

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 36

“Follow me,” Clara said, walking down the hallway. She led me to an office in the back. There was a couch near the door, and a coffee table in front of it. Her desk was in the corner and it was covered in papers and folders. She motioned for me to sit down on the couch.

I sat down slowly. I felt on edge after everything that had just happened, and I was worried Clara would be just another person to take advantage of me. I watched as she moved around the room, ready to run if necessary. She pulled something out of the bottom of her desk drawer and walked over to me. She placed a blanket on my shoulders.

“My goodness, child. You are freezing and barely wearing anything. Don’t tell me that man...” She cut herself off and looked out the door.

I shook my head. “No, thankfully he didn’t do anything to me.” I pulled the blanket around me tightly. I couldn’t stop shaking.

“Good.” She looked back at me and frowned. “You need hot chocolate. I’ll be right back.” She disappeared from the room and a few moments later she came back in and handed me a mug with liquid steaming from it.

I took the cup and gratefully wrapped my fingers around it. The warmth almost burned, but I welcomed every moment of it. “Thank you.” I took a small sip, and I could feel the hot chocolate as it slid down my throat and settled into my stomach.

“That should help warm you up. Make sure to drink all of it.” She sat in her chair, moving slowly as her old bones creaked in the process. It was the first time she really showed her age. She looked over at me and locked eyes with me. I could see a deep concern emitting from her face. “Do you want to call anyone?”

“That would be wonderful,” I quickly said. I wanted to call Mark and tell him I was okay. I’m sure he would race over to pick me up. Clara started to stand up, but I quickly bolted to my feet, spilling the hot chocolate. “No, please don’t get up. I can get it.”

Clara continued standing anyway. “Please child, I’m not as old as I seem. Besides, I’m pretty sure I’m in better condition than you right now. Sit back down and just focus on getting warm.” She walked over to me and handed me

her cell phone, giving me a pointed look. When I sat back down, she continued, "You're safe here. I promise you that, so please just focus on yourself. You look near death right now with how blue your skin is."

I nodded slowly, unsure of how else to respond. I set my drink on the table and looked at her phone. It was the old flip phone style with actual buttons. I went to type Mark's phone number and then froze. "I don't have his number memorized." I didn't know Jori's or Scythe's phone numbers either.

"This is the problem with technology," Clara laughed. "I know I wouldn't know anyone's phone number without that little device. My brain isn't what it used to be. This old age is really getting to me."

I smiled. "I thought you weren't as old as you look."

Clara narrowed her eyes. "Very funny, girl. You're a clever one." She waved her hand in front of her. "Well, there's nothing else we'll be able to do for you tonight. We'll get you rested for now and send you on your way in the morning."

I frowned, looking down at my hands. "I don't have any money. I can go if you want me to. I'm sure I can figure out something."

"Don't be ridiculous. I would never turn out a woman in need. You can sleep in here for tonight. I'm sure I can find something for you to wear as well. Have you eaten?" Clara was still standing a few feet in front of me.

I shook my head. I knew my body needed food, but I didn't feel the slightest bit hungry.

"Well, you finish up that hot chocolate and get as warm as possible. I will scrounge up something for you to eat and be back." Clara left the room before I could say anything.

I grabbed the hot chocolate and pulled my feet into my chest. I was still shaking, but with every sip of the warm beverage, I felt a little better. It was like thawing out a popsicle. With every sip, the ice inside of me melted a little more. I was a little amazed at how I was able to function in the cold for so long. I was warmer now, but I could barely sit still from the shivers. The ache in my body became very apparent as the cold became less of an issue.

I set the empty cup on the coffee table and then wrapped myself deeper into the blanket. I let out a long sigh, feeling almost numb, despite being warmer now. I was tired of being targeted and attacked. I was tired of all of the big decisions I had to make. More than anything, I was exhausted.

"It's not much," Clara said as she entered the room, "but it will give you some of your strength back." She set a bowl of soup on the table in front of me. Instead of sitting in her chair, she decided to take a seat next to me. She had some clothing articles draped over her arm. "The clothes aren't anything fancy, and they are probably a little too big for you, but they'll keep you warmer than that dress."

I took the clothes from her arms and hugged them tightly. "Why are you being so kind to me?"

Clara gave me a soft smile. "Sweetie, us girls need to stick together, especially when the world turns against us. I have no idea what you have been through, and I'm not going to force you to talk about it if you don't want to, but if I can give you clothes, food, and a warm place to sleep tonight, then I will have done my part."

I smiled back at her, picking up the bowl. I wasn't hungry still, but soup sounded easy enough to eat and warm, too. "I'm so grateful I ran into you." I looked down at the soup, still longing for something else.

"Who is he?" Clara asked, watching me carefully.

I was about to ask her who she was talking about, but looking into her eyes, I already knew the answer. "His name is Mark."

"Boyfriend?"

I bit my lip. "It's complicated. He's not officially my boyfriend, but he's so kind and patient with me. He has been so supportive of everything, but I haven't been the best to him."

Clara tilted her head. "You sound like you're head over heels for this boy. What's stopping you?"

