

The Lightning Wolf Chronicles Novel Souls Souls Bound By Promise — Timothy Nelson 31

Chapter 31: Should Be Some Kind of Test

Evelyn's POV

When I pushed through the pack house door after my morning run, everyone was already finishing breakfast in the dining room.

“Evie, where'd you go?” Nadia spotted me first, worry written all over her face.

“Just a run.” I wiped sweat off my forehead. ‘Figured I should train more with the selection coming up.”

“Go shower and change, Luna Isabella said. “We're heading to the training field soon to prep for what's coming.”

I nodded and jogged upstairs. When I came back down in my gear, everyone was clustered by the door. Prince Alistair had changed into

training clothes too, which caught me off guard.

“You're training with us?” I couldn't help asking.

Alistair smiled. “Why not? Been a while since I had a decent workout. His eyes found mine. “Plus I'm curious to see what Polaris's young

wolves can do.”

Something about the way he looked at me made my skin crawl. I stepped back automatically and bumped into someone – Magnus.

“Easy there,” he said quietly, steadying me with one hand.

The training field was packed. Besides our usual group, half the pack had shown up to watch. With only days left before the real selection,

the pressure was getting to everyone.

“Warm-up first, Elliot called out, starting an easy jog around the perimeter.

During the run, I noticed Alistair staying close behind me. His footwork was smooth, effortless – this level of training was probably child's

play for him. Every time I glanced back, he'd flash me that polite smile.

Being watched like that bugged the hell out of me. I picked up the pace, trying to put distance between us. That's when I realized the

triplets had somehow formed a protective wall around me.

'What are you guys doing?' I frowned.

"Nothing," Lucian said casually. "Just getting crowded out here. Don't want you getting bumped around."

I rolled my eyes. The field was huge where was the crowding? But I let it slide and focused on my warm-up.

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Halfway through training, I spotted someone walking toward us. Middle-aged guy with a confident stride and this aura that screamed

danger. Years of combat had left their mark – you could see it in how he moved.

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Everyone else noticed too. Training gradually slowed as people tried to figure out who this was.

"Sentinel Conrad," Alistair called out as the man approached. "You made good time."

Sentinel? My heart jumped into my throat. An actual Sentinel!

The guy – Conrad stopped in front of us. Maybe thirty years old, stern face, but it was his eyes that got me. Sharp as a hawk's, like they

could see straight through any bullshit. Simple black uniform, nothing fancy, but he radiated power.

"Yes, Your Highness. Conrad nodded slightly. His voice carried that deep authority that made you want to stand straighter. "Got here

early. The other Sentinels are checking the pack borders, setting up for the selection."

So that was it. I tried to keep my excitement locked down. All my life I'd heard stories about Sentinels, but this was my first time seeing

one up close. These were the elite – the ones who kept the werewolf world safe from whatever lurked out there.

“Since you're here,” Alpha Adam stepped forward, “why not watch these kids train? Everyone here's planning to try for the selection.

They're our best.”

Conrad's gaze swept over all of us, pausing on me for a second. That scrutiny made me automatically straighten my spine.

“Fine.” He nodded. “Keep going. Pretend I'm not here.”

Right. Like anyone could ignore a Sentinel watching. The rest of training cranked up to eleven – everyone desperate to show their best

stuff.

Me included. My sparring with Sophia turned fierce, every move executed with everything I had. Sweat dripped down my face, muscles

shaking from the intensity, but my focus was laser-sharp.

This was what I'd always wanted. Becoming a Sentinel, protecting people, seeing what was beyond our pack borders. Now that the dream

was this close, how could I give anything less than everything?

When training ended, we were all gasping for air. Sentinel Conrad stood in the same spot, expression unreadable.

“Rest for ten minutes,” he said suddenly. “Then line up.”

Everyone exchanged looks. Nobody knew what was coming next. I wiped my sweat and stepped aside, Nadia handing me water.

“What do you think he's planning?” she whispered.

“No clue.” Though my heart was racing with anticipation.

Magnus walked over, studying Conrad thoughtfully. “Has to be some kind of test. Sentinels don't just call formations for fun.”

“A test?” Lucian frowned. “Now? Isn't the selection still days away?”

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“Maybe he wants to size us up early,” Orion said.

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Whatever it was, I was ready. I drained the water bottle and stretched out my stiff muscles. No matter what Sentinel Conrad had planned,

I'd give it everything.

Ten minutes flew by. Conrad looked at our reassembled group, the corner of his mouth twitching in what might have been a smile.

“Good, everyone's accounted for.” His voice carried across the field. “I'm Sentinel Conrad, running this selection. Since I'm here early,

figured I'd run a little test. Get a feel for what you can do.”

My pulse spiked. A test – I knew it! I clenched my fists so tight my nails bit into my palms. This was it. A chance to prove myself to a real

Sentinel.

Everyone held their breath, waiting for Conrad's next words. The air was thick with tension as we all wondered what this Sentinel would

throw at us.

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Chapter 32: I Want to See Your Real Abilities

Evelyn's POV

Sentinel Conrad looked us over like he was sizing up cattle at auction. "Simple test combat. Pair up and show me what you've got."

My pulse jumped. Fighting in front of an actual Sentinel? This could be everything.

"Rules are simple," Conrad continued. "Don't hold back, but don't put anyone in the hospital either. I want your real skills, not some fancy show."

People started eyeing each other, figuring out partners. I was about to grab Nadia when Conrad's voice cut through the chatter.

"I'll pick the matchups."

His eyes swept the group and landed on me. "Evelyn, you're with Elliot."

Elliot? I blinked in surprise. My brother never went easy on me, which was actually perfect. I needed someone who'd push me hard.

"Magnus versus Lucian, Orion versus Milo..." Conrad rattled off the rest quickly.

Once everyone found their spots, he stepped back. "Go."

Elliot was already in his fighting stance. Being groomed as the next Beta meant his skills were no joke. But I wasn't planning to roll over either.

We started testing each other out. Elliot's attacks came heavy and controlled, each punch packing serious power. I stayed light on my feet, weaving around him, looking for openings.

"Don't hold back on me, Evie," he said quietly, throwing a hard right.

I ducked under it and swept at his legs. He jumped, adjusting mid-air to drive a knee toward my shoulder. I rolled backward, barely dodging.

The pace picked up fast. We both stopped playing around, fists and feet connecting with loud smacks. Sweat stung my eyes, but my focus

was razor-sharp.

Elliot's straight punch broke through my guard, nailing my shoulder hard. The impact sent me stumbling back, but it also lit a fire under

No way I could match his strength, so I'd use technique instead. I started mixing up my rhythm- quick bursts followed by sudden retreats. The irregular pattern threw him off.

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Then I saw my shot. When Elliot threw another heavy punch, instead of dodging, I stepped inside his reach. I rammed my shoulder into

his chest while grabbing his arm, using an over-the-shoulder throw to bring him down.

Elliot hit the ground with a surprised grunt, then looked up with a grin. "Nice one."

"Time," Conrad called out.

I helped Elliot to his feet, both of us breathing hard. Around us, the other fights were wrapping up too.

Conrad walked in front of us, his face giving nothing away. "Not terrible. Better than I expected, anyway."

Was that actually a compliment? We all exchanged uncertain looks.

"But," his tone shifted, "fighting isn't just muscle and moves. Evelyn, why'd you go for that throw?"

