

Letters Sent To Eternity

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Chapter 61

39 – Ryker

I have my fists balled to my sides and I can't look away, but I am mentally willing him to release her. She just needs to know and understand that she can't be that close to him, or any guy that looks at her like that, then my wolf will settle and we can go talk to them like a normal person.

The exact opposite happens though. Something amusing is said and they all laugh. Ben grips her waist tighter and rubs circles on her hip bone with his thumb... and she leans into him. Oh f*ck no!

"Easy, Alpha. Take a breath before you go over and rip his arms off. They don't know because you are a dumbass and let your mate go." Danny warns me. He knows me too well for my liking, but it's for my own good.

"F*ck off. You know how I feel about mates." I growl, but take a deep breath anyway.

"And yet, you are about to forcefully claim her in front of all her friends and family. You and your wolf need to figure this out. He doesn't seem to share your thoughts on mates now that you have found yours." Josh tries for reasonable.

"You're not wrong, but there's no way a human could handle being my mate. There's too much at stake to risk the pack, risk her life."

"Awe! So you do care, you big softie. Better not let Claude find out. And I would like to thank you for confirming that Kennedy is, in fact, your mate. Was that so hard?" Danny chuckles in my head before he walks off to talk to Rayna and out of my reach to throttle him.

"Again, F*ck off!" But my blood boils at the thought of Claude coming anywhere near her and my wolf eggs it on. She can't be away from us, no one can protect her the way we can. My decision is made for me, she's leaving with us, she's ours. I choke on an inhale. That was not my wolf's thoughts. They are mine. Oh, sh*t! I am so f*cked.

My wolf takes advantage of me lost in my thoughts. My legs are moving before I realize and when I finally come to my senses I am right behind her, removing Ben's arm from her body and angling myself in the small space I created between them.

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“A—Alpha

Ryker. I didn't see you arrive.” Ben stutters at my sudden appearance, but stands his ground. Good Beta. He looks around me, most likely to check on Kennedy, but that isn't his concern anymore so I move with him to keep her behind me. He looks back at me clearly confused. I can hear her soft breaths behind me, she's not impressed with me. “Kennedy was just saying goodnight to everyone before I walked her upstairs.”

“No need, Beta. Keep your distance.” My growl is menacing.

“Excuse you!” Her voice was strong and pissed. I'm surprised it took her this long to say something, but my wolf purred at the sound and the feel of her hand on my arm turning me around. We could easily resist, but we don't. He'll never resist her. He's already a whipped puppy. “With all due respect, Alpha.” Why do I like the way she says that? “I think how I get to my room and who goes with me is up to me.”

At the insinuation she was taking her beta up with her for the night, my wolf surges. He turns us to face her

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full on, eyes flaring, we are chest to **chest** and the deeper I breathe the more contact I have with her and I love the feeling. She's average height, but still has to tilt her head up to look me in the eye and she doesn't back down from the look of rage I know my wolf is showing with his red eyes. Good girl. “Not anymore, mate.” My wolf growls out to her and there's nothing I can do to stop him.

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The entire party stops with collective gasps from all the guests. Even the music ceased and her face fell, all the color draining. “No!” She whispers so low I might have imagined it.

I just stare at her. It's not a choice for either of us. She's mine and I just told everyone here. There's no going back now, but I can see the shock and war in her eyes. She doesn't want this anymore than I do, but she also knows what mates mean to wolves. “Yes...mate.” My wolf forces out of my mouth again. I can't help myself, I smirk at her reaction. I want to push her, to see how far I can go before she breaks in front of all these people, needing to find a weakness, any excuse to reject her and leave her here. She should stay here.

She steps closer and puts her finger in my face. “Say that again and I will remove your tongue. I am no one's mate. You keep your distance.” She turns on her heel and moves inside. I go to follow, no one walks away from me, but my sister steps in my way.

“Let her go, Ryker, you've done enough tonight.” I blink a few times and have to fight to pull my eyes from where Kennedy went through the door to look down at Rayna. Why does she

look angry with me? I thought she, of all people, would be happy I finally found my mate. Even if it was like this.

