

An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 31[1,776 words]

Chapter 31

Kent pressed his fingers into his temples as he stared at the door. He had just finished talking to Leo to confirm the travel plans. Alpha Jake had been more than obliging on the phone, agreeing to meet as soon as Kent could get out there. Leo had agreed that they could travel overnight, taking shifts on driving. Kent was desperate to minimize time away from his pack, worried about the possibility of attacks and Riley's illness. Finally he raised his hand, knocking. He could hear her shifting around and he waited, leaning against the door jamb and shoving his hands in his pockets. She opened the door, looking up at him. She was still wearing the black leggings and that soft purple sweater that seemed to make the green flecks in her hazel eyes stand out. Her hair was starting to come loose from the braid, small strands curling around her face.

She smiled slightly at him and he felt a warmth spread through his chest.

"Care to tell me more about the alpha over at New Dawn?"

She rolled her eyes. "There's nothing to tell."

He smirked. "That's a lie. Remember that whole mate bond thing we have going on? I can tell when you're lying."

She raised her eyebrows. "You want to go there? Why don't we talk about what the rogues are after in this pack?"

He felt the color drain out of his face as the smirk slipped. "I was hoping you wouldn't have picked up on that."

"The mate bond works both ways, remember?"

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "It's complicated, Riley."

"I have time."

He stared at her for a moment, knowing she wasn't going to give up.

"Come down to my office."

She followed him, shutting the door behind her. Once they reached his office, Kent went straight to his liquor cabinet, pulling out the bourbon they had drunk on the night they met. He momentarily considered that it might not be the best idea for her to drink while ill, but shrugged it off. He was pretty sure they were both

going to need a drink right now.

“What do you think they’re after?” she asked as he handed her a drink, taking a seat beside her on the sofa.

He took a long swallow of his drink, appreciating the burn of it down his throat.

“I can’t tell you,” he finally answered.

She turned to face him fully, her eyebrows shooting up. “What?”

“Not without talking to some other people first.” He took another sip, looking across the room in order to avoid her piercing gaze. His heart squeezed painfully in his chest.

“Who?”

“I can’t tell you that either!”

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+ Paints 7

“Kent, you can’t be serious right now.” She sat her glass on the table in front of her and reached out to grab his chin, forcing his gaze to hers.

“It’s complicated, Riley,” he said, though it came out sounding like a plea.

“Why?” she demanded. “What makes it so complicated?”

He grabbed her hand, pulling it from his chin to clasp it between his own. His heart was pounding so hard he

was sure she could hear it.

“Because you work for the council. You would have to report it. We... broke some rules.”

“What kind of rules?” She pulled her hand from his, her eyes narrowing.

“The kind you don’t break.” He felt suddenly weary. All these years, waiting for the consequences to catch

him, and now they were finally here.

“If it only affected me, I would tell you,” he said after a pause. “I can handle whatever repercussions come my

way. But it affects other people. Innocent people. And the consequences would be devastating for them.”

He watched Riley reach for her glass and take a sip. She stared across the room for a moment before turning

back to him.

“I understand you want to protect people. But I’m here to help. Your pack is in danger. How am I supposed to

help plan a defense and get rid of these rogues if you won’t even tell me why they’re here?”

“You’re right,” he said tightly, looking across the room. “I know you’re right, but this isn’t a decision I can make

myself. Please just let me discuss things with the other people involved. If they’re ok with my telling you, I

will.”

“And if they don’t want you to tell me?”

He rubbed his face with both his hands, groaning softly. “I don’t f*****g know, Ri. Just let me talk to them,

please.”

“When will you talk to them?”

“After I get back from New Dawn. I leave tonight after dinner. Leo and I are going to drive through the night.

The alpha there was pretty open about wanting this alliance. He doesn’t think it will take more than a day or

two to get things written *out* and agreed to. He said he'll send warriors within the week of us forming our alliance. I have to go now though."

"You can't talk to them before you go?"

He grabbed his drink, taking a long gulp.

"No," he said as he looked at her. "It will not be a quick discussion and it will be really stressful."

She sighed. "You know, you were upset when I wasn't telling you things."

"That's different," he said sharply, and you know it. What you were hiding only affected you. This affects others and I have a duty to protect the people in my pack."

She frowned, looking away for a moment.

"Fine," she said finally. "I just wish you knew I'm not trying to make more problems for you. I'm trying to help you keep your pack safe."

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He touched her arm, drawing her gaze back to him.

"I know that," he said gently. "And I appreciate that."

She took another sip of her drink, drumming her fingers on the side of her glass.

* Points >

"I also appreciate that you didn't argue with me about going to New Dawn," he said after a moment, looking into his own drink. "I thought for sure you would, but I don't want you traveling while you're sick."

"I figured as much." She glanced at him. "But mostly I don't want to go back to New Dawn right now."

"Why is that?" He raised an eyebrow. "What's the deal with that alpha?"

"Jake is a good alpha. He's twenty five, very well liked and an excellent fighter."

"And?" Kent prompted.

She sighed. “He talks a lot. He runs his mouth about everything and brags about stupid s**t. The moment he realizes I’m working at your pack, he’ll start his shit.”

Kent watched her face flush and he suddenly understood.

“So you f****d him?” The question came out harsher than he meant, the disdain clear in his voice.

She shrugged. “It’s not like I was mated at the time.”

Kent stared at her for a moment, Pax roaring in his head. He downed the remainder of his drink and stood up quickly, trying to block Pax out. He crossed the room to pour himself another drink that he downed just as quickly. He felt his hand shaking with fury as he set the empty glass down on the cabinet.

“Aren’t there rules about council members getting involved with pack members while on assignment?” he finally asked, his voice coming out like a growl.

“Yes,” she scoffed, “which hasn’t stopped you.”

Kent scowled. “That’s different. We’re mates.”

She sighed, taking another sip of her drink. “There are rules about it, but the council tends to turn a blind eye unless it affects your ability to do your work.”

“So you slept with him while you were there and that was it?” Kent didn’t know why he asked. Perhaps he was secretly a masochist.

“No.” She wouldn’t meet his gaze. “I went back for a visit about six months ago.”

“Why?” Again, masochistic.

She rolled her eyes. “Why do *you* think, Kent?”

He turned away from her to pour himself another drink, forcing slow breaths. He wasn’t going to yell at her again. He had yelled at her enough over the last few days. He wasn’t going to scream over things that had

happened in the past.

He walked over and topped off her drink, setting the bottle of bourbon on the table. He stood there, looking

down at her for a moment.

“I don’t know how to react,” he finally admitted. “I’m angry, but I know that it’s foolish.”

She shrugged. "I haven't had a mate in nine years. You can't think I haven't been with a man since then.

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+8 Points >

Anything that has happened is purely physical, like scratching an itch. Surely, you've been with other women

since Lily died."

He took a sip, looking at his feet for a moment. "Iris," he said suddenly, causing Riley to look up at him. He scratched his chin. "An old friend from the academy. She lives in a nearby pack. Her mate died in a freak accident. We started... meeting up about a year after Lily died. The elders have always insisted that I be, um, discreet about physical relationships. They always insist that you keep it outside the pack to avoid

complications, so..." He trailed off, unsure of why he was even telling her this.

She reached out and squeezed his hand. "So you get it?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I do. I'm overreacting about this. I know that."

She smiled slightly. "It's kind of hot, though."

He laughed, sitting back down beside her. "At least tell me he wasn't very good."

"I mean, I could, but you can tell when I lie, right?"

He laughed. "*****g hell, Riley." He downed the remainder of his drink.

"Goddess." Riley grabbed his wrist. "Slow down. You're supposed to drive tonight."

"I'll make Leo take the first shift," he muttered, setting his empty glass on the table:

"How about we get some dinner?" she suggested. "You need some food to balance out all the alcohol."

"I can have some sent up."

Riley opened her mouth and he knew she was going to argue, to suggest they go to the dining hall so he

quickly placed a finger over her lips.

“Please,” he said softly, “I won’t see you for at least two days. Can we just have dinner together? Just the two

of us?”

