

Alpha Reid chapter 1 -

REID

The shrill howl of a wolf echoes through the forest, followed by another. Tonight, the woods are crawling with wolves out running together under the light of the full moon. They're running wild, free, answering the call of their most basic instinct at this stage in the lunar cycle, when the moon's energy is at its peak. For many, it's a time for cathartic release, to let go of the past and move into a new phase.

Just a few minutes ago, I was out there running with them. As my pack's Alpha, it's my duty to lead the run every full moon- it's a ritual that promotes pack bonding and solidarity. Us wolf shifters are always looking forward to the full moon run, but anticipation was particularly high for tonight's run because it wasn't just with our own pack; we joined in with the other five packs of wolf shifters that we're aligned with for the run. The full moon run felt so different tonight, so full of promise and possibility. Until it wasn't. As the run was nearing its end, I decided to cut back ahead of the others, seeking a few moments of solitude before everyone else returned.

Typically, my pack would begin and end the run at our own packhouse, but for the combined all-pack run tonight, we gathered at the packhouse in the town of Summervale, home to the original pack in this area and the largest pack in our alliance. The 'six-pack'; that's what we call ourselves when referring to our alliance. The name is corny as hell- it started out as a joke since the alliance is comprised of six separate packs of werewolf shifters, but somewhere down the line, it stuck. At this point, we've all been together for over half a decade, so there's no changing it; the name is as good as official.

The six shifter packs in our alliance originally came together in response to a threat from a shifter pack out west- one led by a crazy ass Alpha who started on a spree of hostile takeovers of surrounding packs. All these years later, Alpha Xavier and his shadow pack still haven't been stopped. About a month ago, the six-pack came face to face with them for the first time while aiding a large shifter pack in Denver that we'd been brokering an alliance with. I'd like to say we were able to take them out at that point, but no such luck- instead, Alpha Xavier now knows about the six-pack, and we're being targeted next. Over the past month, we've been doing all we can to prepare for the war to come.

"Well?" I hear someone ask, and I glance toward the treeline as I'm buttoning my pants to see my buddies Gray and Theo approaching. So much for my five minutes of solitude.

Gray is Alpha of his own pack, too- he was forced into the role right around the same time I was. His pack stumbled upon mine years ago while they were on the run from the shadow pack. We quickly aligned and, hearing firsthand from Gray and his pack how lethal an attack from the shadow pack was, began to search for even more packs to align with. Strength in numbers, right? After brokering alliances with four other packs, we all moved into adjoining territories in Colorado and the six-pack was born.

Along with the formation of the alliance came the formation of my four closest friendships- with Gray, Theo, Jax, and Brock. The five of us are all in our twenties, close in age and either the current or future Alphas of our packs. With so much in common, we were bound to be close, and working together to form and run the six-pack's security

squad has brought us even closer over the years. Now, we're practically brothers. While we only account for five of the six packs, there's a sixth future Alpha, Chase, that we'll be bringing into the fold soon enough. The plan was to bring him in when he finished high school this spring, but with the shadow pack war looming, he's already been up at the squad complex in training.

I respond with a little shake of my head as Gray and Theo draw closer, watching as the two of them exchange glances. It's no secret that my friends were hoping I'd find my fated mate under the full moon tonight, since they've all managed to find theirs over the past six months. I think they just assumed I'd find her, since we brought all of our packs together, but it turns out that tonight was just another full moon and another disappointment.

Of course I want to find my mate- I've wanted to find her ever since I took over as Alpha at the age of twenty. I want my other half, my Luna. Someone to share the responsibilities with and lighten the load. Don't get me wrong, my Beta is fantastic at what he does, but at the end of the day, I'm his superior. I don't want a subordinate; I want a partner. Someone to stand beside me, not behind me.

As a shifter, I've got a fated mate out there somewhere; the one person whom fate has hand-selected as my perfect match and soulmate. The trouble is, I can't seem to find her. The fated bond only reveals itself under the full moon when the two wolves are within physical proximity of one another, and though I've sniffed around the she-wolves in my pack during every moon run since I turned eighteen and came of age to find my fated mate, I've yet to stumble upon *the one*.

