

Alpha Reid Chapter 4 -

SERENA

Taylor's the type of girl that's so outgoing and over-the-top nice that it almost seems disingenuous- because nobody's that sugar sweet, right?

Wrong.

The more I talk to Taylor, the more I realize that this isn't a front; it's really who she is. And I'm not gonna lie, I'm a little jealous. I wish I could be more like her. Maybe I could've been, if life hadn't stomped all over me. If I hadn't seen what I've seen and done what I've done.

She leads me down the hall from her daughter's room to her own, and on the way, Taylor tells me all about her mate, Cyrus, who is also the beta of Reid's pack.

Apparently the adjustment to parenthood has been rough on both of them, but Cyrus has stepped up more than she ever expected him to. Her hazel eyes light up when she talks about her mate, her wavy shoulder-length honey brown hair bouncing as she speaks animatedly.

"So what kind of clothes are you looking for?" Taylor asks once we're inside her room, handing off her round-faced baby girl to me. She takes a step back and gives me a once-over, bringing her hand to her chin. "Something comfy? Dressy? Let's start with this, what are you dressing for?"

I shrug, sinking down to sit on the edge of the bed. "I'd like to go for a run," I say, arranging little Sadie on my lap facing me. She looks a lot like her mama- big hazel eyes and honey brown wisps of hair on her head.

"Casual, then," Taylor says with a snap of her fingers, heading for the large dresser positioned against the wall across from the bed. "Athletic wear." She pulls open a drawer, reaching in and rifling through the clothes.

"That'd be perfect," I agree, shifting my attention to Sadie and making a face to entertain her.

Taylor starts to select items of clothing, forming a neat stack on top of the dresser. "So how long are you staying?" she asks over her shoulder, making conversation as she rummages through her drawers. "Are you from Denver?"

"I don't know," I mumble, adjusting her child on my lap. "And no." I make another face at Sadie she gives me a big, gummy smile. Damn she's cute.

"So then how do you know Reid?" (Read Latest chapters uploaded Everyday on)

"I don't," I sigh, tickling Sadie's tummy. She giggles, and I can't help but grin at the sound of it. I glance up at Taylor to see her leaning back against the dresser watching me curiously, waiting for me to elaborate. I blow out a breath, shrugging and looking back down at her daughter. "I mean he's my mate, so I guess I will soon enough..."

Taylor slams a drawer shut with her hip, her jaw going slack. "He's... and you're..." she stammers, holding up her hands. Her eyes look like they're going to bug out of her head. "Hold on, *what?*"

I chuckle softly, shaking my head. "Hey, it came as a surprise to both of us, too."

Taylor grabs the stack of clothes off of the dresser, rushing over to me with a huge grin stretching her face, her excitement spilling over. "Oh my gosh!" she squeals. "I can't believe it, he finally found his mate! He's been waiting... I mean, we've all been waiting... and here you are! This is incredible!"

“Uh, yeah,” I breathe, chuckling anxiously as I reach up to run a hand through my damp hair.

Taylor immediately picks up on my discomfort, stopping short and reining it in a bit.

“What’s wrong?” she asks, her smile fading.

I just shrug, bouncing Sadie on my knee. Taylor seems nice, but we aren’t girlfriends. I’m not about to bare my soul to her. And even if I wanted to, my own conflicting thoughts and emotions about the whole thing are confusing enough without someone else weighing in.

She places the stack of clothes on the bed next to me and sets a reassuring hand on my shoulder. “Hey, if you’re worried about Reid, don’t be,” she coos. “He’s a great guy.” I glance up at her, smiling weakly. Unsure how to respond.

“Seriously,” Taylor continues, the look on her face so earnest. “You really lucked out with him. He’s the *best*.”

“Yeah, I...” I grit out, panic creeping in. I shoot to my feet, thrusting Sadie toward her mom. “I’m gonna go for that run, clear my head.”

Taylor takes her child from me, and I quickly scoop the stack of clothing from the bed and tuck it under an arm. “Thanks for the clothes.”

“Wait!” Taylor exclaims, balancing her daughter on a hip and holding up a finger. “What about running shoes?”

I pause, watching after her as she crosses the room to the walk-in closet, ducking inside. I consider making a quick exit, but she’s right- I do need shoes.

“What size?” she calls from inside, and if she’s got multiple size options to choose from, I don’t question it.

“Uh, like an eight?” I call back.

Taylor emerges a moment later, a pair of purple and black Nike running shoes dangling from her fingers. “Here,” she says, approaching and handing them to me. “They may be a little snug, but hopefully they’ll work.”

“Thanks,” I breathe, taking the shoes from her gratefully and glancing over my shoulder toward the door. “And for the clothes. Again. I appreciate it.”

