

Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 361

33 – Elara

Under the cloak of night, we slip quietly into the garage, just like any other evening. Jax and Dev haul the rogue out, his head hanging limply as if he's already resigned to whatever fate awaits him.

"What exactly are we planning to do with this idiot?" Jax mutters, frustration evident in his voice.

I grit my teeth. "I swear, I'm going to hang him up by his neck. If he calls himself a 'freelancer,' eventually his own selfishness will outweigh any loyalty he claims to have. I'm done with these rogues—and anyone else hiding in the pack—thinking they can trample all over me. If they want me to be a bitch, then fine. I'll be that bitch." I turn sharply and walk away without waiting for a response, but I know they're right behind me.

We head toward the discreet door leading to the cells, tucked away in the garage. It's a practical setup—after a brutal interrogation, you don't have to walk through the packhouse covered in blood and grime. There's even a shower room down here. My father used it before—cleaning up after interrogations to join my mother at parties filled with unsuspecting guests. If any Alphas were present, they probably caught a whiff of the blood, but no one ever said a word. Each Alpha does what's necessary to protect their pack. Now, it's my turn to do the same.

Jax and Dev are anything but gentle as they drag the rogue down the stairs. They grip him under the arms, letting his knees and feet slam hard against each step. No care, no mercy. When we reach the furthest cell, they drop him unceremoniously onto the floor. We work silently, outfitting him with silver chains and slipping on special gloves to handle the metal safely. When we finish, he's slumped against the far wall, arms and legs bound so that if he tries to stretch out his arms, his legs are yanked back—any movement will only cause him pain.

"Leave him like this for now. No food, no water," I order. "Let's clean up, then sweep the house. After that, I want to see my dad."

"Got it," Jax replies.

“I’ll check my office and bedroom,” I continue. “You two split up and cover the other usual rooms. Then we can quickly hit the common areas.” They both nod, exhaustion clear on their faces. We’ve been at this nonstop for days, but I can’t trust anyone else right now. I guess the rogues’ plan is working, at least in that respect.

When I reach my room, I do what I always do—scouring every corner, every crack. Finding nothing, I head straight for the shower. Immediately, my thoughts drift to Ben. Being in this space without thinking of him is impossible. My wolf won’t let me forget. I’ve tried to release the tension, but every time I come close, I imagine his face between my thighs. It only frustrates me more—that he has this much control over me. I hate feeling controlled by anyone.

My hand rests on the door to the pack hospital, bracing myself to see my mother clinging to life.

“Elara, we have a problem. Get down to the cells, now,” Jax’s voice crackles through my earpiece.

“What’s going on, Jax? I need to see Mom. I haven’t been there in a week.”

“We caught Jeff in a cell.”

“What the hell?!” I freeze, heart pounding, just inside the door.

“He was planting devices. What do you want us to do?”

Without hesitation, I turn and stride back toward the packhouse. I’ll tell my dad what we found once I have more answers.

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Since finding the rogue, anger has simmered just beneath my skin. Ben isn’t here to calm my thoughts, my mother isn’t here to help me control my impulses, and my father isn’t here to guide me. Everyone I rely on to keep my head clear is absent, and that only fuels my fury. This bastard has made my pack doubt me, and I’ve grown suspicious of them in return. He’s too dumb to act alone, but maybe I can use him against whoever’s pulling the strings. I need to know—who’s poisoning these pups? Why? What’s the ultimate goal?

The door to the cells slams against the wall as I storm inside, my wolf and rage pushing me forward. I hear the struggle and rush straight into the cell. Jax and Dev leap back just in time to avoid my flurry of punches.

“How,” I spit through clenched teeth, “dare,” punch, “you,” punch, punch, punch, “betray my family.” I strike every inch of his face, pouring every ounce of the fire burning inside me into each blow. One last punch lands hard in his gut, forcing him to his knees.

“My parents trusted you to keep them safe.”

He spits blood, sneering up at me from the floor. “Yeah, well... this pays better. And I’m about to get a raise.” His black, lifeless eyes chill me to the bone. That smug look makes my stomach twist, then a blinding, white-hot pain sears through my head, dropping me to my knees. My mother’s face flashes before my eyes, then darkness swallows me whole.

She’s gone. Just like that, she’s gone. I was supposed to be with her now. I failed her again.

A fresh wave of anguish ignites in my chest. “Dad! No!” I scream, but Jeff just laughs cruelly.

“What’s wrong?” Dev’s voice whispers in my ear.

“What’s wrong, wannabe Alpha? Trouble with your folks?”

I lunge to attack him again, but another blinding light floods my vision. Nausea rises as the crushing weight of full control over the pack crashes down on me like a physical blow.

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Chapter 362

34 – Elara

A choked sob escapes my throat, raw and desperate. “No,” I whisper, the word trembling on my lips.

Jeff’s voice cuts through the silence like a blade. “Yeah, that’s right, baby Alpha. Your pack belongs to us now.” His taunt is cruel, dripping with satisfaction.

Something inside me shatters completely. My mother was innocent—pure and kindhearted, never involved in any of the dark dealings that had poisoned our lives. She treated every member of the pack like her own child, with boundless love and care. She didn’t deserve to be poisoned, to suffer and die alone in a sterile hospital bed. Rage flares within me again, a blazing inferno fueled by hatred for Jeff, the rogue, and anyone who dared harm my family and my pack. The power of my wolf surges through my veins, wild and fierce.

