

The Pack Rule Number 1 No Mates - Billionaire One 184

[1,567 words]

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Four

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It has come to my attention that I have made a mistake In Chapter 17. I introduced Timmons as the fire chief and Lief as a Sheriff's Deputy. MY BADD... Lief is the Fire Chief and Timmons is the Deputy. Forgive me... but there are a lot of chapters and as I have never been one to take notes I simply got confused. I am going to ask my editor to fix this, but as she is extremely busy, I'm not sure when she will. Also! I would love it if you guys would tell me whose mate you would like to meet next in the comments section! Thank your DRAVEN

Standing on the docks waiting for Glo, I begin to get nervous, I told him five o'clock and it is now fifteen til. I mean, sure, he's not late yet, but somewhere inside of me, I think I'm afraid he won't show up. It's almost like being transported back in time. Back to when I was a little girl and waiting for him to come home. The feeling is not pleasant.

"Are you going to watch the traffic all day?" Emily says behind me.

"Not all da

all day," I quip. "Just until he gets here."

She laughs, coming up behind me to squeeze my shoulders reassuringly. "He'll be here, Draven."

y shoulder. "I hope

I sigh, closing my eyes and placing a hand over hers on my

"What are you guys doing out here?!" Ryder's little voice sounds from the yacht. "Felix is mixing margaritas already! And I need you to tell her Lean have alcohol in mine, because I want to see what the big deal is!"

Emily explodes into fits of laughter. "Not happening bud" You're not old enough yet. But if you're good, I might let you have a sip of Felix's just to taste how horrible it is.

"Fine," Ryder grumbles, disappearing back inside.

"Not drinking tonight, huh?" Lask, my eyes falling open to study my friend. "Any particular reason why not?"

ath and heat "Maybe.

She smiles at me, her face burning with red

My mouth falls open in shock. "No way!"

She grins, her pretty pixie face tilting upward happily. "I haven't gotten sick yet, but Koda says my scent has changed and my period is a few days late."

I can hardly contain my joy in hearing this and wrap her in a bone crushing hug. That would be so awesome! Our kids will be best

friends!"

they will be! Emily coos, her eyes falling over my shoulder to the parking lot behind me. She smirks and juts her chin upward saying. Took Drive

I inhale sharply, the sound of expensive shoes clacking on the concrete behind me.

I take it.

1. I'm on time then."

A strange sense of longing falls over me at that moment and tears fill my eyes, but I shake the emotional response from my system before I turn around. It won't do for him to know how happy I am right now. He doesn't deserve that yet. At least... I don't think he does. Making sure that my locket is still hidden behind my sweater, I smile and turn around. "You are!"

Then I flinch in surprise. He's not alone. There are three others with him. Two men and one woman. All of them dressed impeccably, all of them in expensive suits. Of the three additional newcomers, it's the woman that captures my attention.

1/4

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Four

of a woman who spends increa

her

xáve, confirming my suspicions that I runt

Has Itak, sondering where and when few her before

I shake it off for the moment and eye the rest of Bios companions war silent bodyguards. Their eyes are covered with pitch black shades, yet

The men are toting maple of cases and wear the sof on sense them onstantly ornning the the

My team will be joining us, Gio says, sauntering toward me. Don't wry, if there isn't adequate space for them, they can camp. They'll be spending most of their time outdoors anyway as it is their job to protect me, he poses, then adds, and you Hill

I gasp as I suddenly recall where I remember the woman from. I gaze at her in wonder.

chased away" At her lack of confusion, I shake myself, remembering I had wanted my actual mother. However, for nineteen years I believed that she was, so that was going to take some getting used to mean that label chased away"

"I

She nods, and I can swear her eyes are wet with emotion. "Correct. I was your bodyguard slash nanny for a time. My na

Again, I gasp as a nickname infiltrates my memory and I say, "Zia Sophila

She smiles. "Yes. That's what you used to call me. Although Gio is not my brother-

Not by blood," Gio interrupts her.

not by blood," she agrees. "You were very close to me

1. e. You called me Zib. It means,

You're a shifter," I say, somehow knowing that I speak the truth. "You used to change in front of me and let ride your back"

She grins, shrugging when Gio sends her a sharp look. "What? She loved it!"

"But-" I snap, confused, "you're a woman! I thought female shifters weren't able to shift into their wolves"

She chuckles, "Is that what your American mate has led you to believe?"

Gio smiles, his eyes lighting up with mystery. "Sophia is a full-blooded Northern Gray. So naturally she can shift. Just another of the many perks of our bloodline." His eyes go dark. "Of... your bloodline."

I shake off the hidden meaning behind his words and the nostalgia that threatens to overwhelm me, grateful for Emily holding me up as my legs threaten to buckle. I say offhandedly, "There are plenty of rooms in the packhouse. You should all be very comfortable there." "Who are those guys?" Ryder exclaims, leaping off the yacht and forgoing the ladder dangerously.

"Ryder!" Emily warns.

1. s. "Be careful!"

But Ryder ignores her, walking up to Gio with something like stars in his eyes.

Gio smiles. "He is fearless by nature, Gio observes. "Nothing wrong with that. Hello little woll, my name is Gio Piccoli I am Draven's-"

"Friend!" I say, stopping him from saying father, though I don't exactly know why. Ignoring the sudden hurt in his gaze and the guilt that suddenly drowns my heart, I say, "Let's get this show on the road, shall we? I promised to get there before nightfall." "Yes," Gio agrees, his voice somewhat sad. "We have much to discuss."

2/4

Chapter One Hundred Eighty Four

As I turn around i

Supbla Shisper, Thon, Gill come and y

I'm not sure that I will

DELILAH

"Quinn!" I screech, as he falls into my lap. For a moment I'm afraid

www.going to crash, but thats when relive that he shifte

car into park right before he passed t

My heart is thumping with fear as I study him. A sepsse of fost so acute and so dedining comes cover me and pain lanes through my heart

No! No, not He cant die! I can't lose hist

Suddenly I know it's true. That if I lose him, if this practical stranger dies, I will never again.

"What's wrong with him? Charlie shouts, hopping up from the backseat. He was shot, wasn't he?

I nod, tears filling my eyes as I shake Quinn's body. "Please! Please wake up!" I slap him in the face, "Wake up!"

To my surprise, his eyelids flutter, but they don't open. Yet, he speaks, Duch, Lilac. Why'd you hit me?

"I have to get you

ou to the hospital okay?

kay? Just hold on," I cry, grabbing my phone.

That seems to get his attention. "No!" he yells, snatching my phone from my hands and sitting up

un with a groan

"No..."

"No?" I scream. "What the fuck is wrong with you? You're bleeding to death!"

He grimaces, in obvious pain, but shakes his head. "No.. I'm not babygirl You don't understand, but... I'll be okay in about... I don't know... thirty minutes or so."

Charlie gasps in the backseat. "No fucking way! You're one of them! One of those... creatures! Aren't you?"

I scowl at him angrily, "Charlie! This is not the time for any of your mumbo jumbo about lions that are humans - nor is it ti other fairytale!"

time for any

"They're real, D! I swear to God, Cane and I saw her change! We saw her! Like with our eyes, ya know?"

Oh for the love of God. "Charlie," I say apologetically. "I'm really sorry about all those cans of soup, I never should have hit you

many."

u with so

Charlie balks, his face turning indignant and Quinn spurts with laughter, before groaning with pain.

Then Quinn's body spasms, his back going ramrod straight as he shouts, "Fuck!"

"Give me my phone!" I snap. "I'm calling you an ambulance."

"The fuck if you are," he says. Then, he whips his shirt off and the sight of his delicious muscles has my body flaming with heat.

Soooo not the time Delilah. Control yourself!

Quinn leans forward, showing me his back. "Quick baby girl. Tell me what you

I roll my eyes, but decide to humor him just so t

so that we can move the fuck on from this nonsense and I can get him to a doctor.

"Fine," I hiss, not wanting to look, but doing so anyway. I see... I... see....."

3/4

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Four

Don't believe what Free..... What What the fuck?

Charlie peeks over the seat and grins like the Cheshire Cat. Told you, 's one of them.
Hon a shifter

I'm pretty sure it's me who passes out next

Chapter Comments

Nikki Whata

Bart's Mate Next

Jacqui Rossouw

But what about Griffin? Doesn't he need to find his mate soon?

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5

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,340 words]

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Five

Author's Note: Just a little formal statement that it is NEVER safe to drive speeds of 120 mph.,

QUINN

"Lilac?" I gasp as Delilah's face slackens and she tumbles forward in shock. "Oh shit."

"I knew it! I knew you were one of them. You're a lion too, aren't you? that why you're with D? Were you hunting for us because were hunting for you? Oh my God this is just crazy!" Charlie's gibberish; wiggles in my ears like an unwanted insect trying to scurry into my brain. "You're smooth man, smooth. I really thought you wanted my Delilah for something, but you were using her to get to us."

hot pisses me off. Now that

"Shut the fuck up Charlie. And I mean shut the fuck up now or I'll toss you out and leave you on the side of the road," I growl out. In his frightened eyes in my rear-view mirror. "First let me say this, she is not your Delilah. She is my lilac. Normally I would knock the breath right from your lungs for even thinking she was yours, but seeing as how you've had somewhat of a traumatic experience today, and you are very confused, I'm going to let it slide. However, understand this - I never used her for anything. She is mine. Mine. And I will be keeping her."

"W-what?" He gasps.

"She's my mate you little fucktard. She might not know it yet, but she will soon enough. So do the both of us a favor and keep your idiot prouth shut so I don't sever your head like I've been wanting to from the very moment I say your hands in hers at the diner." Then I peer down at my girl and pet her head as it rests on my lap. "Now, be a good little Charlie and reach inside her first aid kit for some smelling salts please.

"Y-yes sir," he says obediently and in the next moment I'm breaking a pack of salts open and my Lilac is coming back to life right in front of me. Pity, really, I liked having her head resting on my cock. "What the hell?" She says drowsily, wrinkling her nose at the burn from the salts.

I toss the packet out the window, put the car back in drive and grit against the pain of the healing my back is doing as we head back out

on the highway,

"Buckle up kids," I say, smirking at the crazy look my Lilac is giving me "We have a ways to go."

Despite that

at she's still g

awking at me, she does as told and I race along. Not entirely sure if I sh giving me, I try for a smile.

I should be worried or not about the look shes

"Are you staring at me or my muscles?" I ask, swerving around a few cars at speeds of one hundred and twenty miles an hour.

She doesn't answer me and I can't allow that to worry me at the moment, but it does. Fuck. What if

hunters. What if it makes her sick to her stomach when she finds out what well and truly am?

if I disgust

her? She grew up around

I decided to flat out ask. Why? I don't know. Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment, or maybe I just can't stand the suspense. "Do I disgust you, now? Is that why you're not saying anything?" "Disgust me?" She repeats, her voice sounding far off and distant.

I glance at her, noting the strange glaze of her eyes as she watches me, but not knowing what it means. She didn't say no. Damn her. "Lilac... please," I plead, my voice coming out much softer than I intended. I can hear it in myself, the sadness, the fear that I might not get the kind of mate that my brothers were lucky enough to find.

"You're a..." she clams up, grimacing before she finishes her sentence, and at that moment, I think that it's true. That I disgust her. "You really are a shifter?" She asks. "Shifters are... real?"

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Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Five

"Yes," I say quietly. Then I brace myself for disappointment and chance to reach for her hand.

At first, she lets me take it and I release a sigh of relief, but then she tenses, dropping my hand in her lap and all my worry comes trampling back. "So when you found me in the woods this morning, you really were talking to that lion, weren't you?" "Yes he was!" Charlie interrupts. "I told you D! I told you! 1-

'Charlie!' I snap in warning

"Right. Sorry," he exclaims. But I can still see him bubbling with excitement in the backseat.

What a fucking mess. How am I going to explain having him with us when he gets to Port Orchard?

"I wasn't talking to her, Lilac. I was protecting you," I promise, squeezing her fingers in mine. "But yes, in a way, I guess you could say I was communicating with her."

"So... you're a lion," she says cautiously and when I look at her I can see the little wheels in her head turning and I do not like the direction they are headed. "So you were in the woods looking for-"

"The hunters," I answer her. "Not for you. And no. I'm not a lion shifter" I tell her, almost afraid to admit to what I am

"You're not?" she questions, and the relief that I see on her face grants me at least a little calm. Then what are you?"

I take a deep breath, keeping my eyes on the road as we

we take

the exit for the freeway toward Seattle. It might be best if I show you.

"Bullshit. I want to know," she says.

"And you will, I promise. But I want to show you first. Please, just let ro." I meet her eyes, pouring as much as I can into them before I clasp my hand around hers and tug her toward the middle seat. "Do you trust me, Lilac?" I ask.

Her eyes water as she stares at me and my heart breaks for a second when I think she might say no. "That depends," she says. Then she asks in a choked voice, "Are you going to hurt my brother?"

My eyes flare wide and for a moment I can't believe I never thought of the possibility of what might happen to Cane if he's caught by my brothers. Or worse, by Goose or Gryllin

"Shit," I hiss, and I don't answer her before I dial Domonic and once again let the call play over the loudspeaker.

"Where the fuck are you?" He answers in way of greeting. "We're all here in Blackjack waiting."

Delilah trembles next to me and I slip my hand over her thigh to give it a squeeze. "I'm en route, but hey, I'm gonna have to ask you for a little favor and I'm pretty sure it's not one you're going to want to give. But before you give me an answer, just know, if you don't agree to it, I'll have to go over your head and bring it to someone with more power than you."

Domonic

ic starts laughing and despite myself I crack a smile, because he knows exactly who I mean "You are so pushing it, Quinn, you motherfucker. What is it? What's the favor?"

"Is there anyone else around?"

Domonic sighs and I hear quick footsteps and then the unmistakable sound of his car door slamming. "Not anymore, what's up?"

oting the complete quiet in the car.

"The hunters that went after Gayle last night," I begin, noting

The ones that were with your little redhead... uh-huh. What about them? Did you find out who they were to her, or what?"

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Five

I swallow, ignoring the sharp intake of breath from Dedah and the way her

salute has had a change of heart

other come to my brother's aid:

Well that's too fucking bad for her then, isn't it? Domonic says and

comes onto her and shakes my hand as Domonic goes on. "Unless it

she is," I say, looking off at Delilah to gauge

that I'm likely the only one that

"She's my mate.

save her brother

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,477 words]

Chapter One Hundred Eight-Eight

DELILAH

I knew it! I knew it! He is the wolf I saved from my brother's trap! He's my Wolfie.

Tears fill my eyes as Quinn's giant form steps cautiously toward me. He's so beautiful like this. So powerful and elegant... and it's almost inconceivable to think that creatures like him do in fact exist. They really do! And this one, this tall dark brown and gray beast is kneeling in front of me and watching me with eyes the color of citrine jewels. They're animalistic and intelligent, wild and tame, all at the same time.

To think, all these years I've watched my dad and the rest of the Elders hunting for a species like Quinn's and I always thought they were crazy. I always thought they were nuts - AND THEY ARE just not for the reasons I believed. The Elder Few's entire way of life is definitely demented and whether I want to admit it or not, they have always operated like a cult. I just never wanted to think of it that way because my dad was such a big part of it, but the truth is, he was just as disturbed as the rest of them. And now... Cane... I cannot let them have my brother! I can't!

Now more than ever I want to see the Elders destroyed, but I refuse to put Quinn in any danger. Now that I know what he is... I can't let him help me. I can't. If he were to get hurt or worse, killed... I'd never forgive myself. I'd never recover,

As I begin to moan and sob great big alligator tears, the sudden whine of the wolf in front of me goes straight to my heart and for a moment he appears disappointed. Heartbroken... Backing away from me with his head hung low, he releases another whine of pain and I leap forward before I even know what I am doing.

"Please, don't be upset! I beg him, pressing my face into his thick muscular neck. "You are so beautiful Quinn. I swear you are and I'm so glad you chose to reveal yourself to me. Thank you! Thank you for trusting me!" Yet, I continue to cry because I know there's no way brother around this mess we're in. This mess my

put up in.

A rumble of contentment vibrates from the chest of the animal in my arms and I do my best to dry my

tears.

Ruffling his fur in my hands I step back from him and say, "There are some things about the Elder Few that you probably need to know."

Quinn's ears suddenly twitch and his head swivels toward the stairs. He kicks himself into the air and that quickly shifts back into his human form. Much faster than he made the shift the first time and it takes me a minute to process his nudity as he grabs for his clothes. "Wow," I hiss. Try as I might, I can't seem to pick my jaw up off the floor as I'm left to gape at the harmonious fluidity of each of his muscles that glint in the moonlight.

"Stay here," he says. "I'll be right back."

"Is someone here?" I ask as he races toward the steps. "Not your roommate, I hope?!"

He shakes his head, tossing me a sexy grin over his shoulder. "It's my Alpha. Let me go and see what he wants."

Then he disappears up the steps and I'm left staring after him with about a thousand different thoughts scampering through my head.

e to try and call Cane

This might be the perfect time to

Unlocking the back sliding glass doors, I flip on the light switch and take a step out onto the patio. Closing the door behind me as gently possible, I take a moment to watch the

waves crash on the rocks below. It's so beautiful here. In a perfect world, I could definitely see this. It's my new

home.

Staring

ing down at my phone, I dial Cane. It rings three times before he answers and when he does I'm almost at a loss for what to say.

1/3

Chapter One Hundred Eight-Eight

"It's late Delilah," says a voice hardly recognize. His tone is pitched lows, just above a whisper and I have to wonder where in the fuck he "Where are you Cane?" I ask, wondering how much he's planning to tell me about the horrible things he did this morning. To Charle, no less! His best friend.

"Don't worry about it," he says quietly. "I'm safe and I'm tired. I've been but training all day."

"Don't worry about it? 1 snap. This motherfucker! "You left me all along Canet Under a fucking pile of sticks?! You said you'd be back tonight! What happened to that plan?"

He sighs, "It changed Listen, just stay there one more night, okay? Tomorrow I'll have someone pick you up."

I snicker, realizing that he actually thinks I'm still in that godawful cabin. Wow. He really didn't check on me at all. But even stranger, it seems Elder Matthew hasn't mentioned seeing me. "Oh will you?" I snipe. "How's that? Are you going to send Jeebs and a car? What are you the big man on campus all of a sudden Cane? You're just going to send someone? Then an idea strikes me and I want to see what his reaction is. "Puck that, Cane. Send Charlie for me instead. Send him in your truck to pick me up

Silence, heavy and dark greets me on the other end of the line and there's no mistaking the change in his voice when he speaks next. But sadly, it doesn't change the way I wanted it to. It turns colder and emptier instead. "I don't know where the fuck Charlie is D! He abandoned me at the compound. He was too much of a pussy to go through with any of the challenges so he left. I stuck my neck out for him and he made a fool out of me. So if you want him to pick you up, you can give him a call yourself. Otherwise, I'll send someone." He thinks Charlie can't answer

er the phone, because he thinks Charlie is dead, and that knowledge is heartbreaking.

Anger erupts inside of me and I have to work to control the rise of my voice. "No! Fuck you Cane. Don't do it. I'm good on the train or the bus. Forget I even called you at all! Good luck with your training. Watch out for flying cans of soup! I hang up with my chest tight and my breath panting as I wait for him to call me back.

He doesn't.

My breath shudders and fresh tears burn my eyes as I realize that Cane is even more obsessed than my father was. He flat out lied to me about Charlie. Charlie! His best friend from five years old! The one person Cane did everything with! When the pair of them hit puberty they masturbated together! I know, because I caught them and nailed them both with cans of soup! One can each right to the balls. One of my truly finer moments, if I do say so myself. They were inseparable! Like Siamese Twins! And now...?

My Cane? My loving brother Cane? He would never have left me to fend for myself in that rickety cabin! At least, not without heading back to check on me at least once,

Can one person change so much in one damn day? No. I don't think so

Unless... he didn't actually change. Maybe... he's always been this way,

but until today he's never had any reason to show his true colors.

Before today, his survival and my survival have been pretty well entwined. He's never had anyone else to run to except for me and Suddenly he does and he's a murderous Har? Is he on drugs ???

I know Quinn's going to want as much information as he can get about The Elder Few. He might compound, but I don't want to give it. I don't want to send Quinn or anyone else after that circus.

even want the location of their

Charlie.

Not to mention, that if I tell Quinn everything... I might just be condemning my brother to a death sentence on either side. Because if Cane is anything other than completely and utterly stupid... he's completely and utterly devoted to becoming an Elder. And unlike myself, Cane has always believed that shifters were real, so as much as I hate to admit it, I can't see myself getting through to him. At least, not with Elder Roman by his side.

"Goddamn you, Cane!" I hiss to myself, "Fuck!" I take a deep breath and that's when I smell it. Quinn's deliciously crisp scent. But, I didn't

Chapter One Hundred Eight-Eight

hear a thing so there's no telling how long he's been standing behind

"Hey, Lilac," Quinn says softly, and I close my eyes. "I'd like you to know Holy fucking shit.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,958 words]

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Nine

DELILAH

"He's standing right behind me too, isn't he?" I ask without turning around.

"Yup," a cold emotionless voice answers. A voice that does not belong to Quinn.

"How much did the two of you hear?" I ask, wiping the tears from my eyes before I turn around.

"Everything, they say in unison.

Great, now not only do they think Cane could give a fuck less about his sister, but they know he tried to kill his best friend and lied about it.

Despite that I know my brother is in the wrong, and that he is a class A bonehead, I'm still in protective sister mode. Crossing my arms defiantly over my chest, I snap, "Well, good for you. Not that it really matters, because I'm not going to help you kill him."

"Whoa, Lilac!" Quinn says. "Nobody's wants to kill him!

Well that's a lie. For one thing I do

or Alpha... or Domonic... smirks. "That's not true. Gryffin definitely does," the thickly muscled, handsome stranger says

Quinn's friend... or and I glare.

"Dom!" Quinn growls and a look passes between the two.

"Right," Domonic nods, stepping back. "We'll talk more about this tomorrow then."

"Oh no, we won't I say smoothly.

Domonic's eyes narrow, his eyebrows bunching as he studies me, then he flashes me a quick smile that promises more violence than it does joy and he turns around. "You know what I need Quinn," he says. "Get it to me."

Quinn says nothing, simply watches me, a muscle ticking in his jaw, before he sighs and chases after the overly built male that disappeared up the stairs.

I turn back around to watch the black ripples of the ocean and the thick fog rolling in. Am I stupid to think that I can make Cane listen? What if I was the one Elder Roman wanted thrown in the river, would Care have done it? The sad truth was... I don't know, I don't think so, but that's the kind of surprise I can definitely do without.

Where are you Cane? Where did that bastard Roman take you?

Leaning toward the railing, I prop my elbows up and rest my chin on my hands. Maybe it's simply time to let Cane go. He is where he wants to be. Where he has always wanted to be, I suppose. I mean, it's not like he would be the first in my family to choose the Elder path. Nor is he the first to shock me with his betrayal. That award will always belong to my mother. Could be that he's more like her than I realized. Maybe he was only playing a part until the opportunity arose for him shed his skin and slither into a den of serpents, like the little snake he is. Cut old ties in favor of new ones?

lay back th

I groan in frustration as I play back the little details Charlie shared with me about this morning. The arm skinning thing is gruesome as fuck and yet, don't have a hard time picturing Cane completing that part of the act. There's not a doubt in my mind that Cane would have done it just to Pledge. But... I refuse to believe that Cane honestly expected Charlie to die. I will not accept that my brother meant for Charlie to drown. Charlie was able to get free somehow... he was able to untie his wrists and drag himself out of the river. Cane had to have left the binds loose on purpose or something.

Fuck Cane, I hope being Elder Roman's little bitch is worth it..

1/3

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Nine

Elder Roman is the only one of the The Elder Fow that I furys makes to address with his title. Why? Because when I was sixteen Elder Roman walked up on Ted (yes, that douche from the burger joint) trying to force his tiny sausage into my hoo-haw and he ended up tossing Ted across the room. I guess I probably shouldn't have hugged the dude when I thanked him, because the next thing you know, he was everywhere. Always looking out for me, keeping me pure. At first eemed like a normal sort of Uncle type thing to do for me, but then it started to get out of hand. Soon he was showing up at my school and flipping out on any guy I talked to. I finally had to let him know that I

wasn't a virgin and that he didn't need to save me from the world of cock. At first the news seemed to have its desired effect. But the next thing I know, he's flirting with me every chance he gets. Family barbecues, family Meetings, camping trips... until my mother began to notice. That was all it took for me to find them fucking in the poolhouse. I'm sure my mother probably thought I was jealous, and I think I even pretended to be, just so she gave it her all. That night, she declared that men like Elder Roman could never be satisfied by a young girl like me and made me promise never to address him as anything less than Elder. Because he was a mo and I was a girl. No problem, manat Getchal

Sadly, my dad had no idea that his beloved was in the backyard baining his best friend. In the end, it didn't really matter, because Elder Roman treated my mother like the plague from that day on and I couldn't help but laugh at how frustrated that made her

The Pledges of the Elder Few have always thought of Elder Ruanan as somewhat of a legend. The man has never accepted an apprentice until now. Until, Cane. Elder Roman choosing to train Air out of all the sons of the Elders is probably the hand stroking Cane's balls at the monsent, and until his balls unwind, Cane won't know which way is up.

Then again, Cane is a twenty-three year old virgin, and I can't help but think maybe he should at least get some pussy before he decides what direction his life is headed in.

Just as I start to turn, large hands grip my hips on each side, holding me in place and preventing me from moving at all. They stroke up and down from my outter thighs to my waistline to my ribs, then my ribs down to my outter thighs and back again.

You have the sexiest hips, Lilac," Quinn whispers, dipping his head into my neck and nibbling on my exposed shoulder. Sparks tingle and warm the skin with each and every drag of his lips. I have been waiting all day to have you back here and alone," he groans. "You have a promise to keep."

'I do?

Uh-huh, he coos, his arms closing around my middle. Sliding his hands under the front of my blouse, he fires the bare flesh across my stomach, nipping and licking at my earlobe the entire time. "You can't tell me you don't remember," he whispers then dips one hand into the front of my leggings to cup my mound and one hand into my bra to cup my breast. He squeezes both roughly and I shudder in his arms, gasping for breath. "You promised to let me use you tonight, he moans, his hand exploring more and more flesh beneath my shirt as the other begins to dip beneath my panties and stroke mercilessly between my folds.

Why is he rushing this? 1 groan as he presses into me from behind, grinding his thick hard shaft into my back as he shoves me up against the mailing. "Quinn!" I gasp, feeling

his hands grope me, yanking off my top and tossing it to the side, then pulling down my leggings and panties in one hard sweep.

"Fuck," Quinn growls, and I can feel his gaze on me. Strangely enough. I'm not at all cold. In fact, I'm burning up. He groans deep in his chest, as both of his large hands close over the globes of my bare ass. He bends over me, pushing my stomach over the wooden railing and stroking his hands up my back to my shoulders. "I want to take you just like this. Fast and rough, with your perfect hips between my hands and my fangs on the back of your neck. Like a beast."

"Fangs?" I whimper, and Quinn grabs my chin in one hand, turning my face so that I can see the jpossibly sharp canines protruding from his lips. I moan, biting down as his eyes swirl black and yellow.

Now that I see how fucking perfect you are," he groans, his whole hand pinching the flesh over my hip, "I need to be inside of you."

I shudder, wondering how he was able to hide all this intent from me when his friend was standing next to him. I hear his belt buckle, then his zipper. I feel the head of his impossibly thick cock wetting itself against the honey of my entrance as his free hand strokes up and down my bare back.

"Wait!" I try and stand up, but he doesn't let me. "Shouldn't we use protection?"

Quinn groans, kicking my legs apart and dipping the tip of his dick between my sopping folds. "You're my mate, Lilac. We are each others

2/3

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Nine

protection," he growls, reaching forward with one hand to grab the front of my throat while stroking the other up and down my back. "My god you are so fucking soft."

I whimper, loving the possessive way his hands explore my curves as the head of his dick bumps my clit and I cry out. "Quinn," I whine, arching my back so that my ass presses against his hip.

"Oh fuck," he growls, squeezing my throat at the very same time he plunges his cock two inches into my heat. He trembles against me, "Fluck... This is going to be quick, baby. I'm not going to lust."

I moan, falling limp over the railing as an exquisite warmth begins to tingle behind my slit. A throbbing electricity that is begging for movement. So I circle my hips and edge backward, attempting to bring him in deeper as my pussy begins to pulse with need.

"Shit, he hisses, and I can feel him watching as he releases my throat to caress and pinch my hips in his hands. Then, without warning, his hands clutch my flesh painfully and he slams into me, knocking my body hard into the railing. He moans and grunts, pulling out and slamming back in repeatedly, Sending me careening over the railing with each and every thrust. Stronger and harder he pounds into me. Until the sound of his skin slapping mine is louder than the ocean waves below.

I yell, half pleasure, half pain as the hot thick length of him invades my body and my muscles tense, over and over again. "God!" I grab for the railing with my hands, even though I'm still pitched over it. Suddenly my core begins winding tight, and Quing's hands reach up and clasp my shoulders.

"You feel so good," he whispers, pulling me backward now, pounding me into every thrust. His hips pistoning so powerfully each hit knocks a scream from my lungs. I'm going to explode."