She offers me a tender smile. “Don’t mention it. Just let me know if you need anything else.”

I nod, feeling a little guilty for bolting like I am when the girl’s obviously just trying to be nice. I can’t overthink it, though- I can’t allow myself to get too close. She’ll just be collateral damage.

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I turn on a heel, exiting the room quickly and making my way down the hall. I reach the end to find that, thankfully, Reid and his friends have vacated the kitchen, and I bound up the staircase back to my room. *Can I call it my room?* Back to the room I slept in last night.

Once inside, I change out of the oversized t-shirt that I’ve been rocking as a dress since last night and into the clothes that Taylor let me borrow- a pair of leggings, a sports bra, and a long-sleeved shirt. Despite the fact that I’m taller and built differently than Taylor is, the clothes actually fit surprisingly well. I slip on a pair of socks and the running shoes, then go to sweep my hair into a ponytail only to realize that I don’t have an elastic to secure it back. *Dang*. Guess I’ll be running with my hair in the wind.

The packhouse is eerily quiet when I head back downstairs, and I pause on the last

stair, looking around, contemplating whether I should go straight out the door for my run or seize the opportunity to snoop around a little and explore the packhouse unsupervised. Curiosity gets the best of me and I go with the latter. I tiptoe around the living room, ducking down the hallway across from the one where Taylor and her family reside. I creep along silently, peeking into the first open doorway.

It's an office- and from the looks of it, I'd guess that it's Reid's office. I slip inside, peering around at the interior- from the large wooden desk to the plush leather desk chair sitting behind it, to the array of papers spread out on top. In the center there's a large map- a map of Reid's pack's territory, maybe? I slink closer, quickly gathering that it's a map of all of the six-pack territories. There are little notes on it, markings to indicate something... maybe battle plans?

"Are you lost, little wolf?" comes Reid's low, gravelly voice from behind me, and I'm so startled that I nearly jump out of my skin. I whip my head around to face him, pressing a hand to my chest.

He's standing in the doorway, his large and imposing frame taking up most of it. I watch as his eyes flicker from me to the map spread out on the desk.

"You scared me," I croak, struggling to catch my breath as I take a step in his direction, away from his desk.

"What are you doing in here?" Reid murmurs, his gaze sliding from the map to meet mine again.

I can see the suspicion in his eyes; hear the hesitation in his voice.

"Just exploring," I reply, glancing around and playing it casual. "Is this your office?"

"It is," Reid nods.

"Hm," I muse, still looking around. Going to great lengths to appear relaxed, even though I'm freaking out on the inside. My adrenaline is still pumping from Reid startling me, and this close proximity to him has my wolf rattling my cage and my senses going haywire. "It's nice."

As I make a show of looking around his office, I can feel Reid watching me, his gaze practically searing my skin. When my eyes return to his it's disarming and intense, like a punch to the gut that knocks the wind out of me.

"I see you got some clothes," he growls, giving me a painfully slow once-over as he leans back against the doorframe, folding his bulky forearms across his broad chest.

"Yeah." My voice is breathy- probably because Reid is taking up all the oxygen in this damn office. "I was just about to head out."

His eyebrow ticks up in question. "Where to?"

"Just for a run."

He nods slowly, his eyes leaving mine to flicker over my form again. Then he pushes off of the doorframe. "Give me a minute to get changed, I'll join you."

"Uh..." I search my mind for some excuse, but I come up blank. It's not that Reid isn't nice, because he is. And if it were up to my wolf, we'd be around him twenty-four seven. But everything feels so claustrophobic right now; I just need some space to breathe. And I can't breathe around Reid- he steals all my air.

"Sure," I grind out, starting toward him.

Reid angles his body sideways to let me by, but he doesn't move from the doorframe, forcing me to squeeze past him to exit the office. I hold my breath as I do, my eyes never leaving his as I scooch by, our chests brushing. Something flickers in his eyes at

our contact- something raw and primal that has my wolf surging to the surface. Reid comes off as a 'nice guy', and Taylor confirmed as much- but the look in his eyes right now? There's nothing 'nice guy' about it.

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I practically leap away from him and into the hallway, gulping for oxygen as I hear Reid pull his office door closed behind me. He flicks me a glance over his shoulder before starting toward the main area of the house, my cheeks heating as I follow him. What the hell is wrong with me? Why do I keep reacting to him like this?

Duh. The mate bond.

While Reid disappears upstairs to get changed, I flop down onto an overstuffed leather couch in the living room and try to get my shit together. I let my head tip back, my eyes sliding closed as I draw slow, steady breaths, tucking my wolf back into the recesses of my mind. She keeps getting so fucking amped up every time Reid's near, making her more difficult to control than usual. I have no doubt that a run will help.