I spring at Jeff with a ferocity he hadn’t expected. He braced for a killing blow, but I haven’t lost all control yet. My claws extend, sharp and deadly, slicing repeatedly across his chest. Thin, painful cuts—like paper tearing—mar his clothes, and traitorous blood oozes slowly onto the floor beneath us. I lean in close, so close that he can see every shade of green swirling in my eyes.

“My pack will never be yours,” I hiss, venom dripping from every word. “You’ll bleed out, slowly, painfully. Your little rogue partner? He’ll suffer the same fate. And I will hunt down every last one of your organization. They will know their deaths come because you betrayed them.”

Jeff gasps, trying to sound defiant despite the pain. “I didn’t tell you shit, and I won’t, you little bitch.”

“You did,” I retort coldly. “And your partner screwed up. He wasn’t fast enough to stop my father.”

Jeff spits blood at my feet, his voice thick with hatred. “Your father’s dead.”

“Yes,” I spit back, my voice laced with bitter fury, “but he was a smart man. Your partner got cocky, sloppy even, and before he died, my father revealed his identity. Now five packs are ready to tear him apart.”

Jeff coughs again, blood bubbling from his throat. “You’ll never find him. I won’t tell you. Just finish it.”

A humorless laugh escapes me. “You think I’m going to kill you now? You’re mistaken. You’ll tell me what I want to know. You’ll endure this pain again and again, until your mind fractures and your body wastes away. Only then will I send you to the Goddess.” I glance at Jax and Dev, who are preparing to cauterize his wounds. My father may have been a gentle Alpha in his time, but when it came to enemies or threats against the pack, he was merciless. We have many practical tools for healing, but we also crafted harsher methods for those who cross us—handmade instruments that look as ominous as they feel.

Turning away, I leave the room. There are other matters demanding my attention. Jeremiah and Junior need to hear the truth my father died trying to reveal.

“They’ll come for you next. Don’t go anywhere alone,” Jax growls behind me. I ignore him, focused on what I must do.

“Elara! Are you listening? Once this is over, the Beta and Delta will be placed under house arrest until their trial. Sebastian and Richard are suspects too. There’s no way they didn’t know Jeff was a traitor and did nothing.”

“ELARA!” Dev’s voice is panicked.

“Just finish up here,” I say firmly. “He’s getting daily visits from me until I figure out how they moved undetected.”

My heart aches, my head pounds, and exhaustion weighs heavy on my body. The grief for my parents threatens to swallow me whole, but I shove it deep into the back of my mind. Soon, we’ll hold a proper celebration of their lives. Ben and Jason have planted seeds of ideas in my head, and now I must uncover the truth. I also need to check on the pack members—they’ve lost both my parents and must know I’m here for them. Especially after being accused, to my face, of causing all this chaos. There’s a mountain of work ahead.

I reach out to the pack healers, finding two who were loyal to my parents. I explain the situation. They have my mother in their care and found my father in the forest near the pack hospital. They vow not to leave my parents’ side while suspicion hangs over us all.

I make my way to my father's office. Though I've been using it since my mother's attack, it still feels like his space. I'm unsure when—or if—it will ever feel truly mine.

I contact Elder Harlan, who has been the least resistant to my becoming the next Alpha. We need to arrange my official swearing-in before the pack. I expect the pack to be divided—half will accept me, half will resist. If they do, I can enforce it with my aura. The wolves understand instinctively that I am their rightful leader, but the human side is more emotionally charged, making decisions harder. This rogue pack has worked against me for years; I've seen their subtle moves and reactions. I don't want to be the tyrant some fear I will become, but I will do whatever it takes to protect my family and pack. I will prove myself by rooting out this cancer living among us. I am far from the weak little girl they think I am.

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"Elder Harlan, it's time," I say, my voice hollow and strained, unable to shake the emptiness that lingers within.

Reuben's reply comes with a teasing edge. "It's Reuben now, Alpha."

I shoot back, "Save the 'Alpha' for when I'm officially crowned."

He chuckles softly. "Official, child, you already are. The ceremony is just the pomp and circumstance."

I sigh, desperation creeping into my tone. "Still, it's necessary. Some of the pack won't take me seriously until it's done. Please, help me make it happen. It doesn't need to be elaborate or over the top. We could hold it right here on the front steps in an hour if we have to. I need everyone to understand that my father is gone, and I'm here to stay. This is the start of that process. Also, I need your advice about Sebastian and Richard. Jeff is our traitor—I have him in custody. He was in charge of my mother and probably how she got poisoned. How did no one, not even my father, see his betrayal coming?"

"That's the question we've all been asking ourselves," Elder Reuben Harlan says, stepping through the office door alongside Silas Moretti and Walter Fenwick without even bothering to knock.

Harlan looks every bit the doting grandfather you'd expect from a movie—the kind who gives you a warm smile and a secret candy behind grandma's back. Fenwick is the gruff, old-timer who knows the pack's history inside and out, rarely wrong when questioned. Moretti is the silent warrior turned elder, his temper steady and unshaken. The three of them together make an odd combination, but somehow their strengths balance each other perfectly.

