Barren Luna 101

CHAPTER 101

Nolan's POV

Solon didn't leave the hospital until late in the evening. The guards at the doors of the hospital stayed alert, but I had already memorized their routine and snuck past them with ease. Quietly, I scaled the outer wall and pulled myself toward the second floor.

Della had kept her word. The window to Talia's room was unlocked. I pushed it open and slipped inside.

Della stood near the bed, removing a rag from Talia's head and back into a bowl of ice water. Her eyes narrowed as soon as she saw me. "You're late," she said.

"I came when I could," I told her.

"You only have 10 minutes. If Solon comes back early, I expect you to throw yourself out the window or we'll both face consequences," Della explained.

"I understand," I told her.

My attention shifted to Talia. Her skin was pale and clammy. Tubes ran from her arms into the machines that beeped steadily at her side. Fresh bandages covered her wounds.

I moved closer and sat in the chair beside her bed. "Why haven't her injuries healed?" I asked quietly.

"Without her wolf, she can't recover quickly," Della replied. "The doctors have manually clear the wolfsbane out of her system thus all the tubes attached to her. Once the wolfsbane is out of her system, Talia should start healing on her own. Until then, all we can do is keep her wounds clean and keep her comfortable."

I frowned. This was my fault. I should never have told Marco to give her that herb. Now her wolf remained lost to her. Talia would have an even harder time waking out of this coma.

“Why are you here, Alpha Nolan?” Della asked, bringing me out of my thoughts.

“I told you I owed her,” I answered.

“I think there is more to it than that. I know you want to find evidence against the Alpha King, but if you’re caught here, you risk losing that opportunity,” Della said.

The she-wolf was more observant that I gave her credit. ‘She needs to be as Talia’s Beta,’ my wolf added.

“There isn’t more to this other than I needed to see her myself to ensure that she was getting the proper care,” I stated. It wasn’t entirely a lie, but it wasn’t the full truth.

“Fine. Don’t tell me, but remember this, she doesn’t need more chaos in her life,” Della warned, “If you mean to hurt her physically or emotionally, I’ll find a way to end you.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at Della’s warning which only made her glare at me harder. “You have nothing to worry about. I have no intentions of harming her.” (1

Talia groaned as her brow furrowed. Sweat had broken out on her forehead, She twisted underneath the sheets in an attempt to get comfortable, I placed my hand on her forehead, and she was burning up,

“Why does she have a fever?” I asked.

Della reached for the rag sitting in the ice water. She wrung it and placed it on Talia’s forehead. “It is the side effect of the wolfsbane. They break for a few hours and then return worse than before.”

“Why aren’t the doctors prescribing her something to deal with the fevers?” I asked.

“They have and nothing is working. That is why Solon and I have been taking turns tending to her. We’ve been manually causing her fever to break,” Della explained.

‘Hold her hand,’ my wolf urged. ‘This is like when she was in heat. She needs you to ease her pain. Our presence

will reach her.’

‘What would that mean for us? I can’t allow her to interfere with avenging my father,’ I retorted.

“Only our mate matters now. Stop pretending for once and do something useful. It’s just her hand, not some deadly venom!” my wolf growled.

My hand hovered above Talia’s but hesitated for a while. But seeing her in pain because of me, I knew I couldn’t let this continue.

Slowly, I took her small hand into mine. Her hand was hot just like her forehead. Yet within moments, she seemed to cool. Talia’s expression relaxed and the fever in her face seemed to melt away.

Della took the rag off Talia’s forehead and checked her temperature. “The fever broke. What did you do?”

“I… just held her hand. Give her some support,” I muttered.

I didn’t look at Della, but I knew she was staring at me, trying to figure out why my touch was soothing to Talia. This was not good as Della would figure out that I was her mate. I expected her to blurt it out the next time she spoke, but instead she said, “Whatever you’re done, please continue it. She needs this. She’s been through enough.”

I nodded and held Talia’s hand tighter. My thumb brushed the back of Talia’s hand. My wolf gave a satisfied growl inside me.

“I’ll fetch more ice,” Della said quickly, setting the cloth back in the bowl before heading for the door.

The door creaked open, and Della nervously said, “Oh, my King, what are you doing here?”

CHAPTER 102

Rudolf’s POV

When I entered the room, I froze. Nolan was seated beside the bed holding Talia’s hand. The moment he saw me; he let go and drew back. Della cleared her throat and let out a nervous laugh.

“I, uh, will get more ice,” she said quickly, and slipped past me and out of the room.

I walked over to Nolan and snatched him up by his shirt collar. “I was very clear about you to stay away from her. What are you doing here?” I snarled.

Nolan’s expression remained neutral, but an eye twitch gave away his anger. He gripped my wrist and pried my hand off him. “I threatened Della to let me in. I wanted to see Talia’s condition and find some clues about rogues.

“Clues? Is that the lie you’re going with?” I snorted. “What did you expect to find? This ward has been checked. There is nothing here you will discover by sitting next to her.”

“I understand what you think,” Nolan said flatly. “But I had to verify with my own eyes since your warriors failed to notice rogues entering your territory.”

His answer was a bit of a taunt, but Nolan was not defensive. What was his real reason for being here? I could not see how sneaking into this room helped him. If he wanted leverage against me, there were easier ways to create it. If he wanted to provoke me, he had already done so.

A few minutes earlier, I had felt my daughter’s fever rise through the faint bond that remained between us. Pain was so sharp I had thought I had accidentally harmed myself without noticing and then the pain eased as quickly as it came, causing me to rush to see Talia as I feared the worst.

I didn't think it was a coincidence that Nolan holding her hand happened around the same time her pain faded. It made me think of how Nolan had carried her out of the restricted area days ago. He seemed panicked, refusing to put her down even after Solon struck him. It made me think of a possibility that I did not want to say aloud.

