

Savage Hunt by Jane knight Chapter 26

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Chapter 26

Chapter Twenty-Six Don't poke the bear

Chapter Twenty-Six: Don't poke the bear

"Come on now, kid, you don't need to do that alpha stuff with me." Branson said and I couldn't help but chuckle. There was just something about the older man that put me at ease. I didn't know if it was because I had known him for so long or if there was just something about the older shifter. But he had been like a fun uncle that I didn't get to see enough, yet when I did, it was always a fun time.

When I was a kid, I could still remember him throwing me into the air and chasing me through the woods in games of hide and go seek that involved the entire pack. They were fun memories that when the time came, I wanted to do those things with any children that Tillie had with us.

As a teenager, he had snuck me alcohol behind my parent's back and provided my friends and I with a safe getaway for the weekends on his lands.

When I had become a man and taken on the position of alpha, he had aligned with my pack the same way that he had done with my father. It felt good to know that he would be by my side in a fight and I hoped to repay the favor when his pup came of age.

"Who are you calling kid, old man?"

"I'm only as old as I feel and I don't feel too old right now." He said with a laugh and I could hear an exasperated sigh from someone beside him on the other end of the line. Probably his mate. I had yet to meet her but I knew that if the goddess had sent him a second chance mate, then she would be just as amazing as his first mate was. I hoped she was just as kind too. "I take it this isn't just a social call in the middle of the night?"

"It's not. I wish it was. But I've got a problem or what I think might be a problem I was hoping you could help me with." I said, leaning back and tracing my fingers over the grooves of the leather steering wheel cover.

Ryan and Travis came through the door that connected to the garage door that connected to the pack house. Travis' shoulders were tense and I could tell that he was upset from the way that he was moving. Gone was the grace that he normally had. This

was the stilted walk of a caged animal. Ryan was no better with his hair pulled back into a messy bun. His gaze flicking to Travis before moving back to the concrete floor again. This wasn't going to be a fun car trip and I hoped they worked out their issues before we got to Tillie. I didn't want any of this to spill over to her.

"What's the problem? How can I help?" Branson asked, his tone turning serious. I let out a long breath, telling him all about the marks that I had seen on the willow tree by the lake. How old they looked, hoping that he knew something about the markings or if he didn't, then I hoped he knew someone who did.

Ryan and Travis put their bags into the back of the SUV before Travis opened the passenger door and slipped into the seat beside me. He didn't look over at me, just stared out the front window of the car. Ryan got into the backseat behind us, moving to the seat in the middle of the row. I looked into the rearview mirror, my eyes meeting his.

My friend dipped his head and I knew that he was back to himself and feeling guilty for snapping earlier.

"Kid, you there?" He said, and I realized that I had missed what he said. "Why are you asking about that tree?"

"Yeah, sorry. I think someone might be in your territory, someone special to me." I said, dragging my thumb over the seam of my steering wheel as I waited for him to confirm what I had seen as being close to his place. The location of her tagged photo had been so close to my friend's pack that I didn't know how she couldn't have known she was in the thick of shifter territory

"I know the lake you're talking about." His tone was gruff. "It's not my territory but we surround it. That's bear territory. They don't bother anyone and we don't poke the bear."

"Bear?" I asked, already knowing that he was right. I didn't need to see the tree for myself to know that it was a warning to other shifters.

"Yeah, they don't mess with us and we do the same."

"Would you happen to know how to reach the bear?" I asked, finding it strange that he wasn't using the shifter's name with me.

"Yeah, I do. But, Jason... Why do you want me to reach out to the bear?"

"Do you have space for us at the house?" I asked, avoiding answering the question that he was asking. I knew Branson wouldn't

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Chapter Twenty-Six Don't poke the bear

Lv. 1

use the fact that my mate had run and was near him against me but it was still a worry and I didn't want anyone to hurt her or try to use her to hurt me.

"Us?" Branson asked and I could hear him walking around.

"Yes, my mates and I." I said, not wanting to go into detail about my relationship just yet.

"Congratulations, Kid, that's awesome. I didn't know you had found your mate. I can't wait to meet the lucky girl."

"I'll have to introduce you after I catch her." I smirked before realizing my slip of tongue.

"A hunt, how fun. We're holding one tomorrow morning. One of my men, when he was out on patrol, smelled his mate and he's itching to catch her." At his words, I felt my throat tighten.

One of his wolves had smelled their mate and they were planning on hunting her. I just hoped that the wolf who had found his mate hadn't smelled Tillie, I didn't know if I would be able to stand someone touching my mate that wasn't Ryan or Travis.

