

## The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 41

I woke up early the next day, anxious for what was to come. I still had a few hours before it was time to leave, but I felt wide awake. I got out of bed and went downstairs to make myself some coffee. The pack house was surprisingly quiet. It felt like the calm before the storm.

I wondered how much Jori's pack knew about what was going on. I imagined many of them had questions about me before my party, but then after the scene Theron made, I knew people must have demanded answers. Jori was probably dealing with more than me being missing as well. He had assured me his pack house was safe, and no one would dare break through his security. Theron ruined that, which likely shook his confidence.

Theron was good at shaking people's confidence. It was a little weird thinking he and I were related. I always thought I was an only child. It clearly was for the best that I never met him, but I let myself mourn for what could have been for a moment.

I sat at the table at the breakfast nook Jori and I had sat at just a few days ago and looked outside. It was still dark outside, but the sun was on the verge of rising. The backyard looked normal again, and it was as if my party had never happened. I wished it hadn't. It was great until nothing was great. Maybe if I had put down my foot about not having a party, Mark would be here with me.

"Mark doesn't blame you, so you should stop blaming yourself."

I looked up and saw Scythe walking towards me. He sat at the table across from me, holding his own cup of coffee. I clutched my cup tighter and took a sip. The brown liquid was warm as it slid down my throat, but there was a chill at the pit of my stomach.

"There's only one person to blame for everything happening here," Scythe continued.

I could feel his eyes on me, but I couldn't bring myself to look back at him. All of the fiery passion I had before seemed to be gone. I was just worried I wouldn't be able to accomplish my goal.

"I feel like a bad omen." I looked out the window again. The sun had just barely started to creep over the horizon, and the trees almost glimmered in the twilight.

Scythe looked out the window. "The universe has been unfair to you, but that doesn't mean you are a bad omen. You just have a terrible family. We're going to change that luck of yours, if I have anything to say about it. Mark will too."

I looked at Scythe. He had this determined smile on his face. He was confident we would succeed in our rescue mission today. I didn't understand his confidence. Theron was more powerful than us. We outnumbered him, sure, but he wasn't afraid to use dirty tricks. He also had Mark. He had the upper hand in this situation.

"What if-"

"We will succeed." Scythe looked back at me. His signature smile was plastered on his face. "Have faith in us and in yourself."

Scythe stood up and held out his hand. "Shall we go get Mark back?"

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The car ride to the meeting spot was pretty awful. I had to arrive by myself, because we wanted to guarantee the element of surprise as much as possible. We had no way of knowing how closely Theron was watching me, so I left before everyone else by myself. I was driving Clara's car, which somehow felt wrong, but I didn't have anyone to return it to, at least not anyone I was aware of.

I pulled up to the spot where Theron instructed me to meet him, but when I looked around, I didn't see anyone. I checked my phone. The others were ten minutes behind me. They also planned on parking farther away and running through the woods to join us. If Theron was there, I would have to delay him as much as possible. The plan would only work if the others were here for it.

I opened my car door and slowly stepped out. There was a small path in front of me that wound through the trees. I started walking on it, figuring Theron would be deeper on the path. He wouldn't want this to happen in a location where other bystanders were present. He would want secrecy.

The trail was worn down and overgrown, but the ground was firmly worn down. I could feel all of the people who used to hike this in the past, but that was long ago. Nature had started to take the trail back, making it difficult to push forward without branches brushing against my skin.

The trail was longer than I anticipated, but when I made it to the end, it opened up to a clearing. I froze, seeing Theron standing in the middle of the field. He was wearing a dark button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled up and dark pants to match. Haley was standing next to him. She was too far away to see her face, but I knew she had a smug expression.

My eyes narrowed onto the figure in front of them. Mark was on his knees with his head hanging limp. My heart jumped, and I started running towards him on instinct. When I was only ten feet away, Theron held up his hand, holding a knife. I stopped in place, terrified of the threat that knife held.

“Mark,” I whispered.

Mark lifted his head in response. His eyes grew wide and he frowned. “You shouldn’t have come. Leave before it’s too late.”

“Shut up!” Haley kicked Mark in the back, causing him to fall forward. He wasn’t able to brace himself because his hands were tied behind his back.

I yelped, but I didn’t dare move forward. I wasn’t about to taunt Theron when Mark’s life was at risk.

“Now, now, Haley. We don’t want to do too much damage to our collateral.” Theron crouched down and pulled Mark back onto his knees.

Mark’s face was smeared with dirt. There was a dark bruise around his eye and a fresh wound on his cheek. There were bruises on the rest of his exposed skin, and I wondered how many were underneath his clothes. They had to be fresh and serious wounds, too. Mark’s werewolf healing abilities would have already kicked in to help him heal.

Unless Theron drugged him.

What had they done to Mark?

My heart ached looking at him. It took everything in me not to run towards him and wrap him in my arms.

Rip his throat out for hurting our mate, Moon said in my head.

I could feel her anger, and it only added to my own. Theron was playing with fire, and he thought he was in control, but he was so wrong. He was going to get burned.

Theron smirked at me, as if he could read my mind. "Relax, half-breed. He'll be okay, as long as you stick to our agreement. Nothing we did to him is permanent. I just had to teach him a lesson, since he thought he could take me out."

A growl erupted from my mouth. "Let him go."

"Uh, uh. It's not going to be that easy. If I let him go now, there's nothing stopping you from trying to run off with him." Theron pulled out a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and tossed them to my feet. "Put these on. Then I'll let this dog go."

