

The Unwanted Wolf

Chapter 18

Jori took me back to the packhouse, and I felt nervous entering the building again, especially with the way we had left last time. As followed him through the hallways, I felt better as no one took a second glance at me. This time around, I noticed just how lively the packhouse was compared to Mark's. There were people everywhere, having their own private conversations. There was constant movement with people trying to get somewhere. It felt alive and homely. Jori led me to an area that looked like a little breakfast nook. The chairs were white with blue cushions. The walls were gray with simplistic decorations. A large window hovered over the little nook, which opened up to a large backyard. I could see children running around, kicking balls or playing tag. The sky was gloomy above them, but that did not stop them.

"Would you like something to drink?" Jori asked.

"Um, do you have any coffee?" I asked. I was still looking outside, almost afraid to make eye contact with him.

"Sure. Have a seat, and I'll get you some. Do you want anything in it?" Jori asked.

"Cream and sugar please." I sat down while Jori went to get my drink. I took a deep breath. I felt better in some ways, but I still hated the way Mark and I had left things. I didn't understand how sitting in this packhouse felt so right and so wrong at the same time.

My phone buzzed, and I saw a text message from Mark, making my heart leap.

Mark: Where are you? I'm sorry...

I paused before responding. I was still angry with him, and part of me wanted to completely ignore him, but I knew that would be petty. Someone was trying to take my life, and I could only imagine the panic he would have if I simply didn't answer.

Adira: I'm safe. Don't worry.

I hesitated to tell him where I was. I could only imagine his anger when I told him where I was. It made my stomach churn, and I felt like I was betraying him. Jori promised me answers though, and I had too many questions in my life right now. I needed some answers,

even if it wasn't about me.

Mark: Please tell me where you are. I'll come get you.

I put my phone away, deciding that was enough for now. After Jori told me what I wanted to hear, I would tell Mark where I was, but he could wait until then.

Don't ignore our mate, Shadow said in my head.

I jumped at her voice. She had been quiet recently. "He hasn't been honest with us."

He's hurting. Don't make him hurt more, Shadow pleaded.

I could feel Shadow's sadness adding to my own. She pulled my heart towards Mark, and something told me that she wanted nothing to do with Jori. I stood up, ready to run to Mark.

"Are you okay?" Jori asked. His voice rang through my ears, and I stopped. He's ours.

That voice didn't belong to Shadow. I had never heard that voice before in my waking state. I had only heard it in my dreams, and I still didn't understand who or what it was. Whoever it was needed Jori. I felt pulled to him once again.

I sat down, feeling a little dizzy. "I'm fine."

Jori walked over and set two cups on the table, one in front of me and the other where he sat shortly after. "Are you sure? We could have the pack doctor take a look at you?"

I shook my head. "No, I'm fine, really. I'm just nervous." I wrapped my fingers around the cup of coffee, grateful for the warmth it provided my fingers. I looked at the cup, not wanting to make eye contact with Jori.

"I promise there's nothing to be nervous about. I would never hurt my mate."

I looked up at Jori when he said the word "mate." It was a little weird hearing it out loud, and I couldn't decide if I liked it or not.

Jori frowned at the mention of Mark. "I'll tell you about what happened between Mark and myself, but I want something from you in exchange."

My chest tightened. I didn't like the idea of an exchange. "What do you want from me?"

"A chance," Jori said. "I want you to go on a date with me and truly consider me as a possibility of being your mate. I know you met Mark first, but I want a fair chance. I know the two of you haven't marked each other yet, so it's not too late for me to swoop in and steal you for myself."

No!

Yes!

gulped as the voices in my head opposed each other. "A chance? That's it?"

Jori nodded. "Mhm. Imagine being rejected before even being given a chance?"

His words struck a chord with me. I knew that feeling all too well. "Okay. I'll give you a chance, but I'm not going to make you any promises."

Jori smirked, and his dark eyes narrowed. It made his normally sexy features drip with sexiness. "Excellent. Now what do you want to know?"

"Everything," I instantly said. "You said Mark and you used to be best friends. What happened? Why did Mark leave the pack, and why do you two hate each other so much?"

Jori stretched back. "I hope you're ready for this. It's probably not what you would expect, and it may not paint Mark in the best light."

"Just tell me," I said. I wasn't in the mood for him to draw this out more than necessary.

