

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 31

“Rumors of this child spread through the ranks of all sorcerers. It was the first time a hybrid child had been born. It had been forbidden for the different species to mingle with each other, but the reason why faded over the years. A vampire and a sorcerer fell in love and produced a child. The Council of Magic decided to let the child be, thinking no harm would come of it. It was just a child after all.”

Ginger stopped talking for a moment. The way she spoke told me there was so much more to the story.

“I sense a ‘but’ in there,” I said.

“Everything was fine for a while. Years passed, and no other news of the hybrid child emerged. The initial shock of a hybrid child faded as well. My parents stopped talking about it, and I just assumed nothing came of it. But on the night of the red moon, things changed. Screams echoed in the middle of the night. Fires spread through the village I lived in during the middle of the night.

“My family ran out of the house, trying to figure out what was going on. I remember looking up at the sky and seeing the light of the red moon shining down on us among the chaos. It made everything around us look red, and soon everything was red.

“I saw him, just briefly. He was just a child, a little younger than me. He was covered in other people’s blood. I saw him use magic to pull the blood out of my neighbors’ body and then drink it. It was one of the most horrifying scenes I had ever seen. His lust for blood was greater than I had ever imagined. I was only eight years old that night, but that is one of the most vivid memories I have to this day.” Ginger stood up and turned away from me.

“So the Son of Blood and Magic is your age?” I asked, not understanding fully.

“He would be, if he were alive,” Ginger said. “What you must understand, girl, is that after that night, the council realized they messed up. The hybrid child was more powerful than anyone realized, and the council made the decision that the child must be controlled. The only problem is, they didn’t know how to control someone much more powerful than them.

"It took them a while to finally capture him. I don't know exactly what happened to him at that time. He disappeared, and the council never told the rest of us what was going on. He just disappeared, and the rest of us just had to move on with our lives and rebuild what we lost that night."

"They didn't tell you anything? What kind of a council is this?" The more I heard about the Council of Magic, the less I liked them. I didn't hear anything good about them.

"There's a reason I left the sorcerer's society. I didn't agree with a lot of rules and regulations," Ginger said. She turned back to me, sadness filling her eyes. "Before I left though, there was an execution planned for the hybrid. I was in my twenties at the time. He was strung up in front of the public as a warning against breaking the rules in the future."

"I was there that day." Ginger's eyes seemed to grow far away. "There was a craze in the young man's eyes. He was desperate for blood. He was spouting nonsense, saying that even if they killed him, he would be back. When they pulled the trigger on his execution, he exploded into a billow of dark shadows."

"Is it even possible for someone to survive that?" I asked. If sorcerers could live, even after being killed, it would put them on a different level than I ever imagined.

"I have never heard of anyone who did it successfully, but theoretically it's possible. It would take a really strong sorcerer to actually do it. I just assumed he died that day."

"I have come across some strange dark magic recently," I said. "Theron was using dark, shadow magic when I was fighting him, and I have seen it in my dreams. I even saw it in the forest. Do you think that was him?"

Ginger took a deep breath. "I'm not sure, but that would be a good guess. It's possible he survived in some form but couldn't take a human form again. I would guess that whatever form he was able to take lay dormant, waiting for you."

The room grew quiet at the thought. I didn't know what that meant for me. If he was a super powerful sorcerer back in the day, I wondered if he still had the same level of power, and if he didn't, I wasn't sure how I would face him.

"What does this mean for me?"

Ginger looked at me. "If you are part of the prophecy, he likely wants you to grow stronger."

"How do I stop that from happening? I don't know how I can stop him from finding me in my own home and in my dreams." I felt scared, realizing I wasn't safe anywhere.

"Don't start panicking on me now, girl. Just take a deep breath. I'm not exactly sure what you might be facing, but I know magic. I can help put up some protection spells on the house, and teach you to put up a block in your mind to prevent unwelcome visitors while you sleep. We can continue your magic training too."

"What about the Council of Magic?" I asked. "The Son of Blood and Magic is not the only one coming after me."

Ginger's face fell. "The Council of Magic is after you too?"

I nodded slowly. "My father-my real father-came to me, wanting me to leave my life behind and go with him. Apparently, he convinced the Council of Magic not to kill me if I agreed to give up my life as a werewolf and train solely with the sorcerers."

Ginger sat down again. "Don't trust them, girl. After what happened with that hybrid boy, I doubt they will spare you. Even if you agree to their terms, I don't think they will risk you growing more powerful than them."

"I wasn't planning on trusting them anyway. I'm not going to leave Mark. He's the only one I want to be with." I was firm in this decision. I wasn't going to run away this time. No matter what I was facing, I planned to face it with him.

"Good. That boy is good for you. Don't let go of him. Do you know if the Council of Magic is already after you?" she asked.

I shook my head. "It depends on if Cain, my father, has told them I won't go with him. He's been desperate to get me to go with him. I don't think he likes the idea of the council taking his daughter."

Ginger thought about this for a moment. "Hopefully we have a decent amount of time before he runs to the council. It'll give us more time to prepare. Do you think he'll help us?"

“No,” I said without hesitation. “He doesn’t want the council to come after me, but he is too afraid to go against them.”

“That’s fine. I’d rather not work with him, anyway. We’ll figure this out. Don’t look so stressed, girl.”

I took a deep breath, wanting to believe Ginger, but it still felt like a lot. “What if that’s not enough?”

Ginger rolled her eyes. “Girl, you need to have more faith in yourself. Have you forgotten you’re a hybrid as well? This means you have great power within you. You just have to find out how to unlock it.”

I thought about this for a moment. Magic still felt like a strange thing in my body, but I had several moments of pushing my powers to a limit I never thought possible. Ginger was right. I had the power inside me. I just had to find it and learn to control it.

I stood up, feeling much better with Ginger’s words. “Okay. Let’s do this.”

Ginger smiled. “There’s the spunky girl who insisted I help her a few months ago.”

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I walked around the house with a bag of salt, moving slowly around the perimeter with it. Ginger said it was the first task that needed to be done. Salt was able to keep unwanted magic from spying on the house. There were other layers of protection Ginger was currently working on, but that involved a deeper level of magic. As much as I wanted to learn more about those protective wards, I knew there would be time for that later. It was more important to put down as much protection as possible first.

It was getting late, and most people were eating dinner right now, which I was grateful for. I don’t think people would question me much if I explained to them that salt helped keep away magic, especially after Reyland’s speech. He did a good job making sorcerers out to be the enemy. While he wasn’t wrong in that sense, I was still worried werewolves would start thinking of all sorcerers as the enemy, and I knew firsthand that wasn’t the case.

I would rather not discuss the magical help we were receiving, just in case it caused issues for Ginger. I warned her about our company, but she seemed to be aware of everything going on already.

“Adira!” Daniel called out, running up to me.

My heart skipped a beat before I processed who was calling out to me. I was grateful it was just Daniel.

“Oh, hey Daniel.” I set the bag of salt down, needing a slight break from the weight of the large bag in my arm. I wiped off a small layer of sweat from my forehead.

“Where have you been? I’ve been looking for you everywhere after the meeting,” Daniel said. He looked at me and then the bag of salt. “What are you doing?”

I laughed, feeling a little awkward. Daniel of all people would understand, but I still felt like my actions were a bit strange. “Ginger says salt can help ward away magic. We have had some privacy issues with certain magical entities, so I’m trying to add some protection to the house.”

“Gingey is here?” Daniel was the only one allowed to call her that. Ginger had never admitted it, but it was pretty obvious that she was rather fond of Daniel. She acted like he was an annoying little boy, but I was positive she actually thought of him like a grandson. She always responded to his letters and answered his questions. It was a pretty cute dynamic.

“I asked her to come. I figured we could use some help of the magical nature, since none of us really know what we’re up to,” I explained.

“Where is she? I want to say hi.” Daniel’s voice grew a pitch higher, and he was practically bouncing in place.

His excitement made me smile. Of course he was excited to see her. “She’s wandering around here somewhere, putting down her own protections. Just keep her presence on the downlow.”

Daniel wrinkled his eyebrows together. “Why? Is there something wrong with her being here?”

“Not exactly. I just don’t want people harassing her. I think most werewolves here haven’t met a sorcerer before, so I’m not sure how they will react to her.”

Daniel looked over his shoulder. “I see. Don’t worry. I won’t say anything. By the way, I got those books from Alpha Lyna. I haven’t had a chance to look at them, but I’ll probably be up all night, studying them.”

I raised my eyebrows at him. “Make sure you’re getting some rest. Don’t kill yourself by doing this.”

Daniel laughed. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep, knowing there is some juicy information waiting for me to study it.”

“You’re strange, you know?” I laughed at this. “But I’m happy to be friends with someone so eager to learn. It makes my life easier.”

Daniel smiled at this, not affected by my words. “I’m happy to help. I’m going to go find Ginger now, but I’ll give you an update when I have one.”

Daniel skipped off towards the house like a little kid on Christmas. As far as I knew, he hadn’t seen Ginger since I did, so I was sure he was thrilled to talk to her in person. I was a little sad I wasn’t going to see that, since I was sure their banter would be as amusing as ever.

I picked up the bag of salt again, knowing the sooner I finished, the sooner I would be able to relax for a bit. My body ached as I picked it up, but I pushed through it, reminding myself it was almost done. I continued pouring salt on the ground, going all the way around the house. When I was done, I set the salt down and took a deep breath, grateful to be done.

I took a step back to head into the house, but I was surprised to bump into someone behind me. My eyes went wide when I saw Alpha Lyna hovering behind me.

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“My apologies,” I muttered, still trying to get my head on straight. I knew it was rude, but I didn’t want to talk to him. I ducked my head down and tried to walk around him.

Reyland blocked my path, holding his hand out. “Adira, you don’t need to run away from me. I don’t want things to be awkward between us.”

I took a deep breath and swallowed hard. “Things are going to be awkward. How can they not be?”

Reyland didn’t break eye contact with me as he spoke. I could feel his alpha power radiating out. “Avoiding me isn’t going to make things less awkward. We should face this head on, talk it out.”

I scoffed at his words. “No thank you. I appreciate your help here. I really do. But at this point in time, I don’t have an interest in rekindling this relationship. I have too many other things going on, and I don’t have the energy to discuss this with you right now.”

I pushed past him and went straight into the pack house. My heart was racing as I walked in. I had to stop and take a moment to catch my breath. I was proud of myself for standing up to him like that, especially when he was trying to use his alpha influence on me, but part of me was still terrified. I leaned against the door and closed my eyes, taking a few deep breaths.

“Are you okay?”

I opened my eyes and saw Mason standing in front of me. Rie was by his side, their hands intertwined. I pushed a smile on my face.

“I’m fine,” I quickly said.

Mason’s head tilted, and I knew he didn’t believe me. “Have you eaten dinner yet? We were about to go get some food.”

I was relieved he didn’t push into the topic further. “Not yet, but I have some things I need to get done.”