"Adira, don't. I'm not worth it. Please just leave now." Mark's eyes were watering as he pleaded with me.

I wanted to tell him we had a plan, and we would both get out of here, but I still wasn't able to link with Mark, since I wasn't officially a part of his pack, and we hadn't marked each other. He would just have to hold on a little longer.

I bent down and grabbed the handcuffs. "Mark, I'm sorry. I can't just leave you like this. I'm not worth your life."

Theron laughed. "You're not worth much at all. I don't understand why so many people want to help someone as helpless as you."

I stood up, feeling the cool metal of the handcuffs in my fingers. Theron's words sparked a fire inside of me, and I felt my body burn from anger. "You do not have the right to tell me what I'm worth." I stared at Theron, unwavering.

Haley laughed. "What is this new-found confidence you have? You've always been pathetic. Bae here is so much better than you and these wolves you hang out with. Once he takes your powers, he's going to eliminate all of the filthy mutts in this world."

"Stop talking," Theron snapped at Haley.

“Bae,” Haley said quietly, looking shocked that Theron actually snapped at her.

“I said stop talking.” He backhanded Haley, making me jump. “Can’t you do one thing right?”

Haley rubbed her cheek, tears forming in her eyes. I actually felt sorry for her in that moment.

“Why are you helping him? He clearly doesn’t care about you,” I said. I still held the handcuffs, not willing to put them on yet.

Haley glared at me, but she didn’t dare say anything.

“You know nothing,” Theron said, his voice hovering between amused and annoyed. “You thought you could actually get away from me, but here we are. If you had just been a good girl, your mate wouldn’t be in such a bad condition.”

“I will never be a good girl for you,” I said, disgust oozing out of my mouth. “I will never give up fighting you, because you are the true monster in this world. You are the reason humans hate magical creatures, because people like you give us a bad name. You underestimate me, Theron. You think I’m weak because I’m half werewolf, but that just makes me stronger.”

Theron grabbed Mark’s hair and yanked his head back, exposing his neck. He pressed the knife against Mark’s neck. “Be careful, Adira. You’re playing with fire and your mate’s life.”

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“Put those handcuffs on now, or it’s this flea bag’s life.” Theron pressed the knife deeper against Mark’s neck, causing a little red stream down his neck.

I felt my power waning as the fear set in. I had to be careful and play the line. I couldn’t risk Mark’s life while not completely complying to Theron’s wishes.

I lifted the handcuffs in the air to show Theron I was listening. “Okay, you win.” I placed one of the metal cuffs around my wrist, but I hesitated for the other one. I closed my eyes and listened for any indication the others were close. I could hear a small creature scurry through the bushes and scramble up a

tree. A bird fluttered through the forest and landed on a branch. Another bird called out to its distant lover.

I couldn't hear my friends. Where were they? I wasn't sure how much longer I could hold out, and I was afraid they wouldn't make it in time for the plan to work.

"What are you waiting around for? Put the other one on."

I opened my eyes and stared directly into Theron's soul. It was full of darkness and hatred. What kind of life could he have possibly lived to make him like this? I clicked the other handcuff onto my wrist.

"Adira, please run," Mark begged.

"I'm not going anywhere," I said before Theron had a chance to respond to him. I wasn't talking to Mark, though. I kept my eyes locked with Theron's, letting him know that statement was for him.

An amused smile pulled at Theron's lips. "Who do you think you are? You're here alone, now handcuffed, with your mate's life in my hands, and you still have the nerve to challenge me."

"I did as you said."

"You did."

There was an unspoken tension between us. I was resisting Theron mentally, even though my actions said otherwise. In his eyes, I did as he asked. I came to this secluded place to trade my life for my mate's. I put on the handcuffs as he asked. I hadn't gone against him, but both of us could feel that this was just an act. We were just waiting to see who would make the first move.

"Haley, restrain her." Theron didn't break eye contact with me.

Haley looked over at Theron, her eyebrows raised. She was clearly annoyed with the instructions, but she didn't dare say anything. She started walking over to me, taking her sweet time as if to defy Theron in the small way she could.

“Are you going to release Mark? You said once I put these on, you would release him.” I knew Theron was lying to me. He was playing a game as much as I was.

“Once Haley restrains you, I’ll think about it.”

“The deal was you get me and then you release him,” I reminded him.

Theron’s eyes darkened. “Funny thing about that. I don’t have what I want. You’re still alive and you’re still breathing. As long as you’re alive, I won’t have what I want. Maybe I should just kill you now. Then maybe I’ll release this dog. Or maybe I’ll kill him too. There’s nothing that’s going to stop me once you’re dead.”

My jaw tightened. “You lied to me!”

Theron laughed. “So what? I don’t care about keeping promises. That’s not how you get ahead in life. You just have to take what you want. Oh, and don’t even think about trying to use those pathetic powers of yours. Those handcuffs stop you from using your powers. That includes using your wolf. They were specially made by human hunters. Neat, huh?”

My eyes widened, realizing what that meant exactly. I was planning on trying to shift out of the handcuffs to get away if I needed to. I was stuck and helpless, and I’m the one who willingly put them on.

“Release him,” I tried to demand, but my voice wavered. I had lost the confidence I came here with.

I needed the others here now, or it’d be too late.

Haley grabbed my hands and leaned in to whisper in my ear. “You think you’re so clever, but Bae is smarter than you.

