

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 51

Ginger let go of me, and it took a moment to reorient myself. I blinked a few times, looking around the room. Mark, Rie, and Daniel were staring at the two of us. I could see the questions on their faces, but none of them spoke first.

“What was that?” I asked, sitting on the couch. I felt a little lightheaded after all of that. It felt like a lot of information rushed into my brain in a moment’s time.

“I was looking at what made you you. It showed me your potential and possible future,” Ginger explained.

“Possible future? So what we saw wasn’t a prediction?” I asked, thinking about the shadow chasing the wolf.

Ginger shook her head. “Nope. It’s impossible to predict the future. All you can see is a possibility based on potential.”

“What did you see?” Daniel asked.

I hesitated, not wanting to sound crazy at the image. “Well, there was a girl who transformed into a wolf. Then a shadowy figure started chasing her. After being cornered, she repelled the figure.”

Mark grabbed my hand and squeezed. “What does that mean?”

I shook my head. “I’m not sure.”

“It means she will face a great evil. If she’s prepared, she will win the fight,” Ginger explained.

“A great evil? Would that mean Theron?” Rie asked.

“Who is this Theron?” Ginger asked. She moved back over to the pot in the middle of the room.

“That’s my half brother. He’s the one trying to kill me because he wants to inherit the powers of his family,” I explained. I looked over at Mark and squeezed his hand back. I wished I didn’t have to face Theron again, but I knew it was inevitable. He wouldn’t stop, and I knew I wouldn’t be free to live my life until he was gone.

"No, he can't be the great evil. He is weak." Ginger didn't hesitate in her statement.

"How can you be so sure?" Daniel asked. "Can you see his future too?"

"Don't be silly, boy. It is just common knowledge. He is the second child to the Caspian Coven. Even if he manages to kill you and get his coven's powers, he could never be as powerful as you, my dear. He craves power for the sake of power. Those who do can never truly be powerful."

"So who would this great evil be?" I asked. The thought of having to fight someone more powerful than Theron made me queasy.

"Who knows? It will be revealed in time I suppose. It's not worth worrying about until it's worth worrying about." Ginger buzzed around the room, grabbing more bottles and pouring a few drops here and there into the pot. She taste tested it and licked her lips. After a moment, she nodded her head. "Perfect."

"Shouldn't I prepare for it?" I asked.

"No, no, we must prepare for the impending fight with your brother. That we know will happen." Ginger walked over to me and stopped directly in front of me. "For today you rest. Tomorrow you train. Bond with your mate. It will help your familiar come back."

Mark turned to me and raised his eyebrow. I mouthed to him "later." He nodded, understanding.

"So where do we stay for the night?" I asked. The little house didn't look big enough for all of us to stay here. It wouldn't make sense to travel back and forth. At least half the day would be wasted traveling.

Ginger held her finger up. She grabbed a box of knick knacks and pulled out a stick of chalk. She pushed some boxes to the side, clearing up an opening on the wall. She proceeded to draw a rectangle on the wall. Then she dropped the piece of chalk, and pressed her hands against the wall. Her eyes fluttered shut, and she took a deep breath.

Time slowed, and I could feel the energy pulsing from her before I saw anything. It was strong and came in waves, pulsing around her body. Her hands started to glow, and then the entire chalk outline glowed. It grew

brighter and brighter, and I had to look away because it was so bright. After a moment, the light dimmed, and I found myself blinking, dark spots filling in my vision as if I had just been staring at the sun.

“Did you just make that door?” Daniel was the first to speak.

I looked over to where the chalk outline had been, and sure enough there was a new door where there had been a wall previously.

“No, the door just appeared out of nowhere,” Ginger said sarcastically.

“Well, it kind of did,” Rie muttered to herself.

Ginger waved her finger at Rie. “Ah, but you are mistaken, girl. It didn’t appear from nowhere. As I said before, my speciality is breaking things down and building them back up. I broke down the materials that already existed to create something new.”

“That is absolutely incredible!” Daniel jumped over to Ginger. He pulled out a small notebook. “Can you describe to me how you did that?”

Ginger swatted at Daniel’s head. “Don’t be ridiculous, boy. Even if I explained to you what happened, you would never be able to fully grasp it. Without a sorcerer’s blood, you’ll never experience what we do.”

“I see. I would love to inquire more from you, though. This is the first time I have ever met a sorceress before, and I would love to know more. Well, with the exception of Adira, but she knows less than I do about all of this.” Daniel didn’t even seem phased from Ginger swatting at him.

Ginger rolled her eyes. “Fine. I will answer some of your questions, but you must help me cook dinner.”

“What would you like the rest of us to do?” I asked. Even though this lady seemed a little off, she clearly understood powers better than I hoped to. I was willing to help out as a thank you for her promised help.

“You and your mate go rest. I need you both running at full capacity tomorrow. There is a guest area beyond that door, including two guest rooms. Pick which one you would like.” She started walking away, but then she paused and turned back to me, making direct eye contact. “The walls are soundproof, too.” She gave me a wink and turned back.

I felt myself blushing at that comment. I couldn't do what she was insinuating with so many people around. Besides, Mark was still in recovery. I felt Mark's eyes on me, and it just made my cheeks burn even more.