'Second chance mate,' my wolf growled, voicing the suspicion I had. 'He may be her second chance mate.'

Years ago, I may have been elated at the idea. However, with how antagonistic he was, the idea of Talia being his mate was sickening.

"I have confirmed that she is stable. I will leave," Nolan stated, breaking the silence.

"No," I ordered.

Nolan raised an eyebrow. "You wanted clues, right? You will wait here and hear the results of Talia's recent tests with me. If there is anything to discuss after that, we will discuss it."

Nolan gave a short nod and looked back at Talia. He kept his distance from the bed but did not turn away from her.

After several minutes, the door opened. The doctor entered carrying a tan folder. He paused when he saw Nolan, then came forward.

"Do not worry about him," I told him, "What do the results show?"

The doctor nodded. "We repeated the blood work," the doctor said. "The wolfsbane level is falling, but at a rate that is too slow. It has begun to affect her liver and her kidneys. She cannot withstand this for much longer."

"What does that mean?" Nolan asked.

“It means if we can’t find a way to clear her system quicker all of her organs will fail,” the doctor replied.

My stomach dropped and Nolan’s jaw flexed as his hands balled into fists. “How long?” I asked.

“At this pace, three days,” the doctor answered. “If nothing changes, she will die.”

At that moment Della came back in with a refilled tray. She stopped when she heard him, and the tray tilted in her hands. Ice scattered across the floor with a hard clatter. She pressed a hand to her mouth and then knelt to gather the pieces.

The doctor kept his tone even. “We have used the standard treatments to support her heart and lungs. We are managing fluids and temperature. None of that removes the poison. Without the most powerful healer Leslie, there is no method on hand to purge the wolfsbane before more damage occurs.

“Is she in pain now?” I asked.

“Not at this moment,” he said. “Her fever spikes and then breaks. Each spike leaves her weaker. I will order another set of labs in six hours to confirm the trend. If the rate does not improve, we will need to prepare for organ support.”

I looked down at my daughter and then back at Nolan. His jaw was tight. He kept his eyes on the bed.

“You want to prove your innocence,” I said to him. “You know what to do. Find Leslie.”

He held my eyes for a long second, then turned and walked out without a word. The door shut behind him.

I took a calming breath and then faced Della. “You disobeyed my order and let him into this room.”

She stood, the tray now back on the counter. “Yes, my King. I did. He only wanted to check on her, and he did help her while he was here.”

“You don’t get to override my command. I will look past it this time, but there will not be a second time,” I said. I will speak with Beta Logan about your conduct once Talia is stable. Until then, you will follow instructions exactly as given. There will be no exceptions.”

“I understand,” Della nodded.

I turned to the doctor. “Continue monitoring. I want updates on the hour. If her heart rhythm changes, if her oxygen drops, or if she shows any sign of distress, notify me immediately.”

“Understood,” he said. He stepped to the bedside, checked the lines, and made a note on the chart.

I closed my eyes and reached the link. ‘Solon, end your patrol and come to me now. There are urgent matters to discuss.’

‘On my way,’ he replied.

CHAPTER 103

Jason’s POV

The Hunting Rite had ended, and I had taken first place. There should have been a celebration or at least a feast and yet, the Alpha King offered me no acknowledgment. Not even a word of praise or recognition. The silence gnawed at me. I had proven myself against the strongest alphas of every pack, yet it seemed to mean nothing to him.

The other pack leaders left quickly as they had no reason to remain. My father, however, lingered. Clearly frustrated by the inaction of the Alpha King.

“You should go to the Alpha King now,” he told me. “You earned this victory. Make use of it. Go demand your reward from the Alpha King. Solidify the marriage with the princess.”

“The timing is wrong,” I argued.

“What do you mean? You won. You are owed your reward,” my father countered.

“Talia was kidnapped,” I started.

“Not this again,” my father stated. “That omega doesn’t matter. The princess is what is important.”

“I know that, but Talia is important to the Alpha King and Prince Solon. She was poisoned and wounded. They are more worried about her than anything else,” I explained. “It’s not the right time.”

“It doesn’t matter what they think. The Alpha King is bound by tradition. He must honor the Hunting Rite,” he said, his voice sharp. “If you delay too long worrying about others’ feelings, you will miss this opportunity. Are you going to fail our pack again?”

“No, but…”

“Enough of your excuses!” my father snapped. “I don’t want to repeat myself, Jason.”

I watched him storm off. I released the breath I had been holding. It was so easy for him to be cold because he had always been a heartless bastard.

I still cared for Talia in my own way. I never wanted to see her harmed even when I believed Viki. Maybe embarrassed or humiliated, but nothing life threatening.

I had even gone to the hospital once, determined to see her. The moment I reached her floor; Solon blocked my path.

“You cannot enter,” he said flatly. “Go back.”

“I have a right to see her,” I argued. “I care about her more than you ever could.”

“Says the man that cheated on a fated mate bond,” Solon snorted. “You don’t care about her. You only care about control and how you look. Now, leave, Talia needs her rest. She doesn’t need you lingering around like a leech.”

“I will not be dismissed like a servant,” I snapped,

Solon didn’t argue further. He simply shoved me back with strength that sent me staggering into the wall. “Leave, Jason. Or I will remove you myself.”

The staff had watched our exchange and I was humiliated. He moved me like I was nothing. I knew then that if Talia hadn’t been kidnapped, I would not have won the Hunting Rite that felt even more shameful.

“You can’t keep me from her forever. I will speak with her. She is my mate,” I said, backing up. Solon didn’t say anything else but stared me down as I left.

I should be in the room tending to Talia not Solon. It should be me that she relies on from comfort. Talia was still my fated mate even if we rejected each other.

‘He’s doing this on purpose,’ my wolf suggested. ‘He must be afraid we’ll claim her again.’

I agreed.

