

# ***The Rescue of Sheila Quinn***

**A Red Demon Extra**

**(The Red Demon Trilogy #2.5)**

**EXCERPT**

**Ed Bar**

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# 1

I shuffled papers on my desk, not because I was actually organizing anything, but simply to annoy her. I smiled sardonically at the woman with delicate features, platinum blonde hair with a single neon blue streak in her chin-length bangs. The black lab laying at her feet looked up at me and growled.

“Oh come on, Penny,” I said to the dog. I shifted my focus back to Caitlyn. “I am taking this seriously. I am always serious when it comes to family. I have two dozen wolves dedicated to the search. I will round up some more. I promise. But I do have work to do.”

“I know, Mason, I just feel useless.” Caitlyn waved her hand. “But enough about it. Are you going to attend the new moon celebration?”

“Unfortunately, I have no choice.” I dreaded these damn things, getting together with the other packs to promote peace. “My position demands it.”

“Mr. Mayor,” said Suzanne McClure, my secretary, interrupted, sticking her head through the cracked door. She waited for me to acknowledge her with a polite smile and nod. “I’m sorry to bother you, but there’s a Mr. Quinn here to see you. He said it’s an emergency, and that he doesn’t mind causing a scene.”

“Send him in,” I told her gruffly. I looked at Caitlyn and Penny with an apologetic expression. “I’m sorry to cut this short, but duty calls.”

“Not a problem,” said Caitlyn with an unnaturally chirpy voice. As she bounced to her feet, her amber eyes turned blue. Her platinum blonde hair changed into an odd shade of purple, starting at the roots, quickly cascading down to the tips. “I have to go pick up Jocelyn anyway. We’re going dress shopping for tonight. It’s her first new moon celebration.”

I would never get used to how easily the Chimeras shifted, changing their

appearance, something most of them did only when necessary. Caitlyn, however, loved altering her appearance randomly, changing only certain aspects.

Penny was a different matter. Ever since the church's attack, she spent most of her time in the form of an animal, avoiding a human shape at all cost. She had left her bookstore in the hands of her assistant manager. The only time one could see her as the pretty black haired girl was at the Chimera compound.

“Are you still trying to turn her into a lesbian?” I chuckled. Since her friend, and the newest member of Sean's pack, had turned last month, Caitlyn had been on a nonstop mission to bed the shy teen.

“Of course not!” she barked, clearly abashed by the idea. “Just a little bi like me.” She winked at me, spun on her heels and walked out of the office, Penny following closely behind her.

I shook my head, amused by her teenage antics. For only sixteen, she was too headstrong and outgoing for her own good. She was going to be one hell of a woman when she got older. I felt sorry for anyone who tried to stand in her way.

“Mason,” Brian Quinn greeted, walking into my office and taking a seat opposite of me. “It's been awhile.”

Brian was a turned wolf. His family grew up in the Serenity subdivision, one of the few werewolves that called the human district their home while I was a kid. We were acquaintances back in high school, but we were never very close. Our only connection was his sister, Sheila, a gorgeous girl that I had dated during sophomore year.

“What brings you here, Brian?”

“It's about Sheila.”

I would have never imagined that he would be here to discuss his sister. Sheila had run away from home, and subsequently broken my heart, and he had disowned her, much like the rest of his family.

It's a tradition amongst families of turned wolves to bite their young shortly after puberty. Unlike natural born wolves, they weren't able to pass along their lycanthrope genes at birth. Sheila never wanted to become a wolf; she loved being a human. For years, she had been able to hold her parents back from turning her, reciting one excuse

after another. When they had had enough and demanded that she go through with the bite, she took off. I hadn't heard a word about her since.

“What about Sheila? I thought you wrote her off long ago.”

Brian bent his head down in shame, cupping his face in his hands. I stared at the bald spot in his short, light brown hair as he took a couple deep breaths. Without looking up, he said, “I did. I was a stupid kid who did whatever his parents wanted him to do. But I've kept in contact with her.”

“Okay. So what's the problem?”

