The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 76

ADIRA

Everyone gathered in Doctor Zayla's office when it was time for me to try to absorb Cain's magic. Zayla had hooked me up to various monitors to prepare for the moment, and I could hear my nerves in the way the heart monitor raced and beeped over and over again. It was making me more nervous, hearing the sound. I was scared of what would happen with Cain's magic, but I didn't want to show anyone I was scared. I wanted to prove I could be strong and brave, like a lune should.

Mark held my hand and kissed my forehead. Don't worry baby. It'll be okay, he linked me. When I looked at him, he was giving me a smile.

His words made me feel better, and my heart started to calm down. Ginger was on the other side of the bed, and Zayla was next to her, both of them ready to do whatever they could in case there was an unexpected complication. Rie, Scythe, and Reyland were here for moral support. Rie was chewing her nails, and I knew she didn't like one thing about this.

I closed my eyes and focused on the little bottle in my hand. No one actually knew it was dangerous to absorb the magic. They were just worried because the magic came from Cain, and they didn't know what the process was for taking another sorcerer's magic. However, as I held the little bottle in my hand, I knew deep down this was the right decision.

I wanted to believe the best in Cain. I wanted to believe that he wanted to do something to truly try to make up for his mistakes. I also knew that I needed to be more powerful to beat Xavier. Despite those two things influencing me, I knew deep down this was the right decision. As I held the bottle tightly, the magic inside danced with joy. I could feel my own magic reaching out. Something about it made me feel like I was meant to have this magic, and everything would be okay when I released the bottle.

I didn't know how to explain this feeling to Mark or anyone else. They would still have their worries either way, so it wasn't worth the energy it would take to try to explain myself.

I opened my eyes and smiled, knowing it was time. I gave Mark a nod, and he squeezed my hand before letting go and taking a step back. I didn't want him or anyone else touching me during the process, because I wasn't sure how

this process worked. I took a deep breath and opened up the magic inside of me, willing it to absorb and take on this magic to build strength.

When I could feel my magic burning brightly, and my fingers were glowing from the intensity of the magic, I removed the small cork on the bottle. The magic shot out of the bottle and swirled around in the air in front of me. It sparkled with a purple energy, and it danced around, unsure of what to do without a host.

I reached out my hand and touched the swirling cloud with my fingers. The moment I made contact, it jumped at the touch and started swirling around my arm. It prickled my skin, and the hairs on my arm stood tall. The magic continued moving up my arm, diving straight for my face. I opened my mouth, and the magic dove into my throat. It stung and tickled at the same time, and then my body seized as the magic jumped around my organs, fighting with my own magic to find it's own place in my body.

My heart rate spasmed as my body struggled with the war of magic happening inside of me. I couldn't move, and I could barely breathe as it happened, but I wasn't in any pain.

"Adira?" Mark called out. He moved to touch me, but Ginger flung her hand up to stop him.

"Don't touch her. It could interrupt the process," Ginger ordered.

Mark stopped, but I could feel his panic growing. I wanted to tell him I would be okay, but my body wouldn't physically let me. Instead, I sent him a link.

Mark stopped, but I could feel his panic growing. I wanted to tell him I would be okay, but my body wouldn't physically let me. Instead, I sent him a link.

I'm okay. I promise.

Mark didn't respond, so I wasn't sure if he could hear me. I knew Cain had the power to block the mental link between werewolves, so I wasn't sure if Mark could hear me because of the magic. I knew I would be okay, though. I wasn't in any pain, and I could feel the magic calming down. My magic had a life of its own right now, and it didn't seem to like the intrusion of a new magic, but it was becoming more open to it as the minutes ticked on.

Finally, everything inside of me stopped, and the tension in my body released. I took a deep breath, feeling like I hadn't breathed in ages. Mark's hand immediately flung to mine.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

I pulled him in closer for a hug, knowing how worried he was. "I'm okay," I whispered, relief filling me. I took another deep breath and closed my eyes, focusing on the new magic I had just received.

I knitted my eyebrows together in confusion. I could sense the magic still inside of me, but it didn't feel like it was my own. I tried to call on the powers for myself, but all I could feel was my own magic, burning bright with confusion. My chest clenched as I realized what had happened. I didn't absorb the magic.

I looked at Ginger, swallowing hard.

"What is it, girl?" Ginger asked, squinting her eyes at me.

I took a shallow breath, worried about what this meant. "I didn't absorb the magic."

Ginger pursed her lips. "What do you mean? I can still sense the magic." She reached out and placed her hand on my chest. I could feel her own magic move through me as she looked for something specific. After a moment, she took a step back and laughed. "Well, well, look at that."

"What? What happened? Will you all stop being so cryptic? Some of us are trying not to have a panic attack here," Rie said, putting her hands on her hips.

Ginger looked at Rie. "The baby absorbed the magic. It was easier for it to go into an empty vessel than Adira's full one. Her magic was more powerful than Cain's magic, so it found an easier place to go."

"My magic is stronger?" I asked, completely shocked. Cain seemed much stronger than me, and I never thought I would have a chance against a sorcerer like him.

Ginger nodded. "The core of your magic is the strongest I have ever felt. You just haven't learned how to wield it completely."

"So what does this mean for the babies?" Mark asked. I hadn't even realized how hard he was squeezing my hand. He was still on edge about all of this.

"The babies seem to be okay, too," Doctor Zayla said. She was looking at the monitor she had hooked up to me. "Their heart beats are still strong, and I don't see any issues."

Rie looked at me from across the room. "What do you mean babies?"

