

Letters Sent To Eternity

Chapter 431

86 – Ben

Juliette jumps at his abrupt entrance. “For the love of the f*cking Goddess. I’m not going to hurt you.” Jason grumbles heading straight to the couch, not looking at anyone.

“You could have fooled me.” She whispers, then shivers. I wonder if it is the matebond affecting her, or the fact that she stood up for herself.

“I am the last person in the world who would hurt you or let anyone else hurt you.” He mutters, settling in. It looks like someone got a blanket and pillow ready for him.

I look at Elara and the other women in the room, giving them a silent ‘let’s leave gesture.’ They need time together and they won’t get it with everyone from Brianna’s coven mother-henning her.

The witches reluctantly follow, but Elara stops in the doorway and turns to look at both Juliette and Jason. “This room will have protections on it, you are safe here, but that does not mean that you have earned our trust yet. You go nowhere unless you are escorted by Jason or another warrior he assigns and a coven member. These courtesies are because you are Jason’s mate, remember that.” Juliette’s head snaps to Jason, laying on the couch with his arm over his eyes. He’s not sleeping, but maybe he’s hoping to avoid awkward conversation for now. His wolf won’t let him sleep much with her still in this fight or flight state. “We have more questions for you and we do need to finish your check-up, but for now rest.”

We step out of the room, Elara closing the door gently behind us. Two more warriors walk from the main entrance end of the hallway. Once they are in place, she indicates for all of us to follow her. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

We make it to the main level and into the open living space just beyond the entrance foyer when she turns. “I have two warriors inside and outside and three more circling the perimeter of the packhouse. There are also extra warriors on shift running the perimeter and other patrol routes. If this is a ploy or distraction for your Ember and Ash witch to attack us, it will not work. I would like a coven member to be stationed outside the door since she seems to be fine with your kind. If she leaves the room in any other way than escorted by pack and coven members, she will be executed on site. I know what I said, but she is a threat, who seems to have single handedly put mind control on my underage pack members.”

“But, she is terrified...” Brianna protests.

“As she should be. She was caught planting those Shadow Markers. Who knows how many more there are. Our underage wolves are vulnerable until we have them all and she’s responsible for their pain and suffering.”

“No! You don’t understand.” Brianna holds up her hands and starts to pace. “She is a Green witch, yes. But she is also a Chaos witch. A hybrid. By simple nature she should not have that level of fear. Frankly, a majority of Chaos witches have an unhealthy lack of fear. They don’t fear wolves. In fact they are typically our liaisons with wolf packs because of their ability to understand and work with your kind. Did you see her flinch? She was taught to do that, conditioned to cower. She is more powerful than Eliza, but has

no idea. Eliza would not be able to pull off these Shadow Markers, let alone sustain them.”

I sit on the couch, I am mentally tired and it appears we are going to be here for a little while getting on the same page. “So what you’re saying is that on top of the assumed s*xual assault, she was probably harmed in other ways to make her afraid enough to follow orders, but not enough to break her mind so she can complete these intense

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“Yes, Beta. Now we have to get her to trust us enough to get answers, while also making it very clear that we won’t trust her answers blindly.” Marietta sits next to me. “How will this affect your friend? I know a little of your mate bonds. Ours are not chosen by our Goddess, but once a bond is formed, it is very similar to what you experience.”

“I can’t tell you where his head is at right now, but I know this is going to f*ck him up, especially if we find out she isn’t being truthful.” I lean forward, pressing the heels of my hands into my eyes trying to stave off a headache. “It could harm him and or his wolf if we have to execute her. He can reject her before and the feelings will be less if she accepts, but the pain of the rejection will hurt him too.” I look up at Elara, “Kennedy had the same problem with her mate and the little that Rayna has told me about the situation, it got really bad before they figured it out.” She nods at me, as a general rule, neither of us bring Ken up, but the situation bears noting.

