

Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 311

5 – Ben

“Well, Mother, as you know, I’ve been tied up getting ready for our guests since I only just found out I’d be involved in this project,” I said, trying to sound casual. Good, she’s got some fire in her—exactly the kind of spirit I need right now.

Alpha David chuckled softly, clearly enjoying the exchange. “Alright then, let’s sit down for dinner first, and after that, we can talk about our situation.” His tone was light but carried an edge of seriousness beneath the laughter.

The aroma of the dinner was irresistible, though I can’t recall much about the meal itself. Elara had me so distracted that I’m not even sure if I actually took a bite. Before I realized it, the plates were being cleared away, and the casual chatter had come to an end.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen,” Alpha David announced, rising from his seat, “let’s move to my sitting room. It’s time we discuss why you’ve all been gathered here.” We all stood and followed him through a set of grand doors down a long corridor lined with ornate pillars and ancient paintings—remnants of a time that felt like a medieval castle come to life. Once the doors shut behind us, I noticed Alpha David visibly relax.

“I apologize for the ceremony and all the fuss,” he began, his voice dropping to a serious tone, “but I believe there’s a traitor among us. I can’t be sure these walls aren’t listening.”

Jeremiah immediately spoke up, “Are you certain it’s safe to talk here?”

Alpha David nodded. “I personally searched this room twice today. I informed my staff beforehand about the meeting in my office, but I changed the location last minute. I had Elara inspect the room—she was late to dinner for that reason. If she says this place is secure, then it is.”

My mate is clever and cautious, no doubt about it. My only unease is how tightly her bodyguards cling to her. If we’re supposed to be the ‘good guys’ here, shouldn’t they give us a bit more space? If I didn’t know better, I’d think those guards were her mates, the way they hover so close.

“So, Alpha David,” Jeremiah asked, cutting to the chase, “what exactly do you need from us?”

“You’re here for a training exercise,” Alpha David explained, “but it’s more than just practice. This has a real purpose and a serious outcome. My daughter will lead this operation. Maggie and I are here only to facilitate communication.”

That’s the part that frustrates me the most. I wish people would just lay all their cards on the table. And I also wish I wasn’t so utterly captivated by my mate, who hasn’t even glanced my way since she entered the dining room. My wolf is restless, agitated, and it’s not helping my mood. Jeremiah turned to Elara, “What do we need to know? What do you want from us?”

Elara stood, grabbed a map, and spread it out on the coffee table in the center of the sitting area.

“This is what we’ve gathered so far,” she began. “Attacks have occurred here, here, and here,” she pointed to several spots along the western edge of our territory. “There’s no clear pattern, not even in timing. Our warrior, Austin, was attacked at this location,” she indicated another point on the map, “which suggests they might be retracing their steps. It could be coincidence, but my father suspects it’s connected to my transition.”

My heart skipped a beat. She’s in the middle of becoming an alpha. No wonder my wolf has been acting so strangely—finding my mate is one thing, but now someone thinks she’s vulnerable enough to attack. My protective instincts surged, drowning out everything else. Jeremiah’s safety concerns faded into the background; Elara’s well-being was all that mattered.

Elara continued, “I just turned twenty-two, so the pack is in the process of shifting leadership to me. My strength is growing but comes in waves, which makes this phase my most vulnerable. And without a mate, I’m still exposed.”

Finally, her gaze flickered toward me, though it was too brief for me to read her thoughts. “On top of that, being female, many of these rogues believe I’m weak because of my gender. That’s probably why the timing of these attacks is no accident. They think I’ll back down, but they’re in for a surprise if they believe that.”

She paused, then added, “We wanted everyone around us to be aware, just in case help is needed. And we’re hoping your fresh perspective might shed some light on what’s happening.”

My pulse quickened, and I fought the urge to get up and pace, desperate to release the tension building inside me. But I held back, not wanting to draw attention to how deeply this unsettled me. The last thing I wanted was to explain that she was my mate—especially since she clearly wasn’t going to announce it to anyone. We would need a serious conversation before this night ended.

The weight of the situation settled heavily over me. Protecting her had become my sole focus, no matter what it took.

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Alpha David and Jeremiah continued their conversation for a while longer, but honestly, I couldn't recall any of the details if someone asked me later. My mind was completely consumed by one person—my mate—who was deliberately avoiding me, yet chatting easily with everyone else in the room. I could feel the tension between us, and I was certain she was aware of our bond. Still, she wouldn't come near me, nor would she even glance in my direction. Honestly, I wasn't angry about it. She was an alpha through and through, and she needed to be paired with an alpha, not someone like me. I was still tangled up emotionally with Kennedy, and I knew I wasn't ready to be good for anyone else just yet. But my wolf inside me refused to ignore the fact that she was in danger. The thought of leaving this pack and going home in a few days, knowing something could happen to her after we left, tore at me. But if I stayed, what about Jeremiah, Tommy, and Jason? The confusion was overwhelming. I needed to get out of this room. I wasn't made to be an alpha's mate. I was a beta—my role was to protect the alpha. That was all.

