

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 1

ADIRA

The sun was bright as I woke up from a peaceful dream. There was still a smile plastered to my face as I opened my eyes. The dream was so vivid and real, and it brought back such a wonderful memory.

“What has you in such a good mood this morning?” Mark asked.

I jumped, not realizing he was still in the room. He was typically an early riser and up and about before I even woke up. I sat up and stretched, trying to wake my body up.

“I had a dream about the first time we met,” I said. “You were cute as a little redheaded boy.”

Mark sat down on the bed next to me and leaned over to give me a good morning kiss. I pulled back, afraid of what my morning breath was like.

“No! I haven’t had a chance to brush my teeth!” I recoiled on the bed. Normally, I didn’t see Mark before I had a chance to freshen up.

Mark laughed. “I don’t care about that.” He suddenly jumped on the bed, wrapping his arms around me and pulled me into him.

I squealed as I tried to pull away from him. He peppered my neck with kisses, since he wasn’t able to reach my face. This only made me giggle, since his kisses were tickling my neck. He pulled me even closer to him and tightened his grip, so I couldn’t wiggle away. He placed a kiss right on my lips and made a point to linger. He finally pulled away, and I stopped struggling, a burning sensation warming my body as I suddenly wanted more.

“You could have let me brush my teeth before doing that,” I said. “I wouldn’t have struggled so much.”

Mark smiled. “That wouldn’t have been as fun.” He poked my nose, and then his face suddenly got more serious. “Hey, I was thinking about something.”

The serious look on his face had me worried. “Is something wrong?”

Mark shook his head. "Not at all. I know we've been pretty busy with moving here to Asheville, and there are still so many things that need to be done. The place is a mess, and people are still getting settled, so I'd understand if you didn't want to." Mark was talking so fast he was barely breathing.

I cupped his cheeks in my hands and made him look at me. "Just spit it out. You don't need to be so nervous."

Mark took a deep breath. "I've been thinking about this a lot, and I don't want you to feel pressured, so you can say no if you're not ready. But we haven't marked each other yet, and I would love to be able to link with you. If you want."

I smiled at how nervous Mark was about this. I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him deeply. Every day I felt a little more in love with him than before. "I would absolutely love that."

Mark's face instantly brightened up. "You would?"

I nodded my head. "Of course. I've been thinking about it a lot, but you have seemed stressed with the move. I have heard that marking your mate takes a lot of energy out of you, so I didn't want to be selfish by bringing it up."

Mark brushed some hair out of my face. "You can be selfish whenever you want when it comes to me. I love you, Adira."

"I love you, too. So when do you want to do this?"

"I was thinking tonight?" Mark chewed on his lower lip while waiting for my response.

"Tonight is perfect." I kissed him again before hopping out of his arms. "Now, I'm going to brush my teeth before we do any more of that."

Mark grabbed my arm before I could get too far away. He pulled me in for one more kiss before letting me run to our bathroom.

"Are you hungry?" he asked from the bedroom.

"I will be soon," I said with a mouth full of toothpaste.

"I'll go get it started," he said. "Meet you in the kitchen?"

“Okay!”

I finished brushing my teeth as quickly as I could and then got dressed. I felt jittery at the excitement for what was to come tonight. Mark and I should have marked each other by now, but there always seemed to be a reason not to. First it was the threat from Theron. When that was all over, the move to Asheville was a priority. It was much more exhausting than I had anticipated, too. It took time to find the right house to move the pack into. We needed something big enough to hold the members we already have and have the capacity for more members when the pack eventually grew bigger.

I also had to tie up my old life before moving. There wasn't a lot to do, but I wanted to give Lana a notice before completely leaving her. She was sad when I quit, but I think she was happy for me when I told her I was moving in with my boyfriend. She was shocked about that news, saying I never mentioned a boyfriend. I didn't reveal how long Mark and I had actually known each other either. Werewolves understood quick-paced relationships. It was normal to move at lightning speed once you actually found your mate. Mark and I were actually moving at a much slower pace than the average werewolf. Humans wouldn't understand that though.

Then there was the actual moving process to deal with. I never realized that packing and moving an entire house would be so exhausting. We had only been at the new house for a couple of days, too, and there was still so much to organize and unpack.