I laughed, not because I actually found it funny, but because everything seemed so messed up. "Right now it's the distance. Before, well, it was complicated."

“Ah, love. It should be so easy, but it rarely feels that way. Is this boy your soul mate?”

I looked at Clara carefully. Her wording piqued my interest. Normal humans didn't usually ask about soul mates. They talked about finding their one true love or claimed their significant other was their soul mate, but something about her question told me there was more to her question. “Sort of.” I took a deep breath, trying to see if there was a scent to Clara to tell me she was of the supernatural origin.

Clara laughed. “Smell me all you want, but you're not going to get anything from that. I am just a plain old human after all.”

I blinked at Clara, even more confused now. “I don't know what you're talking about.” I wanted to tread lightly until I found out what she knew. If she was a human aware of the supernatural world, there was a chance she was a hunter.

“Relax, girl.” Clara laughed again, and it was so light and fluffy. “I wish your kind no ill will. I saw the signs when I first laid eyes on you. I know you're a sorceress.”

I froze at her words. She claimed that she didn't want to harm me, but I still felt on edge. I didn't understand how she knew I was a sorceress. No one I had come across was able to tell that I was a sorceress. Usually my wolf's scent overpowered that aspect. “How-”

“My soul mate was a sorcerer, so I'm pretty familiar with that world. You all have a sort of energy about you. It's not obvious if you don't know what you're looking for, but now I can't unsee it.” Clara leaned back and looked off into space. It was as if she was thinking of a distant memory.

“I'm sorry for your loss.” I continued watching Clara's expressions. Her eyes crinkled ever so slightly, and the corner of her lips twitched.

She then looked over at me. She was still smiling, but there was a longing in her eyes. “No matter, dear. It was a long time ago. I was angry for a long time, but I have come to terms with it.”

“How did he die?” I paused, realizing my question was likely inappropriate. “Sorry, you don't have to answer if you don't want to.”

Clara shook her head. "It's all right, dear. Another sorcerer stole my love from me. He was greedy and wanted the power for himself. My Ned was one of the strongest sorcerers there was, you see. It made him a target."

"That's awful." I couldn't even imagine losing Mark that way. I paused, frowning deeply. Is that how Mark was feeling right now? He still didn't know if I was alive or dead, and I had no way to tell him.

"It was." Clara looked down at her hands for a moment. Then she looked back at me. "That's why when you get back to your Mark, don't ever let him go. I don't care what the complication is. Hold onto your soul mate for as long as you can, because you never know what will happen."

I felt sick thinking about her words. "Mark isn't my soul mate. He's my mate." Clara furrowed her brows, so I continued. "I'm not just a sorceress. I'm half werewolf too. Mark is my mate for my wolf side, but then there's this guy, Jori. He's my soulmate for my sorceress side. It's been confusing."

Clara nodded carefully. "I see. When you said it was complicated, you really meant it."

I rubbed my hands on my face, the feelings of frustration returning. "Yeah. I hate it. I don't want to hurt either of them."

"But Mark's the one you want," Clara said confidently. She wasn't asking.

I nodded. "I feel terrible, but when I was kidnapped, all I could think about was getting back into Mark's arms. That's how I knew he was my choice."

"Kidnapped?" Clara's eyes went wide. "My, oh my. You really have been through a lot, sweet girl. Can I give you a piece of advice?"

"Okay." I looked over at Clara, my stomach knotting. I was afraid she would want me to pick Jori because he's my soulmate, and that's what she had.

"Let this Jori down as easily as you can. I know this is hard on you, but it's surely hard on him as well. He's the one losing his soul mate."

I thought about this for a moment. Clara was right. Jori deserved a proper conversation about my decision. "I will do that."

“One more thing.” Clara waited a moment to make sure I was making eye contact with her. “Don’t feel guilty about your decision. The heart wants what it wants, and you deserve to find true happiness with this Mark.”

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 37

“So tell me about this kidnapping and how you got away. Was it that man who followed you in here? We should have called the cops.” Clara furrowed her brows and looked angry.

“No, it wasn’t him. Although, if it weren’t for you, I’m not so sure I wouldn’t have been kidnapped again.” I pulled my knees to my chest, feeling anxious about the situation.

“Then who managed to kidnap a half sorceress/half werewolf girl? I’m sure you are just beyond powerful.”

My heart sank at this. I didn’t feel powerful. I felt weak and helpless. I wasn’t sure how I was going to resolve this situation with Theron if he decided to come after me again. Something told me he wasn’t about to give up either.

“I’m not as powerful as you might think. I didn’t know I was part sorceress until recently. My parents hid that information from me. I don’t know how to control my powers yet. Apparently, I have a half-brother I never knew about, either. He wants to kill me so he inherits the family powers. I told him I didn’t want them, but he said he didn’t have a choice.” I hugged my knees tighter. Everything would be easier if I wasn’t a sorceress.

Clara nodded slowly. “He’s right. The only way to inherit a coven’s powers is to be the first born child. If you are older than him, the only way for him to get what he wants is to get rid of you.”

I swallowed hard. “This is just really hard to absorb. I grew up knowing nothing about sorcerers and covens, and now someone wants to kill me because of something completely out of control.” My eyes felt too tired to cry, even though the emotions were building up behind them.