I snapped out of my daze as the room began to stir. People were standing up, saying their goodbyes and wishing each other goodnight. Finally, some relief.

I tried to catch Elara's eye, but she was already the first to leave, slipping out of the room so quickly that by the time I reached the door, she and her two shadows had vanished down the hallway.

Why was she avoiding me like this? We needed to talk—this couldn't just be ignored.

"I'm not leaving without her," my wolf growled fiercely inside me.

I tried to reason with the voice in my head. "She's the alpha of this pack. She has to stay here."

"Then we stay here too!" my wolf snapped back, and honestly, I felt like we were about to come to blows.

"What am I supposed to do about Jeremiah? He's my priority..." I pleaded internally.

"Not anymore. Stop being a coward."

"And Kennedy?"

"What about her? She has a mate. It's not you. Get over it. She's not coming back the way you want."

I turned to see where my friends were. Jeremiah and Jason were shooting me odd looks. Tommy was still deep in conversation with Luna Margaret about patrol schedules. It seemed like he was trying to gather intel about the rogues prowling their western borders.

"Jason, Ben, you want in on this? We should go together—get some collaborative feedback," Tommy called out without looking away from Elara's maps.

“I need to stay with Jeremiah and Rayna,” I said quietly.

Tommy grumbled, “No, you don’t! She’s staying right here with Jeremiah while they work on pack unity with Elara tomorrow. You and Jason are free to scout.”

Jason chuckled, “Looks like it’ll just be you and me, bro.”

“Why can’t he come out?” Tommy asked, still glued to the maps, only half-listening to our exchange.

“Because he looks like his brain got scrambled and he’s got some stuff to sort out,” I muttered under my breath.

I really wanted to punch Tommy in the face for that, but I couldn’t deny the truth behind his sarcasm. I nodded, waved them off, and started walking down the hallway toward my room. Right now, I wasn’t good for anyone.

“Are you okay?” Rayna’s voice came through the mindlink, her concern palpable.

“I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about me,” I said, forcing a laugh. She didn’t need to be distracted by my mess. Her focus had to be on Jeremiah and helping him with the pack’s problems.

“I didn’t ask if you’ll be fine later. I asked if you’re okay right now.” She wasn’t going to let it go easily. I rolled my eyes.

“I’m still working through some things. You guys don’t need me getting in the way. I’m going to bed,” I sighed. She didn’t answer, but I could sense she wanted to press more. When the opportunity arose, she’d probably grill me about my mood swings. Rayna was incredibly perceptive—she was going to be an amazing Luna.

Now, I just had to figure out how to be an amazing Beta with a mate who was an Alpha, living in a pack an hour away. F*ck me. My whole body suddenly felt drained as I stepped into my room. The moment I closed the door behind me, I was slammed against it. A strong forearm pressed against my throat, and electricity surged through every fiber of my being. Then, I heard the sweetest voice I’d ever known.

“What the f*ck do you think you’re doing, mate?”

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Chapter 313

6 – Elara

“I’m going to need you to explain that a little more clearly,” I say, narrowing my eyes at him. His smirk deepens, those sharp chocolate brown eyes locking onto mine with an unsettling intensity. “I thought we had our intentions sorted out before arriving here.”

He's not struggling against my grip, which confuses me. If I truly felt threatened, I would have had him subdued long before he could utter a word.

"Did you honestly believe you could just stroll in and take over my pack?" I press harder against his throat, my fingers tightening just enough to make my point.

"Nope," he coughs, rasping. "I came because my alpha ordered me to. He's here to help you figure out who's targeting you and why. That's it. I'm a Beta, not an Alpha. I don't want your job, your pack, or your title. I've got my own responsibilities, thanks. So, are you going to let me go now, or do you want to fight it out and get this tension off our chests?"

I have a strong urge to punch him right in those perfect teeth, but something holds me back. Instead, I glare at him. "Just stay out of my way while I deal with these rogues. I appreciate your alpha's assistance, but I'm not some charity case or a lesson you need to teach."

Suddenly, he lunges forward and pins my arm against my side. But I'm quicker. I duck under his other arm, slipping behind him and wrapping my arm around his throat from behind. He's tall, so I have to rise onto my toes to get a firm grip, but I manage. He bucks forward, his broad back sending me flying over his head. I brace myself for the fall, but I don't hit the ground.

My eyes snap open as Ben spins me around, locking both my hands behind my back and pulling me flush against his chest. Our noses nearly touch. "If you keep your distance from me, I'll do the same," he says quietly. "I'm only here to do my duty with my Alpha. After that, you can forget I exist with whoever you want. Just do me one favor—wait until we're out of your pack before you start hooking up with your... friends. My wolf isn't ready for that yet."

Then, without another word, he releases me and opens the door, dismissing me. What just happened? I'm stunned. No one has ever dismissed me like this except my father. My wolf growls low in my chest, sensing his impatience. He's urging me to move along, clearly not pleased with my distraction.