The way that he says it is breathless and tortured and I could swear his cock is swelling inside of me. Growing bigger even now as my walls go impossibly tight. With one final thrust, he plunges deep and I melt all around him, shouting his name as I fall apart and my juices coat my thighs. He follows after me with a rumbling growl, planting himself inside while grinding his hips into my sex. I feel his mouth on my sweaty back as he pants for breath and I shudder.

Quinn smiles against my ear and whispers, "Can you feel it now?"

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,733 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety QUINN

I'm still pretty much dressed as I scoop Delilah up into my arms and hid her naked body close to my chest. Everything about her is positively perfect and before she can try to hide herself from me, I natch her wrists in one hand and take her sweet, pink lips into my mouth. Savoring the moment and longling my tongue with hers as I cally her into my bedroom and deposit her on my bed. There's a sleepy satisfaction in her eyes as she watches me, and it's making my dick painfully hard. Tucking her in behind the thick down comforter and sheets, I stretch her long red mane out across the pillows and sigh and sigh.

"I should shower," she mumbles, her eyes drifting closed as her body sinks more heavily into my dreamcloud mattress.

"No," I say seriously. "We'll shower tomorrow. I want you to remain just how you are until morning."

Home I am? V

"What?" she yawns, her eyelashes fluttering as

ring as she gazes at the. "How am I?"

Exactly how I want you. Drenched in my scent. Soon, I'll mark you inside and out."

She snickers, her eyes closing as she turns onto her side, burrowing her face into one fluffy down pillow. "That's almost kind of gross you nasty Wolfe," she taunts me.

The blanket falls away from her back for a moment and I'm treated to the sight of her elegantly curved spine and the plump, round goodness of her remarkable ass. I grunt, biting back a snarl as my eyes catch on the deep mauve of one mouthwatering aureola. Holy fuck, I still haven't tasted her nipples yet. Fucking Domonk. It's all his fault!

He ruined the experience with his demands. I hardly got to taste her at all.

Okay....no... that's bullshit. It wasn't ruined, it was actually pretty awesome, but... it wasn't the way I wanted things to go. I originally intended to take my time to explore her. Shit, I wanted to let her, explore me. Fuck, she's gorgeous and terribly unholy. Her breasts are proud, full, and perfectly round and her hips... her hips are truly one of God's great gifts to mankind. Well, not mankind anymore, my kind now. That four dimensional heart that pops out of her waistline, is mine now. Not a single soul in all the world will ever touch them again. Just me. She's already asleep and I want more than anything to strip off my clothes and join her, but I can't.

At least, not until I get back. Then, I will.

For now, duty calls. I lock the balcony doors, shade the windows and dim the lights. I don't like even the thought of someone peeping in while my Lilac is sleeping. Writing a quick note on a post-it about where I've gone - just in case she wakes up - I stick it to the sliding glass door and head upstairs. My phone buzzes in my pocket with a text from Domonic telling me to hurry the fuck up and get to the bar. I know why he's in such a hurry. He wants to get to his mate. He's dying to check on Draven and that's why he commanded me to hurry. It's not like he can't just call her on the phone, Sure he can. And he probably did. But Domonic is more important than everyone else and Domonic wants, what Domonic wants.

He's not actually supposed to even be heading to the packhouse, so why is he? His dad knows the way, he doesn't need an escort.

All that goddamned rushing I was doing trying to keep Delilah's attention on my dick and off of her cell phone, just so that I could pocket the damn thing-cut in to my first time with her and made me feel like shit. I used sex with my mate to steal her fucking cell phone. What a piece of shit I am. Not to mention that now I'm being forced to violate her privacy and basically, break her trust.

Then again, she didn't exactly trust me with it. I swiped it from her as undressed her on the patio. Slid it into my back pocket and did my very best to keep her mind on other things,

Well, I succeeded. I doubt she even remembers she owns a phone right at the moment.

Relax, Q. It's not like you're gonna keep the damn thing. Or snoop through. Check and see how many different guys she's been talking to. No,

one of that. Just gonna clone the device so that we can watch her every move is all..

1/4

Chapter One Hundred Ninety

Fuck. If Delilah ever finds out about this I'm pretty sure it'll

more than an orgasm for her to forgive me. Shit, I might actually have to

take her up to that the damn lease I thought I just offered to give Cane's phone number, not the whole damned phone. And if this stupid shit creates even one problem for me with Delilah I will personally tell Draven about the software Domonic has on her phone, my motherfucking self. I'll tell her about how Domonic's paranoid, otterive ass reads all her fucking messages and combs through her browser history like a goddamned crackhead. In fact, I think I do that anyway Haha. As I lock up the house, I take off for the bar on foot. More than a little inclined to take my sweet ass time, I pause my steps as my phone

Wait a minute, my phone is on silent.

That phone

"Fuck!" I curse, taking off down the hill at a dead sprint. I don't stop running until I've passed the docks and have made a right to head toward the bar. Then, after waving to a few locals that are still scattered about, I pull out Delilah's phone. The name that flashes across the screen is not the one I imagined it would be.

The phone reads Commander Cherkin

What in the fuck is this?

As I step into the bar, I make the executive decision to answer her phone. You know, just in case this commander or whatever needs assistance. Or a spaceship.

hit the accept button, and hold the phone to my ear, keeping quiet as I listen to the caller curse and then clear his throat.

"Delilah?" An oddly familiar voice filters through the line. "Hello? Delilah! It's me, Ted!"

"Dumbfuck?!" I chortle, not really happy that he has my Lilac's phone number.

"Maximus, you son-of-a-bitch!" Ted snarls. "Didn't my father shoot you? How in the fuck are you not dead?"

"Just a scratch I'm afraid, Dumbfuck. Your daddy might want to get his eyes checked."

"You were five feet from him! Ted snarls.

"No shit. Like I said. Your daddy needs glasses, FYI he's not exactly a spring chicken," I pull away

1 busy myself blocking his number. "How's that toothache?"

from the phone, putting it on speaker as

"Fuck you!" Ted grumbles. "I had to have three veneers put in this afternoon during an EMERGENCY dental appointment and not only are they shaped differently, but they don't fucking match the rest of my teeth!"

Rainier's head swivels in my direction as he begins to laugh and Bartlett pours me a whiskey, which I accept graciously well, that's an easy fix, Teddy. Just knock the rest of yours out and replace them with veneers. Or if you like, I can do that for you too." "What the fuck are you doing on Delilah's phone?" Ted growls out. "Where is she? It's imperative that I speak with her. Now."

"Who the fuck talks

s like that?" Rainier chuckles. "Who is that guy?"

I sigh at the phone, ignoring Domonic's glare as I answer Ted's question "Well, that's too fucking bad because I can promise that you never speak to her again. And didn't I just warn you about talking to her when I sharpened your look this afternoon?"

will

"Fuck you Maximus. I only need to speak to her about Cane. Where
is the?

She's naked and fast asleep in my bed, but I'll let her know that you called. Commander
Gherkin."

2/4

Chapter One Hundred Ninety

"Commander Gherkin? What?

"Eat shit, Tex!" I say as I hang up and follow Rainier into the back office

The computer is online and ready to clone and Demonic takes a seat behind the desk then
reaches for Delilah's phone. I hand it to him warily and he shoots me an irritated look.

"Who was that guy?" Rainier asks..

"A big blond douche. Son of Elder Matthew,"

"One of the poachers?" Demonic asks.

"Who the fuck is Commander Gherkin?" Rainier inquires.

"Same

guy," I say with a

shrug. "That's the name Delilah had him under

Bartlett snorts, "Cute little nickname. He must be an ex or something."

I flinch. "What? No. No way?

"Are you sure?" Bartlett challenges me. Because the name Commander Gherkin pretty
much says it all."

Says what all?" Rainier and I both ask at the same time.

Bartlett chuckles. "You guys

look at the screen.

rys don't know what a Gherkin

nis, do you

you?" Bartlett asks, giggling as he peers over Domonic's shoulder to take a

"Not a fucking clue," I say, taking the phone back after a successful image has been created on the PC.

"What is it?" Rainier asks.

Bartlett winks, his eyes flashing. A very tiny pickle," Bartlett says with a grin. "I serve them all the time fact, right now, there are three jars of them under the counter out front."

me with beer platters and chips. In

"Those little pickles? They're called Gherkins?"

"Yup."

"Fuck!" 1 growl out as the rest of my brothers start laughing. She's seen his dick before. My sweet Mitle Lilac has been up close and personal with that dumbfucker's tiny pickle. "Why the fuck did I answer the phone? Why couldn't I just mind my own business?" "Welcome to

ne to my world," Domonic says as

as he switches seats with Rainier.

After a few minutes of utter silence, minus the tippy tap topping of Rainier's fingers over the keyboard, the computer dings with

location.

"Hmm, Rainier says.

"What?" Domonic asks, "Did you get a location on Cane?"

"Yeah, I did," Rainier says softly. "Her last phone call to him, lasted just long enough to tell us that he's in Idaho, not Blackjack, but that's not what caught my attention. Commander Gherkin lives in Oregon, right? His dad's the one that shot you?" Rainier's eyes go straight

for

Chapter One Hundred Ninety

"Yop. Elder Matthew muud his sols Tel Vermon

Rainier tenses, then stands, his muscles flexing in his eyes swirl with r minutes ago come from a cell tower loss than ton milon awory."

"What the fuck? I growl.

Chapter Comments

Visitor

little pickles lol

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,588 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-One QUINN

The four of us hit the woods and shift instantly, each of us heading at full speed toward the vicinity of the cell tower in question. Ten miles will put us right outside of Blackjack, where more than likely Teddy Gherkin and company are preparing for a hunt. Before we left the bar, Dem called Gryffin and filled him in on what we were looking for. So not only are there four insanely large wolves heading Teddy's way, but there are at least three linn shifters prowling for him

well.

The problems is... we don't have a scent for him. Not yet. But we will find him and when we do I'll be committing his scent to memory. Something I would have and should have done Black at the diner, but didn't because my mind was on other things. Things that I fully intend to act upon once I'm back home and in bed with my mate.

My mate. I have a mate.

My mind is still giddy from the knowledge.

If anyone ever wondered whether or not wolves could smile, I'd ask that they take a look at me now. Because just the thought of coming home to a bed warm with my sassy little redhead's body in it, has my tongue lolling outside of my mouth and flapping in the wind. And the one thing I am not going to do is give her up. Not ever. I want to fill her with pup after pup, until we have too many kids to even name anymore. I'm gonna have my own little pack of monsters and tower of princesses to welcome me home each and every

night, As the four of us converge on one of the RV campsites, we melt into the dark of the trees as silent as shadows. Three boujee looking RVS are parked in the eastern lot, and two older, less flashy RVs are sat across from them on the western side. Something about the fancy trailers has me on edge and before I can doubt myself, I give in to my instincts and release a short yip. The sound is so low and indistinguishable, any humans that hear it will think I'm a bird. But my brothers know what it is and I feel, rather than see them, slow to a stop within the brush.

Slow and low, I creep toward the brightest of the campers. There's a window in the back that, although shaded, is open just a crack. Concentrating on the voices I can hear coming from that sliver of an opening, I try to piece together their whispered words.

"My dad is gonna freak when he finds out we did this! You know the rules! We shouldn't have gone on a quest without an Elder! Were gonna be stripped of our memberships and tossed-"

"Shut the fuck up, Hash. Shit. If I had known you were gonna whine like a little bitch the whole time we were here, I wouldn't have included you."

"He's right though!" An almost feminine voice sounds and my ears twitch, eager for confirmation. "I was just barely initiated to take my brother's place! I haven't even passed any challenges yet!"

So what, Q? Even if one of them turns out to be female, their nights on the Earth are done. If she comes out of that camper and she's armed? She's toast.

Although they are still whispering, and I can't rightly identify either of them as Gherkin, I already know we've found our mark. Just the word Elder was enough to put light a fire in my bloodstream and a low growl resonates behind my chest. The sound vibrates against the earth, calling out to my brothers who I am sure are busy scoping out the remaining two state of the art caravans parked side by side.

es up on this little adventure, you're the only

"He's gotta a point, T-None of our dads are on the council, just yours is When the sun comes one of us that isn't expendable.

A familiar arrogant chuckle tinkles my way and suddenly I'm wishing brought some clothes to wear. Because I would have loved to shake a few molars loose from Ted's lips and smile at him while I did

Then I guess we better catch something, boys. Otherwise you're all doomed. Because the one thing the Elders will forgive, is a spotless

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-One

bounty. Who's ready?" Ted oaks and the camper shucklers us four pairs of legs suddenly come to life in the RV.

Tuck, T. I'm always ready."

Hahaha. That's what you think you little punk,

I creep around the dark side of the BV and take a running start before leaping effortlessly up onto the reinforced steel roof. My footfalls are too light and the roof on this beast too strong for my smooth ascend to be detected. Crouching low and positioning myself just above the largest of the camper's doors, I wall.

Right away a ripple of golden movement across the lot and behind the older trallers, catches my eye and I suddenly have the urge to howl. The cats are here too!? Things are definitely about to become much more entertaining. All that's missing now is a cameraman posted on the comer trying to catch my best angles.

Movement shakes the RV beneath me and my muscles tense with the promise of copper tang between my teeth. Adrenaline pounds through my veins as my fangs forge, becoming razor sharp points of contact. I sight Domonic's red-brown coat to my right, his fur shivering like predatory blades of bloodstained grass, posed and ready to strike.

7 wonder if these boys come to hunt shifters or naturals.

Given their ages, inexperience, and self-proclaimed absence of rank, I highly doubt they are equipped with the kind of weapons they would need to kill shifters, Silver bullets are not easy to come by and palladium bullets won't kill us unless they rip through something vital and we don't have the extra time to heal. Palladium wounds can scar and even fester, but once the bullets are removed, they are no longer a threat. But silver... silver bullets not only burn like the fires of hell, but they poison our flesh and contaminate our bloodstream. They make us... human.

A lock slides from inside the trailer, the camper's body shaking beneath the clumsy footsteps of amateur hunters. It almost feels wrong to kill these incompetent souls. I mean, what if the only threat they truly represent is in their belief system? What Charlie, but were lucky enough to be accepted into their father's madness? Would they still deserve to die?

I shake it off, hardening myself against these new and strange considerations that before today would never have crossed my mind. Those are the types of questions Luna Lily would have asked.

some of them are like

The camper shudders as the door swings open and a thick black barrel glints in the moonlight. One quick inhale is all that I need to take and already I know these boys were doomed the moment they put their jackets on. Lead bullets. What are they hoping to catch? Rabbits? I crouch lower, watching as four males and one hefty female line up just outside the door. The girl can't be much older than eighteen and

lets just face facts here she does not possess the type of physique one might need when running for their life. Which, coincidentally, is something that she will inevitably have to do tonight. If she's quick with that rifle in her hands, the lions will decide to pick her off first, female or no. Simply because that's their way. So for her sake, I hope she's as wet behind the ears as Ted Veneer the Gherkin. That way, she might live. I know one thing, I'm not gonna kill her. Not when all she has to feed my beast is lead.

"Remember," Ted says. "Hunting is illegal in these woods, so unless you want to go to jail, don't shoot unless you are going to miss. Once we've bagged something worthy of the Elder Few, we'll pack up and head home. Got it?"

Four little heads bob in agreement and a barely audible growl on my right tells me we're lighting up this campsite on our Alpha's command. Here we go... it's time for all little Gherkins to say farewell, im going to bag up your body and then I'll meet you in Hell.

Weirdly enough, it appears that the female might actually be a marksman of sorts. Out of all five of these poor souls, it's rather obvious that she's the only one completely at ease holding her weapon. She moves with it, caresses it. Passes it back and forth between grips like it's the most natural thing in the world for her to do. Like it's an extension of her and not just something that she is holding.

But... can she run though? Shit. I mean, she's at least a hundred pounds over the thick limit for her five foot four inch height. Not that! personally mind a rounder, more robust woman, but... they can't climb trees if they can't touch their toes, so there is that. She's doomed.

My eyes graze over the barely visible gray lettering on the pocket of her black jacket.

2/3

08-58 Fr. Nov 15

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-One

Huh. It reads: TEF Rosen. Well, goodbye Rosen. Steer clear of the alley cats headed your way.

Jackets! Wait a minute! They re wearing matching black jackets.

Jackets... Just like the one that man was wearing when he trashed our bar and stole Felix's love soaked chanies.

Well, Bing-fucken-o.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,854 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Two HARTLETT

low in the brash just behind the The long branch that

divet i 4 golden for in the trees above the camper Quinn is tanding on. cout from the massive trunk of a redwood, it at least ten feet up from the roof of the RV But the damn thing is nearly as mantive as a tree itself. Its weighted, I can tell. Whir meant Goose is probably prowling over the top of the damn thing, eager to make a meat out of one of those hunters

Creeping in closer, I hear Domonic's growt, signaling the rest of us to me when he does Melting against a fallen tree trunk that is nearly the exact shade of my russet colored cost, I count the offenders. My muscles tense when I realize one of them is female. Fucking Christ. What the fuck is a woman doing with these guys?

The Lions will kill her without

second thought. I know it. Their hate for hunters runs much too deep. They wouldn't give a shit if one

a ten year old. Well, okay, maybe they would. But as far as they're concerned, female hunter, male hunter - it makes no difference to them. In natural lion prides, the females are the hunters. Shifters and naturals aren't so different from each other. Even though as shifters, we're basically more advanced, we still maintain our basic animal instincts. Especially when in that form.

And me? I'm not gonna hurt a woman. Not even if she had a Glock full of silver bullets to my head. That would be my ending I suppose. Because my instincts are to protect the opposite sex of every species.

As far as my brothers are concerned... there might be a few that feel the same way that I do, but there are more than a few that don't Rainier for instance. And Domonic. If she shoots at them? She's going to get hurt. They might not kill her, but they aren't going to leave her a trigger finger that's for sure.

Damn it. Now I have a choice to make. I can either join in the fight with my brothers and our allies and simply ignore the female, or I can shes go straight for her, grab her attention, and hope to lead her away from the fight. The problem with that logic is from what I can see, probably the easiest kill. Meaning someone might decide to take her out early just to get her out of th way. I refuse to let that happen. So..... there's only one thing left to do.

Im going to have to get their attention before the attack. Which means, once again, Domonic is going to be pissed.

Before I can change my mind, I slide deeper into the dark of the woods and come around on the opposite side of the line of hunters. I'm facing Quinn and the girl has her back to me. Her hair is tied back in a long lustrous braid. It's thick, like a rope, and the color of maple syrup. The elaborate winding tail of it falls well below her plump round ass. She's thicker than a hunter should be, thats for sure, but that doesn't mean she's weak. She just may not be as agile as her companions are.

Quinns sudden crouch on the roof tells me things a head turning my way.

sare about to happen and before it does, I let loose with a howl that has every hunter's

Good. Here t

they come.

QUINN

When a long howl sounds from the dark of the woods straight ahead of me, I tense, shaking the camper a bit andalmost giving myself

away.

Martlett,

t, what the fuck are you doing?

The male hunters scatter forward and head straight into the trees and my eyes cut to Domonic who suddenly isn't there anymore. I snarl and growl as loud as I can, then watch as Ted's back stiffens and he turns to face me from fifty feet away. The instant he spies me on the top of his daddy's RV, he prepares to shoot. That's right Gherkin, don't be afraid to hunt me right here in the parking lat.

1/3

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Two 847011

*sudden thenight has me scanding the western side of the campground. There are people in the older RVs that I'm sure have no connection to Ted and his cronies, Shit, I shouldert be up here. I leap though the air and toward the woods just as a feral, thundering roar seatters the leaves from the trees. Shot rings out somewhere behind me as my paws nimbly touch ground. BOOM POP! BOOM! POPT

Chat, these hunters are idiots! Arent they even the tiniest hit concerned for what might happen should one of the other campers come out? Drom 1 they realize here many different laws they are breaking right now just by shooting within the campgrounds? Reckless endangerment, attempted murder, assault, you name it and Rainier will pin it on.

Cronching love, I slither through the grass, my sights set on Tod as he calmly reloads his rifle. His eyes are twitching back and forth and I Incre he's wondering where I've disappeared to, but he'll know soort eriugh. Ten feet from his back, I ready myself to pounce. My plan is to keep silent until right before and on him. I want him to know four, but not until it's too late. Just as he locks in his ammo, I shoot Into the air. When in motion, natural wolves are too fast for most humans to hit. Wolf shifters are ten times faster and make it nearly impote Freemer, within all species exceptional creation can occur. So when I'm hit across the ribs, not once, but twice mid-leap, I know it

it was the fucking woman. Fuck!

The first hit had my body tumbling to the right and the second sent me into an aerial tailspin. I crashed into the trees so roughly that i heard a few vertebrae crack before I thudded to the ground below.

Fuccccckkkk. That burts and the healing is not going to be a cakewalk either

How did I forget the never ran into the woods? It must have been planned for her to stay posted here, though God knows why.

fying dead appears to be my only option for the moment. I can hear Ted laughing and trying to congratulate the female, but the only sand coming from her is the reload of her weapon. Jesus Christ! She's a regular Rambo.

An extremely feline snarl greets my ears and I gaze up to find Gayle staring down at me with arrogant green eyes. I growl out a fuck you and she buffs then melts back into the grass. A terrified scream reverberates through the trees from twenty yards away, followed by the unmistakable sound of Domonic's attack growl. He's got one, wherever he is.

Fully prepared to lay here for the next thirty minutes that it normally takes to heal, I close my eyes. How funny would it be for them to put me in their trailer dead, only to have me resurrect and rip them apart as they celebrate?

Im seriously considering that outcome when I suddenly feel the excruciating pain of the bullets popping out of my ribs. What the hell? That was quick. Then, my vertebrae are knitting back together as my joints crackle and snap back into place. Holy shit! It can't have been more than two minutes since I was hit. Two minutes? I've never healed that fast, ever. What the fuck?

A low growl of approval leaves my chest when I hear Ted booted footsteps heading this way. Oh yeah. Karma's a bitch little Gherkin. Come

and get me

Ted's arrogant voice floats down from above, "Fucking A, Rose! This bastard is nearly as big as a bear. wolves eat out here?"

"Little blond hunters, I hear the girl say with a laugh.

Or a horse. What the hell do the

Interestingly enough, I find her comment rather funny, especially since that is precisely what I'm about to do. Ted kicks me and I hold myself stiff as a board so that he'll think that I'm dead, but that's when he notices something on my coat that I never even thought to shake off

"What the..." he begins, reaching down to pick something up off my chest.

The bullets. The fucking bullets were just sitting on top of my ribs.

He reaches down cautiously this time, and begins patting my body where my fur is stained with blood. Shit, he's searching for my wounds And when he doesn't find any...-

2/3

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Two

"Hey Roset" he shouts, right up next to my ear. "Come here and look at this!"

Okay. So he is as stupid as I thought. He hasn't even confirmed that Fra dead yet and he's screaming in my ear.

He yells again, "Rose! Come but that's as far as he gets before a savage our tears through the trees and a lioness has him pinned to the ground,

Tvrdu

1 leap unto my feet and watch Ted's eyes bulge when he notices that I'm standing. Taedora has her claws sunk deep into his shoulders, her maw inching closer and closer

to his neck as he struggles against her weight. "Hooooosssseeeee! ho screams, as tears pour from his eyes.

Two feet away, I spot Ted's rifle and take the cool metal between my teeth, snapping it apart at the joints. It drops like a scattering of coins just as I hear the sound of a rifle sliding back.

Shit! Rose!

The sound came from beneath Ted's trailer and even as my head whips in that direction, I know I won't be fast enough to stop her from shooting. So I choose the next best option and jump, sending my weight barreling into Taedora just as the shot goes off. BOOM! POP! Taedora snarls as a bullet tears through some fur and a bit of Desh, but it's just a scratch. She'll be okay. We tumble to the ground in a tangle of arms and legs, but are back on our feet just in time for another bullet to whiz past my snout. BOOM! POP! Jesus! We might need to kill her after all.

I don't know what kind of rifles they've got, but they must not be the best, because the female is reloading again. This time, I don't wait, but neither does someone else,

Cold and deadly green eyes reflect off of the campsite's light posts telling me Gayle is right behind Rose and closing in quickly. She's down low, creeping forward like the apex predator she is and poor Rambo' is too busy watching me while reloading her firearm to notice. Gayle is only a foot away from her now and as I race forth and once again, leap onto the roof of the camper.

"Goddamnit!" I hear the little sniper shout as she attempts to drag herself forward.

Over the other side of the vehicle, I see half of Gayle's body is already under the trailer. So when I hear Rambo start screaming, I know she's as good as dead. 2

I really really hope that the hunter girl isn't Bartlett's mate, he really deserves something good, worthy of his kindness. and obviously in shape to run

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,541 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Three BARTLETT

BARTI

I drew as many of the male hunters as I could deep in the woods and now it's time to circle back. I can hear Domonic some odd feet to my right. His growl is deep and menacing as he finishes his kill. The snap and crack of bones breaking behind his janes the only sound heard since the man beneath him stopped screaming. His hunting rifle never even got to fire one round which is pretty sad.

On my left, it's almost the opposite. A human male is heard screaming and crying like a virgin at the brothel, Rainier silently ripping him to shreds as he waits to die.

There's one more guy out here. I hear him whimpering each time he heads for a new hiding place. At present, he's up in the trees above. Crazy, really, because it takes an insane amount of strength for a human to climb one of these giant western hemlocks. He left his ride lying in the brush right next to his perch. He's probably watching my brothers tear apart his friends. Good From up there he has on incredible view. I'm sure. Maybe he'll live then. Maybe he's learned his lesson.

Just as i complete that thought, Goose races past me, I can't help but pause to watch as he rumbles a growl and sinks his claws into the bark of the largest pine. Five seconds later, the third hunter can be heard wailing like a banshee as Goose climbs up the side of the hemlock's trunk like the mountain cat he is.

Well, okay. I guess he won't live.

Turning away from the bone crunching symphony, I race hack toward the RV camp. Rifle fire pops in the distance, echoing and scattering through the trees. The distinct rumble of a lioness roar pounds across the landscape and I'm instantly afraid. Why? I don't know. But the cloud of gloom that suddenly descends on me threatens to stop my heart. A wash of sadness stutters my steps and the closer I get to the campsite, the stronger it hits.

My body is slowing down, my limbs growing heavy, and I snarl in confusion as 1 creep toward the back of the hunters" RV.

A bloodcurdling scream vibrates into the night and the sound puts the fear of God in me.

What's happened?

Fighting through the mysterious impairment from a moment ago, I grow and push myself to move faster. In a burst of taxing breath andy speed, I explode out of the trees to find Quinn atop the RV with his head lowered as if he's disappointed. The sound of an animal gurgling catches my attention and I push forward only to come to a grinding half when I spy Gayle's tail sticking out from under the RV.

What the fuck is going on?

I race toward the other side, to somewhere- anywhere that I might get a better look. Pain explodes in my chest the moment I round the rear of the trailer and air is suddenly impossible to get. But then, my eyes fell on what lay struggling on the ground beneath the camper It's Gayle..... with her jaws locked around the female hunters neck.

Somewhere inside, I begin to panic. The girl, whomever she is, hasn't got much time left. Her face is flashing from red to purple, growing darker and darker beneath the lioness grip. Ignoring the pain in my chest, I rush forward, snarling and growling at Gayle as I snap my jaws at her face.

An internal growl escapes her throat, but she doesn't release the girl. I give one more warning, one more growl, and when she refuses to move again, I fucking move her.

My jaws open and close over the top of Gayle's face and I don't hold back, sinking my fangs deep enough to puncture bone. She yowls, her body jerking and spasming, claws lashing out as she tries to dislodge my teeth. Too bad her body is flat to the ground and under a trailer. she gets no leverage and ends up banging her head. I release Gayle's fate just to snap right back again and this time I bite down over her eyes. Gayle cries out, her jaws going slack as she retreats from me, backing away with her face a bloody mess. My chest heaves as I draw in a few breaths and then give my attention to the girl at my feet. Her throat is bleeding profusely, and her eyes are closed. She's not moving at all and before I even realize what I'm doing, I shift back into my human form.

1/3 Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Three

My body still aches as I drop down over her and press my ear to the Her heartbeat weak that it hardly registers, but at least it is

still there.

"Quinn!" I scream, scrambling

the ground for anything I can tie around her throat and attempt to stop the bleeding. "Quinn?" I shout again, but he's suddenly at my side holding out a t-shirt and a pair of pants. Flinching, I shake my head. "Get me something I can tie around her neck,"

Without a word, he rips the t-shirt he'd been offering me and hands me the longest strip. Wrapping her throat, I do my best to tie it off lightly. I don't want her to choke, but I need her to stop bleeding.

"I'm going to check and see if she has a phone on her." Quinn says, patting down her pockets in front and then reaching under her when

Before I even realize what I'm doing, I'm slapping his hands away. "Ill check," I snap brutishly and Quinn throws his hands up in "Fuck! Sorry!" he says

Reaching behind her back, I mold my hands over her back pockets, squeezing and kneading to see if they're just as empty as the front. They are. "Sr." I curse softly. Then I notice the front pocket of her jacket right over her left breast punches out slightly in the shape of a square and I close my hand over it, then peel the velcro open and pull out a phone. "God I hope it's not locked."