Her eyes softened. “Sure. But no more drinks.”

He smiled. “You worried about me?”

“Maybe,” she conceded.

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< Chapter 32

An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 32[2,037 words]

After dinner, Kent needed to meet with some of the warriors before his departure so Riley found herself wandering outside, wanting to stretch her legs. The air was cool against her face as she walked from the pack house towards the town, taking in the small homes and shops. A couple kids played at a little park, swinging from the monkey bars and yelling at one another. The sun was slowly going down, casting *long* shadows across the park.

A hand landed on her shoulder and Riley started, turning to see Wesley.

“Sorry,” he said with a wry smile, “didn’t mean to startle you. I saw you leaving and thought you might like some company.”

She smiled. “Thanks. I appreciate it. I thought some fresh air might clear my head.”

“I imagine you have a lot to think about,” he said as they started walking down the street. “I *know you* want to keep your mind on your work, but you can’t tell me that this whole thing with the alpha isn’t consuming a lot of headspace.”

She sighed. “It really is, honestly. My wolf barely wants to talk about anything else and I can’t even think straight when he’s around.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t put this decision on the back burner,” he suggested, glancing at her. “Maybe you need

to make a decision.”

“It’s not that simple.” She shook her head.

“I don’t know,” he replied, putting his hands in his pockets. “It’s obvious that the two of you like each other.”

She frowned, looking down the road towards a couple who were pushing a baby in a stroller. They were lost in conversation, the woman talking animatedly with her hands as her mate pushed the baby.

“Everyone thinks that having a mate is like a fairy tale,” she murmured as the couple passed them. “I thought that too when I was a kid. But it’s not. You have no idea how bad things can go.”

“What happened with your first mate?” he asked gently.

“I already told everyone on my first night here.” She really didn’t want to go into it.

“Yeah, but that clearly wasn’t the whole story. If it was as straightforward as you tried to make it sound, you wouldn’t be this cut up about it.”

She looked at Wesley. “I don’t want to talk about it with you. No offense, I just don’t want to relive those

memories.”

“Have you at least talked to the alpha about it?”

They reached a corner and stopped, taking in the row of small shops to the right of them.

“I told him some of it,” she muttered.

“Maybe you should tell him the rest.” Wesley bumped her shoulder gently with his own and started walking again. “Maybe if he really understands what happened...” Wesley trailed off, rubbing his forehead.

“Are you ok?” she asked, looking at him again.

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< Chapter 32

+8 Points >

“Yeah,” he muttered, “my wolf is just a little restless. He’s pacing like crazy. He’s been like this ever since I left the pack house. I’m starting to get a headache.”

“Oh,” Riley whispered, her eyes widening.

“What?” Wesley narrowed his eyes as he looked at her.

Before she could say anything his whole body spun around. A young woman came around the far corner, her black hair flying behind her in the breeze. She stopped, locking eyes with Wesley.

“Mate,” he whispered, his eyes widening. He ran down the road, pulling to a stop in *front* of her. He reached out to touch her cheeks with the tips of his finger, as if he thought she wasn’t real. Suddenly she launched herself into his arms and they embraced.

Riley watched for a moment, smiling as Wesley stroked her hair. She could tell he was talking, but couldn’t hear him from a distance. The woman tipped her head up, her face beaming as she looked at him.

Riley turned, heading back towards the pack house. She didn’t want to intrude on their special *moment*. She

smiled as she walked. Goddess knows he deserved to find his mate.

Her body was feeling achy as she approached the pack house, her head hurting yet again. She walked on, feeling sluggish and wanting nothing more than to lay down in her room. As she approached the pack house,

she could see Patrick standing on the steps outside.

He raised his hand to wave as she approached. “Where did you go?”

“Just took a walk,” she said as she got closer. “What are you doing?”

“Waiting for a coworker of Lana’s to drop off some paperwork she forgot. She didn’t feel like coming downstairs so I told her I would wait for it.” He c****d his head to the side as Riley started up the steps. “You

don't look so good."

"I don't feel too great," she muttered. "I want to lay down."

He took her elbow and she leaned against him, acutely aware of how tired she felt.

"You shouldn't have gone for a walk by yourself" he chided gently.

"I didn't," she explained. "Wes was with me but he found his mate, so I left them alone."

Patrick smiled slightly. "He *found* his mate here? Who is it?"

"No idea. I didn't approach her. I'm sure he'll introduce her." She leaned into Patrick slightly and he frowned.

"I'll take you upstairs," he said, turning towards the door.

"You're waiting for someone," she pointed out.

"It's fine. It will only take a minute to get you upstairs."

She wanted to argue, but it was pointless. Instead she let Patrick guide her inside and took the elevator to the fifth floor. Kent was waiting on the other side of the doors when they slid open. He immediately took her

arm from Patrick,

"Thanks for letting me know," he said to Patrick as he guided her out of the elevator.

"I mindlinked him when we were coming up. I don't want to get shoved into another wall." Patrick grinned at Riley as he stepped back into the elevator and she laughed as the doors slid shut.

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< Chapter 32

+8 Points

Kent shook his head and then turned to Riley, holding both her arms. "What happened? Where did you go?"

"I went for a walk with Wes."

“Why didn’t he walk you back?” Kent demanded, his face dark. She rolled her eyes and explained that Wesley had found his mate. Kent’s expression softened as he listened. “Well, I guess that’s understandable. How are you feeling now?”

“Better actually,” she murmured, “but I still want to lie down.”

He nodded and slowly let go of her arms. He swallowed hard, rubbing his forehead.

“I have to go pack, but honestly, Riley, I don’t want to go on this trip if *you’re* still getting sick.”

“Don’t be foolish, Kent,” she replied, shaking her head. “This alliance is important *to* protect your pack. We

need those warriors here. You can’t just not go.”

“I know you’re right.” He chewed on the corner of his mouth for a moment. “But you’ll *go* to Lana if you get

sick again. Go to the hospital and have her run tests, please.”

She sighed. “I promise to go if I get worse.”

He wrapped an arm around her shoulder, pulling her tightly against his chest. The hug took her by surprise,

but after a moment she leaned into him, wrapping her arms around his waist.

“I need to finish packing,” he said into her hair. “Please come sit with me.”

“In your room?”

“Yes.” He smiled into her hair. “That’s where my stuff is.”

“I’m not coming into your room,” she said adamantly as she leaned back to look up at him.

“Please.” He let go of her, taking a step back. “I won’t do anything. I’d just feel better having you close until I

go.”

The common sense part of her wanted to say no. That part of her brain knew that going to his room was a bad idea, but the rest of her didn’t care. Especially her wolf, who was begging her to go with him.

“Ok,” she whispered.

He smiled and she felt her heart skip a beat. She followed him into his room. It was huge. A large king bed

sat in the center of the room, covered by a large gray and black bedspread. There was a couch and chairs off

to one side of the room. She could see the door to the ensuite bathroom ajar and a second door that

appeared to be a walk-in closet.

Riley walked over to the sitting area to sit on the couch, positive that she should avoid the bed at all costs. She could see an open suitcase on the bed with some clothes scattered around it. She leaned back into the

couch, watching Kent start to pack.

The room smelled of him, like everything in here was infused with his scent. Something about his scent was calming to her, soothing away her headache. She felt herself sinking backwards into the couch, the exhaustion of her illness and the last couple days coming over her.

Comments

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<Chapter 32

+8 Points

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Comments

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 33[1,411 words]

+ Pants >

Kent wasn't sure when Riley had fallen asleep. He had been packing, trying to ignore the sense of unease that was running through him when he noticed her slumped slightly to the side. He watched her for a moment, the steady rise and fall of her chest, the way her lips puffed slightly when she breathed out.

After a moment he crossed the room, carefully scooping her legs up and moving her so she was laying down comfortably. He grabbed a spare blanket from the closet and draped it over her. He was watching her sleep when he heard the knock at the door.

He crossed the room in a few strides, pulling it open to see Patrick and Max on the other side.

