

Letters Sent To Eternity

251

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

A few figures moved about sluggishly in the fading light, clearly not engaged in any urgent activity at the moment. I leaned close to Finn and whispered, "We need to find some cover." A shiver ran down his spine, his shoulders and back prickling with goosebumps. He didn't reply, only gave a silent nod before leading us deeper into the thick forest.

We began climbing the side of a rocky cliff that rose perhaps fifty feet above us. The faint sound of water trickling nearby grew louder, and I spotted the dried remains of what must have once been a stream. This had been its original course before Finn's group had dammed it up, diverting the flow elsewhere.

"If they haven't taken these spots yet, there are a few caves up here," Finn said quietly. "They're shallow, but we can watch most of their movements from inside, and stay upwind so they don't catch our scent."

He was right. The first cave we came across was empty—no signs of recent visitors, especially none of the werewolf kind. No scents lingered in the air. We spent another hour scouting the area to be certain, then settled back into that first cave after discovering three more similar openings nearby, all unoccupied.

Calling it a "cave" was generous at best. It was more like a shallow hollow behind a crack in the rock—perfect for a quick hideout but barely large enough to hold the two of us comfortably.

"I'm counting about fifty of them right now," Finn murmured, peering out from the cave's mouth. "Though some have come and gone in the last few minutes. Doesn't look like they're planning anything immediate."

"What makes you so sure?" I asked, needing to trust his scouting instincts. Neither of us could fit comfortably on the narrow ledge outside the cave, so we were taking turns keeping watch.

"There aren't any groups forming. If they're plotting something, it's out of our sight. We might be stuck here all night."

"What are you talking about? We need supplies and food if we're going to stay hidden this long. We shouldn't split up unless absolutely necessary."

"We're not going anywhere. If you want intel, we have to stay put and observe their patterns now."

I opened my mouth to argue, but he cut me off. "There are plenty of small animals around. We don't need anything else."

I growled softly in frustration. “What’s your problem with regrouping, making a plan, and being prepared?”

“Nothing, princess,” he said with a smirk. “But some of us have lived this life long enough to know that plans don’t always help. Sometimes you just have to rely on your training and get the job done. Anything else is stalling and dragging out the mission. It’s your watch now.” Without waiting for a response, he stood up and brushed past me toward the cave’s interior. I barely caught sight of him pulling off his shorts.

“What the hell are you doing?” I spun around quickly, turning my back to him.

“You’re awfully twitchy for a warrior who’s probably seen plenty of d*cks,” he teased.

“I’m not twitchy. We just aren’t close enough for this to be comfortable. And you still haven’t answered me—what are you doing?”

“Taking a nap. If we’re switching shifts, this could be a long night if nothing happens.”

“And that means you have to be naked?” I risked a glance over my shoulder, curious if he’d shifted so we could talk face to face. Nope.

“I’m going to shift. It’s easier to sleep in my wolf form. Plus, I’ll be more alert—better hearing and smell if something comes up.”

“Do you spend a lot of time as a wolf?”

“Not lately, no. But when we’re traveling, yes. It’s warmer and more comfortable to sleep that way. Now go keep watch before you miss something.”

Without another word or glance, he shifted. His wolf form twirled in place before curling up tightly. I sighed, realizing I was on first watch. When he woke up, we were definitely going to have a long conversation about who was really in charge of this mission.

Miss L

Author

Thank you so much for reading. I appreciate all constructive comments and little gems of feedback. I can’t respond here, but if you want to join the conversation, you can find me on social media at Miss.L.Writes.

...

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 252

13 – Finn

About two hours ago, I finally took over from Greta. It's the dead of night now, and she's been generous enough to let me rest for quite a while. Only now does it dawn on me why—she's an absolute control freak. Seriously, this girl is wound tighter than a spring. I'm going to have to talk to Danny about finding some way to calm her down; she's way too uptight for her own good. But honestly, that's not the toughest part of this whole mess. Either these rogues aren't the ones we're after and our intel is off, or they've caught wind that Rory is investigating them, so they're playing it cool for the moment. I have no clue why Greta insists on having every single move planned out in bullet points before we do anything. She's the very definition of analysis paralysis. No matter how stunning she is, her obsessive nature is driving me nuts, and I've had more than enough of that kind of crazy to last me a lifetime.

If it were up to me alone, I'd have already done a sweep around the perimeter to get a better sense of their numbers. I know how to mask my scent, and since I'm not officially part of any pack, even if they caught my trail, they probably wouldn't think twice. But I can't just leave her side, and I can barely get ten steps away without her pulling me back. For someone who's supposed to be a skilled, badass warrior, she's incredibly clingy. It's like she's terrified of being alone, though I'm not sure she even realizes it herself. Maybe she's in denial. Whatever the case, it just cements her place in the crazy box in my mind.

