

Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 321

“Was she your first mate?” Dev’s sudden question catches me off guard. I remain still, silent, refusing to answer. I shake my head, my eyes fixed on her. Looking away would mean admitting to someone else that she’s truly gone. I haven’t even managed to say it aloud to my closest friends.

“But not just any girl?” Dev presses again. Another slow shake of my head is my only reply.

“Well, El didn’t miss your little disappearance. She suspects you might’ve been upset with us.” He pauses, lowering his voice. “I know she doesn’t show it, and it’s not really my place to say, but she’s trying not to hurt you. The whole mate thing is a sensitive topic for her... and for you, obviously. She’s got her own issues to deal with, but I can tell you this—when she finds out you’re pining for another woman, McJealous might just come after you. So, be ready.” He chuckles, but I only manage a weak grimace in return.

“Come on, it’s time to eat. El wants to patrol tonight with a small group. After finding those listening devices, she wants to catch whoever’s behind this off guard. Maybe our voyeurs will try planting more while we’re away.”

“If we find more, she can’t stay locked in her room, you know that, right?” I say quietly.

“I know,” Dev replies. “But who’s going to tell her? I need my stuff intact. And where do you suggest she stays?” He arches an eyebrow, and I know exactly what he’s thinking. “It won’t be with Jax and me. As much as we joke about it, I’m not sharing that man with anyone. Plus, we have plans after this.”

We enter the small breakfast room, where Jeremiah and the rest of our team are already gathered alongside Elara and Jax. The expression on Jax’s face immediately tells me I’m about to hear something unpleasant. I walk past Jeremiah and Rayna, catching their confused glances.

Jax holds up another device, pointing toward the sideboard where a row of topiaries stand neatly trimmed.

“What’s going on, Ben?” Jeremiah asks.

I link everyone in our group, “So far, we’ve discovered seven listening devices—in Elara’s office, her bedroom, and now here. I think Alpha David was right—someone is targeting her. This has everything to do with the Alpha changeover.”

“What else have you found?” Jason asks as I begin moving around the room. If our eavesdropper is consistent, there should be two more devices somewhere.

“Nothing. That’s the problem. No scents or any other signs that someone’s been here. Who, besides an Alpha or Luna, can completely suppress their scent?” I turn to Jeremiah and Rayna. Her brother is experienced in situations like this. He often takes over packs without a clear alpha succession, especially when the pack is at war.

“As far as we know, no one can do it without help. Even vampires and casters leave a trace. That said, there are ways to cover it up,” Rayna replies thoughtfully.

Tommy soon finds another device hidden beneath the table, and yet another concealed in the light fixture. As I dismantle them, we begin our discussion.

“So, it seems they’re only listening from a distance. No video or other surveillance equipment has been found?” I glance from Elara to her guards. “I’d start checking the food for any traces of poison. If they want this to look like an accident or natural causes, that’s where I’d begin.”

Jax crosses his arms and smirks. “You’ve clearly thought a lot about how to take down an Alpha.”

“It’s my job to consider every way someone could get to my Alpha or Luna,” I say firmly. “That means running through the entire process in my head—how I’d do it and get away with it. It helps me piece the puzzle together faster. My father has been training me for this kind of thinking for a long time.”

“Really?” Tommy asks, intrigued. “Why not all of us?”

“Probably the same reason my dad has been preparing me for Luna duty,” Jason adds. “Guarding a Luna has its own unique challenges. Instead of just teaching us the basics, they started focusing on specifics a few years ago. This is a perfect example of why.”

Jeremiah clears his throat, drawing everyone’s attention. “Let’s eat first, then go for a run. I have a theory about the recent rogue attacks.”

After Jax and Dev thoroughly inspect the food and question everyone who had access to it, we finally sit down to eat. Jeremiah begins to share his theory, carefully choosing his words and revealing as few details as possible.

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Chapter 322

Hello everyone!

I want to apologize for the scattered updates lately. As a teacher, the end of the school year is always a whirlwind, and this last month has been nothing short of chaotic.

Diving back into Ben and Elara's story, I noticed a few timeline overlaps and continuity slip-ups on my part, especially when considering how all the connected tales intertwine.

So, over the past three days, I've been meticulously going through Ryker and Kennedy's storyline and timeline, as well as Finn and Greta's, trying to ensure everything fits together seamlessly. As I immerse myself deeper into Ben and Elara's journey and start planning the arcs for our friends at Crescent Moon, Dark Moon, and Black Claw, it's crucial that every detail aligns perfectly.

Writing a female Alpha for the first time has been both exciting and challenging. Elara's character has brought a fresh dynamic to the story. My worlds operate within a distinct hierarchy, but gender roles have always been fluid and blurred. Exploring the ideas of love, relationships, and how they manifest differently depending on perspective has been fascinating. I'm particularly drawn to the notion of a female Alpha who leads naturally—not because she has to fight for her place, but because it's her birthright. How this is perceived by traditionalists versus more progressive thinkers, and how it influences the roles, ranks, and instincts of each character, has made for an engaging creative process.

Thank you all so much for sticking with me on this wild ride. I promise new chapters will be coming your way very soon!