Being singled out made my stomach flip, but I answered straight. "Elliot's stronger than me. In a slugfest, I'm screwed. Getting close limits his power, and he wasn't ready for it."

Conrad nodded slightly. "Good read. Know your strengths, know your weaknesses, adapt on the fly - that matters." He turned to the others. *Remember that. Sentinels face all kinds of nasty shit. Pure muscle won't cut it."

He went through each pair's fight, pointing out what worked and what didn't. Every comment was dead-on.

That's it for today," Conrad finally said. "Selection's coming up. Hope you can do better than this."

We started packing up when a voice made everyone's skin crawl.

"Wait!"

Acacia strutted onto the field in designer training gear and full makeup. She looked like she was hitting a photo shoot, not a workout.

"I wanna try out for the selection too," she announced, chin up, staring right at the triplets. "And I want you guys to help me train."

The confidence radiating off her was unreal. "You'll help me, right?"

Orion actually snorted. "Who said we'd help you?"

"Yeah," Lucian wasn't even trying to be polite. "You wanna participate? Train yourself."

Magnus was more direct. "We don't have time for your bullshit."

Acacia's face crumpled like she couldn't believe the rejection. She bit her lip, shot me a venomous look, then tears started flowing. "How can you be so mean?"

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Chapter 32: I Want to See Your Real Abilities

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Conrad had been watching this whole circus with cold eyes. Now he spoke up. "Kid, if you really want in, show up day after tomorrow. But I'm warning you this isn't summer camp. You get hurt, that's on you."

His flat tone carried enough menace to make anyone think twice. Acacia wiped at her crocodile tears, gave me one last death glare, then tan off.

'Jesus, what a drama queen," Milo muttered.

Prince Alistair watched Acacia's retreat with interest, then turned to me. "You sure are popular, Evelyn."

I had no clue how to respond to that and just managed an awkward smile.

"Alright, everyone get lost," Conrad waved us off. "Rest up. You'll need to be sharp day after tomorrow."

People started drifting away. I hung back, my mind still churning over the fight and Conrad's feedback. Every detail mattered this stuff could make the difference in the real selection.

"Evie."

I turned to find the triplets waiting for me.

"Come on, let's head back together," Magnus said.

I nodded and jogged to catch up. Acacia's little scene already felt like ancient history.

But now I had bigger things to focus on. Everything had to go into preparation.

Conrad's POV

Watching those kids walk away, I pulled out my notebook and started scribbling observations.

"Evelyn, 16, Beta's daughter. Adaptable fighting style, good tactical awareness. Physical skills above average, but her ability to read

opponents is excellent. Stays cool under pressure. Worth watching."

"Elliot, 17, future Beta. Strong abilities, solid experience, but leans too heavy on raw power. Natural leader."

"Those three Alphas..." I paused, thinking about how they'd watched Evelyn during her fight. Interesting. Very interesting. The dynamics

between them seemed way more complicated than they looked.

I closed the notebook and glanced toward the distance. This selection probably wouldn't be as straightforward as usual.

I hoped she could handle what was coming. The Sentinels needed fresh blood, needed kids with real potential like her.

Of course, she'd have to prove herself first.

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I headed off, already planning the tests for day after tomorrow. With this many promising candidates, I'd better make things challenging

enough to match.

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Chapter 33: There Are Several Promising Prospects

Evelyn's POV

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When we got back to the pack house, the main hall was buzzing with activity. Alpha King Nathan and Alpha Adam sat on the couch deep

in conversation, their voices low and serious. Luna Queen Selena and Isabella were on the other side with their tea, chatting casually.

“Conrad showed up? Alpha King Nathan looked up when he spotted us.

“Yeah, he did,” Alistair answered. “Even gave everyone a little test at the training field.”

The Alpha King raised an eyebrow. “How’d that go?”

Alistair’s eyes swept over our group, landing on me again. “Pretty decent. There are several promising prospects.”

I ducked my head, pretending not to notice his stare. Being singled out like that made my skin crawl.

“Sentinels don’t waste time,” Alpha Adam said. “If Conrad’s here early, the others can’t be far behind.”

“Biggest selection we’ve had in years,” Nathan mused. “Most participants ever, probably.”

“That’s right,” Adam confirmed.

“Evie,” Luna Isabella’s gentle voice cut through my thoughts. “Come sit. You look beat.”

I walked over and dropped down beside her. Luna Queen Selena studied me with kind eyes. “I heard you’re trying out for the selection?”

“Yes, Luna Queen.”

“That takes guts,” she smiled. “But you’re still so young. Don’t put all that pressure on yourself.”

I nodded, but inside I was thinking differently. Young? So what? Dreams didn’t wait around for age.

The next few days flew by. More Sentinels kept arriving, some even joining our training sessions. Each one carried this aura that screamed danger the kind forged through countless life-or-death situations.

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Participants from other packs started showing up too. The training field got packed, competition thick enough to cut with a knife. I tried not to let the pressure mess with my head, just focused on each session.

Finally, with only two days left until the real deal, tonight was the banquet. A formal one.

I stared at myself in the mirror, wearing the gown Nadia had picked out. Deep blue dress, classy but not over the top, with silver embroidery at the neckline and cuffs that looked like stars.

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“Perfect! Nadia clapped her hands.

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“We’re going to eat dinner, not compete in Miss Universe,” I said, but let her mess with my hair anyway.

The banquet hall was already pretty crowded when we arrived. Besides Alpha Adam and Luna Isabella, all the pack higher ups were there Delta Griffin, Gamma Thomas. Sentinel Conrad stood near the back with another guy I hadn’t seen before. Based on his vibe, definitely

another Sentinel.

Dinner started off relaxed. Good food, decent wine, people actually having conversations instead of just business talk. If my brain wasn’t

stuck on the selection, this would’ve been a nice evening.

After we finished eating, Nadia was dragging me upstairs with the boys when Conrad called my name.

I looked at Nadia, and she squeezed my hand. “Good luck,” she said, then shoved the boys toward the stairs.

“Got a few questions for you,” Conrad said straight up.

I nodded, trying to look calm.

“Say you’re running a ten-person squad,” Conrad started. “Your job is guarding an important mountain pass. Enemy’s got three times your numbers, better gear, and there might be spies in your own team. How do you set up your defense?”

The question made me think hard. Ten against thirty, with possible traitors? This was basically a suicide mission. But Sentinels wouldn’t

ask impossible questions.

“First thing,” I said slowly, “I’d split the team into three groups. Three people as a mobile unit, ready to back up anyone who needs help. The other two groups would hold the high ground on both sides of the pass.”

“Why not bunch everyone together?” Conrad asked.

‘Concentrated defense looks solid, but against three-to-one odds, you’re just asking to get surrounded. Spread out, you can create crossfire, and...’ I paused, “If there really are splies, you don’t lose everything in one hit.”

“Keep going,” Conrad and the other Sentinel exchanged a look.

“Second, I’d set traps and early warning systems around the pass. Not to kill just to know when they’re coming. I continued. Most important though, I’d have two escape routes ready. Holding the pass matters, but keeping the squad alive matters more.”

“What if your commanding officer ordered you to fight to the death?” Conrad pressed.

Harder question. I thought for a long time. “I’d follow orders, but I’d send someone to break through and get word back. Even if we all die, the pack needs to know what went down.”

Both Sentinels went quiet.

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“Last question, Conrad said. “If you found out the spy was one of your own team, what would you do?”

