

Letters Sent To Eternity

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 141

I heard the sharp click of the truck door as he shoved me inside, closing it with a force that seemed almost deliberate. Without a word, he circled to the driver's side and climbed in, eyes fixed straight ahead, refusing to meet mine. The silence between us was thick, and I found myself wondering if maybe we had crossed a line we shouldn't have. But honestly, I shouldn't care—he had done far worse things, and surely he understood that Danny was only teasing. Still, I couldn't reach out to him through mindlink to ask what was wrong. The tension was suffocating. The drive back to the packhouse garage took barely ten minutes, but it felt like an eternity.

The moment I stepped out of the truck, he pulled me into his arms again. This time, I didn't resist. There was something fragile about him, something broken beneath the surface, and I wanted to hold onto it, to hold onto him. Without a word, he carried me through the back door and up the hidden staircase, the quiet creak of the steps echoing in the dimly lit hallway.

Once inside the bedroom, he slammed the door behind us. Before I could even catch my breath, he pinned me against the back wall. His chest rose and fell rapidly, his eyes scanning my face with an intensity I couldn't quite decipher. I had no clue what he was searching for, but I waited patiently. This wasn't something I could coax out of him. He'd speak when he was ready. I gently ran my fingers through the short hair at the nape of his neck, and he closed his eyes, savoring the touch. Taking a deep breath, he opened his eyes again, revealing redness around the rims, teetering on the edge of tears.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, his gaze never leaving mine. I cupped his face, feeling the heat of his skin beneath my palms as he inhaled and exhaled deeply. "That was the worst thing I've experienced in a long time. And I know Danny was just playing around. I know you were teasing him, but it felt like torture. I hated seeing him touch you like that. I hated the way he smiled at you. And damn it, you smiled back. A real smile that lit up your entire face. And I hate, with everything in me, that I haven't earned even one like that from you yet."

He took another shaky breath, and I simply watched him. I saw him crack just a little, tears welling in his eyes. I should feel bad, should comfort him, but I didn't—not yet. He needed this moment of raw honesty. He had no idea what those nights were like for me, but today, he got a glimpse of it. He couldn't stop it or fix it in the moment; all he could do was endure it.

"Can you forgive me? Can I make this right? What do I have to do?" His voice was desperate, searching. A single tear slipped down the cheek of my fierce, intimidating mate, and that was the moment I lost my defenses. He had let down every wall, revealing the depth of his feelings.

Tenderly, I brushed the tear away with my thumb. He leaned into my touch, and I pulled him close, pressing my lips to his. The kiss was electric—more powerful than lightning or explosions. His lips were soft and full, hesitant at first, but when I gently asked for more with my tongue, he didn't hesitate. He let me lead, and the kiss quickly became wild and urgent—teeth, lips, tongues tangled in a messy, desperate dance. My heart pounded fiercely as I pressed closer, craving every inch of him. I wanted more. I needed more.

He pressed himself against me, and I felt every inch of him, every breath, every heartbeat. I dug my nails into his shoulders and moved my hips against his, earning a low growl that sent shivers down my spine. Encouraged, I did it again, reveling in the electric thrill coursing through my body. A sigh escaped me as he deepened the pressure. One hand tangled in my hair, the other gripping my ass firmly—I was in heaven. I bit his lower lip, sucking lightly to ease the sting, and his hold on my hair tightened in response.

I whimpered softly when he pulled away, his eyes half-lidded, a goofy, intoxicated smile spreading across his face.

“Don't stop,” I whispered, unsure if I was begging, pleading, or commanding.

He pressed his forehead against mine, his breath warm on my skin. “I don't want to, but I have to. We need to.”

“Why?” I whined, my voice trembling. “That was incredible!”

He flashed me that dazzling smile again. “I'm glad you think so. I wasn't sure...” He hesitated, tucking a stray lock of hair behind my ear.

“Not sure about what?”

“How it would go. I thought it would happen somewhere more romantic than our bedroom, but I guess this works.” He smiled softly and just looked at me.

My mind was moving slowly, trying to process his words. “Wait... Ryker. Was that your first kiss? I mean, not just our first kiss, but your very first kiss ever?” No way. There was no way.

“What if I said yes?” he replied with a sly grin.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 142

76 – Ryker

Until now, I never really cared. I probably shouldn't care. Yet, deep down, I can't help but feel a flicker of insecurity over the way she asked that question. It's a bad habit of mine—misreading her intentions. Unlike Bennet, and now Danny, I haven't mastered the art of understanding her emotions. I just watch her, caught in the moment, her eyes fixed on me with something I can't quite place. Is it wonder? Or maybe confusion? Disbelief? I'm not

sure. But one thing is clear: I can't stop touching her. My fingers keep threading through her hair, brushing her cheek, tracing her arms, lingering on the small patch of bare skin at her waist where her shirt has slipped up.

I saved myself for my mate. That's the one thing my wolf and I agreed on without question. We held back everything—the binding, the closeness—just for her. And I don't regret it. I can't. That kiss was the most incredible experience I've ever had. More thrilling than my first shift, even more intense than my first kill in a fight. This woman in my arms has awakened something inside me I never thought possible. My heart pounds wildly, and the electric charge between us hums like a live wire. All I can do is stare at her.