We hadn't had a chance to tell everyone the news about my pregnancy yet, but I could tell by the shocked faces filling the room that the cat was out of the bag. I let out a nervous laugh and smiled, unsure of what the reaction would be.

"Turns out we're having twins," I announced.

Rie's jaw dropped. "Are you serious?"

Mark nodded, the smile finally returning to his face. "We found out earlier today."

" Twins do run in your family," Reyland said.

I looked over at him, wondering how he knew that. I had never heard of any twins in my family before. "They do?"

Reyland nodded. "Your great-great grandmother was a twin."

"How do you know that?"

Reyland shrugged. "I think Freya had mentioned it at some point to me. She didn't talk about it much, though."

"Twins are considered to be good luck," Ginger said. "They are a sign of protection and power among sorcerers. They are said to have special powers due to their connection in the womb, but I don't have any concrete proof about that."

I smiled at the thought. It seemed fitting because of everything that had gone on. "I'm sure these babies will be special either way."

Mark placed his hand on my belly and then kissed my forehead. "Of course they will be. They have a special mother after all."

Rie gagged at this comment. "Talk about major cheesiness."

Mark rolled his eyes. "You're just jealous."

"Now, now children. Let's not fight," I said, trying to hold back a giggle. Mark and Rie often reminded me of how siblings acted around each other. "We have a lot of work to do if we are going to get rid of Xavier once and for all tomorrow."

"Are you sure you are still up for it?" Mark asked.

I started pulling the monitors off my body, ready to leave the doctor's office. I had spent more time here today than I would have liked. "I'm positive. Xavier is still in a weakened stage. If we go after him now, we will still have a better chance to get rid of him."

I swung my legs over the side of the bed and started to stand up. The moment I put my legs on the ground, I felt wobbly. Mark instantly had his arm around my waist, and his lips curled into a frown.

"You can't even stand." Mark was still worried about me, which I understood. I would be the same if the positions were reversed. I knew I would be okay with a little bit of rest, though.

"I can stand okay. My body is just a little tired from the process. It took more energy than I realized. I'm okay. Promise." I kissed Mark on the cheek to reassure him.

Doctor Zayla stepped forward with her hands clasped behind her back. "If you are going after Xavier tomorrow, I have a prototype of the anti-magic serum ready. I haven't had a chance to run many tests, but it might give you higher chances against Xavier."

Mark perked up at the thought. "Is it safe?"

"Most likely. I'm just not sure if it will be as effective as I would like," Zayla explained. "I would recommend only one person taking it just to be safe, until we know more. That is if you want to try it."

"I'll do it," Mark instantly said.

I looked up at him, suddenly understanding his frustration with my decisions. I didn't like the idea of him taking something that wasn't tested yet, but I knew he wanted to try to be more helpful in this fight. If Xavier couldn't affect Mark as much because of this serum, Mark would be able to protect me and the babies better. It was just another risk and a chance to give us the advantage.

"I'll go grab it," Zayla said before leaving the room.

"Looks like we have a lot to figure out if we are going into battle tomorrow," Reyland said. "I will get my warriors ready."

"I will talk to Darian and Mason, too," Rie said. "We can make a plan to make sure we have enough back up while making sure the pack is safe."

I smiled at all of them. "Thank you all for everything."

Scythe gave me a big, toothy grin. "Of course. We would do anything for our luna!"

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 77

ADIRA

The car ride to our destination was quiet. The tension was running high as we made our way to the area I sensed Xavier in. I wasn't sure where he was exactly, but I was able to reach out and sense his magic, narrowing the location down more and more as we got closer. The only problem with this was that the more I reached out to him, the more I could feel Xavier reaching back out to me. He was sensing me in return, so I knew he knew we were coming.

It made my body shiver every time he reached out to me. I could feel his dark magic slithering through me, trying to pull me and feel where I was.

I don't like this. Moon's voice echoed in my head after my body shivered again. She could feel Xavier's magic pulling at her as well, since she was the one linked to him. I had to take down the walls protecting my subconscious and Moon in order to search for his magic, which made both of us feel vulnerable.

I know, I said back to her. It'll all be over soon. We will find him and end this. Then we'll both be free of him.

Moon stopped responding, and I knew she was feeling on edge about this. Xavier had already almost killed us once, and I knew he wouldn't hesitate to do it again.

Mark reached over and put his hand on my thigh. He was driving the car while I was in the passenger seat, navigating to the best of my ability. "Are you doing okay?" The concern in his voice was obvious, even though I could tell he was trying to hide it.

"I'm okay. He keeps reaching out to me, and I don't like the way it feels. I never want that man to touch me again." Another shiver spasmed my body as if to emphasize my point.

"So he knows we are coming," Mark noted. His eyes were hyper-focused on the road ahead. "That'll make things more difficult."

"I hope he doesn't have time to prepare. We are getting closer. We should be there soon." We were heading in the direction of my hometown, which made me worried. Xavier had been studying me for longer than I had realized, so I knew this couldn't have been a coincidence that we were heading to the place I had grown up.

I decided to link Rie, who was in a separate car with Mason and Reyland. Rie, can you ask Reyland to check on Pack Lyna? Something feels off.

What do you mean? Rie linked back almost instantly.

We are heading towards my hometown, and I have a feeling Xavier knew we were going to come for him, I explained.

Rie took a moment to respond, and I found myself chewing my lip as I waited for her to get back to me.

"What's going on?" Mark asked as he glanced over at me.