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“Id... I took a deep breath, “watch them quietly and confirm it first. Then handle the problem before things got critical, but I wouldn’t

announce it. No point wrecking everyone’s morale.”

“What if the spy was someone you trusted most?”

“Duty’s duty, I forced out the words. “Personal stuff can’t come before pack safety.”

Conrad finally cracked a smile. “Good answers. Smart, but you’ve still got heart. Your tactical thinking’s more mature than I expected. Who

taught you this stuff?”

“Books, and... experience,” I said vaguely.

“Well then, see you day after tomorrow,” Conrad wrapped up the impromptu test. “Hope you can back up your theory with action.”

After the Sentinels left, I let out a huge breath. My palms were soaked – that was more stressful than actual fighting.

The second I hit the third floor, Nadia rushed over. “Evie! What did they ask? You look like hell.”

“Just some tactical stuff,” I managed a smile. “Nothing major, just got nervous.”

The triplets crowded around too, obviously having been waiting.

*Come on,” Orion said. “The banquet’s winding down anyway. You need sleep.”

I nodded, feeling drained. Not physically, but mentally. That Q&A session had sucked up all my brain power.

I was about to go into my room when Lucian called out, “Get some rest.”

I nodded, said goodnight, and headed inside. Nadia followed me in and closed the door, helping me out of the heavy dress.

“Nervous?” she asked.

‘I’d be lying if I said no, I admitted. “But mostly I’m excited.”

“You’ve got this,’ Nadia hugged me tight. “I know you do.”

Lying in bed, I stared at the ceiling.

Could I actually pull this off?

I closed my eyes and told myself: Hell yes. Absolutely yes.

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Chapter 34: Tomorrow Is the Big Day

Evelyn's POV

Sunlight leaked through the curtains, dragging me out of restless sleep. I'd spent half the night staring at the ceiling, my brain spinning

with tomorrow's selection.

The dining room was buzzing when I came down, but I noticed Sentinel Conrad wasn't around.

"Where's Sentinel Conrad?" I asked, sliding into my chair.

"Left at dawn," Alpha King Nathan replied. "Final site prep. Tomorrow's the big day."

Tomorrow. My heart did this annoying skip thing.

I stabbed at my eggs, but everything tasted like cardboard. My mind kept wandering to obstacle courses and combat tests and all the ways

I could screw this up.

"Evie?" Nadia's voice cut through my spiraling thoughts. "You okay? Your hand's shaking."

I looked down. Sure enough, my fork was trembling like I was in the middle of an earthquake. Great.

"I'm going for a run." I pushed back from the table.

"Right now?" Elliot frowned.

"Need to clear my head." I bolted upstairs to change.

When I came back down, all my friends were waiting by the door in workout gear.

"What's this about?" I asked.

Orion grinned. "The way you were twitching at breakfast? Even a blind person could see you were about to lose it."

“So we figured, Lucian jumped in, “instead of letting you stress out alone, we’d come help you blow off some steam.”

My throat went tight. These guys...

‘Come on, Magnus headed for the door.

They led me to the training field. Morning quiet, just us and the open space.

“Alright, Milo cracked his knuckles, ‘let’s have some fun.’”

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Chapter 34: Tomorrow Is the Big Day

“Are you serious? I stared at the five boys spread out in front of me. ‘All of you?’”

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Tag team, Elliot was already dropping into stance. ‘Let’s see how long you last.’”

I couldn’t help laughing. ‘Bring it on then.’”

Lucian went first. His usual fluid style, but I could tell he was pulling his punches. Which was exactly what I needed-release without

injury.

We traded blows for what felt like forever, sweat soaking through our shirts. Every punch and kick drained the anxiety right out of me. All

that nervous energy transformed into something useful.

Lucian stepped back, Orion stepped up. His attacks came steadier, more controlled. But I was already in the zone, moving like water.

Magnus next, then Milo, finally Elliot. Each one brought something different, forcing me to adapt constantly.

By the time we finished, I was flat on my back in the grass, chest heaving. But for the first time in days, my head felt clear.

“Better?” Nadia jogged over with a towel.

“Much. I sat up, looking at my ridiculous friends. “Thanks, you guys.”

“For what?” Orion dropped down beside me. “That’s what we’re here for.”

“Besides, Lucian flopped onto the grass, watching you stress out was making us all twitchy.”

“Don’t overthink it,” Magnus read my expression perfectly. “Just take it as it comes.”

‘Hungry?’ Milo bounced to his feet. “Let’s go eat. You barely touched breakfast.”

Back at the pack house, I actually had an appetite this time.

After lunch, everyone gathered in the living room. The vibe was relaxed, everyone carefully avoiding any mention of tomorrow.

‘Evelyn.’

Prince Alistair’s voice made me look up. The boys immediately shifted closer, like a protective wall.

“Your Highness. I stood politely.

“Where’d you disappear to today? Missed you at lunch,” he said with that easy smile.

“Training field. Needed to work off some nerves.”

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Chapter 34: Tomorrow Is the Big Day

“Ah. He tilted his head. “Last-minute cramming?”

“More like... venting.”

Alistair studied me with those calculating eyes. “Still set on going through with this?”

The question caught me off guard. “Of course. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Just checking.” His smile didn’t reach his eyes. “Good to see you’re committed.”

“Thank you.”

“I’ll be watching tomorrow,” he added. “Looking forward to seeing what you can do.”

He turned and walked away, leaving me with that weird feeling like I’d missed something important.

“Okay,” I patted the boys’ arms, feeling their tension, “chill out. He was just being polite.”

“Polite? Lucian snorted. “That wasn’t polite. That was sizing you up.”

I rolled my eyes. ‘You’re all paranoid. It’s late – I should get some sleep. Early morning tomorrow.”

“Wait. Milo pressed a small bottle into my hand. “Muscle relief cream. You went pretty hard today.”

“Thanks.” The gesture hit me right in the chest.

Magnus’s POV

We watched Evie head upstairs, then sat in heavy silence.

Alistair wandered back over, claiming Evie’s empty spot on the couch.

“You can dial down the guard dog routine,” he said casually. “I’m not planning anything sinister.”

‘Better not be,’ Elliot said, ice cold.

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Alistair just chuckled, then shifted topics. “Summer training starts soon. You’ll be coming with me to the royal territory.”

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“Part of your leadership development,” he continued. “And yes, before you ask participation in the selection is mostly ceremonial for you

three. But I still expect you to show what you’re made of.”

“Hold up, Lucian caught something. “Summer training means...”

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“Leaving Polaris right after the selection ends,” Alistair confirmed. “Several months, probably.”

“But Evie...” Lucian started, then shut his mouth.

Alistair's eyes lit up with amusement. "Can't bear to leave your little friend?"

Nobody answered, but the silence was answer enough.

"Interesting." Alistair looked thoughtful. "Well, get some rest. Tomorrow should be entertaining."

After he left, the room felt heavy.

"I hate not seeing her for even a day," Lucian muttered. "Several months..."

"If she passes, she'll be leaving too," Milo pointed out.

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"That's different," Orion shook his head. "If she goes first, at least we can say goodbye. At least we'd know where she is. But if we leave

first..."

"She might think we abandoned her," Lucian finished.

"Stop spiraling," I said, though I felt just as twisted up inside. "Evie's tougher than that. Besides, Sentinel training has age requirements.

We've got time."

'I hope so," Elliot sighed.

"Let's just get through tomorrow," Milo stood up. "Whatever happens, we support her."

