

# The Pack Rule Number 1 No Mates

## Billionaire One 260

[ 1,073 words ]

After grabbing Hartlett's phone I'd raced off into the woods after him, but when I didn't find him, I'd made my phone call to my brother only to find that I was too late,

My parents had him.

The Elder Few had him.

And now... I had to go back.

I didn't even know what to tell Bartlett and there was an ache in my chest that refused to let up.

As I trample back through the woods toward the large house that looms beyond, a voice calls out to me..

"Rose."

At the edge of the woods, where the light meets the dark stands Deputy Timmons. I don't know whether to smile or scream as I draw closer to him, so I simply nod.

"It's better this way," he says. "We don't need anymore females around here causing problems, but you have my word. I won't arrest you when you go home."

A sob climbs up my throat as I recall my father's words to me only moments ago.

"You are to return home now. Your fiance is waiting. If you decide not to your brother has agreed to take your place."

"What ab-about Bartlett?" I manage to choke out, the mark on my neck pulsing.

Timmons snickers, "C'mon. You didn't want him anyway, did you? He's a wolf. Like me. You're a hunter. You should go home where you belong." He strides toward me with a cold clarity in his cinnamon eyes. "You're lucky we're not going to rip you to shreds." My body flinches, fear like I've never known clouding my thoughts for a moment. "Bartlett would never. H-he-"

"You're right. Bartlett would never and neither would I. And despite the vow we all made years ago, I don't dislike you, beautiful. Hunter or not. But do you know who is up there right now? At the house? Do you know who just arrived not ten minutes ago?" "Who?"

Timmons smiles, but not unkindly which is somehow that much scarier to me. "The lioness that had her jaws clamped around your throat."

"Wh-what?" I mumble, stumbling back so swiftly that I nearly land on my ass.

"Timmons!" An authoritative voice bellows from the edge of the woods. What the fuck are you doing?"

Timmons grins at me as Dom approaches him from behind, his gray eyes softer than they were only an hour ago and eons more friendly than before.

"Nothing Alpha Domonic," Timmons says with a wink. "Just thought sweet little Rose might want to know what awaits her up at the house."

Domonic's eyes meet mine for a breadth of a second before falling back on Timmons. "You and me need to have a little chat, Tim. This is

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Chapter Two Hundred Sixty

not cool."

"And why not?" Timmons replies, still not tearing his gaze from mine. Because you've suddenly changed the rules?"

I didn't suddenly change anything," Domonic snarls. "And watch what you say. If Rose was your mate - would you want us to treat her like this?"

Timmons rolls his eyes. "Suddenly so friendly... oh that's right. Your mate is here."

"Hey!" Domonic suddenly growls, his gray eye flashing and sending a jolt of fear straight up my back. Domonic's fangs slash out, but he's no longer focused on me, nope, instead he shoves Timmons, sending him back toward the house and away from me. "Go on. Take your anger out on someone that deserves it. Go visit our friend in the basement."

"Right," Timmons growls back before shooting a gentle look my way. "I didn't mean to scare you, beautiful. But I wasn't lying either."

"Tim," Domonic snarls in warning and Timmons turns his back on me, making his way back up to the house.

"Was he telling the truth?" I ask because I can't help myself.

"About what?" Domonic asks without looking at me.

"Is she up there? The one that attacked me?"

His shoulders stiffen, but I can see the answer in his eyes. "Why don't you go and talk to Bartlett about that, huh?"

I shake my head, not wanting to get anywhere near the angry shifter that once had her teeth around my neck. "I'm not going back inside that house. Not so long as she's here." "She?" Domonic questions.

"Timmons said it was a lioness. Was it? I mean," I say with a bite of lip. "Is it?"

Domonic's jaw clenches, his muscles bunching angrily. "Fucking hell," he hisses. "Fine. Have a seat near the docks then. I'll send my mate down to talk to you in a few minutes." "Your mate?"

"My Luna. My wife. My mate. Yes. As much as I hate to admit it, she's probably much better at all this than I am."

"Why?" I chirp suddenly. "Why do you even care? I'm a hunter, remember? And I just found out that I have to return home or my brother has to take my place. So I have to turn myself in."

"Why do I care?" Domonic says quietly, his eyes falling toward the ground as if he's asking himself the very same thing. "Because you are one of us now, Rose. Whether you want to be or not. My brother marked you as his and I'm not just gonna stand here and let you break his heart. Out of all of us..." he trails off, his eyes lifting to mine once more. "Out of all of us Bartlett probably deserves happiness the

most."

I snort. "I doubt I mean all of that to him. He's gorgeous and perfect and..." I close my eyes, the memory of him in my arms threatening to choke me. "So, so sweet. He can find a hundred better girls out there to be with. He doesn't need me." Domonic laughs so loudly that it echoes through the trees, throwing the sound back at us almost as they are laughing with him. "You really don't know shit about wolf shifters, do you? Even with all the classes you must have been made to take?"

My chin tilts up in resentment. "I've only just started my training and Roman doesn't teach everyone everything about shifters... so no. I don't. Not really.

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## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty

Domonic's eyes glint as he steps closer. "Well then here's your first lesson, chick. We don't pick our mates. We know them upon sight, smell, touch... but we don't pick them. My heart stutters in my chest for a moment as he steps even closer. "You may be right - there are probably thousands of other girls that Bartlett could choose if he wanted to... but none of them would be you and you are the one he has marked."

## Chapter Comments

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

[ 1,239 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-One ANANTACIS

I am running in my Iivann form, doing my text lite mer from the chasing me bir im weating out. Tring beyond measure I am gang toks come on with some new way to hide mosel soon Wyres cast upward toward the trees overhead and for once I wish I'd Contas myself is my giffe while my ganditie we still alive but didnt And now that shes gone, all that I'm left with is this raw

onrampara

mage.

Maybe if I were a tres intent of a mult

I could rest and gather my shangra braut me out ever they don't know what truly am. They think I am what I was profonding to he. So maybe this will work.

Without going myself another second to think it way of my former lusion and fucus un the trees up ahead. My mind displaces as it normally does, the fact that the moon is in its wating stages taught but a stato uve my thougins as I go crashing through the brush and into a burst of daylight.

Where am I? I really have to due. But I dont have been paying attention. Not only to that but to the ground at my feet, because suddenly I'm tambling heat of fast at a rapid rate

& speed that sends me careening down a hill so quickly that the howls of the hounds chasing me vanish complasat nerous, a fifferent sound is heard overhead & sound filled with the whir of helicopter blades and the

shouts of kuntans

Lepes and beaches that around me it a bir as I tumble down the mountainside, trying like hell to reach for the invisible tendrils of my magic and slow myself down But I'm too tired and the attem is good, so I continue to fall out of the forest like a boulder rolling down a kill. When I finally stop moving the world confines to spin around me with faces on the end of my consciousness. They are whispering things. Telling me that I'm okay, that I'm lucky they found the But I'm not so sure and as they lift my body onto the stretcher, my eyes go straight for the woods up on the hill to meet the gitting eyes of the predator there and the smit that promises that my end is near.

I can't help myself, I flip him off just for good measure, then fall into the blackness of a peaceful sleep.

PAUL

He's not talking, I don't think he's ever going to start, glaring down at the piece of shit on the table, his body strung up with silver barbed wire.

I think he will, Domonic says at my side. Maybe Gio will do better at getting him to talk. Who knows, they might even know each other

koman chuckles, Lord Gio Piccoli is here? Blood spurts from his mouth Perfect. I can spit in his face then."

"So you do know him, I marma, cringing when my eyes settle on the scars we ve weaved across his body.

Of course I know him. Every shifter in Italy knows of each of the Lords of the five families. But he doesn't know me."

Oh, but he does, Domonic snarls, snaking a silver scalpel across the bastard's flesh.

This torture shit used to make me sick, but with this bastard here before us it doesn't bother me so much. "Do his balls," I suggest with a grin and Domonie's gray eyes darken.

"You doem," he snaps, tossing me the scalpel.

1 toss it back. "Fuck no

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## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-One

"It was your idea."

"It was a bad one. No.

Pussy Domonic barks.

Then I'm a pussy. I'm not touching his halls asshole, I muck, daging ay

"You're both pussies, Roman stays. "Gee it to me and I do it myself

"Or I can do it," a voice sounds from the stairwell and I look up to find Cane standing there

"Have you shifted yet? I ask

Cane grins like the new cat he is and shakes his head to catering down the steps with Gryffin at his back. Not yet. I thought Roman might like to be there for it. Since he's such a great teacher and all

"What the fuck are you talking about? Roman gurgles, more blood bubbling up from his throat as he struggles to sit up against his bonds Roman's eyes fix on Cane and toe fear dazzles there for a second. You should be dead.

Cane stickers, No. You should be dead. I should never have been

\*

What the fuck does that meant koman staps

Would you mind going the lions in the room a little private time with the mutt? Gryffin asks. We promise not to kill him yet.

Lions? Roman's eyes go wild. How? What?

My eyes meet Domonic's just as he nods and the pair of as gaze down at our quarry with the tickly of a smile on our lips. "Sure thing brother, Domonic spit, before kissing his fingers and placing them on the matting rogues forehead. We'll be back soon, pumpkin. Just you wait. Maybe when they're done partying with you, you might be more inclined to talk about that night our mother's died."

'I didn't fill them, he growled "How many times do I have to say it? Yes - I was planning on taking your Luna, but I never even got-

Roman cuts off as Domonic punches him in the jaw. "Oops. I don't suppose I liked your tone. Maybe work on that before we return."

"You killed my mother though, didn't you asshole? Gryffin mars, getting up close and personal for a moment and spitting in Roman's face

Roman, for all that he's worth, has the bad sense to laugh Yeah. And I stuffed the bitch too."

Oh shit.

I am my back on the sudden sound of a feline snarl that erupts from Gryffin's lips and race up the stairs with Demonic at my back. We leave the room quickly, not wanting any of the ladies to have to hear anymore than they may already have.

We have a sort of problem" Rainier calls out from the sofa and I have to smile at the activity taking place all around the room. His eyes are fecked on his phone and hes got that sheriff lock in his eye, the one that says he's being called into work early. "You know," I whisper. I don't think we ve all been in the same house this way since

Since that night, Demonic finishes for me. I know. It feels-

"Good," I finish for hum, my best friend, and he smiles at me in reflex.

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Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-One

"Right Bats. It kinda dows, intense saying.

Tham my est catch on Bartlett who is staring wedly one the window at his mate and Donen seting out on the docks and a sudden

What's this problem? I say, atantly wathing further into the nonn

"Besides that the lines that had hay by the theout is everly laging it ay with sex and Tar in the dining room? He shrugs. The problem is she's leaving Bartlett says in away. She's gehang brok

Relax B, Domonic says, coming up behind me. Deaven will talk to her Cove her a chutes?

"Yeab," Bartlett says, hús nice hopeless. Something tells me it's not go to matter. She's already called her facility and agreed

How do you know that? I ack.

Bartlett meets my eye. Because they've already tested when and where they wanted her to mess them. Hong with the news that her fiance would be picking her up

## Chapter Comments

Jacqui Rossouw

oh my goodness.....just getting really exciting now

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[ 1,156 words ]

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The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Two ROSE

As I sit swinging my legs over the water and gazing off into the ocean, my heart lurches in my chest. What will Bartlett do when I'm gone? The thought of being not only across the sound from him, but across the state is a physically painful thought that nearly has me

buckling over within its clutches.

My parents have informed me that I am to marry Cygnus Marshall. An enforcer of the Elder Few that is at the very least ten years older than I am. I had no idea the man even had interest in me, but he must have. Because that's the way things work in the Elder Few. A bid must be made for the girl of the family to the head of that family from any male member of the Elder Few and that head of the family in question must accept the bid and enter into a contract for marriage. There is no rule for the female member getting to choose because until me, there has never been any other female member.

I know him though. I remember him. I can almost see him staring at me now. His beady black eyes and his unkempt mustache that always made me think of a train robber from the old west - and not a sexy one. Before this, I always assumed he simply didn't like me. The way he would stare at me was that ugly, it was almost cruel. He is a big

behemoth of a man. Maybe even a little bigger than Bartlett, but not nearly as cut with muscle.

Arghhhh... Bartlett.

I want him so badly it hurts and if I could only summon up the balls to tell him about the marriage contract and the fact that I don't want it... If I could bring myself to share the reasons behind my need to go back and what it will mean for my dear brother if I don't, maybe he would understand. Maybe he would have a solution.

HA! Really Rose? Do you think you're that important to him?

I mean sure, Domonic says I'm his mate and that I am one of them now, but they don't actually know me! How hard would they be willing to fight for someone they don't know?

"Hey there," a feminine voice says at my back.

I flinch in surprise, despite knowing that someone was coming to talk to me, and when I look back over my shoulder to see her approach, I am once again struck by the beauty of these women. These mates. "H-hi," I reply, smiling shyly at the green eyed goddess of a girl that can't be more than a few years older than me.

"Wow, you are really pretty," she says, and my face screws up at the lie.

"Ha! Thanks, but there's no need to lie to me. I'm as plain as they come I mumble with an embarrassed smile.

"Never been much of a liar, chick," the girl says, taking a seat on the wharf next to me. "The name is Draven," she says, holding out a dainty hand as the wind blows behind her and the silky black tendrils of her hair shadow half of her perfect features. "I'm Domonic's mate."

"Nice to meet you," I answer shyly, shaking her hand which is surprisingly solid with strength. "Rose."

"So I've heard, she chirps joyfully, a side stretched smile cresting over her lips. "You're Bart's mate, and I can't tell you how absolutely pleased I am to hear that."

"Really? Why?" I can't help but ask and the fond look she sends over her shoulder toward the house tells me he must be watching.

"Bart's the best. And when I say the best I mean it. He's one hundred percent my favorite guy. Even more so than my own," she whispers conspiratorially. Not that I'm attracted to him that way. But my guy is hard headed stubborn asshole - Bart is more of a sweet, all accepting, forever friend that I adore with my entire black little heart and believe me when I say, you got lucky."

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Two

I can't help but blush at that. You make him sound like a teddy bear,"

"Isn't he one though?"

My eyebrows raise up in denial, the memory of his dominant forceful love making at the forefront of my mind. Absolutely not. Her.... he's..." My face colors as I trail off, my core heating just with the thought of what he is for me. "I get it," she whispers, knocking my shoulder lightly with her own. 'Hes probably way different with you than he has ever been with me?

"You and him are close, then?" I ask, a green streak of jealousy climbing up my back for just a twinkle of a moment.

"We are. He's one of my very best friends. Which is why I hate to see him looking how he does now!

I bite my bottom lip, sadness curling over me for a moment. "And how does he look now?" I ask quilterly.

"Defeated," she says without hesitation. "Cheated. Sad. Lonely. Which is strange because he's just found his mate and none of those things should be on the menu of emotions for that guy. He deserves so much better than that." "I didn't mean to make him feel-

"Stop," she says sharply. "It's totally not your fault. Yesterday you were a hunter and today you're a member of the Red Wolf Pack. You've had less time to adjust than any of us, really. So none of what he's feeling was your fault, but..." "But?"

She looks me dead in the eye, all manner of empathy gone. "You will be if you don't let him fix whatever is wrong between you two. Trust

1. me.

"But I-I can't. You don't understand. My brother - h-he deserves a life away from the Elder Few. He deserves a life away from the cruelty of my father and-"

"The cruelty?" Draven's eyes light with green fire. "What kind of cruelty? Is he... abusive?"

A sob lodges in my throat and I don't speak. Not only because I've never shared these secrets I harbor with anyone, but because I was taught never to speak about the inner workings of our family.

"Tell me," Draven commands and for whatever reason, something in her voice makes me do it. Something in the way she's looking at me compels me to answer her.

"Y-yes. H-he is. He has always been," I admit, my eyes filling with tears. And I'm afraid for my brother. He spent so many years taking the brunt of what was meant for me just because I was born a girl. I don't want him to have to take this punishment from me too. It isn't fair. So, I h-have to go. I have to go back."

"No," a growl sounds behind me and my heart begins to stutter as Bartlett walks toward us. "No the fuck you don't. I won't let you. Not without me."

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[ 1,233 words ]

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The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Three

BARTLETT

"Bartlett..." she whispers and beyond the fear in her eyes I can see the longing there too. "What are you saying?"

My eyes catch on Draven's for a short moment before she nods and stands up, helping Rose to her feet when she does.

"I'm saying exactly what it sounds like I'm saying," I decree. The bark of my words fighting through the ache in my chest that started the moment when I read her father's message. "There is no way in this world I'm letting go of you so that you can go home and marry some sorry fucking prick that isn't me."

"Have you spoken to Gayle?" Draven asks as she approaches.

"I have," I say softly, my eyes still on my mate and the insecurity of her gaze. Maybe if I can just get her inside and beneath me again, I can get her to listen to me. Maybe if I stake my claim over and over with my dick, she'll see reason. Seriously, Bartlett?

But I can't help it. My hunger for the beauty on the docks has only multiplied tenfold since having her last night and there is no way in the world I'm going to let her go. The longer I watched her out here with my Luna, the harder it became for me to adhere to

my promise of allowing her to leave. The more and more I thought about it, the old ways - the ways of our ancestors - became deviously tempting. They believed a mate should not only be claimed but forced to accept their lot in life, and sure, out in Port Orchard we have never done things that way, but I was starting to see the appeal.

Draven's arms wrap around me in a hug and despite the sudden jealousy I see flare in Rose's eyes, I hug her back. "Im so happy for you." Draven whispers. "She's shy, but lovely. She's going to need you to make yourself perfectly clear. She doesn't think that you want her enough."

I flinched at that last part, especially when Draven gifted me with a quick kiss on the cheek and the sound of my Alpha growling barreled

down the hill.