"I just think something is weird. I can't put a finger on what it is yet, but I think we should be prepared for something unexpected." I grabbed his hand, feeling like I needed more contact from him to feel calmer. "I asked Rie to have Reyland check on his pack to see if they noticed anything weird."

"It's not too late to turn around," Mark said.

I could feel his worry through our mate bond. He knew how difficult the last fight was, and I was sure the fact that I almost died was going through his mind. We didn't have Cain to help us heal this time, either. We did have Doctor Zayla and more warriors with us. The numbers alone should be enough to take Xavier down. While he was powerful, werewolves were strong, too. We defeated Haley and Theron without any extra help, and Xavier should be weaker than the last time we saw him.

"We can't. The longer we wait to face him, the more powerful he'll grow as he gets more accustomed to this new body." It was tempting to go home and hide, but that hadn't worked for us so far, so I wasn't willing to take that risk.

Reyland said there are no suspicious reports from his pack, Rie finally linked back.

Okay, thank you.

"Apparently, things seem normal in the town," I said. We were on the outskirts of the town now, and I couldn't shake the feeling of something being wrong. The closer we got, the worse the feeling became.

"Apparently, things seem normal in the town," I said. We were on the outskirts of the town now, and I couldn't shake the feeling of something being wrong. The closer we got, the worse the feeling became.

We started driving into town, and it felt like there was a rock in my stomach. We drove through the familiar streets, and everything looked normal, but I knew it wasn't. I kept advising Mark when to turn on the small streets, and with one final turn, we stopped at a tall building. I knew this was where we would find Xavier.

Mark pulled into the parking lot of a large, worn-down hotel, and several cars followed after us. I got out of the car and stood in front of the looming building in front of us. There was no way this was a coincidence. Mark got out of the car after me and walked around to the other side of the car, taking my hand in his.

"This is where we first met," Mark said.

I nodded. "I know. He had to have known that."

"How?" Mark looked at me, and his face looked like it was made of stone. It was smooth and tight as he shoved down all of his worries and concerns. In that moment, I knew he was a warrior and alpha, ready to fight and protect his pack and mate.

"He was in Jori's mind. He probably had access to his memories." I didn't like this feeling at all. This location was calculated carefully.

"Why?"

I looked at Mark, but I didn't have an answer to that question. I didn't know Xavier well enough to know how his mind worked. All I knew was he wanted to be powerful, and he didn't care about other people, only himself. Why he would be hiding out here was a complete mystery to me.

The others started walking up to me, and Reyland was the first one to approach. He looked almost as confused as I was.

"This place has been abandoned for years," Reyland said.

"Why did it shut down?" As far as I knew, the hotel was still up and running when I still lived here.

"They discovered there were structural issues, so they had to shut it down for safety reasons. They were supposed to renovate and fix it, but it was going to cost more than they thought it was worth," Reyland explained. "I haven't been here in years."

I looked back, knowing it was time to go after Xavier. "All right everyone. Stay on your toes, and if you come across Xavier before me, don't engage if possible. I'm the one he wants after all."

Since the hotel was large, we broke off into three different groups to search the building. Mason led one group while Reyland led the other one. Darian had stayed back at our pack house with most of the warriors, just in case anyone threatened the rest of the pack while we were gone. In my group, we had Mark, Percy, Julian, and Hunter. Rie was with Mason with several warriors from Pack Lyna, and Scythe went with Reyland and his warriors to make sure the three groups could communicate with each other.

We entered the lobby of the hotel, and memories of boring pack meetings and parties came flooding into my mind. I had been too young to attend any of the

meetings, and the parties were boring to a young girl who just wanted to run around with her friends. I had spent more time than I should have exploring the hotel during those events.

I led the group through the lobby and into the little courtyard outside. When I saw the fountain in the middle of the overgrown greenery, I smiled, remembering the night Mark and I had spent together when we met as children. I looked at him, and he was smiling as well.

In a way, this is where we began, I linked to Mark.

It was the night I fell in love with you for the first time, he linked back.

Things had changed tremendously since that night, but I was grateful Mark and I had found our way back to each other. If we weren't fated to be with each other, then fate didn't exist. Through all of the crazy circumstances and odds, we found our way back to each other again and again. I knew we would be able to get through this fight so we could have our happily ever after. We had to. It was fate.

When there were no signs of Xavier in the courtyard, I made my way to the ballroom where the dances had been held. As I approached the room, I had to stop from the sudden surge of magic I felt on the other side. I knew Xavier was waiting on the other side of the door for us. I turned to the others and gave them the signal. I decided to let them tell the others. I needed to focus on the fight ahead of us.

I took a deep breath and opened the door to the ballroom. It was dark inside, and dust fell off the top of the doorway as we entered. I looked around, grateful for my enhanced sight in the dark. In the middle of the room, there were two figures sitting in chairs. As I approached, I saw that Cain and Freya were sitting in the chairs, and they were tied at the feet and around the waist to keep them secure. There was something in their mouths keeping them from talking. Cain's eyes were wide, and he was shaking his head, trying to tell me to stop.

I froze in place, trying to identify where Xavier was. I didn't see him right away, but I could feel him. He emerged from the shadows in the corner of the room. He looked different, since he was no longer in Jori's body, but his energy felt the same.

"It took you long enough to show up. I thought I was going to have to start sending pictures of your mommy and daddy tied up." Xavier's voice was deeper now, but it still held the same anger as before. He walked up to Freya and Cain and placed his hands on the backs of the chairs.

I gritted my teeth, frustrated that Xavier had gotten Cain and Freya involved. I was okay with never seeing them again, but now I was going to have to save their lives. I knew it was futile, but I said, "Let them go. They have nothing to do with this."