I stand up to get some blood flowing back into my legs when I suddenly hear it—her wolf whimpering softly. I glance over my shoulder to find Greta breathing shallowly, her chest rising and falling in quick, uneven gasps. Maybe she's running in her dream. Turning my gaze back to the rogues, I see them doing something mundane—cooking a small deer over a fire that seems far too large for the few people gathered around it. Some are hanging clothes on one side of the fire, while the rest simply mill about, doing nothing of note.

“No! Stop! Don't!” Greta's voice cuts through the night, sharp and urgent. When did she shift? It doesn't really matter. She's not loud, but I need to keep her from raising her voice any further. If the rogues hear us, we're screwed.

She's turning her head as if searching for a way out, her eyes squeezed shut, eyebrows furrowed, and lips tight. Her dream must be vivid, intense. I don't want to scare her, so I stay a few steps back, softly calling her name, trying to soothe her. Her mind needs to believe she's safe. She whimpers again and thrashes sideways, risking injury on the hard stone floor beneath her.

“Greta!” I whisper-shout, and her eyes snap open. She immediately drops into a crouched stance, scanning her surroundings. She glances past me, still caught in the lucid dream, unable to see me at all.

“Get the fuck away from me!” she snarls, halting my approach.

“Greta, it's me, Finn,” I say gently.

“Don't fucking lie to me. Back off. You can't keep me here,” she spits out, backing herself against the rock wall. I catch the sharp scent of blood—she must have scratched herself.

“I’m not holding you anywhere. You can leave whenever you want. You’re safe here,” I assure her, stepping forward slowly.

“I said stay away. Don’t fucking touch me. You’ll never touch me again!” she shouts, fear and anger flashing in her eyes.

“I won’t touch you, Greta. I promise. Just take a deep breath. You know me. I need you to wake up, and for the love of the Goddess, stop shouting. We don’t want these rogues finding us.” I take another cautious step closer.

“No!” she yells, darting past me toward the entrance. I don’t try to stop her—maybe some fresh air in the forest will help calm her down. A few yards away, I find her leaning against a tree, breathing heavily.

“Greta,” I whisper, careful not to startle her. “You’re hurt. Can I see? If you’re going to fight these rogues, I need you at one hundred percent.”

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 253

“Just stay put, Finn. Please.” Well, that’s something—at least she recognizes me.

“What was that back there?” I ask, trying to keep my voice steady.

“Nothing. Forget it. Just give me a few minutes. I’ll go grab us some food.” Without another word, she turns and walks away. No explanation, no hesitation. Has she completely lost it, thinking I’m just going to let this go? If she’s dealing with some kind of trauma or PTSD, I need to know—because that kind of thing could get us killed in a fight. But I don’t follow her. She’s awake, alert, and more than capable of handling herself. Instead, I decide to use the time to circle the camp’s perimeter. Maybe I’ll spot something useful.

On the far side of the camp, opposite where Greta and I had spent the night, I come across a rough shelter that wasn’t here before. It’s made from logs and branches, forming three walls and a flat roof. If someone ran through here, it wouldn’t even leave a trace. The thing that worries me most is that it’s built into the side of a hill. Could be just a simple hideout, or maybe it leads into the hill itself, concealing a whole group of people from scouts like us. We’re going to have to check it out eventually.

I head back to our spot to wait for Greta, but I have no clue where she’s gone. Maybe she’s hunting, or perhaps she went all the way back to the cabin to gather supplies like she mentioned yesterday. I settle near some trees that give me a better vantage point across the camp toward the shelter. I can’t see it directly, but I can observe any movement around it.

Before I even spot her, I catch her scent. Greta is approaching, looking much better than she did three hours ago. She’s carrying her own pack, which looks packed full. Both my wolf and my stomach growl at the same time. She must have gone back to the cabin.

“Why is it always the crazy ones who are hot?” my wolf murmurs in my mind.

“I don’t know,” I reply silently, “but keep it in check. She’s our boss now, and she holds the power to either keep us in Dark Moon or kick us out.”

“Whatever. You know the Luna likes you. She’s not going to throw you out just because you’re interested in a warrior.”

“I’m not worried about me, and we’re not hitting on Greta. Crazy, remember?”

“You could use some action, that’s all I’m saying. And the crazy ones tend to be the most fun. Amy led you on, made you wait, then went around on you. You deserve a good piece of—”

“Stop! No, just no.” I shove him back into the recesses of my mind before he causes more trouble.

“You look better,” I say aloud.

“Gee, thanks,” she replies with a smirk.

“No offense, but you looked pretty rough after your nightmare. Want to talk about it?”

“Nope.”

We sit in silence for a moment.