"Baby! What the fuck?" Domonic's voice could be heard from the top of the hill, but all he received in return was Draven's middle finger.

"See you both inside," Draven declares. before turning around to bounce up the stone walkway and back up to the house.

The words she spoke to me were whispered so quietly that I'm sure it made our momentary embrace look like more than what it actually was and the cute little snark on Rose's face couldn't be denied.

"You're jealous," I say with a grin, stepping down onto the docks to gaze down at my beautiful mate.

"No."

"Lies," I rumble, smirking when she glares up at me.

"She's like... really pretty. And someone who I could definitely see you with so-"

"Hey!" I snap suddenly, gripping her chin in my hands and ignoring the spark of electricity that jolts at my fingertips.

"What?" she snaps, glaring at me defiantly, the maple brown of her long, long, locks waving in the wind. "She is."

Shaking my head slowly, I allow my gaze to lock on the sexy heave of her breasts beneath my shirt. "You are every bit as beautiful as she is, princess. Even more so to me. If you only knew..." I trail off, shifting my eyes away from her as my dick hardens painfully in my pants. The memory of the way she looked last night when she came undone is still so fresh in my mind and everytime I picture the part of her lips when she came in my arms I'm almost overcome with the urge to drop to my knees in worship.

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Three

\*Knew what, Bartlett?" she asks somewhat breathlessly and that's all it takes to snag her into my arms and lock her against my chest.

Her eyes flare wide and my fangs snap out, forcing me to look away from her so that she isn't afraid. "How much I want you. It's unreal. I can't let anyone even sneer your way without-"

"Look at me!" she commands with a sudden authority to her words that they could almost come from our Luna. God help me, I do. I can't not. So I turn my face toward hers, fangs and all, and steel myself against the fear I expect to see in her eyes. "Why did you look away from me, Bartlett?"

I shake my head, clamping my eyes shut and trying to will my fangs back into hiding, but they don't go. They can't. She's already threatened me with leaving and my beast is hovering, waiting to pounce. The need to keep her from leaving so great I'm almost afraid I might shift right here. 'I don't want you to have to see the monster in me, I choke out.

That's when I feel it. The gentle, erotic, stroke of her fingers over my teeth and God help me, I groan. "There's no monster in you," she whimpers. "I'm so sorry I said that. I was just... I was..."

I growl, sealing my hands over the back of her ass and pulling her flush against me. My eyes fall open before her fingers leave my fangs and I kiss the tops of them before she can pull away. "I would never hurt you and I'm sorry if my fangs scare you but... they seem to come out when you make me horny," I rumble, averting my gaze from hers when I feel my face heat to absolute mortification.

Did I really just say that? What the fuck is wrong with me?

me..."

She giggles and I feel her hands slide over my chest as she presses her glorious boobs up against me. "I make you horny? Have you any idea what just looking at you does to me? Your tattoos and your muscles - your beard"-she pauses, biting her lower lip-"they drive "Don't stop," I beg her. "Tell me. Don't be shy. I want to know."

Her face heats, coloring to full on red and she yanks my head closer. "They drive me insane, okay? They make me so... wet."

Oh no. Oh shit. She's really done it now.

"Fuck, princess," I snarl. "Would you hate me for dragging you onto that yacht right now and fucking you senseless?"

"Yuck! I definitely would!" A female voice sounds at our back and I curse myself for not hearing her coming.

2

It's Rose. She grabs my attention and locks it deep. It's almost like I have no idea what is going on around me when I have her in my

arms.

Rose tenses, but instead of pushing away from me, she curls into my chest - almost as if seeking my protection. That alone is enough to warm the ache right out of my chest and a growl to my throat.

"Now is not the time Gayle," I say without looking away from my princess.

"Oh, but it is," Gayle quips, leaping toward the docks from her perch ten feet away. "I was told that she and I need a little word. A little... one on one chat to air out our differences."

"Gayle," I snap in warning.

Gayle giggles and the tremble of fear in Rose's bones tells me she's perfectly aware of who it is that stands at my back and she's deathly afraid of her.

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[ 1,272 words ]

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The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred sixty-four

PAUL

I have to head back to the mainland, Rainier attiness at thy back how to hang (kendy and the past twenty minutes.

Nice to see Bartlett with someone special. Out of all of us, I often wonder whether way be sent hus me qe ditmetist something is going on here. Something crazy

Dom thinks you should come back with res and be the one to check the Chathers doing of the have?

"What?" I snap, my attention ripping away from the window. "Why do or even for to g

"Someone was found in the woods naked and the authorities believed that it might, a gart chart sy wo she has been placed in lock up and under arrest, tespite that after they compared the female to a picture not Rose.

And what the fuck am I supposed to do about that?"

Check on the bar. Rainier grins and before taking another look at his phone

"Fine," I snarl. "But I'm coming back here tonight.

"As am I," Rainier chuckles. "So no worries, then

"No worries..." I agree as I step away from the window. ROSE

I latch onto Bartlett with a death grip and his arms close around me so tightly that I'm momentarily fighting a smile. His sent me and for a second I revel in it, in the safety and security it suddenly represents. Could it be true? This mate thing? Could he really we me so desperately?

"No one on one's," Bartlett says for me, pressing a kiss into my head. Just say what it is you have to say right here.

I gaze up into Bartlett's eyes and watch them sparkle for a moment while I take it all in. This new feeling of having someone that wants t protect me so fiercely. Someone who refuses to leave me to my troubles or allow me to face the world alone. Could I really be so lucky? "Bartlett," I whisper, pushing my face into his chest and feeling the pound of his racing heart against my skin.

"It's okay, princess. I've already told you no one's going to hurt you here. They wouldn't dare, he whispers back, pressing his lips onto the top of my head.

"He's right, you know?" the female's voice sounds much closer than before. And besides... you're not the only hunter to have switched sides. My mate has too."

That gets my attention. My eyes flare open and I lean away from Bartlett's chest to look at her- this girl that is shining with so much joy that I can hardly imagine her to be evil at all.

She's not quite as tall as I am, but she's close and when I look directly at her I'm surprised to find her smiling from ear to ear

"I'm sorry," she spits, her lips quivering like she feels stupid just saying the words. "I almost killed you, but try and understand the trails off, her golden eyes dropping for a moment as she studies the ground. "Roman killed my mother and we've been looking for his gang of monsters for a long time."

1/3

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Four

Monsters, I repeat, frowning at her choice of words but finding them somewhat appropriate. Especially after calling Bartlett one myself.

"Yeah, the confirms, her eyes darkening when they lift again to find my own. But I know better now. I know you didn't know any better at the time. Neither did my mate. I mean, it took him shooting me and me forcing a shift for him to realize he was wrong. "Who is your mate? I can't help but ask.

Her smile is back and in full force with that question, her lips turning up in a smirk. "Cane. He's my mate. And now... I suppose he's my

monster too."

"Cane?!" I choke out, shocked. "He's a lion shifters mate? I used to crush on him sooo hard."

Bartlett stiffens against me and a low growl emits from his chest. I swat his chest playfully, not turning my eyes away from the girl. From... Gayle.

She grins. "Yeah. He's got a sort of star power, doesn't he? Even as a human he did.

Even as a human he did? What does she mean...did?

## ANASTACIA

As I sit here in the jail, healing and returning from the haze of sleep, one thought plagues my mind.

I smell wolves. And I mean, I smell them everywhere, but yet, there aren't any in sight.

But there must be, you see, because I am never wrong.

My mother had the gift and her mother before her and her mother before her and so on. But the line of magic always shifted. Skipping one to the next. So my mom was born

without magic and I-being her first born girl - was. My sister is the same as my mother was. She possesses that clarity of old. The knowledge of what is what and who is who, but she can't conjure a candlestick into fire without the help of a match and she wouldn't be able to charm a truck driver even armed with a new set of tits. She is as inherently human as they come, while I was born a witch.

Well... that's our traditional name, but I prefer to be called Gifted.

As I gaze around at the meager line of cells to my left and right, and the officers milling about this tiny little holding, I'm fully aware it wouldn't take much to break out of here. A charmed smile here and an enchanted whisper there. I could have them releasing me right now if I truly wanted them to, but... I don't. The hounds are still out there and with the smell of wolves all around me, I'm thinking there's a reason they haven't already broken into this place and tried to steal me.

They're afraid.

Ha ha ha! My luck may finally be turning in the right circle. Now all I have to do is wait for one to arrive and charm him into taking me in long enough to come up with a plan. Or a spell. Or something that keeps those shadow hounds from chasing me and trying to devour

my

magic.

But where are they? Where are the wolves?

"Um, excuse me Officer..." I purr in my most convincing lilt

"Garret," the brown haired human says, stepping away from his desktop computer to stand next to my bars.

"Garret," I repeat, widening my dark indigo eyes that are only ever violet when I cast and batting my dark featherlike lashes his way. "Did I hear you mention your supervisor coming in?"

"Yes ma'am. He's on his way here now. Should be here within the hour.

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Four

"Perfect. Do you think he might be troubled to speak to me?"

Garret grins, taking in the bouncing spirals of my coiled black hair and the exposed skin of my curves that are still barely covered in the semi-trashed dress that I am wearing before granting me an unwavering smile. He will be. He's actually planning to release you himalt after a few questions about your er um predicament."

My predicament. He means the fact that I was found tumbling toward my death down a mile long incline and the miraculous fact that came out of it with hardly a scratch. Not that I didn't play up my injuries for the sake of sanctuary. Even now I'm nursing a pretend sprained ankle. Laying it on thick for the pity party I may need in the end.

"That's perfect, thank you Garret," I say sweetly, returning his wink with one of my own before sitting back downts.

Great. With any luck this Sheriff will be just what I'm looking for and I'll charm my way right into his arms. At least for the night.

## Chapter Comments

2

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

[ 1,687 words ]

3/3

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five ANASTACIA

When the man in question arrives it is quite obvious. He must command quite a bit of respect around here because the entire room goes quiet at least five minutes before he steps ioff the elevator and into the hall. My senses light up the minute he does telling me everything I want to know... this man in a wolf.

He is a predator through and through and even without my gifts I think I would see it in the dark of his eyes. The ripple of muscles, the sureness of his steps. Everything about him shouts danger. But will he know me? I somewhat doubt it.

I've gleaned more than a few things about this town since I came tumbling down the mountain. It is close knit and small for a beach town. The residents here aren't thrown off by things like women that come racing out of the woods with death at their backs. They either aren't aware that their is an entire pack of werewolves out here or they've

accepted it and don't care. One thing is for sure, the sheriff gets a wide berth when he walks toward my cell. The entire hall is hanging on the edge of his word. Even the drunk in the cell next to me seems to be holding his breath.

The man is big and impossibly handsome, with dark eyes and hair to match and jaw sharp enough to cut glass. Could have done worse. certainly won't mind spending a few nights with you cutie.

"Anastácia Bordeaux is it?" He says to me, reading from a file on the clipboard he is carrying. His muscles bunch and his jaw is tight when he looks at me. As if the sight of me has raised his hackles and he can feel my energy through the iron bars of my cell. "That is correct," I murmur.

He doesn't smile, despite that just pushed enough intent into my voice that he should have - at the very least-felt the pull.

Hmmm... I wiggle my fingers behind my back, focusing a little more heavily on what I want from this man than I would like. I'm even forced to turn my back for a second so that he doesn't see the flash of violet spark through my eyes when I conjure my will. "You mind telling me why you came tumbling out of the woods wearing no shoes and a party dress?"

I grin, forgetting myself for a moment when I see that he truly is unaffected by my charms. What the hell? "1 - uh... I was being chased."

No problem. Plan B here we come.

"Chased?"

So now he looks somewhat interested, his brow furrowing intently as he pulls out his phone and shoots off a text - no doubt to another of his packmates. Good. Maybe he'll send some wolves out to where I was found and they'll scent the hounds. "Chased by what exactly?" he mumbles absently, still texting.

"Not a boyfriend," I taunt him, walking toward the end of my cell where the bar door locks and opens.

"Uh-huh. So you don't know what you were running from? Or you just don't want to tell me?"

Now that he is closer and he is looking into my eyes I should be able to push my charms at him, but when I try all I get is a sharp gasp of breath and a whisper.

He shakes himself. What color are your eyes, Miss Bordeaux?"

He saw them. He saw the flash of color. Shit,

1/5

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five

This asshole has a mate.

Just Fucking Great

PAUL

I'm standing outside of the Bad Wolf Cafe when I get the text from Rainier to go and check the parking lot behind the bar where the false

Hose was found.

ME

Why? What the fuck? I'm not one of your damn deputies Curly. Have one of them go.

RAINIER

Oh, they'll be there. But I need someone who can scent the grounds and Timmons and Koda stayed back on the island. So... that... leaves... you...) ME-

Fuck off.

RAINIER-

I'm serious. There's something weird as fuck about this chick and she says she was being chased by a pack of wild dogs. If she's telling the truth, we need to know about it.

ME

Why WE? I'm not Ranger Joe or Sheriff Andy. Nor am I Lassie, Old Yeller, or Benjy. I don't need to know shit about any fucking mutts that scurry through the woods.

RAINIER

Well, here's the thing, soldier. The bitch has purplish eyes which are first of all a little scary- and she was running BAREFOOT and dressed for the club. Do you know how far the nearest club is from here now that Domonic's place got shut down? ME-

No. But please, do enlighten me.

RAINIER-

Seattle.

Fuck! ME

Fine asshole. I need to check out the bar anyway.

RAINIER-

Make it quick shitface because I don't want to release her until you do and I get the feeling we don't want this broad anywhere around

here.

2/5

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five

Ob no? Viny's that? Is the cute?

RAINIER

You're asking MEEE?

ME

What? Does being mated make it impossible for you to answer that question?

RAINIER-

It does when it means my mate will remove my dick should I answer incorrectly. Yeah. Impossible.

ME-

So she is cute. Because if she wasn't cute you would've just said no.

RAINIER-

I see what you're doing motherfucker and it's not funny. Felix baby, if you are checking my phone right now then PLEASE understand that Don't SEE cute anymore. I only ever see you. And Paul is just some bored little pup that hasn't had any pussy in forever. ME-

Checking your phone? Are you fucking with me right now you whipped motherfucker? And BTW Felix, I get PLENTY of pussy.

A RAINIER-

He doesn't. He really doesn't. Not since the accident.

ME-

Accident? Are you on drugs?

RAINIER-

The girl is a toad. An ugly, deeply tanned, heavily curved toad with weird as fuck purple eyes that have me wanting to carve my soul out and leave it at the door.

ME-

Nice.

RAINIER-

No. Totally creepy.

WE-

I'm heading to the bar. Then to the jail to see this Ribbet that you speak of.

RAINIER

3/5

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five

Yeah whatever, Hurry up though. I already want to go back.

ME-

Purple eyes dude? Really?

RAINIER-

I'm sure they look blue to the average bear, but I am a wolf so i can see them pretty clear

ME-

And a poet apparently. Do you serenade your mate with those garbage words?

RAINIER-

No. My BIG DICK is poetry in itself. I don't have to say a fucking thing

ME-

How disrespectful. Did you read that Felix??? OMG

RAINIER-

Just get to the fucking bar you sloppy piece of shit.

ME-

Over and out Precious.

RAINIER-

Asshole.

ME-

Prick.

Pocketting my phone I run inside and tell Lizzie that she'll need to lock up tonight after all. Even though I just finished telling her that/would do it. The look she gives me is point blank scary so I run out of my place with what feels like a bulls-eye on my back and head down the street toward the bar. There are police scattered around the lot when I get there, so the first thing I do is dip inside to see that things are in full swing and Charlie is not only handling his new job well, but he's even hired a local girl that I know from the restaurant down the way.

"Hey Kendall, I say abruptly, a smile shifting across my face when I realize Bartlett is going to go apeshit when he sees who one of his new bartenders is. "So you're working here, now?"

Her dirty blond hair bounces around her pretty face and when I step a little closer I notice something I hadn't before.

Kendall is pregnant. Holy shit.

My eyes glue to her barely swollen belly, which means that normal people wouldn't notice - but of course I'm a wolf and I do. I can hear it. The barely formed heartbeat.

She must be about three months along and while I know it can't be Bartlett's because she's not his mate- I also know that this means

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five

she was cheating on him when they were together.

While I don't think it will matter to him and that he more than likely new about it - I still have to work to keep a smile on my face in front of this harlot

Yup! Got hired this afternoon. I really need the extra money right now and Charlie took pity on me when I came wandering in today," Kendall says, side eyeing me carefully.

Well thank God for Charlie then, I say with a hint of amusement, catching his eye for an all too brief moment.

She knows what I don't about drinks," Charlie shouts from the other end of the bar. "And Bartlett said I could hire whoever for the job

So you hired Kendall, I finish for him with a grin.

Kendall rounds on me, with two mixed drinks in her hands. "Problem, Paul? According to Charlie, Bartlett won't be in here as much anymore so I thought that "

"That you could insert yourself here and maybe he would take you back?" I whisper cruelly and she sours at me. "Not likely, sweetheart. Bartlett has turned toward greener pastures."

Her artfully sculpted eyebrows shoot up. "Oh?" She snickers. "You jerk offs really are full of yourselves. You think you are the center of the universe. Well I've got news for you." She leans over the bar to get all up in my space and I scowl. "I don't give even a little fuck about Bartlett anymore. We've been over for months."

"Two months," I curdle. "Barely."

She shrugs. "Over is over, homeboy."

"Right," I say with a tip of my head. "Watch this one," I say to Charlie without looking away. "She can be pretty conniving."

Kendall snickers then brings up her middle finger, places a kiss on it. "Give that to Bartlett for me would you?"

I step away from her before I can do something stupid like fire the bitch and walk straight for the back entrance. The moment I step outside I can smell it and I have to force myself not to shift.

