

The Pack Rule Number 1 No Mates –

Billionaire One 219

[1,698 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Nineteen CANE

Sitting down. I don't take my gaze off of Gayle until I've pulled her in for a kiss. She yelps when I yank her forward and into my embrace, but she melts into me like butter.

"Really Cane?" Delilah quacks from her side of the table. "You finally get haptized and you can't help but bring it to the breakfast table?"

Gayle smiles against my lips and I draw her chin into my hands to stare at her gorgeous fac

I don't know what you're talking about, D. I'm still pure, I joke, kissing Gayle once more before I release her to face the table.

Quinn stares over at us looking decidedly impressed. "That's a pretty neat trick, Gayle. I didn't think you had it in you."

Gayle rolls her eyes. "Bite me, Lassie," she snaps.

My eyebrows go sky high and a smile turns my lips as I load my plate with food.

"How many lives do you have left now, Gayle?" Quinn carries on. After being shot by your he cuts off when Delilah punches him under the table somewhere special enough to cause his eyes to water. "Fuck haby girl," he hisses. I thought you wanted kids!" "That

was your last warning, Quinn. First you steal my phone with the most scandalous ruse possible and now you come in here and poke

my brother and my friend. I swear to God if you don't stop, the only kids you will ever see me with will not be yours, am I clear?"

Baby-

"I will have dozens of them, Quinn. All different kinds. And I

"Oh y

yeah?" he spits. "With who? Captain Gherkin?"

Captain Gherkin?

Gayle and Delilah meet eyes over the table and laugh.

Gayle giggles, "Ted?"

Delilah nods with a snicker.

make you take care of them all

"She told you about him?" Quinn hisses, watching Cayle's face but she doesn't give anything away. He turns back to my sister. "So it's true what Bartlett said. You have seen his-

"Hey!" Delilah snaps. "I am eating! Please!"

"So am I." I mumble. "Are we talking about Matthew's son Ted?"

Delilah nods then shudders in disgust. "Yeah. Quinn and I ran into them at a diner on the Washington border, Quinn knocked his teeth out. Literally

"I sit back for a moment, contemplating on how best to share what I've been dealing with. It's hard to change the rules you've been living by your entire life. Even harder to include the people you want to protect in your plans. Especially when that means they may not agree with your strategy "Matthew called me a couple of nights ago. He wanted to broker an agreement for your hand in marriage. I let the bomb drop, ignoring the sudden silence at the table as I dug into my food.

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Nineteen

"He said something to that effect, Quinn states. "I hope you gave him a clear refusal. Not that it matters. He'd be dead before he got to

the altar.

"So he's not dead now, I take it?" I ask.

Quinn's eyes narrow at me. "No. Not yet."

*But he is missing," I add, meeting his gaze,

Quinn nods. "He is."

"Roman was called in to find him. If Ted's there somewhere, he will."

Quinn's eyes fit to Gayle in alarm, but she just appears confused. "Roman's in Blackjack?"

"If that's where the hunters went missing. Then yes. He left early this morning. Around three or four a.m."

hone. "I have to call Gryffin."

That would put him there a couple of hours ago." Quinn remarks, grabbing his phone. "I have

"Gryffin?" Gayle snaps. "Wh-what? Why?"

"Who's Gryffin?" I ask her as Quinn steps away from the table to make his call.

Gayle looks at me,

her eyes worried. "My brother."

"The one who wants to kill me?" I ask, bored.

The one and the same," she stai "He's the leader of our pride."

"So tell me this," I begin, "how often do wolves and lions work together?"

of

She grins. "We weren't always like this. We had a falling out about five years ago and never really reconciled until Domonic asked Gryffin for help protecting his mate. Now, it's like we're all members of the same pack. We help each other. Look out for each other. It's kind nice if you think about it."

"A pack of lions and wolves. Wow, I deadpan. "Any others? Flamingos maybe? Or geese?"

few humans, she says seriously, holding my gaze. "Hopefully one of them will

Gayle elbows me in the ribs, "Haha, very funny. No. Just a few be you.

I smirk at her. She's talking about an entire flip of my lifestyle. Something that should require serious thought, but for some reason, it doesn't. "But what if it's against my religion?" Her face falls slightly and I'm quick to reverse gears. "I didn't mean it," I tell her, gripping her hand in mine. "You are my new religion."

She smiles, her eyes twinkling

Delilah groans, "Okay! Great! Love that you two are getting along so nicely, but can we eat so I actually have something to throw Later? The walls in this place are way too thin and I have a feeling I will need to."

up

Quinn returns to the table-looking visibly stressed and meeting my gaze with a newfound respect it seems. "I think it's time we start sharing information. I'll tell you what you don't know and you can do the same." He looks at Gayle. "By the way, your brother is pissed that you went after your mate against his wishes. He still wants to kill him, but I might have lied and said you were planning to run away with him. When I said that, he changed his tune a bit."

"It wasn't really a lie. I was planning to if it came to that, Gayle says.

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Chapter Two Hundred Nineteen

My heart does this weird little fumbling thing that almost takes my breath away. I glance at her again and see the face of that beautiful girl that I shot in the woods. I can't possibly deserve her. 17 Or sh

"Ahem," Quinn says. "Would you like to start? Or should 17"

Turning away from Gayle, I meet his yellow-brown gaze. I knew this was coming. I shouldn't be so wary of it now that it has, but I know some of the things I'm about to say might shatter Delilah's heart. But then again, looking at the way she stares at this Quinn, she might just be okay.

I fix my eyes on my sister. "There are a few things I've been keeping from you, D." I rethink that comment, wince, then add, "Well... more than a few things I guess."

Ch?" Delilah snipes, crossing her arms over her chest. Am I going to need a can of soup for

I shrug, ignoring the threat, "First thing is, the reason I wasn't able to make the rent last month is because I hired a private investigator to

look into our dad's lawyer

She startles, but says nothing..

I go on, "He found out more than a few things that our mother was happy to keep secret."

"The trust," she says simply, her eyes growing worried.

I nod, sitting back and trying to figure out how best to land this blow. There are requirements that if not met by the end of this year. give mom ownership over all our money."

"What?" she snaps. "Why would dad do that? He left her plenty of her own!"

"He would do that because I made him do it."

She glares, speaking through her teeth, "You what?"

"Not on purpose," I inform her with a shrug. "It's not entirely true that he died before to the Elder Few. He did want to nominate me, I refused."

will

e he had the chance to nominate me for membership

Her mouth gapes open. "But I thought you loved hunting! Why would you refuse?" Then it seems to dawn on her and her eyes water. "The

I nod, trying not to let her tears affect me. I knew you didn't want that life. I knew it would kill you to be part of it and honestly, I don't love hunting. I'm good at it. But I don't love it." I look over at Gayle. "And ever since two nights ago... I hate it."

"I don't understand," Delilah says. "Then what are you doing here? With Roman?"

"You know dad. He was a devoted hunter, D. He wanted his legacy to continue and I think that's why he added the stipulations to the trust at the last minute,"

"What are they?" she asks.

"One, is for you to be married. If you are not married by the end of the year, your two million goes to mom," I say.

"Two million?" Quinn snorts. "Meh,"

"Shut up Quinn Delilah snaps and I can see her heart breaking

"But you see," I say looking at Quinn. "My dad messed up on that part, because it never states who you need to be married to. Just that you need to be married,"

3/4

Chapter Two Hundred Nineteen

Quinn smiles slowly, as if catching on, but Delilah remains somber.

"What's the other one?" she asks. "What's yours?"

sigh, leaning back in my chair and studying Gayle next to me. I have to be an established member of the Elder Few. With my own wall complete with my own trophies or the rest of the money, all eight million, goes to her. To mom." Eight million??? Delilah snaps. That asshole! Then I see her head scramble as she works to catch up. "But if you're Elder Few, you are required to choose a husband for me from the pool of eligible bachelors in the Elder Fowl

"Correct," Ladmit, focusing on Quinn. "Except that my dad screwed up. He must have been angry when he added the requirements and forgot to add the fine print, or he just didn't realize the law behind transfer of entitlement. The trust as a whole belongs to one of us if at least one of these requirements are met. Being as you and I are the sole entities on the document, it can't legally pass to mom without overriding both of us first. So you see, if you get numied, you can have it all. The reason I'm here at Roman's, is because the last time I - checked you weren't exactly on the market, but now... with Quinn..."

Quinn's eyes light up and he smiles at Delilah. "I could have sworn you said that your brother was stupid."

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

[1,845 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty ELDER ROMAN

"I'm going to need you to call my lawyer. These ass backward sheriff's have me detained here at the station under suspicion of aiding Rose Gruber's escape," Matthew spits into the phone.

"Did you do it?" I can't help it. I have to ask. I need to know where the damn girl went and who the bitch might

start

talking to.

"What? Of course not! You know what I planned to do, I never even got in to see her. They wouldn't let me in even after Roosevelt confirmed I was her godfather. They only allowed that damn Aid in there with her." My ears perk up. "What damn kid? You didn't tell me there was a kid."

"A young man. Apparently he's the one that saved her. He's not even family and they had him stationed at her bedside like some kind of bodyguard, Matthew grumbles.

A young man that saved her? From a fucking lion?

"Tell me Matthew... What did the guy look like?*"

Matthew sighs, growing frustrated. "What does it matter-

"It does damn it! Just trust me. And speak quietly please... you never know who's listening," I warn him.

Okay, alright. Um... he was young, early twenties I'd say, Buff guy, well built. Floppy brown hair, brown beard-" "Brown beard?"

"Yeah. Brown board. Looked like he might have tattoos on his upper biceps. Some kind of tribal designs."

The barkeeper. One of the wolf shifters. Well I be damned.

"Got it, Matthew. That's good enough. I think I'll be able to handle that particular problem myself. Don't you worry. As far as Ted is concerned..."

"Yes? Do you have him?"

"No. Not yet. But soon. I can't say any more, you understand? You're in the belly of the beast. Trust me when I say, the less you speak while there, the better. The place is a 200. Get it?" He's silent a moment before he answers. "Got it."

*T'll call your lawyer." Then I hang up.

Turning back to the task at hand, I scan the area to make sure I'm still alone then put on my headphones. Following Ted's scent this morning wasn't difficult once I realized he'd been abducted then carted off. But once I realized where he'd been stashed, I knew the task of getting him out would prove much more difficult. I might need to distract them. I probably should have taken Cane up on his offer to join me. In fact, I may need to turn back and go get him. Lions may not be able to scent beyond their own, but they have excellent hearing. It will be close to impossible to get in and out with Ted undetected.

Grabbing my remote switch for the mic 1 planted near the lion den this morning. I hit the 'activation' button.

I'm parked a good half mile away, plenty close enough for an uninterrupted feed. I hear the phone call come in on my receiver almost immediately after I flip the switch.

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty

"What's up?" One of the lion's answers, No disgusting the way today's youth disrespects the common greeting

The voice on the other end of the line is faint and hard to catch, but I
mate."

...there looking for the hunters, shifter Gaylen

"She's where??? You've got to be fucking kidding me! † told her she better not dare! She promised me she wouldn't! What is she saying about him? Don't tell me she wants him." ...close...has information we need, he's my mate's brother... away with him...your call..."

"Damn it! Fuck! I don't want her disappearing with him, Quinn. He's lignan. He can't possibly protect her."

...not what he seems...he says Roman is there kinking for Tet,"

of the fuck? How do they even know my name?

What

"That fucker shot her! Hunted her! And now I'm just supposed to forget about it because he turns out to be her mate?"

Hunted her? Who? A Moness?

"...I'm going to tell him...change sides...already wants to...lookout."

"Will do. I just checked on the little fuck. He's ready to tell us everything so hurry up and get back."

I listen for a few more minutes as Gryllin, leader of the lion shifters out in these par

parts, shares what he's just learned from Quinn with his pride. I almost want to thank him because now I have all the little tidbits of information that I wasn't able to hear before and my blood boils to a thousand degrees when I realize what has happened. I should never have left him there alone.

If I hadn't, they wouldn't have been able to get to him.

If his mate would never have had a chance to woo him...

Damn it, Cane. I really had high hopes for you. And for your sister.

Now I'm left with only a couple of options and as usual, I choose the one that fits me best.

Chucking off the headphones and saying fuck the ill-fated rescue mission, I start the car and head back to the highway.

CANE

"What d

do you mean he's a shifter?" I'm floored by this news. It can't be right, can it? Roman that I've known for years. Roman who is the most legendary of hunters in all of Elder Few history. He's a fucking wolf shifter?

Quinn nods gravely. "I wasn't entirely certain until I stepped inside this house. Before this, it was only a suspicion. But even then, it made sense. Now that I'm here, it's obvious. He's a shifter. I can smell it. His scent is somewhat tainted though. Almost, sour. We believe it's because he's a rogue." I glance at Gayle, "You didn't smell a shifter. Did you?"

Gayle blushes, turning away. "Lions can't scent like wolves do. Our sense of smell isn't nearly as strong. We can scent our own better than they can though. As well as other feline shifters. But if you want to track a rabbit, call Quinn."

"Well aren't you adorable, Quinn snarks.

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty

Gayle laughs, "We can also see better than they can, by far."

"Bullshit, Quinn fake coughs.

"We can climb too, Gayle snarls. "In both forms."

Quinn flips her off. "Yeah, fuck you kitty"

"Hey, watch it! Is

I snap, not able to help myself. I look at my sister. "Put a moonde on that one

My phone chimes and I pull it out of my pocket to see Roman has just tested. I foreboding washing over me

ELDER ROMAN-

This is going to take longer than I thought. Don't expect me back for at least another day.

ME

Got it.

But I don't get it. Because something feels off. Now that I'm aware that Roman a shutter, I filter through all the steps he would this

find Ted. All the shortcuts he could take because he's a shifter

Then he would have set up some kind of reconnaissance. Be i SWE

My head darts up and I leap up from my

"What is it?" Quinn snaps, following my lead and standing at

"The phone call you made to Cayle's brother - where was he when he answered

"What? Why?"

"Just tell me. Was Ted there? Is that where he was when you called?"

Quinn nods. "Yes, Gryffin has him locked in the basement. But it's okay. He checked and the lad is still whining like a baby down be What's wrong?"

"Fuck," I hiss. "I think you need to leave. All of you. Now."

a minute! Why?" Quinn

Quinn asks.

"Because I know Roman! And now that I know he's a shifter I know what he would have done perfind Ted. I know that be natural skills and his hunting skills together to free the little jerk. He has access to better equipmves cool. He just texted me not to expect him back for at least another day. It's bullshit"

"How do you know it's bullshit though? Quinn asks. "You can't know that

I do and even mite

I chuckle, "I can know that. I know that because Roman has no idea when the right time will be for him to strike. He road listening for the perfect in. The perfect time. He couldnt know it was going to take him longer unei in fact take him You mean, he wouldn't call and tell you not to expect him unless-

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty

"Unless it had already been an entire day. Exactly," I confirm.

"You think he was listening when I called?"

Again, I laugh. "I know he was. It's what I would do. What we are all trained to do." I sigh, glancing at Gayle sadly. "I want you all to leave.

Now.

"No!" Gayle says. "We're not leaving you. You re coming with us."

I shake my head. "No. He doesn't know that I know he's a shifter and there's a whole fucking shed in the back with silver bullets just for him. Besides, I promised to get your mom back for you, didn't I?" Gayle's eyes fill with tears. "No."

I nod, pulling her close. "Yes, I'm staying behind. Because I'm going to kill him and then I'm going to mount him on my goddamned wall."

him?"

"Who?"

"Never mind." Quinn looks at me, his eyes dark. I know what these are. He turns back to the shelves. These are all different kinds of venom."

"Venom?" I question. "Like the stuff snakes bite you with? Or spider's inject you with?"

He shakes his head. "Like the stuff shifters mark their mates with." Then he gasps, reaching farther in, behind the vials of liquid. The container he pulls out is labeled "RED WOLF" and appears to be a large jar of mineral oil with a handful of dark grass at the bottom. "What is that in the glass?" I ask

"Fur," Quinn answers with a grin. "In this case, Red Wolf fur. This is how he does it. This is how he disguises his scent. He must bathe in this shit before a raid and since he never raids as a wolf, it works for him."

That's right. He did mention something to that effect. But he hasn't taught me how to do that yet. It's called skunking. At least that's what he told me. I don't know what he uses though, just that it takes a good month to make what he needs for a batch." Quinn chuckles. Timeframe checks out."

"What? The full moon thing, right? Yeah, he told me about that. Funny that no one ever put that together," I say offhandedly. "No one ever sees him on the night of the full moon."

Quinn's eyes sparkle. "That's because he's busy in Port Orchard, but not as a wolf."

"What? Really?" I inquire, surprised. "But how?"

"Tell me this," Quinn says.

1. s. "Where is he from? I mean, where is his family from? Do you know?"

"Sicily," I say quickly. "He said his family had trouble there and moved out here when he was a small kid."

Quinn's eyes brightened. "Did he tell you

you what b

happened to them?'

I shake my head. "No. Just that they're all dead."

"Yet he remains," Quinn says.

GAYLE

Im not leaving him here," I say for the thousandth time.

The four of us are gathered around the side of the house and we are supposed to be saying goodbye, but I refuse to leave. They can't make

"Gayle," Quinn says, trying to catch my eye the way he has been for the last five minutes. "Your boyfriend has a plan and our being here is going to ruin it. We have to go."

2

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[1,542 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Two

Roman nods, his jaw clenching. Go on."

"We had breakfast. Then The guy disappeared to go to the bathroom. I noticed he was gone for a while, so I went looking and I caught

him in the shed."

"Son-of-a-bitch, Roman snarls.

"I told them they had to leave. That they couldn't be here anymore. The guy tried to attack me, but Delilah wouldn't let him. It it was like he was her little puppet. He did everything little thing she said."

"That's what happens when a man gets unforgivably pussy whipped and whether or not you realize it, Cane, Delilah is a striking young female," Roman growls, leaping up to glare out the front window, "Go on. And then what? Knowing he is probably watching my reflection in the glass, I shudder again, painting a look of absolute disgust on my face. That's when she told me who the girl really was. Gayle," I say, dropping my face into my hands again. "Who was she?" Roman asks.

I shake myself, picking up my gun as if remembering. "The lioness that I shot two nights ago." I look toward Roman, gritting my teeth. "My sister brought her here to take me back with them. Gayle says that Im her mate." Roman's eyes flare wide and he turns around to s study me carefully. And then what happened?"

"I screamed that they were wrong. That it was impossible. That I would never have a shifter for a mate. I demanded that they leave and when they refused..." I trail off, shaking my head. "I shot her. Gayle," I admit, and this time the tears are real. I try to look ashamed. The they left." I groan, pointing the gun at my head when I do. "God help me. I shot her and my chest hurts so bad." I look at him. Tm so Sorry Roman."

I pretend to close my eyes, but as Roman screams and reaches for me, I shoot him four times as I leap to my feet, taking out his knees first and then his shoulders.

He glares at me from the ground. "You little bastard!" he shouts, and his muscles try to expand, I assume so that he can shift, but that's

en he notices that his parts are smoking.

I kick his rifle into the kitchen and place my gun at his temple, then smile. "Don't even think about it. You want to guess how many silver bullets I have left? Or would you like me to show you?" Roman growls in frustration, obviously pissed, but as he watches me, there's something else shining in his eyes. Something like pride

"Wow!" Quinn's voice sounds from the doorway. "I guess you didn't need any help."

"It would have been almost poetic to mount your head on my wall, Roman. But apparently you're wanted alive." Then I shake my head Anew you had a thing for my sister. Gross."

3/4

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Three

GAYLE

When the sound of my brother's bike splits the air, I've just managed to switch out Cane's ruined and bloody sweat pants for a pair of

ings I found in the trunk of the jeep. Not a moment too soon either because in the next minute Gryffin rides up in a cloud of dirt, skidding to a stop inches from the driver's side door of the jeep. Luckily Delilah and I took Quinn's advice and have just started playing in the creek so we aren't in it.

"He might have killed me if we were still in the car," Delilah says. "I most definitely would have succumbed to a heart attack."

I laugh. "Gryff rides better than he walks, so I'm sure you would have been fine."

Gryffin chucks off his helmet, glaring at me from twenty feet away. "You never fucking listen," he snaps, stalking our way. "You promised me he didn't mean anything to you. You pretended not to care about the little human and what do you do? You go after the little shit!" "That little shit is my brother, I'll have you know," Delilah snarls angrily-

"Oh, I'm aware," Gryffin retorts, granting her a disapproving frown before turning to me. "He's human Gayle. Are you sure you want him?"

e did you."

My body tenses with anger. "Don't you dare. You're not dad and I won't let you bully me the way he

Gryffin flinches as if I've just struck him. My reference to his past human mate striking him like a bullet in his chest. I know how much it hurts him to think of that time. Reminding him of the day he rejected the mate he found because my father bullied him into it. She was just as human as Cane.

And she died human.

"Fuck you," Gryffin growls, dropping his head. "Where is it?"

"In the backseat," I tell him.

Gryffin wastes no time, retrieving the vial and syringe. He stares at it hauntedly with tears in his eyes. "Thank fuck!"

"Is it yours?" I can't help but ask, knowing it can't be anyone else's.

clothe

"One way to find out," Gryffin whispers. Shrugging out of his clothes as fast as he can, he then loads the syringe, fixing his gaze on me. "If it's not, and I die, I'll resurrect myself just to come back and tear your little human limb from limb.* "There's no way it's not. He couldn't have known what he knows unless he spoke the truth," I say with more confidence than I feel.

Despite Gryffin's nakedness, I see Delilah's attention is just as riveted as mine is. The pair of us are hardly breathing.

"Here goes nothing," Gryffin hisses. He plunges the needle into his neck then injects the venom without even a moment of hesitation.

Gryffin roars, falling to his knees in the dirt. The vial and syringe shattering on the rocks next to him.

"Shit!" Gryffin hisses, closing his eyes as his body shudders.

"What is it? Is something wrong?" I start to reach for him, racing up to where he trembles on the ground.

Gryffin shakes his head, putting an arm up to stop me from touching him. "Fuck!" he snarls. "That's nice..."

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Three

Nice?! Oh thank God!

Gryffin opens his eyes and the golden amber of his irises catch the light of the sun. He smiles at me then fixes his gaze on the creek. I'm clapping and smiling and so is Delilah.

I want to hug my brother, but before I can he looks into my eyes and says, "I have a promise to keep, I guess." Then he leaps into the air and shifts into his lion at the end of a roar, causing Delilah to fall back into the creek in shock. "Not ready!" Delilah screeches, clamping her eyes shut. "Still a little traumatized."

Gryffin lets loose with a growl then takes off in the same direction Quinn disappeared in. Along the creek that leads to the cottage.

"It's really not fair that they get to have all the fun," I complain. "I want to help."

"Ha!" Delilah shouts. "No, no, no. You're not leaving me out here alone. No way, Jose."

I study my new friend, realizing how truly tiny she is. "You could always ride on my back like the Queen of the Jungle."

"Me? Ride a lion?" She shivers with fear, "No, Animal Planet Experts strongly advise against such things."

"Come on," I say with a wag of my brows. "It'll be fun. I promise."

BARTLETT

"Bartlett!" A voice shouts into my ear and I leap to my feet to swipe at my eyes.

"Shit!" I snarl. "Do you have to yell?"

"What the fuck are you doing in my bed?" Timmons gripes, glaring at me.

That's when I remember that I'm here at Quinn's place and not at home. Rosel Shirt

"What time is it?" I snap, listening intently from the end of Timmons' bed.

"After ten in the morning," Timmons answers, studying me warily. "Don't worry, your little hostage is still unconscious. The hunt for Gayle is still ongoing and now that we have two of the Elder Few's senior members in lock-up, I've been ordered to rejoin the search. I just stopped in to check on the fucking human in my living room and grab a quick shower. I didn't realize you were in here." He squints at me.

Why are e you in here? Your mate is In Quinn's room."

Shame washes over me from head to toe as I recall what I almost did to Rose, "I couldn't lay next to her any longer. It was too hard almost..." I shake my head, pulling at my hair. "I just couldn't do it."

"I see," Timmons chuckles. "Marking her without consent - you're good with. Kidnapping? Okay, Bol sleeping next to her without her knowledge-

Twasn't sleeping!" I snap. "I was..." I shake my head with a growl. "I couldn't keep my hands to myself. I couldn't seem to control my urges. I almost kissed her! An unconscious female! I wanted to so badly, I was barely able to rip myself away. I'm pretty sure if I had kissed her, I wouldn't have been able to stop myself from taking it further."

Timmons sighs, his light brown eyes sparkling with amusement. "You wanted to, but you didn't. So chill the fuck out. You're a better man than most of us are, that's for sure."

What are you saying?" I ask, standing up and heading toward the stairs

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[1,338 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Three

"Jesus Christ. Nothing Bartlett. Just go easy on yourself. Don't feel son guilty. After uit - Quinn twice with a sniper rifle. I doubt she's had any miraculous changes of heart sinew she's going to want blood. So when she wakes up. I'd play it carefully can't afford to t Oh no? I ask tiredly, making my way upstairs. Why's that?

"Because," Timmons chuckles. "Quinn and Gryff are bringing in one hell of a prize tonige

"What?" I snap, "Really?"

Timmon's eyes are bright with excitement. Tonight we'll finally get to fod oor

"What do you mean if he's the one? I snart. Of course he's the one! He has t

"He's definitely the one who has been breaking into the bar. And according to s but he swears he didn't start it."

What? That can't be true, can it?

Chapter Comments

KKN

hmm now were finally gonna knw

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2

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Four CANE

"It's not too late, Cane. You can still make a better choice, Roman campaigns from his place on the ground, but I ignore him. "You are the perfect student. The perfect partner. I never should have left you here this morning. If I'd only just trusted you and taken you with me this would not be happening."

"You're right about that. Ted would probably be free right now, and you and I would already be back here pretending to be family. I grin. getting tired of looking at his face, but refusing to look away for even the briefest moment. His bullet wounds are looking a little black and his complexion somewhat gray, but he's not tied up and he hasn't made a move to remove the silver bullets himself, so that tells me one thing. He wants to appear as weak and sickly as he can. Dawn it. I really should have loaded more silver bullets in this gun. "You call it pretending, I call it revamping, Roman gasps, flashing me a quick smile.

"Are you going to shut him up, or should I?" I hiss, watching helplessly as Quinn attempts to master Roman's state of the art tranquilizer gun. "Because I promise you this, if you don't juice him in the next five minutes, I'm going to turn him into a permanent slot machine." "So bloodthirsty, Quinn jokes. "Try and have a little patience. I just want to be sure I give him enough."

