

Chapter 4

Riley awoke with a jolt, gasping as she sat up sharply. Her forehead was covered in a cold sweat, her mouth dry.

"You ok?" Max reached over to touch her arm lightly.

"Yeah," Riley said, swallowing hard. "It was just a dream."

She looked out the car window. They were on a narrow road with nothing but trees on either side. The sun had sunk well behind the trees, leaving the road shady and dark. She watched the trees fly past, trying to shake the images of Paul. She hadn't dreamed of him in years, but his face was as clear as if she had just seen him yesterday. She wrapped her arms around her chest, trying to shake the coldness that spread over her at the memory of him.

"We're almost there." She could hear the concern in his voice as Max glanced at her.

"I'm fine," she muttered, trying to reassure herself as much as him. "It was just a bad dream."

"You were talking," he admitted. "You kept saying a name, over and over."

"Paul?"

He nodded.

"He's just a bad memory." She closed her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath. "How much further?"

"We're here." He smiled as the woods thinned and they entered a small town. She could just make out the quaint town with small homes and shops in the last bits of sunlight.

"This is a cute town," she commented as they moved down the roads.

"It is," Max agreed.

She spotted the packhouse as they approached. It was five stories high, painted in soft beiges with forest green trim. It had a wide set of stairs leading up to a double door entrance.

"This is lovely," Riley remarked as they pulled in. She was used to smaller, remote packs being a bit worn down and outdated, but Red Moon was clearly different.

"Alpha's father had it remodeled when we were still boys. The first two floors are things for the pack - dining room, recreation area, gym and what not. The third floor is for guests and the fourth floor is split between the beta and gamma wings. The fifth floor is for the alpha."

"What about the warriors?"

"There is an addition on the back for it. You can't see it from here but it sticks out to make an L-shape. It's two stories high. All of the unmated warriors live there."

"Sounds like you guys have a a good set up."

They climbed out of the car and Max unloaded her suitcase. His eyes glazed over and she knew he was mindlinking his alpha.

When werewolves lived within a pack, they had the ability to connect directly through mindlink as long as they were within a certain distance, eliminating the need for things like cell phones most of the time. Riley had lost her ability to mindlink when she had left her pack behind, but found it was not something she missed.

“Alpha is currently in a meeting with your advisor and head warrior as well as our gamma. He asked that you be briefed before going to your room.”

She nodded. “That’s fine.”

He smiled. “Good, because I don’t exactly have your rooming situation figured out. We’re a bit overrun with guests due to our situation. All our allies have sent warriors and we’re struggling to house them all.”

Riley frowned. "Doesn't the luna usually handle lodging and accommodations for guests?"

"Yeah, but we don't have a luna. My mate took over as the alpha's assistant a few years ago and she usually handles these things, but Evan has the flu and she's been occupied the last couple days."

Riley shook her head. "The commander said there wasn't a luna. I just forgot."

"Easy enough to forget," Max mumbled, moving up the steps. "Most packs have one."

There was something about Max's tone that stuck out to Riley, but she couldn't place it. Before she could put too much thought, Rose woke up and began pacing in her mind, making Riley feel slightly nauseous.

"Are you ok?"

She turned to see Max watching her from the top of the stairs, two lines creasing his

top of the stairs, two lines creasing his forehead.

"Yeah," she muttered with a shake of her head. "I'm just tired. I just got back from an assignment yesterday and I don't usually take assignments back to back like this."

Max nodded. "Your commander mentioned that. If you need to rest, I can tell Alpha. He'll understand. It's almost eight."

"No, let's not keep him waiting. I'll be fine." She started up the steps, trying to ignore Rose.

"Alright, boss," Max said with a shrug. He led the way into the packhouse. The double doors opened to a wide lobby full of couches and chairs. There were some pack members sitting in the space, talking quietly. He led her across the lobby to an elevator. Once inside, he punched the button for the fifth floor.

