

Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 341

21 – Ben

“No way, Rayna! This isn’t happening. We have no clue what any of this stuff does, and I’m not going to let you take those kinds of risks,” Ben said firmly, his voice shaking with frustration.

Rayna’s tone rose with each word, sharp and defiant. “You really think locking me up in here is going to fix anything? Make it easier or better somehow?!” The tension between them had been building for nearly ten minutes, their voices bouncing off the walls.

“Ben, come on, man, back me up here,” I said, raising my hands in surrender. I wasn’t going to get involved in their argument—Ben was just too scared to stand up to Rayna on his own. “You saw what happened at the clinic. That stuff messed with her. She can’t be around it.”

Rayna’s voice softened, but there was a dangerous sweetness to it. “Ben,” she said, her tone almost mocking, “would you mind explaining to your friend what really happened at the clinic? I wasn’t affected. The smells were just stronger for me because I’m pregnant. That’s completely normal.”

“Jason, you better get in here,” Ben called out, his voice urgent. “Rayna’s going to need you soon.”

“I thought she was with you. What’s going on?” I asked as I stepped into the room.

“Jeremiah’s acting up. He and his wolf are being difficult, and Rayna is pushing every one of their buttons right now,” Ben replied, rubbing his temples.

“I’m in the middle of something, but I’ll be there in twenty minutes. Hold them off. Distract Rayna with something long and pointless—Jeremiah will sit and listen to her ramble for hours. The sap,” I muttered with a grin.

Jeremiah’s voice cut through the tension, calm but firm. “There’s nowhere else any of us need to be right now. No word from the healers yet. I know you’re worried about your Luna, but you’re stressing her out too. Let’s just breathe and make a plan while we still can.”

I gently guided Jeremiah to his chair, patting his shoulder as I exchanged a quick look with Rayna—an unspoken alliance forming against him. “Jason, he’s on his way. Don’t give me

that look—I'm trying to help here. If you want to get out of these four walls, help me calm him down. Give him something to focus on. Baby names, nursery paint colors, stickers—I don't care. Just distract him. Then the three of us can work on convincing him you don't need to go to the hospital."

Rayna closed her eyes, taking a deep, steadying breath. When she opened them, I saw a spark of mischief flicker there. She was about to stir things up, and I was so utterly doomed. "So, Jeremiah," she began sweetly, "I was thinking about the nursery... We might need to make a few changes to the plans..."

Her voice trailed off, but we could work with that. Jeremiah loved talking about their pup. He was almost twenty and already over the moon at the thought of becoming a dad. I felt his tension start to melt under my hand as I kept a firm grip on his arm, holding him in place.

"What kind of changes, baby?" he asked, leaning back and settling into his chair. I felt safe stepping closer to his side.

Rayna's smile widened as she casually dropped the bombshell. "We're going to need double of everything."

I stopped breathing for a moment. "Wait, what?" Jeremiah leaned forward, eyes wide. "Why double?"

"Jason, get your ass moving!" I snapped at him. This was probably going to make things worse, not better.

But Rayna kept going, her voice slow and deliberate. "Two cribs, two car seats, a double stroller... and we need to pick names," she emphasized the plural, "for two babies." She looked at him with such joy it was hard not to believe her.

I whispered urgently, "Rayna, go now while he's still in shock. I'll handle him. Jason's almost here—meet him at the door and keep him close. Don't give Jeremiah any reason to actually lock you up."

She nodded slowly, rising carefully so she wouldn't disturb him. I didn't move until the door clicked shut behind her.

"Jer?" I asked quietly, lowering my voice. "You good, man? Who knew you'd be so talented at making kids?" I tried to lighten the mood with a joke, hoping it would break through the thick tension hanging in the room.

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"What am I supposed to do now?" I asked, the weight of uncertainty pressing down on me.

"Huh? You're going to have to be a little more specific, my friend," he replied, raising his eyes to mine, his expression riddled with anxiety.

He looked genuinely panicked. “I spoke with Ryker this morning. Things are chaotic here, and we haven’t had consistent contact with Ken since she left. But he’s planning a birthday party for her. He wants all of us there because we mean a lot to her. I was already on edge about traveling with Rayna, and now the stakes feel even higher.” He ran his hands over his face in frustration.

