

# Letters Sent To Eternity

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

## Chapter 41

“Do you happen to know why she’s up so early, and where she might have gone?” The question lingered in my mind, but the answer wasn’t at all clear. I needed to rein in this growing pull I felt toward her. “I can’t have a human wandering aimlessly around the pack grounds,” I muttered to myself, frustration creeping in.

“Mate,” my wolf growled sharply inside me. “You can’t control that.”

“She’s still human,” I countered silently, worry gnawing at me. “I’m not sure it’s safe for her out here alone.”

She shot me a raised eyebrow, clearly unimpressed. Normally, I wouldn’t be concerned about the comings and goings of guests. “She’s a warrior,” Robin reminded me, her tone confident. “And not the type to stay up all night. My guess is she went out to train or run—something warrior-like. I didn’t catch which way she went, but I do know she was on foot.”

“Thanks, Robin. Have the others eaten yet?”

“Nope, but they’ve all been out and about until just recently. Looks like you might be running solo for a bit this morning.” She laughed softly, and I had to admit, she was probably right.

I drained the last of my coffee and devoured the breakfast burrito Robin had pressed into my hands. She knew me too well—I’d run myself ragged without eating if left to my own devices.

Once finished, I took her advice and slipped out the back door, crossing the cool stone patio before entering the garage at the rear. Normally, I’d just shift and sprint off, but I didn’t want to leave my truck behind to be found later. Besides, some of those vultures would still be lurking when we returned for a late lunch. The main floors of the packhouse remained open; with so many people and their endless needs, my staff handled as much as they could, making things easier for everyone. Still, that gave some the false impression they had unlimited access to me, forcing me to master the art of strategic sneaking.

I drove over to the training complex, parking in my usual spot. Stepping out, I headed toward the edge where the trees began to thicken. Shifting in front of guests was something I avoided—not all packs were as accepting or open about it. Some were far more conservative, and I wanted to be respectful. Plus, I’d had enough trouble with photos being snapped and shared among the females in my pack. I definitely didn’t need a repeat of that.

Finding cover behind a large tree, I stripped off my clothes, tucking my shorts carefully into the roots before shifting into my wolf form. I loved this part of my day—being out here in the heart of my home forest, running wild, feeling the wind rush through my fur and the warmth

of the sun on my back. The scents and sights were heightened, almost overwhelming in their intensity. If only I could spend more time like this, simply roaming and savoring the freedom.

Since I was already here, I decided to start my run along the northern edge of our territory, moving clockwise in a wide circle. My original pack borders were now surrounded by packs I controlled—a fact that had taken years to establish. This arrangement served two purposes: it added an extra layer of protection in case of war or attack, and it provided a central refuge for pack members who had been integrated from other territories.

Still, I made it a point to run our original border regularly. Not to insult or look down on the packs I'd acquired—though that was exactly the kind of rumor people like Claude loved to spread. If it helped keep them in line, I didn't bother refuting it. The run only took about an hour, and it gave me a chance to check in on neighboring packs as I passed. Warriors on patrol would sometimes pause to share updates and news. My pack had grown too large for me to track every individual, and not everyone understood the system I'd put in place to maintain our safety. That unpredictability worked to our advantage, keeping outsiders guessing.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 42

28 – Kennedy

During the game, the ball suddenly veers out of bounds, heading right toward us. Without hesitation, Emily leaps up and effortlessly stops it. Watching her, I can't help but think how much raw talent she has—talent that's being wasted just sitting on the sidelines waiting for her turn to play.

A boy, only a few years younger than me, jogs over. "Hey, Em, thanks for the save. Who's your new friend?" He sizes me up from head to toe but doesn't wait for an answer. "I'm Todd, Emily's brother. And you are?" He flashes a grin that looks like it's worked on plenty of girls his age.

I chuckle softly and hold out my hand. "Kennedy. One of Alpha Jeremiah's warriors. Nice to meet you."

Todd's eyes light up. "No way! That's awesome. We're in training too." He points to himself and then gestures vaguely behind him.

"When do you usually train?" I ask, curious.

"This afternoon. The Alpha doesn't let anyone on the grounds until he's done," he replies.

"So, you guys hang out here and play while you wait?" I probe.

"Yeah, most of the time," Todd confirms.

I tilt my head, sizing him up. “How often do you work with the younger kids? I mean, if you’re out here that long, you must spend a good amount of time teaching them too, right?” I’m baiting him now, guessing they probably don’t do much of that and tend to ignore the younger kids who clearly look up to them.

Todd shrugs. “Uh, no. Not really. They’re too little to learn or be any good, so…” His tone makes it clear that’s the end of the discussion.

I raise an eyebrow. “So, you’re telling me that at—how old are you again?” I glance at Emily.

“Seven,” she pipes up.

“Okay, so at seven, you were too little to play, and you and your friends just sat around waiting to be told you were good enough to join? Or did you spend time practicing, getting better, and working with older, more skilled kids so you could improve?”

