

# Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 131

“He didn’t specify much—just insisted it had to be face to face.”

I carefully close the book, marking my place with the ribbon bookmark before setting it aside. Her tone doesn’t suggest anything ominous about the summons. Still, after everything that’s unfolded over the past twenty-four hours, I’m uncertain what to anticipate next.

I rise and make my way down the hall, turning right toward Ryker’s office. The door is slightly open, and I catch the low murmur of his voice, though the words are indistinct. I knock twice and then gently push the door wider, only to be hit by a cloying, artificial cotton candy scent that’s almost sickly sweet.

“Oh! Alpha! You really shouldn’t tease me like that!” Amy’s voice rings out playfully.

Red flashes before my eyes. I act before I think, my instincts taking over. I’m on her in an instant, grabbing the back of her head and yanking her away from the desk where she’s perched with one leg dangling, her skirt far too short, revealing who knows what. She lets out a startled yelp, calling out to Ryker for help as I force her into a bowing position.

“Since you don’t seem to grasp basic manners or respond to polite, politically correct requests, I’ll make myself clear in the only way you’ll understand.” I twist her around just enough to lean close to her ear, and she cries out again. “Keep your wild, reckless, sl\*tty self far away from my mate, or I swear I’ll pull out every strand of your hair one by one and then beat you within an inch of your life—right here, in front of everyone!”

“ENOUGH!” Ryker’s voice booms sharply, and my gaze snaps to his. His expression is unreadable, but if he sides with her now, I don’t know where that leaves me.

He opens his mouth to speak but pauses as his eyes glaze over, caught by a sudden mindlink.

“F\*CK! I don’t have time for this!” Bennet storms in, slinging an arm around my shoulders.

“On it, bossman. Go!” Bennet urges.

Ryker points at me. “You, stay with Bennet and follow his orders. And you,” he directs at Amy, who’s now curled up on the floor, sobbing like a victim, “I’ll deal with you later.” Then he’s gone in an instant.

“Bennet, what’s happening? Where did he go?” I ask, panic rising.

“If you were meant to know, you’d have the ability to know,” Bennet replies coldly. “The alpha deserves a mate who can communicate and contribute during times of crisis, not just someone to shield. We already have enough children and elders for that.”

“Amy, shut the f\*ck up!” I snap, my voice trembling.

“Bennet?” I’m close to tears now. Nothing Amy has ever said has cut this deep before. I think I understand my place—sort of. I should be out there fighting or at least sending calming messages to the pack, especially if something terrible has happened. I hope Bennet sees the desperation in my eyes.

“There was an attack. One of the teens was found seriously injured.”

“How does she know?” I wonder bitterly, feeling hypocritical talking about Amy as if she’s not in the room, but I don’t care.

Bennet closes his eyes briefly. “The teen who found her called out to everyone.” Then, unexpectedly, he pulls me into a firm embrace.

Why comfort her? I think bitterly. Stop making her believe she’s important. She’s nothing. The alpha knows it, which is why he hasn’t marked her yet. He’s just biding his time, enjoying himself while he can. He’ll have to reject her eventually. We all know it. It’s time you all accepted that.

A low growl escapes me, and without thinking, I lunge blindly toward Amy’s voice. Bennet struggles to hold me back as my rage takes over. Tears blur my vision as I punch and scratch at anything within reach until a sob breaks free, and I collapse into Bennet’s arms.

I vaguely register him lifting me up and carrying me out of the office. My tears slow, replaced by a numbing emptiness. Not feeling—that’s what I need right now. I’ll bury everything for later.

I’m nothing. She said it, and strangely, it’s the only truth that fits right now. I don’t belong here, but Ryker can’t let me go. If I weren’t here, the pack would have a Luna who could sense emergencies, who could feel when something was wrong. Someone better.

Bennet stops at my bedroom door. “You’re freezing. Let’s get you warmed up, okay?”

I squirm in his arms until he sets me down gently. “Don’t listen to her. She’s jealous. You have something she wants. She’ll say anything to make you feel small.”

“But she’s not wrong, Bennet,” I whisper, unable to meet his eyes. “Go help. Save the pup.”

“I’m not leaving you like this.”

“It’s an order, Bennet.” I step inside and close the door firmly, leaving him stunned on the other side.

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Chapter 132

71 – Ryker

I rendezvous with Josh, who approaches from the South side of the reported assault. Danny has taken position on the East flank, and I expect to catch sight of him soon, directly opposite me. We have successfully cornered the five rogues responsible for attacking a group of our teens during their routine patrol practice. Yet, lurking just beyond us, hidden in the dense tree line, is another pack of wolves waiting silently. My priority is to capture at least one of these attackers for questioning, but truthfully, I wouldn't shed a tear if every single one of them perished here and now.

The fact that they managed to breach our defenses and strike that patrol line ignites a fierce rage within me and my wolf. Our patrols are meticulously planned—layered and executed flawlessly, designed to be unpredictable unless you're intimately familiar with our system. This isn't the first time a wolf from an acquired pack has tried to sabotage us from within, but now, with one of our innocent pups seriously injured, these bastards will pay a heavy price, and it won't be quick or painless.