Rie reached forward and grabbed my hand. “Nope. You need to eat. Stop pushing yourself so much. It’s okay to relax for a little.”

She started dragging me towards the kitchen, still holding Mason’s hand. I didn’t feel particularly hungry at the moment, but I hadn’t eaten much today, so I knew I should eat. The food was set up buffet style, and even though dinner had started almost an hour ago, the dining hall was still filled with people. I shouldn’t have been surprised. There were now over fifty people at the pack house, which was a huge jump. Our kitchen wasn’t normally prepared for that large number of people eating.

The three of us all grabbed some food and found a table in the back corner as a few warriors were leaving. I picked at my food, my mind still occupied with Reyland. I didn't understand why he would ambush me like that. Mark said he knew clearly that providing us with help didn't mean our relationship would be repaired.

"So where's Alpha Mark?" Mason said, breaking the silence between us.

I looked up at Rie and Mason, seeing both of their eyes on me from across the table. "Oh, he's running the first patrol. He wanted to make sure he was there to help everyone learn the routes."

"That's unfortunate. I was hoping to finally meet your mate. I want to learn more about the man who was able to win Addy's heart." There was a small glint in his eyes, and I knew he enjoyed teasing me.

"How many times do I have to tell you to not call me that?" I glowered in his direction. My appetite started returning as my mind focused on something else.

"I don't know why you bother. You know I'm never going to stop," Mason laughed.

Rie looked between the two of us. "So how long have you two known each other exactly?"

"I saw her diapers," Mason smirked.

My eyes widened. "Did not! And even if you had, there's no way you would remember. You're my age after all." I turned to Rie, deliberately not looking at Mason. "Mason was my best friend growing up."

Rie smiled. "Best friend, huh?" She looked over at Mason, taking a moment to take him all in. The smile on her face grew.

Rie smiled. "Best friend, huh?" She looked over at Mason, taking a moment to take him all in. The smile on her face grew.

"Yeah, so if you need any dirt on him, I have plenty." I looked back at Mason and winked at him. It was my turn to tease him. "Let me just tell you, you'll have your hands full with this one."

Mason reached over, trying to smack me, but it was easy to dodge. “Don’t give her a bad impression before I’ve been able to wow her,” he whined.

“Don’t worry. I can tell she’s head-over-heels for you already. I don’t think it’ll be hard to impress her.” I took another bite of my food and leaned back, looking at the two of them. Even just looking at them, I could tell they would be a great couple. They would make each other very happy.

“Adira!” Rie gave me a dirty look that only made me laugh.

“Why did we invite you to dinner again?” Mason asked.

I stuck my tongue out at them. “Because you love me. Seriously, though. I’m really happy that both of you found each other. It’s a good reminder that something good can come out of all of this madness.”

The two of them grew quiet, and I saw their cheeks turn a soft shade of pink. They made eye contact with one another and grabbed hands under the table. Rie was the first one to break eye contact, looking down in embarrassment. I knew it wouldn’t be long before the two of them mated. I had never seen two mates fall faster for each other.

There was a sudden shift in the buzz of the dining room, so I looked up. I saw Alpha Lyna walk into the room, which explained the shift in noise and laughter.

I took one last bite of my food before standing up. “This has been a blast, and I appreciate you two making sure I ate, but I need to get going.”

Mason followed where my eyes were locked, and he looked back at me, tilting his head.

Rie stood up after me. “Is there anything we can help with?”

I shook my head. “Ginger is here, and there are some things I need to talk to her about.”

“Ah, okay. Well, if something else comes up, just hollar,” Rie said, sitting back down.

Mason watched our interaction, but he didn’t question it. I wasn’t ready to tell him all of the gory details about what had happened in my life. He didn’t even

know about what went down between my family and I, and I didn't want to dive into my magic and the threats that were looming over my head. It felt a little strange not telling him about everything, but I didn't know how to broach the subject with him anymore.

It had been a long time since we were close friends, and even though it was easy to fall back into the same patterns with each other, we were different people than we were five years ago. I wanted to rekindle that friendship, especially knowing Rie was his mate, but that would have to come with time.

I cleared my plate and made my way out of the dining room, avoiding any possible contact with Reyland. I needed to talk to Ginger about the next steps, but I knew it was just an excuse to get out of the same room as my former father. My steps were quick as I searched for the old sorceress.

I found her upstairs in Daniel's room, to no surprise. I peaked in and knocked on the door, making my presence known.

"There you are. I finished laying down the salt," I announced, entering the room. "What's next?"

Ginger smiled. "Next, we train more. We need to make sure you are ready for anything."

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MARK

I shifted back into my human form as I finished up the second shift for patrolling. I was only supposed to do one round of patrols, but after completing the first one, I felt the need to do another. There were too many new werewolves involved, and I wanted to do my due diligence to get to know the people who were protecting my pack. I needed to get a real sense for the warriors around us if I was going to trust my pack's life in their hands.

I would have done a third round of patrolling, but the moon was already high in the sky and it was late. I needed to get some rest so I could start fresh in the morning. Luckily, I knew Darian would be taking over for me for the night shifts. I trusted his judgment, so I knew I would be able to get some sleep with him supporting me.

I miss our mate, Conall said in my head. He had protested greatly when I decided to take the second shift as well. He was feeling the effects of not being around our mate greatly. It made it even harder to stay away from Adira. I understood where he was coming from. I wanted to be by Adira's side, too. I wanted to support her in any way possible, since I knew none of this was easy on her. But we both had responsibilities to attend to.

She had spent the evening training with Ginger to help improve her magic abilities. She told me about it in the brief moment we were able to link when I checked in with her before taking the extra patrol shift. She assured me it was okay, since she had to train anyway. The pack came first, she insisted. She was right, but she was also so wrong. No one could come before her in my heart, not even myself. I knew what my responsibilities were, though, and by ensuring the pack was safe, I was also ensuring she would be safe.

I practically crawled up the stairs to our bedroom. My body ached from the long day, and all I wanted was to be by Adira's side. The pack house was quiet, which was a drastic change from the rest of the day. Almost everyone who was not on patrol had retired to their rooms already. I'm sure everyone was tired from the long day of adjustments and preparation for the next few weeks of their lives.

As I approached our room, I made sure to step lightly. I opened the door slowly and peeked inside. Sure enough, Adira was fast asleep in our bed. I shut the door as quietly as I could, and I just took a moment to look at her sleeping form. Her chest rose up and down slow and steady. Her hands were tucked under her head, and this was the most peaceful I had seen her in weeks. There was something comforting about watching her sleep, so I stood there for a moment longer, taking in my beautiful mate.

Tiredness started to overtake me, and so I stripped my clothes until I was just in my boxers. I made my way across the room and climbed into bed, trying not to wake Adira. I curved my body around hers and draped my arm around her waist. I nuzzled my face into her neck and took in her mesmerizing scent. I instantly relaxed, knowing she was safe in my arms.

She started shifting underneath me, turning so she was facing me. Her eyes opened, still heavy with sleep.

"Mark?" she muttered.

"Shh," I hushed. "Go back to sleep."

She cuddled into me more, but she didn't close her eyes. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too. You need your rest though." I kissed her forehead and held her face.

She still looked at me with big doe eyes. Instead of saying anything, she leaned forward, kissing my lips. Instantly, a fire was ignited, and I could feel her need in the way she pressed into me.

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ADIRA

I didn't know what overtook me, but the moment I felt Mark against my body, I was desperate for his touch. I pressed my body into his, deepening the kiss. Mark responded eagerly, running his hands all over my body, sending goosebumps running down my arm. In return, I ran my hands down his chest, admiring every smooth muscle on his torso.

I continued running my hands down until I found the hem of his boxers. My fingers played with the elastic band, and Mark groaned in anticipation. I brought one hand up, running my fingers through his hair and cupping the back of his head. I pulled him into me, deepening the kiss.

My fingers slipped into his boxers and wrapped around his length. He gasped as I started pumping him slowly. I enjoyed how he twitched under my fingers, finding pleasure in my touch. I didn't know what had come over me. Usually I was not so forward in the bedroom, but when he climbed into bed with me, a sudden need came over me. Maybe it was because we had barely seen each other, or maybe it was something else, but I wanted him more than ever in this moment.

I kept moving slowly, taking care with every single touch. I wanted to treasure every moment to show Mark that I loved him. I wanted him to feel good the way he made me feel good. I kept my movements slow and deliberate, but it wasn't long before Mark grew impatient with me.

He broke away from my lips, latching onto my neck. He nipped and sucked on my skin, making me lose focus on my task at hand. I tried to focus on him, but he was making it difficult. Small moans spilled from my lips, and my core started to burn with such an intensity I had never felt before.

Mark slipped his hand down between my legs and started drawing small circles with his fingers. All was lost at that point, but Mark only seemed to enjoy my reaction. I felt him grow even harder as he pressed into my leg. With his other hand, he pulled my top off swiftly, leaving my torso chilled. He massaged my breast with his hand, and goosebumps filled my body once again.

Mark's fingers sped up the pace, and then he moved down, slipping them into me. He pumped them slowly at first, but he quickly sped up, making my eyes roll back in my head. I felt the energy building up inside of me with each of his pumps, and I knew I wasn't going to last much longer. Mark could sense this, so he started sucking on my mark, which sent me over the edge. He continued moving his fingers as I rode out the waves of pleasure.

He didn't hesitate to pull down my panties and his boxers and position himself between my legs. His lips found my own before he started moving again. He brushed the hair off my face and took a moment to just look at me.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered before kissing me again.

This time he moved so he was filling me up completely. He continued moving, and for a moment, we felt like one. I could feel his energy and his love for me coursing through his veins. I could feel the stress and the worry as well. I clung to his back, wanting to hold onto him for as long as I could. I was suddenly afraid that he would disappear on me. My grip tightened as the heat in my core started to build yet again.

Mark moved faster and faster, and I closed my eyes as I felt the explosion hit me again, only this time was more powerful than any other time with him. I cried out, and Mark captured my mouth. It wasn't long before he was groaning as he finished himself. He collapsed next to me, and when I opened my eyes, I noticed my entire body was glowing like a giant night light.

My eyes were wide as I looked at my hands more closely.

"Are you okay?" Mark whispered, panic suddenly filling his voice as he grabbed my hand.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm down. "Yeah, I think I just got over excited for a moment."

Mark held my hands as the glowing slowly faded. "Well, that's new."

I nodded, keeping my eyes glued to my hands until the glowing completely stopped. "My magic seemed to be showing up more and more."

Mark pulled me closer to him, and our faces were only a few inches away from each other now. He stroked my hair again, and I felt the buzzing in my body start fading even faster.

Mark pulled me closer to him, and our faces were only a few inches away from each other now. He stroked my hair again, and I felt the buzzing in my body start fading even faster.

"What do you think this means?" he asked.

"I think my magic has been growing," I said. It was the only explanation I could think of myself, but I planned on asking Ginger about it more tomorrow.