Todd hesitates.

“Exactly what I thought,” I say with a knowing smile. “From one warrior to another, the next generation can’t improve if you don’t teach them. Not everything can be learned by just watching. They don’t need to be included all the time, but imagine if you had a whole pack of little kids just sitting around on the sidelines. Or if there’s a rough game where they could get hurt, give them something meaningful to do while they hang out—something that actually helps them get better, not just keeps them busy. If you want to be a true warrior, you have to learn to pass on your skills. You have to act like a leader, even if you don’t want to be one.”

Todd looks down and kicks at the dirt, clearly thinking it over.

“I didn’t mean to step on your toes,” I add softly. “I just know what it’s like to feel overlooked and underestimated. How about this? Can we join you for a quick game? I don’t know how to play, but I’d love to learn. I only have a little time before I have to head to morning training.”

“You’re training with the Alpha?” Todd asks, surprised.

“Yeah,” I say with a wink. “Like I told you, the only way to get better is to practice with people who are better than you and put in the work.” I reach for Emily’s hand. “You, Em, are on my team. I’m going to need you to be really patient with me because I have no clue what I’m doing.” She just giggles, grabs my hand, and pulls me onto the makeshift field.

Todd grumbles, “I guess we’re doing this then,” and the other boys look equally annoyed. I feel a bit guilty for hijacking their game, but honestly, they just want things to stay the same and focused on them—that’s typical for their age group. I work with a bunch of kids like this back home.

“I only have ten minutes, so we need to make this quick,” I say, glancing at Emily but addressing the older kids.

“Do you want everyone to pair up?” Todd suggests.

“Sure, if they want. I’m sure a few of them can hold their own. I’m definitely not one of those people—I’ll just follow Emily around while she schools all of you,” I joke. Emily’s face lights up, and Todd laughs when she tells him she’s coming for him.

That’s the spirit. It’s supposed to be fun.

The game kicks off, and it’s way faster-paced than it looked from the sidelines. Just as I suspected, Emily is a natural—a fierce competitor who quickly took advantage of the boys who had been “just playing around” during the first few minutes. After she scored a goal and teased the goalie for being a weak pansy, explaining what he needed to do to improve, the game got serious. Most of the teens paired up with smaller kids, working together to move the ball down the field. True to her word, Emily was patient with me, but being the strategist I am, I mostly passed the ball to her.

She did set me up for a goal, which the goalie deliberately let in—I’m pretty sure he was stroking my ego.

I glanced at my watch. “I have to run, but this was a lot of fun. Next time I’m in town, I’ll definitely join again. Now, can someone point me to the fastest route to the training grounds? I don’t want to be late.”

Todd jumped in eagerly, then cleared his throat. “Well, we need to do our morning run anyway. We could do that and show you the way at the same time.” He shrugged like it was no big deal.

I noticed they’d been “running” all morning playing soccer, but didn’t say anything.

“Sure, that sounds perfect! Running in a pack is way more fun anyway.” They all smiled at me, and just like that, it felt like a party.

Everyone dropped their gear in a pile near the field—no one seemed worried about it—and we took off. Even Emily and the little kids joined in. Thanks to the shortcut the kids showed me, the jog was only about five minutes. We arrived at the training grounds laughing and chatting like we were celebrities, the morning sun casting a warm glow over everything.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 43

29 – Ryker

Although it frustrates me deeply that my Beta, Gamma, and Delta are all off with their girls, neglecting their duties, I can’t deny the quiet satisfaction I feel running alone through my pack’s territory. The cool, damp soil beneath my paws is invigorating, and the steady stretch and flex of my muscles this early in the morning melts away any lingering tension I’ve been carrying.

This solitary run clears my mind like nothing else. I need to get Claude back under control, but I fear the only way to do that is by sending him back to the Moon Goddess. The problem is, Claude has his claws dug into too many people in his region. If I make a move against him, it could spark an uprising and innocent lives might be caught in the crossfire. I'm counting on Robin to help me identify the key players involved—those we can either bring over to our side or confront as a group, making a brutal example out of anyone who dares challenge me or my pack.

Then there's this whole mate situation I have to sort out. I really need to sit down with Jeremiah and get a clearer picture of who she is. Last night, I didn't notice any pack mark or brand on her, which makes me wonder if she's even officially connected to the pack. But honestly, I wasn't exactly scanning for those signs, so it's possible I missed something important.

That leads me to a bigger question: if she isn't a formal member of the pack, how does she hold the rank of warrior? If something went wrong, could she even call for backup? She clearly can't shift, which puts her at a disadvantage in our world. So how did she manage to rise so far, becoming a warrior and even befriend the future Alpha?

I've thought about that a lot. She's clearly close to Jeremiah, yet no one seems bothered by it—not even my sister, who is his mate. Usually, mates—especially female ones—are fiercely territorial. They'd tear apart any woman who got too close to their mate. That jealousy runs deep until they mark each other, which is the ultimate bond. Once marked, you can track your mate anywhere, and any infidelity sends a sharp, agonizing signal. It's a sacred connection.

