

An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 21[1,512 words]

Chapter 21

Rose was getting tired near the end of their run. Patrick's wolf must have noticed too as he stopped occasionally to give her a break. It took far longer than it should have to reach their starting point.

Rose went behind a tree, but Riley was unable to shift. She tried several times until Rose laid down wearily.

What's going on? Riley asked, trying to keep her panic in check.

I don't know, Rose answered. *I'm just so tired. Everything hurts and I feel like I can barely move.*

"Riley?" Patrick's voice echoed through the trees.

*s**t,* Riley said, *we can't even tell him what's happening.*

I just need a nap or something, Rose murmured. *I don't know why I feel like this.*

Patrick came around a tree and spotted Rose. He knelt down next to her, placing his hand on her head.

"Are you ok?"

Rose shook her head.

"Can you shift back?"

She shook her head again.

"Can you walk back to the tree line with me? I can mindlink Lana from there." Patrick grabbed the bag of Riley's clothes and started heading towards the treeline.

Rose climbed slowly to her feet.

Can you do it? Riley asked as she watched Rose follow Patrick.

I guess we're going to find out. Rose only made it to the edge of the tree line before she slumped down again. Patrick turned, kneeling down in front of her again.

"I'm going to go get Lana, Ok?" he said gently.

"Patrick?"

Rose lifted her head, following the sound of the voice. The smell of sandalwood drifted through the air as

Kent came into sight.

"Patrick," he repeated as he got closer, "I've been getting worried. You're a lot later than I was expecting. Where's Riley?"

Rose seemed to perk up as he drew even with them. Riley couldn't help but feel annoyed with her wolf. She

was like a lovesick puppy when it came to this man.

Kent did look *gorgeous* though. He was wearing nothing but a pair of sweatpants and sneakers. His bare chest glistened with sweat. His pants sat low on his hips, showing off his stunning abs.

Kent froze when he spotted Rose. "What's going on? Is everything ok?"

"Umm..." Patrick hesitated, glancing at Rose. "I can't talk to her in wolf form, so I really don't know what's going on."

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+15 Points)

Kent knelt down, reaching out to touch Rose. "Goddess, she's a beautiful wolf." Rose licked his hand, causing him to smile. "And friendlier than her human."

Patrick smirked. "She is pretty. I've never seen a wolf with this coloring before."

"What's going on?" Kent asked Rose. "Where's Riley?"

Rose climbed to her feet and licked his face, causing him to laugh.

"Pax wants to meet you," he murmured, stroking her neck. "He's begging right now actually."

I wish I could meet *him* too, Rose sighed as she preened under Kent's affection.

Well, *right* now I wish I could *shift* back, Riley muttered.

"Can you let Riley shift?" Kent asked Rose, trailing his fingers down her snout.

She licked his fingers in response and then grabbed the bag of clothes, turning back into the *trees*.

Are we going to try again? Riley asked.

Yes, Rose declared, *we can't look weak in front of our mate. Plus I'm feeling a little better.*

Riley rolled her eyes and waited for Rose to start the shift before she took over, her bones and joints cracking

and shifting back into place. She quickly pulled her clothes back on and started to walk where she had last seen the guys. She stopped when she heard Kent's voice.

"You were gone two hours longer than I expected. I was getting worried."

"We stopped for lunch and talked longer than we should have." Patrick sounded tired. "It took longer to finish

the last part of the loop. Her wolf just... got tired or something."

"Tired?" Kent asked. "Is she ok?"

"I think so," Patrick answered. "She says she's fine. She keeps blaming it on stress."

"That's what *she* said yesterday." Kent sounded skeptical.

Riley hurried the rest of the way through the trees. Kent looked up at her as she came closer. She stopped short, her gaze trailing from his face down his chest to where the v of his abs disappeared into his pants.

Patrick coughed and she *jumped*. Kent was clearly trying to suppress a smile. She felt her face go red to be

caught ogling this man yet again.

"I need to get back," Patrick said with a jerk of his thumb. "So if we could move this spectacle along, that would be great."

"Right," Kent said, almost laughing. "Let's go."

They walked back to the training grounds, Riley trying not to walk too close to Kent or look too much.

“When do you start identifying your warriors?” she asked as they walked.

“In school,” Kent replied. “We start training for our pups at age eleven. We have most warriors identified by the time they are sixteen.” He motioned to the training field where several warriors were sparring, going over how the warriors train versus the new civilian training they implemented a few months ago to deal with the rogue attacks. They walked among the sparring circles as they talked, stopping when they came upon Max and Leo sparring.

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+15 Points >

Riley watched with interest as Leo knocked Max flat on his back. “I thought you were one of the best warriors here?” she said jokingly when Max looked up at them.

“I am, but this guy is a f*****g beast,” Max said, climbing to his feet.

“He’s not that tough,” Riley admonished, smirking. “I can take him down.”

Max narrowed his eyes. “No way in hell. The only person that has taken him down is the alpha.”

“She’s right,” chuckled Leo, wiping his forehead. “She’s put me flat on my back more times than I can count. Riley is a force to be reckoned with.”

“Do you think she could take down the alpha?” Max asked, grinning with his brow raised.

“Definitely.” Leo took a drink from his water bottle.

Kent rolled his eyes, smiling good naturedly. “They were going on about this yesterday.” He gestured between Riley and Leo. “But I don’t lose.”

“Not yet anyway,” Riley taunted.

Kent gave her an amused smile. “I’d hate to humiliate the best warrior advisor the Council has.”

“Really?” She laughed. “I’m not scared of you. Fighting Leo is a cakewalk. I took down your gamma yesterday.

”

“Seriously?” Max exclaimed, turning to look at Patrick.

“She did,” Patrick confirmed.

“Only the second time,” Kent pointed out. “You lost the first time.”

She pursed her lips and Kent’s smile widened.

“I’ve taken Pat down every time,” Kent continued. “I don’t lose. I’ll prove that to you right now if you’d like.” He motioned to the sparring ring that Leo and Max had just been fighting in.

“This is going to be good.” Max rubbed his hands together.

Kent motioned to the ring again, raising an eyebrow at Riley.

“Maybe a different day?” Patrick said, looking at Riley. “You’ve had a busy day.”

“Are you her f*****g mother?” Leo asked, glaring at Patrick. “I think she’s capable of deciding what she can handle.”

“Patrick is probably trying *to* save her the embarrassment,” joked Max.

“Just give us a moment,” Patrick said, grabbing Riley’s arm and pulling her away from the other men. “Are you insane?” he whispered, leaning in close to her ear so the others wouldn’t overhear. “You could barely shift back from a wolf about ten minutes ago. Now you want to spar the alpha? What the hell are you thinking?”

“I feel fine,” she whispered back. “I told you it comes and goes.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Patrick admonished. “You asked me to keep the details of your illness a secret from Alpha, the least you could do is take care of yourself.”

“What are you two whispering about?” Kent boomed, coming closer to them.

Patrick stepped back from her, turning to face the alpha. “I was just suggesting that the two of you could

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spar on a different day.”

“Who the hell are you to decide that for her?” Kent demanded, his eyes turning black with anger.

“I’m just trying to look out for her,” Patrick said quickly, his face reddening.

“She can take care of herself. She’s made that abundantly clear to me over the last couple days,” Kent hollered.

“Stop,” Riley said, grabbing Kent’s arm.

He recoiled from her touch. “No!” he yelled at her. “You tell me what the hell is going *on*.”

“Nothing is going on.” Riley felt exasperated, suddenly wondering if she should just tell him the truth.

“I don’t believe that,” he snapped. “You’re lying to me. I can tell.”

She held her hands up in surrender. “I’m not having an argument with you here.”

“f**k this!” Kent yelled, storming back to the pack house.

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 22[868 words]

Everyone stood there in silence for several moments, watching him go. Riley felt a sudden sharp pain in her chest and an overwhelming urge to cry. She turned so her back was towards the men, taking a deep breath, trying to get her emotions under control.

“What just happened?” Max asked from behind her.

“Alpha is mad,” Patrick replied with a heavy sigh.

“Thanks captain obvious,” Max muttered. “I think we all figured that one out.” She heard him sigh. “I’m going

to shower.”

Leo walked up beside Riley. "Are you ok?"

She nodded, biting her lip.

"You know you can tell me, right?"

"I know, Leo." Her voice cracked on his name. She closed her eyes. "Thanks though."

He wrapped an arm around her shoulder and squeezed her gently. "I'm going to get cleaned up," he

whispered, "but if you need anything, just come find me, ok?"

