

## Read Untouchable (Unstoppable 1) by Danielle Hill

Chapter 16-18

Sixteen

Riley

"He'll be fine," I said, my voice small and reeking of an uncertainty I failed to disguise.

I had no idea if he would be fine. It was just one of those things that people said to each other when stuff like this happened. I hoped he'd be fine. That was what should have come out of my mouth, or maybe nothing at all. I couldn't give any reassurances, and we both knew it.

Reno didn't acknowledge my platitudes. He hadn't spoken since we'd stepped inside the principal's office. Funny, floating down the corridor, neither one of us had given any real consideration to the reason for the summons. We'd been so preoccupied with each other, completely lost inside our little bubble of happiness. The one time we'd forgotten that life was a never-ending conveyor belt of crap, doling it out when you least expected it...

"Take a seat, son."

"What's going on?"

The bite to Reno's tone was sharp enough to pierce the shield shrouding us only moments earlier. The sympathetic tone and somber expression on Principal Hewman's face took care of any lingering contentment we might have been feeling. Something was wrong.

Principal Hewman's eyes darted away and back quickly as he clasped his hands together atop his walnut desk. His eyes settled on me. "Miss Mason, could I ask you to step out—"

"No." Reno's voice cut across the room, preventing Principal Hewman from finishing his request.

The older man shifted in his seat a little, nodding his acquiescence, before turning to face Reno, his fingers spreading apart.

"It's your father."

While Reno looked at Principal Hewman, I looked at Reno. His face didn't shift, not one shred of emotion appeared, but his fingers clenched around my hand so hard I had to bite my tongue to keep from yelping. He wore it so well—indifference—but he felt

everything. I squeezed back, feeling my heart bumping inside my chest. Anxiety coated my lungs as I realized that what hurt Reno would undoubtedly hurt me. But more than that, what hurt Reno, hurt Reno. And I'd do just about anything to prevent that.

"He had a heart attack this afternoon. They couldn't give me a great deal of information regarding his condition, but he was taken to Claremont General. Your brother is listed as his emergency contact. They haven't been able to re

ach him yet."

Reno's face blurred as my eyes misted. I could make out the tight set of his jaw, the tendons straining in his neck and the way his shoulders bunched as if he'd just had the world dropped on top of him. But he still didn't speak. I wasn't positive he could.

"Reno?" I murmured, my voice thin.

His head swerved toward me slightly, but he didn't face me. His eyes remained fixed to the shelving units behind Principal Hewman's desk.

"He's in the best hands, son." He hesitated, looking between Reno and me. "I don't know if you'd like to go there now or if you'd rather stay in classes for the remainder of the day..."

When he didn't move or respond, I squeezed his hand. "Ren?"

"Maddox?" Reno's head jerked to Principal Hewman. "Did you want to go to the hospital?"

Reno just stared for a long moment, then cleared his throat, the noise gruff, rusty. "Yeah."

"Can I..." I began, and Reno finally looked down to me. The sight almost broke my heart. His big, brown eyes were glassy, wet and dazed, like he didn't know what had hit him. I turned into him, thrusting my face into his side and gripping his body tight with my arms.

"Yes, of course, Riley," Principal Hewman said. "If you two head out now, I'll keep trying Owen."

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So, here we were in the surgery waiting room. Sitting on too-hard plastic seats, under too-harsh fluorescent lights, with way too much time and space to imagine all the worst-case scenarios. Anyone who knew the Renners knew their story. Brett loved Maddox and Owen like they were his own. I would never have suspected otherwise if Liss hadn't told me the story. It was like one of those heart-warming articles you read in the news, acts of unconditional love and selflessness. It was amazing how Brett stepped up and I knew how much both boys appreciated it. But I also knew that Brett told anyone who commented that it wasn't a decision he'd had to make. The day they'd entered his life, they'd become his family and you took care of family.

Reno was tough. I'd spent years convinced he was impenetrable. But if Brett didn't come through the heart attack, it would destroy him. Chewing on my lip, I let my eyes stray to him. He alternated between pacing the narrow space to sitting on the edge of a chair, leg bouncing impatiently, eyes flickering over every surface and back again. Sliding my lids closed, I breathed in and tipped my head back.

I know I probably don't deserve your time, and I know I shouldn't bother you for favors when you're probably busy answering prayers from all the people who did put in the legwork, but it's important, so I'm asking you, anyway... please get Mr. Renner through this. Please. They love each other, and they need each other. So yeah... please. Amen.

"I gotta try O again."

He said it without looking at me. I nodded. He didn't see.

"Hey, do you want to stay?" I asked, jumping up to intercept him. "You stay, I'll try Owen."