Clara reached over and placed her hand on mine. “I know how confusing this might be. When Ned told me his true identity, I thought he was playing a joke on me. Even when he showed me how magic worked, it was hard to accept at first. You’ll get there, though, and it’ll be more beautiful than you realize.”

A yawn slipped through my mouth, and I was having a hard time fighting off the drowsiness now that I was warmer and felt safe. "Will you teach me about the sorcerer world?" I started closing my eyes.

Clara laughed. "I can teach you what I know, but first you need rest. Let your body recover for the night. In the morning we can talk more and get you home to that boy of yours."

I nodded my head, no longer wanting to fight sleep. It had felt like ages since I got a good night's sleep, and my body could feel it. Clara stood up, and I readjusted so I was lying on the couch. Clara bent down and tucked the blanket around me.

"Sweet dreams child." I heard her footsteps fade as she left, and then I was quickly out.

—

"He's coming for you!" Moon shouted, jolting me into the dream world yet again.

My heart was pounding with fear. "Theron? How do you know?"

"I can feel him. Our powers are linked since you have the same father as him," Moon explained. Her back was hunched, and her tail was flicking back and forth. This was very different than the usual calm demeanor she held.

"Does that mean he can find me as well?" I stood up and looked around, expecting him to come out of nowhere, but there was nothing around us like usual.

Moon nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"Why have you never told me this before?"

"I didn't know!" Moon brushed up against my leg. "I sensed something, but I didn't know you had a brother or it was him reaching out before."

"That's how he found me." I swallowed hard, thinking of the implications. I would never be safe if Theron could sense where I was and find me.

"I'm afraid so."

I started walking away. "I have to get out of here."

"You have to wake up first, dummy. You're not going to go anywhere in here." Moon started following me.

I continued walking. "How do I wake up?" The panic started to grow.

"Just wake up."

"That's not helpful." I tried pinching my arm, but it didn't work.

"Adira." This voice was new but not unfamiliar.

I turned and in the distance I saw a figure a little ways away. "Mark."

I was running towards him in a heartbeat. When I got closer to him, I slowed down. He seemed almost faded. He was standing there with his hands clenched and eyes squeezed tightly.

"I'm coming for you, Adira. Just hold on a little longer," Mark said.

"I'm right here," I said, reaching forward.

My hand passed right through Mark, and he didn't move. He didn't respond to me or acknowledge my presence in any way.

I turned to Moon. "Why isn't he responding?"

Moon sat down next to me. "I don't know. I don't think he's actually here, at least not like we are."

"This is actually Mark, though. I can feel it's him. It's not my imagination." I resisted the urge to reach out to him, knowing it would be fruitless.

"It is him," Shadow said, appearing from nowhere. "He's reaching out to you through your bond. I'm surprised he is actually able to reach you from so far away."

"It's because of her powers," Moon added. "It's amplifying the communication."

"I know you can't hear me, but I can't lose you Adira. I thought I would be okay without you, but I won't be." Mark squeezed his eyes even tighter. "I can't

imagine what my life would be like without you. I know you still might choose Jori, but I just can't lose you this way. Please, please come back to me. Please still be alive."

I looked at Shadow. "How do I reach back out to him?"

"Think of the connection you have with him. It might work." Shadow looked unsure.

I was unsure myself, but I had to try. Mark looked so miserable. I took a deep breath and tried to think of what Mark smelled like, the sweet scent of lilacs and honey. I thought of his warmth surrounding me and what it would be like to be near him again. Mark seemed to grow less transparent.

"Mark, I'm here. I'm fighting to come home to you."

Mark's eyes snapped open, and he looked shocked and confused. "Adira?"

"Adira, you have to go. You're running out of time," Moon warned. "You have to go now."

"Wait." I wasn't ready to leave Mark. It seemed like he was right next to me, and I just wanted to touch him. I tried to reach out to him again.

Moon lurched forward and bit my leg. "Go now or it's over."

Everything whooshed away and then my eyes snapped open. I was in Clara's office again. I was starting to get used to the transition from my mind to the real world, but it was still a little disorienting.

A bell rang as the front door to the lobby opened. My body completely froze, knowing exactly who had just walked through the door. I heard Clara's footsteps moving towards the front. I scrambled to my feet and moved to the door of her office. I didn't dare peek my head out, but I listened carefully, waiting for the confirmation I was looking for.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't expecting any late check-ins tonight," Clara said, her voice ringing down the hallway.

"I wasn't expecting to be here tonight."

My heart stopped. Theron's voice was deep and terrifying. He found me, and I didn't know how I was going to get out of here.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have any rooms available for tonight. You will have to look elsewhere.” Clara’s voice was firm, like it had been when she had spoken to Greg. It was completely different than the soothing way she spoke to me.

“I think it would be in your best interest to give me what I want.” Theron’s voice became menacing. “And I can see it in your eyes that you know exactly who I’m looking for.”

Clara hesitated. “I’m not sure I know who you are talking about.”