She smiled weakly at him. "Thanks, Leo." He let go and headed towards the pack house. She turned to see

Patrick still standing a step away from her.

"I'm sorry." He shook his head. "I shouldn't have gotten involved."

She sighed. "No, you were right. Fighting him would have been stupid with how sick I've been. I just feel awful for putting you in a bad position." She rubbed her aching chest.

"Don't feel bad." He smiled wanly. "Kent will get over it. He always does."

She nodded, wincing at the sudden pain that split her head.

"You're feeling ill again," Patrick said, more a statement than a question.

"It just comes and goes so quickly sometimes," she muttered. "It makes no sense."

"I'll walk *you* back to the pack house." Patrick wrapped a hand around her elbow. "I'll go see Lana after I take

a shower. You should just rest until she can get over to you."

Riley nodded, allowing Patrick *to* lead her back to the packhouse. She felt more and more tired with each step. *Once* they were at the elevator she tried to shake him off, but he insisted.

"You don't look well at all." He punched the call button. "I'll take you all the way up. Just to be sure."

Riley wanted to argue, but she was too tired to fight him. She leaned against the wall of the elevator, closing her eyes until the doors slid open on the fifth floor. She followed Patrick out of the elevator only to find Kent, still shirtless, standing right outside his

office. Riley suddenly felt her exhaustion flee as she felt Kent's rage through the mate bond.

Kent's eyes turned black as he looked at them. "What the f**k is this?"

Patrick sighed, suddenly looking very tired. "It's nothing. I was just making sure she got to her room."

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"Why do you think she can't get to her room without your help?" he snarled.

"Oh for f**k's sake!" Patrick yelled. "I was just trying to be nice. What the hell is your problem?"

+15 Pont

"My problem is that you seem to have taken an undue interest in my mate!" Kent roared, taking a step closer to Patrick, his fists clenched at his side.

"I'm just trying to do my job and help someone out," Patrick yelled back, taking a step closer to Kent. "I don't know what the hell your problem is or why you think it's ok to suggest I would be interested in anyone other than my own mate. But maybe if you weren't acting like such a f*****g macho asshole, your mate would

actually talk to you."

"Stop!" Riley gasped.

"You stay the f**k away from her!" Kent shoved Patrick, slamming him into the wall. Patrick's eyes turned

black as he started to move towards Kent.

"STOP!" Riley yelled, jumping in between them, placing a hand on each of their chests. She felt tingles run through her arm as Kent shoved against her, but Patrick backed up immediately.

"Go to hell, Kent," Patrick spat before turning on his heel, heading to the stairwell.

Once Patrick was gone, Riley dropped her hand and rounded on Kent. "What the hell is your problem?"

"I don't like you spending time with him," he said, his voice low, his eyes still black.

“Your gamma has done nothing but be nice and you act like a complete asshole. He did nothing wrong. He’s done nothing but spend the afternoon telling me how great *you* are and then you act like a f*****g feral wolf.”

Kent froze, his face reddening. “I don’t want you spending time alone with him anymore.”

Riley rolled her eyes. “Get over yourself, Alpha. I’m not part of your pack and I don’t follow your orders.”

“You. Are. My. Mate.” he gritted out.

“Newsflash,” she yelled, “I haven’t accepted this bond and with the way you are acting, I’m not sure I want to. I

only came here to do my job.”

Kent stared at her for a moment, his jaw tight, his eyes glittering darkly. “Do your job then and leave me the hell alone. I never asked for this.” With that he turned into his office and slammed the door.

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 23[1,787 words]

Chapter 23

Riley spent the next couple hours dozing on and off in her room, feeling worse as the time went on. Her chest hurt, her head pounded and her stomach churned. With nothing to do but feel terrible, Riley continued to replay her last confrontation with Kent. He was completely out of line, but she felt guilty. She had asked Patrick not to tell Kent about her

illness and now she had put him in a bad position. She knew that if she had just been upfront with Kent, there wouldn't have been the fight with Patrick.

A knock at the door pulled Riley out of her thoughts. She climbed slowly out of bed and opened the door to find a beautiful woman with long blonde hair pulled up in a bun. She smiled, her bright green eyes lighting up.

She was also clearly very pregnant.

"Hi," she said, holding out her hand, "my name is Lana. I'm Patrick's mate. He asked me to stop by and talk to

you."

Riley shook her hand and forced a smile. "Thanks for coming. I really appreciate it."

Lana followed Riley into the room and set her bag on Riley's bed. "Patrick tells me *you* haven't been feeling well for a couple days now. He also told me that I am not to talk to the alpha about what *we* discuss." Riley nodded. "Not that I would," Lana added. "Patient confidentiality is very important to me. Not even the alpha is

above that."

"Good," Riley murmured, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Tell me what's been going on," Lana said, sitting in one of the armchairs.

Riley described her symptoms, going over when they started, how they seemed to come and go suddenly and were starting to affect her wolf. She went over her back to back assignments and lack of rest as well. When she finished, Lana opened her bag and checked all of Riley's vitals.

Lana put her stethoscope around her neck when she was done. "Everything seems ok. Your heart rate is slightly elevated, but nothing that abnormal. Is there anything that makes the symptoms better or worse?"

Riley shook her head. "Not that I can think of."

"Any chance that you could be pregnant?"

"No" She shook her head again.

"Do you have a mate?"

Riley paused, debating how to answer that question.

Lana c****d her head to the side. “You would know if you had a mate.”

Riley sighed. “Can you keep a secret?”

Becres?

Lana nodded. “Of course I’m a doctor. It’s my job to maintain my patient’s confidentiality.”

“The alpha is my mate”

Lana opened her mouth but closed it, her eyes widening slightly “My alpha? Alpha Kent?”

Riley nodded slowly, watching Lana.

Lana blinked. “Does Kent know?”

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Riley laughed. “Of course he does.”

“Does Patrick know?”

Riley hesitated. “Um... yeah.”

+15 Points

“And that rat didn’t tell me?!” she cried. “I’m his mate. He’s supposed to tell me everything. How can he have tea like the alpha having a second chance mate and not think to tell me!”

“We asked them not to,” Riley explained. “Kent said they couldn’t even tell their mates.”

“Wait.” Lana held up her hand. “Does that mean Max knows too?”

Riley nodded.

“Oh, Penny is going to be so mad!” she exclaimed. “She was telling me the other day that she *thought* there was something going on with the two of you. She said Kent couldn’t keep his eyes off *you*.”

Riley’s cheeks reddened slightly. “Really?”

Lana nodded. "That's what Penny said. She said he watches you whenever you're around." She absently rubbed her hand over the swell of her stomach. "Wait," she said, her eyes snapping to Riley's, "are you the reason the alpha pushed Patrick into a wall today?"

Riley grimaced. "He told you about that?"

"Yes, he tells me everything. Or at least I thought he did. He said he was helping you to your room and Kent went ballistic. But if you are his mate and you aren't marked, then that makes sense. He'll see any male as a threat. Especially given how much time you've worked with Patrick over the last couple days."

Riley frowned. "He still shouldn't have shoved Patrick. But I do think I put Patrick in a bad position. I asked him not to tell Kent about how I've been feeling and now Kent thinks we're hiding things."

"Well," Lana said with a shrug, "you are hiding things from him. He's your mate. He knows when you're not being truthful with him. And if you're telling things to Pat and not him, that probably hurts."

Riley looked at the ground, biting her lip, not sure how to respond.

"Look," Lana said sitting down in the chair again, "I'm not judging you for your choices. It's obvious you're not marked. Have *you* guys mated?"

Riley shook her head.

"Most werewolves mate and mark the same night they meet their fated mate. Is there a reason you two are waiting so long?"

Riley glanced up, rolling her bottom lip between her teeth. "Do you really need to know?"

Lana shrugged. "As a doctor you are trained to believe that any information could hold the key. Also, I'm just nosy"

Riley rolled her eyes. She kind of liked this doctor. She could see why Lana and Patrick were good mates.

"I'm not sure I want to accept the mate bond right now. Kent is also my second chance mate. I had a very bad experience with my last mate and he ended up rejecting me. I'm not sure I can go through that again."

Lana looked at her sadly. "I'm sorry to hear that." She ran her fingers over her swollen belly, looking up at the ceiling for a moment. "Kent is a good guy though."

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“He threw Patrick into a wall this afternoon,” Riley pointed out.