He halted but said nothing, his eyes hovering somewhere over my shoulder. Then he offered a curt nod and sat back down. Leg bouncing, fingers tapping. My chest ached and my heart pinched. He thought caring made him weak. He didn't want me to see him like that. He didn't know it made me love him even more. I'd tell him when we got through this.

"Can I get you anything? Soda? Coffee? Anything to eat? You didn't eat at lunch."

His gaze swung to and then straight past me without stopping. "No. Thanks."

I sighed, gazing at him a while longer. The way his muscles tensed across the shoulders and his jaw quirked, I could tell he knew I was watching him and that it made him uncomfortable, so I turned and left.

"Where are you, Owen?" I muttered as his voicemail answered yet again.

Shutting the screen off, I pocketed my phone, my eyes drifting up at the blaring sound of a nearing siren. I'd walked around the parking lot a little to get a better signal and must have wandered to the ER entrance. Shivering in my light sweater, I wrapped my arms around myself. It was mid-January, too cold for just a sweater, but I hadn't bothered to grab my jacket on the way out of school.

My eyes surveyed the now inky sky. It had been hours and nothing. I didn't know if that was a good sign or a bad one. I didn't know what they were doing, or how long it should take. Rubbing my hands up and down over the thin cotton covering my biceps, I turned back to the automatic doors. The noise from the approaching ambulance suddenly became deafening, and I paused, turning as it screeched into view and stopped in a bay beside me.

As soon as the wheels stopped spinning, there was a flurry of activity. Paramedics jumped out of the vehicle, the rear doors swung open and a gurney appeared, shadowed by another EMT holding what looked like a clear bag. I couldn't really see the person on it. Bloody gauze covered their chest and an oxygen mask obscured most of their face. I followed behind unthinking, my feet propelling me forward. A man in scrubs, stethoscope hanging around his neck, met them just inside the door. The EMT began relaying information in response to his questions.

"Twenty-year-old male. Multiple stab wounds to the abdomen, neck and chest."

My brows drew down as they continued detailing the extent of the injuries using terms I barely understood. I heard them mention internal bleeding and shuddered. It was so formal, so routine. Clipped and efficient. God, this was their job. They fought to save lives—fixed stab wounds, treated heart attack patients—every day. They stared death in the eye. Sometimes they fought it off, sometimes not.

I needed them to win today.

"Name?"

"Owen Renner, he..."

My head filled with white noise, their voices distorting as dread gripped every inch of my body. A loud pounding suddenly throbbed against the confines of my skull. The gurney whizzed through the doors away from me. The gurney carrying Owen. Reno's brother, Owen! Jolting back to reality, I raced to catch up, my chest heaving and my stomach bottoming out.

Owen Renner. No. It couldn't.

I almost slammed into the paramedic, unable to stop my forward momentum. My hands braced against the bed and I watched as a head drooped lifelessly to the side. The mask slipped. A face came into view.

“Hey, miss—”

Whatever they were saying, I couldn’t hear it.

Owen.

My heart pitched into my throat, choking me. “Oh my God, Owen!” I gasped, practically falling onto the moving bed. “Owen! Oh my God, oh my God.”

“Miss.” Hands gripped my arms, and I fought against them, protesting this reality.

“No! He’s... oh my God, he’s my... I don’t... Owen!” I could taste saltiness on my tongue. My face felt wet and my eyes burned, unfocused, as my gaze spun around helplessly.

“Miss, are you family?”

“I... no, I’m... he’s. Oh, my god!”

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A sob tore through me when Owen’s body jerked violently. An urgent voice rang out over my head. Someone firmly maneuvered me aside.

“We’re losing him!”

Arms eased me away from the scene until the gurney quickly disappeared through another set of doors. I stared blankly as they swayed closed, coming together briefly before swinging open again. They swished back and forth several times, before coming to a complete stop. Commotion and noise surrounded me, but it couldn’t compete with the chaos inside my head. I felt disconnected, like I could hear everything through a thick wall of glass, muffled. The same thoughts raced through my head, over and over, shifting and changing. Whichever way I formed them, the truth remained unchanged.

Owen was here. With stab wounds. Someone had stabbed Owen. Multiple times.

And they were losing him.

My eyes shot wide, eventually coming to rest on the concerned face of a man who looked to be mid-twenties hovering over me. “Do you know him, Miss?”

"I, we... we live in the same trailer park," I mumbled, barely finding my voice as I glanced away. Sucking in a breath, I looked up again and said, "But I'm his brother's girlfriend

. And they brought his dad in today with a heart attack." My voice broke, rivers of water cascading down my face. "His brother is here. Waiting to see if their dad will make it."