I haven't yet seen the pup, but the reports I've heard paint a grim picture. He's in rough shape. At least three of the rogues were attacking him when his friends intervened and sent out the call for help. Judging by the snow around us, churned and stained with signs of struggle, this fight has been brutal. Greta reached the scene first and managed to wound one of the rogues with her team before we arrived. That was enough to momentarily distract them, but they refused to back down.

They know they're trapped, and they fight with a feral desperation. These wolves might have lost contact with their human sides entirely by now. The wild, haunted look in their eyes tells me they've been stuck in this animal form for far too long. Their bodies are gaunt and scruffy, reeking of neglect and rot. One of them even has large patches of fur missing, likely bearing heavy scars in his human form.

They brace themselves for battle, none of them expecting to be captured alive. It's a fight to the death or freedom. The largest among them snarls viciously and charges straight at me. Greta's wolf leaps onto his back, sinking teeth into the scruff of his neck, eliciting a furious howl as he bucks violently to shake her off. But before he can regain his footing, I pounce. My wolf clamps down on his left foreleg, dragging him to the ground. He writhes and rolls, managing to throw Greta off in the process. She quickly recovers and moves to assist another warrior while I keep this one pinned and vulnerable.

This is clearly their strongest fighter, and he's out for blood—mine, specifically. He snaps, growls, scratches, and bites at anything within reach. His speed is impressive, but the lack of proper nourishment is catching up to him; fatigue is setting in fast. My strategy is simple: keep him moving until he exhausts himself.

Suddenly, a massive silver-gray wolf crashes into the rogue from the side, tearing at all four of his legs and snapping bones with terrifying ease. In mere seconds, the fierce rogue is down, overwhelmed by my gamma's frenzied fury.

"Bennet, what the hell, man?! What are you doing here?!" I shout, stunned.

"I helped. Now send me back!" Bennet yells urgently.

"What do you mean? Where's Kennedy? Why are you here?" I scan the area anxiously, hoping Kennedy hasn't been reckless enough to come out here herself or that Bennet didn't come because she sent him. When he doesn't answer, I fix my gaze on him. His eyes are wild, nearly unhinged. A wave of panic starts to rise in my chest, but I can't abandon this fight until these rogues are fully subdued.

"Command me to go back!" he screams through our mindlink. His wolf struggles against an invisible barrier, trying desperately to turn back the way they came but unable to move even an inch.

"Calm down. Tell me what happened. Where's Kennedy?" I demand, though every wild and frightening thought races through my mind.

"The Luna figured out how to use her command! Now send me back before she does something stupid!" Bennet's voice cracks with urgency.

My heart nearly stops. Kennedy was fine when I left her. What could have happened? Why would she order Bennet to abandon her without any protection?

"Damn it, Ryker. Please!" Bennet's wolf claws at the ground as if trying to resist whatever command she gave, his eyes brimming with panic and frustration. I feel the same turmoil inside as Josh's voice breaks through.

"Go to your Luna! We've got this."

I don't hesitate. Trusting my team completely, I glance at Bennet. "Let's move!"

"Finally!" Bennet growls, and we both surge through the forest, racing back toward my mate.

"What happened?" I ask breathlessly. I don't think I've ever seen Bennet run this fast before. His movements are almost mechanical, like a machine pushed to its absolute limit. He's nearly matching my speed, which should be impossible.

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"Amy—what the hell just happened? That's what! She really did a number on your mate. If she's not hiding by the time we get back, I swear I'll tear her apart myself. That woman has stirred up more trouble since Kennedy showed up than Claude ever did after we took his pack."

“We can’t just go around killing people because they’re rude,” I argued, trying to keep my voice steady.

“I don’t care! The moment we find Kennedy, Amy’s finished. Dead woman walking.”

My mind couldn’t form any coherent thoughts as we rushed through the house, weaving past frightened guests in the ballroom who were seeking refuge from the chaos outside. I followed Bennet up the stairs to Kennedy’s room, where he slammed his fist against the door until it came crashing off its hinges.

Without hesitation, Bennet began frantically searching the room, shouting Kennedy’s name with desperation. I joined in the search, scanning every corner, but she was nowhere to be found. Yet, her scent lingered—sweet and sharp, a mix of honey and spice. It was fresh, unmistakable. Unlike last time, when she deliberately made it impossible to track her, this trail was clear.

I followed the fragrance, which grew stronger as I approached the patio door. With a forceful push, I slid the door open, the glass cracking under the strain. Snow-covered footprints led away from the threshold.

“No!” I yelled, leaping over the railing without hesitation. We were only one floor above the main level, but I had no idea if she could handle the drop safely. My thoughts raced—did she run away on her own, or was she taken? What had Amy said to provoke this? Bennet’s reaction told me it wasn’t just some petty insult.

Bennet landed behind me, breathless. “Can you tell if she left willingly or if someone forced her?”

“All I can smell is her, and there’s just one set of footprints. But who knows? The attack on the teens might’ve been a distraction. Maybe forcing you to leave was part of someone’s plan. Would Kennedy really bolt on her own?”

