

## Alpha Reid Chapter 2 - 3

### REID

"You'd better have a good reason for calling us over this early," Theo yawns as he steps over the threshold into my packhouse. He and Jax are the last to arrive- Gray and Brock are already here. I sent out a text last night telling them we needed to meet this morning, and considering I don't make requests like this often, they all showed up, no questions asked.

"He's got coffee," Gray calls from the kitchen, holding up the pot. Theo scrubs a hand over his face. "Thank fuck."

I roll my eyes, clapping him on the shoulder and leading him and Jax into the kitchen where Brock is sipping on a cup of coffee and Gray is filling a few more for the rest of us.

"You gonna tell us what's so urgent, or are you gonna keep us hanging?" Jax groans, posting up against the kitchen counter. He's got dark circles under his eyes and his hair is disheveled- I'm guessing he stayed up too late and drank too much at the post-run celebration last night.

"I'll get to it," I chuckle, stepping past him and pulling open a cabinet. I reach in to retrieve a bottle of Crown, handing it over to Jax. "Hair of the dog?"

Jax shrugs, unscrewing the cap on the bottle and reaching for one of the full mugs of coffee in front of Gray. "Fuck it, might as well."

He splashes some liquor into his coffee, setting the bottle on the counter. I reach for it, adding some to my own coffee, which immediately piques his interest.

"Shit, if the news you're gonna deliver has *you* drinking, then I'll definitely need some more," Jax grumbles, taking the bottle back from me and splashing more in his mug.

"Think we're all gonna need some," I murmur, sliding my gaze around to the others as I bring my coffee to my lips and take a sip.

Gray arches a brow, studying me. "What's going on, Reid?"

I swallow down the hot beverage, lowering my cup and heaving a sigh. "Can we sit?" I ask, ticking my head toward the living room.

The other guys nod and follow me in, and we all sink down onto the comfortable leather furniture, forming a semi-circle. They look to me expectantly as I take another sip of my spiked coffee, searching for how to begin.

It doesn't help that I'm fucking exhausted, myself. I had trouble falling asleep last night because I couldn't stop thinking about Serena, wondering who she is and what she's like. My wolf wouldn't settle down, either, knowing that our mate was in the room next door. He was still all jacked up from finding her, and by the time he calmed down and I quieted my own mind, I got maybe an hour of sleep in before being awoken by Serena's screams. I bolted out of bed and tried to go to her, but the door to her room was locked. I came close to busting the damn thing down, but then her screams dissipated and I heard her breathing even out, and I came to the realization that she must've been dreaming, so I went back to bed.

Her nightmares from the next room woke me up twice more throughout the night. I know it sounds crazy since I don't even know the girl, but it physically pained me to not go to her and comfort her. Thanks to the mate bond, I'm hardwired to protect and console Serena. Staying away while she was in distress drove my wolf crazy, but the last thing I

want to do is scare her off by coming on too strong, too fast. I just found her; I don't want to lose her.

I heave a sigh, leaning forward to set my mug on the coffee table in front of me. "The alert at the border last night," I grind out, resting my elbows on my knees and looking around at the guys. "It was a wolf. Another shifter."

"What?" Theo blurts.

"Who?" Gray demands.

I hold up a hand, drawing a breath and giving them a stern look. "Just listen. She said she was abducted by the shadow pack, but she got away. I don't know all the details yet, but I brought her back here last night, and I intend to find out more when I talk to her today."

Gray shoots to his feet, raising his voice. "Wait, what?!"

Theo's eyes fly wide. "And you invited her here?"

"What were you thinking?" Brock groans, scrubbing a hand over his face.

Jax looks around to the others. "She's obviously a spy, right?" he asks dubiously.

"The timing's a little too fucking convenient," Theo scoffs.

"Whoa whoa, we know how many packs they've attacked, we know they take prisoners," I say, turning to Brock. "You of all people should understand, your girl was taken as one."

He shakes his head. "That's different, we knew Astrid before she was taken."

"Yeah, who is this girl anyways?" Jax challenges. "What do you know about her?"

I blow out a breath, shaking my head. "Just her name. Serena Harper."

Brock furrows his brow. "Harper... why does that sound familiar?"

My eyebrows shoot up. "Does it?" I feel a flicker of hope, realizing that I, too, have been pretty damn suspicious of Serena since meeting her. But if Brock recognizes her name, maybe her story is legitimate after all...

"Pretty sure I knew a Brendan Harper back in Wyoming," Brock growls, taking a sip of his coffee. He swallows it down before continuing. "He was about my age. Moved up to Alpha of his pack right around the time I was leaving."

Jax squints, tilting his head. "Wasn't a pack attacked in Wyoming shortly before the shadow pack made it to Denver? I think I remember Quinn saying something about it..."

"I'll get Brooke on it, see what IT can find on her and if they can make the connection,"

Theo offers. "See if her story checks out."

I heave a sigh- I didn't even realize I'd been holding my breath. Holding out hope. Fuck, I hope Brock's right about her last name. I hope her story checks out and her intentions are pure in coming here. I hope there's a chance for us.

"Until then, what should we do with her?" Brock asks, arching a brow.

Gray sinks back down onto the couch and shoots me a side-eyed glance. "We've got holding cells..."

"No." I shake my head adamantly, my agitation evident in my voice and eyes as my wolf pushes forward. "Absolutely not. She's not a prisoner, she's a victim. I'm not gonna throw her in a cell somewhere."

The other guys quiet, but Gray speaks up again. "Then she's your responsibility, man."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I ask defensively, throwing him a glare.

"Keep eyes on her until we can determine whether she's a threat," Brock supplies.

I turn to him, nodding. Calming my wolf and keeping my cool. "Fine, yeah. I can do that."