"Just saw Leo downstairs," Max said, pushing into the room. "I told him *to* take the Lexus for the drive."

Kent grabbed Max's shoulder, halting his progress into the room and motioning towards where Riley was sleeping on the couch.

“In the hallway, please,” he whispered. Max and Patrick both stared at Riley for a *moment* before walking out. Kent left the door cracked open so he could hear if she woke up.

“Is she ok?” Max asked, his forehead creasing.

“I don’t know,” Kent answered, leaning against the wall. “She fell asleep right after she came in here. She’s

just been so sick. I’m worried about her.”

“I didn’t know she was that sick,” Max said. “She said something about not feeling well this morning, but I

didn’t realize it was that bad.”

“I don’t want to leave her like this.” Kent glanced back towards the door.

“I know,” Patrick said softly, “but we also need this alliance. If the scouting reports are right, the threat is only

growing. We need those warriors.”

“Yeah,” Max agreed, “we really need to get this situation under control.”

“Speaking of that,” Kent murmured, “she figured out that we know what the rogues are after.”

“s**t,” Max hissed. “How did she figure that out?”

“She can tell when I lie.” Kent ran his hand through his hair again. “Leo asked if I knew what the rogues were after and I said no. She knew immediately that I was lying.”

“I knew it,” Patrick groaned. “I could see it in her face. I was honestly surprised she didn’t call you out right

then.”

“Me too,” Kent admitted. “I thought for a moment I got away with it, but she brought it up later.”

“What did you tell her?” Max asked,

“Just that I need to talk to the other people involved before I disclose anything. She wasn’t happy with that answer, but she agreed to wait until I come back. I can’t put her off forever though. We’re going to have to tell

her,”

“She works for the council, Kent.” Max’s voice shot up. “She’ll report us. Mate or not, she’ll still do her f*****g job, Do you know what this could do to me and Penny?”

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“It’s not about just you, Max,” Patrick snapped back. “This affects all of us.”

“It affects Penny and I way more than it affects either of you,” Max replied, nearly yelling.

+8 Points >

“Shhh,” Kent hushed him. “You’ll wake her up.” He glanced at the door before looking back. “Just talk to Penny while I’m gone. We can discuss everything when I get back. Right now the most important thing to me is that the two of you keep an eye on Riley. If she gets worse, take her to the hospital and call me right away.”

“Of course,” Patrick said quietly. “You need to focus on the alliance right now. One problem at a time, ok? We need those warriors.”

“Just please...” Kent swallowed, the unease from earlier flowing through him again. “If anything happens to her, I don’t...” He closed his eyes for a moment.

“Hey,” Max said gently, grabbing Kent’s shoulder, “we’ll look out for her. She’s going to be our luna soon enough anyway, right?”

“I hope so.” Kent sighed. “I’ll call you guys when we get to New Dawn, ok?”

**

Riley hurried back towards the couch when she realized that Max and Patrick were leaving. Her hands were shaking as she slid them under her legs, watching the door open all the way, Kent illuminated in the light of the hallway.

“Hey,” he said softly, smiling when he saw her. “You’re awake.”

She nodded, not trusting herself to talk, still trying to process what she had just overheard.

“I have to leave in a few minutes,” he said, walking over to his bed and zipping up the suitcase.

Riley watched him, trying to figure out what the ranked members were hiding. What could possibly affect Max and Penny more than anyone else? Max had not struck her as someone with something to hide.

Suddenly Kent sat down next to her, causing her to start slightly. He furrowed his brow as he took her hand.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes,” she finally managed to say.

“I was talking and I think you were somewhere else.” He ran his fingers over the back of her hand, sparks and tingles running up her arm.

She shook her head slightly. “Sorry, I was just trying to figure something out. I’m still a little groggy.”

“Will you be ok?” She could hear the worry in his voice.

She forced a small smile. “I’ll be fine.”

“I don’t have to go,” he whispered, his blue eyes almost pleading.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You know you need to go. You need this alliance.”

He frowned. “I know. But please go see Lana if you’re feeling worse.”

“I will,” she promised, ignoring the urge to roll her eyes.

He leaned forward and kissed her forehead softly. She closed her eyes, leaning into him slightly.

“Walk with me to the elevator,” he whispered against her skin.

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+0 Points

She nodded and they stood up. He grabbed his suitcase off the bed and she followed him out into the hallway. He punched the call button before turning to look at her, his face pinched.

“I just have a bad feeling,” he said quickly, wincing slightly as he did. “Like something is going to happen.”

when I'm not here."

"Everything will be ok," she assured him. "The warriors are ready for an attack."

He shook his head. "Not an attack." He looked up at the ceiling for a moment before looking back. "It's you. I'm worried something is going to happen to you."

She could feel it, his unease as it pulsed through the mate bond. She bit her lip, studying his sea blue eyes

for a moment.

"I promise I'll go see Lana, Kent," she whispered.

He reached out and pulled her into a tight hug. She rested her head *on* his chest, enjoying the tingles as he

ran his hand down her back.

"I'll miss you," she whispered into his chest, surprised to realize that she really felt that way.

"I'll miss you too," he replied as the elevator doors opened.

She pulled back, turning to look into the empty elevator before looking back at him. He stared at her intensely, reaching out to touch her face. He leaned in to kiss her cheek, but she moved her head at the last moment, catching his lips with hers. He grabbed the back of her neck, pulling her closer to him and deepening the kiss. She heard the elevator doors close as she wrapped her arms around his neck, pressing

herself against him.

He ended the kiss, resting his forehead against hers, his eyes closed. She felt breathless, running her fingers

through his hair.

"You're making it hard to go," he whispered.

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize." He caught her mouth in another blazing kiss, pushing his tongue against her lips. She

moaned softly when his tongue met hers, wrapping her fingers into the short hair at the back of his head.

Finally he pulled back, gently pushing her away.

“I have to go,” he said, his voice hoarse.

She nodded. “You do. I’ll stop.”

“Goddess, I wish you wouldn’t,” he whispered as he hit the call button for the elevator. He ran his hand through his hair as the doors opened **again**. “Goodbye, Riley.” He kissed her quickly on the forehead before grabbing his suitcase and disappearing into the elevator.

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 34[1,476 words]

Chapter 34

Kent drummed his fingers on the steering wheel as they turned down the road that led into New Dawn. They

had been on the road for eleven hours, making decent time with almost *no* traffic overnight. Kent had slept

restlessly for the first half of the drive before swapping spots with Leo.

Leo had dozed soundly for the second half of the trip, snoring lightly with his arms folded across his chest.

But the road into New Dawn was in desperate need of being replaced, filled with potholes and bumps. Within

a few minutes of turning onto the road, Leo had been jolted awake as the Lexus bounced along the road.

“This road is s**t,” Leo grumbled, running a hand over his face.

“Yeah,” Kent muttered, still drumming his fingers. “For such a highly praised pack, you think they could at

least keep their roads in decent shape.”

Leo adjusted himself in the seat, reaching for his phone to check for a message, a habit that Kent still wasn’t used to. Most wolves didn’t use cell phones unless they were outside of their packs due to their ability to mindlink other pack members. But Leo, as a council member, didn’t have the ability to mindlink many people,

so he relied much more on his cell phone to stay in communication.

“Any news?” Kent asked, glancing at Leo’s furrowed brow.

He glanced up at Kent. “Nothing important. Just my mate. My daughter has a stomach bug so I guess they

were both up all night.”

Kent nodded. “That must suck. How old is your daughter?”

“Two,” Leo replied, tapping out a message. “Her name is Abby.”

Kent caught the slight smile as Leo said her name.

“What about your mate? What’s her name?”

“Leah.”

Kent snorted. “Really? Leo and Leah?”

Leo chuckled softly. “Yeah, I guess the Moon Goddess has a sense of humor.”

“How’d you two meet?”

Leo sighed, slipping the phone back into the cup holder. “We met in our first year at the academy. Leah was

actually Riley’s roommate. That’s how I met Riley.”