Later that day, Henry came to my room with a grim face. “There’s been a change with Talia’s condition,” he said.

“What is it? What’s wrong with her?” I asked.

“Her condition has worsened. The doctors cannot figure out why she is displaying flu-like symptoms without signs of infection,” Henry explained. “Her body temp continues to fluctuate as she continues to have fevers.”

“What are the doctors doing? Why can’t they just prescribe her medication?” I questioned.

“They are at loss. They have tried everything. They say she may not last much longer without a healer,” Henry explained. “The doctors are certain. Without her, the wolfsbane will continue to poison her boy and eventually kill her.” 1

“We can send the healer we have,” I suggested.

“No. They need someone that specializes in poisons. One of the doctors suggested Healer Leslie. The Alpha King has given Solon three days to find her,” Henry continued.

“Leslie?” I repeated.

The name stirred something in my memory. My father had once mentioned meeting a healer named Leslie during his travels in the Windpaw pack. At the time I hadn’t cared, but now it seemed like that this exchange had finally come in handy.

“I think I may know where to find the healer,” I muttered.

“Truly?” Henry asked.

“My father told me about her. Windpaw territory. If she’s still there, I can rely on my father’s connections to get her,” I replied.

“Then, you need to tell the Alpha King as soon as possible.”

“No, not yet.”

“What? Why? Talia is practically on her death bed.”

“Just trust me. Go back to your room,” I said dismissing him, Henry looked like he wanted to ask me a thousand questions, but he restrained himself. He nodded and left my room,

I sent a message to Windpaw’s Alpha, Lane. My words were direct. I need confirmation. Is the healer Leslie within your pack?

The wait felt endless, though only minutes passed. Then the reply came. Yes. She remains with us. Why do you ask?

Relief surged through me. I did not explain to Lane why I asked. There was no time for long exchanges.

That knowledge was mine now, and I would use it.

I left my room and made my way to the Alpha King’s wing. Guards at the entrance tried to stop me, but I shook them off. “Move. I need to speak with the Alpha King. This is about Talia’s life.”

After hearing her name, the guards stepped out of my way. Two followed after me. I reached the double doors leading to the Alpha King’s meeting room. I squared my shoulders. (1)

Whatever tension lay between us, whatever doubt he held toward me, I had information that could save Talia’s life. He needed to hear it from me.

I knocked once, then pushed the doors open and stepped inside to face him.

CHAPTER 104

Nolan’s POV

I was halfway down the corridor to the Alpha King’s office when I heard quick footsteps close behind me. I glanced back and saw Solon turning the corner, moving fast. His eyes narrowed the moment he recognized me.

“Why are you here?” he asked. “My father called for me.”

“The Alpha King summoned me,” I said simply.

Solon slowed to match my pace, watching me as if he expected me to admit something. “That is unusual. Why would he want you here?”

“You can ask him,” I said, rolling my eyes. “I am just following orders.”

“And when do you follow orders?” Solon asked and I didn’t respond to his taunt. “If you think you can use this to get closer to my sister, you are mistaken.”

“I am here because the Alpha King requested it,” I said. “Nothing else.”

We reached the double doors. Two guards stood aside and opened them. Inside, Jason was already positioned in front of the desk. He turned slightly when we entered, ready to speak. He stood in front of the Alpha King’s desk, looking too eager, too proud of himself. The Alpha King sat behind the desk. His gaze shifted from Jason to us.

“I called you all here for one reason,” the Alpha King said. “Alpha Jason has come forward with information about Leslie.”

Solon barked a laugh. “Of course he did. Jason never misses a chance to be the center of attention. Father, there are better ways to handle this. Send messages to the other alphas and expand the search. If you rely on him, you will lose time.”

Jason’s jaw tightened. “You can mock me all you want, Prince Solon, but I have something you do not. I know Leslie’s whereabouts. She is in the Windpaw pack.”

Solon folded his arms. “You expect us to believe you? Convenient that you, of all people, are the one who suddenly knows where she is.”

“I confirmed it with Alpha Lane himself,” Jason responded before turning his attention back to the Alpha King: ” Allow me to go to Windpaw. I will bring her back. We don’t have time to squabble amongst ourselves.”

I watched Jason closely. His eagerness sickened me. This was not just about saving Talia. This was about carrying favor with the Alpha King and yet Jason would have everyone believe he still cared about Talia.

‘Disgusting bastard!’ my wolf growled within me. ‘Talia deserved so much more than wasting years with this fool.

I wasn’t about to allow Jason to get away with his plan. He ruined mine and I planned on repaying the favor,

“I will go as well,” I said. “If Healer Leslie is to treat Talia, someone must judge her ability. We cannot let just anyone near her.”

Solon spun toward me. His face was flushed with anger. “This is ridiculous. Jason seeks glory, and you…” his eyes narrowed, and I raised an eyebrow waiting for him to continue. “…you are still a suspect. Neither of you should go. I will go and bring back the healer.”

The Alpha King raised his hand and Solon stopped talking. “We had a slip with our security. This is not the time

for Silverfang’s heir to be away,” he said. “Solon, you will stay. Alpha Jason and Alpha Nolan will go.”

Solon stared at his father, stunned by his decision. Jason tried to maintain a neutral face, but satisfaction crept into his expression. I kept my reaction neutral even though the order stunned me as much as it stunned Solon.

I had just challenged the Alpha King days ago. The Alpha King suspected I had harmed his only daughter and yet, he was placing his daughter’s life in my hands. What happened? Why had he suddenly changed his outlook on me?

“Father…” Solon began.

“That is my order,” the Alpha King declared. The Alpha command slammed into me. He was ensuring that none of us resisted his order. “You will leave at once. Coordinate your route and do not delay. If Leslie is not inclined to come, you will persuade her. You will not return without her.”

