

SECOND CHANCE FOR THE BARREN LUNA

Dust within ancient walls Miles Brooks 11

CHAPTER FLEVEN

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Talia's POV

The ballroom was already full when Della and I stepped through the arched doors of the Silverfang palace. Moonlight shimmered through the tall glass windows, casting a soft silver glow over everything.

Werewolves, both visiting and of our own pack, mingled in clusters beneath cascading chandeliers. Music played softly in the background.

Della tightened her grip on my arm, her green eyes sweeping across the room like a sentinel on patrol.

“If Jason so much as breathes near you,” she muttered, “I’ll rip his damn throat out.”

I chuckled. “Relax. He hates formal Alpha events. He probably won’t even come.’

Her shoulders relaxed, but barely. “Good. The selfish prick wouldn’t be able to stomach the sight of you glowing anyway. Probably burst a blood vessel.”

We passed a group of Beta-ranked guests bowing politely in our direction. I offered them a courteous nod before leaning toward Della.

“It doesn’t matter how he feels or thinks. The mate bond is broken. He can’t hurt me anymore. I’m free.”

A proud smile curled her lips. “Then it’s time for you to have some fun, don’t you think? I’m throwing you a pool party next week. I’ve got a list of eligible Alphas that I know are dying to meet you. You can thank me later.”

I laughed. “You’re impossible.”

“No, I’m your best friend,” she said with a wink. “And I plan to enjoy watching every one of them treat you like the princess that you are.”

Before I could respond, a server passed by with a tray of crystal glasses filled with rose wine. Della grabbed one for herself and handed me another.

“To new beginnings,” she said, clinking our glasses.

“To new beginnings,” I echoed, sipping the chilled wine.

The party was still warming up, and my father and Solon hadn’t arrived yet. They were likely handling last- minute formalities with the Elders. Della led me toward the lounge area to relax until the official announcements began.

We barely made it ten steps before we heard raised voices.

Della stopped mid-step. “What is going on at the entrance?”

My wolf stirred, tense and irritated. ‘Who would dare make a scene on our night?’ she growled.

Della and I turned to look at the growing crowd at the entrance. People were murmuring about poor etiquette and

shameful behavior.

“I said I’m going in!” a shrill voice snapped so loud it could be heard over the music.

“Stay here,” Della said.

But I followed her anyway because I knew that voice.

CHAPTER LEVEN

+25 Bonus

Della and I walked to the front foyer. A cluster of guards stood in a tight formation at the doors, facing off with a woman in a gaudy crimson gown so tight it looked painted on. Her makeup was thick, her heels too high for this kind of event, her blonde curls were being sweated out due to her frantically trying to push forward, and her perfume brought a wave of nausea.

Viki.

“I’m Alpha Jason’s fiancée!” she barked. “He’ll be here any minute! Let me in!”

So, it was true. He really intended to make her his Luna. Realizing I had been right the entire time about his intentions made me feel vindicated, but it still hurt.

It didn't hurt because I regretted my decision. It hurt because it was another reminder that I wasted years on someone who was unworthy.

Viki tried to walk forward again, but one of the guards pushed her back.

"I'm sorry, miss," one said evenly, "but only officially invited Alphas and Lunas are allowed to enter. And we haven't received any formal recognition of a new Luna for the Shadowclaw pack."

"I am the Luna!"

"There's no official Luna of Shadowclaw on record at this time."

Viki's eyes flared with disbelief. "How dare you speak to me like that? I'll have Jason..."

"He's not here," the older guard cut in. "And even if he was, this territory belongs to Silverfang. Unless your status is recognized here, you have no right to enter."

A dozen emotions twisted through me while I watched Viki have a complete meltdown like a toddler.

Disgust.

Pity.

But mostly disbelief that she was out there screaming like a child in front of the royals. It was poor behavior of someone calling themselves a Luna. The irony of it all.

I turned to walk away, but Della gripped my wrist. I could see the mischief in her eyes and before I could stop her, she was already talking.

“Is there a reason you’re causing a scene?” she asked sweetly, though her tone was pure ice.

Viki whirled on her. “Who the hell are you? Mind your business.”

“Someone who is an adult and acts like one. Someone who belongs here,” Della replied coolly. “Unlike you.”

“How dare you talk to me like that! When my Alpha gets here, he’ll-”

Viki stopped midsentence. She had finally noticed me watching her while I sipped wine. She looked shocked at first but then unhinged rage took over.

“What the hell are you doing here?” she spat.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Talia's POV

“Why are you even here?” Viki hissed, her voice dripping with venom.

Before I could respond, Della stepped forward, her eyes flashing with fury. “Shut your mouth before I shut it for you!” she snapped. “Guards, throw her out. Now!”

The guards moved toward Viki, but she clutched her swollen belly dramatically. “If anything happens to me or the baby, Alpha Jason won’t let you off! You’re threatening the heir of Shadowclaw! You’ll be starting a war!”

The guards hesitated. One even glanced at me for confirmation. Della looked like she was two seconds away from ripping her throat out, so I stepped between them and raised my hand calmly.

“Viki, just calm down. No one is trying to harm you or the baby,” I said, keeping my voice even.

“You didn’t answer my question. What is an omega like you doing here?” Viki growled.

“Who do you think you are talking to like that?” Della snapped.

“I’m not talking to you bitch!” Viki snapped back.

Della attempted to approach Viki again, but I grabbed her wrist. She was barely keeping her wolf in check. I didn’t want her to get in trouble for clawing Viki’s face off. I needed to get this situation under control.

