



League of the Unnatural:

PIKE'S PEAK

By

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Prologue

Adira tilted her head enough to stare at the man she'd been in love with since before she fully understood what love was. Pike had his muscular arms tucked behind his head as he and Adira lay beneath the stars on a grassy knoll. He crossed one ankle over the other, stretching his six-foot six-inch frame out, making her palms itch with the need to caress him.

She knew she wasn't his type. Often, she heard her brother, Adam, talking with his friends when he didn't think she was near. They'd call her things like "late bloomer" and discuss how she would most likely grow into her powers in the future.

Rubbing her arm lightly, Adira tried to ignore the fact she was little more than all legs and arms. She'd shot up quickly, reaching five-foot ten but had, as of yet, to actually grow into her body. Her fears were that she might never really have the form of a woman. Lars, a friend and co-worker of Pike and Adam's, often tried to comfort her, explaining that people born with superpowers were often slower at maturing fully than normal humans. Adira only hoped it were true.

She tried and failed to tear her gaze from Pike. "Tall, dark and handsome" didn't do him justice. There was something about him that called to her on every level.

"Did you decide what you want for your birthday yet?" he asked, staring up at the night sky. "You do realize you're eighteen in about five minutes, right? I've been asking since you got home almost a week ago. Hell, I was bugging Adam about it long before that. This is a special birthday. I'd like to get you something you *really* want." He bit his lower lip and glanced out of the corner of his eyes at her. "I'm sorry I missed your last three. Adam sent you off to that boarding school and refused to tell Lars or me where it was. He worries about your safety, with what we do and all, so I try to understand."

"Yeah, the life of a superhero is hard work." Adira refrained from smiling even though she wanted more than anything to show how excited she was that Pike missed her while she was away. Her brother, Adam, had forbidden her from contacting anyone other than himself, going so far as to cast a spell over her to assure his wishes were carried out. Even now, as much as she wanted to tell Pike where Adam had selected for her to attend a university, she couldn't.

"We're not superheroes, Adira. Now, Lars tends to think he's one, but we're not," Pike said with a smile on his face. "Last I checked, I don't wear tights or don a cape."

She laughed at the mental image she got of him doing just that. "Darn good thing because I'm not sure I could look you in the eyes and not bust a gut."

The sideways glance he cast her held something she could easily mistake for interest. Gathering up her nerve, Adira prepared to cross the line with Pike. She could only hope he was receptive. "Has it been five minutes yet?" she asked, hopeful.

Pike glanced at his watch and put his arm back under his head. "Yep, happy birthday, Adira. Wanna tell me what you--"

She wasted no time, rolling over and onto Pike's hard body. The shock on his face was adorable. Giving into the desires she'd fought for so long, Adira bent her head and pressed her lips to his. Pike opened his mouth as his body stiffened. Adira was sure it was so he could protest and she knew better than to give him a chance.

Thrusting her tongue into his mouth, she sought his tongue out, finding it and moaning. At first, she thought he wouldn't kiss her back. When his tongue greeted hers, encircling it, she gave in to the urge to straddle his waist. His cock hardened beneath her at an alarming rate.

That will never fit in me.

Adira hadn't thought her plan out. All she knew when Pike had found her heading out for a late night walk was that she wanted him and she was tired of waiting to let him know.

Pike ran his hands up and under her t-shirt. His thumbs skimmed the underside of her breasts, making her nipples hard and her back arch. He growled and before Adira knew it, she'd been flipped onto her back. Pike's normally brown eyes began to swirl with amber and his breathing grew rapid.

"No," he ground out.

No?

He doesn't want me?

In a flash, he was off her and rushing with inhuman speed towards the woods surrounding Adam's property. Hurt and humiliation moved through Adira as she rolled onto her side and gave into the tears that wanted to come.

Chapter One

League Headquarters--eight years later...

"I'm not wearing those," Pike Kinsley said, folding his arms over his chest as he leaned back in the swivel chair. He took another look at the dark blue tights Lars was holding and scowled. "Do I even want to know where you got them from?"

Lars dangled them high in the air, laughing from the gut. "Oh, come on. Why not? Did you miss the memo? All superheroes wear tights. Think of it this way," he grinned, "chicks will know you're sympathetic to their plight--you know, the whole trying to keep their pantyhose from running thing."

"I'm not a superhero." Pike growled, hoping the threat of a pending shift would cause Lars to simply vanish. He didn't. "If I eat you, will you finally shut up?"

"He'll most likely come back at you like a bad pepper or something," a soft, familiar, feminine voice said from the other side of the room. "Any way you look at it, indigestion would be sure to follow."

He swiveled in his chair, unable to believe the idea of tights had even been brought up at all, let alone while females were present. The second his gaze landed on a tall, buxom brunette, he forgot about the tights and focused instead on how good she'd no doubt fit on him. His cock hardened instantly, longing to be in her. Swallowing hard, he maneuvered a bit in the seat, hoping it wasn't obvious how into her he was.

The lift of one eyebrow told him she was onto him.

She was tall for a female, around five-foot ten. Every inch of her was toned but not to the point she lost her curves. It was perfect. She was perfect. She was also standing in a place whose location wasn't readily disclosed to anyone outside the immediate group. She most certainly wasn't part of the League. If she were, showing up for work on time wouldn't be a problem for Pike. Hell, he'd come a day early and hopefully "in" her if she were part of the League.

Lars stopped defying gravity long enough to stand on the floor and give a small bow. He was known for playing the role of the jackass and seemed proud of the title. That being said, Lars seemed serious about respecting the female before him. That was odd to say the least. "My lady, I have missed you so."

Pike's insides clenched. The hot chick was Lars' girl?

"Lars," she said with a smile. The navy catsuit she had on fit like a second skin as she moved.

Lars, a six-foot two-inch guy with a head of shockingly blond hair, arched a sandy blond brow and grinned as he glanced in Pike's direction. "May I introduce, Pike, dickhead... erm... I mean, 'savior to all mankind.'"

Another growl escaped Pike as he shot a threatening glance at Lars. He was dangerously close to wrapping the navy tights around Lars' neck and choking the life

from the man.