"Come in, gentlemen. Make yourselves at home," I say, my sarcasm thin but sincere. Trust is in short supply these days, and I'm forcing myself not to assume the worst about my packmates. They can't all be enemies.

“How are you holding up?” Harlan asks gently. “That was a lot for all of us to absorb, but you carry so much more—tying you to the deaths of the Alpha and Luna.”

His words hit me like a wave, breaking my heart all over again. But I can’t afford to show weakness. My pack needs me strong.

“As expected,” I answer quietly. “Can we hold the Alpha ceremony today?”

I meet the eyes of all three elders, searching for support.

“What about your mate? You’ll want him here, surely,” Fenwick interrupts. He’s always been the most resistant to the idea of me becoming Alpha instead of my male mate.

“What mate?” I pretend to look around, as if searching for someone who isn’t there.

“Don’t be stubborn, Elara,” Moretti says, folding his arms and leaning back like he’s bored with this line of conversation. “We know you found your mate. You may not have mated or claimed him yet, but the bond is clear.”

“He’s not available right now,” I explain, holding up a hand to stop their protests. “He has his own Alpha who needs him. He’s the Beta of a neighboring pack and has responsibilities...”

“His responsibility is to you, above all else,” Fenwick cuts in sharply. “I may be old-fashioned, but you are his Alpha now. To reach your full strength, you need him here, regardless of his rank. He must return immediately. We are under attack. Call him... now!”

It’s the first time Fenwick has ever addressed me as ‘Alpha’ in any form, and the weight of it settles heavily on me.

“I’ll bring him back as soon as I can,” I say firmly. “He truly is fulfilling his obligations to his Alpha,” I pause to emphasize, “and his best friend. Rayna is pregnant, and they had to travel. He was needed for protection. We can manage without him for the moment.”

I refuse to sound like a helpless woman calling for rescue, but they don’t need to know that. He will come to me when the time is right.

“Let’s do this,” I declare, rising from my seat and striding toward the cabinet where our ceremonial blade and chalice rest. I won’t let these doubts or distractions derail me any longer. I am the Alpha of this pack, and it’s time to make that public and official—so no one can question my authority again.

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Chapter 364

35 – Ben

She’s glowing with happiness. Her health is solid, and her eyes reflect a deep, unwavering adoration for Ryker. Honestly, I can’t even bring myself to think of him as an asshole

anymore. He's proven to be a good Alpha—anyone who was there the week we visited and saw Rayna introduce Jeremiah to him could attest to that. Whatever issues they once had seem like distant memories now. She remains one of the most stunning women I've ever laid eyes on, yet right now, she's gazing at Ryker as if he's the entire universe, and no one else exists in the room.

They stand elevated at the front, the platform raised just enough so everyone in the room can witness this moment. Her blue dress perfectly complements the decorations, and I can almost see the sparkle in her eyes from where I'm standing at the back. I can't catch their exact words, but I know she's worried. She's always believed her humanity to be a weakness here. Knowing her as well as I do, I'm certain that in front of all these people, she's quietly arguing with him about whether she truly belongs in this pack. I can't help but smile at how endearing she looks—though I quickly remind myself that it's the affectionate, sibling-like kind of love I feel for her, not something romantic. I still care deeply for her, but in the same way Jeremiah, Jason, and Tommy do.

"Kennedy, we now formally invite you to become a member of the Dark Moon Pack. Alpha, if you please," the Elder announces, his voice carrying clearly through the room.

I feel Jeremiah tense beside me as Ryker draws a blade and slices across his hand, then hers, before intertwining their fingers. The collective intake of breath from the pack members signals that this part of the ceremony is going exactly as planned. Ryker and Jeremiah had thoroughly discussed every possible outcome for tonight, but they both agreed she was worth the risk. What weighs heavily on all our minds is the marking itself. None of us know how the venom in Ryker's fangs will affect her.

The Elder continues, his voice solemn and steady. "The Goddess chooses each wolf's mate, forging a spiritual and emotional bond that is both a blessing and a challenge. This connection is meant to be unbreakable and serves as a constant reminder of the balance she desires among her creations. Alphas maintain order and protect the pack in times of need. Lunas are chosen to be the binding force—the one who completes us, the one who complements and balances the Alpha." He casts a knowing glance at Ryker, which earns a small laugh in return. "Kennedy, you have repeatedly shown that you put this pack's welfare above your own safety and health. Are you ready to take the next step and become our Luna?"

I'm curious about what exactly she did to earn this recognition.

Her soft, confident reply—"I am"—is probably the only thing keeping me rooted in place.

Before the ceremony began, she had a brief moment with Jer and Rayna. The pregnant whirlwind that is Rayna was no longer able to hold back her excitement, and I suspect Ryker hoped Rayna's presence would help calm Kennedy's nerves. The rest of us hung back, giving her the space she deserved to shine in this pivotal moment.

