

## The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 71

ADIRA

I was back in the room with Rie and the other girls, and they were helping me finish getting ready. It was almost time for the ceremony now. Meeting with Ginger and Jori had taken more time than I had anticipated, so it was tighter getting ready for the ceremony than I had thought.

When we were just a few minutes away from the time, the rest of the girls left Rie and me by ourselves. I peaked out the window, looking at the ceremony below. Scythe had done an extravagant job setting everything up as usual, and I couldn't wait for it to start. I wasn't nervous about becoming the luna anymore. It felt like it was a long time coming, and it should have happened a while ago.

With everything going on, I had been afraid to take on such a big responsibility. I had already caused issues for Mark, Scythe, and Rie, and there was still a target over my head. Before, I was afraid that if I was accepted into the pack officially, it would all fall away. I would be kicked out when something went wrong or others would get hurt because of me. Standing here in my dress, I realized all of that was foolish. I should have taken on the luna title as soon as I accepted Mark as my mate.

I knew I belonged in this werewolf pack. These people were my family, and I was done running away from the things that scared me in my life. I was ready to run first into the fire and take on the responsibility of protecting and loving this wolfpack, like a luna should.

Rie touched my arm, bringing my attention back to her. "Are you ready?"

I smiled, buzzing with anticipation. "More than I ever thought I would be."

"Come on. Let's go, Luna Adira."

Something about Rie's words just felt right. I was just minutes away from being the official luna, and I smiled at all of the new roles and responsibilities that I had taken on in the past few months. I was a mate, soon I would be a luna, and not long after that, I would be a mother. I had given up on achieving any of these titles awhile ago.

We walked down the pack house, which felt empty compared to its normal buzz. There were still guards stationed around the house to make sure there were no intruders, but the rest of the pack was in the backyard where the ceremony was to take place. Rie and I paused at the back door, and Rie turned to me.

She fixed a piece of my hair and smiled. "I'm not going to get too sappy, but I just wanted to say that I'm grateful you are Mark's mate. You are good for him and this pack. We couldn't have asked for a better luna." She stopped and looked up to stop herself from tearing up.

I smiled, touched to see Rie this emotional over me. I pulled her into a hug. "I'm so glad to have met you and everyone else. This is the happiest I have ever been."

Rie hugged me back, squeezing me so tightly I almost couldn't breathe. She pulled away and wiped the tears away from her eyes carefully so she wouldn't mess up her makeup in the process.

"Okay, enough of this. Let's get this ceremony started." Rie grabbed my hand and pulled me outside.

Everyone stood up from their seats and looked at me. There were more people than I had anticipated, since several members from Pack Lyna and Pack Sallow were also there to witness the ceremony. All eyes were on me, but the only eyes I cared about were Mark's. His piercing blue eyes caught my breath, just like the first time we had met. So much had happened since then, and I couldn't believe where we were today.

Rie stepped to the side and motioned for me to move forward. "This is all you, Luna Adira."

I gave her a nod and started walking forward. I held my head up high, filled with pride because Mark had accepted me as his mate and into this pack. He was an amazing and caring leader, and he has always had the pack's interest at heart. He has also been there for me in ways that many people had failed to do over the years. Because of him, I was even building a relationship with Reyland again.

Even with all of the threats and struggles I had been through, I wouldn't take any of this back if it meant no longer having Mark in my life. I loved him more than I ever thought possible, and I knew a bright future was awaiting us.

As I walked down the aisle, I saw so many familiar faces smiling back at me. Reyland was with Mason and a few other people I recognized from Pack Lyna. Cindy and Eva found a seat at the front. I was pleasantly surprised to even see Jori in the crowd. He seemed to be trying to tuck himself away in the crowd so he was unseen, but I was happy he was here at least.

Finally, I made it to the front of the aisle where Mark was standing on a raised platform. Scythe was a few steps behind him. Mark held out his hand and helped me up on the platform. He made a point to still hold onto my hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. I could feel his nerves and gave him a squeeze back, amused that he was more nervous than I was.

I heard a few footsteps approaching, and I glanced to see Rie joining me on the platform. She must have gone around the crowd to avoid any attention being taken away from me.

Ready? Mark linked.

Ready, I linked back, trying to contain the bright smile trying to erupt on my face.

Mark turned to the crowd and lifted his hand. He motioned for everyone to sit down and then waited for the soft murmurs to switch into silence. He stood tall and proud, and his alpha energy was filling the air.

Mark's voice was calm but it carried on through the crowd as if he was using a loudspeaker. "I want to thank you all for coming to celebrate the new luna of Pack Aphelion. It's an honor to have so many different leaders and packs joining us for this special day. Pack Aphelion was created in a manner that was not exactly traditional, and we've been working on increasing our size and strength. Now I have the honor of inviting Adira Lyna to be the official luna of this pack. With her heart and strength, I know we can continue to do even more for this pack."

The crowd cheered when Mark paused, and my heart swelled, knowing everyone was cheering for me.

Mark lifted his hand to calm the crowd. This time he turned to me. His eyes were glowing with pride from his future luna. He tucked a piece of my hair behind my ear and then held my hand. "Adira Lyna, my one true mate and the love of my life, do you promise to treat this pack as your family, protect them and work hard for everyone's safety."