Mark's eyes started drooping, and I knew sleep was starting to overcome him. "As long as you're feeling okay."

I nuzzled into Mark more, my mind still racing. There was something I wanted to talk to him about, but this was the first I had time alone with him in a while.

"Mark," I whispered. When there wasn't a response, I knew he had already fallen asleep. I let out a soft sigh, knowing it would have to wait.

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I woke up the next morning to an empty bed. I sat up, looking around the room for Mark, but he was nowhere to be found. He came to bed after me, so I was surprised he left before I was even awake. I was sure he was working extra hard because of our guests, but it made me wonder if I was doing enough on my end to support him.

Where are you hiding? I linked Mark.

I didn't get a response right away, so I got up and started getting ready for the day. I wanted to make an appearance at breakfast to try to meet more of the friendly faces. In the middle of the day, I was supposed to meet up with Ginger for more training. Yesterday had been surprisingly successful with the practice for my magical powers. I wasn't sure what it was exactly, but I was able to pick up on new techniques faster than before.

When I had finished getting dressed for the day, I started to grow a little worried that Mark still hadn't responded to me. Usually he was quick to respond, so I was sure he was doing something important to not respond right away. There was a chance he was on another patrol and was too far for linking to work.

When I got to the dining room, I looked around for Mark, hoping to see him, but he wasn't there. I had a feeling he wouldn't be, but I was itching to touch base with him. There was something I wanted to talk to him about. Well, at least I had a feeling there might be something. I wasn't really sure if there was anything to bring up yet, but I still wanted to talk to him.

"Hey there, stranger," Scythe said, walking up to me with a bagel in hand.

"Oh hey," I said, my eyes still searching the room.

"Could you sound more disappointed to see me?"

I looked at Scythe with wide eyes. It wasn't my intention to make him feel that way at all. "Sorry! I really am happy to see you. I feel like it's been hard to talk to everyone with such a busy pack house."

Scythe snickered at me. "I'm just teasing you, Addy."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Have you been talking to Mason?"

Scythe smirked. "Maybe."

I poked his shoulder, making a point to dig my finger into his skin more than normal. "Continue to use that name on me, and I will hurt you. I'm going to have to hurt Mason for even bringing that up to you."

"Aww, but I like it! I like Mason, too," Scythe noted. "He seems like a good fit for Rie. It's funny seeing her so in love, though. She never acted that interested in finding her mate before."

"I was never really interested in finding my mate until I met Mark, so I get it." I found myself looking for his face again, even though I knew he wasn't here. I still kept hoping he would show up.

"He's out on patrol with Alpha Lyna. He didn't want to wake you this morning, so he asked me to tell you," Scythe said, watching me watch the room.

I looked at him, trying to hide my disappointment. "Ah. I didn't realize he was going on patrol again so early. He should have woken me up."

Scythe put his hand on my shoulder. "You really are a love-sick puppy, huh?"

I looked at Scythe curiously. "What are you talking about? I'm fine."

"Adira, it's okay to miss your mate. There's been a lot going on, so I know the two of you haven't spent much time together. It gets easier. I promise," Scythe said.

I nodded slowly, unsure of what to say. I didn't want to be one of those people who were constantly mopy just because they couldn't spend every minute of their time with their mate.

"How's Percy doing," I asked to get the subject off me.

"He's still adjusting. I don't think our sudden guests have been much help, either. It's been a lot, and he misses his pack." Scythe's expression fell. "I just wish I could make him feel more at home here. I love seeing him more, but I hate that he's unhappy."

"Is there anything I can do to make him feel at home?" I asked. I could imagine how Percy was feeling. I had experience with getting kicked out of your home before.

He shook his head. "He's not unhappy because he's here. I think he's just upset at how things went down. His life was suddenly turned upside down."

"I hope he starts to adjust." I paused for a moment, observing the room. Everything felt pretty upside down right now. We hadn't had a chance to establish a normal life here before everything had started, which made me feel more on edge. "Jori approached me."

"What?" Scythe exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me this sooner?"

"There's been a lot going on, and I'm not really sure what's going to happen with Jori. He wants to make amends, but he says he only wants to work with me." I had gone back and forth with how I was feeling with the situation. One moment I felt hopeful that Jori was being truthful and everything would work out, but another part of me was telling me we still couldn't trust him.

"Do you think he means it?" Scythe asked. I heard the skepticism in his voice. It sounded the same as Mark's.

I shrugged. "I hope so, but I don't really know. Something seemed to almost be off about him. I can't put my finger on what it was exactly."

"Percy mentioned Jori hasn't been himself recently. Maybe the mate rejection affected him more than he is willing to admit," Scythe suggested.

"Perhaps. Either way, we're not going to rush into that situation. There are other things that are more important," I said. "I should probably get some food before we run out. I have a busy day ahead of me, but hopefully I'll see you later."

—

CAIN

I paced back and forth in my room, running my fingers through my hair. I knew what I needed to do, but I also knew what the results would be. Adira would hate me, but she already hated me, so what did it matter? If it meant my daughter would be safe and alive, I would have to do it. One day she would understand. One day she would realize the depths of her ignorance and understand I had no choice. She gave me no choice.

I shifted to the man I hired to get the job done. He scowled at me when I appeared in his room.

"Cell phones are a thing, you know? What makes you think you have the right to come into my private space without an invitation like this?"

I rolled my eyes at him. He was an annoyance to work with, but I knew I needed his help to achieve the next steps. "Get over yourself, will you? You need me as much as I need you."

"I don't need you," he instantly said. "I can get what I want without your help."

"Don't give me that. If that were the case, you would already have what you want. Just face it. We need each other," I said. I really wished there was another way to get what I wanted without working with someone who acted high and mighty.

He rolled his eyes at me. “Whatever. So why are you here?”

“It’s time.”

His expression shifted and a smirk pulled onto his lips. “Excellent. I’ll execute our plan tonight.”

“Don’t mess this up,” I cautioned. “You’re only going to get one chance.”

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ADIRA

“Can we take a break?” I asked Ginger, sliding to the floor.

“You don’t have time for breaks.” Ginger walked over to me and hit me in the head with a rolled up piece of paper. “If the Council of Magic is after you, you have to access that internal power source.”

“I’m trying,” I said, not making an effort to move.

Ginger sighed and crouched in front of me and bonked me on the head. “Girl, don’t act so defeated. I know you have it in you. You know how to access your magic. You’re overthinking it.”

I blinked at her a few times. “What do you mean?”

She let out a long, exaggerated sigh. “Your magic is tied to your emotions. Think about all of the times that you were suddenly able to expand your abilities.”

I thought back on all that had happened. The first time I used magic was when I was scared. I was able to escape Theron because I was hyped up on adrenaline. I saved Mark from near-death because the thought of losing him was too much to bear.

“My emotions,” I said. “When they are running high, I’m able to do so much more, but I thought you said not to let my emotions overtake my magic because it can grow out of control.”

Ginger held her hand out to me. “Help me up. These old bones don’t work as well anymore.”

I stood up and then pulled Ginger to her feet. I heard the creaking in her body as she got to her feet, and it really reminded me of her old age. She was spritely and spunky most of the time, so it was easy to forget how up there in age she was.

“As for your emotions, you need to be careful to not let your emotions control your magic, but you need to use your emotions to control your magic,” Ginger explained. “That’s probably why you’re having issues expanding your powers. You are holding back out of fear.”

I thought about this for a moment. I didn’t think I was letting fear hold me back, but maybe she was right. I saw what Theron’s desire for magic did to him. He went to a dark place where nothing but power mattered to him. I never wanted to let myself get to that point. When I felt the dark magic from Theron enter my body for even the briefest moment, I felt the craving to be stronger, no matter the cost. I didn’t like that feeling.

“How do I do that without letting myself spiral?” I leaned against the wall in the conference room. Ideally, we would be practicing the magic outdoors, but with all of the werewolves from Pack Lyna around, there wasn’t much privacy anywhere anymore. Training camps were set up all around the backyard, and any farther away could be an issue if we ran into any enemies.

Since I still didn’t want to share the full extent of my magical nature with Pack Lyna, it left Ginger and I to make due with the only conference room that hadn’t been transformed for the boarding room.

“Intention,” Ginger said. “Intention is one of the most important things when it comes to magic. You could create a flame with the intention of lighting a fire and warming your friends, or you can light a fire with the intention of burning someone alive. Those two flames may both be fire, but the flames themselves will be very different with power and ability.”

“Which one is more powerful?” If bad intentions were the only way to create a strong flame, then I wasn’t sure what I would be able to do against a dark force that wanted to spread destruction across the world.

“Some would say the flame created to burn enemies is more powerful.”

My heart sank hearing this. It was making it difficult to understand how to grow stronger without falling into a dark hole.

“But I would disagree with that.” Ginger held a flame in her palm. The light flickered in her eyes. She snapped her fingers, turning off the light in the room. The flame in her palm was the only source of light in the room now, and it was soft and warm. The tiredness in my body seemed to float away.

“A flame created with the intent to heal and warm the soul can be far greater than a flame used to burn and break things. Anyone can cause destruction. Not everyone can inspire and protect. There is a deep power with good intentions, and many disregard that, thinking it’s a weakness. Make that your strength, and you’ll find more power than any other sorcerer out there.”

Ginger held out the flame to me as an offer. I stepped forward, looking at the light and feeling its energy. There was something special coming from this light, and I could feel the power Ginger was describing.

Take the flame, Moon said in my head.

As if in a trance, I reached forward and scooped the flame into my own palms. It floated just above my hands, and even though I could feel the heat, I knew there was no risk of injury. As I watched the flame, I could feel the intention Ginger created it with. I could feel the ball of energy inside of me brightening and courage filling me. This was not about gaining power. It was about being able to protect those around me and keep peace in the world.

I saw Rie and Mason dancing in the flames. Their love and happiness grew as they built a life together. Next, Scythe swirled into the flames. Percy ran and embraced him, making the flame grow stronger. They spun out of the flame only to be replaced with Mark. His face was clear and it felt like he was looking directly at me. He took a step back, fading into a silhouette in the small flame. A female figure that looked just like me joined him, and he picked her up, swirling around. As they parted, a third figure appeared between them, a happy family.

This was what it meant to have power. It meant protecting the people I loved now so we could all have the happiness and love we were meant to have in our futures. The flame faded, and at the same time, I felt the energy inside of me burning brighter than before, the new intention instilled deep inside of me. Getting stronger was about protection, not the survival I had been relying on.

My cheeks were wet with tears, and I hadn’t even realized I started crying. I wiped my face with the back of my hand and tried to compose myself.

“Have you told him yet?” Ginger asked.

My eyes met hers, confused as to what she was asking. “Told him what?”

Ginger simply smirked in return. “Let’s continue our lesson. I want you to practice redirecting energy to create new things.”

I blinked at Ginger, still trying to figure out what she was talking about, but there wasn’t time to move back to the conversation. She was already focused on our next lesson.

