

Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 181

95 – Kennedy

A sudden tension grips me, and my breath catches in my throat. Time seems to freeze as I lock eyes with this older version of Ryker. His gaze is a deeper, darker shade, yet every bit as intense as I remember. If he weren't holding me up so firmly, I'm certain I would have crumpled to the floor by now.

"What?" I whisper, barely audible. Ryker tightens his embrace, and I clutch his forearms as if my very survival depends on it. I'm probably leaving marks on his skin, but only a small part of my mind registers that fact—it feels insignificant compared to everything else swirling inside me.

He looks at me with a mixture of sympathy and concern before asking again, "What do you remember from that night? I need to know where to begin my story."

My lungs struggle to draw in air, but it feels like I'm suffocating. I can't tear my eyes away from those familiar, piercing eyes—so much like my mate's. He knows what happened. He might even understand why. He knows me, yet I have never met him before in my entire life.

Suddenly, I feel his hands gently cup my face. I try to blink, but my whole body feels sluggish and clouded. Then warmth spreads from his lips across my skin, igniting a fire that rushes through me. I take a deep breath, and finally, my eyes sharpen into focus.

"Hey. Stay with me, okay?" Ryker mindlinks softly. "Maybe he can help fill in some of the blanks."

He presses a tender kiss to my lips, and I bury my face in the hollow of his neck, letting his scent seep into every fiber of my being. When I feel steady enough, I sit up and turn back toward Alpha Ryan. I don't even realize when Ryker shifted my position.

"All I really remember is the crash," I begin, drawing in a shaky breath. "I was asleep. It was my fault we were even on the road." A tear escapes, but before it can trail down my cheek, Ryker's thumb gently wipes it away. "I woke up to the sound of the crash and our car rolling. That's what my nightmares were always about—being trapped inside the car, staring at my parents' lifeless eyes." A shudder ripples through me. Ryker rubs my thigh with one hand while holding me close with the other. "Everything else is just fragments, blurry and broken."

Alpha Ryan takes Sarah's hand, pressing a kiss to the back before resting it on his leg. "I don't believe you or your parents were the intended targets that night. More like collateral damage," he says carefully. "I don't mean that to sound callous or to diminish your loss—it's

just my perspective. But I do know what happened from a different angle. We were on that road too." His gaze shifts between me and his son behind me. "We'd just met with the Alpha from Moon River. He has three daughters and was seeking an alliance through a chosen mate bond." I hear Ryker growl low in his chest behind me.

"Arrogant asshole," Ryker mutters under his breath.

"Yes, yes, Ryker, we all know how you feel about that. Relax," Alpha Ryan replies with a small smile before turning back to me. "At the time, I didn't realize his true intentions, or I would have come alone. But that's beside the point. We thought we left peacefully."

Ryker stiffens beneath me. "No way," he growls.

"There absolutely is a way. You're looking at her right now."

"Wait! What's going on? What am I missing?" I ask, glancing at everyone. Their faces mirror the same shock and confusion. Even Josh looks stunned.

"We were attacked," Ryker resumes, his voice steady but laced with anger. "I never had proof that Moon River was behind it, but all our vehicles were forced off the road, and wolves ambushed us. When the fight ended, we checked every car to make sure we accounted for all our people and theirs. That's when I found you, sobbing inside a car so crushed we had to bend metal just to get in. We knew you were human and didn't want to frighten you. I pulled you out myself." His chest rises and falls rapidly, matching my own ragged breathing.

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"But you didn't know me back then, and I didn't recognize you either. If you had saved me, I would have remembered," I say softly, cupping Ryker's face in my hands. He returns my touch with a sad, bittersweet smile.

"I don't think so," he replies gently. "At that time, you were too young to have found your mate. You were overwhelmed, lost in grief and confusion over your parents. Who knows what your mind was actually able to register in that state?"

I take a deep breath, trying to absorb his words. "I took your son from my own, and had him and Josh double back to confront Moon River while I managed the cleanup with the other warriors," Ryan explains. "Your father kept Alpha James's name in his wallet and saved it as an emergency contact on his phone. I knew James from past Summits and recognized that you had a connection to our way of life. I sensed you were special, but I never fully understood how until Rayna found Jeremiah and your name came up again."

Ryker looks at his father, curiosity flickering in his eyes. "So, is that why your travel schedule changed?"

Ryan nods slowly. “Partly, yes. I was also afraid of having this conversation. I worried you might blame us for your parents’ deaths, or worse, take it out on Ryker. He’s waited so long for a chance at happiness—I didn’t want to jeopardize the fragile progress you’ve made by burdening you with this knowledge.” He offers me a small, familiar smile—one I recognize as Ryker’s own. I smile back, grateful for the moment of connection.

“It’s not any more your fault than it is mine,” I say, shrugging as a few tears escape. Therapy has drilled this into me: it wasn’t my fault. It was just a cruel chain of events. That doesn’t make it hurt any less, though.

Ryan sighs deeply. “No, but what weighs on me the most is that without that terrible situation, I’m not sure Ryker would have ever found you.”