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Chapter 323

12 – Elara

“This was a terrible idea. I really should leave.” I struggle weakly, trying to slip out from the cage formed by his arms and the door that traps me inside.

“Where exactly do you think you're going to go? Is there someone else you'd rather be with?” His voice is calm but edged with frustration. He doesn't close the gap between us any further, but the heat of his irritation is unmistakable—always simmering beneath the surface, now turned up a notch.

“No, I... uh... it's just not a good idea right now. I'll figure something out.” I turn once more, attempting to escape his gentle hold. As I blink, I realize he hasn't actually touched me beyond pulling me into his room. Instead, he's gazing intently into my eyes, searching for something I can't quite place. Those deep chocolate brown eyes hold such intensity—like they're trying to unravel a secret hidden within me. He inhales deeply, and as he exhales, the warm breath brushes my face, stirring a few strands of my unruly hair against my cheeks. He must see something in my expression.

“It's okay, Elara.” He steps back from me, releasing his hold. “You can stay. Just give me a minute to finish up.” With that, he turns and walks away. The view of his back as he moves is just as captivating as the one from the front. I can't deny it anymore—it's been far too

long since I've been close to a man. The way his muscles flex beneath his skin as he walks sends an unexpected thrill through me.

"Everything your mate does should make you feel that way."

"Not helping right now."

"I'm just pointing out what you seem to be missing... like, the obvious, full-on hotness of your mate. Seriously, look at him!"

"I am looking, you idiot."

"Are your eyes even open? When was the last time you saw a body like that—and one that's actually available? His muscles have muscles!"

"You're such a hornball, you know that?"

"No more than you, girly."

"He can't stand me. That's clear as day."

"He hasn't forced himself into your personal space yet. That's a big difference. We can't say that about any of the limp dicks who've shown up recently. He's keeping his distance, just like you are. You both have some serious issues to work through, by the way."

"You can take the bed." Ben's voice cuts through my ridiculous argument with my wolf.

"Uh, no thanks. The floor is fine. I don't want to—"

"Elara... Take... The... Bed." His tone is firm, commanding. A shiver runs down my spine, and I freeze, caught between stubbornness and surrender.

"Wait, no. This is your room, and besides, I don't sleep much. The floor will be fine." I don't mention the fact that his scent lingers in the room, stirring feelings I'm not ready to name. I wonder what will happen when I'm wrapped in the blankets and pillows he's used.

"Not happening. Get your ass in the bed so we can both get some sleep." He raises an eyebrow at me, and I realize my wolf is purring in approval.

"Will you knock it off?!"

"What? He's commanding and dominant. We like dominant. I wonder if he'd mind if we..."

"Don't you dare finish that thought! I am not rubbing one out in his bed while he's on the floor next to me. You pervert."

"Who are you calling pervert? You listen to your friends and get off."

"That's different."

“How?!”

Before I can answer, I’m suddenly lifted off the ground. “Ompf! What the...?” The sharp, spicy scent that hits me is overwhelming, making warmth spread through my entire body.

“It was taking too long for you and your wolf to come up with a decent excuse. Go to sleep, alpha.” He says nothing more as he flips off the lights and moves silently across the room. I hear the soft rustling of pillows and sheets, then nothing but the quiet rhythm of breathing.

We both lie there, awake but silent. There’s so much we could say, so many conversations begging to happen. But how do you start a talk about “It’s not you, it’s me” or “Please wait while I figure out all this pack and life stuff”? It wouldn’t be fair to either of us. Still, neither of us is rushing to claim the other either. Maybe that’s a conversation for another time.

“Chicken.”

“Asshole.” I roll my eyes at my wolf’s teasing.

I don’t remember when I fell asleep. Usually, it takes hours for my mind to quiet down, running through everything we did that day, all the tasks still waiting, the requests from pack members, the daily operations, and that damn rogue problem. But last night, I was out cold almost immediately, and I wake feeling surprisingly refreshed as the first pale light of dawn creeps through the window. I refuse to turn and look at the beta sprawled on the floor. My wolf doesn’t need any more encouragement—she finds his light snores oddly endearing.

I decide I need to run the border, alone, just as I had planned before the Silver Crescent guys showed up. I need to focus, to see what I might have missed. I silently thank my stealthy alpha abilities for letting me slip out of his room unnoticed.

“Jax! Dev! We’ve got a run to do. Let’s move!”

“I thought maybe you’d want a bit more rest after a fun night with your mate.”

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“I went to bed last night and just slept. That’s all there was to it,” I said simply.

Jax and Dev exchanged skeptical glances. “Well, you’re definitely not in your own room—we checked. And after following a trail that led straight to the beta’s door, we figured maybe you’d finally pulled your head out of your ass and gone to be with your mate.”

“Nope, not at all,” I replied firmly. “But I did stay in his room for a while. Honestly, it felt like my own room had been violated. I can’t understand why anyone would want to listen in on me there. I get why they might bug my office or Dad’s study, but my bedroom? That makes no sense. Anyone who knows me knows I don’t bring anyone in there who isn’t family or one of you two, and we rarely discuss pack business in private. Meet me out front in ten minutes, and we can hash this out. If you’re not there, I’m leaving without you.”