My heart was pounding in my head. Theron was able to find me here because our powers were linked to the same family tree, but could he sense exactly where I was? Did he know I was just down the hall? No, I don’t think he would’ve bothered with Clara if he did. He could have just shifted into the room with me instead of using the front door.

Glass shattered in the front room, and I had to hold my hands over my mouth to stop me from audibly gasping.

“Don’t mess with me, old woman. I will make you talk one way or another.”

Clara yelped. “Okay, okay. Let me go grab her room key. She’s not worth losing my life over.”

“Good choice,” Theron said.

My heart pounded as Clara walked back to her office. Was she really ratting me out?

Clara walked through the door and flipped on the light. She held her finger up to her lips, telling me to stay quiet. She moved over to her desk, and I watched her carefully. I was also trying to listen for Theron’s footsteps, in case he decided to follow her. Clara pulled a few things out of the bottom drawer of her desk. She then scribbled something on a sticky note.

She walked over to me and shoved a few items into my hands. I c****d my head at her, trying to figure out what she was up to. She just winked at me and left. I looked down at my hand, and there were three things in my hands. There was a key to a car, a small wooden box, and a sticky note. I read the note.

Run to the blue car when you have a chance and don't worry about me. Get home safely for Mark's sake. When you are ready to learn more about your powers, go to the address below. My friend will help you.

My heart raced as I read the note. What was Clara planning on doing?

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 38

"What took you so long?" Theron demanded.

"I'm an old lady. This body doesn't move like it used to," Clara sassed back. She sounded more confident than before, and I didn't understand how she could face Theron like that. Somehow she knew who it was, and even though she was human and had no unordinary powers, she was bravely facing someone she knew was actively trying to kill me.

Theron clicked his tongue. "Where is her room key?"

I hear Clara put something on the counter. "Here. Do me a favor and don't leave any blood. I don't want any police getting involved."

I hated not seeing what was happening. Was Clara giving Theron a fake key to distract him so I could escape? I wanted to look around the corner to see the actions and body expressions of the two of them, but Clara's effort would be a waste if Theron saw me now.

"Who are you to tell me what to do? Ow! What the hell?"

"People like you deserve to go to hell."

"Stupid b***h. You're going to regret that."

My curiosity took over, and I peeked my head around the corner just in time to see Theron stab Clara in the neck with a shard of glass. My eyes went wide, and I completely froze. Red started pouring from her neck, and I couldn't move. I wanted to run to her, but I couldn't reveal myself now, not after Clara... No, she couldn't die.

"Damn it, why can't I shift?" Theron demanded, his face turning red.

"Because I injected you with a power blocker," Clara weakly said. Her hands were grasping her neck, trying to hold the wound steady.

Theron narrowed his eyes. "I would rip your throat out right now if I didn't have more important things to handle. Too bad I can't watch you bleed out." He turned and stormed out of the lobby, the door swinging shut behind him.

"Now, Adira," Clara managed to say as she fell to the ground.

My feet finally started moving, but instead of trying to escape, I ran right to Clara. I pressed my hands against her neck, trying to stop the bleeding. It didn't seem to do anything, and my hands turned red.

"No, no, no. You can't die," I cried. I felt like I couldn't breathe. Why would Clara do this? Why would she sacrifice herself for someone she didn't even know?

"Go now," Clara said, her words gurgling as she spit up blood. "He won't be able to track you for a little while. I suppressed his powers."

"I can't leave you like this. Not after what you did." Tears were freely flowing from my eyes now.

"Don't worry. Ned is waiting for me." Clara's eyes closed. "Go while you can."

My hands were shaking. I couldn't leave...

Heal her, Moon said in my head. You have the power to heal her.

"I, I don't know how." I couldn't think. I had never healed anyone before.

Just try imagining the wound closing.

I took a deep breath and tried to imagine Clara being healthy and the bleeding stopped. I tried to keep my breathing under control, but I was too panicked. I tried to imagine the wound closing, but nothing seemed to be happening.

"Go," Clara said, barely audible. I was confident without my wolf senses I wouldn't have been able to hear it.

A moment later, Clara's body went limp in my arms. There was so much blood. It was too late. I closed my eyes tightly, angry at Theron. There was no reason Clara had to die. She was so nice and helpful. I let go of Clara's neck. I didn't want to leave her like that, but I didn't have a choice. I had to get somewhere safe. I had to get back to the pack so I could make sure Theron never hurt anyone ever again.

I pulled the key Clara gave me out of my pocket and ran to the parking lot. There was a blue car parked near the front, and I hoped it was the right one. My hands were slick with blood and shaking too violently, making it difficult to insert the key to the door. I finally got it in and felt a sense of relief when the door unlocked. I started to open the door, but then I felt a pain in my side, and I was on the ground.

I looked up and saw Haley standing over me. Her hair was a mess, and her eyes were bloodshot. She almost looked possessed compared to the version of her I knew from the coffee shop.

“Do you think I’m just going to let you get away and ruin Bae’s plan?” Haley seethed.

I scrambled onto my feet. I felt stronger than the last time I saw her now that I had some rest, food, and proper clothes.

“Just leave me alone,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

Haley smirked. “Not a chance. If I have to kill you myself, so be it. It’ll be a pleasure, and I’m sure Bae would understand, given the circumstances.”