"Hmm, Pike, interesting name. Once you hear it, you wouldn't dare forget it." She entered the oversized boardroom, sashaying her way towards Lars, keeping her blue gaze locked on Pike the entire time.

There was something familiar about her eyes. Pike looked her over once more, positive he'd remember a body like hers. "And you are?"

The only response he got was a sexy smile. It was enough to leave his cock digging painfully into his black jeans. Unable to help himself, he chanced a glance at the tights now lying discarded in a puddle on the floor.

Thank the gods I didn't put those on. The entire room would know I'm sporting a hard-on.

Lars put his arms out to her. "May I have this dance?"

"There's no music, asshole," Pike bit out, wanting desperately to pummel a man he'd long considered both a friend and an ass.

Lars gave him a knowing smile. "My dear? If you would be so kind."

She clicked her fingers and the room filled with the sounds of sex mixed with a thumping beat. The second she began to dance slowly, moving her hips to the music, dancing around Lars, Pike jerked to his feet. He grabbed his cock and narrowly avoided coming in his jeans. The only other time in his life he'd been this close to coming without being in a woman was the night he'd made the biggest mistake of his life--the night he chased Adira away.

Adira. The very thought of her set Pike on edge. He'd wanted to take what she'd offered--her virginity--but knew it wouldn't have ended there. Something in his gut told him that one sample of Adira would never be enough and he wasn't a one-woman kind of man.

You would have been for her, jackass.

He coughed, doing his best to play down the fact he'd nearly come and to ignore his inner voice. The shit-ass grin on Lars' face told Pike he was being toyed with. Problem was, there wasn't a damn thing Pike could do about it. He was left no choice but to stand by and watch as the object of his desire rubbed against Lars.

Pike's fists clenched as the need to release the beast he carried within grew. Gritting his teeth, he tried and failed to force his gaze away from the spectacle. The female slid down the length of Lars and splayed her fingers over his groin. Lars put his hands in her hair, directing her erotic dance.

The beast within him won, surging forward and nullifying Pike's restraint. He charged Lars with the intent to kill him, friend or not. Never before had Pike been this out of control. The female glanced at him and smiled, putting her hand up and blowing him a kiss. Instantly, it felt as if he'd run smack dab into an invisible mountain. He pounded against the nothingness and snarled at Lars.

"Get away from her, now," he ground out as his teeth lengthened. Fur began to sprout on the backs of his hands, as it always did when the change into the wolf began. Claws emerged from his fingertips as a growl tore free of him. "Let go of me now!"

Lars put his hands up, signifying he was innocent. That was laughable. "Sit, puppy."

He snarled. Ripping Lars' head off would be almost too easy.

Almost.

"What the hell is going on in here?" a booming voice asked.

The music stopped instantly and Lars took a giant step back from the woman. Pike looked towards the entrance of the boardroom and curled his lip as he spotted Adam, an old childhood friend. "I'll tell you what's going on. I'm going to kill Lars and then I'm planning on," his gaze landed on the female, "fucking her until she can't move."

A ripple of power surged through the room, slamming into Pike and lifting him off his feet. Pain radiated throughout his body as the power blocked his ability to completely shift into the form of a wolf. Vaguely, he heard a female screaming and then as quickly as the magikal attack started, it ended. A familiar power cradled his body, easing him to the ground. The next thing he knew, the female he couldn't wait to be in was standing over him, staring down with wide, concerned eyes.

"Pike?" She dropped to her knees next to him and touched his chest gently. Fire seemed to flare from the spot her hand rested on him. She turned her head and stared past him. "What in the hell were you doing, Adam? You could have killed him. He's one of your best friends."

Pike tried to sit up but felt like he'd been hit with a ton of bricks. He knew better. It was worse than bricks. He'd been hit with Adam's power. Confused, he groaned.

Adam appeared next to him. The look in his eyes was anything but welcoming. "What was I doing? Huh? I walk in to find you grinding against Lars and then hear Pike talk about wanting to..." Adam paled. "I can't even say it. And you have the nerve to ask me what the hell I was doing?"

"Do not blame me for teasing Pike. He spent ten years teasing me and you never once said a word."

Ten years?

Pike stared at the woman, trying to figure out how and where he knew her from. He drew a blank. "I've never--"

She smiled, pressing her finger to his lips. "Think before you speak, Pike. You most certainly did spend ten years teasing me. You put gum in my hair on more than one occasion. You made me think you were going to eat me if I got too close to you. You hid in my closet and scared the living hell out of me. I get that we parted on rather," she centered her gaze on him, "*odd* terms but I didn't think you'd up and totally forget me."

Something moved over her face as she pulled back a bit. It was pain. The same look she'd had when he'd refused her all those years ago.

Adira.

He gasped, unable to believe the sexually-charged female with a body to die for and the face of angel was who she claimed to be--Adam's baby sister. "Adira?"

The wide smile that broke over her face made his breath catch. It was her but it wasn't. Gone was the child, having been replaced by a vixen. A vixen who still had vulnerabilities.

"No. It can't be. You're like nineteen or something. You're not old enough to..." His gaze slid down her. "Be in that outfit! Go put more clothes on this instant! Lars is here! He'll see you in--"

"Thank you," Adam said, nodding emphatically. "And where in the hell did you even get that outfit? It looks like you painted it on."

Lars snickered. "Yeah, it does. Isn't latex grand?"

Adam made a move to go at him and Lars shook his head. "I was kidding. I would never touch her beyond a dance, Adam." He pointed down at Pike. "Can he say the same? For a minute, I thought the brute was going to yell 'mine' and claim her as his mate."

Pike arched a brow. The idea had merit. It had been the primary reason he'd rolled off her all those years ago. The urge to tie her to him had been overpowering. It still was. "Ah, shit. Adam, hit me with another dose of your magik again."

"What?" Adira asked, sounding shocked. "Are you insane?"

"Maybe." He licked his lower lip as thoughts of spreading Adira out before him and kissing every inch of her delicious body assailed him. "Trust me, baby, it's for the best. I don't think you want to walk out of here married in the eyes of my people so let him hit me with his power."