I know she's looking for more explanation, but there isn't one to give. No one else was ever going to get this part of me. So I just take her in—the way her blonde hair is tousled, mostly pulled loose from its ponytail. She never wears much makeup, but now her eyes are rimmed with smudged black liner. Her cheeks are flushed pink, and her lips—so soft and inviting—are swollen from the kiss. But it's her eyes, those crystal blue eyes, that have me completely mesmerized. Somehow, they shine even brighter now. I shouldn't have waited this long. I should have done this the very first night she arrived. I feel like the broken pieces inside me are finally starting to mend. I feel stronger, more alive. Just one kiss, and I'm hooked—completely addicted.

“Ryker?” Her voice pulls me back, and I blink, focusing on her words. “Were you planning on keeping me here all day?” she asks, a teasing smile playing on her lips.

I grin and ask, “What if I said yes? What would you do then?”

Without missing a beat, a fiery spark ignites in her eyes. “Then I'd tell you that kiss isn't the only first you're giving up today.” She presses her lips to mine again—light as a feather—and damn, if it doesn't hit me with the same intensity as the deep, possessive kiss we just shared.

I groan softly. “I can't. Not yet.” Taking a steady breath, I pull back and gently lower her to her feet.

She stays close, grinding against me as she moves, her body pressing into mine. I might have just made things a thousand times harder for myself. I know what she tastes like now, what those soft, tempting lips feel like against mine—and it could very well be my undoing.

But she doesn't argue, which is new. Either she understands, or she's planning to catch me off guard when I least expect it. Both seem equally likely. My fiery mate knows exactly what she wants in the bedroom. When I first realized that, I was as pissed off as my wolf. But after a heart-to-heart with my dad, I understood she's human—this is all new to her, too. I believe this will work in my favor. In fact, it already has.

I pull her close again, breathing in the mix of honey and spice that clings to her, mingled with the earthy scent of the forest, dirt, and sweat from the training grounds. She smells irresistible. But I resist the urge and kiss her softly on the forehead. “I just need some time. Can you give me that? Please?”

What I don't say is that I'm terrified of what might happen if we go further too soon. I'm not sure I could stop my wolf from marking her. I've heard stories about passionate markings—they can be brutal and painful for both mates. We're not supposed to hurt each other, and I've never heard of anyone doing so intentionally. But unmarked mates can become aggressive during sex, and the wolf's instinct to mark can spiral out of control, tearing skin, muscles, even breaking bones. I'm already scared of hurting her just by marking her—I don't need raging hormones to make it worse.

She cups my cheeks again, meeting my gaze with steady eyes. "I can give you time—but it can't be forever." Then she laughs, a light, genuine laugh, and adds, "Now I need to go take a shower and deal with these female blue balls." She turns and walks away, still laughing.

"Can I listen?" I call after her.

"Not unless you plan to join me." She winks over her shoulder, and I swear she adds a little extra sway to her step. Damn my life.

We both manage to shower and get dressed for the day without any further distractions. I take her into my office to meet with Josh and discuss the next phase of our building project. I have no idea what role I'll have her play, but I can't seem to stay more than a few feet away from her right now.

"There you are, Bossman," Josh says, not even looking up from a file. "I thought maybe we lost you to the land of the laid, considering your Luna actually seems to like you now."

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 143

"Did you really just crack a joke?" Kennedy interrupted before I could finish my insult, as I tugged her around to the back side of my desk. I couldn't stand the thought of her sitting in her own chair beside me. "I never thought you had it in you." She let out a soft giggle as I settled her onto my lap, and Josh glanced up, locking eyes with her and offering a rare, genuine smile.

That small moment of defending me had him completely captivated as well. My entire team adored her, even though they'd barely spent any time with her yet. Something I was determined to fix.

"I want you to know, Luna, that I'm actually quite a funny guy," I said, trying to sound confident.

She smirked playfully. "Keep telling yourself that, and maybe everything will be just fine." She shifted slightly on my leg, prompting me to squeeze her hip gently to stop her—otherwise, I wouldn't be able to stand and walk away from here. "So, what's on the agenda for today?" She glanced over her shoulder at me, curiosity sparkling in her eyes.

Josh smiled at how easily she changed the subject. "We have a few close visits lined up. We try to check in on at least two areas each month. The pack is nearing five thousand

members now. Our main priorities are training, so every section of the pack is prepared if we ever need them. Then there are the hospitals, for obvious reasons, and the schools. Many of our warriors need a safe place for their pups during long duties, so all the schools in our territory have dorms to accommodate them. It's a lot of effort, but it's absolutely worth it."

I chimed in, waking my computer from sleep mode. "And then there are our projects that generate income. With so many pack members to care for, we try to keep the revenue steady through building projects and by continuing whatever ventures the pack had before we brought them in. Most have something going, but a few either don't want to work or can't. Changing that victim mentality is a real challenge. We distribute resources as best we can. I'm really looking forward to you joining me at the monthly meetings—it'll make those sessions far more bearable. Some former leaders aren't so bad, but there are always a few who seem to make things difficult on purpose. Still self-centered, entitled jerks, even though they lost their pack to me."

For two hours, Josh and I reviewed plans, requests, notices, and updates. Kennedy asked questions to clarify points and spotted gaps we hadn't noticed before. She was genuinely invested, excited to be involved. I don't think I've ever seen another Luna so engaged in this side of pack business—except maybe my mother. But perhaps I'm just biased. Most of this is behind-the-scenes work; maybe more Lunas are involved, but what we usually see is the party planning and event organizing. I don't knock it—I see what Robin does for me—but she's my employee and gets paid to do it. I don't believe it should be a Luna's main focus.

