Barren Luna 191

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY ONE

Viki's POV

"And what do you need my help with?" I asked her as I sat down on the old, stained sofa. I knew as soon as I saw her face that Talia had arrived. I just wanted Maggie to tell me.

"You knew," Maggie responded. "You knew he would bring her back."

"Bring back who? I don't know what you're talking about," I said.

"Yes, you do!" Maggie snapped. "The Princess. He brought back the Princess as his Luna."

"Oh Yes," I said simply. "I knew."

Her hands clenched at her sides. "And you didn't think to warn me?"

I tilted my head slightly. "Would you have listened? I tried to tell you that you would need me, but you thought I was crazy."

"You could've still warned me," Maggie said firmly.

"Do not direct your anger at me," I told her firmly. "As I didn't take the love of your life away from you."

Maggie's face flushed, but she did not deny it. She looked away instead as she sat down in a chair.

"The way," she muttered. "The way he looks at her. He never looked at me like that."

“I know exactly how that feels,” I told her.

She looked back at me sharply. “You do not.”

“I do,” I said, evenly. “Because she took my mate too.”

Maggie’s brow furrowed and asked, “What? How?”

‘You’re playing a dangerous game,’ my wolf hissed within my mind. I ignored her and pushed her down.

“I never told you how I ended up like this,” I said. “Alpha Jason of Shadowclaw was my mate, and she took her from me.”

Maggie’s eyes widened in surprise before they narrowed. “You’re that Viki?” she said before scoffing. “Everyone knows that Talia was Jason’s original mate. He betrayed her for you.”

“That is the story she tells,” I said with a sigh as I stood.

I began to walk around the room as I spoke as I spun my tale for this young fool.

“She came to Shadowclaw as Luna. She hid her true identity to ruin Shadowclaw from the inside out. When Jason served no purpose to her, she abandoned him for someone better,” I explained.

Maggie folded her arms and said, “That does not explain Nolan.”

“Doesn’t it?” I replied, “The Alpha King uses his own daughter as a pawn. No one would expect the dainty, delicate princess to be a danger. I am sure that’s how she got close to Nolán. It’s how she won over Jason.”

“But how does Nolan have anything to do with you?” Maggie asked.

“Talia doesn’t get her hands dirty,” I replied. “Nolan hurt me for her.”

Maggie shook her head. “Nolan would never hurt a woman. He would never do what you are implying.”

I stopped in front of her.

“You are wrong,” I said quietly. “He ruined me because I refused to disappear quietly.”

Maggie didn’t believe me. I could tell in her eyes. So, I would just have to show. her what her beloved Nolan was really capable of.

I reached up and slowly removed the half mask from my face. Maggie recoiled from me. She covered her mouth, gasping in horror at the jagged scar that stretched across my cheek and jaw. The skin was uneven, twisted in places where it had never healed correctly.

“No, Nolan, couldn’t have…. he wouldn’t!” Maggie stammered.

“This,” I said flatly. “This is what he did to me for going against Talia.”

Maggie stood up and backed away from me. “That is not possible,” she muttered.

“It is,” I said. “And I begged him not to kill me.”

“Why would she want you dead?” Maggie asked. I kept my face neutral, but I wanted to smirk. Maggie had taken the bait. She was now asking the right questions.

“Because I threatened the perfect image she wanted to maintain,” I explained. “She had to get rid of me.”

I put my mask back on and said, “But Nolan is merciful, I’ll give him that. He spared my life only because I begged, but he made sure I would remember to never cross Talia again.”

Maggie didn’t respond. I could tell she was trying to process all of it. She was young and naïve. With the scar on my face and her jealousy, Maggie would find a reason to believe me.

‘You’re taking a risk,’ my wolf warned.

‘One we need to get revenge. Before she realizes she’s been fooled, it’ll be too late,’ I told her.

‘But what if she asks Nolan?’ my wolf asked.

‘She won’t, because she would have to reveal that she hid a rogue, and it’s me. She won’t risk him being upset with her, not if she wants to become his Luna,’ I explained.

Maggie finally broke the silence and asked, “So why are you telling me this?”

“I want to help you by stopping her,” I replied. “You helped me and now I am going to help you.”

“Stop her, how?” Maggie asked.

“By making sure the Luna ritual doesn’t happen. She cannot secure her place as Luna without it and if she cannot secure her place, she can be replaced,” I replied.

“Replaced?”

I held her eyes. “Yes. Replaced By the proper person that should be Luna.”

Maggie searched my eyes. She would not find deceit there. I would help her get rid of Talia, but that didn’t mean Maggie would become Luna.

“What do you need me to do?” Maggie finally asked.

“Watch them both. I need to know everything that they do,” I said.

Maggie frowned. “You want me to spy on them.”

“I want you to protect your future,” I replied. “It should be easy for you to do, right?”

Her fingers tightened in the fabric of her sleeves. “And if they find out?”

“They will not,” I said. “She underestimates women like us.”

Maggie hesitated. “And if this fails?”

“It won’t,” I reassured her. “You have to believe in yourself and know you’re doing the right thing.”

She looked at me for a long moment before nodding,

“I will do it,” she said. “I will tell you everything.”

“Good,” I said. “Now go back for now. Allow me some time to plan.”

As I watched Maggie leave, I felt the familiar thrill of purpose return. I was going to make them pay for everything they did to me. This time my revenge would not be taken from me.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY TWO

Talia’s POV

When I woke up that morning, I didn't know where I was. I began to panic until my wolf whispered, 'Calm down. You're safe.'

The memory of the day before came back and I relaxed. It felt surreal that I was here. Weeks ago, I would have thought a person was crazy if they told me I would be the Luna of Bloodmoon.