“He’s going to drop you like a fly when he no longer needs you,” I whispered back.

At this point, I wasn’t sure if I felt bad for Haley or not. It was clear Theron would never care about her the way she wanted him to. He was using her, and I doubted he would share any power with her, like she clearly hoped. No one deserved to be treated like that. But Haley was helping him try to kill me. She was greedy and not innocent by any means.

Haley scrunched her nose and shoved me forward. "Shut up. You don't know what you're talking about."

Haley continued pushing me towards Theron, and my heart started to race. I had to act fast, but I didn't know what to do. I needed to give the others more time. I hoped they were close by. Haley pushed me again, but this time I resisted, planting my feet firmly into the ground.

"At least let me talk to him," I pleaded, looking down at Mark.

He looked up at me, and I could see the regret in his eyes. He wanted me to just leave him here, and I knew he thought it was too late for both of us. He didn't know help was on the way though. Theron didn't know either.

"I don't care about this little romance of yours. Why should I give you a moment?" Theron's eyes were hard. He was right. He had no logical reason to let me have a moment with my mate, so I would have to give him something in return.

"Because I won't fight you anymore. I won't try to run away. I will even help you figure out how to take my powers from me. Just please let me have a moment with Mark before we go." My voice cracked as I pleaded with him. I knew that would help sell my desperation. I was desperate, though. I didn't need to fake that.

"Adira, don't promise that," Mark begged. His blue eyes seemed duller as he looked up at me.

"I won't make this difficult on you," I continued. I hated ignoring Mark like that, but he would understand when he learned why I was doing that. "If you don't, I will fight you every step. I won't stop fighting. You'll have to kill me before you can get my powers."

Theron tilted his head. "Clever girl, and interesting promise. Alright. You can have two minutes."

A sense of relief washed over me, and I dropped to my knees in front of Mark. I lifted my still handcuffed hands to his face and stroked his cheek.

"I'm so sorry I got you into this situation." I could feel the tears threatening my eyes, but I pushed them back. I didn't want to appear weak.



Mark pushed his face into my hands and closed his eyes. "Why would you promise him that you will go with him? Why would you sacrifice yourself for me?"

"Because I—" I cut myself off. It didn't feel like the right time. "I can't stand the idea of you losing your life because of me. I would never have been able to forgive myself if I didn't try."

"You could have been happy with Jori. You could have just left me." Mark looked defeated as those words came out of his mouth.

I threw my arms around his neck and pulled him into my body. His closeness sent a surge of energy through my skin, and I never wanted to let him go. "Mark..." I tightened my grip. He nuzzled his face into my shoulder, unable to return the hug with his hands tied behind his back.

I leaned back, keeping my arms hooked around his neck. "Do you remember what I made you promise me the night before my birthday?"

Mark searched my face for something. "Of course."

I tightened my lips. "I promise you the same thing, okay?"

Mark looked confused for a moment, before his eyes widened. He nodded his head, acknowledging what I was saying.

I pulled Mark again, this time my lips finding his. The ache from being separated from him for so long took over. His lips were cold and chapped, but I didn't care. I just wanted one more moment with him, in case things didn't turn out the way I so desperately wanted them to. I didn't know how I would be able to pull away from him, my core burning with every motion of the kiss.

Mark seemed almost as desperate as me, pushing himself as close as he could in the position we were in. Time blurred, and I held onto the hazy moment for as long as I could.

"That's enough. I didn't want a show," Theron snapped.

He grabbed the back of my shirt and pulled me off Mark, leaving me feeling cold and empty. I resisted the urge to pull back towards Mark, knowing that would only cause more issues. I locked eyes with Mark and tried to tell him everything would be okay, but I had no way of knowing if he got the message.

“Let’s go,” Theron said. “I fulfilled my end of the bargain. It’s time for you to comply, just like you promised.”

My ears perked up as I heard rustling in the woods. It was a larger animal. No, there were three larger animals. I could hear their paws hit the ground and push off into another leap. They were close.

I looked at Theron and smiled. “Funny thing about promises. You promised me that Mark would be safe if I came here and traded my life for his, but you so easily broke that promise. You even threatened his life. What made you think I would keep a promise in return to you?”

Theron reached out and grabbed me by the throat. “You little b\*\*\*h. You think you actually have a chance to get out of this? You are more stupid than I thought.”

He lifted me up by my neck, and my feet kicked underneath me, trying to find something solid to support them with. I tried grabbing Theron’s hand to loosen the grip on my neck, but with the handcuffs still restricting my movement, I couldn’t get a good grip on him.

“You’re dead,” Theron muttered, squeezing tighter.

“No, you are,” I choked out.

A loud snarl echoed through the field. There was a flash of black, and then the next thing I knew I was on my back on the ground.

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A large, almost black wolf pinned Theron to the ground. He was snarling, and saliva was spraying all over Theron’s face. I instantly knew it was Jori. I could feel his energy and strength as an alpha. Theron’s face was frozen with shock.

Haley stared at the scene, but she didn’t move towards it. She turned to me instead. She lunged towards me, and I held up my hands in defense. She never reached me, though. Another wolf flew through the air, knocking her to her feet. This wolf was such a pale blond, it was almost white. Haley screamed as the wolf pinned her down.

Theron shouted out in frustration. In a blink of an eye, he was standing behind Jori instead of pinned to the ground. He pulled out a knife.

“Jori!” I screamed as Theron slashed at him.