“If you must know, I was invited as a guest by the Alpha King,” I clarified. “I wouldn’t be able to get in if I didn’t have an invitation, you know that.”

Viki's eyes narrowed. I could tell she didn't believe me, but just like she was stopped, if I was truly not supposed to be here, the guards would have kicked me out. Viki didn't say anything and continued to glare at me.

"You just need to be patient. You need to wait until Alpha Jason gets here to vouch for you. Yelling and throwing a tantrum will not work here," I added.

I didn't miss the flicker of doubt that crossed her face. Viki seemed to relax as she composed herself, but then her gaze slid down to my neck. Her eyes widened and her lips curled in a sneer.

"That necklace," Viki spat. "How do you have the Rosecrest? You must have stolen it."

My hand instinctively rose to the pendant resting on my collarbone.

"There's no way an omega could wear that," Viki snapped. "It would have burned you."

The more Viki talked, the more I started to realize that Viki was an idiot. How could she not figure out who I am? If I wore the Rosecrest, that would mean I was of royal blood.

"Ma'am, if you keep causing a scene, we will have you escorted off the premises. Please return to your vehicle and wait for Alpha Jason," one of the guards explained.

Viki ignored the guard. Her eyes were focused on me and me alone. “You may have fooled them, but you don’t fool me, Talia. You’re nothing but a disgusting omega that doesn’t know your place. You’re a thief. You think putting on a fancy dress and some stolen jewels makes you a princess?”

The older guard bristled. “Shut your mouth! How dare you speak to Lady Talia like this! She is the...”

I stopped the guard before he could finish his sentence by clearing my throat. He looked at me and I shook my head. This was not how I wanted my identity to be revealed. It wasn’t time yet.

CHAPTER TWELVE

+25 Bonus

“Wait, did you whore yourself to get the invitation?” Viki taunted.

Della’s wolf surged to the surface. Her claws extended slightly as she stepped forward. “Guards,” she barked. “Get her out of here before I forget this is a formal event.”

The guards approached Viki again. “Get away from me! I’m warning you!” Viki yelled as she backed away. The guards grabbed her by her arms and began walking her back to the parking lot.

“Let her go or you’ll regret it,” a voice boomed and Alpha aura quickly followed, making the air around us oppressive.

The guards immediately released Viki, who looked at them triumphantly. Jason strode in, his aura rippling with fury. Of course he would arrive now. He always arrived too late to see the chaos Viki started.

Like the drama queen she is, Viki immediately burst into tears and stumbled into his arms.

“Jason,” she sobbed. “They were so cruel. Talia is here. She’s the one that told them to bully me. She snuck into the party and stole a necklace. She even kicked me out.”

Jason didn’t even look at me at first. He ran a hand down her back, murmuring something too soft to hear. Then, he turned his cold gaze to me.

“Talia,” his voice cracked until his gaze landed on my necklace.

“Take off the necklace,” Jason ordered. “It belongs to the royal family. I’ll help explain everything to the Alpha King for you.”

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jason's POV

The Alpha King's palace was a fortress of gleaming black stone and silver trim, far more imposing than I'd ever imagined. Viki clung to my arm as we walked up the marble steps. Her voice high-pitched with excitement as she chattered about party plans for our baby's ceremony.

I wasn't listening. My thoughts were stuck on my severed mate bond, on Talia.

I still couldn't get over how easily Talia let everything go. How could an omega not want to be a Luna even if it was in name only? Talia truly sounded like she didn't care at all, like the last three years meant nothing to her. It made no sense.

Viki bumped my shoulder playfully. "Jason, are you even paying attention?"

I forced a smile. "Of course."

"Okay. So, I was thinking about blue theme, because of course we're having a boy," Viki continued.

We were escorted through the palace's great hall, and I barely took in the beauty of the palace when the heavy scent of roses drifted through the air.

"Ugh," Viki groaned, fanning her face as if she smelled something foul, "I hate the way roses smell."

I ignored Viki as I inhaled deeply. My wolf stirred restlessly inside me. 'It's her. Our mate is here,' he howled. Halfway down the corridor, I caught sight of a figure ahead. She was slender and graceful. Her long hair spilled down her back like black silk over her silver gown. The woman moved toward the garden path.

It couldn't be.

I stopped walking. My heart pounded. “I need to make a call,” I said quickly.

Viki blinked. “What? Now? Right now?”

“Yes, I forgot to inform my Beta of something important. I’ll catch up,” I said, already stepping away. “Go ahead and find the banquet room.”

Viki looked confused but shrugged. “Don’t take too long.”

I trailed after the woman, careful not to draw attention. My shoes echoed faintly on the stone. I was certain it was her. I could almost smell her. That calming rose scent had to be Talia.

But just as I neared the entrance to the garden, two guards stepped into my path.

“Excuse me, I need to speak to her,” I said, gesturing beyond them.

“The Rose Garden is off-limits,” one replied.

I narrowed my eyes. “By whose order?”

“This is the Princess’ Garden. No one is allowed to enter without her permission,” the other said without hesitation.

I looked past the guards and watched the woman disappear behind a tall rose bush. My wolf growled. We could have sworn it was Talia, but it couldn’t be. It was illogical. That was the Princess. The Princess was not a rogue

omega.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

+25 Bonus

I walked away, flustered, because it still felt like Talia was nearby. Nothing was making sense. My mate-no, my former mate-wasn’t supposed to be here.

Then I heard shouting down the corridor.

“Get away from me! I’m warning you!”

I turned the corner just in time to see two palace guards holding her firmly by the arms, guiding her away from the main entry hall.