“Yes, my King,” I said through gritted teeth as I hated being commanded.

Jason bowed his head. “Understood.”

We left together. As soon as the doors closed, Jason turned to me.

“You should know something before we leave, Alpha Nolan,” he said. “Leslie is not someone who respects titles. She won’t come just because you demand it. If you show up with your attitude and your aggression, you’ll drive her away. If you want this to work, you’ll heed my advice and keep your mouth shut.”

I sneered at his warning and then spun quickly, seizing him by the collar. I snatched him close to me. I could see the fear in his eyes as I glared at him.

“You do not give me orders,” I growled. “I think you have forgotten your place in this sham of an alliance.”

Jason let out a nervous laugh. “Relax. Just a warm reminder.”

Again, he was trying to command me. I wanted to beat him until he could barely move, but I needed him for now. “ If you think you can flex in front of me, I will make sure you remember that mistake for the rest of your life,” I warned.

“I’m not trying to command you, really. We both want the same thing. We want to save Talia.”

I released him slowly. He adjusted his collar, forcing a smile.

“Then we understand each other,” I said.

“Yes, of course,” he muttered. “We leave tonight.”

J Judith GW

Author

Hi lovely readers!

Do you think Healer Leslie will go with Alpha Nolan and Jason to save Talia or refuse? Share your thoughts in the

CHAPTER 105

Nolan’s POV

The next day, Jason and I reached the Windpaw pack. Compared to Silverfang, it was small, but the territory was well cared for. It was a quiet, countryside pack territory. This was the kind of place where someone went to disappear and enjoy the simple things of life.

Alpha Lane met us at the gate. He looked like a man who had spent most of his life outdoors. His skin was tanned, and his hands were rough with old callouses, Gray streaked through his beard and at his temples, but there was still strength in the set of his shoulders.

“Greetings Alpha Jason.” He greeted Jason without hesitation, but when his gaze shifted to me, there was caution. “And you as well, Alpha Nolan.”

I simply nodded to him, allowing Jason to rely on his connections to get us to the healer.

“Greetings, Alpha Lane. We appreciate you seeing us on such short notice,” Jason responded.

“You contacted me about Healer Leslie yesterday, I assume you came for her,” Alpha Lane added. “But I hope there won’t be any violence in my territory,” The warning was for me, but I ignored it.

Jason gave a short nod. “Yes, we came for Leslie. Someone in Silverfang has been poisoned with wolfsbane. Without Leslie, she will not survive. Please help us.”

Lane’s mouth tightened. “I will take you to her cabin.”

He turned and led us into the pack. As we walked, he continued. “I should warn you first. Healer Leslie is not like other healers, She is direct, harsh, and does not care about titles. She does not respond well to orders, but she is skilled. When others fall, she often finds a solution.”

The path took us past the training field and a cluster of houses. Children ran near the edge of the field while guards sparred under the morning sun. The land was quiet compared to Silverfang’s busy grounds. Lane stopped in front of a small wooden cabin at the edge of the trees,

Lane knocked once. When there was no response, he called out, “Leslie, you have visitors.”

After a moment, a woman’s voice responded, “Come on in.”

Lane pushed the door open, and we entered. The cabin was filled with shelves of Jars and bundles of dried plants hanging from the rafters. A young woman with long, wild red hair sat at a table covered in books.

“Healer Leslie, you have visitors,” Lane repeated.

“I heard you the first time,” Leslie stated as she placed her pen in the book to keep her place. She looked up at us, annoyed by our presence. “Alpha Lane, who are they?”

“These gentlemen came from Silverfang. They are here to ask for your help,” Lane explained.

Leslie leaned back in her chair, unimpressed. “Silverfang needs help? That is rare.”

Jason stepped forward. “A friend of ours has been poisoned with wolfsbane. Her wolf is gone. The doctors say she has three days left unless you treat her.”

Leslie raised an eyebrow. “And you traveled all this way because you think I can save her?”

“Yes,” Jason said. “Because you are the only one who can.”

Leslie shrugged. “I don’t care about Silverfang’s problems. Why should I go?”

Her casual dismissal made my patience thin. “This is not about politics. A life is at stake. You have to come with us.”

Her eyes snapped to me, sharp. “You order me in my own home? That is rude. If you want my help, start with an apology.”

My wolf stirred, pushing me to refuse, but Jason gave me a look that told me not to make things worse. I forced the word out.” Fine. I apologize.”

Leslie’s mouth curved slightly. “Better.”

Jason tried again, his tone calm. “If you save her, the Alpha King will reward you with whatever you desire. Gold, land, protection, you name it, he’ll give it to you.”

Leslie laughed under her breath. “I don’t need rewards. I don’t heal for King or coins. But the case sounds unusual. A vanished wolf and wolfsbane at once? That is rare. It could be interesting.”

She stood up and walked over to one of her many bookcases. She pulled down several heavy books, placing them on her table with a thud. She began going through each book one by one, flipping through the pages quickly. Her lips moved as she read. Leslie muttered to herself while she compared passages. Jason and I stood in silence while she worked.

Minutes passed. My irritation grew as my wolf was getting restless. The longer she took, the weaker Talia would become. Then suddenly she shouted, “Found it!” She slapped a book down on the table excitedly.

I felt a flicker of relief, but her excitement about something so serious angered me. It was as if Leslie felt my spike in anger and smirked, “Don’t take it so seriously. You came to me for help. You need to relax.”

“Explain to us what you have found,” I responded flatly. “Please.”

Leslie tapped the page. “According to this text, there is only one way to counteract wolfsbane without help from her wolf. Moonbane Herb. It is more toxic than wolfsbane. The patient cannot take it directly. A powerful Alpha must ingest the herb. His wolf will purify the poison inside his body and then his blood becomes the antidote. Then his blood can be transfused into the patient to heal her.”