“I don’t know. She knows every secret entrance and exit in this packhouse better than anyone. It used to drive me crazy—like a twisted game of hide and seek on steroids. She could’ve pushed the limits if she wanted, but she never did. She always stayed just within the rules, enough to keep everyone from complaining. But she was still a huge pain in the ass.”

“What exactly did Amy say to make Kennedy want to leave now? You mentioned this isn’t the first time Amy’s been difficult, and Robin said Kennedy handled it like a pro.”

Bennet shook his head. “I think it was the whole thing—Amy barging into your office, taunting her, and then what happened after you left.” He recounted the details of the confrontation in my office after I stormed out. At least Kennedy is standing up for herself now, but the way she looked at Bennet when she gave that order—he knew something terrible was coming, and he felt powerless to stop it.

My senses sharpened with every word. Kennedy was spiraling into despair, and I felt responsible. She believed she wasn’t good enough, that I felt the same way. Like an old

wolf drawn back to the forest, ready to be claimed by the Moon Goddess. I had to find her before it was too late.

Time seemed to stretch endlessly as we searched, though it had only been about thirty minutes. For Kennedy, every second mattered. The bitter cold was unforgiving, and I was certain she hadn't thought to bring extra layers.

"There!" My wolf howled, and I spotted her collapsed on the ground, shivering and weak.

We rushed over, and I gently lifted her into my arms. Her lips were tinged blue, her breathing shallow, but she was still alive. I rested her head against my shoulder, pressing her frail body close to my bare chest, hoping to transfer as much warmth as possible to her vital organs.

Holding her tightly, I summoned the pack doctor, Greta, along with Robin and anyone else who might help. Now, it was a race against time. I had to get Kennedy back home—safe and warm—before the cold claimed her completely.

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Chapter 134

72 – Ryker

We headed directly to my room without hesitation. There was no question of letting her be alone now, or ever again. After last night and waking up beside her this morning, the thought of separation was unbearable. My wolf whimpered softly, sensing her fragile state, and I fought to silence him. I needed to be strong for her, to protect her, because my wolf was powerless in this situation.

"Remove her clothes, Alpha," our lead healer instructed firmly as she entered the room. "She needs to be warmed up immediately. Get her under the covers, now."

I didn't hesitate for a second. Bennet stepped forward to help, but my wolf growled low and warningly, still convinced there was some romantic tension between them. I caught the hurt in Bennet's eyes, but I couldn't afford distractions—not now.

"Greta, please assist," the healer said without waiting for a reply. Every ounce of our attention had to be on keeping her alive. I glanced at the healer, desperate for any guidance. "What else can I do?"

"It would help—and speed things up—if she was marked," she replied.

I shook my head vehemently. "No. We still don't know if it will harm her. I won't risk making things worse." Sliding onto my bed, I let the healer and Greta wrap us both in blankets. I curled onto my side, pulling her close to my chest, her ear resting against the steady beat of my heart. Her cheeks remained icy cold. I pressed a gentle kiss to the top of her head, breathing in the faint, sweet scent she carried. "Come on, baby, fight. Please. We need you. I need you," I whispered softly into her hair.

“Boss,” Bennet said, raising his hands in surrender, and I shot him a sharp look. “Could you make her pack? I know we don’t have any information on mates yet, but humans have been part of our pack’s history before. To be included in the lineage, they had to be pack members.” He turned toward the healer. “Could that connection help?”

“I don’t see why not,” she answered thoughtfully. “Given her current contact, she should be able to heal faster from the incision.”

“Can we do that without moving her?” I asked cautiously, reluctant to try anything uncertain.

“We can have you sit up and maintain your position,” the healer said. “It would give her the strength of the pack to aid healing. I believe we should try it, Alpha.”

I took a deep breath, steadying myself as her scent washed over me. “Alright. Let’s try.”

For the next hour, the healer and Greta administered fluids while my mother, Josh, Bennet, and Danny prepared the ritual to make her a pack member. I simply held my mate close as the controlled chaos unfolded around us. Her breathing became less strained, and she seemed to slip into a peaceful sleep, curled protectively around me like I was her teddy bear. But I wouldn’t be satisfied until those striking ice-blue eyes opened and looked up at me.

I closed my eyes, feeling her warmth against me, replaying everything since she arrived—everything my team had shared, Robin’s words, my mother’s insights. She was strong, stubborn even, my perfect Luna—except she was human and so fragile. That reality was hard to accept. She couldn’t mindlink, and I refused to let her enter any fight willingly. Vulnerable as she was, I felt helpless, unable to find a solution for once in my life.

“We’re ready, Alpha,” Josh’s voice pulled me back from the spiral of worry. I opened my eyes, breaking free from the negative thoughts that had been circling around Kennedy’s condition.

I shifted into a more comfortable sitting position. She was straddling me, pressed tightly chest to chest. Under any other circumstances—and without an audience—I would have been thrilled by the closeness. But now, I kept her face nestled into my neck and under my chin, her right arm wrapped around my waist to keep as much of her covered as possible. My mother gently lifted her left hand and extended her palm toward the elder who had joined us. I double-checked every inch of her exposed skin was covered before we began.