She pulled out a knife, and it looked familiar to me. Lunging forward, she swung the knife at me. Instinctively, I shifted and was suddenly standing behind her. I shoved forward and sent Haley flying to the ground. I didn’t hesitate to jump into the car, not even taking a second look at her. I locked the doors and started the car. I put the car in reverse and slammed on the gas. Haley was slowly getting to her feet. I put the car in drive and sped out of the parking lot as fast as I possibly could.

I just kept driving, not thinking about where I was going. I just knew I had to get out of there. I was still on edge and kept looking in my rearview mirror. I kept expecting Theron to show up in the mirror, but thankfully he never did. I clutched the steering wheel tightly, my hands still covered in Clara’s blood.

Just a little longer, I kept telling myself. I had to keep it together for just a little longer, at least until I was surrounded by other werewolves. I would be safe at the pack house with Mark there.

The sun started to peak over the horizon, and the light started to flicker between the trees. With the newly found light, I started to recognize the area better. In high school, we had taken a few class trips to the mountains.

Asheville was only an hour from here. It wouldn't be long before I was back to the pack house.

—

I pulled up to the pack house and a sense of relief washed over me. I did it. I escaped and survived and made it back. I swallowed hard, but my throat was dry. I only made it because Clara didn't. Theron wouldn't be able to use his magic for a while, although, I didn't know the exact timeline the drug would have on him. I didn't even know what hurt sorcerers, but it sounded like they had a substance similar to wolfsbane.

I sit in the car a moment longer, afraid of moving. I desperately wanted to be around everyone again. I wanted to feel safe and warm in Mark's arms, but I was afraid of who else would get hurt because of me because I walked through those doors. I couldn't stand the idea of Theron killing anyone else to get to me, but he threatened everyone I cared about already.

He also said he would kill everyone I knew in front of me.

Finally, I stepped out of the car and started walking towards the door. The door to the pack house opened up, and someone I did not recognize stepped out. It looked like a young teenage boy, and when he looked up and saw me, his eyes went wide. He ran back into the house without even shutting the door.

I climbed up the stairs to the porch, and every step reminded me how worn out my body was. I walked through the front door, and seconds later I saw Rie running down the stairs.

"Adira!" She ran right up to me and wrapped her arms around me, squeezing me so tightly I could hardly breathe.

"Oh my god! Adira, you're back!" This time it was Scythe who approached. His eyes grew wide as he looked at me. "Let go of the girl. She's covered in blood. Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

I shook my head. "I'm okay." It was a lie in more ways than one, but I had something else on my mind.

More people started filing into the room, but none of them were the person I truly wanted to see. I kept waiting for those piercing blue eyes to come

running towards me. People kept touching me and saying things, but I was no longer listening to them.

The back door flung open, and I smelled him before I could see him. He pushed through the crowd and pulled me into a tight hug. His nose buried into my neck, and he deeply inhaled.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here the moment you walked through those doors. I was on patrol,” Jori said.

I was comforted by Jori’s touch, and my body instantly responded, but it wasn’t the arms I wanted to be in. I looked over Jori’s shoulder. Where was Mark?

Jori placed his hands on my shoulders and made me make eye contact with him. “How did you escape? What happened to you?”

“Don’t push her,” Daniel said, pushing through the crowd. “She has clearly been through hell. Let her get cleaned up and checked over by a doctor before you start questioning her.”

I looked over at Daniel, grateful. I still hadn’t said anything else to people, but each time someone asked me what happened, I kept imagining Clara’s body in my arms. There was so much blood.

Rie reached out and grabbed my hand, pulling me away from Jori. “Come on. Let’s get you cleaned up.”

I stopped and pulled back on her arm. “Where’s Mark?” I was supposed to run right into his arms and hold him tightly. There was a sinking feeling in my stomach. Why wasn’t he here to greet me?

Rie and Scythe passed a glance between them, and I knew something was wrong.

Finally, Scythe said, “Mark’s not here.”

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 39

“What do you mean Mark’s not here?” I looked around the room, blinking at everyone.

Scythe rubbed the back of his neck. "He went to go find you."

"Alone? Why didn't anyone go with him?" There were so many people in the room around me, and Mark went off by himself. I didn't understand.

Jori approached me and wrapped his arm around my waist, pulling me closer into him. "We have search parties looking for you. We still didn't know where you were. Mark wanted to run off to get to you before it was too late. He said he could feel where you were, but there's no way he could actually sense where you were, so I wouldn't send the extra men with him."

Jori's touch was comforting, but I found myself pushing away from him. "You couldn't spare a few people to go with him because you didn't believe him?"

"Calm down, Adira. You've been through a lot and need to rest and get a check-up. You don't look okay," Jori said, reaching for me again.

I stepped back. "No. Mark shouldn't be out there alone." I turned to Rie and Scythe. "Why didn't either of you go with him?"

Scythe frowned. "We were going to, but when we woke up this morning, Mark was gone and there was a note in his place."

Rie stepped closer to me. "We can try calling him to see if he'll answer and come back. He wasn't answering my calls earlier though."

