

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter

Chapter Nine

" DRAVEN

What I love most about the little shop I'm in, is the prices are all pretty decent. The one that Domonic dropped me in front of was awesome too, but way too expensive. Once I got a look at their prices, I left. Luckily, there were four other boutiques on the same portion of the block, and I would still be able to see Domonic when he returned for me.

The shops weren't too busy, a few people straggling about, but not many. After I purchasing a few essentials, one of them being a turtleneck, I saunter outside to await Domonic's return. When I see the curb is still empty I begin to wish I bought a watch.

Spying a little cafe across the street, I shrug and walk over, intent on waiting at one of the little tables outside.

With coffee in hand, I take a seat at one of the five stone tables and sipped my mocha greedily. A large shadow passes over me and I look up startled to see one of the guys from the bar standing over me and blocking the sun.

"You didn't leave," he says.

It is the blond guy. The one that was seated in the bar with Domonic yesterday when I first arrived.

"I didn't," I grin, crossing my legs toward him as my eyes scan the street. *Where is Domonic?*

He laughs, sticking his hand out for me to shake. "Paul," he introduces himself, lifting my hand up to kiss the back of it. "May I?"

I nod, kicking one of the chairs out in front of him so that he might sit down. "Draven."

He smiles flashing a barrel of white teeth. "I know. And might I just say, I'm glad you're still here. We get fresh faces in this place all the time, but none of them ever stay. And yours is not only fresh, but it's terribly beautiful."

I have to laugh at that. *So they can be charming when they want to be.* I wonder what changed this one's mind. I'd hate to think Bart and Domonic have told the entire town about what I hide behind my clothes.

"Might I ask who you're waiting for?" Paul queries.

My eyes narrow, and my gaze travels over him with mild interest. He's trimmer than Domonic. Not as heavily muscled. "You might ask, but I might not say."

He chuckles, the laugh lighting up his entire face and crinkling his eyes. He's actually pretty damn cute.

Blue eyes twinkle as he studies me, taking in my hooded sweater and then locking in on my neck. Smile faltering, he swears, "Jesus Christ."

I put up a finger, "Don't!"

Shit. He noticed the bruises, even with my hoodie completely zipped up.

His jaw ticks, but I can see him trying to let it go. The angry tap of his foot is shakes the table until I send him a wavering smile to calm him down.

"I'm out of there now," I say. "So, I just would rather forget about it."

He nods stiffly, his eyes going back to my neck for a long moment. "Understood." With a sigh, he looks around us as if watching for someone. "So, listen, if you still need work, I own the Red Wolf Cafe and if you want you could-"

I interrupt him, holding up my coffee. "So, this magic brew belongs to you?"

"It does."

"Thanks for the offer, but Bart hired me anyway."

His eyes go wide with shock. "He did?"

I nod with a wink. "Yes, he did. And for that I will forever be grateful. Because he did it before seeing the bruises."

"Shit," he simpers, then buries his face in his hands. "I'm sorry. If it had been up to me yesterday, I would have welcomed you with open arms and an offer to take you out to dinner. But Domonic - he's different. I think he was more than just a little thrown off by your appearance yesterday. I mean - we were all expecting a dude. Domonic's really intense most of the time, but he means well."

I giggle. Yeah, okay guy, sure. "So, what does that mean - do you all own the bar, or does it belong to Bart?"

"We all own it, but Bart runs it."

"I see. So out of the four of you, Bart is the only one with even an ounce of raw chivalry." No wonder they acted that way when I arrived. "And here I was afraid you were all going to lock me in and gang up on me."

He gasps, "What? No way!" Again, he studies me. "I'm sorry if it felt that way." Leaning forward, he dips his head in shame. "So, you're staying above the bar now?"

I shake my head. "No. I was but apparently it needs to be renovated, so Domonic has graciously put me up in the condo behind his house."

His eyes narrow. "Really?"

"Yeah."

"That's weird," he quips.

It is my turn to be shocked. "Why is that so weird?"

He shrugs. "Because Domonic ordered the rest of us *not* to help you. In fact, he was very clear about wanting you to leave town as soon as possible."

"Is... that...right..."

DOMONIC

"Draven Piccoli, daughter of Isabella Lucio and Gio Piccoli. She's twenty-two with no driver's license anywhere, but her State I.D. says she's from Florida. Her father disappeared when she was just a baby. Her mother then became a stripper to support her little girl. After a few years doing that, she married, but never changed her name. And for some reason it's taking a while to retrieve a copy of the marriage certificate, but I should have it by tomorrow afternoon. Her mother died two years ago. The cause of death 'undetermined'. Last known address for Draven puts her close to the beach in Miami, in a house owned by one Marvin Ryder. At first, I thought this Marvin might be her stepdaddy, but turns out he's too young. Marvin was the owner of the Beach Club Bar she was working in. Sound familiar?"

"So, she's Italian."

"Yes, looks like it."

"And her real father might still be out there somewhere."

"I'll look into him next."

"That's why she has such beautifully tanned skin."

Rainier laughs, "What?"

"She does. I mean - I still don't want her here, but she does, and you know she does."

I still don't want her here - who the fuck are you kidding. Liar.

Adjusting the belt on his pants, Rainier takes a seat in front of me, placing his big Sherriif boots on my desk. "Okay, so what? A lot of girls have beautiful skin, Domonic. Yesterday you said you wanted her gone, then this morning I got a message from you telling me to dig into her. What's up, Dom? Who is she?"

She's mine I want to say, but I don't. Besides, I'm not keeping her, so she really isn't. I'll eliminate the threat to her safety then send her off to live her life.

And then the ache in my chest will certainly return. Fuck.

I shrug. "Yesterday I didn't know how severe her circumstances were. Now, I do. I still want her gone, but I can't in good conscience send her away until I know what she's dealing with."

Rainier nods solemnly. "Fair enough. But what do you mean - how severe they are? What happened to her?"

I shake my head, not wanting to share any details until I have them all. "Just make sure you take note of any new visitors that come into town. Especially, any father and son duos that might arrive for 'vacation'."

He nods again, dropping his boots from my desk. "Done. But Domonic, if she really is in danger, then why can't she stay? When Pebbles arrived in town a couple of years ago needing a job and a new life, you gave her that. Now, she works here, for you, and is married and happy. What makes this girl any different?"

Not going to answer that.

"Make sure and tell the guys to be on the lookout too. We all should be vigilant. And as soon as you get that marriage certificate, I want to know everything about the man on it. And I mean everything. From the sound of his laugh to his birth mother's panty size. Everything."

Rainier strokes his jaw, looking a little too thoughtful for my liking. "Maybe one of us should date her. You know, just to keep a closer eye on her."

There is it. That clenching, crushing, pain in my chest.

Over my dead body will one of them date her.

My throat begins to rumble a bit, a growl forming in my chest when I look at him, but I swallow it back. "You're fucking married," I nearly snarl, losing my cool for the breadth of a second.

"Not me!" Rainier scoffs. "But Draven's no troll, Dom. I'm sure one of the others would gladly pose at her bedside if that's what it takes."

"No," I grind out. "I already have her staying in my guesthouse out back so that won't be necessary. Besides, I won't have any of them attached to her when it's time for her to leave."

And just what do I think will happen when she does. How long will it take after she's gone, for some other guy to snatch her up?

I can't think about that. I can't.

"Okay," he says with the quirk of an eyebrow. "Still doesn't explain why she can't just stay here, but I better get back to work. I've already been gone too long."

Fuck!

Me too!