

## The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 41

ADIRA

Mark, I don't know if you can hear me, but I'm going to find a way out of here. I will return to you. There are things I need to tell you, and I'm not ready for this to be the end of our journey. I don't know how I will get out of here yet, but I will figure it out. If, by some miracle, you can hear me, I love you. I love you so much, and it hurts not knowing when I'll see you again.

I sat on the floor, concentrating on my link with Mark. He hadn't responded to me, and I couldn't feel him, but it made me feel better at least trying. Part of me thought of it as writing a letter. He may not get it right away, but I have put my words out there. I hoped he would come across them and know I was fighting to get back to him.

Footsteps echoed down the hallway, and I sat up straight, suddenly on high alert. The door unclicked, and my heart raced in anticipation for who walked through the door. I wasn't sure who I would be more upset seeing: Jori or Cain. It didn't matter in the end. I despised both of them for doing this to me. It was the biggest betrayal I had ever experienced.

Cain opened the door slowly, holding a plastic tray in his hand. His nose was swollen and taped up from where I had hit him. At least I was able to cause some lingering damage. He shut the door behind him, but he looked at me cautiously, probably wondering if I was going to attack him again.

The thought had crossed my mind, but I decided it wasn't worth my energy. I didn't move from my sitting position. Cain didn't deserve the courtesy, and I knew this was not going to be my opportunity to escape.

He looked down at me, waiting for me to make a move. When I didn't, he proceeded to set the tray down in front of me. "You should eat something. You haven't eaten all day."

I looked at the tray. There was a piece of bread, something that looked like meatloaf, green beans, and some tea. I didn't touch it, even though my stomach was growling. "How do I know the food isn't poisoned?"

Cain let out an exasperated sigh. "I don't understand why you look at me like this big bad guy. I'm not going to poison you. I'm trying to save your life. The Council of Magic is not someone to bat your eyes at. They said they will kill

you if you didn't come with me, and no one has ever escaped their sentences before. You refused to come with me, so you left me no other options."

Cain was starting to sound like a broken record. He had a one-track mind and wasn't about to listen to me about this, and I wasn't sure if there was a reason to argue with him.

I decided to approach him about something else. "Why did you have to get Jori involved? You wanted me to give up my life with my mate, because I have to give up my life as a werewolf for the council to be happy, right? FYI, Jori is a werewolf."

"Our goals helped each other get what we wanted. It only made sense. He wanted to get revenge on your mate, and by taking you away, that accomplished that. It also got me what I wanted," Cain tried to explain.

"He wants me for himself," I said firmly.

"No, he just wants revenge. He can't have you. He knows that," Cain said. This conversation was clearly getting him flustered.

I finally stood up to face Cain at eye level. "You don't know him. He said to me that I was going to be his. How do you know he's not going to just betray you and take me for myself? Can't you sense the dark magic in him?"

Cain hesitated. I must have struck a nerve with him. "It doesn't matter what he wants. His part is done, so I told him to leave. I don't need him anymore."

"He's not just going to leave!" I snapped. "How naive are you? Can't you see that he's the Son of Blood and Magic? He's the reason you abandoned me as a child. Who cares what the Council of Magic thinks, because when they find out you practically handed me to the Son of Blood and Magic, do you think they will let you go, no questions asked?"

Cain's jaw clenched. "You're just trying to get into my head to get me to let you go. It's not going to work. I understand this situation isn't easy for you, and you miss your mate, but don't worry. I'll make that ache go away. You'll see this is the safest place for you to be. I can teach you how to improve your magic skills, and we can be father and daughter."

Cain was clearly delusional. I looked around the room, and I don't know why I didn't see it sooner. The room was decorated just like a young child's room.

He didn't listen to what I said, because he thought of me as a little girl. Maybe it was because his son, Theron, was killed, or maybe it was the regret of abandoning me as a child, but Cain was desperate to act like a father again, and his mind was clouded with that desire. There was no reasoning with him.

I swallowed hard at the thought. "What do you mean you'll make that ache go away? Are you going to do something to Mark?" I felt queasy again.

"Of course not. Killing your mate will only put you in more pain," Cain said simply.

"Then what are you going to do?" A deep fear settled into my stomach.

"I'm going to remove your mate mark and sever the bond between you and your mate. You won't miss him so much, and then you'll realize that you can be happy here with me," Cain said. There was a small twinkle in his eye, and Cain looked beyond crazy.

I held my hand over my mouth, trying not to throw up. I couldn't let Cain go through with that plan. I didn't know how that would affect Mark's and my relationship, and I had no idea what that would do to my body. I had never heard of a mate's mark being removed before. I didn't even think it was possible.

"How can you do that? You know what it's like to lose a mate. Just remember how it felt when my mother and you separated." My voice was filled with desperation now. Deep down, I knew there was no reasoning with this man, but it wasn't going to stop me from trying.

"Losing your mother made me realize that mate bonds are bullshit. She should've chosen me. She should have chosen our family, but instead she ran off and got married to that mutt," Cain said through clenched teeth.

"You agreed it was best to hide me so the Son of Blood and Magic couldn't find me. Freya loved you. She loved you so much that she resented me for it. She wasn't a true mother to me. And that mut you are referring to? He was more of a father than you'll ever be."

Cain hit me with the back of his hand suddenly. "Such a stubborn girl. You'll learn your place. I'll make sure of it."

He turned around and left the room, locking it behind him. I stood there alone, holding my stinging cheek. Tears started dripping out of my eyes, and I still felt sick to my stomach. I still had no idea how Cain could remove a mate mark, but I couldn't let that happen. If my bond with Mark was severed, I had no idea how he would find me. I would have to stop it in any way I could.

I started frantically searching around the room for any way to escape or anything to use as a weapon. Everything was sealed, and there was nothing in here heavy enough to use as a weapon. After a few minutes of searching, I felt even more helpless than before. This room was carefully planned out for this situation. Cain must have anticipated me trying to escape. He had thought of everything in this situation, except for the one person he chose to help him.

If I was right and Jori was somehow the Son of Blood and Magic, I was in a worse position than I realized. I felt helpless without my magic.

Shadow, are you there? I asked. I couldn't feel Moon's presence in the slightest still, but if Shadow was there, maybe there was a way for her to help me.

Adira, what's going on? Something doesn't feel right, Shadow responded.

We're in trouble. We have to find a way out of here and fast, or we might lose Mark. We might lose even more than that.

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MARK

"Of course. I will inform Darian and Mason of the situation so they can inform the rest of the warriors." Reyland stood up and gave me a nod before leaving the room.

Once he was gone, I made my way up to Zayla, curious about what she had to talk to me about. When I entered her office, she was looking at her computer at something that had a bunch of numbers on it.

"Hey Zay," I said, shutting the door behind me. "What's up?"

She turned in her chair, her facial expression staying the same. "I've been examining the blood samples I took first thing this morning. I know that old

woman said it was a spell or whatever it was that caused all of us to sleep through the night, but I still wanted to look at the science of it.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything else from you,” I said. “I take it you found something.”

“Yes.” Zayla pushed up her glasses. “The magic that was used on us left a marker in the blood. I will not guarantee anything, but there’s a chance I can reverse engineer a serum out of it.”

“What do you mean by that?” I asked. I wasn’t familiar with science. It had been my least favorite subject growing up.

“In layman’s terms, I might be able to create a vaccine to make us resistant to this type of magic moving forward. It will help give us an edge in any future fights against sorcerers,” Zayla explained.

“Are you serious?” I jumped up and wrapped Zayla in my arms. If she could actually pull this off, it would make a huge difference. There were too many magical forces that even when we get Adira back, I knew there would be other threats.

Zayla tensed and pulled back. “I said there’s a chance. Don’t get your hopes up.”

I smiled at Zayla. “A chance is still a chance. I needed to hear something positive right now.”

Zayla’s expression shifted, and she looked down at the ground. It was the first time I saw her look almost nervous. “Alpha, did you have a chance to talk to Adira before she was taken?”

I furrowed my eyebrows, trying to figure out why she had such a serious tone so suddenly. “We hadn’t had a chance to talk much recently, but we had moments here or there. What’s going on, Zay?”

Zay looked at me and took a deep breath. “I also took a look at Adira’s blood that we found. She didn’t have the same evidence of that spell in her blood, but I did see something else.” She paused.

I didn’t understand what was going on. Normally, Zayla was extremely blunt. “Just spit it out. What’s going on? Is she sick or something?”

“She’s expecting.”

“Expecting what?” I asked, still not understanding what she was saying.

Zayla raised her eyebrows. “Mark, Adira is pregnant.”

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MARK

The whole world seemed to stop around me for a moment as Zayla’s words sunk in. If Adira was pregnant, that meant that I was going to be a father. I hadn’t really thought about what that meant exactly. I had just been so focused on trying to start my future with Adira, but I didn’t really know what that meant. I loved her and wanted to be with her. She was my family, and I never wanted that to change. I knew I wanted a future with her, and one day I wanted kids, but I didn’t anticipate that day to come so soon.

If it came. I had to get Adira back before a future with her could start. This was so much more now than just saving my mate. I had to save my mate to save my pup too. The world was spinning suddenly, and I needed a moment. I stumbled back and sat in the patient’s chair behind me.

“Pregnant?” I repeated, still absorbing the information. I knew what that meant, but somehow it didn’t feel real.

“You didn’t know,” Zayla said.

I shook my head slowly. “No, she didn’t say anything. Do you think she knew?”

“It’s possible. It depends on how far along she is. It’s possible she didn’t know. Is this something she would have kept from you, Alpha?” Zayla asked.

My eyes snapped up at hers. “Adira wouldn’t lie to me about something like that.”

Zayla put her hands up defensively. “I just thought I should ask. I don’t know if this is something you guys have talked about. Perhaps she was afraid to tell you if she thought you might not want kids.”

"I love kids," I said quickly. "I still feel like one myself sometimes, but I want a family one day." I paused for a moment, realizing this wasn't a conversation Adira and I ever had. We talked about living a peaceful life, and her becoming the luna. We talked about growing the wolf pack, but we never talked about growing our family. I didn't even know if she wanted kids herself. Maybe she knew, but she was too afraid to bring it up.

"Damn," I said as a realization hit me. "She wanted to talk to me about something. She didn't say what, but I ended up getting pulled away with pack business. I never did get back to her." My heart hurt at the thought. My mate needed me at that moment, but I couldn't give her even a few minutes. If she knew she was pregnant, she would have been dealing with this on her own. I should've been there for her.

I ran my fingers through my hair, frustrated at myself. Adira was pregnant and alone. I couldn't protect her or my family, and she had to deal with all of the emotional implications on her own. The anger started building inside of me again. I had to find her and protect her and my pup.

Zayla put her hand on my shoulder. "We'll get them back, Alpha. None of this is your fault."

