

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 10

I turned slowly, prepared for the worst. Darian was still with me, even though the others had already taken off. Plus, I could use my magic if I needed to. As I turned, I didn't see anything out of the corner of my eye. I continued until I had done a complete 180. I didn't see anyone behind me, but when I looked down and saw a small bunny rabbit on the ground.

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. It wasn't a threat, thankfully. If we had run into trouble, I would have been worried about Mark wanting me to go on future scouting parties. I turned back and saw Darian on edge behind me. I nodded to him and then shifted about fifteen feet. It was as far as I had been able to manage until now. I transformed and took off running in my wolf form.

Darian easily caught up to me. He was a much faster runner than me, but he stayed a few steps behind me the entire time. I was sure Mark told him to keep an extra eye on me. It wasn't necessary, but if it made him feel better about the situation, I wasn't going to make a big deal out of it.

When we made it back to the pack house, Mark emerged from the pack house before we had made it to the front. I shifted back into my human form and jumped right into his arms. His body relaxed as he held me. I knew he had to have been worried while I was gone, but he didn't say anything about it to let on. It made me appreciate him even more. I loved that he didn't try to hold me back just because he wanted to protect me.

"Alpha," Darian said, now in human form. "We found the hunters' camp."

Mark pulled away from our hug, but he kept one arm around me. "That is excellent. Were you able to see how many there were?"

"Unfortunately, no. I was going to get a closer look, but Adira had a weird feeling, so we backed off," Darian explained.

Mark looked to me for more of an explanation.

"I think they might have had traps or something set up. If we had gotten closer, I'm pretty sure something would have gone wrong. I can't explain exactly how I know that," I said. I was grateful for Moon's warning. If the hunters had set a trap, we wouldn't have been prepared.

Darian had his hands tucked behind his back. "It's good that Adira was with us. I wasn't able to sense anything myself."

"It would seem so." Mark raised his eyebrows at me, and there was a smile filling his face. He then turned back to Darian. "Prepare everyone. I would like to attack tonight if possible. I don't want to risk them changing their camp location before we can take care of them."

"Right away, sir," Darian said. He left to make the necessary preparations.

"I will call Daniel to see what we can arrange," I said. Daniel and Percy had agreed to put a team together to assist us. They didn't tell me whether or not Jori was aware of what was happening, and I didn't ask. We needed the assistance for everyone's safety, so I wasn't about to object to any help we were receiving.

"I'm assuming you are coming tonight," Mark said.

I nodded. "Yes, especially with it being nighttime. My magic is stronger at night, and I want to be there to help in any way I can."

Mark pulled his lips tight. "We should start preparing and going over a game plan then." He held his hand out to me, and I took it. Mark was holding back with what he wanted to say to me. His protective side was showing, but he was holding back.

I squeezed his hand as we walked back into the house.

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Scythe, Rie, Darian, Mark, and I gathered around the table in the meeting room to go over the plans for tonight. I was the last one to enter the room, since I had been on the phone with Daniel. I took a seat next to Mark. Everyone looked at me, waiting for me to speak.

I felt nervous suddenly, not expecting to be the first one to speak.

"Are they going to help out?" Mark asked? He grabbed my hand under the table, and I was sure he was able to feel my nerves.

"Daniel said Percy was able to get ten warriors to join us tonight. They will be here around sunset," I said.

"That puts us at seventeen warriors," Darian said. "We can split into four groups and approach at different angles, keeping two groups back, so the hunters aren't aware of our numbers."

"I think it would be best to keep the packs separated in the groups after the incident earlier this week," Darian said. His voice was deep and gruff, making him seem scarier than he was. There wasn't a doubt that he could beat me in a fight, but Darian cared about the pack members and protecting everyone. He would never use his strength in the wrong way.

"As much as I don't like it, I think you're right, Darian," Mark agreed. "We can't afford a fight to break out when facing hunters."

"I don't think Percy would pick warriors who didn't sympathize with us," I said.

I didn't like the idea of separating everyone. Growing up, the man I thought was my father would always say that bonds were made on the battlefield. When you are fighting for a cause, it brings people together. We needed something to bring the packs together.

"Unfortunately, I'm not confident that will be the case," Scythe said. "Percy did his best to find people willing to fight with us for the sake of their pack. He was careful with who he picked, but that doesn't guarantee they are sympathizers of our pack." Scythe's face was filled with hard lines.

He looked as if he had aged several years in the past few weeks alone. The situation with the packs was probably the hardest on him out of all of us. I could only imagine what it was like to be in a situation where your mate was the beta to an alpha that hated your own pack. They were practically star-crossed lovers. They were making it work the best they could, but I worried that if a feud were to break out between Pack Sallow and Pack Aphelion, it would put even more pressure on Percy's and Scythe's relationship.