I look at Bennet and he just nods and follows. It's the only thing that calms my wolf enough to listen to Rayna. Kennedy is his responsibility now when she isn't with me. He'll stay outside her room all night if need be, especially when she is this angry and not very likely to talk to any of us. I can't communicate with her or track her emotions and she needs protection now that my wolf has claimed her publicly. The news will spread like wildfire. She will be a target from now on no matter where she is. He seems to think this won't be a problem. I, on the other hand, see this as a major disaster. I am an aggressive alpha known for taking out alphas and packs without breaking a sweat. My reputation has gained me loyalty and enemies in about the same amounts. My enemies will be salivating at the chance to get back at me by harming her. She will be an easy target as a human. She can get hurt so easily and heals so slowly, she's a liability that I can't afford. And yet...

"Let's call it a night. Emotions are high right now." Jeremiah wraps his arms around my sister and she visibly calms. "We can talk about this tomorrow once everyone has had time to process." He looks me straight in the eye. It's not a challenge, but a warning to be on my best behavior with my sister, and his, while in his pack and I can respect it. That doesn't stop my wolf from letting a low, annoyed rumble break through my chest. It's my sister's reaction that shuts him up though.

"Oh, stop. You big brute. You couldn't have chosen a better, less public time, to do that?" She rolls her eyes and turns to Jeremiah, "I need to go check on her, I'm afraid this is going to set her off tonight."

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40 – Ryker

I grab her arm as she moves away from us. "What are you talking about? What's wrong with her?" What other weakness could she possibly have? Naturally, when I need answers, my sister ignores me, so the rest of Jeremiah's team leaves me guessing too. They clearly care more about her feelings than my anger.

"You maybe should have talked to her before claiming and embarrassing her in front of her friends and family like an alpha-hole." Rayna pulls her arm from my grasp and I just stare at her as she goes.

What the hell just happened? Josh pats me on the shoulder as Jeremiah reaches out and shakes my hand.

"It'll be okay, just give Rayna a bit to calm Ken down. I guess congrats are in order, and maybe good luck." He winces. "My mom is going to lose her mind when she finds out." He chuckles under his breath then follows my sister in the house.

“We’ll show you where you and your guys are staying.” Ben walks up to us with the delta, I think his name is Tommy. Ben is smart enough to look me in the eye, but not hold it long enough to be challenging. He’s not weak or a hot head, I can see why Kennedy would gravitate towards him, which makes my wolf grumble his annoyance at the beta.

“At least she didn’t choose to spend her time with some pansy ass.” I grumble back at him.

“She shouldn’t be spending any time with anyone but us.” He quips back.

“You do understand how stupid that sounds considering how many women we have entertained in just the last month alone.”

“You have never bedded any of them. We have been saving that for our mate. She should have the same respect.”

“You don’t know what her plans were.” I’m trying to shut down that train of thought. I just can’t, no matter how logical it is. “She’s human, there was never any reason for her to think she had a mate, settle down. Rayna is right, we have to tread carefully with her. We don’t know anything about her. She wasn’t raised the same way we were.”

“What are you talking about? She was raised in a wolf pack! She knows damn well what is expected!” He is so agitated, I may have to go on a run to settle him down, but I don’t trust him not to jump into her window and try to mark her while she sleeps.

“Knock it off! You’re getting me worked up again. And people say I’m a d*ck with a temper. Get your act together or she’s not going to want anything to do with us and I still don’t know if I even want her as a mate. I think it’s *too* dangerous for her. But she’s tied to us through Rayna no matter what and I won’t mess up that friendship. Rayna would never forgive me. We have to tread carefully.”

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“Here you go, Alpha Ryker.” I stop and blink. Again, I was so distracted by her that we made it all the way inside and upstairs without my notice. “I hope this is okay, we weren’t aware of your...umm...situation.” Ben glances at a door that has to be Kennedy’s based on the strength of her scent right across the hall from the one we stopped at.

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Chapter 63

“It’s **fine**.” I try not to growl at him. **It’s** perfect and not fine all at the same time. My wolf is not going to **let** me sleep with her so close, but so far away. I will not make **this** any more uncomfortable for **her** or my sister who is still in there with her based on the scent. “What time will we be needed in the morning?” I ask, not look

ing away from Kennedy's door, but needing a change of subject. Bennet is sitting in a chair right next to it, still in the suit he wore for the party.