Adam ran his hands over his face, shaking his head and sending his shoulder-length, dark brown hair everywhere. "Tell me you're not entertaining the thought of claiming my baby sister."

"Hit me again and I'll give you a definite answer."

Adam lifted his arms and a buzz filled the air.

Adira screamed and threw herself over Pike, leaving her breasts pressed to his face. He groaned as his cock reacted violently, threatening to come. "Not helping here, Adira."

She smacked him lightly on the shoulder. "Would you shut-up? Adam will kill you. You should have seen what he did to the last guy who wanted to claim me as his own."

"Last guy?" he asked, not bothering to hide the jealousy in his voice. "No man should have been within a ten-foot radius of you, let alone entertaining the idea of claiming you!"

Lars laughed and Adira groaned as she gave Pike a light shove before moving off him. "Fend for yourself."

Pike rolled onto his side and watched as Adira rose to her feet with a grace he never remembered her possessing. As his gaze slid to Adam, he thought about a few of the things his friend could do. Entice, enthrall and seduce the opposite sex was a big one. Powers they'd cashed in on many occasions to gain valuable intel or entrance into normally locked facilities. Adam had once seduced an entire group of evil chicks, leading them away so the rest of the group could slip in, gather the information they needed and get out before anyone was any wiser. Of course, Adam didn't reappear for a weekend. He claimed he didn't want to blow his cover. It was more like he didn't want to stop being blown but no one called him on it.

"She has your powers?" he asked, groaning. "Great, if she can slap a magikal whammy on me anytime she wants, my cock will never go down."

Adira laughed.

Adam paled. "No. I mean, yes. She has powers similar to mine. Why are we even

discussing this?" Adam pointed at Adira. "Why are you here? Who even told you where here is?"

She shrugged and sat on the edge of the long table. "Lars gave me the address and said I had to be here. I figured you knew."

Adam glanced around the boardroom, his gaze centering on a levitating Lars. "No. I didn't know."

Lars smiled sheepishly. "I was only following orders."

"Who ordered you to have Adira come here?" Pike asked, his fierce need to protect Adira consuming him, just as it always had. When she was younger, he'd laugh and joke with her but in truth, he couldn't stop the nagging feeling in his gut that he was to watch over her--keep her out of harm's way. When Adam had decided to send her away to an all girls' school, it had crushed Pike. He understood raising Adira was difficult for Adam since their parents had died. It wasn't like Adam had a lot of free time between missions. When the opportunity to have her attend a boarding school presented itself, Adam had no choice but to take it. Pike had little choice but to accept his friend's decision, regardless of how empty he suddenly felt. She came home briefly, spending only a week with Pike. He, in turn, used that week to make the biggest mistake of his life. He left her thinking he didn't want her when all he really wanted was to take her as his for eternity.

"I believe we can be of some assistance," a soft, feminine voice said from the other side of the room. The floor to ceiling screen on the back wall of the boardroom lit. An image of six figures sitting at a semi-circular table filled it. Each wore a silver cloak, leaving all but their lips covered. It was a sight he'd seen often over the years. The Tribunal, as they were referred to, met in a secret location and magikally broadcasted their signal to League Headquarters. It was best all the way around since evil seemed drawn to large concentrations of good.

Adam drew in a sharp breath. "Oracle, why have Lars bring my sister in?"

They'd taken to referring to each Tribunal member by nicknames since they didn't seem likely to offer up actual names. The Tribunal themselves, had began referring to one another by these names as well, no doubt to protect their identities. Oracle was the female who sat on the far left. The one who often spoke for the group. Warrior, a rather gruff, and clearly, alpha male would lend his two cents every now and then. For the most part, the remaining four, Conjuror, Force, Illuminator and Nature were silent.

"The time has come for our side to bring in new blood. To strike back. To protect humans as we were created to do."

"No offense," Lars said. "But, umm, we aren't exactly overflowing in the hero department here. Five of our teams are deployed around the world as we speak, leaving the four of us... Three if you take into consideration Adira couldn't fight her way out of a mud puddle."

Damn straight! And there is no way in hell you people are putting her on our team!

For once, Lars had a point.

Oracle gave a knowing smile before tipping her head. She waved her hand in the air and it suddenly felt as if Pike had been hit by a two by four in the gut. He slammed

into the wall. So did Lars and Adam. Adira's brow furrowed as she stared around at them.

"Guys?"

"Adira," Oracle said, drawing Adira's attention. "We would like to thank you for bearing with us and not complaining when we used our powers to change your outfit as you entered the room. It was important they see you as you will often be--a sensual, alluring," all the Tribunal members looked in Pike's direction, "woman. I believe Pike would not have recognized you regardless because in his mind, your image was frozen in time--forever locked on the night you last saw one another."

Sure, why don't you tell her I loved her too much to tie her to me while you're at it?

Oracle laughed. "Perhaps I will, Pike."

He swallowed hard, forgetting that she possessed the gift of not only foresight but mind reading as well.

"My baby sister is not joining the League." Adam struggled against the Oracle's hold and Pike knew it was bad if his magikal friend couldn't escape. "End of discussion. Go home, Adira. You don't belong here."

Chapter Two

Adira wanted to argue with her brother but he'd only voiced her concerns. She didn't really belong here. She'd grown up with the knowledge that a supernatural group of beings walked the earth, protecting humans from evil. Humans had taken to calling them superheroes. Adira called one brother. Adam had been her entire world after their parents' death. He'd done his best raising her until she was ready to go to high school. Adam knew the bad guys were close to finding out he had a sister--a vulnerability. Sending her away was the only choice he had. She understood that now. Back then, it was hard.

She glanced toward the screen, still shocked to see the Tribunal for herself. She'd overheard Lars, Pike and Adam discussing them often when she was younger. Never did she expect to be able to look upon them herself.

"Adira," the female, Adam had referred to as Oracle, said. "Your doubt will be your downfall. If you are to survive among the evil you will face, you must draw from the knowledge that you too are a League member."

Lars and Adam began to argue. Pike growled, the sound so deep and so fierce she couldn't help but cringe.

Oracle let out a soft laugh. "Your objections have been noted. They change nothing. Adira is now one of you. She is to be welcomed with open arms. Your team was meant to be a six-member team. Consider her your fourth."

