

Read Untouchable (Unstoppable 1) by Danielle Hill

Chapter 4

Four

Riley

"Hey, sweets. Good day?"

Mom's tiny form sprawled lengthways on the built-in sofa that doubled as her bed, making it impossible to tell if she'd ventured out of it today. I could only hope it hadn't doubled as her entertainment center this afternoon, but casting a glance to the small kitchenette area, I saw no cookies.

She wasn't a total asshole. She was... misguided, let's say. She wasn't conventional, that was for damn sure, but then, she had become a single mom before she reached adulthood, and as far as I could tell, she just stopped there. She'd fed and clothed me, sometimes barely, patched up bumps and scrapes, and I'd always had a roof of sorts over my head. Mostly, she provided the basics, kept me alive, but let's be honest, it was the blind leading the blind.

Maybe she shouldn't have needed someone to tell her it wasn't the norm to be so open about sex with your kid, or ask them to vacate their home for extended periods of time to facilitate sex, but at this point she was more like the outrageous friend you had to explain to everyone than a mother. All I knew was I had a mom who dubbed herself a sex addict by choice, as if it was something to be proud of, like some display of female empowerment or healthy expression of her sexuality. Apparently, there was no shame in exploring our natural desires.

Standing here as the product of her explorations, I didn't share her views. I mean, I was happy to be alive obviously, but the circumstances of my conception were basically an advertisement for what not to do.

I knew she loved me. She'd always done her best.

"Sure," I muttered.

"Great, hon."

She swiftly returned her attention to the screen, blonde hair piled on her head in a messy bun, and her face a picture of giddy anticipation, fully absorbed in whatever drama was about to go down on the reality T.V. show she'd been watching before I arrived home. Real housewives of who-gave-a-crap where. Not sure the location mattered—different place, same garbage—they all morphed into the same person to me.

Pushing into the tiny bedroom, I slung my bag down to the floor and slumped back onto the lumpy twin bed, falling flat on my back with my legs flopping off the edge. The buzz of my cell sent vibrations along my hip bone. I groaned for two reasons. One, I knew it would be Leon, and I really wasn't up for explaining why I wasn't ready to have sex with him for the hundredth time, and two, the tingle running up my thigh made me think of Reno, which made me imagine what it would be like to sleep with him. If I could kick my ass, I would do it. For a second, I contemplated slapping myself in the face.

"Arghh!" I opted for slapping an arm across my face instead. I shook my head hard in an attempt to expel both the thoughts circling my brain and the inappropriate and unwanted desire that prompted them.

Why? Why did I have to want him so badly?

The buzzing stopped, and I let both arms drop out beside me, crucifix style. Someone should crucify me. I deserved it. Label or not, I had been sort of involved with Leon for the past few years, and yet I fantasized about slapping away the harem of barbies that clung to Reno like cleaner fish on a whale, and slotting myself right in their place. A frustrated moan tore from me.

There was something wrong with my wiring. That had to be it. Leon was a decent guy who didn't live to provoke me, which was more than I could say for Reno. If I ever asked, Leon would agree to be exclusive. I just didn't feel right restricting him like that when I couldn't stop pining after someone else. God, a few short hours ago I'd used him to get a reaction out of his best friend, and not for the first time.

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My attraction to Reno was hideously inappropriate. I fought it constantly, but I felt sure Leon knew deep down that he wasn't the guy I wanted. He was just the guy I let myself have. I let him in because I knew he couldn't truly touch me. He was a buffer. Leon probably wanted to seal the deal with me because Reno hadn't and he wanted something, or in this case someone, Reno didn't have first.

Leon was one of the most popular guys in school, but he was second best to Reno. They might be tight like brothers, but Reno held the spotlight and Leon stood next to him, always had.

I wished I felt something real for Leon, and a whole lot of nothing for his stupid friend, but for as long as I could remember, Reno stirred something in me I couldn't seem to shake or disguise very well. I flat out refused to admit the extent of his hold on me, though. Not even to myself. A river in Egypt and all that. I couldn't afford to go there.

I rolled sideways and curled into the fetal position as I contemplated what to do. I couldn't sleep with a guy just because I felt bad for him, gift him the win he so badly wanted. I couldn't do it just to get at someone else. Could I? Could I really take it that far?

If I did, maybe Leon and I would both get over our Reno hang-ups. I was never going there with Reno, not ever, no matter how much that particular itch needed scratching. I already knew the ending to that story and happily ever after wasn't it. If I let myself go there, even once, there'd be no coming back. I'd become another in his vast collection of human sex toys, and I'd despise myself for it. I already flirted way too close to the line when it came to him. He wasn't into monogamy; he had it way too good to tie himself down. He'd never promise me anything, and I wanted someone to want me for more than sex. I'd sworn my entire life, I'd never let my self-respect become a casualty of my hormones. So, why not just do it with Leon? Get it over with?

