

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 111

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“Meaning?” Colton interjects.

“They are close and whether they come this route or the other, they won’t leave here without a fight. They won’t leave without Juan and his men laid in a pool of their own blood. Varro isn’t such a p**** cat that the life of his daughter remaining will sway him from decades of anger.”

The tension rises around me once more and the shift of bodies moving around me highlights we all feel the same.

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“Do you know which way they approach?” Radar stands to shield us almost instinctively upon hearing our enemy moves close and Leyanne smiles somewhat absurdly for the strained atmosphere.

“Not yet, but my friends are keeping watch. As the crow flies.... Once they change route to advance, then we’ll know.” She shrugs, with a little smug twitch to the corner of her mouth.

“If they are moving then so should we. Get to the villagers and face down my father before they get here. We need to alert the people and those that can still fight should be with us. We’ve waited long enough. If they are close, then we don’t have much longer to wait.” Cesar is in bossy mode and like the rest of us, wants an end to this night before it has even begun.

My heart somersaults because I already knew the plan before he said the word, yet it still makes me afraid. Like a huge, monumental ball of darkness is swinging over our heads on a thin thread that is about to snap at any moment. No matter which way we dive and run, that ball will come crashing down on us because we can’t dodge it.

“Let’s move. There’s no point in waiting any longer.” Meadow cuts through the tense noise and brings us all to reality. “There’s only so much planning we can do.” Her tone tense, her words weighing us down with the truth within. NO matter how much we plan this out, it’s never going to be the same as getting through it.

Colton nods his head to signal agreement and we all get up without anymore hesitation. My stomach in knots and light fading fast outside, we cannot delay any longer. The wind is in our favor as it’s blowing away from the valley, but at the same time it means we won’t smell the vampires approaching either. Our senses maybe overall heightened compared to humans but smell is still our strongest.

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We file out of the truck quickly and quietly in an orderly fashion and wait while other vehicles empty before we play follow the leader and stealthily move into the forest nearby to spread into our designated teams. Colton moving behind me closely as we progress and his warmth cloaks me in the chilled night air. My guards and Sierra surrounding me, and it hits me with a deep dread that this feels as familiar as our mini war against the mountain. The sense of safe that Colton is with me is dampened down as my own anxiety swirls up inside my chest.

You know the plan. Stay close, don't stray from me. No matter what happens stay within the Luna's guard and by mom's and my side. Don't take any risks. We will get through this.

He links me, for my ears only, that soothing and protective way of his, and I nod back at him, turning in time to see him shedding clothes and tossing them aside to turn. That magnificent beauty as his black self appears and seems to take over the landscape with his sheer size. In a flash all the wolves follow suit and leave piles of clothes here in the shadows, dumped and discarded, while human flesh turns to fur and the air becomes eerily quiet. Even the creatures in this forest sense the change of form and go into scared hiding. Wolves reign supreme here and they know when to flee.

I swallow hard and push on behind my newly formed wall of furry protectors, Sierra moving to flank me on one side and I impulsively look around for Carmen. Blinking to adjust and nervous at the lack of her. She was in another truck, but I don't see her wolf figure yet and I want her here with me. I scan the space, pausing for a second before I am nudged in my spine gently by a warm touch.

She's coming. Stay focused. Colton inside my head and knowing exactly why I hesitate. I take a deep breath, trusting he has this all mapped out and move on into the dense wood. In here the light is filtered out dramatically and it almost feels like dusk already, so it takes a moment to get used to the gloominess. It somehow feels like a Hollywood setting for an up-and-coming spectacular misty battle in the shade of a mountain, in the depths of a magical forest. I shudder with that thought and push it away fast.

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I'm Scared. I link him back with impulsive nerves, my inner voice weak, and wavering, and again he nudges me with his nose. That sincere 'I'm here, it's okay' that brings me some sense of calm, yet not fully. I try to keep my eyes forward in a bid to adjust my night vision and flinch when that familiar femme leaps out right in front of me and scares me half to death. I inhale so sharply I have to stifle a choke.

Did you think I wasn't coming? Carmen paces back and forth in front of me in an almost seductive manner, glee at her ability to give me a scare, then rubs her skull against my left hand to show affection. Her mere presence somehow warms me to my core and despite being afraid, I feel more at peace seeing her with us. All four of us close now. Meadow, Sierra, and Carmen, together in one place to see this out to the end. My circle of femmes.

"Maybe for a moment" I smile, hushing my tone to a whisper to suit the emptiness around us and I'm quickly moved forward by my impatient mate with a nudge. He's riled up and ready to fight, his anticipation beginning to seep through to my own emotions and fill me with a buzzing kind of energy. I sigh with deflation and accept that this is happening, no matter how much I try to spread my hands and slow time around me.

We descend into the trees at a steady pace, heartbeat pumping inside my head and I know without a doubt, this night is going to be long.

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The tension of the cool night air prickles my skin and I watch in dismay as the wolves nearby s***ter off into the preplanned groups and move towards the village. Leaving me feeling like we are vulnerable and few. They are to try and gain alliance with those we left behind, from the shadows, and we're to wait here as a front line for the invaders heading our way. They will drive us back towards the valley where we will be met with reinforcements and hopefully will have thinned out the invaders a little.

The witch can see them coming and we don't have long yet it seems like it's already been hours. Tense and hidden and waiting as our numbers lessen and our pack melts into the village to try and reinforce us with the ones we left behind. We need the numbers to stand a chance, and to avoid a collision with Juan beforehand in case we get distracted. Juan won't focus only on them, but his desire to see Colton fall will push his hatred both ways.

My heart starts beating wildly in my chest as I cower behind my mate, flanked by my most trusted and close my eyes against the now heavy darkness to listen to the sounds around us.

"The vampires know something's up and have split and made a wide berth around the valley. They changed course so waiting here is futile. They are aiming for the village, not us." Leyanne bursts into our somber bubble, startling me in the process, appearing right beside Colton as though summoned from thin air. Her dark figure concealed with that witchy cloak she is so fond of, which makes her both mysterious and terrifying. If I had to conjure a movie witch in my head, she would look like this. Hair flying in the darkness face pale and delicate with almost black eyes.

