

## Chapter 98: Letting Go

Anna

When the pack came back after attacking Alpha Brady's pack, they brought Dr. Stephens with them.

Dr. Stephens, the man I have despised ever since I started working in the hospital. All of us, the nurses, knew that he was hurting our pack, but there was very little we could do about it. At the time, we were in a constant state of war. We could barely keep the pack going in between battles, and Dr. Stephens had been part of that problem.

We'd all turned to Savannah. She was younger than Erika and Katie, but she had more medical experience. Without any conscious discussion about it, we had all deferred to her when we questioned Dr. Stephens' methods. Goddess knows, you never questioned him to his face. He'd berate you in front of anyone and everyone in the room. He was a horrible man for so many reasons.

As I stare at the man, who is currently on his knees in front of Alpha Warren, I remember the day I lost the man that I'm pretty sure was my mate. I was almost eighteen. I had actually volunteered to work in the hospital because I felt the draw to him and, as a warrior, he spent more time in the pack hospital than he did in the packhouse, just like most of them did. Back then, the packhouse was a place where warriors slept for a couple of hours before going back out to battle.

Theodore, or Teddy as he'd asked me to call him, had been a young handsome warrior. I made sure that every time he came in, that I was there to treat him.

"The best part of coming into this hospital is seeing your pretty face," he'd say when he'd come in. I'd always blush and he'd always stroke his fingers over my cheek and smile in a way that made me think that he felt the same things that I did.

"How old are you, Anna?" he'd asked once.

"Seventeen."

"How long before you turn eighteen?"

"A couple of months."

"Hmmm, maybe in a couple of months, we can spend some time together outside of this hospital. Would you like that?" he'd asked me. Back then, I didn't recognize the possessive look in his eyes. Now, I'm old enough and I've seen it enough in our pack that I know what it was. He wanted me. Whether he already felt the pull of the mate bond, or he'd just set his sights on me, I'll never know. But I knew that I wanted him, too.

He was one of the ones that got an infection that Dr. Stephens didn't treat. I'd had to stand by and watch as Teddy came into the hospital weaker and weaker each time. The brightness, the light in his eyes that I had fallen in love with, eventually dimmed. He'd still tell me that the best part of coming to the hospital was seeing my pretty face, but the smile no longer reached his eyes.

And then the day came when he hadn't returned to the hospital. I'd been busy, we were always busy in the hospital, but I kept looking for him. He never returned from that battle.

I'd stood outside while we once again lit pyres for our dead and this time, I grieved for the man that would never be mine. It was the day before my eighteenth birthday.

I stood by the pyres as they burned. The warriors, exhausted and overwhelmed with frustration and pain at losing more friends and family, didn't stay long. Alpha Warren and Beta Charlie stayed longer, and the desperation coming from both of them was palpable. We were being killed off too quickly and our doctor wasn't doing anything about it.

I'd stayed out there longer than almost anyone else, crying for the man that I had fallen in love with. One other man was out there with me. When he turned to go inside, he was startled to see me.

"Anna? What are you doing out here? Did you lose someone too?" he asked. I know I've seen him in the pack hospital, but I don't immediately remember his name. He's only recently turned eighteen and started fighting, so he hasn't come in as often as the others.

"I did. I lost the man I think was my mate. I would have known for sure tomorrow. What about you? Who did you lose?"

"My brother. He was a good warrior. But there's only so much that can be done with all this fighting. None of us has time to heal properly."

"Who was your brother?" If he was a good warrior, I'm sure I knew him.

"Theodore."

I turned and looked at him. "Teddy is your brother?"

He had nodded and tried to smile, but instead his lips had trembled, and he'd pressed them tightly together to keep from crying.

"He was the only family I had left. He was good brother. He sure did like you. He thought....well, I guess it doesn't matter now."

"He thought what?" I asked.

He'd looked at me sadly. "He thought you were his mate. He told me he couldn't wait until you were eighteen so he would know for sure."

"I thought so, too," I'd said, looking back at the burning pyres. "What's your name?" I'd asked, realizing I didn't know.