"It doesn't matter. Emergency services are still available.

throw it up to him and turn back to the girl, leaning down once again to listen to her heartbeat. When I don't hear anything, my throat constricts with fear. "No." I say. "No. This is not happening sweetheart. You're not gonna die out here." Quinn steps away to rattle off the address to the campsite and instead of waiting for him to return, I get to work

Tilting her head back and opening her mouth to clear her airway, I lean in to start CPR. Sparks zing across my body where I touch her skin and although that fact registers, I ignore it. Blowing into her mouth twice, I watch her chest rise, then I start the chest compressions. As I work, I'm cataloguing things about her in the back of my mind, just in case I never get another chance to do so. The first thing is that she smells like sugared coconut and chocolate. Two of my most favorite things. Her lips are also incredibly soft and plump and suckable. She's chubby, with abundantly ample curves and long maple syrup colored hair. Her eyelashes are like painted crescents. Dark brown, thick and impossibly long, but I hate that I have no idea what color her eyes are and I'm not going to stop pumping her chest to find out. She has the face of an absolute angel... but she's still not breathing.

The pain that I felt in the woods. The weakness. It was hers. I think I felt her dying.

This can't happen to me. To her.

"Come on baby." I whisper after blowing into her lungs again and starting the compressions. "Come on, please."

"They're too far away, so Logan is sending the chopper," Quinn says, handing me another set of clothes that I ignore. "You should be dressed when they get here or they won't let you go with her.

I still don't stop. "Take over," I tell him. "Thirty compressions, two breaths. I'm about to be at thirty when I'm there, you take over starting with the breaths"

"I got it, Bartlett. We took the same class," he says amused.

We switch almost effortlessly and I'm dressed in some fucker's clothes before he even hits compression fifteen. The sound of the helicopter whirring above us means nothing and I kneel down to switch out with Quinn just as he dips into the hunters trailer and comes out wearing the same thing he just gave me. Sweats and a t-shirt.

When the helicopter lands, I'm surprised to see that Logan is with the EMT team. His eyes are wide with shock as he and a group of four men race toward us bearing an open stretcher and breathing machine.

2/3

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Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Three

"Werve got her," of

me away to place mask over her face,

I almost shove him back out of anger, leit decide against it. Leaping to my feet, I speak to Quinn, Bring her phone to the hospital when

The flashes a wide smile and pockets the device and I nod, then race for the helicopter right behind the nameless female that smells like sugared coconut and chocolate.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,495 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Four DRAVEN

When we first arrived on the island tonight, the house was in chaos. Ryder, nor Felix had ever seen it before, so they spent their first hours exploring the inside and the outside of the house, Gio's people immediately disappeared to scout the property and I was left to unload all of the supplies. It wasn't too much, so when Gio offered to help me I turned him down. However, he wasn't having it and insisted he carry everything. Apparently he didn't like the idea of his pregnant daughter (this words of course) carrying anything heavier than ten pounds up a flight of stairs. It was in the back of my mind to point out that his pregnant daughter had been through much worse than a little heavy lifting in his absence, but I decided to save those little tras for later on. Instead, I thanked him for his considerate gesture and only half flinched when he said the word daughter. It would have been a hell of a workout for me to do it alone anyway. I would have had to make a few trips up and down the steps, onto the yacht, off the yacht - I certainly would have been a little winded for sure. As it turns out, Gio has the strength of ten men and took all six boxes - full of canned goods, frozen meats, etcetera, etcetera - three to a

shoulder and hauled ass up the cliff.

As I watched him, I was reminded of that night he snatched Taedora by the throat in the middle of her shift and rendered her immobile under his grip. I couldn't wait to ask him about that little kung fu secret. I was dying to know how he stopped her from changing. I think Taedota is too. Ever since that little incident, Taedora seems to view Gio as more of a phenomena than a shifter. She's in awe of him, while as far as I'm concerned, he's still just a deadbeat dad, But... I will ask him my questions tonight and... we'll just see if anything changes.

Personally, I can't think of a single fucken thing in this world that could make me abandon my child and I don't even have her yet. So the odds of his gaining my complete forgiveness are slim to none. Although I am willing to hear him out, the best I can offer is some understanding and possibly a semi-truce. As far as a future with him in my life goes... I don't know. Not sure what my heart is capable of glowing at this point.

And yes, I'm confident that I will be having a girl, despite that Domonic believes otherwise.

After Emily slaved away in the kitchen for the entire afternoon (turns out she's a regular Gordon Ramsay) the eight of us had dinner together in the dining room and even my cynical ass has to admit, it was nice having a full table. We laughed, joked, and listened to Gio's bodyguards tell crazy stories about their training days. Sophia tried teaching Ryder some Italian until all he wanted to earn were the bad words. All in all, it was a successful supper.

Now, it's just past midnight and the packhouse is eerily quiet, Ryder has long since gone to bed, insisting he sleep with Em because he promised his brother he'd take care of her. Felix went up about twenty minutes ago after having a few mighty margaritas and Sophia retired a few minutes after that.

So all that remain awake are me, Gio, and his two Italian goons.

"Are they g going to stay out there all night?" I ask Gio, watching through the glass walls of the living room as the pair of them circle the perimeter a few times in their human forms. I haven't seen their wolves yet, and I'd be starting to doubt Gio's story if my memory of Sophia hadn't surfaced.

It is their job, mia bambina. They are used to it," Gio says dismissively. "You don't have to worry about them. Piccoli guards are handpicked from a very young age and trained from the time of their very first shift to endure the very harshest of conditions and beat the most insurmountable odds. It is our way."

"Piccoll guards or not, they're my guests. They deserve to relax and be comfortable. I dislike having them suffer the elements like some kind of second class citizens, while we remain here in the warmth of the house."

Gio sighs behind me. I know you might now believe it, but they are probably more comfortable outside than they would be here resting. All it would take is one slip up, one unnoticed threat, one instance of being caught off guard for them to lose confidence in themselves and in their position."

I roll my eyes. "Well, they have to sleep sometime. When do they ever get to rest?"

Gio laughs, "When their replacements arrive."

1/3

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Four

"You brought more of them? Isk, shocked.

He nods, following me as I retreat from the window to take a seat on the couch. There are presently four of them resting right now in one of the nicest hotels in Seattle and four more in a rental just

My mouth falls open in shock. "You brought ten guards with you?"

He smiles, taking a seat a cushion away from me. "And Sophia."

of my gundo enjoying

"Right. Sophia. Is she a guard too?" I inquire, thinking that she must be and secretly envying the woman's strengths

"She's a little different. She was trained as a guard like the others, but her particular talents are better served offensively than defensively

I blink at him. "Offensively? What exactly does that mean?"

He sits back, his gold eyes sparkling. "She's an assassin. A trained killer

"What would you need an assassin for?" I gape. "You make it sound like you're the leader of a country, not a pack

To my surprise, he doesn't laugh, simply cocks an eyebrow and shrugs dismissively.

"You don't... actually rule a country, right?"

He shakes his head no, then says, "Not exactly."

"Not exactly?" I grapple. "What does that mean?"

He begins to loosen his coat then gestures to the bar in the corner, standing up. "May 12"

I nod. "Help yourself."

Watching him as he removes his coat and unbuttons the cuffs of his shirt, I realize my paternal genomes must be pretty damn good. Gio must be in his forties and not only does he appear to be as fit as a middle-aged man, with a head full of dark hair only hinted with silver almost stylishly painted along the edges, but he's incredibly muscular. I'm sure much of this has to do with his being a shifter, but I met a group of male shifters his age in Red Wolf. Adam, Thomas, the rest of the dads, they're about Gio's age, however something is different. Sure, Adam looks incredibly capable and I imagine he was once built exactly like Domonie, but his energy is more passive to Domonie's aggressive.

Gio... you can almost see the deadly promise in his eyes. Just his presence exudes power. It almost makes me wonder why he has bodyguards at all. Even watching him pour a drink is a little unsettling because there's a sharp precision to each and every one of his movements. And he's so quiet I almost wonder what thoughts are going through his head. Every time I look into his eyes I can see his brain working. This man... he doesn't miss a thing.

he asks, replacing the whiskey behind the bar and returning to his seat.

"What are you thinking al

inking about?" h

My thoughts exactly.

"I was just wondering which of you I'm more like. My mother-Bianca, or you? Not exactly what I was thinking, but close enough.

His eyebrows furrow a bit as he swirls his liquor and then takes a long sip. "You can call her your mother. In fact, you should call her your mother." He peers toward me with an almost barbed look in his eyes. "She was your mother until the day she died. I can understand you have reservations about me, but Bianca does not deserve your ire. Not at all. Isabel was never supposed to take that title away from her. You were meant to know all you could about her. She loved you more than life. So much that she paid with hers. If you do nothing else, please, at least honor her."

A little gasp escapes me and although I'm not offended by his tone, I am suddenly disturbed by something he said, "What do you mean,

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Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Four

she paid with bers?" I ask, fighting the su

sudden burn of tears. "What are you saying? Are you saying that I'm the reason she's dead?"

Gin frowns and when he tilts his head back to take another sip of his whiskey, I can see the shine of moisture in the gold of his gaze. "No. of course not." He meets my gaze with heavy lidded eyes. "That honor belongs to me."

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,499 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Five DRAVEN

The look in Gio's eyes now, is much different than I've come to associate with him. The sharp, intense calculation is gone. The glowing fiquid gold irises that remain bright even when he appears emotional, are dim with pain. I can see the veins that ride over the tops of his hands to curl along his forearms, pulsing as he squeezes the glass in his hand. Its obvious this conversation pains him, but he promised to answer all my questions and it appears its time for me to ask them.

You said your father had her killed, I reprise. "How does that become your honor, if he's the one who sent someone after her?"

Again he swirls his glass, chuckling sadly. "Because, I had a chance to leave her before anyone even discovered her existence, knowing danger that would likely follow if I stayed, but I chose to be selfish. I stupidly thought I could keep her safe. That we could remain hidden. I was willing to give up everything for her. As it turns out... she ended up giving everything for me."

"I don't understand," I say carefully. "Who is your father? Why would he want her dead at all if she's what you wanted? Although you haven't told me, I assume she was your mate." He nods and I continue, "So then, what was the problem? Do shifters not accept mat where you come from? Or

They do," he replies coolly.

"Okay. So then, what gives? Why couldn't you have yours?"

Go takes a deep breath, then downs the rest of his whiskey. Setting the tumbler on the coffee table, he loosens a few more of the buttons along his sleeves and at his throat. Almost as if he's feeling suffocated. To understand that, you have to understand that

pack laws in every county vary, much like human laws do. In Italy, things are done differently. First, there are the five families of power. The strongest, richest, most capable, and most deadly of the bloodlines. Each family reigning over a different territory and each territory being made up of any number of packs that - while still independently governed - come under familial rule. Out here, it's different. Packs move independently of others. They can move as they want to. Govern how they want to. Answering to their Alphas and their Alphas alone. In Italy, pack Alphas answer to their respective Lords. Their... Alpha Lords if you will. Referred to as Lord Alpha at each and every setting. It is done this way to keep our numbers controlled and our humans unaware.

the old days, just before the Great Migration, there was chaos. Disorder crippled the land. So many humans were being killed that it was becoming unsafe for us to walk around freely. Until, the richest and most powerful Shifter families in each region came to an agreement to take control of every pack in their respective territories. Those who swore fealty to their Lords were given a plot of land and resources. Those who refused were either outright slaughtered or ran out of the country.

"Now understand, the problem with humans and shifters at that time was widespread. All of Europe was experiencing much of the same. Asia and Africa as well. War between species was on the horizon. But then something started happening. I cannot tell you exactly why, but more and more shifters were finding themselves mated to humans, Call it nature's fix to what would have been an inevitable end of both species. When it became apparent that shifters and humans that were mates could reproduce, a protective order came into effect, barring all shifters from revealing themselves to humans without due cause. New mind you, shifters and shifters can reproduce with each other, any day of the week. For a shifter to reproduce with a human, he or she must bear the mark.

"The five families decided they would not be integrating the acceptance of human mates. So if a shifter found himself mated to a human and he or she wanted to keep that mate, they had to leave the country. Go rogue or die. These were our laws for a very long time. Now if a shifter applying for leave was not approved and left anyway, they were considered international fugitives, hunted down and executed. It was not done this way to be cruel. It was done to keep our secrets safe,

I swallowed thickly. Is that what happened to you? Did they not approve and you left anyway?"

Gio shakes his head. "No. The laws have changed since then. It is different now, Nok, there is no forbidding the acceptance of human mates. However, in some territories there is a stipulation that all human mates be approved by their respective Lords prior to acceptance. Then if approved, the couple in question is given no more than three years to produce an heir. If at the end of three years there is still no heir, born or unborn, the

human mate's asylum is revoked. But that isn't what happened to me either." Gio sighs heavily, looking at his empty cup like the damn thing betrayed him.

1/2

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Five:

Without asking him, I simply got up from my seat and retrieve the covered bottle of whiskey and hand it to him. He smiles gratefully, his eyes filling with an alien sort of fondness. An affection for me that I can almost welcome, Probably because I yearned for it for so long. but presently, I am still at odds with "Grazie bambina mia, he says lovingly and I suddenly find it hard to look into his eyes.

Thank you my baby. Why do I understand what that means? But of course, deep down, I know why. And honestly, I can feel a bank of memories hovering in my mind, just waiting to be acknowledged. Likewall full of pictures that you walk by every day and stubbornly refuse to look upon. Knowing that the things you see there will cause you a great deal of pain, you simply exist alongside them. Wondering if there will ever come a day you will be strong enough to look. Wondering... if it's worth the pain to remember the love.. Lord knows why I say what I say next. Maybe because he looks like he needs to hear it. Or, maybe, because deep down inside I've been wanting to acknowledge him. Despite that he left me feeling so alone and abandoned, blocking every memory of him from my mind. So far I haven't been able to think of a way to let him know that he's still somewhere in here. Somewhere in me. Perhaps this is how I let him know without making any sort of real promise of forgiveness. He stares into the glass of whiskey and I say, "Sei il benvenuto papà." You are welcome daddy, in full on Italian and it rolls off my tongue like I've been using the language my entire life. Which I promise you, I have not been!

The pure shock that comes over him when I say it sends him reeling backward into the couch. His eyes widen and glow, ripping upward to connect with mine. I keep myself stoic, my face serene and I'm still not heady to address my pain, but damned if my heart doesn't swell right to bursting when his eyes fill with tears and he takes a minute to breathe. Cold, calculated, Gio looks so vulnerable right at the moment that I almost don't know what to do. I need to keep going. To keep telling me the story of what happened to my mother. So I give him something else too. Another tiny consolation, another olive 'twig (not quite ready for the branch yet) that I know he needs. Reaching inside of my collar, I pull up the chain I'm wearing so the locket is visible, and clutch it to my chest. I say, "Go on. You were saying?"

His eyes follow my movement completely, then he smiles faintly and nods his head. He takes a deep drink before clearing his throat and saying, "Each of the five families has an heir. Never are they without one. Should a day come that an heir is not present, it will mean the end of an ancient bloodline. The Boniface's have Sicily, the Zeno's Sardinia, the Cesi's rule Rome and central Italy, the Medici's have Northern Italy, you know

Venice, Milan, Florence..." He looks at me, his gaze wavering, "And everything south of Rome all the way to the Jonian Sea, is ruled by the Piccolis

I'm nodding as I listen. Right up until he says that. Actually, no, I think I'm still nodding, even after. Almost like a broken wooden doll... a moron. Maybe that's my body's way of absorbing absurd information, "I'm sorry, what was that?"

And almost like clockwork, the front door opens and one of his bodyguards comes inside saying, "Lord Alpha, there's a boat approaching.

Now I'm the one who's shocked.

Lord Alpha? What?

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,631 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Six

My eyes shift right back to Gio, instead of looking alarmed at whobian kertyzond put needed, simply sites at me. "You're certain of this?" he asks

I shrug. "Well, I'm not out there, son But I am expecting him

the new

Gio nods toward his bodyguard. "The silver eyed one, Arsenal and engine tempelt, mile

"The silver eyed one?" I repeat with a laugh. "How do you elATI know that?"

Gio grins, chuckling at me like I'm terribly

. "The moment I heard my Grupiter had found her mate, I had him and his family checked

out. I know many things about them. Maybe even more than they know are

I try to ignore that, but I can't. "Do you know

He shakes his head, cutting me off. "That information I was unable to confirm, he says apologetically. "Though I did try, I do not have

I started the fire

I frown. Figured as much, I should probably be angry that he's been keeping tabs on me, but I'm not. And he must have been doing it for very long, because I find it hard to believe he would have let Marcus terrorize me those years. So, I speak on it. "You must have only just started doing that. There was a lot you missed while I was still in Florida."

Suddenly his eyes glaze over, something like fury radiating his gaze. "To Actually I have always been doing that. But up until recently, I was using the wrong soldiers. My... uh..." he trails off with a sigh. There was a breach in trust. The person who I had watching you in Florida was feeding me misinformation. When I discovered his treachery, the damage had been done and by the time I sent someone after you," his eyes find mine, to retrieve you and bring you to me, you were already gone. Needless to say, that particular soldier was executed by my very own hand."

My heart clenches in my chest, pain and longing making it hard for me to speak. By his very own hand? Really?

"You sent someone after

He clutches his glass, his grip so tight, I swear I can hear the glass begin to crack. "I did. He followed Marcus trail all the way to Port Orchard, but by the time he was able to sneak into the dungeon that housed him, the bastard was already dead. I wanted to take him alive. I had many, many, plans for that piece of shit. There are so many things I am sorry for Draven. So many things. I go around and around it all the time. Trying to figure out if there was some other way I could have saved you without leaving you but-" Is over. He's gone and I don't care about anything else but

"It's done," Finterrupt swiftly, not wanting to talk about Marcus anymore "It's over. He's that'

His eyes are still swirling with fury, when he looks at me. "My man, Redolfo, informed me Marcus had been murdered by a rogue and-"

My neck tenses, my eyes snapping to attention, "A rogue? As in a wolf shifter without a pack?"

Gio sits back as if confused that I don't know this. "Yes. He could smell a male rogue on Marcus' body. Despite the rogue's attempt at skunking. One of the many well developed talents of a Piccoli guard is to scent and dissect. Identifying skunking is a required skill." "Skunking?" I whip out my phone, sending Domonic a text about what Gio has only just told me, but I don't panic when he doesn't text back right away. I know he had a busy night planned. "What is skunking?"

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Six

"It's when a shifter disguises his scent with the use of woodsmoke and old fur."

"Old fur? Are you serious? Like what kind of

be any fur. A different kind of animal usually. But in this case, probably fur the rogue has collected over a period of time. More than likely, fur belonging to the pack in question. In this case, your pack." Gin's eyes light up. "Your mate is unaware that a rogue is the one that has been breaking into his bar and his jail?"

My jaw falls open in shock just as Adam walks into the packhouse from outside. "Is that why he breaks in all the time and they never find anything missing? The rogue is collecting samples?"

"What is this about a rogue?" Adam asks, his voice heavy with interest.

I leap up from the couch and wrap Adam in a warm hug. "Adam!" I nearly shout with happiness. "How was your trip?"

Adam smiles widely, looking happier than I've seen him since I met him "Incredible," he says. "I have good news. Great news, actually." Then his smile falters. "I don't know how great Domonic will think it is but I'm certainly pleased. But what is this, about a rogue? I most definitely want to hear this first."

Remembering for the first time that Adam has never met Gio, I release him and turn around only to stop short at the acute look of pain in Gio's eyes. That's when I realize... this is Domonic's father that I've just grabbed into a welcoming embrace. A greeting much warmer than he himself got from me when he first arrived. Despite that I know I don't owe Gio anything, and I shouldn't be bothered by the fact that he's hurt. I am. So I pull my big girl, I'm a knowledgeable, forgiving Luna panties on and say, "Adam. I'd like you to meet my father, Glo."

Just like that, all the pain in Gio's eyes withers away and he smiles, standing up to shake Adam's hand. "Pleasure to meet you," Gio says

"You are a shifter," Adam says softly. "My son did tell me as much, but it still blows my mind a bit."

"Not only a shifter," I say rather proudly. "He's a Lord Alpha."

Glo chuckles, his face taking on an incredibly red tinge

and I congratulate myself for embarrassing him

-him for once.

"Well, pardon me, my Lord," Adam says sarcastically and the three of us can't help but laugh.

"Gio, is fine," my father says.

My father. Well shit. It's not like I haven't wanted one for a very long time, gave Domunica second chance... Why shouldn't I give my father one? Especially with all the knowledge that he apparently has and we don't.

I allow Adam to take my seat and decide to drop down a bit closer to die, which I can see right away, pleases him immensely. My eyes try to water, but I don't let the tears come. I refuse to ruin this moment with a bunch of girly crying. I'll save that for when Domonic is

here

to hold me.

"So about this rogue," Adam starts, "he only comes around during the full moon. When my y son's pack is under the influence of the full moon shift. So if you are certain it is a rogue, then he is one of the ancient bloodlines." you knew?" I ask, shocked.

Adam blinks, looking somewhat embarrassed. "I heard rumors, but to be perfectly honest, I never believed them. Domonic told me what he learned from your father and, despite that he assured me, Glo carried the scent of a foreign wolf, I didn't entirely believe until I walked through the doors just now." He grimaces, Old Alpha habits die hard, and I was incredibly skeptical." "But now you know it's true," I say with a smirk, thinking that Domonic and his dad are incredibly alike in that know it all kind of way. Arrogance. Geez. I wonder if my daughter is going to be that way.

"Now I believe, Adam admits. "Yes."

2/3

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Six

"How funny," I consent. Regular humans think werewolves are a myth and forced shift werewolves think reglanwerewolves are a myth. Huh. How Ironic

Adam rolls his eyes, then his face turns serious and he sighs. "It is extremely likely that this is the one who murdered my first mate.

My Lily. And if what you say is true, Gin, I'm sure thy son would appreciate your help in catching him. Especially if the bastard thinks he's safe every full moon. He stares into Glo's eyes for a long moment, a look of unspoken understanding passing between them. "My son's ultimate fear since his mother died, was always finding a mate and then

losing her the same way that I did. He still hasn't quite forgiven me for never catching his mother's killer. I haven't entirely forgiven myself, either. She was my first, true love and-" "Wait just a minute! I say, my hand going up. "That's the second time I've heard you say first mate like it's a thing. Am I missing something here?"

As I stare at Adam, a smile breaks across his face. "While we're on the subject of myths, I have another for you, But you must promise to keep this from Domonic, because I have no idea how he will react to the news. I will tell him, but in my own time," "Uh-huh. Go on," I say, on pins and needles.

"It has been said that sometimes when a mate has passed on, another might be found. A second love. Another lost soul having experienced the same loss. I never believed it. I never wanted to! That is how much I loved my Lily, but..." Adam shrugs, grabbing for the bottle of whiskey and taking a deep drink, before meeting my eyes. "While we were out in Montana, visiting Gabriel's mother, I met someone." He pauses for a long moment, taking another drink and a deep breath. I swear, I want to grab him and shake him, but he speaks right as I'm about to make my move. He says, "She is my second mate.

Chapter Comments

KKN

HOLY SMOKES

Marietta Gary

Yay, I'm soooooo happy for Adam!!!!!! *Sigh* Adam deserves to be happy again.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,883 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Seven QUINN

As the sound of the air ambulance scattered into the night, I turned my attention back to the task at hand. Any moment now, the cops will be here and we can't have Tedly Gherkin running his mouth about wolves that don't die and lions attacking men, now can we? Racing into the trees at shifter speed, I smile seeing that he is exactly where I left him. Crying like a bitch while Taedora snarls in his face, her thick paws keeping him pinned to the ground. Even though we're pressed for time, I can't help but kneel and fix him with an exhausted look

"Just had to come looking for trouble, didn't you? I taunt, with a shake of my head. "I would have thought you learned your lesson when you lost those teeth,"

His frightened blue eyes flare. "What the fuck, man?" he whispers, too afraid to raise his voice with a full grown lioness drooling on his lovely black jacket, "Is this thing yours or what? Call it off! Please

I meet Tar's eyes, trying to signal to her that we don't have much time We need to get him to her den and fast. Now that I've recognized their jackets, it's not quite time for him to die yet. I want to find out which of these crazies have been breaking into the bar and stealing dirty panties. The sound of screeching tires in the distance snags my attention and after a quick glance around I decide. There's only one way to communicate with The around Ted and that's with him unconscious.

I take a deep breath then gesture for Tae to get off him. When she does, not only is he in shock, but he's a thousand times more frightened of me than before.

"Get up." I snapped.

He simply stares at me from the ground. "W-why do you have a pet lion

At the sound of the word pet, I laugh and The snarls. "I wouldn't call he that if I were you. Now get the fuck up. We don't have time for this."

"N-no! I won't. You're just going to pretend to let me go and then have her chase me. Fuck you! Give me my rifle, then I'll get up!" Ted argues, his arrogance surging forth as if he wasn't just handed his ass by the cat pacing next to him. WHOOSH, WHOOSH, WHOOSH, WHOOSH

The sound of at least four sets of tires racing up the street sparks me into action. We're going to have to run with him through the hills to avoid the brigade of law enforcement that's about to crash this party. It were just going to be the cops, I wouldn't be worried. But the girl was taken in after an animal attack and it won't just be Timmons showing up. It will be forest rangers too, and then Fish and Wildlife

officers.

"Fuck this," I say, straddling him.

"What the hell are you doing?" he shouts. "Get the fuck off of me Maxim

CRACK!

I slug him across the face and knock him out cold. Fuck," I say. "Silence truly is golden."

Taedora shifts back into herself, her eyes darting back and forth warily. Why didn't you just kill him?"

I shake my head, reaching down to toss him over one shoulder. "Because we need answers from this little bastard. We're going to have to stow him at your place. Quick, what's the fastest way to your den?"

I don't think-"

1/4

08:58

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Seven

"Now Tar! We're about two minutes from being interrupted."

"Shit," she grumbles. "I'm going to shift back. I'm not having you store my ass while we climb out of here."

"Aww, Tae. I'm flattered, but no need to worry about that. Haven't you heard? I found my mate."

She smirks, "I'll pray for her. Follow me."

DOMONIC

Rainier and I make it back to the bar, just in time to hear the call come through on Rainier's two-way radio, which is presently resting on Bartlett's desk. Rainier doesn't normally bring it inside when he's not on duty, but it's there and the very first thing we hear when we stroll inside is the out of county call for all Wildlife Officers,

"Shit!" Rainier snaps, picking

ing up the radio to listen in while he gets dressed.

"Possible missing persons and one confirmed injury on Bethel Rd, just outside of Port Orchard at the Rearview RV Campsite, eastside. South Kitsap Fire and Rescue are on the scene. Young adult female/possible minor was airlifted to Seattle Grace Hospital and remains in critical condition. The Emergency Medical report suggests a mountain lion attack and officers should be on the lookout for an adult cougar, possibly seven feet in length and weighing up to two hundred pounds. Orders are to subdue and contain, not destroy. Requesting additional assistance to canvas the area. Eye witnesses reported multiple wolf sightings and shots fired on site. All volunteers are advised to be in full gear. Jackets and vests required. Possible hunters in the area, requesting air

support to issue a warning. "Holy fucking shit," Rainier hisses. "Possible minor? Fuck Dom. What if they were just kids?"

I'd be lying if I said that the moment I heard the words possible minor I didn't want to kick myself for not handling this night a little differently. But what's done is done and there's no way of going back in time, so... "I don't fucking know. What if they were? It's not like they weren't in the woods planning to kill one of us."

"True," Rainier replies. "But, we knew they couldn't. They didn't have the right ammo. So if you think about it, they never really stood a chance and we pretty much swallowed them whole. Rainier shakes his head. "Fuck! They were pretty young. We should have just scared

them off."

I nod, picturing the way I slowly hunted that bastard in the woods just to fuck with him. But, I did let him get a couple of shots off at me before I took him down. The intent was there and when I picture his face, I know he had to be about my age. He might have even been a little older. "That fucker that came after me had beer on his breath, a mustache, and a goatee. So I'm pretty confident that he was old enough to read too. The Warning No Hunting Zone - You Shoot We Shidor sign is pretty fucking big when you drive up. So I won't be shedding any tears over it."

-

Rainier still looks upset, shaking his head and burying his face in his hands as he says, "That kid I tore into looked eighteen... maybe..

Fuck!"

"Hey!" I snap. "Enough of that shit! We aren't the only game out there, you know. There are naturals all over that portion of the forest. They couldn't kill us, no, but they might have gotten one of them," "You're right," he relents, shaking it off as he begins to tie up his boots. But it kind of makes me sick that now I have to play Hunter Hero and join the search for the missing persons that I know are dead."

"No," I state. "You're joining the hunt because it's your fucken job and because it would not do for outsiders to get She hasn't exactly been careful lately."

"Right. Gayle, I forgot. You think she's the one that attacked the female hunter?"

their hands on Gayle.

I nod, "Without a doubt. I just don't see Tardora wasting her time toying with her catch, Besides, the moment I saw that one of them was female, I know better than to touch

her. Draven would have skewered my balls to fry them over an open flame," Rainier laughs. "I think she still might."