"s***. They know we're here?" Colton shifts back to human to reply, still crouching on all fours.

"Likely. Varro has his spies much like I do and some of those beasts have wings. No doubt you were seen. Your wolves in the village..... have they had any luck?"

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I shake my head in his stead, not knowing what sort of persuasions are going on as none of them have linked us yet. They might still be stealth crawling close enough to get in there before Juan's minions kick off. It seems Varro has little to no interest in anyone but the ones still living on this mountain.

"We can't stay here while they infiltrate behind us. We have to hit this face on.I need to go right to the target. My father. It's the only way to get between them and be where Varro is heading." Colton stands up abruptly and Leyanne turns away to shield his unexpected nakedness. She seems unphased by it since she has been around us but non wolves tend to be conservative about it in the way we are not. A sign of respect is to not stare at us naked.

"And then what? Fight him?" I blurt out in impulse and instant fear, shaking my head to try and dislodge the panic forming.

"It's going to happen one way or another. At least if we are in there first, we can be more use than out here. If we stay here we might not be part of it at all." Colton smooths his hand over my hair in a sweet and comforting way, knowing how I'm starting to feel. His voice tender for a second.

I know he's right and I am clinging onto some hope that we can intercept Varro, that my existence will be enough to end this without a fight, even if deep down I know it's a lie.

"Colton... not to sidetrack, but.." Leyanne interrupts with a sudden serious gaze. "About the issue with a certain previous conversation. The things I needed for a spell. I ticked it off my to do list while I was out perusing my birds." Her penetrative gaze and hushed tone make it clear that her words are not for Sierra, who is close by and we both know immediately what she's talking about.

The bind between our lives. She said she could break it and until now she hadn't mentioned it again. This is her way of saying she didn't forget and while she's been absent, she took care of it. Quiet and efficient, just the kind of powerful witch she is. As though it was nothing more than a simple errand she had to run. She wants us to know before we head off to fight. That the danger connecting us to Juan, is now not an issue to anyone but Sierra.

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"Hmmm" Colton acts distracted and uninterested, but I can read his intensive focus on her and Leyanne sees it too.

"Problem solved. Isn't an issue anymore. Completed a successful mini mission with absolution. Between us three, right?" She smiles softly and pats him on the head in an absurdly cute manner. I almost baulk and choke on my own saliva in disbelief that with a snap of her fingers, it's just done. Half my life tied to my mother-in-law and now, blink, blink, it's undone.

"I.....?" The words die in my throat as my mate catches my hand and squeezes it tight, bringing me back to my senses.

"Right. Thanks." Colton coughs to cover my reaction and yet I can feel his sudden spike in adrenaline as it courses through me too. She's unlinked us and now more than ever, Sierra should never find out. If she knew, she would sacrifice herself for the good of the pack and her son. We both know this.

Alpha... the Vampires are coming in from the mountain and south side. We need you here. It's started.

The link comes at us out of the blue. Domi from the valley, a cry for help and everything becomes Chaos. My heart lurching because I know talking it over, making plans, it's all futile. No longer hesitating because Colton's decision is made for him.

Wolves begin breaking away from our line, Colton turns to me and pulls me close to him. It's so fast, so rushed and I almost get lost in the movements. I try to cling onto them pa**ing with sudden fear but he draws me to him and pulls me in to his chest.

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"Go with Leyanne and the guard, take my Mom. Get to the manor and wait for me there. That's where my father will be and where Varro will go. Flank the main entrance and do nothing else but stay put." His casual confidence he normally wears like a shroud is gone and instead he's grasping for a new plan as everything falls around us like dust. They were supposed to come head on.

"I can try and talk to him, try and stop this..." I start but am silenced with a shake of the head.

"He won't stop. He wants revenge. Just go and stay there. You have guards, Carmen, My mom and Leyanne. Stay safe. Get out of the way if vampires flood the manor and don't go inside for anything. I'll be there as soon as we control the threat to the rest of the pack. They're hitting the villages first. Furthest from the manor.... I'll get back to you before any of them do."

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I know what he's thinking. Deal with the attack, rally the pack and put me furthest away from the fight while he does it. His plan to stay with me isn't going to work if the vampires have separated out to flank the entire village. He won't be able to fight hard and gain control with one eye on me the whole time.

He knows he has to come to the manor where his father will be hiding, so right now he thinks it's the safest place for me to wait. Varro won't know where Juan is and will expect him as alpha to come to the aide of his pack at the south edge.

They have no idea that Juan will happily watch his own blood die to save himself and his loyal.

“Okay... I love you.” I don’t know what else to say beyond that. I can argue, beg him to stay with me but we both know he needs to lead. Our pack is strongest with him at the forefront.

“Take her and go.” Colton nods to Radar who immediately comes to my side and presses to my shoulder with his. Flanking me and I’m almost squeezed as another wolf gets at my other side. Colton leans in fast, hits me on the forehead with a firm kiss before turning and leaping backwards into the air and turning mid flow. Form beautiful human to fierce beast as he lets out a war howl and it seems to erupt all around us.

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In the blink of an eye he’s gone, along with a trailing tail of wolves coming from the undergrowth. Heading where they are needed where the battle is already beginning.

Luna...Please Radar links me and I am nudged out of my trance like state and pushed into moving in the direction their bodies force me. I glance back to see my entourage forming a circle around me and Sierra comes up at my rear so her nose is an inch from my neck.

We will get through this together. Don’t be afraid. She links me with that sweet and calm tone. The mother in her needing to console me.

We move stealthily through the woods and out into the open, the night air chilling my skin into goosebumps. The sight of old familiar territory churning my soul in strange ways as my own homeland appears before me like a dark and haunting memory. We are fast to close the gap across wide open space and head to our destination with intention.