"Seriously?" I grumble, "There's no reason why you can't shoot him with it twice. If the first hit doesn't do the job... try, try, again."

"What's the rush?" Quinn argues, his yellow-brown eyes twinkling in a way that tells me we are definitely waiting for something.

"The rush is he's fucking up to something and I don't have even the smallest idea what it is," I say with my eyes trained on Roman's face.

Roman chuckles, "That's my boy." Then he smirks. "We really could have made a great team. Practically share the same blood. Were you aware that I fucked your mother?"

"Whoa!" Quinn glares, shaking his head. "Chill out Old Dog. Are you trying to die?"

"That's not surprising." I quip. "I hope she made it special."

"Jesus Christ," Quinn giggles.

"Oh, she definitely did. She even gave me the key to paradise that night Roman tosses out. "A very gracious hostess, your mother. She set the table and I devoured the meal. She knew she wasn't the one I really wanted, so she offered me a sweeter deal. I mean, I knew the lady was ruthless, but I had no idea how jealous she was of her daughter. I had no idea how far she was willing to go just to ruin her."

Fuck. Do not listen to this shit. What's done is done. Fucking up now won't change the past.

"What the fuck is he talking about?" Quinn hisses, the tranquilizer gun trembling in his grip. "Is he talking about your sister?"

"Maybe," I shrug. "I'm doing my very best not to hear him, so who knows? You should probably do the same."

"That's right," Roman chuckles, his attention on Quinn. "You're the new flavor of the month then. Delilah certainly gets around, doesn't she? Roman eyes him suggestively. Those hips of hers were practically made to take a man good and deep." Holy fuck I'm going to be sick.

"What the fuck did you say?" Quinn snarls.

"Oh, come now. You heard me. You're a wolf. And not just any wolf. An Alpha. At least, you were supposed to be, Roman taunts.

"And you're a rogue. An outcast. An unwanted reject that needed to belong so badly that he chose to join a cult of humans. And what

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Four

would they say, if they knew? Huh?

Huh? What would

would they say if they found out you were nothing but a stray fucking dog?" Quinn challenges.

But Roman continues to smile. "What makes you think they don't already know?"

Okay, that gets my attention.

Sow-of-a-birch... maybe they do know. Not all of them of course, but the council...

My mind stutters for a moment as I try to dredge up exactly what Roman's words to me were when I told him that I wanted to pledge

"You will have to make the ultimate sacrifice." I didn't have a girlfriend or wife, so he chose the next best thing, I suppose. Charlie, my best friend.

So, I beat him up and took two strips of Charlie's flesh. Flesh that was immediately placed in some kind of crystal mason jar full of liquid and taken away. I didn't think it was odd that they kept it at the time, but now that I think about it, I had seen jars like that before along some of the Elder's walls.

Roman was so proud of me after I threw Charlie into the river. He boasted that there hadn't been a sacrifice as powerful as mine since his own personal tribute, when he first pledged,

Roman's wall is the biggest and most decorated. And the very first prize on display is the oldest and most protected piece. The only heart in any of the collections in the whole of the compound. A heart encased in a medium sized, locked silver box. I guess I always assumed it was the heart of a shifter. A shifter that he killed and had died in human form. But what if it hadn't been a shifter? What if the heart that lay inside the box was human?

And not just any human.

His greatest sacrifice.

A symbol of his loyalty. Holy shir

"You sacrificed your mate," I say flatly and Roman's eyes darken. "You had a human mate and you killed her to satisfy the Elder Few. It was the only way you could prove

you were loyal to them. So you carved out her heart and put it in a fucking box just so they would accept you. Just so you could belong."

Roman's face turns purple with anger and his eyes begin to swirl with gold.

"What the fuck?" Quinn hisses. "Seriously?"

"Was it worth it?" I can't help but ask him. "Do you ever miss her? I'm just curious, because I know you wanted us to be a family. You and me. I felt that. I could tell it was real. So I'm wondering... if you could go back and do it again... would you kill her? Or would you- *She didn't want me," Roman says in a voice so quiet I almost don't notice him picking at his kneecap with his right hand. "She called me a monster, so a monster is exactly what I gave her." Then Roman smirks glancing at Quinn, She was a redhead too." Reaching down with both hands, I snap Roman's wrist before he can dig the bullet out and he howls with pain. I smile, "Nice try."

Then I stand up and hand Quinn the gun. "Keep this on him I've got to grab a few things and then we have to leave. They'll be on their

way

"Who will be? A voice snaps from the doorway.

A tall, overly muscular, exceptionally male version of Cayle stands on the porch, chest heaving and dick swinging,

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

[365 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty Four

60%

"Elder Grier and

of the Enforcers. Roman would have called them. It's why he won't shut up and it's the reason why he is, more or less, mintent to lay there with silver bullets in his joints. I kneel down, Ignoring Roman s sudden silence as I dig around in his pockets, I pull out his keys then disappear into the shed out back.

Unlocking the chest as swiftly

I'm able, I grab a twenty two that's strapped to the inside and load it with silver. Then I fish a spare mung out of my pocket and load it with silver as well. The almost inaudible sound of someone approaching has me palming the twenty-two. We had

had a deal.

say, spinning on my heels to come face to face with Dayle's brother.

He's an inch or so taller than I am, but

that doesn't mean shit. I don't want to hurt him, but I'm damn sure not going to let him if he

That's a whole lot of silver you're

packing," Gryffin says curiously.

I chuckle, "Yeah? Well I'm not sure how many holes I'm gonna have to put into that bastard before we get to Washington. If it were up to me, I'd only need one." Gryffin lifts his chin and steps back. "Silver bullets work on humans to

They're sure as fuck

ack do, is all I say, before I race back into the house.

The moment I'm back inside, I study Roman's hands and shoulders, the angle of his mouth when he talks. "Did you take your eyes off him?" I ask Quinn.

"What?" Quinn replies. "No. Maybe. I might have kicked him in the face. But only once."

Roman catches my eye and grins. "They're planning to kill you, Cane. Why do you think he hasn't dosed me yet? Your mate's brother is not going to let her accept you. They lied to you, both of them did. They're going to kill you right here next to me and your poor little mate will never be any wiser."

I shouldn't have given him any attention when he said that, but I did... and because I did, I didn't notice the four silver bullets scattered

around him until it was too late.

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

[1,267 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Five

GAYLE

"I can't believe I'm sitting on the back of the very same creature that tried to eat me only a couple of days ago," Delilah says from above

me

I almost yowl a laugh at that, but I don't want to scare her into falling off so I keep quite. Delilah has a death grip on my fur and I probably should have spent a little more time explaining the how to's and the don't dos of riding a lion before I allowed her to hop on but I just wanted to be back at the cottage already.

Heading in the direction my brother went, I silently cursed my brother and his practical thinking. He must have kept to the creek, which means that I don't have a trail to follow. If the creek forks at any point down into the valley, there's always a chance that I might head in the wrong direction. I had no idea Quinn was planning to crash Cane's suicide mission, so I didn't really pay much attention to any landmarks on our way out

Not to mention I was a little preoccupied with my shattered knee caps stitching themselves back together and all.

Fortunately, I see something up ahead that is not only familiar, but gives me a better idea of the Land Layout. The rickety bridge sits about a mile out. We must already be on the north side of it.

My paws begin to pound the earth with a bit more confidence, my step only faltering when Delilah starts to sing. Actually, I'm not sure sky is the word I should be using, but I'm not certain there is a word for the tuneless ear splitting treble coming out of her mouth. My neck jerks, my head twitching dramatically each time she fucks up a note. I mean - holy shit she's pretty bad. If she gets any louder we're going to be dodging dead birds as they fall from the sky.

"I can tell

(where you're in, it's wayyy ermuuuuh I start. Know there is an urthhha hurt errr uh-hh-king in my hay-art. Ohhh, ohhh, uh I'm in the rubble my body needs a duh uh uhhip if you CAYYY HAYYY INNN

"RAAAIIVIVEKER?" I roar and the screams then I shake her before she can belt out any more sonic abuse. For fuck's sake, she may have already weaponized my molecular structure. The vibrato alone has my fangs pulsing. Had she been allowed to finish that verse of tinny medieval torture, something in my brain would have certainly snapped. In fact, I think my atoms are buzzing.

"What's wrong with you? Delilah snups. "You don't like music?"

I'm almost tempted to toss her ass into the creek and shift back into human form just to let her know how close I was to having a seizure,

but instead, I hiss

If she tries to sing in the car on the way home? Fil eat her.

Shaking the memory of her solo from my mind, I notice we're approaching the river and the rickety bridge. We're mere minutes from the cottage now and I want to jump for joy. In fact, I'm about to, but... something happens. A churning begins in my gut, sending waves of unease through my entire body. Tension ripples across my back and my fur spikes with urgency. I don't know what it is or why but I suddenly know I need to hurry.

Without giving Delilah even a second's warning, I leap out of the creek and onto the hard packed earth. My steps quicken and I lengthen my stride significantly. Instead of using my strength to ensure a smooth ride for Delilah, I'm using my power for speed. When Delilah leans into me, huddling close to my neck like a jockey on the last stretch, I know she must feel it too.

Something is wrong.

I charge down the hill, leaping over fallen logs while dodging trees and trying to keep to level ground. My mind is racing nearly as fast as my legs as I tumble full speed ahead toward the valley below.

Out of all the lions of Blackjack Creek, I have always been the fastest. Ben the older lionesses, the ones that left to attend my father in

1/2

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Five

Africa, are no match for me, Gryffin actually comes in close second, just

ad of Tardora, which is pretty surprising considering he is

a male. He would more than likely be the swiftest of us if he weren't, but he is, so he's bigger than I am and thick with so much muscle that it weighs him down after only a few hundred feet of a sprint. Male lion shifters aren't born with the same traits that females are. They are built to hunt, stalk prey, and protect our young. They are built to defend a pride from within that pride. Should Gryffin ever be challenged by another male shifter for leadership, it would be his duty to fight for us. And if he lost... m

of us would be honor bound to follow new leadership. Even if that new leadership took us away from the weaker of the two and the our homeland. But that isnt likely to happen because we are the only pride of lion shifters in all of Washington. That we know of. There are a few prides in California that we know of and a couple in Oregon. There are more than a few in Utah. However the east

here aren't any lion shifters out there, it just means that we don't know them. We considered uncharted territory. That dorin

probably should-

"Gayle!" Delilah shouts from above me, breaking me out of my useless mind chatter

She's falling over the side of me and after a tiny frustrated mewl, I slow down so she

readjust her death grip on my fur

I knew you still wanted me dead! I knew! Trying to make it look like an accident, are you?" Delilah tipes in my ear. "Well that's just not going to happen! Do you hear me?"

I wish I could laugh for her, but the best I can manage is a snort. I pause in my steps to look beyond the creek toward the trees. I can s the root of the cottage now and I allow myself to get excited enough to growl.

"Lek!" Delilah yelps. "Don't fucking do that! I've watched a lot of Animal Planet episodes in my life missy and I'm telling you right now, wont take much to make me pee down your back when you scare me."

Again I want to laugh, but decide to save my giggles for after this, when we have our mates and my brother riding home alongside us and once again, I leap down the incline.

I've sailed maybe two feet when it hits me, a sharp slice of pain that cuts so deep it feels like my torso has just been severed. I yow! pain and my body convulses mid flight, sending me into a tailspin that has the sun flashing across my vision and the precious carga whipping off my back

How close were we to the bottom of the hull?

y vision doubles. My pupils quake left to right as if caught in the midst of a terrifying dream and I can't even remember, nor can I see as my melt into the eyesight of another. I don't even feel it when I hit the ground on my back and go bouncing and rolling down the hill at breakneck speed. I'm plummeting for an entirely different reason. One that doesn't have a damn thing to do with the drop on this side the bank.

No... I'm falling because Cane is.

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

[1,255 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Six

CANE

There's this moment that passes when you're about to die. An instant of complete clarity. It is almost as if there is a layer of fog lifted

the colors seem brighter. Details are more acute and so are intentions. In fact, right then, when you realize whe

you know there is any way around it, you move toward it without fear, For that half a second, time stretches, the

acceptance lakes over. You brain says, Chi, so das in it then. This is low? And, you

Drun it

to get the bullets. Or Griffin.

I knew better, I never should have taken my eyes off of him. I should have sent Quinn to get

There was never any way they were going to watch over him the way I would, because they are not human. They can heal

I, however, cannot,

Gayle.

I should have listened to her when she asked me to go with them. I should have said, "Fuck this asshole. Let him come for me and the spent as much time as I could noticing every single one of Gayle's smiles in the way that she apparently noticed mine. Now... I'll never know them. Those precious couple of hours with her in my arms is all I will ever get.

dry didn't 1997

I mean... why

Why was I so obsessed with playing the hero?

But I know what the answer is. Of course I do.

I wanted her to feel safe with me. I wanted her to see me as someone who could protect her. To know that just because I was human and weaker than her in some ways, that I had plenty to give. I needed to do something for her that she was never able to do for herself and.... I've failed.

There might have been plenty of time for heroics if I'd just conceded to her request.

No... not her request... she was begging. She begged me. And what do I do? Shoot her again and send her away,

She didn't even know me yet, and she was going to go.

First I shoot her in her very own forest, like a worthless, selfish bastard just to be one of those stupid, arrogant, pricks - and then I shoot her outside of the cottage, disabling her and taking her right to choose away from her.

That's all she will ever know me for. That's all she'll remember of me.

Pain.

I'm sorry Kitty Cat

Goddamn it

shoot

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Six

She said she could love me and I felt that. I felt it and it felt so good. I wanted it. Wanted her.

Shake it off. Cane. You get what you get. At least you got to see her again.

Fuck, Quton. Did you have to kick him? I'm sure that's when he was able to take out the bullets. That's probably the real reason he kept talking so much shit. He wanted one of us to lose our temper and attack him so he'd have an excuse for moving. I don't know what it is he said to Quinn to get him to do it, but I can imagine.

The snark of a wolf bleeding out from his abdomen attracts my attention and I smile. At least he's going to go too. The son of bitch.

The twenty-two I palmed in the shed is still smoking in my hand when I look over at him, at Roman. His big orange-brown eyes are angry as he watches me, blood coloring the dark brown fur of his underside. As far as wolves go, he's fucking ugly and looks more like a large rabid hyena than a majestic wolf.

2

Fuck you too asshole. See you on the other side.

Laying here in a pool of my own blood, with a gash the size of my forearm and as deep as my whole hand, along my torso, I play back the last few seconds with a grin.

Before today, I had never seen a wolf shift before. Now that I have, I've got to say, it's pretty fucking scary. The moment my eyes spied the bullets on the ground, I heard it. The snap, crackle, and pop of bones shifting into something otherworldly. By the time I was able to lift my chin, Roman was already half wolf and his fully shifted paw was flying toward my mid-section. It is safe to say that a wolf's claws are pretty goddamned sharp. I never even felt the blow. But it knocked me back about a dozen feet, and I was airborne for half of them. That's when I did it. That's when I shot him.

The gun slipped out of my sleeve and into my hand easily, then I simply took aim and emptied the chamber into his stomach. At that point, I no longer cared that they wanted him alive, because I wanted him dead. Looks like I'll get my wish, so at least there's that. "Fuck!" A deep, frantic voice sounds above me, panic more than evident in his tone.

When I look up, I'm surprised to see that it's Gryffin, and not Quinn, that is carrying on up above me like some frightened mother hen as he surveys my injuries. For a moment, he looks around like a helpless child, his chest heaving as he pulls at his hair. "Shit!" Quinn yells, his gaze going from me to Roman then back again. Quinn meets my eyes, then shakes his head.

I nod at him, just to let him know I understand, then I turn back to Rogan's wild, feral glare and give him the middle finger. "Give this to my dad, will you?" I say, because I'm pretty sure there is a special hell for people like him and my Pops. "I can't be sure, but I'm betting you and I are headed different places you sick-cough, cough-Tuck."

My body starts to shake with cold, and I taste blood in my mouth. Frowning, I picture Cayle's face when she hears the news and I want to kick myself for adding more hardship into her life.

"This can't happen!" Gryffin snarls. "I won't let this happen!" Then Gryffin disappears into my room, coming back with a strip of my

blanket.

The man Crazy if he thinks he can save me. "What are you doing?" I grumble, harshly as he lifts up my back and wraps the cloth around me thrice over. I hiss and moan with pain and although I know what he's doing is useless, it's not like I can stop him so I remain sullen. When he's done wrapping me, he turns to Quinn, "Quick Quinn, tranquilize that fucker and then pull the silvers out of him. I made Domonic a promise. We can't go back without him. Then he heads for the door. Quinn gazes at me for a long moment, then back at Gryffin. "You'll never make it back in time," Quinn says. "They're parked too far away."

Fuck that. Just do what's asked, I can't let him die. My sister won't recover from it. I know she won't," he says. Gryffin looks at me, meeting my eyes from the doorway. "Don't you fucking dare die before get back."

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Six

"He's almost gone already! He Won't last an hour!" Quinn hisses. "You can't just Quinn cuts off, his eyes going wide with shock.

"What's wrong?" Gryffin snaps.

They're here! I can smell them, Quinn says.

I can barely register their voices now as I begin to fade out, but I hear that last part as my eyes fall closed.

They? They who?

Chapter Comments

Alomea

I'm dying, I didn't read any book until now about werewolves, where author describe a wolf as an ugly hiena, I'm loving it

KKN

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[1,718 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Seven

TRIGGER WARNING: "The following chapter includes thoughts of suicide and depictions of traumatic loss,

AUTHOR'S NOTE; All I can say is just try and hang on. It should be w DRAVEN

"Oh my God!" I say into the phone. "That's so sad." My heart clenches in any chest as I imagine what I would feel if Domonic suddenly wasn't there anymore. What would I do if I couldn't touch him, or kiss him, or fight with him ever again? What would I wout for myself? I'd probably want to die, but Em pregnant so... Ed have to carry on. Fuck, that's depressingg

"Yeah, I know, The murmurs on the other end. "They're on their way back not We're going to host a ceremony for him like we would for shifter, which is super surprising given that he's human. Er was human. Gryffin says he's never seen a braver guy in his life and he would have been proud to have him join our pride. Human and all,"

"Poor Gayle," I whisper, a few tears escaping to trickle down my cheeks, Im in the living room of the packhouse staring out at the choppy sea and when I start to turn away, I see Gio in the reflection of the glass standing behind me. God, he is so damn silent when he moves. He appears to be waiting politely for me to finish my conversation and my es catch on movement along the wharf where Adam is preparing to head back to the mainland. He wants a word with this Rogue Hunter They're bringing in too.

"I really wish you could be here now though. They re about to be here any minute and I'm going to need all the help I can get with Gayle. She's going to be... inconsolable."

"Maybe I can be," I say softly, ignoring the shake of Gio's head behind me. Catching his eye, I say, "Alam is about to head to Port Orchard and if I can convince a certain superhero of yours to come along and protect me, maybe it will be okay." Gio smirks, lifting a brow

a brow as I turn around to face hind

"That's right! Gio's there! That would be awesome! Can he hear me? Tudora squawks into the phone,

Gio nods, rolling his eyes. "He sure can," I say.

"Hey Big Dog!" Taedora shouts, and I have to pull the phone away from ear so that she doesn't burst an eardrum. "Please! Please! Please go with her so that she can help me with Gayle! That girl is like four different lionesses rolled into one on a good day, so on a bad day..." she lets the sentence hang.

Glo studies me carefully. "Do you truly want to go to this... to her?" Gigasks,

I nod, throwing in a dramatically hopeful smile that feels strangely nostalgic. Gio laughs openly. "Some things never change, eh? I never could say no to that face."

"Yes!" Tae and I speak at the same time.

"That settles it, then, I say into the phone. I'll be there in an hour or there. Then I hung up.

"I want to go too!" Ryder's voice chimes in when he stumbles down the stairs, his eyes hopeful. "Emily told me Koda won't be here tonight because they caught the person who started the fire and I want to go too! I want to see her again!"

I shake my head at him. "That would be a very bad idea. First of all, Kodi would kill me. Laina or not. Besides baby I cut off, something Ryder said snagging my attention. What do you mean, see her again, Ryder? just because they caught the person, doesn't mean you'll get to see your mom again, I add gently.

To my utter surprise, Ryder rolls his eyes and scuffs. "I know that! Duh! I'm not stupid. I mean I want to see her again! The lady that started the fire."

4/4

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Seven

My brow furrows. That's right, Ryder was only five years old when his mother died. So he wasn't with the rest of them when they were in the middle of their forced shift. He would have been in the house. He should've been dead!

"It was a man that started the fire," I supply, watching Ryder's reaction carefully.

He shakes his head, no. "It was a lady. She saved me, I was asleep inside the house and when I woke up, she was holding me. She told me she was sorry about my mother and that the fire was only meant for one. Then she put me down and disappeared. I never got to thank her for saving my life."

My blood rushes down to my feet and I ask him, "Have you ever told Koda this?"

The

Ryder shakes his head. "I tried once when I was little, but no one would listen. They

were all fighting or crying or yelling at one another. Then, we left and I didn't see Koda anymore. I tried to tell my dad too, but he never wants to talk about it."

Oh my fucking God. Seriously??? Oh my! GAYLE

The ride home is quiet. The air is heavy. If you asked me how long we've been on the road, I couldn't tell you, but I know we've already passed into Washington from Idaho. Delilah is driving, despite Quinn's protests, but just barely. Neither one of us seems able to focus on much at the moment. Quinn and Gryffin are behind us in the Escalade, with Roman tied up and subdued in the trunk. I don't know how they're keeping him under. I suspect Gryffin must be consistently delivering him fresh doses of the tranquilizer, because shifters are affected when shot with enough of a dosage, but we don't stay down long. They're probably going nuts behind us because the jeep is practically at a crawl and the pair of them are used to driving at ridiculously high speeds. But they aren't about to push Delilah to any faster after what went down at the cottage. Nobody is going to blame her for her near catatonic state.

Not after everything she witnessed.

Not after seeing her brother's lifeless body lie there peaceful and still. Drenched in his own blood.

Oh God! Damn it

Just thinking about the cottage brings a fresh pool of tears to my eyes and a rip of pain to my chest. As the new drops fall I attempt to swallow back a sob, not wanting to see Delilah crumple again the way she did when Gryffin led us into the room.

My chest is aching so fiercely it's almost like we're still there. It's just a ferocious and unrelenting as it was the moment I stumbled toward Cane and cried out to him. When I jostled him and he didn't wake up. Every single sound in the room disappeared and although I was aware of Delilah screaming and crying in Quinn's arms, I couldn't hear her. Then when Gryffin's eyes filled with tears and he spoke to me, I couldn't hear him either. I listened to Cane's chest and I couldn't find a heartbeat, placed my fingers at his throat and I couldn't find a pulse. Even though Quinn told me he was gone, the words were muted and alien. I rejected them with every fiber of my soul.

I remember yelling at them. Soaring at them. Shouting that they were gone.

My Cane wasn't gone! He couldn't be..

Because... I just found him.

He just found me

Besides, I would know if he were gone, right? My body would feel it, right? And mine didn't. Mine thought he was still there.

No force in the universe could be that cruel! Could it? No! Of course no

So I flipped him over despite their protests, ripped off the back of his shirt and marked him anyway.

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Seven

The first thing I noticed was how cold my fangs

didn't put any orgasmic pleasure from the

That isn't true. I

true. I did feel something Love

despite that, I refused to get in pumped Cane so far

the backseat of the jeep and

passed out for a few moments. When

I panicked, screaming in agony and jumping out of the jeep to head back into the house
I very

depleted from emptying my venom

"Where is he?" I'd shouted after busting through the front doors to find the bring when
Griffin followed me inside. "Please scream. Tell me you did bury him Please Gryden
h

deposited

didn't make it with my body so

Perse not fucking loving him said

had my body shook with grief. Then he

there

him at once. The way

I begged Griffin to put him in One look at her ghostly

jeep with me so that I could hold request forgotten

But then he shifted

hook his head no.

Sow, with every mile we gain closer to

home, a plan takes shape in

They want Roman alive because he has answers to questions they've been asking for five years. My brother wants him also that he torture him before he ends his Ele. Unfortunately for them, none of those things are going to happen. Because the very motto, VA ather I'm going to shift into

Son and grant Roman a very public, very

secution. Then

off lers the woods.

toward the humans have been searching for me since last night with any luck they'll catch Because I can't let Gryden End me before they do, and now that

very real possibility that he will. They have

them to. I need them

Because I want to leave this place.

He is the only mate I that I will ever have and if its not going to be in the world, then I follow him into the next.

The closer we get to Blackjack Creek, the more excited I begin to feel. My palms are sweating and I smile (actually smile???) up at the helicopters that are still hovering above the woods. Soon I'll be with you Cone

I won't let you leave me.

And that's when I feel it.

It starts inside of me like a pool of warmth, wrapping around my middle and stretching up over my heart. The feeling is so electrifying and grating that I gasp as my chest blazes with fire. My torso is aching with new pain and my hands rove over my body searching for injuries, best of course, there are none.

hat's wrong?" Delilah cries out, watching me in the

I meet her gaze in the reflection just as fresh tears trail from my eyes. this time, I smile.

Suddenly, my fangs are tingling. I whisper, "Cane."

Share to your friends

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

[1,260 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Eight GAYLE

"Cane? What the hell do you mean, Cane - Gayle?" Delilah shouts in a panic. Her eyes are glued to mine in the rear-view mirror, and for moment I can't even speak as I watch the colors of her irises spiral and curl into each other. Colors of gold, turquoise, and green, warring with one another. Battling for dominance. Hope and fear are equally present in her gaze.

I vaguely remember Cane mentioning something about Delilah not being able to handle the truth of what she was feeling because of her eyes. Strangely enough, I hadn't noticed it until now, and I'm honestly a little surprised that Cane was able to see it. Because for one thing, humans don't possess even half of the capacity for sight that we, as shifters, have. It's not their fault, they simply do not retain the ability to distinguish as many colors as we can. They are born less equipped than shifters can and I'm willing to bet that most people don't even tell that Delilah's eyes change color at all.

But Cane could, Cane did

possibility of Cane being born with advanced instincts, or heightened senses. It certainly doesn't seem too far

Suddenly I wonder at the possibility

of

He was a hell of a hunter... and that wasn't even the sexiest thing about him. No... ironically enough, what turned me to Cane, was what was hiding in his head.

His brain....

on the most about

That thing was more than lethal. His dick fell in at a close second and even now, I can't help but bite my lip when I think of how much heat he was packing. Some of the Blackjack Boys were in for a humbling surprise for sure. But his mind... It was the single most beautiful piece of him, and it was the one feature that I could honestly say was tops all. Bigger and badder than anyone else around. He was-

What the hell? Not w

was Gayle! Is! Is! Is!

