

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 51

CAIN

A wave of powerful energy washed over me, and I instantly knew something was wrong. I ran to Adira's room, needing to check on her. When I got there, a wave of fury rushed through me. I stood there staring at the hole she had created to escape. I underestimated her abilities. Even with the belladonna lining the metal walls, she managed to dig deep and use her magic to escape. No wonder the Council of Magic was afraid of her.

It took me most of my life to be powerful enough to use magic, even in the presence of belladonna. I trained my body to get used to the drug, and slowly it didn't affect me as much. There was no way Adira had training like that. She barely had training in using her magic in any manner. It must have been her wolf side that made it easier for her to break past the barriers of the drug. It was still impressive that she figured it out so quickly.

I ran through the prison, knowing I had to reach her before she got too far away. She still didn't understand why I was doing this, and I was starting to worry she never would. I was going to have to take it up a notch, show her what the council was capable of. Maybe then, just maybe, my insolent daughter would understand that my actions were to save her from a force that would take more than her mate away from her.

I made it to the front of the prison, and I was surprised to see the two guards standing in the front like nothing had happened.

"Where's the prisoner?" I demanded.

The two men looked at each other, completely confused by my question. I had placed these men outside the prison, so if anyone used the only entrance to the place, they would see it. They were lower level sorcerers, too, which is why they needed to be outside.

I let out a frustrated sigh and pushed past them. Clearly, Adira had found another way out. I had to get her back before she made it back to the werewolves. If she returned home, I had a feeling I would never have a chance to save her again.

I took a deep breath to focus on and sense Adira's presence, but then a wave of dark magic hit me. I opened my eyes to see a dark shadowy tornado

spinning in the distance. I could feel the immense power all the way from here, and I recognized the dark energy as the same energy that tried to attack Adira before.

My stomach fell with that realization. The Son of Blood and Magic found Adira. If I didn't do anything, the whole reason I couldn't be with my soulmate would be for naught. I had to do something. I had to stop him from taking Adira.

ADIRA

My heart was still racing with the appearance of Mark. He showed up out of nowhere, and I had no idea how he found me. We didn't have our mate connection anymore, so he couldn't find me that way. It didn't really matter how he got here. I was just grateful he showed up when he did. I felt more like myself with his hand in mine. The ache of being separated from him never quite went away, even after Cain removed the mark.

I squeezed his hand tighter, never wanting to let go of him again. I had spent more than a fair share of time away from him. It was almost overwhelming having him here again, and I could feel the emotions building to tears, but I swallowed them down. We weren't safe. I could let myself fall apart when I was finally home.

Xavier gritted his teeth and threw another attack at Mark. I easily deflected it again. I let go of Mark's hand and stood in front of him. I wouldn't let him harm my mate.

"You will never get me. Just accept this now," I said. "I won't let you hurt my mate or take me."

Xavier growled. "You're really starting to get on my nerves." He lifted his hands in the air, and black tendrils shot up, surrounding Mark and myself. They moved and twisted and hovered around us. They were ready to attack us from all angles, but he held off.

Mark gripped my arm and pulled me into him. His entire body was tense, and I knew he was afraid. I stood tall, knowing I could handle this attack if Xavier decided to release it. The magic inside of me began growing stronger as my desire to protect my entire family filled every cell in my body. This was no longer about getting home to my mate. I had to make sure we all left here in one piece.

“Last chance. Either let me kill that mut and you come with me willingly, or I could just kill all of you,” Xavier said. His voice shook with anger, and I knew this wasn’t a bluff. As much as he wanted me for the use of my power, the darkness consumed his mind. If he had to kill me, he would do it without hesitation. It was the reason I would never choose him. I didn’t care if I could grow stronger and change the world in whatever way I wanted. I would rather have a man by my side who loved me wholly, instead of one who just wanted to use me.

“Not a chance,” I muttered. I raised a shield around Mark and myself, ready to take on whatever attack came our way.

Xavier raised his hand to bring the tendrils down on me. Before they hit, Xavier was knocked off balance. I looked over and saw Reyland’s wolf form dash at Xavier. Reyland knocked Xavier to the ground and bit his arm. He tried to bite the sorcerer again, but Xavier flung his arm, shooting a black tendril out of it. It hit Reyland and sent him flying. Reyland hit the ground and rolled to break the fall.

Reyland quickly got back on his paws and snapped at Xavier. His chest was heaving up and down, and the smell of blood filled my nose. He was definitely injured, but he was still ready to fight. Reyland dashed forward, lunging at Xavier again. Xavier tried to throw another attack at Reyland, but this time I quickly reacted, blocking the black tendril with my own magic. This allowed Reyland to finish his attack, and he managed to bite Xavier’s side.

Xavier cried out in pain, and dark magic flared from his body, shocking Reyland back again. I ran forward, knowing I needed to start going on the offense in order to divert Xavier’s attention from Reyland. I knew Reyland’s wolf was strong, but Xavier was on another level, and I was afraid Reyland wouldn’t be able to survive if he continued getting attacked.

I threw balls of light magic at Xavier, but he sensed my presence and easily blocked them. I continued throwing my attacks at Xavier, not giving him a chance to breathe. He deflected all of the attacks, and I didn’t hit him a single time, but it kept him distracted. Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw Mark change into wolf form. Reyland and Mark then ran at Xavier from the opposite sides while I continued hitting Xavier from the front.

Mark and Reyland leapt into the air, ready to attack Xavier from either side, but Xavier suddenly disappeared, causing the two of them to knock into each other instead. I watched as they fell to the ground with a thunk. I felt a dark

presence directly behind me, but before I could react, a dark tendril wrapped itself around my waist.

“You should have given yourself to me. Now you’re going to watch that mate of yours die in front of you and you won’t be able to do anything about it,” Xavier whispered into my ear.

Mark shifted back into his human form and looked at me. For a moment, it felt like time completely slowed down. Here I was, finally reunited with the love of my life, the only man who never tried to push me to do something I didn’t want to do. He was patient with me from the beginning, giving me time to open up to the love he knew I deserved. He always fought for me, finding me no matter what happened. He worked with Alpha Lyna to bring an army to protect me and the pack.

Xavier was threatening his life, and I was terrified. I tried to raise my hands to use my magic to put up a barrier around Mark to protect him from whatever happened, but Xavier restrained my hands in anticipation of my resistance.

“Not a chance, sweetheart,” he whispered into my ear. A wave of disgust washed over me with his words. Being touched by his magic made me feel absolutely sick, and I needed to get away from him. I needed to save Mark. I needed to be stronger and better.

Xavier lifted his hand to attack Mark, and I screamed as I tried to break free. Mark’s eyes latched onto mine, and he smiled. He mouthed the words, “I love you.” It felt like he was saying goodbye to me. I refused to accept it.

A black tendril shot out of Xavier’s hand, aiming straight for Mark. He tried to jump out of the way, but Xavier anticipated the dodge and adjusted his attack. There wasn’t enough time for Mark to get away. Just as the blast of magic was about to hit Mark, Reyland jumped in the way, pushing Mark out of the way at the last second.

The attack hit Reyland in the side and knocked him to the ground. He rolled onto the ground and stopped moving. From where I was, I couldn’t tell if he was still breathing from where I was. My body went cold at the thought of Reyland being dead. We were just starting to fix our relationship, and he had just saved Mark from Xavier.

Mark sat up with wide eyes, realizing what had just happened. He rushed over to Reyland’s side to check on him. He pressed his hands against Reyland’s

side, and I could see blood on Mark's hands. This wasn't good. I had to get to Reyland and do what I could to heal him.

A surge of magic flowed through me as the desperation increased. Xavier's dark magic was blasted into a million pieces, freeing me from his grasp. I turned and kicked Xavier in the chest, adding a blast of light energy into the attack. Xavier fell back and landed on his back. I quickly shifted over to Reyland's side to see what the situation was.

Mark looked at me with wide eyes, and my heart raced. Reyland was still breathing, but his breath was ragged. Mark pressed his hands onto Reyland's wound, trying to stop the breathing.

"I'm sorry, Adira," Reyland choked out.

"Don't talk. I'm going to heal you." Tears poured out of my eyes as I pressed my hands against Reyland. All of the anger I had felt towards Reyland disappeared, and I just felt sad. I felt sad for the time we lost together, for the pain we both had to endure. I couldn't stand the thought of our relationship ending just like this. He was the only true parental figure I had, and I couldn't lose him now.

I focused on sending healing energy to Reyland's body to slow the bleeding and give him a chance to move on, but before I could do much, I was yanked back by my hair. I grabbed my hair and looked up, seeing Xavier's eyes boring into mine.

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"He's getting back up," Mark said, looking behind me.

I glanced over my shoulder, trying to give Reyland as much healing as possible before pulling away. "Just a second longer," I said.

Mark kept looking back and forth behind me, and then he changed into his wolf and started growling. I knew I couldn't keep healing Reyland, so I hope what I did would be enough for now. I let go of him and turned back to face Xavier. He was limping towards us, a large burn mark in the middle of his chest. He looked worse for wear, and I knew he was struggling.

I stood up and held my hand up in defense. My hands glowed with anticipation. "Just give up before you die."

Xavier glowered at me. "Who are you to tell me what to do? I am the Son of Blood and Magic, Prince of Shadows, King of darkness! I will take what I please from whoever I please. I will never give up."

He lifted his quivering hand to throw a tendril of dark magic at me. I went to block the attack, but a purple lightning bolt hit the dark magic and redirected it before I had a chance to touch it. I looked over and saw Cain standing at the edge of the forest. Xavier looked over at him, but Cain shifted closer and hit Xavier again, knocking him to the ground. Cain looked ready to kill Xavier.

"Wait!" I shouted, stopping Cain before he could attack Xavier again. "Don't kill him!"

Cain's jaw dropped. "Are you absolutely mad? If I kill him now, we can be done with this prophecy once and for all!"

"I want to try to save Jori. He's not part of the prophecy. The Son of Blood and Magic was only using him. You owe me for everything you've done to me." I kept my voice firm and steady. When I first saw Cain, there was a moment of panic that he would try to hurt me or be on Xavier's side, but when I saw him attack Xavier, there was relief that flowed through me.

Cain raised his hand, making my heart jump. However, instead of attacking him, Cain created a time bubble around him. "He won't be able to move while I have him contained. I'll give you a few minutes."