"Wait, what about me?" Rie asked. She still hadn't moved from her corner of the room.

Ginger waved her hand in the air. "Help. Don't help. Relax. Don't relax. Do as you please. Just don't touch my stuff."

Ginger disappeared into the kitchen with Daniel following her like a puppy.

Rie shook her head. "He isn't using his brain properly, is he?"

I chuckled at this. "He's just excited. His thirst for knowledge is taking over the logical side."

"It's a little unnerving," Rie said. "I don't know if I've ever seen him like this before."

"I have," Mark said. "Once, a long time ago. I agree, though. It's a little weird seeing him like this."

I shook my head, smiling. "Well, I think it's cute." I stood up and offered my hand out to Mark. "Should we get you some rest?"

Mark smiled and grabbed my hand. I helped him to his feet, but I could tell he already had more energy than before.

"You two have fun. Not too much though. I'm going to scope out the area to make sure we're safe," Rie said. "I still don't trust this lady." Rie left the room, heading straight for the front door.

I helped Mark over to the door Ginger had created. I grabbed the door handle and pulled. I half expected it to be a big joke, and the door would turn out to be an illusion of some sort. However, when I pulled the door open, it led to another part of the house, as if it had always been there.

There was a small open space that led to three doors. One was open and clearly led to a little bathroom. I picked one of the other doors at random and helped Mark into it. There was a queen-sized bed in the middle of the wall with a window above it. It was equipped with side tables, a dresser, and even

lamps. I still couldn't wrap my mind around the fact that Ginger had created all of this just a few moments ago.

I helped Mark into the bed and looked around the room a little more. I was surprised to find fresh clothes in the dresser.

"She really thought of everything," I said, exploring every nook and cranny of the room.

"It appears so," Mark said. After a moment, he continued. "Why don't you come lie down with me?"

I looked at Mark, and he was holding out his hand to me. I smiled and took his hand. He pulled me into the bed, pulling me to his chest. He immediately wrapped his arms around my waist and held me tightly. I rested my head on his chest and listened to his heartbeat.

"I've missed this," Mark admitted. He started stroking my hair. "I've missed you."

I looked up into Mark's eyes, and when he looked back at me, I felt a warmth growing in my core. I wanted to be with him and hold him tightly. I wanted every part of him, and I wanted him to take every part of me.

"I've missed you, too. There were too many days wasted with me not in your arms." I felt a little silly admitting such a thing, but when Mark's smile brightened, butterflies fluttered in my stomach.

Mark cupped my face and brought it to his. As our lips touched, my need for him grew even more. I melted into the kiss and never wanted it to stop. Something pulled at my chest, and I found myself breaking away from Mark.

He furrowed his eyebrows. "What's wrong?"

I took a deep breath. I was terrified for what I was about to say with Mark, but if I truly wanted him to be my mate, I wanted no secrets between us. "Before we go any farther, I need to tell you some things. While you were in your coma, something happened between Jori and me."

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 52

Mark's whole body tensed, and he sat up, pulling away from me. I could see his jaw clench and unclench as his mind raced over my words. "What happened?" His voice was surprisingly calm.

"Not what you're thinking. Well, I don't actually know what you're thinking. I should just tell you so you don't think it's worse." I took a deep breath, trying to calm my mind. After how Jori reacted in our conversation, I was terrified of how Mark would react. What if he rejected me too? What if he thought I wanted Jori and only picked him because Jori rejected me?

I pulled away from Mark, knowing I wouldn't be able to think straight in his arms. I sat cross-legged on the bed and looked at Mark. He was silently waiting for me to explain myself.

"When you were in your coma, Jori approached me. He asked me if I was picking you as my mate. I didn't want to talk about it then. I wasn't ready to have that conversation, not when you were still unconscious and I hadn't even had a chance to talk to you with how I was feeling. So much had happened, and I didn't want to deal with any of it." I looked down at my hands and squeezed them tight. Tears threatened my eyes as I thought about what happened next in the conversation.

"Go on," Mark said patiently. "Take your time."

I didn't look up at Mark, afraid to make eye contact. "When I refused to have the conversation, Jori grabbed me, and..."

I could feel Mark tense. "Did he hurt you?"

I didn't respond right away. I opened my mouth to answer, but no words came out. Instead I nodded. "But I get it. He was frustrated. He knew the truth. He knew I wanted you, but I wasn't brave enough to tell him to his face."

Mark reached over and grabbed my hands. He waited for me to look at him before speaking. "I don't care what you did or didn't do. No one should ever harm you like that, especially your mate, who is supposed to protect you."

The tears started spilling out of my eyes. I had felt so guilty. Everything that had happened to me felt like it was my fault. I thought Mark would be upset with me or think I didn't want to reject Jori because I was still weighing my options, but here he was saying it wasn't my fault.

“Hey, hey. It’s okay.” Mark pulled me into him and kissed me on the forehead. “I will never hurt you like that.”

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. “There’s more. When I wouldn’t have the conversation with him, he rejected me. It hurt when he rejected me, in a completely different way. My body was in terrible pain, and I couldn’t move or breathe. I still feel residual pain from it, too. And my familiar hasn’t been speaking to me. I’m afraid I’ve lost my powers because he rejected me. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“Hey, why on earth are you apologizing?” Mark pulled me into his lap and wrapped his arms around my waist.