"Gayyyylillece!!! What the fuck?! Stop spacing out!" Delilah screams and I shake myself, my eyes catching on the road and the semi-truck heading straight for us.

"Lilah!" I shout, my hand lifting in what feels like slow motion.

The blare of Quinn's horn behind us, coupled with the dozen or so others that are also misfortunate enough to be on the road when we are the evening - must frighten Delilah into jerking the wheel just hard enough, and to the right enough, to save us from calamity. At least... that seems to be the only explanation. I can't seem to dredge up another. Because I know it wasn't my drunken humanoid reflexes that I've suddenly fallen prey to, nor was it Delilah's extraordinarily delayed response time, having become even more stunted given recent events. However, that can't be it either, because when I finally work up the good sense to check, I see that her hands aren't even on the steering wheel at all. Nope. They're covering her face as she screams.

What the fuck Delah, who in the hell ever taught you to drive?

Rule number one - Eyes on the fucking eroad! Hello!!!

The long trailer of the deadly eighteen wheeler must miss us by mere inches. I mean, shit, you might think a few inches don't matter, but trust me... When those inches are traveling as fast as that descending truck is, with forty tons of God knows what, packed like a fist at the end of a punch, you had better hope you don't even get clipped by a finger! We're lucky our wobbly ass jeep didn't get ripped into the undertow. Shit, the wind off that damn thing alone is enough to change a little weather.

Understand this - whether you are a shifter, or a human, or a rabbit, or a mule those big rig trucks on the highway are not to be fucked with- and should you happen to decide to test out my theory, you are going to go for a motherfucking spin and that ain't no lie. How do I know? Meh... don't ask. It's not like I speak from experience or anything Wink, wink.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty Eight

Back door to earth, f realize, we had to have been hit from and Chinn most ve anticipated the when he put this dream team of ours together and decided to step in to play fed but I don't how time to check now instead of having an eighteen weder headed our way, www.abord to tumble off one of the most treacherous

edge of flackjack Mountain. And while I will most definitely heal from it unless God forbid

will not. Call me a pessimist if you must, but I'm thinking a two hundred foot drop doesn't seem like a sheer

my soon to be sister-in-law.

I don't know where my sudden energy comes from the next moment, but it's the same warm flow of energy as before. The same awareness of all that is around me and every possibility and every outcome. Somehow I end up leaping forward and into the front seat. yanking up the emergency brake, and turning the steering wheel toward the damn cliff edge instead of away from it.

What the fuck? Why? How did I lock this up? How?

Fuck! We're going to go flying over the edge and hit hard enough in this metal can to punch a hole into the earth.

"Cane!" I scream, as I pull up on the brake harder, closing my eyes just before

But... we don't though...

Instead... the next minute and a half of our spiritual awakening is spent with both Delilah and myself, clutching our arms around each other and waiting to land.

It takes more than a few minutes and just when I begin to wonder if somehow we missed the fiery explosion welcoming us to Hell, a voice sounds on my right.

"What the fuck is wrong with you two? Why are you still parked here?"

"Is that... is that God?" I hear Delilah whisper.

"I don't think it is," I whisper back. "That sounded a whole hell of a lot like my dickhead brother."

"Do you think we're alive?" Delilah asks.

"I sure hope so," I answer, squeezing her closer in my arms. "Because... Cane is alive too."

Her eyes pop open and her tiny hand claws into my sides. "What? Really?"

I nod, tears clouding my vision.

"Oh my fucking God!!!!" Delilah shouts and the pair of us start weeping

"That's it," Griffin says. "I want the both of you in the Escalade. Neither of you is fit to drive."

I smile, thrilled that we get to ride in the car with Cane. "Has he started stirring yet?" I Task my brother, jumping out of the jeep without even the tiniest bit of hesitation. "I mean, he probably won't wake up for a while still because I only it felt him about thirty minutes ago and be-"

"Gayle!" Gryffin snaps, grabbing my arms and frowning at me. "What the fuck are you talking about? Cane?"

"Yes! Of course Who else?"

Gryffin's frown deepens. "Maybe you and I should walk home."

Now I'm getting irritated, "What the fuck? No. Why in the hell would we do that? I want to see Cane. I need to monitor his progress. His -heart rate is probably still very low and-"

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Eight

Gayler Gryffin fruens, polling has intres Higit ng Old, haly, I'm very

Okay I know what youre Hanking, Gryff, fast gras dont derstand all! He's healing! Watch, let's go check and you'll see

your

Gayle, baby, I vor bon checking. He is right part to He colder that he was when we left."

What? No. That can't be true. It just out be

Chapter Comments

KKN

Jayleeeeeeee whens it getting better

Share to your friends

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

[1,646 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Nine BARTLETT

"Are you sure about this, Dom? I've made enough bad decisions to last lifetime. I don't want to add another to the list. Especially one that has the potential to harm the rest of the pack."

As long as she's either unconscious or blindfolded while on the yacht, there's no risk. She's human and a human cannot see the mainland from the shore even on a good day. Besides, those hunters would have to be more than a little suicidal to follow a bunch of shitters onto an island. I mean can you imagine? It would be a slaughter. A massacre. If not in our woods, then in the ocean around it. I doubt even Michael Phelps possesses the kind of breaststroke it would take to keep up with one of us in the water. No matter which direction t came from, we'd see them. Nah, it's not a mistake. It's actually quite perfect. I can think of no better place for you to get to know one another."

With a short sigh, I gaze over in Rose's direction. She remains as still as she was before I marked her, albeit with a tinge more color to her alabaster complexion. "Yeah, you're probably right. That way, if she wakes up hostile, she won't have anywhere to run to." "What do you mean?" Dom asks. "I thought you said she spoke to you in the hospital. That she remembered you."

"She did," I admit. "I'm just afraid that the man she remembers and the actual man that she asked not to leave her side are not the same guy. She probably believes me to be one of the campers that were there that night. From the other side of the lot. She has no idea that I was the wolf that tempted her friends into the forest to begin with. She never saw me step out of the woods in my animal fohn, and she has no idea what I actually had to do, to save her life. Inhaling a sharp, readying breath, I leave her to meet Charlie upstairs in the kitchen.

"And what difference will that make in the end, B? You did, in fact, save her. Why should it matter whether you did it as a wolf or a man?"

"It definitely shouldn't," I agree, clenching my teeth as I gaze out at the ocean. Charlie catches my attention at the stove as he lips two omelets effortlessly then snags a spatula on his right so that he can flip the hash browns too. He doesn't look nearly as clumsy when he's cooking as he does when he's walking. Hmm...

"Well then, why worry about it? You don't have to tall her that part until she's ready to accept it," Domonic points out.

"That's the thing though," I admit, smiling as Charlie sets the table and gestures for me to sit. "What if she's never ready? What if she finds out what I am and hates me?"

Domonic huffs and I can practically see him smirking at the phone. "Unfortunately, Bartlett, that is a very real fear we all seem to have to deal with at one point. Look at it

this way—at least your girl doesn't have to battle against a lifetime of trauma scaring her away from shifters. At least you don't have to worry about her being afraid of you."

I laugh into the phone. "You're right. I have to worry about her killing me in my sleep and then mounting my head on her wall instead."

Domonic snickers. "Okay. Yeah. I guess I see your point there. But, she is a female, you know? Maybe she hates hunting. Maybe she was forced into joining the Elder Few by her parents. You never know... you might be just what she always wanted"

"Ha!" I chortle. "You obvious didn't get to see my girl in action last night. No... she loves the bat. I'd bet the better half of my dick on it."

Domonic snorts, "Okay, first of all, which half of your dick is the better half?"

tor

I ignore that, not even certain if there's a right or wrong answer. "If you saw the way she handles a rifle, Dom, you might piss your pants. Just ask Quinn. He knows. She got him once as he leapt into the air and then again, before he even hit the ground! She sent his body spinning into the trees! Spinning Dont Did I mention he was spinning?"

Domonic laughs. "Yeah... well okay. So then I rest my case. Take her out to the island where the only weapons she'll have against you are the ones God gave her. From what I remember, she's pretty thick."

1/3 Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Nine

"You don't even know the half of it, I growl, feeling my pants tighten with just the mention of her goodies. I see Charlie coming me with two heaping plates of food, smiling at the easy way he handles the planes and pitcher of fresh squeezed juice. So with burglar being caught, I guess we no longer need that live-in caretaker"

"You know what," Dom comments. "You're right. I hadn't thought of that I we put out since Doves got here. I guess we don't."

"Huh," I grunt. "Too bad." "Why's that?"

I thank Charlie and nearly groan in delight when I bite into the crispy, buttery goodness of his homemade hash brown just found the perfect man for the job."

Is that a fact?"

"Oh yeah," I say almost orgasmically as I sample the omelet on my plate. "Without a doubt"

"I see. Might not be a bad idea to hire him anyway, you know? You're about to become a mated wolf. You might need to start spending more time at home and less time at the har. And it would definitely be nice to have a guardian around that does have to shift one month. Especially since I'm pretty sure Draven's dad will be heading back to Italy soon."

I hum my acknowledgement, regarding Charlie carefully. "Then consider it done. I haven't asked him yet, but something tells me it'll work out perfectly."

"Good deal," Dom agrees. "I've got to go. Just got to the docks and it looks like my dad isn't the only one who decided to show."

"Oh? Will there still be room for my little caravan of wanderers later?"

"Of course."

"Alright then. Call me when it's time for us to head to the yacht," I say, then hang up. Taking another Charlie... where's home? Where do you live when you're not camping out in a shifter's living room?" bite of my

f my food, I study Charlie. "Sa

Charlie laughs, then loses his smile as he eyes his food. "Oregon. Cept it's not really home anymore. Cane, Delilah, and I... we all had a place there together. But we were evicted last month."

"That sucks," I say, grinning like a fool. Charlie's eyebrows quirk up at me quizzically. Again, I smile, "You ever work in a har Charlie?" GAYLE

I sit in my room next to my bed, rocking myself back and forth as I consider my decision to mark Cane... again.

I haven't done it yet... but I think I'm going to.

The moment we got home, I forced Gryffin to place Cane in my bed. He didn't want to, and he wasn't going to even after I explained everything I felt in the car but when I threatened to shift and race out into the woods for the humans to find, he gave in. He told me that he was only doing it so that I could have my time saying goodbye, but I knew the truth. He was scared to death. He knows that I meant what I said and he also knows that if I decide to join Cane in the afterlife there's no way on this earth that he will be able to stop

ΠH So, I win.

At least for now,

Now, I've locked the two of us in here alone and spent the first hour ignoring every single person who came to the door. I know they mean well, but I'm not trying to hear anything they have to say at this point. Not even Delilah seems to have any hope for his revival. In

fact,

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Twenty-Nine

after Cryffin told us that Cane was still cold, I saw something die in her eyes. Almost as if before, when it first happened and we had just learned of Cane's predicament he hadn't truly believed it yet. But after I dangled that hope in front of her and then Gryffin snatched it away it was like she finally knew. Like... she accepted that he was gone.

Well don't

I refuse to accept it. In fact, I'll never accept it. Not unless he rots right here in my room first.

Yeah, I get it, and I know it sounds gross... ..but that's the only way I would ever know for sure. I'd have to see him fade away first.

My brother was right about one thing though. Cane's body is exceptionally cold and try as I might, I can't seem to find a heartbeat. However, I have to remind myself that he pretty much bled out on the floor of that cottage and a body without blood is what manner of creature you are.

you see, there are a couple of things that are strangely encouraging. A couple of things that have changed since I first marked him and of the way that Gryffin reacted when I tried to mark Cane again in the Escalade - shouting at me and snatching me into his arms I'm keeping them to myself.

But were alone now.

My fangs slice out of my mouth and I turn Cane over onto his side. He's stiff as a board and that would be discouraging except for one thing..... this time when I place my mouth on his flesh... my fangs are pulsing with need

This time... they know their mate is here... and so... I bite him again.

Share to your friends

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

[1,283 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty GAYLE

When I come to, I'm lying on the floor next to my bed and my body is completely capped of energy I have no idea whose face it is floating above me like a spirit of unrest until I lash out.

"Get back, demon!" I hiss, swiping at the thing with my somewhat drunken limbs. "You'll not have him!

"Joor-sumusss!" a familiar voice chimes out. "Chill out the spirit snarls leaping backward and out of my reach

Tac?" I mumble, relieved that it is, in fact, her and not some wayward ghost I pissed off by refusing to lan

and gaze at my bedroom door. It remains closed and intact, the dead bolt still securely in place. Although this is mollifying in sy to aid in my discombobulation. "How the fuck did you get in here? The sudden thought that Cane may have let her in has my head snapply in the direction of my bed. Sadly, he remains in ti

position he was in when I marked him for the second time. Still and lifeless. I can see from here that he's still not breathing and although the actuality of it hurts, I won't let it deter me. I will not give up. He will breathe again. I know it.

"I've been knocking for thirty damn minutes. When I warned you to answer me and you didn't, I scaled the side of the

in the window. She turns her worried eyes toward me, her gaze reaching into my soul. "What are you doing. Gayle s her head.

Tears fill my eyes, but I don't let them fall. I don't know if I can take one more person looking at me like I'm about to beak with a prod lift of my chin I walk over to Cane. My heart wrenches when I allow myself to look down at him and observe my untested. Tandora's eyes follow

and she gasps. Gayle..."

I hold my hand up defensively, stopping her before she has a chance to reach for me. I know what this looks, but I pre not what this is!"

"Oh no?" Taedora hisses, crossing her arms over her chest in annoyance. "Are you sure? Because what it looks marked him twice. Depleted yourself, twice! Despite that his condition hasnt changed! What it looks like to me refusing to let go of someone who

is already gone! And making your friend - his sister-suffer alongside you to let him go, Gayle! He deserves to move on!"

Somewhere in the middle of her little reprimand, I started crying. Suddenly, I'm not feeling so confident anymore. My eyes hum an heart trembles with the fear of her words being true. What if she's right? What if I imagined everything I've been feeling simply be to believe that he's not gone? Could that be? Could I have imagined the golden warmth of his touch and phantom pain of his toru?

Just now, I'm beginning to worry that she's right. I reach back in my memory of what I felt in the jeep and I can't s felt so strongly that he was alive. He's made no progress. My marks haven I even healed!

Am I sure I felt something in the jeep? Did I imagine it?

No, I hear the word like a whisper in my head and my back goes ramiced straight, my tears drying instantly.

That was not my voice.

I turn around slowly, frantically searching my room for the source of the voice. The male voice. When I don't notice anything attention grabbing, I return my gaze to the bed. To Cane.

"What the hell were you looking for, Gayle? What were you doing?" Tagora asks. She steps in front of me, blocking my danch Cane's motionless back and I shove her away to drop down on my bed next to him.

1:3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty

I can only imagine how crazy I must look to her right now, but I refuse to allow it to bother me, I know what I just heard.

Throwing a protective arm over Cane's side, I shake my head at Taedor, I don't care what you think I'm doing! I don't even give a fuck that you think I'm being selfish... because you're right, I am being selfish. I am refusing to let him move on! Most of what you said is accurate. Most. Not all. Yes, I marked him twice, and I know his condition hasn't changed, I'm not fucking blind Tae! Nor am I stupid! And I'm aware that Lilah is going through it, I understand that, trust me I do. Hut you need to understand something as well. I turn away from her, stroking my hand over the warmth of Cane's chest when I speak, He's not gone, Tue. I know this. I realize that none of you believe me and I know marking him again makes me look crazy, but I don't care, Hócause I know what the fuck I felt! I know what I heard! He's not gone Tue! And if 1 give up on him now, after everything I've been feeling Ell never get over him! Not ever! I'll always be wondering

what if. If you guys take him from me before I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are right and I am wrong I will certainly lose my fucking mind! You can count on it?

"Heard?" she asks, tilting her head with worry. "You... heard something as well?"

Oh far fuck's sudes.

If they don't stop treating me like a basket case, I'm going to kill them. All of them.

I ignore her, busying myself instead with the task of redressing Cane's torso- the wrap probably came loose when I turned him over the last time and his bloody waistline is exposed. My eyes lock on the beautifully chiseled ridges of his punctuated abdominal muscles and I suddenly have the urge to clean off the dried blood. Pushing him onto his back, I reach up to ruffle his hair, frowning when I feel how hot his forehead is. Strange... does he have a fever?

"Tae, can you go into my bathroom and grab a - AAAAAAAHHHHELLE MAHAHA!!! I my mouth with two hands.

Oh my God! How did I not notice!?!

Omigod, omigod, amigod!

*What Gayle? What's wrong?" Tandora shouts, shaking my shoulders.

I cut off with a scream, jumping up and covering

But I can't answer her yet, I'm too busy choking on my tears. I'm moaning and sobbing into my hands as I do and soon, Taedora becomes frustrated enough to slap me.

ap out of it, Gayle! What's going on?" she growls.

Snap

Finally I look at her, a very smug, very satisfied smile on my face. Touch him," I say.

"What?" she asks, shaking her head. "No, Not doing that."

"Touch

h him!" I insist, not even mentioning the best part of what I just realized.

"If I touch him, will you at least acknowledge that he might be gone?"

I nod happily. "If you touch him I'll even come out of my room and make you a margarita."

She flinches, her eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Okay... deal I guess." She rolls her eyes, not even looking at him as she reaches out and slaps her hand onto his face. Her mouth opens to snark at me and then she freezes, her eyes bulging wide with shock. "Aaahhh!" she screams, drawing her hand back and jumping away from him. "Omigod

grin as she meets my gaze. He's warm."

She shakes her head, "No, he's not warm! He's burning up!"

"Look at his stomach," I tell her. "He was ripped open, The. The gash was unmistakable."

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty

She looks and before she even says anything I knew

"The healed?!?!?" she gother

still can't beat his heartbeat yet.

all the

1 smile. "Go get my future sister

Chapter Comments

KKN

OH MY GAAAAAWWWD

Rene Marie Beck-Ware

Way to get the heart pumping!!!!

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

[1,738 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-One GAYLE

The moment Tardora left my room I flung myself over the top of Cane's body, exhausted and relieved. "Thank God! I know it! I k

1

Closing my eyes for a moment, I press two fingers into his neck hoping to find a pulse, but it remains elusive. However, I'm not going to let it get me down, not when his entire torso has somehow healed. Of course, he is burning up with fever it seems, which is odd. But then again, how am I to know?

I mean - I've never met a mate before so I don't really know how it supposed to go. In fact, none of us here have. I just call my father, but that would mean telling him that my mate was human and I'm not doing that. He'd probably come home and try to maim me.

the

thought has me thinking back to when Gryffin found his mate.

Five years ago, the year after my mom was killed.

The poor girl that my father forced Gryffin to reject. Her name was Adelle.

I still don't know why Gryffin did it. She was a pretty little thing and had gone to school with us. Not at all the type Gryffin usually went out with, but according to him, she was his mate. He seemed excited about her at first, even saying he liked that she was a girl with no reputation. But little did I know, my father would change Gryffin's mind.

If he would have asked my opinion, I would have told him that he was lucky to even find a mate at all. I also would have told him to fight for her, because I liked her, but... he didn't ask and I had no idea my father had forbidden it. At least, not yet.

In those days, Gryffin did what my father told him to do pretty much without question. So when I heard Gryffin asked her out on a date was excited for her and my dumbass not realizing why he asked her invited her to the house to get ready. She was so sweet and more than a little shy so it took a bit of coaxing to pull her out of her shell, but the end result was a gorgeous girl with a perfectly heart shaped ass and legs that went on forever. Gryffin was stunned to find out that I helped her get dressed, and although there was no mistaking the effect her new look had on him he appeared angry with me. At the time I had no idea why that was, but I would find out soon enough.

At sundown I received a phone call from her. She was in tears, telling me that Gryffin only asked her out as a joke. According to her, Gryffin had taken her into the woods to perform a weird blood ritual and tell her that he never wanted to see her again. She wanted to know if I would pick her up. Of course, I went. Gryffin left Adelle in the woods near the old Red Wolf Packhouse and she had no idea how to get home from there, I

could not believe he stranded her in the middle of the woods with no ride. I wanted to murder my brother. And the story she told me when I arrived to pick her up sounded almost sinister. In fact, if I had been human and someone had done the things to me that Gryffin had done to her, I would have been scared to death. For some reason Adelle blamed herself. She said she should have known better than believe someone like him would want her.

That was the very same night of the fire and the entire reason Domone and Gryffin stopped talking, Gryffin had been seen leaving these woods looking crazed and out of his mind. Apparently rejection hurts like a bitch, whether you are the rejector or the rejected and Gryffin went a little off the rails for the next few weeks. But Adelle seemed pretty much the same as she always was. I guess rejection doesn't really affect a human for shifter for that matter) that is already in a constant state of melancholy, which was Adelle on a twenty-four hour basis. Except, of course, for those few hours I helped her get ready in my room. For that time she was happy.

Later, I would realize that what he actually did was reject their bond as per my father's instructions. It probably seemed like a ritual to Adelle, but it was actually just a formal rejection

Two months later, Adelle's brother Kyle came over to tell Gryffin that Adelle was dead. According to Kyle, she killed herself, Cryllis disappeared that day and stayed gone for a week. Returning only to attend Adelle's funeral. But, no one was invited to the funeral and there was nothing about it in the papers, Every attempt made to contact Kyle after that was useless. It was clear that he blamed Gryffin for

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-One

her death, although we had no idea why. It wasn't like Gryffin and Adelle had a history together. But who knew... maybe she'd always had a crush on Gryffin and Kyle knew that, or maybe she left a note and mentioned Gryffin in it. We were never to find out. Her brother still lives in Port Orchard, but he never comes out this way.

"Hey!" A familiar voice sounds behind me, snapping me out of my reverie. "How's it going?"

"Draven!" I spin around, grabbing her in a quick hug. So nice to see you

Delilah isn't here at the moment. Quinn took her home to talk to Charlie," Tandora says, walking in with a strikingly handsome older man with eyes the exact color of Draven's,

This must be I start to say, my gaze going back and forth between the two of them rapidfire.

"My father," Draven finishes. "Before you ask, yes, he's a shifter."

I nod like a wooden puppet, my eyes wide with shock and my jaw nearly settled of the floor. "How did I not know this?"

"Glo Piccoli," the man says, reaching out a hand for me to shake. I take it easily, my gaze still riveted on him. The man must be over forty years old and smoking hot. His slight accent only serves to make him that much sexier and for a whole minute I forget that my mate is burning with fever behind me. "Just... wow," I say to Draven with a wag of my eyebrows.

"Uh-uh, honey," Tardora snaps. "I saw him first. And your mate is right behind you."

I flip her off and turn my attention back to Cane. He remains as still as death and when I touch him again I gasp in shock. That's

strange, I whisper.

at is?" Tandora asks,

What

"He's even hotter now...." I stroke my hands over his chest again, trying to feel for a heartbeat, but coming up short. Damn it! I don't understand this.

That's when the forty year old shifter in the room speaks up. "Forgive me for interrupting, I know it's none of my business, but did I hear you say, he's hot? As in, he has a fever?"

My head swivels in his direction and I nod. "Yes. Is that normal? I mean... does that happen?"

Gios chin lifts and his jaw clenches, "How close to death was he when you marked him?"

I bite my lip, suddenly worried that this man Gio is going to tell me something I do not want to hear. Something I'm going to reject. But.... I know the only way to help Cane is to be honest so I tell him, I'm not sure. He lost a lot of blood. He was unresponsive the first time I marked him, even though I gave him all the venom I could-

"The first time? Gio interrupts. "Was there a second time?"

I nod guiltily. "Yes," I whisper.

He closes his eyes, shaking his head. Does he have a heartbeat?"

I shake my head no, tears filling my eyes. Oh God, here it comes. He's going to tell me Cave is about to

about to be a zombie or some shit I just know it.

"He needs a transfusion, Glo says smoothly. "And soon. Your venom is cooking his insides. Its changing him... Gio chuckles, then he glances at Braven and Tadora apologetically. I am really sorry to do this girls, and I realize this is America, not Italy - but try and humor me. I'm old school. I'm going to need a word with your friend alone."

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-One

Draven quirks an eyebrow and Tadora snorts incredulously. Neither of them move.

"Guys! Please! I want to hear what he has to say. Ill probably tell you later and I love you both, but get the fuck out. Now, I command

sweetly.

"I'll be downstairs," Draven says, eyeing her father suspiciously. "You're not the law around here Padre, but I'll allow it just this one," smarks at him playfully.

"Don't get frisky either," Taedora wams, stepping out and closing the door behind her.

Gio locks it without hesitation and then walks over to stand next to me, next to Cane. "There is an ancient teaching in the Books of Lore.

A scripture in the Royal Libraries of Transylvania. An outlawed practice that our ancestors have kept so guarded that just the sneaking of

it is a crime punishable by death. He looks at me, squints. And you are one marking away from completing it."

A chill rides down my spine and my body begins to tremble. "What is it? What have I done?" I whisper.

He snilles sadly, "You truly love him, don't you?"

I nod. "T-I mean, I haven't known him long b-but 1-1-

understand. I do not blame you either. I am perhaps a bit jealous, however," Gio sighs. "I'll admit, I would have given this a shot years ago when my Bianca died, despite that it is forbidden, but I arrived much too late. It seems you got to him just in time. You marked him as his soul untethered his body. He must have seen you and decided to

stay. Amazing really, as this is something that can't even be timed properly when done on purpose."

"What? What is something?" I ask. "Is he going to be okay?"

Gio nods. "Yes. But you will need to mark him once more and he will need blood. If his soul is tethered he will awaken... but not as human."

I gasp. What? What the fuck? Then... what will he be?"

Share to your friends

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

[1,584 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Two ROSE

I've been treading water for what feels like days. Swimming in a vast black ocean under a moonless sky. Every so often a light flashes from somewhere beyond the waves, revealing what looks to be a rocky shore just ahead. The problem is, every time I head in the direction of the jetty the shadowed sky swallows up everything but the sea and when the light flashes again, I somehow keep finding myself headed in the wrong direction. It's like I've been swimming in circles. My limbs are so tired, my body is on the verge of giving out. My movements are sluggish and heavy leaving me barely able to do much more than drift in any one direction. The weirdest part is, the water isn't cold here. As dark as it is in this place, you'd think the water would be freezing, but... it's not. In fact, it's warm enough to be bathwater.

Soothing

water... the kind that puts you to sleep. Maybe if I just close my eyes for a while and float until the next light finally makes it to shore. Yeah... that's it, that's what I need. A little shut eye should do the trick.