His words hit me like a punch to the chest. I stop breathing for a moment, staring at Ryker, whose face has gone pale.

“What do you mean?” I whisper, heart pounding.

“I mean that if those events hadn’t happened, you might never have crossed paths with Ryker the way you did,” Ryan explains. “It’s possible you could have met him at Rayna’s Luna ceremony, but with all the chaos caused by Claude and some other rogue alphas, I don’t know if your meeting would have unfolded the same way.”

Ryker pulls me closer, his arms wrapping around me tightly. We both need the comfort, the warmth.

“You might have been in college by the time Rayna’s Luna ceremony—or any other gathering that could have brought Ryker to your pack—happened,” Ryan continues. “Everything had to fall into place exactly as it did for your mate bond to form.”

My heart sinks deeply, and a cold knot tightens in my stomach. The thought that I had to lose my parents in order to find Ryker makes me feel sick. The idea that I can have one but not both fills me with a bitter resentment toward the goddess. I’ve never thought ill of her before—just never understood the harsh ways the wolf world operates. This is just another painful example.

Slowly, I rise from Ryker’s lap. He must sense I need space because he doesn’t try to stop me. “I just need a little time to process all this, please,” I say quietly.

Without another word, I leave the office and head straight to our bedroom. There’s really nowhere I can go without Ryker following, but I’m hoping he’ll give me the space I need to let everything settle.

I decide a long, hot bath is exactly what I need. Sliding into the steaming water, the scent of the fragrant bubbles helps soothe my restless mind as I replay everything Ryan said. I still can’t believe Ryker was the one who pulled me from the wreckage. I remember being told the car had to be pried open to get to me, but no one ever said who did it. I assumed they used the jaws of life. I woke up in the hospital with Aunt Beth by my side, and no one mentioned anything else.

Now, so many questions swirl inside me. Ryan said he knew Uncle James. Did Ryan tell them to keep it quiet? Why didn't anyone tell me a pack of traveling shifters had saved me? It's not like I didn't know about them before.

Just as I'm about to get lost in these thoughts, a soft knock sounds on the bathroom door.

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"May I come in, Lamb?" His voice carries a soft hesitation.

"Of course." My reply is faint, but it lacks sadness or despair—only a deep exhaustion seeps through.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I never realized it was you; otherwise, I would have spoken up much earlier. My dad said he kept it from us to protect your image of me, but I feel like we should have known. And after everything else I put you through... how could you ever forgive me?" His eyes are filled with sorrow, a look I despise seeing on him.

Now he's kneeling beside the bathtub, his face just inches from mine. I reach out, gently cupping his cheeks, and gaze into his vibrant emerald eyes. "There's nothing left to forgive. Every day, you show me you're trying to be better—for me, for us."

"All the pain you've suffered could have been avoided..." he murmurs.

"We don't know that. We can't be sure those wolves were only after you. Maybe they would have attacked us regardless, whether you were on the road or left at a different time. I can't dwell on regrets about things I can't change. I've worked so hard to let go of that. This is how things are, and I want to focus on what we have now."

Suddenly, a loud bang echoes through the house.

"Alpha, Luna, we have a situation!" Josh's urgent voice calls out from the bedroom doorway.

Ryker moves swiftly, positioning himself between me and the door, though Josh is still too far away to see me in the tub.

"What's happening, Josh?" Ryker asks over his shoulder.

"Several omegas have gone missing, and there's a fire raging in the town's southwest corner. Greta says someone knows our patrol routes based on where the disappearances are happening and the timing."

Without a second thought, I spring up, grabbing a towel before Ryker can stop me. He darts behind me into the bedroom as I hurriedly throw on clothes, ignoring Josh's presence.

"We need to move now! Has everyone been evacuated from the fire?" I demand.

“Wait! We don’t have all the details yet. Our Warriors are handling it,” Josh says, raising his hands to slow me.

“Now is exactly the time to act!” Ryker pulls on my arm.

“I need you to stay here and stay safe. Let us deal with this,” he insists.

“I won’t stand by while pack members are in danger! We’ve had this argument before, and you didn’t win. Let’s go!” I rush out before he can stop me again, sending a mindlink to Bennet. Josh and Bennet follow me down the stairs and out the front door. Bennet is already waiting by the car, unfazed by my urgent request.

“I can take the Luna to the fire and check on everyone in that area. Keep us updated about the missing omegas,” Bennet says, nodding to both of them as I slide into the passenger seat. He climbs into the driver’s side, and we speed off before Josh or Ryker can object.

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Chapter 184

96 – Kennedy

“Kennedy! What on earth do you think you’re doing? You need to stay put where it’s safe. We have no idea what these rogues are after,” Ryker’s voice rumbled sharply in my mind, his tone thick with warning.

I glanced sideways at Bennet, my gamma, and smirked. “Is he bothering you too, Bennet? Or is he just saving all his frustration for me?”