"I do. I promise I will continue working hard as everyone's luna to improve myself and the pack for the better."

Mark turned to Rie and Scythe next. "Rie and Scythe, as betas of this wolfpack, do you accept Adira as your luna?"

"I do," Rie and Scythe said simultaneously.

Mark turned back to me. "Then, as alpha of Pack Aphelion, I hereby accept Adira as our new luna."

Mark reached towards Scythe, who was already in the process of handing Mark a large needle. Mark took the needle and then grabbed my finger. His eyes met mine. "You will feel a small prick on your finger."

I nodded my head, and Mark poked my finger with the needle. I winced from the small amount of pain, but it was minor compared to other things I had dealt with recently. After pulling out the needle, Mark lifted my hand up to his mouth and licked the open wound to help it heal faster. When he was done with that, he released my hand and moved over to a small vase being displayed on the stage.

Mark paused and looked at me. Are you ready for this? It could be a little overwhelming.

I smiled at him and nodded, more than ready to be connected to a pack again. I had been on my own since I was sixteen, and I was buzzing to feel like part of a community again. Mark smiled back and then dropped the needle into the vase. As the blood mixed in the liquid component, I could feel new bonds building at my core.

I closed my eyes as I took in all of the swirling thoughts and emotions. I could hear Rie's voice and then Scythe's voice in my head. The rest of the pack members followed after. For a moment, I could feel all of their emotions, starting from the joy they felt with this ceremony to the fears they felt about what had been going on recently. It came in jumbled waves, so it was difficult to discern one voice from another.

However, after a moment, the voices began to settle and my head began to clear. The channels that created the links between members closed, lying dormant as they waited for them to be reawakened later. I took a few deep

breaths to calm my heart from the sudden rush of emotions, and then I opened my eyes.

Mark was holding my forearms, and I hadn't even felt him grab me. He was watching me carefully, waiting for me to confirm I was okay. I smiled at him and then turned to address the crowd.

"Thank you for accepting me as your luna. If there's anything I can do for you, please let me know."

The crowd cheered and clapped, and when they calmed down, Scythe stepped forward. He raised his hand. "And now it's time to party!"

The crowd began moving, bringing the chairs with them to open up a space for dancing. Music started playing as this happened. It was incredible watching how fast the backyard changed into more of a party setting. It made me wonder if Scythe had made these people practice this scenery change before today. Scythe and Rie disappeared in the crowd, and I could feel them moving towards their mates before helping transform the area. It was a little strange being able to feel the presence of the pack members so clearly now.

Mark took the moment we had to ourselves to pull me in closer. "I'm thrilled to call you my luna now." He placed a soft kiss on my lips.

I placed a hand on his cheek and kissed him again. "It's about time, alpha."

Mark growled from me calling him "alpha," and I could feel his desire growing for me. I was sure he would be dragging me to the bedroom this second if Scythe and Rie hadn't planned an entire party after the ceremony.

Mark leaned in and whispered in my ear, "I'll show you how much you are mine later tonight." His breath against my ear sent tingles down my spine, and I closed my legs tighter, trying to hide the arousal pooling between my legs. I was suddenly very tempted to skip this party all together.

A clearing of a throat interrupted Mark and my flirtations. I pulled back, but Mark kept his hand on the small of my back. I saw Jori watching us closely.

"Sorry to, uh, interrupt." Jori scratched the back of his neck.

"You're not interrupting," I said quickly.

Not true, Mark linked in response. He wasn't upset about Jori's interruption. He was just eager to have me to himself.

"I'll make this quick," Jori continued, looking at Mark. He took a deep breath, and I knew whatever was coming next was serious. "I have done a lot of thinking today, and there's something I need to talk to you two about."

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MARK

I had a weird feeling as Jori spoke. I knew he was Jori again, but it felt like the man I knew was a broken shell of himself. He lacked the overwhelming confidence I had looked up to all of my life. He had lost his passion, and it felt like he was simply going through the motions of life.

"I can't be an alpha anymore," Jori admitted. Despite his lack of confidence, he was confident in his statement.

"What do you mean?" Adira asked. Her heart was racing, which told me she knew exactly what Jori meant, but she didn't want to believe it.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to believe it either. Jori had stopped being my friend because he felt his alpha position was threatened. All this man wanted to do was be the alpha of the pack and be a strong leader everyone could look up to.

"There has been too much damage done to the pack because of me, well Xavier, but still me. I don't deserve to be the Alpha of Pack Sallow anymore. They deserve a leader who can protect them and stay strong in the face of adversity." Jori curled his fingers and then uncurled them, giving his eyes somewhere to linger for just a moment longer.

Adira reached out and placed her hand on Jori's shoulder. She tried to make eye contact with him, but he continued avoiding her gaze. "That wasn't your fault. With time, you can fix things."

Jori curled his fingers one more time and looked up at me. "Maybe, but I need to fix myself right now. I don't have the confidence necessary to be a leader, and my pack deserves better than that. I thought about the best way of going about this. Percy would make a good leader, but he's not an alpha. Mark, you were born to be the alpha of a wolf pack. It runs in your blood. Your

grandfather used to be in charge of my wolf pack, and I think it's only right that you get that title back."