A silence falls over the room as the guys exchange glances, the tension between the five of us palpable. I wasn't intending to get so defensive over Serena, but I couldn't help myself; it was a knee-jerk reaction.

"What aren't you telling us?" Gray finally asks, narrowing his eyes.

I should've known that I wouldn't be able to get anything past him. He's more perceptive than the others, and he's the most like me- so he knows I wouldn't be reckless without good reason. And given the fact that Serena showed up out of nowhere on the eve of a war with the shadow pack, my blind defensiveness of her is definitely reckless.

I suck in a breath, my gaze sliding between my four friends. "She's my mate."

The room goes quiet again- so silent that you could hear a pin drop. I look from Gray, to Theo, to Jax, to Brock, waiting for someone to say something. *Anything.*

"Dude!" Jax exclaims, breaking the silence. His mouth spreads into a wide grin. "You found her!" He springs to his feet, approaching me and offering me a fist bump.

"Yeah," I sigh with a sly smile, rising to stand and knocking his fist with mine.

The other guys get to their feet, crowding around me.

"Congrats, man," Brock grumbles, slapping me on the back.

"About damn time," Theo teases as he nudges me, his trademark smirk on his lips.

Gray claps me on the shoulder. "Congratulations, bro," he says, offering a supportive smile. "We can't wait to meet her."

"I appreciate it," I breathe, glancing around at my friends. "Trust me, guys, I know how fucked this situation is. I'm just trying to figure out how to navigate it."

They nod somberly.

"Anyone else want some Crown in their coffee, now?" I joke, raising my brows in question.

It does help to lighten the mood- the others chuckle, scooping up their coffee mugs and following me into the kitchen for refills. We're all topping off our cups when that scent hits my nose- vanilla, tangerine, honey. I immediately look to the stairs to see Serena descending them, barefoot and clad only in the black cotton t-shirt that I gave her last night, her long, slender legs on display. Her ginger hair is damp and swept over one shoulder, and as soon as her bright blue eyes collide with mine, all the air whooshes out of my body.

She's stunning. I swear it's like she walked off of a Victoria's Secret runway and into my packhouse. How is it possible that she looks even better today than she did last night?

"Serena," I utter in greeting, and all of the guys snap their heads in her direction simultaneously.

She smiles shyly, a pretty blush staining her cheeks in response to the attention. She tugs at the hem of her oversized t-shirt with one hand, lifting the other to give a little wave.

I cross the room to her and my wolf pushes forward and practically purrs in response, pleased to be near our mate once again.

"Hey, how'd you sleep?" I ask quietly once I'm in front of her. Fuck, she's even more gorgeous up close. Since it's damp, her hair has taken on this deep auburn hue, making her light blue eyes stand out even more. My fingers itch to reach out and touch her, so I shove my hands into my pockets.

"Great," she coos in response, the ghost of a smile still on her lips. She reaches up to comb her fingers through her damp hair, glancing over my shoulder and fidgeting

uncomfortably.

I look back to see the guys still staring in her direction and I quickly clear my throat, stepping beside Serena and yanking a hand out of my pocket to place on the small of her back. "Guys, this is Serena," I say as I guide her a forward a few steps. I lean in toward her, and even though her delicious scent is so overwhelming that I can barely think straight, I manage to introduce Gray, Brock, Jax, and Theo, pointing each of them out as I do.

"Nice to meet you all," Serena replies politely, then looks back to me, her voice just above a whisper. "Hey, um... as much as I'm loving this t-shirt, do you think there's a chance I could get some pants?"

My smile falters and I suddenly feel like an asshole for not thinking of that. Of course she's gonna want some real clothes- I should've had them waiting for her this morning. "Yeah," I mutter, embarrassed by my failure to consider her needs. I'll have to make it up to her somehow. "Sorry about that. C'mon."

With my hand still on the small of her back, I lead Serena down the hall at the base of the stairs, to the wing of the packhouse where my beta and his mate reside. My beta Cyrus isn't here- he's off doing his morning rounds in our territory to make sure everything's in order- but I find his mate, Taylor, in her daughter's bedroom.

I knock on the doorframe to announce myself and Taylor looks up, bouncing little Sadie on her hip. "Hey Tay," I greet with a smile. "Apologize for the intrusion, but I was hoping you could help me out..."

Taylor's eyes light up when she sees Serena standing beside me and she rushes over, an excited smile on her face. "Hi!"

I chuckle at Taylor's enthusiasm, angling sideways and gesturing to the red-haired beauty next to me. "This is Serena, she's going to be staying here with us. Do you have something she could borrow clothes wise until we get her some of her own?"

Even though my request probably comes off strange as hell without context, Taylor doesn't ask any questions- she just nods, reaching out to take Serena's hand. "Of course! I'm Taylor. We're excited to have another girl around, aren't we, Sadie?" she peers down at her daughter, then looks back to Serena, still grinning.

I see a smile cross Serena's lips, her shoulders relaxing as she allows Taylor to pull her by the hand into the room. Cy really lucked out by finding Taylor; she's just got this way about her that puts people at ease. I'm thankful she's around to help Serena feel comfortable here.

"I'll leave you to it," I say, pushing off of the doorframe and stepping backwards into the hallway. I'm not even sure if either of them hear me- Taylor is already chattering away to Serena.

I make my way back to the kitchen, and as soon as I enter, Jax whistles, a goofy grin stretching his cheeks. "Daaaaamn," he drawls, stepping forward and clapping me on the shoulder. "You left out the part where she looks like *that*."

"She's..." Theo starts, trailing off and wagging his eyebrows. "Damn."

"Yeah," Gray agrees with a laugh. "That about covers it."

I chuckle, raking a hand through my hair. "I know, right?" I suck in a breath, drawing my lower lip between my teeth and wincing. "Fuck."