+15 Points

Lana shrugged. “There are times Patrick needs to be thrown into a wall.” She smiled for a second. “As for your illness, my first thought is a virus, but human viruses don’t usually affect wolves and they don’t typically come and go. I would like to run some tests, but we would need to go *to* the hospital for that.”

“I’d rather not go to the hospital. I’d rather others not know I’m sick.”

“Your mate is going to figure it out eventually,” Lana said seriously.

“It’s not just him. If the Council finds out I’m sick, they may pull me off the assignment. Plus I haven’t disclosed finding my mate like I’m supposed to so that could get me into *more* trouble. I want to *keep* everything quiet from the Council as well.”

“That makes sense, I suppose. I’ll start with some blood tests. I can draw the blood now and I’ll get back to you. But if you get worse, you’ll have to come to the hospital.”

Riley nodded as Lana got up, taking more supplies out of her bag. After she was done, she slid the vial of blood into her bag and threw the trash away.

“Have you eaten today?” Lana asked.

“I had a sandwich at lunch time, but I’m not hungry right now.”

“You should try to eat something.” Lana snapped her bag shut. “Dinner will only be served for about twenty more minutes so you should head down to get something.”

“Ok.” Riley stood up, following Lana out of her room. “Thanks for coming,” she said as she shut the door. “I really appreciate it.”

“I’m happy to help,” Lana said.

They were walking down the hall when movement from the sitting room caught Riley’s attention. She looked in and saw Kent standing up from the couch. He froze when he saw Lana and Riley, his eyes narrowing. He was wearing a pair of jeans and a light cream colored sweater, his black hair brushed neatly back from his face.

“What are you doing up here, Lana?” he asked quietly.

“Just meeting Riley,” Lana said cheerfully, taking a few steps in the sitting room, Riley following. “Patrick has been talking about her so much, I had to meet her.”

Kent looked from Lana to Riley and back, “Why do you have your bag?”

Riley’s stomach twisted but Lana didn’t miss a beat. “I’m a doctor. I always have my bag.”

Riley knew instantly that Kent didn’t buy that. His eyes darkened as his lips disappeared into a thin line.

“Why is everyone so hell bent on keeping secrets from me?” he growled.

Lana glanced at Riley before sighing. “Alpha, you need to talk to your mate, not me.”

His eyebrows lifted. “Who told you we’re mates?”

Lana froze, her eyes widening.

“I did,” Riley sighed, rubbing her forehead.

“Why?” he exclaimed. “You were the one who wanted to keep things a secret, but then you’re just going to tell

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other people.”

“Kent,” she started.

+15 Points >

“Just don’t,” he cut her off, pinching the bridge of his nose, turning away from her slightly. She could tell he was trying to calm down.

“You should go,” Riley said to Lana.

Lana nodded, leaning in slightly to whisper to Riley, “You should just tell him. It’ll be easier.” She turned to Kent. “If you’ll excuse me, Alpha.”

Kent nodded in her direction, not looking up. Riley waited until she heard the elevator doors before she spoke.

“Can we talk?”

He stared at her for a long moment before he shook his head. “No.” He waved a hand dismissively at her. “Go

talk to someone else. You clearly prefer to talk to anyone who isn't me."

"Don't act like that," Riley snapped. "I'm trying to tell you what's been going on."

"I don't care," he yelled, throwing his hands up. "I don't care what you're doing or who you're talking to or what

you're not telling me. I don't f*****g care. I want you to leave me alone. I want you to get the hell out of my life. As soon as this rogue issue is over, I'm going to reject you." He turned, storming past her to the hallway.

Riley felt rooted to the spot as he walked away, Rose howling in her head. She closed her eyes, trying to tell

herself that it was for the best. She didn't want a mate. She didn't want to be with Kent.

But then why did it hurt so bad?

She turned, intending to go back to her room, but everything tilted sideways. She staggered, losing her

balance. She fell sideways, her forehead striking a side table as she toppled.

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 24[1,625 words]

Kent was only a few steps down the hallway when he heard the crash and Riley's cry of pain. His heart jumped to his throat as he turned around, running back to the sitting room. Riley was laying on the floor, a side table knocked askew. She was pressing her hands to her brow, just above her left eyebrow.

"Riley?!" He rushed towards her, dropping to knees just as she tried to scramble away. He could see the blood seeping between her fingers. He grabbed at her wrists, trying to pull her hands away to see but she twisted away, scooting backwards from him.

“Let me see,” he begged, coming towards her again.

“Just go!” she spat, trying to scoot back further but only hitting the wall. He could see the tears on her face

and felt his chest ache.

He had done this. He was so busy being upset and hurt about her that he didn’t stop to think about what she

was going through. He knew she was sick, clearly sick enough to see Lana and his *response* had *been* to

scream and yell at her and threaten to reject her. He felt a sharp stab in his chest, realizing what an ass he

had been.

“Riley,” he said softly, watching her attempt to stand, “I’m sorry I yelled at you. Just let *me* take a look, ok? I

can have Lana come back if you prefer.”

Riley said nothing, not even looking at him. She let go of her head, using her hands to push herself up. Blood

began to flow freely from the cut, running down her face. She closed her eyes against the blood that began to

flow into them. She grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it off, pressing it against her forehead and using

the edges to wipe the blood from her eyes.

She was wearing leggings and a blue lace bra, but Kent did his best not to look at that as he stood up. He

approached her quickly, before she had fully cleaned her eyes and put his hands on her head.

“Let me look,” he said quietly. Surprisingly, she moved her hands, letting him peel the shirt away. The cut was

about an inch long, but it didn’t look deep.

“It’s not too bad,” he whispered, pushing the shirt back to her forehead. “I can patch you up in your bathroom.

There’s a first aid kit in there. Or I can have Lana come back if you prefer.”

“You can just do it,” she breathed, tipping her head back to meet his gaze.

Once in her bathroom, he pulled a first aid kit from under her sink before carefully taking her shirt from her.

He washed and bandaged the cut, keeping his eyes focused solely on her wound. He tried not to focus on

how close he was to her or how he could feel her breath on his neck while he bent over her head.

When he was done, he threw away the trash, stored the supplies and grabbed a washcloth. He ran it under

warm water before focusing on cleaning the blood off her face. He placed a hand under chin, tipping her face up to his so he could see her face better. Her breath ghosted over his face as he worked, her lips parted slightly as she watched him.

As he finished cleaning her face, he ran his eyes down her body planning to check for more blood. However, he realized his mistake **as** she **was** still not wearing **a** shirt. He took in her creamy skin, the shape of her breasts in her blue lace bra, the curve of her waist and felt his blood start to rush to his c**k.

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Chapter 24

“You should wash your hands,” he managed to say.

While she was washing her hands, he quickly pulled off his sweater so he was only wearing his white undershirt. When she turned back around he could slide it over her head.

*15 Points

“I have my own clothes,” she half-laughed. The sweater was huge on her as she slipped her arms into the

sleeves.

He swallowed hard. “I needed to act fast. I was losing blood flow to my brain.”

This time she did laugh and he couldn't help but smile. He reached out and rolled the sleeves up. He pretended not to notice when she dipped her nose to the collar and inhaled deeply, but he couldn't help but feel his smile widen slightly.

"Can we talk now?" she asked seriously.

"Sure," he replied, "but not in the bathroom." He motioned towards the door and followed her out into the

bedroom. She sat on the edge of her bed and while he took one of the armchairs.

"I'm sorry," Kent said quickly, cutting her off before she could speak. "I really want to start with that. I was angry but that's not an excuse. I didn't really mean what I said about rejecting you."

Riley chewed on the bottom of her lip for a moment before sighing. "I'm sorry too. I should have just told you what was going on. I really put Patrick and Lana in a bad position with you. They both told me I should just tell you what's going on, but I didn't want to listen."

"What has been going on?" he asked softly.

"I've been sick." Riley stared at her feet, not looking at him. He waited for her to continue but she didn't.

He furrowed his brow. "I knew that."

She looked up quickly. "You did?"

He shrugged. "Well, yeah. I can tell when you're not feeling well. It's been pretty obvious. You kept saying it was stress, but it clearly isn't. I didn't want to push you though. I figured everyone gets sick sometimes."

She frowned, rubbing her forehead. "It's worse than that, I think. I couldn't shift earlier today when you found Patrick with my wolf. It seems to come and go suddenly. Patrick has been pushing me to talk to Lana since yesterday to *make sure* it isn't something serious. I agreed I would see her, but only if he would agree not to tell you all the details and how much it's been affecting me."

Kent chewed the corner of his mouth for a moment. It suddenly made sense. "That's why he was telling you not to spar today and why he took *you* to your room. He was looking out for you."