"No promises, Beta," I say, my voice sharp. "We have killers to find and rogues to stop. I'm not going to be pushed aside just because you can't handle being in the same room as me. Get over yourself." I give his cheek a light, teasing pat—half to annoy him, half because the small contact sends a surprising thrill up my arm, igniting my entire body.

I walk away with my head held high, resisting the urge to do something reckless—like pin him to the floor and ride him like the prize stallion he is. I definitely need a cold shower... or maybe a hot one, with my new toy.

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Four times. It took me four orgasms before I finally drifted off to sleep last night. What the hell is wrong with me? Jax and Dev shoot me amused looks as we meet in the hallway, heading toward breakfast.

"Need me to bring a charger?" I can almost feel Jax's smirk pressing against my back.

Neither of them bother hiding their laughter when I mutter a half-hearted “fuck off” over my shoulder.

“Well, can you at least tell us which one had that motor running so hard last night?” Dev asks, stepping ahead of me to open the dining room door.

“It won’t matter,” Jax whispers in my ear as we enter. “I’ll know in about ten minutes.”

“What? How?” I try to whisper back, but my voice carries too loudly, drawing the attention of everyone in the room.

I smile politely at my mother as I take my seat across from her, with Jax and Dev to my left. “I thought you might try to skip breakfast to beat the team to the murder site,” she says casually, as if discussing murder over breakfast is just another everyday conversation.

I glance around the room, the chatter of the others fading into the background as my mind races with the weight of the day ahead.

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I nodded my thanks to the omega as she carefully placed the tempting plate before me. Without hesitation, I took two generous bites, savoring the flavors before responding. The others had already started eating, so I didn’t feel self-conscious about catching up or appearing ravenous. I deliberately avoided making eye contact with the Beta, but I did address Jeremiah directly.

“I wouldn’t dream of leaving without you,” I said, my voice carrying a playful, almost storybook princess tone. “After all, our fathers insisted we work together so badly.” I paused, then added, “But I hate leaving things unsettled. Honestly, I did think about going back to the site alone—to see if I could get a clearer picture without all the chaos and distractions.”

Jeremiah’s expression twisted into disbelief. “You were seriously going to go out by yourself? With a killer still on the loose, and likely targeting you? I thought you were supposed to be smart.”

I clenched my jaw, determined not to let his words get under my skin. “For your information, I never go anywhere alone—especially not now.” I gestured toward Jax and Dev standing nearby. “My warriors only give me space when I’m in my bedroom.”

Jax muttered under his breath, “Thank the Goddess for that.”

I ignored him but noticed the range of reactions around the table. Taking a deep breath, I continued, “And I only considered going alone because, as an Alpha, I have to weigh every possibility, no matter how reckless or dangerous it may seem.”

Before Ben could interrupt, Rayna jumped in. “You said ‘warriors’—but you don’t have a Beta protecting you?”

“No, not at the moment,” I replied, feeling a twinge of frustration. “My father’s Beta never had children, so there’s no lineage to continue. I’m sure my enemies will exploit that weakness once they realize it—if they haven’t already.”

“Well, you kids should get moving,” my father said, wiping his face with a napkin before tossing it aside. “Patrol reports show no activity in the last few hours. It should be safe enough to investigate.”

I pushed my chair back and stood. Jax and Dev rose alongside me, as did everyone on Jeremiah’s team—including his Luna. I was surprised he allowed her to come along, considering the danger, but I wasn’t about to stop her.

“You and your mate are both going. Why shouldn’t they come too?” my wolf’s voice whispered sharply in my mind. Usually, it was her and me against the world.

“It’s nothing against her,” I replied softly. “I’m actually glad she stood up for herself without waiting for his permission. It’s just... they were mated recently, and it must be tearing him up inside to have her in harm’s way.”

“Or maybe,” Jax offered with a smirk, “after your father warned about a possible traitor, he feels safer keeping her close.”

“That’s a good point,” I admitted.

Jeremiah broke the silence with a teasing grin. “So, are we going to talk about your smoking-hot mate and the fact that you’re thinking about rejecting him?”

“Nope. Not even a little,” I said firmly. “Let’s focus on handling this first. We can deal with the mate drama later.”

Leading the group out the back door of the main entry hall, I headed toward a peaceful, tree-lined area where everyone could shift comfortably. We kept bags nearby for clothing, so our wolves could carry them if needed. Jax, Dev, and I helped everyone get settled before we all spread out to shed our clothes and shift. Finding a quiet tree, I began peeling off my shoes and garments like the others.

“Don’t kill us, Alpha. Just testing a theory,” Dev’s voice called out, breaking the calm.

“What on earth are you talking about now, Dev?” I asked, glancing up.

“Tell us you found your mate without actually saying it.” I looked up to see Jax standing completely naked less than a foot from me.

GRRRRRR! The low growl that escaped my throat made every hair on my body stand on end.

