

The Unwanted Wolf

Chapter 21

When I left Jori's pack house, Rie was waiting outside for me by the car. There was a large man standing next to her. Rie's arms were crossed, and she was glaring at the man.

"Hey," I said, approaching the car.

This grabbed Rie's attention. She unlocked the car. "Let's go. You can sit in the back, big guy."

I climbed into the front seat. I looked over at Rie. Her face looked pretty neutral. "I'm surprised you offered to take me dress shopping."

Rie glanced over at me. "Why?"

"Well, I didn't think you liked me very much," I admitted. Especially after the conversation I had overheard in the car, I felt pretty nervous being around Rie.

"Because Mark's my alpha, and you might break his heart?" Rie was so straight forward with her words.

I winced at her words. "Yes." I didn't have a defense, and even if I did, I was sure there was nothing I could do to change Rie's mind.

She had known Mark for much longer than me, and I imagined she saw me as the harpy trying to destroy Mark's heart.

"Look, I will forever and always be on Mark's side, but that doesn't mean I am going to shun you. I can't even imagine what you are going through right now, and I'd like to think you are doing your best, right?" Rie pulled out of the driveway and started walking.

I looked over my shoulder at the guy behind us. He hadn't said a word to us, and Rie was acting like he wasn't there. "I don't know if I am, honestly. It has all been a lot to process."

"Do you want to hurt Mark?" Rie asked.

"Of course not!" My response was instant. Even if I didn't want to think about the whole mate situation, I knew I didn't want to hurt Mark. Or Jori.

"Then that's enough for me right now." Rie smiled.

"What if I do end up hurting him? I'm not sure if there is something I can avoid in this situation." I was terrified of making the decision. I knew in the end someone would end up getting hurt, and I hated

the idea of being the person who caused that.

Rie thought about this for the moment. "Of course I want you to pick Mark. All I want is to see him happy. He puts other people before himself all of the time, so for once, I want him to get his happily ever after. But that doesn't mean I want you to sacrifice your happiness for that."

I laughed in response, which felt like the wrong response. "Sorry. I'm just surprised. I thought you would react very differently."

Rie chuckled in return. "Did you expect me to give you the typical, 'If you hurt him, I will hunt you down' speech?"

"Kind of," I admitted.

"I think that's a ridiculous thing to say, especially because it's not true. Feelings get hurt, and sometimes it's unavoidable. Unless someone is being malicious to another person, there is no reason to hate someone or go as far as threatening them."

"You're very wise." I looked out the window and the feeling of nostalgia washed over me as we pulled up to the town mall. It had been over five years since I have been here.

Rie laughed again. "There's a reason I'm tied for Mark's second in command."

Rie pulled into the parking lot, and the three of us climbed out of the car. Jori's protective detail followed us closely, not saying a single word. It felt a little weird since I didn't even know his name, but Rie was acting like he wasn't there. I decided to follow her lead, since I didn't know how to act exactly.

Rie grabbed my hand and pulled me to a store. She let go when we were inside. I looked around and was surprised with how fancy all of the clothes were. Normally I avoided going into stores like these. It was way above my budget, and I never needed anything this fancy.

"Are you sure this is a good store?" I asked. "Aren't we just going to have a small party?"

Trust me, this is the perfect store."

I chewed my lip feeling nervous. I didn't like the idea of a big party, but if it was going to happen, it would be a waste of energy to continue fighting it. Instead, I walked deeper into the store, flipping through the various dresses. I lost Rie in the racks of clothes, but I didn't mind it. I forgot how comfortable I felt going clothes shopping. I used to go all of the time with my close friends in high school.

Jori's bodyguard was following me closely, making sure he was only a few feet away from me no matter where I went. I tried to ignore him for a while. I grabbed a blue dress that had silver sparkles and looked floor length.

I looked back at the man. "Hi, I'm Adira." I reached out my hand to him. He looked at my hand for a moment before grabbing it. His grip was firm and borderline hurt. He let go of my hand and went back to his sullen stance. I waited, expecting him to introduce himself, but when he didn't, I went back to looking for clothes. I wasn't going to force the interaction.

I saw another dress that was silver with a tulle skirt that went down to my knees. I grabbed those two and went to look for the dressing room. On my way to the dressing rooms, I heard Rie calling my name. My jaw dropped when I looked at her. She had an arm full of dresses already.

"How did you find so many things?" My eyes were wide as I tried to count the number of dresses in her arms.

"It's easy." Rie shoved the clothes into my hand. "Time for you to try them on."