Elara moves to me, reaching out her hand. “We should all get some rest. The healers have Juliette’s bloodwork and they will work on it all night, checking for everything possible. If they find anything, they are instructed to let me know immediately, no matter what time it is.” She’s addressing the whole group, but maintains eye contact. I nod back and stand slowly, letting her pull me down the hallway to our bedroom. I’m worried about Jason, I can feel his torment, even though we are technically not a part of the same pack, running through me as if it were my own. Maybe it’s because I was in a similar position not that long ago and I can sympathize. Maybe it’s because we are so close and at one time were training to be a part of the same team.

Out of nowhere my back is slammed against a wall and my mate is in my face. “What the hell?” She has my shirt balled up in her fists.

“I needed to break you out of that head of yours. She’s so close to my face I see the different shades of green flecked in her eyes. I can feel the weight of her whole body pressing mine into the wall. “Juliette will be fine. Jason will be fine. They will get through this, just like you and I did.” She quirks a half smile. “I just had to break you in a little.”

I flip our positions so fast she lets out a little squeak. I run my nose slowly up the side of her neck, my wolf growling at the pleasure of her scent. I press into her and she sighs at the connection, making me smile against the delicate skin behind her ear. “What else are you willing to do to get me out of my head, Alpha?”

“Why don’t we find out?” She shifts an inch and I hear a door disengage. I must have been in my head pretty deep if I didn’t notice we made it all the way here. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

“What! You’re leaving? Don’t leave us hanging after that display, it was just starting to get steamy.” I hear Jax and whip my head so fast, I hear it crack multiple times.

Jax and Dev are leaning against their own door gawking at us. I’m not embarrassed at all, but I don’t share. I tell them as much, laughing at their protests while I push Elara into the dark room and close the door behind me. ” Now, where was I?”

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87 – Elara

“I don’t know what took you so long to get here, but I’m glad you pulled your head out of your ass.” My wolf chortles as I lay here completely wrapped up in Ben’s arms. His nose is tucked into the back of my hair with a faint little snore that makes me smile.

“I do know what took me so long and it wasn’t my head up my ass. I love my parents, but I wanted nothing to do with their weird arrangement with the Elders, or having them think because I am a female that they were just going to walk in and take over or force a douchy mate on me to make me comply.”

“Well, Ben is none of those things, so I was right to push you.”

“You were right, asshole. There, I said it, are you happy now?”

“Very.” She purrs.

My mind shifts quickly to the girl we have locked in a room on the other side of the packhouse though. I wonder how long it’s been since she’s felt safe or cared for. How often

did these rogue wolves, helping this witch, put their hands on her? I feel responsible for her somehow, like she needs my protection specifically. Maybe my Alpha sensibilities are getting stronger the longer I do this job, I'm not sure, but I feel the sudden urge to go question Jeff and Drake myself. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

"I'm going to need you to figure out what emotion you are riding on this morning, Alpha. I was getting a distinct signal two minutes ago," He presses his hips into my butt and I can feel his excitement, "Now, I have the feeling you are going to leave me hanging with blue balls for the rest of the day." He huffs a laugh as he kisses my neck. I tilt my head to give him more access.

"I just keep thinking about Juliette and her situation and it makes me furious. There are so many good men out there like you and Jason, ah!" He bites my neck, maybe for bringing up his friend while he's trying to seduce me. "But her and I have both had sh*tty experiences, making it hard for us to trust and form the mate bond."

"So, what you're saying is I need to continue to convince you that I'm not going anywhere and I'm not after your title? I can work with that." He flips me to my back and hovers over me, pressing his weight down enough to hold me in place. We are still naked from last night's activities and it takes nothing for him to get me wet and ready for him. He's slowly moving his hips rubbing my cl*t just enough to make my breathing catch. He leans down and whispers in my ear, "Another conversation that we need to have in the near future..." He bites my earlobe, "Is your first heat, and what you want to do about that?"

I push up on his shoulders, eyes wide, but he doesn't let me say anything. He smashes his lips down onto mine at the same time he thrusts into me and I am lost in the sensation the tingles and the bond bring when we are like this.

He pulls me to the shower after he completely destroys my body three more times, and washes me thoroughly. There's no heat this time, just care. He even wraps my arms around his waist and washes my hair, while I just stand here, eyes closed, letting someone take care of me for a change. He seems to almost need this kind of connection and I am learning that I enjoy the attention.