—

MARK

As I ran with the rest of the patrol, a strange scent filled my nose, instantly putting me on high alert. I didn’t recognize the scent. It wasn’t the scent of a werewolf, but it wasn’t human either. I had never smelled anything like it before, which worried me. I thought we had more time before the council came after Adira. We weren’t ready yet. We needed more time.

I signaled to the rest of the wolves on patrol with me, but they were already on the same page as me. That was one of the things I appreciated most about Alpha Lyna’s warriors. They were sharp and skilled warriors. They didn’t need much training. The biggest struggle I had with them was getting on the same page. We had to work out communication procedures and make sure everyone was on the same page.

The scent was strong, and it was easy to pick up on the trail of whoever it was, and it went north. We followed the trail, keeping an eye out for whoever was in our territory. I picked up speed the longer we followed the trail. It was possible this person was just someone who had wandered onto our territory, but I assumed everyone was the enemy until proven wrong. There were too many people who wanted to take Adira away from me, and I wasn’t about to take any chances with security.

We followed the trail, and the sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach grew. The trail circled around our territory, but there were no signs of whoever made the trail around. Whoever it was had been scouting out the pack house. They were preparing some sort of attack.

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MARK

We expanded our area of patrol to see if the person scouting out the packhouse was still there, but we didn't find anyone. There was only the one scent, too, which I wasn't sure what to make of it. There was no proof that the scent belonged to a person with malintent, but I knew that was the case. There was no other reason to scout out this territory if they weren't planning anything. I needed to know who it was exactly and more about their plan.

After another hour of patrolling, we still didn't find any other clues about who this was or where they currently were. The next set of patrols arrived to take over, and part of me wanted to stay on patrol to keep looking, but I knew I needed to take a break and talk to others about what we had found.

I made it back to the pack house, and the first stop I made was to my room. I desperately needed to take a shower after hours of running and searching. I kept an eye out for Adira as I moved through the house. I wanted to say hi to her since she was still sleeping when I had left. I also wanted to let her know what was going on. Even though there were warriors everywhere right now, I wanted to make sure she was on high alert. She was strong, and I knew she could take care of herself in a fight.

I entered our room, and I still hadn't seen Adira anywhere. I'm back from patrol. Do you want to get some food? I linked her.

I made my way to the bathroom after grabbing clean clothes while waiting for her response.

Give me fifteen minutes to finish up with Ginger, and then I'll be free, she responded.

I felt calmer after hearing her voice. Excitement bubbled up inside of me, knowing I was going to see my mate soon. Every day it felt more difficult to see her and hold her, so I treasured every minute I could spend with her, even if it was only spent eating or sitting in silence. I was ready for all of this to be over with. We hadn't had a chance to start our life together yet, at least not the way I wanted.

I was craving the monotony of a boring daily routine. I would be happy waking up to her every morning, eating breakfast, and then going about our daily chores, checking in as frequently at the end of the day. At the end of the day,

we would sit in front of a fire, reading as she sat in my lap. It would be quiet, but as long as I was with Adira, I knew I didn't need any outside excitement.

My shower was quick, and I rushed down to the kitchen to pack a picnic for the two of us. The dining room was constantly filled with hungry mouths, so I knew we would get no privacy there. I wanted to take advantage of the few minutes I had to spend some quality time with my mate.

I hurried upstairs, knowing Adira should be done soon. Knowing where Adira and Ginger were practicing, I went to that room and waited outside to make sure I didn't disturb their training. I heard some noise inside followed by cheering. I loved hearing Adira shout in happiness. It seemed to be a much rarer occasion these days.

A moment later, the door opened, and Adira poured out. Her eyes widened when she saw me, and the next thing I knew, she jumped up, wrapping her arms around my neck. She planted a deep kiss on my lips, pressing into me. I could feel her energy buzzing, so I knew good things were happening.

Adira pulled back, the brightest smile filling her face. She still had her arms draped around my neck.

"What has you in such a brilliant mood?" I couldn't help but feel happy, knowing Adira was happy.

"I did! It makes so much more sense now. Ginger helped me dig really deep, and something just clicked inside of me." Adira wasn't breathing as her words spilled out of her mouth.

"Slow down," I laughed. "What did you do?"

She took a breath and smiled with a closed mouth. "I figured out magic."

I raised my eyebrow, a little skeptical. "What do you mean?"

"I get it now. I knew magic was fueled by my emotions, but I didn't know how to put them together exactly, but now I understand it. I figured out what makes magic powerful and dangerous but also what makes it beautiful and lovely. I still need to practice, of course. I want things to become second nature to me, and that's not going to happen without some work, but Ginger says I'm a fast learner. I can do this. I can become someone who can protect the people I love."

Adira was bouncing in my arms, and she was so cute with her eyes filled with wonder and possibilities.

“You’re amazing.” I leaned forward and kissed her again. “I still can’t believe you’re mine.”

Her facial features softened at my words. “I’m the lucky one here. You’ve always been so patient and caring.” She bit her lip and looked at the ground. I could tell there was something on her mind. I brushed a piece of hair out of her face and moved her chin so she was looking at me.

“Why the sudden change of mood?” I grew worried as the bubbly energy shifted into something different.

“What do you have in your hand there?” she asked.

“Lunch. I thought we could slip away somewhere quiet and just spend some time together,” I said, slipping my hand onto her lower back. Sometimes I wished I could read her mind. She was so complicated at times, but it only made me want to learn everything about her.

“That sounds lovely,” she said, her smile returning again. She intertwined her fingers with mine and squeezed. “There’s something I want to talk to you about.”

I raised my eyebrow at her. “Should I be worried?”

She twisted her face. “I don’t think so.”

“That’s reassuring,” I laughed, trying to brush off my nerves.

She lifted up onto her toes and gave me a kiss. “Don’t be nervous. I love you.”

I grabbed the back of her head and pulled her in for another kiss. It would have been easy to pick her up and take her to the bedroom and have my way with her, but that was a slippery slope. I wanted to make sure to spend quality time with my mate outside of the bedroom, even though just being with her sent my mind into a spiral.

Adira was the first to pull away, and based on the glint in her eye, her mind was on the same path as mine. She grabbed my hand and started leading me towards the stairs before anything else could happen.

When we turned to go down the stairs, we almost ran into Darian and Scythe.

"There you are, Alpha!" Scythe exclaimed. "We need to talk to you about the patrols."

"Can it wait?" I asked. I finally had a moment with Adira, and I wasn't ready for it to be cut short.

Darian looked between the two of us and frowned. "Unfortunately, no. It's about what you found during your patrol."

I let out a long sigh. This was too important to ignore. I looked over at Adira with apologetic eyes.

"Rain check?" she said before I could say anything. She smiled at me for reassurance, but I wondered how much of that was a fake facade.

"Are you sure?" I hated this. This was definitely the worst part about being alpha.

Adira leaned over and kissed my cheek. "Do what you have to. I'll see you later."

Adira grabbed the picnic basket from my hands and scurried down the stairs. I watched her leave, wishing I had taken her to the bedroom. It would have meant a few minutes of uninterrupted time with her at least.

—

ADIRA

I moved away from Mark with a heavy heart. I had grown much too excited to spend a few moments with him, but I should have known that something would have come up. I tried to not show my disappointment in front of Mark. I knew he didn't want to leave me, so I didn't want to make his job more difficult. I wanted to be the supportive mate, instead of making him feel guilty for doing what he needed to in order to protect the pack and myself.

I decided to take the sudden free time to attend one of the warrior training sessions. They were being held from sunrise to sundown every day to make sure everyone was up to snuff on their fighting skills. If this turned into a large

battle, we wanted everyone to be as prepared as possible. I wanted to make sure I was included in that.

Mark had been working with me on my defensive skills before the chaos erupted, but it had been over a week since we had done one on one training. Even though I knew my magic would be one of the most powerful fighting skills I would have, I wanted to make sure I had hand to hand and weapon combat skills as well. It was impossible to predict what kind of situation we would end up in, so I wanted to be prepared for everything. I didn't want to be a weak mate holding back the alpha because she couldn't protect herself.

I walked out to the backyard, and it was easy to see where the training session was being held. The werewolves were working on leg sweeps currently. I looked around, trying to figure out who was hosting the training.

A whistle was blown, drawing everyone's attention to the front. Reyland was standing in front of everyone, tall and proud. "Great job everyone. We are going to move onto the next technique. Do I have any volunteers for a demonstration?"

Everyone was quiet in response to the alpha's request. His eyes searched over the crowd, and when they met mine, his demeanor shifted.

"Actually, work on dodging with each other for a moment. I'll start the demonstration a little later," Reyland said, keeping his eyes locked with mine.

When everyone broke off into pairs again, Reyland made his way directly over to me. I took a step back, thinking maybe I should join a different training session. I turned my back to leave, but Reyland's voice cut through the air.

"Don't go. Please." His voice was almost desperate.

I stopped in my tracks, but I didn't turn around. "I don't think this is the training session for me." My hands shook with nerves.

"Stay. Please. It's important for you to sharpen your skills, and I will allow you to beat on me as much as you need to."

I wasn't sure if I had ever heard Reyland be so desperate. I turned around, finally facing him. I found myself actually considering his offer.

"You never wanted me to fight when I was younger." I thought about how protective he was when growing up.

"I didn't want my little girl to get hurt, but I realize that you would have been better off if I had trained you like a warrior. I have realized quite a few things. There's a lot I want to say to you and make up for, but I won't talk to you if you don't want to. I just don't want your training to suffer because of me." Reyland stood tall and clasped his hands behind his back. He was nervous as he waited for my answer.

I looked around, knowing he had a point. I didn't want to keep running every time I saw him either. I would only continue to feel on edge whenever I saw him. That was not the kind of life I wanted to have. I took a deep breath. "Okay, I'll stay."

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"Have you ever thrown a punch before?" Reyland asked, moving on in the conversation to prevent more awkwardness.

"A few times. Mark has been working with me on my skills, but he has been teaching me more self-defense skills," I explained.

Reyland nodded. "You have a good mate there. He's a good alpha, too. Why don't you show me how you punch, and we'll go from there. If people are targeting you, I want to make sure you know how to attack them. Self-defense is great and all, but sometimes the best defense."

I nodded and got into my fighting stance. It felt a little weird to prepare to attack someone who wasn't my enemy, but I knew this was good. I hadn't had much practice with initiating an attack, but it would be good practice. I looked at Reyland, a little hesitant to swing at him. I didn't want to hurt him. Well, a small part of me did. I wanted to believe that I was past everything that happened when I was sixteen, but standing here in the presence of someone I once looked up to made all of my feelings start to bubble up.

My chest tightened as the feeling of abandonment grew. I curled my hands into a fist, and I swung at the hand Reyland was holding up. I winced instantly and shook my hand out. It felt like I was swinging at a brick, and my hand stung.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

I nodded. "I'm okay. I just wasn't expecting it to hurt so much."