"Then it's decided," Mark said. "We will have four groups, two of our pack and two of theirs. We will each have an A team and a B team. Darian, you will lead the B team, and I will lead the A team. We can let Percy decide how he will divide his men. Thank you all for your help in this matter."

"Of course, Alpha. I will get the rest of the men prepared for tonight." Darian stood up, but he waited for Mark to acknowledge him before leaving.

“Thank you. I have a few things to prepare myself, and then I will help out with preparations. You all are dismissed.” Mark stayed in his seat as the others began to leave.

I stayed behind with him. I was curious about what kind of other preparations he needed to make that didn’t involve the others.

Once everyone left the room, Mark’s demeanor completely changed. The alpha role slipped off his face, and I just saw a man who was worried about the night to come.

“Tonight will go smoothly. We have plenty of warriors to fight tonight.” I turned and grabbed Mark’s hand. He was such a caring alpha, and I knew he hated his pack members being put in any kind of danger.

“I know.” His voice wasn’t very convincing. “I trust in our people, and I know the members of Pack Sallow have gone through rigorous training.”

“Then what’s with those worry lines on your face?” I knew there was something else bothering him. He wasn’t one to open up easily about his deep concerns.

Mark grabbed my other hand and looked me in the eyes. “I have a favor to ask of you.”

“I’ll do anything you need.” There was no hesitation in my voice. Mark had asked so little of me since we’d been together. He was always trying to find ways to make me happy and make my life easier, so I wanted to return the favor in any way I could.

“How much experience do you have with hunters?” Mark asked.

I thought about this for a moment, searching my memory. “I haven’t ever faced a hunter face to face. We were warned about them in my pack growing up, and the occasional one came to our territory on occasion. I was too young to be involved in all of that, though.”

Mark nodded. “Hunters range from people trying to make some quick money to experienced hunters who crave the elimination of all werewolves. Their skill levels are all over the place. They are typically known for hunting rogue werewolves and traveling by themselves.”

"Then what are they doing here?" What Mark said lined up with the information I had when I was a kid. I remember having nightmares about hunters, but my mother told me not to be afraid. Hunters were normally too afraid to attack packs, knowing the packs were too strong to take down.

"That's what worries me," Mark admitted. "We know there are at least three hunters in town, and they have been openly trying to attack our pack. I don't think we are dealing with amateurs here."

"Are you worried we don't have enough fighters for tonight?" I asked. "Would it be best to hold off until we can get more warriors from Pack Sallow to join us?"

Mark shook his head. "No, I think it's best to attack tonight. We are ready. I have been thinking about it a lot, and I think we need an upper hand to guarantee the success of tonight. That's where you come in."

This surprised me a little. Mark clearly didn't like me being actively involved in dangerous situations. "Me?"

Mark nodded. "Your magic will be unexpected. These hunters are used to hunting werewolves. I doubt they have much experience with magic users, if any. You can give us the unexpected edge we need tonight. This means you'll have to be on the front line."

My heart raced at the thought. I was prepared to join the fight tonight, but this made me nervous. I wasn't about to chicken out, though. The pack needed me, and I wanted to be a supportive leader in whatever way I could.

"Okay," I finally said.

"That's it?" Mark seemed a little surprised.

"Yes," I said. "I've been training with my magic for a little while now. I'm ready for something like this. I have one condition, though."

Mark looked at me carefully. "What is it?"

I knew Mark wasn't going to like this, so I took a deep breath in preparation. "I think Darian should lead the A group, the one I will be in."

"No." Mark's voice was firm, but his hands felt unsteady in mine.

"I don't like the idea, but I'm worried we would just end up as distractions for each other," I explained. I looked down at our hands. This wasn't an easy decision. I would much prefer Mark to always be by my side.

"No," Mark repeated. "I want to be with you in case something goes wrong."

"That's the problem," I said. "I will be a distraction for you. In the middle of battle, I don't think I should be your main focus, and I can't have you as mine. If you are right next to me, it would be difficult to take my attention off you. If I'm going to do this, I need my full concentration."

Mark grew quiet as he thought about my words. "Fine, but I have a condition of my own."

"That's fair. What is it?" I was surprised Mark agreed so easily to my condition.

"You will not put yourself in any unnecessary danger for any reason. If you feel like you are in too much danger or in over your head, link me and retreat if possible. You are my mate and the future luna of this pack. I will not have harm come to you tonight." Mark's tone was firm, and I knew there would be no negotiating about this.

"Deal." I stood up, still holding Mark's hands. "Come on. We should help the others prepare."

Mark stood up, but instead of leaving, he wrapped his arms around me, burying his face in my hair. "Have I told you how much I love you recently?"

I held Mark back, resting my face against his chest. "Once or twice. It's still nice to hear."

"I will tell you every day for the rest of our lives. You are the most important thing in my life."