Bennet chuckled softly, unfazed by Ryker’s mental growls. “Oh, Luna, I’m pretty sure Ryker’s more annoyed with me than with you. You might have to step in once this mess is over, or else I’m going to be looking for a new bodyguard.” His laugh was easy, casual, but I could see the underlying tension. “Moments like these make me seriously reconsider how much I should prioritize finding my mate and having a son.”

This time, I joined in his laughter. At least Bennet wasn’t scared of the alpha’s wrath for siding with me. There was a strange comfort in that.

“I just wish I could mindlink him back,” I admitted quietly. “If we could just get this fight over with, I could tell him I’m okay. Maybe that would calm him down a bit.”

“Maybe a little,” Bennet muttered, just as a low growl echoed nearby.

“Who’s there?” I scanned the dimming light of dusk, but the shadows swallowed any clear view.

“Don’t worry, Luna. We’ve got your back,” Danny called out, and a wave of irritation pulsed through me.

“For the love of my sanity,” I groaned, rolling down the car window. “Danny! You and Greta, go help Ryker right now! I’m not even going to fight. I’m heading to help with the evacuation.” I rolled the window back up and pressed my fingers to my temples, trying to ease the sudden headache.

“That was... interesting,” Bennet said, turning his wide eyes toward me. I caught the look before he refocused on the road.

“What?”

“I kind of wish I had recorded that.”

“What!?”

“Greta is going to be furious.”

“For fuck’s sake, Bennet! What happened?” I snapped.

“Danny face-planted trying to ignore your Luna command and ended up taking out Greta’s legs while she was trying to change course.” He laughed, genuinely amused by the chaos.

“I never gave them a Luna command, and this isn’t funny. They shouldn’t have been following me at all. Their focus needs to be on the rogue camp that’s disappearing. They belong with Ryker.”

“Well, your mate seems to think differently.”

“I’ve noticed. I’m never going to not be a target. He needs to accept that. You guys are the best at what you do, which is why you’re successful. And apparently, I’m really hard to catch or kill,” I muttered darkly.

“We’ve got about five minutes for you to explain that to me, Luna.”

I exhaled sharply and gave Bennet a brief rundown of what I’d discovered about myself today, adding it to the growing list of things that had changed since the car accident.

Before he could respond, we pulled up to a cluster of buildings engulfed in flames. If this was connected to the rogues, they’d chosen their target well. The fire was wreaking havoc on shops and apartments, and the location was isolated—on Ryker’s original pack lands—with dense forest on one side and a heavily populated residential area on the other. We had to contain this quickly or risk devastating so much more.

I hurried over to a firefighter battling the blaze. “What can I do to help? Is anyone trapped or hurt?”

“Everyone’s out, Luna. We need to get this under control. The healers are handling the injured. We could use help soaking the surrounding area to stop the fire from spreading.” He gestured toward a group nearby. “You can check in with them.”

Without hesitation, Bennet and I joined the team using hoses and buckets to douse the ground and trees around the block. The professionals managed the hoses, while the rest of us fanned out with buckets, the work repetitive but necessary.

As I moved along the forest edge, dumping yet another bucket of water, a low growl drifted across the ground. The wind shifted, carrying the foul stench of rotting garbage and decay.

“Rogues!” I shouted, spinning to run.

Suddenly, a flood of voices crashed into my mind, making it impossible to focus.

“LUNA!”

“Kennedy! Where are you?”

“Lamb! Where are you, baby?!”

The voices overwhelmed me, and I couldn’t respond. I just needed to get away. I wasn’t sure how they’d found me—I’d wandered farther than I realized from the firefighting teams.

“Not so fast, little Luna. You’re a tough one to catch.” Rough arms seized me, and I fought back.

“Pain in the ass? That sounds about right,” I huffed, kicking wildly. “And could you not breathe so close to my face?” I grimaced over my shoulder at my captor.

“Little bitch. We’ll see how smart your mouth is once we take you to the alpha.” His grip tightened as my foot connected with something solid. It wasn’t enough to make him drop me, but then another pair of hands grabbed my legs as I continued struggling.

“Fucking tie her up already. She’s just a human, you pussy,” he growled.

A younger voice, softer and less hardened, replied, “We aren’t supposed to harm her, Dirk.” The teenager’s tone was hesitant, almost obedient. Late teens, early twenties maybe, and clearly less jaded than Dirk. I might be able to use that.

Dirk shifted me roughly so the younger one could bind my wrists. This time I got a good look at him—his sandy blonde hair was shaggy, like he desperately needed a haircut. His honey-brown eyes flickered with uncertainty. He hadn’t been in this life long. My heart ached for him.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Dirk grunted, hoisting me over his shoulder.

I thrashed enough to tug at my restraints, but not enough to make him drop me. The rope bit into my wrists, slick with blood as I started to bleed. Desperately, I reached out and grabbed a low-hanging branch. Dirk wasn’t expecting it and stumbled.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing? The alpha’s gonna be pissed about this. And I better get a piece of your ass for it.” He smacked me, but my elbow connected sharply with his head.