"Hitting someone will hurt on both ends. The most important thing is you are doing more damage than you are taking. Here, let's try it again and focus on fixing your form. When throwing a good punch, you want to make sure you have a wide stance. One foot should be a little back to make you more sturdy. Now make your hands into a fist. Make sure your thumb is on the outside. When you swing, you want to use your entire body. Follow through with your movement, and you'll find you are packing a harder punch."

Reyland demonstrated the stance that he wanted me in. I did my best to copy his form. He ended up correcting me, shifting my feet a little, and adjusting my hands.

"Better," he said. "Now try hitting me again."

I didn't hesitate to swing this time, keeping everything he said in mind. I moved my entire body as I swung. This time the impact with Reyland's hand was more powerful, and I ended up losing my balance. Reyland quickly caught me and steadied me.

"That was much better. Next time, try to stay on your feet though." Reyland had a sly smirk on his face, and nostalgia overwhelmed me.

It was the same look he gave me when he messed around with me when I was younger. I loved those soft moments. He was a firm parent, but he was never overly strict. He just knew that it was a lot to be the daughter of an alpha, and he never wanted me to be caught off guard. The one thing I knew when I was younger was that he loved me. There were times when I questioned whether that was true of my mother.

Reyland's expression changed. "Are you hurt?"

I shook my head, feeling my cheeks. I hadn't realized I had started to cry. "No, I'm fine. This is just a lot."

Reyland stiffened at my words. "I can have a different warrior work with you if you prefer. I want to make sure you get proper training."

"No," I said faster than expected.

Reyland paused and looked at me, confusion etched into his face.

"I was just thinking about when I was younger. I miss those moments," I admitted.

Reyland looked at the ground. "I miss them, too. I missed too much of your life, and that will always be my biggest regret."

Part of me wanted to give him a hug to comfort him, but I wasn't ready for that. "I think I want to see if we can repair this relationship, but it's not easy for me. You broke my trust and made me feel like the most unwanted daughter. That doesn't just go away because you say you're sorry. I need time, and I don't know if I will ever be fully healed from that."

Reyland nodded, the corner of his lip turned up ever so slightly. "I completely understand. I will wait as long as you need. I'm just glad you are willing to at least give me a chance."

I let his words hang in the air for a moment as I processed everything. I wanted this to be real and true. I wanted to rebuild my relationship with Reyland. My memories of him in my childhood seemed so vivid, and as he stood in front of me, I saw him as two different people at the same time. To the younger me, he was my father, my dad, the man I looked up to as a kid. To the current me, he was Reyland, the alpha of Pack Lyna who was here to help make sure I could have a future, hopefully one that included him.

"Okay, so what are we going to work on next?" I asked.

"We need to make sure you can throw a proper punch without falling on your face before moving," Reyland said, a smirk dancing on his lips.

—

I dragged myself to bed at the end of the night, my mind and body both pushed past their limits. I couldn't remember another time when my body was this exhausted. My feet ached with every step I took, and my bones creaked with even the slightest movement. The stairs were the worst and took much longer to get up than normal.

I was grateful for all of the training Reyland helped me with. We worked together, even after the training session ended. He insisted that I work harder to get up to speed faster. He wanted me to be a skilled warrior, which was still a weird thought. He had been absolutely against it when I was a child, so him

insisting on extra training now showed me he was not the same person as before.

I knew I had gained a lot of important skills, but my body was screaming at me to stop. The nice thing about being a werewolf was my muscles would heal much faster, so my body should feel better by the morning.

I opened the door to our bedroom, and my heart sank when I saw Mark passed out in the chair in the corner. He was not in a comfortable position by any means. I knew he had tried to stay awake until I came back, but he hadn't been sleeping much the past few days. His body must have taken over and shut down once he sat down.

I was afraid to wake him up, knowing he would want to stay up with me out of guilt. So I grabbed a blanket and draped it over his body. Then I tucked a pillow behind his head, so he wouldn't wake up with a kink in his neck. I hoped we would get to spend some time together tomorrow.

Apparently, the patrols found some sort of strange trail surrounding the pack house, and that took up Mark's entire evening. They were concerned it was someone scouting out the place, so they wanted to set up extra precautions. Mark checked in on occasion, but he wasn't able to get away to see me, like he wanted.

I crawled into my bed after placing a kiss on Mark's forehead. It felt good to finally relax, and I could feel my eyelids growing heavy.

The bed feels too empty without our mate, Shadow whined in my head.

I know. He's working hard, though. We'll be okay for one night.

Can't we just wake him up or crawl into his lap? Shadow asked.

I'm too tired to move.

Even if I decided to wake him up, I was confident I wouldn't be able to move now that I was lying down.

It didn't take long for me to fall into a deep slumber. I opened my eyes and found myself in my subconscious, but something felt strange. The normal white background was almost pitch black, and there was a loud pounding echoing in the air. Pressure in the air was making it hard to breathe.

“Adira!” Moon shouted.

I turned and saw her running directly towards me. She leaped into the air, and I caught her in my arms. Her heart was pounding.

“What’s going on?” Moon asked, panic clear in her voice.

I looked around, taking it all in. Ginger taught me how to block others from entering my mind without my permission, and I was grateful for it at this moment.

“I think the Son of Blood and Magic is trying to enter.”

The dark magic was surrounding the walls I had put up, and he was putting pressure on me. He was desperate to make a connection with me. I could feel his desire for me was greater than anything else. I swallowed hard, afraid of his intensity. I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths. I focused on my love for Mark and the future I was determined to have with him. I imagined the barriers in my head strengthening, and the pressure grew lighter.

“He’s backing off,” Moon said. She hopped out of my arms, and a sense of relief washed over the two of us.

“He’ll be back,” I said, feeling it deep in my bones. There were only two ways this thing with the Son of Blood and Moon would end, and I would do everything I could to make sure it ended my way.

—

I woke up suddenly, a wave of nausea washing over me. I ran to the bathroom before it was too late. When my body had expunged everything it could, I rinsed my mouth and checked the time. It was only two in the morning, much too late to be awake. I headed back to my bed, checking on Mark on the way. He was still fast asleep, and his mouth was opened wide. There was a small stream of drool coming out of his mouth, which made me smile.

Before I made it back to bed, an uneasy feeling washed over me. Something was wrong. I instantly went to Mark, trying to shake him awake. He was in a deep sleep, and my attempts to wake him were unsuccessful. Unsure of what to do, I grabbed a robe and wrapped it around me. I wanted to find someone to go with me to figure out what was wrong. I was not about to go out on my own.

I scurried down the pack house to the warrior who was supposed to be on guard at the front door. I was surprised when I didn't see anyone. My first thought was that the warrior had just taken a small break, but Mark made sure that security was tight and the patrols were always in position. I doubted the warrior just left like that. The sinking feeling in my stomach became even greater.

I moved around the pack house, an eerie quiet filling my ears. My feet moved even faster, as I grew desperate to find someone. I had no luck, and then I heard a noise in the backyard. I knew there was a patrol stationed outside that entrance, so I hoped it was just them.

I walked slowly, making sure I was ready for what I found on the other side of the door. I slowly opened the door, but I didn't see anyone outside. I looked around, trying to figure out why this place was a ghost town. I shut the back door and locked it behind me. Whatever was going on, I was not about to try to face it on my own. I decided to go back upstairs and do whatever I needed to wake Mark up.

Turning around, I jumped, surprised to see Jori standing behind me. Before I could scream, he put a hand over my hand and pressed me against the wall.

His lips nearly touched my ear as he whispered, "Don't do anything I'll make you regret."

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My heart raced as I went over every possibility of what was happening. Jori's plea for friendship was all a lie. I was so naive, and I was furious with myself. But why would he bother to plead for friendship if he was just going to turn around and ambush the pack house. It made no sense.

"Come with me quietly, and we won't have any issues," Jori said, reaching down to grab my wrist.

Mark! Help! I linked, desperate for his help.

I shifted away, so I was standing directly behind him. "Do you honestly think I'm just going to go with you quietly?"

Jori growled. "I warned you not to do anything I'll make you regret." He lunged at me, pulling some sort of long stick out of his pocket.

I took a step back, easily dodging his blow. “Do you really think you’re going to get away with this? Others are going to be here any second.”

Jori stopped and smirked at me. “Take a look around. No one is coming to help you.”

A sinking feeling filled my stomach. I knew the house was too quiet. “What did you do to everyone?”

“Don’t worry. They’re not dead. They are just having a nice long nap. They’ll stay alive if you agree to come with me.” Jori’s eyes flashed black, but this time the darkness completely overtook his eyes, staying there.

“Who are you?” I asked, taking a step back. I knew something was wrong with Jori, but it was starting to come together for me. Jori wasn’t the type to threaten the lives of others. He was the type to save his former best friend, even though there was bad blood between them.

His smile deepened, and he took a few steps towards me. “I’m Jori, of course.”

“No, you’re not. Jori would never do this.” I kept stepping back, trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.

Mark, I tried linking again, desperation filling my voice. Whoever this was had done something to the pack, and I was worried Mark was hurt. Even if he was asleep, he should still be able to feel our mate bond.

“Do you know Jori, though? You’ve known him for what, a few months? How do you know what Jori, what I would really do?” His stride quickened in pace.

I went through the steps of what Ginger had taught me today. I quickly made an energy ball and threw it at Jori. He winced as it hit him, but it barely seemed to affect him, which made no sense. I threw another one at him, making sure to put the intent of protecting the pack behind it. The attack hit his shoulder, which threw him off for a moment, but he still approached me.

I turned on my heels and started running, not knowing what else to do. If my magic wasn’t strong enough to stun Jori, my other option was to run. I bolted towards the living room, trying to give myself more time to concoct a plan. I heard footsteps following me, making my heart race faster. I wasn’t going to just give up, even if he was stronger than me.

I put my hand on the arm chair and used my magic to throw the chair back. It flung at Jori with great speed, but he held up his hand, shattering the chair into little pieces just by lifting his hands. He definitely used magic to protect himself, and I knew he was possessed by the Son of Blood and Magic. Nothing else made sense.

I burst through the front door, unsure of where to run, but I had to do something. As I scurried down the stairs, Jori suddenly appeared in front of me, hitting my face with the back of his hand with such a force it knocked me to the ground.

"I didn't want to hurt you, but you didn't give me much of a choice," Jori said. He crouched down next to me.

I reached up and felt blood on my lip dripping down. A strange calm fell over me. I looked up at the sky and saw the moon shining down on me, as if it was casting a protective light over me. I took a deep breath, searching deep inside of me.

Jori stabbed something in my neck, and I felt all of my powers diminishing. My eyes felt heavy, and my body was growing weak.

"What was that?" I asked, fighting the sleep trying to take over.

"Don't worry about it." He placed his hand on my chin and held it for a moment. "All will be as it's supposed to."