The events of the past few days had moved so quickly that I hadn't had time to truly process. If I just stared at the ceiling, I would have thought I was still in my room in Silverfang, but the scent of pine and iron in the air reminded me where I was.

Nolan's arm tightened slightly around my waist as he started to wake up.

"I'm sorry. Did I wake you?" I asked.

"No, I've been in and out of sleep all morning," Nolan replied. "You look like you're trying to decide if this is real."

"I am," I admitted. "Coming to Bloodmoon feels strange."

"Strange in a bad way?" he asked.

"No, just really sudden," I replied.

Nolan leaned in and pressed a brief kiss to my forehead. "I never expected to find my mate when I came to Silverfang," he said. " If you ask me, this was the Moon Goddess's arrangement. She has a sense of timing that enjoys humiliating us."

I huffed softly at that. "I suppose she does."

His hand brushed along my back. He kissed me before running his tongue across the mark on my neck. I couldn't help but moan at the feeling. He pulled me closer as his hands roamed my body, caressing.

Eventually, he sighed and pulled away just enough to sit up. “I wish I could stay longer,” he said. “But I will be busy all day.”

“With pack matters?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied. “Marco and I need to meet with the Elders and senior members. There is also preparation for your Luna ceremony. It will formally recognize you as Bloodmoon’s Luna, and that requires a great deal of coordination.”

I nodded. The thought of the Luna ceremony made me nervous. I just wanted time to just let everything settle.

‘And we will,’ my wolf reassured me, but I just didn’t believe her.

“Do not worry about me,” I told Nolan. “I can walk around with Della and get to know the territory.”

Nolan nodded and then said, “That is probably wise. Bloodmoon can be overwhelming at first.” Then he added, casually, “If you need anything while I am gone, you can ask Maggie. She will take care of it.”

Hearing her name brought up the memory of her from yesterday. Maggie didn’t like me and I didn’t want anything to do with her. The way he casually brought her up made me wonder how close Nolan was to her really.

“Maggie?” I repeated.

“Yes,” he said. “She is careful and reliable.”

“Has she served you for a long time?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said honestly. “She has been here for many years.”

“And before me?” I pressed. “Before Silverfang.”

Nolan frowned in confusion. “Do you mean romantically?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said. “I do.”

Nolan let out a short laugh. “No. Never. Maggie and I have never had that kind of relationship. I think of her as a little sister.”

So, then it was one-sided affection. That eased some of the tension, but not all of it. “It seemed like there was more to it than that,” I admitted.

“Like I said nothing ever happened between us,” Nolan reiterated. “She just knows my habits and routines well. She will serve you now too, as my Luna.”

“I do not want her entering our bedroom,” I said as I sat up. “Not for cleaning or anything else.”

I did not want that jealous woman anywhere near us. I already had to deal with one crazy woman attempting to take my mate and successfully did it. I was determined to learn from my previous mistakes.

Seeing how serious I was, Nolan laughed and said, “You are jealous.”

I met his gaze. “Yes,” I said. Is that a problem?”

Nolan leaned forward and kissed me. “No, I find that reassuring,” he said. “Very well. I will make sure she understands your boundaries.”

“Thank you,” I said, relieved that he did not dismiss my concern.

Nolan glanced at the clock on the nightstand. “You should get up too,” he said. “I want you to have breakfast with me before I leave. There is someone I want you to meet.”

My brows knit together. “Who?”

“You’ll see,” he said, already standing. “Go get dressed.”

That only increased my curiosity. I slipped out of bed and quickly went to the bathroom. I showered, brushed my teeth, and got dressed. When I was ready, I followed him out of the room and down the corridor.

The kitchen was already busy when we entered. The sound of cooking and the sweet scent of breakfast filled the air. Nolan led me forward without hesitation.

Then I saw her

For as

efused to process what my eyes were seeing. The woman standing near the counter turned toward

good to see you again,” the woman said with a bright smile.

ween her and Nolan.

as Clara, my former maid at Shadowclaw, the same maid that had betrayed me,

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY THREE

Talia’s POV

“What is she doing here?” I demanded.

All of Clara's confidence left her and her posture stiffened. She sat tray down with shaky hands. Clara then dropped to her knees.

"Princess, no, Luna Talia," Clara said, her voice shaking. "I…I'm so sorry." The words came out fast and desperate, as if she had been holding them back for a long time. "I never wanted to betray you. I swear I had no choice."

The other omegas in the kitchen stopped what they were doing to watch. I grit my teeth. Was she acting vulnerable to gather sympathy?

"Get up," Nolan ordered and Clara quickly got up. "No one is going to harm you. Tell Talia what you told me."

Clara swallowed hard and looked at me as she wiped tears from her face. "Viki threatened me," she said. "She said if I didn't do exactly what she told me, she would kill me. I didn't care at first until she threatened my family."

My chest tightened. "And why didn't you tell me when all this happened? I could've protected you."

"How? Alpha Jason had stopped confiding in you. He only cared about Viki," Clara answered. "I couldn't risk Jason not believing you."

Her words stung, but she was right. I was the only one delusional about Jason still loving me. Even though I understood her, it didn't make me feel any better about her betraying me.

"She forced me to lie," Clara continued. "She made me plant things, repeat stories, twist events so that everyone would doubt you. After that, she never stopped torturing me. She told me I should be grateful she let me live."

"So, how did you end up at Bloodmoon?" I asked.

“I finally ran. I couldn’t take it anymore,” Clara said quietly, “I had nowhere to go. I wandered until I reached Bloodmoon’s border. The guards caught me, but Alpha Nolan saw that I wasn’t dangerous. He let me stay as a maid.”