Meditating totally works for a second to keep my wolf at bay- that is, until I hear Reid's footsteps in the upstairs hall and my she perks right back up.

"Town or forest?" I hear Reid ask.

"Forest," I answer quickly, opening my eyes and sitting up to watch him jog down the open staircase. "Always forest."

He hits the bottom of the stairs and turns toward me, the corner of his mouth tugging up into that panty-melting smile- and *fuck me*, I don't know how I'll ever manage to keep it together around this guy.

"Solid choice," he remarks, dragging a hand through his hair. "Forest is always my pick, too. Though that's probably just a shifter thing."

"Yeah, probably." I push up off of the couch, throwing a thumb over my shoulder toward the back patio doors. "This way?"

Reid gives a little nod and I waste no time in heading outside. I don't have to look back to know that he's followed; I can feel his dominating presence looming behind me. The air is cold, but us shifters run hot- even once winter sets in, the cold doesn't bother us. I don't feel the bite of the cold at all today... I swear that being near Reid has me running a few degrees hotter than normal.

I turn over my shoulder to ask which way to go, but without a word Reid takes off in a jog, heading for the treeline, My adrenaline ratchets up as I spring forward, chasing after him to catch up. I'm fast, so I catch him quickly, and once I see which path he's headed down I race past him to take the lead.

"Slow down, Red!" I hear him call from behind me, my heart pumping as I sprint down the forest path.

"What's wrong?" I laugh, hopping over a downed tree in my path. "Can't keep up?"

I hear Reid let out a growl and his footfalls behind me pick up speed, which only encourages me to run harder, faster.

I'm surprised when he's actually able to keep up. It's unexpected; his agility is impressive given his size. We cover a few miles and I'm the first one to tire, my legs getting sore and my breathing becoming more labored. We reach a fork in the path at the edge of a creekbed and I slow to a stop, leaning against a tree to catch my breath.

"Didn't think I could keep up, did ya?" Reid teases, breathing heavily as he leans against the wide trunk of a tree across from me.

I look up at him, still panting as I crack a smile. "You're faster than you look."
Reid shrugs. "I try to get a run in every morning. Helps clear my head."
"Me too," I breathe. "Gotta start the day with those endorphins."
"Even better than caffeine," he remarks, waggling his eyebrows.
"For sure," I agree. "I'll take any chance to be out in nature, and it's a bonus if it involves endorphins or adrenaline. Totally my jam."
Reid flashes me that sexy half-smile, taking the hem of his shirt in a hand and dragging it up to wipe sweat from his brow. My eyes immediately fall to his well-defined ab muscles and that tantalizing v-shape of his Adonis belt. It does something to me, twisting up my insides, making my core throb with need.
I quickly look away, focusing instead on the forest floor covered in crunchy brown leaves. I steady my breathing, quiet my mind. Then I dare to look up again, and I'm met with the clear blue of Reid's eyes staring back at me.
He's standing closer to me now. So close. *Too close*. Close enough to invade my senses, steal my air. Rob me of my rationality. If this is how I always react to the mate bond while in his proximity, I'm not going to survive it.
"You ready to keep going?" Reid murmurs, the low baritone of his voice sending a shiver down my spine.
"Y... yeah..." I pant, though he's not moving to continue down the path. He's leaning in closer, his lips a whisper away from my own. His hand comes to my cheek and my eyes slide closed as I relish in the feeling of sparks dancing between our skin.
Is he gonna kiss me? I shouldn't let him kiss me.
My eyes flutter open again, colliding with his. My heart races, the tension between us so thick that it's palpable. I bring my hand up to cover his own, tracing his knuckles with my fingertips.
"Reid..." I whisper.
His lips brush against mine and my heart skips a beat.
"Hm?" he hums, tipping my face up toward his own with one hand as he rests the other on the tree trunk beside my head.
I'm so attracted to him. *So fucking attracted*. It's like we're two magnets and the more I try to resist, the more I'm pulled into him. I know I need to turn these feelings off, but with the mate bond at play, how the hell am I going to manage it?
"I..." I wet my lips with my tongue, sucking in a breath.
"Yeah?" he growls.
Reid Raines. Even his name makes him sound like a superhero. I could play the damsel in distress, let him think he can save me. Somehow convince him that I'm actually worth saving.
Or I could run.
I duck under his arm, hopping sideways. Breaking physical contact with him and the trance he has me under. "I'll race you back!" I call, my long hair whipping my face as I spin around.
I launch forward, sprinting down the path in the direction we came from. My wolf whines in protest as my feet pound the earth in a steady rhythm, my face burning. After a few moments, I hear the distant sound of footfalls behind me, but I don't look back. I just run faster, pushing my own limits. I run so fast that he doesn't catch up to me this time.
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