Jori darted out of the way just in time to miss the blade. He turned and lunged towards Theron, but this time Theron was ready. He shifted out of Jori’s path, and Jori rolled to the ground. The wolf was back on his feet in an instant.

“Adira.” Scythe touched my arm, drawing my attention away from the fight between Jori and Theron.

“Scythe.” I breathed a sigh of relief.

“Are you okay?” He helped me to my feet.

“Can you help me get out of these handcuffs?” A snarl drew my attention towards the fight with Jori. It looked like a game of cat and mouse, but I wasn’t exactly sure who was who in this scenario.

Scythe grabbed the handcuffs and tried to pull them apart. I could see his forearms bulging from the pressure, but it wasn’t working.

“Hold on. I’m going to have to shift.” Scythe stripped his shirt and pants and quickly shifted to his wolf form. His wolf was larger than I anticipated from his lanky stature. The fur was a pretty mix of white emphasized by the grey streaks.

He pushed his nose against my wrists, and I knew he was going to bite them off. I held my hands as far apart as possible and then closed my eyes and looked away. I didn’t want to see him doing it for fear I would flinch, and he would end up biting my skin. I heard a loud clink and then my hands flung free. Looking back, I watched as the handcuffs fell to the ground. I grabbed them and shoved them in my pocket, thinking they might come in handy later.

A yelp pulled Scythe’s and my attention. Haley was on top of Rie’s wolf, pinning her down. I was shocked that such a small frame could hold such a large wolf. Scythe looked at me with worried eyes.

“Go. I’m fine.”

Scythe dashed off to help Rie, and I watched him tackle Haley off her. I looked over to Jori. He was still struggling with Theron, but there was a second wolf fighting with him now. That must have been Percy. I hadn't even heard him join the fight, but I was grateful. Two werewolves per sorcerer. This had to go our way.

Finally, I looked to Mark, who was now lying on the ground. I instantly ran over to him and grabbed his arm. He looked weak and dazed. I didn't see Theron or Haley do anything to him, but based on his injuries, I wouldn't be surprised if he was running out of energy.

"Mark." I shook his arm, trying to get his attention.

"Adira," Mark said, his eyes finding mine.

"I've got you now." I cupped Mark's cheeks. "Just hold on a little longer. We'll get you out of here and get help."

"Don't let him take you." Mark's eyes glazed over a little.

"Hold on, Mark." I reached behind him and started untying the rope around his wrists. There were rope burns and more bruises, and his skin was cold to the touch. I knew I had to get him out of here as soon as possible.

Snarls kept tearing my eyes away from Mark, but everyone seemed to be doing okay. I was surprised Theron was able to hold his own against Jori and Percy. I didn't know much about sorcerer's powers other than the ability to shift and apparently heal, and I wasn't watching the fight closely enough to know how Theron was fighting.

I finally loosened the rope and freed Mark. I helped him sit up, but I could tell he was weak. What had they done to him? I had never seen so little fight in him. I tried to pull Mark to his feet, but he fell back to the ground.

"Come on. We can do this. Please don't give up on me," I pleaded. I was fighting back tears of frustration. I just wanted to be safe with Mark.

"Adira," Mark said.

I wrapped my arm around to help him up. His voice drew my attention to him. "What is it?"

"If it comes down to it, promise me you'll run away from here and save yourself. Get away from Theron, leave the country if you have to. Don't worry about me." Mark's hands were shaking.

I clenched my jaw in frustration. I let go of Mark's waist and held his face in my hands. "I won't promise you that. I'm not going anywhere without you. I'm not going to stop fighting for you ever, so you better get up and help me get you out of here." I pressed my lips to Mark's, and time froze for a moment. I wanted to linger there, but others were fighting on our behalf. I pulled away and gave Mark a stern look.

Mark nodded, and I wrapped my arm around his waist again. Together we got Mark standing. I kept my arm around his waist for support and draped his other arm around my neck. I started hobbling him back towards the path, but a yelp pulled my attention. This wasn't like the other yelps.

Theron had Percy's wolf by the arm, and his arm was clearly broken. Theron slammed Percy to the ground, and my heart dropped. Jori lunged at Theron, but Theron disappeared, causing Jori to land on Percy.

"Where do you think you're going?" Theron asked in my ear.

My chest clenched, and I froze. Before I could react, Theron grabbed me by the neck and lifted me up. I let go of Mark, and brought my hands to Theron's, trying to loosen his grip. He was too strong, though. I closed my eyes and concentrated. Shift. I felt the familiar woosh of the air swirling around me, and then I was standing behind Theron.

A cough took over my throat as I gasped for air. I felt like I couldn't take a real breath after my throat had been crushed.

Theron turned to me, his eyes nearly black with anger. "I've had enough of you."

Theron grabbed Mark, wrapping his arm around Mark's neck. "I told you I would kill your mate if you didn't obey, didn't I?"

My heart raced, looking at the scene unfolding in front of me. I looked around, calculating all of my options. I had to be faster than Theron. Maybe I could grab Mark and shift away with him. I still wasn't great at shifting myself, though, so I didn't know if I would be able to shift another person. Even if I could, I still hadn't managed to shift more than a few feet. I wished I had

grown up being trained as a sorceress. I would understand my powers much better and I could save Mark. Maybe I wouldn't even be in this situation.