Nolan nodded. “Her story was consistent after being interrogated multiple times. I believed her.”

I looked back at Clara. I could see the fear in her eyes as if she was reliving the trauma all over again.

‘We can forgive her. Make her prove herself,’ my wolf suggested.

“You will swear to me,” I said slowly, “that you will never betray me again. No matter who threatens you. No matter what they promise. Swear that you will report to me, no matter what.”

Clara nodded vigorously, “I swear it,” she said. “On my life, on my wolf.”

“Understand this clearly, Clara, I forgive you, but that doesn’t mean I trust you. You will have to earn back my trust.”

“I understand,” Clara replied at once. Only time would tell if Clara was telling the truth or not.

Nolan turned to her. “You will serve Talia now,” he said. “With loyalty.”

“Yes, Alpha,” Clara said.

He left us then, explaining he needed to return to his meetings. When he was gone, I released a breath I had not realized I was holding.

After breakfast, I asked Clara to show me around the pack grounds. Della joined us, explaining that Marco was still tied up with Nolan and the senior members.

Bloodmoon's territory was very similar to Silverfang, but surprisingly larger. I understood why Nolan wanted to hold onto the territory on his own no matter what. But what caught my attention was the grand garden.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY FOUR

Talia's POV

I spent the evening exploring the wing of the pack house that Nolan used as his residence. The space was larger than I expected, but it did not feel excessive or cold. It felt lived in.

What caught my attention most was the study.

Shelves lined two of the walls. The shelves were packed with books of every size and binding. Some were old with their spines worn but carefully kept. Then they were well organized by region and topic.

I couldn't help but smile. "So, this is what you do when you're not scowling at people," I muttered as I ran my fingers along the edge of one shelf.

I had not expected Nolan to be a reader. His collection was extensive and there were a few handwritten journals tucked between them.

I pulled one book free and sat down in one of the chairs near the lamp. I started reading, and before I realized it, I was several chapters in. My wolf stayed quiet as she was enjoying this moment with me.

Then, a noise broke the peaceful quiet moment. I could hear footsteps coming from the bedroom. I grabbed a pen from the desk and placed it into the book to hold my place before sitting it down on the desk.

I opened the door to the bedroom saying, "Nolan, I thought you…'

I stopped midsentence as it was not Nolan in our bedroom. Instead, Maggie stood there.

‘I thought Nolan told her to stay out of our den,’ my wolf growled.

Maggie placed a basket of folded clothes down. She had a neutral expression, but her eyes narrowed when she saw me. I met her gaze as I entered the room. If she thinks she was going to bully me here, Maggie had another thing coming.

“I didn’t realize anyone was coming in,” I said.

“This is my duty, Miss Talia,” Maggie stated.

“You can go,” I told her.

“Excuse me?”

“You don’t need to clean the Alpha’s quarters anymore,” I explained.

“I take my instructions from Nolan, Miss Talia,” Maggie responded.

My wolf bristled. ‘Who is she to call him by his name like that!’ she growled.

‘I know, I know. She wants us to be angry. We won’t give her the satisfaction,’ I told her.

“I am his mate,” I replied evenly. “These quarters are no longer his alone, so you are not needed.”

“Again, I follow only Nolan’s orders,” Maggie stated.

My wolf snarled at that, but I pushed her down.

“And aren’t you disobeying his order now?” I asked and Maggie’s eyes widened. So, she didn’t know I knew Nolan told her to stay out. “I am his mate and Luna. I’m asking you to leave.”

“What you want doesn’t matter,” Maggie said firmly.

“That will change after the Luna ceremony,” I said. “And when it does, you will respect my authority along with Alpha Nolan’s.”

Maggie’s eyes darkened. The politeness she had been holding finally fully slipped. “That ceremony may not go as smoothly as you expect.”

I studied her more carefully then. This was not simple resentment or wounded pride. Maggie would cause me harm if she could.

I took a step toward her, allowing my aura to flow from me. “What is your problem? You’ve been disrespectful since I arrived. I have done nothing to you.”

“You did nothing to me, but you’ve done something to him,” Maggie explained. “You’ve changed him.”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying,” I said.

“Nolan was not like this before he left. He needs to be focused to govern the pack properly,” she shot back. “You’re going to endanger our pack.”

“Are you doubting your Alpha’s ability?” I questioned.

“Don’t try to turn this on me,” Maggie said.

“I understand my role as Luna. You don’t need to be concerned,” I said firmly.

“You understand nothing,” Maggie snapped. “He never allowed women near him before you. Not like this. He trusted me. He listened to me. Now he doesn’t listen.”

“This pup desires our mate,’ my wolf growled. ‘We need to put her in her place now before this gets out of hand.’

“You are confusing kindness with affection,” I said. “And loyalty with entitlement.”

Her face flushed red. “You don’t know anything.”

“I know that the Moon Goddess made me his fated mate and not you.”

“You think that bond makes you special. There’s nothing special about you.”

“It makes me his mate,” I answered. “That is not something you can change.”

She stepped closer, her voice rising. “That bond is a curse! You don’t deserve to be his Luna!”

My wolf’s anger flared and I agreed. I had enough of Maggie’s insolence. Right when I was about to slap her, I caught Nolan’s

scent.

‘What are you waiting for?’ my wolf growled.

“This is the perfect opportunity to show Nolan what his ‘little sister’ is like behind closed doors,’ I explained.

“You’re in love with him. No, infatuated. It’s cute really,” I said plainly. “But he does not belong to you.”.

“Shut up! You don’t know anything about me!” Maggie shouted. “Your mate bond is a curse!”

I smiled slightly. “You are young, girl. You have not found your mate yet. When you do, you will understand the pull you are cursing, and you will understand how foolish you were right now,”

Maggie’s hands curled into fists. “You are a witch!” she snapped. “You seduced him!”

