the day was done.

Bernie watched him punch out and began going through his bag for the packages. Darian waved at him and then rolled out. No cops yet. Which didn’t make thinking about being caught any easier on him for the rest of

the uneventful day.

Coming around

Somehow Darian was early again the next morning. So Bernie passed him the first lot and wished him well. The older man looked to be sporting a hangover. Or wasn't at least fully himself since he ran into two walls on his way across the place.

"Any better today kid?"

"No," Darian replied.

"Me weighter. Take care," Bernie finished, spinning around and pushing off back towards the front. Darian went through the stack. A few more this morning; so he'd have to hustle. That music store had a pickup. Looks like they got their business together and already had a reply. He'd pick them almost first since all the other drops were farther in.

"Hey Bernie! These guys don't open till 8."

"The music shop? They said to come in the back door. People down in the basement get there at 6:30. Better move Darian."

He nodded and kicked his pedals around and pushed off through the open doors. A few of the other runners were just arriving. One girl had a nice old trek that he'd been eyeing. Something about those old steel frames that he liked. The aluminum framed bikes were pervasive now. But they felt dead and rigid. Steel was much more alive. The nodded at each other in passing.

The traffic was slightly worse this morning. Probably the threat of rain later in the afternoon got everyone up a bit earlier. At least he was getting paid tomorrow. Which would give him just enough to cover rent and one week's supply of blood. What he would do for the other three weeks was a different story.

Welcome to the life of a vampire. Please don't step on the carpet.

Darian pulled up to the music store and pushed his Fisher through the door. Or tried to. It was locked. The lights were off.

"Probably no one down stairs either," Darian mumbled. Wheeling his bike around he walked down the parking lot along the side of the building to find the back entrance. It pushed open at his touch, and he set the bike just inside the door.

"Yes?" Asked someone from behind a shelf unit filled with parts.

"Pickup. Bernie's Couriers."

"Through there," he gestured with a brass tube. "She'd in."

Darian took the offered direction and began walking down a long hall to the other side of the store. He could hear something playing from the general direction. That Russian piece with the cannons at the end. Pushing the door open just past the stairs, he froze. Dark hair. Very familiar dark hair sitting at a desk next to a large roll door.

The woman stood up from the chair, locked eyes with him and suddenly moved towards the door. A moment later she had a bat in her hand and took three steps towards him. Darian couldn't move. The bat struck him

on the temple and sent him to the floor. On instinct, he grabbed the bat on the second swing and wrenched it from her hands. She stumbled back and banged against the desk, knocking some papers around.

“You!”

Darian didn’t reply, he just stared at the bat dumbfounded, and trying to clear his head. The last thing he expected her to do was laugh. When she did, he became even more confused.

“You bit me!”

After a sigh, Darian opened his mouth. But before he could talk, she took over.

“You freakin bit me. The hell were you thinking. Are you some sort of nut? What are you doing here?” when she asked the last, her hands went to her neck. He didn’t fail to notice she was wearing a shirt with a rather high neckline.

“Pickup,” he said, holding out the slip of paper. The bat was still in his other hand. She didn’t move.

“Courier? Oh,” with weary glance at him, she sat against the desk. “We’re not done yet with what you did the other night.

Darian swallowed, “Look, Amalie right?” she nodded. “I’m sorry. I kind of...”

“Lost control?”

Darian nodded.

“What were you on? Weed? Illusion that you’re a vampire or something?”

See, there's just no telling anyone. They think there's no such thing.

"Something like that," Darian mumbled.

"Then why aren't you bleeding? I really nailed you with the bat."

Darian paled. She had. It hurt, but not much. The strength of her blood from the other night was pushing away the last of the pain already.

"I have two brothers. You're a lot stronger than you should be."

"Just didn't hit me very hard."

"Yes I did. And then you stripped the bat out of my hands like I was a two year old with tooth brush. Like the other night when you grabbed me. I ..."

"About that. I'm really sorry. Like I said," his gut was tying itself in knots. "You didn't um.."

"Call the cops?" Amalie shook her head. Then she got a weird look on her face. "It didn't really hurt. Just more of a surprise."

Darian almost fell apart all over again. Since he was already half sitting against the wall, there wasn't very far for him to sink.

"I've got to get back to work," Amalie almost smiled, "and I'm sure you do too." She fished a package off the top of a stack on the desk. "The law firm sent a return envelope for Bernie's."

Darian slowly stood up, and took a tentative step towards her. He could feel the draw of her from half way across the room. It muddled his already soupy mind. Darian reached for the package and saw Amalie eyeing the bat.

Here he was, a guy that literally attacked her two nights ago, alone with

her in a quiet office with the door closed. With a bat in his hand. He passed her the bat. "Sorry," he mumbled. She bit her lip. Darian turned and made his feet move towards the door.

"Hang on," Amalie said. Darian turned to see her scratching a number on the back of a business card. She stepped across the room and passed it to him. It had her number on the back. Darian raised an eyebrow.

"Not quite what I expected," he said.

Amalie smiled and shrugged. "Call me. We're not through with this yet."

Darian nodded.

"Maybe I kind of liked it," Amalie said as he turned again and stepped out of the room. Darian swallowed and kept walking. Okay. That defiantly didn't go as expected.

Darian some how made it through the rest of the day. He kept thinking back to that smile and shrug. It haunted him. The restaurant job, usually a complete distraction since he would do crap work for half a day, did nothing to set his thoughts aside.

So the first inclination that passed around his head when Darian closed his apartment door behind him was directed towards the phone sitting across the room next to the couch. Which was when he realized he'd just walked up seven flights of stairs without checking the mail. Figures.

Darian set the bike in its usual spot leaning against the wall. He wasn't kidding about the whole kick-stand thing. They were dangerous. The first thing he'd done when buying the Fisher was have the shop tear off the thing.

Another reminder to check the mail. He still hadn't paid off that credit card. It was about time for the bill to show up.

A glass of water and a seat later, Darian looked at the business card Amalie had given him. A generic one for the music store. No person's name, just a blank line.

"What are my chances here?" he asked himself.

Chances of what exactly? That someone would let you nip them occasionally? That they might like it? Or that you could have a friend at all in your current state of change.

"One way or another, it's more of a chance than I had last week."

Darian picked up the phone.