"Bennett. But you can call me Benny."

That night, Benny and I had forged a friendship through our combined sorrow and loss. I'd made a point of making sure that when he came in to the hospital that it was Savannah that saw him and treated him. I wasn't going to lose another friend, and eventually, he and I had become lovers. At first, it felt like a betrayal to Teddy, but I realized I couldn't go my whole life wishing he'd return. He won't. And if he loved me, like I'm pretty sure he did, he wouldn't want me to be sad and alone. Part of me hopes that he'd be happy that it's his brother that I'd given myself to, the only man I've ever been with.

Benny was one of the warriors whose wolf had gone quiet and was dying a slow death when Luna Yara arrived in our pack. He was just one of the many lives that she saved and I'm so thankful to her for

that.

Now, as I listen to Alpha Warren giving his verdict to Dr. Stephens, I feel Benny's hand slide into mine. I turn and look at him and I see that same possessiveness in his eyes that I saw in his brother's so long ago.

I somehow understand what he's trying to tell me without words. This, Dr. Stephen's death, will close the loop on his brother's death. Teddy's murderer, because that's what Dr. Stephen's is, will die for his sins. I know what Benny wants. He's been asking me for months to make it official between us. Knowing that Dr. Stephens will die today, it feels right. It feels like I can finally let Teddy go.

I nod, letting him know that I'm ready to take him as my chosen mate. He smiles a smile that is very much like his brother's, and I blush. He strokes his fingers over my cheek, getting that same possessive look that Teddy used to get. I wonder if this is Teddy's way of letting me know that he's okay with my decision. I hope he is.

When Alpha Warren steps back, the pack, almost as one, steps forward to attack. As expected, Dr. Stephens takes off running. I don't need to kill him, but I want one good swipe at him for letting all those good warriors die while we, the nurses, tried everything in our power to save them.

The pack leaps, immediately giving chase. Benny and some other strong warriors get to him first, tackling him to the ground. Benny holds him while me and some other weaker wolves catch up, taking our opportunity to swipe our claws through his body.

When they release him, he begins to run again and once again, the

pack gives chase. I let others have their turn. Once again, no one said it, but we all know that our Luna doesn't like the idea of us tormenting Dr. Stephens for a long period of time and we will respect her wishes.

It still takes us hours, but without our Luna, we'd have made him suffer like this for days. I was glad when Katie came out and poured alcohol on his open wounds. "That's for our warriors, you asshole," she'd yelled and kicked him in his stomach.

I'd stayed and watched, everyone wanting to give Dr. Stephens a piece of the pain that he had inflicted on so many. It was Haynes who had shifted and holding Dr. Stephens, had looked around.

"Anyone not get their chance at him?" he asks. Dr. Stephens' wolf hasn't been able to keep up with the assault the pack had given him, and his open, bloody gashes and bite marks are bleeding, making him weak. His wolf had forced his shift back to his human form hours ago.

When no one steps forward, Gamma Haynes pulls Dr. Stephens' head back. "You deserve so much more than you're getting. But we, this pack, love our Luna more than we hate you. We never want to disappoint her and while she agreed to allow this, we know it's hard for her. You can thank her, the one you scoffed at when she first arrived, for your easy death."

Dr. Stephens screams, but it only lasts a moment before Haynes extends his claws and removes his head from his body.

When we shift back, Benny turns, walking straight toward me. There's a hunger, a desire that I've never seen in his eyes before. He

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wraps his arms around me, taking my mouth in a possessive, dominant kiss. I wrap my arms and legs around him as he carries me inside.

When we get to his room, he closes the door and finally pulls away from the kiss.

"Time to make you mine," he growls.

"Yes, Bennett. Make me yours," I say.

I send up a silent promise to Teddy that I will be a good mate to his brother, and I feel like something tight inside me, something I've been holding on to, finally lets go, allowing me to give myself freely to Benny, to be and have the kind of mate we both deserve. 1



Cooper Author

*I wanted to tell Anna's story before the book ended and this seemed like the right chapter to do it.*

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