"Luna Beth would like everyone down for breakfast at seven. That will give the girls time to eat and then get started for the day. Beta Josh will be to your left and your Gamma and Delta are on your right. Let us know if you need anything." I don't answer, just turn and go into my room. I don't have **the** mental capacity to be pleasant any longer.

"Let me know if anything changes. I need to know what my sister meant by 'setting her off.'" I link Bennet. She might even talk to him if she happens to open the door. I hate that I am relying on him to get information about her. But, she seemed to like his company while she was in my pack.

"On it boss."

Neither of us are going to sleep and we will have to pretend like we are alive and awake tomorrow or **my** sister will kill me. It won't be the first time we've had a sleepless night. It's just never been over a woman.

I tried everything. Doing a thousand push-ups, a hot shower, reading, pacing, laying on my bed staring at the ceiling, even sitting by the door where her scent was the strongest like a creeper. Nothing was going to calm my wolf enough to let us rest, but there is no way in hell I was walking out of this room to go to her after what she said downstairs. Rayna is right and I need to talk to her, but not like this. We both need to be calm and come up with a plan that works. Which means we have to wait until after this ceremony is over. It's going to be the longest twenty four hours of my life.

The worst part was hearing her scream. I knew it was her, I could feel the panic thick in the air. It made my blood run cold, I left it to Bennet even though it physically hurt to not go to her. I thought my wolf was going to tear through the door, but we couldn't go to her. I don't know what it was, I just had a feeling we would not be welcome. I did however stand at my door listening to Jeremiah and Rayna talking in the hallway, it must have been to Bennet, about nightmares and some kind of trauma. What did the Moon Goddess give me? She's a frail, weak, human who has been traumatized so much that she has nightmares as an adult. She'll never be ready to be my Luna.

A surge of anger rolls through me again. My wolf and I are both angry, but for different reasons. He thinks we should go to her, just accept her, that she was made for us, she needs us. He's angry at my determination to keep her away.

I feel like I have been tricked somehow. I have been waiting for years for a woman who was, at the very least, strong enough to lead beside me and this is what I was given. Like the Moon Goddess doesn't want me to have a real mate. What did I do to deserve this?

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Chapter 64

41 – Kennedy

I know I'm being a brat, but I want nothing to do with the Dark Moon guys and I will avoid having to face them for as long as possible. Rayna explained the situation to Aunt Beth earlier this morning and she decided that we could eat and get ready in my room. My aunt spun it to sound like it would be a better surprise for the guys if they didn't see us at all before the ceremony. I did **not** miss that I was included in the reveal plans. She is clearly Team Ryker on this. I will be fighting eye rolls all day.

She gives me a crushing hug. "I told you that you were special, sweet girl. I can't wait for your ceremony, I bet it will be so grand." The woman is in La La Land and so far gone that she isn't listening to reason.

He doesn't want me or any Luna if the rumors from his pack are true. Rayna won't confirm or deny any **of** the reports I have asked about, which makes me angry, but I also don't want to push. It's not fair for me to put her in the middle of this situation. This day isn't about me, it's about her. I can figure out my own problems after we make today amazing. I will just have to avoid them all for the whole day. Ugh.

Bennet has tried to talk to me every time the door to my bedroom has opened with Aunt Beth, the hairdressers and makeup artists coming and going. I don't even know what to say. And why is he still out there, in the suit he was wearing when they got here? Is he stalking me? Rayna? Did he hear me screaming last night? Oh geez, I bet I woke them all up, but he was the only one concerned enough to come and check

on me.

Rayna snaps her fingers at me and I blink a few times. "Get out of your head! Today is going to be great." She sits tall in a lowbacked, bar height chair the hair stylist brought in.

"Wha...Huh?" I look over at her getting her beautiful raven hair twisted to the side so Jeremiah can mark her properly in front of the whole pack. She looks so beautiful now, and the makeup artist hasn't even had her way yet. "Jer is going to die when he sees you." I try to bring the topic back to her. I can't get distracted again.

"Yeah, well my brother is going to swallow his tongue when you come out." She giggles and so does the hairdresser. And...we're back to her brother and I.

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“Considering he only says about two words at a time, and it’s typically a growly insult or demand, I don’t think that is a problem. Besides, it doesn’t matter. Today is all about you, not me and my crazy ass drama.”

“Would you believe me if I said he was actually shy?”

