

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 21

ADIRA

I hovered over my empty suitcase, unsure of what to pack exactly. It was only an hour to my hometown, but I didn't know how long I would be there. I wanted to pack extra just in case, but I imagined it being just a day trip. I wasn't sure if my mother would even agree to see me, and if she did, I couldn't imagine being there for very long. I knew this was something I had to do.

"Are you ready?" Mark asked, entering the room.

"Not yet," I said. I hadn't even started getting ready.

Mark approached me and then looked at the empty suitcase before looking back at me. "We don't have to go if you don't want to."

I took a deep breath and shook my head. "No. I can do it. It's time I faced my parents."

That word felt strange in my mouth. Parents. Alpha Lyna may not have been my blood-related father, but he still raised me. He was a father to me for most of my life, and I still had plenty of good memories of him. I remembered going on runs with him in wolf form late at night when I was supposed to be in bed, him taking me out for ice cream when I got good grades, him reading bedtime stories to me when I was having a hard time going to sleep.

He was strict at times, but he was a good father all the way up to the point where he turned his back on me for something that wasn't in my control. He betrayed our relationship and left me on my own, and my mother let him. I didn't want to run away anymore though. I wanted to show them I was plenty capable without them in my life.

Mark wrapped his arms around my waist, kissing the top of my head. "I will be right by your side the entire time, and if you change your mind anytime between now and at the doorstep, we will turn around immediately."

I placed my hands on top of Mark's hands and leaned into him. "Are you sure you can leave the pack to go with me?"

“Scythe and Rie assured me they have things under control. Darian will be running the patrol himself, and if anything happens, we won’t be that far away,” Mark said. “The pack should be fine for a day. I think you need me more for today.”

“Good. I’m glad you’ll be with me.” I turned my head and kissed Mark.

His hands automatically started running up and down my body, and I could feel the moment growing more intense. I pulled away, knowing if I didn’t stop things now, they could easily lead to too much time spent in bed, and today was not the day for that. Mark pouted his lip as my body separated from his.

I poked his nose. “I’ll be ready in five minutes. Meet you by the front door?”

“You know, there’s something else we could do in five minutes.” Mark raised his eyes up.

I shook my head with a smile. It would be a lie to say I didn’t have the same thought. “You know very well what five minutes can turn into with us, and I don’t want to show up to Pack Lyna’s house too late.”

Mark sighed. “Fine. I’ll just have to wait until this evening to do what I was thinking to you.” He winked as he left me in the bedroom.

Mark and I were still in the honeymoon phase of our relationship. We couldn’t get enough of each other, and if it wasn’t for all of our responsibilities, it would have been easy to stay in bed together for weeks, doing nothing but enjoying each other’s company. I loved the feeling, and I never wanted it to go away. I feared that moment. I didn’t want to fall into a boring routine where we were just going through the motions of being a couple. I wanted to always appreciate Mark and the love I felt for him.

I wanted to be one of those old couples who still held each other’s hands and always made sure to kiss each other goodbye. A giddy smile danced on my lips at the thought of growing old with Mark. I didn’t need an extravagant life, just a happy one with him would be enough for me.

I finished packing, not wanting to leave Mark waiting for longer than I told him. I didn’t pack much, just a spare change of clothes and a few bathroom necessities, just in case the day trip was extended for whatever reason. Packing didn’t take long, but before I left the room, I grabbed a piece of paper and started writing a note.

While I was hoping my mother could confirm Cain's story and maybe help me out a little, I knew I would need even more help, especially if Cain was telling the truth. I wasn't about to leave Mark, and if this council was after me, I would need another sorcerer who could help me figure out how to handle it.

Dear Ginger,

I hope you have been well. Mark and I are settled into our new home, but there has been chaos ever since we got here, so I apologize for not writing you sooner. I don't have time to go into the details, but it appears the Council of Magic wants me dead after finding out about my true nature. I need your help. I know this is a lot to ask, but if you can come to our pack, I will give you all of the details.

Sincerely,

Adira

I folded the note up and slipped it into an envelope. I pulled out a small bottle Ginger had given to me after we defeated Theron. I unscrewed the lid and pulled out the dropper lid. The liquid was thick and blue. I held it over the envelope and carefully dropped a single drop onto the paper, making sure to have the intention of sending the letter to Ginger.

This was a potion she had created herself to help us keep in touch. It essentially shifted small objects to the location the user intends when touching the liquid onto the object. We had been sending letters to each other back and forth this way. She gave a similar bottle to Daniel, and I knew they kept their correspondence up better than I did.

When that was done, I made my way to the front door. I was surprised when I got there and Mark wasn't waiting for me, since I was sure I had taken longer than five minutes to finish everything.

Where are you? I linked to him.

I'll be there in just a moment. Darian had to go over a last-minute plan with me. Go ahead and go to the car, and I'll meet you there, Mark explained.

I grabbed the keys and went to the car, putting my stuff in the trunk. I leaned against the door, wondering what was taking Mark so long. I wrapped my arms around myself, trying not to overthink what was coming. No matter what

happened, I knew I would be able to figure things out. I had always figured out how to survive, and this would be no different. I would find a way to defeat the council and figure out who this Son of Blood and Magic was. I knew what kind of life I wanted with Mark, and I was prepared to fight for it.

The front door opened, and I looked up, expecting Mark to walk through the door. I was surprised to see Rie running towards me.

“Oh good, I’m glad I caught you before you left,” Rie said, slightly out of breath when she stopped in front of me.

“Hey, what’s going on?” I asked. I was suddenly worried there was an issue with the pack.

“Wipe that stressed look off your face. I promise it’s not a bad thing,” Rie said.

I felt relieved hearing that. I wasn’t sure how many more fires I could handle trying to put out. “Oh good. What’s up then?”

“I know you have a lot going on right now, but I still want to take you dress shopping for your luna ceremony,” Rie said. “You’ll be back tomorrow, right?”

I frowned. “I really don’t think the luna ceremony is a good idea right now,” I said.

“Don’t waste your energy on fighting this, because I promise it’s not going to work. Don’t worry. Scythe and I are handling everything, and we are keeping it a small ceremony. However, you are our luna, and we plan on making it official as soon as possible so we can all link with you. Besides, we need a little good in all of this chaos.” Rie gave me a wink, smiling brightly as ever.

“It would be nice to communicate with the pack,” I admitted. “Do we have to go dress shopping, though? I have plenty of dresses to wear, and going shopping right now seems almost wrong.”

“You most definitely need a new dress, but I’ll tell you what. While you’re gone today, I will go shopping for you. I know your size and style, and I’ll pick out a few dresses for you to choose from. How does that sound?”

“That sounds great,” I said with a laugh of relief.

“Perfect. Now, I hope your trip goes smoothly, and if you need anything at all, don’t hesitate to call, okay?” Rie wrapped me into a big hug.

I hugged her back, tension leaving my body. “I won’t. Thanks.”

The front door opened again, and this time it was Mark who came out of the house. He stopped in front of me. “Sorry about that. Ready?”

I nodded. “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

Rie skipped into the house, waving goodbye to us as we got into the car. Mark automatically got into the driver’s seat, and I was grateful for that. I wasn’t sure how well I would be able to concentrate on the road with my nerves creeping in. The drive went surprisingly fast, and it wasn’t long before we were entering my hometown.

We finally made it to the front of the pack house I grew up in. I didn’t move from the seat in the car, giving myself a moment to prepare myself. I hadn’t seen my mother in almost five years, and I was expecting this interaction to go the worst way possible, which made it even more difficult to move.

Mark grabbed my hand and squeezed. “I’ll be right here next to you the entire time, and no matter what happens, just remember that I love you and you are my family.”

I looked at Mark and smiled. Leaning in, I gave him a small kiss. “Okay. Let’s get this over with.”

I got out of the car and started walking to the front door, Mark just a step behind me. I took a deep breath before knocking on the door. Footsteps approached the door before it opened slowly, revealing a familiar face.

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CAIN

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with me,” I said, sitting down at the table. The man across from me looked less than pleased.

“I still don’t understand who you are or why you would come to me,” he said. He was leaning back in his chair, completely uninterested in what I had to say.

I was a little surprised he even agreed to meet me with the attitude on his face.

“Let’s just say you and I have a mutual interest in common. I need your help, and I can help you get what you want.” I didn’t like going this route, but I felt like I didn’t have a choice. It was clear based on my conversation with Adira that she would never be willing to leave her mate, and I had to do something about it. Even if her mother confirms my story, Adira would be in great danger if she didn’t agree to come with me.

The man scoffed. “And how do you know what I’m interested in?”

“I have been watching you. I know who your enemies are, and I know what happened to you. You want revenge on this man, right?” I slid a picture over to the man across from me.

The man grabbed the picture, and his demeanor completely changed when he looked at it. He sat up in his chair and even leaned forward. “You have my interest. What do you want from me, and how do you plan on helping me get what I want?”

“I need you to help me keep my daughter safe. You do that, and I will make sure you get what you want.”

The man smirked and held out his hand to me. “You have a deal.”

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 22

ADIRA

“Baylee,” I said when she opened the door. Baylee was the luna’s assistant, and she was always around when I was younger. I always liked her. She was kind to me, even when my mother asked her to scold me.

Baylee’s eyes were wide with shock. “Adira. What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to see Luna Freya,” I said. I kept my tone formal. I was here for business, not family purposes after all.

Baylee held the door partly cracked. She looked around with an almost panicked look in her eyes. “Um, but you’re not supposed-”

“Baylee, please,” I said, cutting her off before she said the words I dreaded. “I need to see my mother. Please tell her I’m here.”

Baylee pulled her lips as she decided what to do. “I can’t promise she’ll agree to see you.”

“Tell her I won’t leave until she agrees to see me,” I said. She owed me explanations after what she did to me. I spent five years hiding, but no more. It was time to face my mother, and I wasn’t going to run.

Baylee let out a sigh. “Stay here. I’ll be back.” She shut the door, leaving Mark and I on the porch by ourselves.

Mark slipped his fingers into mine and squeezed. “We’ll get the answers you are looking for.”

I squeezed his hand back, holding it tightly to keep me grounded. I could feel my nerves buzzing beneath the surface, and it was taking all of my focus to stop that energy from surfacing.

“I’m not leaving until I do,” I said firmly. I reminded myself of all of the reasons I couldn’t just go home right now.

It felt like forever before I heard footsteps on the other side of the door. I held my breath as the door finally creaked open. It only opened a few inches, revealing a face that looked almost like my own. My mother had my dark hair, and despite her age, her skin still looked young. She had bright blue eyes, which was the only obvious difference between her and myself.

“You shouldn’t be here,” my mother said.

“I need to speak with you,” I said. “It’s important.”

“If your father sees you here, he’ll-”

“He’s not my father,” I quickly interrupted. “Alpha Lyna is not my father, which is why he kicked me out when I was sixteen. Cain, on the other hand, is my father, and I need to talk to you about him.”