"She'll die!" Adam shouted. "She's not a fighter! Yes, she gained powers similar to mine but seduction won't protect her when she's under attack. It won't--"

Oracle lifted her hand and flicked her wrist. The boardroom faded and was quickly replaced by a darkened city lot. Adira took a step back, unsure what was going on. The Tribunal's images remained, looking like a movie playing in the night sky. "Adam, your sister has hidden many things from you over the years. Your enemy found her shortly after you sent her away to the university."

Adira gasped, never wanting the truth to surface.

Adam snorted. "No. She would have told me. She would...Adira would have...No."

"I think what he's trying to say," Lars cleared his throat, "is that Adira would be dead right now if that were true, Oracle."

The Tribunal member to her right lifted a hand. "They must see to believe," he said, his voice deep.

He clicked his fingers and Adira found herself standing in what had been her dorm room her freshman year of college. She knew it wasn't real, that she couldn't possibly be back in time but that didn't change the way she felt as she looked out the window to see the storm she would never forget, fast approaching. She backed up quickly, rushed toward the door and tried to get out. She pounded on it but nothing

happened. "No!"

"Adira, they must see. They must know," Oracle's soft voice said over the sound of thunder.

Adira looked around for the Tribunal but couldn't find them. She felt the tug of someone else's power on her and instantly felt herself being pulled toward the window. She fought against it to no avail. She found herself right back in the spot she had been almost ten years ago--standing at the window, staring out at the approaching storm. It had caught her attention because of the multitude of lights it held. Greens, purples, blues, pinks, reds and whites. It was hypnotically beautiful. There was also an edge of danger to it. Something Adira, at the time, couldn't put her finger on. Now she knew why. It was no ordinary storm. It was the arrival of what could only be referred to as nightmare creatures.

The glass shook slightly and as it had done so many years ago, it burst outward. A strong wind pulled at her, nearly sucking her free of the room. She slammed her body to the side, her breathing rapid and the knowledge of what was to come fresh in her mind.

The room shook as black mist filled it. Adira tried and failed to steady herself, falling and cracking her side against the desk. Her computer crashed to the floor and sparks spit forth from it.

"Ah," a deep, sinister sounding voice said from behind her. "We thought you a rumor. You have no idea how pleased we are to know you are more than real and left unguarded by your brother."

"Adam?" Adira asked, finding herself repeating the same thing she'd said all those years ago. She turned and looked up to find something that wasn't human standing before her. It had short, black hair and looked like a mix of a boar, panther and human male. Its skin was purplish but that wasn't what caught her attention and held it. No. What terrified her was the beast's jagged teeth and the string of spit that fell from his mouth.

He snarled. "I cannot wait to see the look upon your brother's face when news of your death reaches him. He and his," the beast unsheathed deadly looking claws from its fingertips, "friends killed almost all of my clan. Now, I shall take from them."

Adira sat up quickly and pushed herself into the corner of the room, shaking her head, as scared as she had been that night long ago. "No. I, no--"

"Beg for your life." He tipped his head. "I will make your death quicker then."

"Q'raqueem," a woman's voice said as a green blur whizzed past Adira. "Do not play with your food. Kill her and be done with it."

Q'raqueem, the beast, snarled as a tall redhead appeared in the center of Adira's dorm room. The woman wore a green jumpsuit that left her breasts looking as if they'd topple out. She stared at Adira and then blew her a kiss. "Oh, pay backs are so glorious. Your brother used me." Her gaze hardened. "He made me believe he cared--that he loved me, only to find out he used me for League purposes."

Q'raqueem began to breathe heavy. "You should have known he lied, Chula. He never denied his ties to the League."

Chula tossed her hand up and fire shot forth from it, causing Adira to yelp, even though she already knew what had happened long ago. Q'raqueem took a step back and

bowed his head.

Chula smiled and then stared from him to Adira. "Q'raqueem, how long has it been since you last joined with a human female?"

The beast man looked uncomfortable. "Almost fifty years. They break so easy."

She smiled and pointed to Adira. "Take her, Q'raqueem. She has no powers to speak of. Enjoy her as Adam enjoyed using me."

The idea of losing her virginity to Q'raqueem--even though Adira knew this was history and no longer relevant--sickened her. Her temper flared and with it, a burning began deep inside her. It started in her lower abdomen and worked its way up. Her hands itched as did her neck. The scent of jasmine filled the air and Adira gave into her rage.

Chula glanced around the room, looking puzzled. "How am I sensing Adam's power?"

Adira pushed to her feet and shook her head as she pointed at the beast. "He's not touching me."

Chula lifted her hand and at the same moment Chula shot fire forth, Adira brought her arms up in an attempt to lessen the blow. Much to her surprise, power radiated from her, knocking the fire and Chula into the brick wall. Chula screamed as her own power set her ablaze.

Q'raqueem growled and leapt at Adira. He struck her power and slammed back into a still burning Chula. Adira covered her nose and mouth as the stench threatened to do her in. She closed her eyes and swayed slightly. Strong arms wrapped around her--different from what had happened long ago. She screamed.

"Shhh." Pike's voice soothed her and she opened her eyes to see she was in the boardroom once more.

"How is it he broke our hold?" one of the Tribunal members asked.

She ignored them and turned in Pike's arms to see Adam pinned against the wall. Tears streaked his cheeks as he shook his head. "I didn't know, Adira. I...I would have come. I would have protected you. I didn't mean for..."

Pike kissed the top of her head. "Adam, she had to come into her powers at some point. None of us wanted it to happen like that but at least it happened. It's in the past. We can't take it back. We can only prevent it from repeating itself." He stiffened slightly. "Tribunal, Adira will not be part of the League. I will not watch her barely make it out of a fight alive! I will not--"

A gust of power shot past Adira, seizing hold of Pike and ripping him away from her. In the blink of an eye, Adira found herself surrounded by countless enemies, no longer in boardroom but rather on a darkened city lot.

She looked behind her to find her brother, Lars and Pike being pinned to a brick wall. Each one struggled, no doubt desperate to get to her. It was Pike who drew her attention. His chocolate-colored gaze locked on her and she watched it swirl with flecks of amber. "Run, baby!"