I looked at Xavier and Jori, hoping I could find a way to save Jori. Currently, the body's eyes were completely black, telling me that Xavier was in control. I could hear Jori's plea on repeat in my head. "Kill me." He had begged me to kill him, and I could only imagine what it was like to be a prisoner in your own body, hurting the people around you without being able to do anything about it.

I took a step towards Jori, and Mark grabbed my arm, holding me back. "Are you sure about this?" he asked. His grip was firm around my arm, and I could feel his fear seeping through his veins.

I understood his hesitation. Getting close to Xavier could put me at risk, but I had to try. "I can do this." I sounded more confident than I felt.

Mark nodded and let go of my arm. I walked forward, approaching Jori's body. He was lying on the ground, frozen with anger filling every crease in his face. I

didn't know how to get Jori back in control of his body, but if Xavier had implanted his dark magic in Jori, maybe I could expunge it with light magic.

I looked up to the moon and felt the moonlight filling me with power. I reached through the time barrier and pressed my hand against Jori's chest. I imagined the power of moonlight moving through Jori's veins. I could see the magic moving through his body. It swept through the dark magic in his cells, pulling it out as it moved along. I continued expunging the dark magic until I couldn't feel it anymore.

I felt light headed when I pulled back, and I knew I had used too much energy. My body wasn't used to using magic to this extreme, and I was sure I was exhausted from my time in capture, too. As I stepped back, Jori's body twitched, and a sudden burst of dark energy exploded from his chest. A cloud of dark energy floated in the air above Jori, and I knew Xavier was no longer controlling Jori's body.

The cloud lingered for longer than I felt comfortable, but then it whooshed into the air, disappearing completely. I looked over at Cain, who was staring at me, unblinking.

"It's over. Release him," I ordered. My voice was barely above a whisper, but it was commanding and confident.

Cain dropped his hand, releasing Jori from the time capsule. I moved to Jori's side and checked his pulse. It was slow, but it was steady. It was covered in wounds and bruises, but I didn't have the energy to heal him. From what I could see, he didn't have any fatal wounds, but he was unconscious.

I looked across the battlefield, seeing Mark watching me closely. Finally, I could be with him again. I gave him a small nod to let him know I thought Jori would be okay. His body relaxed a little, but he continued staring at me. It was too long since we had been together, and I knew he felt the effects of this as much as I did, but I didn't know what was going on in his head at that moment.

I couldn't stand being away from Mark a second longer, so I stumbled to my feet and began running towards him. The second he saw me move, he started running towards me as well. I threw my arms around his neck, and he grabbed my waist. We kissed, both just as desperate as the other for the touch. I never wanted to let go, now that I had him back. Tears poured down my face as I was finally connected with my mate again.

The sound of several sets of feet echoed through the forest, catching my attention and breaking the kiss Mark and I were sharing. I looked over and saw Rie, Scythe, and Mason emerging from the forest, changing from their wolf forms to their human forms. As they ran over to us, they paused to look at Cain, unsure of who stood in front of them.

“Arrest him,” Mark ordered. “That’s Cain.”

Cain’s eyes went wide. “I saved her. How dare you!”

“You took her from me and put her in danger in the first place,” Mark growled, tightening his grip on me.

I hissed, noticing there was a pain in my side. I must not have felt it before because of the adrenaline.

Ginger appeared in front of us. “Stupid boy!” she instantly scolded Mark. “You could have gotten yourself killed. You should have at least brought me if you were going to insist on these shenanigans.” She paused and took in the scene for a moment. Her eyes lingered on Cain and then narrowed. “I don’t think so.”

Cain tried to use his magic on me, but Ginger lifted her hand, stopping him in the middle of whatever he was trying to do.

“I’m assuming this one is to be taken captive?” Ginger asked.

“Yes,” I said confidently. I didn’t care that Cain swooped in and saved me at the last minute. That was not enough to redeem him. I looked at the others. “Reyland and Jori need medical attention. I’ll explain everything later.”

Mason nodded. “We have others coming shortly. They’ll be able to help us with all of this. It’s good to see you alive, Adira.”

I smiled, my body starting to feel shaky. “I’m happy you are all here.” A wave of nausea washed over me, and I could tell something was wrong.

Mark grabbed my arms to hold me steady. “Adira, what’s wrong?”

I squeezed my eyes shut tightly. “I think I might be injured.” I reached down to my side where there was a growing stinging. When I lifted my hand, there was blood on it.

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MARK

I saw the blood on Adira's hand and my heart stopped beating. I didn't see her get hurt in the fight, so I had no idea when that happened or how long she had been bleeding for. I looked down at her and saw that her side was seeping with blood. I grew terrified for the baby and the mate, knowing we had to get her help immediately.

Adira started swaying, her eyes growing unfocused. Her hand pressed against my chest to steady herself, but then I felt her body go limp in my arms. I caught her before she fell and picked her up bridal style.

I looked at the others with wide eyes. "Adira needs help. She's hurt!" I moved over to Ginger, who had created some sort of magical bonds around Cain's arms to restrain him. "You have to heal her," I begged Ginger. My voice was strained, and I felt like I was about to lose it.

Ginger's face fell. "I have never been very good at healing, but I'll do what I can. Set her down."

I lowered Adira to the ground gently, but when I went to let go, she squeezed my arm. "Mark," she whispered. "I wanted to tell you this earlier, but I'm pregnant."

I cradled her head in my arms. "I know, baby. I know. We're going to save both of you. Don't worry."

Adira's eyes were half lidded, and I could tell she was fighting. "I'm sorry I didn't do a better job at protecting us."

I shook my head. "No, no. You have nothing to apologize for. You were amazing today. Now save your strength."

I looked up at Ginger pleadingly. We were too far away from anything to get immediate attention. Ginger kept one hand towards Cain to keep him in place, and she used her other hand to touch Adira. Her eyes went white as she touched her, and I held my breath, waiting for an answer.

Ginger's eyes returned to normal. "She and the baby are okay for the moment, but their hearts are growing weaker. I slowed down the bleeding, but

they will need more medical attention as soon as possible, or else..." She stopped talking.

I nodded, understanding what she was saying. I picked Adira up, holding her close to my body. I looked over to Rie and Scythe. "Is Doctor Zayla with you by any chance?"

Rie stepped forward, looking paler than normal. I knew she was terrified, but she was doing a good job at hiding these emotions. "She's coming, but I don't know if she'll have what we need here. We should get her back home as soon as possible."

"I can heal her," Cain said, drawing everyone's attention to him.

"You will not touch her. It's your fault she's in this position," I growled, my alpha tone emerging. I held Adira closer to me, feeling the struggling of her chest moving from the pain she was in. Cain had taken her away from me already. I couldn't trust that he wouldn't try something again.

"She needs help, and I can help her. Is it worth the risk of trying to get her medical attention?" Cain asked. "I understand why you don't trust me, but you don't have a choice. Look, I didn't know about the baby. I wouldn't have... I didn't mean to..."

Rie and Scythe looked at me with wide eyes, but I ignored their stares. Now was not the time to get into Adira's pregnancy. I kept my eyes on Cain's, hoping I would be able to find the right choice in his face. I was terrified he was lying, but I was more terrified of losing Adira right now.

"If you do anything to harm her, I will make sure you die a slow and painful death." I kept my grip tight on Adira, too afraid to let her go.

Ginger looked at me and nodded. "If he tries anything, he won't be leaving here alive or with her." She turned to Cain. "If you hurt that girl or the baby, you won't escape. I will make sure of it. I have more years of sorcery under my belt, and I can guarantee you won't defeat me."

"I'm not going to hurt my daughter or grandchild," Cain said. "I know you won't believe me, but everything I have done is to protect Adira."

Cain's voice sounded sincere, if not a little manic. I believed that in his mind he thought he was trying to save Adira, but that didn't actually change what he

did or make up for anything. Knowing I couldn't waste any more time, I approached Cain, letting him get close to Adira. Ginger released Cain's restraints, but she kept close to him in case he tried to pull anything. Cain placed his hands on Adira's wound, and I held my breath, hoping I wasn't making the biggest mistake of my life.

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ADIRA

Moon and Shadow approached me slowly. I smiled when I saw the two of them. It was good seeing them like that. They were slow with their movements, and they sat down in front of me simultaneously. I was sitting cross-legged in the familiar white room, and there was a sense of overwhelming peace filling me.

"That was incredible," Shadow said. "I didn't know you could use magic like that."

I smiled and petted Shadow's head. "I didn't know I had that kind of power in me, either. You know what the crazy part is? I'm pretty sure that wasn't the full extent of my magic."

"It wasn't," Moon confirmed. "You have grown significantly in your abilities, but you have much to learn in regards to powers, if you can manage to live long enough to reach your full potential."

"Do you have to be so grim?" Shadow snapped. "We were enjoying a moment of celebration together."

"I'm just being realistic," Moon said, rolling her eyes. "I know both of you feel it. We don't have much longer."

I frowned, knowing what Moon said was true. I could feel my strength waning, and part of me felt Mark's arms around me, terrified we wouldn't get to live our best life together.

"I'm not ready. Mark needs me," I said.

"I'm not ready either." Shadow let out a whimper and placed her head on my lap. "We just got our mate back, and we haven't even had a chance to celebrate our pup together."

Moon moved closer, snuggling up to me as well. It was strange having her show any kind of affection. "I'm not ready either, but we can't heal ourselves. We don't have that kind of energy or strength."

I should have felt afraid of the future, but I couldn't feel any fear. I only felt this calm peacefulness. It was a feeling I was very familiar with. I felt it every time Mark held me in his arms as we fell asleep together. I felt it when he held my hand and gave me gentle kisses. Even though I could feel Mark's fear, his touch gave me strength, and I knew he would figure something out. He wouldn't give up. Not when we just got each other back.

"Mark will figure it out." I lay back and stretched my limbs. Either way, there was no point in stressing out right now. There was nothing I could do to change the circumstances anyway.

Moon jumped onto my stomach, making me jump. "How can you be so calm?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "You said it yourself. We can't heal ourselves. Mark has us. It's up to him now, and I trust him with my life."

Shadow shifted to my side and lay down next to me. Her paws framed her face, and she looked at me with sad eyes. "I'm scared."