Jason stared at her. “So, someone has to poison himself first?”

“Yes,” Leslie said. “If the Alpha’s wolf is strong enough, it will neutralize the herb and create the cure. If the wolf is not strong enough, he dies, and the patient dies too.”

I frowned. “Is this the only method?”

Leslie nodded. “The only one written in the old texts. I have never done it, but the symptoms match perfectly. Without it, there is nothing else.”

Jason’s face was pale. “Then… Who is supposed to take it?”

Leslie closed the book and crossed her arms. “Well, that is for you to decide. If neither of you is willing, then leave. I won’t waste time with men who come begging for answers but flinch at the cost.”

CHAPTER 106

Rudolf’s POV

By the third day, Talia's fever worsened with every passing hour. The doctors had failed to break it. Solon, Della, and I stayed by her side around the clock, placing her in ice baths to cool her down. Every report on her condition told the same grim story: she was dying.

Solon stormed into her room as I was changing out the rag for her forehead to a cooler one. "Father, this is madness. You should never have sent Jason and Nolan. They are unreliable. Jason only thinks of himself, and Nolan, he, I don't know what he's doing, but I know this will not end well for none of us."

"Do you think I had a choice? Our doctors admitted they could not save her. We needed Healer Leslie, and neither of us could leave Silverfang to search for her," I replied. Word had spread about our defenses lacking. Both of us needed to be here to defend Silverfang in case someone tried to take advantage.

"Still, trusting them was reckless." Solon muttered.

Before I could answer, Beta Logan burst into the room. He caught the door before it slammed into the wall. He bowed his head quickly before saying, "My King. Alpha Jason and Alpha Nolan have returned. They brought the healer with them. They are already on their way to the hospital."

For the first time in days, I felt a flicker of hope.

When they arrived, I studied Leslie with care. Healer Leslie looked nothing like the solemn healers I had known. She was a young woman, not that much older than Talia. She had long red hair and sharp green eyes that were always observing and assessing her surroundings. There was a mischievous air about her as if she found the situation more intriguing than tragic.

Jason spoke first. "Healer Leslie, this is the Alpha King."

Her gaze shifted to me. "I know who he is." She gave no bow, no sign of deference. Instead, she folded her arms. "So… you want me to save your daughter." (1

"Yes," I said firmly. "Talia's life depends on you.

“I can try, but you should understand now: I will not take responsibility if I fail. If she dies, that is not on me,” Leslie responded

casually.

Solon bristled. “You speak as though you are not the legendary healer we were told about. Why should we trust you with her life?”

Leslie smirked and shot back, “And who are you to doubt me? If I walk out of this hospital, you will have no chance at all.”

Solon stepped forward, but I raised my hand to stop him from doing anything we all would regret. “Enough,” I said firmly. ” This is not the time for pride. Healer Leslie, tell me what you need.”

She glanced past me, her eyes settling on Nolan. “Only him. I need Alpha Nolan’s blood.”

Nolan gave a short nod.

I frowned. “Why his blood? I’m her father, You can use mine.”

Solon stepped beside me quickly. “Take mine instead. I will not allow Nolan near her again.”

Leslie shook her head. “No. It must be him.”

“Alpha Jason, you have nothing to add?” Solon demanded. Jason was Talia’s ex-mate. Even if they rejected each other, they did share that connection. If Solon and I could not help Talia, surely, he could.

Jason shifted uncomfortably but said nothing. Leslie rolled her eyes and said, “Let me make this even clearer. You three are not suitable enough for this. Do not waste my time or the precious time of Talia’s squabbling over who should be the one to take this

It is either Alpha Nolan, or this isn't happening."

My pulse quickened. I wanted to refuse. I wanted to deny Nolan the right to do this. It felt wrong for him to be the one to do something so personal for Talia, but the choice was gone the moment Leslie spoke with such certainty. "Are you sure of this?"

"Absolutely," Leslie said. "My book record is clear. It must be Alpha Nolan."

I looked at him. His face was calm, almost detached, but Nolan was much like his father. The subtle flexing of his hands gave away his anxiety. Nolan was taking this seriously even if his outward demeanor didn't show it.

At last, I exhaled. "Very well. Then it will be Nolan, but I want every step explained."

Leslie nodded once. "Alpha Jason will explain to you. Now leave. I need to prepare with Alpha Nolan."

Solon, Jason, and I reluctantly left. As soon as the door closed, I turned to Jason. "Tell me the truth of this method. Explain every part."

"The treatment uses Moonbane Herb," Jason explained. "It's more poisonous than wolfsbane. The patient can't take it directly. Instead, a powerful Alpha must ingest it. His wolf will work to purify the toxin inside his body. Once that's done, his blood is drawn and given to the patient for healing."

I cut in. "How long does that purification take?"

Jason hesitated. "It depends on the Alpha. Sometimes for minutes. Sometimes longer. But there's a risk. If the dose is too much, or if the Alpha's wolf isn't strong enough to cleanse it, then he dies and loses all chances to save the patient."

Solon's brows furrowed. "So, Nolan will be putting his own life on the line."

Jason nodded silently.

Solon looked away, muttering under his breath, “Why would he even agree to that?” He walked a few steps down the hall, trying to process the risk Nolan was taking.

I was asking myself the same question. It would make sense for Jason to take this risk, but Nolan? I never would have believed Nolan would agree to this.

Nolan and I had clashed since the day he arrived. He challenged me without hesitation, carried a bitterness that made it clear he despised me, and by extension, Solon as well. I stopped believing there was a potential for peace between us.

Yet here he was, willing to swallow poison and risk his life for my daughter.

I no longer doubted him, Whatever stood between us, I knew one thing was for certain. Nolan would not harm Talia.

CHAPTER 107

Nolan’s POV

Leslie evaluated Talia’s condition. She checked her bandages and her last test results. She pressed her hand against Talia’s forehead and closed her eyes for a few seconds. Then, she pulled it back with a sharp sigh.