They grumbled, but I could tell they were moving. They knew I meant it—I would not wait forever. I needed to find out if Jeremiah’s theory was correct, to see if rogue wolves were really crossing the western border, and whether Austin’s attack had been a fluke or just a distraction. I didn’t want Jeremiah to be right, but every instinct screamed that this was the strongest lead we’d had on these so-called random assaults.

We sprinted south toward the waterfront. Until now, I’d never considered that anyone might be coming or going through this area. The water here didn’t connect to a larger body, but maybe someone was using it as a secret passage.

The run to the lake was uneventful. The weather had been remarkably calm all week, almost as if nature itself was holding its breath, allowing us to investigate without interference. A thin layer of snow still blanketed the ground, but with so many shifters moving through our small pack, much of it had melted into muddy trails that we could follow. The lake’s surface was dark, yet it shimmered faintly under the soft, filtered sunlight on the horizon. We walked along the shoreline, starting from the neutral forests to the east and moving toward Red Fang’s border on the west.

Suddenly, I caught the scent of about five rogues—fresh, no older than a week. It seemed they were merely passing through, traveling from the neutral forest to the neutral lands beyond Red Fang. What struck me as strange was the perfect straight line their scents formed. It was as if five wolves had walked side by side from one end to the other, without deviating even once. Every wolf I knew wandered, sniffing and weaving through the terrain, leaving behind scent trails that looked like the grooves made by a rake in the dirt.

“I think the Crescent Moon pack needs to see this,” I said, linking Jax and Dev through the bond.

“Agreed,” they responded in unison.

As we turned to head back, the wind shifted suddenly. I caught another scent—rogues, at least four of them, maybe five.

“Rogues! Heads up! At least four, maybe five!” I shouted to my pack.

We turned toward the source of the scent, making it clear they wouldn’t be crossing into our territory without a fight. I growled low and sprang toward the intruders. Two of them lunged at me immediately. Had they been watching us? I couldn’t tell much more than that they smelled mangy and putrid. Teeth and claws flew wildly as they snarled, swiping at every exposed part of me. One headbutted me hard, while the other sank its teeth into my shoulder. My wolf growled in pain but retaliated fiercely, tearing a chunk of flesh from one attacker and slashing across the other’s muzzle.

I took a quick moment to locate my warriors. I could hear the sounds of battle all around, but couldn’t see them. I reached out through the bond to Dad, Richard, Jeff, and Sebastian, calling for backup. I had no idea if any of them were close enough to arrive in time, but they needed to know something was wrong.

Suddenly—SLAM!

My wolf was hurled head over heels down a small cliff at the top of the embankment. I felt bones crack as we tumbled over jagged boulders, unable to stop the fall. She whimpered in pain. A surge of anger unlike my own or any of my pack's filled me. It was Ben's fury—I could feel it, raw and fierce, barreling toward us at full speed.

When we finally hit the bottom, I quickly assessed my injuries. A couple of broken bones, but nothing that would stop me from fighting if I had to. Still, I was useless to my pack in this state. I hoped Ben knew better than to come to me first—he needed to help the others.

Then I heard it: a deafening roar, the pounding of feet, the sounds of ripping and tearing, whimpering... and then silence. Complete, utter silence. Even the lake and the wind seemed to hold their breath.

"Elara! Where are you?!" Ben's voice cut through the quiet, filled with anger and desperation. The way he shouted my name made me almost want to hide, but I knew I couldn't.

Against my will, my wolf let out a soft whimper before forcing a shift. Now, I lay there, broken and vulnerable—naked, with a shattered leg, and smelling like feral rogue wolves. Just perfect.

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Chapter 325

11 – Elara

I might regret even entertaining this thought if anyone ever found out, but honestly, I'm relieved my dad brought in the Silver Crescent team. These guys are incredibly sharp, and the way they collaborate is impressive. My main issue is that the beta never had children. Jeff once had a family, but something happened—something no one talks about. Even my dad either won't or can't tell me what it was. Sebastian and his mate just welcomed a pup, but he's only a year old. I've never experienced the kind of tight-knit friendships these men share as leaders. The closest I have is with Jaxon and Devon. Even Rayna has been a huge help. As an alpha-born female and soon-to-be luna of the Crescent Moon pack, she's been training to lead her entire life, much like me. However, her training has been broader since she didn't know who her mate would be or what her role as a mate might entail.

"So," Jeremiah broke the silence, glancing up from the map spread out before us, showing my pack's territory and the borders around it. "I think the real issue lies here," he said, pointing to a spot along our eastern border. "The Alpha over at Red Fang is really young—like sixteen or so. I haven't worked with him much, but I know his father passed away last year, and he had to step up early, kind of like Ryker." Jeremiah's eyes flicked toward his mate, as if that detail held some deeper meaning.

"Who's Ryker?" Dev asked, and I was grateful for the question. I'm familiar with most of the alphas in nearby packs and even some beyond them, but there are so many it's hard to

keep track. Our pack is relatively small and self-sufficient, so we don't engage much in trade or dealings with packs farther away. Ryker isn't a common name, so it's easy to forget.