The door behind her opened. The door slammed hard into the wall causing Maggie to jump.

“Maggie!” Nolan snarled.

Maggie went pale instantly, all defiance draining from her face as she turned toward him.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY FIVE

Nolan’s POV

The meeting dragged on longer than necessary. The Elders had so many questions about Silverfang and Talia. Every last one of them wondered whether I had ended the hunt for my father’s killer. By the time it finally ended, my patience was gone.

The senior members filtered out one by one, still murmuring about schedules, patrol rotations, and preparations for the upcoming Luna ceremony. I acknowledged them out of habit, but my attention was already elsewhere.

I wanted to go home.

Marco noticed immediately.

“You’re restless,” he said as we walked out together. “What’s going on?”

“I have things to do.”

“Or someone,” Marco said and I shot him a look which caused him to laugh.

My wolf laughed too. He liked that Marco had noticed the change too. ‘There’s nothing to be ashamed of for wanting our mate,’ he added.

“You’ve been different since you accepted Talia,” Marco continued, clearly enjoying himself. “More relaxed, not obsessing over things.”

“Is that a bad thing?” I asked.

“No,” Marco answered. “It isn’t. I’m glad to see it. Happy to see Nolan, my friend not the Alpha, returning.”

‘You need to learn to listen to me,’ my wolf said smugly. He had been urging this shift from the moment we knew Talia was our mate. It was a constant string of demands: claim her, protect her, be honest. For once, I was listening.

“Go to her,” Marco continued. “If anything comes up, I’ll handle it.”

I nodded and headed back toward the residence. I followed Talia’s scent to the main sitting room and then our small kitchen. She really explored today. It made me smile that she was taking the time getting to know where everything was.

‘Of course she would. She is our Luna,’ my wolf said.

I walked to the bedroom to check if she was in there. As I drew closer, I heard raised voices. One of them was unmistakably Talia’s. The other was Maggie’s.

I stopped just outside the door.

“Shut up! You don’t know anything about me!” Maggie shouted. “Your mate bond is a curse!”

My wolf bristled. ‘We should not allow this pup to disrespect our Luna,’ he growled.

“You are young, girl. You have not found your mate yet,” Talia said. “When you do, you will understand the pull you are cursing, and you will understand how foolish you were right now,”

“You are a witch!” Maggie snapped. “You seduced him!”

That was enough.

I pushed the door open hard enough that it struck the wall with a dull thud.

“Maggie!” I snarled.

She spun around, eyes widening as she realized I had heard everything. The anger drained from her face and was replaced instantly with panic.

“I…I didn’t mean…” she started.

“That is enough!” I snapped, interrupting her.

I crossed the room in two strides and positioned myself between her and Talia.

“You do not speak to her like that,” I said. “Ever.”

Maggie’s gaze flicked to Talia and then back to me. “Alpha Nolan, she is just a…”

“She is my mate,” I said clearly. “And she will be my Luna. You will respect her.”

I turned and pulled Talia into my arms. Talia stiffened for only a moment before relaxing in my arms. She leaned into me.

“Apologize now,” I said.

Maggie hesitated. Her face was flushed with anger and embarrassment. I could see in her eyes that she wanted to argue.

‘Insolent pup!’ my wolf snarled and I allowed my Alpha aura flow from me. Maggie flinched and dropped her head. “I am sorry, Alpha Nolan.”

“Why are you apologizing to me?” I demanded.

Maggie swallowed hard. She opened her mouth but quickly closed it.

“Now,” I growled.

“I am sorry,” Maggie said stiffly, eyes fixed on the floor. “I spoke out of line.”

“It was not sincere,” I said. “Try again.”

Maggie’s head snapped up. She looked at me as if I had betrayed her. She looked at Talia and finally said, “I apologize, Luna Talia.”

I nodded once. “Leave.”

Maggie turned and walked out quickly, the door closing behind her with a soft click. I looked down at Talia.

“I am sorry, Talia,” I apologized,

“For what?” Talia asked.

“You should never have been put in that position, I told her not to come in here,” I replied. “I should have addressed this sooner.”

Talia hesitated before saying, “She likes you. She’s just jealous of me.”

I sighed. “I know.”

“You knew?” she asked, surprised.

“Yes,” I said honestly. “I thought it was a harmless crush. She has been through a lot, and I never encouraged it. I thought she would have grown out of it,”

“So, you’re telling me you don’t like the attention?” Talia teased.

“I don’t. I see Maggie as a little sister,” I confirmed. “I took her in when she had nowhere else to go. The Mad rogues nearly broke her. I thought giving her work, structure, and protection would help her and it did, but it does not mean she gets to ignore rank and do whatever she wants.”

Talia smiled slightly. “I am glad you stood up for me. Thanks.”

“There was never another option,” I said.

“I think you deserve a reward,” Talia purred.

I raised an eyebrow, my gaze lingering on her. “Is that so?”

She nodded, eyes bright. “Very much so.”

“And what would that be?” I asked.

Talia rose onto her toes, wrapped her arms around my neck, pulled me forward and kissed me.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY SIX

Nolan's POV

I cupped the back of Talia's head and kissed her back harder. I walked her backwards until her back hit the edge of the desk.

"Do you like my gift?" she murmured when we broke for air.

1 kept my voice low. "Very much."

"You're incredibly sexy when you're all serious." Talia flirted.

I laughed and then kissed her again. I lifted her onto the desk. Her dress rode up revealing a black thong.

Talia's hands fumbled with the buttons on my shirt before she gave up and tore it open with her claws. She nipped at my chest as she began to unbuckle my pants. I lowered my mouth to her neck as I licked my mark on her. The mate bond hummed to life.

