

Letters Sent To Eternity

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8-9 – Ryker

I'm beyond fed up with these endless meetings, yet I can't bring myself to complain aloud—after all, this whole idea was mine to begin with. Still, I hadn't anticipated just how whiny and entitled these former Alphas and Betas would be. Every time we gather, their behavior only seems to deteriorate further. No wonder so many of them couldn't keep their packs intact.

Right now, I should be preparing for the ceremony to welcome the new Alphas. I don't envy those three young men stepping into the role. Some of the older, arrogant bastards love to flex their power, trying to intimidate these newcomers into submission and warning them not to rock the boat. But that's exactly why we bring in fresh Alphas—new blood means fresh ideas. We grow stronger by learning from both past failures and victories. Still, a few of these old-timers should have been retired long ago, never even allowed a seat on the Elders Council.

It's been a couple of years since we last had new Alphas come of age. I'm not the most recent, but I'm close. I'm a bit of an exception to the usual path. My father was badly wounded in a massive war, and despite his Alpha heritage and healing abilities, he never fully recovered. So, at sixteen, he named me Alpha. I can hardly believe it's been ten years already. I understand exactly how these young Alphas feel, which is why I try to serve as a buffer for them. I've earned a reputation as an asshole, and I wear that label like a badge of honor—especially when dealing with egotistical pricks who have long overstayed their welcome. Some of the other Alphas fear me, or more accurately, my reputation, which I use to my advantage. I usually keep quiet and let my actions speak for me, but some of these kids desperately need help standing up straight.

"Alpha Ryker? Will you help us?" The voice in front of me pulls me from my thoughts.

It's Alpha Edward. His pack is small, and he has no heir. His Luna died giving birth, and he never found another mate, chosen or second chance. This has been inevitable. Edward and I have been negotiating the future of his pack for some time now, but a threat looms from within—some pack members believe they should be able to challenge him for leadership. His warriors have brought me rumors from neighboring packs with similar ambitions. Edward is growing weaker and more vulnerable. He's held on as long as he can, but he can't risk his pack any longer.

Normally, I wouldn't interfere. I'd let the pack thin itself out before stepping in. But these neighboring packs aren't known for settling matters peacefully. They're more likely to use this as an excuse to kill indiscriminately, innocent or not. That means women and children could be caught in the crossfire—or worse. The conflict wouldn't stop there; it would spill over into the territories surrounding Alpha Edward's pack.

That's where I come in. If Edward willingly hands over his pack to me, then the bloodshed will be minimal, if any at all. There's always one person who thinks they deserve to be in charge and tries to challenge me. It's rarely one of the ranked leaders, though. Those guys usually support the transfer because we negotiate for months before any transition like this happens. They ensure their pack is cared for, and I guarantee their future leaders have a place within my ranks. It makes no sense to cut off a future Beta just because their pack merged with another and the position is already filled. As long as those ranked members respect the hierarchy, they keep their titles. I've had to make examples of what happens when they don't fall in line.

"Yes, of course, Alpha Edward. When do you need me to take over your pack? I thought the challengers were being dealt with."

Edward's expression tightens. "I think they've just been waiting for me to weaken enough to stop them. I got reports of aggression after I left today. Both my Beta and Gamma have young families. I don't want anyone to get hurt. I'm afraid they'll target anyone loyal to me—or to you. We need to transfer immediately. I have a bad feeling about this."

"Don't worry. I already have warriors embedded in your pack who will protect your people until I arrive. Still, I think you should stay close to me, just as a precaution. We'll leave first thing tomorrow and should reach your pack by mid-afternoon. Have your Beta prepare the ceremony so we can proceed as soon as possible."

"Thank you, Ryker." His voice is heavy with exhaustion. I can tell he's been holding on until he knew his pack would be safe.

I'm honestly surprised he's lasted this long after losing his mate. Many don't survive that kind of loss. The pain is said to be the worst torture imaginable. Some die from broken hearts; others lose their minds and must be put down for everyone's safety. I've had to eliminate many Alphas for exactly that reason.