“We have time. Toss me some food and tell me something about yourself that has nothing to do with being a warrior.” She shoots me a look like I’ve lost my mind. “What? You weren’t always a warrior, and you weren’t born into Alpha Ryker’s pack. So what were you before this?”

“What about you?” I ask, catching the water bottle and protein bar she throws my way.

“What about me?”

“What were you before this life? Or, I guess, before you became the Rogue Alpha.” She rolls her eyes as if the title is a bad joke.

“I never wanted to be an alpha,” I admit. “I know my place. The problem is, I found Amy by accident, and she had all these big plans. I didn’t really care as long as we were together and the people I traveled with were safe. At first, we were. We found a few places like this,” I gesture around at the forest, “but none of them were good enough for her. The rogues didn’t trust her because she was an outsider.”

She nods slowly, chewing on the protein bar. The camp is quiet around us, the tension easing just a little as we share pieces of our pasts in the fading light.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 254

“So, you’re basically saying they outsmarted you. Why did you keep following her without question?” she asked, her eyes sharp with curiosity.

“That’s what mates do, isn’t it? We become blind to reality,” I replied, swallowing a hefty gulp of water. The sharp pressure in my chest momentarily distracted me from the familiar surge of anger that always rose whenever my former mate was mentioned. “She exploited their trust in me, declaring herself the leader through my name. None of them protested because I was involved in decisions, and they thought maybe she was trying to integrate herself by backing me up. But really, she was just masterful at twisting my reputation to get what she wanted. Pure manipulation at its finest.” I exhaled deeply, taking another long sip.

“Alright, but what were you before all that chaos?” She shifted into a sitting position, clearly eager to hear more about my past.

“My pack was small—just my dad, mom, brother, and me. We were all warriors,” I began, my voice growing softer with the memory. “One night, we were ambushed by a hundred wolves. I still don’t know who they were, but we never stood a chance. They took out our alpha and his family first, then systematically wiped out the rest of the pack. I managed to escape with about thirty others, mostly kids. Strangely, they didn’t chase us, which always felt odd. They settled in our territory, and we were forced to move on.” I shrugged, the memory still bitter.

“How old were you then?” she asked gently.

“Nope! If you want information, you have to share something first,” I teased with a sly grin.

“What? That’s not fair!” she protested, laughing.

“Then you need to be a better interrogator,” I winked at her. It had been a long time since I’d told that story, and somehow, sharing it made the weight in my chest a little lighter.

“Did you uncover anything about those rogues while I was gone? I caught your scent near the southern perimeter,” she said, narrowing her eyes.

“Nice try with the deflection,” I said, winking again as she rolled her eyes. “But yes, I did find something...” I proceeded to tell her about the possible hideout I’d discovered.

“Do you think the rogues we see roaming around are just a distraction?” she wondered aloud. “Maybe they’re coming and going from Rory’s pack through another route since you’ve never seen that shack before.”

“That’s definitely a possibility. Want to check it out?” I asked.

“Absolutely. But first, show me how you shift with your pack on. I’ve never seen anyone do that before,” she said, eyes sparkling with anticipation.

I chuckled, and we spent some time going over the tricky details of shifting without wrecking everything around us. Clothing was always a casualty since our bodies transformed so drastically, but a backpack could be adjusted to fit both human and wolf forms. I had her practice shifting inside my t-shirt a few times so she'd have something tangible to focus on. She was tall but still noticeably smaller than me, so she managed to shift without tearing it apart.

"You're picking this up fast. Let's pack up and give it a real try," I said, impressed.

As she gathered her clothes, I found it difficult to look away. Aside from being completely insane, she was perfect. Her dark brown hair was streaked with fiery red highlights, cut short enough that it fluttered around her face with every move but never obscured her vision. My wolf mind teased me with images of those silky strands slipping through my fingers. Her entire body was toned yet soft, every curve defined but inviting. Her breasts were a perfect, teardrop shape—just the right size—and I could feel my mouth go dry.

"See something you like?" she teased, flipping the question back at me with a mischievous smirk.

Damn her sass. I wanted to spank it right out of her. "You should be honored. It's been a long time since a woman caught my interest like this." I brushed past her, shifting before I could say anything even more foolish.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 255

14 – Greta

I had never encountered anyone who looked at me quite like Finn did. His gaze was intense, almost ravenous, as if I were the last meal he'd ever have. It unsettled me in a way I couldn't quite explain.

"Well, he's a guy—a very, very attractive guy—and you're a woman," my wolf teased from inside my mind.

"Shut up," I snapped at the voice. Then I paused, wondering aloud, "I wonder if he was telling the truth about not having any women catch his eye for a long time."

My wolf chuckled, "Maybe he's bi! I've always been curious about trying a threesome."

