

The Unwanted Wolf

Chapter 25

When I went back inside, a wonderful scent hit my nose and instantly lured me to the kitchen. This was the first time I had been near the kitchen at a meal time, and it was incredible how many hungry mouths there were.

There were several tables set up, like a restaurant would have. Families were gathered at the tables with their children. There was a mix of arguments and laughter echoing in the dining room. It felt like a true home.

There was a table set up buffet style with a variety of food laid out for people. It made sense instead of everyone ordering to go. The more I watched the people flurry around the area, the more amazed I was. I had no idea there were this many werewolves in this pack.

Growing up, my wolf pack was decently sized, but this was easily twice the size. I had no idea such a large wolf pack was so close to the town I grew up in.

My stomach growled, and I started heading to the buffet to make myself some food. I hadn't realized I was hungry, but the scent of bacon filled my nose, making my stomach grumble. I grabbed a couple of pieces of bacon and a chocolate chip muffin in a napkin and then left the dining room. There weren't any open tables, and I felt a little weird sitting by myself.

As I left the dining room, I heard Daniel and Jori talking in the hallway.

"With all due respect, sir, I don't think this is smart," Daniel said.

"You worry too much. No one is going to get her while she's here with me," Jori said.

"You have never dealt with a sorcerer before. None of us have. We don't know what to expect," Daniel argued.

As I approached, I saw that Daniel was clearly tense, especially compared to Jori's relaxed nature.

"Hey, what's going on?" I said, stopping next to them.

"I think we should cancel your party. I'm still convinced there will be an attack on you today, and I think a party will be a good excuse for someone to get past security," Daniel explained. He crossed his arms.

"And I was just telling Daniel that I think it's overboard. There haven't been any signs of a threat in the area according to our patrols.

There's a good chance your attacker doesn't even know you're here. Even if they do, this pack is one of the safest packs for hundreds of miles. No one is going to get past my security." Jori was completely confident in his statement.

"I think overconfidence is going to cause issues," Daniel said flatly. He was not happy with Jori at the moment. His face was in a deep scowl I hadn't seen before.

"Maybe Daniel is right," I said. "I don't have to have a party. I promise I'll be fine."

"Adira, darling, we are going to have a party for you. I will be by your side all day, so there's nothing to worry about." Jori grabbed my hand and pulled me closer to him.

He smelled of fresh pine needles, and his closeness calmed me down.

Daniel clicked his tongue and let out a frustrated sigh. "Don't come crawling to me when this backfires." Daniel turned his attention to me. "Adira, have you noticed any sudden urges of power or anything different? Happy birthday by the way."

"Thanks," I smiled. Daniel was the first one to actually wish me a happy birthday. "I haven't noticed anything unusual as of yet. I will let you know if I do."

Daniel nodded, and then he gave me a pointed look. "Stay on your toes today, and be careful. You're a good one, Adira, and I would like to consider you a friend."

Daniel walked away after that, and I felt myself smiling. I liked the idea of being friends with Daniel. He was a little bookish, but I thought it was a charming feature. He seemed like he would be reliable and stable.

"Don't worry too much about that," Jori said, bringing my attention back to him.

I looked at Jori, who still had an arm around my waist. "What if he's right though? What if my attacker still comes after me here?

Other people could be put in danger for my sake." I didn't like the way Jori wasn't taking things seriously.

"It's your birthday, and I don't want you to worry about something like that," Jori said. "Besides, no one has ever successfully

I felt a little better that Jori had increased security, but something still wasn't sitting right with me. It was like there was a rock in my stomach, and Daniel's caution rang in my ears. I didn't have any facts to back up the odd feeling overcoming me, so I just nodded. "Okay. If you think it'll be okay, I'll try to trust you."

Jori pulled me in and kissed the top of my head. "Good. I want you to trust me, and I want to prove my worth to you."

I felt myself blushing from Jori's contact. Being near him made me feel heated, but I tried to shake it off and took a step back from him. I was getting into dangerous territory with Mark and Jori, and if I wasn't careful, I would force myself into a decision sooner than I wanted to.

"So what is there to do around here?" I asked. I imagined the party wouldn't be until later in the day. I thought about doing more research by reading that journal, but I didn't want to do that, especially not on my birthday. While I didn't like celebrating, I usually tried to do something relaxing on my birthday.