Hearing Kennedy’s name made my stomach plummet, as if it had dropped all the way down to my toes. I never got the impression she felt comfortable in Dark Moon. She only ever spoke with Jer and Rayna, and the last time I saw her face was during a video call before Christmas. Since then, nothing—complete silence. I had suspected maybe he was keeping her away from us, from me. But now he’s throwing her a party? Has she been accepted into their pack? Has she undergone the Luna Ceremony? I couldn’t bring myself to ask Jer—he already knew how hard this had been for me, and I feared he’d read too much into it. The pain I felt when I thought of her had shifted; it was still there, but dulled, more of a persistent ache than a sharp wound. It had taken almost a year to reach this point—and that included an attack on our teens through drug overdoses.

“I have to talk to Dad,” I said firmly. “There’s no way I can keep Rayna from her brother and Kennedy.”

“Don’t tell her,” I suggested hesitantly, almost as if posing a question.

“You might think I’m clueless when it comes to my mate,” he replied, “but I’m not foolish enough to hide the fact that I spoke with her brother. She already knows, and she’s planning the trip as we speak. She’s due back shortly after our birthday, but I’m not sure if anything changes now that we know she’s having twins.” He groaned, rubbing his face again. “Two. Two babies.” But then, when he looked up at me, a grin spread across his face, and his eyes gleamed with excitement. In an instant, his entire demeanor shifted. “Dad said Elara found a mule.” He shot me a pointed look, almost like he was blaming me.

“What? That wasn’t the case before I left. You would’ve known about it before we got back. What was the mule carrying?”

“Some kind of liquid. One of the glass tubes must have broken because he looks like he’s been poisoned. Their healers are working on him now. Where’s Rayna?” He glanced around, suddenly realizing she wasn’t nearby.

“She’s with Jason. He’s keeping an eye on her.”

“Will he? Lately, he’s been so distracted—late to things he usually wouldn’t miss, disappearing without explanation.”

“What do you think he’s up to?”

“It could be a lot of things, but maybe it’s his mate. She’s probably from another pack. He started acting strange when you two began traveling between packs.”

“Are we sure he’s not involved with the drugs that have been circulating? I care about him like a brother, but we need to know if Rayna is safe with him while we figure all this out.” I

hated to doubt, but after seeing Jeff, Richard, and Sebastian hanging around Elara, I couldn't help but question everyone's intentions.

"I went there too, but I don't think so. Neither Dad nor I smell anything unusual on him. Now that I know Rayna has enhanced senses, she would have noticed if he was under the influence of those drugs. As crazy as she might seem when it comes to helping others, she wouldn't knowingly put herself in harm's way."

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Our story is approaching a pivotal crossover moment, and as I revisited Ryker and Kennedy's book to verify the timelines and ensure I stayed faithful to their narrative, I found myself completely absorbed in rereading it. There were so many subtle details and little nuances I had forgotten I had included—each one adding layers I hadn't fully appreciated before.

In the midst of this reflective journey, life around me has been equally hectic. Both of my children are finishing up their spring sports seasons, which means endless travel and packed schedules. June has turned into a whirlwind of activity for us. Over the past month, I've found myself sleeping more nights in hotel rooms than in the comfort of my own bed, a constant shuffle between arenas and fields.

Rest assured, Ben and Kennedy's storylines will be wrapped up soon—I promise you that! The loose threads are being carefully tied, and their journey is far from over.

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Chapter 344

22 – Ben

An hour had clearly not been enough time for Doc Jensen to identify the mysterious substances. The mixture was far more complex than anyone initially suspected. Nearly a week had passed since the discovery, and Jensen made it a point to update us every single day. His findings revealed a dangerous cocktail: Wolfsbane, Foxglove, Belladonna, Mandrake Root, and Datura. Each of these components carried its own deadly potential, capable of harming both humans and wolves alike. On top of these, there were traces of human drugs mixed in, making the situation even more dire. With such a lethal combination, the kids involved stood no chance of survival.

"Miss Elara's poor teenager was likely exposed to either Datura or Mandrake powder," Doc Jensen explained, rubbing his hands together as he recounted his analysis. "Both can cause hallucinations and severe disorientation. In this concentration, if it touched his skin, it could trigger a fatal reaction—stopping his heart instantly. If it was in liquid form, then Wolfsbane and Belladonna would act as powerful sedatives." His brow furrowed with

concern. “What worries me most is the concentration level. Even a tiny amount contacting the skin is enough to be deadly.”

“Thanks for the update, Jensen,” Alpha James said, rising from his seat. “We need to call a meeting. Let’s go, everyone.” Without waiting for a response, he strode out of the room, his tone urgent.

We all followed him back to the pack house. Alpha James’s office was already crowded with the current leaders and those destined to lead in the future, along with their mates. Jeremiah was holding Rayna close, never once breaking contact since we received Doc Jensen’s report at the hospital. The tension in the room was palpable.