“Let her go or you’ll regret it,” I ordered.

They immediately released her. She ran to me in tears. “Jason,” she sobbed. “They were so cruel. Talia is here. She’s the one that told them to bully me. She snuck into the party and stole a necklace. She kicked me out!”

My chest tightened. “It’s okay now, I’m here,” I cooed before turning around.

I wasn’t wrong. She was here.

Talia stood near one of the guards in a silver gown that shimmered like moonlight. She looked like a goddess, but something was different about her. Her eyes were different. They weren’t the dark brown I remembered.

They were violet.

Viki’s sobs made me focus on the issue at hand. The necklace on Talia’s neck. My eyes widened slightly when I realized it was the Rosecrest.

My mind reeled. I had only seen the Rosecrest in books. It was an artifact passed down to Luna queens, imbued with the magic and blood of the royal line. No ordinary wolf could wear it. Touching it would burn anyone who wasn't chosen.

But there it was against her skin and she wasn't screaming. I didn't know how Talia was able to wear it, but I knew it didn't belong to her. She was an omega.

"Talia," my voice cracked.

"Take off the necklace," I ordered. "It belongs to the royal family. I'll help explain everything to the Alpha King for you."

"No," Talia said firmly.

"Where did you get that?" I asked, walking forward. "Talia, that's the Rosecrest. That's a Luna's token, a royal heirloom. You could get killed wearing it."

She didn't flinch at my warning, her expression remained neutral. "I know what it is, and it is none of your business how I got it," she responded.

I reached to pull the necklace from her neck. "You don't know what that necklace is. Give it to me, I can explain it to the King before it's too late."

She stepped back. “I don’t need you to explain anything for me.”

And before I could argue, a crushing force slammed into me, dropping me to my knees. It kept me there in a submission position. My wolf snarled in protest, but we both knew we couldn’t rise against it. 4)

A tall broad shoulder man stepped past me, placing himself between Talia and me. His hair was jet black, cut short on the sides but swept back at the crown. He wore a silver suit with the Silverfang crest over his heart.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Talia’s POV

I was grateful Solon had arrived when he did. Della was seconds away from lunging at Jason. Her claws were already drawn, her wolf bristling with fury. I reached over and placed a hand on her arm. "It's not worth it," I murmured.

Jason looked stunned, still locked on Solon like he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Viki's eyes were wide with panic, clearly realizing she had walked straight into a disaster of her own making. She opened her mouth to speak, but Jason raised a hand, silencing her.

"Prince Solon, I think there's been a misunderstanding," Jason said, trying to sound diplomatic.

"Really? I think I understand quite well what is going on," Solon stated. "Your pack member insulted Talia, called her a thief."

"Viki didn't mean to offend Talia. Apologize to Talia," Jason said.

"What? No, she..."

"Apologize, now!"

"I'm sorry Talia," Viki spat.

I covered my face to keep from laughing at the pitiful expression that Viki had. She really was behaving like a spoiled toddler.

“Don’t let this happen again,” Solon warned. “Let’s go inside Talia.”

Solon pulled back his Alpha aura and Jason was finally able to stand up. “Wait. I’d like a moment with Talia alone.”

Solon’s eye twitched and he said, “That won’t happen.”

I stepped from behind Solon and gripped his arm reassuringly. “It’s fine, Solon,” I said calmly. “Let him speak.”

Solon hesitated but stepped back with a warning glance at Jason. “You only get two minutes.”

I walked with Jason a few paces toward the courtyard edge, making sure Della and Solon were still within view. Jason looked at me like he didn’t recognize who I was. His body was tense with restrained fury.

Jason looked at me as if he didn’t know who I was. His body was tense with barely contained rage.

“You knew the Prince?” he snapped. “How long has that been going on?”

“It’s none of your business,” I replied.

Through gritted teeth, he growled, “Don’t play games with me, Talia. Who is he to you? Is that who you ran to?”

I balked at Jason’s accusation. Was he serious? From the anger in his eyes, I realized that Jason really believed I was in a relationship with Solon. He was acting like he didn’t know me. Not once did I ever cheat on him and if he did, he would have felt it. His failure to see the truth was disgusting and disappointing,

“You have Viki. Go be with her,” I snapped and turned around.

His eyes flashed as he stopped me again. “You humiliated me, rejected me in front of the entire pack and then, you showed up here with him. It hasn’t been even a full day yet and you already have my replacement, Were you

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

+25 Bonus

cheating while I was away?"

"Do you even hear yourself Jason? You sound insane," I said. "The only person cheating in our failed relationship was you."

"Don't twist this again..."

"You marked her, Jason. You don't have to mark a woman for her to have your pup!" I snapped.

"I don't understand why you can't get this through your head. I did this for the pack," Jason snapped.

"NO! You can lie to yourself, but you know, you did it for yourself," I yelled back.

His voice dropped down to a snarl. "You couldn't even give me an heir. What did you expect me to do?"

"Alright, this conversation is over," I said and began walking away from Jason. I wasn't going to continue to let him belittle me.

Jason grabbed my wrist and snatched me toward him. “You don’t walk away when I am talking to you.”

“No,” Solon said flatly, grabbing Jason’s hand and prying it off my wrist. He walked Jason a few feet away from me before releasing him. “If you come near Talia again, I’ll have you thrown out.”

Jason stiffened.

“Do you understand, Alpha Jason?” Solon growled. His Alpha aura slammed back into Jason, forcing him to bare his neck to Solon in submission.