“No! Alphas aren’t shy, it’s not built into their DNA. He is selective in who he talks to, that much is clear. I’m not high on the selection list.” I laugh with her. “It’s okay, we’ll figure this out later. Get ready to knock my best friend on his butt.” I walk over and give her a hug as the hairdresser finishes up.

Once we eat our fill of the small snacks an omega brought us and the final makeup touches are done, we get dressed and the whole process is documented by the photographer that has been following us around since we got up. I have wanted to punch her a couple times for making us stall, pretending to laugh or eat or whatever for the best shot. No one cares that we took a bite of a sandwich.

Rayna’s dress is beautiful and simply elegant just like her. It’s a pale mint green grecian style dress with a

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sweetheart neckline held up by two thin straps leading back to a delicate lace design on her back. The material is cinched at her waist by a thick belt made of the same gathered fabric, showing off her soft curves. The skirt is miles of gathered sheer fabric that makes her look ethereal when she walks.

“Yep. I will be scraping Jer off the floor before you even get to the end of the aisle. You are gorgeous!” I squeal at her and she smiles back at me. “It’s time. Let’s go knock his furry butt out.”

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Chapter 65

I move to open my door and am met with two solid walls of muscle. What the hell? I figured Jason would be here, but... “Oh, hell no! This is not happening. Bennet, don’t you have something better to do with your time?” I shouldn’t snap at him, he hasn’t actually done anything wrong, but he is in my way and way too

close **for** comfort.

“Nope.” He looks us both over with a blank expression on his face. “I don’t see you giving Jason a hard time about doing his job.” He sounds hurt. Is he annoyed with me?

“He’s following his Luna, that’s his job. Why would I give him a hard time?”

“And I’m following mine, get over it. It’s not a discussion.” The f*ck? I can feel my scowl deepen. Nope. He’s not hurt, he’s pissed about having to follow me around. That makes two of us, buddy.

Rayna grabbed my arm and started walking before I could start in on Bennet. Great. Are they all this dickish when they aren’t partying? Maybe they were just being nice when we visited because they wanted to make it easy on Rayna. I had to take deep breaths as we walked downstairs. The Aunt Beth tornado was a welcome distraction when we got to the bottom. Jason and Bennet kept their distance, just watching from the outskirts of the room. I could tell that Aunt Beth was conflicted about my situation based on the concerned look on her face and I’m sure everyone has discussed it at length, about me, but without me. As usual. I hate that I can’t mindlink with anyone and they are forever leaving me out of conversations. I would love to be able to talk to Rayna without prying ears. It takes everything in me to keep my temper in check. I feel like I am going to be angry all day based on the way the morning started. Deep breaths, I keep reminding myself.

“Let’s get you girls out of here, the boys should be down soon and I want to keep you a surprise for now. You are both so gorgeous.” She claps her hands like a schoolgirl.

She ushers us out to a small tent at the back of the yard and tells Jason and Bennet to wait outside. She knows they can hear us just fine through the thin plastic, but I think she is giving us both a moment before the chaos starts. She hugs Rayna and then comes to me.

“It will all work out sweetheart, okay?” She pulls me back and looks me right in the eyes. “Be happy today, you are gaining a sister after being surrounded by overprotective boys your whole life.” She laughs and my tension cracks a little. I take a deep breath and nod, letting it out slowly.

“Thank you Aunt Beth. I’m sorry, today isn’t about me.” I look over at Rayna. “And I really am glad that there has been another girl in the house. I did not know how obnoxious those guys really were until you came along and they divided their attention between the two of us.” I made my voice loud enough to guarantee Jason and Bennet heard me. I swear I heard Bennet laugh and Jason respond with ‘shut up’ and something along the lines of ‘buckle up, she’s yours now.’ Asshole. I rolled my eyes and smiled at Rayna who was giggling at the exchange.

“Alright, it’s time.” Aunt Beth sings. I don’t know how the time is flying by so fast. It seems like we just walked out here, but it’s been at least an hour. “Kennedy and I will go take our places and we’ll see you soon.” We both hug Rayna again and head out of the tent.

Bennet walks just behind my right shoulder so I can see him in my peripherals. It’s the same way he walked behind me when we were in Dark Moon pack. Did he know then? Did they all know and just didn’t tell me? I take a deep breath in and tuck those thoughts away or I am liable to start a fight, but this discussion is

happening. Tonight.