Once dry and clothed, we head out to find the rest of our teams and make a plan for today. I want a crack at Drake and Jeff and I think keeping the male wolves around Juliette to a minimum is the best idea for now. Jason will always be present, his wolf won't allow second hand information about her and he needs to come to terms with

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anything in her past that will affect her ability to form a bond with him. And Ben needs to be there for Jason. Jax and Dev are always good company. And there is just something about two flamboyant gay men that make people come out of their shell.

I set Marge up to attend to the witches personally and keep an eye on Juliette. She has done a lot in her time here at the packhouse. She is the grandmother everyone needs. Melodie is in charge of keeping the rest of us fed with her team of Omegas and a few Kitchen witches. She has taken this blending of species with a level of excitement I have never seen before. She learns something new almost everyday and the energy they all have is contagious. My packhouse feels alive now and I am starting to crave the commotion.

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“I don’t want you down there alone.” Ben says for probably the tenth time. Jax and Dev laugh at the exchange. I’m surprised our back and forth hasn’t gotten old for them.

“Understood, but Jason needs you more than I do and Juliette needs to be around male wolves who won’t harm her.”

“What are you talking about? Jason won’t harm her.”

“That boy has not eaten in over a day! I’m sure he didn’t actually sleep last night either. What do you think he is going to do when those blood test results come back? What happens if she has some disease or, Goddess forbid, she’s pregnant by one of those assholes who abused her?” I pin him with a stare and watch the realization wash over him in horror. “Exactly!” I hiss, “She will need support, no matter what results we get and he needs to remain calm and let her make decisions about what happens next. We need information from her about this witch and these rogues. We won’t get that if he flies off the handle. And there’s no way in hell we are going to be able to keep him away or in the dark about it.”

“Okay, you’re right, but I can’t be in two places at once and I need to be down with you when you question Drake. Please. He had Kennedy too. I know you don’t like talking about her, but she’s a part of my past and I can’t let this rest now that I have more information.”

“Let’s do this.” I hold my hands up when he looks like he is going to protest. “Just hear me out. I think that you and Jason should be in charge of his specific execution. I will allow the two of you free reign when I am done with him. I believe that he will lock on to our mate bond and not give us any real information though. I will keep Jax and Dev with me at all times...”

“I want Marietta with you as well.” He looks down at his plate, pushing the remains of his omelet around. “I think she has some tricks up her sleeve and a ruthless streak that we haven’t seen. If Drake has been working with a witch, it’s possible he has some sort of magical protection against our style of questioning, maybe even your Alpha aura. Please take her with you and keep your link open and I will stay with Jason and do the same.” He’s not looking at me, even the idea of separation is hard for him. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

I stare at his profile for a minute. This strong and stoic guy is secretly a teddy bear. He is sentimental and sweet, something I never would have thought would be for me, but he is perfect. I reach forward and pull his face to look at me. His eyes are closed like he can avoid the discomfort if he doesn't meet my gaze. I study him while I wait for him to come to his senses. His thick dark eyebrows are scrunched down ever so slightly, his jaw flexed, making his pillow soft lips press into a line. His sharp scent matches his mood, but sends butterflies through me. Holding his face, I drag my thumb over his lips and one side of his mouth quirks before setting back into his signature scowl. I know I have him then, so I lean forward and brush my lips on his and pull back.

Quick as a flash he has the back of my neck in a tight grip, intense brown eyes wide, staring into mine. "That was not nearly good enough, mate." He growls low and pulls me in for a bruising kiss that is not made for public, but he doesn't seem to care. "I will see you for lunch and then again for dinner. If you do not show, I will drag you out and punish you."

Chapter 435

88 – Elara

I'm still stuck in the sideways position Ben left me. The demand that I make it back simply for meals so he can check in on me is simple enough, but he made the threat erotic and I am half tempted to be late just to see what he will do to me.

"Let's go, you love-struck idiot." I blink and look around as Dev lifts me up by an arm.

"You know the next problem we are going to have is how many kids will be fighting for the Alpha title." Jax laughs as he links my other arm. "I'm going to bet six."

"Unless they have any multiples, then we are probably looking at eight to ten." Dev supplies and my brain finally reengages. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

I pull my arms free and reach for the door that leads down to the cells. "What are the two of you babbling about?"