I took a step back, shaking my head. “Not the best time, man.”

Jax laughed, shifting into his wolf form before bounding off into the trees alongside Dev’s wolf. What an asshole.

Turning back, I caught sight of the Beta standing frozen, looking like an underwear model with his thumbs hooked into the waistband of his boxer briefs. The low cut revealed the deep V of his abdomen and the faint happy trail beneath. I had to agree with Jax—today was definitely going to be interesting.

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Chapter 315

7 – Ben

A chilling thought kept replaying in my mind: someone was going to die today. That grim mantra echoed relentlessly as I trailed behind Elara and her team, my friends buzzing incessantly over the mindlink, speculating about her being my mate. My wolf didn’t hesitate to stake his claim, but I knew full well there would be explanations to offer once we returned. Still, I didn’t care. My focus was razor-sharp, calm and steady, especially with my body positioned firmly between her and the warriors accompanying her. Yet, if anyone asked, I’d deny it without hesitation. I didn’t want a mate, and as far as I was concerned, she didn’t like me.

It took us about thirty minutes to reach the attack site. The air was thick with the sharp, acrid scent that only rogues carry—a smell tinged with decay and rot. Being away from a pack seemed to alter their natural scent, twisting it into something foul and unsettling. Wolves aren’t meant to live in isolation; over time, they can slip into a feral state so deep that returning to human form becomes impossible. I wondered if these were lone wolves, lost and suffering, or a group traveling together. Either way, they needed to be dealt with.

Elara, Jeremiah, Rayna, and I had the keenest noses in the group, so we remained in wolf form while the others shifted back to human, scanning the surroundings for signs of the rogues’ return. I stayed close to Elara, and the low growl rumbling from her wolf was a clear warning that she didn’t appreciate my proximity. I smirked quietly to myself—she wasn’t the only one capable of asserting dominance here. The thought made my heart skip a beat, though I quickly pushed it aside. This wasn’t what I wanted. A relationship—that deep connection—that was something I’d shared with Kennedy. She was the one I should be with, the one I should be raising pups with, the one I should be loyal to. There was no reason for me to want to be near this Alpha in any way other than as her Beta.

“Get your head in the game!” Jason’s voice cut through my thoughts as I circled the same tree for the third time.

“F*ck off,” I muttered, though I knew he was right. I just wasn’t about to admit it. We had a mission to complete.

“Well, your mate thinks you being glued to her side is a distraction—and she’s right. Back off and let her handle this so we can figure out what the hell you’re supposed to do about this whole mate situation.”

“I agree with Jason,” Jeremiah added. “By the way, when were you planning on telling us you’re mated to the Alpha of this pack?”

“Yeah! Is that where you disappeared to last night? You followed her out pretty quick,” my soon-to-be-dead Delta, Tommy, called out with a grin that was all teeth and mischief.

“F*ck off, Tommy. No, I didn’t follow her. I went to bed. She doesn’t want a mate, and I’m not cut out to be an Alpha’s mate.”

“At least you’re admitting it. For what it’s worth, I disagree. But I think Kennedy still has you wrapped around her finger, and you’re going to make a huge mistake if you don’t let her go.”

“What...” I started, but they cut me off.

“Do you really think I’m that stupid?” I snapped. “I know you all had your own history with her, dumbasses. As long as she was happy, I stayed out of it. You three were better than the other jerks at school. But her move isn’t temporary. She’s not coming back—not the way we planned, anyway. We all have to...” I trailed off, the weight of it pressing down on me.

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“Got something!” Jeremiah’s voice shattered the tense silence.

“There’s more blood over here,” Jax called out, his tone urgent.

We all shifted back to human form, quickly pulling on shorts as we followed Jax toward a thicket about twenty yards from the attack site.

“That’s awful. Why does it smell like that?” Rayna asked, stepping back to stand closer to Jeremiah, her face pale.

“Austin must have wounded one of them during the attack before they killed him. He died here, then someone moved his body,” Dev explained, crouching down to examine a nest-like patch of broken branches nestled in the center of one of the bushes.

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Jeremiah’s voice cut through the quiet as he asked, “Have you figured out if Austin was deliberately targeted, or was he just in the wrong place at the wrong time?”

Jax glanced at Dev’s screen, then leaned in closer. “At this point, it looks like it was completely random. Honestly, it could have been any warrior passing through at that

moment. The only complication is that Austin was only recently added to the rotation—just a few days ago.”

I scanned the area, my senses alert. “Any leads on who the inside man might be?” I asked, lowering my voice. You never know if someone’s lurking downwind, eavesdropping on our conversation.

Elara’s expression was tight as she responded, “I have a few ideas.” But she didn’t elaborate further. Instead, she shifted the mood, saying, “Let me show you some landmarks around here so you can get a better sense of the terrain. It’ll help when we review the maps later. After that, we’ll head back and regroup.”