I cracked my eyes open and looked at his soft gaze. He didn’t seem angry in the slightest. “I… I was worried you would be upset with me.”

Mark furrowed his eyebrows. “Because you’re in pain?”

When he said it like that, it felt silly. I nodded slowly. “I thought maybe you would think that I wanted Jori because of this.”

Mark smiled, almost amused. “You’re here in my arms. You have had no control in this situation. Having two mates must have been very difficult for you, and I have heard how difficult it is to be rejected by your mate. It’s a bond being broken. Your circumstance may be different than others, but it doesn’t mean you deserve to be in pain any more than anyone else.”

My heart felt a little lighter than before. “I’m sure it hasn’t been easy for you either. I’m sorry for that.”

Mark looked down at my hands, thinking for a moment. “No, I would be lying if I said this was easy for me. Seeing you in his arms, resisting the urge to pull you away from him everytime he was close. It was painful. But you don’t have anything to apologize for. If I were in his shoes, I would’ve wanted you to give me a chance, too. I admire you for that, Adira. You have such a big heart, and you don’t want to hurt anyone, even at your own expense.”

I traced Mark’s finger’s that were still wrapped around my body. “Do you want to know when I knew you were the one I wanted to be with?” I looked up into Mark’s eyes.

“I would love to know that.” He leaned forward and kissed my forehead.

“When we were at my party, my favorite part was when I was in your arms. I never wanted to leave. I should’ve realized it then, but it wasn’t until Theron took me that it fully clicked. I was cold and lonely, and I only wanted to be in your arms again. When neither you nor Jori were around me, I wanted you. And I knew then that I wanted you for the rest of my life. You were the reason I made it out of that situation. I knew I had to get back to you, so I could tell you how I truly felt.”

I kept my eyes down, terrified to look at Mark again. I felt so open and vulnerable. I knew if Mark wanted to, he would completely break me in this moment.

Mark tightened his grip on me. “When that bastard took you, I lost my mind. The thought of losing you forever was too much for me. I knew you could still choose Jori, but I couldn’t sit around and do nothing. Jori, he wasn’t taking action, and I couldn’t understand it. Did he not want you as much as I did? Did it not matter to him that you were in danger?”

I looked up at Mark, and I could see the fury in his eyes. I cupped his cheek and rubbed it gently to calm him. “How did you know where to look?”

“This might sound crazy, but I could feel you. I just knew where you were. I just got there too late. I’m sorry. I just made things worse.”

I cupped Mark’s face and made him look at me directly. “I think we need to stop apologizing to each other.” I chuckled, and Mark joined in the laughing.

“Okay, no more apologizing for what has happened. We will move on, knowing we’ll be together forever.”

I pulled Mark into a deep kiss, and everything felt so much lighter now. I didn’t feel any pain from Jori’s rejection while I was in Mark’s arms. I would have been happy if I could just stay like this forever and never think about what was coming.

I broke free from the kiss and bit my lip. “While we are being open, and honest with each other, can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

I chewed on my lip for a moment. "What happened between you and Jori? Jori told me his point of view, but I wanted to know what happened from your point of view."

I could feel Mark's body tense underneath me. I knew this wasn't an easy topic for him. "I suppose it's only fair for you to know," Mark finally said.

"If it's too much to talk about, you don't have to."

Mark stroked my hair. "No, you deserve to know the truth. You ended up in the middle of us, which I'm sure wasn't easy. Plus, I want you to know my side of things. Can you just promise me something? Can you promise me that you won't think of me differently? I didn't handle the situation the best, and there are things I'm ashamed of."

"Mark, I only care about the person you are today. We've all made mistakes in our past, and I won't think any differently of you for something you did in your past." I gave him a smile to reassure him further.

Mark nodded, but he didn't smile back. His eyes seemed to grow farther away. "Just remember that while I tell the story, okay?" He took a shallow breath and then began his story. "My parents died when I was at a young age. I never knew what happened. I was just a child, and I didn't understand how the world worked at that point. Jori's father took me in at the time. I was so grateful for it, and Jori and I became best friends, brothers even. I always knew Jori was destined to take over the pack. His father was the alpha, so there was no doubt that Jori would have the alpha gene as well.

"When Jori turned eighteen, it was confirmed he would be the next alpha in the pack when his father retired. I was going to be his beta. I turned eighteen only a month after him, but what none of us were expecting was that I also had the alpha gene. Turned out that Jori's father was expecting this. He knew my father was the alpha all along, but he never told me this. I had been told that my parents were rogues, but that was a lie. My childhood had been a lie.

"His father told me to leave the pack, but I refused. I told him that I had no intention of taking over the pack, but he didn't care. I knew there was something else he wasn't telling me. So I started doing my research. I talked to other packs around us, and that's when I found out my grandfather used to run the Sallow pack. He was the Alpha, and my father was the one who was meant to take over when my grandfather retired."

I furrowed my eyebrows as I heard Mark's story. Jori hadn't mentioned any of this. "How did no one from the pack know this?"