I laughed, shaking my head at the absurdity. "You're ridiculous. Besides, maybe the bond between him and Amy was different. She could sleep with anyone, and it didn't seem to affect her. Maybe he's the same way. He could be lying just to get some while he's on this mission." The thought left a bitter taste in my mouth.

"Nah, he was definitely eyeing you like you were a snack," my wolf insisted.

“Greta!” Finn’s voice cut through our banter, halting the debate. I turned to see him standing about twenty yards away, shifting quickly. “You want to check this out or just run laps?” he whispered, raising an eyebrow.

My wolf rolled her eyes, and Finn laughed at us both. We jogged back to him, then shifted and quickly changed into shorts and tank tops. Not exactly season-appropriate, but if we needed to shift fast, comfort and mobility mattered more than warmth.

“What’s the plan?” I asked, already guessing the answer.

“Wing it,” he shrugged casually. “The only intel I have is that they come and go through that small opening,” he pointed toward a narrow gap in the terrain, “and I’m not picking up any scents from this direction. Let’s scale the hill, get as close as we can without being spotted, and figure it out from there.” Without waiting for a response, he turned and started walking, as if the plan was already set.

His lack of preparation made my skin crawl, but I couldn’t argue. We couldn’t mindlink, so yelling at him telepathically was out of the question. I had no choice but to follow. We found a spot close enough to catch muffled voices from the shack below, hidden by thick brush. We settled in quickly, crouching low.

“This is taking too long. We need to get him alone. What’s so hard about that?” The voice was sharp and familiar. I glanced at Finn, and we both recognized it immediately. What on earth was she doing here? We had plenty of resources—why couldn’t they follow simple instructions?

“He’s never alone! That’s the problem!” a rough voice snapped back. “You don’t want us seen taking him, but you also don’t want anyone else harmed trying to get to him. What the hell do you want us to do?”

Finn’s voice softened, “Finn never let her mate down.” The woman cooed. “He always got whatever Amy wanted. Why can’t you?”

“Not everything. He didn’t get the pack she wanted,” came the gruff reply.

“That’s because she got greedy. She already had a mate. All she needed was a pack, but she and her father wanted the biggest territory, and she wanted the biggest alpha. She should’ve stayed here and taken over Valley View like Finn wanted.”

“Yeah, well, Finn was captured and killed because of that bitch. So I’m not sure how much I value his opinion on things. Why don’t you go lure the baby alpha out if you want him so badly? Just know I’ll rip his throat out if he so much as touches you. That’s another thing our Alpha put up with that I won’t allow. My mate belongs only to me.”

“Of course not, baby. But I want a pack. Don’t you want a pack to call home? They were too weak to do that simple task. But you and I can.”

I glanced at Finn again. His eyes had hardened, dark and cold. He knew both of these people, and I had a sinking feeling the night ahead would be long and brutal. I wished I

could ask him questions, help devise a plan, but we were too close to risk being discovered now. If they overpowered us, they'd likely try to use us to get to Ryker. Finn was in no condition to fight.

I tapped his shoulder gently. He shook his head, refusing to pull away from listening to their harsh words about him and his mate. He was a masochist in some ways. I needed to get him away, find a place to camp, help him clear his mind.

Scanning the area, I spotted a recessed hollow in the hill—possibly another cave we could use. I tugged on his arm again, and this time, his eyes were frightening. I had never seen this side of Finn before. The pain was etched deep, but there was no light left in them. It was as if he'd locked away the Finn I knew somewhere deep inside his mind. This was the lone warrior, hardened by years of survival, suspicious of everyone's intentions.

I tugged again, silently telling him that no matter how terrifying he looked, I wouldn't abandon him. He was part of our pack now, even if Ryker insisted on following strict protocols. Ryker trusted him enough to send him on this mission, to consider him family. Finn just hadn't accepted that yet. He was waiting for me to walk away like everyone else had.

I tilted my head, pulling gently on his arm once more. This time he didn't resist. He let me guide him up to the recessed area on the hill. As soon as we reached it, he pulled away and slumped against the grassy wall, exhaustion and pain etched across his face.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 256

"Well, at least now we know what their game is," I say, attempting a lighthearted remark to break the tension. He doesn't respond, his gaze fixed far beyond the horizon. This night is shaping up to be a long one. I settle down near the edge of the clearing, positioning myself so I can watch anyone coming or going from the shack. The frustration with Janelle is obvious—she doesn't strike me as the sharpest tool in the shed. Honestly, I can't fathom how she could be leading this whole operation. Maybe she's just a front, a puppet controlled by someone else, like Claude was with Finn. Claude always worked through a couple of intermediaries, making sure no one saw him pulling the strings directly. It was a clever tactic—until Finn met Kennedy, who somehow worked her own kind of magic to win his loyalty. Maybe Janelle's playing a part too, pretending to be the clueless, helpless woman so these burly idiots do all the hard work for her.

