

The Unwanted Wolf Chapter 1 - 4

Chapter 1

Have been alone ever since I was sixteen. I was cast away from my family, rejected for reasons I could never understand. I was a loving daughter, good at school, and had plenty of friends. On the day of my sixteenth birthday, my father gave me one look, and that was all it took. I was given one thousand dollars, a single bag to pack my clothes in, and told that if I ever showed my face to the pack

again, I wouldn't live to see another day.

I didn't understand it. Werewolves stuck together, especially in a world where humans hunted our kind for fun. I was a good daughter, a good werewolf, but apparently I had done something so terrible that even my own family rejected me. They never even bothered to explain to me what I had done so wrong. Instead of celebrating a momentous time in my life with balloons, cake, and friends, I stood all alone at a bus stop with silent tears streaming down my face.

It had been almost five years since that day, and I, Adira Lyna, had become an expert at being alone. With the money I was given, traveled to another city with no known wolf packs and did what I had to in order to survive.

Lie in bed a week before my 21st birthday, not wanting to get up. The weather predicted rain today, and I felt lethargic and heavy. If I had a choice, I would lie in bed all day, waiting for the sunshine. At last, I had no choice but to get up and get ready for work. I couldn't afford to skip a day and lose out on a bigger paycheck. Slowly I sat up and started getting ready for work. My apartment was small but comfortable. My bed shared a space with the living room and served as my couch as well. The kitchen and bathrooms were separate

areas. If I ever had friends over, I would likely be embarrassed by the small space, but that would require me to actually have friends.

I moved around, grabbing my apron and pulling my hair into a ponytail. It felt darker than usual in the room, so I pulled the curtains open, revealing a dark and gloomy sky. It wasn't raining yet, but the clouds were threatening a downpour. I tucked my umbrella into my backpack, pulled on my light jacket, and dashed out the door. I was running a little late due to not wanting to get out of bed, which meant I would be running part way to work.

I jogged down the flights of stairs and pushed the door open, instantly being hit with a wave of cold. Fall had finally greeted us. I lived on the third floor of a run down apartment complex, which could be exhausting at the end of a long day, but I couldn't complain too much. It was within my budget, and I was able to walk to work, saving on transportation costs. I half jogged to the coffee shop I worked at, anxious that I was going to be late. I was sure the manager wouldn't care if I was a few minutes late, since I was typically early, but I had this overwhelming need to be perfect. I despised the idea of being even a moment late.

Dashing into the alleyway, I made my way to the employee entrance. The door was

already unlocked, which meant I wasn't the first one there. I hurried in, but then I slowed down as I got to the breakroom. My lungs ached a little, but I did what I could to make my breathing seem normal. I didn't want anyone to notice that I was a little out of breath. I went to my locker, still trying to get my breathing under control and put my jacket and bag into the locker.

"Look, you don't have to run to work all of the time," Lana said from right behind me, making me jump. Lana was my manager and the coffee shop owner. She was the only other person who ever beat me to work. It was typically a coin flip on who was here first.

"I don't know what you're talking about." My voice was still a little strained. The cold weather was making it more difficult to recover.

"Okay hun. If you want to pretend you didn't rush here, I'm not going to push it, but we both know the truth." Lana started heading to her office.

I smiled to myself. I had been working here for almost three years, and Lana knew me well. She also knew not to push me on these matters. I closed my locker and started heading to the main shop area. "I'm going to start prepping everything," I called out to Lana.

"Okay hun. I'll send the others to help once they get in." Lana's voice was a little muffled from her office.

I made my way to the front and started pulling the chairs off the tops of the tables and then set them down nicely. I glanced at my watch. We only had about twenty minutes before the customers would start pouring in to get their boost for work. I turned on all of the machines after setting up all of the tables, and that's when I started hearing voices from the breakroom.

"How is she here early every time? I just don't get it."

!!

My heart sank hearing my coworkers' conversation. I knew they didn't like me much, but it still hurt a little hearing their words. I leaned against the counter and took a deep breath. I couldn't let them see me without a smile when they eventually joined me. I couldn't

let them know that I felt tired. I had to come across as the perfect employee or risk giving them more ammo than they already had against me.

Crystal and Haley sauntered into the room, in no rush at all. We only had ten minutes before we would be bombarded with orders and people in a hurry. They didn't seem to care.

"Crystal, can you put out the cream and sugar, and Haley, can you start the pots of dark and medium roasts?" I always delegated the morning tasks or else those two never actually started helping. That was probably why they didn't like me much. They would rather talk

about the cute boys in their classes. They were both college freshmen, young and naive to the world. Their parents still paid for everything for them, so they didn't really need this job. It was just for "life experience."

“Sure thing.” Crystal rolled her eyes as she got started, but I pretended like I didn’t see it. I wasn’t actually their manager, but thankfully they still listened to me.