To the Manor, the place I never thought I would go back to and the man hiding within its walls I hoped to never lay eyes on again.

I can feel the tension in the air and the sounds of a raging fight begin to echo our way on the wind, which is strangely soft tonight. My hair rises on my skin as the hackles on my wolf guards follow suit. The noises of a war that are familiar with past experiences yet so different from this distance.

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Calls, cries, ripping and crunching. It sounds like trees being pulled from the earth while rocks crumble and wood splinters. Howls circle around us and links from the pack begin a dizzying crescendo in our heads as they communicate and try to filter one another out amid the frenzy of battle.

Block the links, don’t listen. I’ll tell you if you need to hear anything. Carmen comes through the deafening mess with her sweet and strong tone. Commanding

me yet saving me at the same time. As Luna I shouldn't block out my people, but I don't have the mental capacity in human form to separate the links the way I can as wolf. It's all coming at once and ripping my heart to shreds as I absorb the fear and pain of my pack in our own special way of communicating.

"She's right. You are here to be seen and nothing else. When your father shows up, then you can do something. Let your mate do what he needs to do and block the rest out." Leyanne pats me on the head and it's only now I realize she is with me and not with them. I turn with a sudden flinch and glare at her.

"Why aren't you with Colton? Where he needs you the most?" I blanch.

"Oh pet. You really have no faith in your mate or your pack. I am where I need to be. You are important to not only your people, but the future of two breeds, maybe even three. I am only doing my civic duty as an immortal sister." She smiles in her carefree and grating way and saunters on ahead, lighting the way with a dull glow from her palm and yet it irks me on many levels. I open my mouth to protest but am silenced by Sierra.

She's right. You're in the center of all this. Colton wants you protected, and the witch is useful to us if we are strolling towards the lion's den. Juan may not stay inside and hide when he knows you and I are standing at his front door. In fact, I'm hoping on it.

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Sierra sounds detached and almost cold. Her emotions swirling with bitterness and hatred that I know are aimed at her mate. I blink towards her and have a moment of doubt. Knowing how desperately Sierra wants to see Juan fall, feeling it in her every breath, I suddenly become scared that she feels the change about our bond. That maybe somehow, she knows the witch has done something.

There's fight in her words, a weird sense of fire and fury coming through and I hesitate at the possibility Sierra is hoping for Juan to face us down while the pack is distracted. Maybe she knows already, maybe this is what she wants. If somehow, some crazy way, she sensed the bond between us had been unlinked, then maybe right now all she is focusing on is heading to a target she now thinks she has the power to take on alone.

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Getting close to the manor is easier than I thought it would be. Domi was right about the fact the valley is almost like a deserted prison camp. Everything around the manor is still and empty while the valley has all those who are no longer loyal to their alpha, pushed away. Separated by electric fences, speakers playing nonstop the silent frequency to stop the vampire weapon being used

against them. The whole place is eerie, like a deserted army barracks and strangely dark despite all the spotlights hanging from posts. None are on.

It's almost like the aftermath of a battle in itself and if it weren't for the distant chaotic noise of a real war going on, it would be as silent as the surface of the moon. There are no birds, no small animals, not even any kind of patrols and all the security cameras are facing the ground.

It feels like life has slipped away in what used to be a bustling busy home filled to the brim with an eager pack. Most of the windows are boarded and with only the moonlight as illumination, the place looks like a haunted house in some spectacular horror remake.

"I don't like this." I murmur to myself as Sierra and Carmen turn human and come to my side, pushing Radar and my other flanking wolf aside. We stand staring up at the dark building, no longer afraid of danger when the nothingness surrounds us. You can sense the fact that there is nothing here to be afraid of.

"Are they even in there?" Carmen steps in front of me and peers long and hard at the top west tower and its balcony. The room that belonged to Juan and we see not a single light in the entire place flickering through boards and curtains.

"He's there. I can feel him. He is hiding like the coward he is, locked away tight with his few." Sierra's venom rings true, and I find myself staring at her for a long moment and truly questioning what she knows right now. There's a change in her now we are here, and it makes me nervous to think she is suddenly unpredictable if she has the knowledge we are no longer bound.

If she knows, what will she do? Her death won't affect me and that scares me more than anything. Her desire to see Juan die....it trumps even her need to survive. I know how strong her will to put things right is, and her devotion to ending this.

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"You're right. They're in there. At least a dozen of them or more last time the crows saw him venture out with his men and I can almost guarantee they know about the vampires too." Leyanne nods towards one sole camera which has a small red light blinking in the dark. I stare until my eyes adjust and realize it's moving, spanning the area and functioning normally. Maybe the rest are dead, but he still has one eye on his surroundings. The camera room was always operational from inside those walls and I shiver with knowing we are being monitored.

"So we just sit and wait? And do what? Play eye spy? Wave?" I snap, out of frustration, annoyed that while our people are out there, we're standing here like none of this affects us. I know Colton thinks this is for the best and eventually they will come this way, but this just feels weird and wrong. Like we're hiding from the fight.

Luna!

I'm side struck away from Carmen out of the blue, taken by surprise as I'm caught by another wolf and pulled down to the ground. Covered with a heavy brown furry beast as he bears down shielding me. Panting heavily, my heart skyrockets through my chest and I squirm on the dirt as I try to come to terms with what just happened. There's noise of scr***** claws, gnashing teeth, and yet I am concealed and can only wriggle to get purchase from the wolf on top of me.

Luna. Are you okay?

The wolf protecting me asks via the link in haste, moving enough for me to scurry to my feet and get behind him, to be immediately flanked by other guards where I can get a look at what's happening.

My guards are fighting off three wolves from our old pack. They look haggard and feral, but I still recognize them as some of the subpack which used to run as perimeter sentinels when we lived here. It's not hard to see they are not in the best physical shape and are quickly subdued by my own and pulled to the ground to be restrained as Carmen and Sierra shield me from the front. They seem disorientated and the wave of bitter hate flows freely around them like a thick smog.