"Now that you seem to be over your aversion to your hot as f*ck mate, it sounds like the two of you are making up for lost time, that's all. We have been speculating how many rugrats we can expect in the near future." Jax jumps

back as I swat at him.

"Honestly, it hasn't been a topic of conversation. We need to figure out what the hell is going on and why Red Fang and Black Claw are targets for witches and rogues."

"Based on yesterday, Drake is good at talking in circles. You need to play this smart. Jeff is a raving lunatic at this point, but he still may unwillingly give information." Dev pushes open the door at the base of the stairwell. The air in this hallway is stale with a tang of blood and something else unpleasant.

"It's possible they are both being difficult to be difficult, they could also be wasting time. From what we have seen, all the magic used against us gets stronger with time. They know they are going to die. Maybe the witch herself has threatened to kill them when they have outlived their usefulness. If we get nothing out of them today, I will let Ben and Jason...and even Juliette if she wants in on the action, take them both out. I don't want them in the packhouse any longer."

They both nod and we go through the door that leads to Jeff and Drake's cells. I'm glad there are so many barriers between them and the packhouse. The smell is absolutely horrid. The pungent body odor and excrement mixed with the unmistakable rot that denotes a rogue makes me want to torch the whole room and skip questions. It might be worth it.

"Are your dainty sensibilities affected by our circumstances, little she-wolf?" Drake starts in immediately. It's not even the worst insult I have heard, but it's enough to lock in my focus.

"Considering you both smell like literal sh*t, anyone would be affected. Why is your witch attacking my pack? Why did my parent have to die? What do you all want with Malcom?"

"What, no foreplay?" He smiles at me with yellow teeth. I'm sure at one time he was a handsome guy, but living like a rogue for years has not been kind to him. "I thought we could get to know each other a little better, you know, being neighbors and all."

"What the hell does he mean by neighbors?" Jax asks.

"No idea, but something to look into. He could be playing with us."

"From what I understand you haven't been a part of a neighboring pack for a while. And you clearly aren't an ally, based on where you are sitting. What does your witch want with my pack?"

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Drake is leaning against the far wall, silver cuffs around his ankles and wrists. A silver collar around his neck to keep him from shifting. He's staring at the floor, and He's quiet for so long I think he isn't going to answer me. Then he lifts his eyes, only his eyes, lassume it's to make himlook more menacing. I think he looks like a teenager throwing a tantrum. "Eliza wants what she was promised, she-wolf."

I'm going to ignore the 'she-wolf' comments for now. It's not the most insulting thing I have been called, and let's be honest, I don't give a sh*t if he uses my title as long as he gives me information. "And what was she promised, rogue?"

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"That is a question for the Alpha and Elders of this pack, girl."

“Alright, I’m about done with his bullsh*t.” My wolf grumbles in my head, and I know she flashed in my eyes based on Drake’s smug look. Yeah we’re irritated that he is blatantly not calling me the Alpha, but it will take more than that to get us to crack.

“Considering you are talking to the Alpha of this pack and I have made no deals with any witches in my time, you will have to do better than that. What does she think is owed to her?”

“You aren’t a very good Alpha if your Elders and former Alpha haven’t filled you in on pack business. Your pack owes my mistress and she has come to collect. She will do so by any means possible.”

“Don’t you think this would go a helluva lot more quickly if I was told the demand, maybe even by Eliza herself?” I ask, crossing my arms. “Or is she so afraid of our kind that she has to use you and Jeff as schelps?”

“I am but a humble servant for my mistress.” He spreads his arms, chains clinking as he does. “She does not need to negotiate with lower species if she does not wish.”

I take a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Jax, will you make sure all of the Elders are in my office in twenty minutes, they are under house arrest. You can tell them as much if it makes them move their asses. We aren’t going to get much more out of him. Dev, connect with Ben, see if he has any other questions for this asshole, he dies today.” I know Ben is listening in, but like me his focus is divided and I want to make sure he finds out what he needs to know for closure with Kennedy.