Xavier chuckled. "Adira, my dear. I know you are smarter than that. We both know you came here with backup to ensure you would win this fight with ease. I had to ensure I had something I could use against you to get what I want."

"You're weak. You know you can't win this fight. Why even bother?" I asked. I was hoping to intimidate him, but I could already tell it wasn't working.

"Surely you feel that I'm not as weak as you think. I learned from my mistake last time. Werewolves don't have any power for themselves, so it took me longer to adjust to that mut's body. Plus, he fought me so hard. He didn't want to hurt you, you know. He fought and fought, until I squished him like a little bug. This time I picked someone who already had magic, someone who wouldn't bother fighting against."

He stretched out his hands and took a deep breath. "It feels good to be in a body that is easy to control."

"It doesn't matter what you say or do. You're not going to get me to just give into you," I said. I had seriously underestimated him, but I wasn't scared. I knew I could still handle what Xavier threw at me. I had defeated him before, and I was stronger and prepared for a fight this time. He wasn't going to harm any of my friends or family.

With a deep breath, the magic inside of me ignited into a bright fire. I was ready to do whatever it took to keep everyone safe, and Xavier wouldn't know what hit him.

"This is your last chance," I warned. "Give up now, because you won't be able to defeat me. I can promise you that much."

Xavier smirked at me, pulling out a knife and pressing a knife to Freya's throat. "Maybe you'll defeat me, but are you willing to sacrifice people to do it?"

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ADIRA

Mark, take the serum now, I linked, watching as Xavier held a blade against Freya's quivering body. The serum wasn't a permanent solution, according to Zayla. She said it would only allow magic resistance for a short period of time, anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour, so Mark needed to take it right before the fight.

Now it was time for me to distract Xavier. "You are threatening the wrong person. At least threaten someone I care more about." The words hurt as they came out of my mouth. As hurt as I was by Freya, I never wished any harm to her. She was still my mother after all, and even though I was okay with never seeing her again, a part of me still loved her. I just wanted to bluff Xavier and make him think I didn't care at all.

Xavier smirked and tilted his head. "Is that so? I guess you wouldn't care if you watched me slit your mother's throat right in front of you then, huh?" Xavier felt challenged, and he loved every moment of it. Some twisted part of him wanted to call my bluff and the other part of him wanted to spill some blood.

Cain thrashed against his restraints, trying to break free. I could see the pure panic and heartbreak in his eyes at the thought of losing his mate. Against all odds, they had found each other decades later, but when they ran away to get their happily ever after, they were taken by the very enemy that tore them apart years ago. Only now Cain didn't have his magic to protect his mate.

I was the only one who could do anything to stop this from happening. Xavier's hand started moving, and immediately I shifted behind him. I flung a ball of magic, hitting him in the back and knocking him forward. I threw another attack, knocking the blade out of his hand. The weapon flung across the room and clattered to the ground.

Xavier laughed in response. "I knew you cared. I know you better than you think. You only think you are in love with that wolf because you don't know what real love can look like. Just imagine being with someone who will let you

accomplish anything you want. With me by your side, you'll be unstoppable. I will make sure you have everything you ever wanted. Just take a small taste, and you'll see what I mean."

Xavier shifted and ended up directly in front of me. He placed his hands on my cheeks, trying to hold my face still in order to kiss me. I heard Mark's growl echo around the room as he changed into his wolf form. He dashed towards us, trying to attack Xavier. I knew he wouldn't get to me in time to stop the kiss, so I placed my hand on Xavier's chest and sent a jolt of magic through his body.

He stumbled backwards, and Mark was quick to pounce on him, pinning him to the ground. Xavier shot a black tendril out of his hand and hit Mark in the chest. Mark was sent flying, rolling around and around until he managed to land on his feet. He let out another snarl. He seemed relatively okay, and I knew the serum was working.

Xavier shifted so he was standing up straight again. "I'm impressed you took that blow so well. At such a close range, my magic should have destroyed your body. You've gotten strong, wolf."

I didn't want to give Xavier another chance to attack, so I started sending a barrage of magic attacks flying in his direction. While I distracted Xavier, Percy and the others ran over to Freya and Cain and started working on untying them. Mark dashed towards Xavier, lunging at him with his teeth bared again. I stopped my attacks briefly to give Mark a chance to hit him without the risk of my magic hitting him.

Mark bit down into Xavier's arm, but before he could rip the sorcerer's arm off completely, Xavier shifted to safety. When he appeared again, he showed up right next to Cain. He pushed Percy, Hunter, and Julian away with a blast of magic and then grabbed Cain's face.

"Don't move if you don't want me to kill your father right now. Don't shift or use magic or it's over," Xavier warned. His eyes locked with mine, and all I saw was pure darkness.

I froze, afraid to make a move. I refused to be the reason Cain died. I took a deep breath, and for a moment everything slowed down. I looked around the room, trying to figure out how to save Cain from Xavier's rampage. Even if I did as Xavier wanted, he wouldn't spare the people I cared about. That was the reason villains were more powerful than heroes. True evil didn't care

about feelings or agreements. I knew it would be pointless to make a deal with this monster. There had to be another way.

Mark was ready to pounce, but he wouldn't be able to get to Cain in time. I could shift and try to stop Xavier before he killed Cain, but he already has his finger on the trigger. I knew I wouldn't be fast enough to shift to Xavier and stop him from hurting Cain. Besides, Xavier would see me coming the millisecond I decided to use magic.