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"Are they Juan's men?" I blurt out into the chaos of noise they're making. Grunts, growls and excessive heavy breathing as they are held down, and it's now I can even see how thin and unkempt they are in wolf form. They don't look like they have eaten in weeks. Shabby and pitiful and when they are finally held taught, my wall of wolves moves aside so I can get a better look.

I dust myself down as our prisoners turn to human and it's now I can see exactly who they are. They are the offspring of loyal followers to Juan. Sons of his close command and yet all there of them look broken and exhausted and not exactly cared for. Filthy in naked skin and have sunken eyes and weary faces that have seen better days.

My Guard all turn to human form too and Radar pulls the closest one to him with force, holding him in a grip with arms folded across his back as he bears down on his spine with a knee. Holding him still with that grim expression of a pissed wolf all over his face.

"Who are you to attack our Luna? Do you want to die?" Radar snarls into his ear while a crushing crack as he applies force to his ex-pack mate's spine makes me flinch. In soldier mode Radar is known for being ruthless. He can be brutal and violent when riled and I am seeing hints of him in war mode. It sends shivers down my spine.

"Luna? Pahhh..... We don't have a Luna, nor an Alpha! Deserters who turned their back on us and left us to suffer.... Don't insult us." Aiden, the wolf on the ground snarls right back despite being held tight but makes no attempt to break free. They three are outnumbered by our dozen and it seems smart enough to know fighting won't end well for them.

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"I'll show you what suffering is right now." Radar leans in again with anger but I step forward and tap him on his shoulder to loosen his grip before he does anything to him. A sudden surge of guilt flowing through me because what Aiden said isn't completely wrong and I know Radar won't hesitate to break his bones. We did leave them, and they have suffered. I don't blame the ones left to roam free for hating us and believing we abandoned them. Radar relents a little and sits back on his haunches with a sulking hint of grudging obedience, giving Aiden room to breathe once more. I exhale heavily and try to calm my swirling nerves, knowing as Luna I really need to take command here.

"Aiden.... I'm Alora Santo, Colton's mate. I'm the Luna Radar refers to and this is Sierra. You must remember her; she is Rema now and once was Juan's Luna. The woman he locked up for a decade and betrayed. You are still our pack and that is why we are here. We're here to help." My heart bleeds for these wolves and I can already tell by reading their emotions that the intention to attack us was not for Juan, but for their own heartbreak and pain. I wonder how many of the villagers were hostile towards our wolves fighting for them for the same reasons. Nerves swirling that maybe already our wolves are fighting am*** them as well as taking on that blood thirsty enemy.

"Help? How? Do you have any idea how messed up things have become because of Colton? What are you going to do?" Another of the men on the dirt responds with that same bitter, curt tone. Stubbornness strong in his aura.

"The whole pack is here to fight the vampires off. Stop and listen to the noise in the air. That sound of war and death! Your people are fighting for their lives and where is Juan? Who are the ones who came for you? Scoff all you want but she IS your Luna, and WE are here to help." Carmen steps forward and kicks the thigh of the second wolf with a sharp dig, gaining a snarl in response from the one I recognize as Taemin. A once valued sentinel and someone Colton treated like a brother. A wolf who couldn't leave because his family were tied here.

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"Don't say that sc**'s name. He's dead to us. Just like his son. Nothing good ever came from the sacred Santa bloodline where they're concerned." The third, Robyn grinds out to join the conversation, another from the same sub pack and yet despite his hateful tone, there's a sadness in his eyes as I lock my focus on his face. Behind their fury and venomous words, are wolves who have been abandoned and are suffering from the syndrome caused by fracturing a pack and leaving them Alpha-less. It's a sense of detachment and can cause insane anger and bitterness am*** our kind.

"We don't have time for this. We're not here to fight or hurt you. We're here to protect the pack and take Juan to the vampires. You can either assist or be tied down until this is all over. You don't want to live on as free roaming wolves, then help us and we will reunite the pack when this battle is won. Your suffering can end after this." Sierra becomes dominant in the conversation with a commanding tone I've never heard from her. Stamping towards Aiden and towering over him with a fearless aura as she glares down at him with all the presence of a queen. "You can go on with this attitude and become a hindrance, or you can get up, dust off and do everything to free and reunite our wolves. The vampires are the enemy, not us and Juan..... we're here to make sure he pays for everything he has ever done. Don't you want to be part of that?" She spits it at him and then places a flat palm on Radar's shoulder to move him back so she can lean down and gain eye contact with his prisoner. "We need allies. We need the villagers to join the fight. If not, it looks like a lot of us will die here tonight."

"Why should we trust any of you? Where were you all these months when Juan turned on us?" Taemin struggles to get free but is kneeled upon by an extra wolf as they regain control of him. None of the guards are letting up and seems even if they were once brothers, the priority is to keep me safe.

"You're right! We weren't here.... we were in another place fighting to survive and trying to figure out how to fix a fractured pack. We were out there licking our wounds and struggling to know what to do, while being oblivious to your suffering. We have no excuses." I try and soothe with my words, feeling the intensity of betrayal against them and attempting to push this conversation onwards.

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"We need you to put it aside and help. You're part of the pack here and you three can be more use if you go rally your friends and family to Colton's side. Look at me.... You know who I am. I was here until only a few weeks ago, so don't give me your b***** and act like you were the only ones. I lived here; I know what went down. I'm telling you to s*** it up and stop acting like sulky babies." Carmen walks around to the front of all three and stands with her hands on her hips, jutting out her jaw while swishing her hair back with a flick of her head. "We've suffered too. We've been fighting and hiding, and we've had our own losses. You chose to stay here so don't put that crap on us. Cut the b***** attitude and show some respect to your saviors."

There's silence for a moment as they stare her down and then break contact and all three look away. Clearly recognizing her and knowing what she says is truth, but that high strung wolf gene is hard to dampen. I can feel their fire dying a little and look around me to double check there aren't more to contend with. It seems these three were patrolling near the manor, probably scouting for supplies or maybe sightings of Juan and have no one else with them.