She nodded slowly.

"And I threw him into a wall," he groaned softly, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Great."

“I really am sorry,” Riley said quickly. “I should have just told you. He said he doesn’t like keeping things from you.”

Kent shook his head with a heavy sigh. “Ok, but why, Riley? Why was I not allowed to know?”

She swallowed hard, looking at the ground. “Partly, I didn’t want you to see me as weak or doubt my abilities. But also I didn’t want *you* to be overprotective or try to tell me what I can or can’t do. Like you were this morning, about going into the woods. I don’t need another mate who tells me what I can or can’t do, or who

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constantly tries to bring me down.”

Kent stared at her for a moment, taking in what she said. He could see how she could have drawn some conclusions about him over the last couple days.

“You’re last mate sounds like a piece of work,” he finally said.

She looked towards the window. It was dark outside now. “I don’t really want to talk about him.”

He watched her for a moment, taking in her profile. He really wanted to ask her more about her previous mate, but he decided that now really wasn’t the time.

“Riley?” She turned to look at him. “I know having a mate isn’t something you really want now, but we do have to get through the next few weeks together until this issue with the rogues is sorted. I won’t push you, but please don’t keep me in the dark on things. I’m not asking you to be my mate, *or* to have a relationship with me. I’m just asking that you talk to me. Don’t keep secrets and please don’t ask my friends *to* hide things

from me.”

She nodded. “I won’t. I’m sorry.”

“And for the record...” He paused until she looked up at him. “I would never hurt you like your last mate.”

She stared at him for a moment before glancing away. “I’d like to believe that.”

He smiled slightly. “I’ll prove it to you, don’t worry.”

At that she smiled, glancing at him. He felt a warmth wash over him and fought the urge to go to her, to hug

her tightly. She certainly looked like she could use a hug.

“Can I tell you something?” she asked after a moment.

“Anything.”

“When I walked out with Lana, I was headed to get dinner. I’m actually really hungry right now.”

He chuckled. “The dining hall is closed, but I’ll go down and see if Elva is still there to make you something.”

“Elva? Is that Max’s mom?”

He nodded, “Best cook around. Come out to the sitting room and I’ll go find you something to eat.”

“I can go downstairs,” she said as she stood up.

He shook his head, standing up too. “You’re wearing my shirt and have a bandage on your head. I don’t think that will give the impression you want.” He opened the door and motioned for her to go out first. “Just wait in the sitting room. I’ll bring it up.”

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 25[1,863 words]

Chapter 25

Riley sat on the couch in the sitting room, but Kent took longer than she was expecting. She eventually curled her knees to her chest, burying her nose in his sweater. It smelled so deeply of him and it didn’t take long for the exhaustion of the day to come over her. She wasn’t sure how long she was asleep, but she woke to the feeling of Kent’s hand on her cheek, tingles making gasp slightly as she opened her eyes. His blue eyes were close to her face and she could see the day’s worth of stubble across his jaw. He leaned forward,

gently pressing his lips to hers. Even though it was a chaste kiss, it still sent a rush of heat through her.

She pulled back, sitting up slightly and Kent leaned back on his heels, shaking his head as though to clear it.

“Sorry,” he murmured. “I got a little carried away.”

“It’s fine,” she whispered, giving him a small smile as she sat up.

He pulled a small table in front of her and on it sat a plate of spaghetti bolognese. “Sorry it took so long. Elva

insisted on cooking you a warm meal.”

“It looks amazing.” Her mouth was practically watering as she took the plate of food. She didn’t realize how hungry she was until she took the first bite and her stomach grumbled in appreciation. Kent sat down on the couch beside her, leaving a small space between them, and watched as she ate. If she hadn’t been so hungry,

she might have felt self-conscious.

“How are you feeling?” Kent asked after a few minutes.

“Fine,” she said in between bites. “I wasn’t feeling great when Lana came up, but I’m feeling a lot better now.

But it seems to come and go.”

“What did Lana say?”

“She wants to do some tests. She took some blood to start with, but she wanted me to go to the hospital for

testing.”

“You should go,” he said quickly, “make sure it’s nothing too serious.”

Riley glanced up at him to see his forehead creased in concern. “If it gets worse, I will. But right now I don’t want Leo and Wesley to find out. If they were to tell the Commander, could get pulled from this assignment.”

He pursed his lips but nodded slowly. “But you’ll go if you feel worse?”

“Yes.” She smiled at him. “I promise.”

He smiled back and she felt warmth spread through her chest. She looked away, praying her face wasn't too

red.

"How long have you worked for the Council?"

"Six years, I graduated from the academy at 21 and I immediately got an offer at the Council. I started out as an assistant trainer for new recruits but eventually worked my way to advisor about three years ago."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes. It's what I had hoped to *do* when I applied to the academy at 17. I would have left my pack the moment I was accepted but our alpha wouldn't allow it."

"Why not?" *Kent* looked genuinely confused. "I would never deny a warrior the opportunity to go to the academy. It brings honor to your pack when they *do* well."

She shook her head. "Not everyone thinks the way you do. My old alpha didn't think women should be warriors. He was willing to let me go but wanted me to wait until I was 18. All women had to present themselves in front of the warriors on their 18th birthday to see if they were mated with anyone. He told me if I didn't have a mate amongst the warriors, then I could go to the academy."

Kent made a disgusted face. "Why would you have to present yourself to the warriors at 18? That sounds like a terrible practice."

She shrugged. "It does now that I'm not there anymore, but when you live there it just seems normal. Everyone you know has to do it. He wanted all the warriors to have mates because having a mate makes you stronger. He believed that they would be better fighters."

"Still," he muttered, "sending young girls in front of a bunch of horny, unmated warriors sounds *like* a terrible

idea."

She laughed. "Yeah, it really does, doesn't it?"

"So what happened when you went to the warriors?"

She sighed, setting her now empty plate back on the table. "I never made it there. I ran into my mate going into the packhouse." She could almost see Paul that day, coming out the doors of the packhouse, his blonde hair shining in the sun.

“Was he a warrior?”

She looked up at Kent, his eyes soft and warm. “He was the beta of my pack.”

Kent’s eyes widened, his lips parting slightly. “What happened?”

She frowned, looking away from him and out the window. She still remembered the way Paul had walked over to her, grabbing her elbow so hard it hurt, the way he had demanded she not say anything right there and pulled her away. She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath, almost expecting to smell Paul but instead all

she smelled was Kent.

Kent reached out, taking her hand in his. “You don’t have to talk about it,” he said softly. She opened her eyes to see him watching her intently. “I can tell there’s bad memories there.”

She took a shaky breath. “After he rejected me, the alpha let me go to the academy. He didn’t think I would make it there so he withdrew my backing but I was still able to attend.”

Kent wrinkled his nose. “He withdrew *your* backing? What an ass. That makes things harder for you at the academy. Not many unbacked candidates last.”

She nodded. “Yeah, that first year was rough but once I’d shown my abilities, it got easier.”

“Have you been back to your pack since then?”

She shook her head, sighing. “He didn’t just withdraw my backing. He banished me.”

“What?!” Kent’s grip on her hand tightened as he leaned forward. “Are you kidding?”

She gulped. “No, he really did.”

“Why on earth would he do that?” Kent’s face was close, his eyes shining as he looked at her. She reached up,

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tracing his jaw with her index finger, biting her bottom lip.

“The beta had a chosen mate,” she whispered. “His chosen mate was the alpha’s sister.”

+15 Points >

Kent didn't say anything. Instead he leaned forward, wrapping his arms around her waist and pulled her against him so tightly she was almost in his lap. She buried her head into his chest, taking a deep, shuddering breath as he gently stroked her back.

"I'm sorry that happened to you," he whispered into her hair. She relaxed into him, enjoying the tingles that ran over her body as he held her close.

"What did your family do when he banished you?" he asked, still holding her.

"Nothing," she replied. He leaned back, putting a finger under her chin to tip her head up to see her face. "It was only my dad. My mom died when I was fourteen and my dad nearly died from losing his mate. He was a warrior and he was shunned for being weak after she died. He drank a lot after that and didn't really care

what I did. I doubt he ever noticed I even left."

Kent watched her for a moment. "Did you ever tell anyone at the academy?"

"No," she whispered. "I've never talked about it before now."

"Not even to Leo? I thought you and he were good friends."

She shook her head, scooting back a little so she wasn't almost on top of him. He turned to face her, putting an arm across the back of the couch. She turned to face him as well, tucking her legs underneath her.