Two minutes before open, Lana exited her office with the keys to the front door in her hand. “Ready girls?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be,” Haley said, straightening her apron.

I nodded, putting on my best customer service smile. It felt more strained than usual today. Lana opened the doors, letting in the line of customers already outside the door. Let the battle begin.

There was barely a moment to breathe as one customer came in after another. By 10:30am, I felt like I was ready to collapse. Even Lana hopped behind the counter to help make drinks and take orders for a while with how busy it was. When it finally started to slow down, I took the opportunity to run to the bathroom. After I was done, I stood over the sink and looked at my reflection for the first time all morning. My eyes were sunken in, and I looked paler than usual. Was I getting sick? I didn’t get sick, but I didn’t look great. I splashed water over my face and prepared myself to push through the rest of the day. I couldn’t afford to go home.

As I left the bathroom, I heard Crystal and Haley whispering to each other behind the counter.

“Did you see his eyes?” Crystal said, glancing over to a table.

“I know! I would love those eyes staring into me as he-”

I cleared my throat as I made my way behind the counter. It was inappropriate for them to be talking about customers that way. My

presence did exactly as I expected. They stopped talking, giving me a dirty look.

“She’s no fun,” Crystal said under her breath. They didn’t know that I could hear everything they said, no matter how much they hushed their volume. It was one of the perks of being a wolf. Although sometimes I wish my heightened senses didn’t catch everything they said. It was hurtful at times.

I grabbed a towel and started wiping down some spills on the counter while waiting for the next customer. Haley finished making a drink and called out to the customer. “Mark!” She set the drink at the pick up station and lingered for longer than usual. Was this the customer they were whispering about earlier?

My curiosity got the best of me, and I glanced over to the man walking towards the counter. My heart skipped a beat as I made contact with his piercing blue eyes. I couldn’t look away as he stared directly at me. He picked up his drink and completely ignored the words Haley was trying to say to him. He also didn’t touch the napkin Haley had scribbled her digits on.

“No thanks,” he said in a voice that shook me to my core. It was deeper than I had expected, and I couldn’t move.

He still held my eyes captive as he picked up his drink and took a sip. I couldn’t look away either. This man was not human. He was a werewolf, and his presence was completely overwhelming. I had never come into contact with another wolf who emanated so much power before. He had to be an alpha, a strong one at that. I couldn’t even breathe.

“Adira? Adira?” Lana waved her hand in front of my face, finally catching my attention. I heard the deep chuckle from the wolf, which rocked me a little. I finally broke eye contact and looked at Lana. “Oh yeah? Sorry. What’s up?”

Lana squinted at me. “Can you come to my office for a minute?”

I followed her into her office, but as I walked away I could feel the man’s eyes following me. It caused a shiver down my spine. He probably knew I was a wolf just like him. I just hoped he would leave me alone.

Lana shut her office door once I was inside. Suddenly I was focused on my situation again, and my heart started pounding against my chest. I hated getting in trouble.

“Please have a seat.” Lana motioned towards the chair in front of her desk.

I sat down and instantly started playing with my finger nails. I felt like I couldn’t breathe.

“Lana, I’m sorry.” I went to say more, but she cut me off.

“Sorry for what?” She knitted her eyebrows together until her eyes went wide. “Oh for staring at that beauty? Oh please, you’re fine.

It’s okay to stare at eye candy every once in a while.” She laughed a little.

I smiled out of relief, but it still felt a little forced. I could feel small beads of sweat starting to gather on my forehead. Was Lana’s

office usually so hot? “So, uh, if I’m not in trouble, what did you want to talk about?”

“You have been working for me for a while now. Almost three years if I remember correctly. And you have been an exemplary employee the entire time. It’s about time I give you the official title to match the work you have done for me.” A grin pulled across her lips.

My breathing became a little shallow, and I was having a hard time concentrating on her words. “So you’re saying...?”

“I want to make you the manager of the store. This means you will have a copy of the keys and will be able to open or close without me around. Of course this would come with a pay raise and a few other responsibilities.” She paused, waiting for my reaction.

“That’s great news.” My words came out bland, but they shouldn’t have. A promotion would mean I wouldn’t have to kill myself by taking extra shifts. I would make more money and maybe I would even be able to get a better apartment.

“Are you okay?” Lana’s smile faded.

“I’m fine.” I couldn’t even fake a smile. My body felt weak, and my stomach was starting to churn.

“You don’t look fine. You should go home. We can discuss this when you are feeling better.” Her voice showed her concern.

“No, no, I can’t go home. I’m supposed to work a double shift.” My heart started to race.

“I need the money.”

“And I need healthy employees.” Lana’s voice was stern. “Go home. Your health is more important right now.”

I stood up, ready to protest, but the room felt like it was moving. “Maybe you’re right.” I didn’t want to go home. I hadn’t taken a sick

day since starting. As a wolf, my immune system was incredible. I never got sick, so what was going on? I took a deep breath to orient myself. "Tell Haley to make sure she-

"I know how to run my coffee shop." Lana laughed at this. "Don't worry, I can handle the babies. You just go home and get some sleep."