When I had finished getting ready for the day, I practically skipped down the stairs to Mark. There was nothing holding us back from finally marking each other now. There were no excuses for holding back in the relationship either. We were finally ready to settle into a routine, and I was excited for that routine. I had had enough excitement for a lifetime in just a few weeks' span. I was ready for normal and boring.

Tonight wouldn't be boring though. I had only heard rumors of what it was like to mark your mate, but apparently it was an incredibly intense moment that forged a strong bond between two souls. It took a lot of energy for the body to process, but afterwards, it increases a werewolf's strength and agility. It's partly why it's so important for an alpha to have a luna when running a pack.

I dashed around the boxes filling the hallway and the main area to get to the kitchen. It was only a reminder of how much needed to be done, but I wasn't worried. Rie and Scythe lived for decorating and organizing, which would only

make my life easier. The pack ran smoothly without me, still. They worked well before I joined, so it wasn't a surprise they didn't need me. I only hoped I would be able to make myself useful as a luna to them.

When I made it to the kitchen, the sweet smell of cinnamon and syrup hit my nose. Mark was in the kitchen with his apron on, and I saw a plate filled with french toast next to him. Several plates were stacked next to it, and I knew he was cooking for the entire pack. He normally made enough for everyone to eat, which was just one of the things I loved about him. I had never known an alpha who was willing to take such good care of his pack members in the same way.

"That smells absolutely divine!" Rie said, sweeping past me to grab a plate. "I'm starving. I have been awake way too long already."

"You didn't even move as many boxes as me," Scythe said, following right behind her.

I leaned back against the wall and watched the two of them fight over who got to grab food first.

"So what?" Rie said, bumping Scythe with her hip to get to the french toast first. "I was working hard at making sure everything was in the right place, not just throwing it wherever."

"We can organize later," Scythe defended. "It's more important to unpack everything first, so we can find things."

"We won't be able to find things if they aren't organized." Rie took her plate and moved over to the table.

I shook my head, laughing at the two of them. They were both incredible, but they were also so different. It wasn't unusual for them to be bickering about something or other.

"Guys, can't we have a peaceful breakfast for once?" Mark asked, putting more french toast on the plate.

"French toast! Sweet!" Darian bolted into the kitchen, causing a breeze to fly by with him.

I had gotten to know Darian decently over the past few weeks. He was probably the best warrior of the pack, minus Mark. He was one of the werewolves who helped me out in the battle against Theron. I had grown pretty fond of him. He was definitely outgoing and loud, but I found it amusing most of the time.

The rest of the pack started filing into the room, including a little girl and her mother. Callie was the little girl, and I believed the mother's name was Quinn. I hadn't spoken to them much, but Mark told me that Callie's father died in an accident shortly before Mark left Jori's pack, which is why they decided to join the Aphelion Pack. They needed a change of pace.

I wanted to find an opportunity to talk to them more. If I was going to be the luna of the pack, I wanted to get to know everyone, and I wanted them to know they could rely on me if they needed to.

I watched the room buzz to life as everyone grabbed their breakfast. My stomach rumbled from the smell of food, but I was enjoying watching the happy faces dig into the french toast. I continued to lean against the wall and observe from my corner. I knew I should move forward and join the other pack members. It would be the fastest way to get to know everyone, but I couldn't get my feet to move. A part of me still didn't feel like I belonged.

My stomach rumbled again, and at the same moment, Mark looked over his shoulder and made eye contact with me. It was almost as if he heard my stomach rumbling from across the room. He set down his spatula and made his way over to me. He grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the stove with him.

"What are you doing in the corner by yourself?" he asked, letting go of my hand so he could flip the bread in the pan.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I was content watching everyone. I love the atmosphere here. It feels like all of you are a family."

Mark gave me a pointed look. "We are family."

I smiled at him. I wanted to be a part of this family, but I didn't quite feel there yet. "Everyone loves your breakfast. What are they going to do if you're not here to cook for them?"

Mark laughed at this. "They can fend for themselves just fine. I just like cooking when I'm around. It brings everyone together for just a bit."

I wrapped my arms around Mark from behind and held him tight. "I love all of this. This is what a pack should feel like."

Mark turned off the stove, putting the last piece of french toast on a plate before turning and hugging me back. He kissed the top of my forehead and then pulled away. He grabbed my hand.

"Come on. Let's go eat with everyone."