I went into the dressing room and tried on the blue dress first. I went out to show Rie. She instantly gushed over the dress, but when I looked in the mirror, I pursed my lips. It didn't feel right. It seemed like it was for something way too formal, and I didn't feel comfortable in it. I tried on the silver dress next, and that one felt like it belonged on a high school dance floor. As I went through the rest of the dresses, none of them felt right.

I found myself standing in the last dress Rie had brought me with a frown. "Sorry, none of these feel right."

Rie pulled her lips tight. "Don't apologize. Wait right here. I have an idea." Rie skipped away into the store.

I stood in the middle of the dressing room, shifting my weight. I looked over at the bodyguard, and he was scanning the room carefully. I wondered what was going through his head. Finally, Rie skipped back with a single dress in her hand. She shoved it into my hands.

"Here, try this on," she said.

I took the dress back to the dressing room and pulled it on. When I left the dressing room, Rie's jaw completely dropped. She ran over to me and grabbed my hands.

"You look absolutely gorgeous," Rie gushed. "Look for yourself." Rie let go

of one hand and twirled me towards the mirror. My eyes widened, and I couldn't believe the person in the mirror was me. The dress was a soft peach and the bottom of the dress hung close to my body. However, when I moved, the bottom of the dress flowed like water. I twisted back and forth to make the dress sway around. The top of the dress was a sweetheart neckline and was made out of a silky material. My hands ran over the dress, "This is perfect." I couldn't stop looking at myself. Rie walked over to me and looked over my shoulder into the mirror. "Happy?" "Very much." I was beaming. "Good. Then this is it. We are officially getting this dress," Rie declared. "How much is it?" I asked. I had been avoiding the prices of the dresses so far. "Don't worry about it. It's on me." Rie pulled out her credit card and waved it in front of my face. "No, I can't let you do that." I frowned, feeling guilty at the thought. "Nonsense. Consider it a birthday present. I don't want to hear any arguing either." Rie raised her eyebrows and gave me a look that stopped my words before they even hit my tongue.

Chapter 22

On the way back from the mall, the three of us stopped to get dinner. It was getting late, and I hadn't had a chance to eat all day with everything that happened. We stopped at a small diner that was mostly empty. Rie and I sat in the booth across from each other, and our bodyguard was standing a few feet away, scanning the diner for anything suspicious.

"Why won't he talk to us?" I asked Rie, looking over at the bodyguard.

"Oh Bruce there?" Rie said. She pointed at him with her thumb. "He's always been mute."

"You know him?" I asked.

Rie nodded. "I know most of the pack members still, at least anyone who has been with the pack for more than a year." _

"I didn't realize you were so close with everyone." I chewed on my lip, thinking about the conversation I had had with Jori earlier. "What made you decide to leave your pack and join Mark?"

Rie set down her menu and looked at me carefully. "Mark has always been there for me. In the end, there was no choice for me. I was always going to follow Mark."

"Jori told me a little bit about what happened," I admitted. I quickly looked

down at my menu, not wanting to see Rie's reaction.

Rie was quiet for a moment. "I'm not sure what he told you exactly, but please don't judge Mark based on word of mouth, especially Jori's mouth."

"What happened exactly? I keep picturing what Jori told me, but I can't help but feel like there's a piece missing. It doesn't make sense to me," I said. I finally looked up at Rie, and she had a contemplative look on her face.

"I think you should really talk to Mark and get his side of the story. All I will say for now is things got messy and mistakes were made on both sides. I don't think anyone should be defined by a mistake they've made. No one knows the right way to handle everything." Rie pulled her lips into a tight smile. "Are you ready to order?"

"Yeah," I said. I made a mental note to ask Mark about everything that had happened again. I would have to ask him about it when he was calmer.

When Rie and I made it back, Jori was waiting by the front door for us. I wondered how long he had been waiting, or if he had come down when he heard the car pull up.

"Your rooms are ready," Jori announced. "Let me show you." He held his hand out for me to take.

I looked at his hand nervously. "I'm right behind you." I didn't want to take Jori's hand. Holding hands with him somehow felt wrong, and I was afraid of Mark potentially seeing us like that.

Jori took his hand back and faked a smile. "Right this way." He led us to the third floor of the building. There was a large common area at the top of the stairs where people were playing various games like ping pong and pool. On the other side of the game room, there were two hallways, and Jori led us down the one on the left. He gestured to one of the first rooms. "Rie, this will be your accommodation. Scythe and Mark have rooms near you as well."

"Thanks," Rie said, but she didn't sound thrilled. She opened her door and hesitated in the entryway. "Where's Scythe? After I get settled, I want to help him out with the party planning."

"He's in the kitchen with Percy," Jori said. "I'm pretty they have everything handled though."

