

Episode 21- "A New Shade of Red"

I walked into MS Ninja Ops (Makeshift Ninja Ops) and saw Cam waiting for me.

"Sorry...traffic was worse than I thought." I said.

Cam nodded, "It's fine. You know I've been working on a solution to our absence of a Red Wind Ranger...specifically since Kyle has kids now and doesn't want to do it."

I nodded. "Which I understand. His twins are so little. I can understand him not wanting to risk it."

"Me too...but we still need a new Ranger...I found one." Cam said.

"Who?" I asked.

"Claudia Clarke." Cam said.

I blinked and cocked my head, "Shane's sister? She's a ninja?"

"Yes...and no. About a year ago Claudia moved in with Shane while she got on her feet. She got suspicious of his always disappearing so she followed him to the academy one day. He ended up having to fill her in and she showed interest straight away. She wanted to enroll but Shane was worried how it would look if his sister was let in just like that so he trained her in his off time. He didn't tell anyone but me...not even Kapri. He knew he was technically breaking the rules and didn't want Kapri to think less of him." Cam explained.

"Sounds like Shane. He always thought he had to be everything to everyone...he strived for perfection." I said sadly.

"Yes...but as it turns out Claudia is actually quite skilled. I had to talk to her because I know she is grieving the loss of her brother but she's on board to continue his legacy. She is the new Red Wind Ranger." Cam said.

"Sounds good to me. Why the secrecy?" I asked.

"As I said, no one but me knows Claudia was trained. Shane hid it from everyone, including Kapri...I needed to make sure Claudia was on board before I told everyone...and now I'm not sure the best way to tell them. For all of your flaws you are admittedly a better people person than I am. I would like your help in finding the best way to tell the team." Cam said.

I chuckled, "Thanks, I think...and of course I'll help."

"OK, so how do we do this?" Cam asked.

"First I'd like to talk to Claudia. Where is she?" I asked.

"Here. She's staying here with me." Cam said.

I raised an eyebrow. "Here? I thought you had a hotel...and she's staying with you?"

"No, no...not like that. I was at a hotel but there is so much space in this warehouse that I made a couple of bedrooms. It's easier than going back and forth. And she's staying in a different room than me." Cam clarified.

I nodded, "OK...gotcha."

"Let me go get her." Cam said.

A couple of minutes later Cam walked in with Claudia, who was an adult now. I hadn't seen her since she was 13. She'd been at the funeral but that day was pretty much a blur. The young teen I'd known was 29 now.

"Claudia...wow...you grew up." I said.

She smiled, "It happens. It's good to see you Michelle. I'm sorry we didn't get a chance to talk at the funeral."

"It's ok. It was a pretty hard day on us all. Socializing wasn't a top priority." I said.

Claudia nodded. "I still can't believe he's gone."

"Neither can I...but I hear you want to carry on his legacy." I said.

"I do. I'm more seasoned than you realize. Michelle, he'd been secretly training me for 11 years." Claudia said.

I looked at her, "11 years? Why didn't he ever just admit you to the Academy?"

"At first he didn't want anyone to think I was only let in because I was his sister and after I picked up on the training it would have been too hard to explain to everyone why I was already so skilled." Claudia said.

"Oh wow. The others aren't going to like this...especially Kapri." I sighed.

"I just want to carry on where my brother left off. I know Cam said he asked me but that's not really the truth. The truth is I all but begged him to let me be the Red Ranger. We agreed it was best that Kapri do it for awhile but once she got her Pink Ranger powers and he came to me to ask if I was still interested it was like a dream come true. Please Michelle, you have to make them see that Shane's heart was in the right place when he trained me in secret and that I can be an asset now." Claudia said.

I nodded. "I'll do what I can."

"What's the best way to tell them?" Cam asked.

"Probably to call just the Ninja Storm team here and tell them about the training first and build up to the part of the story where Claudia wants to be a Ranger." I said.

"Then that's what we'll do. I'll stay in my room until you tell me to come out." Claudia said.

"I'll text you when it's time." Cam said.

Claudia nodded, "Thank you Michelle."

"Let's hope this all works out." I said.

Claudia nodded and headed back to her room.

"OK Cam...call the team." I said.

Cam nodded and put out a call. "Rangers, come to Ninja Ops ASAP."

Minutes later the Ninja Storm Rangers came in.

"Cam? Mich?" Tori asked.

"You look like you're working together. What's wrong?" Hunter asked.

I shook my head, "Nothing...but Cam just filled me in on some things and it's time you all knew too."

"OK...what?" Kapri asked.

"Well...you know how Shane tried to maintain the image of being the perfect Sensei...really the perfect everything to everyone." I said.

Kapri tilted her head, "Yeah..."

"And he never would have been able to deal with it if someone accused him of nepotism." I continued.

"No...but why would anyone ever have?" Tori asked.

"Evidently when she was 19 his sister Claudia found out about the Ninja school and asked to be admitted. Shane was worried how that would look so he started to train her on the side without telling anyone." I said.

"He trained Claud secretly? For 10 years?!" Kapri cried.

"He probably didn't want you to have to lie for him Kapri." Cam jumped in.