The ceremony was swift, or as swift as it could be with someone unresponsive. At least she didn’t have to repeat anything back for it to take effect. The elder placed a silver knife in my right hand while my mother steadied Kennedy’s left for me to make the incision. The elder made the same cut on my palm. The moment our blood mingled, I felt a powerful surge of connection flow through us.

Kennedy gasped deeply, her fingers tightening around mine like a live wire stuck to me. I turned our hands so I could kiss the back of hers, then tucked it against my chest, not caring about the blood smearing. Her eyes remained closed, but her body heat rose instantly, and color began to return to her cheeks.

Josh said he was going to get an update on the rogues they'd captured and see if he could extract any useful information. Greta and Danny headed off to their patrols, promising to check on the injured teen and update me soon. The elder and healer packed up to leave, with the healer promising to return once more tonight and again in the morning to monitor Kennedy's condition. Bennet pulled up a chair and slumped back, and I couldn't even bring myself to ask him to leave. He was hurting almost as much as I was over her state. My mother said she would have food brought up for us.

I sat there quietly, holding Kennedy close, feeling the weight of the moment settle around us. The room was still except for her soft breaths and the faint hum of concern from those who cared for us both. In this fragile, uncertain time, I vowed silently to protect her with everything I had.

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### Chapter 135

After everyone had finally left the room, I eased myself down onto the bed, carefully adjusting Kennedy so she could rest more comfortably. She'd been curled up tightly for so long that I worried about her circulation cutting off in her legs. Once I'd fussed over her blankets and pillows more than necessary, I glanced up at Bennet, who was leaning against the wall with a tired expression.

"Come on, just be honest with me. Is there something going on between you and Kennedy?" I asked, trying to keep my tone casual but unable to hide the curiosity—and frustration—in my voice.

Bennet sighed, clearly weary of the topic. "Not this again. Do you have any idea how exhausting you are?" he replied, his voice low but steady.

I shook my head. "I just don't get it. You act like you're just as obsessed with her as I am. You're always right there, one step behind her. It's like you can read her mind, feel what she's feeling. You get more pissed off or defensive on her behalf than anyone else does..."

"I'm her Gamma, asshole," Bennet said quietly, without the anger he'd shown the other night. Instead, there was a weariness in his voice. "It's my responsibility to stay one step behind her at all times. I have to know what she needs, even before she asks for it. Not being able to talk to her because you're a jealous prick made things harder. I had to become more observant, learn how to read her body language. Honestly, I should thank you for that—she never asks for help. She's just as stubborn as you are. I know Jeremiah and the others love her, but I think she always felt like a burden there too. That's why she pushes herself so hard. And then you came along and took all that away from her in an instant. She knows everyone assumes she's the weak link because she's human, and she refuses to be seen that way. I've had this connection with her since the moment you claimed her at Raina's party."

"I didn't claim her then," I said, shaking my head.

“Bullshit you didn’t! I remember it clearly—a half-assed non-apology to Danny for cockblocking him, then you spent the rest of the night hovering around her. And where was I? Right behind you, watching your back next to Josh. That’s when I knew—she was my Luna.”

I frowned, remembering the early days. “She was attacked twice in her first month here!”

“Unfortunately, that’s part of being Luna,” Bennet said grimly. “Ask your mom how many times they were attacked when she traveled with your dad. Or how many times when she wasn’t with them. For some reason, idiots in our species think females are weak and easy targets. But anyone who messes with Greta and lives to tell the tale quickly changes their tune. I’ve even seen the Luna verbally spar with people—she’s terrifying when she’s angry. Except for Amy, I’ve never seen her back down from anyone. And even then, she only showed her pain after Amy was out of sight—like today.”

I swallowed hard, pulling Kennedy closer, as if holding her tighter could somehow protect her from the dangers I feared. “I don’t know if I could survive if anything like what happened to Mom happened to Kennedy. I don’t know how Dad managed it.”

“You should talk to Jeremiah,” Bennet suggested. “Maybe he’ll tell you what happened about a year ago.”

“What do you mean? He mentioned it once but said it wasn’t his story to tell.”

“I don’t know all the details because she wasn’t allowed to talk to me,” Bennet admitted, his voice heavy with frustration. “But she was kidnapped or captured—someone wanted to get to Jeremiah through her. She’s here now, so obviously she escaped. From what I understand, she freed herself. She wasn’t rescued.”

I blinked, stunned. “What!?”

“Ask your mom or Greta—they might know more. She’s human, so she can be broken in ways we can’t. But she’s not some fragile piece of glass that needs to be locked away.”

Even if she’s stronger than I am, my fear doesn’t lessen. Kennedy is too precious to risk harm. I’ve seen her endure and heal from a pack induction ceremony while unconscious. I know what she’s capable of, but that doesn’t make it any easier to believe.

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Chapter 136

73-Kennedy

A sharp ache throbs in my head. Did I drink last night? No, that can’t be right—I haven’t had a drop since I moved here. My eyelids feel unbearably heavy, as if glued shut. I want to open them, but the weight is too much. Still, I’m wrapped in such cozy warmth, I’m reluctant to move at all.