So if I can't mark Kennedy, what does that mean for us? Would I have no real claim on her? Could she simply use me for the title without any real loyalty? I've seen too many weak Lunas who had mates but couldn't handle the immense responsibility of leading and protecting a pack alongside their Alpha. One pack I took over was torn apart because the Luna was unfaithful, and the Alpha literally lost his mind. If I'm unable to mark her, could Kennedy cheat without me ever knowing? Just the thought of it churns my stomach and ignites a fire of rage inside me. I push my legs harder, fueling my muscles with renewed energy. Speaking of blind jealousy, I'm going to have to tame this new beast inside me.

Whenever I reach a double pack border, I make it a point to pause and carefully survey the land between the two territories. Border disputes are the worst—they're infuriating, especially since all this land belongs to me, not them. I'm seriously considering building a school and a hospital right on the old boundary lines, accessible to both packs, just to prove a point. Not all the packs I've absorbed are hostile. Three of them have started to coexist peacefully, and with the expanded territory, more people are meeting their destined mates, and the communities are thriving. My challenge now is to bring more of these stubborn packs on board with the vision.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 44

I managed to complete my entire run without too many interruptions, though I did have to double back a couple of times. Both my wolf and I kept drifting off into daydreams about Kennedy in that dress from last night. Our favorite mental image was trailing behind her as she walked toward my office. I found myself scrambling for excuses to get Robin to send me those photos again—ones that wouldn't make me seem like a total creep or raise too much suspicion. Robin was already onto me; she knew my attention zeroed in on anything related to Kennedy far too easily.

"My only regret is that we didn't get to see her in ecstasy last night. Next time, Ryker, we have to make sure we do," my wolf whined with a low, teasing growl.

"If she's willing to give us a next time, I promise I'll make it happen," I replied, feeling a mixture of hope and determination.

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After finishing my run, I headed back to the tree where I had stashed my shorts and silently thanked the Goddess I'd decided to bring underwear along. As I stepped out from behind the tree and made my way toward my truck to grab some water, I spotted Kennedy approaching. She was surrounded by nearly every pup in our pack, each vying for her attention. She laughed warmly, engaging with everyone, her presence lighting up the area.

She looked absolutely stunning.

A little girl was holding Kennedy's hand, and that's when my wolf really perked up, making me acutely aware of the tightness in my boxer briefs. I recognized the girl immediately; I'd seen her during the young pups' training sessions. She couldn't have been more than eight years old, with blonde hair that looked just like Kennedy's from this distance. The girl gazed up at my mate with pure adoration, and it didn't take much for my mind to wander to the idea of her carrying my pups someday. Great. I rubbed my face, trying to shake the sudden flood of thoughts—apparently, my wolf was now obsessed with pups, too. I always thought that was a girl thing. Though, judging by his tone, he seemed more interested in the activities that led to having pups. Meanwhile, I just stood there behind my truck, feeling like a total creep, trying to calm down my very obvious attraction to her.

"Get a grip, Ryker. You're going to embarrass us both," I muttered under my breath.

"Will you be mad if I say no?" His deep, rumbling laugh made me grin despite myself.

"If you want me anywhere near her, you better control yourself. I refuse to go up to her looking like one of those teenagers trailing her around," I warned.

"Fine. Understood," he conceded reluctantly.

Horny-ass wolf. I'm so screwed.

When I glanced back at Kennedy, she was chatting with the little girl again, not once glancing in my direction. I wasn't sure if she was deliberately avoiding me or simply hadn't noticed I was there. Maybe she was embarrassed about what happened last night, or

perhaps she regretted it. Maybe I'd said or done something wrong. My stomach tightened with uncertainty. This was exactly why I'd never been good at relationships—there were just too many confusing signals. She'd told me it was hot and even said goodnight, but maybe I'd missed something important. I hoped not. For now, I decided to let her come to me.

Kennedy said her goodbyes to all the kids, who lined up to receive a personal farewell from her—something none of their trainers had ever done, as far as I knew.

Then, without hesitation, she walked straight into Jeremiah's arms. My wolf growled low in response, though thankfully, it wasn't loud enough to be heard. I forced myself to trust my sister, who was standing nearby, smiling at Kennedy with a calm, knowing expression.

"And where have you been all morning? We've been trying to reach you," Jeremiah asked, his voice catching my attention sharply.

Why hadn't they been able to get in touch with her? The question hung in the air, thick with unspoken tension.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

## Chapter 45

### 30 – Kennedy

As I arrived at the training grounds, a group of warriors emerged from their vehicles, casting curious glances my way. Even Alpha Ryker, usually composed and unreadable, seemed momentarily taken aback by the sight of my entourage. He lingered near his truck, sipping water quietly, his expression guarded but unmistakably puzzled. I deliberately avoided meeting his gaze, unsure of how I felt about the events of last night. The faint glisten of sweat on his forehead caught my eye, but I quickly forced my mind away from any lingering thoughts, especially with so many young warriors milling around me.