Everyone nodded and headed to bed.

Lying in the dark, sleep felt impossible. Several months apart... when had that stubborn girl become so essential to everything?

Tomorrow she'd give the selection everything she had. All we could do was watch from the sidelines and hope.

As for what came after... we'd figure it out when we got there.

The Lightning Wolf Chronicles Novel

Chapter 5

Souls Bound By Promise – Timothy Nelson

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Chapter 35: First Day of Testing Ends

Evelyn's POV

Selection day finally hit.

I woke up before dawn, heart hammering like crazy. This was it make or break time.

After washing up, I pulled on my training gear. Took a long look in the mirror – game face on, ready as I'd ever be.

The dining room felt different when I came down. All the selection participants were there, but nobody was talking. Just the sound of

forks scraping plates and nervous breathing.

“You good?” Elliot asked.

I nodded, even though my stomach was doing backflips. Too late to chicken out now.

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When we got to the training field, my jaw dropped. The place looked like a completely different world. Massive obstacle courses everywhere, way more intense than anything I'd imagined. The bleachers were packed – not just our pack, but people from all over who'd

come to watch.

Conrad stood in the center with a megaphone, other Sentinels flanking him.

“Morning, candidates,” his voice boomed across the field. “Welcome to the Northern Region Sentinel Selection.”

I walked toward the starting area with everyone else, doing a quick headcount. At least two hundred people. Shit. That was a lot of

competition.

“Today’s the first round,” Conrad continued. “Two parts – obstacle course and one-on-one combat.”

He gestured behind him, and I got my first real look at what we’d be facing. High walls, rope nets, balance beams, mud pits. Each one

designed to break you.

“Obstacle course tests everything strength, skill, brains,” another Sentinel added. “Thirty-minute time limit. Go over, you’re out.”

Thirty minutes? Looking at that maze of torture devices, I wasn’t feeling super confident.

“Get ready,” Conrad raised his hand.

We lined up at the start.

“Go!”

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Chapter 35: First Day of Testing Ends

The whistle shrieked and everyone bolted forward like their asses were on fire.

First obstacle was a three-meter wall. Some people tried to vault it, others looked for handholds. I spotted a slightly lower section and

used a nearby post to launch myself up.

Next came the rope net crawl. The net hung so low it practically kissed the ground. I dropped flat and army-crawled forward, mud

smearing my face and sweat stinging my eyes.

‘Go Evie!’

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Nadia’s voice cut through the noise from the stands. That shot of energy was exactly what I needed.

The balance beam came next, with a nasty mud pit waiting below. People were already falling in, struggling to climb out and keep going. I

kept my eyes forward and took it one step at a time.

Don't look down, don't look down.

After the beam was a tire run had to hit the center of each tire or risk twisting an ankle. I found my rhythm and danced through like it

was a game.

The final obstacle was a slippery slope with ropes. My hands were already raw and bleeding, but I gritted my teeth and hauled myself up

inch by inch.

When I finally crossed the finish line, the timer read: 24 minutes 37 seconds.

I collapsed, gasping like a fish out of water. Covered in mud from head to toe, but I'd made it.

'First round complete, Conrad announced. "If you passed, take five and get ready for combat."

I struggled to my feet, chugged the water bottle someone handed me. Looking around, about a third of the field had been eliminated.

The break was way too short. Before I knew it, combat time.

"Rules are simple, Sera called out. "Knock your opponent down or force them out of the ring. Multiple fights per person. Rankings based

on wins and performance."

I got assigned to ring seven. My first opponent stepped up – some guy named Mark who was built like a brick house.

"Hey there, little girl," he grinned. "I'll try not to hurt you too bad."

I didn't bother responding, just dropped into my fighting stance. Underestimating me was his first mistake.

The whistle blew and Mark charged with a haymaker aimed at my face. I sidestepped and swept his legs. He stumbled but didn't fall.

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Chapter 35: First Day of Testing Ends

“Huh. You’ve got some moves,” he said, getting serious.

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The fight ramped up fast. Mark hit like a truck, so I couldn’t trade blows with him. Had to stay mobile, look for openings. His strengt was impressive, but it made him clumsy.

When he threw another wild punch, I stepped inside his guard and rammed my shoulder into his armpit. Grabbed his arm and executed a perfect hip toss.

Mark hit the mat hard and stayed down.

“Ring seven, Evelyn wins!”

I backed off, breathing hard. First victory felt good, but I knew the next opponents would be tougher.

Second fight was against a woman named Sophia – speed fighter. We went back and forth, but I outlasted her in the end.

Third fight, fourth fight... I lost count of how many people I’d faced. Everything became mechanical – dodge, counter, survive

By the time the final bell rang, I was running on fumes. When Conrad announced that anyone still standing in their ring advanced to the

next round, I literally collapsed.

“First day complete!” Conrad’s voice seemed to come from far away. “Rest tomorrow, continue the day after.”

I closed my eyes and let exhaustion wash over me. I’d done it. Made it through day one.

When I came to, I was in someone’s arms. Slowly opened my eyes to find myself in the triplets SUV.

Magnus was driving, fighting to stay awake. Elliot rode shotgun, nervously checking on Max through the rearview mirror.

I was stretched across the middle row. Orion sat on my left – eyes closed but definitely not asleep. Lucian was actually out cold on my

right. In the back, Milo was snoring with an equally unconscious Nadia in his arms.

Looking at this warm, chaotic scene, I couldn't help but smile.

The Lightning Wolf Chronicles Novel

Chapter 5

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Souls Bound By Promise – Timothy Nelson

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Chapter 36: Your Performance Today Was Truly Outstanding

Evelyn's POV

"You awake?" Orion's voice came from beside me, teasing.

I turned my head and found him watching me, eyes sparkling with mischief. I nodded, working out the kinks in my neck.

"Good thing you didn't stay unconscious for days again, or you would've missed the selection. His tone was definitely mocking me now.

I rolled my eyes but couldn't help smiling. Orion glanced around, lowering his voice. "Everyone's wiped. This selection's brutal."

The peaceful scene hit me different after such an intense day. Seeing these familiar faces sleeping around me sent unexpected warmth

through my chest.

The car slowed to a stop. Magnus let out a massive yawn and rubbed his eyes. "Wake up, everyone. We're home. Almost dozed off myself."

Everyone stirred, stretching and making various groaning sounds. Nadia lifted her head from Milo's arms, pillow marks still pressed into

her cheek.

We stumbled out and headed toward the pack house. The sky was darkening, but warm light spilled from every window.

Luna Isabella met us at the door, immediately steadying Magnus who was swaying on his feet. ‘You all did amazing today. Dinners ready-

eat and get some rest.”

Her gentle voice could smooth away any exhaustion. My stomach chose that moment to growl loudly, reminding me I’d barely eaten since

breakfast.

The dining room was already buzzing. Alpha King Nathan’s family sat at the main table with Sentinel Conrad. When we walked in, their

faces lit up.

“Evelyn!” Luna Queen Selena spoke first. “Your performance today was incredible! Absolutely stunning to watch.

“Agreed, Sentinel Conrad nodded.

Alpha King Nathan smiled approvingly. “I’ve watched plenty of werewolves go through selections, but someone so young with that level of

skill? That’s rare,”

All this praise made me squirm. After years of being invisible, suddenly being the center of attention felt surreal.

“Thank you.” I kept it simple, then noticed something odd.