"OK...so why tell us this now?" Blake asked.

"Shane trained Claudia as an Air Ninja." Cam said.

I nodded, "And as such...she wants to be the new Red Wind Ranger and both Cam and I agree that she would be an excellent choice."

The shock on everyone's face was evident.

"OK...wait...you took away the Red Power from me." Kapri said.

"Yes, because you're not an Air Ninja Kapri. You're an Ice Ninja and eventually the power would have failed you." Cam said.

"You expect us to just accept a new Ranger?" Blake asked.

"Why not Kyle?" Hunter asked.

Tori shook her head, "Ellie and Mellie are still so young. He would never risk his life at this point."

Cam nodded, "Exactly."

Claudia walked in, "Hey guys..."

"Claudia...you're here..." Kapri said.

Claudia nodded, "I'm sorry I hid this from you guys. Shane said I needed to if he was to train me...but now I want to put my training to work. I want to help you take out the monsters that killed my brother. Please...I know Red is usually leader but I'm not looking for that. I'm just looking for a spot on the team."

"That's good. We have a leader." Dustin said.

Blake nodded, "Yeah...Hunter."

"Actually, I meant Tori." Dustin said.

Everyone looked at everyone else.

Finally I spoke up. "Guys, Hunter was always leader of the Thunder faction of the team but he and Shane split overall leadership. With Shane gone Hunter is leader."

"But there's 6 Wind Rangers and only 2 Thunder." Marah asked.

"Funny, I thought we were one team." Blake said.

"We are but..." Dustin started.

"We are or we aren't. Are we Ninja Storm or are we Wind Rangers and Thunder Rangers?" Hunter asked.

Dustin and Marah looked at Tori.

"Ninja Storm. Hunter is our leader. No question." Tori nodded.

"And Claudia is our new Red Ranger. Shane would have wanted it that way." Kapri nodded.

"Really? You mean it Kapri?" Claudia asked.

Kapri nodded, "I don't love that he hid this from me. In fact I'm kinda pissed about it...but what's done is done and he obviously believed in you. So yes, if he dedicated that much time to your training then I think this is what he would have wanted."

Claudia smiled, "Thank you. I promise I won't let you down."

I smiled. "Great! We're all a team again...so if you will excuse me I have another team to fill in and an actual day job to be back to."

"On your back I presume." Hunter whispered to me.

My eyes widened.

"Or does your boyfriend prefer you on top?" Hunter continued.

I turned and slapped Hunter across the face and stormed out. I was getting into my Jeep when Tori, Marah, and Kapri ran towards me.

"Mich, what happened? Are you ok?" Tori asked.

"Hunter made a very unacceptable comment about a secret he knows about me and is apparently holding over my head." I said. I was so angry I was tearing up.

"Oh Mich...I'm so sorry." Kapri said hugging me.

"Is there anything we can do?" Marah asked.

"No. I just need to stay away from Hunter unless it's Ranger related." I said.

"I think that's best." Tori agreed.

"I really do have to go guys...thanks for checking on me. I'll talk to you guys soon." I said as I hugged each of them and hopped in my Jeep and headed for the dojo. I filled the Sonic Rangers in on the roster change to Ninja Storm.

"Great. So we have 2 teams at full power. Now what? We need a plan." Rory asked.

I nodded, "That's the next step."

"And we will work on that but someone needs to take Harley to motocross." Rocky said.

"You should." I said.

"Mich, I have a class to teach. I was going to ask Mina if she would if you weren't back. Since you are I need you to take her." Rocky said.

I sighed. "Fine. I'll be on the comm if you need me."

I went and got Harley ready and drove her to the track. As I predicted Hunter was there. He was talking to Harley's normal coach.

"Hunter!" Harley said hugging him.

"Hey kiddo! You gonna get out there and show me what you've got?" he asked.

Harley nodded and walked her bike to the track and started to ride. Hunter and I stood on the sidelines watching her.

"You're an ass." I said not taking my eyes off Harley.

"You're a slut." Hunter replied, also focusing on Harley.

"My personal life isn't your business." I said.

"You're right. If you want to fuck around on Rocky that's your business...but I know you've been taking Harley around Jon and playing house. Do what you want Mich, but don't drag her into this." Hunter said.

"How is anything involving Harley your concern?" I asked.

"She's a good kid and I've become really fond of her while I've been working with her. I don't want to see her as another casualty of your obsession with Jon." he said.

"You're asking to be slapped again." I growled.

"Do it and when Harley tells Rocky you slapped me I'll tell him why." Hunter said.

I took a breath. "I hate you so much."

"I don't really give a shit anymore. If you want to be Jon's whore that's your business...just leave Harley out of it." he said.

I was too angry to respond. "OK Coach...bring Harley home when she's done. I have some actual business to handle."

"Going to vent to your side piece?" Hunter asked.

I clenched my teeth, “No, in case you’ve forgotten we have evil space aliens to plan against.”

I stormed off. I didn’t know what my next move was but I knew I had to wrap things up with Ninja Storm because with Hunter as their leader I couldn’t work with them anymore.