We only spent about an hour longer exploring, but the western edge of Elara’s territory was breathtaking. A massive river, flanked by thick trees, wound its way toward a roaring waterfall. It was easy to see why rogues would choose this route—there were plenty of hidden spots to camp, perfect for setting up temporary shelters. The abundance of fresh water and game darting through the underbrush, combined with the natural cover from the trees and craggy rock faces near the waterfall, created an ideal environment for survival.

As we made our way back, the group agreed to avoid shifting into wolf form, opting to take our time instead. Elara and Jeremiah began sharing stories from their youth—tales of mischief and rivalry during pack gatherings, especially involving their fathers and other alpha children. I felt a twinge of jealousy bubble up inside me. It wasn’t just that they shared a past, but that Jeremiah knew her history so well while I was still an outsider. It shouldn’t matter, especially since I was pretty sure she wanted nothing to do with me. The sooner I could leave this place, the better. But first, we had to get to the bottom of the rogue problem.

I forced myself to focus as Elara pointed out various parts of the pack’s territory, clearly proud of what her family had built. Her eyes shone with a mix of pride and concern—she wanted us to understand the stakes.

Dev interrupted my thoughts. “Let’s head to the training grounds. The adults should be about halfway through their session,” he said, nudging Elara gently.

“Uh, okay,” she replied, steering us toward an open paddock where mostly men were sparring and training. I stayed quiet, wanting to observe their dynamics. The idea of segregated training didn’t sit well with me, but I kept that to myself.

Elara explained, “We run open training sessions throughout the day so pack members with full-time jobs—whose schedules don’t always align with warrior duties—can still get their workouts in. We want everyone in peak condition, just in case.” Her gaze swept over our group, worry flickering behind her eyes. The unspoken threat of ‘just in case’ hung heavy in the air.

Suddenly, Dev’s high-pitched excitement broke through. “Hey! I’ve got a great idea!” His grin was infectious, but I already knew I wouldn’t like what was coming next.

“You should spar with Ben,” he said, eyes twinkling mischievously. “Jeremiah just got mated, and I’m pretty sure Rayna’s wolf isn’t thrilled about him rolling around with another female...” At that moment, Rayna’s wolf let out a low, possessive growl, perfectly timed.

“See?!” Dev crowed triumphantly. “And you don’t even have a Beta. It’s been a while since you faced off against someone with strength close to your own.” I could tell he was baiting both of us at once—the sly bastard.

I shot Dev a warning look. “She’s so pissed! Good luck, man!” I muttered, already anticipating the chaos.

I couldn’t wait for Tommy to find his mate so I could return the favor. It was clear that all our friends suspected, if they didn’t already know, that Jeremiah and I were mates. They were just trying to push us into acknowledging it since we hadn’t jumped each other the instant the bond took hold.

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Chapter 317

8 – Elara

The expression on Ben’s face spoke volumes—if looks could curse, his would have unleashed a torrent of expletives aimed squarely at my warrior. Honestly, in this moment, I couldn’t blame him. I had no intention of accepting a mate before I claimed my rightful place as Alpha of this pack. The thought of being sidelined by some man who believed his masculinity made him superior was infuriating. Today, the way he shadowed me, as if I couldn’t handle myself, had my patience simmering just beneath the surface. On top of that, I needed to convince the pack’s males that I was fit to lead, despite being a woman. Having a mate by my side now would only complicate that perception. I didn’t want to rise to Dev’s challenge, but maybe it was worth proving this Beta’s place while adding another win to my leadership credentials.

“So, Beta,” I teased, flashing him a sly smile. “Ready to take on the challenge?” His deadpan stare was amusing—he was definitely fun to provoke. Without waiting for an answer, I turned and strode toward one of the sparring rings marked out in the grass, not bothering to check if he was following. Of course, he was. His pride wouldn’t let him back down in front of the others.

Just as I was positioning myself, a low growl cut through the air. I ducked instinctively and rolled away from Ben’s outstretched arm as he lunged at me with surprising speed. Dev was right — my warriors were skilled, truly formidable, but it had been some time since I’d faced an opponent my own age with comparable training. We grappled fiercely. His hand-to-hand combat was swift, but he couldn’t hold onto me long enough to gain the upper hand.

“Quit toying with your food before you eat it, Alpha,” Jax called out with a laugh, but it was the Beta who escalated the intensity.

Ben's strikes came faster, his blows harder. Clearly, he had been holding back—perhaps out of courtesy because I was a woman. That only fueled my anger. I lunged for his throat, and we both crashed to the ground. He rolled on top of me, but I pushed off with my hips, flipping him over my head with one powerful leg. Quickly, I scrambled to straddle his chest, pinning his arms with my legs as my breaths rose and fell in rhythm with his. His golden-brown eyes locked onto mine.

"Well done, both of you," my father's voice broke through the tense silence between us. "But I'm afraid this has to end now. There's another attack."