I stayed quiet for a moment. I knew deep down this was what Jori was getting at, but actually hearing the words from his mouth was a completely different story. I had looked up to Jori all of my life, until I felt betrayed by him and his entire family. There was still a sense of joy that I felt knowing Jori actually trusted me to take over his pack.

"Are you sure this is what you want to do?" I asked. I would be able to combine the packs, which would strengthen the wolf pack and make everything easier. It would be tricky to figure out how to handle the transfer exactly, but I knew we could make it work. I wasn't about to jump on the opportunity, though, not until I knew Jori was one hundred percent sure of his decision.

Jori nodded. "I need to get away from all of this for a while, clear my head, and find myself again. It would be an honor to leave you in charge of my people. And don't worry, I won't come back trying to take control back. I don't deserve that."

"I'll need you to tell the pack the decision you made. It won't go over as well if I'm the one who announces it." I knew there would be a lot of pack members more than willing to join my pack, but I was confident there would be some resistance, too. Too many lies had been told about me. People liked Adira, though, which would make the transition easier.

"Of course. I'll stick around to help with the transition. Then I'll leave town for a while, or maybe forever. We'll see what happens." Jori shrugged to emphasize his indifference to the situation.

I wanted to say something else, but I was at a loss for words. Thankfully, Adira stepped up and saved the day.

She wrapped her arms around Jori. "If this is what you need, we'll happily take over. If there's anything else we can do for you, don't be afraid to hold out."

I was constantly impressed with Adira's caring nature. A man wearing Jori's face tried to kill her and take everything away from her, and she was still here, hugging the man and showing him compassion. One day, I hoped I could find that same compassion. As I looked at Jori, I wished him the best, but there

was also a lot of pain between us, pain that I wasn't sure would ever disappear.

Jori gave a quick smile and glanced between the two of us once Adira released him from her grasp. "I should let you two get back to celebrating. We'll figure out the details later." Jori waved and then slipped away into the crowd.

I watched him walk away, and everything felt surreal. If I was to take care of Pack Sallow and absorb them into our pack, the size of the pack would over quadruple in size. I was a good alpha for our small pack, so I hoped I would be able to bring that same energy to a larger pack.

Adira intertwined her fingers between mine and rested her head on my shoulder. "We'll be able to handle it. We have a lot of strong leaders on our side. With Darian, Percy, Scythe, Rie, and Mason, we will be able to delegate where needed. I believe in you."

I turned and looked into Adira's eyes. She was glowing with happiness, which burned a smile into my face. I hadn't seen her smile enough recently, so seeing her swimming with confidence and joy was a breath of fresh air. With her by my side, I knew I could handle whatever was to come.

"I believe in us." I leaned forward and kissed her plump, sweet lips. I lingered longer than I should have in public, but Adira tasted so sweet, and I loved that she was all mine now. There was no question as to where she belonged.

I pulled away, and there were stars in Adira's eyes. I knew her mind was where mine was at, and it was taking all of my willpower to not ditch the party and take Adira to the bedroom. Scythe worked too hard on the party for us to disappear. Although, would we really be missed for a half hour?

Mark, Adira, we're all set up. It's time to start the dancing, Scythe linked. It was like he knew what I was debating, and his superpower was to interrupt it.

Adira was beaming. "I heard him," she whispered. She was in awe of being able to link with the pack. It had only been her and I linking for a while, so she hadn't experienced a group link, at least not in the time I knew her. She was buzzing with joy.

We'll be right there, Adira linked back, her smile threatening to split her face in two.



She grabbed my hand and pulled me through the crowd, buzzing with joy. I swore at that moment to do whatever I could to make sure Adira had the night of her life. She had been through too much, and she was still finding a reason to smile. She deserved one night without any stress or worry.

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## ADIRA

Scythe announced Mark and I as Luna and Alpha of the pack and encouraged us to go on the dance floor. It made it feel like a wedding reception in some ways, but Scythe insisted it was the Alpha and Luna's job to get the party started. Soft violin music started playing accompanied by a beautiful voice, singing a ballad. Mark held out his hand to me, and I grabbed it quickly. He led me onto the dance floor, and then he placed his hand on my hip, holding my other hand in the air. I placed my free hand on his shoulder.

The last time Mark and I had danced like this was at my birthday party. That felt like years ago at this point, even though it was only months. Mark started moving to the music, and he was more confident in his steps than I remembered.

"Have you been practicing?" I asked, giving him a surprised smile.

"Maybe." Mark winked at me before lifting up his arm and spinning me around.

I could feel all eyes on us, but for once, I didn't care. I relished this moment, knowing everyone here was to celebrate me. I giggled as Mark spun me back into him. He wrapped his arm around my waist and reverted to swaying me side to side. Tonight, everything felt perfect for the first time in a long time. There were a million things to worry about, but they could wait until the morning. For now, I was just going to live in the moment.

"Are you happy?" Mark asked out of no where.

I squinted my eyes at him. "Of course I am. Why would you ask that?"

Mark dipped me suddenly, and the crowd cheered. "Because I want to do whatever I can to make sure you are happy. If you weren't happy, I would figure out what I needed to do to change that."

I hummed for a moment as he pulled me back up. “Well, if that’s the case, you know what would make me happier?”

Mark gave me a questioning look. “And what might that be, my luna?”

“I want dessert.” My mouth watered as I craved a sweet treat.