I can feel the tension radiate through our bond. The four of us had talked about the day she might become someone's mate and what that would mean. Then Beth told us she could never be made pack or marked because it might kill her. I want to know who gave her that misinformation, because it's clear now she can be made pack without any issues. The

marking, however, is what has me holding my breath. My wolf paces restlessly inside my mind. Even though my feelings for her have shifted, we still feel responsible for her. Ryker gently brushes her long blonde hair aside, and she turns her neck toward him, offering access. I feel nothing—no jealousy bubbles up, which surprises me. I'm sure our friends expected some, but all I feel is a deep apprehension for her safety. My fists clench tighter as Ryker's hand moves closer to her neck.

Then she gasps sharply the moment he makes contact, and time seems to freeze. Her eyes glaze over, and though she's standing, it's clear Ryker is supporting her weight as he carefully licks the wound clean. She's marked and alive, but something feels off. Her focus isn't on him or anything in the present moment. I see Ryker whispering softly to her, but she remains distant. Rayna grabs Jeremiah's arm firmly. "Let him handle this. She's okay, I can feel it."

"But she's not responding! What's happening?" Jer's voice cracks with panic. The last time he sounded this way was when she disappeared for two days and returned looking like she'd survived a shipwreck. Suddenly, she goes limp in Ryker's arms, and he scoops her up effortlessly. The crowd surges forward, but no one dares approach Ryker while his newly marked mate is in distress. His wolf would attack anyone who tried—mother included—without hesitation.

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Only a few seconds passed before she blinked, her expression clouded with confusion. "Dizzy," she murmured weakly, barely audible. The crowd around her began to relax slightly, sensing the immediate danger had passed—but something still felt off. Then, without warning, Ryker sprang into action, running toward the exit with her cradled tenderly in his arms.

Jeremiah stepped forward sharply as Ryker approached. "No! Everyone, stay inside—no one leaves. Bennet, you too. Jeremiah, keep them all contained," he commanded, his voice firm but strained, trying desperately to mask the underlying worry. His eyes never left her as he dashed out the front door, whispering softly, "I'm so sorry, baby. I never meant to hurt you."

They were gone for more than an hour, and during that time, a wave of euphoria suddenly washed over me. Then the murmurs began—every variation of "The Alpha's getting laid, and it's so intense we can all feel it through the bond!" echoed around the room. Several couples left immediately, unable to handle the overwhelming sensation. Had I not been so preoccupied with Ken's condition, I might have laughed and collected plenty of teasing material at her expense. Once we knew she was alright, none of us would let her live this down. Honestly, it was probably the ultimate flex—to have such passionate intimacy that the entire pack, and even visiting guests, experienced the ripple of pleasure.

Jeremiah and Bennet paced anxiously near the ballroom's entrance. Jason had warned Jer she would be a handful, and judging by his tense demeanor, he'd clearly reached his limit

with her constant troublemaking. Suddenly, both men bolted out of the ballroom, and naturally, the rest of us followed close behind.

“Holy fucking shit!” Jeremiah shouted, his voice filled with shock. “What the hell just happened?”

We hurried down the stairs after him, but I froze halfway down the last step, nearly stumbling face-first onto the floor.

“My Luna got her wolf,” Ryker announced to those of us closest to her, pride and awe shining in his eyes. “Apparently, it was dependent on me marking her.”

Jeremiah stepped forward cautiously, eyes wide with disbelief. “Ken, can I touch you?” he asked quietly. Her wolf instinctively moved forward, gentle and calm. She looked so natural in this form—unlike many new wolves who tend to be clumsy and awkward after their first shift. “This is incredible! I’ve never heard of a human getting a wolf before. I know it’s part of our history, or legend, or whatever, but this is seriously amazing.”

Her body began to tremble soon after, her wolf signaling she was ready to shift back. Ryker said nothing, his full attention fixed on her, protective and silent.

Josh and Bennet quickly ushered us all back inside, answering the same worried questions from the pack members over and over. Given everything the pack had endured in the past few days, there was genuine concern about the new Luna pushing herself too hard. The party resumed its lively energy as Rayna escorted Ken back into the ballroom, Ryker close behind her. She wore a new, more casual dress, a stark contrast to the earlier tension. Bennet reached her first, looking like a frazzled mess. She threw her arms around his neck, and he visibly softened before pulling her into a tight embrace. I caught only the tail end of their conversation as we all moved closer to greet her. “You wouldn’t want me any other way,” she said softly.

“But you’re okay, right?” Bennet asked, still unsure.

“Better than okay,” she replied with a small smile.

She hugged Josh, Danny, Tommy, and Jason before turning to me. I shoved my hands deep into my pockets, unsure how to act now that we were firmly in the friend-zone. I wasn’t angry or hurt by the shift; after all, our relationship had always hovered somewhere between friends and something more. Now, we had to navigate this new dynamic, and that would take time. For the moment, I kept my hands to myself.

“Hey,” she whispered.

“Hey,” I muttered back.

She stepped closer, sliding her arms beneath mine and wrapping them around my waist. The sensation felt both comforting and strange, as if nothing had changed and yet everything had all at once.

A low growl rumbled behind her, and I smiled.

“It’s nice to know I can still mess with him,” I whispered.

“Don’t push it too far. Jer needs his beta, and Ryker only has so much control when it comes to me,” she teased, her smile warm but with a hint of warning.

She moved on to greet the rest of her pack members and friends, and I settled into a corner seat, watching her with admiration. She truly was remarkable.