Her face paled at the mention of Cain’s name. She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out. She closed her mouth and swallowed hard. Finally, she said, “Follow me. Quickly.”

She opened the door the rest of the way and started walking through the pack house with purpose. I followed her, but my eyes instantly wandered around the house. It felt weird being back in my childhood home. It felt like walking into a memory. The walls were the same, and the common room still had the same worn out couch, but the smallest things were different. There were more plants here than before, and some of the paintings on the walls were new. It made it feel like I no longer belonged in the memory, because it was no longer mine.

My mother continued down a long hallway, stopping at one of the doors. She opened it up, and then gestured for us to go in first. The room was small and just had a round table in the middle of it that was only enough room for a few people. It must have been a meeting room for more private affairs. I entered, but I didn't sit right away. I still felt out of place being here, and I wasn't ready to sit.

My mother shut the door behind her, and she let out an audible breath. It was clear she was terrified of someone seeing us.

"Let's make this quick. Alpha Lyna is out right now, but he'll be back soon," my mother said. She sat down at the table and waited for us to join her.

My fist clenched at her words. I wanted to call her out on caring about this man more than her own daughter, but I knew that wouldn't lead to a productive conversation, so I bit my tongue. I sat down across from her, and Mark took a seat next to me. I stared at her, wondering how someone who looked so much like me could be nothing like me.

"So why did you come here?" my mother prompted when I didn't say anything.

"I know the truth about who I am," I said. "Cain told me about how you two were a couple until you got pregnant. I know I'm not a pureblooded werewolf."

My mother's jaw clenched. "Why would he tell you that? We agreed to keep your nature hidden from everyone, and now he goes and ruins all of that."

"He didn't tell me. I found out about who I am on my own when someone was trying to kill me, and my magic started to emerge. My question is why didn't you tell me?" My anger was starting to rise, and all of the hurt of my own family betraying me started to bubble up.

"We promised to keep your true nature hidden to keep you safe. I was trying to protect you," she defended.

"Protect me?" I scoffed. "How is letting me get kicked out when I was only sixteen protecting me?"

Her face fell at this, and her skin started to show her age as the wrinkles creased with tension. "I know this may be hard to understand, but Alpha Lyna was ready to kill you and me when he found out the truth. He had his suspicions all along. Your eyes never belonged to me or him, but when you turned sixteen, your magic started to emerge, and he could feel the difference. He confronted me about whether you were actually his or not, and I told him the truth. Well, part of the truth. He doesn't know that you are part sorcerer, but I told him that you weren't his daughter.

"He was furious. He felt betrayed and lied to, and he was ready to kill you out of embarrassment of being tricked. I convinced him to kick you out instead. It was to protect you. I could let anyone find out the truth of who you really were."

Her voice was desperate as she explained her decisions. Under normal circumstances, the stress in her voice would have made me feel sympathy, but not in this case. She was trying to justify her actions, but all I heard was fear and excuses.

"You convinced him to kick me out," I whispered as that statement truly settled in. "It was you who convinced him to tell your own daughter to leave and never come back or she'd be killed. That's not the actions of a mother protecting her daughter. That's the actions of a woman trying to sweep her affair under the rug." Tears started welling up in my eyes. I was angry and hurt in a way I wasn't prepared for.

Mark's hand slipped onto my thigh, and his touch was comforting. It helped me take a breath and regain my composure just a little.

"It wasn't an affair," my mother said. Her voice was softer now, almost broken. "I loved Cain, more than anything else in this world. It broke my heart leaving him the way I did, but it was all to protect you. I know it doesn't feel that way, but I swear it's true. I gave up the love of my life to keep your true nature a secret."

"Why?" I asked. "Why was it such a big deal to keep my identity a secret? It's not like you actually care about me."

"You don't understand anything. You're just a child," my mother snapped.

"I'm not a child anymore. I was when you kicked me out, though. Did it break your heart when I left? Or were you relieved that I was no longer a concern for you?" I could feel myself getting out of control, but I couldn't stop it. Nothing my mother said to me right now would fix the way she treated me.

"I was relieved I no longer had to stare into your eyes and be reminded of Cain, reminded of what I had to give up for you to protect you," my mother admitted. She stopped talking, eyes wide. She didn't mean to say that, but her reaction told me every word was true.

I swallowed hard, unsure of what to say in return. To my mother, I was just a hindrance all of those years. I was a secret she was forced to keep, instead of being with the man she truly loved. I couldn't imagine having to make that choice. My child or Mark. It would be heartbreaking, but I would never see a child as a burden, but that was the way my mother saw me.

My throat was dry, and I could barely find my voice. "If you loved him so much, then why did you choose to protect me? It would have been better if you had picked him, not me."

Luna Freya's face hardened. "It wasn't that simple. That prophecy about you, if it was true, then that would mean the world was in danger if your true nature came out. If you really are the Daughter of Moon and Magic, then we had to do everything we could to stop the Son of Blood and Magic from finding you. If he finds you, then it could mean destruction to everything we know."

I stood up, not needing to hear more. She confirmed Cain's story, and I finally understood why she treated me the way she did all of these years.

"Well, he has found me, no thanks to you." I turned to Mark. "Come on. Let's go. I think we're done here."

Luna Freya stood up. "What do you mean he found you?"

I stopped at the door and looked back at her. "Your plan didn't work. Abandoning me didn't protect me, but don't worry. I'm not your responsibility. I don't need your help."

I opened the door, but when I heard Mark speak up, I paused, surprised.

“You made a mistake,” Mark said. “Your daughter is the most amazing person I know. I can’t imagine the decision you had to make, but when you chose your daughter, you should have truly chosen her, because you are missing out on someone wonderful. I can’t even imagine how she turned out the way she did with you raising her, because she is not only strong and independent, but she also cares about those around her deeply. I hope you regret your decisions.”

Mark grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the room, heading straight for the front door. I was in complete shock at what he said to Alpha Freya. Hearing him stand up for me like that made my heart swell with happiness. I felt lucky to have found him. Even if I didn’t have the family I wanted growing up, I knew Mark was all the family I needed.

We walked out of the pack house quickly, and I didn’t hear any footsteps following us. I had a feeling this might be the last time I saw Luna Freya, and while part of me was sad at the thought, I didn’t care at the moment. I hadn’t had a relationship with my mother in a long time, and she made her decisions clear today.

Mark opened the door, but he paused when there was a tall man standing on the other side, looking shocked that the door opened so suddenly. His hair was a light brown, and his green eyes burned with anger.

“Alpha Lyna,” I whispered, my heart pounding against my chest.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 23

ADIRA

Alpha Lyna’s facial expression shifted from shock to anger as he processed what he was seeing. His fingers curled, and he seemed to grow taller. I found myself shrinking in his presence. Growing up, I wasn’t scared of him. He was a loving and caring father, but he could be extremely stern when he wanted to be. I hated getting on his bad side and getting scolded. I always felt bad for his enemies, too. There was a reason he was an extremely admired alpha, even though his pack size was relatively small compared to others.

Standing there, I knew I was the enemy he always feared, and that broke my heart more than anything my mother said. Luna Freya had always been colder

to me, constantly telling me how I should act like a proper daughter so I would fit the image of the child of the alpha and Luna. It was always rules with her, where Alpha Lyna would play with me and read to me. He was more of a parent to me than my real parents, so as I stared into his eyes and saw the hatred for me in this, I almost lost it.

“What are you doing here?” Alpha Lyna’s voice boomed, echoing through the front room.

The confidence I had before fell to the ground, and I couldn’t speak. I was terrified and heartbroken as I stared into the eyes of the man who used to love me like a daughter. My entire body started shaking.

Mark slid in front of me, separating me from Alpha Lyna. “We were here on official business with Luna Freya.”

Alpha Lyna c****d his head to the side as he looked at Mark. He looked him up and down, trying to decide how to act. “And who might you be?”

“I am Alpha Mark, leader of Pack Aphelion.” Mark’s voice was strong and commanding. He wasn’t as tall or as threatening as Alpha Lyna, but he held all of the command of an alpha.

“Pack Aphelion,” Alpha Lyna said, mulling over the words. “Your grandfather was Morris Aphelion, wasn’t he?”

Mark nodded. “Yes, that was my grandfather.”

“Shame what happened to him.” There was no indication of how Alpha Lyna felt about the situation based on his inflection alone.

“It was a great loss. He was a great man,” Mark said without missing a beat.

I wondered what Alpha Lyna had heard about the situation. Mark told me that his grandfather had been painted in a pretty poor light after the coup, but many people knew his grandfather personally, and I hoped they would have made their own opinions about the situation, instead of listening to the rumors that were spread.

“Indeed he was. I worked with him briefly when I was a child. He was a strong alpha,” Alpha Lyna agreed.

Mark's shoulders seemed to relax at the statement. "Well, if you excuse me, my mate and I must be going, since we finished our business here."

Alpha Lyna's eyes fell onto me, but I couldn't tell what he was thinking. His eyes were cold and gave away no emotion. I stepped closer to Mark, wanting to feel just a little better in this awful situation.

Heels clicked in the hallway behind us, and a woman gasped. "Reyland. You're home."

Alpha Lyna's demeanor shifted as Luna Freya walked into the room. "Darling, you didn't tell me we were expecting guests. An alpha, no less."

Luna Freya forced a smile onto her face. "Yes, it was a bit of an unexpected visit, but don't worry. Our business is finished here."

"Nonsense. They are our guests. You shouldn't rush them out the door so eagerly." Alpha Lyna turned back to Mark. "You and your mate should stay for dinner. I'm afraid we have not had a chance to get to know your pack, Alpha Mark. We have been out of touch with the ongoing in Ashville for some time now." Alpha put his hands behind his back, as he waited for the answer.

Mark, I really don't want to stay, I linked him. I knew Alpha Lyna was extending a courtesy, which would have been beneficial to our pack, but I had had enough of this house, and I needed a moment to breathe to get my head situated.

"I appreciate the offer, but I'm afraid we have prior obligations," Mark said with a smile, acting like I hadn't linked him.

"A shame. We should schedule something for the future," Alpha Lyna said.

I felt weird listening to the conversation. Everything about it felt fake. They were both acting pleasantly as one did when they came across other alphas. It was how bonds and alliances were forged, even if the politeness was all a ruse.

"Surely we'll find a more suitable time," Mark agreed. Then he turned to me and grabbed my hand, guiding me around Alpha Lyna and towards the door. "It was a pleasure officially meeting you."

"Same," Alpha Lyna said. His eyes never left me as we walked away.

Just before we left through the door, something came over me, and I pulled on Mark's hand, stopping us. I turned back to Alpha Lyna. "You were a great father at one time. I'm sorry you found out the truth about me in the way you did. I can only imagine how upsetting that news was. It wasn't easy for me when I found out recently. It really is a shame how things went down."

Alpha Lyna's mouth fell open, but no words came out. He was shocked, and didn't know what to say to me.