"You could go on a date with me," Jori suggested.

I narrowed my eyes at him. Jori really didn't understand the wait until my life was no longer in danger thing. "I told you that I will, but not until later."

Jori put up his hands in defense. "Okay, fine. We won't call it a date. Let's just hang out."

I furrowed my eyebrows. It felt like Jori was using a loop hole, but I supposed it wouldn't hurt to hang out and get to know him better. "I guess we can do that."

"Great! Go put something on that you don't mind getting a little dirty and meet me at the front door in fifteen minutes." Jori was beaming.

"I don't think we should leave the pack house," I said nervously.

Jori laughed. "Don't worry, we won't be leaving the pack grounds. Plus, I'll be with you the entire time."

I smiled nervously, but something inside me told me to trust Jori. It would be worth it. I let out a sigh. "Okay, if you say so."

I ran up the stairs and went to my clothes. Jori said to wear something I didn't mind getting dirty, but I didn't have many options. I only packed for a two-day trip. I grabbed my dirty clothes from the day before and sniffed them. They passed the smell check, so I went ahead and threw them on. If I ended up sticking around for longer, I would have to ask Rie to take me shopping again.

I headed back down the stairs, and Jori was already waiting for me by the front door. He was wearing a pair of dark jeans and a white t-shirt with a jacket. I paused at the sight of him. Despite his clothes being simple, I could see how toned he was, and it made something inside of me purr.

"Ready?" Jori asked.

“Yep! I was excited at the prospect of getting to know Jori a little better. Moon wanted me to give him a proper chance, and this was the best way I could think to do that.

Jori grabbed my hand and led me outside. He took a sharp turn to the left and took me to the side of the house. There was a lot of foliage there, and it was a little difficult to navigate through.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Patience, my darling. It’s a surprise. Sorry we have to go this way. Normally I would have taken you through the backyard, but if Jori saw me, I’m pretty sure he’d have my head for letting you see the party area.” Jori laughed a little at this.

“Do you miss them?” I asked. I wasn’t clear about the exact timeline for when Mark and the others broke away from the pack, but Rie and Jori seemed to fit easily back into the flow of everything.

Jori didn’t respond right away. “Watch out.” He grabbed a branch and held it back for me to be able to walk through with ease. He still hadn’t responded to my question after a moment, and I started wondering if he hadn’t heard me. I didn’t want to repeat my question just in case he had heard me.

After a few minutes of walking in silence, Jori stopped. He turned to me with a big smile, and I could hear the rushing of water nearby.

“Welcome to my secret hideout!” Jori pulled back some vines, revealing a grove. There was a small waterfall that poured into a crystal clear pond. Purple flowers surrounded the water, even though we were well into fall now. All around us, the trees grew pretty thickly, giving the area privacy. It almost looked like paradise.

I walked past Jori with my eyes wide. “Wow, this is absolutely incredible. Can you swim in the water?”

“You can, but I wouldn’t recommend it right now. It’s a little cold.” Jori followed closely behind me.

“I would love to have a secret hideout like this. It’s so peaceful, and it would be a great place to just get away.” I sat on a large rock and watched as the waterfall poured down. The sound of the rushing water was soothing, and for just a moment, I felt like I could escape my problems.

Jori sat down on the rock next to me. “I’ll tell you what, if you pick me, I’ll share this place with you.”

I looked at Jori with a small frown. “Jori.”

Jori raised his hands in defense. “I know. I know. I’m not trying to convince

you. I'm just trying to make sure you know everything you would be getting with me."

I pulled my lips into a tight smile and turned my attention to the waterfall. This was a serene place, and I would love to be able to visit here whenever I wanted. That wasn't a good enough reason to pick Jori though.

"I do miss them," Jori said in a whisper.

I looked at him, unsure if I heard him correctly. Between the waterfall and the quietness of Jori's voice, I wasn't sure if I had heard him correctly.

"Rie, Scythe. They were my friends too. That was one of the hardest parts about everything that happened. I lost all of my friends, even my best friend." Jori seemed genuinely sad, and this was the first time I had seen him show emotion that wasn't cockiness or flirting. It felt real.

"Maybe you could talk to Mark and work things out. You don't have to reconnect the packs, but maybe you could repair the friendship." I felt sad thinking Mark and Jori used to be best friends. It wasn't easy losing the people you cared about.