Prince Alistair sat at the far end, unusually quiet. He kept his head down, picking at his food, occasionally glancing at me with this weird

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Chapter 36: Your Performance Today Was Truly Outstanding

expression before looking away fast. Complete opposite of yesterday’s confident prince.

Alpha King Nathan caught my confused look and burst out laughing. “You noticed! Our prince ran into some serious competition today. Got his ass handed to him and he’s sulking.”

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The table erupted in laughter. Even Alistair lifted his head, embarrassment flashing across his face before he forced a smile.

I didn't push for details. Right now I just wanted food and sleep. The selection hadn't just drained me physically staying that focused for

hours was mentally exhausting.

We wolfed down dinner without joining the conversation. After saying our goodnights, we dragged ourselves upstairs.

By the time I reached the third floor, my legs felt like concrete. I pushed open my door and didn't even bother washing up, just collapsed

straight onto the bed. The soft mattress swallowed my tired body, and consciousness faded fast.

Something made me tense up. Years of hypervigilance kept me alert even in sleep. I jerked awake with one panicked thought – shit, did I

miss the selection?

I tried to sit up but something pinned me down. Carefully moving the warm weight, I discovered Nadia sprawled across the bed, one leg draped over me. Yesterday must've really wiped her out – she usually slept like a proper lady.

Then I looked around and froze.

All the boys were in my room!

Magnus and Lucian had somehow crammed themselves onto the tiny corner sofa, two huge guys squeezed together like sardines, Elliot and Milo sat on the floor against the armrest, heads tilted at awkward angles. Orion was curled up at the foot of my bed.

What the hell?

Then I remembered today was a rest day. The selection continued tomorrow.

Relief flooded through me. I leaned back against the headboard, studying these sleeping figures. Warmth spread through my chest.

Nadia stirred next to me, rubbing her eyes and yawning. Then, like she'd been struck by lightning, she pounced on me, shaking my

shoulders.

“Evie! Wake up! Wake up!” Her voice cracked with urgency. “We’re gonna be late for the selection! Come on!”

Her thrashing was so violent it woke everyone. The boys opened their eyes one by one, looking around confused before focusing on us.

When they were fully awake, their faces showed barely contained laughter. Elliot cracked first, then Milo, until the whole room was

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fighting back giggles.

Nadia kept shaking me frantically. “Evie! Why aren’t you getting up? We’re seriously gonna be late!”

I couldn’t help smiling at her panic. The boys all wore shit-eating grins, not one of them bothering to clue her in.

Finally, Nadia noticed something was off. She stopped shaking and stared at my smile, then turned to the boys. Seeing their expressives,

her eyes went wide.

“Wait...” She smacked her forehead, “Oh right! Today’s a rest day!”

Everyone lost it completely. Even Magnus was doubled over laughing.

“Yesterday fried my brain, Nadia said sheepishly, blushing.

After the laughter died down, I got up to wash. Orion stopped me at the door.

“Where you going? He frowned.

I gestured at my gross clothes from yesterday. “To shower, obviously. You guys should too. My room reeks of boy sweat.”

Lucian climbed off the sofa, stretching with his trademark grin. Isn’t that perfect? Now you smell us every day. Makes the memory stick. Otherwise you might forget us, battle maniac.

I laughed and shook my head. “Never gonna happen.”

Three simple words, but they shifted something in the room. The boys exchanged glances as Nadia and I slipped into the bathroom.

Hot water washed away yesterday's grime and exhaustion. I closed my eyes, letting it flow over every inch of skin. My mind kept circling back to the same question why had they guarded my room all night?

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"Why do you think they slept here?" Nadia seemed to read my thoughts, working shampoo through her hair.

"No clue. Maybe they were worried about us?"

"Worried about what? That we'd sneak out to train?"

Actually, that sounded exactly like something I'd do.

When we came out in towels, the boys were still there. They'd straightened up the sofa and were having a quiet conversation that stopped

dead when they saw us.

"Why are you still here?" I asked, toweling my hair. "Don't you need showers?"

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Chapter 36: Your Performance Today Was Truly Outstanding

Magnus stood up, golden eyes serious. "We're making sure you actually rest today,"

He paused, mouth curving into a knowing smile. I bet if we leave now, by the time we get back, someone will definitely be at the training

field."

Being read so easily made me laugh awkwardly. He was absolutely right if they weren't here, I'd probably already be zone.

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Chapter 37: Making Sure She Doesn't Sneak Off to Train

Evelyn's POV

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"Alright," I said, helping Nadia work through a tangle in her hair, "I totally had that plan. But seeing you guys camping out here, I figured

training was off the table."

I sighed. "Still feels weird doing nothing all day. Shouldn't I be... I don't know, doing something?"

Sitting still wasn't exactly my strong suit. Years of staying busy made relaxing feel almost painful.

The boys shared one of those silent conversations with their eyes. Elliot nodded. "Yeah, that's definitely a problem."

"How about this," Milo jumped in, "you two grab breakfast, we'll clean up, then we'll figure out today's agenda."

Before I could argue, they all bolted from my room. Nadia and I cracked up watching them flee.

"They're terrified you'll make a run for it," she laughed while getting dressed.

"Probably smart," I admitted, pulling on clean clothes. "Come on, let's eat."

Downstairs, the dining room felt different. Alpha King Nathan and Alpha Adam were gone, leaving just Luna Isabella and Luna Queen

Selena chatting over coffee.

"Morning, girls," Isabella waved us over. "Come sit."

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The spread looked amazing – fresh bread, eggs, bacon, the works. My stomach reminded me I'd barely eaten yesterday.

“The men went to check on participants from other packs,” Luna Queen Selena explained. “You should rest today. Save your energy,

Footsteps echoed from the stairs. The boys appeared, hair still damp, looking way too pleased with themselves.

‘Don’t worry, Luna Queen!’ Milo announced. “Evie’s gonna rest today whether she likes it or not. We’ve got supervision covered.”

“Damn right,” Elliot grinned. “We’ve planned a whole day of ‘rest activities. No sneaking off to train.”

Both Lunas laughed at their serious expressions. The whole room relaxed into easy conversation.

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After breakfast, they dragged us toward the backyard. The familiar space hit me with memories my birthday party, the warmth. everyone’s faces around the fire.

Nadia squeezed my hand, reading my mood. Her touch pulled me back to the present.

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Chapter 37: Making Sure She Doesn’t Sneak Off to Train

The boys had already claimed the lounge chairs, sprawling out like they owned the place. Lucian stretched dramatically and sighed with

satisfaction.

“Come on,” Elliot patted the hammock, “today’s mission is literally do nothing.”

We settled onto the swaying hammock. For a few minutes, nobody talked.

“So what about the spring ball? Nadia broke the silence.

“Oh shit, right,” Milo sat up. “That’s supposed to be pretty big this year.”

“When is it?” I asked. Social events weren’t exactly my thing.

“Early next month,” Magnus answered. “Right after the selection wraps up. Give everyone a chance to decompress.”

“We should all go together, Lucian suggested. “Seven people would be fun.”

“Seven?” Nadia counted on her fingers. “Won’t that be a little... much?”

“So what?” Orion shrugged. “We already stick out anyway.”

True. Three future Alphas plus the rest of us subtle wasn’t really an option.

“Can you even dance?” Elliot asked suddenly.

I shook my head. “Never learned.”

“Perfect! Lucian’s eyes lit up. “We can teach you!”