"My brother," Rayna answered quietly, and the room instantly felt colder, as if a shadow had passed over us. "He's the Alpha of Dark Moon."

"Oh wow!"

"No way!"

My warriors couldn't hide their shock, and neither could I. Dark Moon is one of those packs parents warn their children about to keep them in line—more legend than reality. But I managed to keep my composure, suppressing any fan-girl excitement. Across from me, I noticed Ben shiver, then blink rapidly as a dark expression crossed his face. It was clear he and his wolf were struggling with something after hearing that. I needed to steer us back on track.

"Why do you think the problem is on the eastern border near Red Fang and not where we found Austin? Aside from the fact that the Alpha there is younger and just took over."

Jeremiah pointed to the map again. "Because Red Fang and your pack have this huge body of water to the south," he explained, "and to their east lies neutral territory. If I were trying to smuggle something, hide someone, or escape someone, that's the route I'd take. If your dad's right and you're being targeted because you're in transition, then it's likely Malcom Jr. is facing the same issues. Your dad reached out to mine only because of your fallen warrior. Attacks happen all the time, but none of us usually ask for help. I think they're trying to strengthen the unity along our borders since we're all still relatively new. We haven't even figured out if the attack on Austin was caused by rogues or something else."

I rubbed my temples, trying to absorb it all. It made sense, but I still had questions. "Then why are there listening devices in my house and personal spaces? What does that have to do with border attacks?"

Jeremiah shrugged. "Maybe they're trying to figure out if you, as a female," I growled at Jason, but he raised his hands to indicate he was just explaining, "or Junior, at sixteen, is more vulnerable. From what we've seen, you're well trained, and so are your warriors. It's just that your numbers are small, and you don't have your full leadership team yet, which leaves you exposed. I'm not sure about Junior's situation. We should probably send someone to check on that, Jer. But the attacks and the listening devices might be two separate issues." Their Alpha nodded in agreement.

I love Jax and Dev, but this kind of support system is addictive. So many ideas and perspectives brought to the table. Each of these men is so different, and I appreciate how comfortable they are letting Rayna share her thoughts without hesitation. What would it be like to have my own full team one day?

"We should check the western border," Jax said, sitting up straighter. "We've been focusing on the east side, and if they're trying to distract us, their plan is working perfectly."

I nodded, feeling the weight of the situation settle over us all. The battle was far from over.

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“We should send someone along with one of Jeremiah’s men to check on Malcom Junior,” Tommy suggests thoughtfully. “That way, Junior knows he’s got backup from all sides and is aware of the threat looming over him. Plus, we can get a sense of his team—or if he even has one. It also sends a message to anyone watching that we’re united, and maybe the problem will just fizzle out on its own.” It’s unusual to hear Tommy speak with such clarity; he’s usually the group’s joker, always deflecting serious moments with humor. His sudden seriousness catches me off guard.

Ben growls lowly, his voice rough. “You should keep your details with you at all times, not just when you leave the packhouse.” His tone is sharp, and I can’t help but tense up. “We know something’s happening here. We just don’t know if the pieces connect—or if we’re completely off track. The only certainty is that someone wants to know what you’re saying behind closed doors.”

“No warrior has noticed anything strange so far,” Dev stands, his expression grim, “but we should see for ourselves.” I rise alongside him, feeling the weight of the tension pressing down on me. I need to move, to get out of this suffocating room. My wolf snarls beneath the surface, itching to lash out at Ben and stake her claim, but neither of us wants that right now. Ben’s mood has been darker since Rayna’s brother came up—there’s definitely something brewing there.

“It’s too late to send anyone out tonight,” Jeremiah declares, his voice firm. “Jason, you and Dev will visit Junior tomorrow.”

A chorus of protests erupts immediately, voices overlapping in frustration. Jeremiah’s aura flares, a calming wave that quiets his men, and I do the same with mine. “Jason knows the patrol routes, and Dev is good with people. We need to find out what they know and whether they’ve had any trouble—without tipping anyone off.”

Ben’s voice rises, disbelief clear. “What about me?”

“You’ll join Elara’s detail,” Jeremiah answers without hesitation.

Both Ben and I protest at once. “I’ve got Chance and Brayden here with me,” I argue, “and Tommy can work with the patrols to gather intel. We don’t have much time—spring is coming fast, and the rains will only make everything more chaotic.”

Jeremiah’s gaze sharpens. “Ben, you’re a beta trained to protect an Alpha, but you don’t have one right now. Mine is available, with extensive knowledge of the surrounding packs. You two need to team up, figure out why there are listening devices in your house, and who stands to gain the most if Elara falls.”

Jax adds casually, “Oh, and she should stay with you tonight.”

Both Ben and I shout in disbelief. “WHAT?!”

“No way,” Ben stammers, his voice tight with refusal.

“This is perfect,” Rayna chimes in with a wild grin, her eyes sparkling with mischief. I had thought she was on my side, but clearly not. “No one would suspect a thing. You two get along the least, and...”