Jori shook his head. He was avoiding eye contact with me. "I don't think that's possible, not with you being both Mark's mate and mine. If you choose me, I can't imagine Mark ever wanting to be my friend. And if you were to choose Mark, I would want to kill him.

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"I wish that weren't the case," I admitted. "It makes me not want to choose either of you. I can't stand the thought of coming between a friendship."

"This friendship has been broken for a while," Jori said. "You making a decision isn't ruining anything that wasn't ruined. You might as well pick your own happiness."

I frowned at this. "It's not that easy. I don't think I will be truly happy with whatever decision I make, because I will be hurting someone either way, which will hurt me. I can't win."

"It's okay to be selfish sometimes," Jori said. "You've been through so much hurt that I think you deserve to be special."

I didn't know how to respond to Jori, so I stayed silent. His words rang true on a logical level. It was okay to be selfish to a certain extent. It felt wrong not to consider the feelings of others. It wasn't in my nature.

We sat there in silence, but I didn't mind it. I felt comfortable and safe

around Jori, and I didn't feel the need to fill the silence. After a while, I felt a chill come over me. I tried to suppress it, but my body shook anyway.

"You're cold," Jori said. He started slipping off his own jacket and put it on my shoulders.

I grabbed the jacket and tried to hand it back to him. "If you give me your jacket, then you'll get cold instead."

Jori pushed the jacket back at me. "Well, I'm not going to wear it anyway, so you might as well wear it yourself." He suddenly turned to me, leaning in. "Unless you would rather have me warm you up with my body."

"The jacket will be fine," I laughed nervously. I slipped on the jacket, not wanting to push the subject more.

Jori didn't move, even as I pulled the jacket on. He reached up and took a strand of my hair between his fingers. He twirled the strand in his fingers, leaning even closer to my face.

"The concept of mates was always so interesting to me," Jori said, keeping his face only a few inches from mine. "A few days ago, we didn't know the other person existed. But now, looking at you, all I want is to be your everything. I want to protect you, and touch you, and make you mine. Just being near you is setting my skin on fire."

I gulped at his proximity. Even though Jori wasn't touching me, I could feel his heat radiating from him. I felt my own body start to heat up as well. My body burned for him, and I was frozen, unable to make a move towards or away from him. Finally, I turned my head away from him.

Jori let go of my hair and sat back. "Do you feel that uncomfortable when I'm that close?"

I turned back to Jori slowly, and there was a frown on his face, making me feel guilty. "It's not that I feel uncomfortable. It's that I don't know if I will be able to control myself, and I don't want to do anything that I will regret. I don't know you, and I don't want to just act on instinct."

"Maybe you should stop overthinking and just let yourself give in for once." Jori leaned forward again.

I reached up and touched Jori's cheek. His face was surprisingly soft. I left my hand on his face, but I didn't make any other movements. I could see myself melting into the man in front of me, giving everything up for him. But I didn't know him. Not really.

"I... I can't," I managed to say. My heart was pounding in my chest, and I

felt like I could barely breathe. Growing up, I had heard many couples describe the mate bond, and I always thought they were exaggerating. They said that they were pulled to each other like magnets, and being near their mate and not being able to touch them was nearly painful. I thought they were needy or giving an excuse for their carnal behaviors, but now I understood it a little better. Every cell in my body was reaching for Jori. My fingers felt like they were on fire with the minimal contact they had. It would be so easy to give in.

Jori leaned in closer, brushing his lips very slightly. "Tell me to stop then." I opened my mouth to say stop, but instead I closed the gap, pressing my lips against Jori's. His hand was instantly in my hair, and he pressed his lips against mine even harder. His hands were rougher than I expected. He tugged on my hair, making me tilt my head back.

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A cool breeze swam through the little grove, sending a chill down my spine. This snapped me to my senses, and I pulled away from Jori. I quickly stood up to put more distance between us. My chest was heaving up and down as I tried to catch my breath.

"We should head back. People might start wondering where we are," I said breathlessly.

Jori smirked, slowly standing up. "I knew you wouldn't be able to resist me. We can go back for now, but just know this place is always here if you want more privacy with me." Jori held out his hand, but I walked past him without taking it.