Once it seems like only the guards remain awake, I step back to my pack and grab two bottles of water. Sitting down beside Finn, I hand him one. "Want to talk about it?"

"At least now I know everyone thinks I died in the fight," he replies flatly. "Not that I expect anyone to come looking for me if they think I survived and got captured. I'm just rogue trash—not worth saving."

I shake my head gently, trying to lift his spirits. “That means you can start fresh at Dark Moon without constantly looking over your shoulder. And you’re not rogue trash. You came from a pack, just like most of them.”

He stands abruptly, moving toward the ledge, his voice heavy with past wounds. “I was raised as a rogue. I barely remember being part of a pack. Rogues aren’t as good as pack-born wolves. I’m still jumping through hoops to prove myself to you, aren’t I?”

“Finn...” I start, but he raises a hand to silence me.

“Get some sleep,” he says quietly. “They’re planning something, but it won’t happen tonight.”

—

Over the next three days of scouting, I grow tired of Finn’s brooding silence. On the second day, I send him back to the cabin to grab more food and take a shower. He calls me “princess,” which I still don’t understand—why he resists basic comforts we have access to. We’re not exactly busy, so why not make use of them? The most important observation is that Janelle and her mate, Justin, never leave the shack. There has to be another exit. Finn doubts Justin would tolerate being trapped inside for long.

“There’s been a lot of movement in the last twenty minutes,” I call over my shoulder as Finn returns.

He thrusts a bag toward me. “Here.”

I’ve been on plenty of long missions surviving on what our wolves catch and protein bars, but sometimes a girl just needs a little treat. I open the paper sack to find an apple, some jerky, and a package of Pop-Tarts—my guilty pleasure. I tear into the sugary goodness and let out a small moan as the sweetness bursts on my tongue.

“Well, if that’s all it takes...” I tease.

“Shut up,” he growls through clenched teeth. “Looks like your mood’s improved. I was right, wasn’t I? A good shower fixes a lot.”

“That, and my hand,” he mumbles, barely audible.

“What was that?” I ask.

He ignores me and points toward Janelle’s camp. “What’s going on over there?”

I take a deep breath, deciding he’s just messing with me and won’t explain his comment even if I press him. “They all started moving like ants about twenty minutes ago. Something’s up, and I have a feeling they’re going after Rory.”

“Did you check in with Alpha Ryker?”

“Yes. He hasn’t heard anything from Rory, but everyone’s on high alert. You know you only have to use his title when you’re speaking to him directly, right?”

“Uh, no way. He probably has some secret Alpha radar for disrespect. He likes you, so you get to call him by his name. He’s still deciding if he likes me enough to keep me around. The fact that Kennedy doesn’t mind me is just keeping me alive, not earning me points—I still had her kidnapped.”

“So you’ll call her by her name but not him?”

“Yep.” He rises and gestures for me to follow. “He gives off major ‘use my title or die’ vibes. She’s more like ‘we’re friends’ vibes. But I’m not stupid—she’s got Bennet, Danny, and Josh wrapped around her finger. One scowl from her, and they’d kill me slowly just for making her unhappy.”

“Nope. I’m pretty sure you’re the one who’s stupid. That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard,” I laugh.

“And yet, I’m not wrong,” he says as he climbs over the hill.

“Where are we going? The rogues are that way,” I point back toward our previous position.

“I think you were right. They’re the decoy,” he says, continuing forward.

—

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 257

I would never admit it aloud to Greta, but she was right to retreat back to the cabin and let off some steam away from people I had hoped would stand by me. I needed to clear my head before I could face the problem head-on. We had welcomed them into our quiet little rogue pack, and they completely upended our world. Honestly, that was what infuriated me the most. I don’t care whether they like me or even want to come after me personally, but Amy and Janelle had infiltrated our pack and found Justin and me almost immediately. Neither of them was eager to be marked right away. I’m not sure what excuses Janelle gave, but Amy’s reasons always revolved around gaining power. For her, it was the ultimate prize at the end of her grand schemes. Every time I achieved what she wanted, she just pushed the goalposts further. There was always another task waiting.

I’ll also never tell Greta that she was the one I thought about while I let my body release all the built-up tension. It didn’t take much imagination and, embarrassingly, it didn’t take long either—but it worked. My wolf was right; I need to find someone back in Dark Moon to take care of this regularly. I’ve been celibate far too long.

“Finn!” Greta whispered sharply. “Where are we going?”