"Will you come to our training?" Emily's voice pulled me back from my reverie. She bounced on her toes, eager to impress. "I want to show you how much I've improved." With a playful grin, she threw a few shadow punches in my direction.

I chuckled softly. "I'm not sure what my plans are for the rest of the day, but if I can, I'll definitely come watch you." Her small arms wrapped around my waist in a warm hug, and I returned it without hesitation. After that, I exchanged quick fist bumps with the guys, offering brief goodbyes as they headed back the way we had come.

"And where have you been all morning? We've been trying to reach you," Jeremiah said, pulling me into a playful headlock. I laughed, the tension easing from my shoulders.

"I went for a walk, met up with the pups, and squeezed in a game of soccer. You know, the usual," I replied.

"I hate it when you just disappear like that," he grumbled.

“Well, induct me into the pack, then you can track me like you do everyone else,” I teased, slipping out of his hold and making my way over to Greta. This was a conversation that never seemed to end. One Elder had once declared it unsafe to brand a human into the pack, and ever since, no one had seriously considered whether humans could handle it. Yet, they’d get upset if I didn’t answer my phone immediately. The truth was, I was terrible at carrying my phone during runs or workouts. Unlike most humans, I wasn’t glued to it. Growing up in a wolf pack where mindlinking was normal, we didn’t rely on cell phones for everyday communication.

“They still haven’t brought you into the pack?” Greta whispered as she guided me inside the training area. “With how protective they are of you, I would have thought that would be a priority.”

“Nope. Not even after last year.”

“What happened last year?” she asked, moving me to the side with the other females as we began stretching. Though I was still warm from my run and soccer game with the pups, the slow movements helped me clear my mind for what lay ahead in training.

“I was kidnapped,” I said simply, shrugging. In a pack this large, led by a formidable Alpha like Ryker, there were always threats lurking.

“Wait, you were kidnapped?” Greta’s voice was filled with shock.

“Yeah. Some rogues figured I’d be an easy target for ransom since I’m human.” I shrugged again, trying to make light of it.

“What did Alpha Jeremiah do when he found you?” she asked, eyes wide.

That question always made my blood boil. I wasn’t sure if it was because I was human or because I was a female, but it was the one thing everyone wanted to know: how was I saved? I couldn’t suppress the low growl of frustration that escaped me.

My expression must have betrayed my irritation because Greta raised an eyebrow, silently asking me to explain before jumping to conclusions. Instead of pressing further, she gave me a quick, light slap on the arm—an odd gesture of understanding that allowed me to speak.

“No one found me,” I ground out through clenched teeth. “None of them did. The rogues thought I’d be too weak to fight back and only tied my wrists loosely with an old rope. When one of them brought me water, I kicked him in the teeth and strangled him. Then only one responded to the noise, so I did the same. The third tried to fight back and landed a couple of punches before I took him down too. I was only gone for two days and managed to make it back to the border, where the guys picked me up. It’s a sore subject for everyone, so no one talks about it.”

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 46

“Damn, alright. Note to self: never anger the human,” one of the girls, Tanya, joked, breaking the thick tension hanging in the air.

Her comment brought a much-needed release, and finally, we could dive into the workout. Still, they didn’t hold back—they bombarded me with questions throughout the entire session. Despite the constant chatter, the training was incredible. I haven’t worked up such a sweat or felt this exhausted in a long time. I could already tell I’d be nursing a few bruises tomorrow as proof of the effort.

Once we wrapped up, we moved over to where the guys had formed a tight circle around Gamma Bennet and, I think, Delta Danny. They were moving so quickly it was hard to keep track, but it looked like some kind of wrestling drill, where the goal was to pin your opponent flat on the ground. No headlocks or anything too aggressive—just fluid, controlled grappling. Watching them was hypnotic.

Both men were stunning, and I wasn’t just imagining things because of my hormones. Their bodies were sculpted perfectly—muscles toned and defined in all the right places. And, of course, they wore nothing but basketball shorts, seemingly for our benefit. Honestly, I needed to get my lady parts under control and let my warrior instincts take charge again. It was like I’d never seen fit werewolves train before—or gotten laid. There was something about these guys that threw me off balance.

Neither could quite get the upper hand. Gamma Bennet had a slight size advantage, but Danny was quick and flexible, slipping out of holds like a slippery bar of soap. It was clearly frustrating Bennet. They went back and forth for several minutes until someone near me shouted, “TIME!”

The sudden yell startled me, pulling me out of my trance.

“Who’s next?” Beta Josh asked, scanning the group. “Kennedy, you up for the challenge?”

My eyes widened as everyone turned to look at me. Panic bubbled up—I felt like I might pee my pants and bolt—but thankfully, my ego held strong. I managed to reply with more confidence than I felt. “Sure, why not?”