"I wondered that myself," Mark continued. "My grandfather was killed and his son was run off. No one in the pack knew he was my grandfather, or that I was the child of the man who was supposed to be the alpha. They told us stories of how the previous alpha was cruel to the pack, so it was a relief when Jori's grandfather took over. They thought he saved the pack, but it was a coo. It was all lies. My grandfather made the pack thrive, but others wanted power. It's incredible how history changes with the words of victors. The truth often gets lost in the grand stories told.

"I tried to tell Jori and others all of this, but he didn't believe me. He thought I was trying to take the pack away from him. That wasn't my direct intention, but it was my rightful place. We fought, and eventually I decided to leave. I knew I wouldn't win against the lies and rumors being told. I didn't ask anyone to come with, but those who believed me or were loyal to me decided to join me.

"I took the alpha medallion when I left. I knew I shouldn't, but it had belonged to my grandfather. If I couldn't live up to my family inheritance, I wanted to take a piece of my inheritance with me. Maybe I shouldn't have taken it, but I was angry."

A realization suddenly hit me. "That's what you gave Jori to get him to agree to us coming to his pack?"

Mark nodded. "He said he would refuse otherwise. I didn't have a choice."

I frowned. "You always have a choice, but you chose me." My heart started pounding as I felt this realization to the full extent. Mark chose my wellbeing over the only family heirloom that he had. He fought for me when Jori wouldn't. He was supportive and loving and cared about me and my happiness.

I found myself pulling Mark into a kiss, but I wanted so much more from him this time.

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 53

Mark pulled me even closer to him, and as our kiss deepened, I could tell he wanted more. I shifted my body so I was straddling his lap and facing him directly now. His hands instantly went up to my head and cradled it gently. He

stroked my hair, sending tingles down my spine, and goosebumps attacked my skin. It was hot and breathless and perfect.

I pulled back suddenly, worried this would be too much for him. “Are you still in pain? If you’re still recovering, we shouldn’t go any farther.”

Mark’s chest heaved up and down, and he was just as breathless as me. He stroked my face with the back of his fingers. “I don’t feel any pain with you so close.”

I leaned my head forward, and pressed my forehead against his. It took every ounce of my strength to not do anymore. “We should be careful.”

Mark nuzzled his nose against mine. “What if I don’t want to be careful? What if I just want you, no matter the costs?”

Mark’s lips were against my neck in a second, and it made me gasp. The fire in my core started as a slow burn, but with each new kiss in each new area of my body, it burned brighter.

“Mark,” I gasped, barely able to concentrate.

Mark hummed against my skin, making me lose all focus. I let my head fall back, and I closed my eyes, focusing on the sensations. I hooked my hands around the back of his neck and held on tightly for support. Mark continued to pepper my neck with kisses, moving down to my collarbone and then back up to my jawline.

He ran his fingers through my hair and our lips found each other again. Everything swirled together, and Mark tasted sweeter than any dessert I had ever had. I couldn’t get enough of him, and with each of his touches, I knew he felt the same. I held the back of his neck tightly as I moved in his lap. Everything became hot and sweaty.

Mark pulled away from me, and I was left gasping for more. His blue eyes stared at me like I was the only thing in the world, and at that moment, he was the only thing I could think of. He was the only one I saw and wanted. He filled my mind and every inch of my skin craved every part of him.

Mark brushed a small piece of hair out of my face. “Adira, I love you. I love you more than I’ll ever be able to show you.”

My heart raced at his words. He loved me, and I knew I felt the same. I felt so overwhelmed hearing those three small words. I hadn't heard them in such a long time, and they had never felt so real. It wasn't a family member saying it out of obligation or a high school boyfriend who thought he knew what love was but actually knew nothing at all. This was real. This was so much better.

I pressed my lips against Mark's again, trying to show him how much that meant to me. I felt the tears stream down my face, and Mark pulled away again. He wiped the tears away from my eyes and frowned.

"Did I say something wrong?" he asked. I could feel his hesitation fill his body.

I shook my head quickly. "No, no. Just the opposite. That was the perfect thing to say." I kissed him again. "I love you, too." The words flowed out of my mouth, and it was much easier than I had expected. I had never felt this way before.

I kissed the tip of Mark's nose and then his forehead. I ran my fingers through his hair and kissed his lips again. "You make me happier than I thought I could be."

Mark smiled. "I never thought I could be this happy, either. I thought after everything that happened, after losing my parents, my best friend, and then my pack... I just didn't think I would ever be truly happy again. But then you stepped into my life."

The tears flowed freely now. I was beyond happy, but I was also scared. This was too good to be true. I was afraid it would all disappear in a blink of an eye.

"Hey, why are you crying?" Mark asked. He cupped my face in my hands.

I shrugged, not sure how to explain everything I was feeling. It was just a lot of emotions all at once.

Mark kissed my forehead and then shifted the way he was holding me in his lap. He moved me to the side so my legs were draped over his lap. He pulled me close to his chest and let me rest my head against his chest.

"Let's just lay like this for a while. We've been through a lot, and there's no need to rush anything." He smiled down at me, looking just as happy to be sitting like this as before.

“Are you sure?” I asked. I could feel how excited he was before, and I was just as excited. I didn’t want him to be disappointed.