I reached down and stroked her head, trying to calm her down. I knew I should have been scared, but something deep down inside of me told me I didn't need to be scared. It was going to be okay.

A bright light in the distance glared into my eyes, so I sat up to get a better look at it, knocking Moon off me in the process. Something drew me towards the light, so I stood up and started walking towards it.

"Um, don't you know they always say, 'Don't go into the light,'" Moon asked as she ran to catch up to me.

Shadow jumped up and joined me on my other side. "What Moon said. We should walk away from the light."

I smiled and said, "This is different. Something is telling me this light is a good thing."

I continued walking on, and the closer I got to the light, the more energy I had. I picked up my pace until the light was surrounding me completely.

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MARK

I couldn't breathe as Cain held his hand against Adira's wound. This was taking much too long. She should have woken up by now. My chest ached from not breathing, but I couldn't get my body to take a breath, not until Adira was okay.

I held her tighter, growing more and more afraid. If Cain couldn't heal her, then I didn't know what I would do. I leaned down and pressed my lips against her forehead. "Please, Adira. Don't give up on me now." Tears filled my eyes, but I did my best to swallow them. I had to be strong for her and our baby.

When I pulled away from the kiss, I saw the most beautiful pair of brown eyes staring back at me. The tears finally spilled over.

"Hi," Adira whispered.

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ADIRA

As I regained consciousness, tears began to flow down Mark's face. I could feel his fear and relief releasing all at once, and it broke my heart to see him like that. I reached up and touched his face to comfort him. "I'm okay."

Mark buried his face into my neck, trying to hold back the sobs that were starting to surface. I wrapped my hand around the back of his neck and held him close. I knew he would do whatever he could to save me, but he doubted himself. For a brief moment, he had to imagine what it would be like to lose me, and I knew exactly how he felt. I had to face that fear not that long ago, only now Mark and I had grown closer. I wasn't sure if I could handle facing him on his deathbed again.

"We need to get Alpha Lyna some medical attention," Mason said, breaking the silence.

Mark pulled away from me just enough to face everyone, but he didn't let go of me. "Is he stable?"

“He seems to be stable for now, but I’m not sure how long that will last,” Mason said.

Footsteps echoed through the forest, and soon more warriors were joining us in the field. They began to approach us, ready to help.

Scythe put his hand on Mark’s shoulder. “Just worry about Adira. We’ll handle the rest of this.”

Mark nodded, releasing his authority to Scythe. “Thank you. For everything.”

He stood up, keeping me in his arms.

“I can walk,” I said. My body was tired, but I felt significantly better. I knew I was going to be okay.

Mark looked down at me with wide eyes. “I’m not letting you go.”

I decided not to push it, especially because I didn’t mind being in Mark’s arms again. I felt like I could relax for the first time since Cain had kidnapped me. I nuzzled my face against Mark’s chest and closed my eyes. Everything wasn’t over yet, but at least I was back with my mate.

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Reyland and Jori were taken back to the pack house and checked up by Doctor Zayla. Neither of them had regained consciousness after the battle, which worried me. At least they were alive for now, though.

Cain was taken into custody and held in a prison cell. Belladonna was used to subdue his magic until it was decided what to do with him. The first priority was making sure everyone was okay. Cain would come later.

Mark and I sat in Doctor Zayla’s office, waiting for me to get checked up on. Jori and Reyland had received priority medical attention, since they were still injured. Cain had mostly healed me, so I insisted on waiting my turn. Mark was against this, but there wasn’t much he could do to change the circumstances.

Mark and I hadn’t had a chance to talk much since the fight with Xavier, since I had fallen asleep on the drive back. My body was more exhausted from everything than I had realized. Now that we were back at the pack house, a

heavy question weighed on my mind. Mark now knew I was pregnant, and I was scared. I was afraid to bring it up, since we hadn't discussed children before, and I still didn't know if he wanted children.

I was sitting on the patient's table with Mark's hand in mine while waiting for Doctor Zayla to finish up with Reyland. Mark was staring off into space, so I squeezed his hand to get his attention. I couldn't keep putting off this conversation.

Mark looked at me and smiled. "Hey, sorry. I don't mean to be ignoring you. I just haven't slept much since you were gone."

"I didn't get much sleep either. It was awful being away from you," I said. I squeezed his hand again.

Mark inched closer to me and placed his hand on my thigh. "I'm just glad you're back."

I nodded in agreement. I opened my mouth to ask him my question, but fear held me back. I just had him back, and if he didn't want children, I wasn't sure how I would handle that.

Mark tilted his head. "What's on your mind, baby?"

I bit my lip and looked down. "Are you ready to have kids?" I looked up at Mark slowly, curious about his reaction.

Mark squeezed my hand and leaned forward to press his lips against mine. When he pulled back, he gave me a soft smile. "Honestly, not really. I'm absolutely terrified to be a father." My heart froze. "But I'm not sure anyone is ever ready to be a father. If you are asking me if I'm excited about this baby, that's a completely different story."

"You're excited?" I whispered.

Mark pressed his hand against my stomach. "The love of my life is having my baby. We are going to be a family. Of course I'm excited. I'm also terrified because this is happening much sooner than I ever imagined, but that doesn't change the fact that I love you, and I will love our child."

My heart swelled and tears threatened my eyes. "I'm scared, too," I admitted. "What if I'm not a good mother? What if-

Mark quickly cut me off. "Hey, hey, hey. First off, you will be a wonderful mother. You are so caring and capable. It might be hard, but we'll figure it out together."

I wrapped my arms around Mark's neck and kissed him. The moment our lips met, a familiar spark ignited. I deepened the kiss, suddenly desperate for Mark's touch again. It had been too long, and even though I didn't hold his mark on my neck anymore, I craved every part of his body.

Doctor Zayla cleared her throat, interrupting the kiss. I quickly pulled back, feeling flushed with excitement and embarrassment.

"I see how you ended up pregnant now," Doctor Zayla commented.

"Zay," Mark instantly scolded. His scolding wouldn't change anything though. Doctor Zayla had always been a blunt person, even when Mark let her know she should use more finesse with her words.

"Am I wrong?" Doctor Zayla asked, raising her eyebrows.

"I've never said you were wrong, but those kinds of comments can be awkward." Mark slipped his hand back into mine and held it tightly.

Doctor Zayla ignored Mark's comment. "Let's check on this baby, shall we? I know the mother experienced some trauma."

I tightened my grip on Mark's hand. After everything I had been through, I was worried it would cause issues with the pregnancy. Even though I was terrified to be a mother, I was also excited. If I lost this baby, I didn't know what I would do. Mark tightened his grip back, and I knew he was just as afraid as me.

Doctor Zayla scurried around the room, pulling out the equipment she needed. "Lie back," she ordered, grabbing a bottle.

When I was lying down, she pulled up my shirt and squirted a cool gel onto my stomach. I jumped, not expecting the cool sensation. Mark gave Doctor Zayla a look, but she completely ignored him. She turned on a little screen and then she grabbed a small device and pressed it against my stomach. She moved it around until she found what she was looking for.

Suddenly, I heard a small heart beat, and my eyes flickered to the screen. Doctor Zayla turned the screen so we could see it better. Mark's other hand grabbed me, and his eyes were wide as he stared at the screen.

"That's our baby's heartbeat?" he asked in complete awe.

Doctor Zayla nodded. She pointed at the screen. "And right here is your baby."

"It's okay?" I whispered. "The baby is okay?"

Doctor Zayla nodded. "From what I can see, yes. I would like to closely monitor your pregnancy, because you have been through a lot of trauma, which can cause complications. As of right now, the heartbeat is strong, so don't worry too much."

Mark's body tensed up. "What kind of issues could there be?"

"Let's not worry about that yet," Doctor Zayla said. "Adira should take the next couple of days to fully recover. I recommend her to stay off her feet for at least a day or two just to be safe."

I frowned at that idea. Now that I was back here, there was so much I wanted to do. I didn't like the idea of being stuck in bed for a few days, but it wasn't worth causing any risk for the baby. "Thank you, Doctor Zayla."

"Adira, you've known me long enough. You can just call me Zayla," she said. "You are going to be my luna after all. No need for such formalities."

"Thanks, Zayla," I said, smiling. That was the most affection she had ever shown me. "How are Jori and Reyland doing, by the way?"

Zayla's face shifted at my question, and she looked much more serious. "Alpha Lyna should be okay. He lost a lot of blood, which is why I suspect he still hasn't regained consciousness, but I expect him to awaken in a few hours."

I smiled, knowing Reyland would be okay. There were some things I wanted to talk to him about, so I was relieved, knowing I would get that chance. "And what about Jori?"

Zayla's face hardened. "I don't have good news for him. I don't necessarily have bad news, either. He is stable for now, but he sustained a lot of injuries. His heartbeat is also unusually weak. I don't know if he will wake up or not, because I don't understand how he got this way. I don't understand why we are helping him, either."

Mark looked at me, and I could tell he had the same question as Zayla. I hadn't had a chance to explain what I knew about Jori yet. Mark had trusted me in regards to Jori. It was time I explained.

"Jori was possessed by the Son of Blood and Magic," I said.

Mark's face twisted. "He was possessed? How? How long?"

I looked down. "I don't fully understand it, but I guess he— his name is Xavier—planted his energy in Jori a few months ago, and he has been slowly taking control over Jori's body. That's how he was using magic, and why something seemed so wrong with him." I looked at Mark directly. "Jori was never my fated mate, either. Apparently, I was connected to Xavier, not Jori."

Mark looked flabbergasted as he processed this information. His face shifted from relief to confusion and then anger over and over again. "So during that fight, that's what that black cloud was? It was the Son of Blood and Magic?"

"I think so. I think I was able to remove Xavier's energy from Jori, but I don't know what that means for him. I don't know if I saved him or not, and I don't know if Xavier is actually gone or not. I don't know if I did enough."

Mark pressed his lips against the top of my head. "You did what you could do, which is more than what I could ever do. We'll figure out the rest. Maybe Ginger knows something about possession."

I knew Mark was right, but I was still worried. I knew this wasn't the end of the fight, but I felt so exhausted.

"Does he have something to do with our mate mark disappearing?" Mark asked.

I looked at him surprised. I hadn't realized Mark had experienced that as well. "No, that was Cain. I don't know how he did it, but he used some sort of magic to remove it."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 55

ADIRA

Mark's face twisted at my words, and I could see his fury. "I'm going to kill him for doing that. He has no right to make such decisions."