“Yes sir,” Jason said through gritted teeth.

Solon turned his back on him and walked to my side. I followed Solon without another word. Jason remained frozen for a moment, then let out a frustrated breath and turned to Viki. She was already playing the wounded damsel again, muttering about how humiliated she felt. He escorted her away, but not before glancing back at me

once.

Solon waited until they were out of sight before turning to me. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” I said, exhaling. “Della was about to dismember him. That was the real danger.”

Solon cracked a faint smile. “I’ll make sure she stays out of trouble. Let’s get back to the party.”

Inside the ballroom, music had begun to play. The atmosphere here was lighter than what I had just experienced. Wolves gathered and chatted over wine and appetizers. My father stepped onto the stage. Immediately, everyone quieted and focused on him.

“Tonight,” he said, voice echoing through the great hall, “we celebrate the return of my daughter: Princess Talia.” ¹

The ballroom erupted in cheers and claps. Solon led me onto the stage to stand next to our father.

“Now 23, from this day forward, she will join the governance of the realm beside her brother, Prince Solon. Join me in welcoming back our Princess,” my father concluded.

The crowd erupted in cheers. The spotlight shone on Solon and me. Even though I was happy to be acknowledged in this way, I felt uneasy. I wasn’t used to this kind of attention anymore.

Sensing my unease, Solon leaned over to whisper, “You’ll get used to it again, sister. No pressure,”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

+25 Bonus

I glanced toward the exit. Jason was gone. I felt a little sad that I didn't get to see the look of confusion on his face after finding out that he betrayed the princess.

I stepped off the stage and mingled. Some Alpha heirs congratulated me while others attempted to get me to agree to dinner dates. Before I could get overwhelmed by the attention, Della reappeared at my side, pulling me away.

"Talía, you need to check this." Della stiffened, shoving her phone into my hand.

P

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Talia's POV

On the screen was a trending post from a gossip forum popular among the wolf packs. The headline was: "Royal Necklace Thief Exposed: The Barren Luna Who Faked Her Status." Underneath the headline was a doctored photo of me angry at the banquet with Rosecrest clearly visible and it was paired with a cropped image of Jason and Viki looking like some fairytale couple.

'Why does she always have to cause problems?' my wolf snarled. 'She already got what she wanted!'

The post twisted everything. It accused me of stealing Rosecrest, betraying the Moon Goddess's mate bond by rejecting Jason, and of endangering Viki's unborn child because I was "a bitter hateful barren omega that only cared about power". The post turned my heartbreak into a weapon and made me out to be a villain.

“It’s Viki,” Della snarled. “How dare she attempt to ruin your reputation! You should have let me claw her face.”

“That would have only made the situation worse, and you know it,” I said.

I wasn’t even upset that Viki made this terrible post about me. I was more upset that Jason allowed her to do it. I didn’t understand why I was surprised. I just expected more from him.

Then Solon’s voice filled my head through the pack link. ‘Talía, Father wants to see you now.’

“I’ll be back,” I told Della, standing up. “Father needs to speak with me.”

“Okay. I’ll try to do damage control and let everyone know that the post is all lies,” Della said.

I left the ballroom and made my way upstairs to my father’s office. The moment I stepped into his office, I felt his anger. It made the hair on the back of my neck rise. My father stood behind his desk, eyes glowing gold. His eyes were fixed on his laptop screen.

“Father,” I said.

He looked at me and I could tell that it was going to be hard to talk him out of setting Shadowclaw ablaze.

“Who dares,” he growled, “spread this filth?”

I bowed my head slightly in respect. “Viki Mayer,” I answered calmly. “She would be the only one that would have the audacity to like that.”

He slammed his hand on the desk, making the wood crack. “I will send warriors tonight. I will wipe Shadowclaw off the face of this earth for this insult!”

“Father,” I said gently, stepping closer. “Let me handle it.”

His nostrils flared. “They called you a thief. They called you barren.”

I held his gaze. “Their words do not matter. If you send warriors to Shadowclaw, we would be proving their words true.”

I had spent enough time dealing with Viki to know her schemes. I would not allow her to twist the narrative by manipulating my father. She needed to learn her place in the world, and I was prepared to show her.

Solon knocked on the office door to alert us to his presence as he entered. “So, what’s the plan, little sister?”

“I’m going to the Shadowclaw Pack tomorrow to have a chat with them about etiquette.”

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

+25 Bonus

“No,” my father barked. “I won’t allow it.”

“This is my mess, father, and I’ll clean it up,” I said, firmly. I wanted to see their faces in person when they found out my true identity. I wanted to see Jason’s regret.

My father looked at Solon, hoping he would be against my plan, but Solon just shrugged.

“She’s not a child anymore,” Solon said. “She will be ruling by my side now. It is better for her to handle this on her own.”

Father exhaled slowly. “You’ll take a guard. This is non-negotiable.”

I nodded. “Thank you.”

I left his office and Solon followed me out. I looked at the comments on the post. New comments were coming in by the second. Some didn’t believe the post. Some sided with Viki’s narrative, but not one comment from Jason.

“Almost fifty thousand comments,” I murmured, glancing again at the post. “And not a single one from Jason correcting it.”

“Maybe he agrees,” Solon said. “Or maybe he’s too much of a coward to go against his own whore.” ¹

“He wants to punish me for defying him,” I explained. “He just thinks I’m an omega that slept her way to the top.”

Solon looked at me sideways. “You could end this in a second, you know. One post showing who you are would shut the whole Kingdom up.”

“I know,” I said. “But I want to see how low they will

go

first.”