Just a few more moments, I tell myself, sinking deeper into the softness of the blanket cocooning me. The darkness around me feels inviting, almost like it's pulling me in to stay longer.

When I finally stir again, a peculiar sensation washes over me—something warm and familiar brushing against my skin. “Hey, little lamb. Can you hear me?” a low, rumbling voice murmurs close by.

“Mhmm?” I respond softly, recognizing that deep voice instantly. I shouldn't like it as much as I do, but for some reason, I can't recall why I think that. I take a slow, calming breath. The scent of rosemary and mint envelops me, making me feel strangely safe. He shouldn't be here, not with me. Another inhale, another exhale. Maybe this is still just a dream. He wants someone like Amy, not me. Breathe in. Breathe out. It's so soothing.

“Kennedy?”

“What?” I whisper back, my voice rough and gravelly from sleep.

He chuckles softly, his breath warm against my cheek. “Open those eyes for me, beautiful.”

I whimper faintly, resisting. “No.” Then I burrow deeper into the bed, unwilling to let go of this perfect moment. This bed is incredible, and the dream of Ryker—he's incredible. I don't want to lose it by waking up fully.

“Why not?” I feel a gentle pressure on my back.

“This is a good dream. I don't want it to end.”

His deep laugh sends a fresh wave of goosebumps crawling across my skin. “Why don't you open your eyes and just make sure it's not a dream?”

I whine again, drawing in a long breath before slowly cracking my eyes open. My gaze falls on the most captivating throat I've ever seen. Can a throat be sexy? I tilt my head upward, my nose almost brushing the smooth expanse of skin before me. That explains the strength of his scent. I watch his Adam's apple move as he swallows, noticing the tiny shivers that ripple across his skin. Finally, unable to delay any longer, I meet his emerald green eyes.

He's here, right beside me, impossibly close.

Oh shit! I jerk away from his arms, sitting up quickly.

“What the hell!?! Luna!” Bennet's sharp voice cuts through the room, making my head snap toward him.

“Bennet? Wha...” I start to ask, but before I finish, a soft sheet is wrapped around me.

“I'd prefer if your gamma didn't see what you look like under your clothes,” Ryker murmurs in my ear as he carefully tucks the sheet around me, making sure every inch is covered.

I glance down for the first time. “What the fuck?! Where are my clothes?” I clutch the sheet tighter, tucking it under my arms so my hands are free.

“The bigger question is, how are you feeling?” Ryker’s voice deepens, taking on a metallic edge that makes my eyes flick back to him. He’s just smiling—that smile that could melt anyone. For a moment, I’m lost in it, before I remember: Alpha just spoke to me... inside my head. I shake my head briskly to break free from Ryker’s spell.

“How is that even possible? And you never told me about my clothes,” I whisper, barely able to get the words out.

Ryker’s hand glides lightly down my arm before taking hold of my left hand. He turns my palm over, revealing a thin scar stretching from the center of my palm down to my wrist.

“You are officially a member of the Dark Moon pack,” he says firmly. “And I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t wander into the woods in winter without any layers on.”

“But I’m no good for this pack,” I murmur, doubt creeping into my voice. “Not as a leader, and certainly not as a Luna. It would be easier for everyone if I just wasn’t part of the problem.”

“Hey, Bennet, we need a little break. Go eat something and get some rest. I’ll call if we need you,” Ryker orders.

“You got it, Bossman. I’m glad you’re okay, Luna. And I agree—don’t wander off in the freezing cold again,” Bennet replies, his tone a mix of concern and teasing.

I roll my eyes, delivering the best sarcastic tone I can muster. “Okay, Gamma. Whatever you say.”

He smiles, reaches over, and squeezes my foot that’s peeking out from under the blanket. Then, just as quickly as he appeared, Bennet stands and leaves the room. His retreat is so swift I almost miss it. Either he’s utterly exhausted—losing sleep over me—or this conversation is going to get complicated. Either way, a heavy weight settles in my chest.

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## Chapter 137

I curled my knees tightly against my chest, making sure I was wrapped up as much as possible. My eyes scanned the room cautiously. Ryker could start the conversation whenever he was ready—I had no intention of pushing it. His room looked familiar, though my memory of it was hazy from last time. Back then, anger clouded my attention. The space was dominated by dark tones—deep blacks and cold steel grays. Everything was spotless, but I couldn’t tell if it was because Ryker preferred minimalism or if the omega responsible for cleaning had an obsessive streak.

Without a word, Ryker slid his arm around me, pulling me snugly against his side. I instinctively leaned into him, as if this closeness was meant to be. “Before your mind spirals

into whatever wild theory it's cooking up, let me explain," he began. "Your clothes had to come off. You were nearly frozen solid, and I needed to raise your core temperature. You were barely breathing. Then the healer said skin-to-skin contact would speed your recovery. And second, I don't understand why you give me such a hard time when I look out for you, but when Bennet asks you not to do something, you obey without hesitation."

I didn't voice it aloud, but the explanation about the clothes made sense. "It's pretty simple, really. He's not my mate."

Ryker waited only a moment before pressing, "Care to explain what you mean by that?"