I forced a smile and nodded before turning back and leaving with Mark. We went straight to the car without saying a word to each other. After climbing into the car, I shut the door, and I could feel my damn breaking. This was harder than I had even anticipated, and I felt completely overwhelmed by everything. All of the pain from five years ago came back. I thought it would be easier knowing the truth of why my parents kicked me out, but knowing the real reasoning and hearing it from the woman I once called "mother" was much worse than knowing.

Mark started driving the car, and I told myself to keep it together for just a few more moments. I didn't want to risk anyone in the pack house seeing me break down. They would only see it as weakness. The farther away from my childhood home we got, the more my walls started breaking down. The tears spilled out of my eyes, silent at first.

Mark glanced over at me, frowning when he saw my face. He reached over and grabbed my hand. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

I squeezed his hand back, grateful he didn't ask me if I was okay. It was obvious I wasn't okay at this point. I opened my mouth to say something, but no words came out. I didn't know what to say. I was still trying to process how I felt. How could my mother think of me like that?

"How could my mother resent me so much?" I whispered. "If choosing me over her mate was going to make her hate me so much, then why pick me in the first place? I deserved to be loved, don't I?"

"Of course you do. Your mother's actions reflect nothing about you. Hey, hey, it'll be okay." Mark pulled the car over when he saw the tears flowing freely now.

He got out of the car and ran around to my side of the car. He opened my door, unbuckled me, and pulled me into his chest, holding me tightly.

"I always tried to be a good daughter. I know I wasn't blood related to him, but I loved him. Didn't he love me? How could he just abandon me like that because of what she did?" I was now sobbing uncontrollably into Mark's shirt. None of this made sense anymore, and the pain was too much.

"I'm so sorry they hurt you like that. You don't deserve this, and I wish I could take away all of your pain." Mark rubbed my back as I continued sobbing into his shirt. "We should get you into the car. Come on, let's sit in the back."

I pulled back from Mark, trying to understand the sudden urgency in his voice. When I saw my hands gripping Mark's shirt, it clicked. My hands were glowing blue as the tears continued to stream down my face. I have never glowed like that before, and we couldn't risk anyone seeing me like this.

Mark opened the back door and slid in first. He quickly pulled me into his lap, shutting the door behind me. He grabbed his jacket and hung it up in the window, giving us some more privacy until I could get my magic under control. I tried to focus on my breathing, and I was going through cycles of calming down and then bursting into tears. The entire time, Mark held me in his lap, comforting me in every way he could think of.

He stroked my hair while assuring me he would always be there for me and he loved me. I was so grateful Mark insisted on coming with me for this. I thought I could handle it on my own, but it was much harder than I anticipated. If Mark hadn't been here with me, I didn't know how I would have handled everything. I felt so lucky with him here with me, and no matter who came after me, I knew I would get through it as long as Mark was by my side.

After some time, I was completely exhausted from crying and fell asleep in Mark's arms. When I opened my eyes, I was in my familiar unconscious mind where I could talk to Moon and Shadow. There was running water in the distance, but something felt different. I didn't feel safe here.

I walked around, looking for Shadow and Moon, wondering where they were hiding. I continued on, walking towards the water. Eventually, I came across a stream of water where Shadow was drinking. Moon was nearby, cleaning herself. She was a safe distance away from the water though. They were on the other side of the stream as me. When I got closer, I sat down in front of the water and pulled my legs into my chest.

The two of them paused what they were doing and watched me. I could feel their eyes on me, waiting for me to say something, but I was too tired to talk.

The exhaustion from crying was still lingering in my head, even though I knew my body was asleep.

Eventually, Moon approached the water, sitting next to Shadow. She looked at me carefully. “He’s watching us. Do you feel it?”

I nodded slowly. It felt like eyes were everywhere, but I couldn’t see anyone. “I feel it, but I don’t know who it is. It doesn’t feel familiar.”

“I can’t figure it out, either,” Moon admitted. “I can feel his intention, though. He wants you for your magic. With you by his side, he’ll have everything he needs.”

“It’s the Son of Blood and Magic, isn’t it?” I wasn’t really asking the question. I already knew the answer. I could feel the pull of the darkness, and it was the same darkness I had seen before. There was something else about it that felt familiar, and I couldn’t quite figure it out.

“Our mate won’t let him take you,” Shadow chimed in. “We’ll be safe with Mark.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Moon said. “I don’t know if Mark will be able to protect us from this. This might be something only we can figure out.”

“I don’t know how,” I admitted. “How do I stop all of this from happening? I’m not skilled enough or strong enough.”

Moon jumped over the stream, sitting down next to me. “We have the power inside of us. We just need to find it.” She sprang to her feet, quickly running away.

Shadow followed suit, quickly catching up to the cat. I stood up, unsure of what was happening.

Moon paused and looked back at me. “Are you coming?”

“Where?” I asked, feeling confused.

“To find the strength you’ve always had inside of you.”y

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 24

MARK

Adira fell asleep in my lap after crying for almost an hour. I hated seeing her that way. I hated that the parents she grew up with treated her so poorly. I was amazed at how she grew up to be such a strong and caring person when she was looked down on for something that was completely out of her control. I just wanted to hold her in my arms forever and never let anyone hurt her again.

Unfortunately, I couldn't protect her from everything. All I could do was be there for her in any way possible, even if that meant holding her while she cried herself to sleep. I wanted to do something for her to make sure she knew how special she was to me and everyone else in the pack, but I wasn't sure what to do or how to do it, especially with how many threats were looming over us right now.

I knew nothing about the Council of Magic or how strong they were. Werewolves once stood against sorcerers, so they couldn't be that strong, right? But Cain made it seem like they had endless resources. That was something I was lacking. As much as I wanted to protect my pack from everything, we were still smaller. Without a proper alliance with Pack Sallow, I wasn't sure how I would be able to manage that.

And then there was this Son of Blood and Magic we apparently had to worry about.

My grip automatically tightened on Adira. I didn't fully understand what this prophecy meant or what exactly this person wanted with Adira, but I wouldn't let him take her from me. I didn't care how I would have to stop it. I just knew there was no other option.

Adira shifted in my arms, looking up at me with her sleepy eyes. Her eyes were still red and puffy from all of her crying, and her hair was a little tangled, but she was still as beautiful as ever. She looked around, groggy and a little confused.

"Did I fall asleep?" she asked. She started to sit up.

I touched her shoulder, encouraging her to relax. "It's okay. We're not in a rush. You can sleep more if you want."

She continued sitting up and looked out the window. "It's getting late, and the sun will be up for only a little longer. We should go back home."

"Okay." I leaned over and kissed her on the forehead before moving to the front.

She moved to the passenger seat, and then we started our drive back to Ashville. She was quiet for the rest of the drive, but she seemed a lot calmer. Her eyes flickered around, and I could tell she was having a conversation with Moon, Shadow, or the both of them. I wanted to know what they were talking about, but I didn't want to disturb her. Adira wasn't the type to keep secrets from me, so I knew she would tell me when she was ready to.

The car ride felt longer on the way back. I was worried about Adira, and I was going over a list of things I needed to do to make sure to keep everyone safe. Since my pack was still small, I knew I would need help if I wanted to fight off these threats. I knew I would need the help of other wolf packs, especially because I knew Jori was not going to lend us help after we went behind that back.

I wasn't sure what other wolf packs would be willing to help us, though. Since we were a newer wolf pack, we didn't have many connections yet. I wasn't sure if other werewolves even took my pack seriously. I would have to talk to Darian and Percy to see if they had any connections we could utilize. Perhaps I could use connections my grandfather had if there were any packs out there that still recognized him as the man he actually was, instead of the one he was painted as after his death.

If we got more help, we could set up more patrols, and we would be able to prepare for anyone who tried to attack again. We could put the sorcerers in their place, so they would stop coming after my mate. I would make sure this guy from the prophecy knew that just because Adira could possibly be part of a prophecy, it didn't mean it was guaranteed to come true. I believed that we could choose our own path, and no prophecy would ever change that for me.

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When we finally pulled up to the pack house, Adira's eyes were still glazed over, and I wondered what she was so wrapped up about in her head.

"We're home," I said, pulling her out of her thoughts.

She blinked a few times before smiling at me. "Sorry. I didn't realize that much time had passed."

"It's okay," I said. Adira was definitely not acting like herself, which only worried me more. "Why don't we go inside, and I can cook you some dinner. You haven't eaten much today."

Adira forced a smile. "I'm not really hungry right now. I think I'm just going to go upstairs and shower and then lie down for a little while."

"Are you sure?"

She nodded. "I'm not feeling the greatest right now, anyway."

I decided not to push the subject. I was sure she was mentally exhausted from everything. I would make sure to bring her some food a little later and try to get her to eat.

"Do you want help to the room? I can have Zay take a look at you too." I could feel my protective instincts kicking in, and they were hard to reign back, knowing my mate wasn't okay.

She smiled again, and it broke my heart seeing her try so hard. I knew she was pretending she was okay because she didn't want to worry me. I would rather have her show her full feelings instead of hiding them, though. I didn't want her to hide any part of her.

Adira grabbed my hand and kissed my cheek. "I'm okay. Promise. I just need to relax and recharge, and then I'll be fine."

I let out a small sigh. "Okay. You go take your shower. I'll unpack our things and make sure everything is in order with the pack. I will check up on you soon, but if you need anything, just link me."

"Of course." This time she kissed me softly on the lips, lingering for a moment longer than I expected. I could almost feel the sadness through her trembling lips, and I didn't want her to stop. I wanted to kiss every part of her body until she was smiling again. I wanted to hold her until all of her pain went away.

Finally, Adira pulled back and made her way to the pack house. I watched her leave, unable to pull my eyes away until she was inside. I let my shoulders fall and my head lean back as I closed my eyes for a moment. A sigh escaped my

lips as I tried to center myself while she wasn't watching me. It was hard watching the woman I loved struggle so much without doing anything, but I wanted to look strong in front of her, even if I didn't feel that way.

After taking my moment, I changed my expression, ready to face everything that was to come. I knew I was resilient, and I could get through this. I had been through too much in my life already, so I knew I could handle whatever else would come my way.

I quickly unpacked the car, so I could touch base with Darian and Scythe about everything that happened while we were gone. It hadn't even been a full day since I was gone, but I wanted to know about anything out of the ordinary, even if it was the smallest thing. I also wanted to start reaching out to other packs for help as soon as possible. It could take time for them to respond to our request for help, and I didn't want to waste any time. People could come after Adira at any moment, and I didn't want Cain to have any ammunition for convincing Adira to leave with him.

As I finished bringing in all of the stuff we packed, I was surprised to hear a knock on the door. As far as I knew, we weren't expecting any visitors. I set down the bag in my hand and opened the door. I froze, my entire body tensing up as I stared at the person in my doorway.