"What?!" I sprang off Ben and stared at my dad, who seemed oddly unfazed. "Why didn't you say anything earlier? Why let us waste time here?" I started moving toward the training entrance, my mind set on the packhouse. I'd leave the guests with him. We needed to focus and figure this out, but Dad's casual attitude was frustrating.

"Elara! Wait!" he called after me.

"No, Dad. This isn't a drill anymore. Send Jeremiah and his team home so we can handle this without distractions."

"Will you hold on, you stubborn child?" His voice held amusement. "Besides, you're heading the wrong way."

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "You said there was another attack. I want to get back to the house and coordinate our response. I'm done looking over my shoulder."

"Elara! Stop and listen." A firm hand gripped my arm above the elbow and spun me around. I expected it to be my father, but the sudden closeness sent a shiver across my skin, making me catch my breath. His scent, so familiar and calming, wrapped around me like a warm blanket. Damn this mate bond—it was impossible to ignore. Still, it allowed me to take in the scene around us more clearly. We were surrounded by pups armed with water guns, grinning like fools. My father was an idiot for not choosing his words better to stop me from straddling the Beta.

Suddenly, the pups opened fire, drenching everyone nearby, including Jeremiah and his team. But they were game for the playful battle, darting around and trying to snatch water guns for themselves.

Ben stayed glued to my side, laughing as he stepped into the path of every stream of water aimed at me.

"Hey, you're supposed to avoid getting wet, not block us from hitting Elara!" one of the younger pups shouted at him.

"Yeah, have you never played this game before?" I teased Ben from behind.

"What kind of Beta would I be if I let the Alpha get soaked?" he replied without missing a beat, stepping back into the line of fire. I froze. He had called me "the Alpha," not just any Alpha, as if I already held the title. I'd never noticed the difference before. I barely had time

to dwell on it before a bucket of ice-cold water was dumped over my head, pushing me forward into Ben's back.

"Holy f*ck! Why does it have to be that cold?!" Ben shouted, spinning around to see who was responsible.

"It seemed fitting after that steamy grappling match you two just had," Jax chuckled. "We figured you might want to cool down a bit."

"Too good an opportunity to pass up," Dev added with a shrug.

We were so close that I could feel his body heat radiating from head to toe. He kept his hands to himself, but I wanted to lean into that warmth, into him. Then the thought hit me: I didn't want this—not until the pack was mine and my mate was ready to stand beside me, not step into my Alpha role for me.

I stepped away from him and looked at my dad, who had somehow stayed completely dry. "We should get you all cleaned up with a hot shower, then discuss your findings. The Luna has dinner ready whenever you're hungry."

That one word—dinner—made a chorus of stomachs rumble.

"We can eat in my office while we talk," I said, turning to walk again, my soaked shoes sloshing with each step.

"Have you checked your office for recording devices today?" Ben asked quietly just behind me. His breath brushed over my ear, sending another shiver down my spine. I knew it was natural, but I wished I didn't react to him this way. I shouldn't respond like this. He didn't deserve to be misled. My body's impulses clashed with what my mind knew I needed right now.

"I plan to do that while you're all changing for dinner."

"Let me help. This is something I'm good at." He raised his hands in surrender. "I wasn't lying to your pup. What kind of Beta would I be if I let the Alpha get hurt? You don't have to talk to me or even look at me, but it would make my wolf feel better if you let us help. He might even let me back off a little." His pleading eyes contrasted with the tension in his jaw muscles.

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Chapter 318

9 – Elara

His wolf. I had never once stopped to consider that his wolf might be causing him trouble. My own wolf desires him as well, yet she doesn't resist my constant presence by his side. She aligns perfectly with what I want: to navigate this transition to becoming Alpha without

putting my pack at risk. “Fine,” I mutter reluctantly, “My office isn’t cluttered like my father’s, so there aren’t many places to stash things.”

He doesn’t smile; instead, he simply nods and gestures for me to lead the way. He still walks uncomfortably close, invading my personal space, but I refuse to comment on it—acknowledging it would mean admitting he affects me, and I won’t give him that satisfaction. My office sits adjacent to my father’s. I doubt I’ll ever take over his space, even after I officially become Alpha. That will always be his domain.

Ben immediately gets to work, just as he promised—silent and focused. I settle at my desk while he methodically examines the shelves. I keep a careful distance, watching him closely. He’s thorough, opening every book, lifting each knickknack my mother insisted belonged here for ambiance. For a moment, I’m distracted by the way his muscles ripple beneath his skin. He never bothered to put a shirt back on, leaving every tan, corded muscle on full display. I’m woman enough to admit I appreciate the sight.

Nothing escapes his scrutiny. If I were inclined to like him, I’d say he’s stalling, trying to spend more time alone with me. But neither of us seems eager for this pairing. My reasons are clear—even if I haven’t voiced them—and yet, my pride aches to understand why he doesn’t want me.