"Even if I listened to you, it wouldn't have mattered. It would've ended up like this anyway. I'm not some stupid girl who will do whatever you want. You chose the wrong person to mess with." My jaw was tense, and my eyes darted around, desperate for anything that could help me. There had to be something, anything.

I stuck my hand in my pocket and felt the wooden box Clara had given me. If I could just get close enough, I could inject Theron with the serum and stop his powers temporarily. It would give us just enough of an upper hand to get out of this alive. I fiddled with the box and got out the syringe. I took a step forward.

"Either way, you are a stupid girl if you think that you can save this mut." Theron pulled out his knife, and then he quickly sank the blade into Mark's side.

Mark cried out in pain, and his face contorted as he started to double over. Theron pulled out the knife, and blood started to gush from Mark's side. This was it. I was too late.

Time seemed to slow in that moment. Mark fell to the ground in slow motion. Theron's lips curled into a smile. I could see Rie and Scythe finally taking over Haley, winning in their fight. Percy had transformed back into his human form, and he was clutching his contorted arm while writing on the ground. Jori's wolf was staring at Theron and myself.

Something snapped inside of me. Too much had been taken from me. My family abandoned me, taking away the rest of my childhood. No wolf pack had ever wanted me, making me feel worthless and unworthy. Mark had somehow changed that, and I was not about to lose him.

He's going to pay, Shadow growled in my head.

I nodded in agreement. My eyes darkened, and I let Shadow take over. My body contorted and changed until my wolf form appeared. My wolf was a pure black wolf with shimmering fur. I stood tall and felt fierce, but I wasn't actually in control. I was in the backseat of my mind, watching as Shadow took control. I could feel her rage and desire for revenge.

We lunged forward, taking Theron by the neck. We pinned him to the ground, and his entire face was frozen with fear. Shadow went to bite down on his neck and take his head, but Theron shifted away, appearing several feet away from us. Shadow was instantly leaping in that direction, ready to bite him again. Theron disappeared again, but before Shadow landed, I imagined us appearing by Theron.

In a blink of an eye, Shadow disappeared and reappeared midair. She landed on Theron, this time biting his arm. She crunched down, causing Theron to yell in pain.

“What the-”

Shadow bit down again, this time biting Theron’s side. His eyes grew wide as he realized what he was facing.

“Haley! Let’s go!” Theron shouted.

Before Shadow could take another bite, Theron disappeared completely. He was nowhere in the field and must have left, running with his tail between his legs. We looked over at where Scythe and Rie had been fighting Haley, and Haley was gone too.

“Mark!” Scythe shouted, transforming back into his human form and running towards his Alpha.

My heart leapt, begging it wasn’t too late. Shadow released control, and in seconds I was back to my human form. My clothes were tattered, but I didn’t care. I bolted towards Mark, dropping to my knees next to him. Mark’s shirt was soaked in blood, and I knew he had lost too much. His chest was still rising up and down, but he was no longer conscious. He didn’t have much time left.

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I pressed my hands to Mark’s wound, trying to stop the blood from pouring out. My hands quickly became covered in the red, sticky liquid.

“Why isn’t he healing?” Rie asked. I could hear the panic in her voice. It wasn’t just me on the verge of losing something. This was their alpha.

"I think Theron poisoned him with wolfsbane." My hands shook. I couldn't lose Mark like this. He would not be Theron's second victim.

Heal him, Moon said.

I swallowed hard. What if I can't?

You have to try. Moon's voice was steady. Losing Mark wouldn't hurt her as much as it would hurt Shadow and me, but I was still grateful she was helping.

How?

Imagine the wound closing up. Bring the light from inside of you and send it to Mark, Moon explained.

Don't let him die, Shadow whimpered.

"We need to get him to a hospital," Rie said.

"I don't think he'll last that long," Jori said, approaching us. He was helping Percy hobble along. They were both back in their human forms and dressed, but they looked a little worse for wear. They would be okay, though. Every injury they had would heal.

Rie clung onto Scythe and started crying into his shoulder. Scythe held Rie, saying nothing. He stared at Mark solemnly, knowing the truth of his condition.

No, they were wrong. Mark wasn't going to die. I refused to let it happen. I closed my eyes, pressing harder onto the wound. Deep breaths. Focus.

I could see the ball of light inside of me start to glow. Good. Deep breath. I imagined Mark's wound healing. I imagined the blood no longer flowing from his body and him waking up. The glow brightened. Deep breath. I imagined Mark's blue eyes and healthy body. He would wrap his arms around me, and we both would be okay because we would be together. Deep breath.

He'll be okay.

Deep breath.

Live. Please.

Deep breath.



I felt the movement in Mark's chest increase, and I cracked my eyes open. Half of me was expecting his eyes to be staring at me. Instead, I saw his chest stop moving. My eyes didn't move from his, and I willed him to wake up, to move.

"Come on, Mark," I whispered.

I heard Rie's cries turn to sobs, but they sounded so distant.

I couldn't breathe.

"Mark, you're not done fighting." I pushed harder on Mark's wound.

My jaw was tight. Mark was too still.

"I'm not done fighting for you." My voice grew louder, fighting off the panic inside of me.

Jori's hand touched my shoulder. "Adira, he's gone."

"No!" I was screaming now as tears poured down my eyes. "He's not gone."

My blood was boiling now. Anger, frustration, regret, all flowing through me. Jori tried to grab me again, but I pushed him away.

No one else said or did anything.

I wasn't done though.

I screamed again, letting out all of my feelings. I pushed on Mark's chest, not able to give up.