2/4

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Seven

That's another thing. My baby is pregnant. Pregnant! With a possible shifter. Before my child is born, I want this mess dealt with. The our home and I dont want to leave it, especially before we find our mothers killer, but I won't risk losing my child over it. No. No way. The hunters have to be dealt with harshly. I want them afraid to even look in this direction. "Look at it this way. Two years from now my pop could be racing through the woods during his first shift and f'dike to know hes safe when he does it. Can you imagine of those bastards would do if they came across a cub?"

Rainier goes silent, his eyes reflecting the sudden worry that I feel. "We won't let that happen. We're going to put an end to and everything they stand for."

"Yes - the fuck - we are," I say absently as I read a message from Draven that came in about twenty minutes ago. Holy shit well..." I say, texting her a thank you and telling her I'll be there tomorrow, "What?" Rainier asks as he finishes putting on the rest of his

This uniform.

"Gio... that motherfucker is like a library of shifter knowledge." My jaw clenches with what I'm about to say, because I know it's going to open a brand new can of worms, "I think we need to find your dad." Rainier sneers. "Fuck that. Why?"

I show him Draven's text and as suspected, Rainier's eyes go hot and his grip tightens on my phone. "A rogue? But the only scent

Pine needles a

and woodsmoke," I finished for him. "Maybe rogue's smell different than we do. Your dad went rogue when he escaped. If their scent changes, we need to know how and what is different."

"Yeah," Rainier agrees, handing me back my phone. "But we should have scented some kind of wolf-

""Not if we weren't

expecting one," I point out "It was a full moon after all."

Rainier's growls. "So it's a foreigner. Someone like Gio?"

I stroke my chin slowly. "Makes sense if you think about it. Maybe all this shit about skunking is older than we are. Maybe its thing for their kind to do. Could be that's why it was easy for Gio's men to recognize it as a tactic and it could also be why it was that was used." The pair of us jerk to attention at the sound of someone joining us.

Rainier snickers, shaking his head. "What the fuck are you wearing?"

Quinn is out of breath as he flips Rainier off and saunters into the room. "A rogue, huh?" Quinn repeats, telling me he was outside a minute before he came in panting like an old maid. "Well if that's true, wait until you hear this little twist." K-What?"

Quinn smiles. "I can't be the only one who recognized the jackets they were wearing tonight, right? Because if Jam, I want public recognition."

My brow furrows in annoyance. "What the fuck are you" I cut off when picture it. The jacket the hunter was wearing. No way. I'm about to check the video on my phone when I see Rainier doing the exact same thing. Pulling up the feed to double check, Rainier's eyes go wide with shock. Tll be damned. No wonder he's been so hard to catch."

"And I'll

I know just which one of them it was, too," Quinn says softly and we both stand tense, waiting. "Delilah says the guy training her brother only hunts one kind of game. Can you guess what it is?"

Rainier and I speak at the same time, "Shifters."

3/4

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,532 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Eight GRYFFIN

with the little bland man-child chained up in the After Quinn left I made à point of staying upstairs where I couldn't be tempted to loy basement. I need to gather myself first and maybe even pat ingether at of questions to ask him when he finally comes to. It may sound stupid, but the truth is Ive never had one in my care that I didn't outright minder. There have only been a handful of times that Gayle or I have been fortunate enough to take one of them alive, and each of these times my anger got the better of me. I ended

up shifting and tearing them to bits. However, I can't shift these days, so this time will be different. This time, maybe I'll get a few answers that I need and finally figure out which hunter it was that killed my mother.

Whoever he was, he took her body before we could retrieve it. I want it back.

I'm not stupid. I know what the fucker probably did with it. It turns my stomach to imagine her that way, but what kind of son would I be if I let some bastard keep her like a stuffed trophy. Passing her down from generation to generation as if she wasn't someone's mother. She was a queen, but we never treated her like one. We should have. We took the fact that we were shifters for granted. Thinking we were safe. Thinking we were invincible. Well, we're not. We're just a lot harder to kill.

She asked me to help her that day. She said she needed me to help her track some hunter because there was something different about him. I blew her off thinking she was paranoid..

There was this girl, her name was Amber, she was a cheerleader at my high school. I wanted her for my mate. I even pretended she was my mate just so my mom would let me bring her around, but deep down I knew she wasn't much more than a human girl with a banging body. I was young, stupid, and horny. My mother was killed while I was out fucking the ditzy bimbo in an abandoned parking lot.

Believe it or not, I felt it when she died. The sad shame is, once I was finished fucking Amber, I didn't want her anymore. Dumped her that same day. She cried and called me an asshole and I laughed as I rode off on my bike. In the next few moments, I felt it. The loss. The dread. The acute realization that something had gone terribly wrong and nothing would ever be the same again.

Back at the den everyone was in tears and right away, I knew, Goose had been with her. I guess when I refused to help her, she asked him to join her instead. According to Goose, she saved his life. He was just as young as I was, but with less training and ended up making some rookie mistake that put him right in the hunter's path. Goose said my mother yowled in warning, signaling that the hunter was in the trees, but by the time he spotted the guy it was too late. So my mother, forever the protective lioness, stepped in the line of fire like the queen that she was.

It should have been me

Gayle was her baby. I was her protector! Her oldest! I failed her.

She deserves a proper

burial.

Shaking off the ghosts of the past, the sound of a helicopter overhead catches my

attention.

I "Gryff!" Goose screams from downstairs and I race out of my ro

of my room as fast as my non shifting legs will carry me.

When I approach him, his face is a mask of panic. "What? What happened? Where's Gayle?"

Goose shakes his head and Taedora shrugs.

"She attacked a female hunter. A sniper," Taedora explains. "Instead of killing her quickly, she had her by the throat, trying to make the girl suffer. For whatever reason, Bartlett stepped in. He ripped Gayle off the human with his teeth and Gayle disappeared into the woods. No one has seen her since."

What the fuck? And the hunter? The girl?" I ask, throwing open the front door and stalking into the yard to scan the woods. I cant see anything. I need my lion back!

1/3

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Eight

A spotlight illuminates me for if moment as a helicopter hovers overhead Fuck. That's not our regular chopper.

A woman's voice could be heard coming from the ginnt speakers attached to the sides of the bird.

"This is a warning. All residents are urged to remain indoors. All visitors are ordered to eculate the area. This is a no hunting zone and all violators will be detained. We are searching for a large adult conger. Assured to be near seven feet in length and two hundred pounds. This animal is extremely aggressive, please be advised. This is a warning. All residents... The voice continues, repeating the same message as the helicopter proceeds to circle a different area.

"What the fuck?" I hiss

"There are men all over the woods," Goose says, idling up next to me. Duys from all over. My eyes rip toward him, and he shakes his head. "They're hunting for Gayle."

"What about the wolves?" I ask, knowing they've got more than a few guys on the force.

Goose shrugs, "I saw Tim and Koda. But Rain and Dom were with me taking care of the threat in the forest. There was a lot of commotion at the campsite, so we went our separate ways right when we were done. There's blood in those woods, Gryff." "Fuck!" I

growl. "They're going to assume it was all Gayle. They're going to hunt her down and kill her."

"Gayle's a little unhinged, yeah, Taedora says from behind me. "But she's not stupid and she's not deaf. She's not going to head back toward the campsite."

I sigh, shaking my head. My sister has been getting more and more out of hand. And now she has a human hunter for a mate. The little bastard tried to kill her and all she would say about it was that she just needed to meet him again. As her human self. She really thinks he won't recognize her. She may be right, but I'm not willing to risk it, so I forbade her from trying to track him. I am the king of this den, but that doesn't mean she'll listen. Good thing she doesn't know where to start looking for the prick. I turn to Tae and Goose and say, "Well it's not safe for either of you to go looking for her as lions, and it's pointless to go as humans, so I guess there's only one thing left to do.

We wait."

DELILAH

I don't know why I wake up, but I do. My eyes pop open and at first I have no idea where I am. Sitting up in bed and seeing that I'm naked, I suddenly remember. My cheeks flame with heat and I can't help but smile like an idiot. Quinn. I'm at Quinn's place. But where is he?

Glancing at the other side of the bed, I see it remains untouched. He must not have come to bed yet. The clock on the nightstand tells me it's two a.m. Shouldn't he have joined me by now?

Maybe he has to run at night or something? He is a wolf.

RAT, TAT, TAT, TAT.

A sharp tapping on my left grabs my attention and I listen intently, trying to figure out where the sound is coming from.

RAT, TAT, TAT, TAT.

The glass! The patio doors! Quinn closed the shades, so I have no idea what is making that sound. But what if it's Quinn? What if he somehow got locked outside?

RAT, TAT, TAT, TAT.

Shit! I need to check

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Eight

I throw off the covers and try to hot out of bed, but I stumble, Holy fuck or sore!

Okay... mybe try to walk a little shower, Del.

I push up off the ground just as the tapping starts again. This time, way more insistent.

RAT. TAT. TAT. TAT: RAT, TAT, TAT, ZATI

"Hold on!" I

"Hold on!" I say to the empty room. "Tm coming."

My head swivels left and right as I search for my clothes, but they're nowhere to be found. "Shit!" I head into Quinn's closet and grab the first hoodie I find, throwing it on and nodding with satisfaction because it reaches down to my knees. Heading for the patio doors, I flip on the porchlight then pull the shades back.

Then, I freeze with my hand on the latch.

You've got to be kidding me.

What the fuck? 11ho the hell is this?

A gorgeous blond female stands on the other side of the doors. But that's not the worst part.

The worst part is what she is wearing. Or rather, what she's not.

"You're not Quinn," I say, eyeing the intruder warily.

Anger erupts everywhere inside of me as I stare at the visitor on the other side of the glass.

This woman is naked and knocking on Quinn's bedroom doors in the wee hours of the fm not shit but a player morning and she doesn't even look cold.

Oh Quinn... just wait until I get my hands on you.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,395 words]

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Nine GAYLE

The peilbad behind the glass looks more than a little upset. With nursed eyes, her gaze travels over my seemingly perfect figure. I know what she sees and lyant blame her for gawking at me like she is Truth be told, I do spend copious amounts of time looking at myself in the mitrot. Admiring ones attributes is not a food thing, but I probably do it a little more than your average beauty does. What can I say? 1 like the way I look. I have the kind of body you might The Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition and that's not likely to

My honey blonde hair is touched with shimmering autumu hurs, filling down past my shoulders, and although it is straight, it's not for straight like say, Draven's is. No, my hair is tem fine and refuses to lay is heavily as all that. It's the kind of hair that goes wild with just a touch of wind, flying about like I'm caught in a cyclone. If I'm perfectly honest, it is my least favorite feature. The strands may be as soft as goose feathers, but I live in northern Washington and ninety percent of the time, my head is draped in a blanket of frizz. However, my skin holds a golden glow to it that I was I will and I never get pul hot even in winter time, just part of my feline heritage, I suppose. Gryffin is the exact same way. He and I could have been cut from exactly the same cloth, our coloring is identical. Well, we are full-blonded brother and sister, so there is tint. He is older, but not by much. Alright so he has the better hair ton, so what? Can't win them all, Gryffin's alphabolism used to be pretty bad, but he's tempered it down since our mother died. I'm the opposite, I guess. After mom was killed, t just sort of got worse. Even luck then, I was way more cunning Dian he was, and definitely more aggressive, but I never used to go as all out as I do now. These days, I apply the 'it's easter to ask for forges than permission' philosophy to nearly every little thing I do, A habit that seems to be getting me in more than my fair share of trouble lately, Just ask the ghetto bird and the forest full of humans scouting for me in the woods. They know I'm dangerous. Gryffin tends to show restraint, whereas I prefer snap judgment and immediate Tonight... I may have even erred on the bad side of sadistic behavior (as if there's a good side lol), but I'm not sorry about it. Even though the result has me ducking through the back alleys of Port Orchard in my very naked and very human form, it was worth it if you ask me.

ctually enjoyed feeling that bitch's pulse go from frantic and strong, to faded out and non-existent. Fucking Bartlett, though? What the hell was his problem? Personality wise, I'm the only one of our lion pride with an almost non-existent fuse and a verifiably explosive temper, to the next time I see Bartlett I may decide to try that little trick on him for robbing me of my kill.

For now though, I have an entirely different agenda and this fiery little damsel of Quinn's needs to get with the program. Did I mention that I am also short on patience as well? No? Well, I am, and this flame haired little fire sprite has yet to even ask me my name. She's still staring at me with murder in her eyes. Not for me, of course. She must think I'm one of Quinn's late night booty calls, which is almost kind of hymny since lie's chutely had plenty of them. In fact, he and I love even been together. Only once! What can I say, the man has a very nice ass, a big dick, and an extremely sinful mouth. He can be very very, convincing. We were young when it happened, but it did happen.

Yet, here we stand, she and I. Her, as Quinn's mate and me, as her brother's.

Her brother is the actant reason I'm here. Sure, I could use a place to hide as well, but there are plenty of empty houses on this beach. They wouldn't be hard to break into. I know which one's have owner's and which one's are truly vacant.

But the first thing I thought of when I realized I was in trouble was my mate, It was the strangest thing. It was like I suddenly yearned for. his comfort. Like I needed him to keep me safe. It's hard to explain, but the closest thing I can come up with to compare it to, is the natural born instinct that off creatures are equipped with when they first come into the world - the urge to go to their mother. It's a default behavior, not all mothers are good. But mine was and I haven't felt that way about anyone since she died.

I have to get to him before the others do. If I don't, he's as good as dead, Gryffin wants to kill him. He said as much. Gryffin never makes idle threats. He's already forbidden me from going after the guy and I know that only means one thing. Gryffin doesn't want me to get I attached because even if I do manage to change the human's heart, or decide that I want to be with him... even if I go out and marry the shade, Gryffin is going to kill him. That tells me that when I see him, my mate, and maybe decide to forgive him, I won't ever be able to bring him back here. To my home.

ing I tried to attack this girl in the river this morning or might never have learned that my mate was her brother and not her

Good thing I boyfriend

"Are you going to let me in?" I shout just to be sure that she can hear me. Quinn's windows are more than likely bulletproof, so it might take a cool minute to force my way in if it comes to that.

1/2

Chapter One Hundred Ninety-Nine

The girl sports as

d1 tant trally blama ber

but she needs to. Shur's probably the only other person su

twallow my taughter. "He

your goodies somewhere else, skank"

This time, I do smile, but only until I see

well when the shades are half drawn.

The girl freezes, eyeing me warily. "What? Then who at jrou here for thee? Not Obar

That other dude, the p

I grin, yeah, Timmons is kind of a douchebag and a bit. He's always getting sight to say about one. "The's human and her brother's a hunter, so I can only imagine what type of colorful introduction chey must harive hard). Tm here to see you," I tell her, stupidly.

Right away, she assumes I'm playing with her and tips me as far as you re concerned, ever again.

Nice try bitibi. Live I said. Quien s not here and

"No!" I shout again, but she continues to close the shades. "You hat

Her hand is all that's still visible behind the glass and when it squeeze the xhades wide open, her gaze even more wary than before.

I nod, offering her a feline smile. Im afraid there wa

but we met in the men this maring

jendly on the shades, I know her curiosity is piqued. The puls

She tilts her head at me quizzically, studying my features as if trying to and nibbles her lip, the wheels spinning in her head as she takes stock together in her mind. The moment it clicks into place for her, the tes shock. But she still looks a little unsure and I decide it can't hurt to show her

equation

yes and my coloring almost ba nous piecing somethin lightning her back and slapping

Hold a finger up to catch her attention, I stretch my neck and crack a few joints to loosen myself up. Taking a quick pesk sure there aren't any helicopters or rangers anywhere nearby. One should always double check. Then I sum back to face her and my lion as quickly as possible, a soft mewl emitting from my throat when I do. I'm completely Bubbergasted by what she does net.

She opens the doors and I wander inside on all fours.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,748 words]

Chapter Two Hundred

DELILAH

I must be crazy. Absolutely, positively nuts. I just let the lion that was going to attack me in the creek, waltz through the patio doors and into the bedroom.

The lion that was a naked woman not two minutes ago.

The naked woman that, for whatever reason, almost had me for a snack ten hours ago.

I watched her change into the creature of my nightmares and said "Tey why not let her in? Let's show her how brave you are!" What the fuck? Am I certifiably insane?

She says she's here to see me, but what if she's not? Why would she be? What business can she possibly have with me? Aside from the, hey, sorry we got interrupted before I could end your life kind of unfinished business?

Maybe she really is here to see Quinn and she is Drying
is trick me.

Maybe, she's into him, or they have a history, or... maybe he simply fucks her from time to time. That could be why they were both in the creek this morning. Technically, yesterday morning since it's after two a.m., but who really gives a damn about that part? It's not important.

at me with an almost cavalier grin. As if

What is important, is that she hasn't changed back into a human yet. Why not? Why is she staring at

he won the game?:

Oh Delilah, if you were just going to fuck yourself you could

you could have at least taken a

little longer in doing

doing it. Drag out your pleasure til the end, diht

Without even realizing what I'm doing, I start backing away from her. Heading toward the stairs one tiny little backward and barefoot step at a time.

She snarls, her head swiveling in my direction and I swear in that moment she glares at me.

"Aww fuck," I hiss as her muscles gather and bunch the way they did when she was perched on that boulder. She's going to pounce on me! Who's the dumbass now, Det? Huh? That's right. You are. And no can of sug was injured in the making of this murder.

A rumbling reverberates behind her chest and she springs into the air with a growl. It's almost as if she does it in slow motion too, because / should be running, or dodging or... dying! But I'm not, nope. I'm standing here watching a large gold cat clear the ten feet of space between us, and all the while I'm wondering how angry Quinn's going to be when my blood seeps into the plush white carpet. Will it be ruined? Does he know that a half cup of steaming water and three tablespoons of dawn dish soap are all that he needs to get the blood out? Wish I could tell him. Too bad I don't have time to. When I get to heaven and God asks me what I learned here on earth, all I'm going to be able to say is - I learned the Animal Planet experts are wrong. It's not Fight or Flight after all. It's Fight, Flight, or Freeze. Because the only thing I seem to be able to move is my fucken jaw as it stretches toward the ground in absolute horror.

I'm going to die.

As the sound of her roar reaches me, I'm pretty su

sure I pee a bit. And just as her long, lithe body is about to tumble directly into my chest, her face suddenly morphs into that of an evil Quinn concubine and her roar fizzles into the giggles of a madwoman.

She drops onto the floor in a naked heap. Rolling and laughing as she clutches her arms to

o her stomach.

All of my air is gone. I can't fucking breathe as I stand here with my jaw still open and my mouth completed raped of moisture. She's laughing.

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred

"Oh God!" she cackles. "You should have seen your face. Well, actually, still there, so you can if you hurry."

One sharp inhale Inter, I'm still watching her cry happy tears onto the floor. "You, y-you-

"I'm sorry," she gasps, "I couldn't resist. I could see you overthinking and... well... it was too easy."

"You know what? I snap, crossing my arms and tapping my foot angrily, I think I may have just been converted."

"Converted?" she snarks, hiking an eyebrow at me as she stands in her abundantly naked glory. "Converted to what? Her mouth falls open in shock. "OH! You mean - oh no! I'm sorry, I must have given you the wrong impression. Yes, I am here to see you, but no... not in that way." She shakes her head, scrunching her nose at me. "I'm only naked because I have to be. Not because I wanted to seduce you, or... convert you, or whatever. I can assure you, I may be a pussy, but mine is the only one I like."

I don't even know where to start.

Her mother certainly raised her to be confident.

If not conceited.

"I understand," I tell her. "And lucky for us, I'm one hundred percent behind your decision. When I say converted, I mean from green to gore."

"Green to gore?" she speculates.

"I'm a vegetarian," I say smoothly walking into Quinn's closet to find her a pair of sweats and a sweater. At least I was, until I suddenly had the urge to try barbecued lion."

She snickers, giggling into her hands with a feline smirk like the saucy little lioness she is. "Ahhh! Okay! Phew," she chuckles, taking the plain black sweat suit I offer her, gratefully.

I don't really like the thought of her wearing Quinn's clothes. Something about it rubs me the wrong way, but what choice do I have? If she remains naked, then every time I look at her she's going to think I'm converting.

I should have tried the douchebag's room and swiped something of his instead.

"I'm going to need those back," I say offhandedly and she snorts.

"Okay, Missus Quinn, she winks.

My cheeks flame red. Oh yeah, I forgot about that. "Right. Well... I didn't know who you were and Quinn... he... um..."

"It's okay, really," she says. "I totally understand. He's your mate. It's natural for you to feel crazy possessive of him. If you way I'd be worried."

I release a sigh of relief, smiling for the first time. "My name is Delilah,
didn't feel that

She grins, stepping forward and offering me her hand. She stands at least a few inches taller than I do, but then again, I'm only tall for a midget so nothing new there.

"I'm Gayle," she says as our fingers entwine briefly. Gesturing to hurry up and get out of here before Quinn gets back."

Once again. Jaw on the floor. Frozen in tline.

toward Quinn's closet, she says, "You should get some pants on too. We need

"Wait," I protest, watching helplessly as she snags a pair of navy blue sweatpants. "I'm sorry, but... Why are we leaving, again? I must missed the entire conversation that we never had."

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred

She grina, tossing the pants at my face. I put them on, but only so that hy as it bare.
"You know

She nods then shrugs. "I know where he was. But it's already been an hour since I last saw him and there's no telling where he could be here any minute and if he gets here before we leave, we'll never be able to get away dean.

"Wait!" I say as she starts to drag me toward the back patio dons. First of all front In the ocean at night! Second, where the fuck are we going and why would we need to get away

barefoor human and

"Right," she says exasperated. "I was hoping to get out of here first and explain later, but I suppose it makes sense that you want to

"Uh-huh," I say with mock gratitude. Thanks so much for understanding

her eyes for a moment before she speaks, "When I attacked you this morning, it wasnt because I thought

She takes a deep breath closing her ey you were one of the hunters."

"The hunters?"

I told Goose when he laid into me about trying to splice you in the creek.

She nods, raising her chin defiantly. "That's what I told

Splice me? How colorful. Jesus.

Im not even

to ask what animal Goose must be... so, go on..."

She giggles again. "He's a moody ass mountain lion shifter that doesn't know when to mind his own damn business, but that's not what important." She bites her lip. "I saw you last night through the window of Dobson's cabin. Before I landed myself in that bear trap in the woods."

gasp, goosebumps riding across my flesh. "Oh my God! You're the one You re the shifter that my brother shot at!"

"Not shot at Shot! He fucking shot me and somehow the bond must have caused me to shift into this form, my human form. Other than that, I have no explanation for why it happened. I was a lioness when the first bullet hit!" "First bullet?"

"Yeah, there were two. But, who cares? That's not the issue. The issue is that we have to find him before they do?!"

"Wait a minute!" I argue, stumbling when she yanks me toward the back doors. "Find him? Find who?"

She groans, grabbing the ends of her hair in frustration. "Your brother! They're going to go after him!"

My bady goes cold. It physically feels like my blood drains all the way down to my feet as I ingest her words. "M-my brother? What? No! Quinn... he...]....."

e shakes

her

head. "You don't get it. We were attacked tonight in the woods. By men like your brother! That's where Quinn was. That's where I was! Him, me, and a few others. We were defending our territory."

she

From the Elder Few?" It's a question, however, Im not really asking anything. I'm sure I already know. Then I shake my head, trying to clear the sex fog from my brain. I knew

they were up to something tonight Quinn and his friend, Domonic. They were acting shady as fuck and after the guy left, Quinn pounced on me. Even though the sex was great, it seemed almost like some kind of distraction. Or like a diversion he had planned for me. But I hadn't wanted to believe that. I still don't. But... I hear what she's saying, and I do. "Why would you care about getting to my brother? I finally you! Why would you="

nally ask her,

my eyes narrowing suspiciously. "He was hunting you. He tried to kill

"I attacked you in the creek because I was jealous!" she confesses, her es glossy with tears. "I didn't know you were his sister. I thought

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[2,377 words]

Chapter Two Hundred

you might be his girlfriend, or lover, or even his wife." She frowns, opel

"Okay, gress. But, okay. Why do you even care who I am to him?"

After a quick glance around, she turns back to me, her eyes bright with he before she tells me, I think I already know. That night he shot me, meets my eyes woefully. "He's my mate," she chokes out, one tear traili Chapter Comments

Marietta Gary

Jayleeeeeeeeeee! Have I ever told you in longer ha don't and THIS is the reason why...cliffhangers,

KKN

lol im convertedé

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred One

DELIKATI

"What do you mean they are going to kill him? Who is? Quin?"

Gayle growls in frustration, "Yes! Him! His pack! My brother! My pride They're going to go after him!"

My heart aches. A sharp stabbing pain teating into it at her words. I shake my head. "No, Quinn won't let them. He won't! You're wrong about that!"

She rolls her eyes. "If you think so, that's on you. But Domande is the Alpha, not Quinn and what Domonie says gres. Trust me."

I take a deep breath, refusing to believe that Quinn would do that to me. Sure, I don't know him that well, but... I believed him when he said he cared about me. I believed him when he said I was his mate. He judet huurt my brother... Right? But if any of what she's saying true, I need to wam my brother. "If we do figure out where he is, how the we going to get there? Task. "I can't shift and I'm no Mowgli, i WILL NOT ride on your back like in the Jungle Book."

She grins, "Qur jeep is parked in Quinn's driveway. We'll take it."

My eyes widened. "That's yours?"

She shrugs. "For the most part. Quinn borrowed it to bring you here. The keys will still be inside of it because one of us was supposed to

me and pick it up. We just hadn't gotten around to it yet. So don't worry about that part. Let's just get out of here before it's too latest,

"Okay," I say with a nod, racking my brain for what I need to do before we leave. "Do you have any money? I do but it's locked in Quinn's car. And my phone-" that's when I cut off. "What?" Gay

Gayle asks, noting the way I freeze mid-sentence, "What's wrong?"

"M-my phone!" I confide softly. "I have to bring it and I don't know where it is." Where is my phone?

"Okay, well where did you have it last?" she asks, gazing past me into the house.

My eyes narrow as I recall the last time I had it. It was just before Quinn ambushed me out here on the patio. Did he take it from me? Did I drop it? My eyes go everywhere, scanning the patio for it, but finding nothing. I had dropped it, I would have heard it fall I'm sure of it. "I had it out here right before... I trail off as my cheeks heat. "Maybe Quinn put it with my clothes."

"Why would Quinn have it?" she asks, alarmed.

I shake my head. "He didn't, I had it. I had just hung up with Cane, and then Quinn and his friend were standing behind me. He introduced me to his friend Domonic and then walked him out. I still had my phone... but then..." Her

eyes fill with worry. "Who's Cane, Delilah?"

I meet her eyes, feeling like a fool as I remember how easily Quinn crept up behind me and stole my attention. "Cane is my brother."

Gayle's eyes go wide. "Did they know you'd been talking to him?"

I nod sadly. "Yes,"

Gayle curses. "He took it. He took it to track him, Some of the pack is

is on the police force. They have all kinds of ways to trace cell phones."

My heart is thumping with pain when I realize I may have been duped. Tell me something, Gayle, When a wolf shifter finds his mate, how

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred One.

does he know? What does he do with her?

Gayle tilts her head curiously. "Well, I'm no expert on wolf shifters, but far as I know, they usually scent her first. They're drawn to it. As far as I know, it's pretty obvious on both sides. Especially after you're uker." "Marked?" I ask curiously,

Gayle appears grim. "Yes. They mark you as theirs right at the base of your throat. We do the same thing, but on the back shoulder. She studies me. "He didn't mark you?"

I shake my head. What if I'm not really his mate? What if he knew I was the best way to get to Cane and tricked me into believing we were mates just to get me to trust him. "In an idiot."

"I don't know what you are thinking, but whatever it is just understand wolves don't usually lie about who their mate is Then she gasps, clamping up a bit.

"What?" I push, curious.

"N-nothing, I mean. It's nothing."

"It's not nothing!" I snap. "I deserve to know. What is it?"

She sighs, "Well, Domonic, he lied about his mate once. To get his real mate to leave town. But that's the only time I've ever heard of that happening. I.

Ters fill my vision. "You don't think they might have lied to me to get to my brother?"

I don't know what I expect her to say, she's staring past me at nothing. Honestly? I don't know. But I do know the longer we stay here the less likely we will be to make it out of here." But I do

"But I don't even have a phone to call my brother!" I hiss.

She says with confidence, "There's always a burner in the jeep for emergencies. You know his number, right?"

I nod. "Of course.

"Then that's all we really need," she states.

"Okay, I just need to leave a note for Charlie," I say with sad resignation

"Go, but then come back this way. We can climb these stairs to the ground floor patio, then the deck winds out to the front of the house. So hurry!" she says.

I nod and race back into the house, heading straight for Quinn's bathroom hamper. I need to make sure Quinn really took my phone, before I start jumping to conclusions. I lift the lid and find my clothes from earlier on the very top, but when I rifle through them I don't find my phone. The same thing happens when I search the rest of his bedroom, Shit I creep upstairs and check the kitchen, the living room, the dining room, the fridge. That's where I find Quinn's note telling me to stay here because he went to the Moonlight Lounge on business -and would be back soon. Business, huh? You fucking lying thief?

