

## The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 17

Dark shadows chased me through a forest. I ran as fast as I could to escape the chase, but I wasn't fast enough. I needed to change into wolf form, and with Shadow's help, I knew I could escape. I tried to change, but nothing happened.

"Shadow?" I called out, running for my life.

Silence.

My lungs stung as I pushed my body past its limit. I couldn't keep up with this. I splashed through a small stream, weaving in and out of trees, calling out for Shadow desperately. I couldn't feel her anymore. It was like she had completely disappeared.

My muscles burned, and I had to stop for a moment. I saw a large rock up ahead and dove behind it, trying to control my breathing so it didn't immediately give away my location. It only made my lungs burn for oxygen.

I heard the screeching before I saw it. The dark shadows found me. Black tendrils hovered in front of me, blocking any chance I had for an exit. I had no choice but to fight now. I held out my hand, trying to throw a ball of energy at the tendrils, but nothing appeared. It was nighttime, but when I looked into the sky, it was completely dark. The moon couldn't be seen, and I suddenly realized it was a new moon.

I had no way to defend myself while staring at this dark evil.

"What do you want from me?" I demanded, trying to make myself seem strong. Even though I was wolf-less and couldn't use my magic, I wasn't going to give up without a fight.

The tendrils swayed back and forth, but they didn't make a move towards me. I had expected them to attack after the chase, but it felt like they were just observing me. After a moment, they started to twist around each other, shrinking in the process. When they all stopped, they created a shadow of a man.

"Adira," the shadow man said. It sounded like several voices overlaid on each other.

My heart raced as the man stepped towards me. I pressed my back against the rock, trying to create as much distance as possible between us.

“Who are you?” I asked.

He stopped and looked around with a blank face. He had no defining features. It was like he was a 3D silhouette of a man. He finally looked back at me, and even though I didn’t see any eyes, I could feel him looking deep into my soul.

Finally, he said, “You.”

Adira, Mark said in my head.

I looked around, trying to see where he was, but as far as I could tell, it was just the shadow man and me in the forest.

Adira, wake up, Mark said again.

I felt my body shaking, snapping me out of a deep sleep. I sprung forward, gasping for air. It felt like I had been holding my breath. I felt disoriented as my eyes adjusted to the room. It was still dark in here, but I knew I was in my bedroom, safe in my bed.

Mark was staring at me with wide eyes. “Hey, hey, calm down.”

My heart was still racing. There was a lingering feeling of that shadow man’s eyes on me. It was almost like he was still staring at me.

“Something’s coming for me,” I whispered, realizing the truth. I didn’t know what it was or why it wanted me, but I knew one thing. Whatever this being was thought I belonged to it.

“You’re okay. You were having a bad dream.” Mark grabbed my hand, trying to comfort me.

I squeezed his hand, and I never wanted to let go of it or of him. Whatever this thing was was coming for me, and I knew I was running out of time, but I couldn’t let it take me. I knew I would have to get stronger.

“Something’s coming,” I repeated. Part of me knew it wasn’t just a bad dream. I looked at Mark, staring at him carefully.

His facial expression shifted as he stared at me. He quickly realized there was more to this than he realized. He pulled me into him and held me tightly. "Nothing is going to take you away from me."

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The next morning, the pack house started to get back to normal. It was more lively, and Mark was back in the kitchen making breakfast. All of the warriors from Pack Sallow had returned home, with the exception of one warrior who was still under Doctor Zayla's care. Percy tried to convince her to release him to Pack Sallow, but she refused to give up her patients.

Two of our warriors were still on bed rest, but the rest of them were active about the house, making everything feel alive again.

I walked into the kitchen, smiling when Darian was sitting at the breakfast table. He had been injured and dosed with wolfsbane during the fight, but it had only been a minor wound. He had gotten away with fewer scrapes than me from the battle.

As I walked over to the table, a nauseating smell hit my nose. My stomach churned in response, and I had to stop walking.

"Hey, are you okay, Adira?" Darian said, concern flooding his face.

The nausea passed with a couple of deep breaths. I refocused on Darian and smiled. "I'm fine. I think I'm still just exhausted from everything."

"You did a hell of a job during that fight," Darian said, tapping my shoulder. "Take it easy. You deserve a break."

I laughed at this. "A break? You're funny. There is still unpacking to do, and we need to find a way to have more patrols."

Darian rolled his eyes. "Someone else can do the unpacking, and I will figure out how to increase the patrols. You shouldn't be worrying about that."