"Fuck," I snarl to myself. "They're still out there."

Chapter Comments

Lori Renner

I'm so enjoying this book

Rene Marie Beck-Ware

Please tell me Timmons finally gets a mate....

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011

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

[ 1,161 words ]

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Six

PAUL

I'm at the edge of the infine, right at the slope when I hear the vagrant growled far off enough in the woods that I don't give chase. A smile turns my lips as I realize these aren't your average wild dogs that are in hiding to. They are shifters tone. But they are most definitely not

Their scent is unfamiliar in these parts, but I have scented them before font not angehere near here. No.

New Orleans

But New Orleans is much too far away for these hounds to be traveling Especially to be chasing after one simple mortal girl.

With creepy purple eyes?

I should get to the station," I whisper to myself, my eyes on the thick of the woods and my mind on the certainty that these hounds are still lying in wait for something

The girl? Probably. But why? What could be so special about her. Hound shifters are not known to have mates. They basically whore themselves, until they find that one compatible female that they all share in order to reproduce. Then after she's reproduced they feast on her flesh and disperse her from the world. They are rabid disgusting shifters that I wouldn't entirely mind a hunter getting their hands on

Maybe she's compatible? But why would they chase her this far? And how would a regular female have lasted that long of a chase?

"Hey there, Paul Officer Gordon's voice filters through my thoughts and I turn to find him behind me. Find anything useful?"

I heard him coming, but I've learned to recognize the steps of a threat and his were much too slow so I paid him no mind until now.

"No. Not really. However there might be some... rabid dogs loose around here. They could be dangerous to the locals. You might want to get the rangers on it," I suggest, my eyes scanning the woods.

"Really?" His gaze narrows as he follows my line of sight toward where the greenery is thickest. "Dogs?"

"Mutts," I say loudly enough that I know the shifters hiding in the forest may hear me. "Nothing special, but dangerous all the same."

Noted. I'll get the word out, Gordon says, lingering as if there is something more he'd like to say.

"What is it, Gordon?"

"Not much, friend. Just thought you might want to know they're calling off the search for those missing hunters. They found some bloody clothing deep in the woods. They're being presumed dead."

My head jerks up and a look passes between us. "What a shame," I say without even a hint of remorse.

"Right," Gordon snickers, tipping his head before sauntering down the hill.

God I love this town.

I'm heading to the station to see Rainier. I'll let him know if he doesn't already." I say absently.

Then I'm off.

ANASTACIA

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Six

Seriously? The only wolf available in the entire station tonight and the bastard is mated. just fucking great. If there was ever a time to regret not bowing to my grandma's tutelage, now would be the time. My natural magics have no idea how to get past the shields of bonded mate.

I can't tamper with his mind at all. Unless I brew a potion - which I have no idea how to do and somehow get him to drink it which sort of doubt he would. He's been looking at me so apprehensively that I'm sure he knows there is something different about me and he decided he doesn't like what that difference is.

Perfect. I might end up having to commit a crime just to stay safe.

"There you are," the sheriff suddenly says, leaping off his perch just in time for the sexiest being I have ever laid eyes upon to step of the

elevator.

Shifter.

But he doesn't exactly smell like a shifter to me. No. Wolves have a very distinct, not always pleasant, aroma and while his is there it is also drenched in something far more intoxicating. A scent so delicious I can feel it sizzle on my tongue as I breathe him in. Oh yummy, yummy. What have you brought for me, good sheriff?

My eyes skate up the the golden haired male standing ten feet from the cells and Goddess help me, my lady parts are sillinngge He is built in such a way that almost has me drooling and I can't seem to focus my intent on much more than him.

Oh yeah. He's perfect for this. So long as he's not mated that is. The thimble of pain in my chest at just having that though, shocks, me out of my head for the tiniest little second and as my gaze lingers on his dazzling blue eyes 1 gasp.

They are bright like the clearest sky on the hottest of summer days and there is no mistaking he noticed me too when that intense pulsing stare of his drops over my body with an almost physical reach. But then, that suddenly, his eyes narrow into a glare and it's as if he's slightly uncomfortable for a second before he rips his gaze away.

He and his friend the sheriff exchange a few whispers, most of which I can't hear, but I do manage a few words and my pulse begins to pound nearly out of my chest when I pick out the phrase 'hounds out in the woods.

Shit. I knew it. They're waiting for me. Fuck.

Think, Ana, think.

"E-excuse me!" I stammer, aiming my words toward the sheriff while pretending not to be aware that his friend is listening just as intently.

"Yes, Anastacia?" Sheriff Rainier shoots my way, his eyes filled with a strange sort of worry for me that I find hard not to exploit.

"I-I know you said you were going to release me tonight, but I was thinking... and well... I don't really have anywhere to go until I can get a hold of my sister and arrange for her to pick me up. Might I be able to stay in jail? Just for one more night?" "Actually," his friend speaks up and holy bejeezus his voice is like molten honey. "We were just discussing that and no- unfortunately, he

can't allow it."

"Oh hello, Sheriff Paul, nice to meet you," the sheriff says on the end of a snicker.

My eyes flash in frustration and there is no mistaking that the pair of them notice. "Fine," I snarl. "But might I trouble you gentlemen with an escort out of town then?"

"Now that pussy thumping Paul says "-can definitely be arranged. I've already volunteered my services."

"Have you?" The sheriff chortles and I don't miss the swift kick he gets from Paul. "I mean- thank you. So I take it you won't be returning

2/3

## Chapter Two Hundred Sorty-Six

Vaud's eyes light with mischief as they meet with my own. Not tonight night I be escorting Missus...?

A blush rises to my cheeks as I fill in the blanks for him. "Miss Bordeaux. Ana Bordeaux."

Not what I intended, but this will work too.

Easier than pic... because I'll have Pretty Paul all alone and completely at my mercy  
Chapter Comments

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

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Seven PAUL

"Let's chat for a moment. Upstairs, Rainier whispers my way, before tuning toward the beautiful female locked battling bark. I going to get your paperwork sorted, he tells her before steering me back onto the elevator Her indigo eyes linger on me for a moment, the sweet scent of honey

barreting my way again the way it did what stepped off the elevator and nearly trapping my soul there in her gaze. I don't know why I volunteered to escort her out of town. I goet wually word her to leave. But I couldn't think of any other way to get more time with her at first. I lied when I said that Rainier wundert alert stay another night in jail. He probably would have been totally fine with that, but I wouldn't be

I follow despite my body's initial reaction which is to stay. I know what he's going to ask me. At least I think I don't need to leave the lovely creature on her own while he does, but allow it because I'm still resting from just the vision of beer. Some despite that my instincts are telling me never to let that lovely creature out of my sight again.

Anastacia is gorgeous. She's like every dark, lust filled thought I've had ver had, poured into one glass and made it was just fur

1. me.

Even her voice incites pleasure in me. The soft, barely identifiable dravd of an accent, hidden somewhere in its deg

Her hair is a bounce of the tightest black curls that fall midway down her back, and her skin is the color of baby seated offer hinting toward an obvious Creole heritage. Impossibly full lips, the color of ripened plums that beg to be Kissed coupled with the thicken plads lashes that smile across two of the darkest purple moons I have ever seen.

And the moment I laid eyes on her one word whispered through me.

Mine.

I can remember how I felt the first time I saw Draven. There was just something about her. Something that almost connected me to ser and at first, I admit, I thought maybe she could be my mate at first. For one, I was insanely attracted to her the moment she stepper inside the bar. Two, there was a fiber of something there that seemed to latch onto my soul and pull me toward her. However, I've se realize, I felt all of that not because she was my mate, but because she was destined to be my Luna. To be fair, I think we all-with the exception of Domonic - felt the very same pull toward her that regard.

This pull was different. I could feel it like a sparkling thread tying the pair of us together. There was something else in the air as well, although I couldn't say what, but it had no bearing on me whatsoever. It was almost as if I could see it. Like a dance of purple mist glimmering in the air. Barely visible and highly potent, but for some reason, unable to touch me.

The moment the elevator doors close, Rainier whirls on me. "Are you crazy? There is something so fucking weird about that. Every single one of my deputies is enamored by her. I don't get it. It is fucking strange and it gives me the damned creeps." First of all, dipshit, don't call her a broad. I swallow my snarl in favor of not looking like a lovesick lapdog and ignoring his mark. For the moment.

"You don't get it?" I laugh. "She's blow your mind beautiful! That's why they're enamored with her Mister Big Words. Not a goddamned thing creepy about that."

"Garret is happily married, jerk off. Yet he looks at her like he wants to get down on his knees and feed the bitch grapes."

"Hey!" I growl before I can stop myself. "Enough of that shit."

He squints at me as we step off the elevator and onto the main floor of the station, but shakes off my little outburst as he goes around warily at the eyes of the normies standing around. "She ran for miles - Paul. From a pack of fucking wild dogs Yeah, okay. So that part is weird."

1/3

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Seven

"Not just any dogs either," I add in a whisper as he guides me into his office and closes the door. "They're hounds, Shifters."

"Fuck! No way," he gasps, dropping into the chair behind his desk as if his legs have just been cut from beneath him. "Yikes. You think they wanted her for="

"Reproduction? Yeah. Probably."

"Holy shit," he replies with a cringe. Then he shrugs it off, lifting his eyes to mine, "Well they're gone by now then. It's already been half a day. Hounds are wandering gigolos. Surely-"

"No," I say matter-of-factly, and I can practically feel my eyes darkening "They're still out there, I could smell them and hear them."

"Shit, Rainier says, suddenly worried. "I'll alert the rangers."

"Already asked Gordon to."

"Ahaha," Rainier says with a smirk. "Are you sure you don't want my job. Sheriff Paul?"

I giggle, "Nah. You can keep it. I'm not into uniforms."

He rolls his eyes. "Might make you sexier."

"Not possible. Besides, it wouldn't be fair. I'm already the best looking of all of us. I'd hate to leave the rest of you floundering in the dirt."

"You fucking wish. If you're so much sexier than how come I have the hottest mate?"

I chortle. "I'll be sure to relay that opinion of yours to our Luna."

"Don't you fucking dare," he says in a cold voice that I know is deadly serious. Then he stands and opens his blinds and we both stare out into the woods around the station. "I wonder if any of Gio's guys have sighted them. These... hounds..." "Probably wouldn't hurt to find out. And we could also use a pair of cat eyes to take up scouting, because I don't know where that girl came from, but I have a hunch that she's been running a long goddamned time, I observe thoughtfully. Rainier inhales sharply, before cursing under his breath about never having enough time to get his mate pregnant. "Fuck. I guess I can head to the island, then bring the cats back with me."

I smirk, sending him a knowing smile. "Ahhh. Does that mean you'll be on duty tonight after all, sheriff?"

He flips me off. "Fuck you to the depths of your little black soul."

"Not with your 'poetic dick' I hope."

Again, he rolls his eyes. "You wish." Powering on his computer, he takes a seat and pulls a few things up on the screen. "Well... they finally got back to me on the origins of one Miss Anastacia Bordeaux. And they are very, very, interesting indeed." Without glancing at the screen, I say, "Let me guess. She was born in Louisiana."

His eyes shoot my way. "How did you know?"

Ngriin. "The hounds. They're not from around here. They carry a darker, almost repugnant smell. One I've only ever encountered one time in my life. During my brief stay in New Orleans."

His eyes go wide. "That time you went chasing after that Haitian girl? The one you were so sure was your mate?" Rainier begins to giggle.

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Seven

I laugh darkly. "Fuck you. I was only sixteen. I didn't know any better."

"Do you know better now though?" Rainier guffaws.

For some reason my mind goes straight for the girl downstairs. The beauty that smells like eyes. "Yeah. I think I do."

honeycomb and wields purple sparkles in her

"But why in the fuck would hounds from Louisiana want one girl bad enough to chase her all the way here?"

My eyes catch on a glint of something deep in the woods and I swallow back a growl.

"With any luck... I'll find that out tonight! Chapter Comments

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

[ 1,108 words ]

3/3

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Eight

CANE

"One last try," I mumble to Gryffin, out in the woods.

"No. Not yet. You're worn out. Can't you feel it? You need to eat. And for the record-so the fuck do I."

"But how can this be? Maybe the change didn't happen after all. Maybe it failed, I snarl, glaring up at the heavens.

"It did not," Gio says in a bored tone. "I can smell you. You are not only a shifter, but you are a powerful one. Besides, your fangs chomped out a couple of times. Use that to scare Roman instead of your shifted form." He winks.

Despite this man being the one I have to thank for saving my life, I have the strangest urge to knock the amused grin right off his heckling face.

"You know what actually might work a lot better than you standing naked in the trees? Domonic gizzles, casting his eyes toward the house. "A hunt,"

"Oooohhhh yeah!!!" Goose croons, excitement flashing in his gaze. "Fuck yeah! I'm down!"

"Do you really want to chance releasing that vagrant piece of shit back on the world just to help me realize my new form?" I snap. "I'm the one in need of provocation and even I know how stupid that would be." "Not him, pussy cat, Domonic laughs. The spare. Teddy."

"But I'm not angry with Ted," I say smoothly. "He's never occupied any type of space in my mind. Not for any reason. Not at all. Not even when he tried to make a bid for my sister."

"That's because you don't already know that he fucked

"Hey!" Quinn spits from the corner of the woods. "No. No. We don't say those words."

"Oh that's right!" Bartlett smiles. "Captain Gherkin."

"Captain what?" I snarl. "Are you talking about those tiny pickles?"

"Dude!" Bartlett snaps his fingers, pointing at me and then gazing around at the wolves and lions around us. "Told you. Tiny pickles. Even he knows what they are."

"Yeah, Domonic smirks, sauntering up to me with a taunting smile on his face, But does he know the significance of these pickles?"

"Fuck the hell off, Dom, Quinn growls, his fangs slashing out and his muscles coiling to shift.

This is kinda cool. Being surrounded by this. I've never had it before. This... camaraderie. Not even the Elder Few are this tight. There's not a single calculating soul around me, not one selfish bastard in the bunch and... I like it. I like... this. 2 So I push my apprehension aside and step toward Domonic. Tell me, oh King of Dogs, tell me of this... this Captain Gherkin."

ANASTACIA

"Stop pacing, sweetheart," one of the younger officers on duty tells me from his perch near the elevator. "The sheriff said he'd release you. I'm sure he intends to do so."

Not why I'm pacing asshole.

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Eight

I allow a smile to cross my lips despite the hunger of his gaze making me feel somewhat queasy and he leers at me with a lick of his lips. the bulge in the front of his pants catching my attention as it begins to solidify grotesquely. Odd.

I don't usually let the depraved stares of those under my charms upset me this way, so why is the way he's looking at me making me want to poke his eyes into their sockets? It's my fault. Well, mostly. I mean, I'm no troll. I can turn the eye my way just as easily without magic as I can with. But the natural engagement of such is so much more fleeting and narrow. Not nearly as potent and uncontrolled as Boy Wonder's reaction to me is over there. I mean, I think he has a full grown hard on in his pants and he's not making any effort to hide that

fact.

Nope. His attention was definitely tweaked to its heights by my magic.

But Paul... Damn. Why didn't I check out his package when he was still in here?

With a bite of my lip, I close my eyes and assess my immediate situation. There isn't a mirror anywhere in sight, of course, this being a jail and a simple one at that. But I don't need one to see the dirt beneath my nails and the mud caked to my skin. Those things are up front and personal. Along with this stupid, lavender, ripped up, column cowl mini sequin dress dress that I am wearing. A dress that I'm afraid I have been wearing for over a week. A dress that barely covers my assets and is so worn that most of the glimmer is gone. Holy Shit. Has it really been that long?

It has. I know it has. And despite that I am still dog tired, there's no rest for the wicked so I absolutely must stay awake until I've discovered a way to end these Shadow Hounds. What are the odds that these wolf shifters might have the answers I seek? Maybe... Suppose I come clean with them about what I am.... might they be convinced to help me?

It is definitely worth considering. However I'm going to have to feel them out a bit more first. The fact that one of them is mated is actually a good sign. It means that there is love in their hearts and they are possibly among the best kind of shifters in the world. The kind that do not survive on the draining of shadows. The kind that don't feed upon the souls of the Gifted to prolong their life like the

Shadow Hounds do.

Draco, the bastard, he'll never give up on devouring me. I know this.

He played a good game, I'll give him that. Luring me into his trap with the promise of a love that was all bullshit. Turning me away from my grandmother and my sister then waiting years to switch the fuck up and finally expose his dark heart for all to see.

But I was the willing idiot who decided to make myself a fool for love. Knowing what I knew about his kind and what they are about. I just didn't recognize him as one of them at first. He kept his pack well hidden from me. Never exposing his hand until the very last minute. Of course, Draco is over two hundred years old and has had plenty of time to perfect his craft.

As much as I hate him now, I must admit, some part of me is still torn to shreds in the wake of my heartbreak. That night, only about a week ago, he taught me that love is the greatest magic of all.

The ultimate illusion.

And I won't forget that fact for as long as I live.

Share to your friends

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

[ 1,003 words ]

2/3

The Pack: Rule Number 1 - No Mates

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Nine PAUL

"I'm having her brought up now," Rainier says as the pair of us step outside his office. "Are you sure about this? You really want to be the one to handle her? I-

"Yes!" I say interrupting for the hundredth time. "I still don't get what it is about her that has got you so-

But before I can finish the elevator doors open and she steps out, the scent of honeycomb even stronger now that she's close. My fangs tingle as I gaze down at her. She's a tiny thing. Not much taller than five feet, but goddamn is she perfect. I can feel my fangs tingling. Shit.

Rainier steps back, almost as if he's afraid to let her near him, the he says, "You're all set to leave Miss Bordeaux-

"Ana!" She snaps, her eyes flaring violet for a moment.