I looked up at Zayla, my walls slowly breaking down. She wasn't the type to comfort others, so this meant more coming from her. After taking a deep breath, I stood up, knowing nothing would get done if I just sat there.

"I should get going. Thanks, Zay. Keep me updated on any progress with that serum."

Zayla nodded. "Of course, Alpha."

I left the room, deciding to check on the progress with the search parties. I felt a little lost with how to proceed at the moment. I had a feeling Cain was involved in the kidnapping, but I didn't know how to go about finding him. I didn't know anything about him, which made it harder to know where to look for him.

I found Darian, Reyland, Mason, and Rie discussing the paths for the search parties outside. They were in the tent we had set up for warrior meetings outside. It was big enough to hold all the warriors currently residing at the pack house, but only the four of them were there at the moment.

“We should expand the area of searching,” Reyland said, pointing at the white board that had information written all over it. “If we start here and slowly bridge out, it will take too much time to find Adira.”

“I understand that, but we don’t have the resources to expand any further than this at the moment,” Darian said. “And if there is a chance she is being held nearby, we can’t risk missing anything.”

“It would make no sense for them to keep her near here, though. They have to know we are going to search for her. They planned everything out too meticulously to make such a simple mistake,” Mason argued.

“Unless that’s exactly what they would expect from us. What if they want to hide in plain sight?” Rie countered.

It was clear this conversation wasn’t going anywhere. “This conversation doesn’t seem to be getting us anywhere. Is there any kind of compromise we can make?” I desperately wanted to side with Reyland. I wanted to do whatever it took to find Adira, but I knew that was just my emotions raging currently.

Rie nodded. “Reyland is right, but Darian makes a good point. Until we have more werewolves to help with the search, we have to be careful. Maybe we can have one group searching farther out so we can try to cover more obscure areas. Hopefully, Scythe and Percy can figure out what’s going on with Pack Sallow and get reinforcements, but until then, we have to work with what we got. We just have to make it as fast and efficient as possible. I think we all want Adira back right now.”

“That’s a compromise I can live with if everyone else is okay with that,” Darian said. He looked to Reyland for approval.

Reyland thought about it for a moment. “I will agree to that.”

I hated that this is all we could do with the information we had so far. I started to fear it would take a long time to find my mate, and I hated that thought. I hated my mate and pup being away from me any longer. I wanted to be there to support Adira and make sure she was safe.

Rie looked me up and down. “Are you okay, Mark? You look sick.”



I wanted to tell Rie that Adira was pregnant, but that wasn't my place. Telling others needed to be a decision that Adira and I made together. I refused to take that away from her. Besides, it wouldn't change the fact that we wanted to find Adira as soon as possible. Telling everyone she was expecting our pup wouldn't change anything about the search, so I swallowed the news.

"This hasn't been easy on me," I told Rie. It wasn't a lie, but it wasn't the full truth. I turned back to the group. "I wish we knew more about the way the attacker thinks. We could narrow down our search that way. I really do think Cain has something to do with it, but I know nothing about him. I can ask Ginger if she has any ideas about him, but for now, I say we take the safe route."

Reyland's facial shifted into one filled with realization. "If Cain is truly involved, I know someone who does know the way he thinks."

Everyone turned to look at Reyland expectantly.

"How do you know someone like that?" Darian asked.

Reyland let out a sigh. "Cain is my wife's true mate."

Mason looked like he had been punched in the gut. "You and Luna Freya aren't mates?"

Reyland shook his head, looking apologetic. "I know we made the pack think that. There was a point when we loved each other, well, at least when I loved her, but we were never true mates. It was a marriage for power, not love."

Mason scratched the back of his neck. He seemed to be having a difficult time comprehending this information, but out of respect for his alpha, he didn't say anything. Rie reached over and grabbed his hand.

Before an awkward silence ensued, I jumped in. "I know this is an awkward thing to ask, but do you think you can talk to her about him, see if you can get an idea of where she might have taken Adira? It would help with the search."

Reyland nodded slowly. "Of course. If it will help bring Adira back."

"I can talk to Ginger then and see if she has any ideas about where to look." I looked at Rie, Mason, and Darian, remembering the conversation Scythe and

Rie had with me earlier. "I trust the three of you will do what's best when it comes to the search parties."

Rie took a step forward, and she exuded confidence. "All right, Alpha Lyna, you talk to your wife to see what you can find out. Mark, see if Ginger knows anything that might help. I'll reach out to Scythe to see what he and Percy have found out. Darian, Mason, can you two handle getting the search parties informed and going?"

It wasn't very often she had to take a role like this. She always looked out for the pack, but this was the first time she truly stepped up to be a leader. It made me proud to have her as a beta, and I was grateful for her for making the logical decisions when my brain was too clouded to think properly.

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ADIRA

I closed my eyes and focused on Shadow's presence. It was comforting to hear her voice and know I wasn't completely alone here. This was the first time I had heard her since waking up here. Without my magic, I was having a difficult time reaching my subconscious plane where I had become accustomed to speaking with Shadow and Moon.

"We've been separated from our mate," I explained to Moon. "We were taken against our will, and I can't seem to use magic. I don't know what he did to me."

Moon disappeared from here, Shadow said in my head. It's been hours since I've seen her. I can still feel her presence though.

This shocked me, since I couldn't feel Moon's presence in the slightest. "You can? Can you tell if she's hurt or anything?"

It's difficult to tell. I can't see or hear her, but she's here. I feel her fighting, but she can't seem to emerge. It's like something is keeping her away.

I opened my eyes and looked around the room. The walls had been covered in wallpaper, so I couldn't tell what they were made of, but the door was telling. It was a metal door, and it reminded me of the handcuffs Theron had used on me to suppress my powers.

I stood up and pressed my hand against the door. I took a few deep breaths, really focusing on the door. For the briefest moment, I could feel it. It was created with fear and hatred to suppress magic. The entire room had to be made out of it, but that would have taken a significant amount of time to create a room like this, and I doubted Cain had the time to do that. Plus, the entire building had this metal infused with it. I wasn't able to shift, even in the hallway.

This building had been here long before me. It must have been some sort of prison for sorcerers. That meant if I could just find my way out of the building, I could use my magic again. Maybe I could send some sort of distress signal to get Mark's attention. The biggest issue was finding a way to actually escape.

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MARK

When I entered the room, I saw Ginger and Daniel sitting at a table next to each other. Daniel was nose deep in the history books Reyland had provided. It was a rare occasion to see that man not reading. Ginger, on the other hand, had her eyes closed, and she was perfectly still. She looked like a peaceful statue, used in a zen garden.

I hovered in the doorway, afraid to disturb their work.

"Don't just stand there, boy. Come in. Ask your questions," Ginger said with her eyes closed. She was one of the most perceptive people I knew. Even without the use of her eyes, she knew exactly what was going on in a room.

Daniel looked up at me and set down the book. He jotted down one last note before giving me his full attention.

"Oh, hello Alpha Mark. I didn't even see you come in," Daniel said.

"I told you, you don't have to call me 'alpha,' Daniel. Mark is just fine." I was a fan of Daniel, but I had a more difficult time talking to him than others. He was very analytical, and sometimes he would get focused on things that didn't seem to matter. Adira always knew how to talk to him, though. Even though they had very different personalities, she was always able to bring out the best in Daniel. It was an incredible talent of hers.

"I know. It just feels weird not calling an alpha 'Alpha,'" Daniel responded. "I'm assuming you're here for information? I still have more things to go through, but these books are absolutely fascinating. It talks about the great war from the perspective of one of the werewolf leaders. They talked about how they overcame the struggle with dealing with some of the stronger sorcerers. The lesser ones didn't matter too much, since they used simple magic. It was the ones with the greater magic that became an issue.

"They developed potions and resistances to certain types of magic. It leveled the playing field, so to say. Vampires were a completely different issue though. They were silent and fast, which gave them a different challenge to face."

"Take a breath, boy. I swear you speak too fast." Ginger finally opened her eyes as she scolded Daniel.

Daniel shrank in his chair. "Sorry, Ginge. I just get too excited sometimes."

"This is all fascinating, Daniel. I'm sure this information will come in handy. I don't suppose there is any information that will help us find Adira?" I knew it was a long shot, since the documentation Daniel was combing through was before Cain's time, but I had to ask. If there was any chance there was a lead that could help find my mate, I had to explore it.

"No. I apologize, Alpha Mark." Daniel looked down at the books, his frown deepening.

I hated seeing how much Adira's lack of presence affected so many different people. I didn't like seeing everyone so upset. But I also loved it. It really showed me that Adira would make a great luna. She had a way of making an impression on people, and the fact that so many people were working hard to bring her back showed a lot about her character.

I placed a hand on his shoulder. "There's nothing to apologize for. Like I said, this could be very useful information. If a sorcerer has Adira, it might help us. If anything, it might help us against the Council of Magic, if they do decide to attack. Doctor Zayla is working on some sort of serum now, so if you find any more information about magic resistance, please let her know."

Ginger looked at me closely. "Interesting. I hadn't encountered a potion like that before, but it makes sense that something like that exists. People have created poisons specifically to harm werewolves and sorcerers. I know there

is something that makes a person more resistant to a vampire bite. I have never come across this kind of thing before, though. Boy, make sure to tell me more about this too. I may even be able to assist that doctor lady of yours."

"That would be great, Ginger," I said. I opened my mouth to speak again, but I was quickly cut off.

"I haven't been able to find any traces of Adira's magic yet. I'm searching, but there's no trace of her, which is strange," Ginger said, her wrinkles in her forehead deepening.

"What could that mean exactly?" My heart raced at the thought. I hated not being able to sense our mate bond, but I knew there were distance limitations with that. Ginger, not being able to feel her magically, worried me more. I didn't know how that worked in detail, though.

"It's possible they have blocked the girl's magic somehow. Perhaps they used belladonna on her to stop her from trying to escape," Ginger said.

If Adira was actively being poisoned, I felt the urge to rush everything even more. "Does belladonna have any lasting or harmful effects?"

Ginger stroked her chin. "From what I've seen, once it's out of a person's system, they go back to normal. I haven't done enough research on long-term effects, though."

"Do you think it would be harmful to a baby?" I wanted to ask the question in a more subtle way, but I couldn't think about how to do that.

Ginger's face brightened a little at the question. "So you know then?"

I hesitated, wondering if Ginger knew about Adira's pregnancy. I didn't want to confirm anything in case she was referring to something else. "Depends. What do you know?"

Ginger cracked up. "Boy, let's not play this game. We both seem to know the truth."

"Know what?" Daniel asked, looking between the two of us.

"Did she tell you?" I asked. I was a little afraid to hear the answer. I was pretty sure that Adira was planning on telling me about her pregnancy before I got

swept up in alpha duties, but I still didn't like the idea of her telling someone else before me.