There was only one solution I saw to stop Xavier from killing Cain, and I wasn't even sure if it was worth it. With another deep breath, I reached out my hand and envisioned Cain shifting away. My magic reached out to him with a familiarity, and when it reached him, it enveloped him before shifting his entire body across the room. At the same second, Xavier shot a black tendril out, but it hit nothing but air.

Xavier lifted his hand up and inspected it closely. "You truly are incredible, Adira. For someone who barely knew magic months ago, you have grown magnificently. I can't wait to share power with you."

He curled his fingers and aimed his magic at Freya. Once again, I shifted her across the room, keeping her safe from Xavier's attack. I had never shifted anyone else before, and I didn't even know it was possible until just now. It was something I wanted to do, so I tried it. The power inside of me was growing and buzzing from the determination I felt at that moment to protect the people around me. I almost felt invincible.

"Get them out of here," I ordered Percy. I knew it was more important for Freya and Cain to get out of here safely than have the three warriors here to help me. I would just be trying to keep them safe instead of focusing on getting rid of Xavier.

I knew Mark and I would be able to handle Xavier on our own, and the others would be here any second to provide extra back up.

"Good job saving your mommy and daddy," Xavier said. "I wonder if you'll be able to save your 'mate' too. You know, I picked this place because I thought it would be fitting for you to see your mate die in the same place you met him. It'll be an ending and a new beginning for you. Quite poetic, huh?"

This time it was me who laughed. "What makes you so sure you are going to win this time? We beat you once, and we weren't even prepared last time. Tonight the only person I will watch die is you."

I started attacking Xavier again. I wasn't interested in hearing him talk and distract me any longer. He couldn't get into my head, because I wasn't afraid anymore. I was tired of the threat, and I was a mama bear, ready to protect her family.

Xavier blocked all of my attacks, but he was losing ground. As I pressed forward, he kept stepping back, barely able to keep up with all of my attacks against him. Mark flung forward and attacked Xavier again, making the sorcerer bloodied from the bite marks. Xavier tried to attack Mark, but I was able to deflect the attacks with my own magic.

Xavier stopped moving, pinned to the ground, injured, and worn out. It was over. We had the upper hand, and Xavier wouldn't be able to escape this time. I loomed over his body as Mark held him on the ground. Mark was baring his teeth, ready to rip out his throat.

"I warned you not to mess with me." I looked down at Xavier, a sense of relief flowing through me. This battle had been even easier to do than I thought, and soon I would make sure Xavier would never be able to harm me or anyone else I knew again.

Xavier smiled at me, which was not the reaction I expected. "You underestimate me again, my dear. Do you really think this was my entire plan? Threaten your family and hope you rolled over and gave into my wishes? I told you. I know you better than you realize. I knew you wouldn't stop fighting me until I was dead."

My chest tightened as Xavier spoke. I was missing something, but I couldn't figure out what. Xavier was much too lighthearted about the situation. Of course he had a backup plan. He was prepared for us today, and he knew he would be at a disadvantage.

"What are you talking about?" My voice cracked as panic slipped into my voice.

"Do you really think I would want the body of a weak sorcerer like this? Of course not. I realized the only way to truly get the power I wanted and to fulfill

the prophecy was to simply take your body." Xavier's eyes went glassy as he slipped his hand out of Mark's grasp.

Mark lunged forward, ready to kill Xavier, but he wasn't fast enough. Xavier used his magic to summon his blade from before. It flew into his hand, and he gripped it tightly. He flung his hand, stabbing himself right in the neck. He instantly started coughing up blood.

Xavier locked eyes with me and choked out his final words, "I'll see you on the other side."

My eyes were wide as I tried to process what had just happened. Xavier had stabbed himself, and now I was watching him bleed to death. A sudden realization hit me, and I flew to my knees, pressing my hands against the wound. I couldn't let this body die. Xavier's magic was trapped in the body, and he was trying to release himself from the host body.

I tried to heal the wound, but it was impossible to do with the knife still in the body. I pulled out the blade, and the wound started gushing blood. Xavier had hit himself in the artery, and he was bleeding too fast. My magic wasn't enough to save him.

Mark changed back into his form. "Why the hell would he do that?"

Xavier's body stopped moving, and black magic shot from the body, just like when I forced Xavier out of Jori's body. The black cloud hung in the air for a moment, but this time, instead of disappearing, the magic lunged forward, hitting me directly in the chest. I could feel Xavier's magic filling my body, fighting for control. It felt similar to when I tried to take on Cain's magic, only this time it hurt as Xavier fought for control over me.

I couldn't breathe, and everything started going dark. I felt the rush of air as I collapsed. The last thing I felt before passing out was Mark's arms catching me before I hit the ground, and the last thing I heard was Mark calling, "Adira!" over and over and over again.

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 79

MARK

My heart stopped beating as I saw Adira start collapsing to the floor. Profanities streamed out of my mouth, and I didn't know what to do. I lowered

Adira to the ground, my hands shaking as I cradled her head. She was still alive. She was breathing, and I could feel her heart beating, but I knew Xavier was trying to take over Adira's body, and I felt completely helpless.

Scythe, bring Ginger here. Now! I knew my order sounded harsh, but Ginger was the only one who could possibly do something to stop this now. Everyone was already on their way, since I linked them to join us the moment we found Xavier. They should have been here by now. What was taking so long?

Adira's body shook, and I knew she was fighting against whatever was happening, but her skin was draining of color.

Adira, can you hear me? I tried linking her, hoping she could hear me, but I wasn't getting a response.