“She's been living in Marion County with her boyfriend Damon Lockwood. Anyway, Damon was indebted to a local pack out there. He owed a lot of money.” Brian sighed. “He made an arrangement with them. To clear his debt, he gave them Sheila. They're going to turn her, Mason. They're going to force her to become the one thing that she never wanted to be.”

“Fuck.” I remembered how much she had detested the idea of becoming a werewolf, specifically a turned wolf, the lowest of the low. The life of a turned wolf was a hard one, especially in Perfection County, a territory ruled by the elitist mentality of natural born wolves. This was truer when we were kids than it was now that Sean had granted the turned wolves permission to form their own packs, but it still wasn't a good life. “What do you want me to do?”

“He just gave her up,” said Brian. He looked up, tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked at me pleadingly with red, swollen eyes. “I know that you used to care for her. If you have an ounce of love for her now, please help me get her. I have nowhere else to turn. Everyone disowned her, so I'm on my own. They aren't just turning her, Mason. She's going to be enslaved to the pack. It kills me to think of the things they're planning on doing to her. Please. I know you have your own things going on, but I have no one else, Mason.”

I wondered where it would end, all these search parties, all these missing people. I would be stretching myself thin, a dangerous thing to do even in a time of peace. I sighed heavily, leaning back against my chair. I couldn't say no. There might have been a time where I could, at last to a man I barely knew and a woman I hadn't thought about in years.

But not anymore, thanks to my self-righteous cousin who always put other people before his own survival.

“Thanks a lot, Sean,” I mumbled.

“What?”

“Nothing,” I said, leaning forward and clasping my hands together on top of my desk. “Where can I find her?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t get it out of Damon before he ran off. All I know was what he told me, and I just told you that. I do know where they lived though. Maybe we can start there.”

“There’s no ‘we’ about it.” I didn’t know Brian, not anymore, and I didn’t trust him enough to have him at my six while walking into a dangerous situation. “I will go. I will find her. And I will bring her back.”

“By yourself? Against an entire pack?” He gave me an incredulous look.

“Right now, it’s a fact finding mission. If I need back up, I have a pack. No offense, but I don’t fight with strangers, and you are a stranger to me now.” I slid a sheet of paper and pen over to him. “Write down everything you know, her address, how I can find Damon, names of the kidnappers, whatever. Put your number on there as well so I can contact you.”

“I-I don’t know how to find Damon. The jerk came and found me before running off.” He scribbled frantically on the sheet of paper. When he was finished, he looked up, fresh tears running down his cheeks in rivulets. “Please, just find her.”

I took the piece of paper and nodded toward the door. “I’ll be in contact when I learn something.”

He glanced over his shoulder at the door and then turned back. Standing up, he offered his hand. “Of course, of course.”

I shook his proffered hand and then watched him leave a sniveling mess. He was far from the loudmouthed teen I once knew. I wondered what happened to him. What’s happening with his sister was tragic, but how he reacted showed a lot about his character. I was right in not letting him come along.

I looked up at the clock and sighed. A little after 2 o’clock; I could leave now and

have enough time to track down Sheila before the celebrations. I pressed the intercom button. “Suzanne.”

“Yes, Mr. Mayor.”

“Clear my schedule for the day. I have to go play private eye.” I grabbed the stack of papers on my desk, straightened them, and then placed them in the bin.

“Yes, Mr. Mayor. Will there be anything else?”

She sounded amused, no doubt from having listened to the entire conversation. A wolf's hearing was spectacular and couldn't be stifled by a thin wall. Our intercom was simply for show.

“And call Dexter Jameson, please.”

## 2

I pulled into the driveway at the Jameson mansion. The large white structure stood prominent among its neighboring houses. Two large pillars stood high on either side of the concrete porch, rows of bushes lined the house behind them.

I had spent a lot of time in this house growing up. I remembered how much I had wanted to live here. It was twice as big as my family home. An entire family could retreat to the four corners of the house and then spend an entire week without seeing anyone else as they wound their way back.

Ever since Sean had moved out, leaving the Jameson house to our twisted uncle, I knew that he would always fight to get it back. When he handed over the Jameson pack and the house to his newly discovered brother, Dexter, I was shocked.