I feel myself sinking as I close my eyes, but I can't bring myself to worry about it. My body is just too tired to hang on anymore. I'm going to drown in this warm black ocean and all I can think is, finally can stop swimming.

The moment I go under he is there and I am suddenly lying on the rocks as naked as the day I was born.

"Hello," I whisper, sitting up and covering my body as best I can with my hands.

He doesn't speak, only watches me with those vibrant blue eyes of his Eyes like identical sapphires that sparkle and shimmer depending on where he's looking. His neatly trimmed beard makes it hard for me to read his face and I can't tell if he's happy to see that I'm awake

or not.

"Where are my clothes?" I ask him, gazing down at my naked form and feeling suddenly self conscious.

Still, he doesn't answer me and I have to wonder if I angered him somehow. Maybe he's tired of watching over me and eager to leave.

I remember asking him not to leave me, but that was ages ago. When we were somewhere else. But where were we? Not in the ocean. Certainly not on this beach. Gazing around, I forget for a moment that I'm naked and stand up to survey the landscape.

Suddenly a forest surrounds me and I'm alone again. I'm wearing my brother's uniform and I have a rifle in my arms. Branches snap somewhere in the woods and I'm instantly alert, listening for any sound of the stranger. The man with the sapphire eyes. Why did he disappear? I need to know where he is before I can get into position. I don't want to make a mistake and accidentally shoot the wrong creature. I only want the lion. The one that tried to kill me. The sneaky, treacherous beast that crept up on me and tore into my throat. For some reason, the woods are too dark here for me to see much of anything. I can't distinguish much beyond the first line of trees. It like being in that vast black ocean again, but this time the trees are the barrier keeping me caged in.

"You can't hunt here," the stranger says from behind me, the deep timbre of his voice sending shockwaves of pleasure to my core.

I gaze down at my rifle and it's gone. So is my brother's uniform. Now, I'm wearing a thin white gown A hospital gown, maybe. When I look up again, he's there. Right in front of me. So close that I'm forced to take a step back just to see into his eyes.

"What is-your-name?" I ask him, but he ignores me, which makes me sad. He must be angry with me.

For a moment I have the absurd thought that I'm not what he wanted. That he'd prefer it if I had been someone else. Anyone else.

"You don't have to keep me,"

I tell him. "I can find my way home."

"You no longer have a home, Rose," he chuckles almost cruelly. "Everything will change for you now. Everything

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Two

I sigh, because deep down I know that it's true. We did something last night. Something we can't come back from. But I can't remember what it is, only that I knew I was a mistake when we did it.

I take a moment to study the stranger more closely. The man in front of me is a perfect specimen, built from all things muscle and power. There doesn't look to be an ounce of fat on him at all. Nope. Every line of his body and every inch of his deeply tanned skin bulges with muscle. It's no wonder he was able to save me from that attack. The man is huge.

The attack! That's right! We stole the RV's last night and went hunting

Things must not have gone well.

Did they get caught?

"Where am I?" I ask the stranger. "Am I dreaming?"

"You are," he says. "Are you ready to wake up now? Do you think you can handle seeing me in person?"

ne?" I ask him.

"Are you going to leave me?" I

He looks down at me and smiles. "Only if you kill me."

I shake my head. "That's ridiculous, I would never hurt you. You saved me. You're my hero. My real life knight in shining armor. Why would

I want to kill you?"

He watches me sadly, losing his smile as his eyes rove over my body in a slow appraisal. "Would you give yourself to me, Rose? Can I have you?"

I can feel my cheeks heat as my hospital gown is suddenly stripped away and I can feel hands on my body. Once again I'm left naked and although I can't see the hands that are on me, I can certainly feel them. What are you doing to me?" I ask him, although he hasn't touched me. Not as far as I can tell anyway.

He grins, standing back and raising his arms to show me his hands. "It's time to wake up now, Rose. Time to face the music. Are you

ready?"

I don't know

I nod and his smile widens, "Good. I've been waiting on you a long time.

The sky above the forest begins to lighten and I start to spin in a slow circle, studying the landscape. But the trees that once surrounded me are gone, leaving nothing but an open sky in their wake. It's like I'm back in that ocean again, with nothing but a vast open void to look upon. Voices seem to be coming from somewhere above me. Echoing and pulsing and... familiar.

"Your friend is here," the stranger says.

My friend? But I don't have any friends.

"Delilah"

Delilah? She is not my friend.

Delilah hates me.

as the one

That's Roses Gruber," I hear Delilah saying. "She's almost as much of a fanatic as Roman is. I wish I would have known she was you had here, I would have certainly requested she sleep on the floor," "That bad?" the stranger asks.

"You have no idea, Delilah snarls.

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Two

A chorus of gasps sound around me,

Crop Pul I say that not found?

es awake, someone exclaims. "Take cover." The voice belongs to an unfamiliar man with an obvious attitude.

the stranger comes and I feel warm fingers trace the side of my

His touch is comforting, yet at the same time electrifying. Lighting spark after spark of awareness in places much lower than my face.

I open my eyes slowly and everything is a blur of color. Blinking rapidly, I reach up and rub at my eyes. Someone dabs at my face with a cold washcloth and I take it from them gratefully. Finally I can see.

Sapphire eyes gaze down at me. "Hey there, Rose,"

"Hi, I whisper. "Am I still in the hospital?"

The handsome stranger shakes his head uneasily. "I'm afraid not."

"Why not?" I ask softly.

The stranger takes a seat

it next to me on the bed and my body instantly heats. My goodness, he is just as handsome as I imagined he was

He sighs, then says: in a serious voice, There is a warrant out for your arrest Rose."

"Shit, I curse, true fear falling over me. That quickly I'm wishing I hadn't decided to wake up. I take a quick glance around and my confusion only grows. I'm in a bedroom. Not in fall "Where are we?" "You're in my boyfriend's bedroom, Hose," Delilah snaps from the opposite end of the room.

"I don't understand," I say, looking away from Delilah's mean glare to settle my attention on the one person in the room that doesn't seem

to hate me.

"Do you remember me, Rose?" my stranger asks. "From the hospital?"

I nod. "And from the campground," I say, and it's true. For whatever reason, I can remember his lips on mine and his panic as I lay there

dying

He gasps. "That's... a surprise. What exactly do you remember of me from the campground?"

I shrug, my cheeks flaming. "Your voice. Your... lips. I remember that you saved my life. I remember seeing you in the hospital too."

"Okay, that's good," he replies, throwing me the sexiest, most panty sizzling smile that I've ever seen.

"But I don't remember leaving the hospital with you. Or how I ended up here."

He chuckles nervously. "Well, you see, Rose... that's because I kind of... sort of... kidnapped you" Pardon me? What?

Share to your friends

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

[1,860 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Three BARTLETT

"Rescued you! Not kidnapped! Quinn barks out, surging forward with his signature playboy smile cresting his lips. His eyes cut to mine warily, the 'What the hell are you doing?' message clear in his gaze, "Come on Bartlett, you don't want to scare the girl!" Damn. What the hell was I thinking

I guess I was just trying to be

honest with her as possible, but he's right. Maybe I shouldn't be quite that honest.

Rose tenses next to me, the tiny little vibrations of her body's response grabbing my undivided attention (not that she ever

and I study her traction to Quinn. Most girls fall all over themselves when he flashes that smile. I've seen it happen a thousand times

when Rose's eyebrows bunch together in irritation, I can't help but smile,

She's not buying his song and dance the way most do

"I think I prefer the cold hard truth, thanks," she snipes at him and I have to suppress a laugh.

"That's what you think, now," Quinn remarks, half under his breath, before stepping back with a shit-eating grin.

Delilah saunters toward the bed, her hazel blue eyes narrowing into slits with every foot closer she gets. "Why not scare her? She and the rest of those assholes deserve everything they get," Delilah spits viciously and although I want to tell her to chill out, I hold my peace. I don't know her yet, but I do know she's distraught. She's grieving. Our

whole pack knows about her brother and what he did. Quinn feels responsible for what happened and while the rest of us know that the blame lies with the killer, we also know that it was our desire to have Roman brought in alive that led to the incident. There's not one of us who doesn't regret how it happened in one way or another. I wish I could have met the guy From what I hear he was one of a kind.

Rose trembles beneath the covers and her discomfort ripples through the bond. The connection that Rose has no idea we share tells me all I need to know about what she's feeling. Strange, I never imagined it to be this acute. This... expressive. According to Draven and Felix, aside from the general awareness that comes with the bond, it only kicks in for them when their respective mates are feeling intense emotion or pain. But maybe it's different for everyone, because it seems like I'm getting every little thing Rose is feeling. Or it could be the fact that Rose is wannre of the bond and has no subconscious filter causing her to broadcast her emotions completely.

She's afraid of Delilah for some reason. Or, at the very least, incredibly intimidated by her. I wonder why.

When I see Delilah's lip curling upward again in anger, I step in. "Are those clothes for Rose?" I ask, gesturing to the small bundle in Delilah's arms.

Delilah flinches, her pretty hazel eyes watering as she looks my way. "Yes," she says, "They're from Taedora. Although, I can't imagine why she'd be willing to donate them to a Wer. However, I didn't know they were for Rose and they might not fit. Taedora is quite a bit slimmer

than she is,"

Wow. Rose's embarrassment skates through the bond and I'm suddenly little mad. I am never mad. th fact, you might just say I have the most resilient temperament of all my brothers. Everyone knows that, (iven the readers do.) But just now I'm having to work to keep my anger in check. At this moment I'm wanting to toss Delilah's little ass up the stairs to watch her bounce a bit. Instead, I throw Quinn Jook and all he does is wince apologetically.

The pants should fit her fine. Her waist is slim enough," I say, eyeing Rose's figure with all the hunger for her that I feel. She notices this and blushes, sending a shockwave of heat through our connection that has me springing off the bed so that my dick doesn't punch Through my zipper. The arousal is so great that my voice is slightly shaky when I continue. "If the top doesn't fit, sh-she can wear one of of Quinn's shirts for the time being." What the Juck? I sound like on flot.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty Three

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Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Three

Rose gazes at me with a bite of her plump, juicy red lips and I'm forced to turn away so that I don't do something stupid like pounce on

her.

One of Quinn's shirts? Oh no- Delilah starts, but is cut off by Quinn clamping a hand over her mouth.

"That's fine." Quinn says with a nervous chuckle, closing his arms around his mate to keep her suddenly violent arms from him. "But I'm pretty sure Tae's sweater will fit nicely, Give Bartlett the clothes, Lilac."

Delilah sputters behind his hand, mumbling what is probably nothing but profanity, then she tosses the clothes onto the bed and bites

him.

"Shit! Lilac! Damn it!" Quinn hisses, but he doesn't release his hold on her. He shoots me a look, "I'll take Charlie to pick up your truck like we agreed, then we're heading back to Blackjack."

The sound of Delilah's phone chiming floats through the space and Quinn reluctantly releases her. She snarls at him as she whips out her phone, "You - are so fucked, Maximus. And I don't mean it in a good way." Then she gazes down at her phone and her entire demeanor changes. "Oh! Oh my God," she gasps. "Cane healed! He healed! We have to get back! We have to get back now!"

"Seriously?" Quinn replies, just as happily. Quinn releases a steady breath of air and I know without asking that his world just got a whole lot brighter.

Tears stream down Delilah's face and she jumps up and down with excitement.

"Healed? Did something happen to Cane? Rose whispers.

Shit!

Delilah gazes at her and I prepare myself for an uncharacteristic show of temper, but to my surprise Delilah just nods.

"But it looks like he's going to make it," Delilah gushes, careful to leave all extra details out. And if you want make it, Rose Gruber" oh crap here it comes-"I would suggest sticking with your savior for a while. The cops in town want to put you in jail for illegally hunting and the entire damn county is out hunting for the lioness that attacked you. The lioness that was only defending her mountain. If you try and go home, you're going to jail. Keep that in mind."

Okay. Wasn't expecting all that, but that works.

I keep my eyes trained on Rose as Quinn and Delilah race up the steps. Fear soaks over our connection and I'm filled with the sudden desire to reassure her and somehow chase it away. Her lower lip trembles and I spur into action.

"Hey," I coo, dropping back down on the bed in front of her and placing both hands on her shoulders. My hip presses against her outer thigh and even though there are several layers of fabric between us, I feel a rush of heat flow through me at the contact. Her warm cinnamon colored eyes lock on me, her breathing turning ragged as her gaze sweeps over the exposed skin of my arms and neck. "You're safe with me, Rose, I promise. I won't let anything happen to you."

"Are they really looking for me? Th-the police?" she asks quietly.

No baby, not out here they're not. Not so long as you're with me. "Yes," I, and it tastes like poison on my lips when I do. "But you don't have to worry about that. You just have to lay low for a while, is all." I release her shoulders, but can't help but drag my fingers down her arms as I do. When my fingertips skate over the soft flesh of her exposed biceps, her core awakens and I feel her body tense with anticipation. Sparks of crackling energy tempt my hands and I almost all her against me, but the sweet scent of her arousal softens the air I'm forced to relinquish my hold on her.

I don't want to. Of course I don't,

What I want to do is dip my hands around the back of her ass and make her ride me like a fucking pony, but even if I could manage to pull that off this quickly in the game, something tells me Rose is a bit more innocent than the others. Sure, she may be able to handle a rifle like a trained member of the United States Special Forces, but without even asking I know... her experience is with hunting. Not... with.

2/3 Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Three

men. She's not as worldly as Draven, or as seasoned as Felix, and she's nothing like the firecracker that is Delilah... She was out last night with a group of young men and behaved as one of them. I wouldn't call her a tomboy per se... but I'm willing to bet she never went

prom.

She probably has no idea how fucking sexy she is.

But that's okay, because just the thought of being the one to show her how absolutely devastating she can be has turned rock

to sold

"You should shower," I murmur, unable to keep the husk of desire from my voice as the scent of her arousal grows stronger. She smells fucken delicious. Her chest begins to heave slightly and my eyes go straight for her bountiful breasts. The very same breasts I almost ravaged when she was still unconscious. Her nipples are looking at me, damn them. Poking straight for my tongue. Fuck!

spine and I leap up a little too abruptly. Disappointment climbs into my chest and for a moment That thought is like a lightning rod to the moment I'm not sure if it's hers or mine. Keeping my back turned, I tell her, "When you're finished getting dressed come upstairs and something to eat. We'll head to the island afterward."

Shit. Am I really going to blindfold her? I don't want to

"Island?" she repeats. "Is that really necessary?"

"Absolutely," again, I lie and start up the steps.

"Bartlett!" she calls out and I freeze, the sound of my name on bath. Doctor's orders and all that.

my name on her lips making me want to turn around and demand I give her a sponge

"Yes?"

"Do you know what happened to my friends? I came with four other people. Do you know if any of them were arrested?"

Goddammit.

I'm going to hell.

"They weren't arrested," I say quietly. "They're missing."

Share to your friends

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

[1,218 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Four ROSE

An accelerated spiral of lust - the likes of which I have never had to suffer through - batters inside my core. Creating a wanton, lecher borderline painful pulse of anticipation in the one place that women were gifted to receive pleasure. A place that has only ever come for me while secretly watching dirty movies, except for today.

It is his fault. Bartletts. Being near him is doing something to my insides that I'm not altogether comfortable with. The moment I opened my eyes and realized he was standing there beside the bed, it was like I was still in that dream. The one he haunted.

I felt a hundred different emotions all at once and I didn't know how to react. Then, he touched me and all I could think about was what it might feel like if he were to kiss me too. Of course, he didn't and he wouldn't, because I'm not that girl. The one that guys like to kiss. I'm not special in any way. At least... not in any way that I want to be.

Rescuing

g me from a lion attack probably made him feel some sense of obligation toward me now. Some irrational duty brought on by the euphoric sensation of saving another's life. When he heard they were going to arrest me, he must have felt sorry for me and decided to (help me escape.

Sarry enough to kidnap you, Rose? Really?

But it has to be that, because, why else would he do it?

As far as being kidnapped goes... I can't really say I'm disappointed. If Tm being honest, I'm kind of excited. I know I shouldn't be... I

Trut 1

My head and heart pound in tandem as I watch him climb to the top of the landing. The muscles of his rear clench and unclench behind his jeans and I'm practically drooling. I've never seen à body so completely packed with all the goodies one might only ever see on h television. None of the guys that I know have even a six-pack. He looks like he might possibly have an eight... or even a nehe. When he reaches the door at the top, he looks back at me and my face flames. The sapphire of his gaze sparkles and he hesitates, resting his hand on the doorframe for a cool minute while we watch each other. My breathing goes ragged as I'm nearly overwhelmed by the sudden sense of longing that washes over me. It feels foreign and almost disjointed, like the finding of a long lost loved one might be. Swallowing thickly. I try to push it down inside of me. To bury it somewhere deep within my bones. For a swift second, he looks like he's about to come back down the stairs and, chicken that I am, I look away. My eyes dart toward the bathroom door in front of me and a moment later, I hear the bedroom door close with a soft click. When I raise my gaze back up, he's gone and once again, I'm disappointed.

Jesus. What is wrong with me?

That man is not for you, Rose. He's way out of your league.

Someone he him would never go for someone

me like

1. mc.

Not ever.

Men like Bartlett always chase after the Delilahs of the world. The fiery, sassy, flirty girls. The ones that know how to talk and how to walk. The ones that say all the right things to entice a man a bit closer. I'm not that girl. I'm just plain old Rose.

My blood is pumping in a frenzied rush, seizing control of my limbs and keeping me cemented in place, my mind scattering to the four corners of oblivion as I work through the implications of my sudden reality. Anxiety has always been constant companion of mine. It is something that I've become accustomed to experiencing whenever I'm forced to interact with anyone that isn't family. Girls like Delilah, for example, make me extremely nervous. They don't tend to like me very much. I'm not sure why exactly, but they don't. Delilah never has and we went to school together from kindergarten to graduation. She was always surrounded by different guys, none of which she ever seemed terribly into. She was popular in that way. A way that I would never be. I can't compete with girls like her and it shouldn't be much of a surprise that she would know Bartlett.

Shake it off. Rose. She left.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Four

The memory of how Bartlett seemed to want to protect me from her cruel remarks brings a fresh blush to my cheeks and a goofy straight to my lips. Then of course... there's the way he looked at me when he spoke about my figure. If I didn't know better I would thought he was checking me out. His gaze did sort of linger on my overly developed bosom, a of

Maybe he was. Maybe he did he ne

what he saw on me.

Afterall, he is taking me to an island Islands are isolated and given that he didn't mention which one were heading to, it could also be private. It's kind of glamorous in a way, even if circumstances coupled with common sense would deem it more dangerous. My mother, for instance, would consider it a red flag warning. However, even if he were a psychopath, I'm hardly the girl Bartlett would decide he just had to have to himself.

But he didn't tell me what we'd be doing there. Will we be camping? Or will be? It could be that he only intends to help me with a place to hide and the moment he gets me

there, he'll disappear. I hope that's not the case. If it is I might be so heartbroken that I'd rather get arrested.

As I throw off the covers and gently step out of bed, I'm prepared to be a little bit shaky and maybe a touch off-balance. But I'm steady on

feet when I stand up and my legs don't so much as tremble. Taking a tentative step forward, I notice not only am I exceptionally stable, but the rest of me feels quite a bit stronger as well.

How can that be? Shouldn't I be weak? I was attacked for God's sake.

Maybe it's like an adrenaline thing. Or it could be that my body is still in fight mode. Who knows, but I find myself in somewhat of a trance as I step toward the bathroom. Picking up the bundle of clothes that Delilah brought for me to wear, I race for the shower, all thoughts of injury absent from my mind. Untying the hospital gown in front of the mirror, I end up doing a sort of double take when my gaze feathers across my neck and shoulders.

What the fuck?

I mean... what in the actual fuck?

Where are my injuries?

Where are the stars?

The bruises, the cuts, the bandages, the stitches?

Where are they?

With a gasp of disbelief, I fall forward on the counter, stretching toward the mirror for a better look at my throat.

My heart begins to pound with an entirely new form of provocation. Dread

There's not one single sign of the attack on me. Not one gash, not one tear nothing but a faded crescent shaped scar that looks like it might

have healed ages ago,

Oh... my... God...

How long have I been asleep???

Share to your friends

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

[1,730 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Five ROSE

Staring at the creamy, unmarred length of my neck, the pulsepoint beneath the scar seems to throb in the light. The mark that rides over it isn't nearly as devastating as I would have imagined it to be. I thought for sure I was going to have a few jagged rises along both sides of my throat. Instead, what I'm left with looks almost like a vampire bit me. Or an animal with a much smaller mouth than a lion has.

Could I have been mistaken somehow? Could the lion that bit me have actually been a much smaller version of the beast I remember? Then again, even a smaller version would have left a larger mark than this.

On top of that - I felt my throat rip front and back! Felt the blood flow down beneath my hair and behind my ears. The trickling of it as it poured from my nape! I felt all of that! But where is the evidence???

Maybe I was in a coma and while they were waiting for me to wake up, my parents decided to have plastic surgery done on me. Or skin grafting. But then that would mean I was out for a long time wouldn't it? And would Bartlett have really been by my side if my recovery took two or three months? I doubt it. Wouldn't I be weak as fuck if I'd been unconscious that long?

Bartlett will have the information. Just the fact that he brought me anywhere, tells me he must have been at the hospital a good deal of the time, right?

No, no. Not right. It is possible that he heard about my warrant from an outside source, I suppose. Maybe that's what happened and that's why he decided to boost me. There's only one way to know for sure.

I'll simply have to ask him.

With a hefty sigh of resignation, I turn away from the mirror and

open the rain glass doors of the eight by ten foot shower. Holy Moly, that's a lot of space. It's almost as big as my bedroom at home. Elegant onyx walls surround me, gilded with golden accents and radiating with heavy yellow lights. Concave shelves line the walls, stocked with an array of different products in a variety of different scents. There: even a long stone bench that presses out of the back wall that is wide enough for two people to lie upon, should they be so inclined.

I've never seen anything like it and for a moment I simply stand there shivering and taking it all in. These people obviously have money My family's pretty well off, but we

could never afford a bathroom as extravagant as this one. It makes me curious about what line of work these people are in. They're definitely not hunters, that much was clear just with Delilah's little speech.

I wonder what kind of shower Bartlett has at home. And... where is his home?

Turning on the overhead rainshower and adjusting the temperature so that steam begins to rise in clouds all around me, I turn toward the shelves. Scanning the selection of bottles that appear to be brand new, settle on a couple of hygiene items that are so deliciously scented that I outright moan in delight. Something about stepping under the hot spray of this stranger's shower, that much was obvious. I can't say I really blame her, but Bartlett must be a pretty close friend of theirs if he's allowed to walk his felonies right through the front door and plant them in the masters bed.

My teeth skim my bottom lip as I picture it what Bartlett must have looked like sneaking me out of the hospital. Did he toss me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes? Or carry me clasped against his chest bridal style? Maybe he simply seated me in a wheelchair and rolled me out the front exit. Or came in disguised as a doctor and placed me on a gurney to wheel me away from danger.

The fact that he deems me important enough to risk something as outrageous as kidnapping floors me. The man is staggering and I have to wonder how old he might be. Judging by his face alone, I'd say he doesn't look much older than twenty, but his body screams of a virile male that has spent years honing his body to perfection.

Did he cradle me in those deliciously muscled arms of his when he finally had me here? When he brought me inside?

God, I hope so.

He must have, right? An image of myself in that paper thin hospital gown that opens at the back, being crushed against the wide expanse

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Five

of his powerful chest flashes across my eyes and my clit pulses with a throbbing hunger. When I think about the fact that my bare ass had to have felt the warm shift of his skin at least once while he held me, I'm suddenly flushed with embarrassment. Did he even notice when it happened? And if so, did he like it when it did?"

Abruptly driven to replay the dreamlike scenario and imagine what I might have felt like to him, I slide an arm behind myself. Then, imagining that I am Bartlett, I close my eyes and push my forearm against the globe of one ass cheek, trying to recreate a moment

I'm not even certain existed. The plump, buoyant resistance that I meet with is surprisingly arousing.

I have a bit of a bubble butt that my brother Rosen always teased me about it. It used to get me upset when he did that and just like anyone else might think, I believed it was his way of telling me that I was fat. For a long time I thought that was exactly what it was. But then one day while Ted was over to the house, I walked in on Rosen with his hands white knuckled around Ted's throat. He said, "You don't ever talk about my sister's ass again, do you got that? Ill fucken kill you if you so much as look at it agate?" A fearful Ted had frightfully agreed, swearing that he had only been trying to compliment me, but my brother would hear none of it. He shoved Ted up against the wall, whispering something to him that I wasn't able to catch and causing Ted to go from peach tone to gray tone in a matter of seconds.

Until that day, I always thought Rosen was ashamed of me. He would forbid his friends from interacting with me at school and everywhere else. I was so sure it was because he was embarrassed of his fatass sister. It turned out that I was wrong. Rosen had been protecting me. He made sure that every single male that I ever came in contact with treated me with respect. Rosen is also the one that taught me how to handle a rifle. I had always wanted to learn, but my father had forbidden me from it. Rosen could see how much I wanted to be included by my dad so he taught me how to aim for rather how not too and how to shoot. Working with me in secret, against my father's wishes, he helped me get comfortable with various firearms. According to Rosen, I was a natural and ten times more of a hunter than he would ever be. I would cry sometimes when he would go off to meetings with my dad and Rosen would always hug me tight, whispering that I only needed to be patient and that he was going to pave the way for me.

One night my dad, Rosen, and I were gathered in the field behind our house, on the empty acre of land that we used for a training ground and Rosen finally announced that he had gotten a full ride scholarship to a University. He admitted that the Elder Few was not what he wanted and my father threatened to disown him. Dad began to yell and scream, but through it all Rosen remained calm. Eventually, my dad realized he wasn't getting through to my brother and as he raised his arm to strike him, Rosen gave me the signal. The next five minutes were filled with me sharing my father every fattle thing that oven had taught me. Needless to say, my father was more than impressed. I was pledged the very next day. The very first female ever to be accepted

Before then, Rosen was the big man on campus. He was the football star, the hockey star, the fucking Prom King for God's sakes! Everyone adored him. Delilah even went out with him once. Most of all though, he was my big brother and I miss him every single day that he is away. He helped me see my worth

So now, as I stand here under the heated rain, I lay down along the bench beneath the spray to give in to a daydream. Pretending I'm still unconscious, I imagine what might have happened when Bartlett kidnapped me. The fantasy has my hands sliding all over

my body greedily and before I know it I'm touching myself, stroking my sex with a feverish touch as I chase the sensations that ride across my

flesh.