“Fine!” I cut her off sharply. The whole mate topic is the last thing I want to argue about right now. If Jeremiah’s men are anything like mine, they’ve probably hashed this out among themselves already. “I want to visit Malcom Junior tomorrow. It’ll look better if an Alpha and a convoy go—if someone’s watching.”

Jax frowns. “But what about leaving Jeremiah and his men behind? That might look more suspicious than you taking one of the guests to bed. That’s standard operating procedure for you.”

Suddenly, a snarl breaks the conversation, followed by the loud slam of a door. Ben’s gone.

Jax glances at me, eyebrows raised. “What’s got him so riled up, I wonder?”

I follow Ben out, frustration boiling beneath my skin. They’re all assholes. Neither of us wants to be pushed into this forced bond. We both have too much on our plates right now, and this is no time for complications. Yet the moment I reach my room, I freeze. I can’t stay here—it would be suspicious if I took a guest room. Jax was right; the best option is to stay with Ben. I can’t be anywhere else, not when I know he’s my mate. That would only make everything worse for both of us. And I don’t trust the closeness my wolf would have to him otherwise. Her patience with my refusal to claim him is wearing thin.

Still, I’m uncertain as I knock on his door.

When he opens it, his scent hits me like a wave—wet, raw, and utterly intoxicating. He stands there, dripping, wrapped only in a towel.

“Nope! Never mind,” I mutter, turning to walk away.

But then, an electric jolt shoots through my arm. Suddenly, I’m yanked backward and plunged into darkness.

“How does it feel... mate?” His voice is low, teasing, and filled with something dangerous.

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13 – Ben

“GO! NOW!” The sharp command from my wolf jolts me upright, nearly throwing me out of bed.

“What? What the hell is happening?” I demand, heart pounding as I scramble to make sense of the urgency.

“She’s in danger! No time to waste. Get moving!” The voice inside me is relentless.

I glance around the room. Elara’s scent still lingers faintly in the air, but she’s definitely not here. She hasn’t been for at least thirty minutes. Damn it all.

Without hesitation, I link minds with the others and take off, trusting they’ll be able to find me. Waiting isn’t an option—I’m too furious, too anxious. Something’s wrong with her. If she’s not hurt yet, she will be by the time I catch up. After everything we witnessed over the last two days, how could she have gone out for a run alone, without protection? And now, she’s paying the price.

I let my wolf take the lead; he seems to have some instinctive way to track her, and I’m not in the mood to question him. Through his eyes, I scan the dense forest as we thunder onward. The scent of water grows stronger with every step. Of course—she wanted to verify Jeremiah’s theory about those rogues using the river to move whatever they’re hiding. Well, it seems she was right.

“Will you shut up already?!” I snap at my wolf, irritated by the constant chatter in my head. “She’s hurt. We can be mad at her for doing her job recklessly later.”

We pick up the scent of the rogues, and my wolf accelerates. We’re moving faster than I ever thought possible. I’ll have to remember this speed for future reference. Suddenly, sounds of struggle and snarling break through the stillness as we crest a small hill. Ahead, Jax and Dev are surrounded, locked in combat with five snarling wolves. But Elara is nowhere in sight. My anger flares hotter, and I charge forward.

“Let’s make this fight a little fairer, shall we?” My wolf laughs darkly. “I can sense her nearby—she’s alive, but something’s definitely wrong.”

“Fine. We even the odds, then search,” I agree, unease settling in my gut. “She’d never leave a fight without coming back, even if she was injured. That much I know.”

We leap onto the back of a gray wolf preparing to ambush Jax from behind. A smaller tawny wolf quickly rolls away, trying to use the distraction to her advantage. But her speed is no match for my wolf’s power. He rips her from the air by the scruff, thrashing violently until her neck snaps, then tosses her aside like a rag doll.

I can feel Jeremiah, Tommy, Jason, and Rayna nearby, closing in. We pull out of the fight and head toward the water, where Elara’s pull is strongest.

As we reach the edge of the woods, my wolf lifts his nose, sniffing for any trace of her. Looking down the moss-covered slope, I spot a flash of her fiery red hair. My heart sinks. A wave of dread crashes over me, and we move dangerously fast over slippery boulders and fallen trees. I know she’s alive—I can feel it—but I need to see her eyes open, hear her sharp tongue tell me off like she always does.

“Really?!” she growls, voice weak but unmistakably hers. “Where are Jax and Dev?”

“Busy, Your Highness,” I reply with a smirk, trying to lighten the mood despite the tension. Her leg is bent at an unnatural angle, but thankfully, no other obvious injuries.

“We need to get you to a healer before that leg starts setting wrong. If it does, they’ll have to break it again—and trust me, you don’t want that.”

“I don’t need you. Jax and Dev can get me there.”

“No, they can’t. They’ll need healers too. What were you thinking, coming out here with only two warriors? You knew there was a threat, and you had no idea what it was, yet you thought the three of you could handle it all? You could have gotten everyone killed.”

“I am not stupid! Don’t you dare imply—”

“No! You’re not, and that’s exactly why this frustrates me so much. Stop trying to be the be-all and end-all.”