When we finally wrapped up and prepared to leave, a wave of nervousness washed over me. Josh had gone to ready the cars, but Kennedy and I hadn't even stepped out of my office yet. I wondered if this anxiety would always be part of me, or if it was just PTSD from when we first moved her here. The very thought of putting Kennedy in a car and taking her away from the safety of the packhouse made my heart pound fiercely in my chest. She couldn't get hurt—never again. We'd just gotten her healthy. I knew it was my fault, but finally having her by my side made the idea of something happening during travel physically sickening.

"Hey. Hey! What's wrong? What happened? One minute you were smiling, now you're clammy." Kennedy stood in front of me, and I barely noticed when she shifted positions. "I didn't think werewolves could get clammy." She smiled at her own joke, but I couldn't return it.

"I... I... Uh... Just give me a moment." I leaned forward, resting my elbows on my knees, running my fingers through my hair. I needed to calm down. I couldn't keep her here forever, and we weren't going far. The whole team would be with us. It would be fine. I just had to keep repeating that mantra.

Then I felt a gentle tingling sensation, starting at my scalp and trickling down my spine. Her fingernails were softly scratching my head.

"Please, tell me. Be honest. No half-truths—I want to help."

I took a deep breath, weighing what I could or should say.

“The whole truth...” She tugged my hair lightly, making sure I understood she was serious. It was as if she could read my mind.

Another breath. “The truth? I’m scared. Every time you travel in a group, whether by car or running, you’ve been attacked. I can’t stop worrying. The track record isn’t great.”

She let out a short laugh, then whispered, “But all those times, you weren’t with me.” I looked up at her, stunned. How had I resisted this for so long? I pulled her close, resting my cheek against her stomach, holding her tightly. She wrapped her arms around me.

“You are the difference.”

I don’t deserve her. That’s my greatest fear. The more I get to know her, the closer I become. And I know, deep down, I don’t deserve her.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 144

77 – Kennedy

It took a solid ten minutes of coaxing before Ryker finally stepped out and climbed into the car beside me. His hand was locked around mine with a grip so tight it felt like a vise, but I couldn’t bring myself to ask him to loosen it. I understood his anxiety—after all, it wasn’t so different from my own. My history with road trips was far from flawless, and I carried my own bundle of travel nerves. Yet, what he was feeling seemed so much heavier, more intense. His tension was almost tangible; I could taste the nervous energy hanging thickly in the air around us. Still, I knew I had to break through it before either of us suffocated under the weight of silence.

“Tell me about Rory,” I said softly, leaning my head against Ryker’s shoulder to try and ease the stiffness radiating from him. He sat as rigid as a board, eyes fixed ahead, and I wondered how he planned to survive this two-hour drive without unraveling.

“He’s a good kid. About your age, actually,” Ryker replied, glancing at me with a flicker of unease before clearing his throat. He must have noticed the way I was comparing him to Rory when I called him a ‘kid.’ “Umm... he’s different, I guess. His whole situation is different. I’m just an interim alpha for them.”

“What do you mean by that? How does something like that work? I thought you had some kind of instinct or magic that tells you who your alpha is, who’s in charge.”

“We do,” Ryker said quietly, “but Rory was only nine when his father died. His mother came to me for help. Their pack borders the Demon Claw pack, and those two have never exactly been friendly. With such a young heir, they were vulnerable. So Antonia—Rory’s mom—asked if I could help him learn how to be a good alpha and protect their pack until he’s old enough to take over. We started his transition last year. Today’s his birthday, and we’re going to the formal celebration. I can’t believe I’ve known him for ten years now.” Ryker

rubbed his rough chin, a rare softness in his voice. “I’ve watched him grow up, like a nephew. It’s kind of crazy to think about.”

I smiled, teasing, “Yeah, just wait until your sister gives you a whole pack of nieces and nephews. Then you won’t know what hit you.”

I could hear the laugh in his voice, but his next words came with a hint of frustration. “I can’t even think about that right now. Why would you put that idea in my head? Now I really want to rip Jeremiah’s head off.”

“Stop that!” I playfully swatted his arm. “They’re mates. It’s no different than you and me.”

Ryker shook his head, a wry smile tugging at his lips. “And I’m pretty sure Jeremiah’s reaction would be the same as mine. In my head, Rayna is still a little princess, twirling around in tutus, dancing like a ballerina—not making plans to be a mom.” He scrubbed his face, clearly unsettled.

“Well, I’m excited,” I said, my voice light. “I can’t wait to spoil nieces and nephews.”

“Really?” he asked, surprised.

“Absolutely! I’ve always loved pups. I’ve been looking forward forever to being an auntie.” I bounced slightly in my seat, unable to hide my enthusiasm. “Now I even know what they might look like. I imagine a little girl with Jeremiah’s milk chocolate hair and those striking emerald eyes like yours and Rayna’s. Or maybe a little boy with dark brown, almost black hair and warm honey eyes. They’ll probably be mischievous and playful most of the time.”

“Is that so?” Ryker smiled at me, and I nodded eagerly.

“What about you?” he asked suddenly.