"Miss Bordeaux, Rainier counters, narrowing his gaze defiantly.

Anastacia murmurs something under her breath, something I'm sure she didn't intend for the pair of us to hear, but we do.

"Fucking mated wolves."

Rainier's eyes clash with mine and he smirks at me knowingly with a shake of his head. "Told you," he whispers. "Something strange... in the neighborhood... who you gonna call... not me asshole."

"Pussy," I cough, barely shuffling out of the way in time to avoid his fist.

Anastacia is lingering at the large glass doors as I approach, her eyes cast downward toward my zipper which instantly puts my dick on high alert and I'm hard as stone before I can take so much as another step. Fucking hell.

The front of my pants swells like a balloon on the end of a hose and all I can do is clear my throat to try and get her attention raised upward. It doesn't work. At least, not until I see her gaze widen and something that looks like a blush stain her cheeks - which actually makes the problem worse. Suddenly I'm carrying what feels like dumbbells attached to my balls and I almost don't know what to do.

You're a wolf asshole. Shake it off. Walk, homie, walk. It takes a moment. Along with a vision or two of naked old dudes climbing up on my junk, but I finally manage to bring my bang bang down enough to start my feet. Yes bang bang and no, it's not a nickname that I have for my dick.

\*Follow me," is all I manage to say, averting my eyes as hers go climbing up my frame.

"Anywhere," she murmurs behind me and I swear to God I almost trip over my own two feet as I step out the door.

"Bye Ana!" A chorus of males shout out to her as we step beyond the threshold and I have to bite down on my tongue to keep from growling.

"Bye y'all!" She giggles, shooting them a slight wave then blowing a two handed kiss in their direction.

Holy fuck. Really?

My eyes meet Rainier's only long enough to read the 'I told you so' in his gaze, then I tear my attention from the station completely and onto the path between me and my jeep.

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Nine

"Can I wait right here for you?" she asks suddenly, her gaze locked on the trees and woods that surround this place, but I know there's nothing out there right now so I shake my head no.

For some reason I am unreasonably angry at the way she just said goodbye to the entire damned precinct. "No. I'm not far."

She gapes at me, her eyes glazing over with a violet heat that makes me smile, but I just step past her and head toward my car. "This way

Anastacia."

"Ana!" She quips angrily, stalling by the door a moment before I hear the pitter patter of her bare feet racing my way.

Oh fuck, that's right. She doesn't even have shoes. When I gaze back at her, I can almost see the soreness of them in her eyes, despite the fact that she is doing her very damned best to hide it.

Well, that doesn't really matter, because I won't really be driving her out of town anyway. We're headed straight for my place, she just doesn't know it yet.

Nonetheless, I don't even think before sweeping her into my arms to carry her and goddamn if the soft feel of her skin doesn't send a thousand sparks lighting across my flesh.

She gasps in shock and just that sound alone has me hard again. Fucking kill me now.

She's gazing up at me with the strangest vulnerability in her eyes, something in them going so dark that they have gone from indigo to ocean blue in the space of a millisecond. I can feel my reaction to her pounding through my veins, sizzling and heating me from the inside out. It's so powerful, so absolutely vibrant with life that I have to take a moment to wonder if it could be my turn. If she could be be

my mate...

God. Could I be that lucky? To have my every fantasy come tumbling into my life in the form of one mystic eyed goddess.

Rainier thinks there's something off about her, and to be fair, there probably is. For one thing - nobody that I've ever met has eyes like hers. They're almost ethereal somehow. But deep down I know she's not a shifter. So then, what is she? Because I'll eat my own dick before I believe she's just an average human girl.

She's from New Orleans idiot. It doesn't really take a genius.

Oh shit. That's right. Maybe she's a... witch. I swallow that thought, breaking my gaze away from hers and ignoring the buzzing in my arms as we approach my bright red jeep. My heart suddenly pulses with discomfort. Not because I have a thing against witches. I don't. But if she is a witch - and something tells me that that particular presumption of her is more than likely - then most of what I'm feeling might not even be real.

And again. Fuck.

Chapter Comments

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

[ 1,602 words ]

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy ANASTACIA

My heart is thumping say practically that do have to do the went to bed up to his way up you control seemed to drain neytrything did thy magh, thy tinngine My day

All that same for heat to midim the bemuku, der expense of the gut but my box\* For a moment, I forget the type of gon's healy at the matt

taught me about shifters and of me to try or that she thing on time, her the time foxy by Yast

My zaza fises from his as to the wind founded Wond of it and promise of the life and was fed yet w there, leaning toward what would pestatly has the wreed singed mile of my fine and the making went the Cotting off the connection felt so amoy that my head give and pushing to do my sist

Stupid, stupid, girl. Were you really going to make a font of yourse

Yes, bitch. I was, the me

Still, for some reason I find my chest aching a bit with bee Stupid, hare, grally when to some unaffected by by it.

Sorry about that, 1 whinger, clutching my fingers into his shit and in the suis planes of the chest file with tode

Oh my... what in the everloving hell is wrong with ma

His eyes flutter downward once more to tangle with the line of my sight before to cars his throat and says, tho I am abiety nor sorry about that

\*For a long heartstopping moment of confusion I'm momentarily caught off guard, then his lips quick up in a hat smile and I bet house

with the most natural, most genuine laugh the had in a long time, gr, I singer Ohay than

Just as we reach the door to a candy apple red way, I find him looking deres at me again is begin biege teathy disappears as tus pupils dilate, their aim falling toward my mouth as he licks his life. I could alter swear his aus disse a little and that his gap tiginens around me, the tendons in his neck tending as he leans just a toy but closer. My head I can tear thumping tembing and is completely out of sync with its usual, simple rhyth

What are your he whispers, but he doesn't really look intent on that asset as he lowers his head chose Drawn, down, down... almost as if hypnotized by something in me.

I'm yours...

It's in my throat. On the end of my tongue. Everywhere in me. And I long to say it butt

Don't you fucking dare. Are you nuts?

Suddenly, Paul freezes on the wind, his entire body colling with unese Tipping his head up to the air, I hear a low grow numble within hits chest. The wolf in him comes straight to the forefront as his eyes dart around the landscape straight ahead of an "What is it?" I whisper, suddenly trembling a little as 1 curi deeper into myself a bit, grasping his shoulders tightly

He doesn't answer me, nor does he put me down, byd his gaze is steady as the hillside and although I cannot sense the hounds myself from whatever distance they might be, I know they are likely watching, he a wolf shafter I to more that certain that Paed can probably smell the bastards.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy

They're out there, aren't they? I hiss, my eyes grazing over the bark of the trees hunting for any sign of movement.

They are, he says tightly, not even pretending that he doesn't know exactly who they are. Shifting all of my weight onto one arm, he fishes in his pocket for his keys so easily that I feel my core heat with a zap of molten flame.

Shit.

Paul unlocks the door and deposits me gently inside. My bare legs hit the smooth, soft leather and I almost purr when I feel the graze of his hand under the cleft of my ass as he steps away. Closing the door with a swift click, his attention still on the woods I sigh with relief, feeling safer than I have in over a week. When I realize how dark his windows are they instantly make me feel even more secure, even though I know the hounds can likely see right through their tint. But who cares about that part for the moment? I can buy into illusions just as easily as anyone else can. Especially when they suit my purpose so completely. Even more so because I'm so tired of running that I could be convinced to live among these wolves for the rest of my days.

Wolf shifters settle in packs for the most part, unless of course they are rogues, or vagabonds, or ignorant. I've already seen enough since arriving here to tell me that Paul and Rainier must be members of the same pack, despite that this place does not seem like any sort of Packland that I've ever come across. Not that there have been many. Regardless, their presence was thick enough at the station that I know there are more wolves here. Of all the corners I've raced off to in the past week, just trying to shake Draco and his evil ravenous horde, this one feels almost... scatheless.

Destined.

One thing is for certain, the moment I am away from Paul, Draco is going to pounce. The very moment I am alone, I'll become his prey

once more.

I just need a way to convince Paul to let me stick around. At least for a little while. Just a tiny... little... while. Long enough for me to do a little research and gather my strength.

As I watch the almost taunting way Paul scours the forest while he heads around the car I can't help but rub my thighs together. There is just something about him that screams for my attention and I'm almost afraid to try and charm him, because once I do, how will I know if his attentions are real?

I won't.

And for some dumb as fuck, bitch you never learn your lesson, reason... I want them to be...

Paul keeps his eyes on the trees even after he jumps inside and starts the engine of the jeep. "Are you cold?" he asks without even looking

at me.

"Um... yeah, actually. I've been cold all day."

He snickers, pulling out of the parking lot smoothly while keeping his attention locked on the north end of the woods. Then he hits a few buttons on his steering wheel and heat blasts through the vents. "As many admirers as you had in the sheriff's station today, you'd think at least one of them would have seen to your comforts while you were in there."

With a bite of my lip, I realize he's right. That alone is something that i never seem to get right when I charm someone. Then again, maybe I do get it right, but as it isn't much more than a surface spell, all that tends to be offered up, is surface shit. Shit like smiles, and lude comments. Leers and rakish gazes.

I mean, I'm pretty confident that if I'd requested things like blankets or extra food while I was in, they would have been provided to me upon request... but he's right. None of those dudes was actually thinking about me. Not one of them. Not really. "We need to talk about what's hunting you," Paul whispers quietly.

"You know what's following me?" I ask, just to confirm.

2/3

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy

Paul smirks, his forearms flexing deliciously as his hands tense on the steering wheel. "You know that I do. The same way that I know, that you know exactly what I am, Anastacia."

"Ana, 1 gripe.

"I like Anastacia better."

"Good thing it's not your name then, huh?" I reply sweetly.

He laughs, casting me a sidelong smile. "You need something to wear. Something way more substantial than you've got on so..." Paul pauses, making a left onto a long stretch of road that offers a breathtaking view of the coastline. The street heads straight up the hill toward the more expensive looking homes and probably the highway as well, but we're not going nearly fast enough to lose the hounds, but once we're on the highway... we will be.

Hmm... I wonder if he truly plans to simply drop me on the outskirts of town or...

"I was thinking we should stop by my place first," he says almost nervously. "While we're there you can take a nice long shower, change into some clean clothes, we could talk over a halfway decent meal, and then... after we've both had a good night's rest-" his gaze finally tilts my way"-maybe we can set out on the highway tomorrow morning?"

Heat climbs my body from the tips of my toes to the very roots of my hair and my body blushes so deeply, I nearly see a hint of rose in the bare cocoa coloring of my thighs. "You mean... you want me to stay the night at your house? With you?" Please don't be mated, please don't have a girlfriend, please don't be TAKEN!!! "A-a-alone?"

Paul deflates, sighing as if in defeat. "Er-um-yeah... Maybe not such a good idea then, huh? Shit. Never mind then, we can just-

"No!" I nearly shout, my hand jutting forward before I can stop it and latching onto the muscle of his thigh. "I mean yes!" My eyes snap shut and I rip my hand from his leg. Fuck, fuck, fuck: "What I mean is... 1-I mean... I... I'd love to." Fuuucccklilinnggg Awwkkkkwwwaarddd.

## Chapter Comments

Jacqui Rossouw

### POST COMMENT

Loving the pace. Thank you Jaylee... Had me giggling at their awkwardness and feeling sorry for them too with their unknowns.

[VIEW ALL 2 COMMENTS >](#)

61

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

[ 1,486 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-One CANE

When Ted is tossed onto the ground in front of me, he's totally unconidious. It's getting dark out now and Gayle has already warned me that after dinner we'll be heading back to the mainland. Something about putting my new sight to the test, "You want to be the one to wake him?" Demonic taunts me, flashing a package of smelling salts like a hand of cards.

My gaze drops down toward. Ted's gherkin covered pants, then toward my own flaccid cock (yes I'm still naked) and I smile. My dick is the one thing my daddy blessed me with that is beyond reproach. One eyebrow quirks up in amusement when I think of all the times as a youth that I wondered if mine was small. Despite the countless pornos researched, that pretty much told me I had nothing to worry about. I mean, if I'm being honest, had I tried to be a porn star, I might have made a few millions of my very own.

"Yeah," "I'll "Yeah," I snicker, catching the salts in one hand. 'I wake the little pickle."

"Hey! Wait!" Bartlett shouts from the edge of the woods, before joining the few of us that are still outside. He runs a hand across his face. in embarrassment and then says, "My mate just wants to remind you all that actually hurting Ted would be wrong. That it would make us... Fuck..." he curses, trailing off with a laugh.

"Make us...?" Domonic prompts him. "Justified? Evil? Bloodthirsty? What, B?"

"Hypocrites, Bartlett whispers tightly.

"Huh." Domonic laughs. "She would be right. Tell her I said so. Then you may also tell her that she can write it on my tombstone for me

when I die."

"Dom." Bartlett was. "She's still

I on the fence about us. Remember?"

"Fine," Domonic snaps. "But from now on, if your mate is intent on sucking the fun out of every single little thing - then you are to keep her the fuck out of our business."

Bartlett rolls his eyes, then slips Domonic off and disappears back up toward the house.

"So then... I don't get to bite him?" I snarl playfully.

"You do it attacks you," Gryffin chirps on my left.

Quinn growls, "Or if he tries to fuck you with his tiny little"

"Gross!" I snap. "I mean, I have nothing against any kind of pleasures of the flesh. Be it nuzzle on male or female on male - but with a little. dick? Come on min, I'm trying to focus."

The three men around me fall into a fit of laughter and I use that moment to kneel in front of Ted, placing the swing of my cock, right at his forehead. Breaking open the salts, I drag them beneath his noses, waking my little treasure on the ground.

Ted rears back with a start, his eyes wild with fear, especially when he sees me squatting in front of him naked. For some reason, the sight pushes the fangs right from my lips. Ohhh yeah, I think this is what's gonna do it.

"What the fuck??? Cane???" Ted hisses.

I grin and I can almost feel my eyes flashing gold. "Hello Ted. I hear you fucked my sister,"

PAUL

1/33

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-One

My house sits at the top of an ficline about half a mile down the road from Domonic's place and amend the corner from Bartlett's. It is ultra-fortified, but there's no guesthouse, so no peilimeter fence, Kodas lace is a mile south and Logance is on the west corner. As soon as I get Anastacia tucked safely inside, I'm going to wander the woods. With any fuck, Ill me Tace to face with the Alpha Dog in his human. foam and he and I can have a little chat.

Who knows? Maybe I can convince him that it's in his best interest to live here and never come back.

Wah right. Pretty unlikely ghen that these hounds have already chased her two and a half thesand miles across the US of A.

Put still, perhaps they're newbies, Maybe they don't know any better?

Even as I think it, I know it isn't true. They smell... old. Almost molded

As my jeep pulls to the top of the drive and my dark umber brick home comes into focus, I don't miss the gap of admiration that falls from the enticing lips of the female at my side. There is one thing about my place that is different from everyone elses in my pack. My windows on the first floor are tinted just the way I like them. Pitch fucking black. I prefer artificial light to sunshine, and would probably love candles if I didn't hate fire so much. Even wolves have trouble seeing through to the indoors from the outside of my house, not that they won't be shaded anyway. For tonight at least.

Now that darkness is falling across the sky and the natural fog of the mountain is descending and the chill in the air is like a living breathing thing

"How many of you live here?" Anastacia whispers in awe.

Just me. The rest of my packmates have their own homes scattered around this same neighborhood," I inform her.

"No packhouse then?" she asks.

"No, I be, even though for some reason I don't Me doing so. My eyes scour the woods around my house for a moment, seeking out movement amongst the trees, but finding none. These hounds are smarter than most of their kind tend to be. They're being careful enough to hang back beyond my sight, "Do I get out? Or..." Anastacia asks, the fear in her voice just a tremble between fright and anxiety.

"No. You sit right there. I'll carry you inside," I say firmly.

"Mmm, okay,"

It's the 'Mom' that sends my mind straight to the gutter. Just that throaty sound of pleasure alone is one I could play in my head to any number of different daydreams. Things I would like to do to her. Things I'd like her to do to me.

For a moment that's all I can see, and my gaze lasers over the heavy swell of her breasts then up her throat and across her lips. Lips that would look absolutely perfect stretched around my cock. Fuck me she's beautiful

Look away dummy. It's time to go inside.

But my cock weighs a thousand pounds. If I'm to carry her, who's going to carry me?

"Give me a second, choke out, cursing how strangled my voice sounds.

Damn it, that shift in my weight makes my dick so heavy it almost feels like it's dragging the skin right off my back.

She's going to see it. She's going to see the barracuda in your drawers and burn it into a frog.

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-One

Or... a meal.

Stop it

chicle, stemming

With a groan that I don't even try to hide, I step out of the honeycomb demon. I don't think I've ever been this hard. Shit! Maybe when I like ten and hit puberty, but tonnelly deste

Be a man, be a man, be a man. One foot in front of the other. The faster you can get her inside, the faster you can beat it eff

Shame crashes over me at that thought. "You're not a fucking pup, idic, I growl to myself, using my shifter speed to fly to the other side

of the jeep. I open her door without saying so much as a word and that quickly I hear a rustling somewhere to my right. "War" I command her in a whisper, as she reaches toward my neck.

For whatever reason, the caution of my voice causes her to squeal and instead of listening she leaps out

a tree. With a quick hop up into my arms, her legs go around my waist and her arms lock around my neck. "Go" barely visible purple mist snakes out all around us. "Hurry I can't hold them off for long. Only while they are shifted Unshifted? Fuck!

My ears pique as the rumble of at least a half dozen footsteps careen up the hill. Fuck me, she's right. They're coming behind her ass, keeping her locked against my body as I use my superior speed to race toward my porch. I as much as I'd like to stick around and listen to what it is that they are discussing, the tremble of fear can't be ignored.