That's partly why Alphas are fiercely protective of their Lunas—and why I'm sometimes relieved I haven't found mine yet. My wolf grumbles in my mind whenever I think about it. An Alpha reaches his full strength only when his fated Luna stands beside him. He'd burn the world down for her, and anyone who dared to capture or harm her would hold an unthinkable power over him. There's nothing we wouldn't sacrifice to save her, including anyone or anything else. I once ripped a man's arms off just for having the audacity to touch my little sister after she said "no." I'd probably do far worse to anyone who even glanced at my mate. The very thought of that kind of possession tightens my chest and terrifies me. I don't want anyone to ever have that kind of control over me.

I spent time speaking with each former Alpha or Beta present. Some of the packs I absorbed came with bloody histories, and not all the leadership survived. With so many pack members, I rely on strong leadership to maintain order. That's why I hold these monthly meetings with all territories—to ensure needs are met and to gauge whether leaders are doing their jobs. Most of my intelligence comes from warriors I've planted throughout the territories. I make a point of showing up regularly to remind everyone who's in charge. It might seem silly, but it's necessary. We rotate the meeting locations across my

pack lands so everyone knows I treat them equally. It's all just a game of egos and power plays. Speaking of which...

"It's about time, Alpha Ryker. Some of us have pressing matters, and you're wasting time chatting with washed-up Alphas who aren't worth your attention."

The voice cuts through the room.

"Hello, Claude. What pressing matter do you have this time?" I deliberately omit his title, and I see him bristle. He no longer holds it—because I took it from him.

Former Alpha Claude Craig is the biggest pain I've ever had to deal with. Yet he insists on being called by a title he lost long ago. Neither I nor my men ever use it. There are plenty of "Alphas" here clinging to their past glories; Claude isn't unique. I choose to overlook his attitude and focus on more important battles. Early in my reign as Alpha of the Dark Moon pack, he tried to challenge me, thinking it would be easy to overthrow my father's prominent pack just because I was young.

He underestimated me and my skills. He also didn't realize that my style of leadership would appeal to the pack I absorbed from him. Many willingly pledged loyalty to me. Unfortunately, I was young and naive enough to believe that beating him meant he'd submit completely. In theory, he did—but he negotiated to keep a small amount of control and surrounded himself with enough minions to remain a nuisance. He's mostly harmless now, but I never take that for granted. I have someone planted in his ranks too. I've already been briefed on the nonsense he planned to bring up. He's not foolish enough to openly challenge me again, but he toes the line, and I have to remind him regularly who really runs things.

I tune out his chatter as he leads us to a table with a large map spread across it. I don't need to listen closely—I'm not about to agree to expand his territory. He seems to believe that more land will make "his pack members"—my pack members—feel more comfortable. What he really wants is to broaden his influence and start taking over neighboring territories before I do. What he doesn't realize is that his borders are completely surrounded on all sides by territories loyal to me. That wasn't an accident. He'd be a fool if he doesn't know that.

"I think a school and training facility would work best right here." He points to a spot miles outside his current borders. He wants me to grant him more land and fund the construction so he can benefit from it. He must still think I'm some naive sixteen-year-old kid. He's already abused every bit of leadership I've given him.

"I'll discuss it with Don and see what he thinks about sharing a school and training facility, especially since that land is well beyond your borders. I'd shift the location somewhat and invite Nathan and Rory to participate, since it would be near their residential areas as well. We'll also need a small healer's center there, so trainees won't have to travel far for emergency care."

He just stares at me, mouth agape like a stunned fish. With four leaders overseeing those facilities, cooperation is essential—and none of those three will be swayed by his nonsense. He should have thought twice before bringing this proposal to me.

“If you’ll excuse me, I have another meeting to attend. Make sure you get your proposal in writing to Robin as soon as possible. I’ll inform you of the decision by the end of the week.” I leave him standing there, dumbfounded, as I walk away.

Now, I need to focus on Edward’s transfer and then make it to the Elders Council meeting. My sister and father are attending in my place, and I trust them to hold off the assholes for me. But I hate the idea of my sister being alone with unmated Alphas. She’s twenty and hasn’t found her mate yet. Last year, older Alphas began eyeing her as a potential chosen or second chance mate because of her Alpha bloodline. I shut that down immediately, but that won’t stop them from trying when I’m not around. She needs protection from that bullshit at all times.