"Nah, I don't think she even truly knew."

"Then how-"

Ginger raised her eyebrows, which was enough to stop me mid-sentence. "I could feel the two souls. It's pretty easy for a sorcerer to sense, especially if they are attuned to the world."

Daniel's eyes practically fell out of his eyes. "Wait, is Adira pregnant?"

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## REYLAND

I had to collect myself before entering my own home. I wasn't expecting to feel relief being away from my own home for days, but now it was clear how much I had been suffocating. My marriage to Freya was a sham. I had barely spoken to my wife since I found out the truth about Adira and my wife's history. We kept up the appearance of alpha and luna in front of the pack, but in private we never spoke, unless absolutely necessary.

I had been living in a prison for longer than I had realized. Spending time with Pack Aphelion made that clear to me. I was still able to do my alpha duties with my warriors there, but I didn't feel the constant pressure that came with holding up appearances. Being back home brought that all back, though.

I wasn't sure I could keep living this life, especially after training with Adira. I wanted to live a different life where I could make Adira proud of me again.

I entered the pack house, and it was mostly empty, since a large number of the pack was still with Pack Aphelion. I went straight to the luna's office and opened the door, not bothering to knock. Freya looked up, surprised at the sudden interruption, but the moment she saw it was me, her expression changed.

"Oh, you're back." She went back to looking at the documents on her desk.

I walked through the door, shutting it behind me. I moved to her desk, but I made a point to stay standing. I wanted to come across as strong and confident to my wife.

“Just temporarily. We need to talk,” I said.

She continued doing her work, almost ignoring my presence. “Now you want to talk? Make it quick.”

“We need to talk about Cain.” I grasped my hands behind my back and straightened my posture.

This got her attention, and she dropped the papers on her desk. Her hand shook for a moment before she tucked it into her lap. “No.”

My jaw clenched. This woman had grown more cold and stubborn over the years. I couldn’t even remember the last time she had said a nice word to me. “That wasn’t a request. As your husband and alpha, you will tell me what I want to know.”

She said and leaned back in her chair, finally looking up at me. “Why do you insist on asking for details now? You never cared about this before. Is it because of Adira?”

“I should have asked for these details a long time ago, but I was so angry with your betrayal, I tried to just erase the fact that it even happened. I should have cut you out of my life, not my daughter.” I stared down at Freya, but she didn’t even seem phased by my words.

“She’s not your daughter. What does it matter to you?”

“She is your daughter. Why don’t you care more?” The woman in front of me infuriated me. Adira was her flesh and blood, but she never stood up for her own daughter. I should have never sent Adira away, but Freya should have never let me, either.

Freya rolled her eyes. “Let’s just get this over with. Sit down and ask me what you wish about Cain.”

I pulled out the chair and sat down, despite not wanting to. I knew this woman too well, though. She would refuse to talk to me if I didn’t do as she said.

“Where would Cain take someone if he was holding them captive?” I asked. There was no point in moving into the topic slowly.

Freya stared at me for a moment. “What kind of question is that? Do you honestly think I would know something like that?”

“You know him better than anyone else I know, and we need to find him. Dig into your memory for a moment. Is there a special place he would hide or go to be away from the world?” Even if she didn’t know where he would take someone, she had to know where he came from or some of his favorite places. Anything was better than nothing.

“Did he take something from you?” Freya sat back and looked intrigued at the situation.

A frowned at her attitude towards this. I couldn’t believe I had managed to pretend to like her these past few years. “I’m not sure yet, but there’s a chance that he took Adira.”

Freya tensed at this statement. “Interesting. I wonder what is going through his head.” She leaned forward and rested her head on her hands. “I may have a few ideas of where he might have taken her, but before I tell you more, I have a condition.”

“You’re not in a position to be negotiating,” I snapped. This was ridiculous. I was trying to save her daughter, and she was trying to make sure she benefited from the situation.

She smiled at my anger. “On the contrary. I have something you want. I’m in the perfect position to negotiate.”

I clenched my jaw. “Fine, what do you want?”

She leaned in a little closer. “When you find him, I want to be there to see him.”

“Why do you want to see him?”

“That’s none of your business. Do we have a deal?” She leaned back, oozing confidence.



She knew she had the upper hand in this situation. I don't remember Freya always being like this. There was a time she was kinder and cared about those around her, but time had hardened her. The woman I once loved was no longer there.

I sighed, knowing I didn't have a choice. We needed to find Adira as soon as possible, which meant we needed this information. "Fine. We have a deal."

Freya's face brightened, satisfied with the situation. She grabbed a piece of paper and wrote something down. She passed it over to me. "I would recommend looking in these locations."

I grabbed the paper and stood up, not wanting to be here any longer than I had to be. I glanced over the places written on the paper. There were more locations than I had expected, but it was still useful information. I folded the paper, put it in my pocket and then stood up.

"I expect a phone call when you find him," Freya said as I walked out.

I stopped at the door and said, without looking back, "I hope you know that this is it for us. You will no longer be the luna of this pack or my wife once my business is finished and I return home."

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 44**

MARK

"No one knows where Jori is there?" I said, more out of surprise than actually looking for an answer.

Scythe had returned an hour ago to give an update on Pack Sallow. Percy decided to stay behind to continue helping out the pack while the alpha was missing, but what they had found there was surprising. Jori had been neglecting his alpha duties ever since Percy was kicked out, maybe even before that. The pack was managing as best as they could, but work was piling up, and things were starting to fall apart.

"People also said Jori's behavior has been erratic, even when he was there. He would snap at people without any prompting," Scythe explained. His forehead was scrunched up as he recounted the things he saw. "The people there were on edge. I have never seen them like that. The pack house wasn't lively. They don't deserve to live like that. Their alpha is supposed to be there

to protect people. The beta is supposed to be there to pick up any slack, but Jori made sure neither were possible.”

I grabbed Scythe’s shoulder and squeezed. Pack Sallow used to be our pack, so I understood why this upset him so much. Those were our friends, the people we grew up with. “We’ll fix this somehow. We’ll make things right.”

“We need to find Jori. I have never been the biggest fan of his, but he cared about his pack. Something is wrong with him.” Scythe curled his fingers.

I thought back to what Reyland had suggested with Jori being involved with Adira’s kidnapping. Had the situation with Adira thrown him into such a dark spiral that he would neglect his duties? Would he really go to the lengths of taking another alpha’s mate? It didn’t seem like it was that simple, but I couldn’t figure out what I was missing.

“We can’t afford to spend extra resources looking for Jori directly, but Alpha Lyna has a theory. He thinks there’s a chance that if we find Adira, we might find Jori.” I hadn’t shared this idea with anyone else yet, but Scythe deserved to know.

Scythe’s face tightened. “Do you think he would be involved with Adira’s kidnapping?”

“I’m not sure,” I admitted. “It’s possible, and until we get more information about her whereabouts, we can’t rule anything or anyone out.”

Scythe stared at me, pulling his lips tight. “How are you doing with all of this? Are you holding up okay?”

My body slumped because of his question. “Not great. There’s a pain in my chest that just won’t go away. If I think about it too much, I feel like I can’t breathe. I don’t know what I’m going to do if we can’t find her. I-”

Scythe pulled me into a hug. “Alpha, we’ll find her. Once Percy organizes things at Pack Sallow, he’ll send us any warriors he can. Everyone is doing what we can. We’ll find her and get her back.”

I squeezed Scythe back, melting into the hug. I needed it more than I realized. “I feel like it’s selfish of me to have so many people searching for my mate.”

Scythe pulled back, keeping his hands on my shoulders. "We all want her back. Adira is our luna, and she belongs home with us."

—

ADIRA

Deep breath. Dig deep.

Deep breath. Focus.

I was sitting cross-legged in the bed, focusing on my breathing. Cain had only come back to drop off more food. He didn't stick around for any conversation. I think he was less than pleased with my reaction to him. I thought about ambushing Cain again. If I shifted into wolf form, it would give me an advantage. If it was the building stopping me from using my powers, that would mean that Cain couldn't use his as well. That would give me an advantage.

The issue then would be Jori. If he was still around, I would have to figure out a way to get past him. I hadn't seen Jori since the first day I was here, and Cain said he had left, but there was a feeling in the pit of my stomach that told me that wasn't actually the case. Jori wanted me, and he would go through Cain if that was what it took. Cain was too naive to see that, but I wasn't going to let my guard down.

I decided it was best to make my move sooner rather than later. I needed to get out of here before Jori came back, assuming he left at all. Time was becoming a bit of a blur in this room. I had no access to the outside world. There were no windows with the sun to indicate morning or night, no clocks to keep my sense of time grounded. For all I knew, I had been held captive for weeks.

Deep breath.

Mark, it's time for me to come home.

I stood up and moved next to the door, so that when Cain entered the room, he wouldn't see me right away. I was able to overpower him once. I just had to do it again. I went over all of the self-defense techniques Mark had taught me as well, while waiting for Cain to show up with the next meal.

The lock to the door clicked, and I held my breath as the door slowly opened. There was a moment of silence where it seemed like time had frozen.

“Adira?” Cain called out. The concern in his voice told me he was on edge.

He started to shut the door behind him, just barely revealing himself to me. I lunged forward, punching him in the throat. His eyes went wide as his hand grabbed his throat. The tray of food he had clattered to the ground, spilling everywhere. He stumbled backwards, hitting the wall hard. I swiped my leg, knocking Cain to the ground. Before he could get up, I dug my knee into his back, pinning him to the ground. I grabbed his elbow and pushed up, making him cry out in pain.

“You are going to release me, or I’ll break your arm,” I demanded.

“You’re insane!” Cain cried out.

“No, you’re the insane one! You took me from my home, my mate, just because you think you know what’s best. You don’t get to decide what’s best for me.”

I gritted my teeth, holding back from doing any serious damage from Cain. He clearly wasn’t skilled with hand-to-hand fighting, which made this easier for me. I only had the basics, but that was enough. It gave me the advantage in the situation.

Cain suddenly flipped around, grabbing my wrist as he did it. He flung me over, and I landed flat on my back. Before I could counter, Cain held out his hand, sending an aura of magic around me. I could see the shimmer of the bubble around me, and I couldn’t move. No, that wasn’t it. I could move, but it was extremely slowed down.

Cain stood up and brushed himself off. “I’ve been patient with you, Adira. I knew this wasn’t going to be easy on you, so I have been trying to give you time to adjust, and this is how you treat me. Did you think you actually could overpower me?”

He paced back and forth in front of me, but all I could do was watch him. I had never felt so hopeless in my time.

“Did you forget that my specialty in magic is time manipulation? Or maybe you thought I couldn’t use magic here because you can’t.” He looked at me with

narrowed eyes and then suddenly laughed. "You really thought I was stupid enough to bring you to a place where I couldn't use my magic, leaving me just as helpless as you. It would have been unwise to send Jori away if that were the case."