"Give me a phone." I held out my hand, which was shaking and covered in dried blood.

Rie looked worried, but she pulled out her phone anyway. I quickly grabbed it and found Mark's contact. I hit the call button and felt myself bouncing as the phone rang. My chest felt tighter with each ring that went unanswered. It went to voicemail.

"Mark, it's Adira. Please come back. I'm at the pack house. I made it back. Please come back." I ended the call and let my arm fall to the side.

Jori reached out and touched my arm. "Adira, please stop worrying about him."

My jaw clenched, and I looked up at Jori. "You don't understand. Something is wrong. I can feel it."

"I think you might just be paranoid and overly exhausted from everything you've been through. Please Adira. Let the doctor check you out at least." Jori squeezed my arms.

I didn't want to go until I knew Mark was safe, but maybe he was right. I was in rough shape, so maybe it was a good idea to get checked up.

At that moment, Rie's phone started buzzing. I looked at it, and my heart skipped a beat when I saw the caller ID. I quickly answered it. "Mark, where are you? Please come back. I'm safe-"

My throat went dry when the voice on the other side was not Mark's.

"Adira, I'm so glad you made it away from me safely. You are a lot more trouble than I anticipated," Theron said.

"Where's Mark?" I tried to keep my voice firm, but it was difficult. I was terrified it was already too late.

"Oh, this weak little mate of yours? He thought he could take me on all by himself, but he was wrong."

Everyone was watching me silently.

"Is he... is he still alive?" I could hardly bring myself to speak.

Theron laughed. "For now. If you don't do as I say, he won't be for long."

"How do I know he's alive like you say?" I wanted proof. I wanted to hear Mark's voice.

"You don't trust me? I'm hurt, big sis."

"Don't call me that," I snapped. "I won't do anything you say unless I have proof Mark is alive. If he is, I'll give you what you want."

Jori tried to snatch the phone out of my hand, but I moved away from him. I could tell he was angry with me, but nothing he could say would change my mind.

"You are really annoying," Theron said. "Fine. Here's your boy toy."

I heard rustling as the phone moved around.

“Adira,” Mark’s deep voice rang through the phone. “Don’t do it. Don’t sacrifice yourself for me. You’re more important.”

“Mark, no-”

I heard a slap on the other side of the phone, followed by Mark crying out in pain. Tears started forming in my eyes.

The next voice I heard was Theron’s voice again. “You got your proof. Now listen very carefully.”

I nodded my head, listening to his instructions. I was to meet him in a park for the exchange, and I was to go alone. I had twenty-four hours, and if I didn’t show up or if I tried anything, Mark would be dead in seconds. Theron promptly hung up the phone, and I felt numb. I had just escaped, but if I wanted to save Mark, I would have to go back. Maybe Theron would make it quick this time.

Rie grabbed my arms. “Adira, what did he want? Was that the kidnapper?”

I nodded slowly. “He has Mark, and he says if I want him to stay alive, I have to give myself up for him.”

“No,” Jori said firmly. “You somehow made it back safely from that maniac, and now you want to give yourself up to save Mark? It’s not worth it.”

My eyes hardened. “I can’t let Mark because of me! I’m not worth other people dying.” I started to hyperventilate as I thought about Clara.

“We will discuss this later,” Scythe said, stepping between me and Jori. “Adira needs to get checked out and relax first.”

“We have twenty-four hours,” I said quietly.

“Perfect. That’s enough time for you to get the care you need and for us to make a plan to save Mark.” Scythe took my arm and started leading me away before anyone could argue.

—

I felt barely present as the doctor took a look at me. I replied to his answers with simple nods. Apparently, three of my ribs were cracked and healed improperly. The doctor has to re-break the bones and set the bones properly.

Other than that, I only had minor bruises that would heal quickly on their own. I was given some sort of medicine that would temporarily enhance my wolf healing powers, so it would only take a few hours for my bones to heal, instead of the normal amount of days.

Rie made sure I took a shower after the doctor's visit. As I was undressing from Clara's pocket, I felt the wooden box and sticky note she gave me. Now that I had a moment, I took out the box and examined it. I opened it up and saw a small syringe inside. I looked like the one Clara had injected into Theron. Was this the same serum that suppressed Theron's powers?

"Everything okay in there?" Rie called from outside of the bathroom.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

She and everyone else was extremely worried about me, and I felt like they were mothering me. Apparently, I had been with Theron for three and a half days. They had searched for me relentlessly, but it was difficult. There was no scent or trail to follow, since Theron had just shifted me away. Each day without any news made Jori and Mark both grow more anxious and irritable.

I could only imagine how they felt. In the few minutes I didn't know where Mark was, I felt panicked and terrified. I wasn't sure if knowing where he was was any better though.

I put the box on the sink and looked at the sticky note again. I wondered who this friend of Clara's was. Maybe she would be able to help me learn how to use my powers and grow stronger. I didn't know if I would ever get the opportunity to find out.

With a sigh, I set the note down and climbed into the shower. I knew Jori would fight me sacrificing myself for Mark. Even Mark told me not to do it, but I wouldn't forgive myself if I didn't even try.