I thought that may change tonight since all six packs ran together under the full moon, thus expanding the pool of candidates considerably. I even thought I smelled something different at one point, only for the scent to fade along with my optimism. Despite the fact that I ran with hundreds of she-wolves tonight, I still can't seem to find my fated mate- and I'm beginning to wonder if I'll ever find her. Not everyone is lucky enough to find their fated mate in their lifetime.

My pack has been pushing me to mate for years. They want a Luna, and I can't say I blame them. While I tend to think I'm an excellent Alpha, the Luna of a pack fulfills needs that I simply can't on my own. The Luna is the compassionate side of pack leadership; the softer, more maternal figure. She provides a different kind of counsel to pack members and helps balance things out. While my mother is still technically the Luna of our pack, she hasn't been able to fulfill those duties for a long time- not since the accident that resulted in my father stepping down as Alpha to take care of her and installing me in his place as the leader of our pack.

Among other things, my Luna would also (hopefully) provide an heir at some point. I'm an only child, so if something were to happen to me, my family line would die out. The other wolves in my pack would then have to challenge one another to fill the spot of Alpha. Not that it hasn't been done before, but when something like that happens, it's messy, and it often results in infighting and division within the pack. Thus, the push for me to find a Luna. If only it were that easy.

I bypass Theo and Gray with their looks of sympathy, making a beeline for one of the large coolers spread out on the packhouse lawn. After a full moon run, the pack typically gathers to socialize, and tonight is no exception. With all six packs here together, it's going to be a huge post-run gathering. Given how many newly mated pairs likely

resulted from the all-pack run tonight, there will be no shortage of reasons to celebrate. I reach down to flip open the top of the cooler, dipping my hand into the ice to retrieve a beer. I'm not a huge drinker, but if there's an appropriate time to get a little drunk, it's now. I flick a glance back toward the guys as I twist the cap off to see that Brock and Jax have joined them, and as I bring the bottle to my lips, Jax starts to head my way. *Fucking great.*

I take a long swig from the bottle as he approaches me, swallowing it down as my gaze slides over to meet his. Jax's sympathetic stare matches what I just saw on Gray and Theo's faces, and while I know he means well, it grinds my gears to be the object of his pity.

"Would you stop looking at me like that?" I sigh, rolling my eyes.

Jax blows out a breath, smoothing his blonde hair back with a palm. "I just don't even know what to say, man. I really thought you'd find her tonight. It doesn't seem fair." He moves beside me to reach down into the cooler for a beer of his own, popping the top. "Since when is fate fair?" I grumble, taking another pull of beer from the bottle. Jax frowns, and I quickly mask my agitation, clapping him on the shoulder. "It's fine, bro. I'll find her when it's right. Besides, we've got bigger shit to deal with right now than my love life, so let's just focus on that, huh?"

I say the words so convincingly that I almost believe them myself. Jax nods, and I clink my beer with his before bringing it to my lips again. I finish the rest in three swallows and toss the empty bottle into a nearby trash can before looking to the other alphas, awaiting my cue to join them. Now that people are filtering back from the run, the pack alphas will be expected to announce and celebrate the happy new mated pairs that were formed under the full moon tonight. Despite my own disappointment following tonight's run, I'll compartmentalize my feelings so I can do my fucking job, like I always do.

I was born to lead my pack as its alpha, and I'm damn good at it. I've had the gig for six years at this point, and I run my pack like a finely tuned machine. The role of Alpha may have been thrust upon me before I was fully prepared for it, but my dad was still around to help guide me as I took the mantle. One of the most fundamental lessons he instilled from the start was the importance of masking my emotions. He'd always say, 'you can't control what happens to you in life, but you can control how you react to it.' He taught me the importance of keeping my cool, of playing my cards close to my chest. He always said the mark of a great Alpha is the ability to think first and react second, to handle conflict with neutrality and detachment. That's what I've always done- even when the conflict is within myself.

I may feel shitty tonight, but I don't let on when it comes to my pack. I grin and bear it, celebrating the new mated pairs with enthusiasm. Once all of the pack alphas have delivered the proper acknowledgements, everyone breaks off to socialize, the food plentiful and the drinks flowing. Theo breaks out a bottle of whiskey, and though I typically stay away from the hard stuff, I indulge in a few pulls from the bottle. It helps take the edge off; to dull the disappointment and emptiness I'm feeling after the colossal let-down that was tonight's run.