“Oh,” Kent murmured, “I knew *you* guys met at the academy.”

He nodded. "Yeah, I found Leah and it took a few months for us to get into mated couples housing. At the beginning of the year there's always a huge need for mated housing as a lot of people find their mates during

that time."

"I recall," Kent said, slowing for a deer that ran across the road.

"Right, so, my roommate had also found his mate and they were spending a lot of time in my room. So Leah and I were spending a lot of time in her room, which meant Riley was always around. After we moved into our new housing, we kept inviting her over. She didn't want to come over at first, but Leah wore her down." Leo

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smiled at the memory of it. "Leah can be very persistent."

rains

"What was Riley like?" Kent couldn't help asking, his curiosity about all the things Riley kept hidden from him.

was starting to get to him.

"She was really quiet," Leo recalled, running his fingers through his hair. "She was rail thin back then, and

looked like a strong breeze would take her away. She had literally no one. She came unbacked to the

academy." Leo paused, glancing at Kent. "Has she told you any of this?"

"I knew she was unbacked," he replied, watching the road. "She said the first year was hard."

Leo nodded. "Riley's smart. I think that's what makes her the best. It's not always about speed or strength.

Sometimes your ability to read your opponent, to anticipate, to calculate. That's what Riley does better than

anyone I know. And that's what set her apart in that first year."

Kent considered that for a moment. "She was fresh off a rejection. I can't imagine she fought very well in the

beginning, just given how badly that affects you physically.”

Leo shrugged. “She looked weak and sick when I first met her. I really felt bad for her. This small, sickly, unbacked woman trying to make her way at the academy. I thought she would fail within a month or so. But Riley is driven, she always was. From the moment I met her, I could tell she had something to prove to everyone. She lost a lot of spars in her first year. She got her ass handed to her more times than I can remember. She got mocked and ridiculed quite a bit. But every bad word and criticism was like fuel for her. She fed off it. And by the end of that first year, she was becoming one of the best warriors there. It was

amazing.”

Kent opened his mouth to reply when the woods unexpectedly thinned, opening to a small town, similar in

size to Red Moon’s.

“Guess we’re here.”

**

Riley woke up in the morning feeling absolutely terrible, perhaps the worst she had felt since arriving at Red Moon. She felt sluggish getting out of bed and didn’t want to go to breakfast. She finally managed to wash her face and change her clothes, opting for a pair of soft sweatpants and sweatshirt. She quickly braided her hair and headed downstairs. It was towards the end of breakfast time and most people had already eaten and left. She got some toast and coffee, sitting at a table by herself.

“Riley!” Wesley walked over, his blond hair messy and a big smile on his face. Beside him was the woman from last night.

His smile faltered when Riley looked up. “You don’t look well,” he said.

She waved her hand. “I don’t feel well. I think I’m coming down with something. I might just rest after I finish eating, but first you need to introduce me to your mate.”

He smiled again. “This is Angie.” He was beaming as he looked at his mate. “She’s a nurse at the hospital.

She’s smart and beautiful and...”

“Stop!” Angie exclaimed, blushing.

Riley couldn’t help but smile at how cute they were. “Well, it’s nice to meet you, Angie. I’m Riley.”

Angie smiled, sitting down across the table. "You work at the Council with Wes, right?"

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Riley nodded. "We've worked together for a few years."

"I'm going to get us some breakfast." Wesley leaned down, kissing Angie on the top of the head before heading over to the buffet.

"Wesley is a good guy," Riley said to Angie, once he had walked away. "I hope you guys will be happy together."

Angie smiled broadly. "I hope so too. He seems so nice."

Angie looked over to where Wesley was, absentmindedly scratching at her collar when she did. Riley saw the

fresh mark there, still red.

Riley suddenly thought of Kent last night, the feeling that went through her when he kissed her, not wanting

to leave her. She felt a sharp stab of pain through her chest and winced.

"Are you sure you're ok?" Angie asked, her face creased in concern.

Wesley set two plates of food on the table, looking at Riley. "No offense, Ri, but you look awful."

She shook her head, squeezing her temples. "I think I need to lay down." She looked up at Angie. "I would love

to get to know you better some time."

"Of course," Angie said with a warm smile. "Once you're feeling better."

Riley said goodbye, making her way back towards the elevator. Her head was swimming and she felt weak.

She stumbled slightly and nearly collided with a solid wall of muscle.

"Hey Riley," Max said, grabbing her arms to steady her. His brow creased when he looked at her. "You are not

ok.”

She shook her head. “I just need *to* lay down.”

“Maybe we should *go to* the hospital and get you checked out,” he suggested gently.

“It’s not that bad,” she lied. “Have you heard from Kent yet?”

“Yeah,” Max said, *not* letting *go* of her arms. “He called about half an hour ago to say they made it there

safely.”

That news felt like a balm, calming her aching chest for a moment.

“I wish I had spoken to him,” she admitted weakly.

“I can call him back,” Max said quickly. “He’d want to talk to you, I’m sure.”

She shook her head. “I don’t want *to* distract him. He needs to take care of that alliance. I’m just going to lie

down for a little bit.”

“How about I make sure you get upstairs?”

She wanted to argue, but she was too tired. He held her upper arm the whole way, making sure she was safely in her room before he left. She crawled into bed, drifting into a fitful sleep.

2

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 35[1,192 words]

+8 Points 2

They weren't even an hour into the meeting and Kent had already decided that this was *going* to be a long day. Luckily, they had decided to start the meeting in the afternoon, giving Kent and Leo time to get settled in their rooms, shower and take a quick nap after a long night of driving.

Kent had struggled to nap, plagued by the same anxiety that had been with him since he left Red Moon. He had called Max to let him know that they had made it safely and to ask about Riley, but Max had *no* updates on her. He hadn't seen her apparently, which did little to settle Kent down. He had called back again at lunch time and all Max would say was that she had been resting today.

Everything else with the pack was fine. All patrols ran normally, no scouting reports had come in this morning and training was running without a hitch. Max had gone over the list of to dos on the phone, explaining how Penny was handling most of the food storage and building winterization, all the details that had been slipping from Kent's mind lately.

He tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair he was seated in as they worked through the preliminary work for the alliance. It was standard agreements before they started working out the specifics *and* decided on what support New Dawn would provide.

The beta, a tall, lithe man with close cropped hair and dark gray eyes named Callan had been handling most

of the basic information. His deep, monotone voice grated on Kent's nerves. The man barely looked up, his

face basically emotionless.

The gamma, Russ, was stretched out in another armchair, his fingers laced behind his head. His curly red

hair fell across his forehead, his brown eyes almost closed. He was clearly bored.

Then the alpha, Jake, sat behind his desk. He appeared to be barely listening, his shaggy brown hair cast down over his green eyes as his fingers absently traced the wood grain on his desk.

"So that about sums it up," Beta Callan finally said, turning the last page over.

"Thank the Goddess," Alpha Jake said, looking up with a smile. "Can we agree to the basics so we can get

going on the details?"

"Yes," Kent said with a wave of his hand, not even making an effort to return the smile.

“Tell me about the issues at Red Moon,” Alpha Jake said. “I see you have council representation with you as

well.”

“Yes,” Kent sighed, sitting up slightly. “This is Leo Anderson, the head warrior who has been working with us.”

“Do you have an advisor?” Beta Callan asked, jotting down notes.

“Two actually,” Kent replied.

“Two?” The gamma straightened. That’s not normal protocol with the council, is it?”

“No,” Leo answered, “but the situation at Red Moon is unique so the council made an exception.”

“So who are the advisors?” the beta asked in that same monotone drawl.

“Wesley Crooks and Riley Atwood,” Leo said.

“Riley?” Alpha Jake’s right eyebrow moved up. “She was out here last year. Why didn’t she come instead of

1/3

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Mr. Anderson? I’m *very familiar* with her.”

Kent gritted his teeth as Pax snarled in his mind. The lilt at the end of the alpha’s statement was suggestive, sending a wave of fury through Kent.