I almost forgot she was trailing behind me. “I told you—you were right. I found the end of the tunnel on my way back.” I glanced over my shoulder as we made our way down the backside of the hill. “Once I figured out who was here, I started searching for the scents of people I remembered being close to Justin and Janelle. Like them, I assumed some had died in the fight with Dark Moon. I didn’t stop to consider that maybe some of them ran off to save their own skins instead of protecting the group that had given them shelter for years.” I didn’t want to sound bitter, but I was. Most of our rogue group was fairly loyal, but it wasn’t the same bond as being in a pack. At the end of the day, most people will put themselves first. I haven’t had anyone like that since Nan.

“You found someone?!” Her voice was eager, but it shouldn’t have made me feel proud. I’d decided to let go of the people-pleaser part of me after Amy. To Greta, I was just a means to an end.

“I found three someones. So that makes five I recognize from our rogue pack.”

“That’s something, at least. What’s the plan?”

I let out a short laugh. “I’m pretty sure you already know the answer to that.” When was she going to understand that there are no plans out here?

“Well, let me give you one then,” she said firmly. “Shift as soon as you can, and we need to keep each other in sight since no backup is coming. If we get separated—which is highly likely—take out as many as you can, then head back to the cabin. If you’re too injured to move, howl three long times every five minutes until someone finds you. Got it?”

“Yes, ma’am.” I heard her grumble under her breath, and I couldn’t help but smile. We followed the massive rolling hill north for almost an hour. The weather was cold, but not nearly as bad as Rory had originally feared. I had brought warm clothes for both of us, just in case we got snow.

“There,” I said, pointing as we finally spotted another clearing near the fork of the river, the boundary between Rory’s pack and whoever was to the west. I knew it was another pack in Ryker’s alliance, though I hadn’t memorized all of them yet. It was almost crazy how many people he and Kennedy were responsible for. I used to think our small group of fifty to seventy members was a lot.

“I don’t see anything,” Greta muttered behind me. She had this annoying habit of looking over my shoulder and breathing right into my ear. My body loved the sensation, but my brain hated how easily she could provoke a reaction.

“It’s easier to see from up close,” I said. “I came from the cabin this way so I wouldn’t leave a trail for someone to stumble upon, and I ran into Billy heading back into a cave down there. When I checked it out, I caught all their scents. Each one was recent, which means they’ve moved through here since we overheard them talking the other night.”

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

“Do you think you’ll be able to handle it if this turns into a fight?” she asked, her voice laced with doubt.

“What?!” I whipped around, disbelief flashing across my face. She had to be kidding. There was no way she was seriously questioning where my loyalties lay at this moment.

“I mean, you lived and fought alongside these people. Can you really bring yourself to fight against them now?” she pressed.

“You’ve never had to survive as a rogue, so I don’t expect you to understand,” I replied firmly. “But the truth is, yes—I can fight against them. Those,” I gestured toward the opening in the trees, “were never truly part of our group. They were the parasites tagging along for the ride. And I say that as someone who’s had more than a few run-ins with vampires.”

“Okay, okay! I get it—you don’t like them. Save your hostility for the fight,” she said, waving a hand dismissively.

“I’m not being hostile,” I snapped back, frustration creeping into my voice. “I’m just tired of being questioned by you and everyone else.”

“Wait—”

Before she could finish, a low, menacing growl ripped through the sparse trees surrounding us. Chaos erupted instantly. Branches snapped like twigs, leaves and dirt whirled in the air, and the world seemed to tilt. For a moment, I was disoriented, unsure of what was happening—until Greta screamed. I spun around, but she was gone.

Blinking through the swirling debris, I spotted her suspended in a rope net, swaying above the ground. Traps—traps they had set. Traps that I had taught them to build. Damn them.

Instinct took over. I barely had a second to dodge a shadowy figure lunging at me before scanning the trees to find Greta still caught in the net. I had to stay close to her until I could figure out how to get her down. They were clearly trying to separate us.

The sky was darkening faster than I’d realized; I should have been more aware of the time. Suddenly, a pair of arms wrapped around my shoulders. I bent forward, letting the attacker use their momentum to flip over me. What they forgot was that Sammy and I had trained many of these kids in combat. I landed several sharp punches to Billy’s gut. He’d always been a bit reckless—acting before thinking and refusing to accept advice. That stubbornness was his undoing now. I grabbed his head and twisted sharply to the side. There would be no second chance for him.

“Finn! Four o’clock!” Greta yelled urgently.

I swung my right arm out in a clothesline motion, catching a girl who was approaching too slowly. She hit the ground hard and rolled, but I didn’t hesitate. Two quick punches to her head knocked her out cold. I didn’t recognize her, but taking her out seemed like the safest choice. Hopefully, next time she’d think twice about who she decided to follow.

Turning quickly, I tried to get my bearings and locate where Greta's net was tied. "I'll search for the release mechanism," I called out. "There are two enemies behind you and at least one more lurking in the trees near the tunnel entrance."