I nodded. I needed to save my energy for my walk home anyway. I got up and left her office. On my way out, I felt my eyes searching for the wolf without even thinking about it. I didn't see him anywhere, and my chest tightened a little. Of course he wouldn't stick around. Other werewolves never stuck around me, and that was probably for the best. I started making my way to the break room to grab my stuff. I didn't bother putting on my jacket, since I felt like I was burning up. Opening the door to the alley, I felt the cold fall air wash over me. For a moment, I felt like I could breathe again. I wiped my forehead, removing the sweat that had collected there. I didn't even realize just how much I was sweating. It felt like I had just come out of a furnace.

"Are you okay?" a deep voice asked from the end of the alley way.

I looked over and saw the piercing eyes from before. My heart started racing again. Who was this man, and why was he here? I was hoping he would've just left me alone, but part of me also felt relieved. I stared at the man unblinking.

He took a couple of steps forward. He seemed cautious in his movements. "You don't look okay. Maybe you should sit down?"

"I'm fine," I finally managed to stutter. I tried to take a step forward and felt woozy again. In a blink of an eye, he grabbed onto my arm to steady me. My entire nervous system was suddenly on fire, and I couldn't breathe.

I pulled my arm from his grip. "I don't know who you think you are, but you don't have to concern yourself with me." I wasn't used to being around other wolves anymore, and I didn't like that he was in my space touching me. I started to walk past him down the alley to head home.

A drip fell on my cheek, and I paused in my tracks, looking at the sky. It had been holding out all day, and of course it would start raining as soon as I had to walk home. The rain started getting stronger, so I thought it would be best to keep moving. I took another step and felt extremely light headed. I reached out for a wall to stabilize myself, and that's when things started going dark, and the world felt like it was falling.

Chapter 2

I tried to catch myself as I fell, but before I could, I felt warm hands grab my waist. Then I felt like I was floating. My breaths were shallow, and I could barely focus on anything.

"Where do you live?" I heard a distant voice say.

All I could manage in response were groans. I felt like the world was upside down and my body was crumbling. I tried to focus on my breath to orient myself just a little, but nothing seemed to work. I could barely keep my eyes open. I could still feel the cold rain splashing on my face, and that was the only thing keeping me semi-conscious.

"Hey, stay with me." The voice sounded more distant than before, but I still felt warmth surrounding me in the coötrain, and it made me want to let go.

Darkness surrounded me as I stopped fighting, but somehow I felt completely safe and warm. The scent of lilacs and honey surrounded me, and any pain I was feeling before was completely gone. It felt like I was floating with no gravity and was a level of peacefulness I had never experienced in my waking state. Time didn't matter here either. I had no idea if 30 seconds or thirty days had passed, and I didn't really care.

Suddenly light blue eyes flashed in front of me, causing my heart to race. I looked around, trying to find where they had disappeared to. "Where are you?" I called out, only seeing darkness.

A figure emerged from the distance, slowly approaching me. It was him. I could feel it in my bones, even though I could only see the silhouette. I tried moving forward, desperate to see his face again, but it felt like I was walking in place. I stopped, waiting for him to get

closer. He stopped about five feet in front of me, and everything became clear. His blue eyes complimented his dark red hair. He was tall and slender but had an authoritative aura around him.

"I have been looking for you." His voice was soft but deep, stirring something inside of me.

"Why me?" I asked, feeling drawn to him. I tried to move again, but my feet were stuck like cement.

"Don't you feel it?" He looked at me, waiting patiently.

"I don't understand. I don't know you. I only saw you for the first time today." There was something pulling my heart to him, but it didn't make any sense. Sure he was attractive, but that was only surface level. I couldn't let myself get carried away.

"Close your eyes and listen to your heart." His voice was like a warm bath after a long day.

I didn't know why, but I trusted him and closed my eyes. I felt a warm hand brush my heart, and I felt weightless again. "Who are you?" I asked.

"We've met before. Just listen and try to remember.

"Mark." His name slipped from my mouth like a fact. I had heard his name earlier. That had to be how I knew it so well, right?

His warmth started to dissipate, and I opened my eyes, desperate to see him again.

When I opened my eyes, the darkness started to

fade as a bright light emerged from the distance. It was almost like the sun was rising. It

strained my eyes, but I couldn't look away.

Suddenly my body jumped, pulling me from sleep. I didn't open my eyes, and everything felt heavy. It felt like I had come back from the brink of death. What had happened? I searched my brain for the last thing I could remember, but everything felt like a distant memory. Did I ever make it home? And what was up with that strange dream?

"Are you sure she's okay? Shouldn't she be awake by now?" a familiar voice said nearby.