Suddenly, my breath caught as a sharp pang surged through my lungs, and my heart skipped a beat. Elara!

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Chapter 366

36-Ben

I push myself up from my seat, an urgent need propelling me toward a phone. I have to check on her—Elara. It’s strange, unsettling even, that I can sense her presence from so far away. We aren’t mated or marked; there should be no connection strong enough for me to feel this. Something is seriously wrong. And then, out of nowhere, a crowd swells around us, people bustling in a chaotic frenzy. My instincts sharpen, and I catch the sharp shout piercing through the noise.

“Jeremiah! Pull your head out of your ass!” Kennedy’s voice cuts through the chaos, directed at our best friend. I turn to see what’s causing the uproar. Rayna’s face is flushed a deep crimson, shifting between furious yelling at Jer and grimacing with pain. Her body trembles uncontrollably. Jeremiah blinks, coming back from whatever daze he was in, and without hesitation, scoops Rayna up into his arms, cradling her head against his chin. Without wasting a second, they rush out the door. Kennedy and Ryker follow close behind, slipping into a waiting SUV. Jason, Tommy, Danny, and Bennet pile into another vehicle, while Josh shouts at me to hop into a third. It seems both our packs are unexpectedly ushering in the next generation sooner than anticipated.

All thoughts of Elara are shoved to the back of my mind as I focus on Jeremiah. His words are jumbled, but his nervous excitement is unmistakable. He’s with a Luna who’s about to give birth, and she’s not making it easy on him.

“How’s she holding up, Jer?” I ask, trying to steady my voice.

“Man, I have no clue,” he admits, frustration and worry thick in his tone. “All I can do is watch her suffer. Even our bond is screaming in pain.”

“Can your wolf take some of that pain from her? Make it easier?” I press.

“He’s trying, but this is normal. She’s not hurt—her body’s just adjusting to delivering twins. It’s brutal.”

“We’re right behind you, Jer. If you or Rayna need anything—food, water, anything—just say the word. Focus on her. We’ve got your back.”

“Thanks, man,” he says, relief flickering in his eyes.

The drive to the pack hospital is short but tense. Once there, healers usher us into a waiting area. Ryker and Kennedy come and go freely, but surprisingly Ryker settles into a chair, leans back against the wall, and closes his eyes. “Let me know if you need anything, Lamb,” he murmurs. It’s a ridiculous nickname, but I notice Rayna’s eyes soften instantly at the sound. Still, she doesn’t sit; instead, she talks quietly with Beth and Sarah, Ryker and Rayna’s mother. Hours pass, and eventually Sarah steps out of the room.

“She wants to see you, Kennedy,” Sarah says softly. Most others in the waiting room have drifted off to sleep.

Kennedy approaches Ryker and plants a gentle kiss on his cheek. I should feel jealous, but instead a pang of envy washes over me. That kind of connection—that bond—I’ve always longed for it. I thought I had it with Elara, but lately my mind keeps wandering to a fiery redhead who doesn’t want me. Damn my luck.

Still, I can’t shake the nagging sensation of pain I felt earlier, the strange unease about Elara. Yet I must keep my focus on Jeremiah and Rayna. How do leaders manage to split their attention like this? I rub my face, trying to calm the storm inside.

“What’s eating you, man?” Jason asks, his voice low. “You’ve been on edge since we got here. Rayna and Jer are fine, so what’s up?”

“I don’t know,” I admit. “My wolf’s restless. Something’s wrong, I can feel it, but I have no clue what or how to fix it.”

“You need to head back to Black Claw and figure out this magic mess,” Jason says. “I felt something between Black Claw and Red Fang before we left. Like a charged barrier or something. It faded as we moved north, away from the water, but it was still there.”

“Why are you telling me this now?!” I snap, then catch myself—many here are asleep, waiting for news. “What the hell?”

“Relax. If something was truly wrong, Elara would call you.”

“Uh, no, she wouldn’t,” I scoff.

“Yeah, but Dev or Jax would. Besides, that barrier’s always been there. That’s why I spend so much time patrolling that border. I sense the magic more than others, but I can’t find the caster.”

“She won’t give me the truth. I need to see it for myself. Once I check on Jer and Rayna—now that the pups are here—they’ll probably stay put for a while to let her heal. She’ll be better off with her mom, Beth, and Kennedy anyway.”

Tommy strolls over, clearly eavesdropping on our conversation. “I was thinking the same thing. I want to stick around and talk to Ryker’s elders while we’re here. They probably know a ton about magic, casters, and what this person might be doing with the defensive magic Jason’s feeling. They might even have insight into the suppliers—maybe how the human drugs are getting in. Have you heard from Junior? Wasn’t he checking in daily?”

“Usually, yes, but they all knew what we were doing, so they’re probably giving us some space, which pisses me off.” I shake my head. Junior wants to handle things on his own, and Elara wants to prove she doesn’t need a male to lead. This is their chance to show it. I take a deep breath, exhaling slowly. “Sounds like a plan. We’ll regroup in a few days. Now, I need to see those pups before I head out to secure the borders and bring them home safe.”

Kennedy and Ryker emerge, hand in hand. Naturally, the room stirs awake, everyone crowding them for news. All they say is that there’s a girl and a boy, both perfect and healthy, then they slip away.