"Nolan," she whimpered.

I ripped the thong from her with a quick tug. I plunged two fingers into her and began to pump them in and out of her.

"Do not tease me," she said, half joking, half pleading.

I removed my fingers and stroked my cock slowly as I lined myself up. Then, I thrusted into her hard. Talia gasped and gripped my shoulders.

“Yes, Nolan,” she moaned.

I start slow, but she wraps her legs around me and pulls me in deeper. The desk creaks under us. Each time I thrust into her, Talia tightens harder around me. Her nails rake down my back.

Talia starts to shake, and I know she’s close. Her head falls back, mouth open, and hair streaming over the desk. My wolf urges me to mark her again, but I want this to last.

“What are you doing?” Talia practically whimpers as I pull away from her.

I walk over to the sofa and sit down. “Aren’t you supposed to be giving me a reward?” I tease.

Talia smirks as saunters over to me from the desk. She straddles me, bracing her knees on either side. She slowly lowers herself

down onto me.

“Goddess, Talia,” I moan as Talia rolls her hips

She picks a fast pace as she grinds down on me. The feeling is overwhelming. I feel her tightening around me, and I begin slamming up into her. Each thrust was sending shockwaves of pleasure through me.

“Nolan, I’m…I’m,” Talia moans before screaming as she finally climaxes.

The pleasure hit hard and fast as I released into her. I bite into her shoulder as I continue to thrust slowly in small circles. Afterwards, we stayed tangled together on the sofa.

Talia traced a fingertip along my collarbone. “I am going to blame you for this if I cannot walk tomorrow.”

“You had to give me a proper reward,” I responded and she playfully rolled her eyes. Talia yawned and closed her eyes. “We need to talk about the Luna ceremony.”

“Now?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said. “Marco and I discussed it with the Elders. The Luna ceremony will be held in a week.”

“A week,” Talia repeated in surprise. “That is so soon.”

“It is enough time,” I told her. “It gives the pack time to prepare properly, and it gives you time to settle into the routine without being overwhelmed.”

She nodded. Her eyes glint with excitement. “I am not bothered by it. I’m actually happy that the Elders approved. I want the entire pack to acknowledge me.”

“They will,” I said. “And I want it to be clear that you are my Luna.” After her experience with Jason, I wanted Talia to know in every way possible that I would choose her and I always will.

“And you, my Alpha. I will do everything to be a proper Luna and protect Bloodmoon with you,” Talia confirmed.

I watched her closely. “You mean that?”

“I do,” she replied. “The Moon Goddess chose you. I chose you. Your problems are now my problems.”

“There is something else,” I continued. “I plan to put Maggie in charge of the preparations.”

All of the excitement seemed to drain from Talia’s face. It was replaced with caution. I expected her to blow up at me, but she said nothing as she waited for me to continue.

“I want to give her responsibility and a chance to prove herself. She is spoiled, but I do not believe she is malicious,” I explained.

Talia was quiet for a moment before saying, “I do not like her attitude.”

“I do not like it either,” I said plainly. “And I will not allow her to disrespect you again. Helping with preparations will give her an opportunity to prove that she has learned from her mistakes.”

Talia sighed and said, “I will try.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that,” I said. “You two have just gotten off on the wrong foot.”

“But, I have a condition,” Talia added.

“What?”

“If she disrespects me, I want her removed from the preparations,” Talia answered.

It was a reasonable request. Talia was being more than generous as any other she-wolf would’ve wanted Maggie removed from the pack. ‘And this is why she’s our Luna,’ my wolf huffed.

“Deal,” I said.

Talia leaned in and kissed me again. “Now, I think I deserve a reward,” she said before nipping my lip.

I was already hard again and flipped her onto her back.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY SEVEN

Maggie’s POV

I did not leave right away. I stayed in the bedroom, trying to be as quiet as possible.

Viki told me to watch them and report back everything they did. I expected to hear Talia badmouth me to Nolan. Instead, I heard a gasp and the desk creak. Then, I heard rhythmic slapping and Talia moaning.

My face flushed as I felt disgusted, like some creepy pervert listening in. I clenched my fists so tightly my nails dug into my palms. My wolf did not even try to comfort me.

“They are mates. This is what they should be doing. You need to leave,’ she said firmly.

I hated that she was talking to me as if I deserved this.

I left the room quickly, but I could still hear them out in the hallway. I walked down the corridor fast. Why did it have to be her? Why did she have to show up? It should’ve been me underneath Nolan.

‘You’re delusional,’ my wolf growled, but I ignored her.

I still couldn’t shake the shame and anger I felt. Nolan had scolded me and ordered me to apologize. He had never raised his

voice to me before.

‘You were out of line,’ my wolf said.

‘No, I was just telling the truth,’ I snapped.

Talia had to have known Nolan was nearby. She set me up to get me in trouble. This was all because of her.

‘No one is going to take pity on you,’ my wolf scolded. ‘You should know better.’

My wolf was right. I let my anger override reason. Nolan already thought I was acting like a child. If I made another mistake, he would not forgive me twice.

I needed to talk to Viki.

Once I got to her home, I knocked once and then twice when she didn't answer immediately. The door opened only a few inches. Viki's masked face appeared in the gap.

"Maggie," she said quietly. "Come in."

I stepped inside and shut the door behind me. Before Viki could even ask me what was going on, I blurted out, "He reprimanded me for that witch! He has never done that. Not once."

"Because of Talia?" Viki asked.

"Yes," I snapped, "Who else?"