“That’s really not necessary...”

“Relax,” Nadia laughed. “Most of the time it’s just talking and eating. The actual dancing part is pretty minimal.”

We spent the morning like that – just talking. Topics jumped from the ball to the selection to random future plans. Easy, comfortable

conversation.

When the sun climbed overhead, Milo sat up restlessly. “This is killing me. Let’s play something.”

“Like what?” Elliot asked.

“Werewolf!” Milo’s face lit up. “It’s this deduction game. Some of us are killers, everyone else has to figure out who.”

“Sounds complicated, Lucian said, but he looked interested.

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We formed a circle on the grass. Milo played host, handing out roles. The game turned into chaos pretty fast everyone accusing everyone else, dramatic defenses, mock betrayals. We were all cracking up within minutes.

After several rounds, we collapsed on the grass, staring at clouds drifting overhead.

“I wish it could always be like this,” Nadia said softly.

Yeah. Me too.

Eventually the boys stood up. Magnus walked over and suddenly crouched down. “Hop on.”

“What?”

“Piggyback. You’ll see better from up there.”

Before I could protest, he’d lifted me onto his shoulders. The height was amazing – I could see the whole backyard spread out below.

Milo scooped up Nadia, making her squeal with surprise.

“Hot spring time,” Elliot pointed toward the back of the yard.

So this was their master plan. Sitting on Magnus’s shoulders, feeling his steady stride, something warm settled in my chest. Being cared

for like this was still weird, but... nice.

The hot spring appeared through the trees, steam rising in the afternoon light. The boys jumped straight in, sending water everywhere.

Magnus set me down gently before cannonballing into the pool. Milo carried Nadia in with him, creating an even bigger splash.

I leaned against the stone edge, letting the warm water soak away yesterday’s exhaustion. The heat felt incredible.

“You know,” I said quietly, watching everyone fool around, “last time we were here was when you guys saw my scars. I was so pissed at all

of you.”

The playful atmosphere shifted. Everyone stopped splashing and looked at me.

Magnus swam closer, his golden eyes serious. “We still want to know who did it.”

He paused. “But we know you won’t tell us, and you’d probably lose it again. So we’re not asking.”

Sunlight danced on the water between us. Looking at their worried faces, my throat tightened. Their concern was real, no agenda behind

‘If you paid attention, you could probably figure it out,” I said finally.

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Chapter 37: Making Sure She Doesn’t Sneak Off to Train

Nadia gripped my hand underwater, offering silent support.

“I don’t want to talk about it right now,” I continued, my voice carrying clearly in the quiet pool, “but when I’m ready, you’ll know.”

Nobody pushed. Orion moved closer, offering his shoulder. His presence was solid, reassuring.

We soaked in comfortable silence. No awkwardness, just understanding flowing between us.

After a while, I noticed my fingers getting pruny. “Alright, if we stay much longer, I’m gonna look like a raisin.”

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 38: So What’s Our Strategy?

Evelyn’s POV

I glanced at the sky. ‘Let’s head back. Should be dinner time soon.’

Everyone climbed out, water dripping off their bodies. We changed and walked back at an easy pace.

Lunch was quiet. Maybe this morning's conversation was still hanging over us, or we were just tired from doing nothing all day.

After we ate, I grabbed a tactical analysis book and settled into the backyard hammock. The others sprawled on the grass nearby, talking

in low voices.

This kind of peaceful afternoon felt precious. No training, no fighting, no pressure. Just sunshine, breeze, and friends.

Before I knew it, the sun was setting.

I woke up earlier than usual the next morning. My body automatically shifted into battle mode – the selection was starting again today.

After a quick shower and change into training gear, I found everyone already waiting. The relaxed vibe from yesterday was completely

gone.

“Let's go, Magnus said.

We walked to the training field together. The morning air was crisp with dew.

The field was already filling up with advancing participants. I spotted several familiar faces – all strong fighters who'd kicked ass in yesterday's combat rounds.

“Way fewer people,” Nadia whispered.

She was right. At least two-thirds of the original crowd was gone. Only the elite remained.

We started our usual warm-up jog. While running, I noticed everyone sizing each other up. Yesterday's challenges showed that teamwork

mattered as much as individual skill.

A horn blast cut through our thoughts.

We stopped and looked toward the platform. Sentinel Conrad stood there, his expression more serious than before.

“Morning, everyone. His magically amplified voice carried across the field. First off, congrats on making it to day three. Everyone here has already proven themselves.”

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Chapter 38: So What’s Our Strategy?

He paused, scanning the crowd. Today’s challenge is team-based combat.”

Murmurs rippled through the participants.

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Conrad saw our confusion. ‘We’re running a simulated resource battle in the arena. Simple rules each team gets a set number of Items. Your job is to grab as many as possible from other teams while protecting your own.’

He let that sink in. “Form your own teams. Five people each. You’ve got ten minutes.”

Five people? I immediately looked at Nadia, who was already looking at me.

“Hey Evelyn, wanna join forces?”

I turned to find Mark, one of yesterday’s fighters. His smile was friendly.

“I think we’d work well together,” he added.

Mark was solid yesterday’s fight proved his strength and technique.

“Sure,” I nodded, then gestured to Nadia. ‘She’s with us.’”

“Course, no problem,” Mark agreed.

Two other participants joined us quickly. Sophia, yesterday’s speed demon with excellent recon skills. And Raven, a defensive specialist who could tank damage like nobody’s business.

Looks like we’re well-balanced,” Sophia said. “We’ve got leadership, attack, defense, speed, and...” She looked at Nadia. “What’s your

thing?”

“Range attacks and trap setting, Nadia answered.

‘Perfect, Raven nodded. ‘Good mix.’”

Ten minutes flew by. Conrad spoke again. “Time’s up. Team captains, come get your starting supplies.”

As the elected leader, I walked to the platform. Conrad handed me a cloth bag. Twenty marker balls inside, each with your team’s color. Protect them while trying to grab others. One hour time limit final score combines what you keep and what you capture.”

I brought the bag back and opened it. Twenty deep blue balls, each marked with our team number.

‘Rules seem simple, I analyzed, “but execution’s gonna be complex. We need to attack and defend while avoiding getting ganged up on.”

So what’s our strategy? Mark asked.

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Chapter 38: So What’s Our Strategy?

I scanned the other teams. One caught my attention five massive warriors, obviously going for pure strength.

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“See that red team?” I pointed them out. “All muscle. They’ll definitely go for a head-on assault.”

“Should we avoid them?” Sophia asked.

“Nope,” I shook my head. “We’re gonna use them.”

“Prep time’s over!” Conrad announced. “Challenge starts now!”

The arena exploded into action. Teams immediately scattered – some defending, others attacking. Just like I predicted, the red muscle

team launched a brutal assault on the nearest green team.

“Execute the plan,” I ordered quietly. “Sophia, scout everyone’s positions. Raven, you and Mark hold here, look defensive. Nadia, start

setting traps around us, but keep them hidden.”

“What about you?” Mark asked.

“I’m gonna go ‘negotiate,” I smiled mysteriously.

Using the chaos as cover, I slipped over to a weaker-looking team – the yellow guys. They were nervously forming a circle.

“Hey, don’t panic,” I raised my hands to show I wasn’t hostile. “I’ve got a proposition.”

Their captain eyed me suspiciously. “What kind of proposition?”