“Why kill my parents?” I ask again. Obviously, Eliza is trying to take over; we knew that, but to what extent? She thinks wolves are lesser and should be slaves. The drugs show us that she has achieved a level of mind control that doesn’t syphon off her magic. But why my pack or Malcom’s? We have the two smallest packs in the region. Even gaining both wouldn’t give her an army to take on someone like Rayna’s brother. So what gives?

“Your parents’ demise was not planned and why we have allowed you to keep Jeff here. He obviously cannot be trusted with menial tasks, let alone important ones. Your father was needed to complete the contract; your mother was not. We clearly put the wrong wolf in charge of their observation. Jeff let his greed and lust get the better of him.” Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

My eyes slide back down the hallway where Jeff is asleep in the corner, withering away from the lack of food and water. “He was only supposed to observe my father, not my mother and me?”

“Yes and no. He was supposed to listen in on your father’s conversations with the Elders. Jeff, we discovered early on, is not the best at relaying information he overhears. He figured out that he could get his rocks off in the same way. I will say many of our warriors have had very pleasant evenings thanks to you.” He smiles ear to ear this time as my wolf lets out a growl in my chest. I can feel Ben’s irritation as well. For some odd reason, that’s not what bothers me the most.

“He was poisoning my mother slowly, why? Who finally killed her while she was in the pack hospital?” It shouldn’t matter he admitted that their group killed her, had been planning to kill her from the beginning, but I want to know who did it. I need to hear the words.

“Your father did, of course.”

My world tilts. NO! That can’t be true. My father loved my mother; he would never...”

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I grab the door frame to keep me steady as my vision blurs. Elara’s all consuming despair blinds me. I feel a grip on my shoulder, but can’t seem to focus no matter how hard I blink.

Warbled sounds are getting louder in my head. “BEN!!” I feel a slap on my cheek and blink again. “Ben! What the f*ck happened? What’s wrong with Elara?” Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

“I...I don’t...Uh, no clue. I gotta go.” I mumble, stumbling to turn around.

“Not like that you’re not. Hold on a second.” Jason steps away from me. I have to use the door frame to keep me upright.

“I know you don’t care either way, but I will be right back, I promise. No one comes in or out while I’m gone, something is wrong with the Alpha and if it’s Drake, this will be his next stop.” Jason doles out commands and I feel Juliette’s fear increase.

“**You** shouldn’t have told her that.” I say slowly slurred.

“I’m not going to lie to her and tell her everything is fine when it’s not and she’s still in danger. Maybe you should stay here. You sound drunk. Your mate doesn’t need you down there like this. You’ll be a

weakness, not a help.”

His insult has the desired effect. My wolf surges forward and I straighten up.

“What’s wrong with him?” I turn at the soft voice. I’ve only heard a handful of words from her since she arrived and never a full sentence.

“We can feel when our mate is in pain or has extreme emotions. Elara is down questioning Drake right now. Something happened and we need to go figure it out.” Jason is quick to give his mate answers.

“I got this. Juliette needs you here right now. Help her heal, I’ll be back later.”

“Um, no. You can f*ck off with that plan. Who knows what he did to her.” We hear Juliette squeak again.

“She’s an Alpha. Unfortunately, she’s seen and will see a lot worse than this asshole.” I look over my shoulder, giving her a weak smile.

Jason grabs my arm, “Stop flirting with my girl so we can go save yours.” I hear another sound, that I can’t decide if it’s good or bad from Juliette. “Please stay here and stay safe. There are two guards at your door and Owen will stay inside. We are still trying to determine friend from foe. Do not let anyone else in

here until we come back, not even Marietta and Brianna.”

“But...!”

“No, Drake is too f*cking cocky down in a cell, something’s up. Marietta and Brianna will be on standby

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+25 BONUS

for

us. No one should come up here, if they do zap the sh*t out of them...or whatever your magic does.”

“It zaps the sh*t out of you. Trust me.” I grumble, teasing, looking over my shoulder at her from the hallway. She still looks terrified sitting on her bed, knees tucked to her chin. She’s not shaking, but wary all the same. Drake did a number on her, and according to Brianna, she could probably incinerate him with a snap of her fingers.