"There's not much else to add," I said quietly. "As a mate, you're compelled to protect me. But I'm a liability—being human is a flaw in this world, and that makes me a target. Bennet can't resist the urge to keep me safe, so I don't do anything that might make his job harder. You, though, have the choice to focus on me or something more important—like the attack earlier today..."

"A week ago. And you are important," Ryker interrupted gently.

I turned fully to face him, no longer caring if the sheet covered me or not. "Wait, what?" I asked, confused.

"The attack, and everything that happened in my office—it was a week ago."

"Then why am I not hooked up to a bunch of machines in the hospital?"

"You don't seem to need them. The healers come by regularly to check your vitals. You do have a needle in your right hand, so be careful with that—it's for nutrients, fluids, antibiotics, that sort of thing. Please take it easy. It took a lot of convincing to keep you here, but your body responds better when we're close. And the hospital bed can't fit both of us. You're not allowed out of bed until the lead healer says so—that's her order, not mine."

I glanced down at my hand and thought I felt a tube tucked between my legs—so there was a catheter too. I rubbed my face with my hands, overwhelmed. "Why do all my embarrassing moments happen in front of you?" Then it hit me. "I've been out for a whole week?" He nodded solemnly. "I missed Christmas?" Another nod. "What did you tell Jeremiah? It's our favorite holiday."

"I told him the truth," Ryker said. "After I brought you home and got you warm and stable. He's not happy about it and still won't share what happened with your home pack a year and a half ago—or the details about your parents. I'd love to know when you're ready to tell me. You must have some kind of Christmas radar, though, because that's the day you started showing signs of getting better."

I felt a sudden urge to call Jer and let him know I was okay. "I'll do that once I move back to my room. When can the healer come and take all this stuff off me?"

"You're not going back to your room," Ryker said firmly, tightening his hold on me.

“What? Why not? Where am I supposed to go then?” I tried to look up at him, but the way he had me positioned made it awkward.

“Apparently, Bennet and I both have a serious problem with locked doors when it comes to you.”

“You didn’t... not again,” I groaned.

“It wasn’t me this time. Your Gamma was so furious when you sent him away, he got back before me and destroyed the door.”

He muttered the last part quietly. “And I might have done some damage to your patio door too. We’ve already moved all your things in here. This is where you belong.”

I sank into his side, feeling a strange mix of frustration and comfort. Despite everything, this place—this moment—felt like home.

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Chapter 138

74 – Kennedy

I can’t quite put my finger on what’s changed, but honestly, I’m not about to complain. Ever since they found me nearly frozen in the forest, Ryker and Bennet seem to have reached some kind of unspoken truce. I’m not completely on my own anymore—not quite. That would be asking too much, I suppose. Still, I’ve started training with Greta again. The biting cold outside is brutal on my thin skin, but at least I get to use the gym at the training center, which is a small mercy.

It hit me only recently how much weight and muscle I’d lost—Greta didn’t hold back, kicking my ass during workouts and then teasing me about how weak I’d become. But every day I feel myself growing stronger, and that progress is lifting my spirits more than I expected.

School has taken over my life too. I’m fully caught up now, and I’m gearing up to take on a light load of business classes. I want to follow in the footsteps of my parents and Aunt Beth. Being so far from my mom’s studio and right in the middle of the largest wolf pack I know means I probably won’t be training any humans anytime soon. But since construction and building projects are the pack’s main source of income, maybe I’ll focus on something that helps me understand that world better. I’ll stick with the basics for now and see where it takes me. After all, Sarah did say I should do what I want and let Ryker handle the bills.

Every Saturday morning, I have a standing date with Alpha to watch the pups. He sits beside me on the sidelines now, and the kids have finally warmed up to him. I think Emily’s approval had a lot to do with that—she was the first to approach him, gently petting his head after giving me a warm hug. No one else dares touch him, though that might be some kind of guy code.

“Luna, are you coming to training today? We’ve been working on this new move that’s super hard, but I was the first to nail it. You should come see,” one of the boys calls out. I think his name is Brandon. There are so many kids now that I can’t always match names to faces.

“He just wants to show off for his Luna,” someone teases.

“Alpha, don’t tell me you’re jealous too,” another chimes in.

“I don’t get jealous,” Alpha replies firmly. “I just don’t like any guy hitting on my mate. Doesn’t matter how young he is.”

“That sounds a lot like jealousy to me,” I giggle, leaning back against his warm fur. He emits a low rumble, like a contented purr. Late January’s cold still bites through the air.

“Are you going to finish your run, or are you coming back with me? I’m getting hungry. You and Ryker must be starving,” I ask.

“We could always eat,” he rumbles, standing up as I do the same.

“That sounds dangerously close to an innuendo,” I laugh as he pops up beside me. Together, we make our way to the SUV I’ve been allowed to use. No one but Greta ever rides with me; the others just follow when they’re on guard duty. Before I get too far, I turn back to answer the boy’s question. “We’re going to eat first, then head to our own training. I have to check the schedule, but if I can stay, I will.”