“BEN!” Jeremiah’s voice cuts through our argument. “Tell Elara we’ve got one rogue left to question. The others chose death instead. Jax and Dev need healers; they’ve called for a vehicle. Dev’s got a nasty gash. Is she okay?”

I know Jeremiah can mindlink her directly, Alpha to Alpha, but he’s keeping me involved—probably to keep me grounded and maybe to needle Elara a bit. He agrees with my assessment: she shouldn’t have been out here with only Jax and Dev.

“She’s got a broken leg. It’s going to take me a while to get her out of here. I’m hoping she won’t fight me on this, but my wolf won’t let anyone else touch her like this either.”

“Finally accepting the m—”

“Don’t say it. Not now. The redhead in front of me is enough of a fight, thanks.” The asshole chuckles.

I try to be as gentle as possible. To her credit, Elara doesn’t yell at me as I pull her into my arms. Maybe it’s more her wolf than her, but the skin-to-skin contact sends a tingling warmth through both of us, the matebond working overtime. I just hope it doesn’t make her heal faster—her leg needs to be set properly first. Still, the bond keeps us calm and focused.

Slowly and carefully, I begin the climb up the embankment. The moss makes every step treacherous, and progress is agonizingly slow, but I refuse to risk us both falling. Every inch closer to safety feels like a small victory.

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“Ben, bring her over here,” Rayna called out to me sharply, catching me off guard for a moment. “I want to examine her leg before the truck arrives. Maybe there’s something I can do to help.” She then turned her gaze to Elara. “I trained with healers back home. I’m better with pups, but battle wounds were common enough that I learned how to treat them.”

Without even seeking Elara’s permission, I trusted my Luna completely and moved toward her, gently lowering her to the ground. Jason handed me a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, and I glanced at him with a questioning look. Tilting his head toward my mate, I suddenly realized she was sitting there completely exposed in front of all our people—and theirs. He was offering me a lifeline, a way to keep my fraying nerves from snapping. A flicker of jealousy surged through me, sharp and unwelcome.

“Here,” I said softly, squatting down and holding the shirt open for her.

“Is that really the most important thing right now?” she snapped, then winced sharply as Rayna touched a sensitive spot.

“Just put it on,” I growled, my voice low and firm.

She growled back, though I couldn’t tell if it was directed at me or Rayna. Closing her eyes tightly to manage the pain, she gave me the opening I needed. I slipped the t-shirt over her head and carefully pulled it down her shoulders. At least now she was mostly covered. She must have been too exhausted or hurt to argue because she slid her arms into the sleeves without another word.

Two vehicles pulled up shortly after. We loaded Jax and Dev into one, alongside Tommy and Jason. Jeremiah tossed the unconscious rogue we’d captured into the trunk. I climbed into the back of the second vehicle, with a protesting female Alpha sitting firmly on my lap. Rayna climbed in on the other side, cradling Elara’s legs in her lap to stabilize them. Jeremiah took the front seat.

My patience lasted barely six seconds before I snapped, “Do you have any idea what kind of danger you put yourself in?” I didn’t care who overheard; they all needed to hear it.

“Yes, Beta, I do. I face it every day. That’s my job.” She then turned to Jeremiah. “Your suspicions were correct. Something’s going on at the waterfront. We didn’t get a chance to investigate fully. We picked up some strange scent trails and were heading back to get all of you to help with a proper sweep,” she met my gaze squarely, “But we were ambushed. We’ll need to conduct a thorough search of the area...”

“When the healers clear you and Dev for duty,” I finished her sentence firmly. “Don’t give me that look. You know you can’t fight right now; you’d be a liability and risk getting people hurt.”

“Alpha? I just had this car detailed. I would appreciate it if you refrained from spilling blood in here,” she said with a dry smirk. And just like that, the little bubble I’d been in with my mate burst. I’d completely forgotten we were surrounded by others. Plus, he’d just implied she was going to make me bleed. I didn’t understand why she was so pissed at me for stating the obvious. Or maybe she knew I was right and hated that even more. That thought

brought a small, satisfied smile to my lips. My wolf purred softly when she rested her head on my shoulder, and I chuckled when I heard her mutter “asshole” under her breath.

The ride to the pack hospital passed without incident. The healers confirmed all our assessments. The lead healer commended Rayna for her skill in positioning Elara’s leg so it could be set properly. The next battle came when the healer informed Elara she had to stay overnight. Dev was given the same news. His wound was infected with something, and he was reacting badly. The healers were taking samples and monitoring him closely. Whatever the rogues had on their claws had done serious damage. When Elara found out, I thought she might tear the room apart trying to leave. Her wolf was so furious that I had to sit beside her on the hospital bed, holding her hand firmly and calming her through the mate bond. The curious glances from the staff didn’t bother me one bit. She was on the verge of hurting someone with her reckless impulsiveness. The healers finally left after I promised to stay and keep watch. She wasn’t going anywhere.

“I don’t need a savior, Ben!” she snapped fiercely.

“You clearly need something!” I shot back. “You pushed yourself so hard trying to prove something that you got hurt. And it could have been much worse.”