“That red team’s attacking everyone,” I pointed to the distant battle. “They’ll come for you eventually. Instead of waiting to get

steamrolled, how about we work together?”

“How?”

“Simple. You guys ‘accidentally’ show a weakness to lure them in. We provide backup and help you fight them off. In return, we split

whatever balls they drop.”

The yellow captain thought it over. “What if you screw us over?”

“That wouldn’t help us. Red team’s a threat to everyone. Weakening them helps us all.”

After we reached an agreement, I hurried back. Sophia had intel ready. “Red team grabbed eight balls from green but lost three themselves. Other teams are either watching or having small fights.”

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“Good,” I said. ‘Get ready. Yellow team’s gonna bait red team over here.”

I laid out the tactics in detail. Five minutes later, red team took the bait, spotting yellow team’s ‘accidental defensive gap and charging in.

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Chapter 38: So What’s Our Strategy?

‘Now!’”

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Nadia triggered her hidden traps. Rope nets shot up, tangling two red team members. Sophia darted in like lightning, snatching several dropped balls. Mark and Raven worked with yellow team to drive off the remaining attackers.

After the dust settled, we split the loot with yellow team twelve balls total.

“That was brilliant!” Sophia said excitedly.

“Just getting started,” I watched the field. “Red team’s gonna be desperate after that loss, and other teams will start moving too.”

For the rest of the hour, we kept using similar tactics. Instead of direct attacks, we profited from other teams’ conflicts. Sometimes we’d provide support in exchange for rewards, sometimes we’d capitalize on chaos during fights.

Nadia’s traps were crucial. Sophia’s speed made her perfect for grabbing dropped loot. Mark and Raven were reliable muscle, making other

teams think twice about messing with us.

Halfway through, Conrad announced the scores. “Currently red team has forty-three captured but lost thirty-five. Blue team has twenty- eight captured and lost zero...”

Hearing this, every other team turned to stare at us. The real challenge was just beginning.

“Everyone’s gonna target us now,” Mark said nervously.

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Chapter 39: You’re Really Suited to Be a Leader

Evelyn’s POV

“No, they’ll go after red team first,” I said. “Forty-three balls? Too tempting. We stick to our strategy.”

I was right. Multiple teams ganged up on red team, everyone wanting those marker balls. Red team was tough, but they couldn’t fight

everyone at once.

We kept playing it smart – picking our moments, staying defensive. Our ball count climbed steadily while we didn't lose a single one.

The final ten minutes turned into chaos. Every team made their desperate push. Red team tried to get their balls back, but they were exhausted.

“Hold the line!” I shouted. “Don't get greedy – what we have is enough!”

Raven had us locked down. Nadia's traps formed our defense. Mark and Sophia handled hit-and-run tactics while I called the shots.

The ending horn blasted.

‘Challenge complete!’ Conrad's voice boomed. “Tallying scores now.”

My heart hammered. I felt good about our chances, but you never knew.

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“Red team captured sixty-one, lost fifty-two. Net gain: nine.”

The red team looked stunned. All that grabbing, barely breaking even.

“Blue team, Conrad's eyes found us, “captured thirty-five, lost zero. Net gain: thirty-five,”

The field erupted. We'd won by playing smart.

‘Holy shit! Mark grabbed me in a bear hug. “We did it!”

Sophia was bouncing around. Even Raven was grinning.

“How the hell did we not lose any?’ Mark demanded.

“Because we weren't greedy,’ I explained. “Red team focused on offense and ignored defense. We used our brains instead of just throwing

punches.

“You're really suited to be a leader, Sophia said.

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Chapter 39: You're Really Suited to Be a Leader

Conrad raised his voice. 'Blue team showed exceptional performance. You proved brains beat brawn. This is exactly what Sentinels need.

Everyone advances to tomorrow's final event."

Back in the rest area, Elliot and Milo tossed Nadia and me into the air.

"Put us down!" I protested through my laughter.

They finally set us down when the pack leaders approached. Alpha Adam, Luna Isabella, Alpha King Nathan's family all looking

impressed.

"Evelyn," Alpha Adam said, "your performance was remarkable. Leadership and tactical thinking like that at your age is rare."

"You got your teammates to trust you completely," Alpha King Nathan added. "That's real leadership."

"Thank you, Alpha King Nathan." I kept my voice respectful, but caught sight of Dad in the back.

He watched me with zero expression. No pride, nothing. Like I was a stranger.

My chest tightened, but Elliot whispered, "Don't let him kill your mood. You were amazing."

He was right.

Sentinel Conrad approached with a rare smile. "Well done, Evelyn. Leadership like that at your age reminds me of people I used to know."

"Tomorrow's the final day," he continued. "We've got something special planned."

"I'll give it everything," I said firmly.

At the pack house, Acacia was waiting by the entrance.

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"Finally," she said, rushing to the triplets. "I've been wondering how selection went."

Then she "noticed" me. "Oh, Evelyn? What are you doing here? Right, you're their 'friend' now. But you don't think you can stay by their

side forever, do you?"

'Acacia, Magnus sighed. "What do you want?"

"I just told you. I'm checking on your selection."

"We're tired, Lucian said, stepping between us. "You need to leave."

"Luc, you've changed." Acacia put on this hurt expression. "You weren't like this before. Did someone poison your mind against me?*

I'd had enough. "Acacia, if you're here to start shit, you picked the wrong day."

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Chapter 39: You're Really Suited to Be a Leader

'Start shit?' She whirled on me, malice flashing in her eyes. "I'm here to care about my friends. What gives you the right to even speak to

me?

"Because she is our friend, and you're not!" Nadia stepped up beside me.

Just then, Luna Isabella appeared from outside. She took in the scene with raised eyebrows.

"Oh, Acacia." Her voice stayed gentle, but anyone could hear the distance. "Looking for the children?"

Acacia immediately switched to her fake sweet mode. "Luna Isabella, yes. Just saying hello."

"How thoughtful. But the children just finished selection and need rest. If there's nothing urgent, please head home."

It was a polite dismissal. Acacia's face went through several expressions before she managed a curtsy. "Of course, Luna Isabella. I won't

disturb them."

Before leaving, she shot me a look of pure hatred.

After she was gone, Isabella turned to us. "Come on, dinner's ready."

She led us inside, then looked at Nadia and me. "You two go clean up and rest first."

Then she turned to the boys. "I need to discuss something with you all."

Nadia and I exchanged confused looks but headed upstairs.

When we came down for dinner, the dining room was empty except for us. The boys and Luna Isabella were still missing.

"What are they talking about?" Nadia mumbled around a bite of roast beef. "So mysterious."

"No clue," I said, sipping my soup. "Maybe something about tomorrow?"

"Maybe." Nadia shrugged. "But Luna Isabella didn't look worried, so it's probably fine."

We ate in comfortable quiet. Today's challenge had drained me completely.

Near the end of dinner, footsteps finally echoed from the stairs. Luna Isabella led the boys into the dining room, and they were all

wearing these weird barely-contained smiles.

Like they knew some secret joke.

"What's with those faces?" I put down my spoon. "What happened up there?"

Isabella's smile got more obvious as she sat down. "That's a secret, dear."

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Chapter 39: You're Really Suited to Be a Leader

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Her tone was all mysterious and expectant. "Tomorrow's final selection they don't need to participate. I heard it's something special the Sentinels designed just for this occasion."

"Something special?" Nadia's eyes went wide.

"Yes, Isabella nodded. 'I don't know the details, but Sentinel Conrad emphasized this will be an unprecedented challenge.'"