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Savage Hunt by Jane knight Chapter 27

Savage Hunt by Jane knight

Chapter 27

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Open hunt and a mother's intuition

"A hunt? Your pack still holds hunts when a mate is found?" I asked, swallowing hard. It was an outdated practice and I didn't know too many packs who kept up with the old ways of the hunt. Sure, we all enjoyed hunting our mate. We were shifters. after all, it was ingrained into our very DNA to crave the hunt. But the old traditions had left mates with so little choice in the matter. The prey usually didn't get to give consent, they were just hunted down and taken like an animal.

"It's a good way to bring a mate in." Branson said, "It solidifies the new mate's place in the pack for everyone. Isn't that what you are doing?"

“No, we got rid of mating hunts a while ago. This hunt is a little more private,” I said, trying to fight down my revulsion without offending my friend and elder.

I didn't want anyone to see my mate like that, being rutted with for just anyone to see after a long hunt. It would drive Tillie away more so than anything I or the others could ever do. She might be okay with Ryan and Travis watching when we were together and I knew it was hot as hell when I watched her with them but I couldn't let anyone else see my mate like that. At least, not if they wanted to keep their eyes and their lives.

It hit me hard that I was willing to kill for Tillie. I was willing to hurt another to protect her, to make them pay for thinking that they could look upon the beauty of what was mine.

Branson and I said our goodbyes and I sat my phone into the cup holder in the center console. I dragged my hand over my face before looking at my beta. An unspoken question hanging in the air. He knew what it was and so did I. I didn't need to ask him how he felt about Tillie being hunted. I could see it on his face.

“No one will hunt her but us.” His words were low and dangerous but they echoed how I was feeling. No one would be touching Tillie. She was mine. She was ours.

Our prey to hunt.

Our mate to take, but only in front of each other. We only shared with each other.

I looked into the rear-view mirror, locking eyes with Ryan. His eyes burned dark with his wolf, his lips pulled back from his teeth and I nodded.

“I guess we are going to poke the bear.” I said, putting my keys into the ignition and starting the engine. Reaching down, I shifted the car into revers and pulled out of the garage and into the driveway. My tires crunched on the thick gravel as I shifted gears again, sending that same gravel spraying into the air as I turned the wheel, pressing my foot to the gas pedal. The SUV rocketed forward and I wrapped both of my hands around the steering wheel, my knuckles turning white beneath the runes on my skin.

We needed to get to Tillie before Branson's pack started their hunt. If we didn't, there would be war.

Scott

“Honey, wake up.” Jewel said, shaking my shoulder. I rolled over, rubbing the sleep from my eyes as I looked at my wife. She looked just as beautiful as she always did, only tonight it was more so.

Her dark hair was curling and tousled with sleep, her blue eyes were bright in the pale moonlight that filled our room. The thin white nightie she had worn to bed was sheer and hugged every curve of her body and made me want to rip it off of her. I knew that I couldn't. I had ruined far more of her fancy, frilly nightgowns more times than I cared to admit and I wasn't in the mood to catch hell from my little woman.

"What's wrong?" I asked, sitting up and taking her into my arms.

"It's Tillie. I woke up having the strangest dream about her. I think she might be in danger." Jewel said, looking up at me. Her eyes wide and misty, she reached up, her small hand brushing it over the side of my face and I pressed myself into her touch. "I know you said that she would be safe at the lake house, but Scott. I think we need to go to her. I've got a bad feeling about her being up there. I don't know if it's because Jake broke up with her or if I'm just being a mother hen and worrying about her, but"

"Jewel, my darling. She's safe up there. Everyone knows it's my family's land and no one would mess with her." I said, trying to

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Chapter Twenty-Seven: An Open hunt and a mother's intuition

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soothe away her worries. I caught her hand in my own, bringing it up to my lips so that I could kiss the tips of her fingers. "They know it's bear territory, my land and no one would hurt our cub."

"I know. I just can't seem to shake the feeling that she's not okay."

I brought my hand up to the side of her face, brushing my fingers over the top of her cheek. "She's safe and you know she'll be pissed if we show up there tonight."

"Scott..." My wife said with a little growl that made my lips twitch into a smile. It was so cute when she tried to get bossy with me.

"Jewel," I said, leaning down to press my forehead against hers. "Tell you what, let's sleep on it and if you are still feeling like this in the morning, then we'll head out to the lake house and you can crash Tillie's pity party."

"Scott, it's not a

"It is, but it's better this way. Now that boy can go find his mate and Tillie can find some nice guy who will treat her like the treasure she is." I said, pressing my lips against my mate's full lips and letting out a growl of my own.

"I know. It's just that she's our baby. I wish that she was really yours so that she could have a fated mate." She said and I felt the warm rush of love. That she could love a brute like me so much. That the moon goddess had given me a mate like her, just made me love her and our daughter all the more. It was something that I had wished too, that Tillie could be mine. That she could have a fated mate out there to come and love her the way that I loved her mother. But it seemed like that wasn't in fate's plans for our little girl.