“What about me?” I blinked, caught off guard. His gaze was mesmerizing, and I found myself drifting, only half-focused on the conversation. The walls of the SUV seemed to close in around us, but I didn’t feel trapped—just drawn in.

“Have you only thought about being an aunt, or do you want kids of your own someday?”

The question hit me like a wave. The space between us felt suddenly much smaller.

“I... I don’t know,” I stammered, unable to meet his eyes. “I guess... I’ve thought about it, sure. Doesn’t everyone?” My voice faltered, words tumbling awkwardly.

“Hey,” he said gently, lifting my chin with one finger. “Talk to me.” He repeated my earlier question, softer this time. “Do you want kids?”

I shrugged, feeling vulnerable. “I guess it’s kind of inevitable now, isn’t it?”

“Only if you want them,” Ryker assured me. “Kennedy, I would never force you into anything. You’re natural with pups, but I know plenty of people who don’t want or can’t have kids.”

“But isn’t there an expectation? To have an heir?”

“Well, yes, technically. But I promise, it’s a decision we make together. No pressure.” I simply nodded, taking a deep breath to steady myself. How had this conversation gotten so intense so quickly?

“What about you?” I asked, curiosity creeping in.

“What about me?”

“Do you want kids? I mean, I know an alpha’s role is to have an heir and keep the bloodline going, but what do you really want?”

He looked down at his lap for a moment, as if summoning courage. His face was a perfect mask, revealing nothing. Then he spoke quietly.

“Would you be angry if I said I want a big family?”

I blinked in surprise. “Uh, what?”

“It’s always been just Rayna and me. I’ve wondered what it would be like to have a bunch of brothers to run around with, or if she had sisters to play house and dolls with—or whatever other dress-up madness she got into.”

I laughed. “What do you mean by ‘big’ and ‘bunch’? Do you plan on having me pregnant forever?”

I was joking, but the sparkle in his eyes told me he wasn’t opposed to the idea.

“Honestly? I’ll take as many as the Moon Goddess will give us. But I’m not foolish enough to throw out a number when I don’t have to grow them all.” He chuckled, leaned in to kiss my cheek, then whispered in my ear, “Whatever you’re willing to give me, I’ll take. Though I have a feeling I’ll enjoy practicing.”

Before I could respond, Jeeves’s voice cut through the moment from the driver’s seat.

“We’re here, boss.”

I wasn’t about to let Ryker have the upper hand. “Too bad. You need more time. Otherwise, I’d kick Jeeves out and practice before we go in.” His nostrils flared, and his grip on my face tightened. Got him!

Jeeves stepped out, laughing softly as he opened my door first. “Remind me never to mess with you, Luna. You fight dirty.”

I shrugged with a grin as Ryker stepped out beside me, clearly adjusting himself. I couldn't help but giggle when he wrapped me in a side hug, pressing a kiss to the top of my head.

"Well, well, well. Isn't this a sight?" a voice called out, low and rough. "I never thought I'd see the day when Alpha Ryker Tryn would take a mate."

Ryker's deep growl rumbled through me, setting every nerve on edge. This was no casual irritation. Something was wrong—unexpected and dangerous.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 145

78 – Kennedy

I edged closer to Ryker, but not because I was scared. The sharp insult from that small man had pierced the air, and I could sense Ryker stiffen immediately. Those familiar barriers he'd built around himself snapped back into place, like an invisible fortress rising up. It had been a while since I'd seen him like this, but away from his pack, he must rely on these defenses as armor. I couldn't reach him with my mind to ask what the problem was, and he wasn't about to explain what made this guy such a thorn in his side. Still, I knew there was some history, some tension simmering beneath the surface. This encounter promised to be an intriguing battle of wills.

Ryker's arm slid around my waist as we turned to face the unwelcome visitor. "Claude," Ryker said, his voice low but sharp. "I didn't expect to see you here. I thought events like this were beneath you." His grip on me felt like a lifeline—or maybe a way to steady himself, to stop from snapping at this man right here, right now.

Claude was small for a male werewolf—not exactly short, but definitely thin and wiry. I'd never really seen a werewolf without muscle before; I'd always assumed their bodies were naturally powerful. Tommy, for example, was leaner than most, built like a runner, but still strong. Even Uncle James, in his forties, maintained an impressive fitness level, looking barely older than Jeremiah. But Claude looked fragile, almost sickly, like his body was fighting some unseen battle.

"I thought I'd check in on our young friend," Claude said, voice laced with something threatening beneath the surface, "to see how his transition is going." There was a warning there, subtle but unmistakable. It was clear we needed to watch over Rory carefully. Maybe Ryker already was. I didn't know much about this kid—I hadn't even met him yet—but the way Ryker's body tensed told me Rory meant a lot to him. That was enough to ignite my protective instincts.

"Like any alpha stepping up to lead his pack," Ryker replied with a shrug, his answer deliberately vague. "He's doing what he needs to."

Claude ignored Ryker and turned his gaze to me, blatantly scanning me from head to toe. But his eyes weren't filled with desire or hunger; instead, it felt like he was trying to unsettle me. I wasn't about to let that slide. This guy had another thing coming.

“Are you done?” I asked, my voice sweet but firm, gesturing down at myself. I was dressed in a cream-colored sweater dress that draped off one shoulder, paired with brown leggings and matching ankle boots. My hair was simply styled in a half-up, business-casual top knot. “I don’t think anyone’s ever taken this long to inspect my outfit.” His eyes snapped to mine, flashing with irritation. I wondered if he was one of those old-fashioned types who believed women should be seen and not heard—or maybe he thought I was insignificant because I was human. Whatever the reason, he was easily riled up, which was good to know.