“Positive. I don’t want any crying when I finally mark you.” Mark stroked my hair, and my whole body relaxed in response. I knew I was safe in his arms. He didn’t want to hurt me, and he would do whatever it took to protect me. And I wanted to protect him.

My eyes grew heavy as I listened to Mark’s heartbeat. Our breaths slowed and synced together, and my mind eased. I wasn’t worried about what might happen in the future. I was just happy that I had a mate who I loved and who loved me back.

—

When I cracked my eyes open, I had no idea how long I had been asleep for. I looked up at Mark, who was still sleeping. His arms were still wrapped tightly around me, but his head was tilting to the side, and there was a little bit of drool on his mouth. I smiled at the perfectly not perfect sight.

His skin looked more plump than before, and his color had returned as well. Whatever Ginger had given him was clearly working. I reached up and wiped the drool from his mouth. Then I untangled myself from his arms and crawled out of the bed as slowly as I could. My body was stiff, and I hadn’t realized how tired I was. There was just something so comforting about being in Mark’s arms, and sleep over took me without me realizing it was happening.

I stretched next to the bed, moving as quietly as I could. I didn’t want to wake Mark up. I wanted him to get as much rest as possible to heal to the full extent. I peaked out the window and saw the sun was about ready to set. It had to be almost dinner time. I decided to leave Mark sleeping and go venture out to see what everyone else was up to.

When I left the room, I instantly smelled a delicious scent. It had completely replaced the smell of the thick potion before, and my feet started following the scent. I found myself in the kitchen, and Daniel was standing next to Ginger as she worked the stove. Together they looked like grandmother and grandson, and I found myself lingering in the doorway to watch them.

“You’re going to let that burn, boy. Have you never cooked in your life before?” Ginger pointed to a pan on Daniel’s side of the stove.

"It's not going to burn. I know how to cook. You don't need to hover so much." Daniel had a big smile on his face, and I knew he was loving every moment of the interaction, even though Ginger was critiquing his every move.

"You don't know how to cook well," Ginger muttered under her breath.

"I know how to cook just fine."

"What's for dinner?" I asked quickly before their bickering got out of hand.

"About time you're awake, girl. Dinner is what we are making, and I don't want to hear a complaint out of you." Ginger didn't even glance in my direction.

"It smells delicious. No complaints here." I shook my head. Ginger was somehow endearing, even though normally I would have been annoyed with her mannerisms.

"Good. Now go get that other girl. It's almost done, and she'll need to wash up after exploring outside like that. Let your mate sleep for now. He'll wake up soon enough." Ginger smacked Daniel's hand when he tried to stick his finger in a dish to taste test it.

I watched Ginger for a moment longer, wondering if she was clairvoyant. She seemed to know what everyone was up to, despite being in the kitchen. I couldn't imagine her leaving the kitchen to check up on everyone, especially with Daniel following her like a puppy. Then I thought about the image of the shadow chasing the wolf. Was that Ginger's doing, or was that something just locked away inside my head the entire time?

"Don't just stand there staring into space. Do as I said," Ginger said, snapping her fingers.

I stood up quickly and walked out of the room. I didn't want Ginger to scold me again. She really gave me grandmotherly vibes; although, it wasn't like the vibes of my grandmother. The mother of my not-father was cold and distant. She never gave hugs and only inquired about my academics. She expected perfection from me in every way. I understood where my father got his cold side knowing her. I never met my mother's mother. My mother didn't talk about her much. I assumed she died a long time ago, but I never heard the story of how it happened or how long ago it was.

The air outside was brisk, and suddenly I wished I had a heavier jacket on. Without the sun high above the sky, the temperature was quickly dropping. I walked around the yard, looking for Rie. I kept my arms hugged around my body to keep as much warmth around me as possible.

After a few minutes of searching, I found Rie standing in the backyard, looking in the distance.

“Hey Rie,” I said as I approached to get her attention.

She continued staring off to the forest beyond. “This is where the bubble ends in the back. I can’t figure out how she does it.”

“Does what?” I looked where Rie was looking, but nothing looked different.

“If I take five steps forward, I disappear back to the area where our car is. You can’t even see this little cottage. It’s incredible. I can’t figure out if it’s some sort of glamour or if we are being teleported to a completely different location.” Rie pointed to a tree a few feet to the right of us. “You see that?”

I looked, but I didn’t understand what was so special about it. “Yeah?”

“It’s different from the trees back there. It doesn’t belong there. It makes me think we are in a different location, but that doesn’t make any sense to me. How does it work?” Rie twisted a strand of hair in her fingers and furrowed her eyebrows.

“Why don’t you just ask Ginger? I know it’s hard grasping all of this. I still don’t fully understand how magic works, but I imagine there are sorcerers out there who don’t understand the shape shifting we do,” I said. It was definitely a lot to wrap our minds around.

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right. I just don’t know if she’ll tell me the truth.”

I shrugged. Ginger seemed hit or miss with answering questions. “Only one way to find out. Come on. Dinner is almost ready. Let’s go inside.”