The Moonlight Lounge? Isn't that the bar he found me outside of this morning?

Finding a pen and the pad of sticky notes, I scribble out a note of my own for both Quinn and Charlie.

Had to go. My brother might be in danger. Will be back for Charlie. I'd tell you to call me but I can't find my phone - Del

There we go. That not only gives him an idea of where I'm going, but it's clear that I intend to save my brother from anything that goes

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred One.

after him. And if Quinn took my phone then the bastard only has himself to blame. And if he led alnut my being his mate??? Well, I guess I know soon crimugh, won't L Chapter Two Hundred Two

ELDER ROMAN

BOL

It's three in the morning when I've returned from o much needed run in the woods. I'm usually alone out here at this cottage and this is the only place I ever allow myself to shift. Now that I have Cane with me, I will have to limit myself to a couple times a week and only in the middle of the night. Potentially, that might cause problems for in might make my temper harder to control, but for now it can't be helped. I'll simply have to deal with it. Even from outside, I can hear the sound of Cane's soft snores behind the walls, so I know he's still sleeping hard after I drugged his dinner with a little ambient. You know, just to ensure he didn't wake while I was in my wolf form. I can't imagine what that conversation would have been like had he caught shining. I'd have to kill him and I've only just acquired him. After I get dressed on the porch, I step into the worms cottage to see my phone lighting up on the counter. Who the hell?

The caller identification flashes with Elder Matthew's name on it and I frown. Something has to have happened. Something bad. He never calls me when I'm training unless it's an emergency.

"Talk to me," I say quietly.

"Roman! Thank God! Were you sleeping? I've been calling you for an hour!" Matthew's panicked voice fills my ears.

"I was," I lie, "and my phone was on silent, in the kitchen. I only got up to get some water. What's going on? Is something wrong?"

"Five of the pledges broke the rules tonight and stole our campers." Matthew releases a sigh and my ears pick up another conversation going on in the background.

Elder Roosevelt is talking to a couple of others nearby, which means they are all gathered at the compound. He's arguing with someone. He says, "Rose is in a coma! I have to go to her! I don't care what you say!"

What the hell? I knew it was a bad idea to replace Rosen with his sister Rase. I knew it. Now it seems something has happened.

"Okay," I reply, settling in my chair and listening to the other Elders talk about an unsanctioned hunt gone wrong. Oh fuck. Dawn kids, I swear.. "Let me guess," I start, knowing I can't rightly admit that I can hear the conversation going on in the background, "they took off

on

hunt."

"Correct. Rose was among

g them. She was airlifted to the hospital, Matthew snarls

What the fuck? What did they hunt? "She was caught?" My hackles go up. Tell me she wasn't wearing-

"She was," Matthew says angrily.

00

*I told you it

was a bad damned idea switching her in for her brother! Rosen would never have done something this reckless!" I snap. "There's going to be an investigation! Someone better get over there quick and do some damage control!"

"Rose's father is heading over to the hospital in just a few moments. Rose was the supposed victim of a lion attack," Matthew admits and Rose's fat

my blood freezes.

"Roosevelt cannot be trusted to look out for the Council interests, Matthew! You know this! Now, where did they go hunting?" I ask sharply.

Matthew groans in frustration. "The woods just outside of Port Orchard

"Fuck," I hiss, "How many times have I told those kids never to hunt in those woods without me? They're idiots then, and deserve what they got. Those are not regular lions Matthew! You know this! What the fuck? Who were the others?" They were all now pledges, save one. Ted," Matthew admits.

1/2

Chapter Two Hundred Two

Ted? As in his son Ted? Can't say I give a fuck about that liute shit getting what he deserves. He's been caught more than a fee times, forcing himself on a different Elder's daughter. Of course, I always swath in and save them. The pretty ones, anyway. Needless to say, they've all been incredibly grateful each time. They thank me with a bl Job or sometimes with sex. All in the interests of keeping their little secret. None of them ever wants to point a finger at a son of the council. Fine by me. The only of them that

never truly thanked me was that brat sister of Cane's. Her mother did, but she was a cheap replacement for the fiery redhead I'd had my eye on.

Matthew goes on, "Something must have gone wrong. They found evidence suggesting at least three of them might be dead. One is missing. Ted is an accomplished hunter, so I'm thinking he may have gotten away."

Oh yeah, he's so skifted. Please give me a break.

"So only one loose end," I remark, thinking that Rose may just have to lie to keep our secrets. "You know what that means, Matthew, Don't make me spell it out for you."

"Well, she's in a coma, Matthew admits quietly, lowering his voice to escape Roosevelt's notice. Thank God. She won't be talking any time soon. But the RVs have been impounded. As far as I know, the authorities didn't find any incriminating evidence in them." "Other than that they're registered to you all," I snipe, draping a hand over my eyes.

"Yes," Matthew admits, speaking up to drown out the bickering voices in the background. "We need you, I need you. You're the best tracker

we have and one of our son's is still out there alive."

"Alright," I say knowing I'll have to prepare a few items before I leave. head out there in the morning. You go with Roosevelt. The authorities will be there waiting for Rose to awaken. Someone is going to have to make sure that she never does. Looks like it's got to be "Understood," Matthew says with cold resignation. "I'll call you from the hospital."

"Matthew!" I say suddenly as something dawns on me.

"Yes?" Matthew answers.

"On second thought, don't terminate her until I give you the okay. Unless of course, she should start to wake up. If she survived an attack and she was already comatose, someone had to have saved her. See if you can get a name. Or if the good samaritan is there with her, take a picture. But be stealthy, they shouldn't know you're inquiring about them. The moment you have what I need, text it to me, I command.

Will

do," Matthew says and then the line goes dead.

Rocking back in my chair, I tap my fingers thoughtfully. Shifters rarely attack and leave anyone alive. I highly doubt a lion shifter just decided her prey had had enough. No. Not possible. If Rose is still breathing, then one of them saved her. And if one of them saved her...

she is his mate.

I smile to myself as I head out to the shed for my custom gear. "Ready or not, here I come."

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,527 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Three

BARTLETT

"Have news!" Doc Rhodes says coming toward me from around the nurses station

Throwing a quick glance over my shoulder at sweet Lady Rosen, I step out into the hall to confer with the doc. I hesitate to leave her for even one little minute just on the off chance that she could wake up and I could miss it. For some reason, I want to be the very first thing she sees. "What's that?" I ask.

Doc Rhodes grants me a mirthful smile, probably noticing the way I continue to stretch my attention from him to her and back again. "You know the only reason you're even allowed in there is because I've known you from the time you were born, right? It's actual hospital policy that you either be immediate family, a guardian, or some form of medical personnel."

I chuckle, sending him a half grin that says try and remove me.

Doc Rhodes rolls his dark brown eyes and his silver mustache twitches with delight as he wiggles his nose. "Anyway, back to the news."

"Yes, please. Let's hear it," I tell him

him, thi

training my eyes on

The first thing is, her name is not Rosen, it's Rose. According to her father, Rosen is her older brother and she is wearing his jacket."

My head jerks in the doc's direction. According to her father? So "They were able to get in touch with her family so soon? A cloud of gloom descends on me almost

immediately. I know I should be happy for her and I am, but..... I'm unhappy for me. The sooner they get here, the sooner I'll be pushed out.

Doc Rhodes flashes a wide grin full of sparkling ivory teeth. The policere able to make contact with her parents after they impounded the RVs. Apparently, Miss Rod Gruber and companions are all members of the same church. The official story is that she and a few members of her youth group drove out here without permissions."

"Youth group?" I scoff in disbelief. 'Like a church youth group

"That's what I'm hearing." Doc Rhodes says, but the doctor

"Don't know of very many congregations that arm their

members with firearms, but then again I don't get out much. Every other moment that I get out of my practice is spent at this hospital.

•

"As far as I'm aware, church hasn't changed quite that much, Doc. She went out there saving souls, that I can assure you."

Doc Rhodes chuckles, "Next thing you know, they'll be claiming that she came all the way out here to pray for the wildlife."

Tanicker, peering toward Rose and trying to picture her with

anything other than a rifle in her hand. Nope, can't do it. Might have something to do with the gunpowder stains on her fingers, but I'm pretty sure that girl doesn't even say grace before dinner,

They were out here hunting Doc. Five of them were. She's lucky I found her when I did, I divulge, shaking the memory of her turning blue beneath Gayles jaws.

"According to the dispatcher I spoke with just a few moments ago, one of the Kitsap Rangers found human blood smeared on the bark of a Hemlock tree. In the woods." He meets my gaze pointedly. They're still saying it was a bear. And with this new evidence, they're extending the search for bear. I'm almost afraid to ask, but..."

I shake my head softly. "Just bear. The rest were male and-"

course; Doc says, cutting me off when one of the nosier nurses edges closer to us to try and listen in..

the bear for, I don't know. Maybe she has a fetish for wild animal attacks, or it could be that Doc just being paranoid. My brothers

Chapter Two Hundred Three

and I grew up in Port Orchard. From the time we were born we have lived there. When we turned eighteen and everything changed, Doc Rhodes became my fucking neighbor. So grant it, he's seen his fair share of weird shit. He knows the animals in our woods are more than meets the eye, but he never outright said so. When I turned eighteen and bought the house next to his, I spent a lot of time trying to drink my pain away. Just like the rest of my brothers, I like a house with a lot of windows, and apparently so does Doc Rhodes - Why? Because we have better eyesight than most creatures do and we like to see what's coming for us before it shows up. On the outside, Doc Rhodes house and my own, have only one very distinct difference. Mine is on the corner of the street and his house isn't. Anyway, one night I was drunk and I shifted in my living room thinking it might be easier to walk on four legs instead of two (I was wrong by the way - double the effort for double the legs) and when I realized it wasn't going well, I shifted back. When I was finally able to see clearly, I realized I wasn't even in my house. I was in Doc Rhodes house, standing right in his kitchen. He didn't say a word, just poured me a fresh mug of coffee and walked me home. He never even mentioned it. Not one time and neither have I. He's just like the rest of Port Orchard's homegrown community, loyal.

rose a placating smile, charming her as I twirl my finger in a gesture for privacy. She just rolls her eyes then scampers off

So, I throw the nurse a

down the hall.

Leaning closer to the Doc's car, I whisper, "The rest of her friends were male, so it is my belief that the forest didn't show them any

mercy.

"Such a shame," Doc Rhodes remarks. "Unfortunately for Rose, that means the authorities won't have anyone else to blame. With this big a mess, they're going to want to make an example out of her. You know they are."

Yeah, I know. I just prefer not to think about it until I can smuggle her out of here. "Good thing nothing happens without crossing Rainier's

desk first."

Doc Rhodes laughs then says thoughtfully, 'Rose's father spoke of having her transported home to be looked after by a private nurse. I didn't argue with the man over the phone because it wouldn't have done any good, but when he gets here I plan to

make it clear that, yes, she's a patient, but she is also a criminal. The only way to help his daughter stay out of prison, will be to cut all the bullshit."

Just then Doc Rhodes' name resonates through the corridor, repeating over the loudspeakers like he's going on sale. With a shrug, he takes off down the hall, leaving me to my thoughts. I step back into Rose's room and slide the door closed, smiling to myself when I remember how many layers of clothing the EMTs had to cut through to get to her body. Rose was wearing three pairs of jeans over a thick pair of leggings and three thick ass sweaters under her brother's heavy denim jacket. As it turns out, a lot of the scratches that Gayle sought to maim her with, never even broke the skin. The clothes Rose had on made her appear sluggish and much bigger than she is. But don't get me wrong, I have zero issues with a plus sized woman. Especially one as pretty as Rose. I was a little disappointed to find out that her ass wasn't going to be quite as thick as it was under four pairs of pants, but until she wakes up and I can get a proper look at her, I'll reserve

judgment.

Out of all the hunters out there tonight, Rose was probably the most dangerous. For some reason, that fact makes me smile. It probably shouldn't, given who's side she was on, but I can't stop seeing the way she handled that rifle.

Scooting closer to the side of her bed, I reach out and trace my fingers over her arm until I clasp her tiny palm in mine. The skin on the top of her hand is so smooth and so soft, but the inside is covered in calluses. Probably from playing with all the wrong toys, something tells me this one never played with dolls. She probably never wears make-up, or fusses over her hair. I doubt she believes in wearing skirts or dresses, not to mention heels. Which is a real shame because she has a voluptuous figure.

I stroke her hand in mine as I watch her, trying to imagine her fingers dosing around mine. Tiny, baby prickles fire between our palms, too weak to connect. Almost as if the bond between us is as frail as her body after the attack. Like it's slipping away from us along with the beats of her heart.

Fick Quinn, where are you? It's not just

the clothes that I need him to bring me, of course not. It's something much more important.

I need him to stand guard while I do the one thing that I know will ensure Rose recovers. And honestly, I couldn't care less if I have her

consent or not.

I am going to n

mark her.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,645 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Four BARTLETT

A deep breath shudders out of me when I see Rose's BPM lower. If Quinn doesn't get here soon, I'm just going to do what needs to be done al

"I hope you don't have a boyfriend, princess," I warn her, leaning close enough to her ear that I can rest my head on the edge of her pillow. "Not that I'm afraid of a little competition. I just don't want inundering someone to be the very first thing you see me do." God she smells good, I need to order some sunflowers. Then again, what are the odds that she accepts girly gifts like bouquets, or chocolates?

Fuck, B. Just chill the bell out until she's actually conscious. You never know, maybe she does like girly things!

Watching the elevators with bated breath, I whip out my phone and shoot Quinn a text telling him someone from the Elder Few is on his way here. That should get him moving. Quinn promised to bring me a few things from the bar besides clothes. One of them being whiskey. I can't imagine what Rose's parents might think to find me in a pair of sweats that came out of their RV. They'll probably assume I was naked and sweaty with their daughter prior to the incident, and while that's okay, I'd rather be wearing something that has enough room for my dick to sway in. The whiskey is key, because when they decide that they do not like me, I'm going to tell them that I own the har in town. Of course, they'll be even more disappointed and unless I smell like boos, it won't be nearly as funny. The EKG monitor beeps steadily on my right and for a few minutes and I watch her heart rate as it begins to fluctuate again. When the number lowers by ten beats per minute, I feel my body tense with fear. That can't be a good thing right?

Not

I've had but one thing on my mind since they took Rose into the operating room and there won't ever be a more perfect time to do it. knowing how long I will be alone with her, presents me with a difficult decision. Her parents are probably hauling ass in this direction from wherever it is they live and after I mark her she will be permanently tethered to me. For better or worse, as they say. For us shifters, marking is akin to marrying, but with actual physical bonds. Humans don't feel it as strongly as we do, at least, I don't think. So, after she's marked, this can go one of four ways.

One - Her parents arrive and push me out. Keeping me from seeing her and robbing me of the chance to solidify our bond. Then she might decide to go home with her parents and attribute the pain of the mark that she will feel due to our separation, to the lion attack. Meanwhile, I will be in complete agony and live every breath of every day in longing for her.

Two - Her parents think I'm a hero, allow me to see her when she finally wakes (eight or nine hours after the marking), and although I'm confident that our initial connection will stir her interests, I do not know if it will be enough for her to want to stick around. The time that I'll have with her may not be enough.

Three - After I mark her, I smuggle her out of here while she's still under and this goes from lion attack to kidnapping real damn quick. A crime I don't think Rainier or the Doc will be able to save me from.

Four - After I mark her, I watch and wait for her to awaken. Once she does and she's preparing to be discharged, Rainier places her under arrest for her part in the hunt, but instead of taking her to jail, he brings her to me. Then, I hide away with her until she accepts me as her new reality. Forced proximity and fated love being the double edged sword that pierces her sweet, misguided little heart.

Yup... that last one is definitely my favorite. I think I'll go with that.

Then again...

feel like a total sociopath when I force Rose to love me.

Five - I call Draven before I mark her and get her to sign off on my crazy so I don't feel

There's no reason why four and five can't work, Perhaps not in that order but...

"Whoa!" Quinn's voice cuts through my brainstorming session and my head jerks up in relief.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Four

"Fucking finally! I lates

Quinn is staring at her with something like wonder, seem to the the hushy we get the Angical hed, Did they perform lipo-suction surgery as well

I growl, shoving him as I take my clothes from his arms. What the foos that man viens the two gay

Quinn turns back around and scratches his head, seemingly confused, "Entre 1 od hem vean sheena toh heater than this." He squints at me. "Are you sure

Shaking my head at him, I can't help but Leigh. "Youge an audade, Do you know that?"

He flashes me a quick, fo a dick smile, then says, "Tor read though, want the like Wort

I'm

"Bigger?" I snort, changing into my clothes right there next to her unctorious body. A nigh at mint

strangling pants and my semi-hard member is allowed a little fresh air Fuck yes. Freedren. I

when I rip away the

get my underwear all the way on and despite that she's immodate and injured, my dick spikes like an iron fist. Sh, so wind

Quinn snickers when he notices. "Okay, So she's definitely the right girl, but... I'm still contured

Flipping him off as I finish dressing, I announce, "For the record, I still wanted hey even before I found out how many lejers of clothing she was wearing "

No shit?" Quinn giggles. "Fucking fooled met So how many licks did it take to get to the tootsie mill center of her tootsie pop?

I glare at him. "Four. But, her size made no difference to me one way or the other

"I know," Quinn acknowledges, chuckling. "I saw that. Deaven will be po proud

"Did you come alone?" I ask, walking around the bed to get to the side intentionally left clear for the

Quinn shakes his head. "No. Hain and Timmons are downstairs monitoring the only entrance that is open this early in the morning. They're going to intercept her family the moment they arrive and force them through a preliminary interrogation. Paul and Login are posed as nurses, thanks to Rhodes, and will be patrolling the halls. Domonir and Koda are watching the parking lot. We all have a feeling more of those fanatical bastards are heading this way. Not just Rose's parents. One guy in particular. Matthew. The fucker that shot me yesterday afternoon when I knocked his baby girl Ted's teeth out

The Gherkin's daddy?"

Quinn nods. "One and the same. Gryff's got him locked away at his place until we can figure out what we want to do with him."

"He's alive?" I chortle. "Do you mean to tell me that you didn't kill anyone?"

Quinn flips me off, "What can I say? I have this fantasy of chasing him and his father, Matthew, through the woods in my human form and then shifting into beast right as I catch them. I'm going to make that dream a reality. I want it almost as bad as I want to head home and sunk inside my beautiful mate."

"Really?" I ask, shocked.

His eyes flick to mine. "I said almost."

Glancing back down at Ros

Rose, I murmur, "I can't believe I'm actually standing here next to my mate. Tracing the bandage over Roses unhealed neck and shoulder, I feel my fangs elongate. They're sharpened to needle points and I can feel more of my venom pumping in with each breath I take. I think it's her scent thats causing it. Triggering my instincts to mark what's mine Fucking hell, she just got fished being attacked and now I'm going to rip right back into her flesh. Shit. What if this goes wrong Task, in sudden panic. "What if her

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Four

body's too weak to take my venäm?"

"You know that's not how it works." Quinn says calmly. "It might feel like you're hurting her at first, but you'll know you're not. If it were

ne, I would have done it at the campsite."

I didn't want to cause her any unnecessary grief. If I had known she was going to fall into a co there. It definitely would we made things simpler." coma - I probably would have marked her out

Quinn's phone vibrates in his hand just as I'm peeling aside the bandage and preparing to sink my teeth between the freshly stitched gashes of her neck. "Fuck," Quinn says and I freeze.

"What? Are they here already?" I ask, watching Rose's face and I pose to mark her.

"No," Quinn snarls. "But I suddenly have somewhere I need to be. So

I sink my teeth into Rose before he can finish and groan with pleasure is ecstasy ripples through my body.

Fuck. No one told me it would feel like heaven Holy shit..

My fangs are trembling with relief, flooding her with my venom as my dick begins to pound against the zipper of my jeans. Someone is moaning and for a moment, I think that it's me, but the sound of the EKG monitor's rapid beeping tells me otherwise. "What the fuck?" Quinn hisses and I reluctantly retract my fangs.

Feeling like I just finished hosting an orgy, I raise away from her throat slowly. Smiling when I see her wounds begin to pinken and heal over. It isn't until she speaks that I realize what it is that has Quinn gaping in the corner like a fish out of water. "Hi," a sweet, soft voice whispers.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,735 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Five

BARTLETT

"Hello," I whisper as Rose's dark brown eyes sparkle with something like recognition.)

her?

She's awake? Did I wake h

I should check the EKG monitor, but I don't have it in me to rip my eyes away. Not while she's looking at me like I'm her savior. My chest is thumping so madly that for a moment I'm concerned, but then I realize it's my heart that's thudding, not hers. Although the beeping of the EKG has steadied, I know that brief spike in her heart rate is going to bring a nurse running. We only have seconds before we're disturbed, so I need to replace the bandages and make everything look normal. I go to reach for her neck and replace the bandages, but she whimpers and I freeze

I go to reach for

Her eyes go instantly heavy, like something is dragging her back down into the abyss. She whispers, "I remember you."

What? How

kissed me," she adds softly.

A smile tugs across my lips and I'm about to explain when her body suddenly shudders, her back arching off the bed as her breathing becomes erratic and the ERG goes wild

"What's wrong?" I snap, my eyes shooting toward Quinn as I reach for her.

He shakes his head and shrugs, "I-I don't know! I've never marked anyone!"

"You didn't mark your mate? I stage whisper and Quinn shakes his head feebly. Rose's body is quaking when I turn back to her. "Shit!" I

growl.

Doing the only thing I can think to do that might help, I reach for her hand, squeezing it to let her know that I'm there as she writhes on the bed. The sparks between us are stronger now, igniting across my palms and buzzing warmth up my arm. Rose's eyes flare wide for a moment, then she looks at me and says in a tearful voice, "Don't leave me." Then her eyes fall closed again and

she stills

"Holy shit!" Quinn heaves,

"Rose?" I prompt her, my eyes trained on her face for any sign that she might hear me. She doesn't stir, but the EKG resumes its steady beeping, so I at least know she's still alive.

"Someone's coming." Quinn warns smoothly, dropping into the chair just behind him.

I leap back to the former side of the bed and take a seat just as a nurse plows into the room. It's Miss Nosey from earlier and she does not look pleased. That is, until she spots Quinn. That stutters her for a moment and her face wrinkles smooth out. I've seen that look before. She likes him.

"What happened here?" she asks, stepping around to the far side of the bed and glaring in my direction.

I shrug my shoulders and answer with, "Nothing. Was something supposed to?"

She squints at me suspiciously and try as I might, I can't keep myself from smiling. What happened is that my sweet little princess

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Five

remembered me. She knows I'm the one that saved her. At least, that's what I gathered from it.

"She didn't wake up or anything, did she?" Nurse - I take a look at her nametag - Patty asks, studying the monitor before hitting the

the print

button.

"No. Uh-uh," Quin and I both say at the same time, putting a crease of uncertainty between Patty's brows.

She's not even looking at Rose while she takes her vitals and it's starting to bug me, so I add, "That machine went a little haywire for moment, but I figured it was nothing." She blinks at me and I smile. Because if it was in fact something to cause concern over, I'm sure you would have been here sooner. Correct? After all, you are her nurse

Patty's tilts her head in a mocking smile that says, Fuck you asshole, then rolls her eyes and gazes down at Rose. She gasps, "What huffs a glare at me. "Who did this?"

Shit, that's right. I never did get a chance to replace the bandages. I'm speechless at this point, completely dumbfounded. "Er-um,

exactly?"

bandages have been ripped off!" Patty snarls in my direction.

"She was tossing around a bit, Quinn's smooth voice floated our way, catching Patty's attention. "Maybe they weren't administered properly. Maybe they were loose and it just sort of happened."

Patty's eyes soften and she sighs. "I suppose that might be it. I'm not the one who bandaged her. It was the new girl, Chastity: Patty shakes her head. "The new ones are always so incompetent," she complains, grabbing some medical tape out of her front pocket and securing the gauze. Then her eyebrows quirk and she groans, "These aren't even the right bandages. She was supposed to use the Nano pads to speed up healing."

"Nano?" I question, hoping Patty lets it go. It won't do for her to see the healing process has already been speeded up.

"Nano Silver Pads," Patty informs us. "They have silver in them. Extremely helpful in regenerative healing"

Heh, For humans maybe. I can't imagine them being of any help to shifters,

Or... to shifter's marks,

"I'll just go and get some and be right back," Patty says, and I'm left scrambling for a way to get her to drop it. My eyes meet Quinn's and

he clears his throat.

-You know, Patty,"

Quinn starts, granting her his signature I can lift a zillion pounds grin as he surreptitiously flexes his muscles. "I was told there was an all night cafeteria in this place and although I was looking for it when I first arrived, I never did find it." His eyes glimmer as they travel over the nurse's body suggestively. Patty blushes shamelessly, her eyelashes suddenly batting a thousand. "It's true, we do have one of those," she says saucily. I can take you

there if you like."

"Oh," Quinn replies breathlessly, still eyeing her up. "I'd like."

Seriously? How the fuck does he do that knowing he has a mate at home?

I mean, I know he's faking it, but how can he? That is not something I could ever do. Especially now that I've found Rose.

pads and come back. Then I'll go on my break

Patty simpers, eyeing him back with a bite of her lip. "Okay, lemme just go and grab those pads and take you down."

Quinn chuckles, standing up and leaning toward her ear. He whispers, "Forget the pads, Patty. The girl's fine without them. Take your break now instead. I have to get going in just a few minutes and I want to get to know you better before I do." wwwwww

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Five

Jesus Christ. If I didn't know better, I'd really think he wanted to bone her. And I can't imagine his mate would approve of this little scene

Alright, Patty croons.

by croons. "Follow me, handsome." She turns back to me." page Doctor R

scene.

Rhodes for you. He can decide about the bandages."

With a grin and a salute, I bid her farewell and watched them walk out together. Not missing the middle finger Quinn gives me before he's all the way out the door. Taking a deep breath, I turn back to Rose and scoot my chair in close. "Tim sorry about your nurse, princess. She's a bit of an asshole. You deserve better,"

Then I reach forward and trace her cheek with the back of my hand. The EKG monitor starts beeping slightly faster, but not dangerously so. More normally. In fact, now that I'm looking, it's up twenty beats from where it was before I marked her. I suppose that's a good thing. At the very least, it tells me that she may no longer be in a coma. More than likely, she's in that deep sleep that I've heard comes with being marked. The interesting thing is, it seems like she can hear me when I talk to her. So, I decided to test my theory. Stroking my hand down over her neck, I caress her bare shoulder under the hospital gown, listening for changes in the EKG the entire time. "I need to tell you something, princess. All this poaching has to stop. You're my mate and I want us to be together. But... we can't be if you decide to continue poaching."

The speed of the beeping rises a bit and I glance at the monitor. The BPMs are up five more and rising slowly. Not so much a cause for alarm, yet, but something that I said definitely had an impact.

Trying something else, I go on, "You'll have to leave your old life behind to be with me, baby. I'll want you every minute of the day and every day of the week. You won't have time for anything else. When you wake up, I'll be right here waiting. I won't leave you unless you ask me to." Then I stroke her cheek again. I'm sorry. That's a lie. I won't leave you alone, even if you do ask. I'm gonna kidnap you after this and take you somewhere I can worship you"

I watch as her heart rate slowly lowers to a calm and steady rhythm. I was worried at first, when I decided to mention the kidnapping, but ironically enough she doesn't seem bothered by it. That makes me wonder how stable her home life is. Maybe she hates it there. So if the thought of being kidnapped by me calms her down, then what upset her before? Which part of what I said triggered her unconscious anxiety? Was it just the mention of poaching? Or was it the part where I said, we couldn't be together?

2

Quick footsteps sound somewhere beyond the door, along

ng with the sound of an older man's voice arguing with Rhodes. Pulling my hand away from her face, I lean back and pretend to be sleeping. When the door opens and I hear a surprised gasp followed by a decidedly unhappy growl, I keep pretending. "Who the hell is this fellow?" the man asks.

Rhodes chuckles humorlessly and I hear him ease into the room. "That is the man that saved your goddaughter's life. He's been here all night."

"Oh," the man says shortly. "Well, I don't want him here. I can watch over her until Roosevelt is done speaking with the police

Not fucking happening asshole.

"I'm afraid I can't allow that," Doc Rhodes says. "Til have to speak w with her father a about it first."

"Are you kidding me? And he is just allowed to sit there and ogle her?"

Rhodes sighs, "He's sleeping, Mister..."

The older man snorts. "My name is Matthew, doctor, and that is all you need to know."

Matthew... Fuck. Where the hell is Rainier?

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,123 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Six CANE

It's still dark out when I'm shaken out of a dead sleep by Roman. For some reason I'm extremely groggy. Maybe my body's just overtired, I don't really know, but when I'm finally able to draw my eyes open, he's fully dressed in hunting gear and I sit up, instantly alert. "What's going on?" I ask.

He flashes me a quick grin. "Don't get up!".

"Why are you

dressed?"

Again, he smiles, 'Elder Matthew called. He has something he needs me to do. Ill be back by late tonight or early tomorrow morning.

I throw the blankets back and prepare to get up. Tll go with you."