Now that I had created some distance between us, the guilt was starting to wash over me. I had just kissed Mark last night, and now! I was kissing Jori. It felt wrong, even though the moments had felt right. My head felt too clouded right now, and I felt myself power walking away.

"Hey slow down," Jori called out after me.

I could hear his footsteps behind me, but I didn't slow down. I just wanted to get back to the pack house and take a moment to myself. Luckily, the path was pretty easy to follow back, so I didn't need Jori to lead the way. I burst out of the foliage, and I could see the pack house again. Jori was still calling my name, but I couldn't stop. I couldn't face him right now.

I ran up the steps to the front porch of the pack house, but before I got to the door I felt a firm grip on my wrist, pulling me

back.

“Adira, please stop,” Jori said between breaths. “Please look at me. Are you okay?”

I still didn’t turn to Jori. I didn’t know how to explain my sense of shame to him. “Please let go of me.”

“Not until you look at me.”

I turned to Jori, but I looked up at the ceiling. I could feel the tears start to build, but I didn’t want them to fall. I didn’t want to start crying. “Will you let me go now?”

“You’re still not looking at me.” Jori’s grip was firm and unwavering.

“I think you should let her go,” a deep voice reverberated from behind me. I turned to look. “Mark.”

“This isn’t any of your business,” Jori said.

“She asked you to let her go,” Mark said. “You’re not listening to her, and she’s clearly upset. That makes it my business.”

I could feel the tension rising between the two of them, and it was worse because they were both alphas. I pulled my wrist, and this time Jori let go of me. I took a step back from the two of them. “I’m okay. Please don’t fight.”

Mark didn’t take his eyes off of Jori, and he looked like he was about to boil.

Jori smirked in return. “See, the lady said all was good. It’s none of your business, like I said.”

My lips curled down as my frustration grew. “Jori, that’s enough.” He was clearly taunting Mark, and I didn’t like it. “Please, can you two not fight for just today.”

Mark shifted his demeanor after my words. He seemed to shrink in height and looked ashamed of himself. “Yes, of course. Rie has been looking for you, so I was helping her search. She was stressing about getting you ready for the party.”

“Isn’t the party not for a couple of hours?” I said. At most it took me an hour to get ready for anything. That was a rare situation too.

“I don’t know what she has planned for you, but I do not wish to be you right now,” Mark laughed.

“I will leave the birthday girl to go get ready then,” Jori said. “I will see you later, darling.” Jori leaned forward and kissed me on the cheek before going inside.

I found myself blushing, but I wasn’t sure if it was from embarrassment or excitement. I didn’t like that he did that in front of Mark. It

almost felt like he was marking his territory.

"I guess I should get going," I said, looking at the ground. "I don't want Rie to go too crazy."

"Wait, don't go yet," Mark said quickly.

I stopped and looked at him. I felt ashamed standing in front of him, and I hated that. "If this is about Jori—"

"No, no. I'm fine. I just got a little overwhelmed and needed a moment to myself. Sorry for worrying you." I was careful not to tell

Mark about the kissing. I didn't do anything wrong per say. I hadn't picked Mark, but something still felt wrong about it.

"Okay. As long as you are sure. Jori can be a prick sometimes." Mark ran his fingers through his hair. "I was getting pretty worried about you. I tried calling and texting you, but you weren't answering."

"You did?" I pulled out my phone and saw several missed calls and text messages from Mark. "Oh shoot. My phone was on silent,

and I didn't hear it. I'm so sorry for worrying you. Jori wanted to show me that grove." I cut myself off, wondering if Mark knew about the place. Jori did say it was his secret hideout.

Mark nodded carefully. "You're safe. That's all that matters. Oh and happy birthday, Adira. I have a present for you, but I'll give it to you later. I'm pretty sure Rie will beat me if I keep you any longer. She already said she was behind schedule."

I smiled. "You got me something? You didn't have to."

Mark smiled back. "I wanted to. I care about you, Adira. All I want is for you to be happy."

Chapter 27

The moment Rie laid eyes on me, she rushed over to my side. "Thank goodness you're here! Where have you been? Never mind that.

We need to start getting you ready."