The twins wander over to join their mates- have I mentioned that Gray and Theo are mated to a pair of identical twin sisters? Gray with Fallon, and Theo with Brooke. Theo's sister Quinn is actually mated to Jax, and if this is all starting to sound a bit incestuous,

it's because it is. Our alliance is beginning to form more and more blood connections through mate bonds, ensuring that we stay aligned into the future. Brock's the only outlier, but his mate Astrid is actually the sister of the Denver pack's Alpha- our newest ally. So once again, mate bonds and blood bonds. Yet another reason why I got my hopes up that my mate was waiting for me somewhere within the six-pack.

Speaking of blood, I'm posted up with the guys and their mates when a beautiful blonde approaches our group, and as I give her a once-over I quickly realize that there's something strikingly familiar about her. It clicks when she steps up beside Jax and I recognize the family resemblance. I know he's got a few sisters- this girl is clearly one of them.

She mumbles something to Jax, then looks around, her bright blue eyes settling on me. As they do, a mischievous little smirk tugs at the corners of her lips before they part to speak. "Jaxy, aren't you gonna introduce me to your friend?"

Theo's brow cocks up as he swings his gaze to me, mouthing 'Jaxy' and snickering. Jax's wolf flashes silver in his eyes and he looks like he's about to protest, so I go ahead and jump in, flashing the girl a smile and extending my hand. "Hey there. I'm Reid."

She places her dainty little hand in mine, batting her eyelashes. "Juliet."

"My sister," Jax quickly adds with a scowl.

"Really?" I squint. "I don't see the resemblance at all..." I lean in toward Juliet, dropping my voice low and winking. "You must've gotten all the good genes."

Juliet giggles, which only serves to inflame Jax's irritation. Pretty much what I was going for. This girl is way too young for me, but I'll flirt with her a little just to mess with Jax.

After the night I've had thus far, a beauty like Juliet is a welcome distraction.

"Want a beer?" I ask, dipping into the cooler behind me for another. Juliet nods, and I grab her one, too, twisting off the top and handing it to her. Steam is practically coming out of Jax's ears at this point, but the other guys pull him away, distracting him to give Juliet and I a little space.

I've gotta admit, setting aside the fact that she looks a little like Jax, Juliet's cute as hell. Despite her being seven years younger than me, she could definitely be a possibility for a chosen mate. Given her alpha blood, I bet she'd be a natural Luna. And if I can't find my fated mate, I'll eventually have to choose one instead... why not Juliet? I

I shake my head in an attempt to scatter my thoughts. She's way too young for me- I shouldn't even be entertaining the notion of mating with Jax's little sister. Maybe the booze has gone to my head tonight more than I thought.

"So how's it going?" Juliet asks, bringing her beer bottle to her mouth and wrapping her pouty pink lips around it. My eyes track the movement and I have a fleeting thought of something else I wouldn't mind seeing those lips wrapped around...

Aaaand I was right, I've probably had enough to drink for the night. I lower my own beer bottle, dangling it from my fingers at my side and forcing those errant thoughts from my mind. (Latest chapters uploaded Everyday only on)

"Good," I reply casually. "How about you?"

She swallows a sip of her beer, flashing me a smile. "Great, actually. Been busy with online classes, and looks like I'll finally be able to put my medic training to good use here soon... which I shouldn't sound so excited about, huh?" Juliet giggles, shaking her head. "Not that I want anybody to get hurt, but I'm glad I can be useful somehow with

this whole war thing. Well hopefully I don't have to be, but..."

"I know what you mean," I chuckle. Now that she mentions it, I vaguely remember Jax saying at some point that one of his sisters was training as a medic.

I pick up on some commotion going on among my friends in my peripheral vision, glancing over toward them. Theo has his phone out, and they're all looking at something on the screen and speaking in low, agitated tones.

"What's going on?" I call out to them, arching a brow.

Brock looks my way, then flicks his head to indicate to the other guys and they all start in my direction. "An alert at the border," he says calmly as he draws closer.

"I'm sure it's nothing to be concerned about, but someone should probably go check it out," Theo adds. "The system only picked up one animal, it could just be a mountain lion or something."

"Better to be safe than sorry," Gray mumbles, his lips drawn into a frown.

I nod in agreement. "For sure." I hand my open beer off to Jax, who has conveniently positioned himself between me and his sister. "I'll go check it out."