Once we hit the porch, I let a loud growl of warning slip past my lips to disguise the sound of me unlocking my door, the the threshold inside and I slam the door closed at my back, locking it at the same time.

That's when I hear it, the dragging howl of six hounds wailing into the wind.

"They've shifted," Anastacia says into my neck, Just beneath

my ear.

And that's when I notice, she hasn't released me and I haven't released her either. But that's not even the worst

Her core is pressed into my jeans, right over my engorged cock, and I can feel how wet she is right through the fuckin Holy shit.

"You... are... a witch. Aren't you?!"

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

[ 1,556 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Two CANE

"Please 1-I'm sorry!" Ted screams, fighting like hell to find purchase among the uncooperative evergreens of the forest. "1-1 don't want to die (4)

My new body feels amazing and despite the cries of the whelp hollering for forgiveness, I'm hardly paying him any attention at all. In fact, the moment I shifted, I stopped chasing the fucker. I mean, it's not like I intended to catch him anyway, and if I'm being honest, I kind of owe him one.

He helped unleash the beast.

And the beast is frighteningly big. And fast. And limber. And strong. And able to climb up the sides of the trees to the tippy tippy top without much more than a few flicks of the wrist.

Oh yeah. I was meant to be a hunter, just like my father said. Just not the type of hunter he imagined,

No. I'm a lion and Gryffin may be taller than me in human form, but only by an inch or so.

In low form though? I've got twenty pounds on him at least.

Haha!

I'm so goddamned happy I don't even realize Ted has pissed himself until the others shift back into their human forms and gather around him, while floundering across the frost covered ground in hysterics. \*Please no! Please God no! I never meant to hurt her! I swear to God! thought I loved her! I just wanted her so bad! I-I'm so, so, damned sorry!" Ted is crying now, on his knees as if he's praying to a tree. But that the fuck is he talking about? Hurt her how? And who? What?

The laughter all around has died as suddenly as it started, and Quinn's naked ass has begun to growl.

you mean... you never meant to hurt her?" Quinn asks Ted in a deadly voice. "The pair of you went out together... on a date,

""What do you

right?"

Ted's snille mulle his words, but I still hear them when he says, "I didn't rape her! I swear! you can ask Roman. He-he's the one that stopped me,"

What The Firck.

"Rape her? Quinn hisses. "You fucked her. Right?"

Ted shakes his head crazily. "N-no! Id-didn't. W wait... I mean, wh-what? 1-1 made a mistake is all. I tried to... to be with her b-b-but, sh- she didn't want me. I really, really, thought she did, but she didn't." "Quinn, Domonic snaps a warning. "Back off. Now. Remember, we promised Bartlett."

"No, no, no. Just wait a second, Dom. I think we may have been a little confused as to what actually went on between my Lilac and this pussy ass, piece of average shit that just pissed in our woods."

"Quinn! Hey, chill out!" Gryffin warns, but his eyes are not on me as I stalk forward as stealthily as possible.

"Did you try to... to FOWCF yourself on my girl, motherfucker? Is that he she saw your dick?" Quinn barks.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Two

"I said I was sorry? Bonsan already punished me for it when it happened Please, please, please! She said she forgave mett

"Oh hell not Quinn spits suddenly, shifting so swiftly he almost takes for kill.

What happens next has every single pair of eyes completely fixated on dir, because one second I'm fifty feet away from them and the very next I'm shifted back into my human form with my hands wrapped and Ted's throat, and a fully shifted werewolf tossed out of my way

"Tell that story again for me, Ted. From the very, fucking beginning," 1 pit.

ANASTACIA

There's a steel rod pressed against my slit and for a moment I don't even hear his question, "Wh what?" II reply, cringing when I hear how moantil I sound. Shit, shit, double shit

His large hands close around the underside of my ass for the quickest second, and I swear I hear him gran under his breath before he peels me off of him and deposits my feet on the cold tile floor and I cire the loss of connection.

He's panting heavily, his eyes nearly black as he gazes down at me. "I said... you're a witch."

His gaze suddenly narrows on me and I flinch, stepping away from him and curling my arms around myself. His hands fist at his sides, his brow furrowing almost as if he regrets the accusation in his words, but it's too late, I already heard him.

I don't even know what to say to him now. No, I'm not a witch asshole. Fm Gifted. Im not a witch. I'm a Mystic. One of the Gifted."

"Same thing," he says with a smirk, gazing around his space as if he's never seen it before.

I follow his lead, taking in the modern yet homey surroundings. Everything in this place is drenched in shades of black, yellow, and to my immense surprise, deep dark violet. The walls are painted an almost silky gray. While my gaze dances across the far wall and the enomous television there, Paul hits a switch and a digital fireplace dampes to life beneath it, the actual warmth releasing within it, drawing me forward, deeper into the space.

"Its not the same thing" I argue, glaring back at him while simultaneously smiling at him with my eyes. "And thank you. This feels lovely."

His eyes are for a moment as he studies me, still dark as pitch, his pupils fully dilated. Tve only met one other Voodoo Queen in my life and she was much older than you are. And her eyes were hazel, but I remember how they would flash gold when she would cast. She once threatened to turn me into a chicken so that she could sacrifice me on the blood altar."

ust between you and me, they scare the hell out of me. But... believe it or not, they're not evil First of all, I'm not a Voodoo Queen and just Just... gifted. For her to threaten you that way, you must have pissed her off" I snicker. "Was she wanting to call on the spints of the dam or something?"

He grins, nodding. "Yeah I think so. I thought I was in love with her daughter. I thought she was my mate. She did not agree."

For some reason that angers me

and I scowl. "Well it's too bad she didn't succeed then."

"Oh is it?" He taunts me. Then whose house would you be safely tucked inside?"

With a bite of my lip, I let my shoulders sag. "I'd probably be dead."

A rumbling growl has me straightening my spine and gazing at him again. To my surprise he doesn't look mad at me, just mad in general and I cannot say that it's a bad look on him. Anger makes his muscles coil and flex in a way that has my mouth watering and my panties soaking. Shit, that's right. He promised me a shower.

"I remember someone swearing that I could have food and a hot bath," I whisper, feeling his gaze on me like a physical touch from across the room

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Two-

"Yeah," he rasps. "Just let me done thing, first."

"What's that?" I ask, with a teasing smile. Kiss me? Undress me? Fuck me against the wall? The world is your oyster Pretty Paul, all you need

to do is ask.

Oh for Goddess sake, Ana, get a grip.

He whips off his t-shirt and my throat closes. My mouth goes completely dry at the tribal ink banded around the prominent flex of his boulderlike biceps and I don't even realize that he's unbuckling his pants until I've finished mapping out every crevice of his abs. Goddess bless this man before me, may I never thirst again. I want him. I want all of him

The sight of the power packed muscles of his thighs has me riveted, and Goddess help me, I mean I cannot turn away. That's when he does the unexpected, turns around, drops his bowers, and graces me with the holiest sight my eyes have ever seen. His rock hard ass. Oh my fucking God I am hungry.

"I'll take it," I whisper before I can

myself. My g

is swimming with so much heat I'm surprised I can see at all.

He glances over his shoulder and the look he fixes me with says I can have it all, but the words that come out of his mouth are, "No matter what you hear, do not come outside."

"Wh-what?" I spit out just as he steps outside the door and slams it behind him.

I leap to my feet, in the next minute, cursing the fact that he just left me alone, but that's when I hear it. The fierce growl of an alpha wolf and I realize exactly what he's about to do. Racing toward the window, peek outside and my breath stutters from my throat. The biggest damned animal I have ever seen now stands snarling on the porch in the form of a dazzling blond wolf

"Oh... fuck..."

Draco is a Shadow Hound, but in shifted form, he's barely even half the size of the apex predator on the other side of this wall. When Paul's magnificent head tips back toward the sky, a loud, earth quaking howl pierces the sky and I stagger back as I suddenly feel the room

fall. spin around me and the ground reach up to catch

my

Chapter Comments

POST COMMENT

Alomea

yeah, I wasn't sure first but it wasn't supposed that Ted escaped from the lion's dungeon some chapters ago? when Cane and Gayle entered the room looking for him...

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

[ 1,101 words ]

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Three

The fog is thick this morning. Lassoed around my grandma's house here twined about a body. It's winter tone and the sky is more gray than it has ever been, but even so the fog is never quite so thick here, so I have to wonder what the hell is going on. Stepping past the weatherbeaten threshold and into my grandma's living room causes me to hear by breath. My nose is ripe with grandma's egg blue in every

It may be dark outside, but the living room is bright and the new beyond the windows shows a cloudless sky direction. What the - huh??

A quick gaze around finds my grandma sitting quietly in her favorite chair, a ball of yarn and fresh knitting on her lap.

"Gran! Hey! Where's Chelsea? My eyes search the space for my sister, frong when I come up empty.

Gran laughs, her dark blue eyes swirling as she looks up at me. "Child, you ow dong well these visits are personal and private."

I squint, turning my head to observe her carefully. She looks younger somehow. Not sick the way she was the last time we were together.

11hen wassss the last time we were together?

"Oh my Goddess!" I exclaim. "This is a dream, isn't it Gran?"

My grandama smiles at me, nodding her head knowingly. "No child, this is a visit. I've been holding onto the veil, waiting for this day for a while now, baby. You've been lost to us for the fast two years. It's nice to know someone has finally breached Draco's barrier over your heart. you

are free now.

What the heck is the talking about? Fr

Free?

"Oh Gran, You were so, so right about him. Jo so sorry. But, you're wrong He's still out there. He's been chasing me since the day you died. He pretended he was gonna take me to go and see you. To see your body, but fall to my knees he lied, Gran. He led

"It's not your fault, angel. You only hoped to be loved. One thing I have learned since passing is that straying from the path is sometimes necessary for the greater good, Even if it may not seem that way at the time. She sighs, "I still love you. No matter the choices you made. I held your hand when you sang your song of sorrow. I was there when you finally decided to run from the best."

"Still," I moan helplessly. Tm sorry I wasn't there for Chelsea... and what do you mean someone has finally breached the barrier? What barrier,

Gran?

She purses her lips, lowering her eyes to the plush white carpet at her bare feet. "Draco placed a barrier over your heart, sweet girl siphon. You are my Gifted her. Your innate ability to inherit my gifts sparked to life the day I traveled. So all of your emotions and eff of your magics, along with mine, were locked up inside of you. You couldn't complete much more than a few surface conjurings before she grins "-now though-" her ryebrows wag "-a true mate has set you free."

"The mate? Gran? What in the niligator crust are you talking about?"

Grandmama's eyes fill with tears and when I reach forward, to grasp her knees and my hands go straight through "Gran? Her body is fading right before my eyes. "Hair"

She chuckles, the sound of a tingle of song from far away. "I did, baby girl. A week. Now that I've finally been able to say goodbye, I can finally pass beyond the veil. I love you my angel. The next time you open your eyes you will know true power. You're going to have to save him from himself. Whatever you take from this visit, let it be that. He will not believe in you at first and you will have to fight tooth and nail to keep Jim close. But I have faith in you, child. You and he will birth a son. And that child will be the next Alpha of his pack." What? Gran? What are you talking about? I cry as everything around me begins to disappear and I'm suddenly back in the woods,

I glance around in a panic as I realize, I've just fallen again and the hounds are only a few steps behind me. I can hear them, smell them, feel them on the wind... and leap to my feet and race forward. A gray sky looms ahead through a crack in the treeline. The tang of ocean brine rides air and I know the coast is near. Salt water! Perfect! Shadow Hounds are extremely susceptible to ocean water! In a minute... how do I know that? What the hell? And why-

All coherent thought leaves me as I tumble down the mountainside and hit my head on a boulder, my skull resounding with a deathly crack

A pair of eyes glint red in the darkness at the edge of my yard and I flash my fangs in warning. The scent of fear is like a siren's song to a wolf and I take my first step in their direction, my lip lifting as I growl. The biggest of the hounds shifts into his human form, his right eyes and the man behind the dog grins.

"Trouble with you, brother, but the female you are protecting is mine. She belongs to me. She promised herself to me after murdering your sister. She owes me. A life for a life."

Tricky meaningless drivel is all I hear and I don't answer to such things. Instead, I growl. Low, angry, and intent on making myself clear. My muscles bunch as I prepare to pounce, knowing it will be much easier to kill the Alpha of their pack while he is human, but something

A crushing pain envelopes my throat and fear blazes across

Anastacia?

chest.

I step back, lowering my head as if pretending to understand the vagrant dog at the edge of my woods. Shifting back into myself, the shifted hound's eyes go wide with shock.

your only

This is you ay from here? I snarl. I don't care what life you think she owes you. This is not her town, nor is it yours. warning. Leave tonight," I snap, ignoring the flash of anger I receive in return before turning my back on him in a show of disrespect. I'm not afraid of you, mutt. Nor am I afraid of your little strays.

Then I step back in the house and lock the door, panicking as I look around and see Anastacia has gone.

hiss in disappointment. She doesn't answer, but my heightened senses can hear her heart beating and my eyes follow the

she lays unconscious on the floor and barely breathing "Fuck!"

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

[ 1,350 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Four PAUL

After throwing on my clothes as quickly a quickly as possible, I carry her up to my room and hit the switch to shade all the windows. I have a very extravagant alarm system and my home is hooked up to a backup genestar, so I'm not worried about someone getting in without my knowledge. Anastacia's eyes are twitching behind the cocoa shimmer of her eyelids and for a moment I wonder if she had some kind of witchy little episode that put her on her ass. Her heartbeat is strong. Her lips are moving as if she's talking to somebody, yet no words are expelled from her lips.

After laying her down on my bed I leap into the bathroom to run her a warm bath, complete with bubbles and lavender oil. Then, I grab her and step under the four headed raintop of my segregated shower and spin the dial to full blast.

Freezing water assaults the pair of us and Anastacia wakes with a gasp "Holy shit!" she cries out, latching onto me and pressing her chest against my own. Her nipples are like hardened pearls that spike through the worn fabric of her top and my dick rocks up despite the cold water that now soaks my body from head to toe.

"Are you okay?" I ask her as she starts to shiver.

She gazes at me with wide, confused eyes Eyes that swirl and pulse like a nebula, an interstellar cloud stitched deep in space. If I didn't know better, I'd say they are even more intense now than they were before she passed out. the darkest part of

"I'd bob-be b-be-better i-f-f-f-w-we w-we-we-weren't u-u-u-u-under th-th-th-the fr-freez-z-zing wat-t-t-er," she shivers out.

"Oh," I whisper, my eyes tangling with her lips as I reach out and shut off the tap. "Sorry about that. I ran you a bath, but I needed you to be alert first"

"W-w-well 1-I'm d-d-d-el-f-f-finitely al-alert n-now," she garbles.

I chuckle, stepping out of the shower stall and into the bathroom where the steam from the tub has begun to rise and dress the space. The warmth hits us right away and she moans, leaning her head back languorously. "Oh, yes please. Don't mind if I do," she says, her indigo orbs turning toward the large jacuzzi tub in the corner of the room. "Perfect"

Yes. You are.

The tile and walls are silver and gray, respectfully and for the first time I notice, all the accents in the room are such a deep blue-violet that they nearly match her eyes. It's just a coincidence, Paul A happy one, but a coincidence nonetheless. She's a witch. She might be making you feel stuff that is not your own. You could be connecting things that would otherwise never occur to you were even a little bit alike.

But I have always loved the color indigo. Always. Even when I was young, I hated how light of a blue my eyes were. I wanted them dark. I wanted them like hers. And I have always had a thing for exotic females Tanned and curved to perfection. Long dark hair... also a plus.

Might she have mocha colored nipples too?

"You must be a terribly powerful witch-" I begin, but scowl stops me and I flash her a grin before changing it up, "-terribly gifted-uh-er- mystic, I mean."

Her eyes shutter and her attention falls to my lips. "Oh? What makes you say

Because the little spell you've cast for attention has my cock throbbing in rhythm to the pulse point on the side of your neck and my fangs curling to bite you

"You should never charm a wolf shifter," I warn her. Then, setting her on the edge of the tub, I take a step back. "It could be extremely dangerous for you."

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Four

Her brow furrows angrily and her lips twist into a frown. "Charm a shifter? You think I've charmed you somehow?"

I tell my eyes heavenward and begin to back out of the room. I'll leave some clothes for you on my bed. Is your head okay?

Crossing her arms beneath her deliciously round bosom, she cocks an eyebrow. "My head is fine. Is your head okay?"

It will be, once I get the fuck out of this room, shit...

My gaze hitches on her outer thighs, where her dress has ridden up to expose part of her ass for my viewing pleasure. Is there a reason her skin is so soft? Because fuck..... it is 300L... Stop yourself. Stop yourself now.

"I'll be downstairs. Take your time. Do you need some help getting undressed? Or..."  
Fuck! What the fuck, dummy?!?

She smiles wide and wicked. "Well it does the around back and I can't be sure, but I think it might be knotted."

My heart is now pumping in my throat. "Seriously?"

She loses her smile. "No. I was teasing," she quips, narrowing her eyes. Just another of my magic tricks, obviously."

Is she being sarcastic?

I go to make dinner. I can shower when you're done."

Or you can shower now while I bathe," she says throatily, standing and reaching behind herself to untie the top of her dress.

I clamp my eyes closed and stumble backward. "I'll leave you to it."

Catching the bare end of a frown as

it turns her features, I slam the door shut just before my fangs spear out, the venom inside of pumping ferociously enough to drip onto the end of my tongue.

"Fucking hell," I snarl to myself, ripping my wet clothes off and dropping them into the hamper.

