

SECOND CHANCE FOR THE BARREN LUNA

Dust within ancient walls Miles Brooks 21

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Talia's POV

Fangvale was perched high on a mountain that is right at the edge of the Silverfang territory. Its sleek towers shimmered in the sunlight, and it stuck out amongst the rugged forest. The structure looked more like a luxury resort than a traditional packhouse. The moment Della and I crossed the checkpoint, I felt a strange mix of freedom and excitement as my heart beat faster.

Della threw her arms wide as we cleared the checkpoint and spun once.

"We have to have fun today," Della declared, loud enough for two nearby Betas to turn and look at her.

I smiled and nodded. "Of course."

"I mean it. No pouting, no politics, and absolutely no brooding. You get one drink, then we scout the dance floor."

“I will try,” I said.

“Not try. You’re doing this today. You’re getting at least one phone number before the day is over.” She linked her arm with mine and tugged me forward.

Della wore a black two-piece with a wrap that made her legs look impossibly long. She carried herself like a Beta who knew her value.

As we stepped through the front entrance, the sound of pulsing music and splashing water thundered through the open courtyard. The pool party was already in full swing. Dozens of wolves were in the water laughing, flirting, and tossing beach balls across the pool. Others lounged on white daybeds under shaded cabanas or danced barefoot on the smooth stone near the water’s edge, drinks in hand and sunglasses perched high.

“You know, you should get in,” Della said, nudging me. “Look at them. Half of these guys are single Betas or Alpha heirs.”

“Yeah, I am really not trying to jump back into a relationship,” I said.

“And why not?”

“I mean they’re not my type.”

Della gave me a look. “Which part? The powerful part, or the half-naked part?”

“The playboy part.”

She groaned and bumped me with her hip. “You have not even spoken to anyone yet. Do not pre-reject what could be a very interesting hour. We are not shopping for mates. We are just looking for a good time.” Della nudged me and pointed toward the end of the pool.”

Della pointed toward the far end of the pool where a group had just climbed out of the pool. Water ran in clean lines down his shoulders and onto the abs of the one with chestnut hair. He caught me looking and smiled in a way that made my heart flutter.

My wolf hummed, amused by my sudden attention. ‘He’s handsome.’

“See,” Della said under her breath, pleased, “not every male is a jerk. You should go over there and talk to him.”

“Playboys do not interest me,” I said, turning to look at Della.

“You say that, but you’re blushing,” Della teased.

CHAPTER EVENTY ONE

+25 Bonus

I laughed and pushed her gently. “Go dance.”

“When you die single, don’t blame me,” Della warned with a smirk. Then, she disappeared into the growing crowd by the DJ booth.

Left alone, I made my way to the refreshment table and grabbed a drink. I glanced toward the horizon while swirling the ice. The sun warmed my skin, and for the first time in ages, I relaxed and let myself just exist.

Then I heard a voice that immediately made me tense back up.

“Well, well, look who’s here.”

I didn’t even have to turn around. That smug tone belonged to only one person: Viki. 61

Why couldn't I escape this woman?

'I told you we should never have been lenient with her,' my wolf growled.

I turned slowly, the ice in my drink clinking as I swirled it. Viki stood a few feet away in typical attire that made her look cheap: heavy makeup caked on, and a tight emerald dress stretched over her small belly. She looked me up and down with contempt.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, forcing my tone to remain neutral. "Shouldn't you be at home in your condition?"

"Jason's networking," she replied, flipping her hair. "He brought me here to support him like a proper Luna."

"How cute." I turned away, uninterested in whatever drama she was trying to start. This was supposed to be a happy day for me. I didn't want to spend another second with her.

But Viki stepped into my path. "Don't act so smug," Viki snapped. "You think just because Solon's protecting you, you're safe? That won't last. Once he dumps you, you'll be nothing but a worn-out rogue with nowhere to run. Then, I'll make sure you disappear."

My wolf bristled at the threat even though I knew there was nothing she could really do to me now that I was no longer part of Shadowclaw. Viki liked the sound of her own threats. She rarely thought about the consequences of her actions.

I laughed. “You already tried that. It didn’t work, but by all means keep on trying. You’ll end up in jail where you belong.”

Viki narrowed her eyes. “I am Jason’s fiancée. I’m the future Luna, not you.”

“Okay? And? Do you want a prize?” I taunted. “Enjoy your title and get out of my way.”

Viki leaned closer and dropped her voice. “Fate might have tied him to you once, but I am the one carrying his heir. I am the one he chose. He chose me.”

My hand tightened on the glass, and I set it on the table instead of shattering it in my fingers, “You are mistaken about several things,” I said. “First, I rejected him. Second is that I don’t care to compete for trash I already put out.”