I stayed frozen, not giving any indication that I was awake. I became hyper aware of the fact that I was not home. The bed was softer than the one in my apartment, and the place smelled of vanilla and pine needles. Where was I, and who were these people? I thought it best to pretend to still be asleep until I figured something out.

"Stop asking," a female voice said firmly. "I have already told you she will be fine. That hasn't changed in the last half hour." She sounded annoyed.

"She was burning up when I found her." The familiar voice was strained, borderline panicked. There was no response to his plea, and

He sounded so pained that I wanted to reach out and grab his hand to comfort him. It was almost impossible to resist moving, but I did. I didn't know him and didn't owe him anything,

He needs you, Shadow, my wolf, spoke to me. I was almost more shocked hearing her voice than being in a room with strangers. She only comes to me on full moons or when other werewolves are around. I gasped at my own realization. Other werewolves.

"Adira?" the familiar voice called out.

Shoot, my cover was blown. I opened my eyes slowly, trying to take in the room. It looked like a bedroom filled with medical supplies. There was an IV in my arm and a tray of what looked like medicine a few feet away. There were two faces staring at me. One of them belonged to the man from the coffee shop. The meeting in the alley flashed into my mind. I must've passed out in front of him.

"How did you know my name?" My voice cracked, and it felt like I hadn't spoken in weeks.

The female approached me, pushing the man out of the way. "You were wearing a name tag when he brought you in. You must be disoriented, but don't worry. You are safe." Her voice held very little emotion. "I'm Doctor Zayla. I have been monitoring your situation."

"Situation?" I couldn't wrap my mind around what happened. I don't get sick, so I don't know what would've caused me to pass out.

"You had a fever and your body shut down to protect you. I'm not sure what happened yet, but I am running your blood work to see if I can figure out what happened exactly. It's unusual for a mere human disease to affect a wolf so drastically.

"How-" I started but was quickly cut off.

"Surely you could tell we were werewolves the moment you smelled us," Doctor Zayla

stated.

The man pushed his way close to me, grabbing my hand. Sparks prickled my skin at his contact. "Are you okay? I was so worried."

"Mark." I stated. His name rang clearly in my head from the dream.

He c****d his head. "You remember me?"

"What do you mean? We haven't really met. I just heard your name earlier today at the coffee shop." That was the only logical explanation.

"That was yesterday," Doctor Zayla stated.

I bolted up in panic. That meant I had missed my shift today. "Yesterday? I have to go. Lana is going to kill me, and just when she was going to give me a promotion. This can't be happening." I tried to get out of bed, but Mark placed his hand on my shoulder and easily pushed me back to a lying position.

"You need to rest more. I don't want you to over do it." He looked at me with worry filling his eyes.

"Look, I don't know why you are so concerned. We just met. Thank you for your help, but I have to get going. I can't afford to lose this job." I brushed Mark's hand away.

Mark's face fell. "Do you not feel it?"

"Feel what?" I didn't understand what he was saying.

Before Mark could respond, Doctor Zayla grabbed his arm and pulled him off to the side. I watched as the two of them look at each other like they were having a silent conversation. I didn't hear any words actually come out of their mouths though. Mark looked angry and then sad. Finally he turned back to me.

"Look, can't you just message your boss and explain you've been sick? It would make me feel better if we could monitor you for just a little longer." Mark's blue eyes pierced my soul, and for some reason I just wanted to give him anything he asked for.

I paused for a moment and then nodded. "Okay, I guess that wouldn't be the worst. Can I just have my phone, so I can reach out to her?"

He smiled out of relief and grabbed my phone from my pile of things off to the side. It was only then that I realized I wasn't wearing the clothes I was before. I blushed at the thought of Mark seeing me that way.

I checked my phone, and I had several missed calls and texts from Lana. I quickly sent a message to her, letting her know that I had a fever but was feeling better. I also apologized for not keeping her updated. I would try to explain it better when I saw her in person again.

Hopefully I still had a job when I went back to work.

A realization hit me. "Where are we exactly?"

"We are at my pack headquarters," Mark answered.

"Headquarters?" I said slowly. "But no wolf packs live in this territory." I started to worry at the thought of being around a wolf pack.

It never worked out for me in the end.

"We recently moved here," Doctor Zayla said. She held her hands behind her back.

A knock at the door pulled all of our attention away. The door cracked open and a head popped through. "Alpha Mark? There's urgent business for you."

"Thank you Darian." Mark turned towards me. "I will be back later. There are some things I wish to discuss with you." He smiled at the thought and then followed Darian out of the room.

Doctor Zayla turned to me. "How are you feeling?"

I paused, actually listening to my body for the first time after waking up. "Like somebody hit me with a truck."

Her lips pulled tight. "Get some rest. Someone will bring some food to you later. I will also check up on you a little later. I will let you know when I get your blood results back."

I nodded and watched her leave the room. The moment the door shut, I started getting out of bed. There was no way I could stay

here. I didn't care how nice they were, I couldn't risk being around a wolf pack for very long. They would surely reject me if I stuck around.