With my eyes on the door, I dress in a pair of black sweatpants, stroke my cock for good measure, then stumble downstairs. I get to work right away, putting together a salad and boiling wild rice. Then I marinate a couple of t-bones and couple of chicken breasts, just because I failed to ask her preference. I've just finished chopping up some peppers when my phone rings and I release a shuddering breath when I

see Rainier's name flash across the screen.

"About fucki

time," I spit.

His Laughter is thick with arrogance. "I tried to tell you. What's wrong? Did she snap your dick off or something? Give it wings, maybe? Warts perhaps?"

"Do not be gross. She's a witch," I growl, tossing the marinated steaks into the frying pan. "And she's fucking with my head."

"A witch? The Muucockkk?"

"Yeah, I had words with the Alpha chasing her as well. According to him, she killed his sister or something and owes him her life," L

grumble.

"Oh fuck," Rainier groans and I hear the unmistakable sound of the yacht engine firing to life.

"Wait a minute. You haven't even left the island yet?"

"We had a thing.... no no. Bad sedre tu

"Yup. He's fucking lethal. I'd be jealous except that Fret

hear Gryffin curse. "But now that you're telling me th

My entire body seizes with anger and I damn near up the phone in

No way in fucking hell am I doing that.

No

Fuck that. We don't even know if it's true," I say as calmly as my suddenly binding exgs will alone and events the opon, Buck that

"Right, right. Okay. Well... have you at least asked her about it yet?"

"Not yet. This just happened. She's still in the bath."

There must be something in my voice, something that gives away how very close I am to the edge hisses, "You fucked her. You fucked her didn't you?" "What the hell? Fuck no, I wouldn't touch a witch asshole. Not for any to why I told it. They to creepy as fuck."

Not even of the were by mate" Al

wearing nothing but one of my shirts and a pair de

Something shatters behind me and I

spin around to find Anastacia standing boxer briefs that must be tied in the front with a rubber band Fuck I forgot to leave the clothes out for her She looks like a real Time Goddess of Wet Dreams and I nearly crush my phone in my hand to stop myself from grabbing her.

There's broken glass scattered across her feet and when my gaze drag every word I just said.

I should have heard her come in. Why didn't I?

beautifully tanned legs to her yes, I

Fuck

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

[ 1,576 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Five ANASTACIA

When I finish my bath I feel amazing, I hadn't had a sonk like that in fever and trying to keep ahead of the hounds put me out of a shower for a week. Enough mud came off of me to fill a swamp with and swear my skin is two shades lighter now that I'm freshly scrubbed. Stepping into Paul's room, I take everything in. His fluffy black pillows and indigo duvet, the gray walls, the black velvet furniture... The space is dark with artificial lanterns lighting the corners of the room in soft orange light. Gazing around, I notice he forgot to lay out clothes for me to wear, so I go ahead and help myself to a couple of things in his drawers. Selecting a pair of his boxer briefs that I tie together in front to keep them on, and a thin, wom while t-shirt that's as soft as kitten fur, I float toward the stairs in somewhat of a trance. Why had Paul and I been under the cold spray of the shower when I woke up?

Why had I been passed out at all?

When I was submerged in that heavenly warm water, with bubbles all the way up to my chin, I couldn't shake the feeling that there was something I was supposed to be doing. Or something that I was supposed to remember. message?

But what? And from who?

The aroma of something cooking spirals up the stairs then into the room and my stomach attacks. Growling ferociously and reminding me that it's been a while since I've had an actual meal. Maybe I'll remember what it is after I eat.

The shirt I've chosen smells delicious. Like papaya and frosted lemonade. A smell that makes me think of cocktails on the beach.

There was a bar in the living room. I wonder how well stocked it might be. Maybe I can make a couple of drinks.

There was

As I float down the stairs barefoot, I can hear him talking on the phone, so I pitter patter over to the bar and grab a tumbler. Then... I listen as he talks about the hounds...

"Yeah. I had words with the Alpha chasing her as well. According to him, she killed his sister or something and owes him her life, Paul

says.

My jaw clenches in anger. What a fucking sneaky Merle War Drake is. First of all, he never had a damned sister. I'm the one that has a sister.

"Wait a minute. You haven't even left the island yet?" Paul is saying as I stalk toward the kitchen needing to set Paul straight. Pausing in the doorway to let him finish his conversation, I admire the lines of his back as he moves. The ripples of tendons and flesh are itching to be explored. Goddess, he's sexy. Despite the loose sweatpants, the definition of his ass calls out to me. Every little more he makes dances with muscle. My mouth goes dry just watching.

"Cane?" Paul asks.

Funny that he hasn't even noticed that I'm standing here. He's a wolf shifter after all. They're known for their superior hearing. I can barely make out the voice on the other line, but I know this much, it isn't female, which for some reason pleases me.

"Fuck that. We don't even know if it's true," Paul says, and my guess is whoever is on the phone suggested that he give me up.

I'm not gonna lie, his passionate response has my core on the hot trot.

Still not noticing me, I eye him as he flips two steaks in the pan, I begin to roll the tumbler between two hands, trying to be patient as

Paul goes on. "Not yet. This is happened. She's still in the bath."

Nope. Actually Fim behind you,

"What the hell? Fuck no, I wouldn't touch a witch asshole. Not for my son. Not even of she were my more."

A ringing starts in my ears that's so loud, for a moment I sway on my feet.

The sting of his words is immediate and much more powerful than I'd like to admit. Batting my eyelashes to keep moisture from gathering. I prepare to make myself known, but something stops me.

Paul snorts and then insults me. They're creepy as fuck."

surge of white hat anger engulfs my palms and the glass in my hands shatters without me even dropping the damn thing. Sparkling slivers shower my feet and although I'm shocked-because I've never had that happen before my mind focuses on the blond bastard in front of me that just called me creepy. Why creepy? How fucking awful com / be? I have never been called CREEPY in all my life.

Paul spins aound, the sound of the tumbler exploding catching his attention. His gaze lands at my bare feet and the glass dust all around me. His eyes sweep upward slowly, the bulge behind his pants swelling in the space of an instant. Creepy my ass. Fuck you, Pretty Paul

He reaches out for a moment when he sees me, almost like he wants to grab for me, but my throat is tight and my eyes are hot with anger. So I shake my head no as my chest begins to heave with rage and disappointment. I suddenly feel so out of place that I don't ven know what to do.

I wish I were at home. At Gran's old place. With my sister.

Leme. You should leave.

And run again? No fucking thank you. I need a good night's sleep at the very least. After that, maybe I'll be able to figure a way home. Maybe Ill have this idiot in front of me take me all the way back to Louisiana. I doubt the hounds will be able to follow his jeep on a two and a hit thousand mile trip.

"Fuck," Paul hisses into the phone. "I've got to go. Call me when you dock." Then he hangs up and we simply stare at one another. To my immense pleasure, Paul looks like he just swallowed a toad. He knows he just fucked up. He knows. He mumbles, "I-I didn't... I mean I just

"No!" I choke out. "Don't you dare apologize. I'd much rather know how you really feel than have you pretend I'm welcome here or pretend you're attracted to me. Then my eyes wither downward, where his cock is still hard as stone. "Creepy indeed." "Pretend I'm attracted to you? Who said that I was attracted to you?" His handsome face flushes and then he smirks down at his crotch. "Uh. Doesn't look like pretend to me."

"Oh, fuck off," I snap and he loses his smile, his jaw clenching angrily.

I hate that he's so handsome.

His words echo in my head I wouldn't touch a witch asshole. Not for any reason. Not even if she were my mate. That declaration alone sends a rip of pain right through the center of my chest, though I can't figure why.

Why does his dismissal of me hurt the way it does?

I've always known that Wolf Shifters have mates. I've never wished to be one. So why does it feel like he just crushed my heart in the palm of his hand?

I snort my disgust at him and at myself as I start to back away, but he lightning fast so he's ont me in the time it takes me to gap, Staring down at me, his blue eyes swirl like the turbulent sea. "Don't more until I can get that glass up.

I sneer at him, despite that his sudden nearness has my downtown damsel damp with anal, Ni, A. Bant get all CREEPY on Jim non,

He steps around me, heading for a

ໄວນ

hall closet and grabbing a handheld yacim from inside. Returning to me, he bends over and fin granted a close up view of his grand derriere while he sucks up the gla. Finishing up the chore, he sets the vacinin on the breakfast nook to my left and then reaches for me so quickly that I don't have tijne to protest.

At least, not until I'm in his arms and being carried brid

bridal style mer to the sink. "I can walk, you know,"

"No," he says simply, not meeting my y eyes. "That glass exploded at your feet. Let me wash it off."

No! I want to scream, but I don't. The truth is, being this close to his powerful chest is soothing in the strangest way. Even if I do disgust

him.

He sets me on the cold counter so

that my feet are in the sink, then he uses the sprayer to remove all traces of glass from my ankles and soles. The water is warm so I relax a bit, staring into the drain as the

remaining glass dust swirls een

down

the pipes, all the while ignoring his eyes that I can feel boring into the side of my face.

Shutting off the tap, he grabs a towel from the cupboard above the sink and pats my feet dry, then his thumb grazes my that heat floods my core. He inhales sharply, his eyes going nearly black as he gazes down at me. A tiny smile turns his lips. "You like me."

skin so gently

I swallow thickly, my eyes snapping toward the stove at his back. "You're burning the food." He ignores that, his hand leaving the towel to stroke five Engers up the side of one ankle. Again feel my pussy thrumming. Dawn him. "And you need to stop touching me," I grumble. "+know how much you hate it."

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

[ 1,176 words ]

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Six

PAUL

Shes wrong. I don't hate it. But that is what bothers me,

I should hate it. Shouldn't 17

She's a witch. A conjurer. She has powers I'm completely unfamiliar with and it fucks up my heart.

She's more than beautiful enough for me to be naturally attracted to, so I know my desire for her is a primal thing. And actual thing

That's not the problem.

The thing that gets me is the other stuff. The purple mist, the flashing eyes, the not knowing why my heart is pumping so rapidly with my fingers stroking up her ankle,"

If she's bewitching me, it makes more sense. If she casted some sort of charm over me,

My brow furrows as I tune into her pulsing, galloping heart, and match it with my own.

Am I really affecting her? Or is it in trick?

"You don't have to use your magic on me," I murmur quietly.

I get it. And I resent it.

Her head snaps up and she snarls behind clenched teeth, "You. Are. Burning. The Food. And I'm hungry" She jerks out of my grip and spins away from the sink, kicking me with her tiny legs in the process. If you won't cook it. I will."

She leaps from the counter and I watch as she saunters toward my stove to take over. My eyes are on the barely visible lines of her juicy little ass as she works and I stroke my cock on the outside of my sweats to ease a little of the tension she created. For some reason, the sight of her cooking in my kitchen sends an explosion of warmth through me. She looks perfect there. And call me an asshole if you want to, but I like the image of her as a homemaker.

My homemaker. Fucking hell.

She's not your anything. She's a witch running from dogs.

"Tell me about the hounds," I say to her, grabbing the mop out of the closet. I need to make sure all that powdered glass is gone.

She side-eyes me, snapping a pair of tongs my way as she flips the steaks off the pan and onto a plate to rest. Her hair is still wet and already the curls bounce and sway with her every movement. "I didn't kill his sister. He doesn't ever fine a sister. As far as I know, he never did."

"Okay," I reply, mopping quickly and then putting away my supplies. Leaning on the doorframe, I watch her start the chicken. With a roll of her eyes, she reaches toward my spice rack and grabs the cayenne, adding a healthy dose of it to the bubbling butter. Cute. So she likes spicy foods. Got it. "The glass you broke was it a tumbler?"

This gives her pause and she bites her plump, delectable lip. Her eyes bat in my direction, dilating when she focuses on my bare chest. "Yeah. I was feeling a couple of cocktail. I dunno. Like a pupaya Pina Colada or something." Papaya I quip. "Don't think I have any. What made you want that?"

Her lips purse and she turns away from me. "I don't wait it. Not anymore."

For some reason I feel that comment like an arrow to the chest and I step forward. "And why's that?" I challenge her, my eyes traveling over the delicious caramel of her legs.

"Because 17 doesn't want me," she whispers, clearing her throat afterward. "Where are we going to eat?"

"Because it doesn't want you..." I repeat not ready to let it go. "It?"

She doesn't turn, focusing entirely on the food in front of her as she fills a pot with water and milk for potatoes. "You. You smell like papaya."

My body jerks in surprise. Papaya? Me? I don't see how that could be true, but still... I have to ask. Is that what you honestly believe? That I don't... that I'm not..."

She spins on me, glaring up at my face from shuttered eyelids, her impossibly long lashes casting a shadow over her cheeks. "It's what you

My jaw goes tight, my fists clenching at my sides as I bypass her to head for the dining room and set the table. I lean in close as I step past her and whisper in her ear, "You smell like honeycomb. Even after your lavender bath." "Honeycomb? What? Yuck!" she

lore honeycomb,

she says behind me and this gives me pause.

And something is telling me, she loves papaya.

Then, I continue toward the other

room, feeling her eyes on my back the entire time. When I'm done setting the table, I turn around to see her transferring the abundance of food onto platters I had set on the breakfast nook. Papaya....

Pulling out my phone, I shoot Draven a quick text.

Do I smell like papaya to you, too?

Luna D-

Is this a trick question?

Humor me.

Luna D-

I honestly couldn't say. I've never been so bold as to sniff you.

Me-

So that's a no. Thanks

Luna D-

Save the weird shit for Jater, yeah?

2/3

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Six

You'd be so mad at me if you knew what happened minutes ago,

Luna D

That alone pisses me off. I don't even need to know what you've done. FIX IT! Whatever it is...

Chuckling, I put my phone back in my pocket. As Anastacia enters the room, she scowls. "Is something funny?" she chirps. Right? A witch couldn't be my mate. Right?

I shake my head, watching her carefully. There's no way, right?

Maybe she has heightened senses, like shifters do. Maybe she can smell it on me

Then again, I don't wear papaya aftershave, nor do I use that type of shampoo,

Could she be trying to trick me in some way? She can't possibly know about the draws of a mate, can she?

Maybe she thinks I plan to take her to the edge of some town tomorrow and just push her out of my car.

Wait just a minute though. I almost forgot about that part. She expects me to take her somewhere. She expects to leave:

Taking a seat across from her at my small, round dining table my body begins to constrict with tension. I don't think I can do At least,

not until we dealt with the hounds

"About the hounds," I start, smiling as she loads my plate with food before she leads her own. "Maybe it's time you told me how you get involved with them. Why are they chasing you?"

She sighs, pausing in the middle of

slicing into her steak. She prefers

the red meat to the white... Interesting. She has to be starving so I almost tell her we can talk about it later, but she lifts her eyes to mine and the fear I see there sends icicles spearing into my chest.

"They're not regular hound shifters," she says flatly. "They're shadow hounds."

"Hounds? What the hell is the difference?"

"Shadow hounds?"

"I thought you said you've met a Voodoo Queen once?"

"I have. She didn't exactly share all her knowledge with me though. So... what are they?"

Her eyebrows quirk upward and she settles back against the cushioned velvet of the dining room chair. "I think you better fix us a couple of drinks, Pretty Paul. We're going to need them."

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[ 2,869 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Seven ANASTACIA

When Paul places a papaya-less Pina Colada on the table in front of me, he retakes his seat. He hasn't fixed himself a drink and I ponder why for only a moment before I take a healthy sip and close my eyes, moaning with pleasure. "Mmm," I murmur. "That's really good."

When I meet his gaze, his eyes are heavy lidded and his lips are wet. The ridges of his muscled forearms are flexed tight and shifting under the light. He clears his throat, focusing on something beyond me when he says, "So tell me about the shadow hounds." "The first thing you need to know... is my Gran was a Mystic like me. She was super talented and wanted to teach me everything I would need to know about my gifts

but-"I pause, taking a bite of the steak and flushing red when my stomach rumbles with furious hunger. "Im so sorry," I say feeling stupid. "I haven't had a real meal in-

"It's okay," Paul replies, his eyes sparkling with mirth. "It's cute."

"Starving is cute?" I asked with a wry smile.

"Not that part," he says somewhat seriously. "Your tummy's little grow! That's what is adorable.

in my stomach. "Uh huh." Are you sure you don't mean creepy? I take a few more bites of my food to subdue the chorus of gurgles erupting then I continue, "Like I said, Gran was a Mystic. My dad was never around. He abandoned my mother when Chelsea and I were very young. so that's when she decided to move us all with Gran. Gran knew right away what I was, even though for the first few years of my life. my mother denied there was anything different about me. My mother was born normal, and she was pretty resentful of me for a long time, but I loved her anyway. How could I not? She was my mom. However, she died only a year after we moved in with Gran..

"When I was growing up, Gran used to tell us stories about shifters. Shifters that were good. Bedtime stories about true love and mates, Stories that any child would have been glad to hear Valiant wolves and brave lions. Protective, devoted, bears and even possessive sharks. They were love storien.."

"Possessile sharks?" Paul asks, flinching "Your kidding? I didn't even know there were shark shifters."

I chuckle, watching him carefully. "Yeah, there are. According to Gran there are shifters of just about any kind.

His blue eyes are wide and guileless as he studies me. "Right... but sharks? And how are stories about possessive mates good for bedtime?"

I laugh, "Not sure. But the way my Gran told it, they were romantic. Besides, from what I can gather, all shifters are possessive. Is that not

000.

He smirks. It's definitely true. But labeling the shark lone as possessive paints a pretty scary picture."

I guess it does. Never thought of it that way. "You're right. She only told me a couple about sharks, but in both cases the male shifters were pretty bloodthirsty when it came to the human women they loved"

"Human women???" Paul snaps, shocked.

How does that even work? Imran what on earth?"