I begin to moan, loud and uncontrolled. My fingers circle my clit and my hips buck with every swirl of pleasure. I don't even hear it when the door to the bathroom opens because that is when I explode into a madness. My arousal pours from me in a waterfall of pleasure and I tremble and whimper, my body shuddering as I bless myself with back to back orgasms.

"Holy fuck," a deep voice says, and it sounds like the bearer is in pain.

I scream, shooting up straight along the bench and closing my arms around myself before turning off the water. I'm barely able to make out Bartlett's distorted form behind the rain glass doors and when I realize what's just happened I want to die. God, no!

He just heard all that Oh my G

"What are you doing?" I shout, embarrassed. "Why are you here?"

He walks forward, closing the bathroom door behind him as he does and my heart burns inside my chest. "I thought I heard you screaming for me. I thought... I heard you call my name."

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

[1,679 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Six

GAYLE

Did he say... Non?

He didn't, right? He couldn't have. My mind has been playing tricks on me all day so why wouldn't my ears be too?

"I'm sorry," I begin, my voice sounding threaded and rasped. "I thought you said lion."

Gios jaw clenches, his chin tipping upward despite that he gazes down at me. "I did," he answers.

My breath hitches, the sound of my heartbeat like a sudden drumming of the death march as it bangs against my chest. "But that's impossible, I reply objectively. "And if it is your idea of a joke, It isn't at all funny. Somewhere in the back of my brain, I am allowed to get excited and the pure, bubbling bliss that threatens to erupt inside of me burns behind my eyes.

is such a thing even done?

"I never joke about the law," Gio informs me quietly. "The law is what took my Bianca from me."

"Draven's mom?" I ask him.

He nods sadly, his jaw going tight. "In the old world, in Italy, the five families ruled - in fact they still do, but now we are much lenient than before-

"We I interrupt, thinking of Draven and the sort of regal beauty that she possesses.

He smiles. "Yes. We. My father was Lord Angelo Piccoli and when he sent me to America, it was to broaden my knowledge as well as to help hunt a few rogues that had escaped vindication. That had escaped him. Also so that I might familiarize myself with the rest of the world's shifters and learn their weaknesses." Gio's eyes water, the left side of his mouth quirking up as if in remembrance. "I met Bianca on my very last day in Miami. The day I was supposed to leave on a cruise back to Italy." He shakes himself as if fighting against emotions he isn't used to displaying in front of strangers like myself.

"And did you love her immediately?" I ask, turning my gaze away from him to stare down at Cane's perfect features.

"Immediately," he confirms, his eyes a bit wistful. "She w

was the most beautiful creature I'd ever laid eyes on. The fact that she was human was disappointing, but not a deal breaker as far as I was concerned. My father, though for him it certainly would be." "Mine too," I whisper, thinking of Adelle.

Gio nods, meeting my gaze empathetically. He goes on, "Bianca used to sell sandwiches at the docks to make a living. Fish sandwiches. So she shouldn't have smelled nearly as delicious as she did when I found her." I laugh with him for a moment before his gaze turns lonely and a faraway look takes over his face. "I stood there and watched her for an hour, just wanting to memorize everything about her. Because at that time, my plan was to go home, convince my father to let me accept her and then return for her, but as the horn and whistle blew to signal that we were boarding, she looked up at me and it was like she knot. As if he was aware of me the entire time I'd been standing there and knew the moment that horn blared that I might be gone forever." He swallows thickly. "Her green eyes sparkled like emeralds the moment our gazes clashed. She offered me her last fish sandwich free of charge and I couldn't help

but take it. When our fingers touched it was over. I knew I couldn't leave her there. Not for any reason. So I sent word to my father that I was staying a bit longer to enjoy the beach. In the coming weeks I fell so deeply in love with her that I decided to leave everything else behind. All of it. My lordship, my money, my father..." he shudders, stepping away from me to stare out the window and into the newly fading sun. "I only had a few years with my Bianca before my father sent his assassins after us. I thought I could protect her from him. I thought I could protect them both. Draven and her mother. Isabel was Bianca's only surviving family. So I met with a few of my people who were loyal to me and not my father, leaving two of them with Bianca while Sophia and I convinced Isabel to pretend Draven was hers. She and her sister were close back then, both of them were struggling when we met. With the money I paid Isabel, I thought I could ensure Draven would be looked after, even in the event that her mother and I didn't make it."

1/3

21:36 Fri, Nov 15

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Six

"Paid? You paid her aunt?"

Gio stiffens, his back going straight. For years. Even after...he trails, going silent for the red mine

"After?" I prompt him

He turns away from the window to meet my eyes, then walks slowly toward

his footsteps brany with lons. "When 1

If her soul. Her

I thought it was going to be to share the good news. Isabel would keep her safe for

ters that accepted wibes with ha Somewhere free. Where my father's laws couldnt touch us and we might join a pack of thought maybe if I found that place, we could live a new life. A happy on Free from fear and hardship. Somewhere I might actu some sleep at night. But..." he chokes up, clearing his throat before he continues. "I felt her de from ten miles phantom kiss upon my cheek as she left this world. I didnt want to believe it was her, but in my heart I knew that here in this world, alone. Even still, when I returned home to see Blanc body, I had the crazy thought to change bes. The Lords of the five families are always trained in the secrets of Shifter Knowledge. The elders of the Transyhanian Count came in and trained i themselves when we were of age, so I knew of all the steps. I knew everything I would have to do. But I also

that they'd killed her. Her ghost fucking kissed me goodbye! Still, it was hard for me to accept. My men were dead too. When I got thenk, all that remained were my father's assassins and my beautiful Bianca's lifeless body." Glos yes with tears, watering so heavily that they shimmer in the soft light of my room. They wouldn't even let me hold her."

I don't know when I started crying, but I did. My heart wrenched when I thought of those moments in the jeep, when golden glow. That... energy. The way it wrapped around me, like a warm hag. I felt him... Cone. Was it his ghost? Was the jeep as I cried? Then I gasp as I remember the way we almost went flying over the cliff... something was like something took control... or, someone did.

- sining near me

"He saved us," I whisper and Gio's eyes, now clear and curious, study me intently. "Delilah and me. He took the wheel from my hande

back home and kept us on the road. I remember thinking that I was crazy for steering toward the cliff instead of away from it and that we were going to die, but—"—

"This cliff had a lot of dirt and rocks?" Gio asks.

I nod, meeting his eyes. "Yes. We were sliding."

Gio chuckles silently then smiles down at me, searching my face with the exact same anatomizing eyes that he gifted his daughter. I sure, they differ in color, with Draven's brightening a moss green and Gio's glowing with liquid gold, but the relativity is not in the irises. No. It is in the potent, watchful, stare that pierces armor and assesses your soul. Striking straight through the outer surface of a person's facade and driving toward the edge of intent. As if even now, he is weighing my person. Sizing me up to determine whether or not I can be trusted.

"When you lose control like that on a dirt road, you are supposed to tum the wheel in the opposite direction of the one you want to go."

"That's just wild," I comment, but smile. "It was him. I know it. And a few minutes ago, when Tandora begged me to let him go, because he wasnt getting any better, I heard someone scream "No."

"Most likely it was him, yes." Gio grins. Then he is here. Waiting. Gio glances down at Cane. "It must be your decision. The des marking will determine the change, but, since he lost so much blood beforehand, he will need the blood of a shifter that er his mate transfused into him, before that last marking or his insides will cook."

"I-I don't know how to transfuse blood! I've never

"I do," Gio says calmly. "You should be able to get a med kit that will have everything I will need at any regular drug store."

Gio's steady, scrutinizing gaze never leaves my face as my jaw drops open and shut-like the mouth of an animatronic robot. Turning my face away from his, my eyes drag slowly away, stretching their focus painfully until they're forced into snapping forward.

My unsteady irises jitter over Cane's newly healed torso, searching for signs of accelerated strength. I think back to the other day, when Delilah and I arrived at the cottage and he was standing there in a thin white towel that did nothing to hide his junk. God, he looked absolutely delicious... I need him. I need my mate and he needs me. He wants this... I know beyond any shadow of a doubt that he does.

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Six

"Sooner rather than later, Glo Comments dryly, taking out his phone and tapping away.

"Okay, I'll send someone to the store to-"

"Already done, Gio says, pocketing his phone. "A few of my people will be here shortly and drop off the kit. They know what to look for. Now, you need to convince one of yours to be his donor. So who is it going to be?"

I smile at him, thinking there is only one lion strong enough to rival Cane's human energy. "My brother. Gryffin."

Chapter Comments

KKN

oh poor Gio

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

[1,695 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Seven ROSE

"I thought I heard you screaming for me. I thought... I heard you call my name." Bartlett's silhouette beyond the distorted glass grows larger as he steps closer to the doors.

Did? Oh God I hope not!

Think fast, Bose, think, think think

"Rose, are you alright in there?" His deep voice sounds somewhat strained and I have to wonder how much of me he can actually see. I'm sure it's enough for him to make out the thickness of my figure at the very least. Now he might even agree with what Delilah said about me before she left. "Rose?"

"Um.....L... I'm fine I just-1-" Fuck! What can I say? The scars?!-1 just panicked for a moment. I realized... I-I don't have any injuries. None."

I watch his body jerk back a bit before he lifts an obscured arm upward and appears to run his fingers through his hair. "Oh. Right," he replies, sounding more than a little sketchy. "Is that a bad thing?"

I move toward the shower door, needing for some reason to see his face. Wanting desperately to gage his reaction to my standing here naked. When I get to the garbled glass entrance I'm relieved to see that it's still too difficult to make out any of his details beyond the glass. This should mean that he can't make out any of my details either. Taking a deep breath, I pull the damn thing open just enough for me to peer out, while leaving the rest of myself warped behind the slivers of rain glass. What the h

hell am I doing? Am I crazy?

The click of the door opening seems to surprise him, though he's looking dead at me when I peek out. The sapphires of his eyes warble, their black centers stretching like a pair of obsidian mirrors. He sucks in a sharp breath as his gaze twitches downward and left, locking on something behind the glass right around where my chest should be. Just the thought of him staring at my boobs has my nipples hardening and my core throbbing again. Almost too naturally for me to notice, one of Bartlett's hands slides toward the front of his jeans to adjust himself and my own eyes follow this path, dropping away from his face then bulging once I see how absolutely thick he is behind his zipper. When his gaze shoots upward again, he is hesitant, his attention darting back down at least two more times before The shuts his eyes completely.

"Uh...maybe I shouldn't have come in here," he murmurs, his fists balling at his sides. "Would you like a towel?"

A real, genuine smile one that I cannot control - rips across my face at his obvious discomfort. My cheeks heat tremendously, watching In wonder as his seat grows more and more prominent, punching against his jeans,

"Yes please," I answer, biting back my excitement as I realize I may be having my very first, very real adult crush. Fuck that. I na definitely having...

A muscle ticks behind his beard, clenches and unclenches, much like my sex is doing, "O-okay," he stammers firally, turning toward a shelf on his left and snatching a fluffy

black towel. He shifts on his feet, the exposed muscles of his arms flexing before he spins my way and thrusts the damn thing at my face. "Here you go," he says huskily, as I open the door just enough to slip my hand out.

Thank you, Bartlett, I simper. His eyes are still closed and when my hand grazes his to grab the towel, sparks of heat curl my fingers around his hand involuntarily.

With a gasp of surprise, I yank the towel from him and his eyelids flutter just barely. Confident that he'll remain that way until I'm covered up, I pull the door all the way out and wrap myself as swiftly as I'm able, tucking the corner of the towel in between my breasts. When I look up again his eyes are open to half most and I jolt backward in what would be the most classically stupid move ever, because that's right - I slip.

A yelp of surprise hurdles from my mouth and into the air as I go toppling forward, my eyes clamping shut as my hands shoot out to

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Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Seven

break my fall, but I don't hit the ground. Instead, it's as if I'm whisked off my feet and spun into the air, bouncing into a pair of the strongest, most capable arms I've ever had the pleasure of fantasizing about.

I open my eyes and Bartlett is holding me. All I can think about at that moment is how heavy I am and I squirm against him until he crushes me more tightly against his chest. Now I can't move except to breathe and a whimper of need trembles past my lips. One of my hands grips his powerful shoulder and the other claws over a rock hard pectoral which is undeniably flexed to perfection.

Oh sweet Baby lesias, that feels so nice.

"Stop wiggling," he rasps, his sapphire eyes sparkling with amusement as he smiles behind his beard. His gaze dips toward my mouth and then lower. His eyes slowly dance down my neck then rest on the shuddering heave of my bosom. He stares for a long moment and I think I hear him curse, but it's so low I can't be sure. The bands of his arms are flexed beneath me and all that I was dreaming about on the bench comes crashing back down.

Was this it? Is this how he carried me away from my doom?

"Th-thank you," I stutter stupidly, clamming up so completely that I press my face into his shirt so that he can't see me blush.

"Mmm...yeah, um...yes - I mean, you're welcome," he rumbles out, "Feel free to bite me if you need to," he whispers, exiting the bathroom with me still in his arms.

["Bite you?" I laugh into his shirt, I can't help myself.

His forearm that rests under my knees fluctuates and I feel the stroke of his fingers across the flesh of my leg. A chill rides over me as he steps back toward the bed. The bed which he must have made while I was in the shower,

Oh my God. Maybe he did hear me. Maybe I did call out his name.

Fire erupts across my chest as I realize that he may have been in here and heard not only his name, but my moans of pleasure. I'd hoped the tremendous beat of the shower would disguise any sound beyond those walls, but in truth there was no way for me to know that. It could be that the walls are paper thin and the echo of sound from that enormous onyx cavern carries like the voice of an opera singer to the balcony up above.

Holy shit. Why am I so stupid?

"Rose," Bartlett whispers, grabbing my attention once again.

Meeting his gaze, I can see

se his worry for me. Like my panicking over my own stupidity is easily read in my eyes. Suddenly I need more than anything for him to let me go.

"Put me down, please," I snap, wincing when I hear the harshness of my tone.

I can feel his heart beating against my palm, the tremor in his chest growing stronger with my words. "Not yet," he argues, laughing when

I glare at him. "Don't be embarrassed," he whispers, his jaw going tight as his eyes search my face for God knows what.

*Embarrassed?" I squeak out, my face blanching. He heard me, he definitely heard me. Oh lord, Cara pervert. "Embarrassed that

you slipped. It's okay, I don't mind catching you. And ... I like holding you," he says so softly that my only response is a breathless little moan. His eyelids lower at the sound, his head dipping downward, almost as if he might kiss me. I tremble in his hold, my gaze going toward his lips as I wait for him to descend on me. Time seems to stop and I hold my breath, not even realizing that my hands are gripping him more tightly.

Suddenly he growls with an almost animalistic rumble that starts deep in his chest. The sound has me gasping in surprise as my clit pulses to life and wetness leaks from my core. My lashes shutter lower and I tilt my head back, waiting. The sensation is pleasure and pain and everything I've never experienced rolled into one.

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Seven

I want this.. I want him.

This is it, my very first kiss.

Maybe even my only kiss.

But... he doesn't do it. He doesn't kiss me. Instead, he sets me down gingerly, on the edge of the bed and then races into the restroom to retrieve my clothes. My entire body aches from the loss of his touch and I find myself feeling even worse than I did when he caught me in the aftermath of my orgasm.

Because now I feel... rejected.

Bartlett tosses the clothes on my lap, all the while keeping his head turned away from me. "Hurry up and get dressed," he says almost too sharply. "We should head out soon. Charlie is going to drop us off at the docks so we can head to the island."

He

turns around and races up the steps much faster than he did the first time, only stopping when I call out to him.

"Bartlett!" I shout, closing my arms around my person in an attempt to make myself feel whole.

He doesn't run around, "Yes?"

How I

in a coma, wasn't 177

long was 1 in a coma?" I ask. "Because I was in

"You were," he confirms, still not turning.

"How long?"

He

doesn't answer me. At least, not the question that I asked, but he does respond and I can see his hand white knuckled on the bedroom door. "Just get dressed. I'll explain everything once we're away from here."

He closes the door and suddenly I'm left feeling bereft and confused. My gaze lands on the back door and the patio beyond it.

I'll bet there are stairs that lead right down to the beach.

Would he chase after me if I left?

Does he really care about me? Or does he feel responsible for me?

There's one way to find out.

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

[1,640 words]

Chapter Teo Hundred Thirty-Eight

BARTLETT

"Let me get this straight, Charlie says with a chuckle. "You've got Rose Gruber down there naked?"

The desperate look of unveiled interest is clear. Charlie's mouth drops open and his eyes bulge, his gaze locked on the hallway at my back

"Let me guess," I speculate. "You went to school with her too?"

Charlie nods, swallowing loudly and sitting up straight in his chair. "Um...yeah."

"Uh-huh," is my reply as I squint my eyes at him thoughtfully. Charlie shifts in his seat, adjusting himself with no less grace than I did in the bathroom only moments ago. "Do not think about her naked. Don't you dare. You are not allowed to."

Charlie sports, "What? Dude, guys have been picturing Rose Gruber naked since she hit the seventh grade. She's got the biggest set of-

snap, dragging a hand through my hair again in frustration. As picture what she looked like behind the bowdlerized glass of the shower, I can only imagine what kind of locker room trend she represented when she was in school. Although the shower doors distorted the details, it did nothing to the colors and her dark pink nipples had practically beckoned me, begged me to taste them: What Rose didn't realize was that when she pressed close enough to the glass, the distortion was completely gone and all that was left was the most glorious set of tits I had ever seen. I tried to be a gentleman, but I

found it close to impossible to look away. Shit. Going in there in the first place was a mistake, but after hearing her sweet moans of pleasure through the walls, I couldn't help myself, I had to get closer. Sadly, I walked in right after she finished and I made up that bit about hearing her call my name just to have a reason for standing there. I'm an idiot

Charlie grins at me. "She's really pretty, Bartlett. I'm happy for you, but th..."

"Uh? What?" I counter, amused.

"She's like G.L. Jane man. She'll eat you alive."

Chuckling loudly, I almost miss the sound of the sliding glass door as it opens downstairs. My neck jerks to the right and I leap from my seat, listening for the sound of someone trying to disappear. When the barely audible click of Quinn's patio door sounds, I know Rose has? just stepped outside. "I'll be right back," I tell Charlie.

She's running? Really? From me?

My chest burns, but I try not to let it upset me too much. After seeing the disappointment in her eyes when I didn't kiss her, I know she feels something for me, so why is she trying to leave? Reaching out for the bond, I can feel her dejection. She aches for me, but she feels like it's hopeless. Damn IL Didn't she hear me when I said I kidnapped her?

Apparently she couldn't tell how hard it was for me just holding her. The amount of control that it took to keep my hands from stroking the sweet peach of her skin was unreal. Not to mention the strength that it took for me to put her down at all.

Draped in a flimsy little towel with her long wet hair plastered to my arm, she was irresistible. Desperate to feel the hot flush of her skin under mine, I wanted to rip that towel away, fall on top of her and dive into her mouth, but it wouldn't have ended there. I wouldn't have wanted to stop and something tells me that she wouldn't have made mi

But that doesn't mean that she gets to leave. Oh hell no.

Deciding to surprise her, I head straight for the back door on this level, ipping outside soundlessly and listening for her footsteps. After a moment I hear them and I know she's already at the bottom of the steps. I suppose she thinks she can escape that way, but she can't. There's no way up from that beach unless you use someone's access stabs and she doesn't strike me as the trespassing type, If she

1/3

Chapter Teo Hundred Thirty-Eight

managed to find the shoes I set out for her, then she probably put them on, and if she did, she'll end up slipping on the rocks. Fuck

That's when I realize the tide starts coming in around this time and soon that entire beach will be covered in water. I race down the steps to the beach so fast I'm practically floating, slipping behind her as she takes her first steps along the rocks. Wanting to reach for her, I see her struggling and decide to wait for her to slip. It's not like I'm wishing it on her, I just know that she will. Rose is adorably clumsy when she's not holding a gun.

Sure enough, it doesn't take long for her to choose the wrong rock. Her legs go shooting up in front of her and her yelp of surprise is swallowed by the crashing waves. Of course, I don't let her hit the rocks beneath her. Leaping forward effortlessly, I catch her again. This time though, I almost went down with her as my own shoe glided along a particularly slippery stone. Barely managing to gain my balance, I glare down at her and shake my head angrily. I'm not really mad, but it won't hurt for her to think I am. If it keeps her from trying to escape again, I can be the bad guy for a while.

"What the fuck are you doing, Rose? Where were you going? For a swim? I snap, shouting over the song of the ocean.

She doesn't answer me, only pouts like a child, her pl

plump juicy lips putting out kissably as she crosses her arms over her chest. The hot pink low-cut v-neck sweater along with the tight as hell solid black jeans that Taedora provided for her, seem to fit her deliciously. Delilah was so wrong. They may be a snug fit, but I'll bet these clothes have never looked better on anyone else in all of existence. Good thing too, because I would have hated to put her in something of Quinn's. That would have seriously pissed me off.

A particularly large wave crashes near us and we're splashed instantly with the ocean's wrath. Without another word I carry her back up the stairs, never tiring and never slowing once until I walk her through the back door of Quinn's kitchen. Once inside, she attempts to drop out of my arms, but I only squeeze her more tightly against me.

"Charlie, make that lunch to go. I need to get her on the island where she can't run off, I say loudly, meeting Rose's incredulous gaze with a challenging glare.

"Right on," Charlie agrees, quickly packing the steak sandwiches he made for us into a small cooler.

le cops, really, I do. But that doesn't mean that you get

Rose gasps, "Who do you think you are? I appreciate you getting me away from the cops, to command me! I decide where I go and what I do."

Rose tenses as I adjust my grip to pull her in closer, switching my hold so that one hand cups her rear near her hip. Her heart begins to

1 hammer in her chest and I can smell the sudden sugared sweetness of her arousal through her jeans. So, I go ahead and grope her ass a bit, squeezing and massaging so shamelessly that her jaw drops to the door. Wouldn't want her feeling rejected again, now would we? She doesn't protest, only gawks at me in surprise, and I grant her a half smile letting her know it was no accident. Dipping my head intimately close to her ear, I say, "I don't think you quite understand your role in all this, princess." Before I pull away, I drag my lips over the shell of her ear peering down at her with a smile, watching the beautiful maple coloring of her eyes become drenched in the black of her pupils as her gaze fondles my own. "I kidnapped you. I will take you where I want to, when I want to, and you will do every little thing I say. She bites down on her bottom lip and groans low in her throat. A sound that no one is meant to hear, but I do My eyes are instantly glued to that lower lip, and I can't wait to suck it into my mouth and toase it with the tip of my tongue-Stop that," I choke out. "Stop what?" she asks innocently, nibbling a bit more.

I shake myself, clenching my jaw as tight as I can. Watching her mouth plump and redden has me picturing things I shouldn't. "Nevermind," I say absently, nodding to Charlie who now stands before us, ready to roll.

The three of us step outside and head straight for my truck, but before we can get there Rose tries, once again, to jump out of my arms. Laughing quietly, I pinch her ass in warning.

"Ouch! I can walk, you know," she snaps, uncrossing her arms to slap my chest.

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Chapter Teo Hundred Thirty-Eight

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Shaking my head at her, I reply, "Not today." Then I climb into the backseat of the cab with her still in my and sealing my arms around her so that she can't move. The softness of Rose's body and the silkiness of fæer hair are and with her legs stretched across my lap her cleavage is front and center. I can literally see all the way down her shirt and realize it, my dick spikes, punishing me for forcing her into the position By the time Charlie is in the front seat and the buck Doug Ku Do my shit is throbbing and my sweet innocent Rose doesn't seem to have a clue.

So... I decided to give her one.

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

[1,580 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Nine ROSE

Every single particle of my being is facing with awareness when Bartlett sits me on his lap. The truck we are in is a newer model and definitely roomy enough for the two of us, but when I try to move to grab my own seat, he closes his arms around my body and I'm pressed tightly up against him. For a moment I simply stare at the side of his face. The dark caramel tan that evenly coats his flesh is set off by the brightness in his jewel blue eyes. Thick, dark lashes fan out beneath his brow, much longer than should be considered fair any man to have. The punch of his jawline is barely hidden behind the scruff of his beard. A beard that is the exact same medium shade of brown as his hair. Like a mingle of butterscotch curls and chocolate, the locks look so soft that I'm dying to run my fingers through them. He is gorgeous even with half of his face covered and for a moment I wonder what he looks like behind all that fuzz.

Tearing my eyes away, my gaze rushes over the winding tattoos that twist up his forearms to disappear beneath his shirt. Peeking out once again along his collarbone and up the back of his neck. I am dying to see the rest of it. I want to know how dark his tattoos are beneath his shirt. What do they represent? What do they mean? Do they stand for something special? Someone special?

I want to

actually know him.

If I hadn't been in danger when we met, would he have even noticed me? Probably not. But I would have noticed him anywhere.

There is no denying it now. I am one hundred and fifty percent crushing on this handsome hero that's holding me. The way it feels to have his strong arms banded around me is bewitching. I can almost pretend that we're a couple. That we're not just simply sexy, tattooed God and boring, average Rose - but we're a unit. A pairing. A man and his woman on their way to the docks.

God, wouldn'tE

I that

be nice.

Stop being such a dork, Rose.

Pretending? Really? You are eighteen.

And a virgin

I doubt that Bartlett would want me sitting here if he knew just how inexperienced I am. It's not just the virgin thing. It's way worse than that. I've never even been kissed or asked on a date or given a valentine or done anything romantic, ever. Never.

As my nerves begin to crawl down from my thoughts, my body tenses and I'm suddenly worried that I may be crushing him beneath my enormous weight. Okay, so I'm not that big, but I'm thicker than most. I've definitely been labeled a fatass a time or two. As the truck rumbles down the hill, the wide expanse of the ocean is revealed and I try to make out any islands that might be out there, but I can't see past the quickly thickening fog. We're close now, I can see boats bobbing on the water and- my God... What is he doing?

My heart stutters as a warm demanding hand splits my thighs, massaging and stroking me over my jeans. It's Bartlett's hand, I'm sure, it couldn't be anyone else's and I'm too much of a chicken to even look at him. Instead, I simply sit there like a frigid old bird. Or a dead bird, take your pick. Shame washes over me as I realize how stupid I must look pretending that I don't know that he's touching me.

In the dark of the cab, with the black suede seating and limo tinted windows, I should feel a bit braver. I should at least have the courage to acknowledge him. But I don't. My breath freezes in my chest, my lungs tightening as I'm suddenly too anxious to breathe. As my cheeks flush hot and my brow begins to sweat, I wonder how long it will take for me to pass out from lack of oxygen.