Viki nodded slowly as if she had expected it. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"I went into his study to clean. She told me to leave. I told her I only take orders from Nolan because she is not the official Luna yet," I explained. "She didn't like that, so she started treating me like I was a kid and I responded."

Viki raised an eyebrow and said, "You provoked her."

"She provoked me first," I said, defensive. "Who is she to tell me where I can and can't go?"

"And then what happened?"

“And then she smiled at me,” I said, the memory making my skin crawl. “She said I liked Nolan. She said it like she was amused, like my feelings were a joke.”

Viki’s eyes narrowed. “She said that in front of Nolan?”

“No,” I said. “Not at first. Nolan came in right after I called her a witch.”

Viki scoffed and said, “You said it where he could hear you.”

“I did not know he was at the door,” I explained.

“Did you apologize?” Viki asked.

“I did,” I admitted. “I apologized. He made me do it twice because the first time was not good enough.”

Viki nodded and said, “Good.”

“How in the hell is that good?” I snapped.

“Because that means that Nolan doesn’t see you as a threat…yet,” Viki stated. “Now, you know if you lash out at her, you will push him even closer to her. You will make her look like the victim, and you will look like the jealous maid who cannot accept her place.”

“I am not a maid,” I muttered. I only cleaned Nolan’s rooms, no one else’s.

“But you are for now,” Viki responded. “And you need to play that role well to get what you want.” She walked over to the kettle on the stove. Viki placed a tea bag into a mug and poured hot water into the cup before giving it to me.

“Talia is skilled at manipulating men,” Viki continued. “She knows how to position herself. You cannot beat her by confronting her. You have to be patient.”

I swallowed hard. “What am I supposed to do now? She and Nolan will be watching me now.”

“And you play the respectful, dutiful little sister,” Viki said. “You bite your tongue and you don’t antagonize her.”

I stared at her. “Why?”

“Because when something bad happens to her, no one will suspect you,” Viki said plainly.

My stomach turned. “You are saying you want to hurt her.”

Viki’s eyes held mine without blinking. “Do you want her gone or would you rather Talia get you expelled from the pack?”.

I thought about how it was so hard being homeless. How every night before I made it to Bloodmoon I didn’t know if I was going to make it to morning. I couldn’t live through that again.

“I want her gone,” I said,

Viki’s tone became businesslike. “Then, you will get control of your emotions and then you will be patient. The plan will be carried out around the Luna ceremony date. Until then, you will play the role of the obedient maid.”

My wolf bristled, “You’re making a mistake. All you have to do is give up on this fantasy of being Nolan’s Luna. If Nolan finds out…’

‘He won’t find out and even if he does, he won’t know it was,’ I cut her off.

‘You are too trusting,’ my wolf huffed.

I finally nodded once. “I will do what you say. You won’t have to worry about me.

Viki’s eyes softened again, that same almost kind look. “Good girl.”

The words made my skin crawl, but I forced myself to accept them. This was not about pride. I had to humble myself to get Nolan

back.

I exhaled slowly and said, “Thank you.”

Viki tilted her head and asked, “For what?”

“For helping me. For telling me what to do,” I said.

Viki smiled and said, “No need to thank me. You’re my friend and I help my friends.”

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY EIGHT

Talia’s POV

I woke up late the next morning. I stretched and rolled over, reaching for Nolan, but was met with his scent and cold sheets. He had already gone to work.

“Thinking of going another round?’ my wolf teased.

I sat up and froze when I saw my reflection. Dark marks stood out against my skin. I traced them, feeling that mix of happiness and shyness settle deep in my chest.

‘Why are you being so shy?’ my wolf teased. “We are supposed to look alike. He is our mate, but perhaps he did too much last night. You two mated like wild beasts.’

I huffed under my breath as I stood. “That is not how I would phrase it,” I muttered, though I could not deny the warmth spreading through me as I thought about how Nolan had pinned me against the desk.

With Nolan by my side, this month’s heat would not feel so frightening. After the Luna ceremony, I would stand with him the way a Luna should and help him govern his pack.

I chose a dress with a high collar. Even though I knew the marks were not something to be ashamed of, I was not ready to display them openly to everyone just yet. With how Maggie was yesterday, I wasn’t going to go out of my way to antagonize her.

“Got a little rough last night?” Della teased as she sat down with me at the round table dedicated to Alpha, Luna, and Betas.

“What…what are you talking about?” I asked.

“You’re blushing. You know it’s okay to show off hickies. You’re a grown adult,” Della replied with a wink.

Before I could respond, I felt Solon’s presence brush against my mind. ‘Good morning. Are you awake?’ he asked.

I smiled faintly and responded, ‘Yes. Good morning, Solon.’

‘I am just checking in on you. We haven’t talked since you left Shadowclaw,’ Solon said.

‘I am fine. Everything is going well so far,’ I responded. ‘How are you and Leslie?’

‘Good’, Solon said. ‘Leslie has settled in well. She complains about the noise, but she has not left yet. We both miss you’.

‘I will visit after the Luna ceremony’, I promised.

‘Remember, if Nolan ever treats you poorly, you tell me immediately,’ Solon said. His tone was so parental that I laughed quietly to myself. Hearing Solon like this made my heart ache in a good way.

‘I will’, I said, though I doubted I would ever need to.

I was just lifting my spoon to finally eat my oatmeal when a familiar scent made me tense. Maggie was walking toward me with a bouquet of roses so large it took both of her arms to carry. The colors were striking, deep reds, soft pinks, pale whites, and hues I had never seen before. If it was anyone else bringing them to me, I would be very excited, but all I felt was tense.

“Luna Talia,” she said warmly, stopping a few steps away. “Good morning.”

Della looked at Maggie and then at me with a surprised expression. The title caught me off guard as well. It was only yesterday that she was calling me a witch.