I giggle, taking another bite of my food and reveling in the way the stical practically melts against my tongue. The man certainly knows his beef. Whatever he added to the marinade is fre for my palate. "You'll and they don't need to live as sharks all the time. The same as you don't need to lnk as a wolf all the time. But one thing is for sure. They re always near the ocean. You might even have a few out here.

He appears thoughtful for a moment, then shrugs. "I don't know. As far as I'm aware, none of us have ever come across any

"Fair enough" I say, starting in on my mashed potatoes, which are light as a cloud and deliciously buttery. Anyway - it wasn't until

1/4

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Seven

met Draco, that the started telling me stories about hounds."

"Draco?" Paul questions, his e

eyes going to the shaded windows almost automatically. "Is that the Alpha?"

""Yes," I answer with a nod. "Gran hated him."

Paul's eyes widen with interest. "Smart

smart woman. They're the most despicable type of shifter there is. As far as I know, anyway. Do you any idea what they do to their women?" have

Biting my lip, I meet his angry gaze. "Yes. I mean I didn't. Not when Let him. But the first time I allowed him to bring me home, my

Gran lost her shit."

"She knew what he was?"

Yes. She was talented that way. She could see things. So can I. She knew what he was just on sight of him. My sister can do that too, but she doesn't have any magic." "So your sister is still alive?"

"As far as I know. I haven't seen her in two years."

Paul appears stunned, but he keeps the focus of his questions on the matter at hand. "So your Gran tried to warn you against him and I'm assuming you didn't you listen to her."

"I thought he was different," I say with a shudder. "He had me convinced that he was. We dated for two and a half years and not once did ever see any sign of his pack. He said he didn't have one. That he didn't believe in the consumption of compatible mates. So I continued to see him, despite Gran telling me different horror stories about hounds every time I stepped in the door. Eventually, I gave myself to him and-" A loud growl rumbles from Paul's chest and I stop speaking.

"Excuse me a moment," Paul says, standing up. "I think I need a drink after all."

I take a deep breath, closing my eyes against the unwanted memory of it all. The last time I saw my Gran

FLASHBACK

"Please baby girl, you have to listen to me. He is not your average hound. Normal hounds are bad enough! Shadow hounds not only drain your life, they drain your magic! He'll keep you as a slave and slowly drain you until he's consumed all of your gifts and then he will kill you. It's what keeps them alive,"

"Enough, Gran! I don't want to hear any more of it! I'm leaving. I just came to say goodbye."

"Please angel, don't go. It's what he wants. To get you alone-"

"STOP IT! I won't

t listen to this

this shit! He loves

and I love him. He's proven it to me already."

Please!

tell me

haven't been with him! Please tell me he hasn't shared you with-"

"That's it! I'm out of here! Mom was right about you. You just want to control everyone in your life."

"He's not the one you think he is. There is another and he is out there waiting."

"Oh please! Enough with the fairytales. You don't care about what makes me happy. Not really."

"If I never see you again. Anastacia, just know that I love

you

and I forgive you."

2/4

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy Seven

Therra no mend to forgive me, Adraise for not sorry

END OF FLASHBACE

gathered in pry eyes by the time Pa

Is Draco the only man you've ever been with? Pad

ripping with energy and are beautifully tensed

I nod, staring at him quizzically, and my answer jedy appears to make His eyes are brighter, One daytime bus, they are new alment fronted was show

Aim. To him. A man you don't

A man I don't belong to? What?

1

guess you could say... I belonged to him at the time:

"Not be spift the end of snarl, "No, you did not."

the time."

No, Anastacia. Not him. You were never his," he growls, bis

turken. Why does he lost

th what looks like p

"Okay, okay, fine, I was never his," I whisper, placatingly and he finally seems to relax. Studying him for a long moment what I see there is familiar in a way that cannot be

real. It's almost as if should know him. Like he should know the the reason I can think of for something like that to be true.

Oh my God.

Visions, or flashes of memory suddenly assault knelt at her feet and begged her forgiveness.

It me from every angle. Of Gran alive and in her Irving room of her talking to

But what memories are these? They didn't happen.

"Oh my goodness," I say as I realize. "Oh wow."

"What?" Paul says, alarmed. "What is it?"

I stare at him, the beauty of him. The power in him. Gran's words from our visit surround me, making me lightheaded.

...someone has finally breached Draco's barrier over your heart. You are free now

"Oh my God," I say to myself, forgetting for a moment that Paul sits right next to me.

... true mate has set you free..."

I shake myself, turning to face Paul and seeing

im with

new eyes. "It's you," I whisper. "You're him."

"What?"

"A true mate has set you free... That's what my Gran said to me in my dream. She said... that I've found my true mate and... I think she was talking about you." Warmth and happiness floods my body and suddenly I don't care about

by of

the things I heard him say on the

phone. All I want is to have him hold

me close.

3/4

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Seven

Me? Pad different, his eyes narrowing.

I nod happily, reaching for his face. "You're my true mate."

No, Paul hath and I can almost hear my heart shatter. "No I am not."

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Eight

PAUL

The way the purple practically drains from her gaze does something to me, sending a wave of alarm through my body. It slices right

through me. The violet of her orbset

appears to wilt, or... close nfl Like a flower in the winter preparing to hibernate. Or a Venice flytrap, once it has an insect in its grip. It dissipates into the black of her pupils with frightening clarity. The show of it is shocking and thrums through my veins cold as death.

That one statement I made, my denial of her, seems to have done something irreparable to her charming eyes. Even her coloring

pales, the natural flush of her skinet

disappearing completely and throat bobs as if she's working to capture her air. Hands that were

reaching for my face that were

just a moment ago jerk backward so quickly that I'm forced to grab the back of her chair to keep her from toppling backward.

But that's not the worst part.

The light overhead glistens off the moisture beneath her thick, willowy lashes and liquid fire burns behind my chest.

"Ouch," she chokes out, blinking rapidly. The sound of that one word sends a spike of longing through me.

Something inside churns with regret, begging

ing me to fix whatever thread I have severed.

"Anastacia," I whisper, struggling to keep my hands at my sides. I want to touch her so badly I can hardly stand it. I'm practically aching to lean in and capture her lips in my own, but... I don't.

"Ana," she corrects me, her voice quivering so slightly

htly that I'm forced to shake my head against it.

She looks so sad. So last. Fuck

\*Why did you call me that? Why would you say that?"

She swallows thickly, turning away. I must have been mistaken. I guess-1-1-

"Just quit it," I interrupt. "Stop playing with me. Mates are sacred for wolves and pretending to be my mate is wrong"

"I'm sorry!" she shouts, slamming her eyes shut almost as if she doesn't want to look at me anymore. "I-I shouldn't have called you that. I- I was wrong. I mean... I must have been."

She's a witch, Paul. A charmer. And she's playing games with you. She knows about mates. She knows what buttons to push

This is not real.

But..

My phone chirps and for the moment I ignore it. Anastacia and I are sitting so close to one another, should be able to feel her heat, but I can't. Her body has gone cold and she's practically shivering.

"Where am I to sleep?" she asks as she resumes eating her meal. "I'm sure you want to head out early tomorrow."

"No."

"No?" she chortles, taking a hefty bite of her potatoes.

"Do you really think I'm just going to drive you a hundred or so miles away and set you free? Just so the hounds can find you again? You still haven't finished telling me how shadow hounds are different from regular hounds."

She laughs humorlessly. "What Ho you care if they find me again?"

"I shouldn't," I snap. "But I do. So, you're not going anywhere until

yo heen dealt with."

I'll figure it out,"

"Well I don't need you to care about me. I've been taking care of myself just fine up III

Like hell if you will. I'm the one that is supposed to no. No I am not.

I'm not him. I'm not.

The fucked up part is that I wish it was true. Despite the messed up shit that I said to Rainier about witches, Anastacia is hands down the most beautiful creature I've ever come across and to have her as my mate wouldn't be any kind of hardship. It would be... perfect. But how would I ever know it was real?

You could mark her. Duh. Then you would know.

With a hefty sigh, I do my best to explain. "All I'm saying is that you don't have to charm me into keeping you safe. You don't have to pose as my mate to get me to-"

"I said stop it!" she shrieks, the sound echoing through the room and causing the light bulbs above us to flare as bright as the sun before burning out completely.

My eyes shoot upward, then around. The only light available to us now comes from the open-concept

kitchen. "What the fuck?"

"Oh!" she gasps, obviously just as shocked as I am.

"Fucking witchcraft," I complain, shaking my head.

She trembles next to me and when I study her grip on her fork I see that her hand is shaking. Damn it. She's either a damn fine actress or I've really upset her feelings.

Watching as she finishes every single bite of her dinner is like torture. Her plump lips drag across the fork with every bite, opening and closing of her mouth painting pictures for me of what it might feel like to have it close around my shaft.

"It's probably best if we stick together through the night," I say before I can stop myself.

She laughs, then swallows the rest of her piña colada in one gulp. "So, it's the couch for me then?" she asks, spinning in her seat until her knees press into my outer thigh.

Fuck.

My eyes are drawn downward, toward the apex of her thighs and my chest rumbles before I can stop it. "Do you really want to be so close to the front and back doors? With nothing but bricks and wood between you and those hounds? Wouldn't you feel safer with a wall separating you from whatever fate they have planned?"

Her chin lifts haughtily. "Would I be safer? Or would I wake up to find myself tied to a stake in the yard?"

That image brings a suggestive smile to my lips and my eyes saunter over her body from her head to her toes. My dick pulses in my pants and I say, "You might awaken tied up to a stake, but not in the yard."

Her color comes flaming back and she inhales sharply, her eyes narrowing on me as she crosses her

beneath her chest. Her nipple

sharpen to points, poking like diamonds against the thin fabric of my shirt that she's wearing, and I growl. Fucking hell, I forgot she was wearing a bra.

My madli sealers fun night shed just as I decide to day face it,

anarls and greeds sound from out in the sends annend the horse. I loved to my hot, my the direction of the front door,

"What?" she whispers, obviously not able to hear as well as I can. "Wha

A four possessive honed riots thangd

"Go upstairs," I tell her, "Lock yourself in my room and don't come i

nummands, standing "Why?" she whines, grabbing my forearm and lighting a fuse with her touch. "Don't pre into her front is pressing into mine. Her nipples are still hard as pearls and Tran feel them so well that the need to have them in think abad for moment. My dick spikes, thrinting upward

annow and pointing pragir for nec

I smile down at her, peeking into the open neck of my shirt just long enough to inspire a groan of envy at the cotton she's wearing

The strangest soothing glow begins to billow in my chest, and it's difficult, but I pull away from her hating myself of her mother and stepping toward the hall. "Do as I say, Anastacia. It'll be alright."

"No! I don't want you to go out there! The shadow bounds-they don't just feed on flesh. They led on mage. Ther normal hounds.

My head jerks her way. "They feed on magic? What?"

She shudders, her gaze lowering as if ashamed. "My Gran once told me that Draco meant to keep me at a slave and drain my mage sowie

I want og to the day the it's what keeps Draco young I didn't believe her because he hid his true self from me for two long year

"When did she die?" I ask warily.

"One week ago. The same

same day I started running"

"Why did you start running?" I ask, although I think I already know.

She gazes at me as if she's ashamed. "Because he introduced me to his pack. The pack he claimed didn't

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[ 1,287 words ]

Chapter Two Hundred Eighty

PAUL

It's harder to step away from my door than I want it to be. Every inch gain is a fight, especially when I hear a dejected whimper escape Anastacia's lips from beyond the confines of my bedroom walls. Is she crying?

Maybe... After all, she's been running for her life since the day her grandmother died without any real time to grieve, so she might be doing so now.

The image of her in the center of my bed, gazing up at me like she was searching for something to say, something that might keep me at her side a little longer, has me ready to turn right back around to give her exactly what she wishes.

She may need someone tonight.

No. Not someone.

You.

I have to stop. It's not true. For a

all I know, she could be crying over her recent break up. They were together for more than two years. The fucking years!!! How many times was he able to slither between her leg Every night, probably. The son-of-a-bitch. If she was mine. though, it might be more like every few hours... minutes... seconds...

But she isn't mine. She was his. She even said so.

It's with that realization in mind that I'm finally able to start down the stairs.

"What's on your mind, brother?" Rainier asks, gazing past me toward the landing and my closed bedroom door.

I hardly hear him as I descend, barely aware of the fact that everyone is talking as the pot stews inside my head.

I mean, what kind of name is Drace anyhow? What exactly did she want from him in the first place? The man that I saw in the woods is a joke. A zombie. A fluke. There isn't anything particularly special about him. He's the Alpha of a pack of dogs. Mutts. Mongrels. form as he is when he's shifted. More wiry than he is cut, and leaner than he is Like most hounds, Draco's just as skinny in his human fo muscular. Judging by the way Anastacia's eyes blaze with fire every time she catches sight of my bare chest and arms skinny is not what she's into.

She's b

power and heat and... connection and... fuck! So am I.

top of h

his head. A crooked smile, if it could

Dark skin, rugged beard, beady black eyes. Twisted black locks that sprout like weeds from the top be called one at all.

Nothing spectacular there. He is roguishly handsome at best.

Like a slumlord or a fucking crack dealer. Or a starving gambler on a winning streak that hasn't left the blackjack table in days. His features are haggard and sunken in. As if he's constantly dehydrated. He basically my polar opposite and probably even has a small

cock. There's only one person I know who can confirm or deny that assumption though, and later tonight, maybe I'll ask her to.

So what drew her to him in the first place, then? Why him? How did he ever grab her attention at all? And then keep it for two and a half years?

Maybe it's not always about looks, Paul.

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Eighty

Then what is it about? Fake loár kufikie? An anchola that bore har anak her magic? And what did he plan to do with

Uh-ph Fuck no, not happening

Running a hand through my hair, I try to redirect my thoughts. The landi. should be thinking about right now. Not the angen tur i det every time I picture Anastacia's perfect mouth. For the explosion of fury that ricts through bay Men gove herself to him! To that that that creatures

"Paul, man! What the fuck? Rainier snaps, shaking his head. How you betting

My eyes skate around the room to find everyone's gaze on

Were they talking to me?

I guess so

"Yeah. What's up?

Timmons snickers and I have the sudden urge to knock back a seriously hot. In fact "Har

be's a witch, motherfucker. And therefore dangerous. None of

Timmons eyebrows draw together, his lip lifting in a smirk. "None of

am puffing he slimy lips on

his teeth. He marks his lips. "Ipt it. That female

persing with her," I sad beber I can stop myself

huh? None of us? He gestures to the five of them that

around my living room. "Or none of us? He asks with a chuckle and a nod in my direction.

"Lay off, T." Rainier snaps, glaring at him. "You've been way too omery lately. What the fuck is your problem

Timmons rolls his eyes. Now here we go. Omery. Did Felix fix you up w  
dictionary

Rainier tips him off and I have to laugh. "He has a point. You're so aortalte lately, one has to consider what it is that you've been reading."

"The hounds," Koda comments, looking bored. "If you guys want... I will go out and handle them all by myself"

"Says

the man with a pup or

on the way," Timmons reminds. "Why don't we go handle them while you stand watch?"

Koda's eyes shoot toward the stairs at my back then back to Timmons before he flashes a feral smile.

"So that would be a no, then," Timmons chuckles. Ill stay then. I'll keep watch here while the five of you"

"Not happening, 1 growl, surprising myself when my fangs shift out.

"Uh-huh..." Rainier murmurs observantly and I'm forced to avoid the question in his  
sgaze. "And why not?"

Ignoring his question, I attempt to redirect. "About the hounds, I announce, forcing myself not to turn around when I hear my bedroom door creak open. What the fuck is she doing? She's supposed to be sleeping. Apparently they're different than regular hounds. These bounds... are shadow hounds." "Shadow hounds? Gryffin repeats, his gaze darkening with familiarity.

"You know of them?" I ask, ignoring the soft patter of footsteps as they wander onto the landing. Goddamn it, "Go back to bed, Anastacia!" I spit through clenched teeth.

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty

"I don't answer to you, Paul, sife snaps halfheartedly. The vulnerable tone of her voice reaches out for me, snatching me by the back of my neck and forcing me to turn around.

Even though I knew she was probably crying when I left her, it still shocks me when I'm met with the evidence of it on her tear stained face. Her watery eyes focus on me and me alone and the sweet pout of her lips is turned down in a frown.

Fuck me, baby, don't come out here looking at me like that.....

Suddenly, it is as silent as a tomb in the house, with every single person in the room looking past me toward the second floor.

"I don't want to be alone right now," she whispers softly.

Something inside of me crumbles and snaps. I make a decision. "Fine. I be up there in a minute. Go back to bed."

The relief that finds her face lights me up from the inside and all thoughts of charmers and witchcraft disappear for the moment. She nods, smiling at me gratefully and spinning in her heels to disappear back into my room.

It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't matter.

All

that matters to me right now... is that she feels better. That she feels safe.

With me...

Set guess, you're keeping watch," Koda whispers making

everyone else in the room laugh.

"No," I say, heading for the stairs. "Let me

et me just put her to sleep. Then I want to hear everything Gryffin has to say about shadow hounds."

"It's a lot," Gryffin calls out and I stop walking to turn around and meet his eyes.

He sighs heavily, shaking his head. "My father met with a few of them in Africa. He told me about them the last time we spoke. There is one thing that I know for certain... one

thing that I'm sure of his eyes go dark and he leans forward they should never be killed at night. Not ever," Chapter Comments

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thus is such a lovely story more chapters please

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[ 1,088 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-One ANASTACIA

atil Paul apeel fa come up here with me, I spent the entire time crying in the center of the bed. The past week has been a long one, and I suppose it has finally taken its toll. My sister was expecting me to show up at Gran's house on the day that she died. I told her that I there. Pomised that Til show up. I definitely meant to. But of course, things don't always go as planned. Especially when your boyfriend turns out to be a twa huuled year old monster intent on degjuring your soul,

Tansonnow I will call her. I'm sure one of these shifters has a plane that can use. I have to know that she is safe and I need to tell her how worry I am about everything

Now that Paul will be coming upstairs to keep me company, I finally draw down the covers and dim the lights. The moment I climb under The security of his weighted velvet blankets and down comforter, a sense of peace surrounds me. My head falls heavily on the softest of pallows and I turn my face into it, inhaling deeply, I smell him all over the damn thing and the scent of him soothes me. With a moan of satisfaction, I let my eyes fall closed.