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I notice the camera is focused on us and no longer moving around, so someone is watching this scene unfold and I second guess whether these boys are with Juan or not. Whoever is controlling it is interested in what's going on here and I wonder if they have audio too. I have an urge to wave and throw them the bird.

"Look. You say Juan is the enemy, then help. He's in there, right? Watching. Holed up like a coward and letting his people suffer. So get up and do something about it. We're here for the same purpose." I aim for a level tone, a hint of warmth in my words and pace around to get eye contact as best I can while ignoring the spying technology. I notice how Radar watches my every move and that the guards follow me closely with a severe stench of mistrust for what were once their brothers. It makes my heart bleed to feel the distance between blood like this and scowl at the manor with a quick glance, at the man who did this to them. A once superior pack and yet we lay crumbled in ruins this way.

"Get up and die by the hands of vampires? None of us are healthy enough to do very much. Isn't that obvious by how quickly you took us down. We are living like wild wolves nowadays, hunting and foraging to survive. Juan uses the frequency to keep us weak." He shifts enough to nod at one of the speakers up high and I turn and lock eyes on what he's motioning towards. Confusion at his words invading my thoughts.

"What?" I quiz and glance back and forth trying to understand. "What do you mean?"

"You don't feel it? I guess you haven't been here long enough yet. The frequency, it has another pitch in the notes and exposure over time dampens our strength and ability. He's making sure we can never take him down and are too feeble to even escape this place." Taemin rolls enough to stare at that same speaker and in unison Carmen, Sierra, Radar, and I all turn and stare at the black box hung up about forty feet in the air and scrutinize it for a moment. A sudden tense quiet as we all take a moment to digest this.

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"So your saying the villagers are all weak right now, and that up there....will weaken the rest of us before long?" I blanch and scrub my fingers through my hair at my temples, suddenly worried and instantly afraid. My heart lurches into my mouth and Radar and I gawp at one another as a problem suddenly hits us.

"Nailed it. We have no strength, and our speed is almost nonexistent. Look at us...we can't even heal properly, we're all sick. Juan really knows how to hurt his own kind." Aiden loses all fight and seems to cave into a disheveled heap under Radar, a long sigh as he gives into the fatigue overtaking him.

"Oh my god." Carmen verbalizes my gut reaction. A moment of panic sets in and I glance around at my comrades, meeting equally shocked expressions as all our minds go to the same place.

Colton, we have a problem.

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I link him in desperation as visions of vampires taking down our strongest flood my mind and am suffocated by the sudden nausea and fear that we just walked ourselves into a trap set by Juan. He can't regain power over his people, but he surely won't mind seeing them all die.

He's pumping out a tone to disable wolves, yet if we turn it off then the frequency to counteract the vampire's weapon will also be useless. It's a no win either way and now as the noises drift towards us on the wind of a full throttle war being raged in the valley, I start to wonder which side is actually winning.

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We know. Vampires are trailing off and heading your way. Get inside the manor and find the control room to try and disable it.

Colton's fast response is ragged and strained and I can tell they are really in the thick of it and not doing so well. I can feel his fatigue, hear his stress levels in just one link. Without seeing what's going on, I can tell the valley must be a bloodbath right now. They are fighting hard to stay in control and god knows how many have died already.

Are you okay? I reply in panic, not knowing how to feel with the way things seem to have suddenly combusted and are no longer in our control. Our plans have gone to hell and I feel useless and somehow cut off from what's going on. No sense of what to do or how to help.

We're holding on and pulling villagers with us. We're coming to you as soon as we can but just do as I ask. There are more of them than us and half of the Valley wolves are weak and sick.

We shall Alpha. Be safe... Luna.... He's right. We need to disable it.

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Radar breaks into the link, which Colton sent using the sub pack bond before I can formulate a response. I'm still rooted to the spot as I let this sink in and try to think. The urgency around us hemming in on me so I feel instantly suffocated and my brain doesn't want to cooperate. It's spiraling.

Take care of her for me. Colton ends the link and goes back to fighting to save his people with one last commanding order.

"He wants us to go inside and disable the tone that's making the wolves weak." I relay to those around me who weren't part of the pack link.

“Get these boys up, they’re coming with us. Move. We don’t have time to wait around.” Leyanne’s commanding voice comes at us from behind, startling me, and it’s only now I realize she wasn’t with us. She’s moving fast, followed by a high-flying stream of crows as she paces at us, her robes flapping in the speed of her own motion. I have no idea where she went but she’s good at doing the disappearing and reappear act.

“The manor?” I ask with uncertainty and am caught by the wrist as she passes and tugged towards the house with hurried force. “What about Juan?” I yelp in fright with the sheer strength of her maneuver.

“He’s not important right now. The wolves are losing because of his damned weapon. We need to turn it off but leave the defense intact so they vampires don’t use theirs. My magic can’t do a thing with technology.” She for once sounds ruffled and majorly annoyed. Dragging me from the center of my pack and with her towards the stairs. My guards seem momentarily shocked that she would haul their Luna this way and then scramble to follow while dragging our prisoners with them. Carmen doesn’t question but hops behind me, Sierra on her tail and I can tell that like me, they are now uncertain and worried. It’s only a matter of time before the frequency affects us too and we don’t know how long that will take. Like a slow poison invading our systems.

“The control room for the cameras used to be on the ground floor near the sub common room.” Carmen flits to human form, pushing in front of us with speed as we get to the door of the manor and halts before she grabs the handle. The door isn’t boarded or blocked but she hesitates and holds up a palm behind her to stop us moving forward.

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“What?” I blanch in irritation.

“Wolfsbane...can’t you smell it.” She leans in and around the door, her nose inching close, scrounging up her face in disgust and then moves to the handle with caution.

“Really?” I snort in amused disbelief “He would swoop as low as tainting handles with wolfsbane. What’s wrong with him?”

