

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two

DRAVEN

"Right." I nod, choking back the disappointment I so willingly set myself up for. "Thanks."

Taking the drink in hand, I begin to sip the burning liquid. Savoring the flavor of failure before heading out into the rain. I watch Bartlett as his eyes trail behind me toward the guys in the back corner booth. A minute or two passes as I focus on finishing my drink. When I am done, not only am I feeling a bit better, but a bit braver.

"There wouldn't happen to be a strip joint anywhere in town, would there?" I ask, handing him back his tumbler.

His hand freezes just before taking the glass. Swallowing thickly, he shrugs. "Yes, there is."

A nearly inaudible growl sounds from somewhere in the room and I turn around, confused, scanning the place for pets.

Nope, no dogs anywhere.

I catch the stare of the man in the back booth. He's still glaring at me, and I have to resist the urge to flip him off. Rolling my eyes, I spin back around to face Bartlett.

"Could you tell me where it is? I need to find a job as soon as possible and I don't have a phone - so no GPS."

"Uh-yeah. I could but-um, I don't think that's the right crowd for a classy gal like yourself." He studies me carefully, tapping his fingers on the bar as if fighting with the urge to change his mind.

This is good! You know you want to help me! Come on, just say yes!

I shrug, "You have to start somewhere, right? A girls got to do what a girls got to do, even if it means dancing for chips." Then, getting up from the barstool I wave a quick goodbye. "Sorry for the misunderstanding, if you'll just point me in the direction of the strip club I'll be on my way."

He sighs again, lowering his head. "It's just past the docks, then about half a mile west," he says, and I nod.

Taking my first step toward the exit, I turn around and ram right into Mister Ponytail from the corner table. My hands push against his massive chest, and I shiver at the heat coming off of him.

Holy mother...

"Excuse me," I say in a whisper, trying to step around him. But he doesn't let me, grabbing my arm to hold me in place.

Sparks.

A tingling of awareness passes through me with his touch. My gaze freezes on his hand, a moan of pleasure tickles at the back of my throat. His grip gentles, but he doesn't let go.

"You won't be getting hired there either," he says with a smirk. My eyes lift toward his. His voice is deep and rich with arrogance. "You don't have what it takes to work there," he says haughtily.

Cheeks flaming, I stepped back from the idiot. Shaking his hand off my elbow, I say sweetly, "Oh really? How would you know?"

He loses his smile, glowering at me with disapproval then punching one fist lightly into his palm in irritation. "Because I own it."

He owns a stirp club? This man?!

Well of course he does. Don't all assholes though?

"Your loss then," I retort, crossing my arms over my chest.

I know I'm not ugly. I'm actually pretty damn hot. I consider myself a ten - hell yeah I do. This stupid motherfucker should too. Not to mention that God just so happened to bless me with a fat round ass and a killer rack, thank you very much, so whatever bullshit this guy was slanging, I wasn't buying.

Turning back around to face Bartlett, I'm met with sorrowful eyes. He feels bad about this, I can tell. So, I lay it on him. Not giving a fuck anymore.

"Look, I know it was messed up for me to lie on the application. Truth be told, I knew you wouldn't hire me if I told you I was female. But I needed to get out of there! I was desperate." Then, I pause, allowing the tears that threatened to spill over moments ago, to finally come. "I still am."

Bartlett hisses with guilt, his gaze floating upward and behind me to where Mister Ponytail still stands. I can feel the heat of the prick up against my back and strangely enough, it is oddly comforting.

No, no Dre! No unhealthy crushes allowed.

"Just go back where you came from, Draven," Mister Ponytail hisses in my ear.

"I can't," I whisper, shaking off the tingles I felt with his use of my name and wiping my pitiful, fruitless, tears in the process.

"Why not?" One of the others from the table - a tall well-built male with pale blond hair asks. Walking up to take part in our little convo, he takes his place on my left.

Shrugging pathetically, I stare at him. "I-I just can't. I was lucky to get out when I did." And that was the truth.

"What are you running from?" The third guy, a chocolate skinned male with light brown eyes asks.

Turning around, I noticed the three of them are now effectively blocking my path to the great outdoors. They have me trapped and I am beginning to feel a little uneasy.

I'm a stranger in a bar, with four muscle bound meatheads. None of which I know. Mama would be so proud.

I decide a little more of the truth can't hurt. "My stepfather." And his son - I leave out.

Mister Ponytail's dark gray eyes light with fire. The chiseled muscles of his well-shaven jaw clenching. "Stepfather?" He chuckles. "How old are you, twelve? Where's your mom?"

I lift my chin in defiance. These idiots don't deserve to know a damn thing about my mother. "She's dead. Now, if you'll please excuse me, I'll be on my way."

But they don't move.

That's it, where did I stash my mace?

"Domonic," Bartlett reasons. "Let the poor girl through."

Mister Ponytail shakes his head just barely. I hear Bartlett sigh in exasperation behind me and I tense for whatever might come next.

So that's his name, huh? Domonic. Figures that even his name is sexy.

Looking down at me, Domonic's brow furrows. "What does your stepfather want with you? You're clearly old enough to live your own life."

I glare at him, putting as much ice in my green eyes as I can muster. "Not your business, now please move."

Instead of granting me access to the outside the way I want him to, he places both arms out to grip the counter behind me. Now caging me in, are a pair of the sexiest forearms that I have ever had the pleasure of looking upon. The golden tan of his skin flexes with muscle and I follow each line of them up over his biceps to his strong wide shoulders. A hint of blue-black ink peeks out at me from the collar of his t-shirt and I shudder. The image of his smooth naked skin draped in tattoos, causing my insides to boil and my brain to fizz out.

Bringing my eyes further upward, I give him a pleading look. Trying for the apologetic high road. "I'm sorry I came here and interrupted - whatever - little meeting you guys had going here. I'm sorry I wasted Bartlett's time by lying on the application. I honestly came here in hopes of a fresh start. Apparently, I chose the wrong town. So please, Domonic, get out of my way."

His muscles flex again with my use of his name, but he still didn't move - just stared down at me.

This shit is getting weirder by the second and now all I want to do is leave.

I decide to insult him - *because clearly, that's what's gonna fix things* and I say, "Do you want to hurt me, Domonic? Is that why you won't move?"

His body jerks as if I just slapped him and he releases the counter to take a large step back. Shaking his head, he sneers down at me. "Come on boys," he says to his friends. "Let's get out of here." Then, looking back at me with the strangest sort of sadness in his eyes, he says, "The last train out leaves in an hour. If I were you, I would be on it."

Well you're not me, asshole!

Then, just like that, the three of them leave.

I let my breath out in a whoosh and speak without turning around. "Thanks anyway, Bart."

I've taken two measly steps when I hear him shout, "Wait a minute."

I grin to myself before schooling my features and facing him with the look of a desperate orphan. "Yeah?"

Closing his eyes briefly, he curses at himself. "I'm probably gonna get my ass kicked for this but what the hell?" He smiles at me, his eyes flashing with amusement. "I happen to have an opening for a sexy bartender, and a vacant apartment upstairs. The rent is real, real, cheap."

My mouth curves upward in a wicked smile, excitement bubbling in my chest. "How cheap?" I tease, playing along.

He laughs, nodding at me as if to say that I played my hand well. "Practically free."

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