



417 To Crimson

Eve 1

For a moment, no one dared to move. My arm around Elliot tightened, and he snuggled closer, detecting the tension the air was now wrought with. This was an entirely new kind of tension; before, it had been like a candle melting to the end of its wick while we searched for clues with whatever light we had left. Now, it was the chilling tick of a bomb above us.

"Retrieve it," Montegue ordered one of the Gammas, who were still stunned into silence like the rest of us. "Now."

They obeyed. One stepped forward, shifting swiftly. His wolf leapt up and swatted the envelope down with a large paw.

I caught it midair, waiting for Montegue to step in beside me as I tore open the crimson parchment, my hands surprisingly steady.

The envelope was still heavy as I retrieved the first item my fingers touched: a letter.

I calmed my raging heart, steeling myself against the nausea from the dread.



Flipping open the folded sheet, I spread it out for us to read.

At first the words were jumbled, blurred, almost unwilling to reveal themselves—then they sharpened.

"My Lovely Crimson," it began. My dread fizzled into disdain; I knew exactly who had written it. 1

My jaw clenched as my eyes flicked left to right, reading James's venom.

"I know it must come as a surprise, especially after our little spat—five or, I don't know, six years ago? We never really got to talk about it. I know it's late, but is it ever really too late to get some much-deserved closure?"

My grip on the paper hardened, vitriol flooding my veins.

"I know my decision still weighs heavily on that beautiful mind of yours. Yet it still hurts that you decided our enemy would be the one to replace me in your heart. Your father was none too pleased by that. Crimson, you were always mine. Even when you lay beside him, you were mine."

I wanted to gag.

Even through the flourishes and curves of his



writing, I could hear the smugness—the hidden cruelty laced between every word.

"It was for the good of not just Silverpine Pack but the werewolf race as a whole—or at least the worthy ones. Every action, though cruel, has been carefully thought out and has gone smoothly according to plan. Though I cannot divulge all the riveting details—you being a traitor now and all."

I bit back the urge to call him every slur that seared through my mind. That was the last thing my son needed to hear.

"But it would seem that you have truly become an obstacle in our course."

I could almost imagine him pressing harder with his pen here, the ink darker, the letters gouged deeper.

"Even more than your so-called 'pack' already was. I won't lie—I never thought you capable. Hollowed, useless... who would have believed you'd become such a thorn in our side? You managed to make that hybrid scum fall for you. You stood before his people holding his hand. You fought us back even when I told you his real plans. You let our little spy, Felicia Montegue, be



uncovered—by manipulating her child, no less.

You should have come back begging for a place with us, especially since, during our last visit, we emphasized you could always return home. Yet you remain stubborn. And the next thing—you're confessing your identity before his people.

You foiled our plans. You interfered with our hold on Ellen and even helped her escape, keeping her from us. All this before the war itself. I have to applaud you."

The words sickened me, bile burning the back of my throat.

"But now, we have no time for games. I have some gifts for you."

I stopped reading and reached into the envelope.

My hand found smooth sheets. Pictures.

The first glimpse was enough to make me shield Elliot's eyes.

Cold dread prickled my skin, goosebumps rising as I stared at Kael, bound upright to some kind of contraption. His clothes were torn, deep gashes scored his flesh, bruises bloomed across what skin remained visible.

His fingers—



Broken. Crushed.

I almost reeled back but forced myself to stay steady, adjusting Elliot on my hip as I handed the picture to Montegue.

The second photo showed Hades and Cain, but in uniforms I had never seen before. They weren't personal garb—no weapons, no familiar marks of home. Their eyes were shadowed, their postures subdued.

I swallowed hard, passing that one to Montegue as well. His face paled further, and the weight of it dropped into my chest.

I forced myself back to the words.

"You have twelve hours to release Ellen to us, and yourself as well. If you do not, all the hybrids you cling to will be promptly neutralized—their heads sent back so that little hybrid pipsqueak can see the result of your selfishness and stupidity. And don't think to stall. I'll be watching the clock, and so will they. Every hour you delay, one finger, one bone, one howl from your precious hybrids will be crushed." 2

See you soon, Crimson. Can't wait to have you back.

Your first love,



James." 1

The paper trembled in my grip, though I forced my fingers to hold steady. The last lines of his signature still burned into my eyes, the cruelty of his "first love" cutting deeper than any blade.

Around me, the silence stretched until it felt like the whole house had stopped breathing. Even the guards, usually stiff and unreadable, stood frozen—shock etched into their faces.

Montegue's jaw worked slowly, his pallor stark against the dim light. His fingers tightened over his cane, the knuckles whitening as though the wood itself bore the weight of his fury. When his gaze lifted, it wasn't only fear I saw, but something else—resolve sharpened like steel tempered in fire.

Elliot stirred against me, sensing what my words had not yet confirmed. His small voice was fragile but steady. "Mummy, I can't read the big words yet, is it from daddy. Is he coming back home?"

Something in me cracked, split open into a cavernous opening that bleed out the hope from me, agony rushing in.

He was intelligent enough to plant a bomb on his



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person, steal his own medical history document to expose Felicia, strong enough to shift into a wolf but still too little to catch most words. He was just a baby. How could tell him that we had been threatened and that I had to go if daddy would ever come back and that was only if Silverpine had morals, which they didn't.

It was too heavy of a truth, even for him, so I swallowed the truth like poison and I lied. "Yes, it is from daddy. He is coming back home."

He beamed. "Can you read it to me?" 2

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