



Cricket Lone Wolf Part 22

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Exams end and Naomi proves her worth to Daria as an ally.

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Final exams started with the students attention focused on getting the highest score possible and achieving the top student spot in their class. The freshman class competition during the school year was extremely high because Marcia set the standard for excellence. She studied hard and had little difficulty retaining what she read. She loved school because it made her use her mind and taught her how to succeed. With the exams, Marcia strived to better her normal high marks. Marcia sat at her desk studying for the next day's exams, but her mind replayed the events she witnessed at the school. She thought that the exams would blot out the mysteries that the school contained. Mystery shrouded the school history and kept a secret from students until they attended classes. The names and identities of graduates remained hidden after they left the school. When Naomi arrived to join Marcia, they explored the school grounds with Stefan and discovered more strange things. The chapel was a source of more mystery and strange nightly gatherings. The more Marcia thought about things, she wanted to quit studying and explore. Naomi saw Marcia's pen drop and eyes search out the window and knew she stopped studying. She coughed, but Marcia sat still, hardly breathing as her mind drifted. She made loud noises with her books and ruler to no avail. Naomi felt Marcia did it this time, she left the room and went somewhere else again. Finally, Naomi sharply clapped and loudly yelled, "Marcia come back!" Marcia jumped in her chair and almost fell over hearing Naomi's voice. "What! Is something wrong? Why did you yell at me?" Marcia quickly grumbled back. She sat picked up her book and pen, which flew off the desk when she awoke. She shook her head to get her brain back on track to the present. She hated when her mind played tricks on her and wished it would stop. She looked out the window down at the village far below counting the blinking lights. It was a habit she developed to focus her mind on the present and pushed the past away. Naomi paused, closed her books and stood up walking into the bathroom. As she ran the water to get a refreshing taste of mountain spring, she quietly replied, "You were doing it again. You looked out the window, and that faraway look came over your face." She returned to her desk with a glass of water in her hand. "What was it this time?" Naomi asked peevishly. Marcia turned to face Naomi and replied, "The same old things. The mysteries of this school and the happenings we witnessed this year. Nothing new, but I want to get answers to a few things that still haunt my days and dreams. Is there something wrong with that?" Marcia's face had an angry view after the rude yell of Naomi that brought her out of the trance. She stood, stretched her arms straight up over her head and reached upward standing on tiptoes. She loudly expelled stale air from her lungs to help her wake up. Soon after that rude wake-up, Marcia closed her books, got ready for bed and sat on her bed waiting Naomi's finish. Naomi finished, left her books scattered over her desk and jumped onto her bed. The girls turned to face each other as they used to in Marcia's bedroom in New Jersey. Instead of the angry faces earlier, the girls smiled at each other, with the faces of very best friends. When they sat like this, they exchanged thoughts or observations that struck them during the day. Naomi spoke first in their usual

goodnight ritual, "Today during and after we played with the orchestra, Daria and Franci plotted how to take you down. I was not sure what to do with them report it or let them hang themselves by allowing it to continue. When I heard them talking, I remembered fourth grade and how we first met. It was as if it was Sarah all again." "I thought all that was behind me when I left New Jersey, but here it can get brutal because we are confined. Daria, I thought would cause trouble because she is always the center of attention. Franci is a new person and Chantel's roommate who found the body. Now I have another dilemma to solve and it is exam week. I hope they hold off until summer school. Will you please become my eyes and ears with them, so I know what is going on?" Marcia sighed as she spoke. "I will do what I can. We are friends and have been for too long to have anything come between us or ruin our friendship. I will handle it the same way I followed Sarah. You will know whatever I know and we can handle the two of them when we need to. We have Stefan and Polina on our side too. I think we will be alright." Naomi said trying to cheer things up. After that discussion, the girls turned out the lights and lay in their beds. Naomi fell asleep quickly and soon snored softly, as Marcia listened and thought about her mysteries. She met Chantel's roommate earlier and felt strange working with her. Playing music with her was fine, but something else that Marcia felt was not right. She felt Franci knew more about the suicide than she told anyone. She thought Chantel's death was not a suicide, but a murder staged to look like a suicide. After a few minutes, her resolve felt that she needed to find the underlying cause of the death. Soon Marcia fell asleep as she watched the stars in the night sky. The bright morning sun flooded the room, as Naomi woke and quickly got ready for the day. Marcia rolled over and buried her head in the pillow trying to shut out the day. Naomi pushed Marcia groaning and moaning out of bed to get ready. Marcia did not sleep well because of her final thoughts when she went to bed. The one thing that weighed heavily still on her mind was the death of Chantel because she loved life more than to take her own. The exams went quickly, but most students felt utterly defeated by the assault on their memories. The group of students appeared in the orchestra room after lunch and played for ninety minutes to relieve the tension. When they finished, a hearty loud sigh followed by raucous laughter flooded the room. The tension disappeared with laughter and cheery banter filling the air. Daria, Franci, Polina and Naomi went to Daria's room to have some privacy to discuss what to do to bring Marcia down. They talked, but nothing came from the discussion because they did not trust Naomi. The one thing that did happen was a discussion about Naomi proving her worth to the plotters. The next day was a free day for the freshman class from exams. Stefan and the girls five of them went out to the stables to get out of the confines of the school building. Stefan mucked out his horse's stall, replaced the old straw with clean straw, filled the water trough and the food bin and tidied up the area outside the stall. The girls either sat on the hay bales or brushed and cleaned Stefan's horse. Daria moaned and complained as usual and she had a new person to support her in Franci. Polina and Naomi worked on Stefan's horse while Marcia spent time looking at the rest of the horses in the stable. Just as the group finished up, the sky, which had been gray all day, opened up and a hard rain with hail followed by lightning and thunder made it impossible to get back to school. Marcia and Stefan knew that the next building had a tunnel that connected to the school and they would not get very wet that way. Stefan grabbed Daria and carried