“As you wish, my love.” Mark turned to the crowd and motioned for everyone to start dancing. As the dance floor began to fill up with couples, Mark led me off to the side where the food was set up.

The table was set up with a wide variety of snacks and treats, and my eyes immediately went to the chocolate fountain. I felt like a little kid at the sight. It felt extravagant and simple all at the same time. I grabbed a strawberry and dipped it in the fountain. I twisted it to stop the chocolate from falling, and then I turned back to Mark. I motioned for him to open his mouth, and I held the leaves of the strawberry as he bit into the sweet and decadent treat.

Chocolate dripped on my hand, and I pulled my hand away to clean it off, but Mark quickly caught my hand and pulled it back to his mouth. He licked the chocolate off my fingers while making direct eye contact. My core tensed and pooled with desire. With actions like that, he was making it nearly impossible to resist him.

Mark leaned forward and whispered in my ear, “I like the way you taste.” It was something he could have simply linked me, but there was something about his breath in my ear that made my legs quiver.

We were reaching dangerous territory, but I didn’t care. I was having fun flirting with Mark. I grabbed a pretzel and dipped it in the chocolate. When I brought it to my mouth, I licked the chocolate off the pretzel and then bit into the crunchy treat. “This tastes amazing.”

Mark bit his lower lip and looked me up and down. I loved the way he made me feel when he looked at me like that.

Do you think anyone would miss us if we left right now? Mark linked.

I looked around the party, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Rie was dancing with Mason, and she looked like she was shining with happiness. Scythe was forcing Percy to dance with him, and Percy looked like

an awkward robot, but he was still having fun. Everyone else was eating or dancing.

I looked back at Mark and smirked. I grabbed his hand and started pulling him towards our room.

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ADIRA

I ran into the house, giggling as Mark chased behind me. I felt like a spy the way we snuck out of the party, hiding behind lights and archways to stay out of the view of others. I was sure we were still obvious, but I didn't care. The adrenaline was pumping through my veins as Mark chased me through the house and up the stairs.

I flew through the door, and Mark was right behind me, slamming the door shut. He picked me up in his arms, his hot breath finding mine. He tasted sweeter than any dessert I had ever had, and I was addicted to him. He set me back down, and his hand moved up the slip in the dress until he was cupping my a\*s. He squeezed me, making me yelp with pleasure.

He nuzzled his mouth into my neck, sucking on the faded mark that told the world I belonged to him. Tingles ran down my body, and my panties were already soaked from the pleasure. He growled against my neck.

"You smell irresistible." His voice was deep and sent shivers right to my core.

I pulled his face and found his mouth, wanting to taste him. I slipped my tongue into his mouth, and he moved his tongue in response, playing with mine. My head spun, and the air was light as this moment became all my own. It was the perfect way to end a perfect night. For once, Mark and I were able to indulge in each other, no interruptions and no worries to distract us.

I grasped at Mark's shirt, plucking at the buttons and slowly revealing his chest. I continued molding my lips to his as I did this. Mark's hand ran up my shoulders and pulled the straps to my dress down, exposing my chest. My hands started to shake as Mark's hands ran over my body. He was doing a good job at distracting me, making it ten times more difficult to remove his clothes.

Mark's hands were soft as he massaged my breasts, pinching my sensitive n\*\*\*\*s lightly. I gasped at the sensation.

"Do you like that, baby?" Mark asked, lightly brushing my n\*\*\*\*s and making goosebumps spread across my body.

I hummed in agreement as I focused on pushing his shirt off his shoulders. I dropped my hands, and my dress fell to the floor, leaving me in just my panties.

"What about this?" Mark leaned down and took one of my breasts in his mouth while still massaging the other one.

I grabbed the waistband of Mark's pants to stabilize myself as every little touch made my arousal go wild. I pulled Mark closer to me, eager for more, and I could feel his hardness against me. I wanted to feel more, so I undid Mark's belt and the top button and pulled his pants down, springing his member free.

I wrapped my fingers around him and slowly started to stroke him. Mark moaned against my breast, and this time it was me who was distracting him. He twitched under my touch, and I could feel him harden even more. I bit my lip, wanting him even more. I was eager and ready and didn't want to drag this out any longer.

"I want you," I whispered.

Mark pulled away and looked at me with a devilish smile. "You won't have to ask twice."

His fingers hooked in my panties and slipped them off. His fingers moved up and down between my legs, feeling my wet folds. He lifted his finger up and licked it clean.

"I love how ready you are for me." With a swift motion, Mark spun me around and pressed me against the wall. He lifted up one of my legs, and I wrapped my arms around his neck to steady myself. He pushed up into me, sliding into me with ease. He thrust up over and over again, pounding me hard, and making me cry out in pleasure.

I didn't bother holding back with my sounds, knowing that almost everyone was still at my party. I knew I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world. I

was in pure bliss as Mark moved in and out of me. He leaned forward and nipped at the mate mark, making my eyes roll back in my head. The pressure in my stomach built as Mark increased the speed.

“I-I’m close,” I gasped, feeling the butterflies in my stomach churn with anticipation.

“Come for me, baby,” Mark whispered. He moved his hand between my legs and rubbed my sensitive bud, which released the pressure in my body. I felt I was floating with euphoria, and Mark continued thrusting, helping me ride out the waves.