But then... Bartlett's fingers trace the outline of my slit over the denim of my jeans and air whooshes into my chest as I gasp. A whimper escapes me, my clit pulsing. Beating with enough vigor to have a heartbeat of its very own. Oh my God that feels so good. Much better than when I do it to myself. He isn't even doing much more than tracing the seam of my pants at the center of my mound, but somehow it's enough.

1/3

Fri, Nov

Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Nine

Thirty-Ning

Nevermind, it's not enough. With every light stroke of his hand he devastates n me, because now I'm starving for more.

My hand claws at his wrist and I hear him inhale sharply before he reaches over to peel my offending fingers from his flesh. Shit, my bad.

"S-sorry," I whisper sheepishly, lowering my head so that my hair falls over my face like a curtain, hiding me from his eyes

not sure, but I think I hear him growl and I realize for the first time that he never released my hand. Instead, he guides it toward him, drawing it down to his lap boldly and placing it over the front zipper of his jeans. Something thick and as hard as steel pushes against my palm. As he attempts to close my hand around it, I realize what it is. The tip of his erection and... my God, are they really that big?

s to a

His fingers between my thighs press harder against my clit and I tremble, my legs separating wantonly as the truck suddenly comes stop. That was quick. Are we there already?

My answer comes when someone dips his nose into my hair and I feel his lips along my ear. Bartlett's voice is dark and husky when he

speaks, "We're here Princess. Now remember what I said before. You are to do every little thing I say. Got it?"

My chest heaves and his hand between my thighs squeezes my sex one last time before he releases me to open the back door and step out of the truck. The sky is a dying gray as the sunlight dissipates over the horizon, but somehow it doesn't seem gloomy. Maybe it's the fact that I'm about to head out onto the ocean with my real life knight in shining armor or maybe it's just the atmosphere of this place. I've never been out on a boat before and I'm completely unfamiliar with this town. We're not in Blackjack, that much is clear. We must be further north. As I step out of the truck I glance to the right to spy an entire row of houseboats alight with laughter and love. The clink of wine glasses and the soft warble of music caresses the air around us. The unfamiliar cacophony of engines heading out and coming in, a surprisingly pleasing sound as I spin around in wonder.

I like this place. It's... different.

For a moment guilt rides over me. Stomping my good mood into the ground as I stand there alive, well, and ready for adventure. While Bartlett is talking to Charlie-another little surprise I wasn't expecting - I step toward the wharf. Toward the boats and the people, all careless and carefree as they either hop in their cars to leave or disappear in their watercraft.

What would Rosen say if he knew what I was about to do?

I snort. He'd probably say "Thank God. Although he helped me get recognized by the Elder Few, he never wanted that life for me I'm the one who wanted it. I'm the one who loved to hunt. Rosen had never gotten over the way they made him kill Piper, his

Golden Retriever. A pet he'd had from the time he was small. It's my belief that he only did it because we'd just gotten the news that she had cancer. She was going to die anyway and she was already suffering. It was a mercy, really. My case was different. Melody was only two years old and slept with me almost every night. When they told me that I was going to have to hunt her, kill her, my beautiful and loving Siamese Cat, I did something terrible. I went to the pound and found a look-alike. A poor unsuspecting creature that was fooled into thinking she'd just been adopted. On the day of my trials, that cat, which I decided to call Milady, drew her very last breath on her second day of freedom, the very moment I lifted my rifle.

Something tells me that I'll be paying for that little trick before they let me to heaven.

I've sacrificed so much to be one of them. One of the Elder Few. It was my dream. My father's legacy-And here I am just giving it all up. Running away like a coward.

I should be screaming, or raging right about now. If it's true what Bartlett says and my friends really haven't been found in all this time, then they probably never will be. I should be out there looking for them or out there hunting that bitch of a lion, but what am I doing instead? Heading to an island with the sexiest man I've ever laid eyes on to lay low. How utterly selfish of me.

That realization is like a knife to the gut.

"I have to go back," I say to myself. "I have to go home and face the music. It's the right thing to do."

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

[1,773 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Forty

ROSE

Tad Bartlett let me go if I tell him I want to go home?

Footsteps sound behind me and somehow I just know it's Bartlett. My face heats and for a moment I wonder if he's going

going to hold my hand or something. The thought is more than a little exhilarating. Grow up Rose. Really? Hold hands? Rolling my

my eyes at myself, I take a couple deep breaths and try to look cool. I don't even get to turn around before I'm being whisked back into his arms,

Okay. So I go back later. I want to spend a little time getting to know Bartlett.

He's cradling me again - bridal style - but this time there is something different in his eyes. Something is off about him. He looks disappointed as he stares down at me. Almost... angry.

I immediately retreat into my shell. All my earlier excitement fizzling out with the glacial cold of his eyes.

He studies me quietly while walking us toward the end of the docks where a mini yacht and a speedboat bob side by side. He says nothing to me as he places me on my feet and makes his way toward the yacht.

My eyes widen when I realize this is the one that we'll be riding. "Are we taking this?" I ask, my voice full of wonder.

He doesn't answer me for some reason and I instantly feel a little less excited. Now this makes more sense. This is the kind of treatment that I'm used to. But even so, I can't stop the burn that fires across my chest, nor the tears that fill my eyes.

I did hope things might be different this time around.

"Hey B, are you heading out?" A voice sounds at my back. I'm still standing on the wharf, but Bartlett is inside of the yacht lowering the ladder.

Bartlett's eyes rove over me. Worry taking over his features as he spies whomever it is that must be behind me. When I spin around, I understand why and my entire body goes cold.

It's one of the Sheriff's Deputies. Oh my fucken goodness.

The man's cinnamon brown eyes lock on me for a cool minute, the spiral curls of his ash brown hair wavering in the breeze coming off the ocean. A slow smile curves his lips upward as he appraises me from head to toe. "Well, hello there gorgeous. Who might you be?" "She's my girl," Bartlett says, leaping over the side of the yacht and bypassing the stairs altogether. The wood planks beneath my feet shudder and quake when he lands next to me and I tumble into his side, my face already red hot just from what he told the deputy. His lie should please but it doesn't. Because, as good as it is to hear something like that come out of his mouth - it will never be the truth and suddenly it is all that I want. To be his.

My head is suddenly swimming, my vision dizzy with desire as my eyes fall on him. Tilting my head upward, I meet his eyes. My lips purse in disappointment, my chest

heaving erratically at the boldness of his. He's just fixed us with that statement. Grabbing me by both of my shoulders, Bartlett says, "Head on up, Princess. I'll just be a moment."

I nod gratefully, spinning around without giving the cop even a second glance. Okay, so maybe I'm not ready to bite the bullet quite yet.

Once I'm up the stairs and on the yacht, I'm feeling like a girl that just barely managed to escape the fire. Walking gingerly toward the helm, I peek down at the wharf to watch the pair of them talking. They seem to know each other quite well, laughing and whispering as I 1/3

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty

look over the railing. At first, I could swear that they don't notice me. That they are oblivious to my standing here spying on them, but when the Deputy steps back to leave, he shoots a quick smile my way, then tosses me a wink.

My eyebrows furrow in apprehension, but he doesn't wait for me to respond before turning back toward the parking lot in what seems to be no particular hurry. I watch him until he is in his squad car and backing toward the road beyond the docks. I don't even notice Bartlett has boarded until he speaks to me.

"You see something you like down there?" he asks, his tone clipped.

My body jerks backward in surprise, his sudden presence snapping me to attention and causing me to yelp with fear. Turning around to face him, I find that he is already directly behind me and I shove backward futilely, not gaining even an inch of distance with the railing at my back.

"You scared me, I admit shakily.

"Yeah? I'll just bet I did," he snarls, stepping back as his handsome face twists up in a sneer. He shakes his head, his eyes lowering toward the deck. "His name is Timmons. Just in case you were wondering." Cocking an eyebrow I wander toward him, watching the drag of his eyes as they stroke up my body with something like reluctant heat. "Did he ask about me?? I inquire softly, biting my bottom lip nervously. Bartlett suddenly scowls, raising his gaze

gaze from my breasts to my face. You damn fucking well know he did. You were standing

"Oh! No... I meant, afterward. When I came up here, I saw you both talking like old friends and I was just curious-"

right there."

"Yes, we are old friends and yes, unfortunately, he is single," Bartlett shops, turning away to pull the lever that controls the steps th barreling away from me toward what I can only assume is the engine room.

I snort in disbelief is he angry with me? Is he... jealous? No... no way. You have got to be kidding me. "I don't care if he's single," Ihiss, following him. "That is not what I was asking! I care about whether or not he recognized me. Your said there was a warrant out for my arrest. I just wanted to know if I should worry about him coming after me."

Bartlett freezes with one hand on the controls and the other on the keys. "Right," he sighs. "I forgot about that part for a second."

Forgot about that part? But that's the entire reason you snatched me from the hospital! Isn't it?

"Okay..." I say softly. "So then, since you forgot, I'm going to assume the answer is no. He didn't recognize me."

Bartlett pushes a button next to the key to start the engines and then jerks a lover toward him so roughly that I go careening backward and toward the ground with my eyes closed and a scream of surprise on my lips. Once again - before my ass can even touch the ground- he manages to snatch me to safety. Locking his hand over one arm of mine, Bartlett snaps my body forward, releasing me just in time for my body to go stumbling into his chest.

Oh...my...yummy.

My hands shoot out to steady myself and I end up grabbing his enormous biceps, dropping my hands downward my nails go into the hard marble of his deliciously flexed forearms and my breasts press roughly against his solid torso. "S-sorry," I stutter, as I begin to pull away.

Closing his hands over my backside before I can garner so much as an inch of space between us, he stops me. I can feel his fingers tighten on my ass cheeks like a brand and I can't stop the rush of liquid that pools at my core, nor do I want to. What I want... is for him to touch me again.. the way he touched me in the back of his truck, Just the memory of it heats my body so intensely that I release a breathy

moan.

The moment he hears it, his sapphire eyes sparkle, the pupils expanding impossibly as his gaze wanders over my face. "So that's why you

Chapter Two Hundred Forty

watched him walk all the way to his car? That's why you waited for him to leave? Because you were afraid?"

I nod and his eyes flare bright with approval, his hands on my ass now growing harder as they grope and massage beneath the clefts.

Pushing past my insecurities has never been an easy thing for me to do, so this time I remind myself of how good it feels when he touches me. This time, I tell myself that he wouldn't be touching me if he didn't want to, and I force my hands to glide up the skin of his forearms, lowering my lashes just enough to shield me from the intimidation of his gaze.

"Why did you tell him, your old friend, that I was your girl?" I ask carefully. This is the type of question that has the potential to shatter my confidence completely and I probably should have started a bit lighter, but I truly want to know.

ms to travel over his rock hard pectorals, "Because... that's what I want

He shudders against me as my hands leave his arms to whisper, looking almost embarrassed.

you to be," he

My body trembles against his as his hands raise to stroke up and down my back, sealing me against him as the sun completely disappears from the sky. I would hear him say those words over and over again if I could, but just now I'm realizing just how much trouble I'm about

to be in.

Because I want this man. Sooo much and when I return home I won't be allowed to have him. The Elder Few won't let me..

Once upon a time I would have settled for being anyone's girl, but now that I've met Bartlett, I understand the wisdom behind asking young ladies to wait until marriage. Not because they will be considered loose or will be branded as whores... but because every female should have that something special to share with the man they desire most. The one thing that might set them apart, portraying them as a cut above the rest.

Then again, men these days often prefer women with more experience, hope Bartlett isn't one of them... because I want to give myself to

him.

And I know it's immature and lame. I realize any possibility of a relationship between us is unrealistic and that he is way out of my league, but ever since the first time his lips touched mine out at the He is my hero.

campsite when he gave me CPR - I have only dreamt of him.

He is everything

And I want him to know that before I have to go.

Chapter Comments

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[1,759 words]

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The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-One BARTLETT

God, she is so beautiful. The longer I spend around her the more power our connection is becoming. At least on my end.

It's a shame, the twelve of us never really had a chance to learn what we should and should not expect after finding our mates. In a perfect world, our mothers would have prepared us for the mate bond by sharing their own experiences with us. Sadly, their lives were cut short and our fathers were too devastated by loss to remember anything beyond their own pain. At the time, none of us planned to accept our mates regardless of whether we found them or not. As a result, we never learned about them. None of us ever thought to concern ourselves with the truth. Nor did we give any thought as to how difficult it might be to reject them.

When Domonic and Draven met, you could almost feel it crackling in the air. Their connection was powerful and unanticipated. Draven took all of us by surprise. In a way... it was like we were ambushed. It's much easier to refuse your mate when her beauty isn't staring you in the face and her scent isn't leading you around by the balls. There was never any doubt in my mind that Draven was going to become part of us. She was exactly the quick-witted, compassionate drop dead gorgeous kind of female that our pack needed to flip Domonic's world around and right all the wrongs of our troubled past.

She fixed everything.

When I sent Rose inside to set the table for dinner I watched her butt jiggle the entire way. Hers has got to be the roundest, most perfectly shaped ass that has ever been created and I'm dying to bite into it. I want to fucking mark her creamy bouncing globes with my fangs and my cock. In fact, I'd like to have her wear my kiss absolutely everywhere so that no matter where she goes or what she does, she be completely drenched in my scent. Ownership will never be an issue and never be questioned.

Questioned the way it was almost an hour ago when Timmons appeared out of nowhere just to give me a hard time. He knows she's my mate! He's seen her asleep in Quinn's bed. If that weren't enough, i know he's seen my mark on her neck. I know he's fully aware of how careful I'm trying to be with her. Yet, I heard him when he first walked up. I heard what he said to her and despite that his excuse was in favor of keeping her calm, I'm also aware of the fact that Timmons never says anything that he doesn't mean. Shake it off Bartlett. He's your brother. He would never even dream of going after your mate.

This jealousy that has suddenly found me is incredibly brutal and furiously strong. Never have I experienced such a violent surge of possessiveness like Rose invokes in me. Not even when I was dating Kendall, who I wholeheartedly thought I was in love with for a time. mean, I guess I could have been but if I was then regular, average love doesn't so much as compare to the emotional, undivided, undeniable, vehement, unconditional passion that is found between mates.

Kendall was a very beautiful woman and I was fine being with her until things started to get too serious. When she started hinting that she wanted more and suggested she move into my place, I finally realized it needed to end. The woman was a great find and we had a good time together, but somewhere in my heart I was holding out for my mate.

Despite the rules my brothers and I agreed upon, I remained hopeful that she might show up one day. Even the fact that I couldn't accept her wouldn't have mattered to me. I didn't want 'said mate' to find me married to a woman that was not her, nor did I want to meet my mate while I was tied to a woman that I would eventually decide to leave. Betraying my mate in that way, even if the girl in question never found out she was mine, would have been something that I could never have gotten over. Because for wolves, a mate is meant to be a sacred part of you. She is your softness and your joy.

Your patience and your kindness. She is everything that you never seem to find in anybody else. And, as it seems, in my my very hard and very heavy, extremely swollen and painfully choked, blue balls striped with the teeth of my zipper case I would have met Rose, saved her life, placed my lips on hers to share my air and then walked away with a regretful heart that would never, ever be whole again.

Now that I have found her, my mate, all I can do is thank the heavens above, that things for my brothers and me have changed. Draven made sure of that. My little bartender waltzed into this town and barged into our lives, shaking the tree at its roots and changing the landscape forever.

I stopped dating Kendall only about a month before the morning that Draven popped into my bar and thank God for that month, because the busted windshields and crazy drunk phone calls that seemed to be waiting on standby every time I walked into work would most certainly have had an affect on my sweet, voluptuous, slightly insecure, adoringly, adorable, Princess Rose. I can tell that she doesn't quite

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-One

trust me yet, but that's okay too. So long as she never refuses my touch and to be honest, I don't think that she ever will. My girl loves it when my hands are on her. I can tell. Smiling to myself as I set the auto-pilot on a fairly gentle course to the waters of Red Wolf, I turn around and head for the main cabin.

Stepping inside I find Rose sitting quietly at the dining table. Two plates are set out in front of her with all the food that Charlie made for us neatly divided into two portions. Smiling, I note that my portion is significantly bigger than hers and my chest warms in the strangest way. She's the one who hasn't eaten in over twenty-four hours and she actually seeks to make sure I have enough to satisfy my hunger. Not only that, but she hasn't so much as taken a bite despite that she has to be starving.

"Bring all that over here," I suggest throatily, taking a seat on the sofa next to the bar and purposefully taking up enough space to force her onto my lap.

When her eyes find me, they grow heavy, stumbling over my person as she tentatively places both plates on the coffee table at my knees.

Biting her lip, she surveys the space that I've left for her and then cocks an eyebrow. "Um... where am I supposed to-"

I cut her off by snatching her wrist and yanking her forward until she stands between my knees. My legs are spread wide open and I know without looking that my dick is a heavy denim outline with the potential to steer the yacht should I decide to drop anchor. Rose stands before me heaving, her perfect breasts at my eye level as I stroke my hands up

over her legs to her rear and contemplate the possibility of tasting them before I taste my supper. My gaze catches on the swing of her thick brown mane as it shimmers behind her, scattered against the light. Fucking hell her hair is long. Shit.

For a second I picture her naked and riding me cowgirl style, with her hair pouring around her like some kind of faery magic and then onto my chest where it would spilt across me, giving me something to grab onto, something to tie myself to.... With a groan, I slam my eyes shut and spin her around, forcing her to sit between my legs on the sofa. This puts her ass flush against my insurmountable arousal and I know she can feel it because she wiggles against me, pushing back just enough to punish my heat. Just the scent of her has my dick straining even more painfully into my jeans and for a second I don't know where I am.

Sweet Jesus, I love the smell of her.

"Princess," I whisper, closing my hands over the tops of her legs and dipping my head toward the side of her neck. "Please eat something.., quickly. I'm begging you."

She chuckles softly at that last part, and the sound is like chimes of music designed to draw me into her spell. "Do you want me to feed you?" What? Oh yeah I do. Fuck yeah I do.

"You better not," I answer huskily, reaching between us for a moment to adjust my pants. "I'm already in danger of driving my dick through your back."

To my surprise she bursts into a fit of giggles, which although absolutely charming, jostles the round globes of her ass enticingly against my Rose worshipping parts, I find myself smiling against her neck, breathing her in as she continues to laugh in my arms. My biceps close around her, hugging her to me for a moment of purely satisfied comfort that has nothing at all to do with the lust that I feel,

Fuck. I really want you, baby. I've needed you for so damn long.

"Let's eat," I rasp into her ear and she stiffens, turning her face just enough for me to get an eyeful of her plump, moist lips.

"Yes sir," she murmurs and I swear I might explode into my jeans.

The next few minutes are filled with relaxing silence as the two of us devour Charlie's delicious steak sandwiches and homemade macaroni salad. Reaching toward the bar without getting up because I'd rather die than leave the blissful warmth of our present position - I grab a bottle of semi-sweet slightly carbonated wine and twist off the cap, offering her the first drink.

She hesitates briefly, then takes the bottle from my hands and downs half of it straight to the head.

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-One

Whoa now, Princess. Slow down," I coo, on the end of a chuckle.

She grins, turning to the side just enough for me to lock on her perfect yum." Her eyes shutter and the next question that comes out of her m

kiss?

Huh? What?

Chapter Comments

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

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Two

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Two

for it! Not Delilah? Seriously? Wu think Delilah is beautiful and that are not? Is that what you're saying to me?"

She nods, probably a little afraid to speak at this point. "Of course... I know

"You know nothing!" I spit, snatching her body back against mine so swiftly that she shrieks in surprise. This time I turn her so that her deliciously long legs go up on the couch and over my right leg. I stare down at her, moaning inwardly at the way it feels when her silken hair falls over my left arm. "You need to understand something, Princess Delilah may be kinda cute and her sassy, flirty, little mouth might have gotten her a lot of attention back in your old high school, but..." I shake my head at her in wonder, my lips turning up in a half smile. "That's all she is. And she does absolutely nothing for me." My head lowers slightly and I pull her in a bit closer, shifting my hips into her so that she can feel the strength of my words in the hardness of my dick. She gasps, her eyelids fluttering as a low fire begins to burn in her eyes. "You though," I start, my voice coming out husky and dark, "you've had my attention from the moment I saw you at that campsite. Even when you were wearing all those layers of clothing-she blushes and I smirk-"and I thought you were quite a bit thicker than you actually are. My eyes just couldn't move past you. I knew right then that I would do anything to protect you. I'd never seen anyone with more sparkling beauty than you." My voice lowers to just a breath above a whisper as I pull her body in deeper, smashing her against my chest and torso by closing my arms around her the way I've been wanting to. "Even before I caught your scent and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that you were mine... I wanted y

you

I don't know if she realizes what I've just revealed to her or not, but if she does, it doesn't register and her hand comes up, her fingers sifting through my beard. "You wanted me?" she asks. "You saw me before the attack?"

I nod, closing my eyes and pressing the side of my face into the warm flesh of her hand. "Fuck yes, baby," I reply. "And you have no idea what it does to me to hear that I get to be your first..." I trail off, opening my eyes to study her face. I know all she asked for was a kiss, but I need her to see my meaning in my eyes. "It makes you even more mine than you already were."

She sucks in a sharp breath, biting her lip the way that I love her to, before she looks away nervously. She is so pure and so innocent, Holy shit. I never asked how old she is, but I'm not even sure I care at this point. Fuck. What if she's like seventeen? The thought is more than a bit sobering, but not enough that I move away from her. But no, wait a minute. Doc Rhodes told me she was eighteen and there's no way he would have lied about that. "How old are you, Rose?" I ask, stroking one hand over her legs toward her rear and reveling in the feel of her rounded hips against my palm.

She laughs anxiously. "I'll be nineteen in two months," she admits somewhat embarrassed, before the last of the wine she drank glazes her eyes and her gaze darkens. "How old are you?" she asks bravely, reaching up with one arm to grab my shoulder as she tilts her chin toward my face, placing her incredibly kissable lips mere inches from my own. I feel her warm hand slide possessively over the back of my neck beneath my curls and I shudder, groaning when her nails scratch into my flesh.

"Twenty-three," I growl, peering down at her face just in time to see her pink tongue dart out against her lips. My hand slides over the front of her stomach to rest just beneath her heaving bosom and my nose traces over her cheekbone causing her entire body to shiver with pleasure.

I'm going to kiss her. I wanted to wait until she knew what I was... but if I don't kiss her now I am going

to die.

"Bartlett," she whimpers, making it sound more like a prayer than a name.

"I know Princess," I say softly, watching her eyes as I urge her closer. "Can you promise me something?" I ask, stifling a groan as she shifts against me and her boobs push against my chest. "What is it?" she whispers.

I stare at her, watching the flare of her eyes as I battle with my demons. "Promise me that no matter what... you'll never reject me."

She flinches, her eyes glowing with surprise before they seal on my lips. I couldn't. I wouldn't. Why would I-

Just promise me," I hiss, begging.

She wets her lips, her elegant tongue dancing lazily across her mouth in a move that has me groaning out loud. "I promise," she says, and I believe her. 2/3

[1,644 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Three ROSE

My heart is thumping in my chest as he gazes down at me. I want him kiss me sooo badly that I'm wondering if maybe I should be the one to make the first move.

"Bartlett," I beg him, pushing myself more urgently against him and causing the molten lava of my sex to drown my core.

His sapphire eyes glitter and I bite my lip. I love the way he stares at me Like I'm a prize that he never thought he was capable of winning.

"I know Princess," he murmurs, finally dipping in a bit closer and drenching me in the heady scent of his cologne. Kiss me, Bartlett! Please! "Can you promise me something?" he asks suddenly, as he shifts against me and the hard rippling muscles of his arms go taut against my back. Fuck. I want him naked. I want to see that part of him that I can feel pulsating against my hips.

"What is it?" I whisper as the sound of my heart beating pounds in my ears and echoes within my chest.

"Promise me that no matter what... you'll never reject me." He says it almost sadly and for a moment I wonder what about him would ever make him think that I would ever want to.

You should promise never to reject ME!!!! I almost laugh at his request. He has got to be kidding, right? "I couldn't. I wouldn't. Why would

"Just promise me," he moans out, pleading.

Licking my lips, my eyes lower from his eyes to his mouth. The wine courses through me, bubbling into my resolve and making my decision for me as I contemplate how best to seduce this man. "I promise," I whisper, before I hoist myself upward with my hands on both of his shoulders and bring my face level to his.

He gasps in surprise at the surge in my movement, opening his mouth to voice something that I don't give him a chance to pronounce. As the first hint of a sound dances past his lips, I groan in frustration, snatching the back of his head in my hands before I push upward. Using him as leverage, I seize control.

My lips press into his, hot and moist and hungrier than I can ever remember them feeling in my entire life. Sparks blaze across my flesh at the first touch of my mouth to his and I won't ever forget the feeling for as long as I live. It's better than I imagined, igniting an explosion of sensations in places no one else can touch.

He's surprised, that's for sure, and he freezes, his entire body going completely still while my own goes wild against him.

I press harder, the scruff of his beard scratching my chin as I push on. Drowning my self doubt with the wine in my bloodstream, I tell myself, fuck this, if he won't do something then I will, and I shoot up onto my knees between his legs so that I am now a head taller than he is and panting with lust when I gaze down into his eyes.

"Princess," he hisses, his eyes dropping toward my cleavage that is now directly beneath his chin. "Holy fuck," he growls, his hands reaching up to grasp the backs of my thighs while his gaze remains locked on my chest.

As I lean down to catch him in another kiss, he shocks me. Lifting my legs up and separating them so swiftly that I nearly fall backward and onto the floor. Then, he closes his own and slams my ass down on his lap, his hand stroking over my rear and grasping my cheeks in a punishing grip. I'm straddling him now and he jerks my hips forward with a snarl, pushing his erection into my heat on the outside of the jeans.

"Oh," I whimper as shockwaves of pleasure riot throughout my body. "Bartlett," I cry out, biting my lip when one hand closes around the top of my breast and I wriggle against him wantonly.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Three

So fucking perfect, he growls, pinching my nipples through my sweater and causing my head to fall back and my chest to rock forward *so hot and soft and all mine.

The heat of his hands sild beneath the back of my sweater and up my naked spine making me tremble and gate against him. A bra being the one thing Delilah did not provide for me, I have to man when the buds of my nipples tighten and erect, scraping against the fabric of my sweater:

Straightening my neck so that I can finish that kiss, I catch a glimpse of myself in the reflection of his eyes and a new form of confidence takes hold of me. The image of me in his pupils is wild and breathless and dare I say... even gorgeous. The girl in his eyes, thes rná awkward or clumsy, she's exotic and passionate, with hair that drapes over her curves and lips that beg to be kissed. Is that how he sees me? Is that what I look like to him?