His face lights up along with the other kids’, while Alpha grumbles quietly. When we reach the SUV, Alpha moves to the back, and I hear the familiar popping and cracking of his bones as he shifts. Then the gate lifts.

“Do you really want to stay and watch the pups today?” I ask.

“If we can. I’m not sure of the schedule, but I’d like to be there, to support. What are you doing?” he replies.

“I had someone stash some backup clothes in here, just in case.” I walk around the side just in time to catch him adjusting the waistband of his athletic shorts, highlighting that irresistible ‘V’ muscle. I swear my brain just melted. “Hey, my eyes are up here, Mate.”

“I’m well acquainted with your anatomy, mate. Am I not allowed to admire it openly?” He gives me a once-over, and I’m pretty sure he flexes just for me. I can’t help but smile. He’s the only guy I want to look at like this, so I might as well make it obvious.

He growls softly and moves closer, still waiting for me to make the first move. He won’t touch me unless I initiate it. At first, I thought it was him trying to be a gentleman after everything that happened, but it runs deeper than that. The only time he loses control is when I catch him off guard—like now.

“You could probably get away with almost anything,” I tease.

“How about this?” I step closer, pushing my luck, and trail a finger down the valley between his pecs, following the center of his abs to the dusting of dark hair that starts at his belly button and disappears beneath his shorts. I trace back and forth twice before he suddenly grabs my wrist.

“Yep,” he pants, breathless. “We need to get going before I throw you up against this truck.” He shivers and gently pushes me forward toward the passenger side, closing the hatch behind us.

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Chapter 139

“What if I told you I wouldn’t mind being thrown against the truck?” I say with as innocent a smile as I can muster, glancing coyly over my shoulder.

He lets out a low, throaty growl. “Just get in the car already. It’s going to be tough enough to focus on driving without that image stuck in my head.”

I lean forward across the center console, my voice soft and teasing. “Maybe I could help you get rid of that problem.” I reach for him, fully aware of where this playful banter is headed.

True to form, he grabs my wrist firmly and leans in close, his voice dropping to a low, intense whisper. “I told you before—when I make you come for the first time, it won’t be from your hand or that cheeky little mouth. I’ll be buried so deep inside that sweet little body of yours, staring into those icy blue eyes, you’ll forget your own name.” He gives me a slow, deliberate smile that sends a shiver down my spine. “Now, I’m both hungry and horny. How about we grab some food so I can calm the hell down before dealing with those teenage hornballs at work?”

“You’d fit right in with them at least,” I tease, and before I can react, he snatches my knee with lightning speed, squeezing it hard enough to make me squeal. Then he starts tickling me relentlessly until I finally give in. “Okay! Okay! Yes, we can go!”

We pull into the packhouse parking area, and an omega promptly meets us to take the car to the vast garage tucked off to one side. As we step inside through the front door, a wave of nerves washes over me. It’s not the people that make me uneasy—it’s the constant alertness, the feeling that Amy might be lurking nearby. I haven’t seen her since that tense day in Ryker’s office, but I know she’s probably still around, waiting for her chance to corner him. Breakfast has always been her time to try and trap him, and so far, everything has been going too smoothly. I’m bracing myself for the inevitable.

Ryker must sense my hesitation because he reaches over and takes my hand, intertwining our fingers. This is the first time he’s held my hand in public. I glance down at our hands, at the simple but intimate gesture, then back up into his eyes. He’s watching me closely, waiting to see if I’m okay with this. I can tell he’s uncertain, so I squeeze his hand tighter, not wanting him to pull away. The electric thrill that runs through me when our skin touches has become something I crave. He smiles gently and leads us forward.

“Whoa! Kennedy, does our growly alpha know you’re holding hands and showing off that big smile?” Danny teases, clapping Ryker on the shoulder.

“F\*ck off,” Ryker snaps, though he can’t hide the grin spreading across his face. I laugh softly as we move through the breakfast line together.

“So, Luna, any other family members for us to meet? Sisters, hot cousins, or maybe some widowed aunties in their cougar phase?” Danny throws out the question casually over his omelet.

I shrug, shaking my head. “Nope. Unlike you guys, I don’t have a house full of family history. It was just my mom, dad, and me. They were both only children, and all my grandparents had passed before I was born. The closest thing I have to family ties now are Jeremiah, Aunt Beth, and Uncle James. Aunt Beth managed to save a few things for me, but most of what was in my house got cleared out after my parents died.”

“Do you mind if I ask what happened?” Bennet’s voice is gentle, cautious. He’s probably the only person besides Jeremiah who’s seen me at my lowest.

“It’s not really a big story,” I begin, forcing a small smile. “My mom and Aunt Beth have been best friends since college. When Beth became the Luna of Silver Crescent, she kind of adopted our family. I guess Uncle James figured they came as a package deal.” I pause, the memory bittersweet. “We were at a party celebrating the graduating seniors before they all went their separate ways. Usually, we’d stay overnight—I probably spent as much time there as I did at my own home. Aunt Beth even gave me my own room when I was six. But that night, I had a huge test to study for, my dad had work to do, and a big storm was forecasted for the next day, making travel risky. So we left late.”