"I never told him or anyone. I just didn't want people to ask questions."

He reached out, gently pushing a strand of hair out of her face. "That's a lot to deal with when you're just 18. You were basically still a kid."

"What about you?" she asked, wrapping her arms around herself to keep herself from reaching for him. "You took over your pack at just 19."

He shrugged. "I didn't really have a choice, you know. When my dad died I had to step up. I wasn't ready but luckily I had his beta *and* Patrick's dad to help for a while. They taught me a lot."

"What about your mom?"

He looked down for a moment. "My *mom* died when I was seven."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

He looked back up. “She died in childbirth with my younger brother. He passed away a day later.”

“That’s awful,” she whispered. “That **must** have been hard on you and your dad.”

“It was hard,” Kent agreed softly. “My dad changed after my mom died. He became so angry and harsh. I was just a kid, I didn’t get it. All I knew was my mom and brother died and my dad turned into this person I barely recognized. I don’t think I ever truly understood what happened until Lily died.”

She reached up, touching the arm he had draped along the back of the couch. He moved his hand, capturing hers and bringing it to his lips. He closed his eyes for a moment, gently kissing her knuckles.

“He was determined to make me tough,” Kent continued after a moment. “He used to drill me until I could barely stand and spar with me until I **was** bloody. A strong Alpha makes a strong pack. He used to tell me that every day and I hated him for it. Goddess, I hated him for a long time. But after Lily died, I realized what

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he was trying to do.”

“What was that?”

“Make it so I could withstand anything,” he whispered, his eyes meeting hers. “He taught me to be tough, to

push through pain and don’t let it cloud your judgment. After Lily was killed, I lost my mind for a while. Then I

killed those rogues and I realized that this was the very thing my father wanted me to avoid. That’s why he

pushed me so hard. He didn’t want me to make stupid, reckless decisions like that.”

“Still,” she said, “it must have been hard to grow up like that. I know what my dad was like, but at least I was older when it happened.”

He shrugged. “I had Max and his mom Elva. She treated me like her own after my mother died. She used to make sure I ate and patched up my sparring wounds and got after my father for being too rough on me. Dad returned the favor by getting Max into all the right training programs. I also had Patrick and Lily and their

parents. They were really good to me too.”

“I bet you have some good stories about Patrick and Max growing up,” Riley said.

Kent laughed. “Sure, I do.”

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 26[1,079 words]

Chapter 26

Kent wasn't sure what time it was when Max mindlinked him, asking to talk. He had been in the sitting room with Riley for hours, he was sure. He had been in the middle of telling Riley about the time Max dared him to climb on the top of the packhouse when they were nine when he realized she had fallen asleep, her head lulling gently on his shoulder. Eventually she had shifted and her head rested on his thigh, her *body* curled up tight.

He was running his fingers through her hair when he heard Max. He looked up to see his best friend standing behind the couch, looking down at them.

“What's this?” he said with a smile.

Kent put a finger to his lip, shushing Max. “She's sleeping.”

“Obviously,” muttered Max as he walked around the couch and sunk in an armchair.

“She missed dinner so I brought her something,” Kent said, answering the question in Max's eyes. “We got to talking and she fell asleep.”

“I get it,” Max replied, stretching his long legs out. “You are really boring. I almost fall asleep all the time.”

“f**k off,” chuckled Kent. He looked back down at Riley, brushing the hair away from her face. “She hasn’t

been sleeping well. I didn’t want to bother her.”

“Just nice to see the two of you not fighting.” Max rubbed his chin. “Speaking of which, what the hell happened this afternoon?”

Kent grimaced. “A misunderstanding. We talked it out.”

Max nodded. “Good.”

“So you spoke to the alpha at New Dawn?”

Max frowned. “Yeah, guy finally called me back at eleven at night. Like I don’t have anything better to do. But I

spoke to him.”

“Well, he’s known for being a prick. What did he say?”

“He said he was open to discussions but that you would have to go there in person.” Max leaned forward,

resting his forearms against his knees.

“Go there?” Kent scoffed. “He’s over twelve hours away. Then a couple days to negotiate. That’s too long.

Can’t he just come here?”

“I suggested that, but he wasn’t open to it. I told him that you leaving when we’re having these attacks would be too difficult but he didn’t seem to care. He said if you were serious about it, you would go there.”

“Can you go for me?”

“No, he was adamant that it had to be you.”

“I don’t want to be gone that long,” Kent sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Suddenly he felt Riley shift, pushing herself up into a sitting position. He immediately missed the warmth of her against him. Her eyes were bleary, her hair in her face as she looked between Kent and Max as though

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trying to figure out what was going on.

“Hey,” Kent said gently, “did we wake you?”

“It’s ok,” she murmured, glancing around again. “I didn’t realize I fell asleep.”

+15 Points >

Kent chuckled. “Yeah, I was right in the middle of a story and I realized you were out. Guess I’m not as good a storyteller as I thought.”

“I was just tired,” she said, yawning as though to make a point. She stretched her feet to the floor. “What were you guys talking about?”

Kent frowned. “A potential alliance. It might not be worth pursuing right now though. I haven’t really decided. I can tell you more in the morning. We’ll probably have everyone meet so we can decide together.”

She nodded, yawning again. “OK.”

He couldn’t help but smile. She was cute when she yawned, her nose crinkling.

“What happened to your head?” Max asked.

“I fell,” she replied, touching the bandage.

“Again?” Max raised an eyebrow, smiling tightly. “A bit accident prone, are you?”

“This hasn’t been my week,” she sighed. She looked at the window for a moment. “What time is it?”

“Close to midnight,” Max said.

“I should go to bed.” She stood up, stretching as she did.

“Nice outfit,” Max muttered, biting down a smile.

Riley looked down and seemed to realize she was still wearing Kent’s sweater. “Oh, yeah.” Her cheeks reddened again and Kent couldn’t help but enjoy how easily she seemed to blush.

“Ignore him,” Kent said, reaching out to squeeze her hand gently. “Go to bed. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Goodnight,” she said to both of them.

They listened to the sounds of her soft footsteps receding down the hallway before Max raised an eyebrow at

Kent.

“So why is she wearing your shirt?”

Kent sighed. “When she fell and hit her head, she was bleeding everywhere. She pulled her own shirt off to

put pressure on it. I could barely think straight the whole time I was cleaning her up. She looked so f*****g delicious. I just put my shirt *on her* to keep my sanity.”

Max scoffed. “And things didn’t go anywhere else.”

“No.” Kent stared at the dark window for a minute. “She’s actually kind of skittish.”

“She’s supposed to be a kick-ass warrior.”

Kent glared at Max. “She is. I saw her spar with Patrick. She’s incredible. I’ve never seen anyone move as fast as she does. I just meant that she’s been through a lot – with her previous mate. I think she just needs to warm up to the idea of a second chance. I don’t want to be too pushy with her. I think it will only drive her off.”

“But you want to pursue this with her?”

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+15 Points

“Yeah.” Kent hadn’t really considered that until now. “I really do. I didn’t think I would ever want to be in a relationship with anyone after Lily died. But I really like her. I mean, she’s smart and strong and an incredible fighter... and f*****g hot.”

Max laughed out loud, shaking his head. He considered Kent for a moment. “I was worried you’d be a bit gun shy after what happened with Lily.”

“It’s f*****g terrifying, man. The first time I had a mate, it was amazing because I didn’t think anything could go wrong. Now, I know how bad it could go and that is scary.”

“But worth it.”

“Yeah,” Kent agreed. “Definitely worth it.”

“I’m going to head to bed,” Max said. “It’s getting late. But I hope things work out for you with her. You deserve a second chance more than anyone.”

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 27[2,203 words]

Chapter 27

Riley woke up the next morning feeling ill yet again. She burrowed down in her bed, burying her nose in Kent’s sweater. She had changed into pajamas after escaping to her *room* the night before, but had ultimately put his sweater back on. It smelled like him and she found it oddly comforting to sleep wrapped in his delicious

scent.

She had only ever slept in the bed with Paul on two occasions. Once was planned but the second time was because he had fallen asleep. That second time had been the beginning *of the end for them*. She never had anything that smelled of Paul in their house and on those long stretches of time when he didn’t come she would be heartbroken, wishing she had just a shirt or pillow with his scent in it. But he was adamant that no one would catch his scent on her so he never let her have anything of his.

Now she lay wrapped in the shirt of her mate, suddenly wondering what it would be like to have him in her bed for a night. It wasn’t even really about s*x, but the idea of waking up with *someone* who wasn’t itching to get away from her. She had spent the night with men since Paul, but those relationships had been purely physical with no real emotions involved.