My body collapsed below me, giving out before my mind. It was hard to keep my eyes open, but I fought as hard as possible.

Mark, please, I linked one last time, hoping I would get through to him.

"Did it go as planned?" a new voice said.

"I have her, don't I?"

"You were supposed to hurt her."

"She resisted."

I lifted my head as much as possible, and I saw Cain standing next to Cain. My heart squeezed tighter as I saw this. Cain was working with Jori.

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MARK

I woke up with a sharp pain in my head. My head was pounding, and the light in the room almost felt like it was burning my eyes. It almost felt like I was hungover, which was impossible. Something was wrong, but I didn't know what yet. I sat up, and my back was sore from the position I was in. There was a blanket on me, and I could smell Adira on it. She must have put it on me after I fell asleep.

I looked around, but I didn't see her here. Normally, I was the first one awake, but maybe I needed the extra sleep.

Where are you? I linked her.

I didn't move while waiting for her to respond. My body ached, and my head was throbbing. Maybe I had caught some sort of weird virus. It was a rare occurrence in werewolves, but it did happen. I closed my eyes and focused on my breathing.

Why wasn't Adira responding?

Are you okay, love?

Still no response. I forced myself to stand up. It was strange for Adira to not respond in a few minutes. The room spun a little as I stood, and I had to use the chair to steady myself. After a moment, I made my way out of the room. Everything was strangely quiet. Ever since Pack Lyna started staying with us, the house was never quiet, except for when most people were asleep. Even then, it wasn't this quiet.

I went down the stairs, trying to find anyone, and I froze when I saw the living room. Furniture was broken and scattered everywhere. A fight had clearly gone down here, but why wasn't I woken up? Everyone knew to contact the alpha if anything as serious as a fight happened, and broken furniture indicated a large fight. My heart raced as I searched everywhere for someone, but there seemed to be no one downstairs.

I burst through the back door and took a big sniff. I could smell a werewolf not too far away from here. I ran, following the scent as I went. I paused when I

saw Darian face down in the dirt behind the pack house. He was in charge of the night patrol last night. Something seriously went wrong.

I ran to his side and gently turned him over. His chest was heaving up and down, so I knew he was still alive. I shook him gently, trying to wake him up.

Darian opened his eyes, groaning as he did. "Why is the sun so damn bright?"

"What happened last night?" I asked, helping him sit up.

He squinted his eyes, looking around the best he could. "I was making my rounds around the pack house. I heard a noise, so I went to investigate it. That's the last thing that happened."

I grabbed Darian's hand and pulled him to his feet. "I can't find anyone in the pack house. I think we were attacked last night, but I have no idea what happened."

Darian started processing everything that was going on a little faster. "Is anyone hurt?"

"I'm not sure yet. You were the first person I found," I said. "I tried linking Adira, but she's not responding."

Darian furrowed his brows. "She wasn't in your room last night?"

I tried to force the panic of not knowing where my mate was down from the surface. I didn't know anything for sure yet, and it would be no good for me to start to panic. "I think she was there at some point. Her scent was in the room, but I fell asleep before she came to bed, and she wasn't there when I woke up."

Darian grabbed my arm, giving me a reassuring squeeze. "She's around here somewhere. We'll find her. We'll find everyone."

I had my doubts with Darian's statement. It was strange that I hadn't seen anyone in the pack house when walking through it. If everyone was drugged, surely their unconscious bodies would be lying around somewhere. Darian was okay and alive though. That was the only hope I had. If whoever was here had severe malintent, Darian would be dead. I hoped the others were okay, and I hoped we would find Adira soon.

I nodded my head, trying to make sure I was acting like a leader and not a panicked mate right now. "Okay, let's go find everyone."

Darian and I considered splitting up to look for the others, but we decided it was best to err on the side of caution and stick together on the chance that the ambushers were still around. We found a few other warriors tucked away in some bushes nearby. They were in the same condition as Darian, confused with a major headache. Once we filled them in on the situation, they added to the search.

Inside the pack house, several people were tucked away in closets. Whoever did this made a point to make sure it wasn't easy to see the werewolves passed out. They also made a point to make sure everyone was unharmed. I was relieved for the safety of my pack and Pack Lyna, however, something about it didn't sit right with me. The longer we looked without finding Adira, the more worried I grew.

Once enough warriors were in a condition to help with the search for the missing members, I made my way upstairs to look for Zayla. I went to her office first to see if she had passed out there. When I opened the door, I saw Zayla drawing blood from her arm. She didn't bother to look up at me.

"Don't worry, Alpha. I will figure out what this drug is that was used on us," Zayla said. She finished drawing her own blood and then proceeded to label it. "I could use a sample of your blood as well."

"Of course." I rolled up my sleeve and walked over to her. I sat in the patient's seat and held my arm out to her.

She quickly drew the blood and then made another label for mine. "I'm curious about how this drug was administered to the pack so efficiently. It definitely wasn't something ingested. That would have been too inconsistent. Perhaps a gas. Do you know if anyone was unaffected?"

"It seems like everyone we come across was affected so far."

Zayla put a bandaid on my arm. "Interesting." She finished what she was doing and then paused, staring me directly in the eyes. "She's still alive."

My heart raced at her words. I knew exactly who she was talking about. I was trying not to think about what happened to Adira. We were still finding pack

members. But it was hard not to jump to the worst-case scenario. “You don’t know that.”

“She’s still alive,” Zayla repeated.

“Zay, how do you know she’s alive? We still don’t know where she is.” This thought scared me more than anything. Several people were after Adira, and if they had taken her, I didn’t know if she was hurt or scared or even alive.

“She has to be alive. Alpha would be too sad otherwise.

“We don’t know that yet. Until I know where she is, until I hear her voice again, until I know she is safe in my arms, it’s impossible to know if she’s alive or dead.” My chest tightened at the thought. There was something about saying it out loud that made it too real for me.

The door to Zayla’s office flung open, and someone from Pack Lyna burst in. “Alpha Mark, come quick. We found blood.”

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MARK

I followed the warrior out of Zayla’s office and rushed to where he indicated the blood was. It was in the front yard of the pack house, and a crowd had already gathered. Zayla was just a few steps behind us at the scene.

I pushed through the crowd, needing to see what had happened. Alpha Lyna was already in the center of the crowd, inspecting the scene. The scent hit me before I actually saw anything. It was the smell of Adira mixed with iron. There was no doubt in my mind that the blood belonged to Adira. My stomach sank and my body tensed. What happened here? Why wasn’t I here to make sure she was okay? Was she still alive?

Alpha Lyna looked up at me and frowned. He stood up and assessed the crowd. In a booming alpha voice he said, “It’s time for all of you to clear out here. There’s nothing to see here, and we still have missing pack members. Go help the search.”

Everyone started to clear out immediately, but it felt like a blur to me. I was able to stay in denial, not knowing where Adira was, but blood meant that she was hurt. There was no denying that. Someone took her away from me while I

was sleeping, and I had no idea who it was. It could have been the Council of Blood and Magic or this Son of Blood and Magic. There were too many people after my mate, and one of them got to her while I was asleep. My mate was hurt and taken while I slept the night away.

“You should go help the search,” Alpha Lyna said.

Zayla looked him up and down, not caring about his alpha status. “I am Pack Aphelion’s doctor, and I will be staying to take a sample of the blood. You do not give me orders.”

I knew I should scold Zayla for her rude tone, but I couldn’t open my mouth to speak.

“Understood,” Alpha Lyna said, taking a step back. He turned his attention to me, putting a hand on my shoulder. He looked me in the eyes and waited for me to process his presence. “She’s okay. There was minimal blood, nothing deadly. Whoever was behind this attack seemed to be cautious about not harming the wolves. I’m confident she’s still alive.”

I swallowed hard, barely able to breathe with how tight my chest felt. “How did this happen? We had patrols everywhere. Someone should have alerted everyone before the bastard even touched our land.”

Alpha Lyna squeezed my shoulder. “I fully intend to find out. No one threatens Pack Lyna and gets away with it.”

“No one threatens my mate and gets away with it.” The numbness I felt started to dissipate, rage filling the void. My fingers curled into fists, and my fingernails dug into my palm.

“We will find her,” Alpha Lyna said, “And I’ll rip them to shreds.”

“Not if I get to them first.” I would kill whoever took my mate, no hesitation. They had better hope they didn’t harm her, or their death would be slow and painful.

“Mark!” Rie said, running down the steps of the front porch. Mason was just a few steps behind her. She threw her arms around me. “Is it true?”

With how fast information was spreading, I was sure she had already heard about Adira. “I’m pretty sure. We’re still trying to figure everything out.”

Rie pulled back, tears filling in her eyes. "I woke up with an immense headache, and then there was so much chatter going on in the pack link. There was an attack on us last night?"

I nodded slowly. There wasn't much damage to the pack house, but it was still an attack. Whoever this was didn't know that they messed with the wrong wolfpack. "I'm positive Adira was the target."

Rie gasped and threw her hands over her mouth. More tears welled in her eyes. "I hate this. I hate how much that poor girl has gone through. She deserves the world. She deserves a break from this chaos. She deserves so much happiness."

Mason wrapped his arms around Rie and pulled her into his chest. She visibly calmed down at his touch.

"What can we do to help?" he asked.

Alpha Lyna stepped up. "We need to find any clues that will lead us to whoever did this and where they might be. We have to get Adira back."

"I'll lead a thorough investigation to find any information," Mason offered. "If they left any tracks, I'll find them."

"There won't be any tracks," Ginger said, joining the group. "Magic was definitely used here last night."

Ginger stood next to Alpha Lyna, and she looked small compared to his tall stature. Somehow she still looked fierce.

"Who are you?" Alpha Lyna asked, sniffing Ginger's scent.

"Who are you?" Ginger returned, jabbing him in the arm. "What gives you the right to just smell an old lady whenever you want. Just because you have that werewolf nose, doesn't give you the right to just go smelling anyone anytime."

Alpha Lyna was taken aback by Ginger's fierceness. He looked to me for help and clarification of this situation. I knew he already knew Ginger wasn't a werewolf. Her scent made it clear she wasn't human either.

“Reyland, this is Ginger,” I introduced. I hesitated before saying the next part. “She’s been training Adira with her, umm.” I looked at the others, unsure of how much they knew about Adira’s magic nature.

Ginger slapped me on the back, making me cough in shock. “Spit it out, boy. We don’t have all day.”

“She’s been helping Adira learn to control her magic better,” I said, still a little hesitant.

Alpha Lyna nodded as he processed this information. “She’s a sorcerer.”

Mason’s eyes went wide. “Magic? Sorcerer?”

Rie grabbed his hand and whispered, “I’ll explain later. Not now.”

Mason shut his mouth and gulped.

Ginger laughed. “I take it I’m the first sorcerer this boy has met.”

“Most werewolves have never met a sorcerer. We stay separate,” Alpha Lyna said. His voice was more rigid now as he spoke to Ginger. He was definitely on edge, which I understood. He hadn’t known sorcerers in the best light before.