He started walking around me. "I need you to understand that the only reason I needed that wolf was to get close to you, especially with that old witch in your house. She put up magic spells that prevented me from entering. That's why I needed that wolf to help. As for containing you, I don't need help."

He walked over and placed his hand on the wall. He took a sharp breath in, and for a moment the bubble around me wavered. It wasn't enough to make more than an inch of movement, though.

"This prison was constructed by werewolves to hold sorcerers during the great war, but it doesn't do much against stronger sorcerers. You haven't had practice with your magic, so I knew it would be easy to hold you here, but I am stronger than these walls." Cain had a small twinkle in his eyes as he spoke. "This place has long been forgotten and there's no way for someone to tie me to this place. Even if your friends figure out I'm involved, they won't be able to track me. They won't find you. Just accept it already. It'll make your life so much easier."

I wanted to respond. I wanted to fight back, but I was stuck, unable to do anything. Cain started walking towards me and knelt down next to me. He reached out and touched my neck, right where Mark's mark was located.

He locked eyes with me. "This is going to hurt, but trust me. This will be for the best."

Cain's hand started to glow, and then the burning on my skin began. My body tensed, and I wanted to scream, but it was stuck in my throat. The fire moved through my veins, spreading through every inch of my body. The pain felt worse without being able to react to it. I wanted to twist and scream to let out some of the pressure, but it wasn't possible.

After a moment, the pain completely ceased. Cain stood up, a small frown etched into his face. "You won't understand this for a while, but with time, it will get easier. You won't miss him so much this way."

Cain released the bubble from around me before leaving the room and locking the door behind him. My entire body ached and felt completely drained. My

hand moved up to my neck, feeling for my mate-mark, but the skin was completely smooth. My heart raced. There was no way he was actually able to remove the mark.

I climbed to my feet and stumbled to the small bathroom attached to my prison. I looked in the mirror, but my eyes quickly filled with tears as I looked at the empty space on my neck. It was like it had never happened. Cain must have manipulated time in a way that erased the moment Mark marked me. My fist pressed against my mouth as I tried to hold back the inconsolable sobbing that was making its way up my throat.

If Cain had erased the mark, then he had erased my bond with Mark. I wouldn't be able to link, even if I somehow managed to escape this place.

A terrible thought suddenly crossed my mind. If Cain had done something to the mark, had he done any other damage to my body? My hand wrapped around my stomach. I didn't know for sure if I was pregnant. I only had my suspicions. I wanted to wait to take a test until I talked to Mark. I wanted to know if he even wanted children. Then I had imagined taking the test when he was there and finding out for sure.

My body shook at the thought of Cain's magic doing anything to harm a baby. I dropped to my knees, still holding my stomach. I had no way to confirm if I was still pregnant, if I had been pregnant in the first. I didn't know what to do. A scream burst from my lips and the sobbing was finally released. I didn't know how to escape or even send a signal out for help. My body doubled over, and I couldn't breathe between the sobs. How could Cain say this was for the best? How did he think this would make it easier for me to give in to his demands? I felt hopeless and empty, and I needed Mark more than ever at this moment.

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 45**

MARK

A sharp pain pierced my neck, right where Adira's mark was. I clasped my hand on my neck, not understanding what this sudden pain was. I cried out and fell to my knees, the pain too much to handle.

"Alpha!" Scythe shouted, trying to steady. "Are you okay? What's going on?"

I gritted my teeth together, the pain too unbearable to push through. I couldn't speak. The only sound that came out of my mouth was an indistinguishable cry. I doubled over as the pain began to spread, but the mark was still the spot that caused the most agony. I gripped my neck harder, willing it to stop.

Scythe was down on his knees in front of me, panic filling his voice. "Get Doctor Zayla here. Now!" He turned back to me, holding my shoulders, trying to help. "Alpha. What's going on?"

"Adira," I managed to mutter, barely a whisper. I didn't know how or why this was happening, but I knew it had to do with Adira. My heart ached, terrified that she was feeling this exact pain. Was she being tortured by her capture? I couldn't stand the idea of it. If she was hurt or injured, it could affect the baby, and I didn't know how I would handle that. I couldn't lose either of them. Not like this.

Another wave of pain burst from my mark, and another cry echoed around the room. This was the most pain I had ever been in. Not only was it physically painful, but it also felt like there was something breaking in my heart. Everything burned and twisted, screamed and ached. I could barely comprehend everything that was going on around me.

"What happened to him?" Doctor Zayla asked, entering the room.

"I don't know. We were talking one moment, and the next thing I knew he was doubling over in pain." Scythe sounded breathless and scared.

"Get that old woman," Doctor Zayla said. "If this is some kind of magical attack, we will need her."

Scythe stood up and dashed out of the room. Everything was getting blurry as the pain seared my nerves. Adira, please be okay. I'm coming for you. Hold on a little longer.

Zayla took my head in her hands and forced me to look at her. "Mark, I know this hurts, but I need you to tell me where it hurts."

My breaths were shallow. It hurt too much to breathe any deeper. "Everywhere."

Zayla squeezed my face tighter. "Where did it start? I need you to tell me if you want me to help you."

I blinked at her a few times, trying to focus on her eyes. She was spinning around, and my head was pounding. "My mark." My throat was dry, and the pain only grew worse. Something was wrong with Adira. I knew that losing a mate was one of the most painful feelings a werewolf could experience, and my heart froze at that thought. I couldn't even think the words. Adira was fine. Adira had to be fine. I needed her. She was my future and my family.

Zayla pulled my hand away from my neck, so she could get a look at it. Her face hardened as she looked at me. "Alpha. Deep breaths. It'll be okay. You'll get through this." She dug through her bag, pulling out a syringe. She moved quickly and injected it into my neck. "Don't fight it, Alpha. It will help you feel better, at least for now."

The pain slowly started to subside, and my body felt heavy. Whatever Zay did to me was working quickly. My brain started to quiet, and the pain floated away as everything went dark.

—

## ADIRA

When I opened my eyes, I found myself in the familiar white room where I normally found Moon and Shadow waiting for me. I was sitting cross-legged on the floor, and there was nothing and no one in sight. It reminded me of the first time I had accidentally found myself here. Before I had any control over my magic, the room was empty, just like this. Slowly, it had developed into something more elaborate as my magic had developed. This made me feel like I had taken several steps back, but being here was better than nothing.

I hadn't been able to access my subconscious like this since Cain had locked me away. I took a moment to just breathe and look around. My head felt foggy, and I couldn't remember what I was doing before this moment. I didn't remember falling asleep or eating or anything. It wasn't getting any clearer, either.

After a few moments, I stood up and stretched my legs. I walked around, but the scenery didn't change. It felt like I hadn't moved much at all. I wasn't sure what I was looking for exactly, but I kept moving. I didn't see or feel Shadow or Moon, but there was something else. I picked up the pace, breaking into a run.



An indistinguishable figure appeared in the distance, and I picked up my pace. It grew clearer the closer I got, and soon I was able to make out the figure of a woman, sitting on the ground. I slowed my pace to catch my breath before I reached the person.

When I was only a few feet away, I stopped, unsure if what I was seeing was real or not.

“Ginger?” I said, still slightly out of breath.

The woman in front of me opened her eyes and a soft smile kissed her lips. “Girl, I’ve been looking for you. What took you so long?”

“Is it actually you?” I didn’t believe it was real. I wasn’t able to use my magic here, so there was no way I had been able to create a connection with Ginger.

“Sit, girl.” Ginger motioned to the ground in front of her.

I sat down and crossed my legs. I looked at her, and I knew it was her. The energy I was reading from her matched the Ginger I knew exactly. “How are you here? He has me in these walls that have something that blocks magic. I haven’t been able to shift out of the room or talk to my familiar or anything. Is this your doing?”

Ginger shook her head. “This is all you, girl. You were able to break through the block with your intention of protecting those that are precious to you. It’s powerful magic, girl.”

I grabbed my stomach, tears filling my eyes. “It might be too late.”

Ginger reached out and grabbed my hand. “It’s not too late. Now, tell me. Who took you and where are you?”

“Cain took me. I don’t know where I am, though. Some kind of-”

Ginger disappeared for a moment before flickering back.

“What’s going on?” I asked, not understanding what was happening.

“Hurry, girl. Our connection is weak,” Ginger said, looking around.

“It’s a former prison.” Ginger flickered away again. When she appeared, I continued speaking. “There was someone else who helped. It was Jori, but

he's not who we think-" Ginger disappeared again. I waited for her to reappear, but it didn't happen. I kept waiting, hoping she would return. I had to warn them about what was going on with Jori. If he truly was the Son of Blood and Magic, he was more dangerous than anyone would realize, and I didn't want anyone facing him.

Ginger didn't reappear, and the white walls started to fade around me. The burst of magic I had managed to manifest was starting to fade, but there was now hope lingering in its place. There was hope that they would be able to find me. They had some information, and Ginger was looking. Mark was looking. Even if I couldn't escape myself, someone would find me. They had to.

—

MARK

My body felt heavy as I woke up to hushed whispers around me. There was a familiar beeping of a heart monitor in the room and the smell of antiseptic filled my nose. I knew I was in Doctor Zayla's office, and I was in one of her patient beds. I heard several voices around me. They were trying to keep quiet, but as they argued with each other, their volume quickly rose.

"There is no way Adira is dead. How can you even suggest a thing?" Rie snapped.

"His mark is gone. What else am I supposed to think?" Scythe growled. "I don't want her to be dead, but that pain he felt was not normal. It looked like the pain a werewolf felt when their mate died. You didn't see his face, Rie."

"But his mark is simply gone. That doesn't happen when you lose your mate. That mark is always there. If Adira died, the mark would still be there," Rie said.

"Then how do you explain what happened?" Scythe was scared and angry, which is the only time his voice sounded like that. Even in more tense situations, he was able to break up the tension with his light-hearted mood.

"I don't know. I don't know, okay? Is that what you wanted to hear?" Rie was on the verge of tears.

"This isn't helping anything, you two. Fighting over what might have happened, does not change what did happen. We should focus on the facts of the situation," Daniel said, stepping in. "We know that mate-marks don't disappear when a mate dies, so until proven otherwise, Adira should be considered alive. There have never been known cases of a werewolf losing their mark, which means this is something werewolves do not normally experience. The logical conclusion would be that something magical happened to the mark."

My heart felt heavy as I lied there, listening to the conversation. I had to believe Daniel's hypothesis that Adira was still alive. If I believed otherwise, I wouldn't be able to get out of this bed. I didn't have another explanation, but I wasn't sure if it mattered much anyway. Something inside of me felt empty. I couldn't feel Adira's bond before, but there was something different about it now. There was no energy left in my body, and I didn't want to move, but I knew I couldn't do that. No matter what was happening in my personal life, I was still the alpha to this wolf pack, and I had to make sure I was fulfilling my responsibilities.