She reluctantly rolled out of bed, padding into the bathroom. She looked in the mirror, carefully pulling the bandage away from her forehead. The cut was healed, all that remained was an angry red line that would probably be gone by evening. She climbed into the shower, spending too long under the hot water hoping that the nausea and pain of her illness would pass. She hoped that Lana would find some answers in her blood

tests.

She got dressed, pulling on a pair of black leggings and a lightweight purple top, opting to stay comfortable. She braided her hair and brushed her teeth before heading into the hall. She headed towards the elevator and paused, looking at Kent's bedroom door. She briefly contemplated knocking on it as she replayed the conversation she had overheard last night. Finally she decided against it, heading downstairs.

She arrived in the dining room and glanced around, vainly hoping to see Kent. He was nowhere to be seen in the bustle of the *room* and she cursed herself for pining after him like a wolf in heat.

"Riley, over here!" Riley turned to see Max at a table with Penny, their two boys, Patrick and Lana. She smiled and wove her way over *to* them.

"There's enough space here if you don't mind dealing with the twin tornados," Max said as she got close.

Riley raised an eyebrow, taking in the two boys. "Are they twins?"

"No," Penny laughed. "Max just calls them that because they are close in age. Go get something to eat and join us."

Riley smiled and nodded before heading over to get some food. She didn't feel much like eating right now, but knew she had to get some food into her. Her head was splitting and Rose was moping in the back of her mind, seeming upset that they hadn't seen Kent yet this morning. She got some toast with jam and strawberries, opting for something light in hopes of keeping her stomach in check.

"How are you feeling?" Riley looked up to see Patrick standing near her elbow.

"Not that great, honestly," Riley replied. "I felt fine last night after you left, but woke up feeling bad again. I keep hoping it will pass."

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+15 Points >

"Lana said she'll have your blood tests back today, so hopefully that will show something." He began to put

some fruit on a plate.

"I hope so." Riley filled a mug with coffee.

“What happened to your head?” Patrick frowned at the red mark on her forehead. “Lana didn’t mention that.”

“It happened after she left. I fell down and hit my head on a table. Kent *took care of* it though. We talked for a

while last night.”

“Did you tell him everything?”

She nodded and sighed. “I did. I’m really sorry about the position I put you in. I *know you* didn’t want to keep

anything from Kent. I know he wouldn’t have gotten so upset with you if I had just been upfront with him.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Patrick said with a wave of his hand. “You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Riley sat down between Lana and Penny, forcing herself to take a couple bites of toast even though her

stomach twisted at the thought of food. She watched Max play a game of rock, paper scissors with one of

his sons. When he lost for the third time in a row, Max threw his hands up and declared his son the

champion.

The boy laughed. “You just don’t want to play anymore.” He sat back in his chair, his bright smile exactly like his dad’s. He had his mother’s auburn hair but his father’s eyes.

“I can’t win against you, Alex,” Max lamented, pretending to pout. “You’re just too good.” Alex giggled, taking a

bite of cereal.

“Play me next, Dad,” said the other boy. He had dark brown hair, brown eyes and an olive toned complexion,

very different from his fair skinned parents.

“What’s the age difference between them?” Riley asked, confused on which child was older.

“I’m older,” declared Alex, pointing at his own chest.

“Alex is older,” Penny said, glancing between the boys, “but we don’t know the exact age difference. Evan is

adopted.”

“That means I didn’t come from my mom’s tummy but she loves me like I did,” Evan explained, earning

himself a warm smile from his mother.

“How did you guys *come to* have him?” Riley asked curiously.

Max and Penny exchanged a *look* before Max cleared his throat. “It’s a long story about how he came into our lives. We can save that for another day. But we don’t know Evan’s exact age, so we’ve had to guess. We do know he is younger than Alex but they are very close in age.”

Riley looked at Evan for a moment and he smiled widely at her. She couldn’t help but smile back. It was clear that Penny and Max didn’t want to talk about where Evan came from in front of him. He didn’t seem very old.

“How old is Alex?” she asked, taking a sip of coffee.

“Six,” Penny said, brushing some crumbs off Evan’s shirt. “We think Evan is about five.”

“Wrap it up boys,” Max said to his sons. “You have school.” The boys acted like he hadn’t spoken and continued playing.

Suddenly Riley felt a tingle down her spine and turned to look at the doorway. Kent stood just inside the door,

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+15 Points >

looking right at her. He smiled when he caught her gaze and she felt a warmth spread through her chest as

her cheeks flushed.

“Someone’s going to fill me in on what’s going on with her and the alpha, right?” Penny said. Riley turned to find Penny watching her intently. She felt herself blush and Max snickered.

“Maybe if we decide you’re ready for the cool kids club,” Max said, taking a bite of his french toast. Penny smacked his arm, causing him to laugh. She turned to tell the boys to get ready for school.

Riley tried to act like she didn’t care about Kent being in the same room as her, even though she knew he was

standing at a nearby table, talking to some of his warriors. Penny finally *succeeded* in getting her boys to say

goodbye to their dad and started towards the door, waving bye to Kent as she passed. Both boys reached out

to hug Kent as they passed and he scooped them both into a hug, causing them *to* squeal with delight.

“Don’t look too hard or people might get suspicious,” Patrick said, chuckling.

Riley’s eyes snapped to his and she felt her cheeks go red yet again. “I wasn’t looking.”

“Right,” Lana said, rolling her eyes, “and I’m not pregnant.” All three of them burst into laughter, causing Riley

to blush harder. She wanted nothing more than to disappear at that moment.

“Looks like someone else is finally the butt of their jokes,” Kent said from behind her, his hand grazing her

shoulder as he walked over to take one of the seats that Penny and her boys left.

“Just for a moment,” Max said with a grin. “We still have more for you.”

“I’m sure,” Kent said with a huff. “You haven’t disappointed yet.” Kent looked around the table, his gaze

landing on Patrick. Patrick bristled, his eyes narrowing as he glared at Kent.

“I’m going to get some food,” Kent muttered, standing up.

“Did something happen between you and Kent?” Max asked Patrick once Kent was out of earshot.

Patrick shrugged and Max looked around the table at Riley and Lana. He sighed. "Why don't I get to know

what happened?"

"Because you're not ready for the cool kids club," Riley answered, causing Patrick and Lana to laugh.

Max shook his head. "Burned by my own joke. Not fair."

"I'm going *to duck out* before he comes back," Patrick said. "I'll talk to him later, in private."

Lana nodded. "I'm going *to go too*. I need to head over to the hospital." She started to stand up but stopped, leaning over to Riley. "Are you feeling better?" She nodded at Riley's plate.

Riley looked at her plate and realized that she had eaten all the food. Her headache had suddenly disappeared, the nausea leaving with it. "It's so strange," she murmured. "It just goes away all of the sudden."

"What are you two whispering about?" Max said, watching them over the rim of his coffee mug.

"Don't bother asking," Kent said, setting his plate on the table. "They don't talk about it."

Lana huffed and shook her head! "On that note, I'm leaving." She turned to where Patrick was waiting a few steps away.

"Pat," Kent called to him, "can you come to my office in about half an hour?" Patrick nodded tersely before taking Lana's hand and leaving.

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"What happened with you and Pat?" Max said, turning to Kent.

Kent sighed. "I'll explain later. Let me talk to Pat and clear the air first."

Max nodded. "Fair enough."

+15 Pants

“Once I’ve talked to Patrick, I want to watch the civilian training and decide the best way to revamp them. Then I need to get some training in. Would you spar with me?” Kenit looked at Max.

“Yeah.” Max stretched his arms over his head. “I feel like I need to kick *your* ass.”

Kent shook his head and turned to Riley. “I’d like to get your opinion on the civilian training as well. Penny is still working on getting together the reports for you, but she thinks they’ll be done by mid-morning.”

Riley nodded. “That sounds fine. I do want to look over those reports *soon*.”

“This has been fun,” Max said, standing up, “but I need to go make sure the training for our new warriors is running correctly. Ryder likes to improvise too much for my taste.” He looked at Riley and gave her a smirk.

You love birds, have fun, you hear?”

Riley rolled her eyes. “I should have sat somewhere else.”

Kent laughed. “I’ll see you later, Max.” Max smiled, waving as he walked away.

“How are you feeling today?” Kent asked, leaning back in his chair.

She shrugged. “I woke up feeling pretty rough, but I’m doing better now.”