"I wish that too, but you know she is mine even if it's not by blood. Tillie was always meant to be my cub, darling. Things just got a little out of order and she got to you before I did. We'll go check on her in the morning, yeah?"

"Thank you, honey bear." Jewel said, wrapping her arms around my waist and pressing her body against mine. She shifted into my lap and I brought my hands to her full hips. "You're right, I'm probably worrying over nothing. It's just hard you know that whole mother's intuition."

I flipped her over, smiling down at her before kissing her again. "I'll show you something hard, darling." I growled, taking all her thoughts and worries away for the night. Tomorrow, we would head to the cabin and she would see that our cub was a little heartbroken, but that she was fine.

Savage Hunt by Jane knight Chapter 28

Savage Hunt by Jane knight

Chapter 28

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Morning Coffee

Tillie

Coffee cup in hand, I stepped out onto the porch. It was early, but the sky overhead was overcast. Painting the lake and the surrounding trees, dark shades of gray making the shadows that much harsher. I looked at the lake, closing the door behind me softly, trying not to break the stillness of the morning. A cold breeze ruffled my hair, which was still damp from the hot shower that I had taken while my coffee steeped in the coffee press in the kitchen.

I pulled my sweater tighter around me, lifting up my coffee cup and taking a sip of the warm liquid, letting the rich creamy goodness of the coffee warm me up. They liked to use the good creamer, but it was something that I didn't normally buy for myself. It was too expensive but if I finished it off, I would have to make a note to buy them a bottle. Sipping coffee out here while I looked over the lake made me feel almost normal.

The shower had helped ease some of the soreness and a good night's sleep had my head clearer than it was before. I felt less like a trapped animal and more like myself. Lifting my hand to the side of my neck, I thought about the marks on both sides and the ones on my bottom. They were still healing, but not as angry looking as they had been. Yes, I was still bruised but the wounds looked like they had been there for over a week instead of just a day. I would have a scar, but I was no longer worried about the wounds getting infected.

The mark was strangely sensitive beneath my fingertips as I traced the lines of those teeth marks. It was like I could feel the touch all the way down to my toes inside the running shoes that I had pulled on. I wondered if Ryan could feel it when I touched those marks? If it felt just as good for me as it did for him?

Strangely enough, there was something else beneath the pleasure. A worry that I didn't understand. It bordered on anger and it made me wonder if that was what he was feeling right now.

Was he worried and angry that I was here?

I hoped that he wasn't. When we had spoken yesterday, it had felt like he understood what I was feeling and that he was okay with me being away from them while I sorted out everything I was feeling. With what I was feeling from him now, I wasn't so sure.

My hand drifted to the other side as I stared out over the water towards the willow tree on the edge of the water in the distance. It marked my stepdad's property line with its big wispy swaying branches. The summer that I had read Harry Potter, I had liked to think that the weeping willow on the grounds of Hogwarts looked something like that tree.

My fingers brushed against the marks that Jason had left on me and I felt a swell of anxiety bloom up in the back of my throat that threatened to take my breath away. Why was Jason anxious? Yes, touching that mark felt good just as it did when I touched the one that Ryan had left on me, but the anxiety was enough to trigger my own.

I lifted the coffee cup, taking a sip of my coffee before moving my hand to my bottom. Tracing the sensitive spot on my bottom where Travis had bitten me, pleasure shot through me, along with irritation and a sense of unease.

What were they doing to make them feel like this?

Were the three of them upset with me for being away from them? Or was something else going on that I didn't know about that had them feeling so on edge?

I decided that I was going to finish my coffee, then I would go inside and call the three of them to find out what was going on. Things had seemed a little better when I had spoken to Travis and Ryan last night. I felt like I understood a bit better what was going on with them and they understood how I was feeling. I didn't know how to explain it, but I was feeling better about them mating and claiming me,

I liked that they had left their marks on my skin and I wasn't sure why, but it filled me with a strange sense of rightness. Like I was always supposed to be theirs. I liked that they had claimed me as theirs. Sure, I was still nervous about it. But it was what I realized I wanted to do.

Ryan and Travis had soothed my concerns some. I wished that I had been able to talk to Jason too, but when I had called his phone had gone straight to voicemail. After that, I had turned my phone off to get some much needed rest.

I was still worried about how everything was going to work between the three of us. There was plenty of time to figure it all out when I got home. We could talk about it then. I wasn't sure how things were going to work out with the four of us, but I knew that

it was something that I wanted to pursue, even if the thought made me nervous about what my friends and family would think.

Hell, even some of my coworkers if word got out. Then again, I had a boss that was a sex demon. So that might not even matter to him and the few that might know what he was. There were all kinds of relationships out there and though ours had a few more people. It wasn't any less valid in the way we all felt about each other. Or how I felt about them. I just hoped that they felt the same way, which I kind of thought that they might.