I slowly opened my eyes as the bickering continued. "You guys are loud."

Rie instantly threw her arms around me. "Mark!"

"Ow," I groaned. My entire body ached from whatever happened.

Rie quickly pulled back. "I'm sorry. Are you okay?"

I nodded slowly, not having the energy to say anything.

"I'm glad you're awake," Scythe said, but his tone didn't match. I knew he was worried about the possibility of what this all meant. He was the one that believed Adira was dead, but I didn't want to think about that.

I went to sit up, and both Rie and Scythe were by my side, propping me up.

"Take it easy," Rie said.

I steadied my breathing, trying to do as she said. "I need a distraction. I need to think about something else."

Rie and Scythe looked at each other, at a loss for what to say.

Daniel stepped up, looking as analytical as ever. “I have gone through more of those books, Alpha Mark. I don’t know how much of the information will help us find Adira, but it will help if any other sorcerers decide to attack us.”

“Go on,” I encouraged.

“Did you know that in this great war, werewolves discovered a metal that could block a sorcerer’s powers? It’s quite fascinating. They built several of them throughout the country to hold prisoners of war. If we can get our hands on metal like that, it would give us an advantage if that council tries to attack.” Daniel was buzzing with excitement from the knowledge he discovered.

“That’s great.” My voice was scratchy from the screaming earlier, and I was still tired. I wanted to rest my eyes again already.

The door flung open, making me jump. Ginger burst through the door with a look of determination on her face. “I made contact with Adira.”

I sat up too quickly, but I didn’t care. Too many fears of Adira’s death was nearly paralyzing this, so this was the news I needed to hear. “She’s alive?”

Ginger nodded. “She is, and I was able to track her energy. The connection broke before I could figure out where exactly, but I have an idea of where your mate is.”

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 46**

MARK

I started climbing out of bed, despite my body protesting. Rie and Scythe tried to get me to lie back down, but I just brushed them off. I couldn’t just sit in bed, knowing we were a step closer to finding my mate.

“Where is she?” I asked. I was ready to charge out of this room right now.

“I will need a map,” Ginger said. “I know the general direction and distance, so I can narrow this down.”

I started ripping the wires off of me, so I could fully get out of bed. My body screamed in pain, but that didn’t matter. None of that mattered. I started walking out of the room. “Let’s get you a map then.”

When I opened the door, I came face to face with Zayla. The frown on her face was deeper than I had ever seen.

“I didn’t say you could be released,” she said in a flat tone.

I knew she was serious about her patients’ health, and normally I listened to her, but not today.

“Ginger has a lead on Adira.” I slipped past Zayla, and she quickly moved out of the way, not saying anything.

I rushed down to the conference room, looking for one of the maps of the area we used for war planning. I started spreading as many maps as possible, filling the table completely. The others followed into the room shortly after. When I was done, I took a step back and gestured to Ginger.

“Where is she?” My voice was shaking with nerves. The desperation to find Adira was filling my core. I didn’t know if I was thinking straight, but I didn’t care.

Ginger approached the table, and looked over all of the maps in front of her. She clasped her hands behind her back and hummed as she reviewed everything. I was practically buzzing with anticipation.

The door to the conference room opened, making me jump. Reyland stood in the doorway, looking confused at what was going on. There was also a level of exhaustion I hadn’t seen in him before.

He looked over at me, and his expression shifted. “What’s going on?”

“Ginger got a ping for Adira’s location. She said she could narrow it down for us, so we could focus our efforts better,” Daniel explained, keeping his eyes glued to Ginger.

Reyland walked over and stood next to Ginger and looked over her shoulder to see what she was doing. Ginger paused and looked back at him, eyebrows raised.

“Give me some space, big guy,” Ginger said. She waited for Reyland to move before continuing.

Reyland took a step back looking sheepish, but he quickly complied with Ginger. It was almost amusing to see such a small woman giving a large man, like Reyland, commands, especially when most people shrank around his strong alpha presence. When she got the space, she went back to the maps and returned to analyzing everything. She made a mark on where the pack house was, just using her finger and magic. She shifted around the table and then traced a line away from the pack house. She closed her eyes and then created a large circle on the map. She took a step back and looked at it for a moment.

Finally, she nodded and said, "I'm confident she's somewhere in this area."

I walked up to the table to get a closer look at the area she circled and frowned. It was much larger than I had hoped, and it would still take some time to send search parties to cover the entire area. It was better than what we had at least.

"We should deploy several search parties there immediately. We'll need at least five." I turned to Ginger. "Did you get any other information to help narrow it down at all?"

Ginger looked me straight in the eyes. "She said that it was some kind of prison that was holding her. You're not going to like this, boy, but she confirmed that Cain is the one holding her captive. She mentioned that Jori was also helping her."

It felt like someone punched me in the gut. "They are working together? That makes no sense." Hearing the confirmation that Jori was in fact involved made me realize I no longer knew Jori the way I used. Maybe I never truly knew him before. One thing was for sure. I was going to make sure they both regretted taking my mate.

"Did you say prison, Gingy?" Daniel asked. His face was tight with focus.

Ginger nodded. "Boy, don't make me repeat myself."

Daniel suddenly ran out of the room, leaving the rest of us confused. Now that Ginger was done drawing the map, Reyland approached the table again, making sure to leave some space between himself and Ginger. He traced the lines Ginger had created.

"This isn't wolf territory. It's in a neutral zone that doesn't belong to any magical creatures," he said. He dug through his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. He looked it over, taking a few moments to look back and forth between the paper and the map.

"What is that?" I asked as he silently looked at everything.

"Adira's mother gave me a list of places Cain might keep her. I'm cross referencing that with this map to see if any of the places fall within this range," he explained.

I found myself waiting anxiously for him to finish. I found my desperation to go find Adira growing. If I could just leave this room and run after her this minute, I would. Scythe placed his hand on my shoulder, so I glanced back at him. He gave me a reassuring nod, and I knew he could feel my anxiety. He was probably the one who could understand my feelings the most. He and Percy had spent several months apart, not knowing if they would ever see each other again. The big difference was that they knew where each other were and could visit at any point.

Reyland pulled out a pen and started marking the map in a few locations. When he was done, he pointed them out to us. "We should be able to focus our search in these areas. According to Freya, these are areas she knows Cain to have visited, at least while they were together.

I looked at the map myself. With Reyland's added information, it narrowed the search area in half. I curled my fingers into fists to stop my hands from shaking. I felt so close to getting my mate back and so far at the same time. I was about to start barking orders, but Scythe stepped up instead.

"Let's get the search parties organized immediately. I want to send eighty percent of our warriors to that area, and I want to leave the rest here to make sure the pack members who cannot fight are safe," Scythe instructed.

I took a step back, realizing it was best for Scythe to take control. If I had given orders, I would have sent everyone to help me find Adira, but that would have been irresponsible as the alpha. My mate was important, but I couldn't sacrifice the safety of my pack to get her back. It wasn't easy to let go of control, but I trusted Scythe and Rie to do what was best for me and the pack better than I trusted myself at the moment.

Scythe pointed to the map at the edge of the determined search party. "We will have the rescue party wait here as the search parties confirm Adira's location. This will give the rescue party the easiest access to joining up with the search party, no matter where Adira is located." Scythe turned to me. "Alpha, you will be waiting with the rescue party, so you can get to Adira the moment we know her location."

"I would like to be in that group as well," Reyland said.

"Of course, Alpha Lyna." Scythe turned to Mason. "Do you think you could handle running one of the search parties?"

Mason nodded. He was clasping Rie's hand. "It would be my honor."

"Perfect. I will lead another one, and-" Scythe stopped talking when the door to the conference room flung open.

Daniel stumbled in with his arms filled with books. He dumped the books on the table on the maps that weren't being used. Everyone watched silently as he searched through the books. He was quickly flipping through pages before tossing the book to the side and grabbing another one.

"Boy, what madness is this?" Ginger asked.

Daniel ignored her, continuing to flip through pages. When he found what he was looking for, he let out a loud, "Aha!" He then pulled out a pen and moved to the map with all of the markings.

He spread the book out next to it as he compared the two. "As I was doing my research, there were these camps mentioned that were made to hold sorcerers. Since Gingey hasn't been able to contact Adira until recently, it's clear that Adira's magic has been blocked. I just assumed Cain was using belladonna to do this, but what if he was holding her in one of those prisons? This particular book lists the locations of various prisons throughout the country."

Daniel stopped to take a breath, saying all of that in one go. He double checked the book and then circled a small part of the map with his pen. "This is the only prison within the areas you both have marked. If he has Adira in one of those ones, this is where she would be."



No one said anything for a moment. If what Daniel was saying was true, we knew where Adira was being held captive. We went from having no idea of where my mate's location was to basically knowing the exact spot in less than an hour.

"We'll send the main search party there," Reyland said, breaking the silence. "We should still send search parties to other locations in case Cain has moved Adira by now, but this should be our main focus."

"I want to be on that search party," I said firmly.

"Mark-" Rie started, but I quickly interrupted.

"I understand that there's a chance she won't be there, which will make it harder for me to get to her, but it seems like there is a high probability that my mate is right there." I pointed to the map to emphasize my point. "I can't just sit back, waiting for someone else to confirm she is there. I want her in my arms as soon as possible."

"Okay," Scythe said.

"Let's go." I started to walk out of the room, but Rie stopped me, standing between the door and myself.

"We need to prepare and get the search parties ready. I know it's hard waiting when we are so close to finding her, but we have to do this right. We can't walk in blindly or risk Adira or others getting hurt if there is a trap set up," Rie said, placing her hand on my arm to comfort me.

I knew she was right, but every inch of my body buzzed with anticipation. I know Ginger said Adira was okay, but her mark was gone, and I had no idea what that actually meant. She could be hurt. Our baby could be hurt. Or worse.

I nodded reluctantly, but I didn't say anything, not trusting myself to speak.

"Let's start preparing," Scythe said. He walked out of the room, with the others following.

Rie held back for a moment, still holding my arm. "We'll get her. We'll bring her home, and you can have your happily ever after." She gave my arm a squeeze before leaving.

I felt like I couldn't move. If I took a step, I knew I would end up running for my mate, so instead, I didn't even try to take a step.

"I don't know about you, but I'm not going to sit here and wait, giving that bastard a chance to hide Adira."

I looked up, seeing Reyland still standing in the room. I hadn't even noticed that he didn't leave. I blinked at him a few times, trying to process what he was saying. He gave me a firm look, and I could see a similar determination in him that I felt.