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 54

“That was delicious,” I said, putting down my fork. I wasn’t exactly sure what we ate for dinner. It was some kind of meat with a tangy soup. After not eating all day, anything would have tasted good, but this was warm and comforting.

Ginger finished her meal and stood up suddenly, tossing her fork in her bowl, causing it to ring out. "I'm done. Clean up when you all are done. Don't bother me for the rest of the night." She walked out of the kitchen.

I jumped out of my seat and ran after Ginger, still holding my fork in my hand. There was something on my mind, and I wanted to talk to her about it before she left.

"Ginger! I have a question."

She stopped suddenly and turned to face me. "Make it quick. I have things I need to get done tonight."

"My familiar told me that Theron could sense where I am because we share blood. Is that true? Should I be worried he'll show up here for a surprise attack?" I wanted to be ready in case we were all in danger.

"You have a smart familiar, especially for neither of you having training. You should try talking to her tonight. Help her through the rejection from her soulmate. She needs you and you need her," Ginger said.

I nodded, understanding. If Moon wasn't going to talk to me, then I would have to reach out to her. "I will." I waited for Ginger to answer my question, but she just stood there as if she already had. "So... Are we in danger of Theron finding us?"

Ginger cackled. "There is no way he is strong enough to find you here, especially if he hasn't come of age yet. I have a protection barrier around my home. No one can sense magic. No one should have been able to enter, either." She looked me up and down. "I still haven't figured out how you managed to find me and get through my protection spell."

I stayed silent, shocked by her words. I thought it was just a cloaking spell to hide the view of the cottage from the naked eye. But when I looked to the barrier, I sensed it. I knew it was there, and I just walked through. I didn't do anything special, and I didn't have any defense or explanation for Ginger.

"Well, I'm off now. Don't be too noisy and get plenty of rest tonight. You'll be training hard tomorrow, and I won't go easy on you just because you were too busy doing the horizontal dance with your mate." Ginger turned and walked away.

"Good night," I muttered, grateful she wasn't looking at me. My cheeks were flushed from her comment. I had no idea if that would even be happening tonight. Mark was still asleep. I was tempted to go check on him, but I didn't want to accidentally wake him up. Instead, I returned to the kitchen to help Rie and Daniel clean up after dinner.

"Where did you run to?" Rie asked, piling the dishes into the sink.

"I had to ask Ginger a question. I wanted to make sure Theron wouldn't be able to find us here." I grabbed the rest of the dishes and started washing them.

Rie paused and looked at me. "What did she say?"

"She said we would be fine. She said we shouldn't have been able to get in. I guess we were a fluke, but Theron shouldn't be able to sense us." I said. I wasn't worried, but I felt Rie tense next to me.

"What if Theron finds us as a fluke too? We shouldn't get too comfortable. We don't even know if we can trust this lady. She seems a little off," Rie said. She sighed and started scrubbing the pots used for cooking.

"She seems okay to me," Daniel said. "She doesn't seem to be the type to lie about things. I think she would let it be known if she had an issue with us."

"Maybe that's what she wants you to think. I'm just saying, I don't think we should get too comfortable. Someone should keep watch tonight, just in case," Rie suggested. I could tell she was frustrated by the situation by her aggressive scrubbing technique. Maybe she was only worried. A lot had happened over the past few days. First I was taken, then Mark. I didn't blame her for being on edge.

"I can take the first shift, if you insist," Daniel offered. "I want to write down some notes and thoughts from today, and I don't think I'll be able to sleep for a while anyway. I think we'll be fine, but you are right. We shouldn't overlook possibilities."

Rie's shoulder's relaxed. "Okay, wake me up when you get too tired." She turned to me. "You and Mark should rest tonight. If you are going to be training tomorrow, you need all of the rest you can get, and after what Mark went through, he deserves a peaceful night."

I finished rinsing off the dishes I was washing and started drying them. "Are you sure? I don't want you two to do all of the work."

Rie gave me a look that told me she wasn't having any of that. "If we are going to have to fight that brother of yours, we need any advantage we could take. Focus on training that magic of yours. We need to understand what Theron and that chick can do so we can guarantee we win that fight. I want that bastard to pay for what he has done to you."

I smiled, grateful for her support, but I didn't feel any happiness behind the pull of my lips. She was right. I wanted this fight with Theron to be over with as soon as possible, and as much as I hated the pressure of it, I was the key to making sure we could actually win against someone with powers. I just hoped I would be enough.

After we finished cleaning, I stepped outside for a moment. I felt the pressure of everything building again, and I needed a moment to breathe. Outside was peaceful. It was calm and quiet, but the longer I stood there, the more noises I heard. The crickets were chirping, and there was a toad somewhere in the garden letting off a long croak every couple of minutes. The leaves of the trees rustled in the wind from the small breeze flowing through.

It was chilly, and I wasn't properly dressed for the cold, but I enjoyed the feeling of my skin cooling. It refreshed my senses and numbed my mind at the same time. The crisp air almost stung my lungs, but I took deep breath after deep breath, inviting the tingling sensation.

I thought about my old life. It hadn't been that long since I was working at the coffee shop with Lana, living in that tiny apartment by myself. It was a quiet and lonely life, but it was mine. It felt like a lifetime away, and I didn't miss it. It wasn't a bad life, and it was easy compared to all of this, but I treasured every moment with Mark. I couldn't imagine going back to a life without him in it. I wasn't sure if I even wanted to go back to my old life at all.