Jason pushes me and I fall in line next to him. We rush down the hall, down the central stairs to the main level, rounding the banister to the door that leads to the cells.

My steps get faster as we get closer to the last cell. Dev catches me by the arm. “She’s better now. Don’t go barging in there or he’ll have another thing to throw in her face.”

“What did he do?” I growl. She has to know I’m out here. The second she says the word, I’m by her side no matter what anyone else here says.

“He told her that her father poisoned her mother in the hospital, giving her the final dose. We don’t have any information for her to prove or disprove the point. He’s trying to distract her.

“You think he’s stalling?”

“Of course. No

one is that arrogant in a holding cell waiting to die. There’s either a plan to release him, or

him dying is a signal for something else to start. I can't decide which might be worse for us." He scowls.

"I was thinking he's stalling too. Jay, did you get any information about this Eliza chick and what she

might be up to?"

"Nothing we don't already know. Juliette was in charge of casting spells that made it look like Elara's

pack was imploding from the inside so no one would come to help. Obviously, that extended to Junior as

well. The only thing specific was the waterfront. Water is a conduit for a bunch of spells I guess." Jason

shakes his head.

I take a deep breath and let it out, pacing the small hallway. I have a couple of options, and I don't like any of them. "So, I can go in there and be her back-up. Which will piss her off and be unproductive, but it

will make me feel better. We can go back upstairs and see what else Juliette has to say since Owen seems to be your wingman and has her talking. He needs to explain his magic, by the way." I look at Jason and a dark look crosses his face so I change track fast. "Or ...**you** and I can go take another look at the waterfront and see what we can find. That's where that cave was with the supplies. We know Jeff was hiding trails

along the shoreline, there has to be more. We've had so much other sh*t going on, I don't think anyone

followed up."

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"That was probably the plan." Dev muses. "I'll stay here, you guys go. Let's check in...say an hour?"

I nod. "Get Marietta down here, I am not above letting her work with Elara to forcefully get answers out of him. And have Brianna check in on Juliette. As much as I don't want to think it, she could still be a part of

this somehow." Jason growls, "I know man, but think this through. She was terrified of us not twelve

hours ago, and now all of a sudden she's curious and asking questions? The only thing consistent is her reaction to Drake's name. What happened since breakfast? Something's changed, and I feel like we've been set up."

"She's the bait, nothing more. Juliette had nothing to do with this." Jason assures.

"I hope so. Dev's right we need more answers, let's go."

We get outside, get out of our clothes, pack the drawstring bags and shift. My wolf is loving the feel of the forest. I feel like we don't run half as much as we used to. It's always in small bursts of time.. I need to let

him out more. We both feel better.

"So what's the plan with the witches when this is all over?" Jason asks.

"Not entirely sure. Elara and I have talked about it, but right now they are in as much danger as we are and we don't know how long they will need the assistance. We've talked about a couple options. Why?"

"My mate is a witch, d*ckhead. What the f*ck am I going to do if she decides to join up with Brianna and

her Coven and they move as far from here as possible?"

"Sh*t man. I don't know. But that is worst case scenario. She may not want anything to do with covens when this is all over. We don't know what she was doing before Eliza's goons took her."

"Has Brianna or Marietta talked about sticking around?"

"Not to me, but they haven't talked about leaving either. They actually moved another group of witches. into the packhouse the other day. I think all the rooms are pretty much full now. I think many will stay if offered a place in the pack. Melanie loves the kitchen witches. Her and Marge have learned a ton of helpful recipes that work for wolves and humans. They only had a couple of kids with them, but they seem to be doing just fine with the pups. Everyone is trying to keep as much normalcy as possible for the little ones."

"You are as much an Alpha as Elara is. Listen to you talking about moving in people and taking care of pups." Jason laughs. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

"F*ck off." I laugh at him as we dodge trying to shove him into a tree. "In all seriousness though. You can take her home to Silver Crescent, you can stay here if that works out better for the both **of you**. You know Jeremiah and Rayna will support whatever you need to do

for your mate. So will we. But don't make any decisions yet, we still have to figure out this bullshit first and end this attack. We may all be taking shelter in Silver Crescent if this goes sideways."