Baby? Had he really just called her baby?

"Adira," Oracle said. "We hold the enemy with our power, allowing you this moment to adjust. Once we release them, they will attack you with all they have. Your focus must be on them, not on the others."

"But they'll be hurt if they can't protect themselves." Adira couldn't seem to tear her gaze from Pike.

"We can assure their safety."

She drew in a deep breath and shook her head as she looked toward the Tribunal in the sky. "I can't fight these..."

"Can't or won't?" the male Tribunal member asked.

Won't.

She didn't voice her inner thoughts.

The man tipped his head slightly. "Perhaps we underestimated Adira, Oracle. It will be a shame to watch one with so much potential die."

"No!" Pike shouted, his voice deeper than normal indicating he was on the verge of shifting into a wolf.

"Adira!" Adam yelled. "If you can, in any way, protect yourself then do it!"

Then Pike will see me as a monster.

"Warrior," Oracle said to the man next to her. "I sense that she would rather die than reveal her gifts to them."

Warrior let out a deep laugh. "Oracle, you are too kind, avoiding naming names." He pointed towards Pike. "Protect all but that one, Tribunal brothers and sisters. If she chooses death, then he shall die, too."

"Pike?" Adira glared at the Tribunal. "You swore you would protect them all!"

"Fight and we will," Warrior said evenly.

Oracle put her hand up. "No, Warrior. Make her no promises. She is too important to lose. We shall not protect Pike. If you do not, Adira, he shall die." With a flick of her wrist, the enemy converged on Pike.

Adira fought back bile as she stared at the scene. Something with long claws struck out, tearing Pike's chest wide open. Her fear switched to rage and before Adira knew it, she was running with inhuman speed toward Pike. She pushed through the bad guys with ease and kicked out hard, knocking the one who had injured Pike away. "No!"

"Go, Adira," Pike said, his breathing labored. "This is suicide. I pick death over watching you die, too."

"Oh, would you shut up? I'm not about to let you die, you big brute." She slammed her hands together, high above her head, drawing on her power. She brought them down slowly. Several bad guys tried and failed to strike out at her, bouncing off her power instead.

Adira thrust her hands forward, sending a wave of yellow power out and into the crowd of evildoers. Many of them burst into flames before burning away into nothing. Ignoring Pike's shocked intake of breath, Adira sent another wave of power at the bad guys. More died.

Sensing her need to recharge, she drew her power back into herself and took a fighting stance in front of Pike. "You will not harm him."

The remaining bad guys glanced among themselves. Some looked scared, others confused and the rest looked pissed. A tall man with stick-straight black hair stepped forth. A sick smile slid over his face, revealing a set of jagged teeth. Adira didn't even want to take a guess at what sort of supernatural he was. She just knew he was dangerous.

“Your powers are almost tapped, female.” He motioned with his hand to the others. “You cannot fight us all with what remains.”

Adira grinned, her rage still driving her onward. “Who said I needed power to kick your sorry ass? I told you that you won’t hurt Pike again and I meant it.”

The man tossed his head back and laughed. “The female thinks she can protect her mate without the aid of her magik.”

“Mate?” Pike asked, mirroring her exact thoughts.

The man continued to laugh. “The wolf does not recognize the scent his body is letting off.” He stared at Pike. “It is one your kind releases when they are near their mate.” He shook his head. “We personally find the entire ordeal barbaric but we also believe you to all be nothing more than housebroken dogs.”

Adira backed up more, pressing her body to Pike’s. Heat flared between them and for a split second, she could do nothing more than savor the feeling of having him close. Coming to her senses, she glared at the man. “Never talk about him that way again. His people are proud, passionate and powerful. Something you will never be. They’re also beautiful. Just look at him! I compare every man I date to Pike. None can hold a candle to not only his looks but to what he has inside--his heart, his compassion and need to protect the innocent.”

The man rolled his eyes. “You are pathetic, female. And sick for being infatuated with a dog.”

Her power reached higher levels and she smiled, knowing she’d be able to launch another attack at any moment. “Infatuated? No. I’ve loved Pike for a very long time.”

Ohmygods, you just confessed to loving Pike. Take it back! Rush to your death and save yourself the humiliation of facing him.

Pike pressed his mouth to her ear. “If you even think of taking that back, I’ll punish you myself when I’m free.”

“W-what?” She gulped, her nipples hardening as his warm breath slid over her cheek. “I... I... love you like a friend. I didn’t mean--”

“Adira!” Lars yelled.

She turned to find a blur moving at her. Something struck her across the face, knocking her off her feet and into the air. Pain radiated through her head and neck. She could barely make out the sound of Pike yelling for her over the ringing in her ears. Adira hit the ground with a thud and winced as her entire body began to throb.

“Get up, female. Fight for your lover’s life. Unless, you have no qualms with his life coming to an end.”

Blood pooled in her mouth as her temper flared. Putting her hands behind her head, Adira pushed up and off the ground, springing to her feet. She crouched and surveyed the situation. Two shifters stood before Pike, each had their claws erect and at killing points on Pike.

The tall man who oozed evil was closer to her. He stood in a wide stance as if daring her to make a move. “Know that they *will* gut him, female.”

Adira’s power surged through her, causing her skin to prickle and her hair to lift on its own. She lashed out with it quickly, fearing that if she didn’t, they’d kill Pike. Her power made the shifters nearest Pike burst into flames. It also did the unexpected--it freed

Pike from the Tribunal's restraints. He fell to one knee and was still for a moment.

As he pressed a hand to the ground, Adira noticed it sprout fur. Pike growled and it was unlike anything she'd ever heard come from him before. When he lifted his head, his eyes were swirling with amber and the cords in his neck were popping. He looked every bit as deadly as she knew he could be and more.

His ear-length, charcoal hair fell forward a bit to partially cover an amber eye. He cocked his head to the side and Adira drew in a deep breath. Pike charged the tall, evil man, knocking him high into the air. Pike spun in a circle, extended his clawed hand and timed his execution perfectly.