I glanced up at Ryker. “We should go. I want to find Antonia and Rory before he disappears somewhere in the crowd.” I hoped my tone made it sound like I really knew them.

The dazzling smile Ryker gave me in return made enduring this clown worthwhile. I had a feeling Claude wasn’t finished with us yet, but for now, I could lead us away.

“Anything you want,” Ryker murmured, pressing a gentle kiss to my forehead before guiding us away from the driveway and toward the house. But we hadn’t taken two steps before Claude spoke again.

“It’s so nice to meet you...?” His hand extended, as if expecting a handshake or for me to finish the sentence.

I didn’t take it. Something about him felt slimy, and I had no desire to touch him. Instead, I looked him square in the face, plastered on my brightest smile, and said, “Luna.” Then I kept walking, Ryker close at my side, a low rumble of laughter vibrating in his chest. Bennet and Josh followed just behind us, their expressions carefully controlled.

“You’re going to have to explain that idiot to me later, right?” I asked without looking up at Ryker, my eyes scanning the room as we stepped inside.

“I figured as much,” he replied. “That was brilliant, though. For now, we just avoid him. Honestly, I didn’t expect him to show up today. He’s been dodging us for a while now. He hates that I’m helping Rory.”

1/2

Chapter 145

+25 BONUS

“Is that the Demon Claw alpha?” I whispered to myself, nodding toward a group of people we passed.

“Former alpha,” Ryker corrected, his head dipping slightly in acknowledgment. He didn’t smile at any of them, and no one seemed surprised or bothered by his cold demeanor. I supposed that was normal in these circles.

“And the plot thickens,” I thought quietly.

We spent the next couple of hours mingling with other visiting alphas, lunas, and pack members who had stopped by. Ryker said little to anyone, his usual scowl firmly in place. No one seemed to expect more than a few words or a nod from him. I found myself wondering if my fierce, dominant alpha was actually a bit shy.

“So, when will Rory officially take over?” I asked after we finally found the birthday boy and settled at a table with some food.

“Really, he could take over anytime,” Ryker explained. “He could have assumed full control whenever he wanted. Like me, he could have been a young alpha. The difference is I still have my dad to guide me when I hit a wall. Rory doesn’t have that kind of support. His mom’s great, but she was a warrior’s daughter, so her knowledge is limited. I’m treating Rory like he’s my son—still capable of running things, but I’m gradually giving him more control and responsibilities as he learns the role. That way, he can ask questions, make small mistakes, and learn from them. That’s how it will be when...” He stopped abruptly and cleared his throat.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 146

“When are we going to have kids?” I finish his sentence for him, curiosity bubbling up inside me.

“Uh, yeah,” he replies with a hesitant nod.

“So, what happens if there are, say, half a dozen heirs? Does the oldest always take precedence, or do they have to compete for it? And what if the eldest happens to be a girl?” I fire off questions, my mind racing with possibilities.

“Whoa, slow down,” he chuckles, shaking his head as I squeeze his knee again. “I’m barely at the starting line trying to figure all this out.” His laughter is warm, but there’s a hint of disbelief in his eyes. “You’ve already got me feeling like I’m one foot in the grave with kids taking over.”

“I told you before, this stuff never really crossed my mind,” I admit quietly. “But now, it feels important.”

“Are you done eating?” he interrupts, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Huh? Why the sudden change?” I blink, surprised by the abrupt shift in topic.

“Dance with me,” he says simply, holding out his hand.

I hesitate. “I thought dancing wasn’t really your thing.”

“No, it’s not,” he admits with a grin. “But with you? I’m willing to break all my rules. Besides, last time we danced, I was too busy trying not to touch you in that killer dress. Honestly, I don’t think I’ve ever been that stressed in my life.”

I laugh, the sound light and genuine. “I thought you were annoyed because you got stuck with me when everyone else paired off. You held me like we were at a middle school dance, keeping a foot of space between us.”

“Nope,” he says, shaking his head. “I was just trying not to freak you out with my reaction to how stunning you looked. I mean, Danny nearly lost an arm for having it draped over the back of your chair when I walked in.” He stands in front of me, offering his hand again. I take it without hesitation.

He pulls me close, one hand holding mine over his heart, the other wrapped firmly around my back, pressing our bodies together wherever they can touch. I rest my chin on his chest, looking up at him, trying to ignore the curious glances we’re attracting.

“You never dance, do you?” I ask softly.

“No,” he replies. “I’ve always avoided it. I’ve seen girls take something as simple as a dance and turn it into a declaration of being ‘chosen.’ I never had the time or patience for that kind of drama. So it just became understood—dancing, parties, even letting someone sit in my truck—were things I’d only do with my mate. I never let anyone sit in my truck, for Goddess’ sake. Not until you.”

We sway only to the slow songs. I suppose even I don’t have enough influence to get Ryker to break out moves to anything upbeat. Still, he lets me dance with Bennet without too much grumbling.

When my feet start aching from the heels, Ryker leans in and whispers, “Ready to go? Our ride’s waiting out back.”