Instead of finishing, Mark picked me up, and I wrapped my legs around his waist. He set me on the bed and continued thrusting into me with my body still quivering from before.

“Mark,” I moaned, my mind going completely blank as I focused on every sensation he was bringing to my body. He knew me better than anyone else in this entire world, and he knew exactly what made my body squirm underneath. He started rubbing between my legs again as he thrust harder and harder, and it wasn’t long before I was screaming again from a second wave of pleasure.

Mark finished after me, and we were both breathing heavily, filled with pleasure.

“Is that what you wanted?” Mark asked, fixing my hair.

I nodded, still recovering from all of the sensations. “That was amazing. You are amazing.”

Mark kissed me, making my heart flutter. When I was with him, I still felt like a teenage girl kissing her boyfriend. It was exciting, and I never wanted it to stop.

“Good. We should probably get cleaned up.” Mark lifted me up and carried me to the bathroom.

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RIE

I hadn't seen Mark or Adira for a little while, and I already knew what they were up to. I didn't bother linking them, because I didn't want to ruin any special activities. They weren't needed for this part of the party anyway. I let the disappearance of the alpha and luna go, knowing I would see them sooner or later.

Mason wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me close. "So I asked Alpha Mark about joining the pack."

I raised an eyebrow. "And?" This man loved to drag out the drama, keeping me on my toes.

"He didn't hesitate to make a great part of the team. He said he will just have to make things official with Alpha Lyna before he can accept me into the pack." Mason lowered his hands on my back, getting frisky already. Ever since we had become mates, it had been almost impossible to keep our hands off each other. Even now, I had a brief thought of ditching the party to run away with Mason, but I knew there would be time for that later.

I poked Mason on the nose. "I told you it wouldn't be an issue. I have an in with the alpha." I gave him a wink and emphasized my point. I knew Adira would be happy to have Mason join the pack, since they had known each other for a long time, and Mark would be happy knowing I was happy. I wasn't even worried about Alpha Lyna accepting it. He had a lot to make up to Adira, so if she asked him to give up his best warrior for her, he would do it without question.

I was still so proud, knowing that Mason was my might. He was one of the strongest warriors in Pack Lyna, even though he was younger than fifty percent of the warriors. The more I learned about him, the more impressive he was to me. I felt lucky, knowing he would be an amazing man to spend the rest of my life with.

Mason brushed his nose against mine. "You were right. I shouldn't have questioned it."

"As long as you learn that early, then we'll be good." I giggled at the statement, knowing that wasn't actually true. I liked that Mason was my equal, and we could talk things through. I didn't want a man I could boss around. I wanted a partner.

Mason spun me around and moved through the dance floor elegantly. I mentally added great dancer to the list that made up Mason's incredible talents. The pace of the music changed, and a slow song filled the air. Mason adjusted his speed to the rhythm of it, and he pulled me even closer to him.

"Hey, do you want to get married one day?" Mason asked, capturing my eyes with his.

I nearly choked on my own saliva. "Are you proposing to me?"

Mason's eyes widened. "No! Of course not. If I was going to propose, I would make it special. I just want to know if marriage is on your list of things you want to do. Some werewolf mates never get married, since they don't see the point. Being mates is enough for them, so I just wanted to know how you felt about it."

I placed my hand on Mason's chest. He was cute when he was flustered. "I have never been one to care about marriage, but if it's something you are interested in, I would do it for you."

Mason hummed, a smile slowly forming on his lips. "Good to know. What about kids?"

My eyes went wide, and I quickly smacked Mason on the chest. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack? I'm much too young for kids."

Mason chuckled, and I knew he thought I was cute when I was flustered. "I just want to know for the future. Not anytime soon. I want time with you before we extend our family, if that's something you want." His demeanor changed, and I could feel his anxiousness grow as he waited for my response.

"I haven't thought about it a whole lot. There always seems to be something to do for the pack, but yeah. I think I would like a kid in the future."

Mason beamed, picking me up and spinning me around. "Really?"

I giggled at Mason's delight. "Yes. Now let's stop talking about such serious matters and have some fun."

"Anything you want." Mason gave me a quick peck before dipping me on the dancefloor.

After a little longer, I caught Mark and Adira sauntering back into the party. If they were trying to hide what they were doing, they weren't doing a good job. They had a new glow to them, and their hair was much less than pristine. I decided to let it go, just happy they decided to rejoin the party.

"Hey, I haven't seen you for a bit." I gave them a knowing look, unable to control myself.

"You must have missed us," Mark responded. He knew exactly what I was getting at and gave me a warning look.

This only made me smile more. I was just happy my friends were finally getting a chance to enjoy their relationship without a million other pressures, even if that would return tomorrow.

I held out my hand to Adira. "Ready to party the night away?"

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ADIRA

"Do you feel it?" Moon asked, jumping into my lap.

I opened my eyes, and my entire body tingled. The moment it happened, my magic radar went off. "He found another host," I said quietly.

Xavier and I were tied together in a way I simply couldn't understand, but I could feel his magic, even as I slept peacefully. I wasn't sure what had happened to the dark cloud of magic when I had expelled it from Jori's body, but deep down I knew Xavier wasn't gone, at least not completely. A force as strong as him was not easily destroyed.

"He'll come for us again," Moon said with a sigh. She seemed forlorn and distant as he spoke as she spoke. "He needs us to fulfill the prophecy."