Ole goddess... The bed feels heavenly and my bones are studdenly aching with exhaustion.

How I fall asleep yet Wait for his

at... To not sate if I can. Sleep is harreling down on me like an eighteen wheeler and I'm helpless to stop it. I'm just so tired.

The door creaks open and still can't open my eyes, but I can speak. Paul," I whisper.

He inhales sharply and I hear him walk toward the bed. I want him in 1 want to feel his warmth next to mine.

"Tuck," he whispers. The bed dips on the opposite side, the heavy mass of him drawing me deeper into the middle. "You look so harmless like this, he says softly. So innocent. I guess you couldn't be charming me now, now could you? That would probably be pretty hard while you're asleep."

That Tim not asleep... though I am pretty close. However, I don't say anything, just reach for him with one hand, stroking my fingers over the bed until they meet with the warm skin of his forearm.

His tendons shift at the contact and I feel one hand close over my own, anchoring me to him and tracing small circles over my chest. A shiver rides across my body, firing it up and begging me to inch closer to the fuse that started the blaze. Worming my body toward the center of the bed until my forehead can feel the expulsion of heat that his skin gives off, I smile and call out to him again. Thank you.

"No more tears, Anastacia, I don't like them," he says softly in warming, and I feel the press of one hand as it traces the curve of my hip over the blanket. Shaping it and molding it against me like second skin. The motion has me moaning with pleasure even as I succumb to the darkness on the brink of rest. "Fucking hell, it's like you were built for me. How are you so perfect?" he breathes.

I think of my sister and of Gran, of the mean things I said to them, and of my stubborn absolutism that kept me tethered to a beast and... I whimper. You're wrong, Paul. As the void of sleep clouds over me, Paul's hand remains.. Not perfect. I never was,

a minute, its fingers cresting on the curve of my ass. "I wish there was a way to know

He sighs and the hand stroking my hip stops for a n

that what I'm feeling is real."

I want to tell him that it is real. I want to speak to him about my dream about all the things that my Gran said to me, but I can't... I'm just too tired and before I know it, I am asleep.

PAUL

1/3

Chapter Two Hundred Eighty Gre

The way she looks benighted In

doubt. Intagining her like this in someone

ing a nirling mver my lip with

Whether the is mine not, I need to be the one to protect her, or I might completely lose my mind.

Acting in my pocket grabs my attention yet as I hear the scratch relmes on my tonight away I know the buzzing must be my

berring

alarm system. The weight of the dog on the roof just triggered one of the sensors

"Son of a bitch," I growls, lesping to my feet and casting my eyes toward the ceiling.

I hear my bedroom door open at my back and Rainier's voice as he hisses. They re on the roof

eyes and body go straight toward the shaded window of my room. I won't be moving from this spot. Not at all. First, I be those things are strong enough to shutter the triple paned bullet-proof sealed windows that make up my second story and I they don't mean to.

They re trying to draw me away from her. For some reason, they don't want me near her. Somehow, I just know that this is true.

betting it's not the Alpha on the roof. He wouldn't risk himself," I remark

Rainier steps inside, standing next to me. The trees are too close to your house. Tomorrow were going to have to cut a few down. I'm

ing to call it in as an animal disturbance and have a few of my deputies send the rangers."

"No," I say with a smirk. "Send out the cats. Give those mutts a little taste of what they're up against."

Rainier chuckles. "What about Koda? Hes itching for a run."

"Me too," I snart. "But I won't leave her alone. I think that's what they want."

"The SUV is outside," Rainier informs me.

Perfect," I say thoughtfully. "Have Gryff and Cane bring that one down and take him to the dungeons. Then tomorrow we'll see what hes made of I have a few questions that I'd like to ask." "No!"

voice sounds behind us, shadowed with an echo of power

We both spin around to see Anastacia sitting up in her sleep. Her eyes are still closed, but her breathing is ragged,

What the fuck?

The eerie reverberating tone and the hair on the back of my neck rises. "To the beach, where shadow hounds are She speaks again in the same weakest. To the shore at dawn when light chases darkness. Saltwater will bind him and wash away his taint." "Fucking witchcraft," I hiss.

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[ 1,327 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Two PAUL

Downstairs with my brothers, I keep one eye on the open door of my bedroom and my ears piqued to listen. There was no need to share what Anastacia had just done and said, everyone on the first floor had heightened senses and each and every one of them heard her

themselves.

"Crazy fucken shit, Timmons hisses. "So saltwater, eh?" He turns toward Gryffin. "Your daddy tell you that too?"

Gryffin's jaw clenches and he shakes his head, no. "What he did tell me, was that a shadow hound killed in the night under a blackened space will kill the beast, but release his shadowed soul. Then that soul will grab the first natural creature of likeness, presumably a dog- or hound, and take that life instead. Apparently shadowed souls can roam freely in the dark."

"Shit, Timmons curses.

I ask, "Take that life instead? Meaning what exactly?"

Gryffin's head jerks in my direction. "Meaning he will transfer his soul to another hound. A natural. And that natural will become a shadow hound shifter. My father said shadow hounds in daylight can be killed, but only under a full sun. Only when the sun is directly above it will the shadowed soul be banished."

"Well that's not good," Rainier gripes. "I mean, fuck. That makes them pretty fucking"

"Indestructible?" Gryffin supplies. "Yeah, I know."

"I wo

wonder if they're aware of that trait, says Cane thoughtfully. "When the three of you went after them in the woods, they all looked pretty different to me. As if they weren't even of the same litter. They might not even know what their shadow capabilities are. The real question is... do they become shadow, or are they born shadow?"

"You're right," I agree, just as the scratching on the rooftop

more about that."

rooftop starts up again. Raising My eyes heavenward, I say, "I need to talk to Anastacia

"Unfortunately, that's not something my father shared with me," Gryffin complains. "If I'd known we were about to meet some, I might have asked."

"Well what's stopping you from doing so now?" I ask..

Gryffin grants me an apologetic smile. "Selfish desire. I don't want that asshole coming home with his whores and if I'm suddenly interested in shadow hounds, he'll know there's a reason for it and might decide to find out what that is. He's been bothering me about taking on a few chosen females. Females that he hand-picked for me himself."

"Is that why he's in Africa? Is he lioness hunting for your wedding?" Rainier taunts him.

"Fuck you," Gryffin says with a smile.

Shaking off the image of Gryffin and his three course wedding, I attempt to steer the conversation back toward the hounds. "So to bind one in saltwater and wash it of its taint probably means....." I trail off

"You wash the shadow from its soul, Koda inserts with a grin. Two birds with one stone there."

"Only if you drown the bastard afterward," Rainier quips.

Koda hisses, "Exactly."

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Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Two

My eyes focus on Cane and Gryffin. "So get up there and grab us a guinea pig."

"Then what?" Gryffin chortles. Bring him in here?"

"Not at first," Cane grins, catching on. We take that fucker to the goddamned beach and wash the shadow from his soul. And then we bring him back here."

I have to smile at that, eager to get my hands on one of the men that have been chasing my not my-Anastacia. I want to make that fucker bleed and have him tell me everything he and his kin planned to do to her. Then... I'll have him apologize and beg her forgiveness. And then I will kill him.

CANE

Gryffin and I step out the backdoor and the slide of the deadbolt behind us seems to echo in the woods. The pair of us are naked and despite the frost in the air, I'm not even a little bit cold. Another perk of becoming a shifter I suppose. When Gayle and I parted ways at the docks, she was concerned that I might have trouble shifting on command and did her best to get Gryffin to agree to a switch.

She wanted me with her and Goose with him, but Gryffin and I both knew I needed the practice, so we declined. Now, she's pissed at me. She didn't even kiss me goodbye. My beautiful savior who mourned my death, refused to even look at me. Denied me a proper send off on my first pack pride mission.

Now? All I can think about is getting back to her and reminding her of what we almost lost. Because I've already made the vow with myself, never to leave her like that ever again. I want a kiss from her every single fucking time we separate from now on. Need my kitty cat. I need to make her pout.

So this little task, although it promises to be a smashing good time, can't end fast enough. I need my

One that note, I tune into the night around us, my eyes lasering through the eerie midnight mist in search of movement beyond the rooftop.

And there it

My eyes immediately pick out four unshifted males high up in the trees. They're just far enough away that they can see the roof of Paul's house. Just as we expected... they appear to be waiting for something. They want the girl left defenseless. Or... they are testing our strengths. Suddenly, this gives me pause, but as we already have a plan in place, I don't speak on it.

It won't matter what they know when they are dead.

Gryffin must notice them around the same time I do, because he meets my gaze with a nod in their direction. I smile, then I'm off. Racing through the woods at speeds even the

wolves can't follow. Trees and shrubbery pass by in a blur. Darkened colors of barest green and deepest un or that bleed into each other are the only markers of the path I follow. The plan is for me to keep them busy while Gryffin takes dow decoy.

These hounds never even see me coming.

Nor are they prepared for the beast that I will shift into.

And shift I do, half a second before I circle at the base of a particularly all evergreen. One they should never have taken the time to climb, because..... now... there's only one way down that isn't me. After quickly reminding myself that I cannot murder them, I leap.

ANASTACIA

I wake from what feels like troubled sleep and for a moment I'm completely confused. A quick glance around reminds me of where I am, of whose home I am in, and for a second I allow myself to smile..

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He left?

zwn. I glance toward the indow and even though it is shaded and tinted I am fairly certain that it is still dark out. I must not wn asleep for very long and the weariness in my bones is confirmation of that. I'm still so freaking tired

The numbling of raised voices finds me through the wide open door of Paul's room and I slip from the bed, wandering toward the second

"You took him! You YOU TOOK HIM FROM MEEEF HE WILL KILL YOU FOR THIS!!!

What the hel?

Whose voice is th

"Shut the fuck up." Paul snarls and just the tenor of his voice, although wrought with anger, it does something to my insides. Calms me.

But who is he talking to?

Take that bastard to the basement."

A panicked snarl, one I have heard before, has me racing toward the railing. My hips clash with the bannister just in time to see Jarl, one of Draco's pack, naked and struggling to get free. The sheriff has his arms in what looks like an ironclad grip while the blondies have hold of his legs.

Oh my

God!

Tarl's eyes steady just long enough to catch sight of me and the moment he does his panic turns to anger. "YOU! YOU WERE TO BE OURS! OUR LIFE'S BLOOD! OUR QUEEN! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR SHADOW??? WHY IS IT GONE???? WHYYY?????" My shadow What?

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[ 1,421 words ]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Three ANASTACIA

Taul? What is going on? Why is he in here?" With a whimper, I stumble back into the wall. Paul's head snaps around, his eyes flashing gold and circling the blue when he spies me on the landing. "You don't know what you have done!" I cry, shaking. "Anastacia," Paul shouts. "Get back in the room!"

If Jarl is inside, it's only a matter of time before Draco's magic crawls through the walls and finds me. I should have done something to make certain this place was guarded before I fell asleep. Why didn't I place wards around the house? And cast a sleeping spell on the grounds?

I am an idiot.

"Get him out of here! I screech. "Please!!!"

Fuck! I have to hide.

How did that fuck even get in here?

Why did the shifters not stop him?

With a deep breath, I scramble back into Paul's room and linger haplessly next to the bed, pacing like an agitated prisoner. I don't want to leave here. I don't want to leave Paul. But Draco's poison is in his house and now it's only a matter of time before Draco's shadow seeks

me out.

A voice like a whisper, floats between my ears, "Hell try to suck your will Into his, the way he did before... you must be bonded to stop him

from it

That thought comes out of nowhere and I clutch my chest, gazing up at the ceiling as if I can see through it into heaven.

Gran, is that you?

Attempting to block out everything else I can hear, I focus on my heartbeat until the sounds fade away.

Gran? I call out with my mind. Gran are you there?

I wait... nothing happens.

Gran, what do you mean I need to be bonded? Bonded how? To what? Grat?!

"Bonded?" Paul's voice cuts through my meditation so loudly I startle. "Anastacia? Who are you talking to? Your grandmother?"

Spinning around, my eyes jolt upward in shock, "1-1 wasn't speaking, I whisper, stuttering.

He heard me! He heard....

my Goddess. He really is my true mate.

A swell of love, pure and warm, surrounds me for a second, and before can stop myself, I jump into his arms.

Catching me to him, a blaze ignites between us. Electric connection crackling at the tips of my fingers. Everything around us fades away as he watches me, his eyes narrowing, pupils batting back and forth as he searches my gaze for only heaven knows what. The flex of his muscles are like bands of molten steel as his arms close around me, drawing me forward until my chest is pressed against his. Jarl is long

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Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Three

forgotten when my nipples ruigainst the cotton of my shirt, just below Paul's deliciously prominent pectorals, Wetness glazes my sex. my core pulsing between my thighs.

Goddess... he's so perfect.

Paul inhales sharply, his fangs elongating. "Stop this," he commands halfheartedly, pulling me closer despite his plea

My hands slide down from his shoulders and stretch over the smooth skin of his powerfully built chest. "Why?" I hum, with a bite of my lip, my eyes heating as they draw over the chiseled lines draped in slightly bronzed flesh. "I like this. I like you "You're charming me. You're making feel things. J don't like it," he snaps with an angry growl before stepping back and releasing me with obvious reluctance.

"Y-you don't like it? You mean... you don't like me." My body is instantly cold with the sting of rejection. "And I'm not trying to charm you!" I snap. "I am not! I haven't! Not even one time have I tried! And I can't anyway! And that's the truth. te doing

His jaw clenches as he steps closer once again. He glares down at me. "You were trying" His eyes dart around in annoyance. "You're it again. Stop it?"

My head rears back as if he's slapped me. "Doing it? Doing what? What the fuck are you talking about, Paul?"

"You're are casting!" He snarls, "I don't like it." He spins around the room, waving his arms in the air like an idiot.

"What in the blue devil are you doing? Dancing?"

My eyes scatter around the the space, watching the untethered magic as he plucks and pinches at different portions of the open air.

"This fucking purple mist shit! He snaps.

"It's all around you whenever you're casting."

What did he say? Purple mist shit?

"P-purple mist?" I gasp, turning in a circle and seeing nothing but my magic. I suppose it does look a bit like mist. "You can see it?"

He freezes, staring at me with disbelief. "You know that I can. The same way I can see the purple in your eyes. I am a wolf shifter. Our eyesight is better than a human's."

That may be true, Pretty Paul, but you shouldn't be able to see it.

That's why it couldn't move through him before,

when I tried to keep the door closed. It's because he's my mate! The Gifted cannot cast ir mates. It's against the rules of the universe. Because he is my true mate, my magic

will not affect him. It cannot touch him. Cannot harm him nor compel him. It is just the way of things.

I can almost hear my grandmama's whispering again, saying Just tell him baby. Tell him how it is.

But I ignore that for the moment, deciding to turn my hurt into rage. I was never good at listening anyhow. I've always been much better at fucking up my life than accepting sound advice when it's given.

"Fine Paul! Think what you want. But tell me this," I snarl, getting up in his face. "With all six of you down there? How did that fucker get inside? Ituh? Do you have any idea what you have done?"

"He didn't get inside, Paul growls, his eyes scorching with hot anger. Staring down at me, a muscle ticks in his jaw. "We caught him and brought him inside."

"Wh-what?" I'm so stunned that I think I lose my mind for a moment. My hand races up toward his face so quickly that I can almost hear it crack against his skin, but I don't because it never makes it. He snatches my wrist right before I can make contact and I want to scream at him.

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Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Three

"You said you would protect me I cry out, tearfully. "Why wedd you

"You spoke

sleep, Anastacia, You told us what to do with them to wash away their taint or so you called it. You said that we should wash him in the ocean water at dawn. So when we heard of the root, I sent someone out to snatch him off of it?

I

I gasp. He's right, I think. Somewhere deep inside of me, I know it's ina

Another whisper in my head... Shadow hounds are extremely susceptible saltwater.

So you brought him in here," I say, chewing on one najl as I try to think "There was only one of them on the roof?" I ask

With a

a nod, I close my eyes, scouring the deepest recesses of my brain for more memories of my visit with Gran. I remember her words almost too easily someone has finally breached Brace's barrier over your heart. You are free now." Someone... Paul... but howe did he do it? When?

When you heard him howl for the first time. That's

when

"Oh my goodness," I say to myself.

"What?" Paul hisses. "What is it?"

He'll try to suck your will into his, the way he did before... you must be bonded to stop him from I

Ill never be safe," I say gravely. "And it's all because of you."

"What makes you say that? Why would you think that?"

I whirl on him, closing my arms around myself protectively. "Because until I am bonded with my true mate, my heart will be vulnerable to Draco's shadow."

Paul's eyes flare with something like anger. "How is that my fault? Maybe you should stop playing games and go out and find him. You-" "You are him, Paul. You are!"

He shakes his head and a crushing pain erupts across my chest, the fire of it so maddeningly painful that I drop to my knees in anguish. "Fine, "I say sudden clarity, ignoring the tears that fall from my eyes. "Then I no longer need your help."

I stand, my eyes blurry, my body tired, and with heavy sadness in my heart.

"What do you mean?" Paul says as I attempt to walk by him. One hand, shoots out and seals around my bicep. "Where are you going?"

am so very tired of running," I whimper without looking at him. "I am going to give myself up."

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