Roman presses me back down. "No. I don't want anything to interrupt your training. You'll stay here."

"But I can help you! What if"

"No!" Roman says again, this time more forcefully. "I need you here. Last night was very wearing on your body. You need adequate rest. I don't want you to worry. Matthew just needs me to track somebody." He stands and heads for the door. "When I return we'll talk more about how we're going to take down that shifter you saw."

I nod begrudgingly, still a little upset that he wants me to stay here. "My sister called last night."

Roman's body tenses with interest and he looks back at me over his shoulder. "Oh? What did she want?"

I watch him carefully. My sister's no saint and she's had more than a few jerk offs in her life. Something about the way Roman reacts everytime I bring her up makes me wonder if he was ever one of them. He's not a bad looking man, even though he's pushing forty-five. Youthful for his age and definitely well built, but I don't really think she'd go for someone that old so I ignore it. Still, his undisguised

interest in her irks me a bit.

"She just wanted to know I was safe. She's pissed that I left her in that cabin," I admit.

He turns around and studi

studies me. "You

u deft by

her? Where?"

I grimace, feeling guilt ride over me like a tidal wave. "Blackjack Creek

Roman's eyes bulge. "You've got to be kidding me."

I shake my head. I'm not. I couldn't take her with me. She would never have let me join the Elder Few. She hates you guys, you know,"

To my surprise, Roman chuckles. "Yes. I remember her distinct dislike for our ways." He sighs as if remembering something. "Your mother practically abandoned you both when your father died, didn't she?"

"There's nothing practical about it. She more

sure than abandoned us. She's even trying to get her hands on the money my father left us. Delilah and Charlie stop mid sentence, painfully aware of what I was about to say. Fuck Charlie. I swallow the lump of pain that tries to climb up my throat with the thought of him. Hoping my face is as blank as I intend it to be, I go on, "Delilah and I have struggled for a while. But I paid for a week at that cabin and she should have been fine. It's not my fault she decided to leave."

Roman's eyes grow worried. "She left? Where is she?"

I shrug, realizing she never did tell me. "In a motel I think."

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Six

"Well that's bullshit, Roman safe. "I have plenty of space here. When Treturn, you and I will go and pick her up. She can stay with us."

I laugh, unable to help myself. "Oht That I go over well. I don't know if he'll agree

Roman chuckles and meets my gaze. "She doesn't have to agree. You're the head of your family now. It's your job to make her agree. Is that understood?"

I nod, then fall back on the bed exhausted. "Yes sir."

"Good," Roman says. "Like I said. We'll fetch her the moment I get back. He starts to close the door, then stops. "She's of age now, you know. You need to start thinking about a match for her. Get some rest.

I stare at the ceiling until I hear his motorcycle start up and leave. Then I whip out my phone and start to dial my sister, but a call comes in before I can finish.

What the hell? It's four a.m.

It's a number I don't recognize, but as it might be Roman calling from a burner phone, I answer anyway. "Hello?"

"Cane!" Delilah's voice sounds on the other end..

"D" I jerk up in bed. "I was just about to call you. Whose number is this? Why aren't you using your phone?"

I can hear her snort of indignation over the line and I can practically see her contemptuous smirk. "You were about to call me? Really? At four in the morning?"

I groan, "Yes D. I was. Whose phone are you on?"

She sighs, "A friend's. I

I lost my phone somewhere, so I'm using hers."

"Okay. Well, I was about to call you and tell you that I can come and pick you up in the next day or so. You don't have to worry anymore! have somewhere for us to stay." She's so quiet for so long that for a moment I think she's hung up. "Delilah?" "Yeah. Um... I'm here. It's just that"-she sighs-"If you can just tell me where you are, my friend and I will come to you."

"Nuh-uh. Na friends. Just you," I say adamantly.

Then, no! I won't

of I won't come," she snaps.

I groan. "For fuck's sake D, Why do you always have to be so difficult?"

"Cane, just tell me where you are. My friend needs your help," she says. It's about those creatures you were chasing. You know.... the-

"Shifters!" If I was barely awake before, I am fully awake now. "What happened? Did they come after you? Did they hurt you, D?"

"Not exactly. They hurt my friend. She's in really bad shape. I'm actually driving her jeep right now heading your way. You're in Oregon, aren't you?"

Fuck!

"No D! I'm not in Oregon. I'm in Idaho. Shit! My brain scrambles for a minute as I try and figure out what I should do. I don't want to push her away again. Especially after all that shit that Roman said about me being the head of the family now. So I made a decision. "Does your friend have a pen and paper?"

She's silent for a moment, then she says, "Yes, she does."

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Six

"Okay," I say. "You and your figh can come here. But only you and her

"Of course."

"This place is remote and hard as hell to find without perfect instructions, so listen carefully. Are you ready?"

"Absolutely,"

For t

the next ten minutes I give her detailed directions to Roman's cabin and then we hang up. Who could this friend of hers be? Chapter Comments

KKN

hee hee hee!

Marietta Gary

Ahhhh, damn Jaylee, you're killing me. I freaking love this story!

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,440 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Seven GAYLE

"I almost can't believe he bought it, I say, excitement that I really shouldn't be feeling barreling into me. The chance to see him again, my mate, overriding the murky fact that he shot me, It really shouldn't fill me with joy. After all, he wants to kill me, but in true shifter form I want to believe his heart can be changed. I want to believe that he might be helpless in falling for me. That's fair, right?"

"Why wouldn't he buy it? Delilah shorts. Tm the one who was selling it to him. I'm his sister. He would never suspect me to side with

you guys."

"Any why not?" I have to ask. "Did you hate us too?"

She shakes her head. "No. Actually, I've always had an extreme love for animals, but I've never been a believer in shifters. I never thought they were real. Ironically enough, I was still a little in doubt even after I watched the bullets pop out of Quinn's back."

"You've got to be kidding," I giggle. "What was your reasoning for that happening, if you didn't think he was a shifter?"

She shrugs, turning toward the Idaho exit instead of the Oregon one we were originally headed for. "I don't know, Vampire maybe. Anything that wouldn't allow my brother the satisfaction of being right for once.

"Vampires," I laugh. "Believe it or not. That thought isn't too far off - as there are giant bat shifters in the world."

You've

got to be kidding?" she snaps.

"I'm not. I know one. His name is Antonio and he is an excellent lover, inform. "Taedora and I were both convinced he was our mate for a

time.

"Oh really?" she asks, her voice taking on a disapproving tone. "Does that happen often? Two of you having the same mate?"

I shake my head. "No. Not typically. And never when the mate is human. At least not as far as lions are concerned. I've heard dragons do though."

She almost steers off the road. "I'm sorry. But did you say dragons?"

I have to laugh. "Yes. They're real too." Then I think about it and realize, it could be bullshit. I've never seen proof that they do actually exist. "Not that I've ever met one. I guess it could be considered Shifter Lore. But when I was little my mom used to tell me stories about twin dragons with the same human mate. Supposedly they live in the mountains of Japan and Hawaii. And wherever there are volcanos."

"There are volcanoes in Washington," she says matter of factly.

"Oh crap," I say, just realizing. "I guess you're right. Touche"."

"I think I'll stick

"I think I stick with wolves," she says almost absently.

I smile. "Quinn's a pretty good catch."

Her head jerks toward me. "You say that almost as if you know."

I swallow thickly, not wanting to dive into that one. Our friendship is too new. "He has quite the reputation."

"Uh-huh," she murmurs. "So I've gathered." She sighs heavily. "Maybe I should call him and let him know I'm safe.",

almost choke. "Don't get crazy. Remember, he stole your phone! If you call him right now, not only will he be pissed enough to kill me, he'll bring the whole brigade with him to stop you from interfering in what they have planned for your brother,

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Seven

She sighs unhappily, "I don't want to believe that."

"Well, you need to believe it. It's true," I state grimly.

"He should already know I would never forgive him for hurting my brother. Never."

He probably does, but I don't tell her that. The truth is, he probably wouldn't hurt Cane if he realizes that Delilah would never forgive him. But Gryffin... he will. And Domonic owes Gryffin big time for helping him save Draven. Their alliance may just be important enough to trump anything that Quinn might want. At the same time, it might not, but I'm not willing to take that chance.

"How long until we get there?" she asks, knowing I'm the one on GPS duty. "Two hours," I say, my heart thumping a bit more heavily at the thought. Not quite enough time to mentally prepare myself, but it will have to do. "Do you think he'll recognize me?"

She shakes her head. "I don't think so. He only saw you for a few seconds in the dark, with night goggles on. He shouldn't. If anything, he may be wary of you. But he would never expect me to have befriended you and lie about anything shifter related, so we should be fine."

"What if he doesn't want me? I can't help but ask.

She looks at me sympathetically. "If what you guys feel is anything close to how I feel about Quinn... he will." Then she smirks. "Just baptize him and you win."

"Baptize him?" I ask, confused.

She shakes her head, laughing. "I've got news for your sexy little ass. My brother? He is still a virgin."

No fucking way "What?"

QUINN

"What do you mean, she's not there?" I ask Timmons again, trying to incorporate my deep breathing techniques into hearing this news.

He shakes his head at me arrogantly. "Your little manipulative human left a note. She's with Cayle."..

Anger rolls through me and despite that we're in the hospital lobby, I'm forced to stop myself from shifting. The note said that?"

"No. Cayle's scent was all over your room and outside of the house. Plus, the jeep is gone."

"That fucking bitch!" I snap. "Well, at least I know where they're heading

Timmons' eyes light up. "Oh really? Where's that?"

"They're heading after her brother. Cane. Gayle's mate."

"Holy shit," Timmons grumbles. "That's right. Rainier said something to that effect when we joined the arch party earlier.

A familiar voice on the telephone behind me has my back going ramrod straight and my nerves prickling

I just walked into the hospital," the voice says. "I'll call you when I have news."

"Son-of-a-bitch," I hiss, keeping my back turned so the man doesn't seeme,

"What?" Timmons gripes. "What's wrong?""

wait until I hear Matthew get on the elevator and for the doors to ding closed. "That old bastard that just got on the elevator. He's one of the Elder Few," I say, turning my head in the direction of the elevato Chapter Two Hundred Seven

"What?" Timmons replies, "I thought Rainier hut the dode outside,"

"They must have come separately," I inform him "We knew they might try and enter like strangers, but we didn't think they'd spara

hour apart-filad I stayed."

arrival an be

Timmons nods, acing the stairs. Then this one's mine. Il grab him and get him off the floor. It I be up to you and Bartlett to get the girl mut of here,"

"Agreed," I say warily. "I can't believe were about to try and pull this shit off."

"What is this we shit?" Timmons cackles. I'm the

It's you and old Barty Boy when are about to become criminals."

"Right," Lagree, flipping him off as he heads for the stairs.

I don't have time for this! I need to go after my mate, but I'm going to have to try and trust her for now, Gayle has probably convinced her that we want to hurt Cane. In fact, she might even believe we do. We dont. Well, I don't. Domonur probably does, but he wont if I ask him not to. Why? For the very same reason that I refuse to hurt that fucker. Because of our mates. All it will take is for me to tell Draven that Domonc intends to go after my mate's brother against my wishes. She'll go ballistic on his ass. He's still not all the way out of the doghouse yet when it comes to her and he knows it, so... It is what it is.

Whipping

g out my phone, I send Bartlett a text.

ME

We need to move now, Matthew is in the building. Timmons is heading up for him. Tell Rhodes to start her discharge paperwork so that we don't get caught up.

BARTLETT-

I know. He just tried to get in here, but Rhodes denied him entry. Such team player, that guy. I'm on it. I'll get to Rhodes as soon as I hear Timmons take Matthew, Get the car ready. I'll meet you at the back entrance.

ME

You don't need help getting her out?

BARTLETT-

Maybe. But if anyone gets in trouble for this, I want it to be me,

Heard. I'll text you when I'm out back.

Racing outside, I note Dom and Rainier look toward me from their respective corners of the lot, but ignore them and head straight for Bartlett's truck. This would have been a might easier if we had my car. Then again Matthew might have recognized it. I'm rather surprised that Matthew is here and not out looking for his son.

One has to wonder why....

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,493 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Eight BARTLETT

I can hear Timmons arguing with that jerk off Matthew while Doc Rhodes and Nurse Patty discuss the Nano Pads at the nurses station. To my relief, Rhodes insists that they're not needed and sends Patty off to make the rounds. As I pace back and forth in front of Rose's

bed I

start to worry.

What if Rhodes doesn't want to cooperate? It's bad enough he's going to think I'm crazy when I ask him to print up her discharge papers. This is a step above and beyond overlooking the rules. This is flat out breaking the law. I can't ask him to put his career on the line for me, but maybe I can get him to assist without actually signing off on my scheme.

Rainier and Timmons are busy, hut Koda and Dom are out in the parking lot and I suddenly have a crazy idea.

As quickly as I can, I text Koda and Dom telling them what I need them to do. When their only answer is a winky face and thumbs up, I take it to mean that they re on their way in. I listen at the door, smiling to myself when I hear Timmons escorting Matthew back toward the elevators. Good. Perfect Get that fucker out of here. He had to threaten the old man with his handcuffs to get him to comply. Christ, such a nosey old bird

At the very same time Matthew disappears behind the elevator doors, another set opens up to reveal Koda. Smiling to myself, I watch as he approaches Doc Rhodes to explain that Rose needs to be reassigned to a different floor in order to prevent her family from interfering with her eventual arrest. Rhodes argues for a moment, then picks up the phone and makes a call. With a hefty sigh, Rhodes and Koda head my way. I barely have enough time to toss my ass back down in my seat before they're standing in front of me. "Bartlett?" Rhodes barely looks up from the chart hes scribbling on. "They're prepping a room on 2088. You can head on down ahead of her and I'll have a small team transport her there shortly."

the second floor for Ms. Gruber. Room

I nod my head and stretch my arms upward, yawning to appear as exhausted as possible. "Okay, Rhodes. Im gonna go home and get an hour or two of shut-eye. Just call me if something happens before I rehim." "Will do," Rhodes says happily.

Meeting Koda's eyes briefly, I exit the room and head toward the elevators, only ducking into the stairwell at the very last minute. Then, I race toward the first floor back exit, sighing with relief when I spot Quinn waiting exactly where he said he would be. "What happened? Quian asks, confused. "Where's the girl?"

"Give it a moment," I say smoothly, my eyes on the parking lot and the security guards rolling by on

their golf

f carts.

Two minutes pass, then five, then ten. Come on Dom, come on. The moment I hear the fire alarm go off I face my truck and open the back door, making sure the back seat is completely empty and turning around just in time to see Koda exit with Rose's body slung over his shoulder. He passes her to me without a word and then disappears back into the hospital. With inhuman speed, I jump into the back of my truck with her in my arms, closing both doors in the same movement. Quinn drives off at a slow and normal pace, only Speeding up once we hit the highway back toward Port Orchard

"Well, it's official," I say, settling Rose more comfortably on my lap. "Ive lost my damn mind,

-Where

are you planning to take her?"

"My place, I guess is my only answer. My eyes are on Bose as I attempt to rub the chill from her bones. Wearing nothing but a hospital gown, I'm painfully aware that she is totally naked underneath.

"I don't think that's a good idea. Once they notice that she's missing and check the security footage, it won't be jug Rainier who goes looking for her," Quinn points out.

"Koda's supposed to be taking care of the cameras, but you're right. I would feel more comfortable, somewhere else. At least until I know

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Eight

where she and I stand."

Quinn nods, steering off the highway and onto the road headed into Port Orchard. "I have an idea. You and Rose can stay at my place until she regains consciousness. There's somewhere I need to be and I have an excitable little human that I need someone to watch while I'm gone. If he's left with only Timmons to deal with, he might not live past tonight. The guy is obsessed with the existence of shifters and I'm afraid he might do something stupid like ask Timmons to shift so that he can get a piggy back ride."

My brow furrows and I chuckle. "Wait a second. Isn't your mate at your place?"

Quinn's jaw clenches angrily. "No. She went on a little road trip with Gayle and I plan to make a surprise appearance"

"Huh," I reply, thinking it over. "If you're sure you don't mind us sleeping in your bed."

Quinn flashes a quick smile. "Just don't fuck her on it and we're all good"

Just the image is enough to get my dick hard. "I make no promises"

Quinn laughs, turning onto his street. "I can deposit your car in your driveway to make it look like you're at home and race back on foot to drop off your keys and pick up my car."

"Sounds good. But why in the world did your mate leave with Gayle? Didn't Gayle attack her in the river?" He stares at me pull into his driveway and that's when I remember. The brother. "I see. So, they went to Idaho." pointedly as we

The

Quinn nods. "And they already have a few hours of a head start. Not to mention Cane might have given Delilah actual directions to place. All I have to go on is a goddamned cell tower and a fucking ache in my chest that started the moment Timmons told me she was gone."

"And you can't call her because you have her phone, surmise, lifting Rose into my arms and following Quinn around the side of the house then down to his back entrance. "Exactly," he snaps, sliding open his bedroom door and ushering me inside.

I lay Rose down on the empty bed and cover her with the blankets while Quinn heads upstairs to check on his scary human. Removing the medical tape and bandages, I take a long look at her now fully healed wounds. Although we were always taught what our venom does for our mates, it's still a shock to see the proof of it with my very own eyes. Checking her pulse as a precaution, I'm pleased to see her heart rate is strong and steady. Thank God

"Okay, I'm off," Quinn says, coming back down the stairs with a note in his hand.

As he heads back out, I stop him. "Quinn!"

"Yup?"

I met his eyes thoughtfully. "You might not be able to call her when you get there, but you can certainly call Cane

Quinn smiles. "That's right. I'd like to think I would have thought of that on my own, but my-file Lilac screws the common sense right out of me."

"Not on this bed, I hope." My gaze goes straight for Rose, the thought of her sleeping on soiled sheets roiling my gut, "Maybe I should have changed the sheets first."

Quinn laughs. The sheets are fine. It's the patio you need to steer clear of."

"For fuck's sake."

"Then again," he says thoughtfully, maybe change the sheets just in case."

2/3

21:28 Fri, Nov 15

Chapter Two Hundred Eight

So that's exactly what I do.

8x60%

An hour later, I've only just laid on top of the bed, over the blankets and next to Bose when my phone vibrates in my pocket. Doc Rhodes name flashes across the screen and I feel a shiver of unease when I send it straight to voicemail. Not wanting to lie to the man, I didn't dare pick it up. With any luck, he'll just think I'm asleep and won't try lick for a while. When it immediately rings again, it's my pulse that needs to be checked. I let this one go to voicemail as well and curse myself when I hear the distant buzz of a couple new helicopters. Probably just a new addition to the search party on the lookout for Gayle. One of my brothers would have shot me a text if it were me that they were looking for, Right? Right. Of course they would have, I should just close my eyes and get some rest. No need to wig out over a phone call and some air traffic.

Again my phone buzzes, but this time it's with a text.

Oh Fuck

It's from Doc Rhodes.

Is it just me or are those choppers getting louder?

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,183 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Nine

BARTLETT

Staring at the text notification on my phone is not going to fix anything, nor will I be any wiser. The helicopters outside still seem pretty loud, but there's no way they launched a manhunt for me. If Koda somehow failed to wipe the security footage like he was supposed to, I'm sure he would have let me know. Koda is a man of few words, but at the very least he would have told me to run.

Stop being a pussy. Just read the fucking message," I scold myself. Even if they are after your lovesick ass, it's not like you can't change from man to woll the moment they catch up to you."

It's the truth. The only time a shiflet ends up in human jail is when they're hunting someone on the inside, or when they are hiding from someone on the outside. I desire neither. I punch open Doc Rhodes thread. RHODES

Just thought you might want to know that after reviewing Ms. Gruber's EKG printouts and brain wave activity, it's my belief that young Rose came out of her coma at some point early on - probably around the time you were dozing off next to her bed - then she must have decided to pretend she was still incapacitated, biding her time and waiting for the perfect moment to disappear. That's right, it seems that Miss Rose Gruber has evaded palice. The chaos that erupted shortly after she was transported to the second floor was probably an elaborate attempt by the young lady to escape notice as she fled the hospital undetected. At least, that's what the authorities believe because that is what I told them likely happened. Nevermind that she was barefoot, half-naked, and hundreds of miles from home. She could be anywhere in Seattle by now, but I'm fairly certain that she's not. Such a pity that she was unable to meet her knight in shining armor. FYI - Rose's father, Roosevelt (shocking, I know) and her godfather Matthew, do not believe she escaped. They maintain that she must have been abducted and are now on the lookout for you.

I smirk to myself, rereading the message a few times while deciding whether or not to text him back. Looks like Rhodes is more of a team player than I thought. I don't know how I feel about the blame falling on my mate, but as I'm pretty confident I can convince Rainier not to have her arrested it should be fine.

ML-

Thanks Rhodes.

RHODES

You can tell me

ME-

what's so special about her later.

What makes you think there's something special about her? Not that there isn't. She's definitely one of a kind.

RHODES-

Your mother and I were good friends Bartlett. Very good friends.

ME-

Pardon me?-

RHODES

Lol. Not like that. She and I went to school together. We grew up right next door to each other. I knew her, her entire life. BARTLETT-

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Nine

And NOW you live next door tome. How funny.

RHODES-

Yes. I was even there the day that she met Mike and he swept her off her feet.

ME-

That's

new information. I knew you and my mother were friends, but I didn't know you knew my father too.

RHODES

I didn't say I knew him. Mike wasn't too keen on Melody having many male friends, so our friendship took a backseat.

ME-

Makes sense.

RHODES-

Anyway, like I said, I was there when your parents met. So I know THAT look.

ME-

You're too smart for your own good Doc.

RHODES

Just take care of her and try to stay out of trouble.

ME-

I'll do my best.

Smiling to myself, I place my phone on Quinn's nightstand and turn to face my mate. Rose.

Other than the skimpy attire she's wearing, you'd never know she'd just been attacked by a two hundred pound lion. With that thought in mind, I gently remove the bandages on her neck and smile at the crescent shaped mark my fangs left behind. Knowing she is in a deep sleep, I decide to trace my fingers over it and before I even realize what I'm doing, I kiss her neck.

It starts off innocent enough, but once my lips graze that mark pleasure shoots through me and I press my mouth more firmly against the soft skin of her throat.

Fuck, that's nice.

I can't help it, I need to have a little more. My tongue lashes out, swirling over the mark as my body settles somewhat over hers. My arms are still carrying my weight, but I have one of my legs stretched over both of hers. She is under the blanket and I'm on top, so her virtue isn't in any immediate danger, but as I begin to bite and suck around her collarbone, I realize my mistake.

She just feels so good to touch Jesus,

My right hand dips into her hair so I can hold her head in place while proceed to cover her exposed skin in open-mouthed kisses. I'm hard as a rock now and my dick weighs a ton, so not only are my lips getting more frantic, but I'm moaning into the side of her neck as I taste her.

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Chapter Two Hundred Nine

"This may be classified as creepy behavior, but you taste delicious princess." I groan, sucking a little harder on her fesh as my body jerks forward reflexively and I'm forced to grind the inch or so of space between our hips. The front of my pants just barely brushing over the covers causes my cock to pound with heat. It's the most exquisite type of torture and soon I'm nibbling her earlobe. "Fuck. It's so good," I whisper harshly, painfully aware that my fangs are tingling behind my ps.

Red alert! Time to stop! Don't you dare mark her again!

My body isn't listening anymore and I feel my cuspids spearing out.

"Fuck, princess. I'm sorry," I whisper. This was a really bad idea."

But even as I say

by the words, my hand leaves her hair to drag down the right shoulder of her hospital gown and tug it low enough to expose the swell of one intensely rounded breast. Hers are large and plump. I'm guessing D cups, DD possibly, and my eyes fire upon sight of the pale peach colored mound. I already knew she was top-heavy when I thought she was plus sized and at the time, the image just sort of made sense. But now that I know which curves are fake and which are real, the picture has become almost pornographic in nature. Tracing the needle points of my fangs gently over her buoyant flesh, I groan. My body shudders, my dick swelling so swiftly I think I get a little lightheaded. My shaft is pressing painfully against the confines of my jeans and you would think that would be enough of a signal that I'm skating on the edge of disaster. But... I still can't seem to stop myself

Lowering myself onto one elbow, my chest drops closer to hers and I swear to fucking God I can feel the hardness of her nipples through four layers of fabric. The hospital gown, the sheet, the blanket, and my shirt. Jesus Christ.

I have to kiss her.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,543 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Ten

GAYLE

That has to be the bridge your brother was talking about," I shout, pointing toward the top of a wooden structure that barely peeks out

over the tall grass.

"Where? Delilah snaps, exasperated.

"Over there!" I point toward a large copse of trees and what looks to be the drop off of a jagged valley. It's behind the woods. It's camouflage."

"Well, do you see the road he was talking about?" she asks, pulling to the side of the lone highway and shielding her eyes from the sun as it creeps up on the horizon.

"Because I can't see anything. Why are your windows not tinted??? Everybody tints their windows! Don't they?"

I giggle, shaking my head as I fish around in the center console for Tars old sunglasses. "Not lions. We have exceptional vision in both the daylight and the dark. I can look dead at the sun at any time of day and watch the birds fly under it." "Really?" she exclaims. Really? For how long?"

"What do you mean?" I find the glasses then slide them into her lap. "Here, you can have these. Put them on."

"Thank you! These are badass," she gushes, studying them before she puts them on. "What I went to ask was, how long can you look directly at the sun before it starts to tase your eyesight?" She gasps, "Gajde! Are you aware that these are Prada?" "Yes, of course I am, Lilah. They were Tag's and that's the only brand of sunglasses that she ever wesurs.

She loves her sunglasses, even though they're completely useless to us." I punch the moon release button and slide open the sunroof. And to answer your other question all day. From sunup to sundown." Then I unbuckle ny seatbelt and stand up in my seat, poking my head out of the sun roof to study the landscape more carefully.

What does it look like?" she asks.

A big glowing ball surrounded by sparkling fire," I inform her, spotting the river cane told us about a mile away where the valley flattens, out a bit. "Not only can we literally sun watch, but we can also see eight times farther than you guys can. I can see more of the

bridge now that my view isn't obstructed, but I'm still having a hard time finding where the dirt path meets the highway that we're on. The grass is just too damn high,

"That's so unfair!" she grumbles. "How is it that we as humans are born with enough brains to skyrocket ourselves to the top of the food chain, but we are at the bottom of the barrel for absolutely everything else. Every other predator on earth gets to have a bunch of cool stuff! Perfect eyesight, superior strength, exceptional speed, sharper teeth!!!

I laugh, hoisting myself up so that I'm seated on the roof of the jeep. And what makes you think humans are at the top of the food-chain, Lilah?"

She snickers. "Because we are! Not naturally, no. But our brains are more advanced than that of the natural apex predator and what we weren't born with... we created."

"That's where you're wrong," I tease, glancing down at her through the roof's opening before launching myself up onto my feet. "You're forgetting there's one more species even higher up on the pyramid than humans."

"Oh yeah?" she taunts almost arrogantly. "And what species is that? Dragons?"

Now that I'm standing five and a half feet higher than before, not only do I spy the carefully camouflaged road, but I can see the mountain in the distance. And...the cottage on the far side of the river. That's it that's the place. He's in there right now... waiting for us. With a genuine smile that I don't think I've flashed since my mother died, I effortlessly slip back down into my seat and say, "Shifters."

1/3

21:28 Fr, NOV

Chapter Two Hundred Ten

CANE

I hear a car roll up out front just as I step clothes in here with me?

I step out

of the shower and I rush to wrap a towel around my waist. Fuck! Why didn't I bring my

Rolling my eyes, I rip open the bathroom door, steam chasing behind me as I spot my sister through the large bay windows. She and her friend must have parked on the far side of the house instead of under the awning, which has enough space for four and a half cars. Why? Are they afraid something followed them here?

They probably left their vehicle on the gravel tumabout that is meant to remain clear at all times. It have to be moved, but since it is on the only side of the house that is completely invisible from every vantage point, it can stay there at least until tomorrow. Besides, it's not like Roman is here to bitch about it and she is my sister. The absolute only female in this entire world that I consider a princess.

She raises her sunglasses onto her head and our eyes meet through the long glass panel of the front door. Dread unfurls in my stomach as I reach for the deadbolt and I can finally see the color of her eyes. A normal Delilah, a come and content Delilah, has eyes that are hazel blue, and are threaded with slivers of gold and green. An extremely pleased Delilah, or an excited Delilah, shimmers with a swirling oasis of turquoise and green, with highlighted gold around the edges.

But today... her eyes are more green-gold than they are any shade of blae... and that can only mean

Shit She's mortally pissed about something.

And an angry Delilah can be more dangerous than any other creature on this earth.

one thing.

Fuck. She must know about Charlie.

mur All me.

She's going to fucking

For a moment, my hand freezes on the lock and I do a mental inventory of every door and every window in the house. Did I leave any unlocked? Holy fuck I hope not. The possibility that my sister may have played me like a fiddle this morning is enough to cause my palms to sweat and my chest to pound at a hundred miles per minute.

There is no female friend that was attacked by a shifter. She just wanted to know where I was. The real friend she is talking about, has to be Charle Fuck, fuck, fuck

We stare at each other through the glass, neither of us saying a word. As I continue to remain frozen, as stuck as a Roman statue, my eyes dart back and forth in search of this friend.