“This doesn’t look good,” she said. “Based on her last test results from this morning, her fever is much higher now. The wolfsbane has spread through most of her system. If we don’t act now, she won’t make it.”

Her words unsettled me, and I said curtly, “Then stop wasting time. Do what you need to do.”

“Are you always this impatient?” she asked.

I didn’t answer her. Leslie rolled her eyes before pulling a small wooden box out of her bag. When she opened it, a bitter scent came from the dark green spring she pulled out of the box.

“This is the Moonbane Herb,” Leslie explained.

“I know what it is,” I responded. “Get on with it.”

“Don’t rush me,” Leslie snapped. She cleared her throat and then continued, “Once you swallow it, the pain will be unbearable. It feels like fire tearing through your body. Most people can’t handle it long enough for their wolves to fight back. You need to understand what you’re agreeing to.”

“You wasted time telling me that? Give it to me,” I said.

Her mouth twitched like she found the answer amusing. “No hesitation? Good. That’s what I like to hear.” She dropped it into my hand. “Only your blood will work for her.”

I frowned. “Why mine? Why not the Alpha King or Prince Solon?”

Leslie looked at me as if I said something idiotic. “Because they’re not her mate,” she replied as she rolled her eyes.

My wolf surged inside me, wanting to claim it, but I forced him down. “You’re mistaken. We’re not mates.”

Leslie reached out and flicked the pendant that hung from my neck. “You wear a suppression charm. That tells me more than your denial does. A mate’s blood will always heal faster. That’s why it has to be you.”

I popped the herb into my mouth. “I already told you. We’re not mates.”

Leslie shrugged and said, “You can lie to yourself, but you can’t lie to me. You should be happy that you have the bond. It is the only thing that is going to keep you alive for what comes next.”

I didn’t answer as I chewed the herb. The taste was sweet and sour like candy. I easily swallowed it down, and in the next breath, pain exploded in my chest. It spread fast, hitting every nerve in my body. My knees buckled, and I couldn’t help but roar in pain. My wolf howled right along with me as we both fought against the herb.

Solon began banging on the door. “What’s happening in there?”

“Everything’s fine. Alpha King please get your son under control. We don’t need any interruptions if we are to save her,” Leslie shouted back.

I staggered toward the bed. Talia lay still. Her face was pale, and her lips cracked and dry. My vision blurred as I felt as if I would fall unconscious at any moment. I grabbed Talia’s hand and held on. My other hand dug into the side of her bed, my claws ripping through the mattress.

“I have to…endure…for her. You can’t leave me, Talia,” I said through gritted teeth.

The pain seemed to intensify by the second. My wolf howled inside me, trying to push back. Then, I felt warmth coming from Talia. Our mate bond came to life, wrapping around me and giving me the strength to fight through it.

The pain didn’t vanish, but it had become bearable. My wolf stopped howling and muttered, ‘She is helping us with the poison. We will survive this.’

Minutes passed and the pain became a deep ache. My body shook with sweat, but I was still managing. The agony became more like an annoying itch before finally fading.

I forced my eyes, that I didn’t know, I had closed open.

Leslie had moved closer to me and was watching me carefully. “Do you feel any pain?” she asked.

“No, just exhausted,” I responded.

“Good. That means your blood is ready.”

Leslie laid out her equipment on the table: needles, tubes, and bags. She pulled a chair beside Talia’s bed and gestured for me to sit. I stood up from my kneeled position and sat.

“How much do I give her?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. There was no clear answer in the text.”

“Then how do we know when to stop?”

Leslie smirked. “Simple. You keep going until she wakes.”

I glared at her and growled, “Hurry up and get on with it.”

I extended my arm for her. She prepared my arm and then slid the needle into my vein. My blood began to flow through the line that led to Talia.

I leaned back in the chair. At first, I felt okay other than the exhaustion from dealing with the herb, but as more blood drained, my body grew heavy.

“Rest,” Leslie said. “You’ve done the hard part.” She stepped out of the room to speak with the Alpha King and Prince Solon.

“Hurry and wake up, Talia,” I whispered, tightening my grip on her hand.

I closed my eyes and leaned back in my chair. Right when I started to drift off, I heard it. Her voice was weak, but it was her voice. My head lifted, and my heart pounded in my chest. Her lips had moved.

“Nolan.”

CHAPTER 108

Talia’s POV

When I opened my eyes, I felt relieved. It had taken me so long to wake up. I continued to follow the voices until I finally was able to open my eyes.

A woman I didn’t recognize was sitting next to my bed, reading a book. I shifted in bed, trying to lean up which caused her to look up from her book. She gave me a small smile, as if she had been waiting for me to wake up. I then noticed Nolan slumped against the wall. His head rested back, and his skin was pale. A tube ran from his arm to mine.

I licked my dry lips and managed to say, “Nolan.”

His eyes quickly opened, and he turned his head toward me. He looked worn down, but hearing my voice seemed to give him energy. “You’re awake,” he said.

I cleared my throat and said, “How long…how long have I been out?”

“You’ve been unconscious for a week,” Nolan answered.

His response surprised me. I really thought it had been longer. I turned back to the girl as she started to remove the bandages from my arms and shoulders.

“You don’t need these anymore,” she said. She peeled back the last bandage and I was prepared to see raw wounds, but the skin beneath was smooth and healed.

The girl nodded her approval and said, “You recovered even better than I expected.”

“How is that possible?” I asked. With my wolf still gone, I should have at least another week before the wounds were healed.

The girl winked at me and offered me a glass of water. “Because I know what I’m doing. I’m the strongest healer for a reason.”

There was only one person that could claim that and I immediately asked, “Wait, you’re Healer Leslie?”

“That’s right,” she said, sounding pleased.