He studied me for a moment before smirking. “Tomorrow will be entertaining.”

Or so I thought.

An hour later, just as I was settling into my bed, there was a knock at my door. I opened it to find Solon.

“They arrested her,” he said. “Viki’s in the dungeon.”

My eyes narrowed. “What?”

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Talia's POV

This was not how I wanted to spend my night.

I thought I would be able to get a good night's rest, but it seemed that I could not escape Viki's foolishness.

'We should just leave her in the dungeon to rot,' my wolf growled. 'It is what she deserves.'

“I thought Viki left with Jason after you told him to back off,” I said, breaking the silence.

“She spread lies about you, so I decided to take action,” Solon shrugged.

“Solon!” I snapped. “I told you I’d handle it. You can’t always make decisions for me.”

“Yes, I can! I’m your brother, and she slandered you,” he replied coolly. “She deserved to be punished.”

I rubbed my temples in frustration. “Ok. I will meet her myself now.”

I made my way down the dark, damn corridor that led to the holding cells. The scent of mildew and blood clung to the air. It didn’t matter how many times I came down here. It always made me uneasy.

I stopped outside Viki’s cell, where she sat on the small cot. Viki sat hunched on the small cot, her arms wrapped tightly around herself as she rocked back and forth. Her once-styled hair was a tangled mess, and her makeup had long since smudged into streaks of black beneath her red, swollen eyes.

The moment she looked up and saw me, her face twisted with rage.

“You!” she shrieked, scrambling off the cot and throwing herself at the bars. Her fingers clawed desperately through the gaps, trying to reach me. “You planned this! You told them to lock me up!”

I rolled my eyes and shook my head in disbelief. She still was delusional. “Stop playing the victim, Viki. Jason’s not around to fall for the act this time.”

Her eyes flashed. “You’re trying to turn him against me! You think if you play innocent long enough, he’ll forget everything we’ve been through—but he won’t! He knows what you are!”

And just like that, her voice cracked as she launched into sobs, wiping at her face with trembling hands. It would’ve looked convincing—if I hadn’t seen her pull this routine too many times before.

“Viki,” I said calmly, “you’re not in here because of me. You’re here because of you. You ran your mouth, mocked my broken bond, called me a thief, and dragged my name through the mud. If not, you’d be at home.”

Viki gripped the bars so tightly her knuckles turned white. “They weren’t lies, and you know it! Everyone saw you throw yourself at the prince like a little harlot. You seduced him to get the Rosecrest!”

“I did nothing of the sort,” I interrupted coolly. “And whether you believe it or not doesn’t matter. The fact is, you’re here. And if you don’t stop your lies and repent, you’ll stay here.”

“You think this is over?” Viki hissed. “You think they’ll believe you forever? You’re just an omega! Once the Prince is done with you, he’ll leave you just like Jason left you because you’re useless!”

I clenched my fists but didn’t rise to her bait. “And that’s where you’re wrong, Viki. Jason didn’t leave me. I left him,” I said simply.

Viki sneered, thinking she hit a nerve. “You’ll always be useless. No matter how many men you seduce. At the end of the day, no one will ever really want you.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

+25 Bonus

I turned to leave. “It seems like there’s no point in talking to you tonight. We’ll try again, maybe in a few days. Enjoy your cell, Viki.”

“Jason will never forgive you!” Viki screamed behind me. “He’s going to make you pay for this! I carry his heir! I’m the real Luna! You’re nothing but a washed up, broken bitch!”

Just as I reached the end of the corridor, a familiar scent wrapped around me-cool pine and smoke, commanding and unmistakably royal.

I froze. My eyes widened, heart skipping a beat before I dropped into a respectful bow.

“Good evening, Prince Solon.”

His footsteps slowed as he approached, the air growing heavier with his presence.

“Rise, Lady Talia,” he said, his voice smooth but firm.

Relief flooded my chest. He was playing along. Not a flicker of recognition crossed his face beyond what was expected. He was protecting my identity-at least for now. Thank the Goddess.

Then his tone shifted-colder, clipped.

“Alpha Jason, step forward.”

I turned toward him, confusion prickling at the edge of my thoughts. “Prince Solon, there’s...”

My voice trailed off as Jason emerged from the shadows of a nearby cell.

He'd been there the whole time.

His gaze locked onto mine, unreadable, intense, and utterly still. Not once did he glance at Viki-not even as she jolted upright on her cot and threw herself dramatically against the bars.

"Jason!" she cried, her voice cracking as fresh tears streamed down her cheeks. "Please, save me! Save me and our pup!"

The shift in her was instant-calculated. One second she was raging, the next she was a broken, trembling shell of innocence. Her hands clutched the iron bars as if they were the only things keeping her upright.

But Jason didn't move.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Talia's POV

Viki clutched her swollen belly like a shield. "Jason, please," she whimpered. "You have to save me. They're treating me like a rogue. This is not healthy for our pup!"

Jason looked torn, his gaze flicking from Viki's tear-streaked face to Solon, who stood stone-faced beside me. Just as Jason opened his mouth to speak, Solon spoke. "Is this how you allow her to slander others at will, Alpha Jason?"

"No, Prince Solon," Jason muttered.

"Jason, I didn't do anything. You have to believe me!" Viki sobbed.

"We heard everything, Viki. You're not here because of Lady Talia. You're here because you lied and slandered a royal guest," Prince Solon stated.

Viki looked hopeless for a split second before she whirled on me. Her eyes were filled with hatred as she hissed, "You planned this! You set me up!"