I quickly grabbed Mark's arm, trying to calm him down. "I completely understand. I never want to see Cain again after everything he has done, but we still have the Council of Magic to worry about. He might have vital information for us for that."

Mark took a deep breath, but I could still feel his anger coursing through him. He turned to Zayla after a moment. "Is there any danger of marking each other again?"

"Let me see the spot where your marks were," she said.

Mark pulled his shirt down, exposing his skin. Zayla touched the nook of his neck where my mark used to be. I hated seeing that spot empty again. It reminded me that the connection Mark and I used to have was gone, and I missed it. I missed being able to just link him whenever I wanted.

"This is so interesting. It looks like there was never a mark there in the first place," Zayla said.

"I know Cain's magic mostly revolves around time manipulation," I said. "It's possible he simply reversed time on that spot, but I don't know enough about magic to know if that's what he did."

Zayla nodded as she listened. "If that's the case, then I don't see any harm in doing it. It might even help Adira recover. If you feel physically up for it, then I will leave it up to you."

I looked at Mark and smiled. I was ready to return to our bedroom and mark each other again right now, but I had a feeling Mark would be hesitant. He was worried about me and the baby, and even though Zayla gave me the clear, I had a feeling he would want to be cautious.

"Thank you for everything, Zayla," I said. "Please let me know if there are any changes with Reyland or Jori. I would like to visit them later."

“I will,” Zayla said.

“We should get going. I want to make sure Adira gets proper rest.” Mark picked me up in his arms and started carrying me out of the room. I wrapped my arms around his neck and rested my head against him. I still felt exhausted from everything, so I was grateful for Mark’s assistance.

We made it back to the room, and Mark set me on the bed. “Do you need to clean up at all? Did Cain let you shower?” Mark looked down at the ground, and his hands were shaking. He was struggling with all of this still.

“He kept me in a room that had a bathroom. He gave me food as well. I’m okay. I promise. But a shower would feel nice. I want to wash the past few days off me.” I interlaced my fingers with Mark’s and pulled him close. It was awful for me to be away from Mark, but he also had the added layer of not knowing if I was alive or not. I could only imagine how difficult this all had been for him.

Mark stroked the back of my head. “I’ll start the bath for you. It’ll be more relaxing.” He started to walk away, but I held him back. Even though I knew he was just going to the bathroom to run the water for me, I couldn’t stand the thought of being away from him for a second. I had missed him way too much, and I hadn’t had enough time with him to counteract that feeling of emptiness.

Mark looked at me a little confused.

“Don’t leave me,” I said, looking down.

Mark grabbed my chin and made me look at him. He kissed my lips while stroking my cheek with his thumb. “I’m not going anywhere again. Don’t worry.” He wrapped his arms around my waist and lifted me up. He brought me to the bathroom with him and set me on the toilet.

He then started running the water, testing the temperature with his hand. When it was at the level he wanted, he turned to me and grabbed the hem of my shirt, pulling it above my head. He tossed it to the side and then helped me remove my bottoms. He turned the water off and then undressed himself. He grabbed me and then sat in the bathtub, placing me in front of him.

He poured some soap on a luffa and then started washing my back with it. I let my hang forward as he continued washing my back. The soft scratches the luffa made on my back and the little touches from Mark’s hands were

absolutely amazing. My body relaxed more and more. Once he was done with my back, Mark pulled me against his chest and started washing my front.

Mark's lips brushed against my ear as he whispered, "I missed you so much while you were gone." He nipped at my earlobe, making a tingle run down my body.

I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. "I missed you too."

Mark pressed his lips against my neck and gently started sucking on it. His hands moved down on my chest and started massaging my breasts. He swirled his fingers around my n****s, making them go erect. Small moans poured out of my mouth, and I could feel Mark harden behind me.

"Mark," I moaned, wanting even more.

Mark groaned in response. He grabbed my chin with one hand and made me look at him. He looked at me with his bright blue eyes with an intensity and love I hadn't seen before. "I missed your noises." He kissed my lips softly, moving his other hand down my stomach. "I miss the feel of your skin against mine." He kissed me again. "I missed holding you in my arms, knowing you are all mine."

His fingers slipped between my legs and began moving up and down slowly. I gasped at his touch, and he caught my mouth with his lips to muffle the sound. As he continued moving, I grew breathless from his touch. It didn't take much for the he at to start building in my core.

"Mark," I whimpered, needy and desperate for more.

"Don't worry, baby. I'll take care of you." Mark slipped his fingers inside and started pumping. His lips started peppering my neck and his free hand traced my collarbones. He moved faster and faster until I couldn't take it anymore. My body seized up from the sudden pressure until it suddenly exploded, filling my body with a feeling of euphoria.

When it stopped, I slumped against Mark, feeling drained and ready to sleep again.

"Feel better?" Mark asked, whispering in my ear. I hummed and nodded, too tired to speak. "Good," he said.

He finished helping me wash up, taking his time to wash my hair. When he was done, we rinsed off, and he wrapped me in a towel and carried me to the bed. He set me down and found a pair of pajamas and started dressing me.

I lifted my hand and stopped him. "What about you?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" he asked, holding my shirt in front of him.

My cheeks flushed a little. "Well, you made me finish. What about you?"

Mark smiled softly and kissed the top of my head. "There will be time for that later when you are more rested. I'm perfectly content knowing you are safe and taken care of."

I pouted, wanting more of a connection with Mark. He was probably right, though. I was pretty exhausted, and I wasn't sure if I could handle any more activity. I nodded and let Mark continue helping me get dressed. He pulled on a pair of boxers and then crawled into the bed behind me, pulling me close to him.

I turned so I could look at him. "I was hoping we could mark each other again," I admitted. "I hate not bearing your mark, and I hate not being able to link you anymore."

Mark grabbed my hand and kissed it. "I know. I hate that too, but you've been through a lot, and so has the baby. I don't want to put too much stress on your body. Tomorrow we'll do it as long as you're feeling better."

"Okay," I agreed reluctantly.

"I love you," Mark said, staring at me with wide eyes. It was as if he was afraid to blink.

"I love you, too." I kissed his lips softly. It felt good to be safe in his arms again. I stroked his cheek. "I can't wait for things to go back to normal."

Mark's face fell. "I'm not sure if there will be a normal for a while, still. With Jori being in a coma, I have to figure out what to do about that. Hopefully Reyland wakes up soon, too, because I don't think I can handle three werewolf packs. Then there's the Council of Magic. We still don't know if they are after you, and I will not let anyone else take you. And then there's the baby. I need to

make sure you two are safe and find a way to make a good home for you both.”

Mark’s body was tense as he spoke. All of his concerns flowed out of his mouth as soon as he started speaking, and I hated seeing him like that. Not only was he worried about me and now our baby, but he had our pack to consider and Jori’s. His alpha responsibilities were weighing heavily on him.

“Don’t forget you have plenty of people to support you. Scythe and Rie will help you out with our pack. I’m sure Daniel and Percy can help with Pack Sallow. Mason will surely help with Pack Lyna, and Reyland should wake up soon. And I’m here. I can help take care of this pack.” I pressed my hand over Mark’s heart. “You’re not alone, and you will never be.”

Mark grabbed my hand and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. “I’m lucky to have found you.”

I smiled at him. “I’m the lucky one.”

—

MARK

After sleeping for several hours, I woke up with a voice in my head.

Alpha, I have an update for you, Scythe linked. Do you have a moment?

I looked over at Adira with groggy eyes. She was sleeping peacefully, and I didn’t want to disturb her, but I knew I couldn’t neglect my alpha duties forever.

What’s going on? I linked back.

Can you meet me in the conference room? He asked.

I watched Adira’s chest rise and fall slowly. She was finally calm and relaxed, but I didn’t want to leave her. After everything she had been through, I didn’t want to risk her waking up by herself. I was also being selfish, and I didn’t want to leave her side. Even before Adira had been kidnapped, we hadn’t spent much time together, so now I didn’t want to spend a moment away from my mate.

Can you meet me in my room? I linked him back.

I'll be there in a moment.

I crawled out of bed, careful not to wake Adira up. She shifted when I pulled away, so I paused for a moment, waiting for her to relax again. When she fell into a deeper sleep, I kissed her head and made my way out of bed. I grabbed a robe and pulled it around my body. I went to the door and cracked it open, waiting for Scythe to arrive.

It wasn't long before he and Percy were at my door. I opened the door a little more, but I kept it cracked. I wanted Adira to see where I was in case she woke up. "What's going on?" I asked in a whisper.

Scythe glanced into the room. "Are you sure you want to discuss this here? I don't want to disturb Adira."

I nodded. "I can't leave her side."

Scythe didn't push it anymore and started talking. "Cain is in custody, but he is demanding to speak to Adira. The psychopath still thinks he was in the right, and he feels entitled to talk to Adira, since he saved her life."

"That's not happening," I said quickly. I never wanted Cain to lay his eyes on Adira again.

Scythe nodded. "Percy also has an update on Pack Sallow."

Percy stepped up. "I did what I could there, but they need an alpha. Right now, they don't have an alpha and a beta, so there was only so much I could do. They need guidance. Until we figure out what's going on with Jori, I was thinking you could take over as alpha."

I frowned. "I can help out, but I don't think I should be the one to take over the pack. That could just cause problems with Jori when he wakes up."

"If he wakes up," Scythe said. "If he is still the same person. If Adira is right about what happened to him, we have no way of knowing if he is still the same person."

Percy looked me directly in the eyes. "I know there is a complicated history with you and the pack, but they need you. They need an alpha, and you are the only one suited for the job."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 56

ADIRA

I woke up to Mark gently shaking me awake. I opened my eyes and smiled when I saw him staring at me. “What time is it?” I asked. It was still dark in the room, which made me feel disoriented.

“It’s late.” Mark knelt next to the bed, waiting for me to sit up. “Zay told me Reyland woke up, and I knew you would want to see him. If you want to go back to sleep, we can visit him in the morning.”

I lay my head on the pillow for a second, ready to go back to sleep, but when my brain processed what Mark had said, I flung forward with wide eyes. “He’s awake?”

“He woke up a few minutes ago. He was asking about you.” Mark moved to pick me up, but I stopped him.