I stepped into the circle beside him.

“Hey! I didn’t know she was an option,” Danny whined, fake-pouting. “Honestly, I’d rather roll around with her than Bennet.” He wiggled his eyebrow, and I couldn’t help but laugh along with the others.

“Everyone’s fair game,” Alpha Ryker said, his voice laced with teasing as the first hint of a smile appeared on his face all day. He reserved those rare moments of warmth mostly for his sister.

Josh stood up, poised and ready. “Actually, Alpha, we haven’t seen you partner up yet. Why don’t you step in?”

His smirk made me feel like I’d just been played, and a flicker of irritation sparked inside me.

A brief, unreadable look passed between the two men, but Ryker didn't budge. Crossing my arms, my frustration grew. I understood that being human made me a novelty, but I didn't want to be treated like a sideshow or the punchline of some joke. I worked hard every day to keep up with these guys, and I was already plotting mental revenge on Josh for his cheek.

The room felt charged with unspoken challenges, and I was determined to prove I belonged here, no matter what.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 47

31 – Ryker

Why was he so anxious about her? Why was she alone if no one could reach her? And why on earth was she unreachable? He admitted he hated it when she vanished like that. Did she do this often? My thoughts spiraled out of control, my chest tightening with a surge of panic at the idea of her being lost—when she was right here, just beyond my sight. I longed to rush to her side, to wrap my arms around her, to soothe both myself and the restless wolf inside me. But we couldn't—not yet. My mate was safe within my pack, yet she had been alone, unprotected, and no one knew where she was.

Damn it! I drew a slow, steady breath, inhaling deeply and then exhaling, trying to steady my racing heart. I had to keep calm; otherwise, I risked shifting uncontrollably. It had been ages since my first shift, and I was determined not to lose control now. I kept telling my wolf that no one outside the pack knew she was ours—and this was not how she was going to find out, if I even chose to tell her at all.

I followed the others inside, struggling to calm both my mind and the wolf's as we moved forward. I needed to listen closely to their conversation. There had to be a reason for all of this.

Thank the Goddess for Greta. At least she seemed to be thinking along the same lines as I was; I could see it in her expression.

"Why isn't she inducted into the pack?" I nearly choked on the words. What the hell had I missed?

Greta walked away with her, and even with my heightened hearing, the chatter was too loud and jumbled from across the field for me to make out their words.

Wait—she wasn't officially part of the pack? That's what I'd heard. She was a human among wolves, visiting another pack, with no real ties to either one? If they were attacked or ambushed and she was taken, we'd never find her. That couldn't be right.

Now, I didn't care who knew—well, not entirely—but I was letting my emotions take over.

"Jeremiah?" I called.

He turned toward me. “What’s up?”

“Did I hear correctly? Kennedy isn’t inducted into your pack, and she disappears regularly?”

“Something like that,” he replied, his expression darkening, though he tried to mask it. At least I knew he wasn’t okay with her vanishing. “It’s a long story. She doesn’t exactly go missing; she’s just really good at hiding from everyone.”

“Come warm up with me. I’ve got time. I don’t have any humans in my pack, but one I took over does, so I’d be interested in your experience. She’s been with you for a while. Why hold back if she means that much to you? It’s clear she’s important, and as long as my sister’s okay with it, I won’t interfere. She clearly has a place among your ranks and can fight—so what’s the deal?” I softened the truth a bit. I had no idea if my new pack included humans, but I wanted to understand his perspective—and their relationship. It was easy to blame my sister for the situation.

“It’s not really that complicated. Kennedy and I are close—about as close as you can be without being biological siblings, maybe even closer given our circumstances.” His words grabbed my full attention, and I stopped pretending to warm up.

“What exactly does that mean? Is my sister safe with you?” I gave him my best protective big brother look, though I hated to admit I’d been thinking of my own feelings before hers.

“What?! Oh, right. I forget not everyone knows our history. Sorry. It’s common knowledge in our pack. Kennedy and I are basically twins.”

“Basically?” I frowned, annoyed by the vague answer. Getting clear information from a non-enemy shouldn’t be this difficult.

“Our mothers were best friends. Hers was visiting mine when they both went into labor at the same time, right here in my pack. We were born on the same day, just minutes apart. We’ve been inseparable since day one. Our bond is like that of twins. We’ve always been treated that way.”

That explained a lot, including my sister’s behavior. Still, the idea of her disappearing unsettled me. But at least my chest eased a little, knowing there was no romantic connection between them.

Josh called us over, interrupting our talk. We all began pairing off to spar, which was the best part of this training. Everyone was on equal footing, and no one had to worry about hurting each other. We could go all out and really test our strength. I naturally chose Jeremiah; I wasn’t finished with our conversation, and it was rare to have another Alpha my age to spar with, so it didn’t seem strange.