Solon sneered at Viki's audacity. "And it seems that you still don't understand the severity of the situation."

((

I rolled my eyes. "Don't flatter yourself, Viki. You made that post all on your own. I didn't tell you to slander me."

"You knew I would be arrested, that's why you taunted me at the banquet!" Viki argued.

"I did not taunt you. In fact, I told you to wait for Alpha Jason and you would be let into the banquet, but you didn't want to hear the reason," I clarified.

"No! No! This was your plan all along. You knew we would come and..."

"Just stop it, Viki," I snapped, cutting her off. "When are you going to accept that this is the consequence of your actions? For the record, I had no idea you were arrested until Prince Solon notified me. Nor did I know Alpha Jason would be here tonight."

Then Jason inhaled, his jaw clenched, as he dropped down onto one knee to kneel in front of me. "Please release her," he said stiffly. "Viki just... acted out because she was provoked."

I blinked, stunned. “Provoked?” I repeated. “When did I provoke her?”

His voice was low, almost ashamed. “You shouldn’t have worn that necklace in front of her. You knew it would upset her. The hormones got the best of her.”

I frowned as I looked at him in disappointment. Again, against all logic, Jason was choosing her over me. It was

shameful.

“Am I supposed to believe that having a baby makes you a terrible person?” I asked,

Jason couldn’t even meet my eyes. The sight of him kneeling in front of me made something in me snap. Whatever was left of my feelings that I had for Jason had disappeared the moment he chose to excuse her cruelty. This was no longer the man I fell in love with.

‘He is not worthy of us. He is not worthy of the Alpha title,’ my wolf growled in disgust.

“She will delete the post,” Jason finally offered.

I raised an eyebrow. “The damage is already done Jason. What is deleting the post going to do for me?”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

+25 Bonus

Jason didn’t say anything, and I scoffed, stepping away from him. “That’s what I thought.”

Solon’s gaze narrowed. “Alpha Jason, I am being merciful by having her here instead of jail. However, if Lady Talia says so, I can change that.”

Jason finally looked up at me, pleading, “Talia, please. Just...”

I cut him off. “She slandered me, Jason. She called me barren. She mocked my rank and my name. She tried to destroy what little dignity I had left. And you’re defending her?”

Jason looked down. His voice was barely a whisper now. “What do you expect me to do? She’s carrying my pup.’

Solon scoffed beside me. “And that gives her the right to act disgracefully? With a mother like that, your pup will turn out to be just as deceitful as her.”

Jason’s shoulders slumped. “Then what do you want from me? Should I cast her out? Let her rot in this cell?”

Solon’s eyes flicked to me. “That’s not my decision to make. It is up to Lady Talia.”

Jason didn’t look powerful now. He looked small and desperate. I looked at Viki, who was now cowering in front of me. She made my life a living hell after Jason came back. I remembered all the hurtful words she said and all the hurtful things she did to me with glee in her eyes when she thought she had the upper hand.

‘She doesn’t deserve mercy,’ my wolf growled.

Viki whimpered and dropped to her knees dramatically. “I didn’t mean it... I was just scared. You came back so suddenly, and I thought I was going to lose everything. I panicked.”

“See, she apologized. Let her out,” Jason said.

“That’s not enough, Jason,” I sighed.

Jason looked up at me, eyes filled with panic. “What do you mean it’s not enough? She apologized! What more do you want? Viki’s been under pressure. The pack expects-‘

“I was the Luna of Shadowclaw for three years, Jason! I know exactly what the pack expects. And unlike her, I didn’t attempt to ruin someone’s life and reputation,” I snapped.

“Talía, just, please, she won’t be able to handle a royal punishment,” Jason pleaded again.
1

“I’m not cruel Jason. I would never harm a pregnant woman,” I said, “Viki doesn’t have to be punished if she is willing to tell the truth and publicly apologize. Or she rots here until the baby is born and longer if I feel like it.”

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Jason's POV

I never thought Talia could be so cold.

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She used to be so agreeable and soft-spoken. Now, she stared at Viki like she was nothing. Her voice had no tremor. It was just cold as she gave her terms: a public confession or let Viki rot in that cell.

"Talia, you can't be serious. Our reputation will be ruined. The other packs will no longer take us seriously," I said.

“Sorry. What happens to your pack has nothing to do with me,” Talia countered.

Viki curled against the cell wall as she began to cry again. “I didn’t mean to hurt her,” she sobbed, snot and tears running down her face. “I thought she was gone. I didn’t know she was... that she was someone so important. I was scared, Jason. Please, tell her. I didn’t mean it.”

“I’m standing right here, Viki. Your apology doesn’t mean anything unless it is public,” Talia reiterated.

Viki clutched her stomach and pleaded again, “Please, please Talia. I’m carrying the heir.”

My gaze went to Talia. She had a stern expression. Talia meant what she said. It was either apologize publicly or rot in the cell. I couldn’t leave Viki here.

I turned back to Viki and sighed. “You’ll apologize publicly, Viki. That’s the only way.”

Viki’s head jerked up. “Jason-”

“No.” I hardened my voice. “As your Alpha, you will do what I say. You will publicly apologize for spreading rumors about Talia. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Viki sniffed.

I looked at Talia again. “That’s what you want, right?”

She gave a single nod. “Let her out.”

The guards opened the door without hesitation. I stepped into the cell and bent to lift Viki in my arms. She whimpered and clung to me, but my focus wasn’t on her. It was on Talia.

She stood next to Solon, poised like a princess. That damned necklace still glowed at her throat. Her violet eyes didn’t hold any warmth for me when I met them.