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We get to the waterfront and it looks exactly the same as the last few times we explored here. Jason and I shift, get dressed and search for the weird scent trails Elara and I found the last time we were here.

"What the hell...?" Jason walks off in the opposite direction of the cave I was hoping to explore. If my theory is right, Juliette put up the blocks that kept us out before, but now that she is mated to Jason, I wonder if he has special privileges?

"Jay, what's up? I want to see if they are still using this cave." I'm slow jogging to catch up to his pace.

"Don't you smell that?"

"What? I get the faint trails that are fading, maybe a week or so old. What do you smell."

"Burnt...something. Come on."

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Chapter **439**

90 – Ben

+25 Bonus

"What the hell are these crazy witches doing?" I whisper out as we edge closer to the treeline. If my sense of direction is right, we are directly south of Elara's packhouse, but far enough away that it might be considered neutral territory. I don't smell the patrol wolves' scent marking.

This area juts out towards the waterfront, like it's a little peninsula, and full of thick, closely set trees. What is odd though is beyond the first couple trees, the rest are black. Black trunks, black branches, black leaves, black needles, black pine cones. But they aren't burnt. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

Jason reaches his hand out, "Don't touch anything. We don't know what's on them."

“Do you feel magic here, then?” He asks, looking over his shoulder as he carefully walks forward.

“Not like with the Shadow Markers, but something is here. Can you feel it?” I never thought about it before now, but he might be a better beacon than I for magic now that he’s mated to a witch.

“I don’t know. It’s not like what it felt like when Brianna, Marietta, and the healer were doing spells on Juliette. That was like a buzz or static in the air. It felt alive. I think magic was here, or maybe it’s asleep. Can magic be dormant?”

“No idea, but another question for our visitors. I think you and I need some extra lessons. Do you still smell whatever caught your attention?”

“You don’t smell that?!” He keeps walking carefully. There is a fog that’s rolled in off the water and settled around the base of the trees. The last thing we need is to step into a trap.

“Can you be more specific about what that might be?” I roll my eyes, he’s walking with a purpose, something has his tracking instincts locked in.

“It’s burnt...” He stops suddenly looking up.

66

I step up behind him, following his line of sight, and suck in a breath as I am smacked in the face with the smell, “Flesh.”

“Elara, we have a major problem. Knock Drake out and get out here. He’s a distraction. Marietta and Brianna should see this too.”

I link her and Jason together. If she wasn’t terrified and still healing from what they did to her, I would have Juliette come out too. I want to know if she was a part of this. If she is, then my friend is f*cked.

I don’t get a response from my mate, but I feel her acknowledgement of the command through the bond. Jason and I move forward cautiously.

“Look for small bundles of herbs, candles and stones or crystals on the ground. That’s what the Shadow Markers were made of, it’s the only thing I have to go on right now.”

“Why would anyone do this?” Jason is still staring at the kid strung up between two trees. His body is in an ‘X’ with his arms hanging from branches and his legs tied to the trunks. His head is dropped forward to his chest, and he’s not breathing. His bare chest is covered in marks. Some look like defensive wounds, others are symbols that were carved in or maybe branded on. There is something circling his position on the ground. I won’t go any closer to him until the witches get here. Hopefully, it is protecting us from whatever was done to him.

Chapter 439

+25 Bonus

“I’ve never seen a power drain like this before,” Marietta says as she walks up an hour later with a whole host of people. She and Brianna are circling the area, touching the black trees and whispering under their breath.

Elara walks straight to me, her hands are like ice when she laces her fingers with mine. I look at her, but she just shakes her head. Not even a mind link to explain. I don’t have to question for longer than a second when Elder Fenwick makes his way through the group.

“This is what happens when you flout tradition and refuse to follow tried and true pack laws, Alpha.” He enunciates her title. “You have brought ruin and destruction into our pack with you alliance to these witches and upset the natural order in our pack.” I am ready to be done with this Elder permanently.

“Your concept of natural order, Walt, is that you have all the say and want to control your Alpha. If you have nothing productive to add to the conversation, kindly stay out of the way while we investigate this crime on the pack lands you so desperately want to maintain.” I lead Elara forward towards Jason, keeping her next to me. These elders read too much into little things like who walks in front of or behind another.