Adira blinked, doing her best to register the sight before her. The man fell to the ground in two pieces. Pike spun--his eyes still wild as he stared at the few remaining bad guys. They backed away and tried to run in opposite directions. They weren't as stupid as Adira thought they were. No. They were well aware that Pike was going to kill them.

The next thing Adira knew, Lars and Adam were there, chasing down the bad guys. Adam looked in her direction as he ran. "Calm him down, Adira!"

Her gaze snapped to Pike. She knew he wasn't in control right now. The beast he carried within was leading his actions. He charged another man, killing him instantly as well. He growled, sounding anything but human.

It's Pike in there. Don't be afraid. Pike would never hurt you.

Thinking her inner thoughts foolish, Adira considered leaving Pike to work his aggression out on his own. When she noticed more fur sprouting on his body, she knew he wouldn't stop. No. He'd fully shift and leave Adam and Lars no choice but to hunt him for fear he'd turn on a human.

Letting her power rise, Adira used the gifts she'd been born with. She released the magik that allowed her to entice the opposite sex. Pike and the bad guys he was near turned their attention to her almost instantly.

"Pike," she said softly. "Pike, honey, are you in there?"

She swallowed the blood pooling in her mouth and nearly gagged on it as she watched Pike for signs he was conquering his beast. None came. He, however, did. Before she knew it, Pike was before her, lifting a clawed hand and bringing it toward her head quickly.

She stilled, waiting for him to do what he'd done to the others--kill her.

One sharp claw touched the cheek she'd been hit on and Adira whimpered. There was no way she could turn her power on Pike. She couldn't hurt him. She closed her eyes, ready to accept the outcome.

The moment warm, full lips pressed against hers, her eyes snapped open. She stared into Pike's eyes and found the swirling amber fading fast. Unable to help herself, Adira ran her tongue over his bottom lip. She'd dreamed of being able to kiss him again, taste him, feel him deep within her.

When he didn't resist, she continued her sensual exploration of his lips, biting softly on his lower one. A growl emanated from the back of Pike's throat as he ravished her mouth. He yanked her to his steely chest and plunged his tongue into her mouth. Lost in the moment, Adira ran her hands into the back of his hair and found his tongue with hers, dancing around it, caressing it and showing him how much he meant to her.

Pike ground his hips against hers, pressing his clothed erection against her mound. Her breath hitched as her pussy dampened. She ran her hands down the length of his arms, noting the fur was gone and only the man remained. He broke their kiss without warning, leaving Adira touching her swollen lips with trembling fingers.

Oh gods, he's rejecting me again.

Pike spun around and put his body before hers. "Just because I'm calmer doesn't mean I can't kill you as easy as I did your buddies."

The other bad guys? She'd forgotten all about them the moment Pike touched her.

Pike cracked his neck and rolled his shoulders. "Which one of you wants to die first? Hurry up. I don't have all night. I fully plan on claiming the little lady behind me."

Adira's eyes widened. *Claiming her?*

"My dick is so hard it hurts so come on, step up and die, assholes," Pike said, putting his clawed hands out. "Assembly-line style works best for me but I'm open to anything so long as it leaves you all dead."

The bad guys accepted Pike's challenge. Adira went to assist only to find she wasn't needed. Lars swept out of the sky, killing one while her brother appeared out of thin air before another bad guy. Adam thrust power at the guy and he burst into flames. Pike beheaded the last of them and stared down at the ground, refusing to turn and face her.

"Pike?" she asked unable to bear the idea he'd reject her once again.

He ignored her, focusing on her brother instead. "Adam."

Her brother cast a questioning look in her direction as he answered Pike. "Yeah?"

"I think you should hit me with a heavy dose of your power. If you don't," he sighed, "I'm going to claim Adira. I'm not strong enough to fight it again."

Lars whistled and put his hands in his pocket, looking as if he were trying to pull off an innocent stance. It was then Adira realized Lars had most likely known all along how she felt about Pike. He'd caught her on more than one occasion staring dreamily at Pike from a distance when she was growing up.

She waited with bated breath for her brother to flip his lid. Adam didn't. He licked his lower lip and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Were they right, Pike? Does the wolf in you recognize Adira as its mate?"

Pike nodded. "The wolf and the man."

Lars put his hand up even though they weren't facing him. He reminded her of a child in school, wanting his teacher's attention. "Uh, guys. The, umm, Tribunal recognized it as well. It's why I was sent to retrieve Adira to begin with. They learned she was being subjected to various attempts on her life by the enemy and when I asked why they didn't send you or Pike, they sort of told me."

"What did they *sort of* say?" Adam asked, still looking stressed.

"They told me that you would never forgive yourself for sending her into the fires and--" Lars scratched the back of his arm, looking uncomfortable. "They said Pike couldn't be trusted to bring her back to headquarters once he realized, for sure, she was his mate. They sort of thought he'd basically claim her, club her over the head and carry her off into the sunset--far from here."

"They were right." Pike glanced over his shoulder at her. "The second I figured it

out, I would have taken you far away from the fighting.”

“It is her destiny to fight alongside you,” Oracle said, drawing their attention to the Tribunal. “She must be taught all the techniques and skills you each possess in order to assure she will be able to protect not only herself but the next generation of League members as well.”

“Next generation?” Adam shook his head. “Adira switched majors midway through. She graduated with a business degree not education.”

Oracle laughed as did the other Tribunal members. “Adam, your mate must be trained as well as Lars’. The same goes for the other teams deployed around the world. Each of their mates must be taught to defend themselves and to fight alongside you.”

Lars and Adam exchanged confused looks. Adira thought about what Oracle had said and then took a giant step backwards. “By next generation you mean our children.”

Oracle nodded. “Yes, Adira. You must be taught to hone your skills so that in the event Pike and the others cannot be there, and an attack comes, you can protect your children.”

“At least until their father returns,” Warrior said snidely.

Oracle elbowed him and he grunted. “Chauvinist.”

“What? You cannot think her skills will ever rival Pike’s.”

“Pike is an amazing asset to us all. So shall his children be one day. Do not discredit Adira because she is a female. She too will be an asset to us. Their children will possess her gifts as well. A perfect blending of their parents.”

Adam made a “T” with his hands. “Hold on. You want me to be okay with Pike screwing my baby sister?”