There was a quick flicker of surprise on his face, but not to the extent that he couldn't believe what I'd told him. He was one of the EMTs who'd brought Owen in, his uniform still marked with smears of blood. He'd seen it all. He knew how cruel life could be.

My breath caught in my throat, and I held his solemn gaze through a thick veil of tears. My voice came out a whisper, small and childlike.

"Is he going to die?"

Seventeen

Riley

I moved on autopilot as I made my way back to Reno, simultaneously reluctant and desperate to get to him. I wanted to comfort him. I wanted to support him and show him I loved him, but I came bearing news I wouldn't want to bestow on my worst enemy. Gasping on a cry, I raised the back of my hand to my open mouth, silently heaving.

I couldn't do this. I couldn't tell him his brother was here fighting for his life along with his dad. How could I tell him that? My knees buckled as I sank to the floor, my back sliding down the surface of the wall behind me. Burying my face in my hands, I sucked in a steadying breath and clenched my fingers into fists. After a few minutes spent fighting to pull myself together, I dragged myself to my feet and walked toward the doors leading into the waiting room where Reno would be. Sitting or pacing, all alone.

Except, when I got there, he wasn't alone. He was sitting, head hung low between his thighs and both hands gripping the hair at the nape of his neck. A doctor crouched in front of him, his large dark-skinned hand resting on Reno's bent knee. They both looked up when I pushed through the doors.

And I knew.

My hand flew to cover my mouth as one lone tear worked its way over Reno's lower lid and bounced to the speckled linoleum beneath his feet.

Brett didn't make it.

I asked without asking. One hand still covered my mouth while the other pressed into the wall, trying to find something to grasp onto and keep myself upright.

He answered without words. A simple shake of his head. Another tear escaped, and he turned away from me.

The doctor's mouth formed a sympathetic grimace as he squeezed Reno's knee, then rose to stand. Glancing in my direction, he inclined his head in what seemed to be condolences and left the room.

I ran to Reno's side, wrapping my arms around his neck and tucking my face into his shoulder. I needed to be the strong one; keep myself together so he could fall apart, but the burden I carried pressed down on me like a giant's fist, the weight crushing, unbearable. His arms came around me, and I positioned myself sideways across his lap. His head rested in the crook of my neck, quickly dampening the material of my sweater. I held tighter, trying to keep all the pieces of him together, because the thought of what was still to come terrified me.

A few minutes passed before he shifted, lifting me easily from his lap to the chair beside him.

"I'm so sorry, Ren," I choked.

He lifted his head slowly and brought his eyes to mine. "Did you get through to Owen?"

I felt the blood drain, my entire body growing cold as the breath froze in my lungs.

His brows drew together, thick, black slashes angling down on his unusually pale face. He must have read the dismay on my face. "What? Is he coming?"

My features crumpled as I reached to cover his hand with mine. "Ren," I started, but the words wouldn't come, couldn't make their way past the boulder of grief blocking my windpipe. I dropped my head.

"What? Riley, what's going on?"

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Rough hands grasped my biceps, probably harder than he intended or realized. I raised my head despondently and gently shook it.

"I couldn't get through, but I... when I was outside, they brought someone into the ER. From an ambulance. He had multiple stab wounds and it... it didn't look good." His grip intensified. I knew he was squeezing too tight, that he'd leave bruises, but I hardly felt it. "Reno, it was... it was Owen. The person they brought in. It was Owen."

His eyes stared into mine, but I could tell he couldn't see me. "Reno?" I reached up to cup his jaw and he jerked away, lunging to the far side of the room.

"You're wrong." His voice came out harsh, angry.

"It was Owen, Reno," I said, tone gentle.

Unfocused eyes met mine, and I saw something in them I'd never seen in anyone before. Horror. Sheer panic. The kind you'd see in the eyes of a man who knew he was about to lose everything that mattered.

"Reno," I cried, jumping up to go to him.

"Where is he?" he demanded, moving away from me.

My hands fell to my sides as I opened my mouth to answer him. He didn't wait before bolting through the doors in search of his brother.

Without me.

Eighteen

Riley

The stab wound to Owen's abdomen had pierced straight through his liver, causing major internal haemorrhaging. They hadn't been able to get him to surgery in time to stop the bleeding. He'd lost too much. They hadn't been able to save him.

Owen David Renner died less than thirty minutes after his stepfather. In the three days that passed since, people tried to find comfort in that. At least they went together. They'll have each other up there. The platitudes were heartfelt and sincere. People needed to find the light in the dark. They failed to mention that Brett and Owen dying on the same day, minutes apart, left a seventeen-year-old boy without a family. For Reno, there was nothing but darkness. It felt like I'd lost him to it, and I couldn't find my way through.