“Keep your fucking hands to yourself,” I snarled.

He laughed low and dark. “Don’t worry, little Luna. Our alpha’s got plans for you first. No one’s touching you before then. After that... well, I can’t make any promises.” He chuckled as I scanned my surroundings, trying to hatch a plan.

That’s when I noticed the blood smeared on the branch I’d grabbed. Dirk started moving again, and I decided that if he thought I was a pain now, he had no idea what was coming.

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Chapter 185

97 – Kennedy

I clutch at every object within reach as Dirk drags me forward relentlessly. They assume I’m merely struggling for show. Let them believe that—it’s their ignorance that plays into my hands. Their underestimation of me, just because I’m human, is exactly what I need right now.

“Ryker! Please, find me, baby,” I whisper repeatedly in my mind, hoping my plea will somehow reach him. I leave a trail of blood on everything I touch, tracing a path that I pray is enough to guide him. It has to be enough. I know Ryker can sense me when I’m close, but I’m unsure how that works outside the packhouse. Does his ‘Kennedy compass’ function beyond our home territory, or is it limited to familiar grounds? I can’t be certain, so I have to rely on the injuries I’ve sustained to lead him here.

Time blurs as we keep moving, though my stomach aches sharply where Dirk’s shoulder presses into me. He’s clearly digging in harder on purpose, bouncing me roughly to inflict more pain. The thought of him eventually paying for this—slowly, painfully—is a small comfort I hold onto tightly.

Fatigue creeps in, sapping my strength from blood loss and the strain of being hung upside down for who knows how long. I can’t afford to succumb to sleep with these monsters nearby; who knows what horrors they’d unleash if I let my guard down again. I keep reaching out for anything within reach, focusing on the rough branches, the jagged edges of bark, anything to keep my mind occupied. It’s the only way to distract myself from the nightmare unfolding around me.

I have to concentrate on Ryker and the others finding me—leading them straight to these bastards who believe they can storm a pack as large as ours, inflicting pain and destruction on innocent people, and walk away unscathed. I push away the dark images that threaten to consume me: the hot, unwanted breath on the back of my neck, the rough, calloused hands dragging across my bare arms, the tearing of my clothes, the crushing weight pressing me to the ground.

No. I won't let those thoughts take hold. I need to focus on the light—on hope. Ryker is my beacon. He will come for me. He wants me. He needs me. I cling to the reality that they were all with me earlier. Bennet wasn't far from where I was taken. He always keeps me in his sight. How they slipped past his sharp eyes is beyond me, but I know he won't be far behind. He's probably pacing, anxious and restless—almost more attached than Ryker himself. That thought makes me both sad and smile at the same time.

I reach again for a branch, exhaustion weighing heavily on me, but I force myself to keep trying. More blood seeps from my wounds—I have to keep marking the path. Ryker and the others will find me. They have to.

Just as the weariness threatens to overwhelm me, I'm suddenly thrown through the air. My eyes snap open as the air is knocked from my lungs. I land on something unfamiliar—not the ground, but certainly not any comfortable piece of furniture I know. The air smells of sweat, earth, and something foul. I fight the urge to breathe through my nose, struggling to draw air into my burning lungs.

“Stop your whining. You're too soft after living in that cushy packhouse,” Dirk sneers, his voice dripping with contempt. “Go get the alpha...” He glances at the young man assisting him. “I have to make sure she doesn't slip away. Apparently, she's slippery.”

What the hell is he talking about? I roll my eyes despite the coughing fit that rattles my chest from the rough handling and the stench surrounding me. This isn't a house or a shack—maybe a tent? But it's too dark to see clearly, and whatever the walls are made of must be thick; I can't hear a thing from the other side. Maybe that's just how human ears work.

“Trying to figure out how to escape?” Dirk tilts his head, pretending to scrutinize me. He's aiming for intimidating but ends up looking more constipated than fearsome.

“Not a new thing, Dirk,” I say, emphasizing his name with as much sarcasm as I can muster while taking in my surroundings.

I'm sitting on the ground now. My eyes adjust to the darkness, revealing patches of grass beneath me. A sliver of light seeps in through a crack in the door that wasn't fully closed. I'm unsure if that's a trap meant to lure me into running or a way to keep Dirk in check, signaling that someone is watching. I rest on a pile of grimy, rough fabric—maybe old sheets or blankets—but they're so filthy I can't tell for sure. One thing's certain: when I get out of here, I'll need several shots to protect myself from infection.

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“You really should at least listen to what the alpha has to say, don't you think?” Dirk's voice cuts through the silence again, but I deliberately ignore him. Still, I catch the subtle tone beneath his words—was it a warning, a plea, or a veiled threat? The uncertainty twists in my gut.

“The way you speak to a Luna is all wrong, Dirk.” The sharp ‘k’ in his name snaps like dry twigs between my teeth. “If your alpha were truly an alpha, he’d understand that.” I keep my gaze wandering around the sparse surroundings, making it clear that he holds no importance for me.

