

A Warrior's Second Chance

Chapter 2

1512 Words

FAYE I didn't go straight to find Jason like I planned. I went to the training grounds to check if Sage was back. As I got closer, I noticed a man standing in the middle of the training grounds. The way he moved caught my attention immediately. He was practicing with a longsword. Each swing showed how good he was with it. For a second, I just stood there and watched. There was something in the way he moved. Like he didn't just train for discipline. Like it was as natural as breathing to him. He looked dangerous and powerful. As if sensing my eyes on him, he stopped mid-swing and turned. Storm-gray eyes locked onto mine, and that was when I realized it was the same man from earlier, the same one I'd caught sight of from the training ground. Up close, he was even more imposing, tall, and broad-shouldered, with his hair still damp, as if he just stepped out of the shower. I stiffened, pulling my gaze back to his face. "Didn't know anyone else trained this late," I said, my voice coming out softer than I meant. He lowered the sword slightly, but didn't look away. "And yet you still decided to watch," he said in a deep and calm voice that sounded almost amused. Almost. "I wasn't watching," I shot back, folding my arms across my chest. "Just passing by." One dark eyebrow lifted. "Is that so?" He took a slow step closer, still holding the sword loosely at his side. "You have a strange way of 'passing by.'" My pulse kicked up, but I refused to step back. "It's a free field," I said, lifting my chin. "Or do you think it belongs to you?" His gaze flickered over me for a moment. "Do you always talk to strangers like this?" he asked in a low voice. "Only when they act like they own the ground they stand on," I shot back. A faint smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth, but it didn't reach his eyes. "And what would you do if I did?" I raised my eyebrows. "Challenge you to prove it." His smirk faded, replaced by something darker, interest, maybe, or surprise. For a moment we just stood there, facing each other. Then he moved closer, close enough that I caught his scent. "Tell me," he murmured, his voice a much softer voice, "Do you always speak first,

or do you fight first?" My heart beat faster, but I kept my voice steady. "Depends," I said. "Are you worth the effort?" His eyes narrowed slightly, but the corner of his mouth curved again. "Bold," he murmured. "Most people hesitate." "I'm not most people," I said, my words sharper than I intended. For a moment, neither of us spoke, just continue to stare at each other. Somewhere deep inside, Nova stirred, silently watching him too. "I'm not here to be good," I said, without even knowing why. "I can see that," he replied quietly. A beat of silence passed, then he turned the sword in his hand, letting the blade catch the moonlight. "Next time," he said in a low voice. "if you want to watch, step closer. You'll see better." Heat rose to my face, from anger or something else, I couldn't tell. "I wasn't watching," I snapped. He didn't argue. He just dipped his head slightly, as if in mock respect. "Then maybe next time, you won't stop at the edge of the field." Before I could find a reply, he stepped back, turning away as smoothly as he'd first turned to me. He lifted the sword again, his focus already shifting away, like I was nothing more than a passing moment. I stood there for a few seconds longer, with my heart pounding, and breathe caught somewhere between anger and something I didn't want to name. Then I forced myself to turn and walk away, back toward the path. I still had to find Jason. The last thing I needed tonight was any sort of distraction. What just happened? And what is wrong with me? Tonight of all nights.... I sighed, disappointed in myself. It almost felt like I'd cheated on Jason, just by having that conversation with him. I should tell Jason when I see him. I didn't want any secrets between us before the mating ceremony. "Are you okay?" Nova asked as I turned to leave. "I'm nervous," I admitted. "About Sage. About tonight." "You're strong, Faye. You'll handle this too." "I hope so," I whispered back. As I neared the cabin, I frowned in confusion as laughter and soft moans reached my ears. My heart started beating faster as I heard Jason's voice. "Did anyone see you?" "No, I was careful," came the answer. My blood ran cold when I recognized Sage's voice. "Good," Jason murmured. "You know how crazy this is, right?" "Then stop," Sage teased, giggling. "But you won't, will you?" Jason chuckled. "No. Not when I finally have you like this." My chest exploded in pain. Slowly, I stepped forward and pushed the door open and they were there on the bed, Sage and Jason, tangled together in the room prepared for my mating

night. At the sound of the door, they both turned, eyes wide. I couldn't move or breathe. Before anyone could speak, footsteps approached and Alpha Wells, the elders, my father, and a few others entered only to freeze at the sight. "What is this?" Alpha Wells thundered. "Jason!" My father's face had gone pale. "Sage! Explain yourself!" Jason's jaw tightened. "Father, it's nothing—" "Nothing?" Alpha Wells snapped. "You brought Faye to us, you swore she was your choice, and now this?" Jason swallowed but didn't look, sorry. "I did want her once. But my feelings changed. I kept pretending because I didn't want to hurt her or disappoint you. But I can't keep lying." His words pierced me like a blade in the heart, but I forced myself to stay calm. Alpha Wells's voice was hard as he spoke. "So instead you choose betrayal? You shame your mate and this entire pack?" My father turned to Sage. "Your own sister, Sage. Why?" Sage's voice trembled with anger. "Why shouldn't it be me for once, Father? All my life, Faye got everything. Even the title of commander, though I'm the older twin. She got to choose her mate. And me? I was promised away to a stranger. Why can't I have what she has?" She turned to me. "You always got chosen, Faye! I was always left behind. I wanted the best for once. I deserve it." Her words hurt, but deep down, I'd seen signs of her resentment before. This wasn't new. "You didn't have to do it this way, Sage," I said quietly, trying to keep the pain out of my voice. "You could have chosen openly. Instead, you chose betrayal." Sage's mouth twisted. "You wouldn't understand. Everything always came easily to you. You don't know what it feels like to be second best." Jason turned to me. "I did try, Faye. Truly. But my feelings faded. I didn't want to hurt you, but I couldn't keep lying." "You didn't hurt me, Jason," I said. "You broke my trust. You could have ended it before tonight, instead of humiliating me in front of everyone." Jason's jaw tightened. "You're forgetting something, Faye. I'm old enough to know what I want. I don't owe anyone an apology for living my life. I chose Sage, and I won't apologize for that." "And yet you lied until the very last moment," I said, keeping my voice calm. Jason opened his mouth, but no words came out. I turned to Sage. "Why?" It was a simple question, but I needed to hear it from her. Guilt flickered in her eyes, followed by stubborn pride. "I'm tired of being in your shadow, Faye," she said. "I'm tired of being second best. I won't say sorry for wanting more."

“And you thought the way to get it,” I said softly, “was to steal it from me, in secret?” She didn’t answer. Instead, she turned away. I drew in a slow breath and nodded. “Fine. If this is really what you both want... then live with it. I won’t stop you.”