“This should be interesting,” Della muttered.

“I heard from Alpha Nolan that roses are your favorite, I gathered every variety Bloodmoon has. I thought you might like to choose which ones will be used for the Luna ceremony,” Maggie continued.

“They are beautiful,” I said carefully. “Thank you.”

Maggie stepped closer and Della growled defensively. I gripped her wrist and shook my head. Maggie wasn’t that dumb to attack me in front of the pack.

“Thank you, Maggie. I think these two will be just fine,” I said as I pointed out two varieties.

Maggie nodded eagerly. “Of course. I will make sure everything is arranged properly.” Maggie stood there for a few seconds and said nothing.

“Uh, did you want something else?” Della asked rudely. “If not, please leave. We are trying to enjoy our breakfast.”

Maggie hesitated and then bowed her head slightly. “I also wanted to apologize for my previous rudeness. I understand my place now and I am truly sorry.”

Della looked at Maggie and then at me. ‘How bad did Nolan reprimand her?’ she asked through our mind link.

‘Not enough for her to change her attitude that fast,’ I replied. I had expected Maggie to put up more of a fight than this.

At that moment, Clara approached with a small pitcher of juice. Before she could set it down, Maggie gently but firmly took it from her hands.

“I will take care of that,” Maggie said. Clara stepped back, clearly unsure, and I made a mental note of it. Maggie poured the juice into my glass.

My wolf bristled and growled, ‘Do not trust her.’

“Apology accepted,” I said and Maggie turned to look at me in surprise. I gave her a small smile, and she then went to pour juice into Della’s glass.

‘Do you really accept her apology?’ Della asked.

‘No,’ I replied.

I learned enough that words meant nothing. Just like her apology was insincere, so was the acceptance of her apology. I would keep an eye on her.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED & NINETY NINE

Talia’s POV

The day of the Luna ceremony arrived before I knew it.

I stood in the lounge with Della beside me as maids moved quietly around us. This would be my second Luna ceremony, but this time it felt different. I had my best friend at my side this time and a mate that truly loved me. There would be no more uncertainty about my place in Bloodmoon.

“How do you feel?” Della asked.

“Nervous but excited,” I replied.

Maggie and Clara worked together to prepare me. Clara handled my dress carefully as she smoothed the fabric and fastened the delicate closures, while Maggie focused on my makeup and jewelry. Della watched her carefully.

‘I’ll make sure she doesn’t do anything fishy,’ Della told me through the mind link as she checked every product Maggie used. Nothing had been tainted and Maggie was attentive, overly so.

“You look as radiant as the Moon Goddess herself, Luna Talia,” Maggie said. “The ceremony hall will be blessed simply by your

presence.”

Della crossed her arms and said, “Cut it out already. We all know that you don’t like Talia.”

Maggie paused before lowering her gaze. “Miss Della, I told you I was wrong before,” she said. “Luna Talia is the Luna of Bloodmoon now, and she deserves the highest respect.”

“Sure,” Della said with narrowed eyes. “Whatever you say.”

The final touches were completed in silence after that. When Clara stepped back and Maggie adjusted the last strand of my hair,

Della let out a low whistle.

“Well,” she said, smiling at me. “Alpha Nolan is going to forget his own name.”

I laughed as Della offered her arm and led me from the lounge toward the main hall. The closer we got, the more I could hear the music playing. When the doors opened, I gaped at Nolan.

Nolan stood at the front of the hall. He was dressed in a tailored tailcoat that fit him perfectly. Della placed her hand under my chin and closed my mouth. “Don’t drool,” she teased.

Nolan smiled at me and took my hand, leading me away from Della and towards the stage.

The hall fell silent as we stood on the stage. One of the Elders approached us. He was old, much older than my father.

“Bloodmoon, today is the day that we will finally be complete!” the Elder announced, his voice booming. The audience cheered.

“We have dealt with pain, loss, war, but we survived through it all due to Alpha Nolan,” he said, his voice carrying clearly through the hall. “But an Alpha can only do so much without a Luna. Today marks the next step in Alpha Nolan’s journey in securing his position and his rightful place of Alpha of Bloodmoon.”

The audience cheered and then, the Elder turned to me and said, “Princess Talia of Silverfang, daughter of the Alpha King, fated mate to Alpha Nolan, do you stand here of your own will, prepared to bear the weight of Bloodmoon as its Luna?”

“I do,” I answered.

“Alpha Nolan,” The Elder said as he turned to look at Nolan, “do you swear to stand beside her as mate and equal, to protect her life, her authority, and this pack, even at the cost of your own?”

“I swear it,” Nolan replied without hesitation.

“Then by the laws of Bloodmoon and under the witness of the Moon Goddess, this bond is recoguned

Maron stepped forward then, holding the crown. It was more beautiful than I had wagued Diamonds ined in carve and an ins center rested a moon-shaped raby, deep and void

Nolan took it from Marcs and placed it gently on my head. He leaned down and kissed me and the hall empted in cheers.

Later, music filled the hall as members began to dance and drink. Nolan kept an arm around my waist as we moved among frem as we accepted congrastations and gifts. While we were talking, I heard someone yell from behind me, “Look out.”

I turned to see Maggie trip over her feet. The goblet of wine she had in her hands went sailing through the air before the wine splashed all over the front of Nolan’s suit

*1 am so sorry, Alpha,” Maggie said quickly as she grabbed a napkin from a nearby table. She moved forward to dry him off, ber he waved her any

“It is fine,” Nolan said. He turned to me and placed a kiss on my cheek. “P’m going to change. F’ll be back”

When Notan left, Maggie turned her attention to me. “Luna Talia,” she said softly. “Some members from the border district have arrived outside the hall. They traveled a long distance to pay their respects.”