“I can walk,” I insisted. I swung my legs over the bed and stood up. Mark hesitated, ready to pick me up, but he let me do what I wanted.

“If you get tired, let me know, and I’ll carry you.”

I lifted up on my toes and kissed him on the cheek. “I will. I just want to stretch my legs.”

Mark interlaced his fingers with mine, and together we walked to Doctor Zayla’s office. The lights were low, which emphasized the lights coming off the various machines around the room. We walked past Jori to get to Reyland’s bed, and my eyes lingered on Jori for a moment. He looked extremely pale, and his chest was barely moving with each breath. I wondered if he would ever get past this and wake up. I had so many questions for him.

We continued on, and in the patient’s bed at the end of the room was Reyland. He was sitting up, sipping on some water. Zayla was examining him by pressing a stethoscope to his chest and back. After listening to his breathing for a few minutes, she stepped back.

“Your heart sounds strong, and your breathing sounds normal. At this rate, I will be okay with releasing you around noon tomorrow. You recovered nicely.” Zayla made eye contact with me and then nodded. “I will check on you later.”

Zayla turned and walked away, giving us a little bit of privacy. Mark was still holding my hand, and I knew he didn't plan on going anywhere.

Reyland looked at me and smiled. "Adira. You're here."

I smiled at him, relieved he was still alive. I was terrified from seeing him bleeding after being attacked. It made me grateful I never joined him on the battlefield as a child. "You look well." My throat tightened as my emotions bubbled up.

"I feel much better. That doctor of yours is incredible. I might have to steal her from you." He chuckled at his own joke, and his laughter filled me with joy. It reminded me of my favorite parts of my childhood and felt like home.

Mark let go of my hand and pulled a chair up and motioned for me to sit down. "You should take it easy."

I sat in the chair, even though I felt okay. I wasn't going to worry about Mark right now. I turned my attention back to Reyland. "I need to thank you. You risked your life for me, and you put yourself directly in harm's way for my mate."

"It's the least I could do to help make up for what I did to you. Besides, what father wouldn't put himself in harm's way for his daughter?"

My heart swelled at his words, and my throat tightened even more. Hearing those words coming out of his mouth stirred something deep inside of me. "You're not technically my father," I reminded. It didn't feel that way, since Reyland was the best parent I had ever had, but it was also the reason he kicked me out on my sixteenth birthday. It made me hesitant to fully open up to him.

"I have come to realize that blood doesn't matter when it comes to determining your family. The people who choose to care about you and you choose to care about in return—those are the people who are your real family members." Reyland took a deep breath and looked down at his hands. "I know you may never see me as your father after what I did to you, but I will always see you as my daughter."

I chewed on my lip, unsure of how to respond. I missed Reyland more than I wanted to admit, but the pain of being rejected by him wouldn't go away instantly. With all of his help and sacrifices recently, I knew I was ready to

start to move on from what happened. Even if it took time, I knew I would get there eventually.

I reached forward and grabbed Reyland's hand. He looked at me with wide eyes and a slightly agape mouth.

"I've missed having you as my dad." My emotions choked me, and the tears sat on the brim of my eyelids. The moment I blinked, I knew the tears would spill over. "I want to rebuild that, if you are willing to be patient with me."

Reyland's face relaxed. "Of course. I'm just happy you aren't kicking me out right now."

I giggled, knowing it was only a half joke. "I can't kick you out now. The war isn't over yet. We've only won the battle."

"Did that bastard escape?" Reyland's jaw tightened. "He deserves to die a horrible and painful death after what he did to you."

I glanced at Mark, who was just patiently standing by during the conversation. There was a subtle anger in his face, and I knew he was just as angry as Reyland, if not more so.

"I'm not sure," I admitted. "I think we saved a friend, but I don't know if the true enemy is gone or not. I still don't understand a lot of these magic things."

Reyland closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I can only imagine. It's a lot to take in."

Mark stepped forward. "We'll figure it out, though. We have a lot of resources, and surely Cain knows more about the situation. We'll make him talk."

Reyland gave Mark a sharp nod. "It's good to hear you captured him." He turned to me. "Are you doing okay? Did he hurt you?"

My hand slid to my missing mark and thought about the pain I felt when Cain had removed it. I swallowed hard and decided not to go into detail about that.

"I'm okay," I said. "I just need some rest to be safe."

"Make sure to actually get that rest. Whatever you think you need to do can wait." Reyland looked at Mark. "I trust you will keep an eye on her, son."

Mark smiled. "Of course. I insist on making sure they're healthy."

Reyland tilted his head to the side. "They?" he repeated.

I looked at Mark to see his reaction. He was looking back at me and nodded to me. I smiled and looked at Reyland. "Yes, you're going to be a grandfather."

Reyland looked like he had stopped breathing. He looked back and forth between Mark and myself. His eyes finally settled on me. "Wait, you're pregnant."

I beamed, excited to finally share the news. "Yes. Not everyone knows yet, so do me a favor and don't tell anyone yet."

Reyland reached forward and pulled me into a big bear hug. "I can't believe I'm going to be a grandpa. Of course I won't tell anyone."

Mark looked at me sheepishly. "By the way, Rie and Scythe know, so just expect their reactions when you finally see them."

I knitted my eyebrows, confused for a moment. Then I realized they were there when I told Mark about the pregnancy. It wasn't exactly the way I imagined the announcement, but none of this was how I imagined it.

The door to the patient's room slammed open with a loud bang! I looked over and saw Luna Freya storming towards us. She looked wild and furious. She moved right over to Reyland.

"Wait!" a warrior yelled, running into the room after her. "Ma'am, you're not allowed in here."

Mark held up his hand, signaling to the warrior that he had the situation. My heart raced seeing my mother rush into the room. I had no desire to talk to her after our last conversation. I was hoping I would never see her again after how she treated me.

"You promised you'd take me when you went to find Cain," she snapped. "How dare you go back on your word like that!"

Reyland's eyes narrowed at the sight of my mother. "It was an emergency situation, and Adira's life was in danger. I didn't have time to wait for you to show up."

Freya's face started to turn red, and she lifted her hand to slap Reyland. Mark grabbed her hand mid-slap.

"You have no right to walk into my pack house and slap my guests, especially one who is lying in a hospital bed. Do you have no sense of respect?" Mark's voice was deep, and his alpha energy was oozing out.

"I am the luna of Pack Lyna, young man. You're the one disrespecting a luna from a well-known pack," Freya snapped.

Mark held her hand firmly. "I know exactly who you are, and I simply don't care. I don't put up with anyone disrespecting my pack or my guests. I suggest you address me appropriately, or I will have you escorted out of this house."

Freya clenched her jaw, and it looked like she was about to explode. She took a deep breath to compose herself and took a step back. "I was promised to be taken to see Cain in exchange for information to help find Adira. Since Adira has been returned, I'm assuming my information was well used. Now I expect my end of the bargain to be fulfilled."

Mark clasped his hands behind his back. "The prisoner won't have any visitors right now, but we can discuss a compromise at a later date. We can find a room for you, but it's late, Luna Freya. We all need rest, and these matters will not be discussed tonight."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 57

ADIRA

Luna Freya was escorted out of the patient's room, and the entire time, my heart was pounding. I didn't understand why I was so afraid to see her. She had never done anything to physically hurt me, and there was nothing she could do to hurt me, but I sat there frozen with fear, hoping she wouldn't talk to me.

My heart hurt as I watched her fight for her right to see Cain, wishing she had fought for me like that one time in my entire life. Deep down, I knew she thought of me as a burden and nothing more.

When she was finally out of the room, Mark turned back to me. He cupped my cheeks and made me look at him. "It's okay. She's gone."

I tried to swallow, but my throat was dry. It was irrational to feel so much fear from someone I used to call "mother," but I was having a hard time calming down my heart.

Mark grabbed my hand and squeezed it. "Let's get you back to bed. It's late."

"She doesn't have any power over you," Reyland said, looking at the entrance to the door. "Just because she is your mother, it doesn't mean she has any place in your life."

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my heart. "I know. I just wasn't expecting to see her right now."

Mark turned to Reyland. "What was this deal you made with her?"

Reyland turned and looked Mark in the eyes. "I planned on telling you once I got back, but that's when we found out where Adira was being held. Freya requested to be present when the search party went to find Cain in exchange for information. I agreed to it, because I was desperate for information, but with how fast everything happened, it wasn't worth even attempting to bring her."

Mark was silent for a moment. He looked at me, and his eyes brightened. "I completely understand. I would have likely made that same deal in your situation. Perhaps we can arrange a meeting with the two of them, depending on how my interrogation goes with Cain."

"I want to be with you when you talk to Cain," I said.

Mark took a step back. "I don't want you anywhere near him, not after what he did to you."

"I agree with Mark," Reyland said. "That man should never set eyes on you again."

I stood up and looked at both of them. Mark tried to help me up, but I brushed him off. "I understand where you two are coming from. Part of me would be happy if I never saw him again, but I feel like it is more important for me to be there. As messed up as his actions have been, I believe he believes he was just trying to protect me. If anyone is going to get information from him, I have the best chance."

"I don't like this," Mark stated firmly.

I grabbed his hand. "I know, but I won't be alone. You and others will be with me."

"If he tries anything to hurt you, I won't be able to hold back from killing him." Mark's face was hardened as he spoke. I could see all of the pent-up anger and fear still lingering on his face. If he wasn't more concerned about my health, I was confident Mark would have killed Cain on that battlefield. Messing with an alpha's mate was one of the dumbest things a person could do.

I kissed Mark on the cheek and smiled. "I would expect nothing less from my alpha."

Mark looked down at me with wide eyes, and this time there was something else lingering there.

Reyland cleared his throat, and he looked around awkwardly. "I'm glad to see you doing well, Adira, but I think we should all get some more rest before the sun tells the world it's time to get up."

I chuckled to myself, realizing Reyland was feeling uncomfortable at the idea of his daughter flirting with her mate in front of him. He never did have to deal with that when I was a teenager, since I hadn't dated anyone while I was still a part of Pack Lyna.

I leaned over and kissed Reyland on the cheek. "Good night, dad."

Reyland beamed in response. "Good night, Adira."

—

The next morning, I was feeling significantly better. My body wasn't as tired after getting some proper sleep with my mate. I was up fairly early, feeling the

need to get started for the day. I know Doctor Zayla said I should take it easy, but I was buzzing and couldn't stand the idea of being in my room any longer.