her to the next building with the rest of the girls following them. Once inside the building they went down into the tunnel and walked toward the school. With Daria limping along, she and Franci lagged way behind with Naomi urging them to move. Naomi hated confined space and the tunnels with their walls and doors scared her. "Naomi, hold up. Daria is having trouble keeping up and you know your way around these tunnels. Run ahead and tell Stefan that we are lagging behind." Franci pleaded loudly. "I will run ahead and tell the others," Naomi replied as she sped off at a slow trot to catch the other three. As Naomi trotted on, she thought about how to get Daria and Franci to trust her and include her in their plotting. Maybe an accident in the tunnels would be enough to sway them to accept her. There were a few storage rooms off the tunnels, which contained supplies for rescue or survival. She speculated that if she locked Stefan and Polina in one of them she would prove her worthiness. Naomi hated the tunnels and the longer she stayed in them, the more her fear rose. She feared that the tunnels would collapse and trap her. As Naomi rounded one of the corners, she saw Stefan and Polina stopped just outside a storage room with a broken door. She ran up to them just as they entered the room to get some of the water stored there. As she approached the room, she pushed the door and it fell against the wall wedging shut. Stefan and Polina heard the door, but could not move fast enough to escape the door as it fell. The door blocked the entrance preventing Stefan and Polina from crawling out or anyone getting inside. The door trapped them unhurt, but unable to move anywhere within the room. As the door fell, it made a loud rumbling noise that echoed throughout the tunnel system. Marcia ran back to see Naomi, Daria and Franci near the door helpless to give aid. The four girls stood outside the room calling to Stefan and Polina. No sound came from the two students trapped inside and fear rose that something terrible happened to them. Daria stood not attempting to rescue them, Franci, Marcia and Naomi beat on the door and yelled for their friends. As they pounded, several faculty members arrived to ascertain why the noise was so loud. Two of the men tried in vain to move the door, but it would not budge. A third man went in search of another room that contained rescue equipment. Fifteen minutes later, he returned with an ax and a jack to help move the wedged door. The men hacked at the door creating a spot where the jack fit under it. They used the jack to move the door and create a hole wide enough to allow rescue. As they opened the hole, the medical team of the school came to the area. One of the medical team entered the room and found the students unconscious near the door. He removed some of the debris from around them and revived the students. He assisted Polina as she crawled out of the room into the arms of the rescuers. She sat on a cot set up for triage as the other medical team members examined her. Except for a few bumps and bruises, she was fine. She drank some water and chatted with her friends as they waited for Stefan and the medic to exit the room. The medic in the room with Stefan examined him carefully and saw a bad cut on Stefan's forearm. He wrapped it gently with some bandaging material and helped Stefan exit. When Stefan appeared, a cheer went up because both students were safe. Stefan sat next to Polina while the medical team examined him and redid the dressing on his arm. The cut on his arm was relatively minor and just needed cleaning and a new bandage. He drank some of the water that Polina had in her hand and felt much better. As the medical team packed up their gear and left, the headmaster approached the group of students. He

looked at them shaking his head but smiled that they were all safe and relatively unharmed. He spoke softly to the group, "I want to see all of you in my office tomorrow about what happened here. This incident appeared to be an accident, but I want to know what happened. Appear at my office after you finish your exams tomorrow and we will talk. Now go clean up and get to dinner. Marcia and Naomi, it is our night to have dinner. I expect you to appear in my office in thirty minutes." The students walked quickly away from the headmaster, as he stayed behind to survey the damage. He stood and watched the group leave, as he wondered what happened and why.