“You should go now,” Tommy urges, glancing at me. “If you hit the road soon, you’ll be home by dinner. We’ve got this. We’ll call if anything happens. It’s better that Rayna and the pups stay here while we sort things out back home. Alpha James is there too; he can help. Go. Tell us what you find and if you need anything.”

“Yeah, we’ll talk to Jer. He’ll understand.” Jason pats my back and steers me toward the door.

Well, I guess I’m leaving.

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Chapter 367

37-Ben

I reach for my phone and try calling Elara, but as I had suspected, it goes straight to voicemail. I attempt to contact Jax and Dev as well, but there’s no answer from either of them. They’re probably caught up with work or so exhausted that they don’t even hear the ringing. My gut tells me it’s the latter. I keep my foot on the accelerator, pushing the speed limit just enough to make good time as the sun finally rises fully above the horizon, bathing the world in warm morning light. Today should be flawless. My Alpha and Luna have just welcomed their first pups, marking the arrival of our next generation. One of my closest, longtime friends has been marked and is now officially the Luna of her pack. Not only that, but she’s been deemed special enough by the Goddess to receive a wolf companion and become a shifter herself. By all accounts, I should be feeling joyful and at peace with how everything is unfolding, yet an uneasy feeling churns inside me.

Grant had made sure I had a vehicle waiting with a full tank of gas so I wouldn’t have to stop unnecessarily. That’s a relief because I’m on my own and pressed for time. I can’t afford to pause and deal with any rogues or nomads along the way. Not all of them are bad, but their way of life is something I just don’t comprehend. Shifters are meant to live and

thrive within packs. We depend on each other. Many nomads are mixes of different bloodlines, which complicates things further. When casters or fae are mixed in, it alters how the wolf inside us manifests. Most wolves with magical DNA lean toward one side or the other, but occasionally there's a rare individual who carries an equal balance of both species. That's where nomads come from—they don't fully belong to any single group. I can only hope this isn't part of the trouble brewing beneath the surface. My mind races, spinning through countless possibilities. It's better to let my imagination run wild now, while I'm alone, so I can keep a clear head when I get back to Elara and see her pushing herself to the brink.

When I pull up to the packhouse, Alpha James is already waiting on the front porch. Tommy must have warned him I was coming. I park quickly and jump out, ready to keep this visit brief.

"Hey Ben, come on in," James calls, waving me inside before turning his back.

"I actually need to keep moving, Alpha," I reply. "I was just here to switch vehicles and grab some clothes."

"Your stuff is already on its way to Black Claw," he says firmly. "Come on. We need to talk."

His tone sets off alarm bells in my mind. Does he have news about Elara? I swallow the knot of anxiety tightening in my chest and follow him at a slow pace that feels almost painfully deliberate. We head toward his office.

I've always had a soft spot for this packhouse. It stands apart from the others I've seen. Junior's looks like a cozy cabin tucked in the woods, though its size reveals it's an Alpha's home. Elara's packhouse is grand and ostentatious, with sweeping architecture that demands attention. Even Ryker's place is larger than life, with rooms that feel like spacious apartments. But Alpha James's packhouse was built more like a large family home. It sits at the end of a long, circular driveway, surrounded by towering trees in the back. I can't count the hours we spent playing back there as kids. The blue siding and white shutters give it a warm, inviting feel. Every room is a comfortable, normal size—not designed to impress or intimidate neighboring Alphas. He built it to fit the needs of his family and friends.

His office reflects that same practical spirit. It's spacious enough for five or six Alpha-sized men to gather without feeling cramped. The walls are adorned with a few family portraits, but there's not much else in the way of decoration. A single bookshelf stands against one wall. He once told us that all pack history is preserved with the Elders in their own spaces, so he prefers to keep his office free of clutter. That always made us laugh.

Now, standing here, I wonder what serious conversation lies ahead.

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Chapter 368

"Have a seat, Ben. We need to have a serious talk before you leave," the Alpha said firmly, his tone leaving no room for refusal.

I hesitated for a moment, heart thudding in my chest. “Is something wrong, Alpha? Did something happen to Elara or Junior?” I asked, anxiety creeping into my voice.

He fixed me with a steady gaze. “I’m waiting on a few answers myself, but your reaction just made my decision easier. I want you to be straightforward with me. Is Elara your mate?”

My breath caught in my throat. I hadn’t voiced this truth aloud to anyone before, but if he demanded it, I had no choice but to confess. I looked down at my hands, my voice barely above a whisper. “Yes, sir.” There was no shame in my admission—just a quiet acceptance—but for some reason, I felt unusually subdued.

“Has she rejected you?” he asked next.

My eyes shot up to meet his, my heart pounding so loudly I was sure he could hear it. “No, sir.”

“And do you intend to reject her?” His question was sharp, probing.

“That’s a tougher question to answer, sir,” I admitted, my mind racing. “Neither of us has really had the chance to consider it fully. She’s the rightful next Alpha, but many males in her circle expect her mate to take the title, which would push her into the Luna role. She doesn’t want that, and I don’t want that for her. I don’t want to be an Alpha—I’m proud to be a Beta. This is the role I was born for, and I won’t be forced into anything else.”