The doors to the ballroom flung open, and Reyland was the first one through the door. Ginger and Scythe were right behind him. The others filed in, but I stopped paying attention to him. I held Adira tight in my arms, desperate to do something to save her.

"What happened?" Reyland asked, kneeling in front of Adira and me. He looked at the lifeless body and then back at me.

"Xavier released his magic, and it went straight into Adira. I don't know what to do." I looked at Ginger with wide eyes. "Please stop him. Please save her. I can't lose her."

Tears fell out of my eyes as I looked down at Adira's tormented body. We were so close. I thought we had Xavier right where we wanted him, but it was the exact opposite. Now Adira had to suffer for our mistake, and I felt completely helpless. I didn't know what to do except hold my mate tight and hope Ginger could stop this madness.

Ginger slid to her knees and pressed her hands against Adira's chest. She closed her eyes, but then she suddenly pulled back, sucking in a sharp breath through her teeth. She looked at her fingers and then looked at me.

"I don't think there's anything I can do to help her. She has to fight him and expel his essence from her own body," Ginger said. Her voice was quiet, which almost scared me more. Ginger was normally loud and confident, so her voice coming across this calmly made my stomach unsettled.

"There's nothing we can do? I can't just watch her fight like this alone." I hated this. My mate was being attacked, and all I could do was watch helplessly from the side.

"Talk to her. Let her know you're right here. Remind her of the reasons she needs to keep fighting," Ginger said. "That's all we can do. It's up to Adira now."

–

ADIRA

Everything was dark around me. The white room that usually filled my subconscious was drenched with poison, and I could hardly see a thing. I stumbled forward, knowing I couldn't give up. This was my mind and my body, and I refused to let Xavier take it from me. The problem was, I didn't know where he was. I could feel his presence all around me, trying to steal what was mine, but I didn't see a physical form.

"Adira!" Shadow called out. "Help!" I looked around, but I couldn't see Shadow anywhere. Her voice sounded like it came from all directions.

"Where are you?" I called back.

Instead of hearing Shadow, I heard a deep chuckling echo around my head. It almost sounded like it came from right behind me, so I flipped around, expecting to see Xavier. There was nothing there.

"Let her go!" I screamed, terrified Xavier was doing something to my wolf. I kept turning as flickering shadows caught my eye, but there was never anything there. More laughter echoed around me, and I felt like I was losing it. Everything about this felt like a bad nightmare, and I knew there was no waking up to escape the horrors.

"It didn't have to be like this," Xavier's voice said from nowhere in particular. "I wanted you to be my queen, but you chose to be my captive instead. Now you'll be forced to live in your own head like a prisoner while I use your hands to kill everyone you have ever loved."

My chest tightened at the thought, and it was becoming more difficult to breathe. I could feel the darkness infiltrating my soul, and I felt helpless. I wasn't prepared for an attack of the mind, and I grew terrified that I wouldn't

be able to fight Xavier off. I started running to find something other than darkness, but I ended up tripping and falling onto my hands and knees.

Adira, don't give up. Mark's voice echoed in my head, and for a moment, a shimmer of light caught my eye.

"Mark? Where are you?" He didn't respond to me, but I knew that was his voice. He was talking to me, waiting for me to return to him.

I started moving towards the light, hoping I would find something there.

I'm here with you, baby. We all are. I'm not letting you go. I know you can do this. You have to. I need you. I can't do this without you. Mark's voice broke as he spoke, and this sparked a fire within me. He was desperate and in pain, knowing Xavier was trying to steal my body. I couldn't just roll over and let Xavier take over my body.

Xavier laughed again. "Does your mate honestly think he can do anything to stop this?"

It was my turn to laugh. "He doesn't have to do anything, because I'm strong enough on my own." I stood up and looked around the room. It was still dark, but it no longer scared me, because I knew light would always chase out the shadows.

"I'm so scared," Xavier's voice was dripping with sarcasm. He wasn't taking me seriously, but I knew that would only work out to my advantage.

"You continue to underestimate me," I mused. I started walking forward, feeling a strong presence straight ahead.

"Because you are just a babe. You know nothing about magic. I have been in this world for longer than you've been alive times three. You are nothing against my experience." Xavier's physical form appeared ahead, but all I could see was a shadow.

I raised my hand and shot a blast of magic into the air. Fireworks erupted, lighting the room and fighting the darkness. The flashes of light illuminated Xavier's face, and for the first time, I knew I was looking at Xavier's true form. This wasn't a borrowed body that he needed to build his power. This was the face of the man who was killed by the council all of those years ago. His eyes

were lighter than I had expected. I had only ever associated light eyes with this monster, so it threw me off to see pale blue eyes staring back at me now.

He was young, too, maybe around my age. His skin was soft, and if I didn't know better, I would have thought he was just an innocent bystander. However, as the light faded, the shadows shot back into Xavier's body, filling his eyes with the black magic filled with hatred. I knew he never had a chance to live a normal life. His magic poisoned him from the beginning, corrupting his mind with a lust for power and blood. He had to be stopped.

I shook my head as I looked at the twisted form in front of me. "I may not know how to control my power as well as someone like you, but what I do know is I don't care. There is more to this world than being powerful. There is love and family and happiness. I almost feel sorry for you. You were corrupted before you ever had a chance to feel any of that. But I can't feel sorry for someone who never tried to change their circumstances."