Something inside of me recoiled at the thought.

My cell phone buzzed again.

"Hey."

"Babe, where you at?"

"Home. Where am I supposed to be?"

"On the end of my dick!" Leon guffawed. I rolled my eyes. "J. K. But we're hooking up tonight, right?"

I rolled to my back and stared at the faded brown circles on the ceiling.

"Ri?"

"Huh? Oh, uh, I just... hey, Leon?"

"Yeah?"

I palmed my forehead, hating what I was about to do. "Hey, Leon, did you have sex with Ashley in the locker room at lunch?"

"I, uh... it was... we... what?"

His garbled response made it even harder. I was placing blame unfairly. I'd never asked him not to be with other girls, and I continuously played a game of fire with the guy he'd

called brother since kindergarten. I was dangerously close to getting burned. This whole charade had to end.

"Look, Leon, I don't think this thing between us, should, uh, continue," I said, my voice weak.

"What?" he clipped. "Are you fucking with me?"

"No, I'm not. I'm just... I don't think we're, well, I don't think this is going where either of us, uh, wants it to, uh, go." lame. lame, lame, lame. I should have practiced something.

"Right. So where do you w

ant it to go?" He sounded hurt, and that hurt me. We'd been friends since I moved here over eight years ago. He had been the first person to talk to me. Granted, he'd pulled my pigtails at recess and caught farts in his hand before covering my face with it, from the ages of eight through to eleven, but I'd eventually figured out why. Boys!

God, I should never have touched his dick. Touching dicks ruins everything. What was I thinking?

"Uh... not where... you, um, want it to go?" I cringed at my own words.

He was silent for a beat. "Is this because I've been pushing for sex?"

I sighed. "Yes, and no." Before he could interrupt, I hurried on, trying to explain without coming right out and confessing that it wasn't him I wanted. "It just made me realize that I'm not ready for any of this. Not sex, not a relationship, not... yet." The lie tasted bitter, but it wasn't like I would ever act on my unwanted feelings for Reno.

"We don't have to have sex. We can just keep things the way they are, I'm good with tha—"

"No, Leon. I don't want to be doing anything with you, not if you're... doing stuff with other people."

"I won't then. I won't touch anyone else."

"I'm not! I'm not pissed off, Leon. I just..." my voice trailed off, mainly because I didn't know what the hell to say. I'd never doubted he liked me; I just didn't think there was anything real there. I certainly didn't expect this much resistance. I didn't want to hurt him.

"Please, Ri. Just give me a chance. Give us a chance."

The plea in his voice struck me directly in the chest. What the hell have I done?

My mouth opened but struggled to form words. "I... I... can't—"

He cursed down the line, anger and frustration bleeding into his tone.

"Leon?"

"You think I don't know what this is?" There was an edge to his voice I'd never heard from him before. My pulse sped up. Games of the heart were no fun.

"What, what is?" I mumbled.

He went quiet. The silence stretched until it became uncomfortable. Just as I was about to speak up, he did, his voice low and angry. "He doesn't want you. He messes with you because he can. Because you wind up like a goddamn toy." He practically spat the words down the line, and I felt the threads of our friendship strain.

"Leon—"

"No. I get it. You think I don't see the way you look at him, fucking drooling? You leave a puddle every time you're in the same room, and not just from your mouth." Uh, gross. "You see the girls he fucks? Who throw themselves at him? And what, you think if you dump me, he'll trade all that for you?"

His mocking laughter hit my ears, and a flare of anger dampened my guilt.

So, I'd hurt him, and he was hitting back. I accepted my part, but I wasn't about to just sit back and take it.

"Wow. Guess you see a lot standing in his shadow, huh?"

"You bitch!"

"Yeah, well, you're being an asshole!"

"Yeah, well, you're a whore!"

"I'm a virgin!" I screamed.

"You're fucking frigid!" he shouted.

"Make up your mind, you fucking idiot!" My breath huffed and my fingers flexed. If he were here, I'd be throwing fists right about now.

“You know what? Go fuck yourself, Ri!”

“Well, I definitely won't be fucking you!”

The line went silent.

I exhaled heavily. Great! Just great. Well, you handled that like a pro, Riley. Goddamn.

I flopped back on the bed, springs poking me in various places, thinking about how this was all Reno's fault.