"What are you doing here?" My words came out more defensive than I intended, but I knew I wasn't completely unjustified for being on guard.

"I think you and I should have a conversation," Alpha Lyna said. He was standing tall with his hands behind his back.

"I don't have any interest in talking right now," I said. I knew I should be more pleasant with this alpha, but it was hard knowing his history with my mate. The way he just pretended like everything was okay when we were at his pack house rubbed me the wrong way as well.

"I know you don't have any reason to like me. I'm sure Adira has told you about what happened between her and I by now, but I would appreciate it if you could at least give me a chance to talk to you." His demeanor was calm, despite my defensive nature.

"Give me a good reason why I should bother talking to you," I said. There was very little this man could say to me to make me change my mind about him.

There was never an excuse to abandon a sixteen-year-old girl who was raised as a daughter.

"I have made mistakes, mostly out of anger. I took it out on the wrong person. I've known that for years, but I didn't know what to do. Seeing Adira today made me realize I had to do something," Alpha Lyna explained.

I scoffed at his words. "You kicked a teenager out and threatened to kill her because your wife lied to you. Adira didn't do anything wrong, yet she is the one who suffered all of these years. Even if she wasn't yours by blood she was still your daughter. She loved you like a father, and you didn't even have the courtesy to tell her why you kicked her out. I'm sorry if you suddenly feel sorry, but that's your burden to bear. Adira has been through enough. If you realized your mistake, you should have reached out to her sooner. It's too late now."

I tried to shut the front door, but Alpha Lyna stopped the door with one hand. I could feel his power radiating through his stance.

"Please just hear me out. Adira doesn't have to ever see me again if she doesn't want to. I don't deserve redemption for what I did to her, and I would understand if she spent the rest of her life hating me. I deserve that. But I can help her and you if you let me." Alpha Lyna was still completely composed. I expected more emotion from the words coming from his mouth. I expected a form of desperation or pleading, but he had practice being a leader who had a strong image to maintain. He didn't show simple emotions, since that could make an alpha seem weak.

I disagreed with that philosophy as a leader. I had to be strong for those who followed me, but I always wanted to be upfront and honest with them. I wanted them to see that I wasn't perfect, but I still would do everything I could for them. It felt more genuine than bottling everything up to try to make a perfect picture.

"I will agree to hear you out on two conditions," I finally said. I didn't like this man being around Adira in any way, but maybe he could help us out. "If Adira doesn't want you around, then that's the end of it, no matter what kind of help you have to offer."

Alpha Lyna was silent for a moment. "Okay. What's your second condition?"

I took a step forward, straightening my posture. "If I find out this is some sort of ruse to hurt Adira or my pack, you will regret crossing me."

The corner of Alpha Lyna's lip turned up ever so slightly. "That sounds more like a threat, not a condition."

"Think of it as you please," I returned. "As long as you understand that I will protect the people I care about at any cost. Don't cross me. Don't hurt my mate. Don't hurt my pack. It's as simple as that."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 25

ADIRA

The blood in my head was pounding in my ears, and I felt like I couldn't breathe as Reyland spoke to Mark. My back was pressed against the hallway upstairs next to the stairs as I listened to their conversation. I could barely focus on the words as I tried to control my breathing. I wanted to believe that Reyland regretted his decision to kick me out, but I had a hard time believing it. If he was truly sorry, he would have come to find me.

"As long as you understand that I will protect the people I care about at any cost. Don't cross me. Don't hurt my mate. Don't hurt my pack. It's as simple as that." Mark's voice was firm and unwavering as his alpha tone emerged.

"I completely understand. Say the word, and I'm gone," Reyland responded.

Mark hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Fine. You'll tell me what you have to offer first, and then I'll bring the information to Adira. Then I'll let her decide if she wants your help."

"Fine. Are we going to discuss things here?" Reyland asked, the slightest hint of impatience in his voice.

I held my breath as I waited for Mark's response. I wanted him to tell Reyland to go home. I hated the idea of that man coming into my home. Everything about Reyland's voice told me he was here as an alpha, not a father. He was too formal and lacking emotion, just like the day he told me to leave.

"Right this way," Mark said.

My stomach churned, and I couldn't take it anymore. I ran to the bathroom, barely making it in time to puke my guts out. I felt completely sick and stayed in front of the toilet until the entire contents of my stomach was gone. I shifted my weight so I was sitting on my butt instead and leaned my head back against the bathroom wall. I still felt queasy and didn't want to move. I didn't want to leave the bathroom for fear of running into Reyland.

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MARK

Alpha Lyna sat across from me in the conference room. Neither of us had said anything since I let him into my pack house. I had thought about asking Darian or Scythe to be present for this meeting, but I decided it was best for me to talk to him in private first. He was too tied up in Adira's history, and it wasn't my place to share her past with others. If the alpha said something useful, I would decide what to do at that point.

"So why would you come here and offer us any kind of help?" I finally asked when he didn't offer up the information.

"After you left, my wife informed me of the conversation you all had. She had never told me the full extent about what Adira was before, but it makes sense. When she turned sixteen, I could feel a change in her, and I knew she wasn't mine," Alpha Lyna explained. He sat tall in his chair with his fingers intertwined on the table.

"You didn't ask any questions before you kicked your own daughter out?" I asked, scoffing at the audacity of this man. Before I made such an intense decision, I would want to know everything about the situation.

"I tried to ask her, but the only thing she would admit to me was that she had an affair and that Adira wasn't mine. She refused to explain how, when, or who. Before you push me about that, I realize I should have found out more before taking it out on Adira, but I can't change my actions from the past. I can only control my actions now," he said, leaning forward. I could feel his alpha pheromone increase, but it didn't intimidate me. In fact, it had the opposite effect. This man was so used to using his alpha status to get people to listen to him that he didn't know how to have a real conversation.

"So what did Luna Freya tell you that made you change your mind about Adira now?" I asked. The more this man talked, the less I liked him.

“Nothing,” he admitted. “It was what Adira said. She was right. I used to be a father figure to her, and she was my daughter. I loved her like a daughter, and that never stopped. I was just filled with so much anger at the time that I wasn’t thinking straight, but seeing Adira and how she turned into a strong young lady made me realize how deeply I regretted losing her relationship.

“I made my wife tell me the truth, the whole truth, about who and what Adira was. Freya told me about this horrible prophecy about Adira and how you guys came to her for answers. I don’t know exactly what you are facing, but I want to lend you my help. I abandoned Adira once, but I don’t plan on doing it again.”

Everything Alpha Lyna was saying sounded too good to be true. If he was willing to offer help, then we could have backup for potential issues sooner rather than later. This could be exactly what we needed to face these challenges, but I didn’t know if we could trust him or if Adira would want to accept the help.

“Are you able to supply warriors to help us?” I asked. I needed to know the full extent of the help he could offer before going to Adira with this.

“I can provide as many warriors as you need within reason,” Alpha Lyna said. “I can even lend support for training your warriors. I understand that your pack is fairly new and still pretty small.”

I nodded. “Yes. We manage okay, but I fear we don’t have enough manpower to deal with outside threats. What do you know about sorcerers and the Council of Magic?”

Alpha Lyna knitted his eyebrows together at the question. He stroked his beard as he thought about it. “I don’t know much about them if I’m being honest. We might have some records with our historian about the war, but ever since the pact was made, our pack hasn’t had contact with sorcerers. Over the generations, knowledge has been lost about them.”

I nodded, understanding the dilemma. I knew sorcerers existed in their own territories, but that had been the extent of my knowledge before meeting Adira. We were never taught about the war as young pups. It had been labeled as unnecessary information by an elder long ago, which was ridiculous and naive. To hide history created the risk of repeating it the horrors it entailed.

“The Council of Magic wants to get rid of Adira for what she is, and we’ve been told they will come after her. The more information we have about them, the more prepared we can be for when they do come,” I explained.

Alpha Lyna’s face shifted back into its neutral form. “I understand. I will see what information we can dig up and provide it to you as soon as possible. I can have my patrols head here as early as tomorrow if you choose to accept my help.”

“Thank you. I will reach out as soon as we have come to a decision,” I said, standing up. I held out my hand to him. “I appreciate you coming here to offer your help, Alpha Lyna.”

He stood up and took my hand. His grip was firm and would have hurt most people’s grip. “Please call me Reyland. I hope to be working with you to protect my daughter—to protect Adira.”

I walked Reyland to the front of the pack house and escorted him out the door. Once he was gone, I took a moment to myself. His help was very appealing, and I wanted to take all the help I could get. No one would take Adira from me if I had anything to say about it. However, I didn’t know how Adira would feel about all of this. She broke down crying just from seeing the man, so I wasn’t sure how she would react to him being around the pack house to keep an eye on her.

I needed to talk to her sooner rather than later, though. I had no idea when any of the threats would attack, and the sooner we were prepared the better.

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ADIRA

I took a few deep breaths and willed myself to get off the bathroom floor. I didn’t want Mark to find me like this. He was already worried enough. I didn’t want him to know I was throwing up due to anxiety. I quickly brushed my teeth and washed my mouth out, feeling much better after freshening up.

As I exited the bathroom, Mark was entering our bedroom. His face was twisted, and I could tell he had some sort of internal struggle going on.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked when he saw me.

I nodded slowly and then walked over to the bed. My legs were a little shaky from sitting on the bathroom floor. I waited for Mark to say something, knowing he was going to tell me about Reyland showing up. He walked over to me and sat down next to me.

I watched his face shift as he went through several thoughts. I reached over and grabbed his hand.

“What did he want?” I asked, wanting to help Mark say what he needed to. I didn’t want to wait any longer, guessing what happened either.

Mark looked at me with wide eyes. “How did you-”

“I was going to grab some water, and I overheard some of the conversation,” I explained. I looked away from him. “I didn’t want to face him though.”

Mark squeezed my hand. “And you don’t ever have to face him if you don’t want to.”

I wished that was true, but I knew it wasn’t. “I can’t hide forever. I will have to face him one day. I just didn’t want that day to be today. So why did he come here?”

Mark shifted so he was looking directly. “He wants to offer us help. He says he’ll do research about the Council of Magic and will provide warriors to help protect our pack.”

I tightened my lips. “He offered help, just like that?” He was never the type of alpha to offer other packs help without some sort of deal that would strengthen our pack, which made me suspicious of his intentions.

“He says it’s to make up for what he did to you. I don’t know how genuine the offer is, but we could use the help. If you don’t feel comfortable with it, though, we don’t have to. We can reach out to other werewolf packs if you would prefer.” Mark was very quick to make sure that we didn’t have to do any of this.

I felt oddly still at the offer. I didn’t feel anxious or nervous. I wasn’t happy either. As much as this offer seemed weird for Reyland’s character, I had never known him to be the malicious type, and Mark was right. We could use the help. Getting help from Cain didn’t seem to be an option, and if I wanted to make sure my life stayed intact, we would need help from someone.