Xavier's jaw clenched, and his fists shook as the anger took over. "They are the ones who tried to take everything from me. That council locked me up like I was scum on this earth. They took everything from me, including my body. Once I get your power, they will be the first ones to suffer. I don't need your sympathy or anyone else's. I know who I am, and soon the world will tremble at my feet."

Xavier sent a blast of dark magic in my direction, but time slowed around me, and I was able to easily step to the side of the attack. My hands moved to my stomach as this was happening. I hadn't done anything to deflect Xavier's attack, but I knew Cain's magic was based on time manipulation. I could feel the power buzzing in my stomach, and I knew the babies had slowed time to keep me safe and give me a chance to easily dodge.

Time returned to its normal speed, and Xavier blinked at me. "How did you do that?"

I smirked at him. "I'm not alone here. You've made an enemy of the wrong person."

I moved forward and started throwing balls of light at Xavier. The space around him slowed again, and he tried to stop the attacks, but he couldn't move fast enough to deflect them because of the time bubble he was stuck in. One attack after another hit him, and soon the room was lit up by the amount of power pouring out of me.

Time returned to normal, and all of the attacks hit Xavier all at once. He was blasted back, flying several feet away before he hit the floor with a thunk. The room lightened a little, as Xavier tried to catch his breath.

I walked over to Xavier and stood above him, holding out my hand with another attack prepared. "This is my body, and you can try to take it over, but you won't win, because I'm just as powerful as you, except I have something to fight for. You shouldn't have threatened my mate or my family, because I don't care how much time you have had to practice, you won't defeat me, because I can't let you. There are too many people who need me."

Xavier coughed up a little blood before smirking at me. "You really are a force that shouldn't be reckoned with. I hope the world sees this side of you, because it will burn from the power of a scorned woman. Just do me a favor. Take out that council and show them they don't control anyone."

I scoffed at his request. "I'm not looking to take revenge on anyone. I don't want power. I don't care if the world knows who I am. I just want to live a quiet and peaceful life with my family. I'll deal with the council if I need to, but I know you won't give up, and I'll never be safe with you here."

I knelt down and pressed my hands against Xavier's chest. I forced as much light into his body, and I watched as the darkness was pushed out and the light began to fill the room. I didn't stop until there wasn't a single shadow in my subconscious, and I couldn't see anything because it was so bright.

When I was sure there were no more signs of Xavier's presence, I stopped and sat back. My chest heaved as I started to breathe again. I hadn't even realized I was holding my breath. I looked around, making sure there wasn't something I missed, and everything felt normal again.

Moon and Shadow suddenly appeared in front of me and sat down.

"You did it," Shadow said.

"He's finally gone," Moon added.

I smiled at him, relief filling me to my core. "Yeah. I finally feel free. Let's get out of here."

With another breath, I emerged from my subconscious and opened my eyes, finding myself in the real world again. I was in Mark's arms, and he was

staring down at me with tears staining his cheeks. I reached up and wiped the tears away.

"Hi," I whispered, my body aching from the battle that just took place inside of me.

"Adira?" Mark's voice was shaking, and I knew he was barely holding on, waiting for me to return.

I smiled up at him, knowing everything would be okay. "I'm back."

The Hunted Wolf – Chapter 80

ADIRA

I sat on the porch in the spring air, listening to the sound of the children playing in the front yard. My hand gently rested on my rounded belly as I felt the twins kicking. They were growing more active every day, and I knew they were happy and healthy. I closed my eyes and took in the sounds surrounding me.

Ever since Pack Sallow was dissolved and became a part of Pack Aphelion, the pack house has been constantly filled with people and laughter. It made it feel like a home, and it was amazing to see everyone reunite with each other. It made it clear to me that combining the packs was the right thing to do all along. The packs were never meant to split up in the first place.

It had been months since we saw Jori. He helped with the initial transition, and then he left with only a note to say goodbye. I knew why he left, but it still made me sad. I hoped Jori would return one day and rejoin this pack. He would never be the alpha again, but all of his people were here. Part of me knew deep down that Jori would never return, at least not in a permanent manner. Perhaps he would be back to visit and check up on things, but there was too much pain and history for him to return. The future was unknown though, and I refused to write him off completely.

After Xavier was defeated, the mood in the pack house lightened up, and it wasn't long before Reyland returned home with the majority of his warriors. The threat of the council was still looming over us, but if they ever decided to attack or threaten me, I was ready. Reyland said he would meet us on the battlefield if it ever came down to that.

"Adira, you are looking well."

I jumped at the voice. An elderly man appeared in front of me, and I could feel his magic oozing off of him. I started standing up, ready to fight, but he held out his hand.

"No need to stand up for me, especially not in that condition." His eyes moved down to my belly. He took a seat on the chair across from me.

I settled back into my chair, but I was on edge. I didn't know this man, but something told me he wasn't a threat, at least not at this point.

Mark, there's a sorcerer here. I'm on the porch. Hurry. Even though I didn't think he was a threat, I didn't want to be left alone in this condition. Plus, I wanted to make sure the pack was put on alert, just in case I was wrong.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I told you. I'm not a threat to you. There was no need to alert your man." The man was calm as he spoke. The way he held himself told me he had seen more than his fair share in this world.

"Who are you?" I repeated. Clearly, he knew who I was, and I didn't care if he said he wasn't a threat. I needed to know who I was dealing with.

"My name is Winslow. I am one of the elders on the Council of Magic."