“We have more answers than we did yesterday, but still, more questions remain,” Alpha James began, his voice steady but grave. “We will continue working closely with Red Fang and Black Claw. Our three packs seem to be the primary targets. I’ve spoken with other Alphas, and they are on high alert as well.” He paused, scanning the room. “I’m ordering all of you to travel to Dark Moon.”

A chorus of protests erupted from Tommy, Jason, Jer, and me. Alpha James raised his hands, signaling for silence.

“There are several reasons for this command,” he said firmly. “First, it gets our most valuable members out of harm’s way. And before you ask, Tommy, I’m not talking about you.” The room erupted in laughter, breaking some of the tension. Tommy feigned shock and offense, but we all knew the joke was coming.

“Rayna is our future Luna, and she carries the future of our pack within her. She must be protected at all costs,” James continued. “I’ve spoken with Ryker, and he hasn’t seen any signs of what we’re dealing with in his territory. With his sister in danger, he agrees with this plan. Our smaller packs are being targeted because of their size and because young Alphas are stepping into leadership roles. This also shows these traffickers that we’re not intimidated and that we’re still operating as usual. It may give them a false sense of security, thinking they can continue their operations without interruption—but that will give us a better chance to catch them.”

I couldn’t hold back. “What about Junior and Elara, sir? I’ve grown connected to those packs over the past few months, and I worry about them too. It’s one thing to protect Silver Crescent, but what about the others?”

Alpha James nodded thoughtfully. “Jaxon, Devon, and Tommy have been working on a patrol schedule that ensures our warriors cross paths frequently to share information. That’s all I can say about the setup. Only a handful of people know the full rotation and routes for security reasons, but so far, it seems effective.” He gave me a look that said there was more to the story, but it wasn’t the place to discuss it. I recognized that look well from my time with Black Claw—there’s someone in this room he doesn’t trust. My wolf and I immediately began scanning everyone present. I hated living in this constant state of suspicion, but the corruption was very real. Luna Emilia’s betrayal was proof of that.

“There’s another reason for this travel order,” Alpha James added, his voice softening slightly. “It’s for Kennedy.” My heart nearly stopped at the mention of her name. “Your birthday and hers are coming up, and Ryker wants to surprise her.” He glanced at Jeremiah. “This is the perfect cover to get Rayna and your mother out of the pack.”

Jason finally spoke up, concern etched on his face. “Should she really be traveling right now, sir? The healers said she might deliver early. Aren’t we too close to her due date? What if she goes into labor on the road? Wouldn’t it be safer to keep her here?”

Rayna cut in sharply, her voice firm and unwavering. “She’s not missing Kennedy’s birthday or her Luna ceremony. My brother has finally stopped resisting—I’m going. And frankly, I’m tired of having my food and water tested here. It’s making me anxious, and that’s no good for the babies. I need to leave while you all sort this out.” Her gaze locked on her Gamma, who didn’t argue but looked longingly out the window, reluctant to leave.

“It’s settled,” Alpha James declared. “Get packed. I’m not sure how long you’ll be gone, so plan for at least a couple of weeks. The boys will travel back and forth as needed.” He turned to Luna Beth and quietly pulled her from the room.

With that, the meeting was dismissed.

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I glanced over at Jer as we stepped out of the office. “Did your dad mention when he wants us to leave?” I asked, curiosity tugging at me.

Jeremiah nodded. “He said the morning of our birthday. That way, we’ll get there just in time for dinner and surprise Ken. Why do you ask?”

He trailed behind me, Rayna close by, pretending not to eavesdrop on our conversation. Honestly, I didn’t mind her listening; if she weren’t here, Jer would have told her anyway.

“I need to check in with Junior and Elara,” I admitted, my voice low. “They don’t have the same resources we do, and I worry the support around them is fragile at best. Richard is doing his job, but I don’t trust the Delta and Gamma at Black Claw. Something feels off about them—I just can’t put my finger on it. Maybe they don’t want a female Alpha, but I suspect there’s more beneath the surface. Luna Sam is pushing herself to the brink, too. They’ve got warriors, but their leadership is practically nonexistent. I’m planning to head to Black Claw first, check on them, then swing by Red Fang to see Luna Sam and Junior. They need to know what we’re doing in case they need to step in while we’re gone. They should also know who to contact. It shouldn’t take more than a day.”

Rayna’s soft voice came from just behind Jeremiah. “What are you going to do, Ben?”

I stopped and turned toward her. “Do you mean about Luna?”