Leo glanced at Kent, his eyebrows pulling together before he replied. “Call me Leo, please. *And* Riley has only been at Red Moon for about a week. She wanted more time at the pack *to work on* the situation there. Her and Wesley are working in tandem and they don’t want to lose momentum.”

Jake nodded. “That’s disappointing, but understandable.” He looked at Kent. “You’re lucky, Alpha Kent. She’s

the best in more ways than one.” He smirked.

Kent’s fingers dug into the arm of the chair. Pax’s hackles were up and Kent’s mind was swimming in *red* hot

rage.

“Can we get back to the matter at hand?” the beta drawled, casting an annoyed look at his alpha.

“Of course,” said Jake with a wide smile.

**

Her dreams were full of Paul, his blond hair shining in the sun, his smile with the gap between his two front teeth. She dreamed of the taste of him, the way his chest had felt under her hand. She could hear him laughing as he rolled them over, pinning him under her. But the dream shifted. His laughter changed to yelling, his smile twisting into a sneer. She wasn't under him willingly, pushing him away from her as he pinned her arms down.

“You're mine,” he kept snarling, baring his teeth. “You don't get to just leave.”

She twisted, sweat pouring down her forehead, screaming. But it didn't matter. They were too far away. No *one* was out here to hear anything. No one was coming.

Suddenly there was a pounding at the door. The dream faded as Riley twisted. She forced her eyes open. The room was dark. She was drenched in sweat, her whole body shaking. Her legs were tangled in the sheets, and

in her daze, she was unable to free herself.

She suddenly thought of Kent and how she wished he was here.

“f*****g hell,” someone yelled from outside the door. “Where is the f*****g extra key to this door?”

“Penny is getting it,” another *voice* replied, sounding further away. “It's in Alpha's office.”

Her whole body ached. Her breath was coming in short, painful bursts. She was pretty sure her heart was

going to come out of her chest from the way it pounded.

“Riley!” A fist slammed against the door.

It was Patrick, she realized.

“Can you hear me? Please f*****g answer me!”

He sounded panicked in a way she had not heard. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Her throat was dry, her lips chapped. She managed to twist to see the clock on the bedside table. 9:13PM it read.

There was the sound of the key in the door and a moment later Patrick rushed in, Max only a step behind

him.

“s**t,” Patrick muttered, quickly unwrapping the blankets around her legs. “Get a car, Max. We need to get her

2/3

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to the hospital right now.” He finally succeeded in getting the blankets off her legs as Max rushed out of the room. “Can you talk to me, Riley?”

“I don’t feel well,” she whispered as he picked her up. She looped her arms around his neck, resting her head against his shoulder..

“I got that part,” he murmured as he straightened up.

“How is she?” Penny appeared in the doorway.

“Bad,” he answered. “Mindlink Lana and let her know we’re coming. And then call Kent.”

“No,” Riley gasped, “don’t.”

Patrick carried her towards the elevator. “He needs to know.”

“Please,” she whispered.

“We’ll discuss it once she’s at the hospital,” Penny said sharply to Patrick. “Don’t stress her out right now.”

“Ok,” he muttered as the elevator doors opened.

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 36[865 words]

Chapter 36

Riley awoke to a conversation around her. She vaguely recalled Patrick climbing into the backseat of a car with her before she had fallen asleep, or passed out, she wasn't sure. Her whole body still hurt terribly and she struggled to open her eyes.

"We need to call him," Patrick was insisting.

"Penny said she didn't want him called," Lana replied. "It's her decision."

"We told him we'd call if she got worse." Max sounded stressed.

"How long has she been sick?" Wesley demanded. "You all seem to know this has been going on."

Patrick sighed. "She's been sick since she got here. It's been getting worse all week."

"Why the hell didn't I know about this?" Wesley exclaimed.

"I didn't want you to know." Riley forced her eyes open. She swallowed, wincing at her painfully dry throat.

She was lying in a hospital bed. She could see several machines beside her and an IV attached to her arm.

Patrick and Max were standing on one side of her bed, Wesley on the other. Lana was closer to the *door* and Angie was standing at a small counter behind Wesley, filling some syringes.

"Thank the Goddess, you're awake," Max muttered, rubbing his forehead.

"How are you feeling, Riley?" Lana asked, coming closer.

"I've had better days," she replied, licking her lips. "Can I get some water?"

“I’ll get you some,” Angie said, glancing over her shoulder at Riley before heading out the door.

“What has been happening?” asked Wesley, rubbing his forehead. “They’re telling me you’ve been sick, but you didn’t tell me. How am I supposed to have your back if I don’t know what’s going on?”

“I just didn’t *want* you or Leo to go *to* the commander,” she whispered, closing her eyes against the sting of tears. “You’re already hiding enough information from him for me.”

Wesley shook his head. “*You* do realize you’re in a hospital now. I’m going to have to call the council. I can’t

hide this information.”

She nodded. “I know.”

He raked a hand through his hair. “Hell, Riley. You should have some more faith in me.”

“Wesley,” Lana interrupted, “I know you’re upset, but this isn’t helping right now.

He looked slightly chagrined. “I’m sorry.”

“You and I can call your commander together in the morning,” she said calmly. “It’s too late to call tonight. I’ll give him my opinion on her condition and maybe he will give me a chance to figure this out.” She looked at Riley. “But, truth be told, the council has the best hospital facilities, so if I can’t get you better, it would be

good for you to go there.”

The door opened and Angie walked in carrying a plastic cup with a straw. She handed it to Riley who took a long swallow. It felt soothing against her sore throat.

1/2

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Riley looked back at Lana. “I really don’t want to go if I don’t have to.” She didn’t voice that the thought of being even further from Kent was physically painful.

“We’ll have to see what your commander says in the morning.” Lana kept her voice even. “I will ultimately

have to defer to him.”

Lana looked at Patrick and then back to Riley. "As for the alpha, I think it would be good to have your mate

here, but I won't force it."

"Mate?!" Angie's eyebrows went so high they almost disappeared into her hairline.

"I'll explain it later," Wesley muttered.

Lana glanced at Angie and then back to Riley. "Don't worry about Angie. She won't go telling people."

"He needs to establish that alliance," Riley said, looking over at Patrick and Max. "We all know that. He'll leave the moment he hears I'm here. If he doesn't get those warriors, this pack's safety will be at risk."

Patrick shook his head. "I've hidden enough information from him. Last time he threw me into a wall. I'm not doing it again."

"Then I will," Max said quietly. Patrick turned to open his mouth but Max raised his hand. "She's right. We

need those warriors and Kent will walk away the moment he hears she's worse. We barely convinced him to

go as it is."

Lana shook her head. "I think you've lied to that man enough, Riley, but if this is what you want." She sighed,

rubbing her hand over her swollen stomach.

"You need to rest," Patrick said, looking at his mate. "This stress isn't good for you or the baby."

"We'll go in a minute." Lana turned to Angie. "Finish drawing up the medicine. I'm going to order the tests to

start in the morning." She looked at Riley. "Angie is going to give you some medicine for all the pain and nausea, plus something to help you sleep. Can you talk to your wolf at all?"

Riley closed her eyes, focusing on Rose. She called to her several times without an answer.

"She's there but she's not answering me," Riley said heavily, opening her eyes.

Lana frowned. “Ok. Let’s see if some medication helps. I’ll check on you first thing in the morning.”

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 37[1,080 words]

+8 Points >

Pax snarled again, making Kent’s already pounding headache worse. They had worked through lunch and were now pushing dinner time with this alliance. The alpha and beta had both suggested waiting to wrap up the details until tomorrow, but Kent was not going to relent.

His phone with Max this morning had set him on edge, worsening the already terrible anxiety he was feeling. Max wouldn’t go into details but stressed that the alliance needed to be wrapped up today. He insisted that the pack was fine and that Riley was “hanging in there” – whatever the hell that meant.

So Kent had insisted that they keep working on the details, arguing over the types of support they would lend, trading agreements, communication details and dates to re-evaluate the alliance. He found the gamma and alpha fairly easy to agree with, but the beta was firm in details that Kent disliked. Twice already, Alpha Jake had to overrule his beta for the sake of getting through the agreements.