“Must be because I’m here,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows at her.

“Goddess,” she muttered, “don’t get your hopes up.”

He smiled widely. “Don’t think I didn’t notice how red your face got when I came in.”

She looked away, feeling her face flush hot.

“Yep, just like that,” he laughed.

“I’m leaving,” she muttered, pushing her plate away.

Kent reached out, placing his hand over hers before she stood, causing her to freeze. “Are you feeling ok

though?” His face was earnest, his smile gone.

“I am.” She smiled at him.

He rubbed his thumb over the top of her hand. "I liked talking to you last night," he murmured.

She felt her breath hitch slightly. "I liked it too. You're easy to talk to." He smiled and she felt her heart rate

pick up. Finally she slid her hand from under his and stood up. "I should go."

"I'll see you in an hour," he said, still smiling.

She turned, walking to the door and trying to resist the urge to look over her shoulder at him. She only made it to the door before she felt pulled to look back. He was watching her from his seat, still smiling. He raised his coffee mug, his smile widening. She felt her cheeks go red yet again as she hurried out of the dining hall.

You like him, cooed Rose.

Shut up! Riley snapped back.

An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 28[835 words]

Riley walked out to the training ground, the crisp fall air refreshing across her face. She watched the groups of warriors training as she walked. Some were sparring one on one while others watched. Other groups were sparring in teams of two or three and some more advanced warriors were sparring two *to* one. She looked around, trying to determine where the civilians would train when the hairs on the back of her neck stood up.

She turned to find Kent watching her from across the grounds, close to the training academy. He was wearing a pair of athletic shorts and a green t-shirt. He smiled when she looked at him and she couldn't help

but smile back.

Our mate looks *amazing*, Rose gushed as they headed towards him.

He does, but *don't* tell *him* that, Riley chided. *He might* get ideas.

I might like those ideas, Rose replied, adding in some graphic suggestions.

Goddess, what *am I* going to do *with you*?

Riley stopped in front of Kent, tipping her head back to look up into his face. She wanted nothing more than

to reach out and touch him, but she fisted her hands at her side to resist the urge.

“Are you feeling alright?” he asked, looking down at her.

“I’m fine.” She dug her fingernails into the palm of her hands.

He nodded. “The civilians train over here.” He motioned to a portion of the training grounds beside the

academy. They walked over and he explained the process of dividing them into groups based on age and ability. He went over the tiers they had created to move the civilians through training.

“You mentioned before that students start training in school, right?”

Kent nodded. “Yes, we start training at eleven and identify warriors by sixteen.”

“So those that aren’t identified to be warriors, do they have to follow any type of mandatory training after

school?”

He shook his head. “It never felt necessary before. Prior attacks were so small and manageable. We have never had fights or wars with neighboring packs because of how far away we are from everyone. Some of our civilians have asked that these training sessions remain a regular thing. We’re open to that, but we haven’t decided if they will be optional or mandatory.”

“I’d suggest it be mandatory until a certain age, unless there is a medical condition that interferes.”

“Yeah,” he said, rubbing his chin, “Patrick had the same thought.”

Riley looked at Kent for a moment. Did you talk to Patrick about yesterday?”

He looked at her for a long moment. “Yeah, but now isn’t the time to talk about that.” He put his hand on the small of her back, guiding her towards a group of civilians that were training.

They walked around together, discussing the system and ways to fine tune it. Riley was impressed by how well they had managed things overall and most of her suggestions were

minor. At some point, Max came over to join them as well, listening intently to Riley's ideas.

1/2

Chapter 28

"I think that will work," Kent said, after a long discussion. "I have a meeting with my trainers after lunch so I will bring up the suggested changes to them and see how we can start implementing them." He turned to Riley. "Penny said she would have the reports emailed over to you in an hour, but that was a while ago, so I imagine those are ready for your review." He then turned to Max. "And we can train until lunch time if have nothing else going on."

"I'm ready," Max said. He turned to Riley. "Why don't you train with us? If you're as good as Leo says, I think I would enjoy the challenge. Plus I still want to see you take this chump out." He pointed a thumb at Kent.

"I don't think that's a good..." Kent started but trailed off when Riley narrowed her eyes at him. "I mean, f**k it. Do whatever you want." He shrugged, rolling his eyes.

"Passive-aggressive much?" she muttered.

He held his hands up. "I'm not telling you what to do. You do whatever you want. But I won't go easy on you regardless."

"Am I missing something?" Max said, glancing between the two of them.

"Yes." Riley and Kent answered in unison.

Max nodded, looking nonplussed. "Glad we're on the same page."

Riley sighed, rubbing her forehead. "I've been a little sick. Nothing serious, but Kent doesn't want me exerting myself until I'm better."

Max looked at her for a moment. "Well, not to agree with the mean bastard, but he's probably right."

Riley shook her head. "Whatever. I'm going to read those reports." She turned to leave.

"That sounds like a great choice," Kent called mockingly after her.

"f**k you," she snapped, looking over her shoulder.

"Is that an offer?" he asked, wiggling his eyebrows at her. Her face turned red as Max howled in laughter.

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 29[1,270 words]

Chapter 29

Riley was working at the desk area in her room, pouring over the reports for most of the morning. She had to admit that for such a remote and isolated pack, Red moon stayed on top of their paperwork and technology. She saw what Patrick had described to her about the increase in the number of attacks and the force used.

She was in the midst of the reports when there was a knock at the door. Riley opened it to see Wesley.

“I heard you were going over the reports on the rogue attacks. I’ve read through them *too*, so I’d be interested in your perspective.”

She nodded. “That sounds good. I like thinking out loud. I’ll grab my stuff and *come out to the* sitting room.” He walked away as she grabbed her computer and notebook. Once she was situated, *Wesley* reached out and turned her notebook towards him, skimming her notes.

“Find anything interesting?” he asked as he skimmed.

“The attacks within the last year feel strategic,” she said.

He nodded. “I thought the same thing. The attacks starting two years ago felt intentional to me, but more like they were just testing out different tactics to see which stuck. Then within the last year, it was much more

strategic.”

“Exactly. I looked back three years ago, but all those attacks involve only one to three rogues. Nothing to

suggest they were more than the normal attacks. However, two years ago they seem like they're testing times

with shift changes and weaker patrol spots to see what happens. Then you can see where Patrick and Max

start adjusting patrol shift changes and numbers. The attacks wane for a few months but then come back

with more intensity." She pointed to a part of her notes, showing a couple dates.

Wesley nodded. "Like the rogues notice the pack changed the schedule so they dropped back to observe."

"Right. Then *the* attacks start happening at points around the grounds that are further away from the warrior

barracks – where the majority of the pack's reinforcements would be. That gives the rogues advantage to overpower the warriors *on* patrol before help can arrive."

"I didn't notice that," Wesley said, leaning in to look at her notes.

"Then there was the attack six months ago, the one with two separate attacks was well timed. The rogues

waited for the majority of the reinforcements to reach the first attack before launching the second. It was a clear diversion, but I wonder why they didn't attack with more force in the second wave. The rogues had the

potential to do a lot more damage, but they put most of their numbers in the first wave." Riley motioned to the paper. "Why would they do that?"

Wesley looked out the window for a moment before looking back at her. "They didn't have the numbers?"

"I don't think that's what it **was**," she replied. "I think they were looking for something."

"But what?" Wesley furrowed his brow.

Riley shrugged. "I don't know." She rubbed her temples, her head starting to pound.

"Too much thinking, clearly," Wesley said with a smirk. "I can see it's frying your gears."

"My gears work just fine, much better than yours," she muttered with a glare. "I'm just tired from traveling and

stress and I haven't been sleeping well."

"You'd sleep a lot better with your mate next to you," he remarked.

"Goddess knows I don't need this from you too," she groaned, shutting her computer. But her mind flashed to waking up wrapped in his sweater, wondering what it would be like to have him in the bed too.

He shrugged. "You know I'm twenty-six and I haven't found my mate yet. If I find her, I won't hesitate."

"It's different for you," Riley sighed. "You've never had a mate. You don't understand how wrong things can go.

"Maybe," he said with a shrug, "or maybe you don't realize how right things can go."

She felt a sharp pain in her chest that made her flinch.

"Are you ok?" Wesley leaned forward to put a hand on her shoulder.

"Yeah." She shrugged his hand off. "I just don't want to talk about this anymore. I think we should get some lunch."

He hesitated before nodding. "Ok, let's go find some food in the dining hall." He stood up and helped her gather her things. He waited in the hall while she put her stuff away and then they headed down.