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Chapter 66

42 – Kennedy

My stance by Aunt Beth and Uncle James was already going to be a hot topic amongst the pack members who don't like me, we had actually discussed, at length, whether I should stand up front with them or be given a seat. My vote was to sit, this day wasn't about me. But Aunt Beth shot that down. I am Jeremiah's sister for all intents and purposes and as a part of the family I will stand up by him while we welcome our future Luna into the pack. But, now that I have a bodyguard from Dark Moon also following me around, the whispers aren't exactly whispers and Uncle James had to audibly growl to silence them as we made our way to the platform in front of the gathered crowd. Clearly people from the party last night have been running their mouths.

We each met Jeremiah and gave him a hug. He held onto me for a second longer. "I love you Ken. We'll figure this out." He whispers in my ear.

"Love you to Jer." I give him one last squeeze and move to stand by my aunt and uncle, Bennett right behind

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1. me.

So far I have avoided

looking at the front row where I can feel Alpha Ryker's presence. I knew the moment he was outside, like a pressure pushing on my skin letting me know he's here. The closer I am to him the stronger the pressure and it changes as I move around. I could tell which direction he was in without looking. His stare is making my skin heat up too. I feel flush all over, like the summer sun is beating down on me in the late fall air.

The ceremony is beautiful. I've never seen one before since they only happen once a generation typically. The elders give some pack history and describe the lore that brought Alphas and Lunas into power and their roles as the leaders of the pack. He uses a ceremonial silver blade with all kinds of jewels embedded into the handle to slice into each of their hands. When they clasp them together, mixing her blood with his, I hear all the pack members gasp as she becomes a part of the Silver Crescent pack.

An instant sadness and longing fill me. Is that all that it would take to become a pack member? A nick of the hand and a few pretty words? I have always felt like an outsider and jealous of the bond that these wolves have through their Goddess. Now I really don't understand what all the fuss has been about keeping me out of the pack. There is no way that simple little action could harm me. I get cuts and scrapes all the time when we train or when I run in the woods. I have to fight the tears back. Am I really that unwanted because I am human? Deep breath in and out slowly. Did the elders just make up an excuse to keep me out because of that? Preying on Aunt Beth's unreasonable fear of losing me after losing my mom. I tak

e another slow breath in and out. I can't get upset here, it's not about me I remind myself. I blink away the moisture behind my eyes.

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I feel a light touch of fingertips on my back and my emotions instantly settle and it takes me a second to realize it isn't Aunt Beth's hand from my left, but Bennet's from my right. Another breath in and out, along with more questions to ask.

A few more words are spoken, but I don't really hear them. All my focus is on my best friend as he gently sweeps a loose lock of hair from Rayna's face. Then he leans in, fangs bared and marks her as his Luna and mate. When she marks him even I feel the surge of power as they are blessed by the Goddess. The whole pack cheers and breaks me out of whatever trance I was in during all of that and I smile and clap along. I feel

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fuzzy and numb. So many emotions and none of them the happy ones that I should be feeling for Jer and

Rayna.

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Chapter 67

Thank the Goddess for Aunt Beth's seating arrangement. She had the head table set with Rayna and Jer in the middle, Uncle James and Aunt Beth on Jer's other side, followed by Ben, Tommy, Jason and me. On Rayna's other side were Ryker, Josh, Danny and Bennet. Unfortunately, the gammas must have had **some** sort of understanding and they switched places as everyone was sitting down so no one could protest without causing a scene, sneaky bastards.

At least it was Bennet and not Ryker sitting next to me though, that would have made for even more awkward conversation, if he talked at all. This left no doubt in anyone's mind who I am to the Dark Moon pack and the pointed stares and whispers started up again.

I kept conversation surface level with Bennet through dinner and Tommy is always super chatty so I didn't have to engage much. Once the DJ starts playing music and drinks are flowing more freely I began to loosen up and enjoy myself with Rayna and my guys. I actively avoided Ryker and just pretended that Bennet wasn't following me around like a shadow. I have to watch how many drinks I have though. Not having a wolf's metabolism, alcohol affects me so much worse and I need to be clear headed to follow through with my plan.