I swallow hard, the image flashing in my mind. “I fell asleep in the backseat, so I only know what happened from what others told me. Somewhere about halfway home, a drunk driver hit us. Our car flipped multiple times and ended up pinned against one of those concrete barriers in the middle of the highway.” Ryker wraps his arm around me, pulling me closer as I speak. “It took me forever to find a phone and call for help. I couldn’t get out of the car. According to the therapists, being trapped with my parents—who died instantly—in the wreckage for that hour before help arrived is what causes my nightmares.”

“Please tell me the driver got what he deserved,” Josh demands from the other side of Ryker, his voice sharp.

“He died too,” I say quietly. “I was the only survivor. No one can explain how or why. Our car was crushed beyond recognition. They had to cut it open like a can to get me out, and I only had a small cut behind my ear that needed three stitches.”

Ryker tightens his hold around me, and I lean into him, feeling the warmth and safety he offers. The past is painful, but here with him, I find a moment of peace.

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Chapter 140

Everyone’s eyes are fixed on me, and it’s the one thing I despise the most—the pity that lingers in their gaze. It’s a look that makes me feel small, as if I’m some fragile creature broken beyond repair. But the truth is, none of us could have changed what happened. I’ve come to terms with that much. The circumstances are what they are, unalterable and cruel. What still haunts me, though, is the memory of sitting there, utterly trapped, surrounded by my parents’ lifeless forms.

I inhale deeply, trying to steady my racing heart. Ryker pulls me closer, his arms wrapping around me protectively. I only just realize that he’s holding me like this, out here in public—and surprisingly, it doesn’t make me uneasy at all.

“It’s been over three years,” I say softly, my voice barely above a whisper. “I’m not saying it doesn’t hurt sometimes, but I can’t keep playing the victim forever. The nightmares have eased up, which makes things a little more bearable.” I glance up at Ryker, a sudden realization dawning on me. My nightmares lessened when I moved here. Even during my lowest moments with him, they never came back. Has he noticed the change too?

“What?” he asks, pulling back enough to look me squarely in the face.

“I’m not sure,” I admit, feeling the confusion in his eyes. I can’t quite put it into words myself.

We finish our meal in silence, the quiet between us comfortable rather than awkward. I bundle up again, ready to head to the training grounds together. This time, I ride with Ryker in his truck. The hum of the engine fills the space between us, but no words are needed.

The moment my feet touch the cold ground, I’m suddenly lifted and tossed over someone’s shoulder amid a chorus of laughter.

“What the hell?” I protest, pushing against the broad back holding me. It’s Danny. “What are you doing?” He’s skipping—literally skipping like a carefree child—and it’s making it hard to keep a straight face.

“Bennet and the Bossman have had enough of your time. Today, you’re my partner!” he declares with a mischievous grin, breaking into a jog as Ryker shouts after him to stop fooling around.

The kids erupt into laughter at Danny’s antics, and despite myself, I can’t help but join in. It’s ridiculous, but it’s fun—a welcome distraction. Danny sets me down on the far side of the training field, as far from Ryker, Josh, and the pups as possible.

“Alright, Luna,” he says, bouncing on the balls of his feet like we’re about to spar in a boxing ring. “You’ve been out of the game for a bit. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

I wonder if he knows that Greta has been coming to the packhouse gym to train with me. I’m not back to full strength yet, but I’m improving. I’m bundled up in snow pants and a down jacket—thin enough to move in, but still different from my usual workout gear. It’s strange moving like this, but I guess I should get used to fighting in less-than-ideal conditions. If I’m

ever targeted, it won't be convenient or comfortable. This might be embarrassing for both of us, but it should be fun—and I'm sure I'll be laughing through most of it.

About thirty minutes in, I realize Danny's true plan. He's got a score to settle with Ryker, and apparently, I'm his way in. That suits me just fine. I have my own scores to settle, and I know we've caught his attention because of all the whooping and hollering coming from the teen side of the field. Ryker's distracted, and Josh keeps winning the sparring matches, whatever moves they're focusing on.

Every now and then, Danny manages to sneak a touch on my backside or trap me in a hold that presses us chest to chest. He's even gotten me tangled in some positions that feel like a twisted game of Twister. I notice Ryker's eyes lock onto me whenever my backside is in full view. It's good to know I can command his full attention when I'm bent over like that. It's giving me a few ideas.

Danny comes at me again, thinking I'm distracted, but I'm ready this time. I duck under his arm and deliver a sharp smack to the back of his head for his cockiness before pushing him away. It feels incredible to be out here, moving and sweating. I know he's still going easy on me, but I don't care. I had to shed my coat and snow pants a while ago, and now I'm working out in just my thermal leggings and top—another form-fitting distraction for Ryker. I smile to myself as Danny and I reset.

When the session finally ends, Ryker strides straight toward me with a fierce look in his eyes. Danny chuckles, presses a quick kiss to my temple, and bolts like his life depends on it.

"COWARD!" I call after him, laughing.

Ryker doesn't slow as he crashes into me, lifting me off the ground. My arms wrap around his neck, and my legs barely manage to lock around his waist. He's staring right into my eyes, so I have no idea how he's navigating without looking where he's going.