It always happened, and I planned to be the one gone before the rejection came. I didn't need a wolfpack. I was better on my own.

Chapter 3

Quickly I got dressed, afraid people would return at any moment. My legs felt shaky, but I pushed through it. They seemed nice enough and had helped me in a dire moment, but my fight or flight instincts were kicking. I had to get as far away from this place as I could. Several wolf packs had traveled through this area over the years, and every time it started the same way. I was a lone wolf, and they thought maybe they could help me. They offered to let me join their pack because they wanted to save me. It was dangerous for a

wolf to be on their own. It would be easy for a hunter to track them down and kill them. No one would miss them or try to get revenge.

The first time I had been offered to join a pack, I eagerly accepted. It was only a year after my own family kicked me out of their pack, and I was lonely and scared of the future. It started off great, and I let myself imagine a future with the other werewolves. However, that did not last long. The longer the pack was around me, the weirder people started acting. It wasn't long before I was kicked out and told to never return. That one stung almost as much as when my own family removed me. I had gotten my hopes up, only to be crushed.

Every other encounter ended the same way, except I never accepted their offer or expected anything. They would keep trying until they realized there was something wrong with me. It ended in rejection every single time. Sometimes they just disappeared in a blink of

an eye, and other times I was left with bruises and cuts all over my body. I didn't understand what was wrong with me. I had tried to ask them, but no one wanted to say anything. I couldn't understand it. I was always pleasant and helpful. They even thought I was funny at times. It was almost like there was a forcefield around me that repelled anyone who

tried to get close.

That's why I had to get away from this pack. It wouldn't be long before they came to the same conclusion everyone else did, and I

didn't want to deal with the rejection or potential beating.

I listened at the door. There were muffled voices not too far away, so I kept my ear pressed to the door, waiting for them to go away.

While waiting, I pulled out my phone and pulled up the GPS to get an idea of where I was exactly. They had taken me to some sort of house that was across town from where I lived. If I ran in wolf form, I could probably make it home in 40 minutes.

Hopefully they wouldn't

come after me after they realized I was gone.

When the hallway grew silent, I slowly turned the door handle and peaked my head out to make sure the coast was clear. I didn't see anyone, so I left the room, shutting the door as quietly behind me as possible. I couldn't tell which way was the way out, so I just picked a

direction and hoped for the best.

This is a mistake, Shadow said in my head once again.

I rolled my eyes, ignoring her. She should understand my desperation to leave. She had been rejected along with me over the years. I

didn't understand why she wanted me to stick around this time.

As I kept moving, I breathed a sigh of relief when I found the stairs. I hurried down the steps, freezing as one of the steps creaked

under my weight. I froze and looked around, expecting someone to come bolting towards the noise. After a moment, I kept moving. The

creak probably wasn't as loud as it had felt. At the bottom of the stairs, I took a deep breath, trying to see if I could smell anyone around.

A familiar scent of lilac and honey filled my nose again. Automatically my body started moving towards the scent. When I realized what I

was doing, I pulled myself in the opposite direction. I had to go away from the scent if I wanted to leave unnoticed.

There was a large door that surely had to be the front near the stairs. I started going for it when I heard voices approaching. I pulled

open the first door I could find and slipped into the room. I couldn't see anything at first, and then my eyes adjusted. There were coats

hanging up in here along with some cleaning supplies. I pushed myself as far back as I could in case any way came looking for something in the closet. It was probably futile, since any wolf that came close would likely smell me before seeing me, but it made me feel

better.

"Have you seen the wolf they brought in yesterday?" a voice asked, too close for comfort.

"No, Alpha won't let anyone go near her except the doctor."

"He's being weirdly protective."

"I guess. He also may not want to overwhelm her when she's not feeling well. I don't think she has a pack. My scouts said there are no

"That's good. We might be able to make this our permanent home."

My heart started pounding at that thought. If they decided to move their homebase here, I could be the one forced to leave this time.

That would be worse than any other incident with wolf packs.

“Do you think she will end up joining us?”

“It seems like Alpha wants that to happen.”

The voices started to fade away and when it was silent again, I cracked the door open. Once again it seemed like I was alone. I tiptoed out of the closet and made a beeline to the front door. I had to get out of here fast. I didn't even have time to think of what I would do if

this pack decided to stay in town. I managed to get through the front door. I shut it behind me quickly, not even worrying about how loud

it was. I bolted away from the house, eager to get away as quickly as possible.

I took a deep breath, channeling Shadow as I tried to shift into wolf form. My chest tightened at the attempt. Nothing else happened.

I kept moving away, but my breathing was more labored than it should have been. I tried again, and this time I felt a sharp pain.

Whatever illness I had left me still too weak to shift into wolf form, and I had never felt more vulnerable. I had never had an issue shifting

before, and it would take me much longer to get home on foot.