I could feel my wolf pacing within me. I needed to get away from Viki before my wolf took control. This was not the time or the place for this. I turned again because the simple act of walking away would bruise Viki’s ego more efficiently than continuing to argue with her.

Her fingers snapped around my wrist. “I’m not done talking to you,” Viki growled.

+25 Bonus

I looked at her hand around my wrist before I met her gaze, “You want to play this game?” I asked, my voice low.” At a neutral gathering with dozens of witnesses everywhere?”

“You wouldn’t dare cause a scene,” Viki sald with a smirk, attempting to call my bluff as if she had forced me into

4 Corner

I raised my free hand and slapped her. The sound cracked over the music like an extra beat that did not belong. Heads turned. Viki staggered back and clapped a hand to her cheek with manufactured shock that failed to disguise the fury under it.

“You bitch! You hit me!” Viki screamed, her eyes wide in shock, “You actually hit mel”

“You were overdue for that slap. Have you learned your lesson, or do I need to slap you again?” I growled.

Several wolves backed up and gave us space. All eyes were on us with interest. Fangvale security hadn’t moved to intervene yet.

“Talía, what are you doing?!”

Jason’s voice roared behind me. The weight of his aura slammed into the space like a thunderclap, Wolves stopped out of Jason’s way, giving him a clear path to me.

He stormed across the stone patio. His face twisted with fury. Before I could react, he grabbed me by the shoulders, his fingers digging in. “You assaulted her? What the hell is wrong with you?”

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CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Talia’s POV

+25 Bonus

Viki dropped to her knees, sobbing like she was the victim. “She slapped me!” she cried, still clutching her face. “I was only trying to talk to her. I was urging her to come back to Shadowclaw. I didn’t mean any harm!”

I scoffed. Of course, she was using her same old tactic: twist the truth, play the pitiful card, and rely on crocodile tears to blur the facts. And just like every other time, Jason fell for it.

“Is that true? Did you hit her for no reason?” Jason demanded as he stared me down, shaking me.

I shoved him off me, insulted that he had to ask. “No, it’s not true, but it is not like you’re going to believe me.’

Jason waved me off, refusing to hear it. “She’s pregnant, Talia! Are you out of your mind? How can you be so cruel?”

“I don’t have time for this,” I said sharply, stepping back.

Jason reached out like he was going to grab me again, but Della rushed to my side. She slapped his hand away and planted herself protectively at my side. “Don’t touch her again unless you want to fight, Alpha. Prince Solon won’t take kindly to this,” Della growled.

Jason looked down at her hand where she blocked him. His nostrils flared, and his chest rose with a growl, “This doesn’t concern you.”

Della met his glare. “She’s under the protection of Silverfang,” Della shot back. “Everything concerning her is my business.”

Jason hesitated, clearly not expecting anyone to stand up to him. He looked between us. His brow furrowed. “She threatened me again,” I finally said. “She said I’d disappear once Solon abandons me.”

Jason rolled his eyes and said, “You took that seriously? I told you she’s pregnant and the hormones get to her. Viki apologized to you publicly. That was supposed to end this.”

“Are you dumb? Pregnancy hormones are not an excuse for threatening someone!” Della said.

“And clearly, her apology was insincere. It’s been barely a week, and she’s already threatening me again. That wasn’t an apology, it was just another opportunity for her to humiliate me and you allowed it. Maybe she needs to go back to the dungeon.”

Jason’s face hardened. “You can’t do that unless I give permission. You’re still my Luna. The Shadowclaw elders haven’t approved your release.”

“I don’t need their approval, Jason.” I crossed my arms. “I rejected you. The bond is severed. You made your choice when you stood by and let her lie about me,”

Jason flinched at that, but he masked it quickly with anger. “My father...”

“Is a tyrant,” I interrupted, and Jason looked shock as if I had slapped him. I could tell that Jason expected me to shrink back at the mention of his father. Before Jason’s betrayal, I would have. I feared his father and wanted his approval, but now, I couldn’t care less what he thought.

I continued. “Before you became an Alpha, he used to beat you within an inch of your life and still expected you to kneel and thank him for it. And now you’re letting him dictate your future?”

I could hear a low growl from Jason. I didn’t care. Let him be angry. But I was tired of him and Viki humiliating

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

+25 Bonus

1. He needed a taste of his own medicine.

Jason recovered quickly, stepping forward and blocking my path. “You don’t know what you’re saying. You’re upset-”

My wolf surged forward, furious at the challenge. My nails lengthened, and my muscles tightened with the first twitch of a shift.

Then, a bone-deep roar split through the courtyard like a thunderclap. It was so loud I could feel it. Everyone froze.

A man in a tailored black suit strode forward. His thick black hair combed neatly back and sharp eyes that scanned the courtyard like a hawk. A silver armband on his left bicep bore the Blood Moon insignia.

“Who the hell...” Jason started.