Though I didn't speak out against his decision at the time, I didn't believe it was the right thing to do. Dexter was a stranger. I thought Sean was being too trusting. Since then, however, Dexter has shown his true character, proven his loyalty to the pack he had never known. But I wasn't here to see Dexter.

As I walked up to the door, I passed a guard, nodding cordially. Michael Willis was his name, a turned wolf who married into the Jackson pack. It was common for alphas to keep a retinue of guards, especially the Jameson alphas. Your life being in constant danger was the price of being on top of the pyramid. Turned wolves that married into the pack were the best option. They wanted to prove themselves, but they weren't generally motivated to challenge the alpha.

I knocked on the large mahogany door, and a sweet old woman answered within seconds. “Mr. Jackson. It's a pleasure to see you again.”

“Martha, dear,” I replied, giving her a light embrace and a kiss on the cheek, “one of these days, you will call me Mason.”

“That would be improper, dear.” She stepped back to let me enter. “You’re a man of position.”

Two more guards were positioned in the foyer, one at the left wing, and one at the right. I nodded to them both before turning back to the gray haired woman. “Man of position my butt. You used to change my diapers.” Her eyes lit up with mirth, but her lips pursed in disapproval. I chuckled. “I’m here to see Dexter and Zoey.”

“Yes, they’re waiting on you in his office.”

I thanked her and made my way down the left corridor. Stopping at the third door on the right, I knocked. The door swung open and an attractive blonde answered wearing a sheer black negligee, her flawless body on full display beneath the see-through material.

I didn’t recognize her by sight or scent, and I would have remembered both. She was too stunningly beautiful to forget, and she smelled like a flowery meadow on a spring day. My eyes flashed blue instinctively. She smiled, her yellow eyes locked on to mine. “I don’t believe we’ve met, I’m Mason.”

“Candice Hoffman,” she responded, holding out a delicate hand.

Like an oaf, I grabbed her hand and shook it vigorously, wincing at my lack of manners. Before I could embarrass myself further in my flustered state, I swept past her and walked up to Dexter and Zoey, the former sitting behind his desk, leaning back in his chair, and the latter sitting sideways on his lap, her right arm tossed around his shoulders.

I took an empty seat at his desk. “Dexter, Zoey, thanks for seeing me.” I nodded my head behind me. “Where’d you find Candace?”

“Ah.” Dexter laughed, lightly slapping Zoey’s bare thigh. “We picked her up during our last trip to St. Louis. I told her she could stay here until she got on her feet, but it might become a permanent arrangement.”

“And you’re okay with this?” I asked Zoey. It was common for wolves to have lovers other than their mate, but it wasn’t common to invite them to live in your home.

Zoey chuckled. “You should ask Dexter if he’s okay with it. She’s my girlfriend.”

I looked behind me to see Candace smiling. She raised her hand with her palm outward and waggled her fingers while blowing me a kiss.

I turned back to see the amused expressions of my two hosts. “Well, that’s kinda...

No, as hot as that is, the living arrangement is still weird. But, it's not my place. I actually came here to drill you on the wolves of Marion County.”

“Did something happen?” Dexter asked, his jaw tightening.

“Nothing in Perfection. This is a personal matter. I'm looking for an old friend. I just need to know the area I'm walking into and whatever information that would lead me in the right direction.”

“Well,” said Zoey, “I'll answer whatever I can, but I haven't been back since moving here.” She climbed off Dexter's lap, straightened out her blue skirt and matching top, and then she walked around the desk. She sat in the chair to my left, turning to face me. “It's nothing like Perfection. There's no real structure there. Most of the wolves are alone, only a handful of packs, but they're more like roving street gangs. The packs are generally small, never more than a baker's dozen, and their alphas don't last long.”

“I need to find a pack that makes a habit of buying people,” I clarified, “and forcing them to turn and join their pack.”

“I wouldn't say any of them have that as a practice, but none of them are above that sort of shit. The Marion County wolves aren't like the wolves here. Actually, they're more like the Rebel Rousers. They each have their own standards and rules. Think of it like this, we're all trained house pets with full bellies and they're the feral creatures hiding in dark alleyways, hunting for every scrap of food they can find.” Zoey's expression changed to one of compassion. “I'm afraid without any personal detail, I won't be able to help you track down your friend. Why did they want her in the first place?”