Jason and I walk through how and what we found when we got here and the fact that he could smell it from half a mile away and I didn’t smell it until I could see it. Brianna gave us all assignments, each of us looking for specific ingredients or remnants of them. We were all so tasked with looking for specific symbols. She seems to have an idea of what happened here, but isn’t saying much.

“What happened here?” Jax asks after doing his own sweep for magical elements and Brianna hasn’t spoken for over an hour. She’s been kneeling in front of the poor kid, still strung up, muttering under her breath. “Was he magical? He’s not a wolf, I can smell that much.”

Marietta moves behind Brianna, almost protectively, “We believe he was a hybrid. A witch and a wolf, and he was used as a conduit.” The wind whipped around us as if the forest is confirming.

“Why can’t we smell that he was a wolf? Even a rogue born wolf has a scent after death.” Elara questions, and Walt scoffs again, like she missed an easy question on a test. She stiffens next to me, but gives no other indication that she heard him. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

“I think that was the part that was used in the spell, his wolf blood, his connection to your Goddess and the forest.” Marietta confirms, Brianna is still muttering, completely blocking out

the conversation going on around her. “Your wolves have a deeper connection to the forest, which is part of your magic. Whoever did this is looking for something. Something hidden to our magic, but connected to yours?”

Chapter 440

91- Elara

The witches are looking for something. Something on my land. What the hell could we have on our pack territory that is worth so much death and clearly years of effort? I squeeze Ben’s hand and he returns the gesture looking at me, confused why I don’t mindlink him and tell him what is wrong. The problem is I am what’s wrong.

This whole sacrifice doesn’t make any sense based on what Walter felt the need to inform me on the drive over here. I was going to shift and get to Ben as quickly as possible with Jax after their all-call, letting the witches take one vehicle with Dev. But, Walt insisted this was relevant and he needed to accompany us...in a separate car than the witches.

The Elders and my father apparently made a pact that was magically bound. This supposed pact tied me to another male, regardless of my mate, but secured our safety. What I don’t understand is why my father never said anything to me about it. He was ruthless in my training as an Alpha and never shielded me from some of the harsh realities of my position. I am also confused by the ‘male’ part of his story. He didn’t say an Alpha or wolf, just that I was contracted to another male for our safety. That is also where his story ended. He promised to continue it at a later time, when I was done playing host and ready to get back to being a pack leader. Copyright © 2025 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

Now I have to wonder if this is the reason for all of the trouble we have been having. Did my father enter into some agreement that had magical repercussions if he went against it? I only ever believe half of what Walter is saying most of the time, but that means half of this story is true. Now, I have to figure out which half before I tell Ben anything. I need to know what Walter knows, because when Ben finds out that someone tried to sell me to a high bidder, he will kill anyone involved...and I won’t stop him.

With all his bravado, Walter didn’t get in our way, per Ben’s instructions. He didn’t stray far either, clearly wanting information to take back to the other Elders.

“Are you going to tell me what that is all about?” Ben side eyes Walt as we take in what might be another Shadow marker, but the charred remains make it difficult to tell.

“Yes, but not now.”

“Why not now? Will I kill him for it?”

“I believe you will kill him either way, but for this, I’m not sure. He’s being cryptic. I can’t tell if he is trying to rile me up or telling me the truth. Can you give me some time to process?”

“I want to know before we go to sleep.”

I sigh and nod, but that's actually generous. We'll see what the ride back brings.

"Why is the scorching only on the one side of all of these trees?" I ask Marietta. Brianna still isn't talking to us.

"It's a barrier. What we don't know is if the burn happened because someone tried to breach it or if it was caused when the caster set it." She places her hand out in front of her, between two of the burnt tree trunks and leans forward. I expect her to step through and walk past the trees, but she stops. The air is holding her fully leaning bodyweight. "The barrier is a strong one.

"

"Did he die because they hung him in the barrier's path?" Jason asks.

"That is a possibility." Marietta says solemnly, looking back up at the kid. His face is so disfigured and without a scent I couldn't tell who he is. He could be one of my pack members, one of Malcom's, or any one of the surrounding pack's teens.