

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter 1

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"There's nowhere you can go that I won't find you. You are mine. You will always be mine and I will plant my seed inside of you, so that you will never be free."

The words of a monster that is sometimes a man.

DRAVEN

When I got off the train at the Port Orchard Station, the first thing I noticed was the thick fog surrounding the town. Like wisps of smoke in a heavy blanket, branching like arms from a single cloud, it stretched everywhere. Wrapping around the evergreen trees and up along the mountainside. Settling over the ocean shore and the docks of Port Orchard, Washington.

The sky above loomed a deep gray despite that it was mid-afternoon, and a fine sprinkling of rain danced in the air. It was beautiful, and now, it was my home.

I had applied for a job at one of the few bars in town while I was still living in Florida. I'd been saving for the last three years awaiting the day I would finally disappear from Miami, forever. About two weeks ago, I got my chance. And I took it.

Then again, not sure if you would call what I was doing before, living. I guess, it was more like existing.

And...

Suffering.

Shrugging off the memories of the people I left behind, I step onto the mildly crowded street. Port Orchard wasn't the largest of towns, but for whatever reason there were a lot of people out on the streets. Picturesque shops line the block I am on, with towers of old-style cottage homes climbing up the hillsides behind it. To my right, I could see the fresh fish market near the docks and to my left, a bustling marketplace full of charming townsfolk selling their wares.

Lovely.

I had studied the map of this city on my phone before I busted it to smithereens, back in Miami. I was happy to see the pictures of this place were pretty accurate. Online it

looked like a virtual heaven. For someone wanting to escape into rain and fog, it seemed perfect. The reality did not disappoint.

Hiking my backpack up higher on my shoulder I head toward the docks in the direction of my new place of employment.

The Moonlight Lounge sounded fancy, but I knew it wouldn't be. Not for the wages they were offering. Besides, this was not a town riddled with ritzy cars, and boujee customers. When I applied over the internet at the library in Miami, I didn't really think I would get the job. It was just one long shot hope in a string of long shot hopes that I had been fantasizing over.

Ironically, this position came with an apartment located above the establishment. Two birds with one stone there, so of course, it was the highest on my wish list. The owner wanted someone who could not only bartend but serve as kind of a live-in caretaker of the place. So naturally, it was perfect for someone like me. Someone who didn't exactly want her name on any lease.

Though, I may have '*accidentally*' checked the box marked male as opposed to female, and the offer I received *was* addressed to a Mister Draven Piccoli, I wasn't going to correct this miscommunication until I arrived. Which is what I was about to do now. Not many caretakers are ever female. Now, all that is left to do is pray my employer might overlook my little slip up and let me stay.

If not? Well, then I'd hold up in a motel or something until I found employment elsewhere. Now that I am here, like actually here, I am completely charmed by the mysterious aura surrounding the location. Now, I want this to be my home.

Glancing up at the neon sign flashing Moonlight Lounge in a modern font of purple lettering, I take a deep breath and push inside.

The bar is clean and mostly empty. Not completely unusual for bars at this time of day. The dim lighting and retro leather interior give the place an almost mafia vibe. Stepping further inside toward the long wooden bar, I pull off my hood and glanced around.

My eyes catch on the table in the far corner, closest to the tinted front windows. There are three men seated there and each of them look up the moment I walk in. One of them stiffens, sitting up to glare at me as I stare back.

My chest constricts. My heart thumping in my ears. For a moment, it is as if I recognize him. As if I KNOW him, but that is impossible.

He is extraordinarily handsome, with dark red-brown hair in a short ponytail and eyes the color of burned coal. Deep and gray and... somewhat penetrating. The other two men appear more basic, and not nearly as intimidating as the first. Nothing special there, just a couple of muscle-bound dumdums with bad attitudes.

Their eyes shift toward me, all of them sneering. I lift my chin and look away, secretly hoping that one of the three is not the owner.

Fuck you too, fellas.

Turning my attention back to the bar, I ring the little bell next to the cash register, hoping it might catch the attention of whoever is in the back.

A tall, burly man who appears too young to be the owner, comes bounding through the swinging double doors behind the counter. Sporting a scruffy brown beard and a head full of hair to match, he too, appears to be overly built and impossibly muscular. The guy's mouth twitches upward as he checks me out. His gaze roving over me from my head to my toes and then back again. Kind blue eyes narrow slightly when they catch on my backpack.

"Can I help you, little lady?" He asks with a smile.

I nod, "Are you Bartlett?"

Cleaning a tumbler with a terry cloth rag he pulled from the shelf, he nods. "I am. Who might you be?"

Here it is. The moment of truth.

"I'm Draven Piccoli. I'm supposed to start work today."

Bartlett tenses, his eyes falling toward the table in the corner, then shifting back to me. "No. You can't be. Draven is supposed to be a-a man."

I sigh, stepping closer to the bar to take a seat. "No, Draven is supposed to be the caretaker slash bartender. Why does it matter what sex 'Draven' might be?"

Bartlett chuckles. "Because the Draven I hired needs to know how to bounce people out of a bar and lift at least a hundred pounds. HE needs to be able to handle a gun in the wee hours of the morning on the night of a full moon. And you? YOU don't look like him."

"I can lift a hundred pounds," I argue, with a quirky smile. "Maybe not too many times in one day, but I can lift it."

I try to put a bit of pleading in my voice, hoping that I can play the cute card and he might buy in.

Shaking his head and setting a tumbler of amber liquid in front of me he whispers, "Have yourself a drink babydoll, and then be on your way. I apologize for any

inconvenience this may have caused you, but I'm not in the market for any sexy caretaker."

I frown. Damn it. I knew this might happen, so why am I now so disappointed?

My eyes fill with tears that I'm careful not to let dry. I think I'm probably gonna need to shed a few to get my way. They are already burning with the thought of the struggle this is about to present for me. Maybe I can find a job as a waitress. Or maybe, there might be a strip joint in town, and I can apply there. Strip clubs never turn down a fresh face - believe me, I would know.

Seeming to notice my discomfort, Bartlett leans in closer to me. "Just how far did you travel to get here sweetheart?"

Meeting his eyes and blinking back my tears, just for effect, I grant him a wavering smile. "Far enough."

He sighs. "I'm sorry to hear that. I can't help you."

Shit.