A small, girlish voice inside me whispers that maybe he has a girl, and jealousy flares instantly at the thought. After all, we’re still in high school. I remember those days vividly—when everyone wanted to be your friend, and countless kids tried to hook up just to brag about it. Jeremiah once told me about his adopted sister, who was harassed by girls simply for being friends with him. She acted as a buffer, keeping the crazier leeches at bay. Maybe Ben did the same, thinking he had plenty of time before making a choice. He’s neither marked nor mated—I’ll keep that secret to my grave—but I did check last night when I confronted him. His scent is pure, and there’s no sign where a mate’s mark would be.

“Hey, Alpha.” His rough voice pulls me out of my thoughts. He holds up a small device, then points to his lips, signaling silence. “What time do you want to meet tonight? I need to update Alpha Jeremiah.”

“Let’s have an early dinner on the veranda—say, 4 o’clock. Then we can meet in the study. It’s big enough for us to spread out and review everything we found today.”

“Sounds good. I’ll let him know. Need anything else from me?”

“No, thank you, Beta. See you in a couple of hours.”

Ben moves toward my office door, opens it, takes a deep breath, then closes it behind him. I watch, fascinated, as he silently resumes searching my office. The earlier conversation seemed strange, but now I understand—he’s baiting whoever planted the listening devices. He uncovers two more, dismantling each with care, when a sudden knock at the door startles me. I’d been so absorbed in watching him work that I hadn’t noticed anything else.

Ben slides the remains of the devices into my desk drawer and steps beside the door just as I approach. I shoot him a look, but he ignores it. Is this really what a Beta does? Sometimes it feels like a never-ending blockade to my life.

I open the door to find my father's Beta and Gamma standing there, their expressions stern and serious.

"You're needed, Elara," my father's Beta states simply, as if that's all the explanation I'll get.

"Okay, Dick. Any idea where I'm needed or what to expect? Or should I just wander around hoping for the best?" I ask, a hint of sarcasm in my voice.

Ben coughs to hide a laugh beside me, drawing Richard's attention for the first time.

"Shouldn't you be with your Alpha, boy?" Jeff remarks, stepping past Richard into my office. I hadn't invited either of them in. Richard respects me enough to wait outside, but Jeff, my father's Gamma, acts like he can do whatever he wants since I'm not yet the official Alpha.

Richard is an old man who has never witnessed a female Alpha before and isn't thrilled by the idea. He doesn't openly oppose me, but he still looks to my father for decisions, even though they're supposed to come from me. We're working on changing that dynamic.

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Chapter 319

"My alpha is currently engaged in a way that makes me want to keep my distance, sir. Given the threat level, my time is better spent collaborating with Alpha Elara since neither of you seem interested in handling the situation," he states firmly, emphasizing my title as if the two grown men before us had forgotten I hold one. His words carry a subtle jab, implying they aren't fulfilling their responsibilities, and while I appreciate the hint, I can't help but worry about him too.

"Isn't your little boyband supposed to be having dinner soon? I thought I overheard something about you eating early and then heading back out to patrol. Don't let us delay you," Jeff says casually, pacing around. My ears twitch at the mention, but I dare not glance at Ben. I never mentioned eating early to anyone besides planting bait for the listening device.

"Jeff can't be stupid enough to just blurt that out, can he?" I whisper to my wolf.

"He's taken a few hits to the head. So, we can't be certain," she replies with a hint of skepticism.

"We're at the mercy of Alphas Elara and Jeremiah. If they want us to run patrols again, we will. If they want us to eat, we eat. My evening plans haven't been set," Ben says with a shrug as he steps away from the door, pretending to study a book on one of the nearby shelves—the same one he glanced at when we first arrived. His body language makes it clear he has no other place to be.

“Okay... so you don’t have to like him, but he’s starting to grow on me,” I admit quietly.

“What?!” My wolf is incredulous. I need her support to resist Ben until we reach our goals. I don’t have time for a mate—especially not a man who seems intent on taking my father’s place.

“Stop being so dramatic. We know someone is listening, and we know they appeared less than fifteen minutes after you both mentioned eating early and leaving this office. He’s a Beta; there’s no way he’d leave an Alpha unguarded with a potential threat standing just feet away from you. Remember, he doesn’t want to be your mate either. It’s just in his nature to protect,” she reasons.

Why does that simple truth make my stomach twist? I don’t want him, he doesn’t want me. That should be enough, but the thought still gnaws at me.

“So, Elara...” I begin.

“Alpha Elara,” Ben corrects Jeff without looking up from his book. I quickly turn away, pretending to focus on something on my desk to hide the smile tugging at my lips. “It’s customary to use titles in front of guests.”

“Who do you think you’re talking to, boy?” Jeff steps closer to Ben, slamming the book shut and throwing it on the floor, trying to get his attention. What an asshole.

“Currently? A Gamma who doesn’t seem to understand protocol. No worries, it’s an easy mistake—especially when you’re close to your alpha,” Ben replies coolly, sizing Jeff up. “Or more likely, you’re not used to dealing with high-profile visitors.” His smirk is the final blow.