I don't see any sign of her and my suspicions of this being some kind of a set up increase tenfold.

'Open the door Cane," she demands, her gaze narrowing on me as she crosses her arms over her chest,

"Have you looked in the mirror lately?" I ask.

She scowls, rolling her eyes. "So I didn't brush my hair, so what? Open the goddamn door Cane!"

"Not your hair, D. Your eyes."

Her eyebrows shoot up as it dawns on her that she's already given herself away, but to my surprise, she just rolls her eyes and says, "Okay Cane, yeah, you got me. I'm super pissed about what you did to Charlie and we will be discussing it. But that that's not why I'm here.'

Hes alive! If Dehlah knows about it, then he has to be

Thank fuck

A flood of relief washes over me and a piece of the wall that I built around my heart that day crumbles, but the guilt for what I did and

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Ten

the memory of it are still there bolding strong. I grit my teeth to keep all emotion from my face as I tell her, "We're not going to talk about it. Not now, not ever. Things are different now, I made a decisim and I stand behind it."

My sister's eyes darken with a swirl of emotion, but other than that she doesn't react. "He's not here with me, Cane. So open the fucking door or so help me I'm going to stop asking."

I shake my head in disapproval, pissed that she'd even threaten to disrespect my mentor's home. I know my sister and she's got more fire in her temper than she does in her hair. If I don't open the door, she'll break every fucking window in this place. Even after she gets inside.

Claring down at her, I rip the door open and ask, "Where's this lead of yours? Or did you even bring one?"

She smirks, turning her head in the direction of the turnabout. "After you."

Okay Maybe she really did make a friend. Well, color me impressed.

My sister has never gotten along with other girls. Not even for a playdate when she was in diapers. It wasn't that she wasn't liked, she was, at least she was at first. But it never

took longer than an hour or two in her company for people to ascertain the truth about Delilah Simply put? She's a bitch.

"Cane, this is my new friend, Gayle," Delilah says.

My eyes are glued to the floor as Gayle steps into my line of sight, so the first thing feet.

ing that I notice is that she's barefoot and she has pretty

"Nice to meet you," I say to her feet, before dragging my gaze upward and nearly swallowing my tongue, Holy shit

Chapter Comments

KKN

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,283 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Eleven GAYLE

The night I first saw him, before he shot me, I watched from the trees Delilah, Cane, and some other human male interacted in the cabin. I didn't know he was my mate yet, but I did know he wasn't dressed in all that gear to go trick-or-treating. Anger burned inside of me as I waited there, perched in the arms of the trees and guarded by boughs of shadow. After Cane and his friend had loaded their hunting rifles, he stepped up to the open window to scan the trees. Then I remember thinking that it was a real shame he was going to die that night, because he was the first human male Ed ever found even remotely attractive.

Cane had an intense focus in the blue of his eyes that drew me in and the few times he smiled, I noticed he had an incredibly expressive mouth. It seemed to possess different mechanics than most lips did. The majority of people only have maybe a couple of different smiles, a quirk, a grin, a frown, but Cane appeared to have a thousand different curls of his lip. Up ways and sideways and both ways each more adorable than the last. It was a disconcerting thing to notice about myone, but I brushed it off, attributing it to the fact that he had the first baby face I'd ever come across. Besides, he was lumen and a huster, and his presence was not welcome. So, I set off from the trees to ready for battle and stepped right into one of his stupid steel traps,

When

the first bullet pierced me. I wasn't afraid, I knew I would undoubtedly survive. He and his friend had the wrong ammunition to kill a creature like me and I contemplated toying with him a bit first before I ripped the flesh of his neck open. But then the second bullet hit me and I can't rightly explain what I felt. Sorrow, despair, loss, disappointment. They were just a few of the myriad of emotions that rushed over my heart. It was confusing and for a moment I thought maybe I'd been struck somewhere vital, or poisoned somehow by the bullet. I lay there in the leaves as he and his friend approached, simply trying to navigate my head and the sudden chaos of my emotions.

Then, he touched me and it happened. The connection. The bond. Every species of shifter has their own identification process. As things are, we aren't lucky enough to scent our mates the way that wolves can. Nope. We have to touch them. Skin to skin contact is the only way to know. So you can imagine how much more difficult it can be for us to find a mate. No one goes around just touching other people when they finally decide it's time to find their mate. It's ridiculous and not to mention, who the hell wants to???

So yeah, I was completely unprepared for my body to Shift into my human form right there in his arms. But the very moment I did, I leapt from his hold without so much as a look in his direction. And other than the quick glance back that I gave him once I was two miles from his cabin, I'd never thought to see him again.

Most of the time, I only ever viewed humans as weak. Especially if they were male. I didn't think they had anything to offer and never saw the appeal.

again like me. I

But now... I do. I do...

When Delilah turns to me and motions me forward, my first thoughts are to remind myself that Cane was wearing night goggles when he watched me shift in the woods. He shouldn't be able to recognize me. Not by my face, at least. Those night vision gadgets hunters use are probably great for humans that desire to know what's alive in the woods, but beyond that they don't garner much else.

It will be fine! He saw you for half a second and when he did you were the very same color as the leaves on the trees. "Cane, this is my new friend, Gayle," Delilah says and I finally step beyond the wall and into full view of the open doorway.

"Nice to meet you," Cane says, in that worn scratchy timbre that I've just decided speaks right to any kitty.

I planned to introduce myself cordially. I wanted to present myself as a normal, regular girl and not as an idiot, but every natural charm that was born with is zapped from my body when I'm this close to him again and all I am able to do is stand there as he stares at my bare feet. Shit. Why didn't I grab a pair of shoes out of the trunk?

Then of course, there is one little matter regarding his outfit. Or should say... lack thereof.

I'm not disappointed in his clothing choice, just a tad unprepared. Because there he is. My mate. My attacker. And all he is wearing is one

1/2

Chapter Two Hundred Eleven

of his uniquely identifying quirks of the mouth, and a goddamn bath towel.

Why didn't Delilah tell Cane to get dressed first? Why did she let him open the door in a TOWEL777

My eyes can't help but sweep over him languidly. Drinking him in as I only glimpsed him fully dressed before now. Considering that Cane's human, I wasn't expecting much in terms of physical attraction and was fully prepared to whip him into shape. But... it appears someone else already has and I wish I could thank them. Whoever they're.

Although I may be physically stronger than he is, Caise does not appear weak, Not at all. He and his sister must come from good stock, because they were both rather spectacularly put together by an overindulgent maker,

Water droplets dangle from the ends of his dark blond hair and then trail down over his lickable neck as he lifts his eyes from my the tiniest quiver of a smile skating his lips.

toes.

My body heats to a thousand degrees when his vibrant blue gaze connects with mine. I can feel my heart hammering in my chest, and I imagine the vein in my neck, pulsing visibly to match its tempo. My breath catches, my throat bobbing as my mouth goes completely dry and I wait to see if he recognizes me.

He seems to have a similar reaction the moment his attention settles on my face, and I blush, thinking that he likes what he sees...

But then his gaze narrows at me skeptically and I realize he might have been looking at me that way because he finds something familiar

about me.

Instantly, I lower my eyes in an attempt to appear shy and non threatening. They fall to the one place that a damp

damp white towel does nothing to hide. The shadowed contours at the vee of his hips provide a significant outline for my approval and approve, I do. And... so do my lady parts. I suddenly wish I could thank his mother for being selective and choosing to breed with a winner. I can only pray that my fangs aren't protruding from my lips.

Oh my God. This may have been the stupidest idea I have ever had.

"I thought you said your friend was in bad shape, D. You called it an emergency. Said she needed my help," Cane remarks, stepping closer, "Her shape looks just fine to me. More than fine... actually." Huh? What?

Is he being suspicious or flirty?

Fire burns across my cheeks and it suddenly feels like I don't know who I am. I've never felt like this before. Never

Then he says, "Where did you say you two met, again?"

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[1,002 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twelve

CANE

"Where did you say you two met, again?" I ask, not taking my eyes off the girl in front of me. There's something about her. She looks... familiar.

"I told you.

Port Orchard." My sister walks into the house, dragging Gayle past me and into the living room.

Gayle's windblown hair bounces around her shoulders as she passes me and the salt blond tendrils brush across my skin. Now that my sister's back is turned, I allow myself to take a better look at her friend's backside. Not the best idea I've ever had, because not only does she catch me, but I'm only wearing a towel and the bounce of Gayle's ass has my compass pointing north.

Her amber eyes widen and her soft honey skin pinkens with a blush, before she smiles and shyly turns away from me.

With a bite of my lip, my gaze still lingers, roving unabashedly over each of her curves that the oversized sweatsuit somehow fails to hide. She's smoking hot, and I almost can't look away, but Delilah spins around and I'm forced to face the front door. Locking the deadbolt back into place and cinching my towel to disguise the stiffness of my dick, I ran the woods.

You girls can take the spare bedroom next to mine, I inform them, my back still turned as I pretend to regard the road into the forest. Studying their reflections in the glass of the bay windows, I'm not surprised to see the two of them miming back and forth. If I didn't already know they were up to something, I might have been upset. But Delilah is my sister after all, and even though I know I'm not her favorite person at the moment, she would never do anything to hurt me. So, I'll play along. For now.

Thinking about that almost has me laughing. Delilah, Delilah, when will you see? People aren't always what you think them to be.

Besides, I am more than a little eager to learn all there is about Gayle and this shifter threat Delilah used to get invited here. Now is the perfect time to do it, if not the only time. Because Roman will be back by tomorrow and Gayle can't be here when he returns. Well, I mean, she shouldn't be. Delilah is the only one he was expecting and something tells me, he's not going to like Gayle as much as I do.

My dick pulses at that thought and I grumble quietly to myself when I realize there may be no way to hide my erection. The girls still haven't made a move toward their room and I realize that's because they have no idea where mine is. Shit. New plan then. It turns around, my eyes going straight for Gayle as I walk their way.

"Oh for fuck's sake!" Delilah complains.

I chuckle, pausing right in front of her beautiful friend and ignoring my sister completely. "She probably should have let me get dressed. first," I whisper.

Gayle's golden caramel eyes sparkle behind the darkest, most lusciously long lashes I've ever seen. They bat downward as she dips her head to hide behind her hair.

"After me, ladies," I say, stepping into the hall toward my room. "The two bedrooms on this side are ours. The door on the other end of the hall belongs to my mentor." "What do you mean, ours?" Delilah asks, quirking her brow up suspiciously. "I'm not living here."

I step into my room, turning to lace them before I close the door. "Maybe," I say. "Maybe not."

Most definitely not," Delilah snaps and I try to ignore the hostility of her tone.

I knew that would be the case, but I had to make the offer anyway. Delah has never liked Roman and now that I've seen with my own

1/2

Chapter Two Hundred Twelve

eyes that he seems to have an unhealthy interest in her, I'm not going to fight her on it if she doesn't want to stay. Besides, that's not why I called these roomsours.

I hold up my hands in surrender, and smirk when Delilah glares at the horizontal spike at my waist. "I just meant to say that these are the Two that are open for use." Then I shift my attention to the heat of Gayles gaze and say, "And you are welcome to choose either one." My intention is clearly delivered and judging by the hazy look in Gayle's eyes, pleasantly received. Unfortunately, Delilah has eyes like a hawk and doesn't miss a beat.

"You re disgusting. Delilah gumbles, opening the door to the other bedroom and gazing inside.

I know I've never been so forward in front of my baby sister, and I hate to spoil her image of me, but maybe it's time. I'm aware Delilah still believes I'm a virgin and while that's adorable and all, it simply isn't true. She's definitely old enough to know that an older brother's job is to set an example, not that it worked out the way I hoped it would. Delilah was a very active teenager with a less than desirable reputation. To this day, she still has no idea how many of her conquests faces met with a few blows of my fists. She was a wild child, but I am her older brother so...

Im glad she's found a friend. Especially this one.

I know I would see her again, but I never in a million years would have thought it would be before I went looking. She's just as dazzlingly beautiful as she was that night in the woods. There's no way I could have ever have forgotten her face.

Something about Gayle pushes me beyond my comfort zone. I normally wouldn't take such risks, but there isn't really and time not too.

Gayle CANNOT be here when Roman gets here. I don't want to have to lie to him about what she is.

an?" Delilah asks from the bed in her room

"Where's Roman?"

I'm still staring at Gayle when her entire demeanor changes and she tenses with fear. "Roman?!" Chapter Comments

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,714 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirteen CANE

She knows him.

Pretending not to notice Gayle's abnormal reaction to the simple mention of Roman's name, I head toward the dresser to pull on a pair of gym shorts. The bureau stands to the left of my bedroom door and just out of eyesight for anyone who isn't actually standing on the threshold. "Something came up," I yell toward my sister, hanging back in my room for a moment just to see if she tries to get more information out of me. "He should be back tomorrow."

Rolling out a few of my drawers, I bury my hands inside the top one and shuffle the contents around a little bit. With my ears trained on the hall, I begin loading and unloading a 9mm clip I keep stashed inside, just so that I can look preoccupied. As I expected, it doesn't take much longer than a minute for the scuffle of bare feet to sound as the two girls head my way. And why in the hell aren't either of them wearing any shoes?

This room remains dark throughout the entire day, which is just how I take it. The walls are painted a matte navy blue and the blackout shades are top of the line. They don't even allow for an outline of sunshine that would suggest the weather. Delilah loves a bright room, which is exactly how the other one is decorated. So I know she won't choose to spend much time here at all, even if her friend does.

I start closing my drawers as she enters with Gayle on her heels. As predicted, the first thing she does is sigh and flip on the lights. When the low wattage lamp goes on above my bed, it hardly changes a thing. The soft amber lightbulb I chose for the space, emits more of a glow than an illumination and I hide my smile when she doesn't come any further than the threshold.

"Seriously, Cane?" Delilah grumbles. "You are so damn weird. Get a fucken lightbulb put in. A real one."

"Is that one fake?" I ask curiously, leaning my forearms along the dresser and looking her way. I'm not at all serious, but she thinks I am and the pity in her gaze never fails to amuse me.

"I like it," Gayle says, walking all the way into the room to take a seat on the bed. "I can see just fine."

I just bet you can, gorgeous.

Gayle leans back on my bed, elegantly crossing her legs as she balances back on her elbows, causing her boobs to jut forward with a bounce. She doesn't do it to gain my notice - for Anova she already has that it was just a complication brought on by the complete fullness of her breasts. For whatever reason, I find that to be both adorable and a little disappointing all at the same time. I want her to want to get my attention, but I love that she does it so naturally.

It's obvious to me that she and my sister are utterly and completely in cahoots. It's not really surprising to me that Delilah's first real friend would be a girl that isn't entirely human. My sister was born with such a deep love for animals that I almost felt sorry for her. Being a part of the Elder Few life that my dad was devoted to, had to be torture for a girl with her heart. When he died, I hoped we could put it past us for the most part and I tried to make a living in other ways. Sure, I enjoy hunting. After all, I was raised to. But I saw what it did to her. She went from being my dad's greatest treasure, to my dad's only daughter. A commodity in the eyes of the Elder Few - a prize that a lot of those idiots have had their eye on from the time she is puberty and blossomed into womanhood, to now. My mother was no help. That woman lived only for her boys. If Delilah was gaining too much attention from either of us, she would find a way to snag it back. She was jealous of Delilah to a disgusting degree she still is. The way Delilah alienated herself from my father and me made her isolated. She couldn't seem to trust anyone and as a result, she never made any friends.

There is a reason I joined the Elder Few and it's not the one that she thinks. Sure, they provide pretty damn well for their own, but they also have some pretty archaic beliefs so I'd just as soon say no thanks. But a couple of weeks ago, I found out something horrible that is sure to break Delilah's heart.

There are stipulations to the trust that was left to us by my father. Requirements, that if left unmet, will grant my mother ownership. So I knew I had to get Charlie and Delilah away from me so that I could see the provisions were filled. My mother... the witch... has

been fucking the lawyer into secrecy since the day that my father died. There is close to no time left to the obligations, but I refuse to give up.

To fulfill

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirteen

So, as much as I would like to casually drop down on the bed next to Gayle and spend the rest of the night flirting, I don't want to take anyone away from her that she might turn to in the event that something happens to me. Besides, Delilah obviously knows Gayle is a shifter, and there's no way Clayle doesn't realize that I'm the one who shot

her. She may not even truly like me. She might be trying to get me alone so that she can repay the favor behind Delilah's back. But I don't think that's what this is, surprisingly enough. Although, I probably should

I don't know... there's just something pure about the way that Gayle looks at me.

Sure, it could be that my dick is just telling me that and I'm only seeing what I want to see. Because from the moment I saw her shift in the woods, I've had a permanent hard on. The woman is so outrageously hot. I more than definitely want to fuck her, but it's clear to me that they came here with a certain agenda, and I have to find out what that is. comes

When it comes to caring for my sister, I have learned to keep my genuine interests to myself. In the past, any girl I brought home was either picked apart by Delilah's never-ending crusade to find someone she deemed worthy of me, or the girl ended up feeling sorry for me because she thought I was an incapable virgin. I can't really complain, because the whole virgin' thing actually got me quite a bit of pussy. They all wanted to be my first. But in this particular case, I'd prefer it if Gayle didn't view me as her prey.

The moment Gayle starts giving me too much attention, Delilah might declare an end to their friendship and I don't want that. So when Gayle's kively gilded gaze slides up over my body toward my eyes, I suck in my bottom lip and turn back toward my sister, doing my best to look disinterested.

"Did he tell you what h

he was going out to do? Delilah asks me

"Who? Roman?" I reply. "Yeah. He did. But it's Elder Few business, D. You know I can't say anything. Not that I really give a shit about that

part

Delilah chews her lip, meeting Gayle's gaze over my shoulder in silent communication. Boy, aren't they precious?

"If you're worried that he won't let you stay here, don't be. He actually asked me to invite you. In fact, he was planning to take me to pick you up the moment he got back," I inform her, watching her face carefully. He seems to really want to help us. I don't know why you don't like him." I throw that last part out there just to see what reaction I get. I do like Roman, he knows a lot about hunting and survival. I don't like some of the things he's had me do. Killing those bikers for instance. That was a test and I knew it was. If I didn't happen to know for a fact that the particular crew he had me target were a bunch of kidnapping rapists, I probably would have failed that one. But I did know, so I

passed. I might not get so lucky next time. He says he never targets the innocent, but I don't know that for sure. What I do know is that I don't want him for my sister.

"He's a creep, Cane, just trust me," Delilah says vaguely.

But her eyes darted around, refusing to even look at Gayle. So I straighten, watching Gayle from the corner of my vision and seeing that she too, looks curious.

So I say, "Did he do something to you? Something you're not telling me about?"

I

Just drop it, Cane," Delilah growls, growing immediately frustrated and standoffish.

She's agitated now, and that bothers me. My sister isn't the damsel in distress type. Nor is she a girl that's easily traumatized. She's more likely to get mad than she is to get sad and the fact that she looks steaming pissed tells me that he probably did do something. "Did he touch you, D?" I ask, in as low a voice as I can manage. "God, Cone! Can we just relax for a while! I didn't come here for a fucking therapy session. Jesus!" She barks.

I don't even know what to say to her now, I like this place out here and some of the things Roman said he wanted to do sounded pretty cool. It would have been nice to stick around for a bit, even after I get what I'm after, but....

My phone rings on the dresser and it feels like every set of eyes in the room glances at it. The caller identification flashes and I glare.

"Who is it? Delilah asks. "If it's Roman, tell him I'm here alone."

Chapter Two Hundred Thirteen

I absorb that little piece of information, pack it away for another date and

Chapter Comments

KKN

canes a tricky one

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[1,831 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Fourteen

CANE

"Someone probably found your phone," I say, holding my cell out for her to take.

Her mouth sours and the phone continues to ring. "Answer it," Delllah tells me. Tell him we're not here.

Him? 110?

"Tell him?" I frown, shaking my head. "You weren't really at a motel, were you?"

"No," she admits. "I wasn't."

She and Gayle share a look and this time I snap my head in Gayle's direction just in time to see her mime the words, "Tell him," to my sister.

Tell me? Tell me what?

Gayle sees that I'm looking at her, I know she does. But to her credit, she doesn't let it sway her. Choosing only to acknowledge me once she has finished, her eyes snap to mine and she offers me a wan smile. The timid little turn of her lips is so endearing that I find myself smiling back.

The phone is still ringing in my hand so I look at it one last time, then block all calls from Delilah's number. I can always remove the block, so I don't worry.

When I look up at Delillah, her eyes are a turbulent shade of swirling blue and her mouth is sputtering wordlessly as if she's in shock,

Shit, she's worried.

"What's the matter?" I ask, my brow furrowing. "Who is this guy and why does he have your phone?"

She shakes her head, taking a few deep breaths and then looking toward Gayle for help.

"He's her husband-boyfriend," I hear Gayle say in a carefully cloaked voice.

Delilah's eyes narrowed into slits. "Really, traitor?"

"Lilah's the infamous Missus Quinn, Gayle chuckles, drawing my attention.

Lilah, huh? That's cute.

I stare at her as she continues to laugh, her face going from simply sexy, which seems to be her standard setting, to adorably charming as her face lights up with joy from her laughter. "You're just mad because I refused your sexual advances, Delilah taunts from behind me.

Gayle gasps dramatically, sitting up to cross her arms over her chest. "You never told me you refused! I thought you were still considering

Somehow in the space of the last five seconds, my chest has begun to throb and I rear back a bit, losing my inner peace as I take it in that Gorgeous Gayle is a lesbian. Well, that just really, really, sucks. I can't exactly explain why it upsets me so much. She wouldn't be the first chick I wanted to bang that turned out to be unattainable in her case, more ways than one. But for some reason it hits a whole lot harder this time. Maybe because I thought we had a connection and like I said before, my dick was painting a very different picture for

1/4

1. me.

Chapter Two Hundred Fourteen

But I really thought... no, not thought. I know she was flirting with me Don't 17

While the two of them continue to laugh, I zone out a bit. The world shattering news that Delilah has a boyfriend after just being single two days ago, is completely forgotten as I try to get my throat to work so that I can ask a question. I'm still reeling and now I'm staring at Gayle like she is in fact a traitor. When she looks over at me and her laughter swiftly dies, so does Delilah's.

As the room falls uncomfortably silent, I finally

finally find

my voice. "So... you like-

My phone starts ringing again and I swipe a hand over my face to hide my frustration before I take a look at the caller ID.

Unknown Caller.

Without consulting either of them, I hold a finger to my mouth, ordering them silent, Chances are it could be Roman, but my money is on this Quinn guy.

"Hello?"

I can hear the distinct whir of tires racing over pavement for a moment before everything goes silent on that end and a man's voice says, "Hello Cane. My name is Quinn. Before you decide to lie to me and say that Delilah isn't there with you, can you please tell her that I know that she is and I desperately need to talk to her about something

I smirk, then without so much as a second thought, I say, "Sure, you can speak to her. Just a second."

"Ub-okay," Quinn says, laughing with relief. "Thanks."

"No problem," I say, handing Delilah the phone and ignoring her soupcan glare. Roman doesn't have any canned goods," I inform her, closing her hands around my phone when she refuses to reach for it. "He believes fresh is the only way to go."

"Ew," Gayle says with a shudder and I grimace, realizing what that may have sounded like given our prior conversation. Then she turns to

Gayle, "I'll be in our room."

Our room. Jesus. Could I have missed all the signs? Is my baby sister even more adventurous than I already knew she was?

I walk toward the head of my bed and then throw myself on it, my back slightly inclined against the five fluffy pillows along the headrest. Gayle hasn't turned around to look at me, but I can't seem to take my eyes off of her. And it's not like I'm ogling her body either. I'm just staring in hopeless admiration at the back of her head. Like a fool who managed to convince himself it was alright to believe in unicorns, only to learn that they only revealed themselves to women. Stupid analogy, I know, but I'm not much of a reader.

me, blushing when she sees that I'm already looking at her. Where is this shyness coming from? Is it

She twists her body to the side

because of my sister?

le to face m

"What were you going to ask me?" she inquires softly, chewing her lip when I don't respond. "Before Quinn called?"

Her sultry y voice is powerfully sexy and I find myself hoping to paint a new picture. One where I convince her to give dick a shot and she agrees to one night of nothing but foreplay. That way, if she still doesn't want me I can always bullshit-myself and say it was because I didn't give it my all.

"I don't remember," I lie and try for a smile, just so that she doesn't have to feel bad for me.

"You don't?" she teases, playfully. "Are you sure?" She turns herself on the bed until she's on her hands and knees crawling toward me.

My eyes go instantly heavy, my dick twitching visibly in my shorts as her back arches and her sweet round ass rises and falls behind her. This girl is evil

She converges in my direction but then stops when she almost reaches the headboard. Curling her legs beneath herself as she sits facing

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Fourteen

the side of my head. Her knees re so close to my waist that I can actually feel the soft fabric of her sweatpants each time I inhale. It's torture, and it's not fair. Although depressed, my cock doesn't seem to be immune to her nearness and I can already feel it swelling. despite that I fight it. Looking down at my ever growing bulge, I grit my teeth and get ready to snap. Fully intent on chasing her out of here with some good old fashioned bullying, my mouth falls open to spit fire, but I meet her gaze and I just can't do it. My chest physically aches at what I see on her face. Fear and hurt. Like the eyes of a frightened animal.

Like the eyes of the girl that shifted in my arms before she ran away.

way to her.

She's afraid of what I was about to say

But why?

Maybe she's decided that my sudden change in demeanor means that I've recognized her.

I shot her twice at close range and then after she fell, kicked her to make sure she was dead. Fuck. That's ugly I can only hope she was still unconscious for that part. Dropping my rifle, I released the trap and tried to gather her up to throw her body over my shoulder. Then... she shifted in my arms becoming this absolutely breathtaking girl whose eyes were still closed in what I thought was death.

I'll never forget what that felt like. The shock and excitement of seeing a famed lion shifter lasted less than a second. That all fell into the background the moment I saw her face. It was white noise compared to the shame and regret that I felt. I wanted to lay her down and turn the gun on myself. But then her eyes popped open and she stared at me for a long moment before leaping out of my arms and racing away. Then, Charlie shot at her retreating back before I could stop him. I don't even know if his bullets hit her, but I do know that I wanted to find her again.

That was only a few nights ago.

And now... she's here.

And somehow, I've scared her.

So I go ahead and go for it, asking her the question that I figure I already have the answer to, just so that she isn't afraid of me. "Are you in love with my sister?" I hate how defeated my voice sounds, so I look away.

P-pardon me? Wh-what?" she scoff.

"Are you two... you and my sister..... are you-"

"No-na! No, no, no, no!" she exclaims, but it could be that she's just embarrassed because Delilah refused her. "She has a boyfriend!"

I finally look at her and find her looking about how I did when I realized she was into women. At least she's not looking scared anymore...

"Yeah," I say. "But it's new. So who knows how long that'll last."

She blinks at me in utter disbelief. "Call it a hunch, but I'm thinking it might last a while."

Sister likn

"You don't know my sister like I do," I chuckle. "She bounces back faster than most."

She taughs, shaking her head at me like I'm missing something. "You just don't understand."

I understand that you're the first girl that I have ever seen her hanging out so freely with. And I'd hate to see her lose your friendship just because she doesn't return your feelings, I sigh, thinking about mine for her. "Sometimes it's enough just to have them around." Her brow furrows. "I'm not into your sister," she murmurs quietly.

I apologize, I mumble, letting her off the hook.

3/4

Chapter Two Hundred Fourteen

"1-1-Im not 1-she takes a deep breath-I didn't even know that she liked women."

My eyebrow shoots up. "She doesn't."

Gayle tilts her head at me, studying me openly. Then why would you think I was in love with her? I don't get it."

"Because you like women," 1

1.1 point out a

and for a moment I wonder if I misheard what they said, but I don't want to get my hopes up

Because I like women? Wait a minute! What Oh Oh no! She gasps, closing both of her hands over her mouth before falling into a fit of giggles

Her body quakes with laughter. The sound of it is so intoxicating, that almost start laughing v

But then she curls forward clutching at her stomach and her head lands right on my chest... with her.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,371 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Fifteen GAYLE

My stomach drops when I realize I've just crash landed onto Cane's bare and beautifully sculpted chest. He dexes underneath me, his body tensing up as I turn my head and my breath fans out across the grooves of his abdominal muscles. After working so hard not

to get caught staring, the smooth solid feel of him warms with sparkling energy against my skin and I shudder. My laughing stops and I lift my head slowly, not wanting to accidentally knock him in the face too. Catching glimpse of the large bulge that has developed behind his m I my cheeks pinch with heat.

shorts, I feel n

With a package like that, he would fit in so well at the den,

Just that thought is enough to depress me, because I know what I want is impossible. It's not that I don't think I could convince Taedora and Goose to accept him. It's that I know Gryffin won t

Unless..

I shake off the idea before it can take root inside my head. Cane is a a hunter. The only reason he's even been flirting with me is because he thinks I'm just some pretty girl. A girl, just as human as he is.

If he knew... Or more like when he finds out that I'm not, he might be disgusted by me. Hunters are the way they are for a reason. They kill animals for sport. If Cane felt anything for the girl he had in his arms on the night we met, he wouldnt be out here training to hunt More shifters.