"All right. I warned you though." Jori took a sip of his drink before beginning his story. "Mark and I grew up together. We were only a couple of months apart in age. We did everything together for most of our childhood. We played sports together, trained in combat, even went on group dates together. We were inseparable. We always talked about how we would run this pack together. I was to be alpha, and he would be my beta. My father had been the alpha of the pack, so it was natural that I would take his place and take over the pack. Mark had been fine with being my second in command. We were best friends after all."

"What changed?" I was focusing on listening to the story and holding my judgments until the end.

"Suddenly, Mark decided that he was meant to be the alpha and take over the pack. When he was eighteen, he discovered he had the alpha gene as well," Jori explained.

"How is that possible? Wouldn't you guys have known he had the alpha gene much sooner?" I remembered what my father had taught me growing up. Only certain families had the alpha gene in their bloodline. Families without the alpha gene usually joined packs with an alpha in it. The alpha gene was dominant, so a son of an alpha was almost guaranteed to have an alpha gene and take over the pack when the older alpha relinquished their power.

“Mark was an orphan. His parents were killed when he was only a few years old. My father graciously took him into our pack, but we didn’t know much about Mark’s family,” Jori explained. “We became his family. He was practically my brother, but when he turned of age and discovered that he had the potential to be an alpha too, he decided to betray us. He declared he was the rightful heir to the pack and that he should be alpha over me. I tried to convince him to relinquish his rights to be alpha and run the pack by my side, but he refused.

“He tried to gather enough people to take the pack by force, but when he realized not enough people supported him, he left with those who supported him.” Jori stopped talking and picked up his drink. “I let him leave peacefully, even though he tried to steal everything from me. I didn’t want to harm him. He used to be my best friend after all.”

I didn’t have anything to say in response. The Mark that Jori described didn’t sound like the Mark I knew. The Mark I knew was loyal and caring, but it was hard to know if that was the true Mark. I had only known him for less than a week. I didn’t know who any of these people were. I didn’t even know my true self apparently.

“I’m sorry I was the one who had to tell you the truth,” Jori said. “Mark should have been the one to tell you all of this, especially if I shook my head. “It’s not always easy to talk about your past when it’s filled with hurt. You only want new people in your life to see the good. I still wish he had told me though.” I looked down at my coffee cup again. It was still untouched. I lifted the cup to my lips and took a small sip. The sweetness hit me first, coating my tongue with a pleasant sensation. Then the cream took over, but when I finished swallowing, I was left with a bitter taste in my mouth. Everything about the drink should have been right, but something just felt off.

The sun was starting to set, and darkness encroached on the backyard. I looked at my phone, and it was around dinner time. The ten new text messages from Mark told me he was starting to worry about me.

“I should call Mark and tell him where I’m at,” I said.

“Even after all of that, you are going to run back to him?” Jori said. He did his best to keep his tone flat, but I could tell he was irritated.

“That’s not what I’m doing.” I felt defensive. “I just want him to know where I am so he knows I’m safe. He deserves that much.

Jori reached across the table and grabbed my hand. "Don't tell him. He'll come running here and drag you away from me. Just stay with me for tonight."

I looked at Jori's pleading eyes. There was something pulling me towards Jori, and his offer to stay here was more than appealing.

But I couldn't just leave Mark in the dark like that. He had done so much for me in the past week that I couldn't do that to him, even if I was upset with him.

"I have to tell him. I don't have to go with him. I haven't decided what I'm going to do yet." Jori's hand was still on mine, his grip firm.

"If you go with him, you're not giving me a real chance." Jori's eyes were pleading.

I frowned. "I have to tell him where I am," I repeated. "I won't go back with him though."

Jori finally let go of my hand. "Promise?"

I nodded my head, my chest tight from the decision. "I will be back." I stood up and walked away from the breakfast nook. I didn't want to make the phone call in front of Jori. I wanted to have a clear head when talking to Mark.

I walked down the hallway until I found the door that looked like the back yard. I stepped outside. The children were no longer outside, and it was much quieter out here. I imagined their parents had called them to dinner. It was almost completely dark by now. I felt at peace for a moment, just breathing in the chilly air. I pulled out my phone again and pulled up Mark's contact. I took a deep breath

before hitting call. I listened to the phone ringing, terrified Mark was going to be furious with me.

"Adira?" I heard Mark's breathless voice say on the other side of the phone.

"I'm okay, Mark," I quickly said. I knew he was worried.

"Thank god. I was worried your attacker had..." Mark's voice trailed off.

"Where have you been?"

"Don't be mad, okay?"