“So how does it work with your pack? She’s fully human—I can smell that. How is she with you now, as a warrior?”

He didn't even flinch. He knew I was still talking about Kennedy, but if he was suspicious of my intentions, he kept it to himself. Maybe this was normal for them. She was certainly special.

"She was made special for us."

"You're such a sap," I teased.

"When it comes to our mate, there's no other way to be."

"Stop it. I'm going to throw up."

"No, you won't. You almost threw him into a wall because he didn't have her exact location."

"Her parents died when she was fifteen. It's not my story to share, but my mom took her in immediately, and we've been inseparable ever since."

"That still doesn't explain why she's not a full pack member, or why she disappears."

"She can't be without getting hurt or dying. One of our elders found information saying it would kill a human to be inducted through our rituals. The magic that turns us into shifters is too strong for their fragile bodies. After what happened to her parents, my mom refused to research or test the theory any further." He shrugged.

That was the end of his explanation? One person said no, so they stopped looking, even though she risked her life daily just by being around us. Training as a warrior isn't easy for a wolf; for a human, it must be borderline masochistic torture. His mom was an idiot.

"You never tried to fight that?"

"Ken and I did, for a while. But when my mom found out, we got an Alpha command from my dad forbidding it. I think she's more afraid of losing Ken than anyone else. It's her last link to her best friend, and it makes her a little crazy."

"More crazy than the idea that a simple scratch could be fatal to her during training? Or that she was lost for hours in my pack because no one can mindlink her?" I asked, harsher than I intended. "If I'd known, I would have assigned a warrior to protect her."

"And she would have beaten your ass for even suggesting it." He laughed darkly.

"Not likely," I muttered, but both my wolf and I knew that if she wanted to fight, we'd let her.

"There's a fine line when telling Kennedy what to do. If she thinks you're patronizing her, she'll fight back—and then probably do whatever she can to spite you. Don't shoot the messenger, but we can't go against the order until I become Alpha. We're all just biding our time until then. And Ken makes sure my mom doesn't know we can't find her sometimes. It's her one bit of freedom, and I can't take that away. She's already lost too much. My parents are way overprotective of her. I'm lucky she's here now, but part of that is because my parents got stuck at the summit since I found Rayna. We kind of lucked out. My mom's

been trying to figure out how to keep her from going away to college next fall. Kennedy doesn't know that, and it would piss her off. If you haven't noticed, she's as much an Alpha as you or me."

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 48

32 – Ryker

"I'm definitely picking up that vibe," I said, trying to keep the mood light despite the tension hanging between us. "But it makes sense if you and her are somehow connected. She's an Alpha female, and honestly, they're even more intense than we are." I gave a small smile, knowing this was a lot of information—things I never thought he'd share with me.

Jeremiah chuckled. "Yeah, tell me about it. And of course, I'm mated to one. I'm pretty sure I'm going to be juggling a lot, especially if Ken decides to come back and live with the pack after college. That's what Mom wants. She wants to be close to the business her mom started before she was even born."

I shook my head with a grin. "Not happening, Jer-bear. Deal with it. She's staying here. She's Dark Moon Pack now." I could feel my wolf's possessiveness ripple through me, sharp and unmistakable.

Jeremiah raised an eyebrow. "We can't say that just yet. We haven't claimed her."

Curiosity piqued, I found myself wondering what kind of business she was involved in, and my mind started racing with ideas about how we might be able to bring it here, into our territory.

"Then claim her, you f\*cking moron," I snapped, my voice low but firm. "She's ours."

He held up a hand. "She has her own plans, and we have to respect that." As much as that thought twisted my stomach and churned my heart, I knew I had to be careful with her. Wolves would drop everything for their mate, but humans? I still wasn't sure how that bond worked for them. Could she resist it in a way we couldn't?

"Look who's the sap now," he teased.

I sighed, trying to focus. "Let's just get to work. We'll figure this out soon enough."

At least now I had a bit more insight into her background, and I could respect that Jeremiah was trying to protect her while still honoring what she wanted. If she was even half as stubborn as she seemed, Jeremiah was right—we were all going to have our hands full. Honestly, the idea of her submitting to me was almost thrilling. Would she do it willingly, or would she fight me every step of the way? I had to shake the thought away quickly when Jeremiah gave me a sharp slap on the side of my head, catching me off guard just as my mind was wandering into dangerous territory. He didn't need to see me half-hard, fantasizing about throwing her around. That was something I'd keep to myself.

We dove into training, and I lost myself in the rhythm of the fight. Jeremiah was a skilled opponent, making me work hard for every win. It was reassuring to know my sister would be safe with him around. If he fought this well in practice, he'd obliterate any threat to her without breaking a sweat.