She glanced around cautiously, but by then we were in the hallway leading to our bedrooms, far from any prying ears. “I know Elara is your mate. I can feel it. But it’s clear neither of you have made any progress with the bond. What’s your plan?”

I hesitated, the weight of the question pressing down on me. “Honestly, I don’t know.”

Jeremiah’s face tightened with concern, maybe even frustration. “What do you mean you don’t know? She’s your mate, man.”

I let out a slow breath. “I’m a Beta. She’s an Alpha. She’s fought her entire life to be the best Alpha she can be. All the men around her are waiting for her mate to come along and become the ‘true’ Alpha, the one who claims her as his Luna. But she’s not a Luna—not to me, and no offense, Rayna, but I won’t be part of that dynamic. Besides, I’m needed here right now. What happens if I choose her? Do I become her Beta? How does that even work? And where does that leave you? I don’t have younger brothers ready to take my place. I’ve seen what her pack and Junior’s pack are going through without solid leadership. I can’t just abandon you like that.”

Rayna’s tone remained gentle, her concern evident. “Are you sure that’s the whole story?”

I shook my head slowly. “Rayna, she doesn’t want me. I’m just a Beta; that’s not enough for her. And I don’t know if I’m ready. I still love her, but I don’t know how to move on.” My voice dropped to a whisper, the admission raw and new. Ten months she’s been gone, and I’ve never said those words out loud. Closing my eyes tightly, I let the vulnerability slip free, knowing this would be the only time I allowed myself to be weak. Now, I could put on the mask again.

As if sensing my turmoil, Rayna pulled me into a comforting embrace. The scent of fresh flowers surrounded us, calming my restless mind. I’m not usually one for displays of affection, but with her, it felt grounding. “We’re going to Dark Moon,” she said quietly. “You’re going to have to face her. I know it hasn’t been ideal, but she and my brother needed to work through some things between them. She is his Luna, and he intends to claim her fully. He’s bringing her into his pack and plans to mark her. Beth doesn’t know yet, but I wanted you to be prepared.”

I glanced at Jeremiah over her shoulder. “You’re okay with that? With everything that could happen to her?”

Jeremiah shrugged, a hint of resignation in his smile. “It’s not up to me. Ryker knows what we fear, but he’s choosing to try, and that’s something Ken deserves. Can you imagine telling her not to, if it’s truly what she wants?” His smile was weak, but genuine. I just exhaled sharply through my nose. He wasn’t wrong, but it still stung. I wasn’t sure I could watch someone else claim her.

“I need to go,” I said, stepping back from Rayna’s embrace. “I’ll be back by the end of tomorrow.”

She nodded, understanding. I turned toward my room. After Kennedy left, Jeremiah had moved me here. He said it was to help with the transition, but I suspect it was so they could

keep a closer eye on me—both him and Rayna. The early days of my depression were dark and heavy. Neither of them followed me now to force conversation, and the house was quiet as I loaded the SUV for my trip. This would probably be my first solo visit to the other packs. The thought made my chest tighten, but I pushed forward, determined to do what needed to be done.

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Chapter 346

23 – Elara

“Alpha, you really need to eat something and get some rest,” Melanie insisted, carefully setting down a tray filled with food and a steaming cup of coffee. “You’re not following the schedule the warriors laid out.”

I snapped back, my voice rough, “That plan was designed for their shifts, not mine.” Then, forcing myself to calm down, I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply. Melanie didn’t deserve my irritation. “Sorry, Melanie.”

She gave me a forgiving smile. “It’s okay, Alpha. But seriously, some rest would do you good. You’d be sharper, and maybe a little less cranky.” She smirked, clearly enjoying teasing me. I must have looked exhausted to let her get away with that. Before I could answer, she added, “Relying on coffee alone can only keep you going for so long.” Her expression softened. “When was the last time you actually slept more than two hours?”

“Yesterday, when you kicked me out of my office,” I replied curtly. “Why?”

“That was three days ago,” she corrected, placing a hand on her hip. My eyes widened in disbelief. “I’m giving you one hour to finish whatever you’re working on, then you have to go up to your room, clean up, and get some sleep. Otherwise, I’m calling reinforcements.”

I raised an eyebrow. “And who exactly are you going to call? My mother’s still in a coma, my father’s indisposed, and all my warriors are as wiped out as I am. None of them would dare challenge me—they know better.”

Melanie arched a brow. “I’ll call Ben. Your mate will make sure you listen.”