“Thank you,” I whispered. “If not for you, I wouldn’t have survived.”

“It was nothing,” Leslie said as she said as she loosened the strap on my arm and then removed the line connecting me to Nolan.

“Why did Nolan have to give me blood?” I asked.

“My method only worked because his wolf was strong enough to purify the poison. Without him, it would have failed. You owe him just as much as you owe me,” Leslie replied.

I looked back at Nolan. His eyes had already closed again, and his head rested against the wall. He risked himself to save me twice now. My chest tightened at the thought. Before I could ask Leslie more, she walked to the door.

Leslie pulled it open. “She’s awake,” she called.

I could hear footsteps approaching rapidly. Father and Solon came in at once,

“Talia,” my father said, grabbing my hand and then he pulled me into a hug. “You’ve come back to us.”

Solon stood on the other side of the bed. His voice was quieter than I was used to. “I told you she would pull through. Talia is one of the strongest people I know. She wouldn’t leave us like this.”

“I heard your voices. I followed them to wake up. Every last person in here saved me,” I said.

Father looked at Leslie. He released me and stood. He bowed to her which was something my father never did.

“You have my gratitude, Leslie. If you ever need anything, you can call on Silverfang,” my father said.

Leslie gaped before composing herself. “It was nothing really.”

“Tell me, how is she now? Any lasting side effects?” my father asked.

“None,” Leslie confirmed. “Her body has pushed out the poison. She’ll need rest, but she’s out of danger.”

I could see the relief in my father’s body as his body relaxed at hearing Leslie’s response. He turned back to me. “What happened, Talia? Tell me everything from the beginning.”

“I thought I saw Viki. That’s why I excused myself. I wanted to go look to confirm,” I explained.

“You should have told me. You…” Solon started.

“Let her finish,” father cut in and Solon nodded.

“I saw her beaten and tied to a tree. I released her and she injected me with the wolfsbane. When I woke up, she had me chained up in silver. I couldn’t fight back. She had two rogue wolves with her. The rogues…” My voice caught as I remembered how the rogues tore at my clothes, sank their claws into my chest. I forced myself to continue. “They tried to assault me while Viki stood there and watched. If it wasn’t for Nolan, I don’t want to think about what would’ve happened.”

“Jason, that bastard,” Solon snarled. “He’s been playing us this entire time. He must have been sheltering her. It explains why she’s still alive. He let her go instead of ending her. Guards-” He turned toward the door. “Bring him in for questioning.”

“No,” I said firmly. I pushed myself upright even though my body still felt weak. “Jason didn’t know. Viki said she had escaped

from him.”

Solon turned back to me. “You’re saying he’s innocent? After everything?”

“I’m telling you what Viki told me,” I replied. “Viki did all this just to kill me so she could get back into Jason’s good graces. Jason didn’t know what she had planned.”

“It doesn’t matter. He knew Viki was loose and he told no one. He knew she held a grudge against you and that makes him guilty, “Solon snapped.

“That’s enough. Jason will not be touched unless I decide otherwise,” father cut in. He turned to the guards at the door. “Add extra security to the borders. If Viki tries to return, she must be stopped immediately. I want guards watching Jason at all times. Report everything he does directly to me.”

CHAPTER 109

Talia’s POV

Two days later, I was cleared to leave the hospital. My body still felt weak, but the doctors agreed I was well enough to leave. Father arranged a dinner that evening to thank both Leslie and Nolan for what they had done.

The long table in the dining hall was set with all my favorite foods. Leslie sat across from me, her red hair loose around her shoulders. Nolan sat at the far end of the table as if he was trying to stay as far away from me as possible. Father took the central seat, and Solon sat beside him.

Father raised his glass and said, “To Healer Leslie for using her skills to save Talia, and to Nolan, who risked his life. Without either of you, Talia would not be here.”

Everyone lifted their cups. Leslie grinned and clinked her glass against mine. “You were a challenge worth taking,” she said.

After the first course, Father leaned toward her. “Silverfang could use a healer like you. Will you stay here? You would be honored and well provided for.”

Leslie shook her head and declined, “No. I am happy at Windpaw. I came only because I heard the case was difficult. I wanted to test myself. That’s all.”

Father’s face fell slightly, clearly disappointed that Leslie did not agree. He would not beg Leslie, but I was sure my father would be sending gifts in an attempt to persuade Leslie later.

Then, Father looked at me and asked, “Your wolf still has not returned, has it?”

I shook my head. “No, Father,” I replied.

Leslie leaned back in her chair and chimed in, “That’s not unusual after trauma. Sometimes, a wolf won’t return until the bond with a mate is complete. Once she mates, the wolf will answer again.”

I clenched my hands in my lap. The thought of my wolf being tied to something so personal made me uneasy. It felt like I didn’t have a choice if I wanted to return to being normal.

Solon noticed my discomfort. He touched my arm lightly. “Don’t worry. You’ve gotten through worse. You’ll get through this. The Moon Goddess does grant second chance mates. She would not fail you a second time.”

“Indeed Solon. In half a month, we will hold the Sacrifice Ceremony,” Father added.

With everything going on, I had completely forgotten about the Sacrifice Ceremony. It is time to thank the Moon Goddess for all her blessings. It was also the time when single wolves sometimes found their mates. For bonded pairs, mating ceremonies

follow soon after.

“I will help you choose a mate, Talia,” my father said. “The time has come.”

The words shocked me. “I already had a mate.”

Father nodded. “And you will have another. It is the way of our kind. You are of age, and the packs will expect it.”

Before I could respond, Leslie laughed. “And what about Alpha Nolan? Will he stand beside his mate at the ceremony?”

The question froze me. My mind went back to the dream I had while unconscious. I had called him mate in that dream. The memory made me blush. I found myself staring at him.