There’s nothing else here—no furniture, no personal belongings. It’s as if they pack up and move so quickly that they leave everything behind or stash it somewhere else. These sleeping tents stand out starkly against the forest’s natural backdrop, the most obvious signs of their presence in the wilderness.

“Whose place is this?” I ask, just to keep him talking, hoping he’ll accidentally reveal something useful. But the stench is unbearable, so I lower myself to the ground, desperate for relief. I wonder if all rogues carry this foul odor because they neglect hygiene, or if being outside a pack changes them somehow.

“You’re fortunate enough to be sleeping in my humble abode while you stay with us, Luna,” Dirk replies with a smirk.

I have to swallow hard to keep the bile from rising in my throat.

A soft voice breaks through the tension.

“Ryker, follow me. Find me, please. Bring the kids. Track me through the forest if you have to.”

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“So, you’re the one stirring up all this trouble,” a deep, gravelly voice rumbles from behind Dirk. If fear hadn’t gripped me so tightly, I might have caught the humor woven into it.

“I haven’t done anything a sane person wouldn’t in my position. What do you want? Let’s get this over with so I can go home,” I say, trying to sound detached and uninterested. Showing fear would only weaken me, and anger or aggression would just drag this out longer.

A low chuckle drifts through the tent’s opening. “At least one thing we heard about you was true—you’re a feisty one, aren’t you?”

“I’m being held against my will, ripped away from my friends and family. Do you blame me for fighting back?” I challenge, though the man still hasn’t stepped inside. Dirk stands between us, a shield for this stranger, who hasn’t dared to show himself fully yet.

“You have no family worth mentioning,” the voice sneers.

A sharp pang clenches my stomach, but it fades quickly as faces flash through my mind—Jeremiah, Aunt Beth, Uncle James, Ryker, Bennet, the others, Greta, Rayna. “I have plenty of family. I don’t know where you’re getting your facts, but they’re wrong.” I cross my legs and straighten my back, trying to appear composed despite the pain and the blood I’ve smeared on the forest floor. Even if I can’t stand, I can look confident where I sit.

“Hmm. Comfortable? You might be here for a while,” the voice says, almost amused.

“I’m done with the Dirk puppet. Whatever you do with your hand and his backside is your business, but I don’t need him to be your mouthpiece. If you want to speak to me, come in and say it yourself.”

Another laugh, soft and almost a whisper of “feisty” again. I brace myself for a rude dismissal, but after a hushed exchange, Dirk steps aside. A man appears, easily twice Dirk’s weight and at least six inches taller—a closer match to Bennet and Josh. They’re all bigger than me, so I hadn’t noticed before, but Dirk looks scrawny next to this guy. I should have just fought Dirk and run. Well, hindsight is twenty-twenty. I’ll remember that for the future. And the fact that I overheard their conversation—Dirk calls this man ‘alpha,’ but they have no real connection. That’s interesting.

“Well, now I understand why you get so angry at the mention of me,” the man says, his rugged handsomeness marked by a lifetime of hardship. He’s no Ryker, but there’s something about him I can respect.

“I’m tired of the cryptic nonsense. What do you want from me? Or rather, what do you want from Ryker? Because it’s clear I’m just bait.”

“Feisty and smart. I like that. I only want my mate—and to get her, I need you and your mate.”

“What?” The words don’t add up. Nothing about this makes sense.

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Chapter 187

98 – Ryker

“Just take a deep breath,” Josh urged gently.

“I WILL NOT CALM DOWN! NO ONE LEAVES THIS FOREST UNTIL SHE IS FOUND!” I bellowed into the thick darkness surrounding us.

Every warrior who could be spared stood around me, alongside every pack member touched by her presence. They had all gathered for one purpose—to bring her back safely, something I had failed to do.

“I’m not telling you to calm down because I’m stupid. None of us are calm,” Josh said, his voice steady but firm. “But you’re our strongest connection to her. If you lose control, we lose that link. So pull yourself together and tell us what she said.”

I could feel the tension in his words, see the concern etched on his face. Still, I couldn’t care. My mate had been ripped away from right beneath our noses.

I had wanted her home, safe and sound, but her stubbornness had led us here. I was right to worry, and now no one knew what she was enduring. I could sense her presence, but it was scrambled—like a radio signal caught in static. To make matters worse, she had somehow figured out how to mindlink us without having a wolf of her own. How was that even possible? She had warned us all, and we were on high alert. Yet, she was the only casualty in this complex, multi-layered attack. No one else had been hurt in the fire. Thanks to doubled patrols, we intercepted a dozen rogues trying to breach our defenses. The problem was, they were all killed before she was taken, leaving us with no one to interrogate.

All I could do was pace, my nerves fraying with every step. I'd be lucky if I still had hair left by the end of this.

My mind kept replaying the look on her face when she told me about her capture in Silver Crescent, the horror she'd endured. I couldn't let that happen again. I refused to fail her once more. My chest felt like it was being crushed, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stop the suffocating weight.