When it looked like all of my guys, Ryker and most of his guys were occupied, I hugged everyone and said goodnight, claiming the long day and night before on being tired. I know Ryker is watching me, he has been all night, but hopefully he will continue to keep his distance

and pretend like I don't exist. The same hope is nonexistent for Bennet. He glued himself to my side the whole way up to her room.

"I'm going to sleep,

Bennet, go enjoy the rest of the party. Today was probably not much fun for you. Or go to sleep, I know you were out here all night last night."

"Not happening, Lu..."

My hand shoots up in front of his mouth. "Don't you dare call me that!" I took a deep breath to calm down, he's just doing his

job. A job he is forced into. It's not his fault he was assigned to me and clearly feels like I am so weak I need to be protected inside the packhouse that currently has three alpha males roaming around and countless warriors. "It's just Kennedy, nothing else. And I have been perfectly safe in the confines of this room for my whole life. Go rejoin the party, or go to bed, but don't sit out here all night." I don't give him a chance to answer. I walk in my room and close the door, then

I lock it for good measure. It wouldn't keep any of them out if they really wanted to get in here, but it sent the message that I wanted to be left alone.

I quickly stripped out of my dress and hung

it up in the closet switching to black leggings, black tank and black long sleeved shirt, sock and tennis shoes. I am not going to stay here if the plan is to just ship me back to Dark Moon without even having a discussion first. Clearly more people knew about me being Ryker's mate and no one thought to tell me or ask how I felt about

the situation. Ryker barely talked to me when we were at Dark Moon and didn't even try to approach me to talk today. Asshole probably thinks I will just fall at his feet like all the alpha chasers do. Well he has

another thing coming if he thinks he can just pack me up and dismantle my whole life at his command.

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Chapter 68

43–Kennedy

There is an apartment above my mom's studio. I have been having it renovated over the last couple years. Even Aunt Beth doesn't know that. She's been trying to find reasons for me not to leave the pack for school since I got here. She thinks I don't know about her plans, but her fear of me leaving has become a bit over the top as we all come into adulthood. I know it's the first place Jer will look, but I'm hoping his loyalty to me is strong enough to keep

everyone away for a little while. The studio is thriving and I have been working with Mark for years learning the business and helping it grow. He's another one to worry about since he's one of Jer's pack warriors, but I'm putting a lot of

faith in the fact that he understands as much as Jer why I need this. But if an Alpha or Lama command is put on him, he won't be able to go against it like Jer.

I pack a couple days worth of clothes, my laptop and a few other small essentials and move toward my door listening. I can hear Bennet breathing on the other side and smell his cologne from the crack under the door. He must be sitting next to the opening again. Stubborn as s. Well, me too. I smile a little at the idea that the Moon Goddess got one thing right. I moved to turn on some music and set the little bluetooth speaker as close to the door as I could without being too obvious and for good measure, I turned on the shower in my bathroom with a bathbomb, letting the strong fragrance mask my scent, before opening my window. There is a small section of roof that juts out from the first floor, I toss my backpack onto it. I have to time this right, I need to leave while the party is still going on and scents are everywhere out here. It will be harder for them to start tracking me. But I need Bennet to believe I showered and went to sleep to buy me as much time as possible. Once I am in the woods I will be able to use some of the tactics Ben's dad has been showing me for hiding my scent on the run. None of the guys or Aunt Beth know I have been doing this, but after being taken, Beta Daniel and I thought it would be good to know since I'm not as fast as a wolf. I actually understand my limitations being human and just wish that they could all see I'm not as reckless as they think, but it has helped me stay under their radar. I spend more time at the studio than they know and I haven't been targeted since. There have been a couple times when it has helped me avoid rogues camping in the woods, but I'm not telling anyone about those close calls or they would lock me up for sure.

I move back to my bathroom, and notice my blonde hair is like a freaking beacon against my black clothes. I braid it and find a stocking cap I wear when I run in the winter, that will have to do. When I'm done I shut the water off and move around as if I were getting ready for bed, then I turn off the light and ruffle the covers around. The memory foam mattress is soundless. I slowly and quietly move to my window and listen. I hear Bennet take a deep breath in and huff it out. I'm not sure if he is frustrated or relieved, I kind of feel bad since I'm disappearing on his watch, but I tried to get him to leave. It's on him now. The music picked up a bit and I took my chance to climb out the window.