“Don’t act like you’ve never broken a bone in a fight,” she retorted.

“I’ve never walked into a situation blind,” I said firmly.

“There isn’t always time for endless planning,” she said, swatting the mattress impatiently. “Sometimes you have to face things head-on. That’s the best approach right now because we know absolutely nothing about what’s going on—and it’s clearly not just in my pack.”

She tried to get up again, but I stopped her. “Sit down, or I will sit on you. Stop making my job harder.”

“I’m not your job! Go follow your Alpha around,” she shot back.

I ignored her outburst. “Speaking of following an Alpha—where were your Beta, Gamma, and Delta? They should have been with you, Jax, and Dev. They should be here right now.” She crossed her arms and turned her head away. Just as I suspected—she hadn’t told them. The real question was why. Was it because she was trying to prove herself? Or was it because she didn’t trust them?

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Chapter 329

14 – Ben

Honestly, I’m at my wit’s end with this woman. For three days straight, she’s flat-out refused any help and has even pushed back against having a protection detail assigned to her. I get that she needs to coordinate with Malcom Jr.—he has his own team, his own age group—but she’s deliberately choosing to go it alone, flying blind. I just don’t understand why. And

to make matters worse, my wolf is reacting to her stubbornness by wanting to step in and guard her around the clock, twenty-four seven.

“Jer, I need you to help me out here. She’s driving me insane. Just send me home or send me to Junior’s place—I don’t care—just get me out of this mess.” I run my fingers through my hair again, the tension pulling at my scalp. I swear, if this keeps up, I might start tearing it out. I just came back from checking on Elara and her leg. My wolf can’t go more than two hours without checking in. She healed quickly, but I know that leg is still sore, even if she won’t admit it. She refuses to rest it longer or keep a team with her, and I’m worried she’s going to get someone else hurt with her reckless behavior. Once again, I noticed only Jax and Dev are with her, prepping and planning. When I asked why, her answer was sharp and clear: she doesn’t need an entourage to lead.

Suddenly, a wave of calm warmth washes over me, like a soft blanket settling around my shoulders. It flows down my body until it reaches my toes, and I feel a small hand press gently against my back. I was so tense I hadn’t even noticed Luna approaching me. “You’ll figure this out, Ben. She’s your mate,” Rayna whispers quietly behind me. Everyone else, except Elara and me, has said it aloud—the word ‘mate.’ Neither of us has dared to acknowledge the bond openly. There are obvious signs now, undeniable after her attack the other day, yet we both stubbornly refuse to speak of it.

“That’s actually why we brought you in,” Alpha David says from behind his desk. It hits me how disrespectful I was about his daughter, right in front of him. Before I can apologize, he waves me off. “This started years ago, but she’s determined to prove herself without any help from her mate. You seem to be fighting for her just a little harder than she is for you. Both of you have things to work through before you can truly accept each other. I just hope it’s not too late.”

I stand there, silent. He’s not wrong. I’m still in love with Kennedy, and I’m scared I always will be. I don’t understand what the Moon Goddess was thinking, letting me fall for someone who wasn’t my mate. She took my whole heart with her to the Dark Moon.

Jeremiah breaks through my spiraling thoughts. “We have to head back to Silver Crescent. Dad wants to coordinate after Elara’s findings and the little intel we got from the rogue we caught.”

I take a deep breath, feeling both relief and anxiety about leaving. At least I’ll get some peace. “I need you on point here and with Junior,” Jeremiah almost whispers the last part, and I stop breathing for a moment.

“What!? You’ve got to be kidding me. No offense, Alpha David.” I start pacing again, frustration bubbling up.

“None taken,” David replies calmly. “I know your relationship isn’t the most stable, but you’re the best person for this role because of your connection to our pack.”

“You do realize she’s probably going to try to kill all of us in our sleep after this, right?” I mutter to the ceiling. “Especially since she wasn’t part of the decision.”

“Well, she isn’t Alpha yet. This involves so many people, and we need to get a handle on it. We have to coordinate with the packs bordering the lake and ours to understand how deep this goes. She has to follow orders just like you,” David says, sounding a bit like a frustrated parent. “She’ll do what’s best for the pack, even if she doesn’t like the process.”

“When do we leave?” I ask Jeremiah.

“We leave in an hour. I’ll have you traveling between the packs about every two weeks. Junior will need help too—his whole team is young, like ours. His mom wants to meet and review what they’ve discovered now that we’re all involved and seeing similar patterns. So, we’ll stop there on the way and update you if anything new comes up. Tommy and Jason will alternate traveling with you, depending on where Rayna and I are. Keep an eye on Jason—he’s been acting strange since our encounter at the lake.”

Perfect. I get to babysit our Gamma and the crazy Alpha. Thanks, Jer.

“So, who’s going to tell Elara that I’m sticking around at her and my Alpha’s command? Because I’m not volunteering for that,” I say, sinking slowly into a chair as the information settles in. I was hoping for a break from the constant push and pull of the mate bond, some distance between us.

“I’ll leave that to you two,” Jer laughs. Asshole.