A burst of light shot through my hands as I touched Mark again. The light lingered and glowed brighter and brighter until I couldn't see anything but a bright yellow light. I stared into the light, searching for something.

Piercing blue eyes appeared in the distance of the bright light, and I chased after them.

"Mark, come back! You can't leave me."

The eyes became brighter and closer until I could see all of Mark. He looked angelic in this light. His skin was pale and radiant. His hair had an unnatural

shine to it. I reached out to him, and Mark smiled so brightly, it stopped my heart.

"I'm not done fighting for you," I whispered.

"I'm not either," Mark said, grabbing my hand.

The light grew even brighter, blinding me completely. I could still feel Mark's warmth around me, even if I couldn't see him. I held onto that feeling. Deep breath. Bring him back to you.

All at once, the light disappeared. For a split second, I could only see darkness. Then my vision came back to me, and I was still sitting in the field, pressing into Mark's chest as everyone stood around me solemnly.

Mark's chest rose, and he gasped for air. He flung forward, his blue eyes meeting mine for a moment. He started falling back to the ground, but I flung myself forward, catching him and softening his impact. I could feel his heart beating against my chest and his chest rising up and down.

"What just happened?" Percy asked the question on everyone's mind.

I didn't answer, not sure of what to say. I pulled away from Mark and watched his breathing turn steady. His eyes were closed again, but he was alive. I checked his wound, and there was no more blood pouring out of it. His energy felt weak, but it was there.

"He's alive," I whispered, almost not believing it myself.

Rie let go of Scythe and knelt next to Mark. Her eyes were still wet from the tears, but they were no longer flowing out of her eyes. She pressed her fingers against his neck.

"His pulse is weak, but he seems stable," Rie concluded.

"We need to get him out of here now," Scythe said. "We don't know if Theron will come back, and Mark still needs medical attention."

"I need attention too," Percy added. "We should leave now."

I didn't move right away. I was still in shock about what happened. Scythe was the first to move. He leaned down and wrapped his arm around Mark. With

Rie's help, they lifted him up. I watched them start moving him back to the trail, still unable to find my energy to get up.

He was alive.

He was alive because of me.

I slowly stood up, not wanting to be here anymore. I took a step to follow Rie and Scythe, but something in me told me to stop. I looked back at Jori, who hadn't moved. He was staring at me with icy eyes. His fists were curled so tight his knuckles were white. His jaw was tense, and he seemed like a statue, not even breathing. I wanted to know what was going on in his head, but something told me I wouldn't like it.

I opened my mouth to say something, but no words came out. Jori and I were locked in a mournful gaze.

Percy stepped towards Jori. He cradled his injured arm against his body. "Come on. We should get back to the pack."

Jori finally broke eye contact with me. He nodded to Percy. He glanced back at me, and for the brief moment we made eye contact, my heart wrenched. I could feel his pain, but I couldn't bring myself to move to him.

"You should go to your mate," Jori said. His voice was void of all emotion. He started walking, moving past Percy and myself.

I found myself following after, moving deliberately slower so I wouldn't end up next to him. He and I both knew the truth about who I was going to choose, but neither of us were willing to say it out loud yet.

—

We got back to the pack house, and Mark was instantly taken to the infirmary. It was empty, and the doctor there seemed a little panicked. I could tell he didn't have a lot of experience, which wasn't completely surprising. Wolves usually healed at an abnormal rate, so there was very little a doctor had to do other than set bones to make sure they healed properly or put ointment on open wounds to make sure they didn't get infected until they healed.

I wanted to wait in the room with Mark while he was being checked on, but it was pretty hectic. Whatever I did managed to close Mark's wound just enough

to stop it from bleeding and gave him a little more energy to push through, but it wasn't enough to completely heal him. Between being poisoned and the amount of blood Mark lost, Mark was still in poor condition. It would take time to heal, and the doctor and nurses inside were nearly panicking as they tried to figure out what to do.

I couldn't stand the sight, and I felt like I was just constantly in the way. It left me pacing outside of the room, waiting for any kind of update.

Rie approached me after Mark had been in the room for what felt like hours. She pulled me into a hug, squeezing me tighter than she ever had.

"Thank you so much," she whispered into my hair. She was taller than me by a good few inches.

I hugged Rie back, not realizing how much I needed that. Tears started silently streaming down my cheeks. "He's not in the clear yet."

Rie pulled back, holding my shoulders firmly. "He's alive, thanks to whatever you did. That's enough for now. We'll get him through this."

I nodded, still feeling anxious. Mark was finally back at the pack house, and so was I, but it felt like it was one thing or another keeping us apart. A part of me wondered if I would ever get my happily ever after with him.

"Umm... so about what you did..." Rie was looking off to the side, biting her lip. "Can you do it again? Maybe it would help?"

I looked down at the ground, squeezing my eyes tightly. I tried to remember what I did exactly. "I don't know. I was trying to heal him, but it wasn't working. When I thought he was... he was gone... I don't know. Something just snapped in me. I think it might have been the pure emotional terror of losing him that drove me to that point. I don't know how to control it though."

"Don't feel guilty or stressed about it," Rie said. "I just thought maybe it could help. But you've already helped enough."

I heard footsteps approaching. I looked up and saw Scythe approaching.

"Any updates?" he asked, stopping between Rie and me.

I shook my head. “No, and I’m worried. Whenever I go in there, it seems like they don’t know what they’re doing. I wish we could take him to a better doctor.”