"I made a mistake with Adira years ago and left her on her own. I'm not going to do that again. I realize this might be a mistake, but I'm going to go after her," Reyland said. He seemed taller in this moment. Out of all of the moments where he showed his alpha strength and power, this was the moment I respected him the most. His love for his daughter was shining through, brighter than the moon itself.

I nodded my head. "Let's go get my mate back."

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 47**

ADIRA

Cain gave me what I needed to get out of here unknowingly. These walls were made of metal that was meant to hold weaker sorcerers captive. He mistook me as a weaker sorcerer. I wasn't weak. I just lacked practice, but Ginger had given me the tools to escape. Now that I knew it was possible to use magic here, I was determined to use it. I was the Daughter of Moon and Magic after all.

I took a deep breath, placing my hand on my stomach. I had the most powerful intention to imbed into my magic. I had the intention of protecting my family and my possible unborn child. I had the intention of returning to the man I loved more than any other person before. I didn't care if I had Mark's mark on my neck anymore or not. He was my mate, and nothing could possibly change that or the way I felt about him.

I took another deep breath, channeling the power and energy in my core. My body ached after Cain took away my mate's mark, but I couldn't stop just because of a little pain. Ever since I regained consciousness, I could feel the magic buzzing inside of me. Cain's deep betrayal had the exact opposite

effect he was going for. I refused to just lie down and listen to his wishes. He sparked a fire deep inside of me that reignited my magic, despite the metal in the walls trying to subdue me.

It was a weak buzz at first, but I had been sitting there for hours, cultivating the strength I would need to escape. I wasn't there yet, but I knew I was on the verge of reaching a great potential. My hands glowed from the energy building up inside of me, and I felt like almost anything was possible.

With my eyes closed, I started working on sensing my surroundings. The magic flowed out of my body and started crawling around the room I was in, painting a clear picture of my surroundings in my head. When I could see the room I was in with magic, I pushed my magic to move through the walls. At first, I was met with resistance. It was like bouncing a ball against the wall, the magic getting flung back to me.

I took another deep breath, imagining what it would be like to be reunited with Mark, what it would be like to start a family with him, what it would be like to be happy and safe. I tried to push through the wall once again, and this time I broke free of it. My entire body jolted with the motion, but I quickly focused on my breath again.

I imagined moving through the complex, the magic giving me vision to the hallway I ran down when I first tried to escape. I made a point to mark out my path while trying to sense the presence of anyone else. When I made my escape, I wanted to make sure I left without being noticed. It wasn't long before I sensed Cain's presence. He was pacing back and forth in his room, and I could feel his high stress levels. This wasn't working out the way he had hoped it would.

Noting where Cain's room was, I continued my search. I hadn't heard anyone else since being here, but I wanted to be sure. With my resistance, I wouldn't have been surprised if he had other sorcerers around. I continued pushing my magic more and more, sensing everything along the pathway to the exit. When I made it to the door I had tried to escape from, I picked up on the energy of two different sorcerers. They were standing outside of the building, but they still felt weak.

I would have to find another way out or a way to get through them. I decided it was best not to come in contact with anyone. My goal was to get out of here as silently as possible, so I could get far away from the prison before anyone

noticed I was missing. I retreated, searching the building for another exit, but I wasn't able to find one. I was going to have to create one myself.

One final deep breath and I recalled my magic. My eyes snapped open as the magic returned to my body like a stretched out rubber band returning to its regular position.

I felt more charged than ever, and I knew I was ready to escape. I stood up and broke my focus on my magic. I wanted to wait until after Cain dropped off food to try to escape. It would give me the largest window to actually be successful. I couldn't let on that I had found a way to use my magic in this prison. It would ruin everything.

I lay down on the bed and closed my eyes for a moment. Now that I had solidified my plan, I wanted to give my body the rest it needed. There was nothing else to do while waiting for Cain to arrive with the food, and I wanted to make sure I was taking care of my body for the sake of the baby.

It wasn't long before the exhaustion overtook me, and I fell into a deep sleep. I didn't end up in the white room of my subconscious. Instead, I found myself in something akin to a nightmare. It was dark and howling wind whipped all around me. I saw a glimpse of Mark in the distance, and my body moved before I could. I ran as fast as I could towards Mark.

He reached out to me, ready for me to join him, but when I got closer, he suddenly disappeared. I turned, desperately trying to find him, but when I turned around, I saw Mark being held up by a black tendril by the neck.

"Mark!" I screamed, my voice echoing back to me over and over again.

I reached up, shooting a ball of light at the tendril. The tendril retreated, dropping Mark to the ground with a thud. I ran to his side, holding his face.

"Hold on, Mark. Just a little longer. I'm coming home," I whispered before pressing my lips against his.

Mark grasped my arm. "I will never stop fighting for you."

Clack! The door opening to the prison jolted me from my sleep. I sat up quickly, staring at the door. Cain was standing there, a tray in his hand with the expected food. At the sight of him, I instantly felt sick. I turned on my side, so I was facing the wall instead of him.

Cain set the food on the ground, and his footsteps echoed in the room. His hand touched my arm, making my entire body go tense.

"I know it hurts right now, but it'll get easier. When I removed your mother's mark, it made it easier to accept that we were never meant to be." With that, Cain turned and walked out of the room, and the familiar click of the door being locked, snapped me into action.

I went to the food tray first, taking a few bites of the food provided. At first I was nervous about eating the food Cain gave me, but when I realized that I was going to be here for longer than I hoped, I knew it was essential to nourish my body. I had to stay strong if I was going to fight my way out.

After I finished eating, I waited a few minutes and then used my magic senses to check on Cain's location. He was back in his room, and it seemed like he was making some sort of phone call.

I figured it was safe to make my escape. I pressed my hands against the door and I closed my eyes. I focused on my breathing and then started imagining the molecules that made the door what it was. Ginger and I had practiced transmutation during my last training session with her. I had been successful on a smaller level, but I had never tried anything this large. This was my only chance to break free, and I had to do it for the sake of my future family.

I imagined the material the door was made of separating. This was separating me from Mark, and in the moment, I wanted the door gone more than anything else in the world.

After a moment to focus, the door started shifting beneath my hands. I opened my eyes and saw a hole melting into the door. As soon as it was large enough for me to fit through, I slipped through the hole, emerging into the hallway. I looked both ways, double checking that no one was around. When the coast was clear, I pulled off my shoes and started running towards the exit.

When I was near the exit, I took a sharp turn to the left and continued running until I hit a dead-end. On the other side of the wall, I could feel the freedom. I pressed my hands against the wall and started creating an opening. This one was much faster to create, since my magic was charged.

I stopped once I could fit through the opening, and I broke free, breathing fresh air for the first time in at least a week. I inhaled the cool fresh air, which gave me a burst of energy. Looking up into the sky, I saw the moon shining

down onto me, making my body glow like a night light. I had never felt so much energy flowing through me before, and I knew my magic had reached a whole new level.

It was time to return home.

I began running, eager to get as far away from here as possible, but something dark and lurking reached my senses, making me stop cold.

Looking up, I saw his eyes glowing from the edge of the forest. Jori was standing there, waiting for me to break free. It was like he knew this was going to happen, and the smug look on his face told me he was coming for me.

“There’s no use in running from me,” Jori said. “You won’t be able to get away.”

I glanced at the prison behind me and then back at Jori, unsure of what to do. I couldn’t go back to the prison, but I wasn’t ready to face Jori either. I looked up into the sky, admiring the full moon. It was on my side, giving me what I needed to be successful. Now, I had a simple choice. Did I run or did I fight?

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 48**

MARK

Reyland and I slipped out of the pack house as soon as the coast was clear. It was a couple of hours driving to the prison cell we were sure Adira was being held in. I wasn’t going to go by myself, but when Reyland suggested leaving as soon as possible, I was not about to object.

Before we left, I wrote a quick note and left it in my bedroom. I wanted the others to know where I had gone when they finally realized I wasn’t around anymore. I knew Rie and Scythe would be upset with me for not listening to them, but the chance to save my mate was too overwhelming. If Adira had felt even half the pain I did when the mark was removed, I needed to get to her as soon as possible to make sure she and the baby were okay. I was not going to lose them before our life together truly started.

Reyland offered to drive, which I was grateful for. I was vibrating from the anxiety of needing to be by my mate’s side again. I wasn’t sure how well I would actually be able to focus on the driving part.

The car ride was silent for the most part. We were both in our heads about what was happening. I knew I needed to get my mate back and kill the bastards that took her in the first place, but I wondered what was going on in Reyland's head. He and Adira had been separated for several years, and while I knew he was making an effort to repair things, it was taking Adira time, which I completely understood.

I hoped Reyland and Adira could work things out, but in the end, I would support her decision. I was just grateful that Reyland was here with me now. If things got messy trying to rescue Adira, at least I had another alpha here to help me out.

Reyland pulled the car over. "This is as far as we go in the car. It's on foot from here."

"Follow me," I said, wanting to take the lead on this.

I shifted into wolf form with Reyland following suit. We began running through the forest in the direction of the prison. Every few minutes, we stopped to make sure we were going in the right direction. After a little bit, we came across a clearing and stopped along the edge of the forest. In front of us, there was a large, boxy building that was completely gray on the outside. There was nothing that distinctly screamed this was the prison, but I knew. Something deep down inside of me told me this was where Adira was being held.

Reyland and I scouted the outside of the building, and we saw there was only one entrance and exit to the building. There were two guards standing in front of the door, which should have been easy to take them out. By the scent of it, they weren't sorcerers, nor werewolves. I didn't know what kind of magic they had, but if we snuck up on them, we would have the advantage.

ADIRA

"Why the hesitation?" Jori asked, slowly walking towards me.

I created two balls of energy in my hands to show Jori I was serious. "I've already told you before, I'm not yours, and I will never be. I'm going home to my mate."

I shifted several feet away and started running. I wasn't going to just give in, not when I had come this far. Footsteps echoed behind me, and I heard them

quickly catching up to me. Between the speed, and the number of footsteps, I knew Jori had changed into his wolf form to get to me faster.

Shadow! I shouted, reaching out to her. She didn't hesitate to take over, changing our form to wolf form as well. Together, Shadow and I were able to pick up the pace, creating some distance between Jori and myself. I didn't know where I was or how far I was from the pack house, but I wanted to run to get away from Jori. I didn't want to risk fighting him, causing harm to myself or the baby. I didn't know what he was capable of, but I knew he had years of warrior training under his belt that would put me at a severe disadvantage.

I weaved in and out of the trees, running as fast as I could, but I could still hear Jori's footsteps following behind me. I took a sharp turn, hoping to throw him off my trail, but it didn't seem to be working. I broke free from the trees into a small clearing in the forest. A sudden wave of fear flowed over me, and I could feel Jori's presence shift and grow. There was a dark cloud hovering behind me, and it made me want to run faster and farther than before.