It seemed too convenient that she would tell me this information once holan left

‘It’s a trap,’ my wolf growled.

“I understand. Clara, please inform Nolan,” I said Clara nodded and left immediately. It seemed I wasn’t the only one suspicious of Maggie, but I was determined to figure out what game she was playing this time.

Della stepped closer to me and leaned toward me. “Do you want me to come with you?” she whispered

I shook my head gently. “I will be fine. I will not be long, And if I am, you know where I went and who told me to go.” (2

Della nodded and said through the mind link, ‘Be careful’

I followed Maggie toward the doors. We stepped into the quieter corridor beyond the hall.

“Where are they waiting?” I asked.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED

Talia’s POV

“They are waiting in the garden outside,” Maggie said eagerly. “They traveled so far just to see you. It would mean a great deal to them if you greeted them personally.”

“This is not right,’ my wolf growled. ‘Why are you going along with this?’

‘Because I want to know how far she is willing to go with this,’ I responded.

My wolf huffed. ‘We should not be reckless,’ she urged. ‘At least wait until our mate returns.’

I didn’t want to wait. I wanted another opportunity to show that Maggie should not be around us. My wolf growled low within me, but I ignored her.

How would I explain this to Nolan if I was wrong? It would look like I was being petty especially since Maggie apologized twice in front of witnesses. There was no reason, yet, to refuse a simple request.

'I still think this is foolish,' my wolf grumbled.

'If this is a trap, you will reach out to Nolan immediately,' I told her.

"Luna?" Maggie said, bringing me out of my thoughts. I had not realized I had stopped walking.

"Lead the way, Maggie," I told her. Maggie smiled as she led me out of the hall. Two warriors approached us. They eyed Maggie suspiciously before focusing their attention on me.

"Luna," one of them said carefully, "it is late. The outer grounds are not secure at this hour. We advise you to remain inside."

Maggie bristled immediately. Before I could respond, she snapped, "How dare you stop our Luna! Do you have any idea how far those members traveled? If Alpha Nolan learns that you prevented her from greeting them, you will answer for it."

The warriors looked at Maggie in surprise.

"That is not our intention," the other warrior said. "We are only following protocol."

"And protocol is to follow the orders of your Luna and Alpha," Maggie countered.

"Which you are not," the first warrior growled. "I will contact Alpha Nolan to confirm your statement."

Maggie's face became flushed with anger, and I could've sworn she looked fearful for just a moment.

"I appreciate your concern," I said, intervening on Maggie's behalf. "I will be nearby and will return shortly. There is no need to alert Alpha Nolan over something so minor."

The warriors hesitated. They looked conflicted. After a moment, both bowed their heads.

“Forgive us, Luna,” the first one said, “Please be safe, We will be nearby if you need our assistance.”

“Thank you,” I told them. Maggie shot them a triumphant look as she walked past them.

“You shouldn’t antagonize them,” I said.

“They shouldn’t have stopped us. They…”

“You never make enemies of the ones that are risking their lives to protect you,” I told her firmly, cutting her off. I was starting to understand how she made rogues so angry that they were trying to chase her down and kill her back then. Maggie did not know how to talk to people. It was a miracle she got this far in Bloodmoon.

“Yes, Luna,” Maggie muttered.

We walked along the stone path that curved away from the main hall. The lamp posts cast soft light across the grounds, illuminating just enough for us to be able to see in the dark.

“Maggie, what do you think about Nolan?” I asked, breaking the silence.

After a brief pause, she said, “If it weren’t for Alpha Nolan, the Bloodmoon pack would never have grown this strong. The borders are secure. Trade has increased. Even the Elders respect him now and don’t treat him as an arrogant pup anymore.” She clearly admired Nolan and I had to bite my tongue as I felt jealousy creeping up my spine. I fought the urge to reaffirm my position as Nolan’s mate.

“He works tirelessly,” she continued. “He rarely rests. He never hesitates when the pack is threatened.”

“He takes his responsibility seriously,” I added.

“He always has,” Maggie replied. “Even before he became Alpha when the Elders governed the pack.”

I didn’t want Maggie telling me more about Nolan. There were some things that I wanted to hear from him. “Tell me about yourself, Maggie,” I said in an attempt to change the topic.

“I was an orphan,” Maggie stated.

“That had to be rough,” I said. “Did you lose your pack?”

“To rogues,” Maggie answered. “When the mad rogues attacked the border, my parents sent me away. I grew up in the wild on my own. Every night I was hiding because the mad rogues never left anyone alive. When they caught up to me, Alpha Nolan saved me. He brought me back here. This pack became my home.”

I felt sympathy for Maggie. To have that happen to her at such a young age was heart breaking. It made sense why she was so obsessed with Nolan.

“Alpha Nolan is my only family,” Maggie added.

“He is a great Alpha,” I said after a moment. “I hope, in time, I can become the kind of Luna you can respect and perhaps a sister to you.”

Maggie didn’t respond. We continued walking. The path grew narrower and less light. The garden ahead was partially obscured

by trees.

“Where exactly are they waiting?” I asked as I began to slow down.

Maggie gestured ahead vaguely. “Just beyond the hedge. They were exhausted from traveling and needed to rest.”

My wolf surged forward, “Turn back. NOW!’

“Maggie, this doesn’t feel right,” I said as I came to a complete stop.

“No, they are just ahead,” Maggie insisted.

A cool breeze ruffled the leaves on the tree.

Then, I smelled a scent I thought I would never smell here: rogue wolves. The scent was strong, too strong.

I grabbed Maggie’s arm hard enough to make her gasp.

“RUN!” I shouted.