I let the hot water run over me, and my body started to relax. It washed away all of my thoughts for a few moments. I stayed in the water longer than I had anticipated, but I felt much better after the shower. I got out and dressed in the clothes Rie gave to me. I was practically a new person once the grime and dirt was gone.

When I left the bathroom, Rie was waiting right outside for me.

“Come on. You should lie down for a little while.”

I stopped. “No, I don’t think I will be able to relax until we figure out how to save Mark.”

Rie frowned. “We can figure that out after you rest.”

I shook my head. “Rie, please. I can’t lose Mark. Not before I tell him I-” I cut myself off from continuing. I didn’t want to say anything else until I spoke to Mark directly.

Rie lifted her eyebrows knowingly. “I see. Okay, let me tell everyone to come to a meeting now.”

Jori, Percy, Scythe, Rie, Daniel and myself met up in a meeting room. Everyone started sitting down, but I stayed standing. I didn’t feel like sitting.

“We have to save Mark no matter what,” I started, not wanting to wait around.

“No, he is not worth your life,” Jori said firmly.

“I’m with Adira,” Scythe added. “We have to save Mark. We don’t have to sacrifice Adira though to do it.”

“I have nothing to gain by trying to save that traitor,” Jori said, crossing his arms and leaning back in his arms.

Rie jumped to her feet. “You’re the one who betrayed him!”

“This is not the time to get into that subject,” Daniel said before things got more out of hand.

“Look, I don’t care who helps me or if I have to go by myself and sacrifice myself to rescue Mark. I’m going no matter what.” I looked directly at Jori. I knew he had his selfish reasons for not wanting to rescue Mark. If Mark was out of the way, there wouldn’t be much of a choice for me, and I understood that he didn’t want to lose his mate. But it didn’t change anything for me.

“Adira, please.” Jori stood up, not breaking eye contact with me. “We could be happy together, you and me. Don’t risk your life for Mark and just stay here and be happy with me.”

This was the most genuine thing I had heard from Jori since I had met him, and it hurt my heart. Part of me still was drawn to Jori, and even though I knew Mark would be my choice, I hated seeing Jori look upset.

I sat in my chair slowly. “I can’t let Theron kill anyone else because of me.” My voice was weak and defeated.

Percy looked at me closely. “What do you mean by anyone else?”

I proceeded to tell them everything that happened to me. I started with how Theron was my half-brother trying to kill me so he could inherit the family powers to Clara sacrificing herself for me. I left out the part about the note and the syringe she gave me though. I still wasn’t sure what I would do with them, and I didn’t want anyone taking the serum away from me. I could see people getting greedy with something like that, which scared me.

When I stopped talking, everyone was quiet and unsure.

“I’m so sorry,” Scythe finally said. “Clara wasn’t your fault. None of it has been.”

“But it is,” I quickly retorted. “If I had stayed away from all of you, no one would’ve been put in danger. I can’t let anyone else die because of me.”

Jori looked at me carefully. “I think I get it. I still don’t like it, but if you insist you have to do this, then I will help you. You will not be going to that meeting by yourself.”

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 40

“All right everyone, we know the plan. Rest up tonight, and tomorrow morning we leave,” Jori said. He stood up and waited for everyone to start leaving.

I got up, deciding I should rest while I could, but before I made it out the door, Jori called my name. I turned to look at him, and I saw Rie watching me with careful eyes. I nodded to her to let her know it was okay, and after a moment of hesitation, Rie left Jori and me alone.

“Hey,” I said quietly, still standing by the door.

“Can you shut the door?” Jori asked. He moved around the table so he was closer to me.

I shut the door, feeling a little nervous. I had no idea what Jori wanted to talk to me about, but I knew he wasn't happy with my decisions. I feel Jori's arms wrap around my waist while I'm still facing the door. He buries his face in my face, sending shivers down my spine.

"I'm so glad you made it back here," Jori muttered into my neck. He kept a firm grip around my waist.

I let him hold me like that for a moment, partly because I knew how stressed he had been, but also because his touch was still comforting to me. "Me too." This was the calmest I had felt in a while, and I knew it was selfish of me to stay there like that, but I wasn't ready to separate yet.

Finally, I turned around to face Jori. He kept his arms around me, keeping me close to his body. He studied my face carefully.

"You're going to choose Mark, aren't you?" His face told me that he already knew the answer to the question.

I couldn't bring myself to tell him the truth. It was even harder in his arms like this. I could feel the bond pulling me to Jori. I could even see a future with him, a happy one at that, but I knew I wouldn't be true to my heart picking him. I didn't want to hurt him, but I knew there was no way out of that.

Jori's face fell. It was weird seeing him without his cocky demeanor. He was almost like a new person, which almost made this more difficult. "Actually, don't answer that. I don't know if I could go through with tomorrow after hearing it from your mouth. I don't want it to be official yet."

"Jori..." My heart ached looking at the fear in his eyes, knowing his pain was my fault.

He let out a sigh. "I'm not going to give up on you yet. I can't. I love you, Adira. I know I haven't known you long, but I have never felt this way with anyone else. I can't stand the thought of losing you, especially not to him."