He leaned back in his chair, folding his hands over his stomach, clearly relaxed but watchful. “What about your feelings for Kennedy?”

“Sir?” I blinked, confused by the sudden shift.

He gave a knowing smile. “I thought there might come a time when I’d have to order you, as Alpha, to let her go. It didn’t come to that, but it was close.”

I rolled my eyes and glanced out the window, trying to hide the flush creeping up my neck. “Was I really that obvious?”

“You were,” he said, “but you were also blind.”

My gaze snapped back to him, curiosity and frustration mixing in my eyes. “What do you mean, sir?”

“As soon as you all turned eighteen, and we confirmed she wasn’t mated to any of you, she started pulling away—romantically, at least. You were the only one who didn’t notice. After the accident, I knew she was special. No ordinary human could have survived that attack. I assumed she would mate with someone, but I never agreed with her mating with Jer the way Beth did. They’re too much like siblings. Now that you’ve seen her marked and mated, how do you feel about your own mate?”

I exhaled slowly, trying to put my feelings into words. “It’s not obsessive like Jer and Rayna’s, but she’s always on my mind. Right now, I want to get back to her—I know

something's wrong, I can feel it. But it's not tearing me apart to sit here and talk with you. Once we're done, I'll leave."

"That's probably because neither of you has fully accepted the bond yet. And you can't keep traveling back and forth the way you have been for months. So, I spoke with your father and your brother." His voice dropped, and my stomach tightened as I braced myself. I didn't want to hear what was coming. "I'm sending you to Black Claw—permanently. Elara needs a Beta she can trust, and it seems she trusts you. That's something I understand well, since she doesn't give her trust easily."

"But, sir," I protested, "Jeremiah and Rayna just had pups. I'm needed here..."

"In Black Claw," he interrupted firmly. "You're more valuable to them. You've had the best training and upbringing. You have friends and family who will support you no matter where you are. Black Claw doesn't have the same luxuries we do in your area. Like I said, your things are already on their way. Your father and I have started training your brother, but we might send him to you from time to time so he can gain some real-world experience away from home." He took a deep breath, then leaned forward, shuffling some papers on his desk. "Now, there's something else we need to discuss—your witch problem."

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Chapter 369

38 – Ben

"What exactly are you talking about?" I ask, my tone sharp with disbelief. It's clear to me that a witch is behind these relentless attacks—drug dealers and assassins lurking in the shadows, striking at every opportunity. Yet, he speaks about it as if it's some mundane topic we discuss daily.

"It seems there's a conflict brewing among some of the local covens," he replies calmly.

I lean forward, gripping the arms of my chair. "A conflict? What kind of dispute involves poisoning and murdering wolves?" My voice rises in frustration.

He shrugs slightly. "It's not exactly a quarrel between covens themselves. From what I've gathered, there's a growing demand for werewolf muscle as mercenaries. Witches, warlocks, fae, and vampires alike are all converging on the idea that if they can control us, they'll have their own pack of loyal enforcers at their beck and call."

I sit back, stunned, my mouth agape. What the hell? How could anyone even conceive of that? We're not some new species to be toyed with; we've coexisted alongside these supernatural beings for centuries. It makes no sense at all.

"I was thinking the exact same thing," he says with a small smile. Did I say that out loud? "Witches and werewolves share something unique—we both have human forms. Other supernatural creatures struggle to blend into the human world as seamlessly. I suspect that's part of the reason. And while witches aren't weak by any means, we have the

advantage in strength, endurance, and pain tolerance. That's what they're after. If they can control us, they gain a powerful edge over other supernaturals."

I rub my face, trying to process this. "Okay, but how does all of this relate to a dispute?"

He leans back, thoughtful. "The covens are split on the issue. Some want to coexist peacefully with us, maybe even collaborate, while others want total domination—complete control."

"That makes more sense. But what about Elara and Junior? What's their connection to all this chaos and danger they've been facing?"

"That's what Tommy is investigating. But I suspect the same reasoning you have. The faction pushing for control probably sees Elara and Junior as vulnerable targets—Junior because he's young, and Elara because she's a woman." He pauses, noticing my sudden agitation. "Take a breath. Sit back down."

I realize I'd jumped up impulsively, heart pounding and breath uneven. I'm just as tired as Elara is of people assuming she's weak simply because of her gender. Following his advice, I settle back into my seat, letting the tension ease.

"As I said, it's all speculation, but the people behind this don't really know either of them well. Still, their tactics are working—they're flooding the area with drugs, getting wolves addicted or worse."

"How did you uncover all this?" I ask, curiosity piqued.

"I have contacts," he explains. "Two coven leaders live just beyond the White Diamond Pack's borders. They're mostly green and kitchen witches, with a few elemental practitioners. They're exceptional with healing potions and herbs. They want protection—not just from supernatural threats, but even from human criminals who try to exploit their talents. But they're adamantly against slavery. Many have firsthand experience of it."

"So who's leading this group that wants to enslave Elara and Junior's packs?"

He takes a deep breath. "About ten years ago, a faction of chaos witches broke away from their original coven. They call themselves Ember and Ash now. They live hidden among humans, but harbor a deep hatred for them—though they despise their isolated forest existence even more. Their leader is named Eliza. My contact managed to get me that much. Eliza never leaves the forest, fearing attacks and the possibility of her coven being absorbed by Ember and Ash."