"ALPHA! Knock it off!" My beta growled sharply. He'd never had to put me in my place before. "You're just making Bennet worse. Give him something to work with. He needs to find her just as badly as you do."

His words snapped me out of my spiral briefly. I glanced over at Army Gamma—her gamma.

Tears streaked down his dirt-smeared face. He'd been running through the forest where we last caught her scent, his hands bloodied and scratched, eyes wild with desperation as he screamed her name like a child trapped in a nightmare. Now, he crouched on the ground, staring at the bucket she'd been holding, hoping it might offer some clue about where to search next. He'd even tried shifting, but her scent vanished just like all the deserted camps we'd found before.

"I can't do this, Josh. I can't focus or think straight. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to function without her," I admitted, my shoulders slumping. "This is why I didn't want a mate. Why I tried to resist her. There's too much power here, and whoever has her knows it."

I couldn't even meet his eyes. No alpha should feel this powerless.

"Both of you better buckle up," Josh said, voice hardening. "I'm calling in reinforcements. We need Kennedy, and you two idiots are wasting time."

I barely had the energy to question what he meant.

"Ryker! You need to stop and think. So many pack members see her and work with her every day. Talk to them—your warriors, even those kids who follow her everywhere. Figure out how to find her. There has to be something we can use."

“Mom,” I said quietly. “We’ve talked to everyone. No one knows anything about these rogues or where they could be hiding. They’re like ghosts. I don’t know what else to do.”

At least my mom was safe, and Rayna was far from here. I used to worry about both of them being used against me, just like my dad.

“You’re not listening,” she snapped. “I don’t care about those rogues. They took my girl. I want you to burn them to the ground. What I meant was talk to people about Kennedy. She managed to mindlink this whole pack in a crisis. She warned us all. There has to be more clues she left behind—whether on purpose or not. Talk to those who know her best, who know her habits and little quirks when she’s away from you.”

I nodded, even though she couldn’t see me. A new tactic. A strategy. I could work with that.

Just as I opened my mouth to brainstorm with Josh, the sudden crashing of branches caught everyone’s attention. All eyes turned toward Todd and a few teenage boys who helped Kennedy on Saturdays.

“ALPHA! ALPHA! We found her... I think it’s her. No one else could be that over the top,” Todd nearly collided with me. I grabbed his shoulders, blinking a few times before asking him to repeat himself.

“We found a trail... uh... a trail of her... of her... Ummm, would you mind letting go of my shoulders? I feel like you’re way too close.”

“Just tell me, Todd,” I said, releasing him but instinctively stepping closer when he tried to back away.

“It’s a trail of her blood. A lot of it,” he said, swallowing hard.

My heart sank, and dizziness washed over me, but I forced it down. I had to get to her. See her again. I could feel she was okay, but if Todd was right, we had a serious problem.

“Show me. Bennet! Get your ass up. We have a Luna to save. And I think this time, she might actually let us without too much grief.” I tried to lighten the mood, knowing Bennet blamed himself more than I did. We’d both need time to heal.

Without hesitation, Todd and his friends led us through the forest. Within five minutes, we reached the spot where she’d clearly grabbed a branch for dear life. Her blood was smeared across leaves and bark—not splattered, but pressed into fingerprints in several places. She’d fought hard. That was my girl. Keep fighting, Lamb. I’m coming.

We pushed through a dense thicket, the forest thick and shadowed around us. I wondered if her captors even realized how much blood she’d left behind. Either they were fools, or this was a trap. We had to move carefully, the slow pace only amplifying my frayed nerves.

“I’m coming, baby,” I whispered, uncertain if her frequency was as scrambled as ours, but unwilling to stop trying.

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Chapter 188

99 – Kennedy

“I’m honestly not sure how I’m supposed to help you find your mate,” I said cautiously, trying to keep him talking long enough for my team to pick up the trail. “But I don’t understand why you need both Ryker and me involved.” I added, hoping to buy some time. “And, by the way... Dirk here still hasn’t even told me your name. Your servants clearly lack basic manners when it comes to formal introductions.”

That comment earned me a sharp slap across the face, completely out of nowhere. I staggered sideways, my vision flashing white spots as a burning pain radiated from my cheekbone. It felt like it might be fractured. Slowly, I managed to push myself back up into a sitting position, cradling my left cheek with my hand.

“I’m no damn servant, you little bitch,” Dirk spat venomously. “I’m a warrior.”

“That’s debatable,” I muttered through clenched teeth, the words slipping out from the right side of my mouth. “Just so you know, you’re going to lose your arm for that.” I tried to keep my voice steady and calm, though inside I was bracing for whatever might come next. Dirk’s face twisted with rage, looking like a cartoon character ready to explode.

He raised his arm to strike again, but before he could, the unknown alpha grabbed his wrist firmly and shot him a warning glare. “I don’t want a war here,” he said quietly but firmly. “And if you lay another hand on her, that’s exactly what you’ll get. Count yourself lucky if you walk away with all your limbs intact.”

Dirk’s furious gaze shifted to his leader. “She’s your prisoner. Why are you taking her side?”