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Here goes nothing. I throw my backpack on and climb down the short drop to the ground and listen again for any signs that I have been caught. The party is still going on in the backyard and I can hear the laughter and chatter coming from all the happy partygoers. I should still be there with Jeremiah and Rayna, living it up and celebrating their matebond, but I just can't handle all of the conflicting emotions going on right now and I need my space to get my head on straight. I move toward the forest, tighten the straps of my bag

and run.

It takes about 40 minutes to get to the studio if I am jogging at a steady pace. My goal tonight is to get there more quickly, but I also have to

o be careful to not leave my scent all over the forest too. I found the nearest cedar tree and started pulling off small ferns and rubbing them between my hands to let off the

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fragrance. I tie a few in my braid too since those are the two places my scent is the strongest. I then tuck several ferns into the outer pockets of my backpack and in my leggings. I will continue to crush them as I go to mask and lessen my scent. I also have to be careful about where I step. If any of them are good trackers they will be able to see broken branches and freshly moved dirt from my footsteps, even in the dark of night. It's too bad there isn't a stream or any other body of water near here. That would allow me to lose them completely.

About 30 minutes in and I think I am making great time and pace, when I hear it. The unmistakable sound of a howl, and it isn't a happy or playful howl. It's pissed. I try to move more quickly, but I can't just start running in a panic, that will erase all the work I did to stay hidden. Ten more minutes and I finally make it to the clear walking path that leads into the city, where I hope all the smells there will hide my scent and I can run more quickly. It's not much further to my mom's studio. I can do this. I start running, hard. I can almost hear the pounding of paws on the ground in my panic. I know it's my imagination, the blood rushing in my ears from adrenaline. None of them are that fast and I have almost an hour head start. But I don't take any chances and put on a burst of speed I didn't know I had. Just when it starts to feel like my lungs are going to burst and I can't go any further a snarl rips through the air and the ground shakes as a massive black wolf lands in front of me.

"Oh, f*ck!" It's my good luck wolf statue come to life. And he looks ready to kill.

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Chapter 69

44- Ryker

This whole day has been a roller coaster of emotions. Add to that **not** sleeping and my wolf worrying about whatever made Kennedy so afraid that she screamed herself and half the packhouse awake last night.

I can only pace my room so long hoping to hear any of their conversations. Clearly, this **is** all normal and everyone just goes about their business like nothing happened.

I hear Rayna and Kennedy getting ready in her room when I go down to meet with Alpha James and Luna Beth this morning. It lessened some of the tension in my chest to hear them laughing together. At **least** she likes my sister.

"Maybe that will soften her up for us." My wolf sounds lovesick and wistful.

"We can only hope." I roll my eyes, because I have a feeling Kennedy has fairly strong, expressive emotions and she probably would not put 'soft' and I in the same sentence.

There isn't much for us to do since Beth won't let Jeremiah near the girls, which apparently extends to all the guys except Jason and Bennet. Josh can sense me about to crawl out of my skin. I rarely have down time and could be doing so many things while we wait around for guests to be welcomed in and final touches being done.

"If you don't stop pacing you are going to owe Luna Beth a new floor." Danny chuckles and the rest of the guys laugh from their spots around the island.

"Shouldn't it be me who's nervous?" Jeremiah asks.

"I'm not nervous, I don't like not having anything to do." I squeeze the bridge of my nose.

Five minutes later Alpha James walks in the back door. "It's time boys, let's get this party started."

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off Thank the Goddess. We walk out to our seats and get settled. Danny and Josh have not taken their eyes off me. I can see them out of my peripherals. Danny's smirk makes me want to smack him and Josh's stoic face gives nothing away if you don't know him. But, I can see the muscle in his jaw tick. He's ready for something to happen. That makes me more nervous than anything.