I have attacked every hunter.

or I've ever met since my mother was killed. I should hate Cane too. I really should. But God help me, I dont

"I'm so sorry! Did I hurt you? It really was an accident. Just another uncharacteristic bout of clumsiness I seem to be experiencing whenever he's around. The find one being when I fell into his steel trap. Not that I'm going to tell him about that.

"I'm fine," he says huskily. Then, "Nothing you could do would ever hurt me."

"You don't think I can hurt you?" I snort, dipping my head down so that my hair fell over my face.

"I didn't mean it like that. I'm sure you could. It's just," he sighs, "I know that if you did hurt me, it wouldn't be any more that I deserved."

*1

I tremble at that, flipping my hair out of my eyes to assess his mood. A few minutes ago, I was sure he had recognized me. The sudden scowl on his face was aimed directly at me and he looked so disappointed I could hardly breathe. Even Delilah seemed worried.

But she knows everything about him that I don't, so when she left me in here to go and talk to Quinn, I knew I'd be okay. Well, I hoped. Now that we've actually met, just the image of him realizing who I am and taking aim to shoot me threatens to crush my heart. Now that I'm looking at him again, I don't see any of that former disappointment in his baby blue eyes.

He's watching me so intently I don't even notice his hand slide forward until I feel one of his fingers tracing up and down the side of my leg.

"You don't like women?" he asks with a quick smile.

"No," I whisper, my breath hitching and my eyes growing heavy as he broadens his exploration and gently strokes over my knees. Thank fuck," he says, tilting his head to watch the graze of his hand.

"We were just joking when she said that, I explain, shamefully leaning little farther into his touch. My body is purring as he continues Chapter Two Hundred Fifteen

to strum my leg, his fingers becoming more and more bold with every passing second. I'm forced to bite down on my lip just to keep making any catlike noises and by the time his fingertips skim the back of my ass I've nearly given up the fight You still have to tell him who you are!

didn't find the joke to be nearly as funny as you did," Cane says, in a low, steady mire as his palm settles over the top of my fact, he raises his hand a bit higher, a little closer to my core, I found it pretty depressing "Why?" I can't help but ask.

"Because I'm not a woman," he says simply, his hand kneading my thigh

"No, you're not. You're a hunter," I whisper and his hand freezes, his gaze raising to mine.

He studies my eyes for a moment, then my face, but he doesn't remove his hand.
"Right, I

"Why?" I can't help myself. I want to know. "Do you love it that much? Hunting?"

His jaw clenches and his soft blue eyes darken when he shakes his head. "I've never loved it, but I used to enjoy

A small coil of hope begins to wind inside of me. "You don't anymore?"

"No. I don't," he rasps out, his hand tightening a little on my thigh..

My eyes catch on his fingers, then ride the vein that bulges over the muscles of his forearm all the way up his face. "What changed?" vonderfully cut biceps to

Again his jaw clenches and with it, his grip on my thigh. "You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you," he says smoothly.

"Try me." I say.

He smiles slightly, his eyes sparkling a little as he watches my face. "You're from Port Orchard, right?"

"Not exactly, but close enough," I admit.

He nods as is satisfied. "Then I'm sure you've heard the stories about the animals that live there in the woods." I nod, eager to see where he's going with this. "A few nights ago my buddy and I were out there bunting." "It's illegal to hunt out there," I point out, a little bit of my anger getting the better of me for a moment.

"I know," he chuckles. "Which is why so many do it. If you can get away with it, there's not much competition from other hunters."

"Gross. But okay, go on."

"I needed some big game for something that I'm working toward and I knew that would be the one place I could find it. Within the time frame that I've been given, I had to make a splash so I headed out there confident I could get what I needed. I set up more traps than ever before in the best location possible and then headed back to the cabin and I waited. Monitoring the area with a high frequency mic, I was able to hear every rustle of leaves, every whisper of wind... every animal cry." He looks away from me to stare straight ahead at the wall.. "It didn't take long, maybe an hour, before it screeched through my headphones. Even though it was my first time hearing it, I knew right away it was the sound of a wounded lion. I could hear it thrashing in the trap so I knew it was caught." He takes a deep breath, still not Jooking my way. The first shot I gave her was from a decent distance, but she was still thrashing.

"She?" I choke out. That's when I realize I've started to cry and my side that he shot me in has started to ache. I swipe at my cheeks to wipe the tears away and his gaze steadies on me, the blue of his irises full of an emotion I can't quite place. "Go on," I press him. "The second time I shot her," he shudders, his lip curling a little at the emory, "I was pretty close, but for some reason, I still didn't take

2/3

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Chapter Two Hundred Fifteen

that I don't know why I dder, befels away dinner guirily, "bur

swallowing innafly. Then

lifted her pertiway into my arms. I kept thinking I should we Charlie seemed to be, beat something

Juggler about what I caught, far I sousid tune been an excited

the charged - buat melted from tion to woman night 1 albemys adsuttet that they were tolle. This one

he's finding at hund do speak. At thun morcent, when I thought she was dod,

bear anything, could speak, couldn't bes

then..... she opened her eyes and took off evening And

Chapter Comments

KKN

the anticipation is killing me

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,723 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Sixteen

GAYLE

No. You shot at her as she ran! You shot at me! I want to scream at him, but I don't.

You let her go? No. You shot at her as

He says, "I was still on the ground, frozen in shock, watching her retreat when I heard Charlie start shooting at her back."

Oh...

lis lip curls upward in disgust. "It made me so angry that he would do such a thing after seeing her. Seeing how beautiful she was." "Beautiful?" I can't help it, I am a fool and I blush.

"I wanted to hurt him. Badly. So, I pretended everything was fine and I took him with me where I needed to go, but when the time came and I was presented with the opportunity to, I did. I hurt him." He shakes his head at himself. "I'm good at that. Pretending. I've been doing it for a long time."

I'm panting by now, so completely shocked by his admission that I almost don't know what to do. I ask, "Is that what you're doing here? At this place? Pretending?"

He finally looks at me and whispers, "Yes."

"But why? What's the point?"

His brow wrinkles, his attention drifting toward his hand on my leg once more. "It's complicated. I need something that only Roman can give me. So I have to keep pretending. At least... for now." "Does your sister know that?" I ask.

"No," he says absently. "It's better if she doesn't. It's safer that way."

He caresses my inner thigh. "Are you?" My breath hitches again as his hand dives deeper between my legs to squeeze and caress my

to ask. "With me?"

you pretending now?" I hop

"Does it look like it?" he asks, flexing his muscles so the front of his gym shorts twitch and my eyes are drawn to the pulsating hardness between his legs.

if you're a virgin, I coo softly, my hungry gaze locked on his bulge.

"Your sister says

fuck that

He chuckles, "My sister has a big damn mouth. She tells everyone that

Again his dick twitches and my mouth waters as I swallow back a moan. You're pretty aggressive for a virgin, Tremark shakily, my eyes closing when his pinky finger traces over the fabric covering my slit. Oh God. "I know," he replies, turning his hand so that he can press more firmly against my core.

"Mmph, bite my lip harder, wanting to purr so badly. "You probably shouldn't do that," I rasp, as my fingers begin to tingle, my claws begging to be set free. -Wetness pools inside of me, leaking from between my folds. "You don't like it?" he asks teasingly, stroking again and again. Up and down, then in circles over my clit. "Tell me to stop."

My eyes are still closed and my head rolls back with pleasure. "I don't want you to stop," I whisper, and it's true, I don't. "But you definitely -should." Because any more of this and my kitty will be desperate for more than an intense petting.

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Sixteen

"Fuck," he hisses in amazement? "How can someone like you get so wet for someone like me?*"

What? That's right. I m not wearing panties. Shil

"What does that mean?" I whisper, bringing my head back up and opening my eyes to study him. "Someone like me?"

He licks his lips, his gaze dark and intent on the movements of his hand between my legs. "I want inside," he says, avoiding my question. "Come closer," he murmurs.

There isn't really enough space for me to come any closer without sitting on his lap, so after about thirty seconds of careful thought, that is what I do. Popping up on my knees a little more swiftly than I probably should have, I stretch over his lap, lock my knees around his waist, and begin lowering myself as slowly as possible.

His eyelids droop and his teeth close over his bottom lip, both of his hands coming forward to clamp themselves around my thighs.

"Like this?" I murmur, settling easily over his hardness, but not giving him all of my weight. It's my turn to tease him and when his dick. jumps the spare inch between my heat and his, I rock my hips just enough to barely graze him.

His fingers tighten on my legs. Jesus. Yes. That's

's nice."

"But I thought you wanted inside?" I remind him gently, placing my hands on lightly tanned skin of his well defined abs. The skin to skin contact causes heat to buzz up my arms and I gasp in shock at the pleasure of it. Instead of answering right away, his h

hands stroke upward to grip the back of my ass. His eyes are half-lidded when they find mine and he slams me down on his lap. He groans deep in his throat as he guides my hips into a punishing rhythm, grinding my core back and forth. over the top of his shaft. "I definitely want inside," he whispers harshly

Conscious of Delilah in the other room, I moan quietly as the friction between us begins to drive me toward climax. My head is thrown back and my eyes are closed, I've given up control completely. Content to let him steer me onward when-

-the door to the other room bursts open and the pair of us scramble apart like guilty teenagers. Im back in the position I was in before I straddled him, but with my knees bent to the side instead of under me, Cane drags a pillow down from the top of the bed to cover the space between us as well as the bulge in front of his shorts. He somehow makes it look so natural that by the time Delilah is back in his room, she hardly even looks our way,

"Houston we have a problem!" she exclaims and I jerk to attention.

"What's the matter?" I ask, watching her pace back and forth in front of the bed. I feel Cane's hand slide under my ass and give it a squeeze, and my body tenses.

Delilah freezes in her steps, then faces her brother nervously. "I'm really sorry, Cane. I know this place is like some big hush hush that a lot of the elders don't even know about, but Quinn promised me that he was alone and that his presence could only help matters, so I gave him directions to this place and well... Quinn will be here in an hour."

"He's coming here?!" I gasp.

Surprisingly enough, Cane continues to look almost bored, secretly groping my bottom as he talks to his sister. "Quinn, your boyfriend?"

Delilah nods, her gaze flitting steadily back and forth between the two of us. Im sorry."

"Good," Cane tells her. I think Id like to meet him."

"Huh?" Delilah says, confused. "You mean you're not mad? What about Homan?"

Cane grins, his fingers pushing forward and wrapping around my core fijom underneath. I shoot him a warping look, but he ignores me. "Roman's not here, D. I mean, he can't stay but you already said you arent either, so what is there to be mad about? Besides, I think

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Sixteen

might have a favor to ask of his."

"A favor?" Delilah quips, eyeing him suspiciously. "I don't know how generous he's going to be with you. I mean..." she trails off.

"Why wouldn't he feel generous, Delilah? What are you not telling me? Cane asks.

Delilah winces, chewing her lip. "He's not exactly your biggest fan. First, you left me in Blackjack by myself and he saved me from becoming lunchmeat."

"Saved you from becoming what-huh?" Cane asks and I lower my head guiltily.

ir way to see

Delilah continues, "Then of course, there was Charlie. Quinn and I came across him on our way see you when I thought you were still in Oregon." She glares at him. "What you did to Charlie was really fucked up, Cane."

My head snaps toward him and he sighs heavily. "Yeah. I know. But he deserved it. Trust me. Besides, I left the ropes loose enough for him to get free. He lived, didn't he?"

My eyes bulge.

"Seriously, Cane? Delilah snarls.

"So what else, then? Why wouldn't he want to do me a favor? He's into you, isn't he? Gayle seems to think that he's different from your past suitors.

"Fuck you Cane," Delilah snaps, flipping him off. But then she says, "What kind of favor?"

"Well," he starts, his fingers circling beneath me and causing me to wiggle a bit, "it's not so much a favor for me as it is for you." He sighs, finally taking his hand back and sitting up in bed. He studies the two of us carefully. "Maybe it's time the two of you tell me what you're really doing here. His blue eyes sear into mine, but he speaks to his sister. "You told me the friend you had with you was injured by shifters, but that was a lie. So tell me what the truth is. Tell me what you are really doing here? That part feels like it's directed at me and given that he doesn't look away, I'm the one that answers.

I release a slow breath. "We came to warn you," I confess.

"Gayle... um..." Delilah starts, probably seeing something in her brother that makes her nervous.

Warn me about

ut what?" he inquires thoughtfully, his eyes still on me.

"There was an attack last night between Port Orchard and Blackjack. Your people," I say carefully, ignoring Delilah's frantic attempts at waving me down.

"I can see you Delilah," Cane says offhandedly, still looking at me. And who exactly are my people?"

The hunters. The Elder Few. Your people," I say. At least, that's the way everyone else sees them."

"And do you see them as my people?" he asks gravely, looking down at his hands.

-un)-I-" I want to say no, but he still doesn't have all the facts about me yet.

"Right, Delilah groans, then topples onto the bed in front of us. She reaches forward taking my hand and I finally look at her. "Cayle... I thought we should wait until Quinn gets here to tell him. You know... just in case he doesn't react well." I smile at her. "It's okay, Lilah. I don't think he will hurt me."

"Tell me? Tell me what?" Cane looks up at me again, his blue eyes full of sorrow. He smiles sadly and says, "That you're the one that got away. The lion shifter that I almost killed. Go ahead then. Tell me something I don't know."

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[1,683 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Seventeen

GAYLE

Im gaping at him, my ears ringing as I process what he said.

"You knew?" Delilah asks, jumping up from the bed. "You recognized her and didn't say anything?"

Cane rips his eyes away from mine to stare at his sister. "You started this. You are the one that lied to me on the phone."

"Because I didn't think you would tell me where you were if I told you the truth, Delilah snaps.

"Well, it doesn't matter now does it? You're already here," Cane says, his eyes rake over me to settle on my lips. "Both of you are. So go ahead. What did you have to tell me? What do I need to be warned about? Or was that a lie too?" "No, not a lie," Delilah says. "Gayle came to me because they were hunting for her in the woods. She said she needed to get to you. She

"Who was hunting for you in the woods?" Cane snaps, his brow furrowed. "The Elder Few?"

I shake my head. "No. Well, yes and no. A few hunters were there, but not for me in particular. For anything I guess. Kind of like you were that night. It's the authorities that are hunting for me." "Why?" Cane asks.

I swallow thickly. "The hunter that I attacked survived and ended up at the hospital. So it was called in as a lion attack."

"But how would they know which lion?" Cane says.

"They wouldn't," I say, "Not really. But the thing is, I ran in the opposite direction of my home and I couldn't very well walk through the streets naked, so I went to see your sister."

"Why my sister?" Cane asks. "Had you already met?"

My lips purse and Delilah coughs. "Sort of" I say.

"You know what?" Delilah chirps. "I'm gonna go in the kitchen and make some breakfast. That way when Quinn gets here we can eat and discuss what happens next. Sound good?"

"Close the door behind you," Cane says, glaring when Delilah hesitates.

"It's fine," I say.

"Jesus, D. What is it you think I'm going to do? She's a damn shifter! Do I look armed?" Cane snaps.

Delilah flips him off and then slams the door.

"When did you realize?" I ask, looking at him.

He's still watching me sadly when he shrugs. "I knew who you were the moment I saw you, I didn't know why you were here, and I still don't. Not really. But you were here with my sister and I knew she would never do anything to hurt me." "You're right. She wouldn't," I agree.

"Would you?" he asks, seriously.

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Chapter Two Hundred Seventeen.

"No," I whisper. "Never. Not me But the other shifters, they

"If anyone

should want to hurt me, it should be you." He frowns, glaring at the wall directly ahead of him. "So if that's why you're really here, that's fine. Go ahead,"

I shake my head. "But it's not why and I don't want to

Well you should," he says, "Were you unconscious after I shot you the second time?"

Again, I shake my head. "No.""

He closes his eyes. "So you

you felt me kick you."

"Goddamn it, he snaps.

"It's okay," I say, reaching out for him and trying to take his hand, but he shakes me off and my eyes

"Why did you come to warn me?" he asks. "Why should you even care what happens to me?"

I take a deep breath, reminding myself that he is my mate and he deserves to know it. "Because you're special for me, I reply quietly.

I take a

breath with her news about Quinn. "Special... Special how?"

He looks at me, staring into my eyes the way he was before Delilah burst in here with

"I watched you for a while that night," I say. "I was in the trees, with a clear view of you in the cabin. I saw you with your microphone. Ever since my mother was killed I've made it my business to watch the hunters that stop through. I thought you were handsome, so I probably watched you a little longer than was necessary. I remember thinking that you had a thousand different smiles and all of them were good." He laughs, his lips quirking up.

"When I jumped down from the trees, I was still thinking about you. I wasn't paying attention and stepped right into that trap," I pause, watching him carefully. "I didn't mean to shift in your arms. It happened when you touched me because you touched me." "What does that mean?" he asks.

I look away, staring toward the bedroom door as doing so will put me on the other side of it, should he not respond well to what I have to say. "I want you to know it's okay if you don't want me. You don't have to accept me. I won't hold it against you. You're a hunter and I understand if the thought of being with me freaks you out! Some of the other shifters know who you are for me, and they'll be understanding but

"Hey!" Cane interrupts and I feel him tugging on the ends of my hair. "Slow down. I think you skipped something."

"Did I?" I ask, turning around to see him smiling at me.

I think so," he chuckles. "You skipped that part about me being your mate."

My stomach flops. He knows? "L... I-um-I thought your sister said you were stupid."

He laughs, still playing with my hair. She tells everyone that too." Then he loses his smile, his eyes sad. "You're too beautiful to forget, Cayle," he says, trailing his hand down my back. "Truth be told, I was going to come looking for you."

"To hunt me?"

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Seventeen

"No! Well, yes and no," he explains. "You're part of the reason I'm here with Roman. He's the shifter expert and I knew he was the only chance I might have at finding you again. But I never had any intention of hurting you, I just wanted to know how to find you. I needed to find you. But you found me instead."

My eyes are wide. "But you land those goggles on, so I really didn't think you could even see me."

He grins, his hand sliding up my back under the sweater. "I switched the night mode off after I shot you."

"Oh..." I say shivering when his hand grazes the bare skin of my back. But it was so dark."

"The goggles have a light in front. You were in my arms," he murmurs, sliding closer to me on the bed.

"So you did feel something." I say in awe.

His hand on my back slides low, dipping beneath the waistline of my sweatpants and tracing the line of my spine downward. "Yes," he says. "But I didn't know much about mates until I came here. Roman told me."

"Roman," I repeat, my mood darkening. "You

said he's a shifter expert. Tell me, what makes him an expert?"

He freezes, his eyes filling with worry. "Why? You know him, don't you?"

"Maybe," I whisper. "The hunter that killed my mother, my father once said his name was Roman. He learned his name from another hunter. One he was interrogating after my mother's murder. So tell me What makes him an expert? Has he killed any?" Cane sighs, removing his hand from my clothes altogether. "Yes,"

My throat tightens. "Did he keep them? I managed to get out. "Does he stuff his trophies?"

*Gayle

Have you seen them? His trophies?"

"Are they somewhere here?" I hiss, my skin suddenly itching to search the place.

"No."

I nod. Figures. "But you have seen them. You know where they are."

"They are where all trophies are kept," he admits. "Each successful hunter is given a wall at the compound. You don't become an Elder until you've had a successful hunt."

"Does he have a lioness there? A full grown female?"

"You can't go there Gayle. You'd be killed. I won't let you."

"Does he have one or not?"

"No," Cane says.

"You're lying." I hiss, tears streaming down my face: "Please Cane. Please don't lie to me. So far I think you've been honest with me. Don't do it. Don't start lying."

His eyebrows draw together as if he's in pain. "I won't let you go there."

Chapter Two Hundred Seventeen

"Tes he have a lioness?" I ask gain as his hand reaches for my chest and wipes the tears away.

.." he starts, then shakes his head. Teaching into my hair with one hand, he yanks my head back, polling me down onto the bed as he tolls over the top of me,

I'm panting beneath him as his body settles over mine,

his legs between my coon. "Cane, Throathe

He has one hand in my hair and the other cradling my

1. ma. "Youre not going there. Do you understand They'll trap you and hold yam there until they're ready to ie you fou la game. And if they figure out what you are? He lets the question hang

Shaking his head, he nashes me, closing his lips ever mine quickly and men into my mouth. I cant help it, I mean hark. The sparkling warmth of his lips melting against mine creates a sort of hazy confusim in my brain and before I knew it, I'm arbing up against him. his tongue dances in my mouth. His hips rock forward and he dives in deeper, angling my head so he can kiss and suck his way down neck. My nails sharpen and my claws tingle with pleasure, I don't even realize it, but I clutching his hark, -Shit," he mumbles, biting into my nock. "Your nails are pretty sharp."

"Oh!" I gasp, releasing his back. "Sorry, I didn't mean to:"

"Stop," he chuckles, lifting his head away from my neck to stare down at me. I actually like it." He presses his forehead to mine,kissing me sweetly, "I want you to promise me that you won't go there. To the compound."

"You don't understand," I complain. "My brother wants to kill you

him you know where the trophies are kept, then he might

"No!" Cane snups.

We need to bury her Cane. We need to," I plead.

Tine," he whispers, kissing me again. "Then I will get her for you. But you are never never going there. Promise me."

But I-"

"Promise me," he says again.

I sigh heavily, kissing his lips. "I promise."

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Chapter Two Hundred Eighteen CANE

Satisfied that she means what she says, I tear my eyes away from hers and drag my gaze lower the heading beneath me and see anything more beautiful. My eyes catch on the swell of her breasts behind the thick cotton sweater and I want to tear it off of her, but I'm not a lion shifter so I doubt it would go so well. I'll bet she could tear mine though, especially with those nails of hers.

Fuck, she is sexy.

want to keep you under me forever, I confess, stroking one hand down from her face to graze her neck. "Just in case you decide

change your mind about me

"That would never happen," she whispers. "That's not how mates work.

"No?" I ask, reaching down to caress her stomach under the sweater, "does that mean you're stuck with me?"

"That means you're stuck with me. Because I'm more than a little territorial. I can be kind of....

"Evil? I suggest, smoothing my

my hand upward to trace the underside of one breast with my thumb.

She hitches, "Sometimes. Maybe."

"Figures," I say, "So then all I have to do if I want some girl killed, is flirt with her?"

She tenses, one hand reaching down to grasp my wrist and push it higher so I can cup her full breasts, I hum with approval, my dick spiking against the outside of her thigh as I grip the split heavy flesh of her mounds. Gayle grumbles, "That's really not funny, I nearly mangled your sister in the creek because I thought she might be your girlfriend."

I can't help but giggle. "You're not serious."

"Ask her," she says.

I stare into her liquid gold eyes, my hand on her breasts still kneading he is serious. I squeeze a bit harder and she gasps. "I want to fuck you so bad right now, but I know there isn't time."

"We can be quick," she whispers, biting her lip.

1. me.

Fuck. She's perfect for e

"Hut I don't want to be quick," I rasp, dipping my head down to kiss her. I want to take forever"

"Well I want to have both," she argues, drawing her leg up to trap both of mine inside.

"But I'm a virgin, remember?" I tease, falling against her and bucking against her sex. She her too many clothes on. "You have to go easy on

She laughs into my mouth, then distracts me with her teeth on my earlobe while she reaches into the front of my shorts and palms my dick. I groan su lood 1 hear Delilah fake retching in the kitchen.

"God that feels good," I whisper, pushing myself into her hand as pleasure zaps through me.

"Yes it does," she agrees.

Gayle continues to kiss me, her mouth going lower and tasting my thro. All I can do is moan into my pillow as she continues to massage

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Eighteen

1. me. I feel like her hostage, not being able to move at all because her touch is that gratifying

"You're going to make me come," I warn her, latching onto the side of her neck as she continues to work my shaft. Jesus." I hiss, pushing myself harder and harder into her hand. Then she stills and I nearly start weeping. Don't stop," I whine. "Why would you stop?" "I hear something. A car I think," she says,

-shit.

How far?

"Half a mile."

"Oh yeah?" I draw my hand out of her shirt and lower my shorts. Closing my hand over hers, I continue to stroke myself. "You're not finished."

Gayle looks down, her eyes going black with heat as she whimpers at the sight. That's all it takes. A surge of arousal rides up my spine, pleasure barreling into me as I slam my lips down on hers. I explode behind her hand, groaning into her mouth and ruining her sweatsuit. My body writhes against her as I pant for breath, my hips grinding into her to curb the edge of my climax.

"I think you're going to need a new sweatsuit," I mumble, wrapping my arms around her and holding her close.

Five minutes later we are fully dressed. Me in jeans and a black t-shirt and Gayle in a pair of my dark green camo sweatpants and one of my white tees.

more

After glimpsing her body when she changed, I'm pretty sure I might be one of God's anointed. He or she definitely likes me a little more than I thought. Because Gayle is like every wet dream I've ever had, come to life. Not to mention that she's quite literally Catwoman in Her nipples poke out the front of my shirt so prominently I almost want to grab her a sweater instead of my shirt.

"This Quinn," I say, coming up behind her by the door and snatching her into my arms before she can open it. "He's a shifter too, isn't he?" She leans back into me and I slide my hands up the front of her, under the shirt. My teeth tease her earlobe while my hands squeeze

her

trasts.

"Yes," she shudders, pushing her tight round ass against the front of my jeans.

"I don't want him staring at my nipples," I whisper, kissing her throat. And when I say mine, I mean yours."

"I don't think you have to worry about that," she chuckles. "He's pretty devoted to your sister."

I freeze, the implication of her words settling over me. "That right?"

She's his mate

Don't know how I feel about that. How safe can she be as a shifter's mate? It's one thing for me to have a shifter mate, it's a little different thinking about my baby sister having one. I'm not sure I like the idea "That's right," Gayle says, turning around in my arms and studying my face. "What's wrong?"

stare down at her, working to school my features so she can't see the conflict in my eyes. "Nothing, I lie. "Let's go."

Her face falls and right away I feel that lying to her is not going to be something I get away with. I sigh, pushing her into the door and pressing my forehead against hers.

"I just worry about her is all, I admit, then kiss her lips gently.

"Well wait until you meet him to pass judgment," Gayle suggests.

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Eighteen

"And if I don't like him, will

shift into your spirit animal and tear off his head for me?" I ask.

she laughs heartily and I can't help but smile back at her, "Come on!"

then we enter the dining room there is an incredible spread set out on the table. Biscuits and gravy, scrambled eggs, cut fruit, bacon,

pancakes, a pitcher of freshly squeezed juice... I'm actually quite impressed my sister was able to get all this done in the hour had to work with. Even more so that she actually cooked the meat that she hates to touch. "This looks amazing!" Gayle says, taking a seat,

I can hear two sets of voices in the kitchen and I hear my name whispered more than once.

Seating myself next to Gayle, I call out to my sister, "What, no grass? What will you eat?"

stomps into the dining room right on cue, bet middle finger the only response she gives to my question. Behind her looms a beast of scale to suggest the regular consumption of

steroids. He's good looking. I suppose, with spiky black hair and same color as Gayles. His are a bit more yellow than hers are and for some reason I don't think of a

on when I see them

TA woll

chill rides over my body as I realize he's one of them. The wolves of Port Orchard that Roman was telling me about. The pack of Alphas

hex had his sights set on for years.

wants them all. He thinks it will be the greatest coup of all time.

seat across from me

nds behind the chair next to hers. Before I even realize what I'm doing, I'm shooting up

and glaring into his eye

His gaze narrows on me curiously, but he doesn't sit and neither do I.

Delilah calls out, her voice laced with worry. "What are you doing? Sit down."

But I ignore her.

er, battling for so

some way to see myself out of this now that my baby sister has just made herself a target.

A target for Roman

A target for me.

So you're the infamous Cane, Quinn says lightly, obviously trying to diffuse the sudden stress of the situation for my sister's sake. He reaches a hand out. I don't take it.

is all that I can say

He takes his hand back and smirks. It seems Delilah doesn't give you enough credit. You know exactly what you're doing. Don't you? Stop it down or leave. Those are your only two choices," my sister snaps.

him as I wait for his reaction to her swift reprimand. To my surprise, his eyes fill with worry and he flashes a quick

Chapter Two Hundred Eighteen

"Sorry Lilac," he mumbles, looking away from me and dropping down so quickly in his chair I think he might break it. Lilac For real?

my sister. "It's been two days, D. Two days and you have more nicknames than I have testicles. You must have been busy."

I stare at my

Delilah tenses, piling fruit onto her plate next to a serving of biscuits and gravy. That tends to happen when your family leaves you in a matchbox full of tinder wood with nothing but a can of soup to remember them by." my fists clench

"Be nice, Lilac. If he hadn't disappeared to skin and drowned his friend, you and I might never have met," Quinn says and my at my sides.

"Quinn," Delilah hisses. "I'm warning you."

My body is so light with apprehension at this moment that for the first time, I don't know what to do. What path to take? Which plan to make? This wolf will ruin everything. I'm just about to snap when I feel Gayle's soft hand close over mine and somehow it calms me. I look at her. The agonizing worry in her eyes does me in.

That's when I realize there is no more singular planning. Not if I want to keep het

And I do.

More than anything.

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