My body tensed at his words. This was the first time the council had tried to make contact with me directly. I knew I couldn't trust this man. "If you try anything, I'll-"

Winslow held his hand up. "Relax. I told you, I'm not a threat to you. I know the council wanted you dead before, but we've been watching you, Adira Lyna. We know you destroyed Xavier, the Son of Blood and Magic, instead of giving into his ways. We know you just seem to care about living this small life with the werewolves. We also know you are Cain Caspian's daughter. He pulled a fast one on us with that little secret of his."

Winslow leaned back and stroked his speckled gray beard. He almost seemed amused at the thought. "I didn't think Cain had the guts to lie to us of all people. That man has guts. You wouldn't happen to know where he is, would you?"

"No." This wasn't a lie. While we were dealing with the rest of the fight against Xavier, Freya and Cain slipped away again without so much as a thank you for saving their lives. I hadn't heard from either of them since. I hadn't been surprised by their actions, and I didn't waste any time looking for them. I didn't need them in my life.

Winslow waved his hand. "No matter. From what I understand, he no longer has his magic. He would be useless to the council."

"Why are you here?" I asked. Winslow was taking his time explaining himself. "If I'm not a threat, then why bother me?"

Winslow smiled. "You like to get to the point, huh?"

"Well, when a man who once wanted me dead comes to my home uninvited, I'm not looking for a tea party." I looked at him closely, trying to read his behavior. He seemed to be light hearted, but I knew there was more to him than that.

"To be clear, I never wanted you dead. The council did."

"It's all the same to me. Now, are you going to answer my question?" I sat up straight, pushing on the armrests on the chair to keep me balanced.

Winslow hummed and looked out into the yard. "As I said, the council no longer sees you as a threat. We realized we jumped the gun with determining your fate. That doesn't mean we no longer care about your existence, though. Adira, you destroyed one of the most powerful sorcerers that ever lived, something that the council themselves were never able to accomplish. You have so much potential, and we don't want it to go wasted. I am here on official business on behalf of the Council of Magic. We would like to invite you to be a member of the council."

I furrowed my eyebrows at the offer. It was the last thing I had expected from someone on the council. "Is this some type of trick?"

Winslow flicked his wrist, producing a black piece of paper with gold trimming. "I assure you this is no joke. This is your formal invitation."

I grabbed the paper he offered me and looked at it closely. The paper was imbued with magic, and I could feel the intention of the magic user who created this card. I could feel that what Winslow was saying was true.

"Me? A member of the council of magic?" I couldn't process the idea. It had taken me too long to accept the idea of being a luna of a wolf pack, and this somehow felt so much bigger.

"It's a great honor, young lady. It has been a long time since someone new was invited to join the council."

I looked up at Winslow, meeting his eyes. This did feel like a great honor, but I already knew my answer. I held the piece of paper back out to him. "No thank you. I'm happy with my life here. I'm not interested in joining the council."

Winslow chuckled, and he didn't grab the paper. Instead, he stood up. "I had a feeling you would say that. Keep that paper, in case you change your mind. Who knows? Maybe you'll decide that you'll be able to accomplish more with the help of the council."

"I doubt I'll change my mind." I stood up awkwardly as I tried to meet Winslow's height. He towered over me, but I still felt better standing.

Winslow shrugged. "No one can predict the future. That offer won't expire for a long time, so hold onto that tightly. Take care of those babies. I have a feeling I will see you in the future."

Winslow disappeared, giving me no chance to respond to him. I looked at the paper again, wondering if I should throw it out. I had no need for it, since I knew I would never leave my family to join the council, but something told me Winslow was right. It was better to hold onto it than let it go.

I looked up, feeling Mark's presence approaching. He ran out of the woods in wolf form, and just before he made it to the porch, he shifted to his human form.

"Are you okay?" Mark was out of breath from running. He had been on patrol when I linked him, and I knew he instantly ran to me. He grabbed my shoulders and looked me up and down. His hand moved to my belly to feel the babies.

I nodded. "We're okay."

Mark looked around. "Where is the sorcerer? Do I need to send patrols out?"

I looked at the black card in my hand. "No, I don't think so. He's gone now. I don't think the council is going to be an issue anymore, either."

Mark pulled me close to him and kissed my forehead. "Are you sure?"

"Not one hundred percent, but I have a pretty good feeling about it." I wrapped my arms around his waist and pulled him as close as I could with my protruding pregnant belly.

Mark smiled down at me. "You have no idea how relieved I am to hear that. I couldn't get the fear of them coming for you out of my head."

I rested my head on his chest. "I know. Everything feels right now. We are finally going to get our happily ever after."

Mark pulled back, and he had a glint in his eye. He started digging into his pocket and pulled something out. "I've been waiting to do this for a while now, but it never felt like quite the right time, but you're right. It's time we got our happily ever after."

Mark got down on one knee and opened the little black box in his hand, revealing a silver ring decorated with small diamonds. My eyes went wide and my hands flew to my mouth. I had been content just being mated to Mark, so I didn't even think about officially getting married.

"Adira Lyna, Luna of Pack Aphelion, love of my life, and mother of my children, you make me happier than I ever thought I could be. I lost my family at a young age, and I never thought I would be able to get that back, but you make me feel safe and loved. I'm a better man because of you. Will you marry me?"

"Of course." There was zero hesititation with my answer. Mark stood up, and I threw my arms around his neck. Tears of joy streamed out of my face, and my heart was racing with excitement. This was unexpected and absolutely perfect. "I love you, Mark."

"I love you, too." Mark leaned in, brushing my cheek with his thumb before sealing his love with a kiss. Finally, everything felt absolutely perfect, and I was excited for the next stage of my life with Mark, the man who showed me I could truly be wanted by the right people.

The End.