I looked at the door and frowned. I could hear something drop from the inside, and I was worried that the doctor wouldn’t be good enough for Mark.

Scythe smirked at me. “That won’t be necessary.”

I furrowed my eyebrows and tilted my head. “Are you a mad man? Mark needs so much more help than a normal wolf. I don’t think his body is doing anything to assist in the healing process.”

“That is where I come in,” a new voice said from behind Rie. I hadn’t even heard anyone approaching.

I looked behind Rie and saw Doctor Zayla standing there. She had a bag slung across her chest, something that looked like a mini ice cooler in one arm, and a bunch of papers in the other. Her hair was tied into a neat bun, and her glasses were sliding down her nose.

“What are you doing here, Doctor Zayla?” I was surprised and relieved to see Doctor Zayla.

Doctor Zayla looked me up and down once. “Scythe called me and said that Alpha needed my help, so I am here.”

I smiled and wrapped my arms around her. She instantly stiffened. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

Doctor Zayla laughed awkwardly, pulling away from the hug. “Please show me where this incompetent doctor is so I know where to begin.”

## **The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 45**

Doctor Zayla barged into the room. “You are excused.” She waved her hand at the other doctor without giving him eye contact.

“Who do you think you are just coming in here and-”

She stopped and looked at the man curiously. She tilted her head ever so tightly. “I’m the doctor taking over this case. Do you really think you are more

competent in this matter? If you do, please prove it to me. If you are not confident, I suggest you leave so I don't make you cry."

Doctor Zayla's words weren't harsh, but she was very blunt with the way she spoke. She oozed confidence out of her pores, and I knew I would never go against her unless I was absolutely confident in my abilities.

The other doctor opened his mouth to say something, but then he thought better of it and scurried out. His nurses followed him, leaving Doctor Zayla, Rie, Scythe, Mark, and myself in the room.

"Excellent. Now I can make sure Alpha gets the proper treatment." Doctor Zayla instantly got to work. She pulled out various items from her bag and started checking Mark's vitals and other indicators.

Mark was hooked up to a heart monitor, and the steady rhythm of his heartbeat was soothing. It was a constant reminder that he was still alive. His face was pale and still as stone. I couldn't break my eyes away from him, anticipating his eyes opening and him smiling at me again. My whole body ached for that smile of his.

"Please hand me the bag with the yellow liquid in it," Doctor Zayla ordered.

I looked at Rie and Scythe, unsure who Doctor Zayla was talking to, but Scythe was already digging through the bag for the item requested. I imagined the two of them were much more accustomed to the way Doctor Zayla worked. I took a step back, afraid of getting in the way.

Doctor Zayla started hooking up the liquid to an IV. She skillfully put the IV in Mark's arm. She quickly continued her work, undoing the bandages the other doctor had dressed and re-doing them to her standard. She went over every inch of his body, and when she pulled back the blankets to check on his torso, I winced from the dark purple and blue bruises covering his body.

Mark was tortured. That was clear to me. Theron didn't have Mark for a long time, but he didn't hesitate to use it to hurt him. I wondered how many bones were broken and how much pain Mark had been in. With his wolf suppressed, the pain would have been much worse and lasted much longer. My stomach was in knots thinking about it. I felt responsible for the pain he was in, and I wished I could do something more to alleviate the pain.

After a few moments, Doctor Zayla took a step back from Mark and looked at the three of us. "He will get through this. He will likely be out for at least another day, if not longer. Once the wolfsbane has worked its way through his system, his body will be able to start repairing itself more efficiently. For now, I've given him pain medication and fluids to help his body heal to the best of its ability in his current state."

"Is he going to have any lasting damage?" I asked.

"Unlikely. Although if there is a drug in his system I'm unfamiliar with, it's possible. I have taken a blood sample and will need to analyze it to be sure." Doctor Zayla turned to pack the blood sample in her bag.

"Thank you for coming on such short notice, Zayla," Scythe said. He looked over at Mark, his eyes glassy.

"No need to thank me. I would do whatever Alpha needed. I will stick around here for a few more days to continue to monitor his condition, but I hope we can all return home soon." Doctor Zayla turned and looked at me. "He would recover faster if you marked him."

My mouth went dry at the suggestion. I was not prepared for her to say something like that. "I, uh. Well." I didn't know what to say.

"Zay," Rie said in a cautionary tone. "That's not really our business."

Doctor Zayla shrugged. "I'm just letting her know. Marking your mate makes them stronger. The bond with a mate is very powerful, and it can even increase the healing process."

I shook my head. "I can't mark him without his permission." I looked at Mark. I wanted him awake sooner, but with everything that happened, I could not mark him without a conversation with him.

"He loves you. He would not be upset with you, if that's your concern," Doctor Zayla said.

"He what? He told you he loves me?" My mouth was dry again, and my heart was racing. He hadn't said that word to me yet, and it was terrifying to think about.

"No. It is obvious by his actions that he loves you." Doctor Zayla spoke so confidently, which threw me off.

"Come on, let's go find something to eat. We should give Adira a moment alone with Mark." Rie stepped up and grabbed Doctor Zayla's hand, pulling her out of the room.

"You act as if I have done something wrong. I am just speaking the truth," Doctor Zayla protested.

"I know. There's just a time and a place to say something like that."

The two of them disappeared out of the room. Scythe stuck around, shifting his weight from foot to foot.