I scoffed at the mention of the prophecy. "I'm tired of this prophecy. What does it matter? It's just some legend someone predicted a long time ago. I'm sick of everyone trying to tell me how to live my life. Xavier is just a power-hungry monster. I don't care if he is technically my soulmate or whatever. He doesn't truly care about us. He only wants to control this world and destroy it in the process."



“We will never be rid of him and his threat if we don’t do anything.” Moon pressed her head against my chest, and I knew she hated being tied to him as much as I did.

I knew Moon was right. I had to find a way to destroy him once and for all. It was the only way I could guarantee my family’s safety and my happily ever after. I stood up, still holding Moon in my arms, deciding I no longer wanted to sit back and let the threats come to me.

“I’m going to find him, and I’m going to kill him once and for all. No more running, no more hiding.” I stood tall and strong, and I knew what I needed to do to ensure my success in the matter.

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I stood in front of the bathroom mirror with my shirt lifted, looking at the baby bump on my stomach. It still didn’t look like I was pregnant. With the right shirt, no one would notice the little bump, and anyone paying closer attention who didn’t already know I was pregnant might just think I was bloated or ate a big lunch.

I placed my hand on my stomach and closed my eyes. I could feel the baby’s energy flowing through me. It was strong and happy. I couldn’t believe I could sense the baby’s energy so early, but it made me love my future child more than I ever thought possible for someone I had never met.

I heard the bathroom door pull open, and I opened my eyes, only to see Mark entering the bathroom. His hair was sticking straight up, just like a bird. He was only in pajama bottoms, and he still had sleep in his eyes. When he saw me, he walked right over to me and wrapped his arms around my waist.

He nuzzled into the crook of my neck, while placing his hands directly on my stomach. “Someone is up early.”

I placed my hands on his and leaned my head back. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“Morning sickness?” Mark asked. He looked up and made eye contact with me through the mirror.

“No, I’ve just had a lot on my mind.” I looked at my own face, and there were bags under my eyes, I had only gotten a few hours of sleep. “There’s something I’ve realized I need to do.”

Mark tensed up, keeping eye contact with me. "I'm not going to like this, am I?"

I let out a long sigh. "No. I need to go after Xavier. I felt him last night, and he has already found a new body. He's still weakened, so now is the time to strike. If I don't do anything, he's just going to torture another soul like Jori, and he'll come after me anyway."

Mark was quiet. It was clear he didn't like the idea, but he also understood where I was coming from, so he didn't want to simply reject the idea. "I hate the idea of you being around him. He almost took you from me once. I wouldn't be able to stand losing both of you." This wasn't a rejection of the idea, but it still hurt my heart. I knew how much almost losing me affected Mark.

I turned around so I was facing Mark, and I wrapped my arms around his neck. "I know. I can't stand the thought of losing you, which is why I have to do this. Xavier will not give up until he has what he wants or he is dead. I plan to make sure it's the latter. I've been thinking about this for hours now, and I want to take Cain's magic. It'll make me more powerful, which will give me an advantage. I want to be as prepared as possible. I'll be stronger, and Xavier will be weaker. He won't stand a chance."

Mark looked like he was going to be sick. "Didn't Ginger say there is a possibility that you won't be able to handle Cain's magic or the baby wouldn't be able to handle it?"

I bit my lip, unsure of what to say. I couldn't make Mark feel better about this situation. There was a risk to us, no matter what path I decided to take, and I needed to take the path where I would have the most control.

"I've thought about that, too. Cain knew I was pregnant, and he is a skilled sorcerer. If he thought there was a risk to the baby, I think he would have warned me at the very least."

Mark looked shocked and stepped away from me. "Adira, that man kidnapped you and removed your mate mark. He kept you locked up and was trying to control you. You can't make your decision on whether he gave you a warning or not. I don't care if he saved you in the end or tried to make amends. He's a piece of garbage. I'm putting my foot down. You will not take his magic."

My mouth fell open. Mark had never given me an order before. Even when he didn't agree with my decisions, he tried to support me. This was a new side to him I wasn't used to. I took a step back, anger building inside of me.

"You're putting your foot down? Guess what? You don't own me, and you don't make decisions for me. I get that you don't agree with it, but in the end, it's my decision."

Mark ran his fingers through his hair. "You can be so infuriating, you know that? Did you stop to think about how this would affect me? If I lost you or the baby, I'm not sure I would be able to survive that. I was barely holding it together when I didn't know if you were dead or alive. If taking Cain's magic is what breaks you... No. I can't deal with it."

Mark's voice was tense with anger, but as he continued talking, I realized there was something other than anger driving his harsh words. He was terrified.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself down before I said something I would regret. I was angry, but fighting fire with fire would only burn us both. Instead, I stepped forward and cupped Mark's face.

"All I ever do is think about how this affects you and our future. If Xavier were to attack again and target you or try to use you against me, it would break me. I feel like I'm the reason one of us is in danger. First Theron, and now Xavier. It has been threat after threat, and I feel like I'm to blame. I'm tired of being the victim in all of this. I have to do something to protect you and our future family."

Mark pressed his forehead against mine and closed his eyes. "That's the problem. I should be the one protecting you, but I can't. All of this magic is so foreign to me, and I feel like I'm too weak to protect my family. Even against Theron, I was completely useless."