I lifted my eyebrows. "This is my pack, too. I need to be helping out just as much as everyone else."

Darian smirked. "Those bags under your eyes say you need more sleep."

“Sleep is for the dead,” I laughed. I had slept plenty in the past twenty-four hours and was ready to do something, even though my body still felt exhausted.

Mark walked up next to me with two plates in his hand. He leaned over and kissed my cheek before slipping into the chair next to me.

“He’s right. As future luna, you need to make sure you’re getting your rest,” Mark said.

I sighed at this. “No fair. You two are ganging up on me. You both have had less sleep than me, and you’re fine. Plus, as future luna, I should be taking on my fair share of duties.”

“Before this turns into a fight,” Rie interrupted, “when do I get to take you dress shopping for the dress you are going to wear at your Luna Ceremony?”

“There are too many other things to worry about. We don’t need to rush the ceremony,” I said, feeling embarrassed. All eyes were now on me. I loved the idea of being the luna of this pack, but I didn’t feel like I deserved a big celebration for the matter.

Rie laughed. “Someone should tell Scythe that. I don’t think he slept a wink last night, preparing for your party. It’s happening next week whether or not you like it.”

I looked at Mark with pleading eyes. I knew he would understand the best that there were more important matters to worry about and not the ceremony.

Mark threw his hands in the air in defense. “Don’t look at me. If you want to try to stop Scythe from planning this party, be my guest. I know better than to try to stop him from planning a party.”

Everyone at the table laughed, and I knew Mark was right. Based on how above and beyond Scythe had gone with my birthday party, I feared the extent he would go to in order to plan this ceremony.

“I don’t really have a choice, do I?” I said, defeat evident in my voice.

“Nope!” Rie exclaimed. “So you might as well let me take you dress shopping sooner than later.”

“Fine, we can go shopping in the next couple of days. I want to keep an eye on everyone here for a few days first,” I said. It felt wrong to go dress shopping knowing our warriors were still bedridden after risking their lives for the greater good of the pack.

“Here, have some food,” Mark said, changing the subject before Rie tried to beg me to go shopping today.

I looked down at the plate of food, and the thought of eating sounded pretty horrible right now. I pushed the plate away and wrinkled my nose. “No thanks. I’m not really hungry right now.”

Mark knitted his eyebrows together. “Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m fine. My stomach is just a little upset. Nothing to worry about,” I insisted. I felt fine other than my stomach. “I’ll eat a little later. I think the weird sleep schedule threw off my appetite.”

Mark looked at me carefully. He reached forward and felt my forehead. When he was satisfied, he pulled back. “Okay, but tell me if you end up feeling worse.”

I leaned over and kissed Mark on the cheek. “Of course.”

Rie gagged at the sight. “Do you guys have to be so cutesy in front of everyone?”

Mark chuckled. “You’re just jealous.” He quickly pulled me in, kissing my lips deeply.

My face turned bright red with embarrassment. We had kissed in front of other pack members plenty, but this was too much.

“Mark,” I whined when he finally pulled away. I felt like I had to catch my breath, and the kiss made my mind wander to some less than appropriate places.

Mark smirked at me, making the feeling worse. His eyes told me he knew exactly what I was thinking.

Rie suddenly stood up. “I’m going to get out of here before I throw up. I’ll see you later for dress shopping.”

"I should get going, too," Darian said. "I have some training to do."

"You should be resting today!" I protested. "You need to make sure you are fully recovered."

"I'm fine. Besides, I need to make sure I stay on top of my warrior skills. We will be having a lot more training sessions in the next couple of weeks." Darian stood up and cleared his plate before leaving.

It was only Mark and me left at the table now. Mark grabbed my hand from under the table.

"Are you sure you're not hungry?" he asked.

"I promise I'm fine. I will eat when I get hungry," I assured. "Hurry up and eat. We have a lot to do."

Mark continued eating, but then he paused, his fork still in the air. I knew that look and knew someone was linking him. When he returned to the moment, his lips curled into a frown. He dropped his fork on his plate and stood up.

"We have a problem," he announced. He looked at me, and I saw deep concern and frustration. There was only one person that could cause Mark's face to twist like that.

Mark hurried to the front of the pack house, and I was a step behind him. I had a feeling I would need to step in to make sure things didn't get too out of hand. He rushed out the front door, leaving it wide open.

When we were outside of the pack house, my suspicions were confirmed. Jori was storming up to the pack house, his eyes dark in anger.

"What gives you the right to risk the lives of my pack without my knowledge?" Jori demanded, his fists curled. He looked ready for a fight.