“Because an alpha kills for their mate,” the stranger replied coldly. “You’ve already hurt her more than once tonight, causing her pain and suffering.”

—

“How else were we supposed to get her here?” Dirk snapped back. “I didn’t see you out there risking your neck for her.”

“I have to keep things organized here,” the alpha answered, his tone low but firm. “You’ve messed up so many times, I’ve had to make sure the others stayed hidden and taken care of. We can’t afford to move again. Don’t you understand that? Finish the job so we can finally move on with our lives. This has dragged on long enough. I need my mate. We need our Luna. And I can’t do that without them.” He gestured toward me.

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“Can someone get me some ice for this?” I asked, pointing to my throbbing cheek. “I don’t heal like you guys do.” I desperately wanted Dirk out of the way so this alpha could finally

tell me what he really wanted. This couldn't be as simple as "hand over your mate and we'll let you go." Dirk clearly wasn't privy to all the details.

"Dirk, take a walk and cool off," the alpha ordered. "I'll see if we have something for your face, Kennedy."

"Luna..." I corrected sharply.

"I apologize. Luna Kennedy." Without another word, he shoved Dirk out the door, still barking instructions to my guards as he did. When he returned, he opened his mouth to speak, but I cut him off.

"What's your name? I'm not calling you 'alpha'—I already have one of those. And since I can't feel your aura, calling you 'Alpha' before your name is going to be difficult, but I'll try."

"My name is Alpha Finn."

"Alright, Finn. Now, what exactly do you want from me? Dirk isn't the brightest, and it's obvious he doesn't have the full picture."

My cheeky tone earned me a small smile from Finn. "I can see why you're a Luna, even as a human," he said with a hint of amusement. "How about I get you that ice, and then we can talk?"

I rolled my eyes and shifted to get more comfortable on the hard ground. This time he laughed as he left the tent.

I was exhausted, hungry, and uncomfortable, but I didn't trust anything they might offer me to eat or drink. Who knew what their real plans were? And no matter how badly I needed rest, I wasn't going anywhere near Dirk's pile of filthy rags. I needed to get out of this cramped, dark tent.

The entrance shifted, and I thought Finn was coming back with ice—and maybe even a suggestion to tie me up outside by the fire. Anything would be better than this dank, smelly place. But when the face sneering at me wasn't who I expected at all, I wasn't even surprised.

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Chapter 189

"At last, I've caught you, you damn homewrecker."

"I wouldn't say I'm shocked to see you, Amy," I reply, my voice steady despite the tension thickening the air between us, "but I'm definitely piecing things together. Not all of it, though. Can you explain why your mate wanted me captured?" I figure it's worth a shot—she's never one to keep things brief. Hopefully, she's still talking.

"I want to be a Luna," she states bluntly, her eyes burning with determination.

“Isn’t that what you already are? Your mate’s the Alpha of this rogue pack, which makes you their Luna by default. Didn’t they teach you how this works when you were a kid?” I say, my tone edged with disbelief. She responds with a light slap—so much softer than the ones Dirk dishes out.

“Stupid bitch,” she spits venomously. “I wanted to be Ryker’s Luna, and I almost had him—until your weak human self showed up. Why couldn’t you just stay away and let him hate you? He was this close to rejecting you. You don’t deserve to be his mate.”

Her words hit my gut like a punch. I know I shouldn’t believe a single thing she says, but the doubt creeps in anyway. Was he really going to reject me for her? He never mentioned a thing. If he had, I would have let him go, especially at the beginning. I understand that he should have a mate who’s his equal, but now? Now he says he loves me. Or is that just the mate bond talking? He can’t just get rid of me because of it. I need to push these thoughts away, but it’s hard not to let her poison my mind.

“What was your plan, anyway?” I ask, trying to keep my voice steady. “Kill me and then reject your own mate, hoping Ryker would choose you? You do realize he never would, right?”

“Of course he will! He’s been mine for so long. He was going to pick me before you showed up,” she insists, her eyes blazing with conviction.

“He’s never wanted a chosen mate,” I say, rolling my eyes. “Anyone who knows him understands that. Clearly, you weren’t close enough to him to know that.”

SLAP!

I wince, already dreading the reflection I’ll see when I finally get a look at my face.

“He’ll choose me if he knows what’s best for him,” she declares. “He’ll reject you and claim me. Otherwise, you’ll die. When Ryker claims me, I’ll reject Finn. It’s that simple.”

“That’s your brilliant plan?” I ask, my hands rubbing over my sore cheek. “Do you even realize how many holes there are in that idea? What do you plan to do with the mate you already have if he refuses to accept your rejection?” I nod toward the tent’s entrance.

“I’ll reject him and command him to accept me. He’s only pretending to be an alpha. I deserve a true-born alpha,” she says, puffing up her chest as if she’s already won.

“And why exactly do you think that?” I ask, not even bothering to mask the boredom creeping into my voice. She’s clearly delusional.