I am fully prepared to see my sister walking towards her mate. I may be biased, but my sister is always beautiful. Today was no exception. But, I stopped breathing as I watched Kennedy walk forward with Beth and James. I only resumed the process of taking in oxygen when Josh elbowed me to turn my focus where it should be, on my sister walking toward her mate. Both my sister and Kennedy had pastel dresses that were long and flowy, with thin straps barely holding the things up. They looked like they would be better suited for summer than fall, but with the way wolves' body heat runs, my sister probably doesn't feel it. I'm surprised to see Kennedy doesn't look the least bit uncomfortable though. Where my sister's dress is a soft pale green, her favorite color, Kennedy's is an ice blue that matches her eyes. She looks strong and confident like any female warrior, her head is held high and for the briefest moment I feel something like pride watching her stand with her family and accepting my sister. But the feeling is short lived as she watches my sister join their pack. A flash of anger and jealousy crosses her face as Rayna and Jeremiah join

their hands. 1

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I feel my own anger and jealousy rise watching her reaction. Her breathing is quick and shallow, like **she's** holding in tears. It happens again shortly after and this time it is laced with sadness when Jeremiah marks Rayna. Does Kennedy wish it was her in Rayna's place? Is she that good of an actress

ss to pretend to **be** friends with my sister? Another surge of irritation hits as Bennet comforts her and her breathing slows and shoulders visibly relax. Is she just quick to lean in to any wolf that shows her attention? Will she go after Bennet too? She's clearly close with Ben. I wonder who else she has her sights on?

My whole body is vibrating, swirling with anger, hurt, sadness, lust, wanting, jealousy. It's enough to drive anyone insane. If I wasn't here for Rayna, and in the front damn row, I would just get up and leave and never look back. But I can't do that to my sister. I can at least hope that now that they have marked each other, maybe Kennedy's sadness is her coming to terms with Jeremiah finding his true mate and she will not cause them any trouble.

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Chapter 70

I was hoping to talk to her after dinner tonight, but I don't think me or my wolf could handle it. We have **so** many questions, but our emotions are too high and I don't think we would be able to ask them in a way that would actually get us answers. So I let Bennet stick to her the way he has been since she arrived in our pack, and I stay just out of her sight. Danny has also kept close to her, but he thankfully caught on to my mood and hasn't tried to bait me into approaching or talking to her. Josh seems to think I need a babysitter and hasn't left my side all night. I do relax a little as I watch Kennedy say goodnight to everyone and then head upstairs with only Bennet in tow.

"Let me know if anything happens. I still don't understand what had her screaming last night." I link Bennet, who has been harboring a low level of annoyance with me all day. It makes sense, he's loyal to his Luna and his Luna is currently pissed at me and the world at large.

"Yep." Is all I get at first. "You going to keep avoiding her, or are you going to grow a set and actually talk to your mate sometime this century?"

"First of all, f*ck you! Who do you think you are talking to? You may be my friend, but I am still your Alpha."

"Then act like it. She is miserable and doing an amazing f*cking job of hiding it. It would probably help if her mate was the one comforting her, not her gamma."

"I saw you comfort her. Keep your damn hands to yourself. I can't help it if she has to get past the fact that Jeremiah is mated to someone else and she has to move on. She's done a great job pretending to not be in love with him though. I give her acting skills an A+."

"You deserve all her wrath if that's what you think is going on. Dumbass. What's the plan, in case she decides to talk to me and asks? You going to just steal her away from her friends and family, or are you going to give her an hour to pack up and say goodbye?"

"Watch the tone. I was hoping to talk to her in private tomorrow. Claude is still a threat and I don't think he's the only one. She's too fragile to be left alone, but I don't know if it would be safer to leave her here or take her home. We'll talk in the morning. I will find a way to get her alone." We are just going to skip over the absolute disrespect he threw at me. As long as he

e's doing his job I can put up with her attitude clearly rubbing off on him. Her mood is going to affect his, but I didn't think the effect would be this strong so soon and from someone without a wolf.

"Yeah, good luck with that." He scoffs. What the hell is happening? We have been friends forever, but he has never talked back to me when it's serious.

I didn't stick around the party for long after she left. I tried to dance and talk with my sister, but all she wanted to do was talk about Kennedy and that topic was not open for discussion, which obviously made her mad at me too. Naturally, she's excited to gain Kennedy as a sister in more ways than through Jeremiah. The last thing I wanted to do was be in or cause a fight on the day of her Luna ceremony so I said my goodnights and went up to my room where I could at least calm my wolf by being in proximity to Kennedy.

When I got to the top of the stairs I found Bennet sitting in a chair just outside her door playing a game on his phone. He was still in his suit from the ceremony. He hasn't left her side for a minute. And I kind of feel bad about putting him in this position, but it is his job to protect her at all costs.