We needed some sort of break from the universe. It felt like one attack after another. Maybe this was the break I needed. Maybe for once, the universe was on my side to make sure I could find the happiness I wanted.

Finally, I said, "We should accept his help."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 26

ADIRA

The pack house was filled with people as we organized everything for the warriors Pack Lyna sent to us. I was running around, making sure all of the spare bedrooms were set up and ready to go for our guests. We didn't have enough room for everyone to have their own place, so we set up cots for people to share sleeping spaces. With the varied patrol schedule Darian made, it allowed us to put a few extra people in rooms.

I didn't expect the pack house to be filled so extravagantly this quickly after moving. It was always Mark's hope to grow the pack into something more, which is why he wanted to make sure the house we bought was big enough to take on new werewolves. It came in handy now with all of the guests provided for us from Reyland.

I hadn't had a chance to speak to any of the warriors yet, since I was too busy helping Rie and Scythe with all of the preparations. The warriors had already arrived, but we were still busy making sure there were enough beds and food to keep everyone comfortable. It was impressive with how quickly Reyland was able to organize everything. He was always on top of the warrior side of things when I was growing up.

It impressed me so much that it made me want to be a warrior myself, but Reyland never liked the idea of his little girl fighting. It was weird to think about the old days. Even though I knew he wasn't my father, it still felt like he was. I still wanted to show him what I had managed to do and make him proud, but I had to remind myself that his opinion no longer mattered. He was the one who threw our relationship out the door.

I told Mark I didn't mind if Reyland was around to help with the warriors. He was extremely skilled and seasoned, and I was sure he could give helpful advice to both Mark and Darian. I didn't have any intentions of interacting with him directly, though.

Rie and I were organizing one of the rooms for the warriors, trying to figure out how to comfortably fit three beds in the room without making our guests feel like sardines.

“We need more sheets up here,” Rie said as she made one of the beds.

“I think I have more downstairs. I’ll run to go get them,” I said.

I practically skipped down the stairs, wanting to finish our preparations as soon as possible. I knew Mark and Reyland wanted to host a meeting to go over the plans with the warriors in a little more than an hour, and I wanted all of the preparations to be done before then.

The downstairs was filled with people chatting or wandering around, waiting for instructions. It felt like I was at a convention of some sort with the mass amount of people in my own home. It was a little strange being around this many people again, but I enjoyed the feeling. It was lively and loud, and it reminded me of my childhood.

I went to the linen closet, searching for more sheets for the beds. I didn’t see any other sheets in the closet, but I swore I had bought some more. Maybe I left them in the car. I turned to run outside, but I instantly ran into something hard.

“No way. It really is you!”

I took a step back and looked up at the tall figure in front of me. His sandy brown hair was styled more neatly than the last time I saw him, and he had definitely filled out. He was no longer the skinny teenage boy I grew up with.

“Mason,” I gasped, not believing my eyes. “There’s no way that’s you!”

“Addy! It’s been way too long!” Mason wrapped his arms around me, pulling me into a big bear hug that lifted my feet off the ground.

I giggled and smacked his arm when he set me down. I pretended like the smack hurt my hand. “You know I hate being called ‘Addy.’ And are you made out of stone now?”

He chuckled, beaming as brightly as ever. “I’m no longer a boy. I’ve grown into a strong man. You have definitely grown up yourself.” He looked me up and down, making me blush.

I rolled my eyes at him. "Careful. You are trying to flirt with a mated woman."

Mason laughed again. This time the sound rumbled deeply in his chest. "Gross. You're like my little sister, Addy. I would never flirt with you. Did I hear you correctly, though? You're mated?"

I nodded, smiling when I thought about Mark. "Yes, I am in fact mated."

"I'm going to have to meet the man that finally tamed the girl who never had interest in boys before. I'm not sure I'll believe it otherwise. Although that stupid smile on your face is telling me you're quite infatuated with the man." He gave me a wink to emphasize his point.

I wrinkled my nose at his teasing. "I was just waiting for the right man to come along."

"Clearly." Mason's tone shifted to a more serious note. "You're happy, right? He's good to you?"

I bit my lip, trying to hide the smile forming. "He's perfect. He loves me and treats me better than I deserve." Just thinking about Mark made me miss him. With all of the preparations that needed to be done, I had barely seen him today.

"I don't think that's possible," Mason said. "So who is this man, and when do I get to meet him?"

I rolled my eyes at his comment. "Well, I'm pretty sure you'll meet Mark at the warrior meeting, since I'm assuming that's the reason you're here."

Mason put one hand up. "Wait, Mark as in Alpha Mark?"

I nodded, smiling as he made the connection. His face turned from confused to shocked. His eyes were wide and mouth gaped.

"You are mated to the alpha? Look at you. So what, are you the luna of this pack then?" he asked.

"Not officially, but they are planning the ceremony. I'm not sure when it's supposed to happen though."

I had forgotten about the ceremony with all of the planning for Pack Lyna's help with the warriors. I wondered if Scythe was still planning that among the

chaos. I wasn't about to ask about the ceremony, not with all of the work that needed to be done here. As intimidating as being an official luna was, it was something I was actually looking forward to. It just felt wrong to ask about something like that at a time like this.

"Wow," Mason mused, running his fingers through his hair. "I always knew you were meant to be a luna. I mean your parents are alpha and luna after all, but it's a little weird thinking about it. Especially with the way you disappeared so suddenly."

I felt the shift in the mood, and I wasn't sure if it was on my end because of the topic we were broaching, or if it was also on Mason's end.

I laughed nervously, grabbing the back of my neck. "Yeah, it's a weird thought to me. I didn't think I'd ever grow up to be a luna. I hated the idea of becoming my mother."

Mason's expression softened. "There's no way you'll ever become like your mother. You have too big of a heart for that."

Mason looked down at the ground and shifted back and forth on his feet. There was something simmering below the surface, but I didn't know if I wanted to ask him about it. There was a time when Mason was my best friend. He was always playing with me when I was a young girl, and he never treated me differently because I was the alpha's daughter. Other kids shied away from me because they were afraid they'd get in trouble if they did or said the wrong thing. Mason never cared that he was constantly being scolded.

Things were different now. We were no longer kids, and I hadn't spoken to Mason in years. I wanted to talk to him and see what was on his mind, but I didn't know what to say or do. I hadn't even thought about seeing other people I had known in the pack when we invited Pack Lyna's warriors to stay with us. I was sure to see others I knew.

"I should probably get going. I still have quite a bit to do to make sure the pack house is ready for everyone." I started to walk away to find the bedsheets we needed.

"Wait." Mason grabbed my arm, stopping me. "Why didn't you say goodbye when you left? We were friends, and you just disappeared one day. I waited for you to reach out to me with an explanation, but it never came."

My heart raced thinking about it. I had wanted to reach out to Mason, but I was afraid of the consequences. I was afraid of him leaving the pack for me or hating me for not fighting to stay. The longer I waited to reach out, the harder it became to do it.

"It's complicated," I finally said. "I know that's probably not the answer you wanted, but now's not the right time to get in it."

"Didn't you miss me?" Mason asked. His eyes were large like a puppy's, and it broke my heart.

"More than you probably know. I promise I'll explain it more later, but just know you were one of the best things about the pack house for me." I held eye contact with Mason to let him know how serious I was. It had been awhile since I thought about him, but right after getting kicked out, I thought about Mason every day.

Mason nodded. "Okay. We'll talk later. Addy, I'm really glad you are so happy right now."

I smiled back at him. "Are you happy?"

Mason smiled, but there seemed to be something missing in his eyes. "Mostly. We'll catch up later. Go do your luna duties."

I laughed at this. "I'm not the official luna yet."

"You've always been a luna at heart." Mason winked and then waved goodbye.

I took the opportunity to run to my car before anyone else stopped me. I was sure I had bought more sheets at the store, so I wanted to see if I had left them in the car when I brought the rest of the stuff in. I looked in the backseat, but I didn't see anything. I checked the trunk next. There were random things in the trunk, so I had to crawl part way in to search around. I shifted things around, shouting when I finally found the bag.

I backed out of the trunk, looking at the items inside. There were several sheets in it. I wasn't sure if it was enough, but it was a start at least. I stepped back and turned, freezing completely.

Standing in front of me was Jori. His eyes were red and worn and his hair was a little messy. I was surprised to see him at the pack house. Someone should have seen him and given Mark a heads up, but there were also a lot of people coming in and out right now. It would have been easy for Jori to slip past our patrol.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

Jori looked me up and down. “We need to talk.”

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 27

I took a step back from Jori, feeling uncomfortable. Something seemed a little off from him, but I couldn’t figure out what.

Jori’s here, I instantly linked Mark. I didn’t want to be alone with him.

Where are you? Mark responded without hesitation.

By the car.

“What are you doing here?” I pressed my back against the car, wanting to create as much space between Jori and myself.

“We need to talk,” he said. He looked down at the ground, and for a moment, it seemed like he shrunk.

“You said that already. What do you need to talk about?” A strange feeling was floating in my stomach, and I knew something was off.

“I’ve been a jerk,” Jori admitted, shoving his hands into his pocket. “I agreed to work with you guys moving the pack here, but then I have been treating you terribly. I’ve been stubborn and rude, and you don’t deserve that.”

I relaxed a little after hearing his words. “What changed? Why is this coming out now? You could have asked me to have a meeting with you or something.”

Jori looked up at me, his eyes a little less wild. “I’ve been angry, so angry, but I don’t want to be angry anymore. I want to work things out so our packs can be allies. I just don’t trust myself to act right around Mark, still. There’s too

much history there. But you, I feel like there's still a chance to fix things and build a friendship."

I bit my lip as I thought about his words. "Mark isn't going anywhere. He's the alpha of the pack, so if we are truly going to get along, you'll have to find a way to work with him."

Jori's shoulders sank. "I know. I know I'll have to deal with him eventually. I'm just asking for it to be just us for now. I feel more comfortable with you."

I heard the front door to the pack house swing open, and Mark came rushing out. I was suddenly worried that Jori would get more aggressive at the sight of him, so I held my hand up, signaling to Mark to hold off for a moment.

I gave him a pleading look and linked, Just give me a moment.

Mark paused in his tracks, looking between Jori and myself. I could tell he didn't like the idea of staying back, but he didn't move forward. He only watched us.

"I don't know what to tell you right now," I admitted, looking back at Jori. "I want things to work out, but I don't know if I can trust you. I feel like you've been a completely different person."

Jori's jaw twitched, and for a moment I saw a flash of anger. "I know. I don't blame you for not trusting me. I haven't been able to trust you either, but I want that to change. For Percy. And for my own happiness."

"I want to believe you," I admitted. "I want our packs to get along, and I don't want any tension between us." There was a "but" at the tip of my tongue. What I wanted was the same as what I expected.

Jori grabbed my hand, making me get tense again. I could feel Mark's nerve from across the yard as well. "Then believe me," Jori said. "Let's figure out how to get along and make this town a good environment for werewolves."