I nod, but shoot him a look that says I’m aware of the strange tension in the air. He tilts his head slightly, and I follow suit, silently hoping he’ll mindlink me what’s going on. But it’s clear we’re not out of the woods yet when Ryker, Jeeves, and another warrior—Brian, I think—join us.

“Ryker? Talk to me. You’re kind of freaking me out,” I say, grabbing his hand. He allows it but doesn’t squeeze back; his hand feels stiff, distant in mine. “Mindlink me if you can’t say it out loud.” As we slip away from the shadows behind the building, the sun is dipping low, painting the sky with a deep orange glow. I feel irritation bubbling up but remind myself not to risk anything if he’s tracking or listening for danger.

The atmosphere in the cab is heavy, too tense for me to relax or fall asleep.

After what feels like forever, I catch snippets of their mindlink conversation.

“That was close, boss,” Brian mutters, but then silence falls again as they resume scanning our surroundings. Their vigilance is subtle; if I hadn’t been so restless, I might never have noticed.

“Can I get a quick rundown? Or should I start guessing?” I fold my arms, mimicking a child throwing a tantrum.

“I’ll explain later,” Ryker says, his tone calm enough to ease some of my anxiety. Still, I’m frustrated by the lack of answers.

I tug on his arm, coaxing him to lean back in the seat. He looks puzzled, but I return the favor of silence, settling in comfortably by tucking my legs up and resting my head on his shoulder. He drapes his arm over my knees, and that’s the last thing I remember.

I blink away sleep as gentle motion rocks me. Taking a deep breath, the scent of rosemary and mint hits me like a jolt of energy.

“Hey, Sleeping Beauty. Rest up. We just got in,” Ryker whispers as I stir, moving to free myself from his embrace.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 147

79 – Ryker

“Don’t even think about moving, little lamb. I’ve got you.” My voice was low but firm, and I couldn’t bear to have her any farther away right now. That drive felt endless—every mile stretching on like a test of my patience. Thank the Goddess that Claude and his idiots took the bait.

After the second attempt on Kennedy’s life here, Josh and I scoured our territories for a she-wolf who resembled her closely enough to serve as a decoy. That’s when we found Mia, a fierce warrior who was more than willing to pose as Kennedy’s double. The two attacks, plus Claude’s unexpected appearance today, told me this was no coincidence. Something far bigger was unfolding. Claude didn’t flinch when he saw us, even though he’d been actively avoiding me for months. He seemed caught off guard by Kennedy being with me and didn’t come near us for the rest of the time at Rory’s. Still, he shadowed us through the party—tracking him wasn’t difficult.

About an hour after we got there, Danny arrived with Mia in a second car. Whenever Kennedy danced with Bennet, I made it a point to leave the room—and without fail, Claude followed me. Josh and I dropped subtle hints about ‘Kennedy’s vehicle’ whenever Claude was within earshot. I also spoke with a few other alphas about the safety measures they had in place for their mates. When it was time to leave, our entire team gathered around us. This allowed me to move Kennedy safely and slip Mia into her place. Then we split up quickly. Bennet, Danny, and Josh accompanied Mia, making it look like they were on Luna duty. It wasn’t a foolproof plan, but it was the best we could improvise on the spot. And it worked—Claude took the bait. Mia’s car was attacked. Thankfully, all my warriors came out mostly unscathed, with only minor injuries. I can’t even bear to imagine what might have happened if the plan had failed or something went wrong.

I’m incredibly relieved that Kennedy sensed something was off and didn’t cause trouble as we left. She’s usually stubborn when she doesn’t get answers to her questions, but this time she stayed quiet. It hadn’t even occurred to me to mindlink her about what was happening until she asked. By then, the attack was over, and it didn’t matter. She curled into me and

finally drifted off to sleep, which has to mean she isn't too mad at me. Of course, she won't just let it go, so I'm hoping she stays asleep long enough for me to come up with a better explanation than "I forgot you can mindlink now" by morning.

I wake up suddenly, turn over, and panic when I realize the space beside me is empty—the sheets feel cold. She hasn't been here for a while. Sitting up quickly, I throw the covers off and scan the room, struggling to keep my breath steady. Kennedy never gets up before me. She's a morning person, yes, but she always sneaks in a few extra minutes wrapped in blankets while I get ready.

As I search for clues about where she might have gone, I catch the faint sound of soft, rhythmic breaths coming from outside. Moving toward the door, my throat instantly tightens. There she is—on all fours on the deck, her back arching and lowering slowly in a fluid motion. She's wearing the tiniest pair of pink shorts I've ever seen, hugging every curve of her defined ass. She shouldn't be out here like this, where anyone could see her, but I'm frozen in place, unable to stop watching.

She shifts onto her toes, lifting her hips toward the sky in a slow, tantalizing stretch. The thin fabric reveals the full outline of her pussy, and if I were a wise man, I'd drop to my knees right behind her and worship every inch with my tongue. But I remain rooted to the spot. She dips forward, pressing her hips to the ground as she gazes at the sky, then pushes back up to repeat the arching movement. Only then do I blink, quietly slide the door open, and step outside for a better view.

I know she heard me come out, but she doesn't even glance my way. Instead, she continues moving, teasing me like a forbidden fruit just out of reach. When she lifts her hips again, I'm right behind her, closer than I even realized I'd gotten. There's no way I'm putting space between us now.

"Ken..." I manage to croak, my voice rough from desire.