I froze. No one but Jax and Dev knew about Ben being my mate. Well, that was probably a lie—warriors were the worst gossipers, even worse than teenage girls. The rumor was likely already swirling, but I hadn’t confirmed it to anyone. “What makes you think he’s my mate, or that he’d have any influence over my decisions?”

She waved her hands animatedly. “Start with the way you look when he’s around. He doesn’t treat you like some ‘stupid female,’ like other visiting alphas, betas, and warriors do.” She grinned. “You don’t brush off his help like you do with everyone else. Should I keep going?”

“You think I have a look?” I leaned back in my chair, watching her pace in front of my desk.

She actually giggled. “Yes, Alpha, you have a look. It’s not some lovestruck, googly-eyed thing. You just seem more confident when he’s here. Your aura feels stronger—not overwhelming or unpleasant, just... more. Does that make sense?”

I frowned, confused. “I don’t feel any different than any other day.”

She paused, clearly tuning into something, then her mouth curved into the most mischievous smile I’d ever seen—like Jax when we were kids about to pull off some prank. “Well, let’s put that theory to the test, shall we?” She stepped to the side of my desk just as the door opened, and the man himself walked in. I shot Melanie a sharp look.

“So, you got a heads-up but not me? Who’s in charge here?” I asked, trying to sound nonchalant. I knew Ben was watching the exchange, but I wanted an answer from her.

“Yep, definitely different,” she winked. “One hour, Alpha, then you rest.” And with that, she walked away.

Ben grinned, a teasing glint in his eyes. “Did your mom die and take over as head of house?”

My head snapped toward him. “Honestly, I have no idea. Why are you here? You’re not due back for another week.”

“We’re traveling to Dark Moon in a couple of days. I need to be with Jer and Rayna. Thought I’d check in before we left.”

I slid back in my chair, reluctantly picking at the food Melanie had brought. She was right—I’d been running on adrenaline and coffee far too long. I only ate because she insisted.

“What’s in Dark Moon?” I asked.

“Rayna’s brother is the Alpha there, and they’re inducting his Luna into the pack with a ceremony.” Ben’s voice caught for a moment, almost like he was choking on the words.

“You’re telling me your Alpha and healers are letting Rayna travel in her condition?”

Ben’s tone shifted, heavy with meaning. “Much like you and her sister-in-law, Rayna basically gets what she wants. She’s not going to miss this for anything. It’s been a long time coming.” There was definitely more to that story. “Have you found out anything new about your mule?”

I welcomed the change of subject. I pointed to the map spread out on my desk, covered in marks, highlights, notes, and scribbles—it had become our central hub for the investigation.

“We’ve pushed as far west as the mountains bordering the White Diamond Pack. Alpha Chase hasn’t seen or heard anything unusual, but he’s keeping an eye out since a coven is located on the other side of the range. There’s also a neutral territory just north of them, bordering White Diamond and Blue Moon, opening on my northwest side. Alpha Wess hasn’t spotted anything either, but they haven’t had any issues or reason to be on alert.

That covers all our border territories, and they're on high alert. Word's probably spreading that we're hunting, because since I spoke to those two, I haven't noticed any movement."

"What about the cave?" Ben asked.

"Cleared out. I took healers who could better identify the substances, but everything was gone—or at least, it appeared that way."

"What do you mean 'appeared'? And how could they have moved all that stuff? It was full."

"That's why we think it was an illusion. If witches are involved, that's totally possible. I couldn't enter, only look inside, which tells me there are wards up. We took a tip from someone spying on my pack and set up cameras, plus included that area in our patrols. We haven't seen anything yet, but that doesn't mean they aren't using the space and sneaking in and out some other way." I rubbed my hands over my face, then tried to run them through my hair, but they got stuck. I had no idea when I'd last brushed it. With a sigh, I pushed back from my desk. "How long are you staying?"

"Elara, no offense, but you look like hell. You need sleep."

"I can't sleep—not while the bastard who poisoned my mother is still out there. We keep getting bits of information, but we're no closer to finding out who's behind this." I led him toward the door. As much as I wanted to protest, I knew I needed to at least shower and look somewhat presentable. No one would take me seriously if I looked as rough as Ben said.