I chewed on the inside of my cheek. I didn't like the idea of Mark not being more involved in this, but maybe this would be a start to a better dynamic with Pack Sallow. It wasn't ideal, but it was better than the current situation.

"I will have to talk to Mark about it, but I think we'll be able to work something out." I pulled my hand back, instantly feeling better when he wasn't touching me.

Jori sighed, filled with relief. He threw his arms around me. "Thank you so much for giving me a chance. You won't regret it. I promise."

He released me from the hug and finally backed away, giving me some space. Jori still looked off, but I could feel a shift in his mood. Maybe all of this was affecting him more than I realized. If that were the case, I hoped we could fix things with Percy and Jori. Percy had been acting differently ever since Jori kicked him out. It hurt him not being there for his pack. And if we could build a better relationship with Pack Sallow, they could be our allies if the Council of Magic really did come after me.

"I need to get going, since there's a lot for me to do right now." I stepped away from Jori, creating more space between us.

Jori nodded. "I'll see you soon." His eyes moved to Mark's, and a little smirk pulled up on the corner of his lips.

I turned and walked away from Jori, trying not to run to Mark. When I reached him, Mark's entire body was tense. I grabbed his hand, trying to make him relax, but his eyes were still glued to Jori.

"He's up to something," Mark said, still looking behind me.

"It's possible," I admitted. "He seems really off, and I didn't like being next to him."

"What did he want?" Mark asked. He finally broke his stare and looked down at me. His arm slipped around my waist, and he pulled me into him.

"He says he wants to patch things up," I said.

"He just kicked his beta out of the pack for helping us, and now he wants to patch things up?" Mark's voice was full of skepticism.

"I know. I'm not sure if it's true, but it's worth a shot, right?" I asked. "If we have a chance to mend the bridge and make everything peaceful again, shouldn't we try?"

Mark hummed in hesitation. "I don't want you to get hurt. I'm having a hard time believing he changed his mind in just a matter of days."

I could still feel Mark's agitation at the situation, and I didn't blame him. This wasn't just a simple decision. Jori's actions have set a precedent, and there was no reason to believe he wanted to change other than the fact that I wanted it to be true. I wanted harmony among the packs, and this would help bring that, or at least put a foot in the right direction.

"Maybe I am being an idealist," I said, my shoulders slumping. "I just want everyone to get along. This isn't what I was expecting when we decided to move here." I let my head rest against his chest, feeling defeated.

Mark let out a sigh and hugged me tighter. "Maybe you're right. It's worth a shot to see if he's being genuine. I don't want you alone with him, though. Not until we know if this is real or not."

I leaned back so I could look up at Mark's face. His lips were scrunched, and I knew he still didn't like the idea.

"Are you sure? I don't want to risk it if you don't think it's a good idea."

Mark nodded. "I'm still not sure if this is a genuine request, but you're right. We have way too many things to worry about right now without having to worry about Jori and his pack. We'll take precautions and take it slow and see how everything goes."

I smiled, feeling hopeful about something. Between having Reyland's help with protecting our pack and Jori starting to come around, I saw a bright light at the end of the tunnel. With this support, I was sure we would be able to figure everything out.

—

Everyone made their way to the backyard where chairs were set up in preparation for the meeting. There wasn't a room inside the pack house large enough to hold all of the werewolves staying with us right now, so we were forced to set up an area in the backyard. It wasn't an ideal situation since we were far into winter right now, but there weren't many choices.

I stood at the entrance of the meeting area, greeting everyone as they found their seats. Mark and Reyland were with Darian, preparing for their

announcements to everyone. A plan had been set, and this meeting was to get everyone on the same page. I didn't know the specific details myself, but I knew different patrol shifts and paths were decided. In addition, everyone would go through additional training and preparation to improve their fighting skills.

All of the preparation felt a little strange. It was as if we were preparing for some huge battle or war even. I didn't know if it would come down to that or not, but I hoped it wouldn't. We still needed more information about the Council of Magic and what they might throw at us. I hadn't spoken to or seen Cain after our last conversation, and I didn't have any plans to, either. I was hoping Ginger would be able to get us the information we needed. If she couldn't, only then would I turn to Cain to try to convince him to at least help us.

"Adira!"

I looked up, surprised to see Daniel's friendly face. He ran right over to me, pulling me into a hug. I had worn him down since becoming friends with him. He was extremely awkward the first time we hugged, but now it was a natural greeting for him.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, surprised to see him at this meeting.

"Rie didn't tell you?"

I shook my head.

"She invited me here. Apparently some guy brought books that had information about sorcerers in it, and she thought I would be one of the best people to look at it," Daniel explained.

"Things have been pretty crazy here. I'm not surprised she didn't have a chance to tell me, but I'm thrilled you're here. It feels like it's been a while since I've seen you." I let out a small chuckle at this. It wasn't that long since I had seen him, but a lot had happened since then. Then with Percy getting kicked out of the pack, I was worried Daniel wouldn't be allowed to talk to us. It was a relief to see him here.

"I should probably find a seat before there are no more seats left," Daniel said. "Find me after though. There are things we should talk about."

“I will find you as soon as I’m free, but no promises for when that will be.” After the meeting, I wanted to go around and make sure everyone felt comfortable here. These warriors would likely be staying at our pack house for several weeks, if not longer, so I wanted to make sure no one felt out of place.

I also wanted to say hi to those I knew. It was a little strange seeing so many familiar faces, especially those who were around my age. I had seen them at some of their most awkward stages, but now they were warriors. A lot had changed since I left home, and it was weird seeing the familiar faces of strangers I once knew.

It didn’t take much longer for everyone to settle into their seats. People here were well trained and didn’t loiter when they knew they were expected somewhere. Murmurs filled the air while everyone waited for the meeting to start. I stayed back, not wanting to get in the way of the warriors or the alphas.

After another moment, Alpha Lyna cleared his throat, and silence fell through the crowd like a wave crashing down. It was almost eerie how quickly the silence filled the air.

“First, I want to thank you all for joining us here at the last minute,” Mark started. “Pack Aphelion is honored to be hosting Pack Lyna here. I know many of you have questions about why you might be here or what’s going on, and we plan to answer all of the questions we can. Before we get into anything, please let me or my mate, Adira, know if you need anything at all to make your stay here more comfortable.”

“We appreciate your hospitality,” Alpha Lyna said. “Werewolves, we have a unique opportunity to create an ally here. Pack Aphelion is a fairly new werewolf pack, but they have the makings to become one of the strongest werewolf packs over time. That is partly why I have offered our help to the enemy they face. The other reason is because the enemy threatening them is an enemy that once threatened all werewolves.

“Sorcerers have decided they don’t like one of the members of Pack Aphelion, and they have threatened the life of one of the werewolves here. Werewolves and sorcerers have lived in peace for centuries, but now they threaten that peace by deciding the fate of one of our own. By threatening one werewolf, they threaten us all, and I will not stand for that.”

The crowd cheered at Alpha Lyna’s words, showing just how much effect the words of their alpha had on them. Reyland had always been a commanding

source, influencing those around him to see his way. I was grateful he was on our side of this.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 28

ADIRA

“We have stations set up around where you can find out your room assignments, guard patrol, and training times. Please get this information for yourselves as soon as possible, since the first patrol starts in an hour,” Mark announced to everybody. “Thank you for listening to us, and if you have any questions for myself or Alpha Lyna, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Everyone got up, and there was a crowd around Mark immediately. I stayed where I was, knowing I wanted to be here if anyone had questions about their living space. Rie skipped up to me, making it to me before the crowd hit.

“How are you doing, Luna Adira?” Rie asked in a teasing voice.

I rolled my eyes at the comment. She had been calling me “luna” for several days now, and every time I reminded her I wasn’t the luna yet. I decided to let it go this time.

“I am just grateful to have all of these warriors to help us,” I said.

“Do we know more about what we are facing yet?” Rie asked. She had been just as busy as me with getting everything prepared. It had been awhile since I had sat down and had a real conversation with her.

“Not as thoroughly as we’d like. Pack Lyna brought some text that might have some more information, and I reached out to Ginger to see if she could help us.” I kept an eye on the warriors, waiting for someone to approach us.

“How are you handling all of them being here?” Rie tilted her head forward, giving me a look to tell me what she actually meant.

I looked down at the ground, debating about how much I wanted to say. I wanted to be okay with everything, and I wanted to make sure I looked like a leader in front of everyone else. It wouldn’t be long until I was officially a leader, so I wanted to make sure to practice now.

"I'm trying not to think about it," I said. I had managed to avoid Alpha Lyna so far, and I was hoping I would continue to be able to avoid him. I wasn't sure if it was possible with him staying here with the warriors, but I was going to try.

"Why did you agree to his help if you were going to feel uncomfortable?" Rie asked, a frown plastered on her face. "You don't deserve to put yourself in uncomfortable situations."

I forced a smile onto my face. "I feel like I'm in a rock and a hard place. I don't want to be around him, but we need his help. If what Cain said is true, we need to be prepared for a fight with the Council of Magic. I don't want this pack to suffer because I'm a target. If I'm here, I'm putting everyone at risk. If being around Alpha Lyna means being a little uncomfortable but ensuring everyone's safety, then I'll put myself in the uncomfortable situation."

Rie opened her mouth to speak, but a warrior approached us, so she stopped, not wanting to talk about these personal matters in front of others.

"I came late, so I'm not sure where I'm supposed to go," the female warrior said as she approached us. When she got closer, she paused and turned her head to the side. "Adira? Is that you?"

I smiled, recognizing the girl from years ago. We were never friends and didn't hang out much, but as the alpha's daughter, my mother was always forcing me to remember the faces of the children around me. It was my job to know my pack members, since one day I was supposed to run the pack.

"Fey, it's been a while," I said. I looked over my clipboard, searching for her name on the room assignments. "You'll be on the third floor in room 20." We had gone around and numbered all of the rooms to make it easier to identify which room everyone was assigned to.

"Thanks." Fey hesitated, looking at me closely. "I'm surprised to see you here," she finally admitted. "I heard a rumor that something happened to you."

"Oh?" I didn't know what else to say. I had heard about some of the rumors already, so I wasn't surprised she knew about them. I didn't plan on explaining what actually happened either.

"Well, I heard several rumors. No one ever confirmed what actually happened to you. You just disappeared, and we didn't talk about it. I thought maybe..."

Her voice dropped off, and she looked down at the ground. After a moment, she looked back up at me. “Anyway, I’m glad to see you’re healthy and okay.”

I smiled. “It’s good to see you, too. If you need anything, let me know.”

Fey walked away, and I let out a long sigh. It was weird seeing people I used to know. There seemed to be a weird air around them when they saw me, and I didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t exactly tell them the man who I thought was my father kicked me out when he found out my mother had lied to him about me being his child, and I was actually the child of a sorcerer, so there was a weird prophecy around me that could cause great destruction. Even if I had the energy to tell that story over and over again, I was sure most people wouldn’t believe me.