Go back, Shadow pleaded with me. We need him.

“We don't need anyone.” I kept pushing forward, running as fast as my body would allow, which wasn't very fast. Every breath stung

my lungs, but I didn't stop. I had to get far enough away that they wouldn't find me, if they were looking for me. If they shifted into wolves

and sent a search party, I was at a severe disadvantage. I hoped they would not think finding me would be an urgent matter and not

worth the risk of running around in wolf form. That could just cause more problems for them.

After another hour of moving, I finally made it to my apartment building. I pushed through the door, and for the first time since I left

the pack house, I let myself stop, and I leaned against the wall at the bottom of the stairs. My body was screaming at me, and I let myself

sink slowly to the floor. Everything was a mess, and I just didn't want to deal with it. I didn't want to think about the fact that if this new

pack decided to stay in town, it could lead to me being forced out and having to start new yet again.

After a few moments, I felt my phone vibrate. It was Lana texting me to feel better and if I needed more time off I could have it, since I

never took off sick or asked for vacation time. Part of me wanted to take the next couple of days off to fully recover and make a

contingency plan, but a part of me knew it could also lead to me sitting in my apartment, stewing about everything. I decided to at least let myself have the rest of the day, and then I could go from there.

A notification popped up, showing my phone was only at ten percent. This was my sign to drag my body to my feet and start the climb to my apartment. By the time I made it to the top, I felt like I was going to collapse. Just a few more steps. I kept repeating that to

myself until I was in front of my bed. I let my body collapse, not even worrying about changing my clothes. I quickly fell into a fitful sleep.

When I woke up again, my body still felt heavy. It was dark outside, and I had no idea how long I had been asleep. I checked my phone, but it was completely dead. I plugged it in and then sat in my bed for a moment. My head was pounding, and then my stomach growled, and I wondered how long it had been since I ate. After a few more moments of sitting there, I dragged myself to my kitchen and took some painkillers. I chugged a glass of water after. I must have been dehydrated. My stomach felt full from the water, but I knew I would need some more substance to let my body fully heal. I found a pack of ramen in the cupboard and proceeded to put on a pot of water to boil. I checked my phone while waiting. I had a few spam emails waiting for me and a response from Lana. It was also 4:00am. If I was going to work today, I would have to start getting ready in forty-five minutes. I did not have the energy to rush, so I figured I should let myself take the day off and fully recover.

I sent a quick message to Lana, letting her know I was still recovering but I should be back at work the next day. I finished making my food and picked at it when it was done. I didn't have much of an appetite, but I ate what I could manage. When I had had enough, I set the bowl on the counter and crawled back into bed.

I fell asleep again, and it felt like the darkness was suppressing me. I tried to fight it off, but there was nothing tangible to fight."

Help!" I cried out.

"I'm here. Don't worry." It was the voice of Shadow, but it wasn't echoing in my head like usual. It sounded like it was coming from

I looked around, but my night vision was weak. I wondered if this was what it was like to be human. "Where are you?"

"I'm still with you." Her voice came from the opposite direction.

I flipped around, but I couldn't see her still. "What's going on? Why couldn't we shift earlier?"

"I don't know," Shadow admitted. This time her voice sounded like it was right next to me. "But we need to return to the pack."

This time when I turned, I saw the shape of a wolf with shining black fur. I placed my hand on Shadow's head. I had never interacted with her before like this. "They are not our pack. It's too risky."

Shadow shook her head. "You're letting your head get in the way. I know you can feel it."

"Feel what?" I was starting to feel frustrated.

"He won't reject you."

Mark's face instantly appeared into my eyes. No, he was an alpha just like the rest. Sure, I felt drawn to him, but he would reject me just like everyone else. I was too much of a risk to his pack, but he just didn't see it yet. It's not like he even offered me to stay or anything,

not that I stuck around long enough.

I wanted to believe Shadow's words, but I knew it was not worth the risk of getting my

hopes up. I wasn't sure if I could handle the inevitable rejection if I let myself imagine actually joining a pack. Shadow was surely wrong, but I couldn't find the words to say it out

loud. Maybe, just maybe, this time would be different.

"You need to be careful." A new voice echoed in the room.

I froze, unable to see anything other than Shadow and darkness. "Who are you?"

"You are in danger." That was the only response I got from the unknown voice.

The dream started to fade, and everything turned black again.

Chapter 4

After waking up, I almost felt like myself again. It had been three days since I was last at work, which felt like a lifetime ago. It didn't help that I was constantly in and out of sleep with strange dreams plaguing me every step. Something was definitely strange in regards to my illness, and part of me wondered if I should have stuck around and asked that pack doctor more about what happened to me. No, quickly pushed that thought from my head.

I quickly got ready for work and was at the coffee shop before I knew it. Thoughts of what had happened still racked my brain, and I wasn't very aware of my surroundings.