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Chapter 347

24 – Elara

He trails behind me quietly as I make my way to my room. Once inside, I hear the faint buzz of his phone vibrating in his pocket. Glancing over, I catch a glimpse of his lock screen, and my heart skips a beat. It's a photo of him with a blonde woman, both laughing at something off-camera. The image is clearly cropped from a larger picture, evident by the disembodied hands at the edges. He deliberately zoomed in to show only the two of them. Could this be the reason he's resisting the bond? Does he still have someone else? Even after finding me, she remains the first image he sees when he checks his phone. Feeling a pang of jealousy, I turn away and head toward the bathroom, leaving him to his notifications. Maybe they're sexting while he's on the road—that has to be it. After all, he's here often, but I can't help but feel uneasy about him traveling unmarked to a pack where there's a female Alpha, unmated and unmarked, every couple of weeks.

I step under the hot cascade of water and let the warmth ease the tension from my muscles. It takes two thorough rounds of shampoo and conditioner to wash away the dirt and grime, restoring my fiery red hair to its true vibrant shade instead of a dull rusty brown. Honestly, I haven't been keeping up with basic hygiene as well as I should. While scrubbing myself with an exfoliating sponge, making sure I'm clean enough to satisfy Melanie's standards, I

suddenly hear a sharp intake of breath. Startled, I straighten up from my bent position and turn around, nearly losing my balance. Strong, warm hands catch me just in time before I slip on the slick soap suds pooling at my feet.

“I didn’t realize your shower was open concept,” Ben mutters, his eyes closed.

“You’ve seen me naked before. This isn’t anything new, Ben,” I whisper, surprised at the softness of my voice. Why am I whispering?

“This is definitely not the same thing,” he replies, still with his eyes shut. “I heard from Jax and Dev, and one of my healers. I just wanted you to know.” His words ignite a flare of irritation inside me.

“Oh, so now you’ve decided to be a gentleman?” I grumble, realizing I must be delirious.

I try to pull away from his embrace, but his hands tighten around my ribs. He’s dangerously close to places I both desperately want him to touch and simultaneously want him to avoid. I haven’t been with anyone in a long time. That’s all this is—desire born of loneliness. I don’t want a man whose attention is elsewhere, even if he is my mate. He doesn’t want me, and I don’t want him, really. It’s only this forced bond making me feel like this—along with the tingling, the electric current running through my entire body. Just his touch alone makes me feel like I’ve finally slept through the night for the first time since this whole ordeal began.

“If you could see what’s running through my head right now, you wouldn’t call me a gentleman,” he murmurs, his chest vibrating against my already sensitive nipples, sending another surge of heat through me.

“Prove it,” I challenge, the words slipping out before I can think better of them. His eyes snap open, but they’re not his usual warm brown; instead, the black depths of his wolf swirl within, signaling the fierce battle raging inside him.

The blonde woman on his phone. I don’t understand why I’m not fighting harder. Neither of us truly wants this, but somehow, it’s helping. My mind feels clearer, my body more whole. I hate this mate bond for the control it wields. His wolf demands his mate, and he wants whoever that is.

His thumbs glide over my nipples again, and an involuntary moan escapes me. He presses harder this time, coaxing a deeper, more primal sound from my lips—one I’ve never made before. His serious gaze remains, but the devilish smirk belongs entirely to his wolf. Without warning, he lifts me effortlessly, and my legs instinctively wrap around his waist. A hand presses firmly against my back, pulling me closer as he tilts my chest toward his face. His mouth lands on my skin with a bruising bite that, surprisingly, I enjoy far more than I should. He sucks hard, leaving marks, then kisses the spot tenderly before moving on to another sensitive area on my breasts.

So absorbed am I in his touch that I barely register us moving until I’m suddenly laid down on my bed and he’s crawling over me. His clothes are drenched from pulling me straight from the shower, but he’s in no rush to shed them. Instead, he licks and sucks every inch of my body below my neck, his attention relentless.

I barely have a moment to think before I feel him lower his mouth to my core, his lips capturing me with a hunger that makes my breath hitch.

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Chapter 348

“OH F*CK!” I jerk suddenly, but he’s quick, pinning me down firmly with an arm wrapped tightly around my waist.

“Not so fast, little Alpha,” he murmurs, his voice low and commanding. “I haven’t had my fill yet.”

This definitely isn’t Ben behind the wheel, and honestly, I’m not complaining in the slightest. He moves with relentless intensity, fast and hard, and already I can feel the fluttering stirrings of pleasure deep in my belly. Just when I think I’ve reached my limit, he slips his fingers inside me, and I shatter—screaming and cursing through the most overwhelming release I’ve ever experienced.

“Our girl likes it a bit rough,” he growls into my core, his voice vibrating against me. “Let’s see what other sounds we can pull out of you today.”