“You look pale,” Rie said, placing her hand on my shoulder. “Maybe you should go lie down for a bit.”

My stomach was churning, and I felt low on energy. “There’s a lot that needs to be down here.”

Rie took the clipboard from my hand. “I can handle the room assignments. You just worry about yourself. You have been doing a lot recently. Have you been sleeping enough?”

I smiled sheepishly. “There’s been a lot to do, and when I’m doing things, I’m not thinking about my impending doom.”

Rie raised her eyebrows at me. “First off, there is no impending doom. I refuse to let that happen. Secondly, you need to make sure you’re taking better care of yourself. I know you have a lot going on, but if you work yourself sick, it’s not going to help anything.”

My instinct was to object, but I knew it did no good to argue with Rie. I was feeling unusually tired and the thought of dealing with more people from my past seemed like a lot right now. I looked over at Mark and saw he was talking to a bunch of people, so I didn’t want to worry him by linking him right now.

“Will you tell Mark I went to lie down when you see him?” I asked.

Rie put her hand on my arm. “Of course. Now go nap so you feel more refreshed later.”

I was about to step away, when I heard my name being called, drawing my attention back to the crowd.

“Addy!” Mason shouted, jogging over to us. “I’m glad I caught you here. That mate of yours is something else-”

As Mason approached, his face suddenly shifted, and he paused, completely mesmerized as he stared at Rie. I looked at her looking back at him. Both of their eyes were wide and dilated, and I could practically see the electricity bouncing between them. I held back a laugh as I watched the awkward tension build. Neither of them knew what to say at that moment, and it was pretty adorable.

“Rie, this is my childhood friend, Mason. Mason, this is my good friend, Rie,” I introduced them to break the silence.

Rie held out her hand, falling out of the spell. There were still sparkles in her eyes. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Mason grabbed Rie’s hand and leaned forward, kissing the back of her hand gently. “It’s a pleasure to meet such a beautiful woman.”

Rie blushed and giggled, and she suddenly looked like a teenage girl. “What a gentleman.”

I knew exactly what was going on, and my heart filled with joy for the two of them. My old best friend and one of my new best friends just found each other as mates. The happiness in their eyes was enough to tell me I was no longer needed here.

“I’m going to go lie down for a bit, but you two have fun getting to know each other.” I waved goodbye to them, but I was positive neither noticed me leaving. I shook my head with a smile as I walked away. They both deserved to be happy, and I was excited for them. Who would have thought such a strange circumstance would have brought two mates together?

As I made it back into the pack house, silence surrounded me, and it was a relief. I didn’t even realize how overwhelming all of the chatter had been until it was gone. The exhaustion I felt in my body returned now that I was alone, so I went straight to my room. I shut the door behind me and practically collapsed in my bed.

This was a new level of exhaustion for me. Even with not sleeping well, I felt unusually tired. Planning for everyone and dealing with the crazy emotions recently must have been taking a lot out of me. I closed my eyes, and it wasn't long before I was drifting off to sleep.

I fell into a deep sleep, but it wasn't long before I felt something familiar pulling at me in the back of my mind. I opened my eyes to find myself in my dreamscape. I expected to see Shadow or Moon here, but neither were around. The typical scenery was also missing, and I found myself in a plain white room. I still felt something pulling at me, so I spun around trying to find what it was.

I stopped when I saw Cain standing in front of me.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded, my tone cold. After our last conversation, I didn't have much interest in being around him. I wasn't sure how he even got here.

"I wanted to try making you understand one last time," Cain said, his voice eerily calm.

"How did you get into my subconscious?" I asked, not wanting to hear him try to convince me to leave Mark yet again.

"You forget how powerful of a sorcerer is, and I'm not even as powerful as the Council of Magic. That's what I need you to understand. There is no fighting them. If you don't come with me, they will come for you, and you will die." Cain clasped his hands behind his back and started pacing back and forth.

"We have allies. If you just help us prepare, then we can stop the Council of Magic together," I said. "I'm not leaving my mate or my home, so don't bother trying to convince me to go with you again."

"You really are a stupid girl, aren't you?" Cain snapped, losing his patience. "If I go against the Council of Magic, it will be a death wish for me and you."

"Then go," I said firmly. "I have no interest in your help, so stop wasting your time on me."

"You don't understand," Cain said.

My fists curled, and I found myself growing irritated. “Understand what? I understand the Council of Magic is a threat. I’m prepared to face them, so just leave me alone.”

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 29

ADIRA

“You don’t understand,” Cain repeated. “This is bigger than you or me.”

I rolled my eyes. “I don’t care. You’re not listening to me, and I have no reason to trust you. Leave now.”

Cain scowled at me as his frustration ran wild. “You’re going to regret this. I’m not done with you.”

“Well, I’m done with you,” I said.

I pushed my hand out in front of me, causing an invisible wave to rush forward. It hit Cain, and his form broke into a million little particles that wisped away with the wave. Once again, I was alone in my subconscious. My hands were burning with power, and I could feel a shift in me. I didn’t know how Cain was able to enter my subconscious without my permission, but I never wanted that to happen again.

I looked at my hands, glowing with the anger I felt at his violation. I knew before that I didn’t want to work with him, but the ambush solidified that feeling. I walked forward, waving my hand in front of me and creating a doorway. I opened the door and locked it behind me.

When I opened my eyes, I was back in my bedroom. This transition from my subconscious to a waking state felt different. I felt different. I sat up and looked at my hands, which were still glowing. The power I had used in my mind palace was still surging within my body. Normally, I had more control when I was in my mind, but when I woke up, most of that power was gone.

I still had a long way to go towards developing my powers. I had practiced healing, but I could still barely do that. I hadn’t been able to achieve the same level of healing as I did when I saved Mark from near death. There was something about the emotional intensity that made my powers burn brighter than ever, but when I was calm, it was more like a dim light. I had also been

able to create light balls of energy that could do damage, but I knew there was so much more out there that I hadn't figured out soon.

I needed to find a way to expand my magical powers, especially if I was going to face off against sorcerers. Hopefully, Ginger would be able to help me again. I hadn't heard from her since I sent the letter, so I didn't know what she was up to. I thought about just taking a trip to her, but with Pack Lyna now staying here, I knew my help would be needed. I couldn't go running off like that.

I got up from my bed and went to the bathroom. I splashed some water on my face and then examined my hands. They were still glowing like night lights attached to my arms. I flipped them over, unsure of what I was looking for. I could feel the magic inside of me bubbling just beneath the surface, ready to be used and manipulated.

I wasn't sure what this meant or what I could do with it, but the possibilities felt endless. I waved my hand in front of the mirror, and little sparkles started floating down, disappearing right before they hit the counter. A smile erupted on my face as I watched the shimmering lights fade away. It wouldn't do much good in a battle, but it was something new that I created all by myself.

I turned the lights off and threw more sparkles into the air. It was a truly magical feeling as everything shimmered around me, and I felt at peace, seeing I could make something so beautiful. It was a good reminder that the powers I had could be something wonderful, too. So much chaos and frustration had come ever since I discovered the part of me that was a sorcerer, that I hadn't had a moment to realize the beauty of the possibilities it also held.

Leaning forward, I pressed my hand on the mirror, smiling at the sparkles slowly falling down around me. The mirror started to ripple, and I quickly pulled back, shocked by the sudden change. I wasn't trying to do anything, so it surprised me. I held my hand close to me as I looked into the mirror.

As the ripples settled, the mirror no longer showed my reflection in it. It seemed like I was staring at a completely new world in front of me. It was dark in the mirror, but the moon shone down on the world below. The silhouettes of trees stood out against the bright ball of light, and in the middle of it, there were two figures standing in the middle. There was one male and one female, standing several feet apart. I couldn't see their faces, but they stood there, looking at each other.

After a moment, the female turned away and walked into the forest. The man ran after her, grabbing her arm. She tried to pull away, but he grabbed her and pulled her back to the center of the forested area. He stopped and embraced her. She tried to resist, but then she slumped into his arms.

I held my breath watching the scene unfold. I didn't know what this was, but I knew it wasn't my doing. Somehow, I still felt connected to whatever I was seeing in the mirror.

Shadows burst out from the two of them and swirled around the couple into a large tornado. The shadows grew bigger until they started getting sucked back into the couple, once again revealing them. The man was standing tall, but the woman had collapsed onto the ground. The man walked away, leaving her helpless on the ground. As he walked forward, everything in front of him began decaying.

The mirror suddenly cracked, and the scene in front of me disappeared. I blinked a few times, and then black smudges started emerging. It wasn't long before I could make out the words, "You're mine," on it. They disappeared, but I couldn't take my eyes away from the mirror, unsure of what I had just seen. Was the girl in the mirror supposed to be me?

I felt queasy suddenly and found myself dropping to my knees. I threw up over and over into the toilet until there was nothing left in my system. When I was down, I sat there catching my breath before I stood up and rinsed my mouth out. I still felt a little queasy, and I started wondering if there was something wrong with me.

A realization hit me. I grabbed my stomach, worried I was going to throw up again.

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MARK

I smiled as another warrior approached me. It was nice getting to know all of these warriors that were here to help protect my mate and my pack, but I was getting a little exhausted from all of the interactions. I needed a moment to breathe and relax and check on Adira. I hadn't talked to her much since Jori had shown up, and I still wasn't sure about that whole situation. I loved that she wanted to believe the best in people, but I needed to make sure she was safe above all else. I wanted to believe Jori had truly changed, but the timing

of it didn't feel right. I didn't understand what could have changed his mind between kicking Percy out and now. I definitely wanted to tread lightly on the situation.

As the warrior left, Alpha Lyna turned to me. "It's different running a pack with so many members, isn't it? Small packs are pretty easy to manage."

I held my grimace back at his comment. I felt the underhandedness of it, but I didn't want to react. "It is more work running a larger pack. I grew up in one, so I have seen the ins and outs that go along with it. Having the right team can make the world of difference, though, and I trust my team. Besides, when I grow my pack, I imagine it will be a lot slower than this."

Alpha Lyna smiled, and I couldn't tell if he was amused or impressed by my response. "True. Being a good alpha is understanding when to delegate tasks to the right people. As for the size of your pack, you never know how your pack will grow or when. One time we had a large group of werewolves whose pack had been destroyed by humans. Their alpha was dead, and they had nowhere else to go. Luckily, we were able to take them in and assimilate them into the pack."

"That's quite impressive," I commented. "I know I may seem young and inexperienced as an alpha, but I know more than you might realize. I'm also not afraid to admit when I'm wrong or need help."

He clasped his hands behind his back and nodded. "I'm glad Adira was mated to someone like you. You're not this cocky young alpha who thinks he knows everything, and you seem to know when to respect your elders."

I smiled back at him, holding back my true feelings. "There are some things I should check on before I get pulled into another conversation. I will see you at the first training session later today."