"I didn't realize you felt that way." My voice was softer now. I had continuously been thinking about what I could do to stop all of this madness that I had forgotten that Mark would want to protect me, too.

Mark grabbed my hips and pulled me closer to him. "I just don't want to fail you as your mate."

“Hey, look at me.” I waited for Mark to pull away so he could make eye contact before continuing. “You have never and will never fail me as a mate. You saved me from Xavier. You found where Cain had taken me, and you found me. You are an amazing, supportive, caring mate, and I’m sorry for not including you in the decision to go after Xavier and take Cain’s magic. That should have been more of a conversation, but I need you to understand where I’m coming from.”

Mark nodded, and I saw some of the tension leave his shoulders. “I do understand where you are coming from. I’m just terrified that I’m going to lose you and our baby. I shouldn’t have tried to order you around like that. If you really think taking Cain’s magic is the best shot that we have, then I’ll support you. I want Ginger to look at the magic again, and you should get another check up with Zayla before doing anything. They should both be present when you take it, too, just to be safe.”

I smiled and gave Mark a kiss. “Those are terms I can agree to.”

## **The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 75**

MARK

I walked into the conference room, and Rie and Scythe were already waiting for me in there. My morning had been delayed because of the argument with Adira, and I was running late for the meeting. I wanted to discuss Jori’s proposition with them before I brought it up with everyone else. They had helped me set up the pack in the first place, so I knew I would need their help to make this a smooth transition, if we were going to make this work.

“Are you okay?” Rie asked the moment I sat down.

I wasn’t in the best mindset right now. My stomach was in knots after the argument with Adira. It was our first real argument, and I didn’t like it. We were normally better at communicating with each other, and I wasn’t proud of myself for the way I snapped at her. In addition, I still wasn’t a fan of what Adira wanted to do, but she had a point. If we didn’t do anything to attack our enemies first, we would end up always on the defense, and it was exhausting.

I looked at Rie and gave her a smile. “There’s just a lot on my mind.”

Rie nodded, not pushing the subject more. “If you need to talk, you know where to find us.”

“So what’s this about?” Scythe asked, quickly changing the subject.

I took a deep breath, trying to clear my mind. “Jori approached Adira and me yesterday. He said he wants to give up being alpha and give his pack over to me.”

A strange silence filled the room, and both of them simply looked at me, waiting for me to say something more. I wanted to give them a moment to digest the information.

“Is this a joke?” Rie finally asked.

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. Ever since he woke up, he hasn’t been the same. I’m sure you’ve seen him. He has no resolve. What happened to him broke him, and he doesn’t want to be alpha anymore.”

“We are talking about Jori, right?” Scythe asked in complete disbelief. “The man who dropped his best friend to protect his title of alpha. The man who was threatened because his best friend turned out to be an alpha, too?”

I nodded. “I know. I couldn’t believe it for a moment, but he was being serious. Being alpha takes a lot of confidence and strength. He doesn’t have that anymore, and he knows he can’t run a pack like that. He wanted time away to heal.”

“And what happens when he leaves, gets his confidence, and comes back to demand he gets his pack back?” Rie asked. Her jaw was clenched, and it was obvious she didn’t believe Jori’s claim.

“If he gives up his claim, that will be it. I will make that clear to him and anyone who decides to join the pack. I hope he has realized his mistakes and won’t try something like that, but if it happens, we’ll take it as it goes. What matters is Pack Sallow needs a leader. They have been through a lot. These are people we have known almost our entire lives. We can’t just abandon them in their time of need.” This wasn’t a discussion in my mind. I was already going to accept Pack Sallow into our own. I just needed help with the process. I needed Rie and Scythe to understand that.

“This isn’t going to be easy,” I continued. “That’s why I’m asking you for your help. We need to figure out how to do this transition as smoothly as possible and what to do about the two packhouses. Are you two up for the task?”

"If this is what you want, we've got your back," Scythe said.

Rie added, "Please. This will be easy compared to the elaborate parties Scythe plans."

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## ADIRA

I sat on the other side of the table, waiting for Ginger to speak. Her eyes were closed as she felt the energy of the small bottle that contained Cain's powers. She was taking her time, looking at every aspect of the magic, to make sure it was safe. She didn't trust Cain, which I couldn't blame her for. No one, not even me, trusted Cain, but I still didn't think he would do anything to intentionally hurt me.

After what felt like much too long, Ginger finally opened her eyes. "Girl, are you sure you want to do this?"

I nodded slowly. I didn't exactly want to do this, but if I knew my family and I would be safe, I had to do this. If there was no threat, Cain's magic wouldn't be a temptation. I didn't care about power, but I felt like my hands were tied. Every moment Xavier went unchecked would make attempting to destroy him forever more of a risk.

"If it's safe, yes. I want to get rid of Xavier permanently." I was confident as I spoke.

"All right. I have looked at this again and then two more times after that. I don't sense any tricks or malintent in this magic," Ginger said. Her face was pulled tight. "Just know that just because the magic itself wasn't tampered with, it doesn't mean it's not dangerous to you. I have never heard of a sorcerer absorbing another sorcerer's magic before. I don't know how your body or the baby would handle it."