Reno would turn eighteen in five weeks. Brett's second-hand man at the garage, Trent Donovan, had said he could stay with him and his family indefinitely. But Reno hadn't left his bedroom since he walked through the door, laden down with the possessions his brother and father would never need again. I'd stayed here, bringing him food, and taking it away uneaten. I'd knelt on the floor by his single bed and rested my head by his pillow, but he'd barely spoken a word. It was soul crushing.



"Reno?" I rapped my knuckles against the flimsy wood of his closed door and waited. When he didn't answer, I pushed down on the handle and went inside, a sandwich and can of soda on a tray in my hand. "Hey? Ren?"

He sat on his bed, back against the wall, knees up and legs apart. He turned to me, eyes coasting over the tray. "Thanks," he said, voice scratchy with disuse.

Placing the tray on his nightstand, I perched on the edge of the bed and stroked my fingers down his forearm, tracing the protruding vein and sinew. He looked so strong. But this had brought him to his knees. He'd lost everything in the space of one night. Less than that. I wanted to be here for him. I wanted him to let me be here for him.

"Did you sleep?"

"Some."

I nodded. "That's good."

My eyes swayed to the small window. The drapes, drawn roughly across the glass, left just a wide enough gap to see outside. This side of the trailer park backed onto a bunch of trees, their gnarled branches swayed in the wind, bare of leaves. It looked barren. Everything felt barren.

"I need to plan the funerals."

Funerals. Plural.

My heart plummeted. It was unfair, so fucking unfair. A knock sounded on the trailer door. Leon had left to grab a shower ten minutes ago, but people came and went all day, bringing casseroles wrapped in cellophane.

"I'll get it." I jumped up, guilt tearing into me when I realized how much I wanted to escape the conversation about the funerals Reno would have to plan. My face caved when Liss appeared behind the door, and I practically fell into her waiting arms.

"Shh, it's okay, babe." Her palm stroked my hair as I cried into her neck, and I felt my body trembling. "Come on."

She moved us through the door and closed it behind her while I cried my heart out on her shoulder. Eventually, the tears ebbed, and I sank down into a chair at the diner while Liss moved around the kitchen, filling the kettle, grabbing cups and canisters. She set everything in position on the countertop, the kettle bubbling and steaming, then turned to me, big blue eyes sad and shining.

She cleared her throat roughly. "How is he?"

My gaze drifted to the door, and my lips rolled together hard, squeezing to stop the sobs that never seemed to stifle.

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“Not good,” I croaked. “He was just—” I broke off, throat clogging with emotion. “He was talking about their funerals.” The word barely wheezed out of my lips, the reality of it too harsh to consider. But Reno had to. He had to consider it. Plan it. Attend it. He had to live it.

He had to say goodbye to everyone he loved. My eyes welled again, chest tightening to the point of pain. “He won’t let me in.”

“He will,” she said. She didn’t sound convinced. I’m not sure I would have believed her, anyway.

Reno suddenly appeared in the kitchen doorway. The sight shocked me so much I nearly knocked Liss over in my haste to meet him. He’d ventured between his bedroom and the bathroom in the last seventy-two hours, but never beyond that.

“Hey, you okay? You need something?”

“Nope. I’m heading out though,” he muttered, walking past me.

“What?” My head spun to follow his movements, my brows dipping low over my eyes.  
“Where?”

He shrugged, pushing his arms through his jacket and grabbing the keys to his car from the hook by the door. “Just out.”

“Ren, I—”

“What?” he bit, and I flinched.

My gaze strayed to Liss who watched silently. When her eyes met mine, her lips turned down in

a slight frown before she tilted one shoulder up a tiny fraction. As clueless to what was going on here as I was.

Looking back to Reno, I held my arms out at my sides. He was hurting, vulnerable. I'd seen him at his lowest and that had to be hard for him. But I loved him. And I wanted to be the person he turned to, leaned on.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

Thumbs digging into his hips, he studied me for a long moment, then sighed. "No, Ri. Thanks for everything you've been doing, but you don't need to." He spread his arms wide, his gaze surveying the surrounding space. "This is it now. I'm good." His voice cracked, but he pivoted and pushed through the door, leaving me watching after him.

My heart plummeted and the ground beneath my feet seemed to give way. Because this was what I'd feared, what I'd predicted, and I didn't know how to stop it from happening.

"I've lost him."

An arm came around my shoulders. "Give him time."

It scared me that time might not be enough.