"Of course." He turned away from me to do his own thing.

I quickly walked away, wanting to be near Adira, even if it was for only a few minutes. All of this preparation had pulled each other to other duties, and she was already asleep when I had gotten into bed last night, too. I missed her, which felt crazy. I had seen her a few times today, but it was different than our normal quality time.

I caught a glimpse of Rie, so I headed that way. I knew she had been working with Adira on the room preparations, so I hoped my mate wouldn't be too far off. As I approached, I saw a line of warriors waiting to talk to Rie, but Rie seemed rather distracted by one of the warriors from Pack Lyna.

I approached the two of them, not seeing Adira anywhere nearby. "How's the room assignments going?"

Rie jumped and screamed. Clearly she hadn't seen me approach, even though I was almost directly in front of her. "Oh, Alpha Mark. You're so quiet." Rie giggled.

I c****d my head to the side, trying to gauge the situation. Rie seemed flustered and distracted, which wasn't like her. I looked at the man standing by her, and he practically had hearts coming out of his eyes. There was definitely some sort of vibe between them, and it was pretty strange seeing that side of Rie. She had always been into shopping and decorating, but I hadn't seen her show much interest in guys ever. I wondered what had changed for her.

"Have you seen Adira anywhere?" I asked, deciding now was not the time to broach the subject. I would have to ask her more about her behavior in a more private setting.

Rie tucked her hair behind her ear. "Oh, she was feeling really tired, so I told her I could take over for her while she rested. She's probably in your room." She looked at the warrior and blushed again.

Weird. "Okay thanks. Make sure you're helping these warriors in a timely manner. There seems to be a line forming, and we need to make sure the first patrol is ready to go for their shift in forty-five minutes."

Rie's eyes widened in realization. "Yes Alpha... Mark." Her face shifted as she pulled her lips tight. She was definitely nervous. She never called me Alpha Mark.

I shook my head, almost amused at her behavior. Just to make sure things were getting done, I turned to the warrior standing next to Rie. "I'm Alpha Mark, by the way. Who might I have the pleasure of meeting?"

Rie chewed on her lip and then turned to the line forming in front of her while I took the attention of the man making her go googly-eyed.

The warrior held out his hand and smiled brightly. "I'm Mason, fifth rank warrior in Pack Lyna. It is a pleasure to meet you, sir."

"That's quite the hand shake you have there," I commented. "I look forward to meeting you."

"As do I." Mason looked me up and down and smiled brightly. He was definitely an attractive man.

"I hope I meet you again soon, Mason. I must take my leave and check on my mate in this brief moment of down time." I gave him a quick nod before heading to the pack house.

It worried me a little that Adira would agree to lie down at a time like this. I had caught her awake in the middle of the night several times, so I knew she wasn't sleeping well. It must really be getting to her if she chose to take a step back from an event like this. Adira was the type to push herself past her limits.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 30

MARK

I entered the bedroom, surprised to not see Adira lying in bed. I heard water running from our bathroom and wandered over in that direction. I waited a moment, but when she didn't come out, I knocked on the door.

"Come in," Adira said in a quiet voice.

I opened the door and peeked inside. Adira was sitting on the toilet, looking completely drained with a dull look on her face. I looked around and saw the mirror was cracked. My mouth fell open and I rushed to Adira's side.

"What happened? Are you okay?" I asked, checking her over to make sure she was okay. I didn't see any physical wounds.

She blinked a few times, processing that I was in the room with her. She squeezed my hands and forced a smile. "I'm fine. I'm not hurt."

I looked over at the mirror, confused as to how it got like that. Mirrors didn't shatter for no reason, and Adira wasn't the type to lash out in anger.

"What happened to the mirror?" I asked, hoping to get more clarification.

She turned and looked at the mirror, her eyes widening. “I didn’t realize that actually happened. It was weird. I came in here to wash my face, and I was practicing some magic, and then this image suddenly appeared in the mirror. I’m not quite sure what it was or what it meant, but then it disappeared and these words appeared. Next thing I knew the mirror cracked. I thought it was all part of the vision or whatever.”

As I listened to Adira’s story, I squeezed her hands tighter, afraid to let go. She seemed so out of it, and I couldn’t tell what she was thinking. Something was definitely throwing her off, and I had a feeling it wasn’t just the mirror cracking. I wanted to know what she saw in this vision.

“What words appeared?” I asked. I brushed her hair out of her face.

She looked at our hands and then looked back up at me. “You’re mine.”

My stomach dropped hearing this. It was clear this was a message sent to Adira, likely by this Son of Blood and Magic, and I didn’t like it. I knew nothing about whoever it was, and I felt like Adira wasn’t safe in our own home. I felt helpless about the whole situation, and I needed more information.

“Maybe Ginger would know what this was,” I suggested. She had helped us out when Adira was first getting used to her magic. I wasn’t sure how involved in this sorcerer world she was, but I was sure she had to know more about all of it than us. Maybe she could use her magic to help us stop whoever this was from invading our home at the very least.

“I sent a message to her, but I haven’t heard back yet,” Adira said.

“Did someone say my name?” a familiar voice said from the doorway.

—

ADIRA

When I saw Ginger in our room, I jumped up and ran to her, throwing my arms around her neck. I was thrilled to see her. It had been too long since we left her house to face Theron.

“You came,” I said, a sense of relief filling me.

“Of course I came, girl.” Ginger gently knocked me on the head, even though I was taller than her. “You asked for my help. Did you think I was just going to abandon you? Have you no faith in me?”

I shook my head, smiling. “No, I just hadn’t heard from you. I wasn’t expecting you to just show up.”

Ginger rolled her eyes. “Letters are so tiresome, and I already get letters from Daniel on an almost daily basis. I didn’t feel like writing another letter to you when I could just show up.”

“You have impeccable timing,” Mark said.

Ginger squirmed at him. “Boy, why are you sitting on the bathroom floor? Do you know how dirty that is?”

Mark quickly stood up and rubbed the back of his neck. “I was just, uh.” His words fell off, and he was definitely feeling flustered around Ginger. Ginger was one of the most blunt people we knew.

“Give him a break,” I chuckled. “He was checking on me.”

Ginger looked me up and down and then c****d her head to the side. The mirror caught her eyes, and she moved towards it. Her fingers reached for the glass, and they hovered about an inch away from it. A soft blue light glowed from her fingers as she moved her hand around.

“This is some old magic.” She looked over at me. “This was not your doing.”

I shook my head. “I was in here, and this image appeared. It started playing like some blurry, animated movie. Words appeared, and then the mirror broke.”

“Did you touch the glass?” she asked.

I nodded. “I touched the mirror, and that’s when it all started.”

She hummed, expecting that answer from me. She walked out of the bathroom and went straight for our bed. She looked at it and then moved away, deciding that’s not where she wanted to be. She left our room and started heading for the stairs.

I ran after her with Mark just a step behind me. She went down the stairs and straight to the kitchen. She knew exactly where she was going, even though she had never been here before. Several warriors were walking around the pack house, but Ginger weaved in and out of them with ease. I bumped in to some of them, trying to keep up with Ginger.

She finally stopped when she made it to our kitchen. We had several pack members cooking food to make sure we had enough food for all of our guests, but Ginger didn't seem to mind them. She went straight for one of our cabinets and grabbed some tea out of there. She then walked back to me, holding up the box of tea packets.

"Is this all of the tea you have?" she asked.

I stared at her for a moment, a little confused as to what was going on. "I'm not sure. I don't really drink tea. Umm, Ginger, what about the-"

"Not here, dear. First I'll get my tea and then we'll talk." She scurried around the kitchen, grabbing what she needed to make her tea.

I looked back at Mark, who shrugged. He walked up to me and put a hand on my hip, pulling me into him.

"Are you okay for now?" he asked.

I looked up at him, and I could still see the worry creasing his face. "I'm okay. If you need to go do something, don't wait around on my behalf."

He looked back at Ginger, and his grip tightened on me. I could tell he didn't want to leave. "I'm leading the first patrol, which will start soon. I need to make sure I'm ready for that. If you need anything at all, don't hesitate to link me."

I smiled at him and placed a gentle kiss on his lips. "I'm not going to bother you while you are on patrol, unless it's an emergency. There are plenty of people around here who can help with anything I might need. Besides, I'm sure Ginger and I have a lot of talking to do once she gets her tea."

Mark still didn't look convinced, but he let out a sigh. "Fine. I'll see you when I get back." He placed a kiss on my forehead.

I wrapped my arms around his torso and held him for a moment. I wasn't ready for him to leave so soon. We barely had time together the past few

days, and I felt like there was so much I needed to talk to him about. There were things we both needed to do though.

“Will I get you to myself for a bit tonight?” I asked.

“I will make sure of it,” he said.

“All right, you two. You’ll be fine for a few hours.” Ginger walked up with a cup of steaming tea in her hands.

I gave Mark one last squeeze before pulling away. “Stay safe out there.”

Mark smiled. “Always.” He kissed my lips one last time before parting and heading towards the back yard.

“I’m ready now,” Ginger said, looking at me expectantly now that Mark was gone.

I looked around the kitchen at all of the new faces buzzing around. After Alpha Lyna’s speech, I wasn’t sure how everyone felt about sorcery. People outside of my pack didn’t know about my true identity, at least to my knowledge, and I didn’t want them privy to this kind of information.

“Let’s go somewhere a little more private.”

I led Ginger to one of the conference rooms before we continued our conversation. We sat down, and she sipped her tea. I waited for her to start talking, but she was taking her time, which made me nervous.

“Mirrors have been used for communication for a long time,” Ginger finally said. “They can also be used to spy on people, too. Not many sorcerers use them these days, especially with technology. It’s a much older practice. Do you have any idea of who might be trying to contact you?”

“We think it’s the Son of Blood and Magic. My parents told me that I’m part of some prophecy involving him. I don’t really know...” My voice dropped off as I saw Ginger’s expression change.

Her face turned almost white as I spoke, and her eyes were wide. “What did you say, girl?”

“The Son of Blood and Ma-”

“Oh dear,” Ginger said, cutting me off. “This is making much more sense. I didn’t even think about that. I should have. It makes sense.” Ginger stood up and started pacing around the room.

I watched as she muttered to herself, working through this new information. I could feel her anxiety pulsing through her.

“So you know about the prophecy?” I finally asked, pulling Ginger’s attention back to me.

Ginger stopped and looked at me. “Yes. I know more than most.” She stopped and sat back down. She pushed her tea away from her. “When I was a young girl, there were rumors of a hybrid boy who was born.”

“Like me?” I asked.

“Yes, and no.” Ginger looked around, almost afraid that someone was listening. She stood back up and ran her hands over the walls, creating a magical seal around us. She sat back down when she was done, but she was mulling over how to proceed.

Finally, she began again. “There was a son born of a sorcerer and a vampire a long time ago, and he became known as the Son of Blood and Magic.”