Of course, things could go faster if the alpha would have stopped going on tangents and stories about the various she-wolves he had met. Kent was pretty sure if he had to hear one more story, he was going to punch

the man in the face.

Leo, for his part, was doing his best to keep Kent in check. After Alpha Jake had gone on in some detail

about his encounters with Riley, Leo had taken to cutting him off and changing the subject as quickly as possible. A few times Kent was pretty sure he had started growling but he was cut off by sharp looks from

Leo.

“I think that should just about do it,” the beta said, looking over the papers he had just printed off. “All we

need to do is sign.”

Kent’s body sagged slightly in relief. He was so ready to be done with this. They all walked up to the alpha’s

desk to scrawl their signatures.

“Will you stay until tomorrow?” Alpha Jake asked, his normal smile in place. “I could introduce you to a couple she-wolves that might keep you company.”

“No,” said Kent tersely. “I need to get back to my pack before there is another attack.”

The alpha frowned but *nodded*. “Right. Of course.”

As soon as they cleared the office, Kent began to dig his cell phone from his pocket.

“Thank the Goddess that is over,” *Leo* muttered as they entered the stairwell. “I don’t think I could have

tolerated that jackass for one more minute.”

“I was ready to rip his throat out,” Kent growled, unlocking the phone as he followed Leo down the stairs.

“I would have had your back,” Leo said over his shoulder.

They walked out on the second floor, heading towards the room as Kent punched the number for Max.

“When are we leaving?” Leo asked as he reached his door. “I’m ready...” He tapered off when he saw Kent with

his phone to his ear.

Kent held up his finger to Leo as the phone rang. Leo leaned back against his door, pulling out his own phone

as he waited.

1/3

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+ Points

“Hey Kent.” Max sounded exhausted, worse than he had in the morning.

“Hey Max. We’re done. We got the alliance wrapped up today. We’re probably *going to* grab some dinner and then head back. We can probably be back by midmorning.”

“Great,” Max sighed. “I really need you back here.”

“Will you please tell me what’s been going on?”

There was a long pause. “Listen, Kent...” He trailed off.

“What’s going on, Max?”

He sighed again. “I had to think about what was best for the pack, ok? I know what we promised you, but we really need this alliance.”

Kent felt his stomach drop. “What’s wrong?” It came out as a growl.

“Riley is in the hospital.”

Kent’s chest constricted. Pax whined in his head. Even Leo sensed something was wrong, looking up from his

phone to watch Kent.

“When did she go to the hospital?”

“Last night.”

Kent was pretty sure he forgot to breathe for a moment. Pax howled in his head. Leo straightened up, his

forehead creasing in concern.

“Last night?”

“Yeah.” Max sighed again. “She slept all day yesterday. We got worried when we hadn’t seen her so Pat, Penny and I went to check on her. She was in bad shape so we rushed her to the hospital. Lana’s been doing tests all day, but as far as I know she hasn’t figured out what’s going on.”

Kent felt frozen. A mixture of fear and rage tore through him.

Leo leaned forward, grabbing his shoulder. “Alpha, what’s going on?”

“Why did you wait so long before telling me?” he whispered into the phone, trying to keep his composure.

“She didn’t want to tell you,” Max started.

“And you listened to her?” Kent nearly yelled. Why was she still so hell-bent on keeping things a secret from

him? His chest ached at the thought that she still didn’t trust him.

“She pointed out that you would have abandoned the alliance if you knew. You would have come straight

back.”

“Of course I would have,” Kent roared into the phone. Leo’s hand fell away and he backed up against the door. “She’s my f*****g

mate!”

“And we needed this alliance, Kent!” Max yelled back. “You would have let your emotions cloud your judgement. We have to put the safety of the pack above all else.”

“I have sacrificed everything for my pack!” Kent screamed. “I have given up most of my life for my pack! I will

2/3

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not sacrifice her too!”

There was a long silence on the other end.

“I was just trying to do what was right,” Max finally said, his voice soft.

“If she dies, I will never forgive you.” Kent barely even registered that he was crying.

“I know,” Max whispered. “Please just get home.”

“I’m going to f*****g rip your throat out when I get there. Pat’s too.”

“Noted, Alpha.”

+8 Points >

Kent ended the phone call, staring at the floor for a moment, his breath shuddering out of him. He felt a hand

on his shoulder and looked up to see Leo watching him.

“I can be ready to go in ten minutes,” Leo said calmly. “You can tell me in the car.”

1

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 38[860 words]

Chapter 38

Riley was laying in the hospital bed, watching the heart monitor beside her. She had *no* medical training, but she was pretty sure that what she was watching was bad. She curled her hands into fists, digging her nails into her palms so hard she wouldn’t have been surprised to find herself bleeding. She desperately wanted to see Kent and her resolve about not calling him was crumbling.

She had been taken down for test after test all day. Lana came in repeatedly to check on her, but with no news. The pain and nausea were getting worse and no medication seemed to take the edge off. Rose was completely unreachable and Riley was worried. The last time she had *gone* this *long* without talking to Rose was right after Paul rejected her.

The door opened and Patrick walked in, carrying a plate of toast and a cup of applesauce.

“You’re awake,” he noted with a small smile, walking over to set the food *on* the table *beside* her. “You were sleeping when I stopped by earlier.”

“What time is it?” she asked, sitting up.

Patrick reached over and adjusted a pillow behind her so she could sit up comfortably. “Around eight in the evening.”

She shook her head. “I remember going for the tests right after lunch, but that’s it. Did Lana get any answers?”

“I don’t know,” he said, sitting down in a chair beside her bed. “I didn’t see her on my way in. Angie gave me the food to bring in. I’ll mindlink her to come give you an update.” His eyes glazed over for a moment before focusing back on her. “She said to give her five minutes.”

She nodded. “Thanks.”

“How are you feeling?”

She sighed. “I’ve felt better.”

“Can I call Kent yet?”

She looked at him. His face was impassive. “Is the alliance taken care of?”

He looked at her for a long moment. “It wasn’t when Max spoke to him this morning.”

“When it is taken care of, *you* can tell him.” She sounded more sure than she felt.

“Riley,” Patrick said, his voice hitching slightly, “do you realize how sick you are? He would want to be here. He already lost one mate and that nearly killed him. Don’t you realize that’s why he didn’t want to leave you? The thought of losing you is eating him up.”

She bit her lip, looking away, desperately not wanting to cry in front of Patrick.

The door to the room opened and Lana stepped in. She looked between Patrick and Riley for a moment before shaking her head.

“Pat, *now* is not the time to be upsetting her,” she chided gently, walking closer to Riley.

“I wasn’t trying to,” he muttered, rubbing his face with both hands.

1/2

< Chapter 38

+8 Points

Riley took a deep breath, composing herself before looking at the doctor. “What have the tests shown?”

Lana pursed her lips. “Nothing. They’ve shown me absolutely nothing.” Riley felt her stomach drop. “Your heart rate is too high, Riley. It’s been elevated since you came in last night and no medication is touching it. I’m worried that it can’t keep working at this rate, especially with your wolf being unreachable.”

“What happens if it doesn’t come down?” Riley asked.

Lana glanced at Patrick and then back. “Your heart could give out.”

Riley felt like someone had stolen the air from the room. Her whole body started to shake and tears pricked her eyes. Patrick stood up, grabbing her hand, his face pinched.

“I’ve already spoken to Wesley,” Lana said. “We’re calling your commander in the morning to request an emergency transfer to the Council hospital. I think they will have the facilities to figure this out.”

Riley swallowed, a tear escaping and running down her cheek. She looked over at Patrick. “Please call Kent.”

He nodded, a look of relief washing over him. “I’ll call him right away.”

The door to the room opened suddenly and Max stepped in, taking in the scene before him, his face strained.

“Hey,” Max muttered, “this probably isn’t the best moment, but I needed to talk to Riley.”