Nolan scowled and said, “I don’t have a mate. Mate bonds cause unnecessary distractions.”

Relief washed over me, but for some reason, I also felt disappointed. I looked down at my plate trying to process the feeling. Again, I wish my wolf was here to talk to. She always knew what to say.

Leslie smirked. “I agree with you. Mate bonds only tie people down. They are restraints. I’ve avoided them since I became of

age. I take herbs that hide my scent so no bond can claim me.”

Solon balked at Leslie’s response. “That’s irresponsible. The Moon Goddess gives us bonds for a reason. You’re turning your back on what it means to be a wolf,” he argued.

Leslie rolled her eyes and countered, “You’re only thinking about yourself, Prince Solon. You are a Prince. No one can touch you, but other wolves like me can’t take the chance to be chained to someone you might not even like or someone that goes against your very morals. To let fate rule your life is a gamble and I would rather choose for myself. That is my responsibility.” 1

“You’re just selfish and immature,” Solon responded.

“Enough,” Father said firmly, glaring at Solon. “You will apologize. You will show her respect.”

“I apologize,” Solon said through gritted teeth. He downed his glass of wine, and I nudged his shoulder.

Leslie gave him a mocking little smile and turned back to Nolan. “You’re quiet, Alpha. If you ever tire of fate pushing you around, I can give you the same herbs I use.”

“Perhaps I will take you up on your offer,” Nolan stated.

She leaned forward and smiled seductively at him. “And maybe I’ll stay long enough to see if you reject me when you finally meet your mate,” she continued.

I felt my stomach twist. Watching the way Leslie smiled at him annoyed me. What was their relationship? What happened while I was unconscious?

CHAPTER 110

Talia’s POV

Werewolves rarely get drunk. Our bodies burn through alcohol so fast that most of us can drink all night and still barely feel anything. I used to be the same, but everything was different now.

Two glasses of wine at dinner left me dizzy and my face hot. The room didn’t spin, but I could barely walk in a straight line. All my words came out slurred.

Solon noticed right away. “That’s it for you,” he said quietly, taking the glass from my hand before I could lift it again.

“I’m not a child,” I responded, reaching for the glass but he kept it out of reach.

“You’re done,” Solon stated and then gestured to the guards by the doorway. “See her to her room.”

“I don’t need babysitters. I can walk on my own,” I told him, though the words came out weakly.

“I know you don’t, but after what happened not too long ago,” he said. “I’d rather we be careful.”

“Good night then,” I pouted and left the dining hall with the guards. The guards followed just behind me, trying to give the feeling of walking alone.

When we crossed the courtyard, I saw Nolan walking toward the garden path. He was by himself. I slowed. The guards shifted to guide me inside, but I shook my head.

“I want some air,” I said. “Return to your posts.”

“Prince Solon said…” one of them began.

“I said I’m fine,” I snapped. “Follow orders. Just tell Prince Solon you sent me to my room.”

They hesitated for only a moment, and then they stepped back. I crossed the courtyard and followed the same path Nolan had

taken.

The garden behind the east wing was quiet, unlike my rose garden. It was edged with hedges and stone benches. Lanterns cast steady light along the path, and the pond at the center reflected it, still and dark.

Nolan sat at one of the benches in front of the pond. He had one arm resting on his knee as he watched the water.

I stopped a few steps behind him. “Alpha Nolan.”

He turned his head, saw me, and then looked back at the water. “You should be resting.”

“I will, but I came to ask you something,” I muttered.

“Speak then.”

“Why did you save me with your blood?” I asked.

“You didn’t expose me to your father when I broke into his private library,” Nolan explained casually. “When I saw rogues, I tracked them. I had no idea they had taken you, I did what I would have done for anyone.”

“You expect me to believe that lie?” I scoffed.

“It is the truth.”

I stepped closer so he had to meet my eyes. “Just because I was unconscious doesn’t mean I don’t remember, and I didn’t hear things.” I expected to see some type of reaction from Nolan, but his expression never changed.

“You carried me out of a dungeon. You stood by me in the hospital while others argued outside,” I continued. “You swallowed poison because Leslie said it had to be you. Do you honestly want me to accept that you would have done all of that for anyone?”

“Believe whatever helps you sleep. I don’t blame you for your father’s choices, but don’t turn this into something it isn’t. I’m not interested in you,” Nolan responded.

His response angered me. Why was he lying? I should have walked away, but the thought of letting it go felt impossible. “That’s your final answer?” I asked angrily.

“Yes.”

Lantern light flicked across the pendant at his throat. I went with my first instinct. My hand shot out, grabbed the chain, and yanked. The clasp snapped. The pendant fell into my fist.

Nolan stood at once and said, “Give it back.”

I quickly hurled the pendant into the pond. It fell in with a splash and then sank to the bottom out of sight.

His scent hit me instantly. My body reacted before my thoughts caught up, the wine making it harder to ignore. I remembered his scent from the night in the library and how it made me feel.

“You shouldn’t have done that. You have no idea what you’ve done,” Nolan growled.

“Then you shouldn’t have lied,” I said. “You keep pretending that I don’t matter. And you know that isn’t true. Why are you lying?”

“I don’t owe you the answer you want,” he said flatly. “I did what was needed. That’s all.”

“You almost died,” I snapped. “You almost died, and I would have had to live with that. Do you think that would have been easy?”

“Go back to your room, Talia,” Nolan growled, stepping closer to me.

“No,” I said.

I grabbed his collar and pulled him down to me. I kissed him hard. Nolan remained still at first. For a second I thought he would push me away, but then his hand gripped the back of my neck and deepened the kiss. His other hand gripped my waist, pulling me flush against him. He kissed me as if he had been waiting for so long to do so.

The kiss triggered a memory of us in that library when my heat had consumed me. I remembered his mouth then. I remembered the word I had whispered that night.

Mate.