I wondered briefly how she knew it was a woman that I was searching for, but shrugged it off. “Do you know a man named Damon Lockwood? I think he's a human, but somehow found himself mixed up with one of the local packs.”

She thought it over and then shook her head. “Doesn't sound familiar.”

“I used to date a girl, Sheila Quinn, until she ran away from home because she didn't want to turn, but her parents were going to do it anyway. Her family disowned her, except for her brother.

“It was this brother that came to me today. He said that her boyfriend, Damon, was indebted to a pack in Marion County, and that the pack forced him to give them

Sheila to clear his debt. Damon told the brother that they planned to turn her and force her to remain in the pack, and then he ran off.”

I leaned toward Zoey, locking my eyes on to hers. “She never wanted to turn. I can't let this happen, but I have nothing to go on.”

Zoey sighed. “I honestly don't know how to lead you to a pack. This really isn't a signature, kidnapping. But I do know of a lone wolf who made most of his money from gambling. He was a bookie who shamelessly took whatever he wanted from those who were in his debt. It's possible that he started a pack and somehow kept others from challenging him. His name is Xander Bend.”

I nodded. It might not be a direct path to finding Sheila, but it was a lead. “Where can I find this Xander Bend?”

“The last I saw of him,” Zoey answered, “he was hanging around J.T.'s Alibi, a hole-in-the-wall sports bar off of Hwy 55.”

“Thank you for your time, Zoey. I really appreciate it.” I nodded to Dexter. “Thanks.” I stood up and turned to leave, but Zoey grabbed my wrist.

“You need to be careful, Mason. Take your pack with you. For all the fighting amongst themselves, the wolves of Marion always stand together when dealing with outsiders. Let me call Tom and Elliot. I'm sure my brothers will go with you.”

“That's okay,” I replied, “I'm only looking right now. When I confront them, I'll bring my pack with me.”

This wasn't entirely a lie. I had planned on bringing a few Jackson wolves, but with her warning of these wolves being feral creatures, I wanted to bring a few of those with me as well. Just not two that might hold loyalty to Marion County; though, I would never say that to her.

### 3

It was a long drive to Sheila's home. I never would have found it without my GPS. This rundown area of Marion held no street signs. It was as if they wanted strangers to get lost along their winding roads lined with shabby clapboard houses.

Sheila's rundown abode appeared in better standing than those of her neighbors, complete with a rusty fence that ran around the property. The gate squealed in protest as I swung it inward. I could feel eyes on me as I walked up to the concrete slab that passed for a porch. When I reached the front door, I knocked, purely for show, and took a minute to sniff out the area.

I didn't smell any lingering wolves, which was a good thing. One of the main reasons natural born wolves detested turned wolves was because of the latter's ability to partially change, growing out their claws and fangs without needing to fully shift into wolf form. We call them an aberration, unnatural, and we look down on them in contempt, but only to hide our own fear. Unless I shifted into wolf form, one or two turned wolves would definitely have the upper hand.

I tested the handle, but it was locked. Assuming the deadbolt was locked as well, I placed the palm of my hand between the two. One quick push forward, and both locks broke free of the door frame, leaving splintered holes in their wake.

The inside of the house was much nicer than the exterior. Plush carpet lined the floors, photographs hung from the eggshell white walls, showing a slightly older version of the girl I used to know. Leather furniture and mahogany tables filled the room.

I wasn't sure what I was looking for exactly. It wasn't like the pack would have had Damon sign a contract, print it and give him a copy with their name and address in it.

The best I could hope for was that members of the pack had been here recently. I could mark their scent and hunt them down, but even that would be a tedious endeavor,

driving all over town with my nose hanging out of the car.

I still had a few hours before I needed to get back to Perfection and the new moon celebration, keeping the peace between the packs. A few hours could be the difference between a solid lead and a wasted trip, so I closed my eyes and sniffed.

I picked up on Sheila's scent easily, the same milky lilac I remembered from long ago, a scent that brought back bittersweet memories in full, technicolor detail.