“She wants us to call Kent,” Patrick said, letting go of her hand to take a step towards Max.

“Well, good,” Max said with a terse nod, a muscle in his cheek jumping as he looked at Riley, “because I just got off the phone with him. They just finished signing the papers for the alliance.”

“Did you tell him about Riley?” Patrick asked.

Max nodded, rubbing the back of his neck. “I did.” He looked at Riley. “You said you didn’t want him to know until the alliance was handled. Since it was done, I figured it was time. He’s on his way.”

She felt relief wash over her. The thought of seeing him soon brought her some comfort.

“Was he upset?” Patrick asked quietly.

“I think so.” Max shrugged, sighing heavily. “He said he’s going to rip both our throats out for not telling him sooner, so I guess we have that to look forward to.”

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An Unwanted Second Chance Ripped 39[1,539 words]

Riley woke up to see Lana checking her monitors. Lana’s face was pale, her eyes narrowed as she considered. the screens, absently rubbing her stomach.

“Hey,” Lana said when she realized Riley was awake, “how are you feeling?”

“Pretty bad, actually.” Riley licked her chapped lips. “What time is it?”

“Around 6:30 in the morning.” Lana looked back at the monitors. “I couldn’t sleep last night so I decided to come over early and check on you.”

“I’m sorry,” Riley whispered.

Lana frowned. “Don’t apologize. You’re the one who is sick.” She looked back at Riley. “Wesley and I have a call scheduled at eight with the commander.”

“Is Kent here yet?”

Lana shook her head. “Not yet. Hopefully within the hour. Patrick said they were driving through the night but it’s still a long drive.”

“I hope he gets here soon,” Riley murmured.

“How’s your pain?”

“Awful,” Riley replied. “The medicine isn’t doing anything.”

Lana sighed. “I can’t...”

“Where the hell is she?!”

Both Lana and Riley looked towards the door.

“Well, it appears Alpha is here,” Lana said with a heavy sigh.

“You should have f*****g called me the minute she was brought here,” he was yelling as he approached. “I told you to call *me* immediately!”

“Kent, she asked...” Max tried to interject.

“I don’t care what she f*****g asked you to do!” he roared, just outside the door. “I am your alpha and you listen to me!”

The door flung open and there stood a very haggard Kent. His black hair was a mess and there were deep bags under his eyes. His eyes were wide and black with rage, but as his sandalwood scent filled the room, Riley was sure that she had never felt such relief.

Max, Patrick, Leo and Wesley were all a step behind him.

Kent stood a step inside the door for a moment and the anger quickly disappeared, his forehead furrowing as he looked at her. In three strides, Kent crossed the room, cupping Riley’s face between his hands. Tingles erupted from his touch and she sighed softly. Up close she could see his eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks and chin covered in a day’s worth of beard growth.

He leaned down, brushing his lip gently against hers and Rose stirred in her mind.

< Chapter 39

Mate is here, Rose whispered weakly.

“What happened?” Kent murmured. “I can’t leave for a day without you falling apart.”

She smiled weakly. “I just started feeling worse.”

He shook his head. “I told you I shouldn’t have gone. I knew something was going to happen.”

“You couldn’t have prevented this,” she replied, reaching up to pull his hands from her face.

“I still should have been called right away,” he insisted. “I should have been told the moment you were brought here. I don’t know how you keep getting these fools to do what you want.”

She shrugged. “They must like me more than you.”

He rolled his eyes. “I should have been called. I would have been here right away.”

* Fords

“That’s exactly why I didn’t want you to know,” she said, frowning at him. “Your pack’s safety is the most important thing here. You needed that alliance. You need those warriors. You can’t blow that just because

you’re being emotional.”

He narrowed his eyes. “I’m not emotional.”

She scoffed. “Right, because you’ve done such a good job at proving that to me over the last week.”

“Stop arguing,” Lana said suddenly.

“We’re not arguing,” Kent grumbled, looking up.

“Yeah you were,” Max muttered from the door.

Lana paid no attention, watching the monitors intently.

“What is it?” Kent asked.

“Her heart rate is coming down,” Lana replied. “It’s been highly elevated since she came in and no meds were getting it to come down, but it’s been dropping over the last couple minutes. It’s completely within a normal range now.” She looked at Riley for a moment.

“Your color is looking better *too*. How do you feel right now?”

Riley took stock of her body. She had been so focused on Kent that she barely noticed how she felt.

“I feel way better.” She looked up at Lana. “My wolf even spoke to me a moment ago.”

“So she woke up better today?” Leo asked from the doorway.

“No.” Lana shook her head. “I was in here right before you guys came. Everything was looking even worse.”

She told me she felt awful.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Kent said.

Lana stared at the monitor for a moment, then at Riley, and then at Kent. Finally she looked back at Riley.

“Have you ever felt sick when you’re around the alpha?”

Riley thought about it for a moment. “I don’t recall.” She looked at Kent for a moment. “I guess not, no.”

Kent looked down at Riley for a long moment. “You have always told me you’re starting to feel better when I’m around. I just assumed you were pretending so I would leave it alone.”

2/4

< Chapter 39

+8 Points >

“Remember when we ran the perimeter,” Patrick said, leaning against the wall, looking at Riley. “You had trouble shifting, you felt ill and tired for most of that run. You couldn’t shift back until Kent came over. Then the next thing I know, you were ready to spar him. You said you felt fine, but once he got mad and walked away, you felt sick again.”

Riley opened her mouth to reply, but realized she didn’t know what to say. She looked at Kent again and then

back to Lana.

“What does that mean?” she asked.

“Well,” Lana said, “I can’t be sure, but if I were to go out on a limb, I would say that this illness has something to do with the mate bond. You only feel sick away from your mate, then he must be the key to you getting

better.”

“How can you be sure?” Riley asked.

“I can’t,” Lana answered. “But it makes sense. Your body and soul are *connected*. Your emotions, your mental

wellbeing, all of that plays a role in your physical health. We all know how weaker wolves can die from

rejection or death of a mate. You two more than anyone understand that.” Lana tapped *her* chin. “Tell me, how did you feel physically following your rejection?”

Riley closed her eyes, wishing she could stop revisiting this subject. Kent *reached* out, cupping her face with his palm and she turned her head into his hand, kissing his palm.

“I thought I was dying. I felt like someone was trying to split my chest open. I could barely walk. I didn’t eat. I

felt so weak.” She looked up at Kent, realization striking her. “It’s the way I’ve been feeling lately.”

“I’m going to suggest a test,” Lana said. “Let the alpha stay in the room for a part of the day. If you continue

to improve, we’ll have him leave for a few hours. If you start to get worse with him gone, then we’ll know this

is all connected to him.”

Riley looked at Kent for a long moment before nodding. “We can try that.”

Lana nodded and looked up to the doorway. “Wesley, when we call the commander, we’ll let him know we think she’s turned a *corner*. We can always revisit the topic of a transfer later if we need it.”

“Sounds good,” Wesley said, folding his arms over his chest.

“Let’s clear out,” Lana said *to* the other men. “I’ll come back and check on you in a little bit,” she said to Riley.

Kent and Riley watched everyone walk out, Max closing the door as he left last. Kent looked down at Riley

and raised an eyebrow.

“See, you need me.”

She rolled her eyes. “Goddess help me.”

He laughed and leaned down to kiss her forehead. “Scoot over,” he whispered. I haven’t slept in over a day. I’m about to pass out.”

Riley obliged, sliding over to make space so Kent could climb into the bed. He stretched out next to her and she curled up against him. He wrapped his arm around her shoulder, her head resting on his chest.

“Tell me about the visit to New Dawn,” she murmured.

He rubbed her arm absently. “I wanted to kill that f*****g alpha.”

3/4

Chapter 39

“I take it he ran his mouth,” she said, turning her face so she could *look* at him.

+8 Points >

“Ran it?!” he exclaimed. “He never stopped talking. He didn’t just talk about you but every woman he’s f*****d. He thinks himself quite the ladies man. I don’t know what you saw in him.”