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Chapter 9

I’m barely conscious, but I can feel Jeremiah’s strong arms wrapped around me, his broad chest rising and falling beneath my head as it rests against him. Each breath he takes is steady, each squeeze of his hand reassuring. Glancing to my side, I notice Rayna sitting close to Jeremiah, her eyes filled with sympathy as she watches me. The sting of tears begins to prick behind my eyelids. I try desperately to blink them away, but it’s futile. They slip down my cheeks in slow, reluctant streams. I clamp my eyes shut, attempting to hold back the flood.

“Hey, don’t fight it,” Rayna’s voice is gentle, almost a soft melody in the quiet room. “Let yourself feel the sadness. It’ll help you heal.” Her words soothe me, and I finally surrender, allowing the tears to fall freely.

“It doesn’t make it any less humiliating,” I admit, my voice trembling as I sniffle and pull my hands away from hers, rubbing them across my face in a futile attempt to dry the tears.

Just then, Ben appears at the foot of my bed, bringing a sliver of comfort. “That makes sense,” he says, stepping closer. “What happened this time? Was your dream different? You actually yelled out for all of us.” He gestures, and I see Tommy and Jason standing behind him. “You’ve never done that before.”

I blink, unsure how to answer. “I don’t know. I don’t really remember,” I lie, closing my eyes briefly. But the haunting image of their lifeless eyes and bloodied bodies lingers behind my eyelids, refusing to fade. I open them again, voice barely above a whisper. “Jer, are you sure you want me coming on this trip? I can’t imagine your in-laws would appreciate you bursting into my room in the middle of the night. I’m a liability no one wants around.”

Realizing I'm still curled up in Jeremiah's lap, with his mate sitting right beside us, I pull away and shift to sit next to him instead, hugging my knees to my chest as a pounding headache begins to throb behind my eyes.

"Mom's gone," Jeremiah says firmly, his voice steady. "There's absolutely no question—you need to be with me." I stare at him for a moment, disbelief flickering across my face. I roll my eyes but don't argue. Instead, I push myself off the bed.

"Where are you going?" he asks, springing up beside me.

"Bathroom," I reply, trying to sound annoyed but only managing a tone of quiet defeat. I don't wait for his response.

I take longer than necessary, lingering in the bathroom to wipe the tear stains from my face and try to calm the storm inside me. Every blink brings the horrific vision back—the shattered car, their broken bodies, the blood. When I finally return, they're all still there. I roll my eyes again and head to grab some workout clothes.

"What are you doing now?" Ben's voice carries concern this time.

"I'm wide awake," I admit. "There's no way I'm falling back asleep. I'm going down to the Alpha's gym. I promise I won't leave the packhouse. It's the middle of the night—go get some rest, you guys. We've got a long drive tomorrow. I'll probably catch some sleep in the car." I don't wait for any protests.

Apparently, the only cure for these nightmares is a grueling three-hour workout. By the time I finally come back upstairs, it's six in the morning, and my stomach is growling loudly enough to demand attention.

"The dreams are getting worse," I confess quietly as I stand at the kitchen island, spooning yogurt and fruit into my mouth. Jeremiah approaches from behind, wrapping his arms around my shoulders in a comforting embrace.

"What's strange is that the dreams are more fragmented now—choppier, harder to remember—but the emotions they stir up are stronger than ever," I say, my voice low. I have no clue what's going on, only that everything changed when we turned eighteen—some things becoming less clear, others intensifying.

I keep these thoughts to myself around Jeremiah. He'd probably chalk it up to some wolf-related phenomenon. He's done that before when odd things happened to us as kids. We have this uncanny ability to read each other's thoughts and call each other out without hesitation. Over time, I learned that as long as I don't lie outright, I can keep some things private. Maybe he's learned I need space sometimes and chooses not to pry.

After all, I'm human. There's no magical link between my quirks and their werewolf abilities, and for some reason, I constantly find myself having to explain that to my supernatural friend. We do have a secret way to communicate without using the pack's telepathic link—sign language. Aunt Beth started teaching me when I was little, after discovering the telepathy stuff. I was jealous that she and Uncle James could talk to pack members

mentally, and that Jeremiah and the others would eventually have the same gift. Learning sign language was my way of belonging.

Jeremiah and I still use signs, especially at school, where kids can be cruel to anyone they see as different. And I'm definitely at the bottom of their list. But with our silent language, I have a shield—a way to connect without words, without judgment.