I didn't want to work at that little coffee shop anymore. Not only was it filled with memories of Haley, who I never wanted to see again, but it felt so mundane. The world was much bigger than I ever thought, and I wanted to know more about it. I wanted to know more about my history and sorcerers and the coven I was born from. I wanted to know what the full extent of my powers could be, and I knew I couldn't do any of that working in a coffee shop.

The door suddenly burst open, and I turned around, coming face to face with a wide-eyed Mark. His hair was disheveled, and he was out of breath. There was a panic on his face.

“Are you okay?” I asked with a frown.

He moved over to me and grabbed my hands. “I woke up, and you weren’t there. I had this moment of fear that it was all a dream or that maybe he had taken you again. I just had to see you to make sure you were okay.”

I stepped forward and lifted up on my toes to give Mark a kiss on the cheek. “I’m okay. I promise.”

Mark’s shoulders visibly relaxed, and he grabbed my hand. “You’re freezing. What are you doing out here in the cold with such a light jacket?”

“I was just clearing my head. I’m okay though. It’s not that bad.”

Mark narrowed his eyes. He lifted my hands to his mouth and kissed them. “Your fingers are practically icicles. Come on. Let’s go inside and get you warm.”

“Can we stay out here just a moment longer? It’s so peaceful?” I smiled ridiculously big, showing my teeth. I knew it wasn’t a pretty smile, but I was hoping it would be cute enough to convince Mark.

Mark rolled his eyes. “Fine, but only for a few minutes. I don’t want you to get sick.”

I bounced, happy he agreed to stay out here with me a moment longer. “Thank you.”

I let go of Mark’s hands and turned around, so I could look at the sky. Mark wrapped his arms around me, pulling me against his chest. His body heat surrounded me, and the cold seemed so distant now.

Mark leaned forward and brushed his lips against my ear. “I only agreed to this so I could have the pleasure of warming you up later.”

My face heated even more at his comment. I kept my eyes fixed forward, afraid of him seeing my blushing. I didn’t want him to tease me. “Are you feeling better?” I tried to deflect.

Mark chuckled, and I could feel his chest vibrating against my back. “I feel like I could run a marathon.”

I closed my eyes and leaned back against Mark even more. “Good. I’m glad you’re feeling better. We have a big day tomorrow.”

Mark tightened his grip on me. He kissed the top of my head and whispered, “I’m so happy you’re in my life.”

The Unwanted Wolf – Chapter 55

When I cracked my eyes open, I was in the white room that had become familiar over the past few weeks. It had been silent the past few nights, with the exception of the venture I went on with Ginger.

As I looked around the room, I realized something was different. Instead of the completely white room I was used to, there was some grass up ahead. In the middle of the grass patch, I saw Shadow lying down on the ground.

I walked over to her and sat cross-legged in front of her. “Hey, where have you been?”

Shadow lifted her head. “I’ve been sleeping.”

“Why haven’t I heard from you the past few days?” I knew Moon would be affected by Jori’s rejection, but I hadn’t imagined it affecting Shadow.

She blinked at me a few times and then let out a long yawn. “I don’t have control here, and I’m most powerful on a full moon. I haven’t been ignoring you. I was just hibernating in a sense.”

I reached forward and scratched behind her ears. What she said made a lot of sense. I had never spoken to Shadow in this place until Moon came along, and my powers started to develop. It had only been through mind communication or when I shifted into her wolf form.

“Have you seen Moon around? Is she okay?” I hoped she knew her whereabouts. I needed to help fix things with her. I could only imagine how upset she was with me about not choosing Jori, and it made my stomach twist into knots.

“She hasn’t been doing great. She won’t talk to me. I don’t think she likes me very much. She’s over there if you want to talk to her.” Shadow gestured with her nose in the direction where I would find Moon.

I scratched behind her ears a few more times before standing up. “Thank you for your help. We are going to have to prepare for a battle with Theron soon, and I’m going to need your help. Be prepared.”

Shadow nodded, and I started walking in the direction of Moon. The grass started shifting from the bright green surrounding Shadow to a yellowish-brown as I kept walking. It looked like it was dying, and my heart ached. As I kept walking, I saw a gray tree with black burn marks all over it. It had no resemblance of life to it. I felt a pull to it, and I instantly knew that’s where Moon was.

As I approached, I saw Moon’s white body sitting on a branch above me. She was resting with her eyes closed, but as I got closer, she cracked her eyes open. When she saw me, she closed her eyes again.

“Oh, it’s you.” Her voice was monotone.

My chest ached, seeing the clear despair she was in. “Moon. How are you?” It felt like a silly question, but I didn’t know what else to say.

“What do you think?”

I frowned. I didn’t know how to fix this, but I had to try. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to cause you so much pain.”

This seemed to get Moon’s attention. She opened her eyes again. “Why are you sorry?”

I hesitated answering. I didn’t understand why she would ask me that. “Because of me, you lost your soulmate.”