Before I could say anything, Rie started dragging me upstairs. The first thing she did was force me into the shower, saying she would get everything else ready for when I got out. I stood in the hot shower, letting it warm up my body. My fingers were still chilled from being outside for so long. The weather was pretty nice, considering the time of year. However, the water had cooled down the air, and with the small breeze, it made me pretty chilled. The hot water felt like a nice comparison.

When I got out of the shower, I saw my clothes had been replaced with a white bathrobe. I tied it around my waist. It was softer than any towel or bathrobe I had even felt before. It made me feel like I was in a

fancy hotel. I left the bathroom to look for Rie.

When I found Rie, she was sitting in the game room, but it no longer looked like a game room. Most of the big items had been pushed to the side, and there was makeup, clothes and various other items spread around the room. Rie was sitting on the couch, braiding a young girl's hair.

"Adira! Perfect. Give me a moment, and I'll start on your hair," Rie said.

"I can dry my hair myself," I said. I sat on the couch next to Rie. There were several girls here getting ready, and I didn't recognize them.

"Except you won't be. It's your birthday. You won't be lifting a finger tonight," Rie declared. She was halfway through the braid.

A teenager was curling her hair nearby, and she looked over at me. "Oh, so this big hoopla is for your birthday?"

I nodded. "Sorry. I'm sure your house has been pretty chaotic because of me."

"Girl! Are you kidding me? I love parties! It has been pretty drab around here, so I'm so happy Alpha Jori is finally letting us do something fun. In my opinion, you're my hero." The teen girl had a big smile on her face. "I'm Cindy, by the way."

"I'm Eva!" the little girl in front of Rie shouted, bouncing up and down. She wasn't any older than six.

"Eva, hold still," Rie scolded.

Eva whined in response. Then she looked at me. "Are you going to become part of our pack?"

My heart sank at her question. "I don't know."

"Why not?" Eva kicked her legs up and down, making Rie mutter in frustration.

"She has to choose Alpha Jori as her mate first," Cindy said. She was very blunt with her words.

Did the entire pack house know what was going on with me and my mate situation? I really hoped not. I didn't want anyone to look at me like a villain, especially when I didn't know what to do yet. Of course people would talk about it, though. I have never heard of

someone having two mates before, so I'm sure most werewolves were in the same situation. Once you found your mate, it was supposed to be easy. Finding your mate could be the difficult part, because more often than not, your mate was not a part of your pack.

My mother always thought it was the goddess's way of making sure to breed strong genetics and form alliances. Some packs were rather small,

so things would get messy pretty quickly if everyone found their mate within the same group. It was for that reason many packs participated in an annual ball. Only wolves of age typically went, but I had attended the ball when my family had hosted when I was still a little girl. Often the Alpha and his family would attend as well to monitor their pack members.

My eyes lit up with a sudden realization. “Hey Rie, did this pack attend the Lycan Ball for the Lyna Pack?”

Rie c****d her head, thinking about the question. She finished tying the end of the braid with a ribbon, adding a bow to it. “That would have been a while ago, huh? I’m sure members went. The pack usually attends. I wouldn’t have gone myself though.”

“Do you think Jori or Mark would’ve gone?” A memory that had been long forgotten was now playing in my head over and over again. I don’t know how I had forgotten those piercing blue eyes.

Rie’s eyes lit up. “They did. I remember being jealous of them, because I wanted to go to see the people in the pretty dresses. Normally they didn’t attend the events, but the one for Pack Lyna was a special occasion since it was the year of the Lycan. Goodness,

“I think I met them there,” I said. A smile was beaming inside of me as I remembered everything that had happened.

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Rie jumped up. “Did you really? That’s insane! I guess Pack Lyna doesn’t reside that far away. I’m surprised we all haven’t met before. I guess you have though. Do you think Mark and Jori remember it?”

I shrugged my shoulders and stood up next to Rie. “I have no idea. They sure made an impression on me, but I don’t know if I would’ve done the same.”

Rie smiled softly. “You leave more of an impression than you realize. You might be quiet sometimes, but there is an energy about you that leaves you wanting to know more.”

“Really? No one has ever said that to me before.” I was much more used to people running away from me.

“She’s not wrong,” Cindy agreed. She was now applying her makeup. “The first time I saw you, I instantly took notice of you. — Normally, I don’t notice new people around here, unless it’s a cute boy. But I was hoping I would come across you again.”