The sudden feel of Bartlett's warm hands groping the flesh of my breasts has me falling forward with a moan. My head hits his shoulder and I watch lazily as his hands knead my mounds behind the shirt,

"Fuck Princess," Bartlett chokes out. "I want these in my mouth. I want to bury my face in them and taste every inch. I'm going to suck on you everywhere. Mark you with my teeth until there's no more questioning it. Everyone will know that you belong to someone and if I have anything to say about it, they will know that you are mine."

The thick, hard length of him pressing against my core seems to beat against the denim of his jeans and I'm about to reach down and free him his torture when I feel his lips along my neck.

"Ahh," I moan, as Bartlett sucks viciously.

Is beard scratches my throat, but only adds to the crippling pleasure his mouth is giving me. Locking his hands on the back of my ass again and he begins to rock me against him. Grinding me downward in a punishing rhythm that I can't help but latch onto. My hips buck and rotate, winding feverishly against him as I chase the pleasurable twisting that ricochets throughout my sex "Bartlett, please," I whimper, dragging my mouth across the side of his jaw and leaving sloppy kisses anywhere my lips touch.

"My baby," he rasps huskily, releasing my throat to turn his face into mine.

Finally... His tongue plunges into my mouth, searching and tasting... exploring every corner behind my lips. A crackling of electric energy vibrates across my lips and I suck his bottom lip into my mouth, teasing the flesh with the tip of my tongue as I moan in ecstasy. He groans with satisfaction, guiding my hips into a frantic pace. The friction between us charging our kiss as my core tightens and my hips begin to jerk with the beginnings of my climax.

Bartlett's chest is heaving and he pulls away just slightly, just enough to speak into my mouth. "That's it baby," he whispers, "take it. Come for me. Explode like you did in the shower. Like I did that night I first carried you inside. I wanted to fuck you so bad that night. I laid you down and stroked my hands over your body... Kissed your throat and your shoulders... Fuck, how I wanted you. It was torture having you beneath me and not being able to bury myself in your heat. I had to force myself away from you or I would have done it. I would have fucked you right there without you even knowing it was me. That is how beautiful you are. That is how you own me."

The fact that he just described my fantasy of him. The one that played in my head while I made myself cum in the shower, is not lost on me and has me moaning so loudly that I almost don't hear it at first. The howling. When I do, I'm torn between earth shattering pleasure and giving in to a new and sudden fear. A fear I never knew I might have. As it sounds again, I freeze, my body seizing up.

"What is it baby?" Bartlett moans, still kissing my lips as if he doesn't possess the ability to stop. "Why did you stop?"

"Wolves," I whisper. The tremble in my voice is troubling for me as I've never been afraid of them before, but for some reason, now... I am.

"Wolves?" He repeats, thrusting upward against my sex as if he's hardly even listening to me.

"Wolves," I say again, and that's when I realize what is so frightening about these wolves. Almost as if on cue, I hear it again, the howling. But this time around it's closer and Bartlett finally seems to understand what has my body as still as death. "Why would there be wolves

out here on the ocean?"

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Three

Bartlett sighs heavily, his hands gliding up and down my back soothingly. They're not on the not exactly on the ocean.

"What does that mean?" I ask, curious.

ean, he informs me, then winces.

He studies me carefully. "They're on the island. Not the ocean."

"Oh," I say, relieved. Duh Rose. Really? But wait... "Wait a minute. Which island are they on?"

His eyes darken with worry and he places a sexy kiss under my jaw. "They're on Red Wolf Island."

"Oh," I say softly. "Which island are we headed to?"

Maybe I shouldn't have asked because the moment I do is when everything changes. He stands so abruptly that I nearly fall off the couch and onto the floor, but he catches it and apologizes before he says, "The same one. Chapter Comments

KKN

dayum this is so addicting

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[1,096 words]

3/3

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Four ROSE

"Th-the same one?" I stammer, my heart pounding erratically for a completely different reason now. Jumping to my feet and gazing outside, I see trees on a rocky shore, much like the scene from my dream and I begin to feel lightheaded. "Oh my God..."

Bartlett is staring at me oddly and I realize for the first time how difficult it is to read his features because of his beard. The mark on my neck pulses for a moment and my hand goes up automatically to rub at it. I'd almost forgotten about all the questions I needed to ask. Questions about how long I was in a coma and what happened with my injuries.

"What are you afraid of, Rose? Do you have a problem with wolves?" Bartlett asks, his voice somewhat strained.

My eyes find his and I rub the mark again when another wolf's cry wrenches the air. "I-I don't know," I answer honestly. Then I study him, thinking of the things he said to me before we kissed. At the time they didn't strike me as any more than passionate, but... I suppose some of it was a little odd. 'Even before I caught your scent and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that you were mine... I wanted you.

A strange thing to say if you think about it. Very strange actually. Reminds me of something we were taught by Elder Roman during training, but I can't remember what it was.

Almost as if he can feel my confusion and my fear, he steps forward and tips my chin up with his finger. He says softly, "I told you would protect you, didn't I?"

His touch and the sincerity of his eyes it does something to me. Warms me from the inside out. But even so... I don't want to camp somewhere there are wolves roaming around. "Are we staying on the yacht?" I ask.

A muscle in his jaw ticks and he licks his lips, his gaze going hot for a moment before he says, "No. My brothers and I have a house on this island."

"You have a house on an island of wolves?" I squawk. "How many brothers do you have?"

He chuckles, "Yes, we have a house here and they're not really my brothers - but then again, they are."

"How many?"

"There are twelve of us," he says softly.

Jesus. That's a lot of brothers that aren't really brothers.

"Are they here?" I ask, instantly feeling self-conscious. What if they don't like me?

He cocks an eyebrow, his face souring a bit. "Why? Are you interested in them?"

My back straightens, my brow furrowing, "What? No! Why would you even ask that? I've never even met them!"

Actually, you have. You just don't realize it yet."

I'm okay what does that mean? "Oh. Well, no, I'm not interested in anybody." When did I meet them? Since knowing Bartlett I don't think I've seen twelve people, let alone met them. "Nobody, huh? Well that's disappointing," he replies, pretending to be crestfallen.

My face beats as I gaze up at him, thinking of all that we were doing a few minutes ago. I can't help the stupid smile that stretches across

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Four

my face. "Except for... well, you know..." I roll my eyes.

"No. I don't know. Who?"

"You!" I snap, feeling stupid and lowering my head so that my hair hide my face,

He laughs. "I just wanted to hear you say it." He studies me as if trying to figure something out, then shakes his head. I hope you don't mind sharing a room with me."

My voice comes out high pitched and squeaky, "Will we be sharing a bed too? Guuuuhh! Did I have to sound so scared? Geez

"Is that a problem?"

"No! No! Absolutely not. I-I've just never um... you know, slept with... um... a-a man before." Cool your panties, Rose. You don't want to look like a child. I bite my lip nervously, thinking that all of my confidence from before must have evaporated with the moment.

He smiles, dragging a thumb upward to pluck my lip away from my teeth. "You have no idea what it does to me, when you do that, he says huskily as he begins dragging his thumb back and forth over my bottom lip. "I guess I can sleep on the floor if you want me to, but I'd much rather be next to you." His eyes are dark, the blue of the irises practically gone. "I want to finish what we started. But if you're not ready, then I'll understand." He releases my lip, staring at me like he wants to eat me.

My clit pulses, responding mindlessly to the insinuation in Bartlett's words. "I want to be with you," I whisper, stepping closer to him when another howl echoes beyond the water. My body tenses and I reach out to grab his arms as I gaze out the window. His muscles are hard, flexing beneath my fingers and drawing my eyes toward them for the thousandth time. "Are there a lot of wolves? Like... we will see them?"

He gazes down at my hands, his jaw going tight. "Don't be afraid of them," he says. "It's like I said - I'll protect you."

"Do you have a gun? Or a rifle? If you do I can-"

"No! What the fuck for?" he snaps, yelling. His burst of sudden anger has me stumbling back and away from him, my body trembling as I finally realize the man is a literal stranger. When he sees my reaction, his face is instantly contrite and he runs a hand through his curls as if exasperated. "I'm sorry, Rose. I didn't mean to yell at you. It's just..."

I shake my head, looking away as tears fill my eyes. My father loses his temper like that. A lot. I've always hated it. It scares me to death. When he finally gets his hands on me... after what we've done... Ted and Tommy and me and the rest... I might not be able to walk for a while he's going to beat me so badly. Thoughts of my father remind me of the predicament I'm in and I can't prevent the tears from falling now, when I could have before.

"Rose?" Bartlett's voice sounds behind a sea of tears. "Princess, don't cry. Please..." He steps up to me, but I raise my hands warding him

off. "Rose, I'm sorry!"

But I shake my head, burying my face in my hands for a moment so I can readjust myself. I don't know you! What the hell am I even doing here?

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Six BAYLE

"So let me get this straight, Gryffin says, staring at the kit in Glo's hands. "You want me to volunteer a couple pints of my blood so that you can save het mate, but you won't tell me why it will help and it don't matter what my blood type is."

"Come on Gryff! Please, I moan, exasperated. Dropping my head in my hands I begin to count backwards from twenty so that I'm not tempted to rip my hair out.

"Not exactly," Gio says. "The blood does matter, just not the type."

"Right," Gryffin replies and I can feel him watching me. He sighs and runs his hand through my hair to get my attention.

When I look up at him, I find his face full of concern, his golden brown eyes heavy with pain. Please don't say no.

"You're sure this whatever it is that you are doing - will work?" Gryffin asks.

"No," Gio says smoothly. "I refuse to guarantee anything. But I am pretty confident that it will."

"It will," I whisper, my eyes falling on Cane as I reach out to touch his beautifully bare chest. "He's getting hotter," I say, somewhat alarmed.

"Then we must do this now," Gio says, gesturing for Gryffin to have a seat next to Cane.

Gryffin scoffs, "I never said I was going to-"

"Oh for the love of God Gryffin! Please!" I snap, my claws forking out and my eyes going feral.

Gryffin practically jumps into the chair next to my bed and Gio begins to chuckle. "That's a neat little trick, Gio comments.

It's not a trick," Gryffin tells him. "My sister is batshit crazy."

"He's right," I say with a grin while I examine my razor sharp claws. "If he hadn't sat down just now I would have gotten the blood for you myself."

"I have no doubt," Gio chuckles, amused.

The next few minutes are spent with me hovering over the pair of them while Gio sticks both men with needles and tubes. It doesn't take very long. Gio appears to know exactly what he's doing and soon a steady flow of blood is traveling through the tubes and into Cane's arm. "How are we measuring this?" Gryffin asks quietly, turning in his seat to face Cane.

"We're not," Gio says, gazing at his watch. "We're timing it. Two pints should take only two minutes.

"And that's all he needs? You're sure?" I ask, sitting on the foot of my bed.

"I'm not sure about any of it," Gio mumbles, still staring at his watch. "But I know that without blood in his body, he will never make the change and the average shifter only needs two pints in him in order to heal naturally."

"But he's not a shifter," Gryffin remarks, confused.

Gio meets my gaze with a smirk and then calls time. Oh so carefully, Gio removes everything from Gryffin first before reaching for Cane's arm. He removes the needle and tube, then slides his fingers lower to rest over the pulse point on Cane's wrist. His brow furrows quizzically and then he turns toward me. "Perhaps I'm too old and unsteady. You do this," he tells me.

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Six

"Me? Do what exactly," I ask, practically shoving Gryffin out of his seat as I insert myself by Cane's side.

"Watch it, sis! Gryffin snarls, only half serious.

Gio smiles and takes my hand, placing it on Cane's wrist. At first I'm confused, I have no idea what I'm supposed to do and just as I open my mouth to say so, I feel it. His pulse. He has a pulse.

"Cane!" I sob, falling onto the ground next to my bed and kissing Cane's lukewarm wrist.

I can't help myself, I leap forward and place my ear to Cane's chest, listening intently to the slow, miraculous thud of his heartbeat. I don't know how long I remain that way, tears cascading from my eyes, but soon it is only Gio and me in my room. "You must mark him again. Once more," Gio says, reminding me of the forbidden ritual I have already begun.

"What will happen to him if I don't?" I can't help but ask. "Will he still wake up?"

Gio shrugs, but his face is doubtful. "I have no idea, but if all you wanted was for him to be human, we might have used a human blood donor that was a match in blood type and there would be no way to reverse the damage caused by the venom already. The only way to ensure he heals properly is to mark him again."

"Okay," I reply, gazing down at Cane's face and planting a kiss on his lips.

"I am going to step out now," Gio says as I turn Cane on his side so that I can access the back of his shoulder. "It is one thing to direct you, it's another to watch you. So long as there are no witnesses, nothing has been done."

I turn to face him, my eyes still brimming with tears. "Thank you Gio. I'll always be grateful for you."

He nods, granting me a small bow before exiting my room.

After a moment of thought, I lock the deadbolt and race back toward my bed. Remembering how tired I was after each marking, I decided to get into the bed with him. I stare at him for a moment, thinking I see his eyes twitching behind his eyelids. But that can't be. Right? The time is now, Gayle! What are you waiting for?

I whisper, "I can't wait to hear your voice again. Please come back to me."

Then I push my fangs out and with one final look at Cane's peaceful face, I sit up and bite the back of his shoulder.

The first thing I notice is his skin, it's a bit harder to pierce than it was the last two times. Not difficult by any means, but a little more resilient, as if his tissue has become a little tougher. My fangs throb with heat and it feels almost as if an electric current is passing through them. So much that I almost swear I see a spark. As the buzzing begins to slow and I grow weaker, I notice the pulsing of Cane's throat. It's almost as if I can see it, the venom and blood pounding through him. I slide one hand over it, at the base of his throat and I can feel it. His heart beating at a rapid rate.

I retract my fangs in alarm, wishing I had asked Gio what to expect before he left the room. He is a wolf shifter and I'm sure if I called his name, he would hear me, but my door is locked and I'm much too weak to get up and unlock it. In fact, as I contemplate calling for Taedora to climb in my window again, spots fill my vision and I sway in my seat. Before I even have a chance to turn Cane onto his back, pass out. Again.

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2

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Seven ROSE

It's been five minutes and in that time I've felt the yacht pick up speed and turn, then sway to the right and cruise. Now, we're safe still, Viell, basically, if you don't count the slight bob of the craft on the water, I hear Bartlett's footsteps on the deck then voices speaking in low hushed tones somewhere on the ground, but the howling has stopped. Almost as if by command.

Could they have trained wolves out here?

Like guard wolves?

They must be guard wolves of some kind. I mean, I doubt there is much game out here on this island. Then again, it might be bigger than I imagine it to be.

But if it was, wouldn't I have heard of it before?

I still hear the voices and after a moment more of heightened anticipation, I decide to face my fears, step out of the cabin and into the night. Creeping along the deck so slowly I begin to feel like that girl in the movie, I take in the surrounding trees and rocky cliffs. There is an enormous white house at the top of the hill. Modern and box like, three stories tall. Large glass windows for walls on every floor, most

that fan out of them shaded, some of them, bright with light. A thick curl of fog travels within the trees. Thick wisps of haunted breath over the pebbled shoreline.

As I scan the yacht, I realize I don't see Bartlett, so I make my way toward the voices then peer over the rail. He stands there with a beautiful woman garbed in nothing but a bathrobe. She has long, dark, curly hair and a seductive smile on her face as she speaks to him. Instant jealousy coils through me. Sliding into my gut with a venomous sting. They are standing much too close. She notices me first and stops talking, granting me a welcoming smile. I don't return it.

Bartlett says something to her that I can't hear and she nods before turning around and heading up a staircase of stone steps that must lead up to the house.

"Hey Princess," Bartlett says from the bottom of the ladder. "Come on down. The wolves are...put away."

One eyebrow shoots up quizzically. Put away? Really? So they are guard wolves then. That is the craziest thing I've ever heard and although I'm a hunter, it almost makes me sad. Wolves are wild, majestic creatures. They shouldn't be domesticated, or forced to watch over an island. And why not? So they could be hunted?

With a frown, I make my way down the ladder, eyeing the surrounding wharf the moment my feet hit the boards. The forest is dark and still, but the fog that moves through it gives it life, making it appear almost sinister. The black water that splashes along the rocky shore reminds me of the first part of my dream, the swim through miles and miles of ocean. There was an island there too. Once shrouded by

darkness that I simply could not get to.

Well. I'm here now.

Bartlett watches me carefully as I approach, I can see the wariness in his eyes, like he's afraid of something.

"Who was that woman?" I ask sharply, closing my arms around myself to rub the chill away.

Bartlett smiles down at me, forcing one of my hands into one of his own. "Her name is Sophia. She's just visiting here from Italy."

My jealousy grows when I realize she probably has one of those sexy Italian accents and when Bartlett tugs me toward the stone stairs I follow reluctantly.

"When is she leaving?" I grumble a little more waspishly than I mean to

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Seven

Bartlett chuckles, squeezing my hand in his as we make our way up the side of the hill. Not for a couple of weeks at least. Maybe not at

"Why not at all?" I ask before I can stop myself.

Maybe she's dating one of his friends or maybe she's dating all of them.

Kind of like a house mother or live-in who-

Stop it Rose! That's not fair.

"When her...boss returns to Italy in a couple of weeks, he may decide for her to stay and watch over his daughter."

"His daughter?" I ask, glancing through one of the large glass windows that isn't shaded. A modern floating staircase can be seen with glowing steps that appear to be lit from underneath. Does she live here too?" "Sometimes," Bartlett says easily, dragging me toward the front door and placing his hand on a panel along the wall.

Whoa. This place must have cost them a fortune.

"Sometimes..." I repeat. Kind of like at the compound. Sometimes we are made to sleep there in the barracks and sometimes we are allowed to go home/But when I get back, I have a feeling it will become my permanent residence. "Come on, Princess, Bartlett coos when the door pops open.

As we step inside we are greeted by the tummy grumbling smell of baked bread and I almost moan in pleasure, it is that good. The warmth in the room chases the chill away immediately and for the first time I realize, it's really not that late. We must only be about an hour or so ride away from the mainland.

The decor in the room is done in shades of gray, with teal blue track lighting that gives the place an almost futuristic vibe. The open floor/ plan allows me to see most of the space from the doorway, aside from the kitchen and what must be a bathroom. Voices sound around the wall and Bartlett tugs me in that direction.

"It has to cool first! Stop touching it? A tiny, pixie of a girl, with long shimmering blond hair is saying to an adorably handsome young man that looks nothing like her.

How many people live here? Jesus.

That's right, he said twelve brothers.

The boy turns the moment we step within view and he grins wide and proud when he looks at Bartlett.

'Bartlett! I made bread! Fresh bread! But Em says we can eat it yet. Did Koda come with you?" the boy asks, eyeing me suspiciously.

"He's not. He and the others have something really important they're handling tonight. But Draven and Gio should be back later tonight," Bartlett answers him, ruffling his hair.

The kid shakes his head and says, "I already told Draven, that Roman dude is not the one! They've got the wrong guy. It was a lady that started the fire. Not a man. I hope they're not going to kill him."

Bartlett stiffens, his hand tensing over mine and although I'm more than a little alarmed by what the kid said, I try not to show it.

Roman? As in Elder Roman?

way. Can't be,

2/

Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Seven

The blond girl in the kitchen seems to notice me for the first time and her dark onyx eyes widen almond manically. are you talking about? Didn't Sophia just talk to you about the fact that we have a guest?!?!* Ryder rolls his eyes, a smirk turning his lips. 'Yeah, I remember. So?

"So then, what are you doing kid?" the girl chuckles stepping out of the kitchen.

Ryder smiles up at her and whispers loudly, "I didn't give away our secret.

What secret? What?

"Okay I think it's time for a little talk," the girl says sharply. "Go upstairs, I'll see you in a minute."

"No! I don't want to! I want to get to know Bartlett's ma

"Hey!" Bartlett suddenly barks, dropping my hand to cover Ryder's mouth playfully. "You don't talk to your elders that way, remember? There will be plenty of time for you to get to know Rose later. I promise. Okay?"

Ryder nods, reluctantly, going completely quiet when Bartlett releases his mouth.

I stare at this kid with dark blue eyes and I suddenly feel like he may be my only ally in this place. A place that is seemingly full of secrets and set apart from the mainland. A place where they have wolves as guard dogs and little boys that speak of things like killings and fires.

What have I gotten myself into?

"This Roman, he wouldn't happen to be a hunter, would he?" I ask Bartlett.

The boy, Ryder, freezes on his way to the stairs as if he's going to turn around, but before he can, Blondie yells, "Upstairs, now! She huffi as Ryder finally trudges up the steps, then turns to me and smiles. "Hi! I'm Emily, Koda's fiance." "Hello Emily, I'm Rose," I say quietly, shaking her hand.

"Do you cook, Rose?" she asks me and I'm acutely aware of Bartlett's tantalizing gaze on me.

"I do, yes," I answer. Not well, but...details...

"Perfect! Would you mind listening for the timer and taking my roast out when it goes off? It will need to be basted. There are seasonin in a bowl of melted butter to the right-*

"Em!" Bartlett interrupts her and her mouth snaps shut. "I'll handle it. You handle that." He's obviously referring to the kid and I have to wonder what secret little Ryder was talking about.

"Right! Be back in a few," Emily says before disappearing up the stairs.

Bartlett turns to me, his blue eyes still wary. "Have a seat, Princess. I need a drink.

"What about the roast?" I ask, studded in place as I watch Bartlett saunter over to the bar in the corner and open a glass bottle of whi:

"We'll hear the timer from here. Sit down, Princess. Please," he says almost rudely and I bristle.

I watch him pour two glasses of amber liquid as I step into the posh living room and take a precarious seat at the end of the couch. Downing one glass somewhat purposefully, he pours another then heads my way. Here," he says, handing me one. "Drink it."

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Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Seven

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[1,560 words]

k: Rule Number 1 - No Mates Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Eight ROSE

Bartlett's jaw lightens and after a strung out moment of silence in which I've been holding my breath, he downs both glasses of liquor himself. Placing both tumblers on the coffee table in front of me, he plaps down next to me on the sofa.

Tell you about Roman, he repeats my request like it's a joke, even smiling when he looks at me. "Why do you care about Roman, Princess?"

My eyes narrow on him as I study his demeanor. Does he think I'm stupid? 'My family is a member of an Elite Hunting Club called the Elder Few. One of our instructors, one of the council members, his name is Roman and after what Delilah said at that house...about Cane...I'm curious, because Roman took Cane as his personal second. Most pledges are made to train with all the Elders. Cane was picked especially for exclusive training. If something happened to Cane, it's easy to assume something may have happened to Roman. So tell me about him. Tell me about this Roman that your brothers' are holding."

His eyes sparkle at me in the dim light, a lazy smile stretching across his lips. "An Elite Hunting Club, is that what you people call it?"

You people? What?

"Yes, I hiss. "That's what we call it."

He laughs, his hand going from his lap to the top of my thigh where he begins drawing little figure eights over the fabric of my jeans. I ignore the tremble of pleasure I get from it, keeping my face hard and guarded.

"You're done being a hunter, babygirl," he whispers, meeting my eyes. "I won't let you go back to that. I told you so in the hospital."

What is he talking about?

"You don't own me, Bartlett," I say carefully.

His hand freezes. "Oh no? Well, you definitely own me," he says so quietly I'm not sure he meant for me to hear. Taking a deep breath, he slides his hand in between my thighs and pushes it up against my jean clad slit. "I kidnapped you, remember? You're mine. I'll keep you here until you realize that if I have to."

He says it so matter-of-factly I start to wonder if he's serious. "You kidnapped me to keep me from being arrested," I remind him. "Or was that a lie?"

He studies me, stroking the press of his hand up and down my sex and causing me to wiggle despite my promising myself not to. It feels good, really good and before I know it my chest is heaving and my eyes are growing heavy.

"In the long run, yeah, that's true. I kidnapped you to protect you from being arrested, because your entire 'Club' is going down soon enough and if you're with them when they do..." he trails off, his gaze falling from my eyes to my lips. "And yes, you would have been arrested at the hospital when you woke up, so I took you. But in truth they wouldn't have kept you much longer than a day. Even with the felony charges."

"And why is that?" I ask him breathlessly, my legs falling open just a touch as his stroking becomes more insistent.

He leans toward me and I can smell the liquor on his breath, it's a heady masculine scent that has me feeling a bit dizzy. "Because I happen to be really good friends with the Sheriff," he says with a smirk.

Before I can respond, he stands and lifts my legs off the floor and onto the couch, stretching them across it and tugging me forward so that I'm basically laying down. Then he climbs over the top of me, drawing one muscular thigh forward to separate my legs as he settles above me, most of his weight is resting on his forearms, but the lower half of him is heavily pressed into me. As I pant for breath beneath him I can feel the urgent steel of his erection pushing into my thigh. My hips thrust upward reflexively and my hands go up to clutch his powerful chest. His shirt sticks to him like a second skin, so when I draw my hands downward over his abs I feel every inch of his ridges.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Forty Eight

He ginana, grinding homell ag**

Bartlett start, but he choses that moment to lose ba

His tongur pres deep, dancing with my mom as his chest

chest, my nails scraping gently the entire way. The feet of his naked stan are wantonly. Moisture erupts between my legs and I writhe against him as he lays more insistent.

One hand strokes down my shoulder to grope my breasts and I gap against his mouth, and his hand leaves my boobs to fumble with the button of my jeans.

"Bartlett," I murmur, turning away to catch some air as I feel the button of my pants come loose.

"Yes, baby?" he coos, his hot mouth over my ear where he begins to nibble and suck on my earlobe.

Anything I was going to say flies straight out of my head when his mouth travels lower, to suck on my neck and his hand dives into the front of my pants to stroke over my bare sex. My clit pulses and I moan, my hips jutting upward and into the heat of his fingers as they begin to strum my core.

"So perfect," he moans, nipping at the side of my neck. "So wet for me. My body goes slack as his fingers begin to circle my bud of pleasure and I can feel my orgasm rising within. "That's it baby, just relax. Let me give it to you."

But I don't want that. I want him just as insane as he's making me, so I draw one hand out of his shirt and close it over the top erection. He spasms against me, his hand on my sex suddenly closing over my slit as he hisses with pleasure.

The timer goes off in the kitchen and we both freeze, panting against each other like there aren't other people in the house.

He shudders above me, then whispers in my ear, "You stay right here just like this. I'm going to take care of that roast and then I'm taking you up to my room."