Moon scoffed in response. “No, it’s not your fault. Our soulmate wasn’t kind. He was pushy, and he even hurt you. What kind of soulmate is that? I don’t care if he was destined for us. That’s not acceptable behavior.”

I stared at Moon, not believing what I was hearing. I thought she had disappeared because she blamed me for Jori rejecting us. “But it’s my fault for wanting Mark. I can understand him being upset.”

Moon stood up and stretched her back. She then walked on the branch so she was standing right next to me. "Adira, you fell for Mark because he was kind. He fought for you and he was caring. Even I can't deny that."

"So you're not mad at me? That's not why you've been ignoring me?" My heart was pounding, waiting for her response.

"Of course not. I've been upset, and I just haven't had the energy to reach out to you. A soulmate is supposed to be someone who loves you and protects you no matter what. The way he grabbed you and hurt you... that was more painful than anything. It was a betrayal of trust, and that's a lingering pain that doesn't just go away." Moon jumped down from the branch and landed on my shoulder.

She was lighter than I expected, and her body was warm. She purred and rubbed her face against mine.

I felt a weight lifting off my shoulders, even as Moon stood there. "I'm sorry Jori wasn't what you wanted or needed him to be."

"I'm sorry to you as well. You have dealt with so much rejection. You didn't deserve the way he treated you." Moon licked my cheek.

I reached up and stroked her head. "You know, I'm sure Mark would love you. I don't know if there's a way for you two to ever meet, but I don't doubt he would love you. I know it might not be the same."

Moon purred in response. "Of course he would love me. I see the way he looks at you. That man is head over heels for you. He loves every part of you, and I'm part of you. I hope I can meet him one day."

"I will try to make that happen."

We stood there in silence for a few moments, and I felt the bond with Moon growing stronger. The grass around us started turning green again. It wasn't as bright as the grass around Shadow, but it was no longer dead. Life was coming back to it again.

"Hey Moon," I said, breaking the silence.

"Yes?"

“I’m going to need your help to defeat Theron. I don’t know what I’m doing, but I found someone who is willing to train me. I’m going to need you if we have any hope of defeating him once and for all,” I said.

“Ah yes, the old lady. I like her.” Moon jumped off my shoulder and sat in front of me. “I’m ready to help.” She flicked her tail, looking up at me.

I smiled, feeling better about the training. “Perfect. And if you need anything, let me know. I know emotional pain isn’t something that just goes away.”

Moon’s eyes brightened. “No, but you’ve helped a lot already. Now it’s my turn to help you.”

—

I woke up from the light peaking through the window. It was still early, and the sun was just barely rising over the horizon. A smile pulled at my lips as I felt the warmth of Mark’s body wrapped around mine. His arm was still wrapped around my waist. I lay in bed just a little longer, taking in his scent.

That was the most restful night of sleep I had had in several nights, and I wasn’t ready to break the spell quite yet. I snuggled into Mark’s body, pulling his arm around me a little tighter. He responded, nuzzling his face into my neck. The hair on the back of my neck raised, and I felt my cheeks flushing, thinking about his body pressed against mine.

Last night things almost progressed to the next stage. I wanted it. My body wanted it. I knew he did too. But I had to focus on the next steps and training. It took every ounce of willpower to stop things, but I didn’t want to let my desire take over when I knew I was going to have a long day today. I wasn’t sure how much longer I would be able to push it off though. Every part of my body wanted it. Every touch of his sent a fire burning through me. Ever since I knew I wanted to spend my life with him, I couldn’t get it off my mind.

My heart fluttered at the thought, and I knew I had to get up before I started making bad decisions. I started pulling Mark’s arm off me, but he resisted, pulling me in closer to him.

“Uh-uh,” he muttered. “You’re not going anywhere.”

I twisted my body so I was facing him. "I have to get ready for training today. I don't want Ginger to get upset with me before we have even started." I couldn't wipe the smile off my face.

"What if I want you more?" Mark asked, finally opening his eyes.

I quickly pecked his lips and then tried to wiggle out of Mark's arms. He responded by tickling me. I screamed with laughter, squirming away from him.

"Mark!" I couldn't stop laughing as his fingers tickled my sides.

"You're mine," Mark laughed back. He stopped tickling me and pulled me back into him.

I stopped struggling and gave him a pointed look. "Mark, I have to go."

"But I don't want you to." He curled out his bottom lip and pouted at me.

I wiped my finger on his bottom lip. "I don't want to leave either, but I have to. What will it take for you to let me go?"

Mark hummed for a moment, thinking about his terms. "Three kisses."

"Fine," I agreed, still smiling.

Mark bent down, lifting my shirt a little. He kissed my stomach, making me squeal again.

"One," he said.

He shifted and kissed my neck, making me giggle.

"Two."

His eyes met mine, and then he planted his lips on mine. He lingered on my lips, moving slowly and sensually. His tongue brushed against mine, and I easily gave into him. I melted from his touch, and my entire body tingled.

Finally, Mark pulled away, smiling at me.

"Three," I whispered, completely out of breath. I had zero desire to get out of bed now.

Mark leaned in and kissed my forehead. "Come on. Let's get out of bed. You have a big day."

"That was four," I said, sticking my tongue out at him.

Mark winked at me. "Think of it as a bonus kiss."