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*It was a warm autumn day, the golden leaves falling all around us. I couldn't stop staring at her; the way her straight hair, the color of sandalwood, cascaded over her bare shoulders; the way her sundress clung to the natural curves of her body, curves I needed, as a testosterone-fueled teen, to feel, indulging in pure, animalistic bliss; the way her lips twisted into a playful smile whenever she looked at me.*

*We were picnicking in Jackson Park, her favorite place. She loved to tease me mercilessly about my rise in the pack, and how I would one day be the alpha of the Jackson pack. It didn't matter to her that the Jacksons were now a part of the larger Jameson pack. According to her, I would fight tooth and nail (She always giggled at that reference) and win my family's freedom.*

*The laughter always stopped when I replied with my desire to bring her to the top with me. She had always made it known that she had no desire to turn, but I wanted to convince her otherwise. When I looked at her, I saw my other half. It didn't matter that we were still in high school. It didn't matter that we had our whole lives to live and there was no guarantee that we would make it last. I had faith, I had love... I had her.*

*Until she spoke. "Mason, I just can't do it anymore. I'm afraid that one of them will sneak into my room and bite me while I sleep."*

*"Then come stay with me." I took her hand, pulling it close to my chest. "No one will hurt you. No one will make you take the bite if you're not ready. I promise."*

*"But you want me to turn." She pulled her hand back, dropping it into her lap. "You want me to turn and be your mate."*

*“I want you to be my girlfriend. I want you to become my wife. Sheila, I love you. I will never pressure you to turn. You can remain a human until you die of old age.”*

*Sheila stood up, brushing her hands down her dress. “I love you too, Mason, I really do; but being with you is a risk. No matter if you’re fine with me remaining a human, it won’t last long. Sooner or later we will want children, and then I would be forced to turn.”*

*“Sheila, please...” I stared up at her, my wide eyes pleading silently.*

*“I’m sorry, Mason. But I just can’t do this anymore.” As a single tear escaped her left eye, she spun around and walked away... for good.*

\*\*\*

There was another scent, human, that stood out from all the weaker scents of comers and goers. It was a masculine scent, one that reeked of worry and perspiration. The fear was an indicator that the scent belonged to Damon, as did the way it formed around Sheila's scent, waves of anxiety permeating the subtle lilac fragrance.

I wasn't surprised to find his scent here; it was his house after all. What did surprise me was how strong it was, as if he were just here. The way Brian explained his encounter with the scared little weasel, I would have assumed Damon would have been hundreds of miles away, never to return. A man in fear for his life, so afraid that he traded his girlfriend for a chance to escape.

I searched for other scents, those that might be pertinent to finding Sheila. I needed a wolf scent, but there were none. Any dealings Damon had had with the pack must have happened elsewhere. Damon had to have lured Sheila out of the house to give her over. Yet, if that were the case, I was at a dead end. If I had only come earlier and caught Damon before he ran off...

A creak in the floorboard caught my attention. I opened my eyes slowly, listening intently. I allowed my consciousness to ride the sound waves, tapping into my inner-wolf, heightening my sense of hearing.

I heard a quick, soft scuttle coming from behind the inner wall of the living room.

I slowly walked down the hall and stopped in front of the first door on the left. A bedroom. Damon and Sheila's bedroom.

Maybe I hadn't missed him. I hadn't been subtle when I broke in. Hell, I even knocked first. He must have heard me and hid, hoping I would go away.

"Damon," I called out. "I'm coming in. I just want to ask a few questions. Okay?"

Nothing.

"Damon, I'm not here to hurt you. I only want to find Sheila."

Still, he offered no response.

I took a deep breath and slowly turned the doorknob. The hinges creaked as I swung the door open and stepped inside. The room was cast in shadows, a single swath of light sweeping down the center from the window.

A shadow moved to my right. I turned toward it, throwing my hands up in defense. But I wasn't fast enough. A loud crack echoed through my skull as a baseball bat connected with the side of my face. Crumpling to the ground, I saw a short, rotund man standing above me, his face blurred by a combination of shadows and the tears filling my eyes.