My wolf paced within me. He was angry, desperate even to get Talia back. ‘She’s our mate. She’s ours. You need to bring her back home,’ he growled.

As the guards were escorting us to the exit that led out into the parking lot, I paused. “Talia, you don’t have to do this. You don’t have to stay here. If you come home with me, I’ll forget everything. We can start over. You’re my fated mate. You can’t stay here with him.”

“No.”

The word hit me as if Talia rejected me all over again.

“No?” I repeated, giving her the option to change her mind. “What do you mean no?”

“I mean no, Jason. I won’t go back,” Talia replied.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

+25 Bonus

“Why? You were Luna there. Without the title, you’re just an omega. Why wouldn’t you want to go back?” I asked. “I won’t return to a pack that humiliated me. I won’t return to a pack that doesn’t respect me,” she said. “I won’t be Luna in a place where I have no dignity. You chose her over me, Jason. Now, you have to live with that decision.” “I chose the pack!” I snapped, louder than I intended. “We had to have an heir.”

Talia tilted her head slightly. “And that was your choice to make and it is my choice to not accept it and not to come back.”

Solon stepped slightly in front of her, just enough to block my view of her. His eyes stayed cool and unreadable.” Alpha Jason, you don’t need to worry about Lady Talia. I’ll take care of her,” he said.

I hated how easily he said it. How she allowed him to defend her. My fists clenched. “You’re really going to throw everything away? For him? I gave you everything you could have ever wanted!”

“No,” Talia said as she stepped from behind Solon. “You gave what you thought I was worth.”

“Talia, please...” I said walking forward.

Solon stepped back in front of Talia again. “She has made her decision, Alpha Jason.”

“She’s not yours,” I growled.

“And neither is she yours,” he replied. “Please leave, Alpha Jason, it is getting very late.”

I bit back a snarl. How dare he dismiss me like that! Talia was my mate, not his. I wanted to hit something. My wolf was howling inside me, pushing against my resolve to take control.

‘Fix this! Bring her home! She’s slipping away,’ my wolf howled.

‘Don’t you see I’m trying! She won’t listen to reason!’ I snapped.

Talia used to be so gentle and understanding. But now she was cold. She was a completely different person.

‘It’s the Prince. He made her like this. We have to get her away from him,’ my wolf snarled.

It would be easy to grab her by the wrist and drag her home, but she was now under the protection of Prince Solon. There was nothing I could do. Challenging him was a death sentence for myself and the entire pack.

Viki stirred in my arms, her voice pitiful. “Jason... let’s go home.”

I gritted my teeth. I wanted to yell at Viki for being so impulsive, but there was no point. I took a steadying breath before saying, “Sure, Viki,”

I turned one last time to Talia. “Mark my words, Talia. You’ll regret this. You’ll miss me and beg me to come back.”

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+25 Bonus

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Talia's POV

The moment Jason left with Viki, I finally allowed the tears to fall.

I held them in through the accusations, the betrayal, the cold indifference, but now, with no one left to see me break, I collapsed.

Solon caught me before I hit the ground. I sobbed into his chest as I clung to him. He wrapped his arms around me without hesitation.

"You don't have to hold it in anymore," Solon cooed. "Let it out.

"I just don't understand," I said through choked breaths. "He used to treat me so well, and I'm his fated mate, but

now....”

Solon held me tighter, but he didn’t interrupt me.

“He loved surprising me with little gifts,” I continued. “It could be a new rose or a necklace. Or even a cup of chamomile tea before bed when I had a stressful day. He used to listen and pay attention to my preferences.” My voice broke. “I thought that was what love was.”

Solon let out a quiet sigh, brushing a strand of hair behind my ear. “Only through difficult times will you know who someone truly is.”

I shook my head. “No. We didn’t have any problems. Everything changed when he came back with Viki pregnant,” I explained. “He moved me to the guest room and moved her into our bedroom. He started saying I wasn’t supportive enough and that I was being selfish, but I tried. I let it go for the sake of the heir. I let Viki do whatever she wanted.”

“And she repaid that kindness with lies and slander,” Solon growled.

“I sensed her hostility from the beginning,” I admitted. “But I still believed in the bond. We were fated mates. I believed that no matter what, Jason would choose me. I believed he wouldn’t allow Viki to hurt me. He would protect me, but he didn’t. He allowed everyone to disrespect me. I was so naïve.”

“No,” Solon said firmly. “You were not naïve. You were hopeful and loyal. That’s not a weakness, Talia. Those are good traits to have.”

“You’re only saying that because I’m your sister,” I muttered.

Solon grabbed my chin, forcing me to meet his eyes. “It’s the truth, Talia. You are a wonderful person, and it is a shame that he didn’t cherish you.”

I began to cry all over again and let out a bitter laugh. “You know the cruelest part about all of this is that there’s nothing wrong with me,”

“What do you mean?” Solon asked.

“I went to the pack healer and had multiple fertility tests done. The test results showed that I didn’t have any fertility issues. Jason didn’t even try. He gave up on me so easily.”

“Jason is a fool. He lost his true Luna and one day he will realize and regret his decision, but, Talia, you cannot keep living in the past. You need to let go and embrace and live the life meant for you,” Solon said.

I wiped my face and nodded. “You’re right. Thanks, Solon.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

+25 Bonus

“Of course I’m right,” Solon said with a wink which made me smile. “Now, come on. It’s late and you need your rest.”

The next morning, I walked into the palace dining room and found Della already seated at the long marble table, stuffing her face with French toast and eggs.