I decided to step in before any argument could possibly start. “Ginger, do you know who did this? Who took Adira?”

“I may be clairvoyant, but I can’t see the future. I don’t know who exactly was here, but I know it was strong magic. They used a hell of a spell to knock us all out, though. I haven’t felt this hungover since I drank three pitchers of golden goose liquor with Clara.” Ginger paused.

“Do you think the Council of Magic came for Adira?” I asked. I held my breath, terrified of the response.

“No,” Ginger instantly said. “We’d all be dead if it was the council. They would have done more than pull a simple sleeping spell on the pack house. I only felt three different sources of magic here, one of them Adira’s.”

“This was the work of only two sorcerers?” Mason said. His eyes looked like they were about to bug out of his eyes. “How are we supposed to have any chance against sorcerers if this is the damage of only two?”

Ginger looked at Mason, and for a moment, she held sympathy for him. "In the great war, werewolves were incredibly strong, and sorcerers feared them. They seemed to have some sort of resistance to magic, so they were an equal match to sorcerers. I know this may seem like a lot, but I promise this is not a hopeless situation."

"We've defeated sorcerers before," I added. "They tried to attack and kill Adira a few months ago, and we were able to defeat them with no casualties."

Alpha Lyna looked at me closely. "This isn't the first time Adira has been attacked by sorcerers?"

I shook my head, the anger bubbling to the surface again. "No. Since she is half-sorcerer, half-werewolf, it has been causing a lot of issues for her. It is a complicated story, but I'd prefer not to get into it right now. I want to focus on finding my mate first."

There was a subtle pain in my chest from the separation from my mate. I had already been feeling off from spending so little time with Adira these past few days, but this was different. She wasn't here, and I couldn't even sense her. Even when I had been on patrol, I was close enough to her to sense her. I hadn't felt her all morning, and it was starting to ache.

"We'll find her. Mason, start investigating the area for any clues of where these bastards might have taken my daughter-taken Adira," Alpha Lyna said, catching himself in his words. He continued on as if nothing happened. "Ginger, can you continue looking for more magic clues?" He quickly added, "Please."

A small smile pulled at my lips as I saw the effect Ginger had on this alpha. I had not seen Alpha Lyna use the word "please" the entire time he was here. He was used to giving commands, no questions asked, but Ginger wasn't having any of that.

"That was the plan," Ginger said, a little sass still in her voice.

Alpha Lyna turned to me, too nervous to speak to Ginger again. "We'll find her. We'll do everything in our power to find her. I'm here if you need anything, too, son." He turned and walked away, Mason and Rie following behind him.

The word "son" echoed in my ears. Even though Reyland wasn't Adira's real father, his fatherly tendencies were showing for the first time here. He was

protective and worried about Adira, just like a father should be. It was a relief, knowing another strong alpha cared about Adira in a deep way.

I stayed put, needing a moment to collect myself before going back inside. I was fighting the rage I felt towards the attackers and the deep fear of losing my mate. It would have been easy to fall down a dark rabbit hole, but I knew I had to keep it together for Adira's sake. I had to do whatever I could to bring her back.

"She fought hard, you know," Ginger said, bringing my attention back to the moment. "Her magic and presence were everywhere. She was strong and clever with the use of her magic. I could practically see her doing whatever she could."

"I should have been there with her," I said. "If I had just stayed up longer and made sure she was safe before going to bed or-"

"Stop that, boy. There's no sense in going through the should've, would've, could've logic. What matters is right now. Adira is most likely alive. Whoever did this held extreme care of not killing anyone, which says a lot about whoever did this," Ginger said.

That was when it clicked in my brain. "I know who did this."

Ginger c****d her head to the side. "Who?"

"It had to be Cain. He was desperate to protect Adira, saying if she didn't go with him, the Council of Magic, they would kill her. I should have seen it earlier. Of course he did this." I gritted my teeth at the thought. I didn't like Cain before, but now he was dead in my mind. He didn't respect Adira's "no" and instead of helping her prepare for an attack, he stole her away from me.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 39

ADIRA

I cracked my eyes open, trying to remember what happened last night. Wherever I was smelled different than what I was used to. It had a strong scent of lemon and antiseptic, and it made my stomach a little queasy. I opened my eyes, and I was surprised to find myself in a bed filled with pillows and blankets. The room was decorated with pink and rainbows, almost like a

child's room. The light was soft and cozy. This was not what I was expecting to wake up to by any means.

Standing up, I went straight for the door. The handle was locked, which shouldn't have surprised me. Even though this was set up to make me comfortable, I had still been taken against my will. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I didn't need to use a door handle to get through a door. I just needed to use my magic and shift through it. That much I could handle.

When I tried to shift, nothing happened. I tried multiple times, but I couldn't even feel a spark of energy within me. I wrapped my hands around my stomach, terrified as the reality set in. This attack was carefully planned. They made sure the pack wasn't around when they took me last night, and they made sure I wouldn't be able to use my magic in this room.

I sat back down on the bed and let my head fall into my hands. The bits and pieces of memory I had before passing out were distant and blurry, so I tried to go over the details. It was Jori who had attacked me, but it wasn't Jori at the same time. It was definitely his face and his voice, but I saw a darkness in him that I knew didn't actually belong to him. The darkness was familiar, though. It felt like the same darkness I faced with Theron and then again in the forest with Haley. It had the same intention; I knew that much. I didn't know what the exact intention was, though.

How long had this been going on with Jori? Last night, whoever I was talking to made a good point. I didn't know Jori, not really, so I didn't know where Jori ended and the dark energy began. Percy would probably be the one who knew this best, but I wouldn't be able to talk to him until I could get out of here. I couldn't warn the others about Jori, either. My blood went cold thinking about that possibility. If others didn't know Jori wasn't Jori, he could cause a lot more damage. He could go after Mark even.

Mark? I tried linking. Maybe there was the possibility he could hear me. Linking my mate was part of my werewolf abilities, but there were limitations on distance, and I had no idea where I was or how far away from the pack house I was. I wanted to hear Mark's voice again though. I wanted to know if he and the others were okay last night. For all I knew, Jori had killed everyone, and that was why the pack house was so quiet.

I stood up and found myself at the door again. I pounded my fist on the metal, frustrated and scared.

“Let me out!” I cried, banging on the door, filled with frustration. “You can’t do this!”

Eventually, I stopped and slid down to the floor, feeling completely defeated. Without my magic, I didn’t know how to get myself out of here. I wondered if I could still transform into my wolf form, but I didn’t know how much good that would do in this room. There were no windows, and with the door made out of metal, I wouldn’t be able to break through it, even with my wolf strength. I had to figure something out, though. There was too much at stake to just wait around for someone to try and rescue me.

The lock on the door clicked, and I jumped to my feet, ready to attack whoever came through the door. I could overwhelm the person and make a run for it. The door opened slowly, and my heart raced as I waited for the opportune moment to strike. The door revealed Cain’s face in the entrance, and anger flooded my bones. The memory of his voice from last night filled my brain. He was the one behind this kidnapping.

I widened my stance and held up my hands in the attack position Reyland had made me practice one thousand times last night. When Cain was in full view, I used my entire body weight to throw a punch at him. My fist connected with his nose, and blood instantly started pouring down his face.

“What the hell?” he snapped, holding his nose.

I used the moment of distraction to push past him and out of the room. The rest of the place looked completely different compared to the room I was left in. The walls were gray and cracked. The air was moist and held a strong moldy scent to them. Leaky pipes hung above on the ceiling. Wherever this was hadn’t been used in a long time, and it held the feeling of some sort of prison.

I ran down the hallway, unsure of where to go, but I knew I had to continue running before Cain got his wits about him. I tried to shift forward to gain some speed, but I still couldn’t feel any magic inside of me. With Cain’s magic, he would be able to find me faster if he knew where I was. I just had to get far enough away so I could link Mark. If he knew where I was, he would come for me, even if I couldn’t escape myself.

There was a door at the end of the hallway, and I went straight for the handle. It was unlocked to my relief. I opened it up, just to find another hallway. I ran down that hall, but it felt like I was in a maze. I was afraid that if I couldn’t get

out of here, I would be stuck here for forever. I found another unlocked door and pushed my way through.

This time when I opened the door, sunlight flooded the room, burning my eyes. It felt like I had a hangover, and the sunlight caused an instant headache. I refused to let that stop me, so I continued moving forward. A second later, something solid hit my chest, knocking me back. Before I could fall, an arm wrapped around my waist.

“Not so fast, princess,” Jori said, a smirk heavy on his lips. “Did you really think it would be this easy to escape?”

I tried to squirm out of his grip, but he only tightened his grasp. He picked me up and threw me over his shoulder, holding onto me by the back of my legs. He entered the building and shut the door behind him, shutting out my freedom with it.

I continued kicking, trying to break free from his grasp. “Let me go!”

He chuckled at me. “Do you think throwing a fit will make me let you go? Do you honestly think that has ever worked?”

“Do you honestly think you’re going to get away with this?” I asked, hitting Jori’s back, still trying to make him let me go.

“Yes. Of course. No one knows where you are, and they have no way to find you. Not only will we get away with this, but you will be mine forever,” he said.

A chill ran down my spine at his words. “I will never be yours.”

Jori continued walking through the building, taking his time to return to the room I woke up in. When he got to the room, he tossed me onto the bed and then left, shutting the door behind him. Cain was still standing in the room with me, holding his bloodied nose.

“Why do you have to insist on fighting me on this so much? Can’t you understand I’m just trying to do what’s best for you? I’m your father after all,” Cain said.

I sat on the bed, not having the energy to try to escape right now. I knew it wouldn’t work anyway. I would have to come up with a different plan. “You have never been a father to me, and you never will be.”

Cain let out an exasperated sigh. "You're a stubborn girl. You get that from your mother. Maybe some time alone in here will make you change your mind."

He walked out of the room, quickly shutting the door behind him. I ran over to the door and instantly tried to open it, but it was locked already. I hit my fists against the door and pressed my forehead against the metal. Tears spilled out of my eyes, and there was a soft pain in my chest from the separation with Mark. I needed him by my side with his arms wrapped around me, but I didn't know if I would ever see him again. I stood up and placed my hand on my belly, more tears falling from my eyes.

—

RIE

Mason stared at me with a slack jaw. "So that's why Adira just left so suddenly on her sixteenth birthday. I heard rumors, but I never found out the truth. I kept waiting for her to reach out to me, but it never happened. I was angry with her for such a long time, but I don't blame her. Why would she reach out to everyone back home?"

I wrapped Mason in my arms. I had just told him the quick and dirty version of what I knew about Adira's story. I had avoided the subject until now, since I didn't feel like it was my story to tell. However, given the circumstances, I wanted to let Mason know why sorcerers were involved in all of this.

"It's a lot," I said, pressing my cheek against his chest.