He lunged at me, and I spun to evade, but he caught one arm around my waist. I was quick enough to keep his other arm from grabbing me, so we both stumbled, pulled in opposite directions. I aimed an elbow at his back, but he ducked and rolled away. Coming back at me, he grabbed my arm, trying to lock it behind my back. I twisted with the pull and caught him in a headlock. He didn't hesitate, bending forward and throwing me over his shoulder—a move I'd never seen him pull before. My brain jolted in surprise, but I managed to twist midair and land on my feet. I still had him locked in a headlock, which forced him to fight blind, face down. We struggled for a minute before I finally released him so we could start again.

After we wrapped up training, I felt proud of myself for not getting too distracted by the hot blonde moving in my peripheral vision. Even though it was tempting, I kept her in sight the entire time. Her scent caught me off guard when the breeze shifted, giving Jeremiah a few easy holds.

Jeremiah and I walked over to the crowd watching Danny and Bennet sparring. They were practicing a capture technique designed to bring in prisoners unharmed—not out of kindness, but to keep them alive and defenseless for questioning. The idea was to inflict injuries that made the captives unable to fight back, making torture more effective.

Josh stepped forward and called Kennedy into the circle to spar. My wolf immediately perked up at her name, then instantly tensed with irritation. Why was he pulling her into the circle? I was growing tired of the emotional rollercoaster she was putting me through today. It was just another reason to keep her at arm's length. And yet, I couldn't stop myself from paying attention to her.

She looked shocked for a moment but then steeled herself with determination. She wasn't backing down, even though she knew she was physically outmatched. Stubborn and proud—just like I thought. My wolf growled low in my chest, and my irritation only grew. Of course, Danny whined about wanting to roll around with her in the dirt, which sent my wolf's annoyance through the roof. I barely managed to hold back a growl. I might have to physically remind him she was off limits before I really lost it.

Taking a deep breath to calm myself, I couldn't resist teasing him. "Missed out last night, and you're missing out again."

He shot me a confused look.

"Are you purring? What are you, a cat?" I laughed, embarrassed for my wolf.

Jeremiah gave me a sideways glance, but I ignored it. "Even though you're an idiot, she was in our arms last night, not his," my wolf purred again.

I shrugged and taunted Danny, “Everyone’s fair game. You should’ve thought about that before you chose.”

Josh stood up, breaking the tension, and I immediately regretted opening my mouth as soon as he locked eyes with me. “Alpha, we haven’t seen you partner up today. Why don’t you step in?”

I cursed silently. “F\*cking dick,” I mindlinked him. He was too suspicious, way too observant for his own good. His smile told me he knew something was going on with me. I could either take the bait or watch him get all over her, and he’d do everything in his power to get a reaction out of me.

“What’s wrong, Alpha? Scared of the human? Or is there something we all need to know?”

I stared back, willing my wolf to keep calm so I didn’t do something stupid—like marking her in the middle of sparring. The only thing I wanted was to touch her, to have my hands on her. That thought had been invading my mind all day, threatening to take over. That wouldn’t fly here. I couldn’t let Josh get close to her. At least Danny’s flirting had been all talk. No one else was going to touch her.

Just like last night, the moment my hands were on her, I’d struggle to let her go. My mind was a mess, and it shouldn’t be. I should be able to fake disinterest like I did with every other female. But my hesitation was obvious, and my whole team was staring at me with confused expressions. I don’t hesitate. Ever.

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 49

33 – Kennedy

Beta Josh’s lips curled into a tight, mischievous half-smile, a spark of playful defiance lighting up his eyes. “Alright, let’s do this,” he said quietly. He crouched down, and I mirrored his stance, letting the simmering frustration from their silent exchange fuel my determination. They were probably whispering about how weak I seemed, debating whether the Alpha could hold back enough not to hurt me. To them, this was nothing more than a game—one where I was the punchline of their stupid jokes. That thought alone made my blood boil.

A low growl rumbled through the group, and Alpha Ryker grunted sharply, “Fine!” Just then, someone shouted, “Go!”

In that split second, I had to react. Josh leapt back, and Ryker lunged at me from behind. I ducked quickly, avoiding his outstretched arms, and managed to strike the upper part of his thigh. The hit probably stung more than it hurt, like a bee’s sting on his massive, well-defined muscle. I forced myself not to think about those sculpted muscles—no distractions. The blow did shift his momentum just enough for me to pivot away, almost slipping free. But he caught my left arm, flipping me over so I landed hard on my back before I could even blink.

The air was knocked out of me, though not as badly as I expected. It was obvious he was holding back, trying not to hurt me. That only fueled my irritation further. I rolled to one side, colliding with a calf pressing down on my torso as Ryker punched the ground where my shoulder had been moments before. Sliding under his leg, I realized I was operating in pure survival mode. I wasn't going to win this fight. His team struggled just to keep up with him—there was no chance I'd land any real damage. All I could do was avoid getting hurt.

He hadn't anticipated how quickly I'd wriggle free, because before he could react, I managed to land a blow to his kidney. Without even looking, he reached behind, hooking his arm around my waist and yanked me around, slamming me back onto the ground in front of him. This time, he straddled me, pinning my arms to the sides with his legs and using one hand to cradle the back of my head, preventing me from cracking my skull on the impact. How considerate.