I didn't know what to say. I felt connected to Jori, but I couldn't say I loved him. "I don't want to lead you on." I knew I should just tell Jori now that I wanted to be with Mark, but I couldn't.

Jori shook his head. "You're not. I know the truth, but things can change. Until you and Mark mark each other, this fight is not over for me."

I pushed Jori's arms, wanting distance between him. This was becoming too much. This guilt was starting to eat at me. I wanted to tell Jori what he wanted to hear just to see him smile, but that wouldn't be fair to each of us.

Jori dropped his hands, letting me step away. "I don't want you to pick him. I don't want you to put yourself in danger tomorrow for him. I just want to take you to my room and never let you go. Please don't go tomorrow. If things go wrong and that psycho gets a hold of you, I don't know what I would do. I can't go through that again."

I stood firmly, my look unwavering. "I'm going tomorrow." This was not up for discussion. Not again. Everything was already planned, and I was prepared for the worst-case scenario. Mark would walk out safe, even if I was not.

Jori stepped forward and touched my face. He didn't say anything and just stared into my eyes. My heart raced from his touch, which said more than any words could. He rubbed his thumb over my cheek.

"Please don't," Jori whispered. He leaned in and pressed his lips against mine. For a moment, I let it happen, and fire started spreading through my body. I almost felt more powerful from the contact, and part of me wanted more. Something told me that if I chose Jori, I would have all of the power I could. Being with him and nurturing our connection would nurture my powers.

I pulled away from Jori, moving as far away from him as I could. I didn't care about having power. I cared more about having a real connection with someone. "I'm sorry."

I opened the door and ran out, heading to my room. I didn't want to see Jori's face. I made it to my room and sat on my bed. I let my head fall into my hands. When I decided I wanted Mark, I didn't think it would be this difficult to tell Jori I didn't want to be with him. Maybe it would have been easier to tell Jori the truth if Mark had been there, but I wasn't confident about that. I just knew it would mean I wouldn't be worrying about Mark.

A knock on my door pulled me from my thoughts. My door was still open, and I saw Daniel standing in it.

"Can I come in?"

"Sure," I said. I sat up straight and watched as he approached.

Daniel looked around the room for a place to sit. When he didn't see anything but the bed, he stayed standing. "How are you handling everything?"

I looked down at my hands. "I don't know. Okay, I guess."

"You know, what happened to that lady wasn't your fault."

I kept looking at my hands. I knew Daniel was trying to help, but it still felt like my fault. "What's so special about me? For the past five years, it felt like everyone was rejecting me and running away. I was the unwanted wolf. I don't understand what all of you see in me."

Daniel knelt down to the ground and grabbed my hands. He looked up into my eyes. "You're different, Adira. The moment I met you, I could tell something about you was unique."

"It's because I'm not a pureblooded werewolf." I looked at Daniel's eyes. They were soft and kind.

Daniel squeezed my hands. "Sure, that's part of it. But it's not the only thing."

"What do you mean?"

Daniel hummed for a moment, thinking. "You're very kind. You care about people, even when you haven't known them for very long. You're brave too."

"I don't feel brave. I was scared when Theron had me captive. I'm scared of picking a mate. I'm scared of learning more about my true identity."

"It's okay to be scared. Being brave is not the absence of fear. Being brave is standing up for yourself and others, despite the fear. When Theron had you at the party and threatened everyone there, you agreed to go with him to save everyone. You could have given up when you were captive in that cell, but instead you chose to fight. You fought to come back here, which is pretty incredible to me. I don't know if I would've kept fighting through everything you did. You are incredible, Adira."

A smile creeps onto my face. "Thanks Daniel. This hasn't been easy, and I would be lying if I said I hadn't thought about giving up, but I can't do that. I haven't been happy in such a long time, but because of all of you, I got a taste of what happiness can feel like. I'm not ready to give up on that yet."

Daniel stood up, but he didn't let go of my hands. "Don't give up on being happy. Never give up on that."

I stood up and wrapped my arms around Daniel. "Thank you for being such a good friend."

Daniel hugged me back, and this time he didn't feel nearly as awkward as he did the first time. "Anytime, Adira. You know, Mark and Jori weren't the only ones worried about you when you went missing." Daniel pulled back from the hug, but he still kept me at arms length. "Scythe was a mess. Rie tried to hold it together to make sure proper efforts were being made to get you back, but I know her. She wasn't okay. I think Percy was even worried."

I made a face at that. "I didn't think he liked me very much. We haven't even really spoken."

"He's not so bad when you get to know him. It takes a little while though."

I thought about this for a moment. "I didn't realize everyone cared so much."

Daniel smiled. "Like I said, you have an effect on us. Do us all a favor tomorrow. Make sure you get Mark back, but don't let yourself get taken either. I'm not sure we could handle you going missing again, especially so soon."

I smiled, but I still felt a little torn. I wanted to do whatever I could to bring Mark home, but Daniel had a point. There were people here who still cared about me, and if Theron took me again, what would stop Mark from just following after me? I decided in that moment that Theron wasn't going to win. He wasn't going to take me back and get his way. I was going to show him he made a mistake going after me.