"I won't go far," she replied, growling softly with frustration. "Figure out how to get me down."

Typical Greta—always the warrior, never losing her cool. If I could free her, this fight might actually turn into something worth watching.

I glanced up just in time to see a male and female wolf trotting toward us at a measured pace. I knew Janelle wasn't with them—she wasn't a fighter, more of a delicate princess like her cousin.

I shifted, prowling forward with my wolf's energy simmering beneath the surface, eager for the fight but conserving strength. They would come to us. They weren't in any rush.

Being upwind, I couldn't catch their scent, but maybe they recognized me—maybe they realized I was far from dead. Perhaps they were reconsidering their choice to face me.

The female lunged suddenly—guess not.

She swiped with her claws, but I was bigger and used my size to my advantage. She snapped and clawed relentlessly, aiming for my wolf's forelegs. I understood why the male let her strike first. The moment one of her claws pierced my skin, a searing pain exploded through me. Poison. He was counting on her to wear me down so he could finish the job easily.

The sting was unbearable—my skin burned and tingled where she'd broken through. My muscles twitched involuntarily, but I forced myself to push through the agony.

"Finn! To your left, fifty yards—a birch tree, about ten feet up!" Greta shouted.

I focused, gritting my teeth against the pain, ready for whatever came next.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 259

16 – Greta

This has to be the most ridiculous situation I've ever found myself in. Here I am, caught in a damn net, dangling from a tree like some cartoon character in a slapstick show. Seriously, who still sets traps like this? It feels like something out of the Middle Ages.

"Finn! Quit messing around with that idiot and get me down!" I shout, frustration bubbling up as I swing back and forth.

There's a heavy thud as both guys hit the ground. Finn's wolf growls low and menacingly in my direction. Even though the light is fading fast, I can still tell the difference between these two wolves—they're almost evenly matched, but I can sense the subtle edges.

I keep scanning the treeline. There are others waiting their turn, shadows blending into the darkening forest, too many to count. If I don't get down soon, this is going to be a death sentence for Finn. They'll wear him down, one battle after another. I glance upward again. There's no way he can reach me like this. The only option is to climb the net myself, which was clearly designed to trap guys the size of Finn and Ryker. I'm swinging wildly, tilted like a pendulum, and it's a nightmare trying to keep my balance. Whoever set this trap knows exactly what they're doing with this medieval contraption.

Finally, I reach the net's closure. My weight makes it impossible to open, no matter how hard I pull or tug. I look down and see Finn struggling below; I can smell the coppery scent of blood in the air. Damn it! I extend my claws above the net's closure and swipe furiously.

Suddenly, my wolf shifts as we plummet toward the ground. She thrashes wildly, shredding the ropes with her claws as we fall. The impact hits hard, sending a shockwave up her legs, but we land running. No time to nurse bruises now—some of the stragglers at the treeline have joined the fight, emboldened now that Finn isn't alone.

My wolf rears up to face a massive opponent. This guy is too big to be normal—his proportions are all wrong. He's like a werewolf T-Rex, with a barrel chest twice as wide as normal and tiny, stubby legs. Something's definitely off about him, but there's no time to analyze. We slash at his eyes, then clamp down on one of his forelegs. He howls in agony before vanishing from sight. My wolf has tufts of his fur stuck between her teeth—gross. She glances over to see Finn piled on top of the burly beast. I'm not sure if he threw himself in or was thrown, but I'm grateful for the backup.

A sudden growl pulls my attention just in time to dodge a swipe of claws that flashes inches from my face. Another giant, another nightmare. What are these guys on? I shoot a quick look at Finn, who's still locked in combat with the T-Rex beast. This new opponent is huge—tall and broad, probably the type to just crush his enemies by sitting on them. He's about to get a rude surprise.

We circle each other, biting and clawing, a deadly dance. He's toying with me, clearly confident because of his size. His arrogance is about to be his downfall.

We duck and slide under as he pulls back for a heavy strike. I aim straight for his vulnerable spots. We roll and scratch along his underbelly, and for good measure, my wolf delivers a brutal bite that neuters him—one less reproducing jerk in the world. He collapses, and we shove him sideways. Let him bleed out.

I take out two more females, using a hip check to slam one into the other and then snapping their necks with ease. Then I glance back at Finn. I still smell his blood from earlier. The rest of their group must have scattered to warn Janelle about what's happening. Finn took down several of them before I jumped in, and now I've added my own tally to the chaos.

The forest around us grows eerily quiet, save for a faint rustle about thirty yards away. That's Finn. I stumble toward the sound, feeling disoriented—as if drunk. Something is definitely wrong. My wolf refuses to shift; there's a heavy unease settling over us. I wish she'd give me some kind of clue.

Then it hits me. Oh shit, Finn!