Suddenly, he locked eyes with me. "She's not wrong, you know. Maybe a little blunt, but not wrong. Mark cares very deeply for you. I don't think it's just the mate bond, either."

My lips pulled into a tight smile. "I care about him, too. I know I haven't been the best to him, but-

"Hey, you're doing the best you can, especially given your circumstances. Sometimes the choices you make aren't the best for your mate, even if you're doing the best for you." Scythe put his hand on my shoulder.

"Is that what happened with you and Percy?" The words slipped out of my mouth without thinking. Normally, I tried to avoid prying into personal things like that, letting the person reach out to me if they wanted to talk about it. "Sorry, you don't have to answer that."

Scythe's hand fell to his side. His eyes fell to the floor before meeting mine again. "No, it's okay. It's about time I talked about it."

"You really don't have to." I clasped my hands together, squeezing tightly to try to push down my nerves.

Scythe gave me a small smile. "It's really okay. I think I'm ready to talk about it. I think you might understand more than others the struggle I had to deal with."



He motioned towards a few chairs. I turned one of the chairs so it was facing the other, and we sat next to Mark.

“How much do you know about what happened between Mark and Jori?” Scythe asked, after settling into his chair.

I frowned. “Not as much as I would like to. I have heard Jori’s side of it, but I still haven’t had a chance to ask Mark for his. No one else has really explained it.”

Scythe nodded. “I will leave the details for you and Mark to talk about. You won’t really need those for my story.”

I tried to hide my disappointment. I would have loved to hear Scythe’s point of view of what went down. He clearly took Mark’s side in everything, but I felt like he would be a more neutral source of information than Jori or Mark.

“Well, after Mark decided to leave, the rest of the pack had a choice of what they wanted to do,” Scythe continued. “Mark didn’t ask any of us to leave with him. He made his announcement, letting everyone know when he would be going, saying it was best for him to leave.”

“He didn’t ask you to come?” I said. This was a little surprising, especially after Jori’s explanation. He had made it seem like Mark tried to lead a rebellion against him and the pack.

Scythe shook his head. “No, but I had been with Mark through everything. He was trying to do what was right, even if he didn’t always succeed with doing the best thing. I don’t blame him, though. It’s hard to do the right thing all of the time, even if you are trying your best.”

I knew that feeling all too well. I wanted to do what was best for everyone else, but it seemed like I kept making mistakes and someone was getting hurt because of me. I swallowed hard, trying to push the guilt bubbling up inside of me back down.

“So how did you end up going with him?” I asked.

Scythe looked down at his hands. “Mark saved my life, in more ways than one. I nearly drowned in a river when we were younger. I was trying to act brave in front of some kids, but the current was strong, too strong for me. I didn’t have my wolf yet either. I nearly drowned, but Mark didn’t hesitate to

jump in after me. He was older and already had his wolf, so he was stronger. He pulled me out of the water. He became my friend after that. I didn't have any friends before that. I didn't fit in with other kids."

I reached forward and grabbed Scythe's hand, my heart reaching out to him. I used to think I was fine being alone, but I had been lying to myself for the past few years. It was Mark and Scythe and even Rie who made me realize the truth. They gave me something invaluable that I couldn't imagine living without now.

"He helped me with my identity. I struggled with it for a long time, thinking I had to be someone I'm not. Mark helped me realize that I am perfect just the way I am. Which is why I knew no matter what happened with the pack, I would follow Mark to the end." Scythe squeezed my hand and the small smile on his face faded.

"Did Percy know this?" I asked. I could tell the next part was the hardest part.

"I turned eighteen a few days before Mark left," Scythe began. "I didn't know Percy was my mate until my birthday. When we found each other, that was the best night of my life. I felt like life was this whirlwind of laughter and love and pleasure. I wanted to keep breathing in that beautiful whirlwind, but when Mark said he was leaving, I told Percy I had to go with Mark. Percy didn't want to go. I begged him, but he said I was being stupid and ignorant for leaving with an alpha who didn't even have a pack. He told me I was giving up a good life for a stupid reason."

"So you left and he stayed." I felt like I couldn't breathe at that thought. Finding a mate was supposed to be beautiful, but it was rare for people to talk about the tragedy that could come with it.

Scythe nodded and let go of my hand. "Yes. I tried to hate him for not coming with me, but I couldn't. I couldn't hate someone I loved so deeply."

"Did you guys patch things up? You two looked like you were getting along."

Scythe's face shifted again, tightening in ways I didn't even know it could. "Yeah, we started talking, and it was like I never left. Things have been great, but we aren't going to stay here. Eventually, Mark will leave, and I will go with him. I don't want to go through that again."

"Have you talked to Percy about all of this?"

Scythe shook his head. "I'm afraid to break the bubble. I know it will pop on its own sooner than later, but I don't want to do it sooner than I have to."

I looked to the ground. I wanted Scythe to be happy, but there was nothing I could do to change the circumstances. "I'm sorry."

Scythe stood up, taking my hand with him. He kissed the back of my hand, and then patted it with his other hand. "There is nothing for you to apologize for, dear. Thank you for listening to my story."

I stood up and pulled Scythe into a hug. "Any time. If there's ever anything you need me to do or if you just need an ear, I'm here for you."

Scythe parted from the hug. He touched my chin, giving me an older brother vibe. "You too. You're not in this alone. We are here for you. Now why don't I get out of your hair, so you can spend some alone time with Alpha?"