Warrior laughed and for a moment, Adira wondered what he looked like beneath his robes. In that brief moment, he’d seemed to let his guard down and be himself. “Yes, Adam. That is exactly what we expect.”

Lars snickered and Adam shot power out at him, knocking him onto his ass. Adam faced her. “Adira, you don’t have to accept his claim. You can refuse based solely off the fact you’re not a shifter. Pike will have to live with your decision. It’s the way of his people.”

“Your brother speaks the truth, Adira,” Oracle said. There was a note of something close to sorrow in her voice. “It is within your rights to refuse his claim.”

Refuse Pike? The idea made her chest tight and tears well in her eyes. “What about Pike? Does he have to accept--”

“That you are his mate?” Warrior asked, finishing her sentence for her. He chuckled. “Adira, take my word for it. Pike has always felt the need to protect you. That night so long ago. The one you both kept hidden from Adam and Lars. He wanted to claim you then, make you his wife in the eyes of his people but he fought it for reasons only he can explain to you.”

Warrior turned his head and focused on Oracle before looking back towards them. “The moment you re-entered his life, now a woman, the urge to lay claim to you, make you his and his alone was all consuming. It is something a fellow shifter can pick up on. It’s also something we all long to feel for ourselves. If we are ever lucky enough to find ourselves in that situation, we would have to be an idiot to try to deny it.”

The raw emotion in Warrior's voice moved Adira. He'd lost out on love somewhere along the way.

Pike's jaw set and he refused to meet Adira's gaze. She'd lived with the knowledge he didn't want her like she wanted him for eight years. She didn't need to hear him say it out loud.

Adira nodded and then tipped her head down. "I think I understand. I should go now. I assume I'll be summoned as needed to League Headquarters."

Adam smiled, exhaling loud enough for her to hear. "I'll take you home."

Pike's shoulders slumped. "She doesn't want me?" he asked, barely above a whisper. The pain in his voice left Adira rushing towards him. She put her hand on his back and pressed her forehead to him.

"You didn't ask for this. I won't trap you."

"Trap me?" He turned and drew her into his arms. His masculine scent moved over her, making her body heat with desire. "Baby, trapped is the last thing I think of when I picture us together. I damn near killed Adam when he sent you away and refused to tell me where." He choked back what sounded like a sob. "I needed to tell you that I didn't refuse you--I refused to shackle you to me at that tender age, Adira. Hell, in my head, I thought I couldn't be a one-woman kind of man, yet for over eight years only one woman has held my heart. The minute you walked into that boardroom, I had to fight to keep from tackling you to the ground and ramming my--"

Adam cleared his throat. "Still standing here and not really wanting to hear this conversation."

Pike slid his hands into her hair and kissed the top of her head. "I won't let you take it back, Adira."

"Take what back?" She caressed the spot on his chest that had been injured, marveling at his ability to heal so quickly.

"What you said before." He took hold of her hair and tugged until she tipped her head back. As their gazes met, Pike caressed the back of her neck. "You told the asshole who is currently in two pieces that you love me."

"Aww, I'm positive I don't want to hear this." Adam made a half-choked noise before grumbling on further. None of what he said was audible. More or less, disgruntled caveman noises.

Lars chuckled. "Funny. I was thinking how I've been waiting for what seems like forever for Adira to own up to the way she feels about Pike. Pike's just too hardheaded to realize something until a horde of demons points it out to him or he'd have told her what he was dying to say a long time ago."

Pike growled and Lars shut up. Adira reached up and cupped Pike's scruffy cheek. "I've made a big enough fool of myself in front of you, Pike."

Turning his head, he planted a chaste kiss on the pad of her thumb. "Baby, I have been in love with you for a long time." He narrowed his eyes. "We'll just safely say I'd wanted to give you me for your eighteenth birthday for some time. What do you say? Can I cash in or is it too late?"

Another slew of curses and inaudible ramblings came from Adam's direction.

Adira laughed.

Power wrapped around her and Pike held her close as energy surrounded them. “Hang tight, baby. It’s the Tribunal’s combined magik. They’re taking us back.”

Chapter Three

Pike held Adira close to him, afraid if he dared to blink she'd disappear. When he looked out, he expected to see League Headquarters. He didn't. Instead, he found that they were in the exact place they'd been on the night of her eighteenth birthday. The night sky boasted stars in abundance and the smell of the woods nearby always reminded him of home. Adam's property butted up against Pike's and each remained relatively untouched over the years.

"Pike, I thought you said they were going to take us back?" Adira asked, trying to back away from him.

He kept a tight hold on her. "Baby, they did. Back to the point I screwed up. At least the spot anyway. I think they want me to set it right."

"Do *you* want to set it right?" she asked.

He'd wasted enough time with his head up his ass. He'd waste no more. Taking hold of the back of Adira's neck he forced her to face him. He pressed his lips to hers and closed his eyes.

This is heaven.

His cock dug painfully at his jeans, wanting to be free, to be in Adira. Pike took their kiss to another level, eating at her mouth. Adira melted in his hands and the smell of her arousal washed over him. He had little doubt that her pussy would taste as good as it smelled.

Unable to wait any longer, Pike lifted his index finger and let a claw emerge. He put it between her breasts and carefully slit down the center of the latex outfit she wore. He bent as he cut, putting his face near the swells of her creamy breasts.

Adira took hold of the latex and ripped it open, freeing her breasts to him. His cock twitched and for a split second, Pike feared he'd come before he started. He groaned, using his un-clawed hand to cup her left breast. She tipped her head back as he slid his tongue out and over the pink, pebble-like peak before him.

Berries and cream.

He rolled her nipple in his mouth, sucking gently as he continued to cut his way down her outfit. When he reached the juncture of her thighs, Pike retracted his claw and skated his finger over her wet, smooth slit.

"You're shaved," he said, nipping playfully at her erect nipple.

Adira rotated her hips, causing his finger to slip into her wet core. They both gasped as she began to ride his finger. "So tight," he whispered, moving his mouth to her other nipple.