"Insist on helping," Rie said flatly. She turned to me. "If you need anything, don't be afraid to reach out to me."

"I won't." I smiled, feeling a little better about my dynamic with Rie. While

she was clearly loyal to Mark, it helped knowing that she wasn't against me.

Rie hesitated to go into her room. She looked at Jori, and I couldn't tell what she was thinking. "I guess I should put these away now." Rie held up a couple of bags of things she had bought while we were at the mall and then disappeared into the room.

hallway and took me to the other hallway on the right.

"Why am I over here?" I asked. I would have felt a little better being closer to the others. I knew them better than I knew anyone else in this pack.

Jori stopped in front of a room about half way down the hall. "Because my room is at the end of the hall and Bruce is down this hallway as well. I will feel safer knowing we are near you; although, I would prefer it if you were in my room with me."

I frowned at Jori's statement. "I'll be fine in my own room."

Jori hummed a bit. "I know. I just don't like the idea that someone is trying to kill my mate. I would rather be closer to you because of this."

I didn't know what to say in response to this. I appreciated Jori wanting to protect me, but he almost felt a little pushy. I reached out to open the door we had stopped in front of. I was still holding the dress Rie had bought me, and I was ready to set it down. "Well, I should get settled in as well."

Before I could open the door, Jori leaned forward, pressing his hand on the door frame and moving closer to me. I could feel his hot breath against my lips. "Go on a date with me."

I pressed my back against the door, trying to put some distance between Jori and myself. My heart was racing with his proximity, and I felt a shiver run down my spine. Part of me wanted to close the distance between us. Without Mark around, Jori's presence was overwhelming. Jori's energy was very different compared to Mark's. He was oozing dominance and confidence, and it drew me towards him.

My mouth felt dry. "I don't want to think about going on a date right now," I croaked.

Jori licked his lips. "I want to show you what it would be like to be my mate."

He touched my cheek with his free hand, and his touch

caused my skin to erupt with goosebumps. "I promise you won't regret it."

I could feel my pull towards Jori growing. It took every ounce of willpower to not give into Jori at that moment. I felt like I hardly had

any control, and that scared me a little. I reached my hand back, grasping for the door handle. I knew if I didn't get some space I would make a decision that I would regret. I finally found the door handle and turned it. I stumbled back as the door opened behind me.

Taking a deep breath, I felt my senses clearing just a little bit. "I told you I don't want to think about any of this right now."

Jori hovered at the door, not moving from his position. "If I promise to figure this out for you, will you promise to go on a date with me once this is all over?"

I hesitated in my response. I told Jori I would give him a fair chance and wouldn't just pick Mark because I met him first. I nodded slowly. "I can promise you that."

Jori smirked. "Perfect. I promise it'll be like nothing you will ever experience with Mark." Jori's cockiness was filling the air, and it made it difficult to breathe.

"Well, I should settle in and call my work. I don't think I'm going to make it back to work in time." I reached for the door and slowly started shutting it.

Jori took a step back. "Okay, I'll see you later. If you need anything at all, I'm here for you."

I smiled and shut the door. Instantly, I found myself leaning against the door for support. My legs felt weak and my body was shaking. I didn't know if this was from good excitement or bad excitement, but I was happy to finally have a moment to myself to process.

I looked around the room I was standing in and once again I found myself in a strange room by myself with a pack I wasn't part of. Just a week ago, life had been normal. I was comfortable with my little apartment and my steady work schedule. I missed that life, but it felt like it belonged to someone else completely. It was a simple life and I was making it work, even though I was lonely.

Now I was surrounded by people, people who wanted me, and it almost felt like too much. I didn't know how to process it all or decide who was the right choice to make.

With a deep breath, I stood up straight and hung my dress up in the closet. I looked around the room and saw the small bag I had packed for the trip sitting on the bed. I sat next to it and pulled out my phone. I had the day off work tomorrow as well, but I didn't think I would be leaving this town for a few days at the very least. I wanted to give Lana a heads up about my absence as soon as possible, but I

didn't know what to tell her exactly.

Finally, I called Lana and let the phone ring.

"Hello?"

"Hey Lana. Sorry for calling so late." I imagined Lana sitting at home comfortably.

"Don't worry hun. It's not late. What's up?"

"I just wanted to give you a heads up that I may not be at work for a bit. I had a family emergency and had to go out of town. I'm not quite sure when I'll be back." I held my breath for her response. I never talked about my family, so I didn't think she would know it was a

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I hope everything is okay."

"Yeah, me too." I really hoped I would be able to return home and return to work sooner rather than later.

"Where did you go by the way? I don't think you have ever mentioned your family to me before."