She wiggles her hips in response. "What?" Her breathy whisper sends a shiver straight down to my cock.

"You know what," I say, flexing and unclenching my hands, fighting the urge to touch her, to pull her against me. Resisting her is going to kill me.

"Hmm. Too bad," she murmurs, pressing back into me. Somehow, she manages to stand gracefully while grinding that luscious ass against my throbbing length. Then, with a sly smile, she turns and walks away, leaving me breathless and aching.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 148

I need to figure this out—fast. The question is simple on the surface: will marking her cause her harm? Yet, no one seems to have a clear answer. She's part of the pack now; we've confirmed that much. She's expressed a genuine desire to try, but she's also made it clear she won't be the one left behind if things go wrong. What if the venom acts like a parasite or

is toxic to her? Time is running out. She's determined to either be marked or walk away, and that ultimatum is weighing heavily on me.

By the time I manage to get the right part of my brain firing properly, she's already showered and left the room.

"Hey Bennet. Are you with Kennedy?" I ask, hoping for some insight.

"Of course," Bennet replies. "But the real question is, why aren't you with her?"

"She pushed me hard this morning during yoga on the deck. I didn't take the bait, and she wasn't happy about it. Just wondering if she's mad or if it's safe to come downstairs."

"Uh, she doesn't seem upset at all. Actually, she's messing around with Danny and some of the guys right now. I was going to ask you something... never mind."

"Ask what?"

Suddenly, I get radio silence from everyone. I know it's her—she told them not to respond to me. She's learned how to use her command, and it's frustrating as hell. And the worst part? This is my fault.

I change quickly and head to my office to work, but I don't last an hour before I find myself striding onto the practice field where the young pups are training.

There she is, laughing with Danny, Bennet, and a bunch of the kids. Without hesitation, I approach her, gently cup her face in my hands, and pause for just a moment. I need her full attention, her eyes locked on mine. The instant our gazes meet, I press my lips to hers. Judging by the giggles and quiet chuckles from the kids and the low laughter from the warriors nearby, this probably isn't the most appropriate place for a kiss in front of pups. But two can play the flirting game—I just need to decide how much I care about winning.

I pull back just enough to meet her eyes again.

"Such a little tease," I mindlink her, a smirk tugging at my lips.

"So you remembered that was an option, huh?" she replies with a playful sparkle in her eyes.

"I needed you to remind me. And I need to remind you—don't forget this before you leave." I kiss her again, softer this time. "Next time, I might not be so controlled."

"What if I said that's okay?"

My wolf growls low and deep, a sound of both warning and desire. To distract myself, I ask what the pups are learning. The little girl I saw with Kennedy on her first day of training steps forward confidently, like the pied piper leading the way.

“The Luna is teaching us how to stay safe if bad guys come around and we’re all alone without a grown-up,” she says proudly.

I crouch down to meet her at eye level. “Is that so?” She nods enthusiastically while the other kids hang back a step, content to let her take the lead in talking to me. I don’t usually work with the little pups—being this close can be intimidating for some of them. “Can you tell me how you stay safe when you’re all alone?”

“Yeah! We played hide and seek, and she had to find us. We have to watch where we walk, and then we have to make our smell different to confuse them. The last one found wins!”

“Who won this time?” I ask, already guessing the answer.

“Me! But we had help. I don’t think the Delta’s very good at this game—all his team got found first.” I can’t help but laugh at that.

“Did you hear that, Danny? You need to practice more. I’m sure...” I glance down at the little girl. “What’s your name, sweetheart?”

“Emily, Alpha.” She giggles, and I realize I should have known her name already.

“I’m sure Emily could give you some pointers.” The warriors laugh, and the kids join in, even though they don’t really understand what’s so funny.

I stand up and turn back to Kennedy. “Will you join me for lunch when you’re done here?”

“I promised Sarah I’d have lunch with her, if you don’t mind the extra company.”

“I haven’t had a proper meal with my mother in a long time. Think she’d mind if I crashed your girl’s day?”

“I highly doubt it.” She smiles warmly. “Go work. I have things to get done if I want to be on time.”

I lean in to kiss her once more. Now that we’ve opened this floodgate, I don’t want to stop.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 149

80 – Ryker

I have never paced so much in my entire life. It’s not that I’m anxious or worried—actually, I don’t even think I’m nervous. Still, the restlessness is undeniable. Kennedy has been willingly spending time with me outside of training sessions and pack business, and it’s something new. She’s showing a genuine interest in the pack, just like a Luna should. For the first time, this relationship feels real. I want her. Not just in the physical sense, which has always been true, but now she means something deeper to me. She’s important.

“Ryker, sit down. You’re making me itchy,” my mother scolds, glancing up from the stack of books she’s been engrossed in. We’re sitting in the cozy dining nook of the house she and my father chose when they moved out of the packhouse. It’s just a few minutes away, nestled quietly in the woods—private, peaceful.

“I can’t. I have no clue what I’m doing, and I can’t afford to mess up anymore. What do I do?” I ask, my pacing growing more frantic.

I give her a quick rundown of everything Kennedy and I have shared since she arrived. Of course, my mom already knows most of it from Kennedy’s perspective, and naturally, she sides with my mate. She proceeds to remind me of all the ways I’m being an idiot, in that uniquely maternal way only a mother can.

“Well, she didn’t flat-out reject you when you mentioned kids yesterday, so I’m still hopeful,” she says with a teasing giggle. “Maybe I’ll get grandkids one day after all. I was worried for a bit there.”