“What’s right with him?” Carmen retorts with gritted teeth and moves aside to let the witch try the door. Wolves are harmed by wolfsbane even with the simplest touch. It’s one of the few poisons that merely grazing our skin can burn in the most agonizing way.

I flinch a glance at Radar from the corner of my eye and watch that proud wolf form tense slightly. His eye scar came from a combo of using a silver dagger and wolfsbane and I know it’s one of the few things in life that still makes him nervous. Even in the grimoire library we banned it from the house as it’s so potent against us we cannot be around it safely. It’s our Kryptonite and yet Juan has smeared his own front door with it. It sums him up entirely.

"I guess he never ventures out this way, or out at all." Leyanne observes and one of our wolf prisoners let's out a wry laugh.

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"Why do for himself what he can make others do. Juan only takes the likes of us in, and we don't come back out." Taemin snarls and then slumps against Radar, who is still holding him tight as though he doesn't even have the energy to hold himself up anymore. They have been exposed to the frequency for god knows how long and I'm worried about their usefulness and health if we take them further. Carmen seems to gaze into the distance for a second, her body stiffening and I know she's momentarily lost in memories of what was done to her in this house.

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"Hmmm.... Seems he doesn't care all too much about protecting the way in. This wolfbane is nothing more than a deterrent." Leyanne shoves the heavy door open after a few taps on the lock and a spark of light, which I assume is some magical unlocking ability and swings the heavy wooden slab back into the once familiar hallway.

Inside it looks the same as when we left, only dark, dusty and unused as though it's sat dormant and empty for months. The air is stale, and the lights are all out, leaving an eeriness in as Leyanne lights the way with the glow from her hand to cast some illumination. It's too still, too empty. We know Juan and his minions are inside this manor, but it seems they care little about protecting the main door or leaving life down here.

"Where are they?" Sierra also turns human and moves in beside me, taking my hand in hers as we creep in quietly. My guards let go of the prisoners and flank around us in a semi-circle immediately. Realizing they pose no threat when we are literally walking into the lion's den. Aiden moves to the nearest couch and sinks down exhaling heavily and seems to instantly pass out. Taemin and the last wolf edge back to the door and stay there seemingly afraid to come in. They're spent and they have no fight in them anymore. They won't help nor hinder and my guards leave them be.

The hair on my neck stands up and my skin goosebumps all over as we move further in, tiptoeing, and yet we all sense something and stop abruptly.

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"I don't like this" I point out with a nervous waiver in my low tone.

"Me either" Carmen whispers almost into my ear as she moves in against my other side and takes my free hand. Squeezing it tight as though needing assurance or giving it.

"Let's find the control room and quickly." Radar also turns human, moving past us fast and heads down the dark passage to what once was our daily route, keeping eyes on our surroundings and using his ability to sense for others. To our once loved common room and place as a sub pack we liked to be together. For a second I long for Meadow and Colton beside me to go through with this and cross my fingers that both and the rest of our pack are safe. They're warriors and some of the fiercest fighters of the Santo pack, but I'm still scared to death about what they are enduring right now, out there. I need Meadows presence here to fire up my own courage and regret not asking Colton to send her by my side too.

We move as one fluid unit in rapid speed, alert to our surroundings even though it truly seems deserted. We get to a small door just past our old corridor and Radar kicks it in with ease, breaking it from its hinges and the heavy door falls backwards into the pitch-black space with a grind and thud before finding a resting place against shelving. Leyanne moves in behind him and lights it up with both her palms glowing bright white. That room of monitors and keyboards and endless wires and tech. This used to be manned around the clock and now it sits here ticking on its own, like some lonely forgotten entity. A dark empty and airless space with only small red lights blinking quietly to themselves to indicate some things are running.

"Where is the one who was controlling the camera out there." I ask quietly remembering one of them was operational and trailed our movements. Someone was definitely watching out there.

Radar moves inside and flicks at the wall bringing illumination to the room and scans the space to be sure we're alone.

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"Either its movement sensitive and automatic, or else they are using security from somewhere else too." He moves across the desks with his fingers, clicking buttons here and there and trying to locate the audio control for the speakers outside.

"They left this running by itself because he's short on manpower." Carmen buttons in and moves Radar out of the way while she too starts pressing buttons and brings a seemingly dark monitor to life. "This is the main system to access the audio feed to the perimeter speakers. It's on a loop and comes from a frequency recording they made at the lab. I can access the main files here. We need to separate it out from the new tone that's weakening the wolves."

I gawp at Carmen and this new sudden ability with computers I never knew she had. I know Radar was familiar with the security and the feed as he was a sub pack captain and often came in here, but Carmen seemed oblivious to this side of things.

“She was often on Rota for control room duties” Radar reads my mind and nods at Carmen, making me blush at my stupidity for a moment. I forgot that all wolves at some point got switched around to cover almost every chore we ever had in this manor. I just never lasted long enough to get these kinds of duties.

“Why aren’t they protecting this?” One of the Luna’s guard wolves pipes up behind me and Radar shrugs.

“Who knows. Like the main door being vacant, and the grounds outside. Maybe Juan has really lost his mind and up there hiding in the shadows like some kind of feral beast.” He snorts in disdain.

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“Move, let me work. I can do this if you give me some space.” Carmen enters bossy mode and yanks a seat out so she can slide in at the desk and proceeds to pull up different screens on the monitor. Instantly immersed and looking competent with a keyboard as she starts pounding it noisily.

“This seems too easy. This doesn’t feel right.” I point out and Sierra squeezes the hand that’s still enveloped in hers. She has been silently looking around and summing things up yet doesn’t seem phased at all by the progression of things. There’s a weird calm to her and a hint of fire that was always lacking. I wonder if this is how Luna Sierra of the past was and how she managed to run to save a child when she was on the verge of being ended. Seeing her this way, a silent strength and ease, I suddenly feel confident with her presence.

“We should look around. Try to make sense of what’s going on here. Alora’s right. Something’s off and knowing him like we do, he would never just leave this so open and accessible.”

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“Colton wanted us to stay put. Near the entrance until they get here.” Radar warns but Sierra shakes her head.

