

## Chapter 42

28 - Kennedy

At one point the ball is kicked out of bounds towards us and she jumps up and stops it easily. This kid has natural skills that are being wasted sitting around waiting for her turn.

A boy just a few years younger than me runs over. "Hey, Em, thanks for the stop. Who's your new friend?" I stand as the boy eyes me up and down. He doesn't wait for a response. "I'm Todd, Emily's brother. And you are?" He lets the question hang while giving me a smile that must work on girls his age.

I laugh a little under my breath and extend my hand. "Kennedy, one of Alpha Jeremiah's warriors. Nice to meet you."

"Oh, man. That's awesome. We're in training too." He points to himself, then randomly behind him. 1

"When do you guys usually train?"

"This afternoon. The Alpha likes to train with his warriors on Saturdays so no one is allowed in the training grounds until he's done."

"So you guys usually come out here and play while you wait?"

"Yeah, most of the time."

"How often do you work with the littles? I mean, if you're out here that long, you must spend a lot of time teaching them too." I'm baiting him now. My guess is they do nothing of the sort and they regularly dismiss and ignore these kids who seem to be enamored with them.

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I raise an eyebrow at him. "So you're telling me that at, how old are you?" I look at Emily.

"Seven."

"That at seven, you were too little to play and you and all your friends just sat around waiting to be told you were good enough to join in? Or did you take the time to practice and get better and work with kids older and better than you so you could get better?"

"Uh..."

"What I thought. From one warrior to another. The next generation can't get better if you don't teach them. Not everything can just be watched and picked up. They don't have to be included all the time, but just think about it when you have a whole pack of them just sitting here." I wave up and down the sidelines. "Or, if you have an intense game where they could really get hurt, give them something to do while they are here hanging out, something that will actually make them better, not just keep them busy. If you want to be a true warrior you have to learn to pass on your training. Act like a leader, even if you don't want to be one."

"Okay." He looks at the ground kicking at the dirt.

"I didn't mean to overstep. I just know what it's like to be overlooked and underestimated. How about this? Can we join you for a quick game? I have no idea how to play, and I would love to learn, but I don't have long before I have to go join morning training."

"You're training with the Alpha?"

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"Yeah. I told you, the only way to get better is to practice with people who are better than you and to work." I wink at him and reach out for Emily's hand. "You, Em, are on my team. I'm going to need you to be really patient, okay, I have no clue what I am doing." She just grabs my hand and giggles as she drags me on to the makeshift field.

"I guess we're doing that then." Todd grumbles, and the rest of the guys look irritated too. I kind of feel bad for highjacking their game, but at the same time I don't. They just like things to stay the same and focused on them, it's the age group. I train a set of them back home.

"I only have ten minutes, so we have to make this quick alright." I look at Emily, but I'm talking to the older kids.

"Do you want everyone to pair up?" Todd asks.

"Sure, if they want. I'm sure there's a few of them that could hold their own. I am not one of those people though and I'm going to follow Emily around while she schools all of you." I laugh at the look on her face and then Todd laughs when she says she's coming for him.

Now we're on the right track. It's supposed to be fun. We start the game and it is way faster than it looks sitting on the sidelines. Like I thought, Emily is a natural and a beast and she took advantage of these boys 'just playing around' the first couple minutes of our game. Once she scored a goal and informed the goalie he was a weak pansy, and what he needed to do to not suck so bad, then it got real. Most of the teens had a smaller kid with them and they were working in pairs to move the ball. And true to her word, Emily was patient with me, but being the smart strategist that I

am, I just passed her the ball more often than not.

She did set me up to score a goal, which the goalie stroked my ego and let it go in, I'm convinced.

I looked down at my watch. "I have to run, but this was a ton of fun. The next time I'm in town, I will totally join again. Now, I need someone to point me to the fastest route to the training grounds, so I'm not late."

"We can show you, if you want." Todd jumps in eagerly, then clears his throat. "I mean, we need to do our morning run anyway. We could get that in and show you at the same time." He shrugs like it's no big deal.

It's not lost on me that they have been 'running' all morning playing soccer.

"Sure, that would be great! Running in a pack is more fun anyway."

They all smile at me. I guess it's a party then.

They all just drop any extra stuff in a pile next to the field, I guess no one is really going to mess with it, and we take off. Even Emily and the littles joined in. With the shortcut the kids showed me, the jog was only like five minutes, but we came in like celebrities, laughing and chatting away.