“Mom!” I groan.

“What? No male wolf holds onto his virginity like you have. For a while, I thought maybe you were gay, and we’d have to find a surrogate,” she teases.

“Mom,” I grumble, rubbing my face with my hands. Of course she knows everything. This woman is impossible.

“Either way would have been fine with me, but I like Kennedy. She’s good for you. You’ve had it too easy for too long, with everyone kissing your ass. That girl will keep your ego in check.”

“That she does, exceptionally well. But I have no idea what I’m doing. I’ve never dated before. What if I screw up and piss her off again?”

“Oh, baby, that’s guaranteed to happen at some point. No need to worry about it before it even happens. Now sit down. Are they on their way?”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” I mutter. “Bennet said he’d let me know when they were coming, but I haven’t heard from him.”

“Did you think to check with her? You can mindlink her now, and she has one of those newfangled phones,” my mom replies with a sly grin. Great. Now she’s mocking me. But she’s not wrong.

I pull out my phone, fingers hovering over the screen as I start a message to Kennedy. I type a few lines, then delete them, unsure how to break the ice. My mom chuckles at my awkwardness, and suddenly I know exactly what to say.

Me: Please save me...

Kennedy: What could you possibly need saving from?

Me: My mother...

Kennedy:

Kennedy: Glad to see you know how to use your phone.

Me: Hurry... she's in a plotting mood.

Kennedy: Isn't she always plotting something?

Me: Fair... but do you want her plotting grandkids?

Kennedy: Touché! Bennet says we'll be there in five.

Just as she finishes, I hear the SUV crunching down the cleared path, right on time. I rush outside to meet them, my mother's laughter trailing behind me. At least Kennedy comes straight to me, wrapping her arms around my neck, and I love how natural it feels.

"I honestly thought you might run to hug my mom first," I whisper in her ear.

"I almost did, just to see how you'd react," she laughs softly.

I pull back to look into her eyes. "So sassy."

Her amusement shifts instantly into something hotter, more intense.

"What are you going to do about it?" she challenges.

I growl low in response, but we're interrupted by my mother reminding us we're not alone.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 150

"You can give him a good scolding later. Right now, I'm starving—let's eat!" She chuckled as she and Bennet stepped inside the cozy cottage.

The lunch was nothing short of wonderful. We learned that my father was expected back from his travels within the next couple of days. Interestingly, he might be even more excited than my mother to finally meet Kennedy. My mom has this natural charm that effortlessly draws people in. Just like Bennet, she had Kennedy opening up about her childhood—growing up with the knowledge of werewolves and pack life, yet not fully part of it until a few years ago.

I discovered so much about Kennedy during our time together. For instance, Christmas is her favorite holiday. Although we each have our small family gatherings, our work never truly stops. The stories Kennedy told about Silver Crescent left me convinced that our

modest traditions are bound to change dramatically next year. Still, I'd do just about anything to keep that sparkle alive in her eyes and the warm smile she directs at me.

When it was time to leave, after countless hugs and repeated goodbyes, we began to head out. But Kennedy suddenly hesitated.

"What's wrong?" I asked, noticing her discomfort. Everything had been perfect just moments before, so I wasn't sure what had shifted.

She shrugged, looking uncertain. "I don't want this to sound strange." I raised an eyebrow, silently urging her to continue. "Could Alpha walk me home?"

"Is that all?" I asked, relieved. She nodded. "You never need to feel nervous about asking to see him or wanting to spend time with him."

"I guess I'm just not sure how that works," she admitted. "I mean, you're both the same, but in my mind, you feel like two separate beings. Does that even make sense? I just... I have this urge to see him right now." She shrugged again, a little embarrassed.

"You can spend as much time with him as you want—as long as I get an equal share," I teased, leaning down to kiss the top of her head. "Let me change quickly and toss my clothes in the truck with Bennet."

"Okay," she replied softly.

Bennet said nothing as he followed me outside, where I could change and shift behind the truck. I wondered if Kennedy had ever witnessed a full shift before. It was something I made a mental note to ask her later. I didn't want to frighten her if it was new to her.

Alpha padded around the truck to meet her, shaking his sleek black fur. She simply stared at him, as always. She seemed momentarily mesmerized, as if she couldn't quite believe he was real—even though she'd been around shifters her whole life. Alpha nudged her gently with his shoulder, breaking her trance, then began to walk toward the packhouse.

She remained quiet for a while, but eventually her curiosity got the better of her. "So... are you always in Ryker's head? Or do you go to sleep or become dormant until he needs you? I've always wondered how this 'two minds' thing actually works."

This was yet another thing I admired about her—how naturally she spoke to him, treating Alpha as his own person rather than just a part of me. She knew I was listening somewhere inside, but she didn't seem bothered by it.

"We both can listen to the conversations happening around us," Alpha explained. "But I can also pull back if I need to. After a tough fight or when we need to recover, that's what I do. It helps me focus and conserve energy, which speeds up healing. But I'm also very present for any interactions with you."

"Is that so?" she asked, intrigued.

“Yes,” he confirmed.

“What’s been your favorite interaction with me so far?” she pressed.

“Don’t you dare!” I scolded, laughing. She wasn’t playing fair, and he clearly didn’t care about embarrassing me at all. This could go in so many different directions.