Unexpectedly, Jori appeared in front of me, stopping me in his tracks. He was still in his wolf form, but he had shifted, just like a sorcerer. My heart raced as the realization dawned on me. There was no running from Jori. Not only was he fast in wolf form, but he also had magic abilities that allowed him to shift and easily catch up to me. I didn't have an advantage against him.

Jori changed back into his human form, and I followed suit. I couldn't run. I knew I couldn't fight. There was only one last option.

Jori smirked at me. "I could say that you running away is annoying, but I actually admire that about you. If you were some weak girl who just rolled over the moment something was difficult, you wouldn't make a good queen."

"Queen?" I repeated.

"Together we will rule this world. It's no use pretending any more," Jori said. "You already know the truth, anyway. You know who I am. "

"The Son of Blood and Magic," I said firmly.

Jori laughed at this. "Yes, such a fancy title, isn't it? It's not one I would have picked personally, but it has a nice ring to it."



“Who are you exactly? Have you been Jori, pretending to be a normal werewolf this entire time?” There were so many questions I had, and he seemed to be in a particularly chatty mood, so I decided it was time to get some answers.

“No, my dear. I am just borrowing this body at the moment.” He lifted his hand up and inspected his fingers. “I plan on getting a better body sooner than later, but this one has been pretty useful. It’s been interesting seeing that mate of yours get so angry, too.”

I gritted my teeth, wanting to punch him in the face. He enjoyed the pain he had been causing Mark. “Have you been in Jori’s body ever since I met him?”

“Yes and no,” the man who was using Jori’s body said. “I planted my seed in him several months ago, and it’s been slowly growing. That’s the only way I have been able to take a physical form. When you met Jori, you were drawn to him because you could sense it was really me. It took much longer than that for me to have any control over his actual body, though. He was strong and fought against me, but eventually I grew stronger.”

“Jori was never my mate, was he?” I felt strangely calm as I came to this conclusion. Mark’s childhood best friend never actually betrayed him. It wasn’t me who drove the wedge between them, either.

“No, he wasn’t. I’m your true soulmate, Adira.” He took a step towards me, holding out his hand. “Join me. Together we can grow stronger. We can unite this world and make it whatever we want to.”

I took a step back. “I can’t do that. I don’t even know your name or how you are alive. I don’t know what kind of world you want to create, and I have my own life.”

He took another step forward, closing the distance between us. His aura was strong, and his desire for me filled my every pore. “My real name is Xavier. I’m alive because what most people don’t understand is that we are more than our bodies. You see, that Council of Magic may have destroyed my body, but I have been surviving as energy in the wind, searching for the one who was destined to make me strong again, searching for you.”

“Sorcerers can cultivate and manifest this energy into magic. Vampires take energy from others to grow stronger. Werewolves absorb the energy to change their bodies into different forms. Humans are weak and pathetic, but

us 'magical creatures' know how to use the energy and powers in this world to grow stronger, which is why the two of us together can become more powerful than any other being in this world."

"It took longer than I anticipated," he continued. "You weren't even alive for many of the years I was searching. Then, when you were born, I felt a shift in the universe. I knew you were alive, but your parents had kept you much too hidden. It worked for several years, but they weren't as clever as they thought. They still held onto the love for each other, which I was drawn to. Werewolf and sorcerer, torn apart by two worlds and a dark prophecy. It was quite the tragic love story, which made it all more delectable when I discovered the truth." The way he looked at me gave me chills.

"You used Theron to get to me, didn't you?" I asked.

Xavier smiled, looking up into the sky. "It was easy to manipulate that half-brother of yours. He already held such a hatred for you, and he was searching for you too, which made it easier to find you. Him trying to kill you, that wasn't part of my plan though. He got what he deserved for trying to take my soulmate out of the picture."

Xavier was dark and twisted, and for the first time, I truly saw the man standing in front of me. This wasn't Jori, Mark's best friend, Alpha of Pack Sallow. This wasn't a werewolf who was just trying to find his mate. This was Xavier, half-sorcerer and half-vampire. This was a man who wanted power to become the strongest force in the world, so he could turn the world into playdough and mold it in the way he saw fit. And I was the missing piece to his puzzle.

If I wanted it, I could join this man and become just as powerful. I could get rid of the people who hated me for being mixed-blooded. I could use my powers to create a world where everyone was accepted and no one felt unwanted.

I could never do that, though. It would take away the beauty in life.

I took a few steps back, feeling light-headed from this conversation. Everything I thought I had known now looked so different. I placed a hand on my stomach, praying the baby was still okay. I had been through too much, and I didn't even know how long I was in the pregnancy. I still hadn't confirmed I was actually pregnant, either, but deep down I knew the truth.

"I love Mark," I whispered.

“You’ll grow to love me so much more,” Xavier said. He closed the distance between us again. “You’ll see that I can do so much more for you than that weak wolf.”

I shook my head, taking deep breaths to keep my nausea down. “I don’t want you. I want Mark. I want to fall asleep with him by my side every night. I want to make a family with him, not you.” Tears streamed down my face. Even though I wasn’t currently mated with Mark, my deep love for him hadn’t wavered.

Xavier sighed. “I thought having that nitwit sorcerer take away your wolf mark would help with this. Adira, I know you don’t see it yet because of your feelings for the wolf, but I can make you happier than he ever will.”

He stepped forward and grabbed my wrist, and his face instantly twisted. His eyes flashed black, and he squeezed my wrist, making me cry out in pain. He slowly tilted his head, his nose snarling as anger flowed through him.

When he spoke, his voice was deeper and almost echoed with fury. “You’re going to have that mut’s baby?”

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 49**

RIE

I knocked on Mark’s door, wanting to give him an update about the status of the search party. I hadn’t seen him in a little while, which worried me. I could only imagine what he was going through at the moment. I had only just found Mason, but if I could be by his side every day because someone took him away from me, I would be a complete mess.

There was no answer at the door, so I knocked again. “Mark. We are almost ready to go. I just wanted to go over some final preparations.”

Still no answer. There was a sinking feeling in my stomach. Scythe and I had asked him to give us control because we didn’t trust him to make rational decisions for the pack. He reluctantly agreed, but that didn’t mean that he wasn’t stupid enough to run off and get himself killed.

I opened the door when there was still no response. There were no signs of Mark in the room.

Mark? Where are you? I tried to link, but there was no connection there.

I forgot to have someone babysit the alpha in case he did anything stupid. My heart raced, knowing he had gone ahead without us. We didn't know how many men Cain had or what the situation was, but this wasn't good. I had no idea how long he had been gone either.

I was about to leave the room when I noticed a note on the bed. I snatched it off, feeling irritated. The note was labeled "Rie and Scythe," I was instantly frustrated by my alpha.

Rie, Scythe,

I know you're going to scold me for making this decision, but I hope you both understand the severity of the situation and how I couldn't sit back, knowing my mate could be in danger. Just try to imagine how it would feel if your own mate had been kidnapped? You were right to take the decision-making away from me. I was only thinking about Adira's return and not about the safety of the pack. I failed my duty as the alpha, but I'm grateful you two have been here to support me.

Reyland and I are going after Adira on our own. We couldn't wait, knowing where she was. Please hurry. We might need your back up.

Alpha Mark.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself. I wanted to smack Mark for making such a reckless decision, but I would have to get to him before that could happen. I ran downstairs, straight for Mason. He was with Scythe and Darian, making the final preparations for the attack plan.

"What's wrong?" Mason asked the moment he saw me.

I shoved the letter into Scythe's hand. "Mark and Reyland went to get Reyland on their own. We need to go now, so those two idiots don't get themselves killed."

"I'll get the rest of the warriors ready. You three go now," Darian said.

We didn't hesitate to run off.

—

## ADIRA

For a brief moment, I was relieved to hear Xavier mention the baby. He must've been able to feel it, which gave me hope that it was okay. However, once I regained my senses, I smacked his hand away and took a step back. He had no right to touch me, and my life was none of his business.

I created two energy balls in my hands, ready to fight. I had managed to get away from Cain, and I was not about to be taken away by some other man who thought he had a right to my life. "Stay away from me," I growled. I was not going to go easy on him.

Xavier smiled, c\*\*\*\*\*g his head to the side. "Adira, my dear. There's no need to fight. There's a simple way to solve this issue. We can get rid of the mut's baby, and then we can have our own."

I threw the energy ball at him and instantly shifted behind him, hitting him with another attack. A rage built within my core that I had never felt before. I had never hated someone so much in my life before, and I was now seeing red. My blood boiled. This man thought he was going to take my baby away. I was so sick and tired of everyone threatening my happiness. All I wanted in life was to have a happy, peaceful life with Mark. And now a happy family with him.

"How dare you threaten my baby," I growled, a fever growing inside of me.

With a scream, I lurched forward, throwing a punch at Xavier. He wasn't expecting my sudden attack, and I hit him in the jaw. Pain radiated throughout my fingers for a second, but then the adrenaline kicked in. I hit him with another magic attack, not giving him a moment to think.

Something snapped inside of me, and I began to hit Xavier one after another. I wasn't even thinking about my moves. I was just switching between hitting him physically and throwing magic attacks at him. His body was flung back and forth from the barrage of attacks coming at him. He fell to his knees, and I paused, hovering over him.

Xavier looked up at me with Jori's smile. His eyes were completely black, and he looked almost crazed. He sat on his knees and wiped the blood off his mouth with the back of his chin.

"I see you like to play rough." His laughter echoed in my ears, causing a ringing in them. Something had cracked in him, and I could risk letting him touch me.

I created a mystical knife and held it against his neck, using magic to hold it. I was still several feet away from him, not wanting to risk getting too close to him. I pushed my hand forward, making sure the blade was flushed against his skin.

"Don't test me. I'm not in the mood to play games with you," I cautioned. I didn't want to have to kill him. I didn't enjoy killing others in any manner, but if it came down to it, I wouldn't hesitate if Xavier pushed me. The only thing holding me back was Jori's face. Somewhere in there, I hoped Jori was still alive.

"Life is a game, my dear." Xavier went to grab the blade, and I tried to push it into his throat, but he grabbed it before I could succeed. The magic blade crumpled in his hands, and specks of magic floated to the ground.

I tried to attack Xavier again, this time with the intent of killing, but before I could throw the magic attack, black tendrils shot out of the ground and wrapped around my wrists. The dark magic immediately cut off my own magic. I tried to pull away, but the grip of the tendrils tightened, pulling my arms out to the side.

"Why are you doing this?" I screamed, too frustrated to hold my composure.

Xavier shook his head as he approached me. For a moment, I thought I saw someone who didn't look quite like Jori. He was a little taller and paler. However, when I blinked, the image disappeared. He stopped walking when he was only a few inches in front of me. He stroked my cheek with the back of his hand.