“When is Junior expecting me? And is it just going to be Jason and me, or should I plan on Elara, Dev, and Jax joining us?”

“Honestly, that’s up to her. If her mother and I had any say, she’d spend another day or two healing. But with her pack in danger, she won’t want to be left out of anything. She also wants to revisit the waterfront...”

“Absolutely not! No offense, Alpha David, but the last time was a disaster, and she only had Jax and Dev with her.”

“I agree,” he says, “but it’s not a decision I’m going to make for her, nor would she let me.”

“We have to go, Ben. A storm’s coming tonight. I’ll be in touch after I talk to Junior. Try not to antagonize your—” I cough to cut him off. “We’re really doing this?” My annoyed expression doesn’t waver.

“Fine. Don’t antagonize Elara. You need to check out the waterfront; she’ll want to go with you. Look into Red Fang’s section of the waterfront. We need to learn more about it. Dad thinks something’s being transported. But what could be so big it has to travel by water and still stay hidden? And what about those scent trails?”

I nod. “I’m on it. Let’s see what kind of weather this storm brings. Winter’s been mild so far, but I’m worried it’ll make our investigation harder.”

I stand, ready to leave. I have my orders, and the Alphas have their own farewells and plans. Somehow, I've just volunteered myself to break the news to the ice queen that her favorite Beta is sticking around for a few more weeks.

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Chapter 330

15 – Elara

Can someone really feel the urge to kill so many people all at once? Lately, my father and Ben have been battling fiercely for the top spot on my personal irritation leaderboard. Not far behind them are Richard, Jeff, and Sebastian, all hovering just out of reach but equally aggravating. Until now, my dad's leadership team never followed my lead or gave any indication they wanted to protect me. Their focus has always been on my parents, which makes sense, since none of them have children old enough to take on the role yet. Sebastian's son is barely a year old—he will likely be the Delta for my future kids, if I ever have any. That is, assuming my mate lives long enough.

"We need to get going. Junior's waiting for us, and you wanted to run along the waterfront," Ben says without looking up from the map sprawled on the desk. It's been nearly two months, and this map has become his constant companion in my study. I wonder what he expects to find after all this time. Saying nothing, I turn and walk out of the room.

My wolf's paws hit the dirt with steady rhythm. The forest air is thick with the scent of earth and pine, and the feeling of the soil beneath her feet is grounding. I have mixed feelings about the shift from winter to spring—there's a maddening pattern of false starts. Since the Silver Crescent group arrived, we've had a few mild days, and I hoped we might skip the back-and-forth and move straight into spring. But that hope is dashed as a cold front sweeps in from across the water. We examine the area carefully. The scent trails we tracked earlier remain strong, indicating someone is still running this path. This time, however, we cross into Malcom Jr.'s territory. The trails continue, but when I try to follow them further, Ben's wolf halts me. I wish I were fully shifted so I could mindlink with him like my father does. Being half in and half out of wolf form is frustrating, especially when it feels like my dad is deliberately making my responsibilities harder.

"Do you smell that?" Dev asks. "Looks like we're getting snow again. I thought we were done with that."

"Yeah, I noticed the change yesterday. The wind off the lake is only going to make it worse," Jax says, flanking me on the other side.

"Elara, your dad needs me," Richard says stiffly. He clearly dislikes me—and guarding me seems to be a burden he resents. He jumps at any chance to leave my side.

"That's fine, Richard. I can hear Junior's men coming to meet us. Take Jeff with you," I reply firmly.

"But—"

“Take him. I’m not in the mood for his attitude today.”

“He’s just doing his job, Elara.”

“No, he’s not. He should be with my mother, not trailing behind me, grumbling and only half paying attention. Sebastian can stay if you want, but Jeff is on my last nerve. My mother is about to be without a Gamma. I have Jax, Dev, Ben, and Chance with me. We’ll be safe, I promise.”

“Understood.” Richard slows down, and Jeff stammers beside him. I notice Sebastian also hesitate, as if weighing where his loyalties lie.

“Just go. All three of you.”

“But I should stay with you. That’s my job as your Gamma,” Jeff protests, his voice edged with frustration. He always argues with me, but I’ve had enough.

“You are not my Gamma. I am not a Luna, nor will I ever be. Go to my father. All of you.” I release enough of my aura to make it clear I’m serious.

When I turn to run again, I catch sight of Jax, Dev, and Ben shifting into their strikingly handsome human forms. These three could easily make a fortune just posing for photos.

“Stop drooling and tell us what’s going on,” Jax says with a raised eyebrow. I start to respond through the link.

“Just tell all of us. This telephone nonsense is driving me crazy. We’ve all seen you naked,” he adds with a teasing grin.

Ben rumbles low in response, shooting Jax a sideways glance, but neither of them reacts further.

“Just shift and talk to us. Those three have been unusually involved over the past two weeks. What’s going on?” Jax presses.

I shift fully, standing tall with my hands on my hips, daring Ben or any of them to react. I ignore Ben’s shallow breathing—he wants to cover me up but won’t say a word as he stands just as bare, right there in front of my very gay and very taken warriors.