If I had time to wait for this, I would. I only wanted to risk my own life, but the longer we waited, the more dangerous the fight with Xavier would become. I looked down, wondering what this decision said about me. "I know. We don't have time to wait though. Will you be in the same room as me when I do this? I don't know if you can do anything, but if something goes wrong, I want you to be there just in case."

“I can’t promise you anything, girl, but I will make sure I’m there, and I will do whatever I can to help if it comes down to it,” Ginger said.

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After getting the approval from Ginger, I met up with Mark. He and I had split up the morning to make sure we got everything done that we needed to. I know Mark and I had worked things out after our argument, but I still felt off from our fight before. We hadn’t fought like that before.

As I walked down the hallway, I saw Mark making his way towards me from the conference room. I paused for a brief second, but when our eyes met, I found myself running towards him. He enveloped me in his arms, and any lingering tension in my body melted away with his touch. I buried my head in his chest, and he buried his in my hair.

“How did your meeting go?” I asked as I pulled back, still keeping my arms hooked around his body.

He placed a soft kiss on my lips before talking. “It went well. Rie and Scythe helped me come up with a game for how we are going to handle everything. Now it’s just a matter of talking to everyone and putting it into action.”

I smiled. “Good. You’ll have to catch me a little later. Zayla is waiting for us. Ready?”

Mark smiled and let go, immediately grabbing my hand and leading me down the hallway. Before I even attempted to take on Cain’s magic, Mark wanted me to have another ultrasound and checkup with Doctor Zayla to make sure I was healthy enough to attempt it. If there were any lingering issues, I told Mark that I wouldn’t even consider absorbing the magic, and I would find another way.

We entered Zayla’s office, and I changed into a patient’s outfit. Now that Jori was no longer a patient, the office was quiet. It was a nice feeling. We hadn’t had any other fights or injuries recently, and I hoped we could keep it that way.

Once I was in the patient’s gown and situated on the bed, Doctor Zayla emerged from her office. In her spare time, I knew she had been working on some research, and she had a lot more spare time without any in-house patients. She immediately got to work, setting up the proper machine and

equipment. When she was done with that, she squirted a cool jelly on my stomach, making me jump a little. I was more prepared for the sensation this time, since I was familiar with it, but the cold temperature was still a little bit of a shock.

Next, Doctor Zayla placed a small device on my stomach and moved it around to get a proper view of the baby. As she did this, her face twisted, and my stomach suddenly turned into a rock. I knew something wasn't right by the way she was checking and then double checking. I felt like I couldn't breathe, and my heart started to race.

Mark squeezed my hand, sensing my stress through our bond. "Zay, is something wrong?"

Zayla didn't look up at him and continued her work. She put a finger up. "Give me one more moment. I need to be absolutely sure."

"Sure of what? Is something wrong?" Mark's voice sounded as stressed as I felt.

"Ah, there we go." Zayla's face relaxed as she held the device at a specific spot.

"Zay," Mark said, his alpha tone slipping in. He had very little patience, and I knew he was holding my hand as much for himself as for me.

Zayla pointed to the little screen. "Do you see these spots here and here?"

I looked at the screen and saw what she was pointing out, but I still didn't understand what it meant. "What are we looking at?"

"There's two of them," Zayla said flatly.

My head snapped to Mark, who was still looking at the screen. His brain was still trying to process what she said. Finally, he looked at Zayla.

"Do you mean two babies?" he asked.

Zayla nodded. "Yes, you are having twins."

"Twins?" I repeated, processing the information.



“Twins,” Zayla repeated. “It looks like both of them have strong heartbeats. They are very healthy, and you seem to be doing well, too. I’ll run your blood sample to be sure, but you should be able to return to your normal level of activity.” She pressed a button, which started printing a picture. She handed me the picture when it was done.

“Thanks, Zay,” Mark said. “Can you give us a moment alone?”

“Of course. Link me if you need anything.” Zayla disappeared back into her private office where she did research.

Mark turned to me, and there was a bright smile on his face. “Twins,” he repeated again, letting the news sink in.

“Yeah.” I didn’t know what to say. I barely felt ready to be a mother of one, and now I was having twins. My chest felt tight at the thought.

“Hey,” Mark said, drawing my attention. He cupped my face and made me look into his eyes. “We can do this, and this doesn’t change anything. You’ll still be a great mother. We’ve got this.”

“There’s going to be two babies.” A small incredulous laugh slipped between my lips. “Two.”

Mark kissed my forehead and pulled me into his chest. “Yes, there will be. Looks like we got it right on the first try. We won’t have to have any kids after this.”

This made me laugh, and some of the tension left my body. “And we weren’t even trying. Guess we are pretty skilled at this parenthood thing.”

“Other parents will be jealous of us.” Mark was beaming, and I could tell he was more excited by the news than scared. I was still more scared than excited, but seeing Mark’s smile made me feel a little better.

I let out a sigh, and I felt a little lighter. We still had time to figure out being parents to two babies, but there were other pressing matters. “Since Zayla said the baby–babies– looked healthy, and Ginger gave the clear on the magic, I want to take the magic today. If possible, I want to go after Xavier tomorrow. I think I can sense where he is, and I’m ready for all of this to be over already.”

Mark nodded slowly. “So, tomorrow we attack and end this business with Xavier once and for all. That sounds nice. One less thing for us to worry about.”