“If Juan really is hiding in here like some deranged coward then we might put a stop to this if we drag him out and throw him to Varro ourselves. Isn’t that why he’s here? Look around, does this seem like the set up a sane Juan would have?” She splays one palm wide to gesture our surroundings and Radar only dodges her and shrugs. That stubborn in him only adhering to orders.

We all stand quiet for a moment, even Carmen pauses her typing as we throw one another looks. All human now as we stand in this small open doorway and narrow hall and the witch who has been pensive breaks the silence.

"From a magical perspective. The air is strange, and it does seem that living energy is faint and few. If he's here, he doesn't have many men left with him and he's certainly not down here." It's almost like she's agreeing with Sierra and Radar seems to hesitate. His aura getting bristly because he doesn't like being questioned.

"Less than half a dozen, on the upper floors. Changes nothing." He grits his teeth and then looks away, a strange expression on his face. One of his gifts is finding bodies at distance, even through walls and I guess from the second we got in here he pinpointed where all the dangers lurked. I know he's being cautious and wants to protect us as Colton ordered and I understand this is how he is.

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"There's more of us than them. We can do this. You know where they are." Sierra turns to him with a pleading expression and like always he lowers his head to avoid her gaze. His face flushing with some color because he doesn't want to argue with his Rema and he definitely will never disobey her son.

"With due respect Rema, the Alpha told us to say by the entrance and to disable the audio tone. We are not going further in." He turns his head away, stiff and pointed in tone and I know how much he must be hating saying No to her. Sierra digs her heels in though and that flash of fierce shows face as she tries to bring her small frame nearer to his tall height, her eyes ambering out.

"I trump the alpha's commands when he isn't around, and the only one who can say no right now is my Luna.... Whom I doubt will do so." She smiles with a wicked and almost smug expression and throws me a raised brow as though challenging me to deny her. I swallow hard, eyes flickering from Radar's bowed head to the witch and then Sierra as I feel cornered about how to answer. My throat instantly dry with the pressure to say something.

"Sierra, I don't..." I make a feeble start to reason with her, not sure about what we should do but she isn't backing down.

"I'm going to look, so either come with or don't. I'm not afraid of that man anymore and I'm not without my own talents. Besides, Leyanne will come, right?" she nods to the witch, makes a move to step around him and Radar explodes. He catches her by the shoulder and pushes her back enough to make her step back inside again.

"Over my dead body!! You stay with the Guards and you stay by my side! I'm not even joking with this b*****. He's up there, whether sane or not, armed or not.... you stay put and do what the alpha told you to do! There's no arguing with this, or me.... Do as you're told!" His voice booms crazily loud, his tone enough to make even me tremble and all of us flinch. I think it's the first time I have ever seen Radar lose his temper in such an explosive way, with a ripping growling tone that puts the fear of god into all of us.

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Sierra turns her face away refusing to engage with the death glare he throws her way and I blanch at the irony of this. The first time his direct look at his Rema is in anger while she sulkily looks elsewhere.

"We should look around even a little. To secure the ground floor at least." I try weakly to diffuse the sudden tension with a soothing hushed voice, dampening the sparking air around us and Radar softens slightly. Instant submission as he regrets his outburst, and I can almost taste his apology in the air. He nods and then bows my way, returning to respectful sentinel. Knowing that he shouldn't disregard my request.

"I'll take three and do a sweep while you all stay here hemmed in with the rest to stay safe, Luna. You go nowhere but right here while we scope the floor." Radar commands and I nod, even though I'm the one who should be issuing orders. I'm already tired and uptight and I know Colton will explode if I disobey what he told me to do. "You three...come." Radar clicks his fingers at the wolves standing furthest out from the door and motions them to follow. Fast to do something because I think he needs some breathing space to calm down. The others split apart to let him leave and they disappear without a backwards glance into the darkness, transforming to wolf like giant dark silhouettes in the hallway as they go silently.

As soon as they are far enough away to not hear us anymore, Sierra turns to me with a defiant gleam in her eye, determination ebbing my way. Her posture strong and upright and her eyes are glowing with orange fire.

"Let's go. Radar means well but he can't stop us from doing this. Juan needs to be found and thrown to the enemy as soon as possible." Sierra pushes past me, marching towards the door and despite coming face to face with a wolf blocking her path she faces them down with ferocity. Carmen freezes and turns her head to stare, while Leyanne smirks and shrugs at the sudden show of psycho Sierra. I exhale loudly my head beginning to ache and wonder how I ended up with a mother-in-law who has a sudden death wish.

"Move or suffer." She snaps at the nearest wolf and I know Radar made a wrong choice in picking his three men. He left behind those who won't stand up to a Rema or Luna and I know I better pick a side. One word from me and they won't argue. They know better. I falter, seeing the anger growing in Sierra but the witch pushes me forward and I know I'm at a loss. Sierra is right and my confidence is knocked from what happened in the forest. I'm hesitating because of the babies in my belly and knowing I cannot turn.

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"Come on...with me you're safe. Maybe we can end this quickly." Leyanne's voice seems to entwine inside of me like a warm hug and I am calmed with her warm touch on my arm.

I'm pushed forward to Sierra's side, no more thought required, and with a click of fingers the wolves move, although I know they are immediately linking Radar to report this, so we better run.

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We make light work of moving fast in unison and tracking back down the corridor towards the main entrance to the grand staircase. Sierra takes the lead and Carmen runs behind the witch and I, both of them in wolf form, as we start our search for the infamous Juan. My heart's pounding through my chest because I know radar will be hot on our heels and Colton is going to be so mad about this. His fury will know zero bounds when he finds out I disobeyed him and ran from Radar and the Luna's guard, but my gut tells me to trust Sierra and do this. Sierra has a point and finding Juan first, pushing him out there for easy access may be the cure to this war and the end to this night's battle. If we shackle him and hand him over to Varro then there's less chance of Juan being killed in the process and maybe I can beg Varro to protect Sierra's life in keeping him alive for the rest of his.