“You’re up!” she said, her face lighting up as she waved a fork at me. “I was starting to think I would have to drag you out of bed. I don’t know how you could ever miss all of this good food!”

“I didn’t sleep much,” I muttered, taking a seat beside her.

“Hangover or bad dreams?” Della asked gently.

“No, just a long night,” I said.

“Well, lucky for you, I have something better than coffee.” She grinned and slid her phone across the table.” Behold!”

On the screen were photos of ridiculously attractive Alphas of varying heights and ages. Some were shirtless. Some were in suits. All of them made Jason look like a troll.

“Della...”

“Nope. I am not letting you get out of this,” She shoved a roll into my mouth, to keep me from talking. Fangvale’s annual gathering is in a week. Alphas, Betas, and royals from all over will be there to vacation and look for their mates. Solon already told me to make sure you go.”

“I’m not ready for that kind of relationship...”

Before I could finish my sentence, my phone buzzed and then Della’s phone buzzed.

“Who would be texting me right now?” Della asked. She glanced at her phone and snorted.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“It’s going to ruin your morning, but fine, see for yourself,” Della replied as she handed me her phone.

On the screen was a link to a video. The caption read: Shadowclaw Pack's Luna Publicly Apologizes for Slander.

Without a word, I tapped the link.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER TWENTY

Jason's POV

The video loaded slowly, and for a moment, I hoped it had been taken down. Viki's face appeared on the screen. Her eyes were still red and puffy. Her makeup was caked on and deliberately smudged in the right places. Her hands trembled as she stared into the camera.

"Goddess, she's trying to look as pathetic as possible for sympathy," Della snorted.

"I want to apologize," she began, her voice cracking. "to Luna Talia for everything I've said and done."

Della rolled her eyes beside me. "Good start. Let's see if she can keep it up."

Viki sniffled delicately. "I was jealous," Viki continued. "Talia was just an omega, and yet Alpha Jason still made her Luna. I've known him my whole life, but I was forced to live in the shadows, pretending to be nothing when I was the one who truly loved him. I'm the daughter of our Beta, and I'm carrying his child. It wasn't fair."

My jaw tightened. Viki was making it seem like I bullied her out of being Luna. The Moon Goddess chose me to be Jason's mate.

Della let out a low growl. "Why is she acting like you stole him from her? He was your mate not hers!"

Viki swallowed hard. "I let that jealousy poison me. I said and did things I shouldn't have. I damaged Jason's reputation. I embarrassed our pack. I hurt Talia."

She grabbed a tissue handed to her from offscreen as she began to cry. "I just care so much about Jason. It was never my intention to cause harm or ruin anything. I'm truly sorry."

The video ended with her bowing her head in silence.

I sat still, staring at the blank screen. I leaned back in my chair as I processed what I had just seen. My father and Solon were not going to be pleased with this.

"That manipulative bitch. That was a load of crap," Della snapped, bringing me out of my thoughts.

"She never even admitted she lied," I added. "She didn't address the worst parts in her post."

“Exactly. That wasn’t an apology. She talked as if she’s doing you a favor by admitting to jealousy. I can’t believe Jason let her post that.”

“Neither can I,” I responded.

Once again, I had been naïve. I don’t know why I expected a real apology. Viki was incapable of feeling remorseful.

I should’ve known better.

“She’s still trying to control the narrative,” I continued. “Still trying to make it out like she’s the victim in this situation.”

“Because she’s scared. She finally stole what she wanted and she’s afraid you’re going to take everything back,” Della explained. “It’s good she’s scared. Maybe she’ll keep her damn mouth shut from now on.”

I sighed, picking up her phone. “Let me see what the comments are saying,”

Della snatched the phone before I could look. “No. Don’t torture yourself like that.”

I raised an eyebrow. “You know I have a phone too,” I said, picking up my phone. “I need to know what everyone is saying about this.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

+25 Bonus

“No, you don’t. You already know what they’re saying,” Della said, softening her tone. “But suit yourself.”

I frowned as I scrolled through the comments. “The comments are divided,” I muttered, and Della leaned over to read with me.

@SilverHowl: So, Viki’s a homewrecker? Yikes. Talk about embarrassing.

@RoseFur: The ex-Luna got what she deserved. The weak cannot rule a pack.

@RoyalPaw: Beta’s daughter or not, she disrespected Luna and Alpha, she needs to be punished.

@GoddessMark: Can you blame her? An omega should never be Luna. What was Alpha thinking?

Della finally snatched the phone from me. "Alright, that's enough."

"Goddess, she's so infuriating," I groaned. "She didn't even say my name properly. She called me 'Luna Talia' like I wasn't part of the pack, like I didn't used to be her Luna."

"Because she knows that is the only way she can justify what she did," Della said. "You're the true Luna, but Jason is allowing her to talk like this, just emboldens her disrespect for you and proves he doesn't respect you either."

I nodded slowly. "That's the worst part."

Jason let this be said about me, broadcast to the packs, and he hadn't stopped it. It hurt. Not because I wanted him back, but because our entire relationship had been a lie.

I took a deep breath and smiled. "You know what we need?"

"What?" Della asked as she angrily ate her the last of her eggs.

"Something fun that would provide photos for the pack gossip pages."

“Wait, are you talking about what I think you’re talking about?”

“Yes,” I said, already heading for the door. “Shopping. I need to get dresses for Fangvale right?”

“That’s the Talia I know,” Della whooped and grabbed my arm. “Let’s go. Shopping awaits!”

+25 Bonus