I glance at the clock, feeling the urgency creeping back in. "How does this help us? I need to find out what happened to Elara—I sensed something was wrong hours ago. All this information feels distant, not immediately useful."

Ben stands, offering his hand. "Now that we know witches are behind these covert attacks, we can learn how to see through their defenses and catch these rogues in the act. It's

progress.” His gaze is steady. “Don’t think you’re being cast out. You’ll always have a place here. This is your home. But now, you have to go protect your future.”

I nod, a flood of mixed emotions washing over me—not quite joy, not quite sorrow, but somewhere in between. I know I’m doing the right thing, yet I wish Jer, Rayna, and the others could be here for this part of the journey. Taking a deep breath, I head out to the waiting SUV, already fueled and ready.

I wonder what he meant about all my belongings being sent to Black Claw. Honestly, I wouldn’t even recognize my own room anymore. We just finished school, and it was probably cluttered with trivial high school stuff that doesn’t matter to anyone now. This might be one of the most awkward moves I’ve ever made. But it’s time to face what’s ahead.

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Chapter 370

The drive usually took me an hour, but today I managed to cut it down to about forty-five minutes. During the trip, I kept my phone glued to my ear, making as many calls as I could squeeze in. I needed to reach my girl—my girl. Saying it aloud didn’t feel as strange as it once did. Maybe I was starting to accept it. Now, my mission was clear: convince her that she belonged to me and reassure her that I had no intention of stripping her of her title, no matter what nonsense the fools around her were spouting.

“At least you made it in the end,” a familiar voice teased from the passenger seat.

“Shut up, asshole,” I snapped back, a smirk tugging at my lips. “You love Kennedy just as much as I do.”

“I was never in love with her,” he replied smoothly. “But enough talk—move it. The closer we get, the more I can feel the tension radiating off our mate. She’s suffering.”

I knew she’d need time to accept me as her mate, and a whole lot of convincing. But before I could even begin that, we had a bigger problem to solve: the rogue and witch situation. If that wasn’t handled, she wouldn’t even consider listening to anything I had to say.

We pulled up in front of her packhouse. I barely had the car in park before I was out the door, sprinting inside. The heavy weight of unease was thick in the air—I could feel it pressing down on me.

I dashed toward the source of raised voices near the Alpha’s office.

“No! I won’t eat a thing until you show me,” a desperate voice cried out. What the hell was going on?

“But Alpha, I made it myself, just like always. There’s no one else here,” came the frantic reply. This wasn’t normal.

“Elara, what’s happening?” I asked, stepping through the doorway.

Melanie looked wrecked—her face pale, dark purple circles shadowing her eyes, a clear sign she hadn't slept in days. She'd lost weight too, her body trembling as she shrank back from Elara, who was a whirlwind of panic and fury at her father's desk. There was an aggressive energy radiating from Elara, almost tangible. I wasn't sure if she was aware of it, but it was hurting Melanie.

"Mel... Melanie, look at me," I urged gently. The omega turned slowly, clearly afraid to take her eyes off Elara. "When was the last time she ate?"

"Two days ago," Melanie whispered. "I found out how they poisoned her mother. Elara made the whole staff leave—except me. It's bad, Ben. She needs to eat. She needs to sleep. But she won't, not after..."

"After someone planned and succeeded in killing both my parents?" Elara's voice cracked, wild and raw. "No. I won't rest until those bastards are caught and sent to the Goddess." Her eyes were wild, unfocused, paranoia creeping in like poison. The rogues were winning; she was isolating herself, tearing her pack apart from within. She was playing right into their hands.

"Melanie, leave the tray. I'll handle it. My things should have arrived. Can you find Jax and Dev and have them put the supplies in the room across from hers? Please."

"Yes, sir," she nodded quickly and hurried off.

I turned my gaze to Elara. I wanted to offer comfort—she had just lost both her parents while I was away. That's what I felt, but this Elara wasn't in the mood for gentle reassurances. What she needed was someone who could match her fire.

"Elara! Get up. You're going to eat, then shower. After that, we'll go over all the information we have and figure out a plan."

"Who the fuck are you to tell me what to do?" she snapped, rising slowly, stalking around her desk like the predator she was.

"The only person you can't command," I replied coolly. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way, but you're coming."

"The fuck I am," she spat. "I have work to do. Go back to your little blonde girlfriend and leave us to handle things ourselves."

I tilted my head but stayed silent. I'd never mentioned Kennedy to her, but there was only one blonde she could be talking about.

"Oh, you think I don't know about her? That's why you always rush off when Junior or I need you, isn't it? Well, run along. We don't need you." She waved me off dismissively.

There was something about that gesture that snapped something inside me. That was the last straw.

Without warning, I lunged. She barely had time to react before I slammed my shoulder into her abdomen—probably harder than necessary, but she'd pissed me off, and she could take it. I stood tall, hoisting her over my shoulder as she screamed every curse word imaginable. Last time, I'd had to wear her out just to get her to sleep. I wasn't sure if that was the best approach now, but right then, I had an overwhelming urge to spank the sass right out of her.