We barely make it to the open entrance and foot of the stair when a thudding troupe of huge fierce wolves moving stealthily come at us from behind, reckless fleeing, and Carmen growls as warning. The impending doom of an angry pack. I shiver at the arrival because despite being his Luna, I know radar will scold me into next week.

Luna, stop! Wait... Don't do this! Radar's voice comes through like a bullet to the brain, harsh and direct, not concealing his anger and anxiety that we're taking matters into our own hands. Leyanne doesn't hesitate and turns to them with a blinding p*** of something she throws in the air. A slight movement of hand with devastating results and I can't fault that witch for her reflexes. A spark, a flash, a thick cloying smog that chokes the space up behind us and brings them all to a dead halt as we venture on and quicken to escape them. Whatever it is, it serves well to startle them, and we leave them in our tracks. It smells like burned rubber and old ash.

"Sorry pets but needs must. Be good little pups and guard the door, we have company coming." She sing songs back at them, brazen as always, concealed by the haze of grey smoke in the darkness and I blanch with a quick glance back before following Sierra up the staircase. Clinging to her rump like a helpless child to help move me faster while still in human form. My powers are pointless and not being able to transform feels like I'm a dead weight who can only follow their lead.

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"Why are we shaking them off when they could be helping by following?" I retort, out of breath from exertion and she lights up the hall for us with her palms once more. That gentle glow which has surprising ability to shine the way clear. Perplexed at my own uselessness and leaving our capable guards behind.

"Because he's too obedient and he won't let any of us step a foot further in this pursuit. The fates want us girls to handle things for now, else we wouldn't have

ended up here like this." Leyanne is always so self-assured and I do wonder if she has the ability to read the future. If maybe she's a waking seer, someone who can see beyond time while going about her daily business. It's rare but it would explain her ability to know things.

"But still...." I start and trail off when Sierra turns and throws me a dark amber glare, hushing me and I get the message loud and clear. She doesn't want Radar up there with us when she faces down Juan because she knows he would shield and intervene, and Sierra wouldn't get within ten feet of that monster. Radar would put himself in the firing line always and I can feel Sierra's desire to be the one to bring Juan down. It's out there like a thick aura around us and I worry she may be blinded by her own hatred of the man and not thinking straight.

We get up the spiral incline and into the long corridor which splits to sleeping quarters and a second stairway. Blinking momentarily and trying to make a decision on direction when Carmen sticks her nose in the air and heads for the passage up ahead of us to another level. She seems to know where to go and her sense of smell has always been top notch. Without a word we all follow, swift and silent, without second guessing her ability. My nerves eating me raw and making me shiver with anticipation but all I can do is keep moving forward and pushing down the nauseating worry. It's dark and Leyanne's glow is the only thing taking the edge off the eerie creepiness of being in the manor while it feels abandoned.

We end up moving this way up three flights to the fourth floor, the place where Sierra's wing with Juan all these years is located, and I wonder if he's hiding in his own bedroom. A coward like him, it seems fitting somehow. To be hiding in the dark corner by his bed, hopefully trembling at the impending doom of his long reign.

I can sense Radar behind us and it throws me a little, not far, keeping his distance so Leyanne doesn't startle bomb them again and it gives me reassurance knowing he won't flake on his duty to protect. He's given up swaying us and has decided obedience and caution is better. He knows how stubborn I can be, and that Sierra isn't afraid of him in the slightest. Keeping close enough to watch. Sierra and Carmen seem oblivious to them but the witch glances back and fixes a smug smile on her lips as though telling me she feels them too and somehow knew they would back us up. I just cannot work her out sometimes.

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We finally get to the long narrow corridor which leads to the west wing: the master bedroom in the top corner of this manor. The lord's boudoir, so to speak. And Leyanne lets her glow fade to nothing at all so our night vision all kicks in perfectly and prepares us for what we assume is a darker space. The air around us is thick with dust and tension, all poised and quiet for a moment while Carmen and Sierra turn back to human form and Carmen reaches forward for the handle of the double doors.

"Wait." I whisper, a hushed cautious tone and that rearing up of fear and doubt swirling in my belly now I can feel the presence of wolverine on the other side. We know he won't be alone, but we have no idea how many of his minions are left.

There could be a dozen of them and maybe an equal match to our group. "We might be outnumbered." I add in haste.

"There's only a half dozen. He seems to have lost many along the way." Radar's voice comes at me softly from behind and I jump when I realize he has moved to my rear and close enough to whisper it directly to me. "You four are going to be the death of me. Cole is going to go crazy when I tell him I have zero authority over you anymore." He rasps, letting me know he isn't pleased in any way and I wave him away with a complacent gesture. I know it's not fair that he will get hell from my mate, but Colton will eventually calm down when this is all over. This is for the good of the whole pack.

"Why is it so quiet and still?" Carmen's craning at the door to listen through the thick wood and pauses before reaching to touch the handle with caution. I notice her sniffing the air first to check for wolfsbane and then she grips the cold metal firmly. Leaning her shoulder against the smooth surface and tilting her head to have one good listen once more.

"They're in there, just not doing anything. Waiting maybe." Radar moves me aside and slides up next to her, looking at the door and he too evaluates it. "I have no idea if they are sleeping, or just poised for a fight." He frowns, narrowing his glowing eyes and fully shifts Carmen out of the way.

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"Who can sleep with a full-blown vampire war going on out there?" Sierra snorts, the hatred evident for Juan and she gets so impatient with the stalling she shoves Radar out of her way and grabs the handle herself, yanking it down and heaves the door forward with intent. The clicking noise is loud and prominent in this noiseless air and startles me.

I close my eyes tight and take a hurried breath as the swoosh of air at my guards leaping forward to surround us gives me a new sense of safety. Into immediate guard mode as they flank us, and await instruction from Radar rather than their Luna. There's a creak, a groan, and then the heavy scuffing noise of the doors being pushed fully open, and yet nothing happens.