Finishing off my coffee, I looked out at the walking trail, all thoughts of my mates and the future vanishing from my thoughts. I tilted my head to the side, noticing that someone was on the walking trail that led to the lake. Had they been camping in the forest and gotten lost?

I sat my coffee cup onto the wooden railing, wrapping my sweater around me a little tighter before making my way towards the porch steps.

Savage Hunt by Jane knight Chapter 29

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Dangerous creatures in the woods

Walking down the stone pathway that led to the lake, my steps were quick and sure. I didn't need to look down at the stones. I had taken this walk more times than I could count. My steps were quiet, the rubber soles barely making a sound until I hit the crunch of the leaves that littered the ground.

I watched the person standing on the pathway that led onto our property. It was so close to the woods that I worried that maybe they had come onto Scott's land by mistake. I mean, it wasn't easy to get here from the woods, but maybe this person had gotten turned around in the woods. It was easy to do and I had done it before.

From the distance, I couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman, their body was slim and they had bright copper colored hair that fell past their shoulders in soft looking waves that ruffled in the cold breeze.

The closer that I got, I realized that it was a man. His hands tucked into the pockets of his trousers. A thermal shirt hugged his chest and shoulders, showing off a slim but muscular torso. He wasn't much taller than I was. His shoulders stiffened as the breeze ruffled my hair and he turned away from the water to look at me.

His face was delicate, there was no other way to put it. His cheeks were sunken in and he looked hungry and I wondered how long he had been in the woods. Bright amber eyes moved over my face and his gaze flicked to my lips before moving back up to my eyes. He looked to be around my age but there was just something about him that I couldn't put my finger on. The way he looked at me was familiar and triggered alarm bells in the back of my mind, like in some primal way I knew that I should be on high alert around him.

It was a strange feeling because he didn't look threatening and I didn't feel like I was in danger.

Yet, something in me was screaming in warning that I needed to get away from this very pretty guy. That was also a strange thing to think. Most men, I wouldn't say, were pretty, but he was. I found myself taking a half step closer to him as I looked at his wavy hair. What would it feel like if I touched those strands?

His eyes widened and he looked up at me, the color in his cheeks spreading. I realized that I had been caught staring at him. I looked away, turning towards the lake so that I could concentrate on something other than the man in front of me.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

I shouldn't be thinking about how pretty this guy looked or how good his hair would feel beneath my fingers. There were three men out there who had marked and claimed me.

Who had railed me until I couldn't walk straight, yet as I glanced over at this man. I knew that it wouldn't be like that with him.

That he would let me take control with him, giving into my every desire to do things to him that I knew that I shouldn't want to do. Not when I had Jason, Ryan, and Travis.

This must be my punishment for having a one night stand with three men.

There was no way that I could want to be with this guy, yet I couldn't help but look over at him again. My face burned and I turned away to look at the lake once again as he came closer.

"Hello, I'm Gideon." His voice was deep and had a strange, lilting quality to it. An accent that I couldn't quite place it wasn't exactly southern but had to be close to it.

"Hi, Gideon. I'm Tillie. Did you um, did you get lost?" I asked, worrying my lower lip as he stopped beside me. I clasped my hands together in front of me, worrying my pointer finger over the smooth line of my thumbnail. Trying not to think about how close he was standing to me. How his very presence seemed to pull my attention away from the water.

"No, Tillie. I didn't get lost." He said.

I could feel his eyes on me, so I chanced a look at him again. He had the strangest expression on his face. It was like he knew me, yet I had no idea who he was. I took in his clothing, they looked clean. His trousers were dark green but pressed and his boots were well worn hiking boots. "If you're not lost, then why are you here? I'm not trying to be rude. I just, I don't see many people coming out here besides me and my family."

"I'm just studying the land and getting ready for the hunt."

"Well, you can't hunt on this land," I said, wrapping my arms around my body to try to fight off the chill. I didn't know if it was the cold weather or from the anticipation that his words filled me with. My mates had talked about hunting me and that had filled me with the same excitement that I was feeling right now, standing next to this stranger. "It's private property."

"I know it is. I was just curious about you." His teeth sank into his lower lip and he looked down at the ground.

"Me? Why would you be curious about me?" I asked, watching the blush spread across the tops of his hollowed cheeks. How was he all sharp angles like that? Did he starve himself to look like that or did he just have an amazingly fast metabolism?

"No reason. I just, heard you drive in yesterday-" He said, looking up at me. "And I just wanted to see what you looked like."

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“Do you live close?” I asked, shivering as the air grew colder.

“Yeah, not too far from here. You should go back inside. There are dangerous creatures in the woods.” He said and my head shot up. I looked at him closer, did he know about shifters?

Was that what was in the woods? It would be my luck that there were. Had I run from three shifters into another one?