I nearly cry out when he pulls his hand away, but then he flips me over onto all fours, and the sharp slap of his palm against my ass makes me squeal and moan all at once. Who am I right now? I’ve never been into rough or intense sex before, but right here, right now, it feels incredible—not threatening or overbearing. It’s like he’s giving me permission to let go, to surrender my worries and lose myself in the pleasure he’s offering.

I brace myself, expecting him to enter me from behind, but instead, his mouth finds me again. I bury my face into the pillows, my body arching instinctively to give him better access. The deep, appreciative growl that rumbles from his throat sends an electric pulse racing through me. His hands knead my ass with reverent care, easing tension from my muscles as my body trembles, teetering on the edge of another climax. I don’t even understand how he’s bringing me here so quickly. I’m panting like a wild animal in heat, his growls matching every flick of his tongue.

“Let’s see if you can handle three this time,” he challenges, pulling back just enough to rub my clit with one hand while the other teases my entrance. The flood of sensations overwhelms my senses, frying my brain. I can’t form words or respond coherently—only sounds escape me. Again, I come hard, his fingers thrusting rhythmically inside me, stretching out the orgasm far beyond what I thought possible. I’m completely spent, unable to move from this position.

Slowly, he withdraws his fingers, his breath warm against my skin as he comments on how wet I am, how hard I came just for him. “We should clean up the mess we made,” he says with a teasing grin.

Before I can even ask what he means, his tongue is back, tracing slow, deliberate strokes from my clit down to my puckered ass. The sensation draws another needy, sultry moan

from my lips. He kisses each cheek softly, his thumb caressing the tight muscle with gentle strokes.

“Next time, little Alpha. Next time,” he growls, the smile audible in his voice.

I feel myself tipping sideways, too drowsy to focus on anything real. My body and mind are utterly wrecked, unable to function properly. Then, finally, I drift off into the deepest, dreamless sleep I’ve had since my mother was attacked.

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Chapter 349

25 – Ben

My wolf has never so completely taken over my human form before. Once the tension between Elara and me finally snapped, I didn’t resist him much at all. We both knew Elara wouldn’t calm down without some forceful intervention—it was either subdue her or wear her out. My wolf chose the latter. The temptation was overwhelming; there she stood, fierce and dripping wet, silently demanding to be taken care of. We both needed this release, and my wolf was growing impatient, tired of waiting for us to get our act together. Thankfully, he didn’t push me to kiss her or mate with her, which I was grateful for—and I’m sure she would be, too. We’re not at that point yet. There has to be a real conversation first. I won’t force her into mating, sealing the bond prematurely, and even kissing feels too intimate for now—another thing we’re just not ready to cross.

I spot Jax and Dev in the hallway, grinning like fools as I quietly slip out of Elara’s room. “She’s asleep,” I say awkwardly, though there’s really nothing else to add. I just want them to stop staring at me like that.

“Yeah, I’d hope so after all that,” Jax chuckles, his smile growing even wider. I roll my eyes, feeling my mouth twist into my usual scowl.

“Are the patrols out so you two can get some rest as well?” I ask. They both nod and fall into step beside me. I need to get away before Elara wakes and we’re forced to talk about what just happened. “Good. I’ll send you what I’ve got from my healers. We’re probably dealing with witches working in tandem with wolves acting as mules to move through our packs. Your patrols will need to watch for signs beyond the usual scents and tracking markers. There will be magic in the air — a faint metallic taste and a smell like sulfur from a match before it’s struck. These clues will be subtle, but they’ll help us pinpoint whoever’s behind this, so we can get some answers and put a stop to it.”

“We’ve noticed a shift in the pack,” I say, stopping to look at Dev, needing him to explain. “People are scared. Afraid to leave their homes, afraid to let their pups play outside. Rumors are circulating—some folks in our pack are blaming everything on Elara’s transition to Alpha. The Alpha knows about it and has been trying to shield her, but now that she’s fully in transition and running the pack in his stead, she can’t be kept in the dark much

longer. We might be facing an uprising, maybe even a challenge, sooner rather than later. She's going to need you, even if she never admits it or asks for help."

I take a deep, steadying breath, then exhale slowly. "I'm traveling with my Alpha to Dark Moon. He's celebrating his sister's Luna ceremony and their birthday. His Luna is heavily pregnant, and we'll need all our warriors on alert. Stay vigilant, anticipate Elara's needs. If she asks you something, don't lie—but if her father hasn't told her something, maybe it's best to let him decide when to share it. Too much knowledge right now will only distract her, and she'll burn out even faster trying to prove everyone wrong." My gaze drifts back down the hallway toward Elara's room. "I'll be gone for more than half a day, so I'll need a heads-up if anything comes up. Blue Moon and White Diamond should be able to assist—Elara has forged the alliances we need. Don't let her stubbornness get the better of her; she's trying to do everything and protect everyone. She has a lot to prove, but dying for it isn't the answer."