She shrugged. “Broad shoulders. Nice eyes. A really big...”

“Careful,” he growled, squeezing her shoulders. “Don’t anger the man who holds the key to your health.”

She giggled. “I’d hate to see what happens.” He smiled at her. “Did you at least get the alliance all taken care

of?”

“Yeah,” he muttered, “we took care of that in between all the stories of his s**** escapades.”

She smiled. “I missed you.”

He kissed her forehead again. “I missed you too.”

2

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Chapter 40

After lunch, Lana came in to establish that all of Riley's vitals had returned to normal. Riley had felt progressively better as the morning went on. She had spent part of the time napping in the bed with Kent. They had eaten lunch together, Riley scarfing down her toast and applesauce before stealing bites of Kent's lunch as well. He had pretended to complain as she snuck his food, but smiled as he watched her eat. When Lana tried to make Kent leave, he initially resisted, insisting that if Riley was better with him around, then he shouldn't leave. Lana did finally manage to persuade him, but he insisted he would not leave the hospital. He even refused to leave the same floor, insisting he needed to be close in case she got sick again. He agreed to meet with Max, Patrick and Wesley to discuss the alliance and what that meant for their defenses, but only as long as someone he trusted sat with Riley.

That was how Leo came to be sitting in a chair beside Riley's hospital bed. Since he had been a part of establishing the alliance, he didn't have to be in the meeting. Also, Kent insisted that *Leo* was probably the only person who hadn't lied to him about Riley so he could trust him more than anyone else.

"Tell me about the visit to New Dawn," Riley said to Leo, wanting more information than the little Kent had shared.

"It was pretty standard for an alliance meeting. It all went textbook perfect." He rubbed his chin. "Well, except for that part where you apparently slept with the alpha at New Dawn and he decided to tell us about it."

Riley felt her face flush. "You knew about that."

"I didn't know it was the alpha," he muttered, looking amused. "Believe it or not, Leah doesn't share every juicy detail you tell her."

"Thank the Goddess."

He smirked. "I have no idea how Kent didn't rip his throat out. Did he have any idea going into that meeting?"

“Yeah.” Riley sighed. “I told him. I know how Jake can be and I had no doubt he would say what he did. I knew Kent *needed* a fair warning.”

Leo shook his head. “If I heard someone talking about Leah the way he was talking about you, that would have been the last thing he said.”

She blushed again. She rubbed her temples, leaning back into the pillows.

“Not feeling so good?” Leo asked.

“My head is starting to hurt.”

“Wow” he muttered, “your mate’s been gone a whole fifteen minutes and you already don’t feel good. I think the doctor might be right. Did you feel sick at all this morning when he was with you?”

“No,” she sighed. “I felt better than I have in days, actually.”

Leo looked at his hands for a minute before looking up again. “Why didn’t you tell me that you’ve been sick?”

Riley looked up at the ceiling. I didn’t want anyone to know I was sick at all. I was already asking everyone to keep information from the council, from their pack members and elders.” She shook her head. “I didn’t even want Kent to know at first, It was Patrick who figured it out.”

1/3

Chapter 40

“Oh, I got the whole story,” Leo said, stretching his legs out. “Kent raged for the first half of the drive back

about you keeping important things from him. And I guess you’ve managed to get both the gamma and beta to hide things as well.”

She turned her head to look at him. “I should have just been upfront, but I couldn’t let him blow that alliance.”

“You still could have told me. You’re one of my best friends. I would have liked to know.”

She felt her eyes start to sting and blinked, looking away. “I’m sorry. I just didn’t want to tell the council.”

“Well, the council found out anyway, so I guess that didn’t work out.”

“Do you know how Wesley’s conversation with the commander went this morning?”

He nodded. “Whey is willing to give you three more days. If you make a full recovery, you’re fine to stay.”

“Did Wes tell him about Kent?”

Leo rubbed his chin. “No. We talked about it briefly before he called, but he didn’t want to say anything without talking to you first.”

“Good.” She sank back into the pillows, closing her eyes against the throb of pain that went through her head.

“What happens when the commander finds out? You have to tell him eventually.”

She opened her eyes to find Leo watching her. “Who said I have to tell him?”

He frowned, his forehead creasing. “You have to tell the Council that you’ve found your mate, eventually. With a mate as high ranking as an alpha, there will be a discussion about your ability to maintain your position.

You can’t just hide that you’re mated to an alpha and are going to be the luna of a pack.”

“You’re assuming I’m going to decide to accept this bond,” she stated simply.

Leo opened his mouth as though to speak but no words came out. Finally he shook his head.

“You can’t be serious right now. You can’t still be thinking about rejecting that man. All he did during our trip

was talk about you and ask about you. He wanted to know all the details I would tell him. Then when he

found out you were sick, he drove like a mad man. He refused to sleep, refused to talk about anything except

what might be happening. Riley, that man loves you.”

She shook her head hard. “No, he doesn’t.” But really her heart was hammering in her chest so hard it hurt.

Could he really care for her that much?

“I’d put money on it,” he snapped. “You can’t just brush him off like his feelings don’t matter.”

She looked away, swallowing hard. “And what about what I want?”

“Ok,” Leo said sharply. “Let’s talk about that. How do you feel about him? And don’t lie. Because I see the way

your face lights up when you see him. I’ve known you for nine years and I’ve never seen you like this about

anyone.”

She stared at him for a long moment before a deep ache flashed across her chest and she flinched. She rolled to her side, pulling her knees up, suddenly crying.

“Shit.” Leo was out of his chair and beside her in an instant. “I didn’t mean to upset you like that.”

“You don’t get it,” she whispered, trying to wipe her face. “You don’t understand what it is like to love

< Chapter 40

+8 Points

someone, to have your whole world revolve around them and then have them toss you aside. I can’t do that again. I was willing to give up everything for my last mate and it meant nothing to him. I lost everyone I loved in an instant. Not only did he reject me, but my alpha banished me. Remember how I came unbacked to the academy? He thought I would fail and he told me as much. The alpha ordered my rejection and then kicked me out of the only home I’d ever known and my mate didn’t even bat an eye.”

Leo leaned down, brushing the tears off her cheek. “But that wasn’t Kent. That was someone else. Someone stupid enough to not realize how lucky he was. Your previous mate was an asshole and your previous alpha sounds f*****g terrible. But he’s not them. I’ve been working with this man for two months. He’s a good alpha. He’s a good person. And I’m worried that if you keep fighting this *bond*, it’s going to kill you.”

The door burst open and Leo straightened up as Kent rushed in.

“What happened?” he demanded.

Lana followed him in. “Alpha, you’re supposed to stay away for at least three hours. That’s what we agreed. But it’s barely been half an hour.”

Kent wheeled around to face her. “I know that but I felt her pain through the bond. I had *to* come check.” He turned back to Leo. “Why is she crying?”

“We were talking,” Leo explained. “She got upset.”

“Why did you upset her?” Kent yelled, coming closer.

Leo put his hands up and looked at Riley in a way that suggested he knew he was right about Kent.

“Stop yelling at him,” Riley said to Kent. “He didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Alpha,” Lana said, sounding exasperated, “you have to stay away so we can confirm my theory.”

“Don’t bother,” Riley said with a sigh, sitting up. “I was starting to feel pretty bad again but now that he’s here,

I feel fine.”

“Then either I stay or she *comes* with me,” Kent said firmly. “Clearly she’s going to be sick unless I’m close. Until we can figure out how to make this stop, she needs to stay with me.”

“What do you want, Riley?” Lana asked. “Would you prefer to stay here longer or would you rather return to the pack house with Kent?”

Riley looked at Kent for a long moment. “I’ll go back to the pack house.”

He smiled slightly.

“Alright then,” Lana said. “Let me write up the discharge. I want you to come back tomorrow for a check up. I’ll have Angie bring your clothes in and help you get changed.” She looked at Kent. “Alpha, a word.” They walked into the hall, leaving Riley alone with Leo.

“Give him a chance,” Leo said. “That’s all I ask.”

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