Just as I finished getting dressed, I heard a knock at our door. Mark was still in bed, fast asleep, so I tiptoed over to the door. I cracked it open, and instantly Rie burst through the door, wrapping her arms around me. She held me tightly and didn't let go for a moment.

"I'm so happy you are okay and back here!" Her voice was by no means quiet, and I heard Mark stirring in the bed.

"Why are you so loud?" Mark groaned, turning over.

"I'm happy my luna is home! And I haven't had a chance to talk to Adira yet," Rie defended. "It's not my fault you are still in bed."

"It's my room," Mark grumbled, pulling a pillow over his head.

"It's also Adira's, so you have to deal with my presence," Rie said. Her voice was loud and peppy, and this was the best mood I had seen her in for a while.

Mark grabbed his pillow and chucked it at Rie, hitting her in the face. I burst out in laughter at the shock on Rie's face. I stepped in between them before things got more chaotic.

"Okay, that's enough children." I sat on the bed and looked at Mark. "I'm going to go get breakfast with Rie. You can join us when you're ready."

"Actually, I need Adira for the morning. You can have her after," Rie said.

Mark glared at Rie for a moment before looking back at me. "Have fun, and don't be too long. I want to spend more time with you today."

"I'll come right back to you when we are done." I kissed Mark on the cheek and tried to stand up. He quickly pulled me back for a real kiss. His tongue dipped into my mouth, making my core buzz with excitement. For a moment, I completely forgot about Rie in the room, and I just wanted to stay in bed with Mark all morning.

Rie groaned and grabbed my wrist, pulling me away from Mark. "Very funny, Mark."

Mark smirked at her. "I was just giving my mate a kiss goodbye."

“Uh-huh.” Rie didn’t believe Mark for a second, knowing exactly what he was doing. She pulled me out of the room and towards the dining room.

My face was still flushed from the kiss with Mark, and my mind was preoccupied with thoughts of being marked by my mate once again.

“Earth to Adira,” Rie said, waving her hand in front of my face. I hadn’t even realized we were already in the breakfast nook.

I bit my lip, feeling a little embarrassed. I knew Rie knew what I was thinking about. “Sorry.”

Rie rolled her eyes. “It’s fine. I know exactly what Mark did. I’m just glad we finally have a moment together. It’s been much too long since we’ve had a chance to talk, and there’s so much we need to go over.”

“Oh, like that mark on your neck?” I teased. I could see Rie’s fresh mate mark on her neck, sticking out of her shirt.

Rie’s face turned bright red, and her eyes veered away from mine. She tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. “Mason is great.”

“He is. I still can’t believe my childhood best friend mated with one of my current best friends,” I said with a smile. It was a sweet couple, and I couldn’t have been happier for both of them.

Rie bit her lip to try to hide her smile, but there was no hiding it. “That’s a little weird to think about, but I never thought I’d find my mate in the midst of all of this chaos.”

I reached out and grabbed her hand. “You deserve it. You two are adorable together.”

“Speaking of which, now that you’re back, we need to figure out when we are going to do your luna ceremony,” Rie said.

I shook my head. “That doesn’t have anything to do with what we are talking about.”

“Well, that’s enough talking about me,” Rie whined. “I’ve been wanting to figure out this ceremony—Scythe is going to need to be involved too—and catch up with you. I was scared we wouldn’t have a chance to plan this ceremony.”

Her energy shifted, and she looked down at the table. “I can’t even imagine what Mark was going through, because it sucked for me. I hated not knowing where you were or if I would ever see you again.”

“Rie.” I pulled my lips tight. I didn’t realize my missing presence would cause such turmoil for anyone other than Mark, but it made sense. I would have been upset if it had been Rie or anyone else taken away like that.

Rie suddenly looked up with a bright smile on her face. “And that’s why I want to focus on happy things like planning your luna ceremony and perhaps even a baby shower.” She lifted her eyebrows up, a devious look on her face.

My eyes went wide. How many people knew about the pregnancy? “We don’t need to worry about the latter one any time soon.”

Rie pushed her lower lip out and pouted. “Come on, Adira. I need details. You and Mark are going to have a baby?”

A smile spread across my face helplessly. “We are. I’m not very far along yet, though.”

“I can’t believe there’s going to be a baby in this pack,” Rie mused, smiling brighter than ever.

“Me neither. It doesn’t feel real yet.” I still felt like a kid in a lot of ways, so it was a weird thought that I would be a mother soon.

Rie reached over and grabbed my hands. “You are going to make a wonderful mother. You are already a great luna. So I’m thinking we plan for the luna ceremony on Friday. I know things aren’t over yet, but I also think we need some positivity in this house. What do you think?”

“I think that’s a great idea.”

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 58

MARK

I started getting ready for the day, unable to just sit there while Adira was having breakfast with Rie. I knew she would be safe with others around, but I still wasn’t a fan of leaving her side for very long. I didn’t want to hover,

though, so I took the time to shower, and then I went over to the infirmary to check on the patients.

As I walked in, I saw Reyland was getting dressed and Zayla was walking towards the door. I stopped her on her way out. "Reyland's being released?"

"Yes, alpha. He should still take it easy, but his wounds have completely healed now. He'll just face some residual lack of energy," Zayla indicated.

"That's excellent news." I looked over to the other patient's bed. "Any updates on Jori?"

"No, but you'll be the first to know when there is any update." Zayla grabbed my arm. "Alpha, I see that look on your face. You are not to blame for any of this. There was no way I could have prevented this."

I looked back at her. Zayla had known me since before I left Pack Sallow, years ago. She knew me when Jori was still my best friend and when I had found out the truth about my family heritage.

"I should have known. I did know to some extent. I knew the Jori we were talking to was not the Jori I knew from so many years ago, but I just wrote it off as he had changed. I was too wrapped up in wanting Adira to choose me that I didn't see what he was going through." I looked at the ground, feeling ashamed of myself. I had put my own priorities first, and I missed something extremely obvious.

"From what I understand, it was a slow change, and you and Jori had long been estranged. There was no way for you to know he was infected with the Son of Blood and Magic. You didn't even know that someone like that existed." Zayla tightened her grip on my arm. "Don't let yourself get stuck in the past. Look forward to what you can do now."

I nodded my head, knowing that was easier said than done, but she was right. I could help Jori's pack and make sure they were taken care of while he was incapacitated at the very least. "Thanks Zay."

"Any time, Alpha. I will take my leave now. I'm still working on that serum that will help make werewolves immune to magic. If that council does decide to come after Adira, we will be ready." Zayla left the room quickly.

Reyland walked up to me and placed a hand on my shoulder. "You have a heavy mind right now, son. Anything I can help with?"

I took a deep breath and looked at Reyland. He had surprised me time and time again since he came back into Adira's life. I was grateful to have an older alpha around as well. Since my parents died when I was at such a young age, the only father figure I had growing up was Jori's father, and he wasn't exactly a role model. He also passed away at a young age, forcing Jori into the alpha position before any young alpha should have been.

"I don't know what to do with Jori's pack while he's like this," I admitted. "They need a leader, and Percy is doing what he can, but he's only a beta, and technically he's not even the pack's beta since Jori kicked him out. That pack was left in shambles, and with my strange history with them, I don't know what else I can do." Even if I tried to help, I was sure I would be met with resistance of some sort.

Reyland squeezed my shoulder. "You come from a strong line of alphas, and you have one of the biggest hearts out of every alpha I have ever met. Follow your heart, be open and honest with them, and people will listen."

"Thanks, Reyland. Hopefully that will work."

Reyland nodded and let go of me. "I have some things I need to check up, but if you need anything, let me know." Reyland left the room, leaving me and Jori alone.

I slowly approached Jori's bed, my heart racing as I walked forward. He looked so unlike himself while he lay there in the bed. He was always a strong force, whether good or bad, so to see him so still and unmoving was unnerving. Even though I wasn't sure I could still consider him a friend, I still didn't wish this upon him.

I sat down in the chair next to Jori. "Jori, you have to pull through this. I know you would roll your eyes at me for saying this to you, especially after the bad blood between us, but there are people out there who need you. Percy cares about you and so does your pack. Just don't give up."

I wanted to say more, tell him that I wanted to try to work things out between us, but I didn't see the point. He probably couldn't hear me anyway, and even if he could, I doubted he would want to be friends again. I sat there for a moment longer before standing up.

“Get better soon, Jori.” I turned to walk out, but movement caught my attention from the corner of my eye. I thought I saw his hand move, but when I looked back, he was still and still as ever.

I decided to leave and head straight to the dining room. I felt emotionally drained after seeing Jori like that, and I wanted to see Adira again. When I made it to the dining room, it was starting to calm down, and only the stragglers for breakfast were still remaining. Adira and Rie were sitting in a corner booth, and Adira burst out into laughter, her eyes crinkling as her lips pulled up. She was glowing, and my heart warmed to see her so happy.

I grabbed a bagel and slid into the chair next to her. Rie gave me a dirty look at my sudden presence, but Adira turned and pecked me.

“You’re not supposed to be present for this conversation,” Rie said. “This is a girls-only conversation.”

I rolled my eyes. “Too bad. I missed my mate and wanted to see her. So you can continue your girly talk with me here or change the topic.”

Rie groaned. “You’re so annoying sometimes. You get her more often than I do.” She pouted out her lip.

“I’m not going to apologize for that. Don’t you miss Mason?” I raised my eyebrows at her, and she simply glared in return.

Adira interlaced his fingers between mine under the table. “Okay, children, no need to fight over me. Rie, we’ll figure out a time to find a dress for the luna ceremony soon, and we’ll have more time together.” Adira shifted closer to me and rested her head on my shoulder.

I felt better, knowing she was here with me. “You’re not going dress shopping, are you?” I didn’t like the idea of Adira going out right now, especially if I wasn’t going to be with her. I knew Rie wouldn’t want me there if they were picking the luna dress out.

“Don’t worry, Mark. I will get the dresses and then we will do a fashion show here to pick the dress. You will not be invited to that, though.” Rie made sure to emphasize the last part. She took this responsibility much too seriously, but I was also happy Adira had someone like her.

“As long as I can still be in the pack house at the time, I’m okay with that.” I felt better, knowing Adira would be here. I knew the pack house could still be infiltrated, as the Son of Blood and Magic proved, but we had more patrols in place, and I knew it was safer here than anywhere else.