Riley rubbed her temples. Rose's pacing was relentless and she was panting. Riley was

having a hard time focusing on anything else.

What is wrong with you? Riley demanded.

I don't know, Rose answered. I can't explain it but something is going to happen.

"Are you sure you're ok?" Max asked again as the elevator doors slid open. They stepped into a wide hallway with white wainscoting and burgundy walls. In front of them was a set of wooden double doors. The hallway had several doorways that Riley could only assume were bedrooms as well as a small sitting room off to one side.

"Yes," she replied, shaking her head slightly. "I'm fine. My wolf is acting strange. I think she's overtired."

"We don't have to do the meeting right now," Max insisted. "You can rest and I'll ask my mom to cook something up for you. She's the head cook now and she won't mind in the least."

"Please stop," she said, sounding harsher than she meant. She took a deep breath, trying to calm her voice. "I'm fine, honestly. I want to meet the alpha tonight."

He chewed the corner of his mouth for a moment before nodding. "Ok then."

Max pushed open one of the wooden double doors in front of them and she followed him into the room. The office was huge, done in the same white and burgundy walls as the hallway. There was a large cherry desk set opposite the double doors. Behind the desk were several sets of cherry bookcases and on either side of the bookcases were large floor to ceiling windows. On the right were four large black leather armchairs and on the left was a large leather couch.

Riley was immediately struck by the smell of sandalwood and pine. The smell was so powerful, so alluring that it rooted her to the spot.

She barely registered Wesley and Leo, sitting in armchairs to her right or the man leaning back on the couch to her left. Her eyes flew immediately to the man behind the desk, who stood up as they walked in.

He was clearly the alpha. He was tall with jet black hair that was brushed back from his face. He was muscular, his light blue polo stretched taut across his chest and biceps. His eyes turned black as he looked at her, his hands curling around the edge of his desk. She could see the veins in his forearms pulse as his eyes widened.

He was the source of the alluring smell. Her eyes felt glued to him, her heart pounding in her chest. She wanted to run to him, to touch him, to breathe him in. But at the same time, she felt rooted to the spot, unable to move in any direction.

Mate! Mate! Mate! cried Rose.

"No," whispered Riley.

"NO!" The alpha's voice boomed through the room, causing the other men to start slightly, surprise splashing across all their faces.

"Alpha?" said that man on the couch. "Are you ok?"

The alpha's mouth turned down, his arms trembling as he tightened his grip on the desk even more. Riley couldn't look away from him, her body humming, her mind racing as Rose pranced about declaring this man their mate.

"Alpha," Wesley said cautiously, "this is Riley Atwood. She's the best advisor from the Council. She's the one you requested."

"NO!" the alpha roared, his eyes getting even darker with anger, though Riley wasn't sure how that was possible. "GET OUT!"

Leo stood, his face a mixture of shock and confusion. "Alpha, you can't order her out. She's the one you requested. You specifically asked for her."

“Not her,” growled the alpha. “The rest of you - get out.”

Max grabbed Riley's elbow. “I'm not sure what's going on, but maybe you should come with me.” He tried to steer her away but the alpha growled again.

“She stays,” he boomed. “The rest of you - GET OUT!”

Max immediately released her arm and turned to leave, unable to disobey his alpha's order. The man from the couch, likewise moved to leave. Wesley and Leo hesitantly moved towards Riley.

“Are you ok, Riley?” Wesley whispered as he approached.

“We can stay with you,” Leo offered, gently taking her wrist. She finally tore her gaze away from the alpha to look at her friend. Leo had short sandy brown hair and light brown eyes with a sharp nose.

short sandy brown hair and light brown eyes with a sharp nose.

She shook her head. "I'll be fine," she managed to say, her voice sounding raw. "It will be fine. You can go."

They both moved away from her, casting wary glances at the alpha. She turned to watch them go, nodding in what she hoped was a reassuring way. As the door shut behind the two of them, she turned to face her mate.

Chapter 5