I had never worried about having a mate before, at least that was always what I told people. Who needed a mate when you could go shopping? Deep down, I was jealous of those around me. It felt like everyone was finding their mates while I was playing the side character. When I met Mason, that all changed, and I didn't know how strong the mate connection was. It had been everything I wanted when finding a mate and so much more.

Mason was strong and caring, but he was also funny and sweet. He was hot, too, like out of this world hot. I had barely been able to keep my hands off him since our first meeting.

Mason stroked my back and held me tight against him. "We'll find her. We have to."

I let out a long sigh. “I hate this. I hate all of this. Adira is so kind and special, and she doesn’t deserve this. It feels like she just can’t catch a break, but she doesn’t stop trying. She keeps going and still makes sure that everyone is okay, even when she’s not.”

Mason pulled back and put his hand under my chin, making me look up at him. “We’ll get her back. We’ll make things right.”

Mason leaned down to kiss me, and I lifted up on my toes to meet his lips. A fire burned inside of me, and for a moment, I thought about bringing Mason back to the bedroom and having my way with him. It would be the perfect distraction, even if it was just for a few moments. Reluctantly, I pulled back, breaking the kiss. If the situations were reversed, I knew Adira wouldn’t stop searching until she found me. I couldn’t in good conscience have my way with my mate when she couldn’t be with hers.

I grabbed Mason’s hand. “Come on. Break is over. We need to get back to work.”

Mason pulled me back into him, kissing me again, this time slipping his tongue into my mouth and making me completely melt under my touch. He pulled away, and I whimpered, wanting more.

“I just wanted one more kiss.” He grabbed my hand again and started pulling me out of my room, which had been our room for the past few days.

“You’re a tease,” I whined.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 40

MARK

Adira, I don’t know if you can hear me or not, but I miss you. I miss you so much it hurts. You are my love, and my everything. I will do whatever I can to bring you home. I won’t stop until you are safe in my arms. I just hope you are okay and not hurt. I hope you know that I’m looking for you. I love you more than my heart can handle.

I opened my eyes, anxiously awaiting a reply from Adira. Part of me knew it wasn’t coming. I had made sure to try linking Adira every hour just in case, but each time it went unanswered. I wasn’t going to stop, though. In case she got

back in range or woke up or whatever the case might be, I wanted to try to reach out to her.

I got up and headed out of our room. I had to get back to searching for any clues about Adira's whereabouts. We had found remnants of evidence, but nothing was concrete to know where to even begin to search for her. As careful as they were, there had to be some way of finding Adira. When Theron took Adira, somehow I was able to just sense where she was at, but this time was different. It almost felt like there was a block up, stopping our connection all together.

When I opened the door to my room, I was surprised to find Rie and Scythe standing outside. "Is everything okay?"

"As fine as it can be given the circumstances," Scythe said.

"Alpha Lyna went to Pack Sallow to ask Jori for assistance with the search. Pack Lyna has a better relationship with Pack Sallow, so we thought Jori might be more cooperative with him. We want to start sending out search parties soon, and the more werewolves we have on our side, the better our chances will be," Rie explained. "Hopefully we can get the assistance, but Darian and Percy are working together to set up teams and paths we want to search. We are going to start nearby and then expand our borders."

"She's not in town," I said confidently. "I would be able to communicate with her if she was."

"Not if he used wolfsbane on her," Scythe reminded. "We don't want any stone unturned."

"When are the search parties going out? I want to join them," I said. I couldn't just sit here and wait while others searched for my mate.

"No," Scythe said with authority.

I raised an eyebrow at him. It wasn't like him to challenge my authority. I was his alpha after all. "Excuse me?"

"No disrespect, Alpha, but I insist that you do not participate in the search parties, especially while we are searching blind. I know you are desperate to find Adira. We all are, but we need our alpha here. What if a different search party finds evidence of where Adira is and you are miles away in the opposite

direction? What if another attack happens on the pack house, and you're not here to help defend everyone? You are not thinking straight, and as your beta, I say you do not go on any search parties now."

"I agree with him completely," Rie added. "We respect your opinions and decisions, but your mate is missing. That would cloud anyone's judgment. We insist on taking over for you on major decision making until we find Adira. Of course we will still consult you and inform you of everything that is happening."

I swallowed hard at their words. I knew they were right. I felt desperate to get Adira back, and as much as I was trying to control it, the feeling was still there, simmering just below the surface. They were right not to trust me, because I didn't fully trust how I would react if something came up. This is why Rie and Scythe were my co-beta's. I trusted them completely, so if they were telling me they thought it was best they step up for a little while, then I knew I should trust that, too, even if it was hard for me to let go.

"Okay," I finally said. "But the moment we have any evidence of where Adira might be, I will be on that search and rescue team."

"And we'll be right by your side," Scythe said.

Rie clapped her hands together. "Great, now that that is settled, have you eaten, Mark?"

"I'm fine," I said. I hadn't eaten since we confirmed Adira was missing. Thankfully, all other pack members in Pack Lyna and Pack Aphelion were safe and accounted for with minimal injuries, but confirming only Adira was taken made me feel queasy.

Rie poked my chest. "That's not the question I asked. Have you eaten?"

"No," I admitted. "But I'm not hungry."

"Too bad. We are going to go get some food. We can discuss some strategies concerning the next steps while eating to make you feel better, but you need to take care of yourself. What would Adira say if she knew you weren't eating?" Rie asked.

I frowned at the thought. Adira wouldn't want me to break down just because she wasn't here. "Okay," I agreed, even though I wasn't sure if I wasn't sure if I was capable of eating at this moment.

The three of us walked down to the dining room together. The pack house was buzzing with energy once again. It took some time for everyone to fully wake up after whatever magic affected us all. In the morning, it had seemed like the pack house was filled with zombies, so it was nice to see the change.

We made it to the dining room, but before we could grab any food, Alpha Lyna approached us, concern showing on his face.

"We need to talk," he said.

Scythe furrowed his eyebrows. "You're back fast."

Reyland nodded. "We should discuss some things in private. You might want to bring that mate of yours as well."

Scythe nodded, and his eyes glazed over for a moment as he linked with Percy. He finished and looked at me.

"We can go to one of the conference rooms," I said. I led the way with the others following close behind me.

We all sat down, and the air in the room felt heavy. We waited for Percy to arrive, so Reyland didn't have to tell his story more than once. I was on edge, wondering what was so urgent. I didn't think it had to do with Adira. Reyland wouldn't have waited to tell me that information. Strangely enough, I was sure he wanted to find Adira almost as much as I did. It was a little weird to adjust my view of this man. He seemed extremely different from the cold demeanor he put on when we went to visit Adira's family home.

My opinion of him had also changed since Adira told me the story of how Reyland had kicked her out of the pack house at sixteen. I still think what Reyland did was something I could never do myself. If I ever had a child, I would protect them at all costs. I wondered if I would feel differently if I found out the child wasn't actually mine, but I doubted I would. Sixteen years was a long time to build a bond, and I knew you didn't have to be blood-related to someone for them to be family.

Percy finally entered the conference room and took a seat next to Scythe. “My apologies for being late. I was helping Darian with some things. What’s going on?”

I turned to Reyland, wanting to know the same thing.

Reyland made eye contact with Percy as he spoke. “I went to Pack Sallow to ask for help with this situation. Even though Pack Sallow has become more separated from other werewolf packs, we have had a long-standing relationship with the pack. I thought I could talk to the alpha to get their help. I understand things have been tense with your pack and them, Alpha Mark.

“However, when I got there, I instantly could tell something was going on. The pack members seemed to be tense and confused. I asked to see the alpha, but no one knew where he was. I recognized some of the older members from years ago, and they were able to tell me a little about what’s been going on. Apparently, Jori, their alpha, has been disappearing for long periods of time, and he hasn’t been there for almost a week. Things are in chaos, and I fear the pack is in trouble. As an alpha, I can’t just sit back and watch another werewolf fall apart.”

Reyland turned back to Percy. “I understand you used to be the beta before certain things happened?”

“How did you know that?” Scythe asked.

Reyland looked at him. “I like to learn about wolf packs, and people talk. I have heard quite a bit about the recent events since getting here.”

“What do you want me to do?” Percy asked. “I’m no longer a part of that pack. I was kicked out, and my connection to them was severed by the alpha.”

“You were their beta, and they need help,” Reyland said. “I can’t tell you what to do, but I’m sure you still care about the people you left behind. They need a leader, so I recommend stepping up and at least helping them out right now.”

Percy was quiet as he thought about this. I knew he was in a lot of pain from the way Jori treated him. Percy had been a great beta to the pack, and I understood that Percy went behind Jori’s back, but Jori’s reaction was still extreme. He couldn’t see that Percy had done what he did to protect his pack, not just ours.

“Okay, I’ll check it out at least,” Percy finally said.

Scythe squeezed his hand. “I’ll come with you if you all can spare me for a few hours.”

“I think we can manage that,” I said. Scythe would have been useful here, but something told me there was more going on with Pack Sallow than we knew about. I needed to know more, and if we could get more support from them for the search for Adira, I wanted to take advantage of the situation.

Scythe nodded. “We’ll go now then.” He and Percy got up and left the conference room.

“I’ll go see if Darian needs any assistance while Percy is gone,” Rie said, getting up herself. Before she left, she turned back to me. “Don’t forget to eat.” She emphasized her seriousness by pointing a finger at me. She then left the room, leaving Reyland and myself alone.

I stood up, assuming the meeting was over, but Reyland cleared his throat, drawing my attention. I sat back down and looked at him.

“I hate to bring this up, but is there any chance this Jori guy has something to do with Adira’s kidnapping?” Reyland asked. “I don’t know all of the details, but the two of them have some sort of history, yes?”

“Yes. They were also fated mates. Adira chose me over him,” I explained.

“What do you mean they were also fated mates? Werewolves can only have one mate,” Reyland said.

“Since Adira has a dual nature, this caused her to have two mates, I guess. I’ll admit I don’t fully understand the how or why, but I guess I am her werewolf side’s mate, and Jori was her sorcerer side’s mate,” I said. “It’s possible that he was involved, I suppose. Jori has been acting strange and aggressive the last few times I’ve seen him, but I didn’t think he was capable of kidnapping someone else’s mate. The timing does seem too aligned to be coincidental.”

“We need to find this alpha just to be sure,” Reyland said. “If there’s any chance that he knows anything, we have to explore the possibility. It would be easier to track another werewolf, too, compared to a sorcerer.”

I nodded in agreement. I found my fists curling at the thought of Jori taking my mate. We hadn't been friends in a long time, but I knew Jori. At least I thought I did. He had been my best friend growing up. He had his moments of being a d**k, but overall, there was still goodness in him. I knew that much. I wasn't about to write him off as a possibility though.

Alpha, are you busy? There's something I need to discuss with you, Doctor Zayla linked me.

I looked at Reyland. "Something is requiring my attention momentarily, so I must get going, but I agree. We should find Jori. If anything, it will rule him out as a possibility."