“That I will accept.” Rie’s eyes blanked for a moment, and I knew she was being linked. She started to smile, and I knew who it might be. She came back to the moment, her face a little flushed. “Well, I’ll leave you two to enjoy each other’s company for now.”

“Say hi to Mason for me,” Adira teased.

Rie bit her lip and quickly dashed away with a quick, “Bye!” ringing out.

Adira chuckled and wrapped her arms around mine, holding me tightly. “They make such a cute couple.”

I wrapped my arms around Adira’s waist and pulled her onto my lap, needing her to be even closer. I nuzzled my nose against hers. “Not as cute as you.”

Adira giggled and tried to squirm out of my arms. “Mark. People are watching.”

“Let them. I want everyone to see how happy my mate makes me.” My voice was deep as I whispered to Adira.

Adira’s face flushed with embarrassment, but then I could feel her squirming in a different manner. She looked down at me, her eyes growing darker. “I don’t want to wait for you to mark me again. I feel better today.”

My pants tightened at the thought. I wanted more than anything to mark Adira again. Everyone needed to know she was my mate, but I also missed having her voice in my head.

“Are you sure?” I needed to be sure she was up for it, because I wasn’t sure how much I would be able to hold back again. If her body needed more recovery, I didn’t want to hurt her.

Adira blinked a few times, making her eyes wide and inviting. “Positive.” She was breathless, making my thoughts turn to dirty places. She pressed her lips against mine, moving slowly. This only hardened me more, and I knew if we didn’t stop this, I wouldn’t care who was watching me take my mate as mine again.

I stood up, cupping Adira's butt with my hands to support her. I squeezed her bottom, making her yelp with surprise. I knew people were watching, but I didn't care. I carried Adira to our room, eager to have her to myself again. I quickly shut the door behind me and locked it, knowing I could not afford any kind of interruption right now.

Turning around, I pressed Adria against the door and started attacking her with kisses. My tongue swirled around her mouth, enjoying her sweet taste. I couldn't get enough of her, and I started kissing her everywhere. I took my time on her neck, taking pleasure in every little noise she made. I needed more of her skin, so I held her with one hand and leaned back.

Adira helped me remove her shirt, exposing her chest to me. I took her n****e in my mouth and swirled my tongue around the sensitive bud. I pressed her back against the door, but she arched, pushing her body into me more. I could smell her arousal growing, which only made my own desire grow more. It took everything I had not to toss her down and fill her completely. I wanted to make sure she was enjoying everything as much as possible, and I still wanted to be careful with her.

Adira started grinding her hips against mine, and I couldn't take it anymore. She did things to me that I didn't even fully understand. I started undoing my belt while running my tongue up her neck again. I found her mouth and brushed her panties to the side. I slipped my tongue into her mouth while filling her up with my c**k. She moaned into my mouth, and I loved the sensation of her warmth wrapped around me.

I thrust into her with her still pressed against the door. She wrapped her arms around my neck. She bounced up and down on my c**k, and it felt amazing. It had been much too long that I had been in her like this, and I wasn't sure how much longer I could last. I stopped thrusting and moved her away from the door, still inside of her. I lay her on the bed beneath me and looked at her eyes, filled with bewilderment.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 59

ADIRA

My fingers quivered as I reached for Mark's shirt. I was shaking from pleasure already, but I still wanted more. I lifted his shirt above his, and he helped me speed up the process. He pulled out of me for a moment to remove the rest of his clothing. He slipped his fingers on my bottoms and pulled them off in one

swift motion. He slammed back into me, making me scream from the pleasure that radiated through my body.

He captured my lips with his own and nibbled on my bottom lip. My hands grasped for anything, and I found his hair, pulling it gently. He growled into my neck at the sensation and moved his hips faster and faster. I wrapped my legs around his waist to help him hit even deeper. He started hitting the perfect spot over and over again, and my eyes rolled behind my head.

“Mark,” I moaned. “I... I need you.”

“I know, baby.” He sucked on the sensitive spot that used to hold his mark. He nipped at me, teasing me with what my body needed most. He rolled his hips into mine, and I was breathless from all of the pleasure.

“Please,” I begged, arching my back. I wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him as close to me as possible.

Mark picked up the pace of his thrusts, and I felt the familiar build up of pleasure in my belly. I was on the edge of release, and Mark sensed that. He bit down on my neck, sending me over the edge. My body burned with pleasure, and the sensation filled every cell of my body. There was a slight searing pain, but Mark quickly licked the mark to help it heal. Something about this time around made the pleasure feel more intense.

Mark kissed me as I continued to ride out the wave of pleasure. When it was all over, my body relaxed, collapsing into the bed. The exhaustion began to overcome me, but I wasn't ready for that yet. I pulled myself back up, sucking on Mark's sensitive spot.

“You don't have to if you're too tired,” Mark whispered, wrapping his arm around my waist. He sat up, pulling me up with him.

I shifted so I was straddling him as he sat against the headboard. He kept his arm around my waist and stroked my cheek.

I looked into his eyes and smiled. “I don't want to stop. I want to make you mine now. I can't stand not being fully mated and marked with you.” I rolled my hips on Mark, starting the friction again. Mark groaned in response, and I knew he wasn't going to protest.

He moved his hands to my hips, helping me bounce up and down on his c**k. I leaned my head back, enjoying the feeling of my mate being so close to me. I loved every moment of it, and even though my body was starting to ache with tiredness, I didn't want to stop. I cupped Mark's face and started kissing him intensely. Nothing tasted better than him, and I would be happy if I could taste him every day for the rest of my life.

I moved my kisses down Mark's neck, sucking on his sweet spot. I took pleasure in his moans echoing in my ear, and I dragged it out a little longer. Mark growled with impatience, and he started thrusting up into me, distracting me a little. It felt like it was becoming a game, so I bit down on his neck, marking him. His body tensed, and then I felt him released in me. I bounced a few more times, helping Mark ride out his own euphoria, and when he was down, we both collapsed onto the bed, trying to catch our breaths.

I looked at Mark and started laughing softly to myself. Mark raised his eyebrows at me. "Why are you laughing?"

I grabbed his hand and inspected his fingers, still laughing. "I know everything that happened over the past week was awful, and I wouldn't choose to willingly go through it again, but no one else has ever been able to experience marking their mate on more than one occasion." I shifted onto my back and smiled, gazing at the ceiling.

Mark propped himself onto his elbow and looked at me. "Of course you would find the positive in this situation." He leaned over and kissed my cheek.

I grabbed his face and pulled him in for a proper kiss. I found myself getting lost in the kiss rather quickly, but I pulled away before things went any further. My body felt too exhausted for another round. I snuggled in closer to Mark and closed my eyes, ready to fall asleep.

Mark stroked my hair. "I have to go to Pack Sallow's pack house today to help them out. You should stay here and rest and recover for the rest of the day."

My eyes snapped open, and I saw Mark staring at me. "If you're going, then I'm going."

Mark frowned, still continuing to stroke my hair. "You need your rest. I'll be okay."

I grabbed Mark's hand, holding it tightly. My heart was racing. "I don't want to be left here alone." I could feel tears starting to threaten my eyes, which felt ridiculous. I should not have been that emotional just from the idea of Mark being away from me for several hours. I wasn't sure if it was the pregnancy or the trauma from being forced to be separated from Mark, but I didn't want him to go anywhere without me.

Mark wiped the tears away from my eyes and kissed my forehead. "Hey, hey, don't cry."

"I'm sorry." I hid my face in his chest, which muffled my voice. "I don't know why I'm crying. I just can't stand the idea of being away from you for very long right now. Even breakfast with Rie felt like a lot. I know I'm being ridiculous."

Mark grabbed my face and made me look at him. "You're not being ridiculous. Being away from you while Cain held you captive felt like the worst time of my life. I acted like I was being strong, but inside it was a completely different story. I never understood why mates acted so clingy before you, but now I get it. Being away from you feels like I'm missing part of myself."

I sniffled, trying to stop crying, but Mark's words only made me cry more. "I was so scared I would never see you again, and I would never be able to tell you about the baby. Even now, sometimes I'm afraid to blink, like this is all a dream that I'll wake up from the moment I close my eyes."

Mark wiped away my tears again. "I promise you this isn't a dream, and I'll do whatever it takes to make sure no one takes you again." He leaned down and kissed me, and I felt much better. I still didn't want to be without Mark, but it made me feel better that I wasn't alone in that feeling.

When Mark released the kiss, I whispered, "Have I told you how much I love you recently?"

Mark smiled. "Hmm, I don't think so. Why don't you tell me again?"

I rolled my eyes, secretly loving it. I spread my arms out as wide as I could in this position. "I love you this much times a million."

Mark stretched his own arms out, grabbing my hands. "And I love you this much times a billion."

I giggled, interlacing my fingers with him and kissed him. "You, sir, are silly."

“Does it make you love me more?” He had such a goofy grin which made butterflies churn in my stomach.

“Of course.” My eyes started to grow heavy now that mood lifted a little. I closed my eyes and rested my head on Mark again.

Mark stroked my hair. “Just rest for now, my love. We’ll go to Pack Sallow together after we both get some sleep.”

—

Mark, Scythe, Percy and myself stood outside of the pack house for Pack Sallow, and we were all feeling pretty nervous. I could feel Mark’s insides vibrating with anxiousness, but he looked composed on the outside. I understood why he was feeling so nervous. We were basically stepping into a wolf pack to help them out while their alpha was incapacitated, but no one asked for our help. There were only a few ways this could really go.

Scythe stepped forward and knocked on the door, waiting for someone to answer the door. We weren’t going to walk in like we owned the place. That would only go badly. The door opened to a familiar face. Cindy opened the door with a warm and welcoming smile on her face.

She moved past Scythe and Percy and went straight for me. She wrapped her arms around me and squeezed tightly. “Adira! It’s been too long. You look amazing.”

I hugged Cindy tightly, instantly feeling better. I hadn’t seen Cindy since shortly before Jori rejected me, so it was good to see her and know she still liked me, even though I didn’t choose her alpha. “It’s good to see you. I hope your studies are going well.”

Cindy laughed and shook her head. “As well as they ever have, so not great. I’m doing what I can though, given everything that’s going on. Eva is going to be thrilled to see you, by the way. She asks about you all of the time, wondering when you’ll join our pack.”