She looked at me, eyes sparkling with encouragement. "Evie, you must do your absolute best. As for these boys..." She gave them a

meaningful look. "They have their own tasks."

The boys' expressions got even weirder. Magnus actually coughed, like he was covering something up. Lucian kept his head down,

concentrating on his food, but I could see him trying not to smile. Orion was studying me thoughtfully.

Nadia and I looked at each other, both confused as hell. But then we started laughing.

"Alright, fine," I stood up, pulling Nadia with me. "Keep your secrets."

If they didn't want to tell us, I wouldn't force it. Tomorrow would reveal everything anyway.

"We're heading to bed," I announced to the table. "Take your time eating."

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 40: Coming to Find Me This Late, Is There Something?

Evelyn's POV

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The boys all looked up when I stood, their gazes lingering on me in a way that made my skin crawl. Something was definitely up with them tonight.

"We're heading to bed," I announced, pulling Nadia with me. "Take your time with dinner."

We escaped upstairs, leaving behind whatever weirdness they had going on.

Back in the room, Nadia crashed the second her head hit the pillow. Today's challenge had wiped her out completely. She'd done great,

but the physical toll was real.

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I lay staring at the ceiling. Tomorrow was the final day I wondered what this "special challenge" would be. The way everyone was acting

all mysterious made my stomach twist.

My brain kept replaying today's tactics, analyzing every move. Could I have done better? Probably. There was always room for

improvement.

Footsteps echoed from downstairs – the boys finishing up and heading to their rooms. The pack house settled into its usual nighttime

quiet.

Just when I thought I'd get some decent sleep, soft knocking came from my door. So gentle I almost missed it.

I waited. Another knock, barely audible.

Who the hell is that this late?

I slipped out of bed carefully, not wanting to wake Nadia, and tiptoed to the door. When I cracked it open, I found Orion standing there

looking like he'd rather be anywhere else.

He was mid-knock, freezing when he saw me. His face broke into this relieved smile, and he actually started to reach for me before catching himself. The way he glanced nervously at the other doors made me want to laugh.

The dignified future Alpha, sneaking around like a kid afraid of getting caught.

I couldn't help the quiet laugh that escaped.

Orion grinned back, then gently pulled me into a hug. His warmth surrounded me, carrying that familiar pine scent that somehow made everything feel safer.

I hugged him back, and all my anxiety about tomorrow just... disappeared. We stood there in comfortable silence, just breathing.

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Chapter 40: Coming to Find Me This Late, Is There Something?

When we finally pulled apart, he kept hold of my hand.

“You’re gonna freeze out here barefoot,” he said softly, eyes full of concern. “The floor’s cold.”

I looked down at my bare feet. “Well, maybe if someone hadn’t come knocking at my door in the middle of the night...”

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His face flashed with guilt, then joy. “Sorry.”

“So,” I dropped the teasing, “what’s up? This about tomorrow’s selection? Whatever you guys were talking about with Luna Isabella?”

Orion nodded, then shook his head. “Yeah, but not just that.”

He took a breath, like he was picking his words carefully. “Mom did tell us about tomorrow. I can’t give you details, but...” He looked

directly at me. “Whatever happens, remember it’s just a selection. Don’t panic. Trust your gut.”

The serious tone made me even more curious, but I knew he wouldn’t say more.

“That’s it?”

Orion suddenly looked embarrassed, avoiding my eyes. “Actually... no.”

I waited.

“I wanted to see you,” his voice got quieter. “Tomorrow might be really intense, and I don’t know what’ll happen, so...” He met my gaze again, and there was something tender there I’d never seen before. “I needed to see you one more time. Make sure you’re okay.”

My heart did this weird skip thing. The air felt thick, and I could hear my pulse in my ears. This was new territory for me.

To cover my panic, I reached out for another hug. “Thanks for caring.”

Orion hugged me back, tighter this time. I could feel his heartbeat through his shirt, just as fast as mine.

When I started to pull away, he held on. I was about to ask what was wrong when he slowly lowered his head. His breath was warm

against my cheek.

Then his lips brushed my forehead.

The kiss was feather-light, but it froze me completely. Warmth spread from that spot through my entire body like electricity. My face caught fire instantly.

Holy shit. First kiss. Even if it’s just my forehead.

Orion stepped back fast, his face red as mine. “I...”

2/5

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Chapter 40: Coming to Find Me This Late, Is There Something?

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Seeing him all flustered was actually kind of funny. This confident guy who’d just been so gentle and bold, now stammering like a nervous

kid.

“You’re such a sap, I managed, trying to sound normal even though my voice shook. “Get back to bed before the others catch us.”

His expression got complicated at the mention of the others. He glanced at Magnus and Lucian’s doors like he was worried about

something.

“Yeah,” he nodded. “You should sleep too. Tomorrow...”

He didn’t finish, but I got it.

“I’ll give it everything I’ve got,” I promised.

He looked at me one more time, then disappeared into his room. I stood there for a second, touching my forehead. It still felt warm.

What the hell was that?

The feeling was completely foreign. I didn’t know what to call it or what to do with it. But it made me... happy.

“Well, well, well.”

I spun around to find Nadia propped up in bed, grinning like she’d won the lottery.

“You were awake?!”

“Obviously. You two were having your little romantic moment right outside the door. How could I sleep through that?”

My face burned hotter. “We weren’t being romantic!”

“Oh really?” Nadia sat up fully, her grin getting wider. “Then who just got kissed on the forehead? ‘You’re such a sap,’ she says, but inside

she’s probably melting.”

‘Nadia!’ I dove at the bed, trying to shut her up.

She dodged easily. “Who would’ve thought our tough little Evie would have such a soft moment. Late-night visits from future Alphas-

how cute!”

“It wasn’t a late-night visit! He just wanted to talk about tomorrow!”

“Just talking requires that much hugging? And forehead kisses?”

I had no comeback for that.

3/5

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Chapter 40: Coming to Find Me This Late, Is There Something?

After Nadia finished laughing at me, she got serious. “But really, what did he say about tomorrow?”

I shook my head. “Nothing specific. Just told me not to panic, said whatever happens is still just a selection.”

“Sounds like tomorrow’s gonna be intense.” Nadia frowned. “And the boys aren’t even participating. That’s weird.”

“Yeah.” I sat on the bed. “Why would they skip the final day?”

We both went quiet, trying to figure it out. But there was no point guessing.

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“Forget it,” Nadia yawned. “Tomorrow’s problems for tomorrow. I’m exhausted.”

She lay back down, but couldn’t resist adding, “For the record, Orion’s definitely serious about you. You see how careful he was? Especially

about the other two finding out.”

The other two. Magnus and Lucian.

“Go to sleep!” I pulled the covers over my head.

Nadia chuckled, and soon her breathing evened out.

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But I couldn’t sleep. My mind kept replaying the whole thing his hug, the kiss, the way he looked at me...

These new feelings were exciting and terrifying at the same time.

I don’t know when I finally drifted off.

The next morning, violent shaking dragged me awake.

“Evie!” Nadia’s voice was full of panic.

I rubbed my eyes, still half asleep. “What’s wrong?”

I sat up and saw her pale face.

“They’re all gone!” She grabbed my shoulders, voice shaking. “Everyone’s gone!”

“What?” I snapped awake. “What do you mean, gone? Who’s gone?”

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The Lightning Wolf Chronicles