When the elevator doors opened on the first floor, Max and Kent were standing on the other side. Both were shirtless, covered in sweat and laughing at something when the doors opened. Kent looked at her and

smiled, causing her heart to flutter. She felt her flush yet again and cursed the stupid mate bond. Both men

stepped back to allow them off the elevator.

"Find anything good in the reports?" Kent asked, graciously ignoring her flushing face.

"I think so," she answered. "Wesley and I were discussing it. I would like to talk it over with you guys and

Patrick when we can."

“Sure,” Kent said. “We can find time this afternoon. I also have a report back from our scouts, so we can hear their reports together. I’ll talk to Patrick and let you know.” He looked at Max and Wesley. “Can I talk to Riley privately for a second?”

Max nodded and punched the button for the elevator to open.

Wesley looked at Riley. “I’ll see you in the dining hall,” he said and she nodded.

Once Max and Wesley were gone, Kent leaned in again. “Are you feeling ok?”

“Are you going to ask me this every time you see me?” she asked.

“Until I know you’re all better, yes.”

She rolled her eyes. “I feel fine right now.” Which wasn’t a lie. She wasn’t sure if it was the promise of food or the giddy feeling she got when she saw Kent, but her ill feeling had gone away quickly again.

He nodded. “I also wanted to talk to you about Patrick. You asked earlier and I did talk to him. I apologized to him for the way I acted and I feel really bad about it. I wanted to apologize to you again.”

Her expression softened. “You already apologized to me.”

“I *know*,” he whispered, leaning closer, his scent almost overpowering. “I just still feel really bad. I was being stupid and mean and I don’t want *you* to think that’s me or how I usually act. Patrick made me feel like a real

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< Chapter 29

+15 Points >

idiot.” He rubbed his chin for a moment. “I also feel like your fall was partially my fault. If I hadn’t been trying to upset you, it wouldn’t have happened.”

She looked at her feet for a moment before looking up. “Please don’t blame yourself for that. I’m glad you

talked to Pat. I’m fine. You don’t need to worry about me.”

He reached out and trailed his fingers down her arm, his breathing slow. She felt herself lean towards him

slightly lifting her hand to run her fingers lightly over his stomach. She felt his *muscles* contract under her

touch.

“Ok, but I’ll still worry,” he breathed. “I think that’s my job now.”

She felt her heart rate pick up, her face flushing again.

“Your face is red,” he whispered, smiling.

“Goddess,” she said, dropping her hand and reeling away from him. “I’m going to find Wesley.”

“Bye Riley,” he called after her, chuckling to himself.

An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 30[1,172 words]

Later in the afternoon, they all met in Kent’s office to hear the reports from the scouts. The two head scouts were young men, probably not much older than twenty. They were both tall and slender, their long legs. suggesting to Riley that they were probably very quick, a necessary trait for a good scout.

Kent motioned to one of the scouts. “Tell me what you found, Scott.”

The red-haired man leaned forward. “They’ve set up a camp on the northwest part of *the* woods, roughly five miles outside our territory. There’s more than we initially realized and it seems that *more* are joining everyday.

“How many do you estimate?” Patrick asked.

“Over a hundred at least,” Scott replied.

“Not all are fit for fighting,” added the other scout, brushing his dark brown hair from his eyes. “But the majority are, I think...” He paused, looking at Scott.

“Go ahead, Jeremy,” Kent said, “tell us what you’re thinking.”

Jeremy nodded. “There were a couple rogues that seemed to come and go. Once they brought back more people. I think they might be recruiting.”

Riley looked at Wesley. He met her gaze and nodded.

“Anything else?” Kent asked the scouts.

“Not at this point,” Scott answered.

“Please go back out tomorrow,” Leo directed. “Set up a rotation if you need to, but I want constant eyes on them. We *need* to verify if they are actually recruiting like you suspect. I also want you to get more accurate

numbers.”

Both men nodded and headed out the door. After they were gone, Kent turned to Riley.

“That seemed to confirm something for you two,” he said, pointing to her and Wesley. “You two were going over the reports this morning. What did you guys want to discuss?”

Riley and Wesley filled them in on what they had noticed in the reports and the suspicion that the rogues were searching for something in the pack,

“It makes sense,” Wesley said. “Riley was right when she said they should have thrown more force into that second wave attack than the first. If their goal was truly to drive the pack from the land, that would have made more sense. But a small second wave suggests they were trying to move undetected, to search for something.”

Riley nodded. “And if they are truly/recruiting, then they are trying to gather the force to take whatever they are looking for here.”

“What could they be looking for?” Leo asked, turning to look at Kent. “Do you have any idea?”

“No,” *Kent* said quietly.

Riley’s eyes snapped to him, but he was looking intently at his desk.

1/3

< Chapter 30

+15 Points>

He’s lying, Rose confirmed. Riley opened her mouth to say something when Rose interrupted. *Don’t say it! He knows you can tell.* He must have a reason. *Don’t confront him in front of the others.*

Riley closed her mouth slowly. Rose had a point. It might be easier to get Kent to tell her in private, when his defenses were more likely to be down.

“Hopefully the scouts can get us some more intel,” Leo continued, clearly oblivious to Kent’s lie.

“Hopefully,” Patrick agreed softly. Riley glanced at him and he met her gaze. She could see the question in his

eyes. She raised her eyebrows slightly, daring him to say something but he looked away.

“How often do your scouts report back?” Riley asked after a moment.

“Usually about every two to three days, but it depends on the quality of the intel,” Max said. “Sometimes they

come sooner, sometimes they take as long as five days.”

“One thing that concerns me,” Leo said, “is the numbers the scouts are reporting. If Jeremy’s hunch about the

rogues turns out to be correct, they could outnumber us. Red Moon warriors sustained heavy losses before

the Council intervened. We do have warriors from the Council and allied packs, but I don’t think it will be

enough.”

Max looked at Kent expectantly and Kent sighed.

“I have another pack willing to provide support,” Kent said rubbing his chin, “but I’ll need to meet with them to

establish a formal alliance. I’ve had some hesitations though.”

Riley realized this was the conversation she had awoken to last night. “Which pack?”

“New Dawn,” Kent replied.

“I’ve heard of them.” Leo frowned. “But I don’t remember why.”

“You *were* out at New Dawn, weren’t you?” Wesley said, looking at Riley.

“A little over a year ago,” she said, her stomach dropping slightly.

You'll *have to tell Kent about it if he goes out there*, Rose chided.

That's not going *to be a fun conversation*, Riley replied.

"Riley?"

Riley looked up at Kent, realizing she had missed a question. "Sorry, my wolf was talking to me."

"I asked about the pack and the alpha. What can you tell me?"

She shrugged. "Good pack. They have good warriors. I was out arbitrating a boundary dispute. I wasn't there long. It was a pretty straightforward issue. The alpha is Jake Hunter. He's a good leader, well respected."

"He insists that Kent has to go out there," Max explained. "The pack isn't the closest to us. I tried to convince him to come here or let me come out to negotiate in Kent's stead but the guy was pretty adamant."

"He would be," Riley said mildly. "His pack follows older rules. He has worked to update some things, but his

elders are resistant."

Kent nodded. "Would it be a worthwhile alliance?"

"Yeah," she said, "it really would, as long as he agrees to send warriors immediately."

2/3

Chapter 30

Kent frowned, nostrils flaring as he thought. "I hate the idea of leaving the pack right now. There could be an

attack."

"We're prepared for an attack," Leo pointed out. "What we need right now are more warriors. If this is the best chance at getting more warriors, I think you should go."

Kent nodded. "I'll need someone from the Council to go with me, to relay the Council's interest in this alliance.

"Riley should go," Wesley said simply. "She already knows the alpha."

Riley froze. The last thing she wanted was to go to New Dawn with Kent. That was a disaster waiting to

happen.

“No,” Kent said too quickly, making everyone look at him. “I just meant...” He paused, glancing at Riley. “You’ve had a lot of traveling in the last few weeks.”

“Riley really is the best choice,” Leo commented.

Kent bit back his reply, staring at Riley for another moment. “It’s up to you,” he said finally.

“No, you’re right,” she said to Kent. “It has been a lot of traveling in the last few weeks. Plus, I don’t want to lose momentum on figuring out the problems here. I need to figure out what the rogues are after,” she added

pointedly.

“I can go then,” Leo said. “Just let me know when we leave.”

Kent nodded. “That sounds good. I’ll call the alpha at New Dawn and work out travel details.”

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