“This is a surprise to me. I thought most people didn’t like me.” I sat back down thinking about this. Why would the people around me want to get to know me better when for years everyone ran away?

"It can be a little scary," Eva said. She jumped up and ran over to Cindy.

"Big sis, can you help me with my makeup?"

"Eva," Rie scolded. "That's not a nice thing to say."

"No," I said instantly. "I'm curious as to why Eva thinks I'm scary. I've had a lot of werewolves offer to let me join their pack only to turn around and reject me. I've never understood why."

Eva turned and looked at me. "I didn't say you were scary. I said being around you can be a little scary."

"What's the difference?" It seemed like the same thing to me.

Eva pursed her lips and moved over to me. She grabbed my hands and looked me dead in the eyes. "You seem nice enough, but you know how werewolves have that wolfy smell?" I nodded when Eva paused for a response. "Well you have that wolfy smell, but it also smells... weird. It's almost like you're not actually a werewolf, but you are wearing the scent of one."

I looked over to Rie. "Is that true?"

Rie hesitated and started inspecting her hands pretty closely. "Well, kind of, yeah. I didn't know how to describe it before, but Eva said it pretty well. The werewolf scent is the first thing that's noticeable about you. But then you realize that there's something else. I could see it unnerving some people."

"Some boring people," Cindy said. We all looked at her, so she added, "I think it's pretty cool. That's why I wanted to get to know you better. You're different, and I think of that as a positive, not a negative."

"That's very kind of you." I smiled at the thought. It made sense why people ran away. I had never known I smelled differently.

Cindy shrugged. "Just being honest. Eva, if you want me to do your makeup, I'll need you to come over here."

"Right, we need to get started on you or we're going to run out of time," Rie said, pointing at me with a brush.

Rie went into hyper-focus mode after that. She started by brushing out my hair and then blow drying it. She had me sitting on the floor in front of her while she worked her magic. Next, she grabbed the hair curler and sectioned off parts of my hair. Curl by curl, she quickly turned my usually flat hair into a voluminous curly mess. She quickly added hair spray and then ran her fingers through my hair. I felt her tugging at specific places on my head, but I wasn't allowed to see anything until I was completely done. Rie waved over Cindy, who was finishing up Eva's makeup. "Will you help with her makeup when you're done with Eva?"

"Of course! I will be there in a moment."

“Should I put my dress on while waiting?” I asked.

Rie gave me a pointed look. “No, we can’t risk getting anything on your dress. I’m going to start on your nails.”

Rie got up and grabbed her nail kit. When she came back, she motioned me to sit on the couch. She took my hand and started giving me the full nail treatment. Usually when I did my nails, I just put on a layer or two of nail polish and called it good. Rie, on the other hand, was trimming my cuticles and polishing the nails.

When she was all done with the prepping, Cindy came over and started working on my makeup. I had never felt so pampered before. closed while Cindy worked on my makeup. I easily lost time as they finished dolling me up, and I had no idea how long everything took.

“Okay! All done,” Rie finally announced. She stood up and stretched out a little. “Now to get you dressed.”

“Rie! Where’s the birthday girl?” Scythe demanded. He was stomping up the stairs. “It’s time for the party to start.”

Eva ran over to the top of the stairs, and when Scythe made it to the top, she pushed on his torso. “No! You can’t come up here. No boys allowed!”

“I wouldn’t need to come up here, if you all were down there already.”

Scythe crossed his arms.

“Go away! We’re not ready. You can’t see.” Eva pushed on Scythe again, but he didn’t budge.

Rie was laughing. “Don’t worry, Scythe. We’re almost done. It’s fine for the birthday girl to be fashionably late at her own party. We’ll be down soon.”

Scythe rolled his eyes. “Fine. You have fifteen minutes or I’m coming back up.”

“We’ll be down when we’re down!” Rie shouted after him. She turned back to me. “Let me grab your dress.”

Rie ran off to grab my dress. She came back, and I started pulling the dress up. Rie helped me zip up the back and then took a step back to look me over.

“Wow! You looked like a princess,” Eva said. “I want to look like you one day.”

“You look beautiful,” Rie agreed, a huge smile on her face. “Are you ready to see what you look like, Princess Adira?”

I laughed at the new title I was given. I nodded my head and followed Rie to a mirror. I took one look and felt myself tearing up.