"You don't look like death anymore." Lana said, a smile plastered on her face.

My eyes snapped up, realizing I wasn't alone the moment I heard her voice. I laughed at her comment. "Yeah, I feel a lot better."

"You definitely look it. I'm just glad you're back. This place doesn't run as well without you." Lana started walking out of the room, but paused before she reached the door. "Before you leave for today, make sure to stop by my office, and we will discuss that promotion."

A smile instantly formed on my face. Calling out sick three days in a row was not exactly model behavior, and I was worried it would be enough to make Lana change her mind. Luckily I had a good work history, so she must have taken that into consideration.

The thought of the promotion made me buzz, and I started prepping the shop for opening faster than normal, despite not feeling quite at one hundred percent yet. The other girls trickled in as they normally did before opening, and soon the shop was filled with customers eager to get their morning coffee before heading off to work. The distraction was much welcomed, since I didn't have a moment to stop and worry about what might happen in the near future.

Halfway through my shift, I stopped to take a break. It was finally calm enough that we didn't need all of the baristas manning the counter. I decided to peek into Lana's office to see if she had a moment to talk now. I was getting eager and didn't want to wait until the end of my shift.

Lana looked up as I entered the door, and she smiled. "Hey there!"

"Hey." I walked further into the office. "Do you have a moment? I'm on break now, and figured we could continue that conversation

from the other day.”

“What an eager beaver we have here.” Lana chuckled. She stood up and grabbed a folder from her shelf. She gestured to me to sit down. “Now is a great time.”

She started going over the pay, which was significantly higher. Hours were pretty similar to what I was working already too, since I took on extra shifts whenever possible. Most responsibilities I would be given, I was already doing anyway. I didn’t see any downfalls to this promotion, and I was grateful for the positive thing with all of the worries that had come up with this new wolf pack coming into town.

After we figured things out, I headed back to the front to continue working. When I went back behind the counter, I could feel Haley’s eyes on me. I looked up at her, and she had a scowl on her face. She never seemed to like me much, but I hadn’t done anything to her to

deserve such an intense glare. Maybe she heard about the promotion and didn’t like me being officially in charge.

“Hey Adira,” Crystal called, pulling my attention away from Haley. “Can you wipe down the tables before new customers come in?”

I was a little shocked that Crystal was giving me orders. It was unlike her to take initiative. I didn’t mind though. I wanted to get away from Haley’s glare. “Sure thing.”

I grabbed a wet rag and made my way to the tables.

“She’s so annoying,” I heard Crystal mutter from across the room.

“I know, I can’t believe she can call out sick for days and then come back and get a promotion,” Haley agreed.

So it was about the promotion. Hopefully it wouldn’t cause too much tension in the workplace. I already directed them, so it

wasn’t a problem for when the promotion became official.

The bell to the front door rang, indicating a customer had just come through. I didn’t even have to turn around to know who it was.

His wolf smell hit my nose the moment the door was opened, and sure enough when I turned around, Mark’s piercing blue eyes hit mine.

My heart skipped a beat. I hadn’t considered the possibility of him coming back to my work, especially the day I returned. Of course he would though. It was the only way he knew how to contact me.

To my surprise, he didn’t immediately come towards me. He went to the counter and ordered a drink. I watched him as I continued

wiping down the tables. He didn’t look at me again as he waited for his coffee. I fully expected him to walk over to me and confront me as

to why I ran away after agreeing to stay, but after the initial eye contact, he acted like I didn’t even exist.

“Mark,” Haley called, placing his coffee on the delivery table.

“Thanks.” He nodded and grabbed his coffee. He immediately turned towards the front door.

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe he wasn't even going to bother to get me to join his pack. He had likely already written me off.

My eyes were glued to him as he walked out. A part of me almost felt disappointed he didn't even try to talk to me. I should've been relieved, but I wasn't. I went back to cleaning, going over everything in my head again. Why would he have come to the coffee shop just to ignore me. It wasn't anywhere near the pack house, and he probably knew I would be there.

I went to wipe down the last table when I noticed a piece of paper on the table. I picked it up and glanced at it before throwing it out. When I flipped it over, I saw neat handwriting on it.

I have something important to discuss with you. I know you don't trust me, but please give me five minutes of your time. I won't bother you again if you agree to this and ask me to. You have my number if you agree to this.

-Mark

I read the note over and over again. I was staring at him the entire time, but I didn't see him put the piece of paper down. He was sly.

For a moment, I was happy that he did actually want to talk to me. Apparently he hadn't written me off so quickly. I also appreciated the fact that he didn't confront me at work or force me into a conversation. If I wanted to, I could ignore him entirely and move on with my

life. He only wanted five minutes though. It couldn't hurt too much to talk to him, right?

"What are you looking at?" Crystal was standing next to me, trying to look at the paper. I hadn't heard her approach.

"Nothing." I quickly shoved the note into my pocket. I immediately walked away from her, still unsure of what to do about Mark.