Before Jeff’s temper explodes, Richard steps between them. Despite the twenty-plus years between them, Ben’s size advantage over my dad’s Gamma is obvious. Richard understands the situation, but Jeff apparently doesn’t.

“Let’s go. Leave the kids to their work,” Richard grunts, pushing Jeff out the door.

Ben closes the door behind them and turns to me. “You should check every room, including your bedrooms.”

“Wait, wait, wait. What?” I sink back into my chair, overwhelmed. “I know Jeff is a major jackass, but...”

“But nothing. You know someone is listening, and I think it’s specifically targeting you. We need to find out if the devices are everywhere or if you’re the only one being spied on.”

He leans forward, resting his fists on my desk. The energy radiating from him is intense; his muscles ripple beneath his shirt, distracting me. I rub my hands over my face, trying to break the spell he’s unknowingly casting.

Rising to my feet, I head toward the door. “Let’s get Jax and Dev. They won’t be thrilled if we find listening devices in their rooms.”

Ben chuckles softly behind me.

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Chapter 320

10 Ben

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The urge to protect her gnaws at me relentlessly. After just one day here, my Beta instincts have kicked into overdrive. My wolf and I are certain Jeremiah is safe—for now. We know Jason and Tommy will watch over him and Rayna if anything goes wrong. Judging by the tense glances exchanged at the training grounds earlier and what I saw in her office, only her parents, Jax, and Dev truly have her back in this place. Everyone else seems to have their own agenda, and that fact infuriates me to no end.

“Beta instincts, my ass,” a voice grumbles inside me.

“Quiet,” I snap back. “The only thing I’m good for right now is being her Beta. She doesn’t want a mate any more than I do. The Goddess must have messed up this time.”

“Keep telling yourself that,” the voice teases.

Jax and Dev take the lead as we walk down yet another long, narrow hallway. Elara doesn’t stop them as they push open the door at the end. I hesitate in the doorway, unwilling to invade their space with my scent. The room is clearly theirs—personalized in a way I wouldn’t expect from warriors. To me, it looks more like a cozy apartment: a sitting area, a small dining space, a hallway likely leading to the bedroom and bathroom, and a large sliding glass door that dominates the back wall.

“You can come in. Being in our home won’t suddenly turn you gay,” Jax jokes with a laugh.

“I’m not worried about that,” I reply, “I just didn’t want to leave a new scent in your personal space.”

Dev nudges Elara playfully. “Look at you, being considerate. See? You should learn manners from your boy.”

“He’s not my boy,” Elara snaps.

“I’m not her boy,” I say at the same time.

They exchange a knowing look, sharing something silently through their mindlink, then smile and begin searching through their rooms.

“For the record, you smell good. So we don’t mind your scent here,” Dev grins and winks at me. I try to suppress a laugh. “All I know is if there are recordings of us, I want copies. The last few days have been epic. Imagine replaying that.”

Jax growls at his mate. “Save it, you two. We need to test this theory first. Then you can get it on until sunrise—or until I call you out on patrol again. Whichever comes first.”

After spending an hour searching, we come up empty-handed, but they promise to keep looking just in case. Moving on to Elara’s room, I barely take two steps inside before spotting it: a small device hidden in a plant on a high shelf. I grab Elara’s arm and pull her over, signaling everyone to be quiet but continue the search. Her eyes widen in shock. This confirms she’s a target—not just any random pack member. If it were me, I would have bugged the rooms of her main bodyguards too. Whoever planted these devices is clearly new to the game. Like in her office, we find three bugs total—hidden in a plant, a picture frame, and a book. None of her other spaces are compromised. The only scents in the apartment belong to her, Jax, and Dev. Once I dismantle the devices, we finally speak openly.

“They’ll figure this out eventually. I just don’t know how often they check these or if they’ll come back and plant more. I don’t want to make you paranoid, but this is something we’ll need to check every single day.”

“We?” Jax raises an eyebrow. “Are you sticking around then, tech boy?”

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“I’ll do whatever my alpha thinks is necessary.”

“What about our alpha and your m...” Elara slaps her hand over his mouth. He shoves her playfully, and suddenly they’re all at it—laughing, shouting, and jumping over the couch, racing around the tiny table. Their energy reminds me of the guys and Kennedy. My chest tightens painfully at the thought of her. The ache is so sharp I instinctively rub the spot over my heart, desperate to ease the pressure. I say nothing and quietly slip out of the stifling room.

For a few hours, I managed to forget she left, and the hollow space she left inside me. I make my way to the main floor, then out to one of the many cozy spaces behind the house designed for relaxing or entertaining. The cool evening air is a struggle to breathe in, but I sink into a chair and pull out my phone. Opening the photos app, I find the folder that holds my personal torment. I stare into those blue eyes—her eyes—smiling back at me. It was a random summer day, just hanging out by the pool. Her stunning body was on full display in a bikini and a pair of short shorts, but it was the look in her eyes that captured me: sultry, intense, and meant only for me. She gazed directly into the lens—into my soul.