"Okay," I agree, with a bite of my swollen lip.

Then I watch him as he reluctantly lifts himself off of me and disappears into the kitchen. Bartlett is fast. It certainly doesn't take him long. Before I know it he's lifting me off of the couch and into his arms, then heading for a door on the second floor. The entire way he watches me, his eyes a glowing blue that almost seems unnatural. Once inside, he kicks the door shut and deposits me on a large, soft, king sized bed that is draped in a thick white goose feather comforter. The light in the room is bright until he dims it by turning the switch on the wall. Locking the door, he then turns around and leans back against it, staring at me with a hooded gaze.

I begin to feel nervous with him staring at me the way he is and I sit up against the headboard. "Bartlett, what are you thinking about?"

"You," he says huskily. "How much I want you. How hard it is going to be just to keep myself from exploding the moment I'm inside you."

His words send a pulse of heat through my entire body and I allow it to fuel my confidence. I kick off the socks and shoes that I'm wearing, noting his eyes as they follow the act. Then I reach for the hem of my sweater, pausing only to urge myself on. I'm not wearing a bra, so when I peel the fabric off of me, my breasts tighten and pebble with the chill in the air. I'm extremely heavy on top, but I like to think I have nice boobs. However, now that they're bare for the first time in front of someone that isn't my mother, I'm a little self-conscious. Especially when Bartlett remains frozen against the door.

"What's wrong?" I ask, bringing my arms up to cover myself.

Absolutely nothing," he rasps, his eyes flashing again in such a way that has to be a trick of the light. His jaw is tight as he watches me, his gaze dropping to the front of my unbuttoned pants. "Take the pants off too," he commands. "I want to see that beautiful ass of yours

too."

can feel myself blush at the demanding urgency in his words, but for some reason, it makes me feel sexier. So, I sit up on my knees and start to draw the pants downward, leaving my panties on in the process. As I work them over my hips, I hear him walking toward me

2/3 Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Eight

slowly. By the time I've lowered them to my knees, he's standing at the side of the bed, his head tilted as he surveys

Jesus Christ," he whispers, watching as I remove the pants completely then sit back on my heels in front of him. My eyes meet his and he says, "Now take off my pants."

I reach forward, keeping my eyes trained on his as I unbuckle his belt and undo the button of his jeans. His dick thrusts against my hands

as my fingers close over the top of his zipper.

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

[1,048 words]

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty

BARTLETT

If she looks up even once she's going to know...

As she begins to suck even more greedily, I know I'm going to come, that there's no stopping it. So reach forward and grab the back of her head, slamming myself into the back of her throat roughly and keeping her attention on my cock while I will my fangs back in. Fuck she's beautiful. Her moans dance across my shaft as I explode across her tongue. She sucks every little piece of my soul back into her neck and I nearly crumble over the top of her in ecstasy.

"Jesus Christ, Princess, I gasp. Her hands on my thighs tighten, her hardened nipples trekking over my muscles and causing me to spasm as another second climax rides free. "Shit baby!" I swear, pushing her off of me so that I don't actually kill her by coming a second time, down her throat.

She falls back onto the bed looking vulnerable and hurt, as if she thinks she's done something to upset me when she hasn't.

"I-I'm sorry," she says.

I'd love to argue with her, love to tell her that she has nothing to be sorry for, but my dick is spurting cum all over her bountiful breasts and just the sight is enough to rip every word I want to say from my throat. So I place a finger to my lips as I finish, then I fall down over the top of her, dropping my weight over hers as all of my energy disappears and all that's left is the delicious way that she feels beneath me. My mouth finds her throat and I suck a tantalizing amount of flesh onto my tongue as I groan into her neck. "Sweet God," I murmur. "You're fucken amazing."

She stiffens beneath me and I feel her breasts spike against my chest. Was that okay? I thought maybe you were disappointed because-*

"No, baby, no," I gasp against her flesh, nibbling greedily on her earlobe. "You were perfect. Everything was perfect. More than perfect. I've never come that hard in my life." I draw in the scent of her, burying my nose in her hair and shuddering in her grip. "Oh," she sighs happily and I feel the tension leave her body as she arches up against me. Her nails trail up my back, causing me to shiver and my dick to harden against her thigh. "Then why did you push me off?"

"I didn't want you to choke to death on my second flood," I hiss into her ear, before slamming my lips onto hers and stealing her gasp of surprise right from her mouth. "I've never come twice in a row like that. In fact, I don't know any males that have." "Really?" She coos with delight, right in my ear.

I suppose I've said the right thing, because the next thing I know, she's flipping me over onto my back and climbing on top of me. As she straddles me I can't help but fondle her boobs, as they're practically begging for my touch. "Fuck. You really were made for me,"

I growl, shooting up into a sitting position so that I can taste her breasts. "So fucking beautiful."

She tenses, but I ignore it, continuing to feast on her bountiful mounds until she says, "You shouldn't say things like that to someone like me."

"Why the fuck not?" I snap, flipping her over to grind myself against her sex. "It's true. You just don't get it yet, but that's okay with me."

"I don't get it! You're right," she gasps, as I suck one hardened nipple into my mouth and caress the globe beneath it with one hand. She moans despite herself, and I position myself at her entrance, ready and willing to show her just how perfect we can be together. "What happens when I go back to my life and I'm not allowed to date you. Or will that be okay with you, too?*

I freeze. Even my dick stutters. I growl, "There's no going back to your life, Princess. I thought I made that clear. And not allowed to date

me? What?"

Her eyes dampen and I'm momentarily knocked off guard. What the hell?

1/2

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty

have to go back, Bartlett vint de

ferstars! what will happen

I grew, I can't help myself, and my fangs tingle wanting to be expened

arting to th

1. c. You aren't going mywhere and I don't give a fuck what you way

happen to you? To last part by pushing the head of my dick between her folds and that swiftly my anger dissipates, riding on the pleasure skates through my body.

"I don't care what will happen if you don't. Do you know what will happen if you do? What

She whimpers and moans, shifting against me until I'm a little deeper inside of her. "You can't truly mean the like you...you can't possibly want me past tonight."

"What the fuck? I snarl, grasping her face in both my hands and gazing down into her beautiful brown eyes. "You cracy, Princess. beautiful as you are... has no one taken the time to tell you?"

She shudders beneath me, shaking her head, no.

I chuckle, massaging her temples as I sink an inch deeper into her heat and her hips rise up in pleasure. "Then maybe I have you...every single say if I must. You are perfect, baby. And you are mine. I plan to keep you. I want to put babies in you. Lots of babies! "B-babies?" She trembles, but not with fear, which pleases me. Her eyes sparkle with heat and she wiggles her hips until the head of my shaft becomes flush with her hymen. "You can't mean that - if y-you-"

"I mean in it damn it," I snap, dipping down to take her mouth in mine again. "You have no idea how much I mean that, baby, Isay against her lips. "Soon you will. I've already marked you as mine. And you will remain mine." Her body tenses for a moment, but I don't give her time to respond to what I've just said before I ask her, "Tell me that I can have you. Tell me now."

She gasps beneath me, clawing at my back with her nails. "You can have me. I want to be yours." Chapter Comments

∞ 2

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[1,546 words]

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-One

ROSE

The moment I say it, he curses, his eyes glittering as they watch me. "This is going to hurt at first, Princess. There's no getting around that

part.

I open my mouth to tell him that it's okay, that I can take it, but he thrusts forward and all of my words disappear. A sharp tearing pain forces a scream out of me that he swallows behind his lips. I can feel him. All of him. He's throbbing inside of me and I feel so full as I gasp for breath behind his lips. "Oh God," I cry softly, as my body adjusts to him.

That's it. I'm not a virgin anymore.

Do all first kisses end up this way?

"Shh," he murmurs, rocking his hips side to side. "It's okay baby girl. I've got you. The pain shouldn't last long. At least I hope it won't, because I'm dying to get moving inside of you."

I moan, realizing that the pain is almost gone already. My hips jerk upward, searching for release, and my eyes glaze over as they cling to his powerful shoulders and trace over the tattoos on his chest. He's so perfect. Can someone like him really want me? Want to put babies

in me?

'I've already marked you as mine. And you will remain mine. His words haunt me in such a way that they have my thoughts spiraling out of control. Something about what he said should disturb me, but instead it makes me that much more aroused. "Move," I command him. "Please move," I moan, leaning up to trap his bottom lip between my teeth.

He growls, not missing a beat as he begins to slowly stroke in and out of me, causing my pleasure center to swell and rise. I can't stop the shouts of ecstasy from erupting from my mouth as he increases his pace and his groans join my outcry of rapture. "I'm going to explode baby," he groans into my mouth. "Come with me.

That's all it takes for stars to light behind my eyes and my muscles to clench around him. His mouth falls toward my neck and for a moment I think I feel something sharp caress my pulse point and send me into overdrive. He pounds into me and I lose myself into oblivion, forgetting everything that ever came before him in that instant. All my worries, all my fears, they disappear as I feel him latch onto my neck with a growl and a sharp nip of his teeth pushes me toward blackness.

"I think I love you," I whisper like a fool, as I fall into the deep and all I can feel are his lips on my neck.

"Thank fucking God," he murmurs as I pass out.

CANE

There's a light behind my eyes as I wake, but it's not quite morning and can feel that. I can also feel the press of a very warm, very feminine body against mine and I know without thinking who it is. Gayle.

I can smell her. The potently fresh scent of her invades my senses and realize we must have fallen asleep together somewhere.

But where?

Does she know where she is? That she's here with me?

Without opening my eyes, I stretch my arms around her, pulling her in close and blanketing myself in her softness before my mind is well

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-One

and truly awake. Id be happy just to stay here forever. With her in my arms.

But we can't have that. When Roman returns and she's here...

Roman... Shit!

I jerk upright, panting heavily as all of my memories come crashing back. Holy fucking shit, where am I?

The last thing that I remember is being in the jeep, sitting next to Gayle. Right before she and my sister went over the edge of the cliff. But they didn't though, and Although I can't rightly remember why at this particular moment, I realize that shouldn't be my last memory. But it is.

I can still remember the fear I felt for them both as Gayle erupted into the front seat and began to steer the jeep in the wrong direction. Then...I must have reached for her. I must have...

Why aren't I dead?

Didn't I die on the floor in Roman's house?

"Holy fuck. I feel so strange. But not in a bad way. In a...good way.

A very odd I suddenly have the urge to run and climb trees type of way.

I should be dead! A glance down at my torso - which I can remember being ripped open to the point of no return - tells me that I've somehow healed. Somehow...

I can remember Roman telling me about how wolf shifter mates could heal their human counterparts and I suddenly know without a doubt that that must be what has happened. Did she really? Did she get there in time to save my life?

But no. That doesn't feel right either. Because suddenly, I can remember seeing her crying over me. I can remember the ache of pain and longing as I watched her come to pieces over my dead body. The rage that ensued when I tried to, but couldn't touch her. When I realized she couldn't hear me tell her that I would always love her. That I was sorry for shooting her, sorry for not listening to her. That I wouldn't be moving on without her.

I'd wanted so badly for her to feel my arms around her, but she couldn't. She couldn't feel them and she didn't know. I'd watched her bite me frantically. Watched her pass out from the struggle and I'd followed her when her brother put her into the back of the jeep, petting her head the entire time. Oblivious to anything and everything but her for that entire horrible, achingly helpless hour before she woke.

I can remember her screaming and crying for me. I was there for all of it.

But when they almost went off that cliff, I think I dove inside of her. It was odd and energy depleting. So depleting that what happened after falls into the dark recesses of my mind like an afterthought.

But I must have saved them. Because now we're here.

Or maybe, it's just her and in my refusal to leave her I've somehow concocted a heightened sense of smell and sight.

Maybe I'm still gone and I simply wrapped my spirit around her as she slept.

Taking a deep breath, I have a good look around. My surroundings are way different than I expected them to be. It's still dark out, and the room around me is draped in shadow, but for some reason I can see every single detail about this place. Everything. And...I can see it well.

"What the fuck? I hiss to myself.

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-One

When I knew I was dead, it was like everything around me was cast in sort of glowing for. The trees were blurry, the cars and people, Murry. The only thing that wasn't was Gayle, But now...now I can see every single thing too clearly.

Her quick gasp of breath draws my attention downward and what I see has my blood heating and my heart pumping wildly. Gayle is

swake,

My heart? What?

And...she's looking at me. Like of me,

'You're awake!' she says and for a moment I'm looking around for someone else. But then she says, "Cane?"

'Gayle?' And that's my voice, Mine, Not the soundless whisper from before when I was apologizing to her. When she wept over my dead body and no matter how hard I tried, she couldn't hear me, "How?" "You're awake!" She shrieks and I smile.

"Yes. I think I am."

It worked! It worked!" she yells jumping out of the bed and over my body in one movement. "I have to go and get your sister! She's asleep downstairs! She refused to leave until we knew if it worked!" "Wait! I shout out. "Wait a minute, kitty cat. What are you talking about? If what worked?"

She freezes, her full glorious lips, twisting into the cutest of guilty smiles. "How do you feel?" she asks, carefully, walking up to me and dragging one hand through my hair.

Closing my eyes, I purr, loving the way her hand feels on my head. Adoring the way she scratches the top of it. "Fuck that's nice," I say, purring again.

Purring? Holy shit? What the fuck? My eyes pop open to meet hers.

'It worked, she whispers, tears in her eyes. "You're changed."

"Changed?"

"You have to promise not to be mad,' she says softly, scratching my head again.

'I couldn't be mad at you kitty cat. You have no idea how I my words cut off as tears climb into my throat. Just the memory of the pain. of not being able to hold her has taken my mouth hostage.

"I know," she coos. 'I almost lost you. We almost lost each other. But now, everything is right. Absolutely everything. And you - you're changed

I grin, grabbing her hand in mine and kissing it, then purring when I realize I can actually feel her now. "Changed?"

"You're a lion shifter now Cane."

Watt...what?

Author's Note I realize I promised a triple update and I will adhere to that.. just not yet. I have a prior engagement that will take me away from my laptop for the next 6 hours, but the moment I return I will be on

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[1,301 words]

3/4

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Two CANE

1

You're a lion shifter now Cane. That is what she said...right?

I shift my body in her direction, my brows furrowing as she watches me Her saucy confidence falters for a moment as her nerves begins to take over, Golden brown eyes darken, losing a bit of their spark as I remain mute, still at a loss for words. When her face falls a bit, a quivering frown turning her lips, I finally reach out for her, but she doesn't see me.

Gayle's eyes clamp shut. "I would have asked you if you wanted me to first, but-her voice breaks, tears pouring from the shimmering bronze of her closed eyelids-"you weren't healing. Y-you-you...I th-thought you were dead, she finishes with a harsh whisper, just as her chest begins to quake and her breaths start to come and go in rapid procession. The saddest little whimper escapes her lips as she begins to convulse and sob violently.

She's hyperventilating. Fuck.

I leap toward her, startling a little when my small exertion of force shoots me the entire eight feet. Launching straight for the wall, I throw my weight backward a little to slow myself then I dip downward, scooping her into my arms and against my body. She moans against me like a small child, curling her face into my throat and clawing the muscles of my chest each time her body shudders.

Cradling her as close as I can in the rigid branches of my arms, I murmur, "Hush Kitty Cat. It's over now." But she doesn't quiet, instead she begins to shake even harder. Her cries come in stronger and the sound of her agony takes me right back to that moment when I realized she couldn't hear me. When I watched her kneel over me and scream. The memory of it pushes in from all sides and I hate myself in for putting her through it. I hate that I allowed my ego to rule my actions. Wanting to prove to her that I was strong enough to be her mate, I completely missed what was truly important and...we nearly lost each other. That fact barrels over me, fear gnawing at my chest once again.

When it happened...when I began to realize that my spirit had left my body and that I would never have any more than that one pathetically short moment of intimacy with her, not only did it destroy me, but it filled me with insurmountable anger. I couldn't believe how stupid I'd been. It shouldn't have mattered to me whether or not Roman lived or died. All that should have mattered was securing life with my beautiful new love.

"Enough baby, stop. Please stop. You're breaking my heart. I'm having to fight for control as it is not to cry myself. I still can't believe that I'm able to touch you. That I can feel you again." A turbulent tremble of pain riots into my heart and I bite down on my lip, a sob of relief escaping me as I soak her in.

"I'm s-sorry," Gayle breathes, shuddering as her shaking begins to slow. I'm so sorry, Cane. Maybe I shouldn't have, b-but y-you h-have to understand I-I wanted you here! I Wanted you with m-me! I don't c-care if I had to t-turn you into skunk. I s-still would have done it. So please, don't be mad at me. P-Please."

Mad at you?

Is this girl crazy?

As her sobs climb back upward as she belts out, "G-Gio showed me what to do. He knew what was h-happening to your body. H-he said I was lucky b-because you must have ch-chosen to stick around, He said that was why you were s-still...um...well...fresh..." I have to chuckle at that as I climb back into the bed with her in my arms and pull the covers over the both of us. "Fresh, huh?"

She whimpers, biting back on another sob as she shivers against me. I couldn't let you g-go. Everyone tried to t-tell me that you were gone, but I refused to believe it. But Cane," she moans, "I was sooo afraid that they were right. I was so, so, afraid. 1-1 d-didn't plan to ever stop biting you. They were going to give you an honored send off. A shifter's ceremony - my brother and the wolves said they'd never met anyone braver than you.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Two

Despite the morbid topic and the shiver of relief that went through me knowing that I didn't have to wake up six feet underground, or even worse - burned to ash my chest warmed. I'd gained her brother's respect after all.

"I had a plan. I knew that the rangers were still looking for me in the woods because I attacked that hunter-"

"When you attacked, which hunter? Wait a minute, when was this?"

"It was before Lilah and I headed to Roman's. The rangers plan to shoot me on sight, she mumbles distractedly. "But that's not important-

"Oh no? It's not?" I murmur sarcastically, smirking at her sexy ass and noticing how beautiful she looks with her tear stained cheeks barely scrubbed with a flush of pink. "I disagree."

She grants me a small, almost shy smile before continuing on, almost anxiously, "Like I was saying - I knew that once my brother took you away from me that I...!"-she pauses to take a deep breath-"I would lose it and that I wouldn't be able to say goodbye to you." She swallows thickly and I reach out with one hand to swipe the lone tear from her cheek. "So...the moment that they took you away, I planned to shift and head straight for them."

My throat constricts with pain as I realize what she's saying. "What? No...baby-"

Her golden eyes flash brightly and she glares up at me. "Yes...yes, Cane. I wasn't gonna let you leave me," she whimpers, turning away as a fresh bout of tears cascaded from her eyes.

"I know," I choke out. "And I understand, baby." Hating that I'd said that, I clench my jaw, my eyes filling with moisture as she turns back toward me in shock.

"Y-you do?" she whispers.

"Of course I do, I swear, my eyes going heavy as I shift my body over hers. "What the fuck do you think I'm doing here? I refused to leave you. I was determined to wait it out. To sit on the sidelines of your life until the day you passed over and could come back to me. I wasn't going anywhere without you. Especially after all the ways I messed up.

"You didn't mess up, Cane. You were brave. You were strong and-"

"No Kitty Cat - I was stupid!" I snap with a violent shake of my head. "I just...I needed you to feel safe with me. I wanted you to know that I could protect you, so I insisted that I would take care of Roman. But...it was a mistake. I should have gone with you. When you begged me to leave with you, to let it go...I should have listened. Instead...I almost killed us both, but I would have waited for you baby. I would have wandered this earth

watching over you for the rest of your life, loving you from the other side, hugging you in your sleep and never being able to truly touch you." I chuckle, dipping my head down into her hair as a tear escapes my eyes. "I'm so fucking glad that you brought me back. Now? All I want to do...is touch you."

She trembles beneath me and my body jerks again when I feel her hand close over the front of my jeans. "I love you, Cane."

"I love you too, Kitty Cat."

"Cane?"

"Yes baby?" I whisper, turning my face so that my mouth caresses her ear.

"I'm going to need you to touch me. Now..."

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[1,536 words]

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"Slow down Kitty Cat," I chuckle softly into her ear, eliciting a shiver of pleasure from her as I do. My nose traces over the underside of her jaw and I breathe her in, reveling in the sweet heaven of her scent. It is suddenly ten times stronger than I remember it. My dick hardens to a painful degree, pushing against the confines of my jeans and I swallow back a groan, trying like hell to dial it back a notch, so I can take my time with her. "If I start touching you now, I won't be stopped and there are a few things I want to say to you first. There are some things I want to get clear."

"Clear?" she snaps at me, with an angry scowl, shifting her body against mine before yanking the button open on my jeans. "How's that for clear?"

I laugh lightly, grabbing both of her wrists in one hand and then pinning them above her head easily. She struggles against my grip, bringing a smile to my face when I realize she really can't get free. "You really changed me into a lion, huh?"

Her struggling stops, her face falling slightly. "I-I did, yes. I mean"-she huffs, blowing a few strands of her lovely golden locks from her eyes-"yeah. Are you mad?"

I burrow my nose deeper into the side of her face, dragging my lips slowly over the shell of her ear before I whisper, "Hell no."

Her body relaxes and a soft sob escapes her lips. For a moment I'm frozen, just trying to understand why she would think something like that would upset me.

"Thank God," she whispers, thrusting her hips upward and into mine. "Now stop fucking around and kiss me."

"Not yet baby," I mumble, biting her earlobe when she growls and tries to free her wrists. "Just give me a second to savor my new reality for a moment. I mean, here you are, lying beneath me and not only am alive and well, but I'm actually strong enough to subdue you." "Haha, maybe I made a mistake then," she grumbles.

"You know better than that," I tease her, lifting my head to look down into her glowing amber eyes. Her lips are pouting and I can't help but smile. "Do you have any idea what it was like to watch you scream and cry over my body?" Losing my grin as that memory surges forward, I'm suddenly transported back to that moment. "I tried to tell you - tried yelling that I was sorry and that I was still here." I shake my head, closing my eyes when I see it again in my mind.

"You...you watched me?" she whispers sadly. "You remember?"

I nod, keeping my eyes closed and my hand locked around her wrists when she again tries to free them. "Just listen for a moment. Please." I don't see her nod, but I can feel her acceptance in the relaxation of her body, so I continue, "You weren't the only one that was scared, baby. I was too." My eyes open and I see that hers are filled with fresh tears. My words are slightly garbled when I speak next, because try as I might, I can't keep the pain out of my voice. "I saw you run into the room and drop down in front of me. I reached for you as you sunk your teeth into my flesh. I closed my arms around you, but you"-I shake my head, breathing so that I don't break down and cry-"you couldn't feel me. You couldn't hear me. I was so, so, scared that whatever you were doing wasn't going to work, and when it didn't...and you passed out from the effort - I finally realized that I had..." I clench my jaw, fighting for control over that moment and reminding myself that that moment is gone. "That I had died," I say, and her tears begin to fall again, but this time gentler.

"You hugged me in the car. In the jeep. Didn't you?" she says in amazement.

I flinch slightly, nodding. "I hugged you many times. Over and over again. You were all I could see," I whisper harshly. "Everything else was background noise. I couldn't even really see my sister. I could sense her presence and hear her voice. See her coloring. But you - you were the only thing that was vibrant and clear. You cast everything else away in shadow. When you were in the jeep crying silently, I could feel you letting go of me. It...hurt," I admit, gritting my teeth when she shakes her head and cries a little harder. "I wanted so badly for everything you were saying to be true. I wanted you to bring me back to you, so when I could sense that you were starting to accept my death, I reached for you and begged you will all my might not to give up on me. But you couldn't hear me and you couldn't feel me and 1-

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"I could feel you," she says, stilling me. Staring down at her in shock, I gin to shake my head and she nods vehemently. "Yes Cane. I felt you. Like a warmth electrical current. I felt your arms and I could smell your scent. That's why I refused what everyone else kept trying to tell me. I felt you in the back of that jeep and I just knew you would be coming back to me. I knew." She sighs, her tears drying just as mine begin. "You saved us from going off the road, didn't you?"

Releasing her wrists with a frustrated growl, I wipe the moisture from my eyes. "Yes," I choke out. "I jumped inside of you. That was the last thing I remember, before waking up here. The very last thing. Everything else is black."

"Well I felt that too," she coos softly. "Thank you."

I laugh shortly, smoking down at her as her eyes light up and she slides her hands down to the hem of her shirt. "Now that we know that we're spiritually bonded, I'd like for us to be physically bonded as well. Then she bites her lip and whips her top off, bra and all. "I still have more to say," I protest weakly, salivating as her gorgeous, butter gold mounds are revealed. "Holy fuck," I whisper, my balls tightening as the desire to fall into her becomes a driving, living force.

"Oh?" she taunts, grinning at me as she gropes her bosom and a feral growl erupts from my chest. "What more?"

"For one thing," I snarl half-heartedly, working to control my breathing when I feel her dainty hands drag down my zipper and my achie cock bounces free. "Shit. I know all about you lion shifters and how you sometimes have more than one mate," I snap. Her hands fre the heat of them filtering through the thin fabric of my boxers easily and causing me to groan. "I just need you to know - I won't be having any of that. You are mine and I won't share you with any other male. I don't give a fuck if it's in your nature or not. I'll kill whoever you bring into our relationship. I might smile and laugh and pretend it's all good, but it's best if you know now that it will all be an act and I will sever his head form his body and not give any more than a little giggle of a fuck."

To my surprise, she seems pleased by my words, smiling up at me like the fucking goddess she is. "Good. I've never liked the type of relationships that come with numerous mates. But just so you know, I want the same thing from you. Any bitch that you meet from here on out that you may or may not find yourself drawn too is going to lose her face in a fight with me. I will not be sharing either."

"Oh that's right," I mumble, relaxing my hold on her as I maneuver her halfway under my body and prop myself up so that I can swirl my tongue over one deliciously sharpened nipple. "According to you I'm a lion now, so I can possibly have more-*

Her claws shift out, shredding my boxers and stopping my words. "Don't even say it. Not even as a joke."

"Hush Gorgeous," I choke out, sliding lower before she even realizes what I intend to do. I rip her leggings down and off of her, tossing them somewhere behind my head. "I don't want to waste any more breath. I never want to find myself in the position I was in again. Dead-

"Don't say that!" she hisses. "Don't talk about yourself being dead," she snarls.

I smile at her, stroking my hands up over her velveteen legs greedily. "So fucking soft..." Then I pull them apart, bending them at the knees and groaning when I reveal her perfect glistening pussy. "As I was saying. I was 'unalived' before without having tasted you, and I absolutely refuse to chance that ever happening again."

"Fuck," she groans and I smile.

"Not yet Kitty Cat. Let me worship you first."

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