Also, what did he mean I already had his phone number?

The rest of my shift went by in a blur. I had gone back and forth between deciding to ignore Mark and wanting to meet up with him

about 20 times before it was time to go home. I had valid reasons for either option and was completely torn. As I packed up my stuff to

leave, I thought about the way Mark had asked for the meeting. In the past, other alphas had tried to force me to join them, insisting they knew what was best. Mark wasn't pressuring me.

I sighed as I grabbed my jacket and made my way to the alley. I knew I was going to meet up with him. Now I just had to figure out

how I had his phone number. When I got home, I searched through the clothes I was wearing when at his pack house. Since he had left a

note at the coffee, maybe he had snuck something into my pockets? Did he expect me to run away?

I grabbed my old clothes from the laundry and dug through them. There was nothing stuck to them. How else would I have his

number. My phone buzzed, and that's when it clicked. He had my phone. Maybe he programmed his number. I looked through my

contacts, and I saw his name listed. I clicked on his name and paused, staring at it for a few minutes. I was scared to reach out. I knew!

wouldn't like what he had to say. Things so rarely worked out for me.

I took a deep breath and hit the call button. I stopped breathing as I heard the rings to the phone.

"Hello?" His deep voice reverberated through my ear, making my heart beat faster.

"Mark?"

"Adira?"

A shiver went down my spine as he said my name. "Yeah."

He was silent for a moment, waiting for me to say something. "I'm glad you called."

"Can we meet in person? I will go wherever you feel comfortable." He didn't sound pushy. In fact, I could sense a slight desperation behind his seemingly calm voice.

"How about Willow Park? I can be there in fifteen minutes." I didn't want to give myself a chance to change my mind.

"I'll be there." There was an awkward silence between us. "Thank you for giving me this opportunity."

He was thanking me? Something about him felt different from the other werewolves I had come across in the past. "You're welcome."

Thung up the phone, unsure about how I was feeling with everything. Before I had a chance to convince myself to not go, I changed

out of my work clothes and left my apartment. The weather was still gloomy, but it wasn't quite raining yet. I pulled my jacket around me

tighter as the wind picked up on the walk. It almost felt nice as the cool breeze blew through my hair.

As I approached the park, I saw a tall figure standing near the park sign, shifting back and forth on his feet. Even though I couldn't see

the details of the figure, I instantly knew it was Mark. As I got closer, his form perked up. I could see his smile at the sight of me and my

heart jumped. He really was pretty. I stopped a few feet in front of him.

"Thank you for meeting me here," he said. His smile faded, and I could see his nerves growing as well. I didn't fully understand why he was nervous.

"So you said you had something important to discuss with me?" I decided it was best to jump right in the conversation. "If you are going to ask me to join your pack, I'm going to tell you now that you are wasting your time."

Mark furrowed his eyebrows. "That's not it." He motioned for us to start walking.

"It's not?" That's always what this conversation came down to.

"Well, no. I have thought about the possibility, but we don't know each other yet. There's something else." His footsteps were light but fast.

I had to push myself to keep up. This wasn't a leisurely walk by any means. "I don't understand. Then what is it that you want to talk to me about?"

Mark rubbed the back of his neck. "Well, there are a couple of things. I wanted to make sure you were okay. You weren't exactly in

the best condition when you left, and you left so suddenly. I was worried you had passed out somewhere and was in danger, especially

since you didn't show up to work."

"How did you know I wasn't at work?"

He hesitated in his answer. "I have been coming in every day, hoping to see you. I know that sounds creepy, but it was the only way! I knew to get in contact with you."

I should have been weirded out at this thought, but I appreciated it. He didn't have to worry about me or go through the effort of

checking up on me. I was a stranger to him, yet he had helped me when I was sick.

When I didn't say anything, he continued. "I also wanted to apologize to you for taking you to my pack house. It wasn't my first option, but you weren't in a condition to tell me where you lived, and knowing your nature, I knew it was best not to take you to a normal hospital. I can only imagine how violated and scared you were when you woke up. I shouldn't have left you alone in that moment."

The apology surprised me. Most alphas assumed they knew best and had never apologized to me for their actions. Mark was

definitely different than the other werewolves I had come across. I looked over at him, and he was practically shaking from nerves.

Instinctively, I reached out and grabbed his arm. I felt tingles shoot through my fingers, and Mark stopped at the touch.

"It's okay," I said. "You were trying to help. It was just a lot for me to take in. Plus, usually werewolves don't always have my well-being at the front of their mind."

Mark nodded, seeming to understand this notion. I am sure he has had to deal with many packs in his time. "Speaking of your well-being, there is more." A frown curled onto his lips. "Doctor Zayla got your blood test back and figured out what made you so sick. There was wolfsbane in your blood. A lot of it actually. In fact, there was so much wolfsbane in your system that you should be dead right now."