"Please try to understand that I find your antics to escape amusing, but I do have a limit to my patience. You also need to realize that I'm the one in control here, so you should listen to me." Xavier grabbed my chin and forced me to look him in the eye. "I don't need you to get what I want. I just need your powers and your womb. Once I have what I want, I can discard you like a dirty rag. Alternatively, you can join me willingly, and we can build something beautiful."

He held out his hand to me. "The choice is yours."

I wanted to spit in his face and tell him that he should jump off a cliff, but I needed to tread lightly in this situation. He had me trapped, and he wanted to kill Mark's baby. I needed to say the right things and then strike when he was off guard.

I looked up to the moon, praying she would give me the strength to do what I needed to to protect my baby.

Looking back at Xavier, I smiled. "You're right. I've been fighting this. I fell in love with someone, which was a mistake. He could never provide me with the kind of world you can."

Xavier looked into my eyes, and I could feel his hesitation in the way he held onto my chin. "This seems too easy."

I didn't blink. "You didn't give me much of a choice. I would rather pick the path that allows happiness."

Xavier smiled, looking down at me. "If you really think so, if you are truly ready to give up that former mate of yours, then kiss me."

—

MARK

Reyland and I prepared to attack the prison. It would be easy to take out the two guards. The problem would come once we were inside. There was no way to know how many more men were in there, keeping guard. We would have to make sure to use our surprise attack to our advantage. If we could take out the entire prison, if we took them out one by one.

I nodded to Reyland when a scream echoed in the distance. I instantly recognized the tone as Adira's. It came from the opposite direction of the prison. Reyland looked in the direction of the scream as well. We made eye contact for a moment, and we knew the same thing. We weren't going to find Adira in that prison. She was strong and never stopped fighting. I shouldn't have been surprised that she found a way to escape.

The scream told me she was in trouble, though. Before another second passed, I changed back into wolf form and started dashing through the forest, desperate to get to my mate. I smelled the air, and Adira's sweet scent filled my nose. She was so close I could taste her. My adrenaline kicked, and I ran

faster than I ever had before. Her scent was getting stronger, and I knew I was seconds away from being with my mate again.

The trees opened into a small clearing, and I froze when I saw the sight in front of me. Adira was standing in the middle of the field with black tendrils wrapped around her arms to restrain her, and Jori was standing in front of her. His hand was placed firmly on her chin, and a growl erupted from my chest. How dare he touch my mate?

Jori suddenly leaned forward, pressing his lips against Adira's, and I went completely blind with rage.

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 50**

ADIRA

The moment Xavier's lips pressed against mine, my body revolted. I couldn't stand another man kissing me, even if I didn't mean it. I only craved Mark's touch. A surge of energy burst through my body, causing the tendrils to disintegrate. Xavier was thrown off, and stumbled backwards. I flung my fist at him, hitting him as hard as I could.

"I knew it was too good to be true." Xavier spat blood onto the ground.

He lifted his hands out, sending several waves of back tendrils shooting towards me. I lifted my hands to create a shield, but the dark magic automatically diverted around the shield. The back magic began swirling around Xavier and me, twisting up and up until we were standing in the middle of a small hurricane.

I looked up and watched as the light of the moon was blocked out of vision, and I could feel my magic grow dimmer in response. The magic surrounding us was filled with anger and pain, one of the most powerful emotions out there. The feeling of it was so intense, I started to feel queasy. I understood how this magic could destroy the world, especially if I allowed it to grow stronger.

As I stood there, absorbing the intensity of the dark magic Xavier held in his heart, I understood what my position in all of this was. The prophecy came to my mind as if it was always in there. I felt the words flowing out of my mouth automatically.



"In the darkest hours of the darkest days, the Daughter of Moon and Magic and the Son of Blood and Magic will be fated together, creating the most powerful couple in existence. It would be a bond no one could break and one that would end up breaking the world. Destruction would rain when the two became one, and the world would change forever."

Xavier smiled at me as I repeated the prophecy. "You feel it in your bones, don't you? You can feel that this is what we were meant to do. We were meant for each other."

"Unless the Daughter of the Moon chooses light over dark," I continued. I didn't know where this was coming from, but I could feel it. Everyone only focused on the first part of the prophecy, but no one realized there was more to it. There was a choice.

"What are you talking about?" Xavier snapped. His eyes grew wide with fear.

I looked straight into his eyes, and I knew he felt the words the same as me. "Standing on the pinnacle of darkness, she would have the choice to choose a different path. She would walk away from the Son of Blood and Magic, never creating the dark bond in the first place. She would choose light and create a bright new future."

"How are you doing this?" Xavier growled. He was starting to panic.

I grabbed his arms, feeling the spark inside of me growing once again. I sent a wave of light magic flowing around Xavier, wrapping his arms like he had done to mine.

"I am choosing light. I am choosing love. I am choosing a life without you," I growled, putting my all into countering his dark magic.

Xavier's eyes flickered, and for a moment I saw Jori's eyes, instead of the dark pits filling them.

"Kill me," he whispered, and I could feel the shift in energy. Jori somehow managed to break free from Xavier's grasp for a split second, telling me he was still in there, fighting against the parasite that had taken over him.

"Jori," I gasped, letting go out of surprise.

His eyes snapped back to black, and I knew Xavier was back. He took advantage of my shock to grab my throat. He squeezed my larynx and lifted me into the air. I tried to shift away, but the dark tornado blocked me from going anywhere.

“You chose wrong,” Xavier said. “I would rather kill you now than let you walk away from me.”

I clawed at his grasp, but I couldn’t get him to let go. I was struggling with breathing, and I was starting to lose focus.

—

MARK

I dashed forward, seeing that bastard touch my mate like that. I was ready to rip his throat out with my teeth. I watched as Adira broke free from his grasp and lunged forward, hitting Jori right in the face.

That’s my girl.

I felt proud of the way Adira fought back. That was one of the things I admired most about her. She never gave up. No matter what horrible things the world threw at her, she kept fighting hard for the life she wanted. I wanted more than anything to make her happy and keep her away from the terrible things in this world.

As I ran towards Adira, ready to finally be with her again, I watched as a black tornado unfolded before my eyes, completely consuming Adira and Jori in the mix. I froze, unsure of what to do. I didn’t know how to break through that magic wall, and fear consumed me. I was too close to lose Adira like this.

I shifted into human form and looked over at Reyland, who was only a few steps behind me. He shifted into his human form and stared at the dark tornado billowing in front of us. His eyes were wide, fear filling them to the brim. This only made me start to panic more.

“What the hell is that?” Reyland asked, disbelief constricting his throat.

“Magic,” I whispered. “How do we get her out of there? She needs help more than ever. I can’t lose her.” I was just trying to keep my voice steady, but hysterics threatened every word, making it hard to speak at all.

Bright lights started sparking through the tornado, and I could feel Adira's energy. She was fighting for her life in there. She was strong, but I didn't want to leave her to fight on her own, not when I was only a few feet away. I started moving towards it, but Reyland grabbed my shoulder.

"If we rush in there not knowing what we are up against, it could kill us," he said, holding my shoulder firmly.

I watched the tornado, giving Adira a moment to break free, hoping she could beat whatever this dark magic was. "She could be killed if we don't help her." I was on edge, hating the scene unfolding before my eyes. I didn't understand how magic worked, and I especially didn't understand how Jori was able to control magic. He was just a werewolf. He had always smelled like a pure alpha werewolf, so how was he able to control this dark magic now?

Suddenly, Adira's magic disappeared from the tornado, and I knew something had gone wrong. I pushed Reyland off my shoulder and dashed forward. I didn't care if this killed me, but I had to protect Adira and my baby. I shielded my face as I jumped into the tornado. For a split second, all I saw was darkness. I could feel inexplicable rage and was ready to kill the first person who crossed me.

A moment later, everything came back, and I saw Jori holding Adira up by the neck. She was fighting to get away, but I could see her losing strength. I was going to kill him. There was no doubt about that in my mind. I jumped forward, grabbing Adira while elbowing Jori in the face. The dark tornado disappeared, and Adira and I fell to the ground. I made sure to twist my body, so she landed on top of me.

She gasped for air now that her neck was freed, and she looked around in a daze. Finally, her eyes met mine, and tears welled in her eyes.

"Mark?" she whispered, disbelief filling her face.

"It's me, baby," I whispered, pulling her into me. I held her as tight as possible without hurting her, never wanting to let her go. It had been much too long since I had seen her, and it felt like a piece of my heart had been returned.

I wanted to stay there forever, but I knew we were still in danger. I started to stand up, and I could feel Adira clingy to me. She was shaking with fear. She was acting so strong, but I knew she was acting strong this entire time. It was time for me to take over and protect my mate.

“How are you here?” Adira asked, refusing to let go of me.

“I told you, I would never stop fighting for you.” I stood up and set Adira behind me. “We can talk more when I know you’re safe.”

I looked at Jori, who was still trying to process what happened. His eyes snapped to mine, and I saw they were filled with complete darkness. What happened to my best friend?

“What are you doing here, mut? She’s mine, so don’t get any ideas,” Jori growled.

I couldn’t believe my ears. Even if Jori had gone completely mad, why would he call me a mut? He was a werewolf himself.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” I growled.

Adira grasped the back of my shirt. “That’s not Jori. It might look like him, but he was essentially infected by the Son of Blood and Magic.”

I furrowed my eyes at Adira’s explanation. It made no sense and all of the sense at the same time. The man in front of me looked and sounded like Jori, but his actions and the black magic were nothing like the young werewolf I had grown up with. I decided to just accept it for now and get more of an explanation once we were out of this situation.

The man in front of me smiled with amusement. “You heard her. I’m the Son of Blood and Magic, and that’s my soulmate you have hiding behind your back. I don’t know what you plan on doing, mut, but I can tell you one thing. She’s not leaving here with you.”

“That’s not your call,” I said, making sure Adira was behind me. I would make sure she could leave here with her freedom no matter what it took.

The man that looked like Jori laughed wholeheartedly. “Do you really think you’re strong enough to defeat me today? I’m the strongest sorcerer ever. A measly werewolf will have no chance against me. Save yourself the pain and just lie over and die.”

He lifted his hands and shot a black tendril at me. Adira lifted her hand up, creating a shield in front of me. The attack deflected off to the side. She stepped up and grasped my hand. “You’re forgetting that you’re outnumbered.

Also, you're not as powerful as you think, or have you forgotten? You are still trying to gather the strength back that was taken away from you by the Council of Magic. You may have found another body to host your energy, but you'll never be as powerful as you once were when you had your own body."

The man gritted his teeth and tried to throw another attack at us, but Adira easily deflected that attack, too. Now that her hand was in mine, I could feel her magic buzzing inside of her, stronger than I had ever felt before. She was on a mission, and even though I came here to rescue her, I knew Adira would be the one getting us out of this mess. I was just here as emotional support.