It had only been a few months since I had seen these two, but I was excited to see Eva. She was sweet, and I was touched that she still asked about me. “I can’t believe she is still asking about that.”

“You make a great first impression,” Cindy said. She grabbed my free hand and started leading me inside. “Come on. Everyone is waiting for you and Alpha Mark.”

I pulled Mark along with me, and Scythe and Percy weren’t far behind. “They are waiting for me too?”

Cindy continued leading us to the backyard. “Of course. You and Mark are a duo after all. They are expecting the alpha and luna.”

I wasn’t officially the luna of Pack Aphelion yet, but I didn’t bother to correct her. Mark and I were mated and marked, and that was almost more than an official title. Focusing on a technicality wasn’t worth the energy. Besides, in just a few days, I would be the luna.

We made it to the backyard, and there were rows and rows of chairs set up, and the pack house was already gathered around, waiting. There was a small stage at the front.

“Who set this all up?” I asked, amazed that everyone was already gathered.

“I helped some of the others set up and gather the members. There was some resistance to this meeting, but it wasn’t too bad,” Cindy said.

“How has the pack been handling everything?” I asked.

Cindy’s face fell. “Some days, I don’t know. There are a select few of us trying to hold this pack together, but it’s hard. There are others who feel like they can just do whatever they want with Alpha Jori not here. There has been a lot of fighting. It’s a little scary sometimes.”

My heart broke hearing this. Cindy was too young to be dealing with all of this, but I was also impressed with her actions. Most teenagers wouldn’t step up in her situation. I gave her a reassuring smile. “Alpha Mark, Scythe, Percy, and I will do what we can to help you guys out. Don’t worry.”

Cindy threw her arms around me. “I’m glad you are here.” She pulled away and looked down at the ground. “I don’t mean this in a bad way, but I wish you were my luna.”

I nodded, unsure of what to say. I would love it if I was her luna, but she would have to leave her own pack to do it. I would never suggest that to someone. It

wasn't my place to take her away from her home. "Even if I'm not your luna, you can always come to me for help."

Cindy nodded. "Well, I should find a place to sit. Thank you all for your help." She scurried off to join the crowd.

I turned to look at Mark. "Are you ready for this?"

Mark nodded and squeezed my hand. "Ready as I'll ever be."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 60

MARK

I stood up in front of the crowd, looking at the faces of all the people waiting for my speech. I recognized so many from when I was growing up, but there were definitely new faces from those who joined the pack after I left. They were expecting answers and explanations. I was sure there were those expecting me to fall on my face.

I refused to give them that satisfaction. Reyland was right. All I could do was be open and honest with them. If they refused my help, there was nothing I could do about it except accept it. I placed a hand over my heart, and a silence fell onto the crowd.

I summoned my alpha energy and courage and began speaking. "I know there has been a lot of confusion about what has been going on with your pack recently. Your alpha hasn't been himself, and he has been missing more than an alpha should be. I'm sure there have been plenty of rumors, but I'm here to provide you clarity. Alpha Jori was attacked by a sorcerer who possessed his body, so he hasn't been himself recently. We were able to exorcise the sorcerer who took over his body, but Alpha Jori is in serious condition."

Gasps echoed through the crowd and murmurs grew louder. I held up my hand and silenced everyone.

"I know you may not have reasons to believe my words, but I have no reason to lie to you all. I'm only here to offer help if you so choose. Alpha Jori is currently in our infirmary, and Doctor Zayla is doing her best to bring him back to health, but we don't know what kind of recovery he is going to make, if he's going to make one at all. I welcome all of you to visit if you wish. We can

make a schedule so the infirmary isn't overrun, but I don't want to keep your alpha from you.

"In the meantime, my mate and betas are here to help with the needs of the pack. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if there is an issue that needs attention. Percy is also here to help."

"Traitor!" someone in the crowd shouted. Percy winced at this accusation.

"I would be careful with your words," Mark cautioned. "Alpha Jori was not in his right mind when he kicked out his own beta. Percy had always put this pack first, even before his mate. I would hesitate to call someone like that a traitor."

Adira stepped up and took my hand, which surprised me. "I can't even imagine how difficult this situation has been for all of you, which is why we are here to offer support. A wolfpack without its alpha doesn't have a sense of direction or unity. That's why we want to help you in any way we can. Most of you grew up with these three. You should know that they only want the best for those they care about. They have all made sacrifices for their own happiness for others.

"If you can't see that or don't want their help, then that's on you. But I would think cautiously before biting the hand offering help, because it may not always be there. Other wolf packs might try to take advantage of the vulnerability having an incapacitated alpha brings. We aren't trying to tell you what to do or take care of your pack. We are simply offering support until your alpha can get back on his feet."

"What is Alpha Jori never gets better?" another voice asked.

"Then you will all have a serious choice to make," I said. "My wolf pack is open for any of you who choose to join, or you can leave to find another wolf pack."

Percy was the next one to step up. "Thank you all for listening to us today. Please reach out to Scythe if you wish to make an appointment to see Alpha Jori, and if you have any other concerns, feel free to approach the rest of us."

The crowd stayed silent until we stepped off the stage, and then the roar echoed through the crowd. I could hear the panic in some voices and the anger in others.

Adira grabbed my arm. "You did great up there, Mark."

I smiled at her, even though I didn't exactly feel like smiling. "I just hope they take me up on my offer for help."

"They will. At least some of them."

"Adira!"

I looked and saw Eva running up to Adira. She threw her arms around Adira, hugging her tightly. Adira hugged her back, her face lighting up.

"Eva! Look at how big you've gotten." Adira looked Eva up and down. "You are becoming such a beautiful young lady!"

Adira was glowing while talking to Eva, which filled my heart. I knew more than ever that Adira would be a wonderful mother to our child.

—

ADIRA

I collapsed in our bed when we finally made it home. There was a surprising amount of people who approached us, wanting to talk about their concerns. Mark made me sit most of the time, insisting I still needed my rest, but I was still exhausted. It was emotionally draining to hear about the plethora of problems going on with Pack Sallow. I never realized how many things could go wrong in a pack without leadership absent for such a short period of time.

"Do you have anything else going on today?" I asked Mark, who was changing into some fresh clothes.

"I have some alpha duties to attend to. I also want to talk to Reyland about contingency plans if the Council of Magic attacks prior to us being ready. We also want to start figuring all of that out." Mark looked stressed just talking about everything he had to do.

I turned on my side and reached out my hand to him. "Can't you just spend the rest of the day with me?"

Mark walked over to me and sat on the bed, grabbing my hand. He kissed the back of my hand. "I wish it was that easy, but I can't afford for us to not be

prepared. If they come after you before we are ready to stop them..." His voice caught in his throat.

I curled around Mark's body. "They won't get me. I'm not going anywhere."

Mark looked at me, but I could still see the fear in his eyes. "I will make sure of that. You should take the evening to rest, maybe take a nap. You have been doing too much, which can't be good for you or the baby after everything you've been through."

"I was actually thinking of visiting Jori before his pack starts flooding in for visits," I said. "I don't really want to just sit around."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

I shook my head. "You have plenty of other things to do. Besides, I want to see if there's anything I can do to help him."

Mark quirked his head to the side. "Zay says that medically Jori is healed. I don't think using your magic to heal him would be a good idea. Besides, we don't know if that would hurt the baby or not."

"It wouldn't hurt the baby. Using my magic doesn't hurt me. And I know it may not work, but I have to try." I looked up at Mark. "Before you got there, there was a brief moment where Jori broke through Xavier's control. He begged me to kill him. Hearing that was difficult. Knowing what he was going through was enough that he wanted to die broke my heart. It doesn't feel right to just sit here and not do anything."

Mark still looked unsure. "It's not your burden to bear. You didn't do this to him."

"It's because of me that he got hurt. I don't know why Xavier chose him of all people to possess, but it was to get close to me. I have to at least try."

Mark leaned down and kissed my forehead. "I understand. Just don't push yourself too much, and if it turns out you can't do anything, don't blame yourself."

I nodded, since I wasn't sure I could trust my words. Anything that came out of my mouth would feel like a lie. It was hard to not blame myself for the situation. Even though the prophecy was not my doing, people I cared about

were getting hurt in the process. I also had a lingering fear that this was not over. I knew Xavier's presence left Jori's body, but I feared he was still out there, waiting to grow stronger.

Mark squeezed my hand. "I will link you, and if you need anything at all, link me. I will drop whatever I'm doing to join you." He leaned down and kissed my lips and then kissed my belly.

"And you do the same. Don't overwork yourself. Take a break and visit me when you can." I thought about the days leading up to my kidnapping and hated that. I had barely seen Mark, even when we were in the same pack house, and I didn't want that to happen again.

"I will be quick. I want to spend as little time away from you as possible." Mark kissed me again and then left me alone in the room.

I stood up after a moment and then made my way to the infirmary. It was quiet in there, since Zayla seemed to be off doing something else. I sat next to Jori's bed, listening to the slow beeping, indicating his heart was still beating. I wondered how long he had been alone here. I knew none of our pack members would want to visit him, and I doubted anyone from Pack Lyna had a reason to visit him. I just hoped people from Pack Sallow would visit him soon. No one deserved to lie in a hospital bed alone in this condition.

"I'm sorry this happened to you Jori," I said. I knew he probably couldn't hear me, but it made me feel better talking to him. "You didn't deserve this. It's a little weird thinking I've never known just you as a person. Well, except that time we briefly met as kids. I hope we get the chance to properly talk to one another one day."

I reached out and grabbed Jori's hand. I closed my eyes and focused on sending my magic through him. I felt around his body, searching for any remaining presence left over by Xavier. I still didn't feel any of the dark magic, so I started looking for Jori's presence. That was more difficult to find than I had anticipated, but eventually I found it hidden deep down inside of him. It was buried beneath layers, and I knew that was why he hadn't woken up yet.

He had buried his subconscious to protect himself from the dark magic infiltrating his body, but now that the magic presence was gone, he was still stuck.

I placed my hand on his forehead, and with a deep breath, I tried to enter his subconscious mind. I felt a chill run down my spine, and when I opened my eyes, I was standing in a white room. In the middle of it, Jori was sitting cross-legged, staring off into space. I had made it into his subconscious mind.