She traced her way down the side of her body, making Pike's need to take her intensify. As Adira put her hand over his and eased her finger into her channel, Pike realized he'd lost control of the situation somewhere along the way. This buxom brunette before him owned his every move--his very soul. She always had.

And she always will.

Her drenched folds drew his finger in deeper. Adira withdrew her finger and lifted it to his face. "Taste," she whispered and it was all he could do to keep from coming.

Sliding his lips over her finger, he moaned as the sweet taste of her cum moved down his throat. The beast within tried to surface but Pike held it in check as he licked every bit of cum from Adira's finger. Growling, he took hold of her waist, lifting her quickly before setting her gently on the ground before him.

He spread her legs wide and smiled as the last bit of her latex suit ripped open. The sight of her shaved mound, spread out before him was too much. Pike gave into his basic urges, dropping down and licking her folds. Adira bucked beneath him and he took hold of the backs of her thighs, keeping her in place as he began his sensual assault. He tweaked her swollen clit and chuckled into her pussy as she gasped.

"Pike, no more. Please. I can't take anymore."

Ignoring her, he continued to vary licks and sucks as he slid his finger into her hot core. He instantly began finger fucking her as he lapped up her cream. Her scent was the sweetest thing he'd ever known.

Mine.

No part of Pike rushed to refuse his internal claim. He was ready to acknowledge who she was to him and to make sure she never got away again. Her juice coated his chin as her legs came together quickly, pinning his head in place. Pike didn't mind. He licked more, his eyes rolling back in his head as Adira cried out and came with a start. Her orgasm left spasms moving through her pussy. It tugged at his finger.

His cock, now past the point of painfully hard, needed release. So did he.

Pike drew his finger from Adira's body and went to work undoing his jeans. The moment he got them down far enough for his cock to spring free, he slid up and over her, aligning the head of his cock with her entrance. He stared down at Adira, holding his cock. "If you don't want me, you need to tell me now. Once I enter you, there will be no going back. I'll claim you fully. Do you understand?"

Adira bit her lower lip and arched beneath him, causing her pussy to rub against his cock head. "Claim me."

Claim me.

There were no sweeter words he could have heard at the moment. Surging forward, Pike went to the hilt in her heated haven. She fit him like a glove, as if she were made for him.

She was.

Adira wrapped her partially latex-covered legs around his waist, taking him deeper into her body. Tiny animalistic noises came from her as he thrust in and out. Her cunt pulled at him, trying to keep him in place and making it almost impossible for Pike to avoid hitting his zenith.

"I'm coming," Adira said, panting and clawing at his arms.

"Too tight, baby." His entire body went rigid and he knew he was close to an orgasm. Giving into his preternatural side, Pike let his eyes swirl and his incisors lengthen. He waited, worried he'd scare Adira.

She tipped her head back and countered his thrusts. "Gods, yes, Pike! Take me!"

Claim me!"

With that, he sunk his teeth deep into her flesh. Her coppery sweet blood filled his mouth, sating the beast he carried while his balls drew up. He came in jetting waves, soaking her womb with his seed.

"Mine." He growled as he released his teeth from her flesh, keeping his cock rooted in place. Planting a tiny kiss on the bite mark, Pike couldn't help but let out a soft, nervous laugh.

"Mmm, Pike?" Adira kissed his cheek. "What's funny?"

"Nothing, baby. I woke up this morning and never expected to be a married man by midnight." His cock began to harden once more and he eased it in and out of her slowly.

Adira stared up from blue eyes at him as her brow creased. "I'm sorry. I never expected this to--"

"Adira." He narrowed his gaze on her. "Shut up and let me show you how much I love you. Never apologize for being my mate. Hell, it's me who owes you one. I'd hate being stuck with me for eternity."

Tears filled her eyes and Pike went to pull out, afraid he'd hurt her. "Adira, I didn't--"

She held tight to him and used her magik to keep him in place. "I'm not crying because I'm upset, Pike. I'm crying because I'm happy. You said you love me."

I did.

He thought back and realized he had. A slow, cocky smile spread over his face. "See, I'm romantic."

Adira reached down between them and laced her fingers as far around his cock as they would go. She stroked him, as he continued to move in and out of her at a leisurely pace. "Mmmhmm, you and romance often are linked as one."

Pike glanced around, noting the grass in Adira's hair and varying states of undress they were in. He grimaced. "Baby, let's stop. I'll take you home and do this the right way."

Ignoring him, Adira rubbed her clit and locked gazes with him. "Uh-huh, but not... until... you... finish... fucking me."

Pike began drilling into his mate, never wanting to leave the sanctuary of her body. Adira's breathing grew irregular and he knew she was close to culmination. Wanting to share the moment with her, he increased his pace. As she cried out, he released his cum in her, filling her completely. "Ahh."

She let out a soft laugh as she kissed the edges of his lips. "I take it you liked that?"

"No. I loved it." He kissed her lips. "I love making love to you, Adira." Pike kissed the tip of her nose. "Most of all, I love you."

Epilogue

One month later...

Pike watched as his wife took down two villains with one blow. He'd already killed at least a dozen and was charged up. Seeing Adira wield her magik, wearing a tight little number that hugged her curves, left his breathing rapid and his cock hard.

Her blue gaze landed on him and a smile graced her lips. "I think I'm finally getting the hang of this."

"Adira," he said, his voice tight as the need to be in her grew to astronomical proportions.

She disappeared and reappeared right before him. "Are you hurt?"

He nodded, pulling her close to him and rubbing his erection against her low abdomen. "My cock is throbbing, baby. I can't watch you kick ass and not want to be in you."

A soft laugh came from her. "A month ago you couldn't watch me be near a bad guy. Now, you're horny when I am?"

"Yes, but I'm horny all the time when it comes to you so I don't think we can count that as a strike against me." He wagged his brows as he moved in and kissed her passionately.

She clung tight to him and Pike knew they'd made the right choice. Adira was his now and forever and he'd never let her go.

Adira broke their kiss but stayed close to him. "Mmm, let's go home. The last time we had sex after beating up bad guys in that alley, Adam found us. I think we may have scarred him for life."

Pike chuckled as he lifted his wife in his arms. "Use your magik and take us home before I stop caring who sees me make love to you."

THE END