He's covered in blood—mostly his own. He's back in human form, panting heavily and struggling to move. I can't tell if he's trying to stand or just crawl away. A twig snaps under our feet, and his gaze snaps to us. A chill runs through me, sinking deep into my stomach.

Finn is usually a fun-loving, childish joker—a wild card with a grin always ready. But the look in his eyes now is the complete opposite. There's nothing but pure hatred, rage, and anger. I don't think he even sees my wolf. He's seen her before; she's not new to him, so he should recognize us. But the death glare he's giving us sends a cold wave through my veins.

My wolf lowers herself, belly flat against the ground, muzzle touching the earth. We never submit to anyone, but she senses his desperate need for safety. He doesn't know who to trust. He trusts no one. He's trying to slip away into the forest to heal—or maybe to die alone. Even when surrounded by people, Finn is always alone.

She whimpers softly, pulling my attention back to him. Slowly, she crawls forward on her belly toward Finn. His expression softens just a fraction, a tiny crack in the armor of hostility. I'll take that as a hopeful sign.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 260

We edged closer until she could gently nudge him. When he didn't resist, she kept nudging beneath him until finally hoisting him onto her back. The forest around us was dense and shadowy, the air thick with the scent of pine and damp earth. Carrying him through this tangled wilderness was no easy task—he was heavy, and it was clear we had to include this kind of endurance in our training. The trek back to the cabin stretched on for over two hours, but there was no other place where I could properly care for him.

When we reached the cabin, we had to shift our forms just to open the door. Then, shifting back, we lifted his barely conscious body and dragged him inside. She lowered him as gently as possible onto the floor beside the bed. I shifted again, quickly grabbing one of his shirts to throw over him—being naked seemed to unsettle him—and helped him onto the bed. He groaned softly, and I understood why. His skin was marred with shallow scrapes and deep, angry cuts, evidence of how viciously he'd been targeted. Whoever had done this wanted him to suffer.

I gathered every rag and healing ointment we had stocked in the cabin. While I boiled water, I checked in with Rory, helping him strategize for his men. I sent a message to Ryker, asking for a few more soldiers to assist and scout the surrounding area. Janelle and Justin

would move on if the shadowy figures recognized Finn and we couldn't glean enough information about their destination or ultimate goal. Still, we couldn't dismiss the possibility that they might return to Dark Moon seeking revenge.

Slowly, I began cleaning Finn's wounds, most of which were concentrated along his torso. It was clear they aimed for vital organs, but either they lacked the skill to inflict fatal damage or Finn truly was as formidable in combat as he claimed. Every time we sparred, I came out on top. Now, I found myself doubting whether that was ever really the case.

I tried to roll him over, but a deep cut ran from his left shoulder, disappearing beneath him. I couldn't tell how far it extended. He resisted my efforts—he was a big man, and I wasn't exactly fragile, but this was a struggle. "Come on, Finn. Let me help you," I urged softly.

"Just leave it," he slurred, his voice thick with exhaustion.

"Absolutely not. Flip over now, before I have to get rough with you."

There was a sharp breath, then silence stretched between us. Was he really going to ignore me? Just as I reached to grasp his shoulder, he suddenly flopped onto his stomach, his head still turned away. "That might be the nicest thing you've ever said to me," he muttered into the pillow. I couldn't help but smile—there was the feisty Finn I knew.

"I'd never stoop so low as to say something nice to you," I teased back.

He chuckled, muffled by the pillow. "I won't tell anyone. Mate's honor."

His words froze me in place.

We hadn't spoken about this since the night of the attack. I didn't want a mate—never had, not after what happened with my former pack. Yet, somehow, the Moon Goddess had decided to toy with me after all these years. I had told him no, but after what Amy did to him, and seeing how he was rejected, I couldn't bring myself to stoop as low as she had. I refused to cause him more pain—no one deserved that. But I couldn't be his mate.

I pushed the comment aside, focusing on cleaning the wounds. Many of the scratches were beginning to heal, but some of the deeper gashes stubbornly bled on. His wolf's healing powers should have kicked in by now.

"You know what you have to do, don't you?" my wolf whispered inside me.

"No," I replied firmly. "His wolf needs to heal him."

"His wolf can't right now. Finn is ready to let go. His depression runs so deep, even his wolf can't pull him out. He needs his mate. You have to show him there's still a reason for him to stay."

"Why me?" I asked bitterly. "I'm no good for him. Not as a mate."

"That's not your decision."

“Why not? It wasn’t my choice to be caged and abused either. What does the Moon Goddess want from me?”

“I don’t know. But right now, put on your big girl panties and help this warrior. He’s under your protection, part of your pack. Your job is to bring all your warriors back.”

I groaned inwardly. “I hate it when you use logic on me.”