“My dad is alpha-born, which means I have alpha blood. I deserve a full-blood alpha as my mate, and I will have Ryker,” she says, stomping her foot like a petulant child. I’m honestly losing patience with her childish tantrums.

“So your dad isn’t an alpha running a pack? He’s just alpha-born?” I clarify.

“He should be running a pack, but that’s going to change soon enough,” she replies, her eyes wild with manic energy. I’m not sure if she’s still talking to me or just lost in her own thoughts.

“Is he trying to take something that doesn’t belong to him, too?” I ask, watching as she begins to pace nervously.

“Ryker’s pack belongs to us. It should have always belonged to us. Alpha Ryan never should have survived that attack. The plan was flawless. The warriors were in place, and his car was sabotaged. If only he had died, we would have everything right here,” she says, her voice dropping to a whisper filled with bitter resentment.

Wait—what? How does she know so many details about the attack on Alpha Ryan? Oh no. This can’t be real. Suddenly, it all makes sense—the carefully targeted attacks, the insider knowledge. This isn’t random at all.

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Chapter 190

100 – Kennedy

That damn woman—she was somehow involved in Alpha Ryan’s attack? The realization hits me like a lightning bolt, instantly erasing every ounce of fatigue and weariness clinging to my bones. She was the one responsible for putting Ryker’s parents in danger, all just so she could claim a pack for herself.

My heart pounds fiercely in my chest, each beat echoing louder than the last. My breaths come fast and shallow, but I force myself to stay composed. She grins at me, that maddening, unhinged smile she wears like a badge of pride. She thinks I’m terrified of her. How wrong she is. Inside, I’m trembling with rage and loathing, every fiber of my being screaming to lash out. But my hands are tied in my lap, the only barrier stopping me from strangling her right here and now.

The one thing that puzzles me is the “we” she kept mentioning. Who was she referring to? It couldn’t have been her mate—there’s no way he would have allowed her to manipulate him for ten years straight. What exactly did she mean by “we”?

I bring my hands up to my face, rubbing them roughly, probably smearing blood across my skin, but I don’t care anymore. I just need to extract whatever information she holds so I can relay it to Ryker when he arrives.

“How was Ryker’s pack supposed to belong to you if his father died?” I ask sharply, rolling my eyes in disbelief. “He would’ve just taken over, like he did after the accident. Your plan wasn’t thought through at all. You and whoever you’re working with aren’t exactly masterminds. Clearly, you weren’t born to lead a pack... even if you claim to have alpha blood.”

Her expression stiffens, and I can see the irritation flash in her eyes. She revels in hearing herself speak, so I keep pushing to get her riled up. “That alpha blood of yours must come from some distant relative, right? Is that your claim? Or maybe your dad was like the third son in a long line of bigger, better alphas, and this is your pathetic way of proving yourself?”

She strides over to me with a predatory confidence, grabbing the top of my head and yanking hard enough to pull out a few strands of hair. The sharp sting brings tears to my eyes.

“Listen here, you worthless human trash,” she spits, venom dripping from every word. “I’m an alpha’s daughter. That’s more than you can say for yourself.”

I grit my teeth, my voice strained but defiant. “And yet, I’m mated to the most powerful alpha around, while you’re stuck with a rogue.”

Her hand lashes out again, this time a harder slap that stings across my cheek. I feel the sharp scrape of her nail, and warm blood begins to trickle down my face. “Your father was a terrible alpha and an even worse parent—just look at the mess you turned out to be,” I mutter through clenched teeth.

That’s all she’s managed to do—inflict a few slaps. Nothing more.

She has no other ammunition.

“My father only lost his pack to Ryker by chance,” she snarls. “But that doesn’t matter anymore. Ryker belongs to me. You’ll die, and I will become the Luna of the Dark Moon pack.”

Suddenly, a scream slices through the air—a chilling, blood-curdling sound that makes my skin crawl. Apparently, these tent walls aren’t as soundproof as I had hoped. But there’s nothing more to hear after that. Amy bursts out of the tent without sparing me a second glance. I exhale heavily, feeling the weight of her selfishness settle over me like a dark cloud. She’s a terrible leader, always putting her own interests first—her curiosity, her safety—never thinking about anyone else.

I push myself up slowly and edge toward the tent’s opening. In the distance, more shouting and screaming echo from multiple directions. I strain my ears, hoping to catch any cries of children. The men and women here have their reasons for being involved, but no child would ever choose this life willingly. I refuse to let any innocent get hurt because these people dared to attack my home.

Peering through a narrow crack in the tent’s flap, I check to see if anyone’s watching me. Satisfied that I’m not being observed, I step outside cautiously. With all the noise around, I don’t need to be quiet, but I remind myself that caution is never a bad thing.

“I was wondering when you’d figure out they didn’t bind your legs,” a voice suddenly says behind me, making me jump.

I whirl around to see Finn standing there, holding a half-melted bag of ice. My eyes shift from the ice in his hand up to his face, where pain is etched deeply into his features.

“Don’t worry,” he says softly, “I have no intention of hurting you.”