"You sure, man?" Brock asks, furrowing his brow. "We can send a couple squad members..."

I wave him off with a hand. "Nah, I'll take care of it. Where was the breach?"

I leave out the part about how I'm looking for any excuse to get away from this damn post-run celebration and just be by myself for a while. To drop the mask that everything's fine and I'm unaffected by the disappointment.

Theo shrugs, passing me his phone so I can see the map on it, a red dot blinking to indicate the security alert. I study it for a moment, familiarizing myself with the location identified and realizing that it isn't too far from here.

"Got it," I mumble, handing Theo's phone back to him. I turn to Juliet, flashing her a smile. "It was nice meeting you, but I've gotta run."

I can see the disappointment in her eyes, but she returns my smile nonetheless, replying that it was nice to meet me, too.

I say quick goodbyes to the guys and their mates, then take off around the side of the packhouse, heading for my vehicle. I fire off a text message to my beta that I'll meet him back at the packhouse before leaving my phone, keys, and clothes in the car for him to bring home, then shift to my wolf form once again and take off in the direction of the border breach. (Latest chapters uploaded Everyday only on)

Once I'm in wolf form, it's like the more distance I put between myself and the crowd at the Summervale packhouse, the easier I can breathe. I cede control to my animal, allowing him to lead the way through the dense forest between territories as I let go and take a back seat. I don't want to think right now; don't want to feel. I just want to run.

So I do. I traverse the rugged terrain, navigating the rocky creek bed and dodging fallen branches. As I advance through the Goldenleaf territory, though, something starts to feel... *off*. Different. It's not the kind of different that sets off alarm bells in my head, though- it's the kind that's exciting. Like there's something electric in the air, sending pulses of energy through my veins.

Then I smell it. It's a scent unlike anything I've ever come across- like vanilla and tangerine, sweet like honey, fresh like a spring rainstorm. I can't pin down exactly what it smells like, but it's fucking *delicious*, and suddenly my wolf doesn't give a shit about investigating the breach at the border of the territory, all he cares about is finding the

source of that scent.

My rational mind is at war with my instincts, but at least the two seem to have the same direction in mind- that intoxicating smell seems to be coming from the same direction I was headed, toward the border of the territory. My wolf is getting more worked up every minute, in a frenzy to get closer- suddenly I'm running on pure adrenaline and endorphins, the most blissful sensations washing over me as the scent gets stronger and stronger.

It's like it's all around me. I skid to a stop, throwing my nose to the sky, looking around wildly. It's so strong, like I'm right on top of it, but I don't see anything or anyone. I advance forward slowly, the scent leading me into a thicket of brush. Branches tug at my fur as I slink in further, pushing through to the other side.

And suddenly, I see her- a beautiful red wolf. Her glossy fur practically glows under the light of the full moon as she lifts her head, casting her gaze in my direction. My legs move on their own accord, leaves crunching underneath my paws as I step out of the brush. As soon as our eyes meet, the realization slams into me. I've never seen her before, but I know *exactly* who she is.

Everything in my field of vision goes fuzzy, shimmering as my wolf tucks himself away and the change comes over me. My fur recedes, bones snapping and rearranging as tingles break out over my whole body. Then the shift is complete- I'm crouched on two legs in human form, vision sharpening again as I blink across from me, searching for the red wolf as I rise to stand.

She's shifted, too. A girl rises to her feet from where the red wolf was, her bare form bathed in moonlight. My eyes devour every inch of her creamy skin, from her long, shapely legs to the curve of her hips, her flat belly, her narrow waist. Her fiery red hair spills over her shoulders, obstructing my view of her breasts. Her face is round, cherubic, like a goddamn angel in the flesh, accented with high cheekbones and pouty pink lips. She stares back at me with the bluest eyes framed by thick dark lashes, her expressive eyebrows drawing together in confusion.

I watch as her eyes tour my form, a rosy blush staining her cheeks when they drop between my legs. It's then that I realize how obvious my attraction for her is- my dick is standing at attention, practically saluting this flame-haired goddess. She's the most beautiful creature I've ever laid eyes on; the kind of perfection that tests faith and reignites belief.

I'm rooted in place, in complete awe of her, as the word that's on the tip of my tongue slips past my lips. "Mate." (Latest chapters uploaded Everyday only on