"Yes, sir," Jax replies with an unexpected seriousness. It feels strange—technically, I outrank him, but he's never addressed me so formally before.

I nod and continue toward the front door, where Melanie is waiting with a brown paper bag. I raise an eyebrow. "Some food for the road, sir," she says politely. What's with the 'sir' all of a sudden? I don't ask; instead, I just nod and accept the bag. It's heavier than I expected, and I can't help but smile. She's really good at her job.

I drive to Junior's pack intending to check in and relay where I'll be, and who to contact if help is needed. Luna Sam looks just as worn down as Elara did. She's doing her best to hold it together without her mate, but it's clear she's struggling. My wolf makes a dry joke about not offering Luna Sam the same 'service' we gave Elara—after all, Luna Sam is on her own. I fight back a smile at the memory, the weight of the moment lightened just a little.

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Chapter 350

Ben's expression was tense, his brows furrowed as he paced restlessly in Luna Sam's office. Luna watched him with a knowing smile playing on her lips. "What's got you looking like that, Ben?" she teased gently. "Did you and that special female alpha finally come to some kind of understanding?"

Ben stopped mid-step, his face hardening. "What are you talking about?" he asked, his tone sharp. He didn't like discussing mates, especially not with someone who didn't fully grasp the complexities of his situation.

Luna leaned back in her chair, folding her arms with a hint of amusement. "Do you really think I was born yesterday? You've been running between packs for a while now. Didn't it ever occur to you that I'd notice something? Like the fact that your alpha chose his future Beta and Gamma as his liaisons, instead of sending his top warriors. Your Alpha and your best friend—they both know what's happening. You've found your mates, haven't you?"

Ben's jaw tightened. "Jason hasn't found his mate," he interrupted firmly.

Luna smiled knowingly. "Ah, but I think he has. Every time he visits, he carries the same floral scent—not something typical for a male wolf. And his mood shifts when he's here, like he's torn between two worlds. Yet, he seems the most at peace when he's coming from or going to Black Claw. And don't even get me started on you and Elara. You can't be in the same room without staying within a foot of each other. You naturally gravitate toward one another. But when you both overthink it, you resist the bond. I hear you sleep on the floor when you stay together. Even after all this time, neither of you has made a move to fully accept the other." She placed her hands on her hips, disappointment flickering in her eyes.

If only Luna knew what they had done to their mate before arriving here, Ben thought bitterly. She wouldn't be so quick to judge them holding back. His wolf stirred inside him, pride swelling at their defiance.

"Not a conversation I'm having with Luna Sam," the wolf chuckled in his mind.

"It's complicated for both of us," Ben admitted, his voice low. "Until this threat is neutralized and we uncover who's trying to destabilize Elara's leadership, nothing else should distract us. This situation affects all our packs and the people who rely on us for protection. That's what matters most right now."

Luna nodded thoughtfully. "Just remember this—mates exist to stand beside you when you need to borrow or lend strength. They're meant to make you stronger, never weaker. Too many Alphas forget that. They wait until they feel fully settled in their role before claiming their mate, fearing vulnerability during the transition. But what they should understand is that having your mate by your side during that time actually smooths the process—and makes it quicker."

Ben frowned. "Why are you telling me this? I'm not an Alpha in transition."

"No, but—if I may be blunt—you're the closest thing Black Claw has to a Luna right now. You're a Beta by blood, built to protect your Alpha at all costs. You're mated to an Alpha, and you will be her protector—the glue holding your pack's fabric together. You're already doing it. You step in when needed, and step back to watch when your voice has been heard. You're guiding and leading, just not in the same way your Alpha or mate would."

Ben swallowed hard, the weight of her words settling deep inside him. It had never occurred to him that Alpha James, Jeremiah, and even Rayna might be setting him up by sending him here. They wanted him to claim his mate, to let go of Kennedy, to move forward as if she never existed. A surge of conflicting emotions flooded him—grief, guilt, hope, and something fragile like acceptance. He simply nodded, unable to find any other response.

"You know where to find me," Luna said softly. "If you need help, just call."

Ben gave a curt nod and stepped out of the Red Fang packhouse, his mind heavy with thoughts that refused to settle. The air outside was cool, the fading light casting long shadows across the ground, but inside him, turmoil churned like a storm yet to break.