Leaning in with a cocky grin, he muttered just loud enough for me to hear, "This is an interesting position... something new to try..."

Before he could finish his sentence, I surged forward and kissed him. Time seemed to stop, and a wildfire ignited behind my eyes. I had no idea what compelled me to do it, and instantly regretted it. That wasn't even a proper kiss, but somehow it was better than anything I'd ever experienced before. On impulse, I bit his lower lip hard enough to draw blood.

His growl sent a shiver through me, awakening a heat deep inside. Luckily, I was already soaked in sweat, so he wouldn't be able to smell or feel my arousal. I didn't let that distract me—I wrenched my arms free and flipped us over. He was so caught off guard that I moved his massive frame with ease.

He lay there, panting, eyes wide as he stared up at me, a thin trickle of blood trailing from where I'd bitten him. His hands gripped my hips tightly. For a moment, we just looked at each other.

Suddenly, an arm was thrust in my face. I blinked, then looked up to see Danny offering his hand. I hesitated for a second before accepting his help to get off Ryker, who released me slowly, almost reluctantly.

Josh reached out to Ryker as I dusted myself off, and I swear I heard him mutter, "That's what I thought, bossman." What on earth did that mean? Then he turned to me with a grin. "Unfortunately, Ryker pinned you first, so he wins. But I won't lie—it was pretty amazing to see someone pin his ass for once."

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

Chapter 50

Ryker muttered under his breath, "That has to be cheating," though his trademark half-smile tugged at the corners of his mouth, softening the complaint as it almost reached his eyes.

Danny shot me a teasing wink. “Cheating? Nah. She just has more... assets than you, and she knows exactly how to use every single one.” His grin was mischievous, and I couldn’t help but laugh at his bluntness. “And I’m seriously annoyed I missed out on all the action again.” Despite his words, his tone was light, and the scowl he wore was clearly just for show.

The rest of the warriors chuckled along, so this had to be a good sign. Still, my attention was fixed solely on the Alpha. He was quietly wiping blood from the corner of his lip with his thumb, a small but somehow incredibly attractive gesture. Why did that make my heart skip? Then, catching the way I was staring, he flashed me a dark, knowing smile that sent a jolt through me. I rolled my eyes at him, which earned a low, growly laugh from his throat, a sound that sent another shiver down below my waist. Stupid hormones. Stupid irresistibly hot Alpha.

We wrapped up the training session soon after, the air buzzing with chatter about the Alpha getting bested. Technically, I hadn’t beaten him — not really — but I was happy to take the credit since he barely broke a sweat. I was pretty sure he could still get through the rest of his day’s schedule while sparring with me.

As everyone started gathering their gear and heading toward the vehicles, I hung back. I hadn’t come with them, and I wasn’t sure if there was room in any of the cars for me. My friends were deep in tactical discussions and didn’t even notice when they left me behind. This was a new situation for me, but oddly, not an unwelcome one. At least they weren’t hovering over me for once. Worst case scenario, I could just run back to the packhouse—it was right on the main road and easy to find.

Suddenly, a low, husky voice came from just behind me. “You ride with me.” The tone, quiet but firm, sent goosebumps racing down my neck. I gasped softly, caught off guard. He chuckled quietly, clearly amused by my reaction. I was so stunned I couldn’t even form a response, so I simply nodded and turned to follow him.

We reached his truck—a massive, rugged beast. At 5’5”, I found the running board sitting at my hip, making the climb up feel like scaling a jungle gym. Who owned a truck this enormous? It was absurdly tall. Still, I couldn’t deny it was stunning—sleek black paint gleaming under the sun, tinted windows so dark they looked like mirrors, and not a gaudy accessory in sight besides the obvious lift kit. It screamed power and prestige.

He opened the door for me, and I raised an eyebrow in surprise. He responded with a single raised brow of his own before nodding toward the seat inside. I rolled my eyes again but appreciated the gesture as I carefully climbed up into the cab. It was a slow climb, but he didn’t offer to help, just waited patiently, letting me take my time.

Once I settled into the seat, he closed the door silently behind me. The interior was just as impressive—spacious and commanding, much like everything about Ryker. Dark slate gray leather covered the seats, buttery smooth to the touch. Honestly, I could have fallen asleep right there, so comfortable did it feel. I leaned back, closed my eyes, and took a deep breath, trying to steady my racing heart. But that only made things worse.

His scent filled the truck, strong and unmistakable, as if no one else had ever been inside. It wasn't mixed with anything—no food, no other smells—just him. I wondered if it was new, or if I was just noticing it for the first time. My whole body trembled with a strange craving as I inhaled again, like an addict desperate for her next fix.

Thank you so much for reading. I truly appreciate all your thoughtful comments and kind words. While I can't respond here, feel free to join the conversation on Facebook under