The man cut him off coldly. “I’m Marco, the Beta of the Blood Moon Pack.”

Gasps broke out across the gathered wolves. Even the DJs dropped the music volume in stunned reaction. Della stiffened beside me, which was confusing. Why was she worried?

Blood Moon Pack, second only to SilverFang in power, but was deathly loyal to the royal family. No one should be this shocked by Marco. What was I missing?

“Silence,” Marco ordered. “Alpha Nolan is resting. Anyone who causes further noise will answer to him.”

No one argued.

Even Jason took a step back away from Marco. Viki’s eyes darted around in panic, and she slowly stood, brushing her hands down her dress. She looked at Jason, as if to silently plead for him to fix this.

“Beta Marco, I...”

Marco’s attention turned to Jason and he held his hand up, silencing Jason. “If you can’t control your future Luna, you need to leave.”

Jason opened his mouth to argue but quickly closed it. He walked past Marco and grabbed her by the wrist. As he was leaving, Jason leaned close to me to say in a low growl, “This is not over.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Talia's POV

The moment Jason and Viki disappeared, Marco gave the crowd a polite nod and said, "You may continue enjoying yourselves."

But no one did.

Guests shuffled away quickly, leaving half-finished drinks and awkward glances in their wake. The music had gone quiet, and even the warm sunlight now felt oppressive. I couldn't help but feel awful because all of this happened because of my argument with Jason and Viki.

Della and I stood in silence near a cabana, watching the last few guests leave.

I exhaled. “What just happened?”

Della didn’t answer. Her eyes were locked on the path where Marco had come from. Her body was still tense like she was bracing for a fight.

“Why are people so scared?” I asked. ” Fangvale isn’t even his territory.”

Della whipped her head toward me, eyes wide. She slapped her hand over my mouth before I could say another word.

“Don’t talk about him here,” she hissed under her breath. “Let’s go home. I’ll explain to you.”

Confused but trusting her, I followed her quietly out of Fangvale.

We arrived back at the Silverfang estate just as the sun began to sink behind the hills.

Della was silent until we closed the door behind us. Then she dropped her purse on the table and let out a long, tight breath. "I can't believe Alpha Nolan actually came to Fangvale."

"I still don't get it," I said, settling onto the couch. "Why did everyone leave? Why was everyone so scared?"

"Because it's a bad omen," she said. "That's why it's such a big deal he was there. Nolan never goes to public events. People call him the recluse Alpha. When he comes around, bad things are bound to happen. To know that he was at Fangvale, that's big news."

"But, I am not understanding."

Della nodded. "Blood Moon is second only to your father's Silverfang Pack in strength. He became Alpha when he was just twenty-one and turned his whole pack into a military force. No one crosses him."

I knew of Alpha Nolan. He was infamous for being ruthless. Any wolf that stood against him was cut down without mercy. He never attended the annual rituals led by my father. Alpha Nolan was the only Alpha of the ten to skip them; however, my father was never offended. He always said, "He's there when I need him, that's what counts."

"Yes, I understand all of this, but he shouldn't frighten the other packs," I argued.

Della sat beside me and folded her hands tightly. “There used to be eleven.”

I blinked. “I know that. It was absorbed into another pack.”

“No. My father told me that small pack was invaded by Blood Moon without warning. Alpha Nolan wiped them out and killed the Alpha himself. And your father did nothing. He didn’t even publicly reprimand Nolan,” Della explained.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

+25 Bonus

I felt my stomach drop. “When did this happen?”

“Of course, when you were with Jason.”

“Why...why didn’t my father do anything?”

Della shook her head. “Nobody knows. But some think your father tolerates Nolan because he’s too dangerous to provoke. Others think they share a secret. It has to be something big to keep them from turning on each other.”

I sat in stunned silence.

My father? The same man I'd always seen as the ultimate authority, the unchallenged Wolf King? Why hadn't he acted? Had Nolan become too strong, too dangerous?

For the past three years, while I was trapped under Shadowclaw's roof, I hadn't thought much about Silverfang. I hadn't needed to. It was another world I no longer belonged to. But now that I was back, I saw how little I really knew and how wrong I had been. I felt ashamed that I didn't keep up with what was going on.

I was still lost in thought when I heard the front door open.

A moment later, Solon stepped inside, surprised to see us. "Back already?" he asked. "How was Fangvale?"

"Chaotic," Della muttered, already heading to the kitchen for water.

He glanced at me. "Anyone interesting show up?"

I hesitated for a beat too long. "Alpha Nolan."

He froze mid-step. “What?”

“Well, we didn’t really see him. We heard him,” I added quickly. “His Beta made an appearance and basically told everyone to be quiet. Della dragged me off right away.”

Solon shoulders relaxed only slightly. “Good. That was a very smart move from Della. Talia, you need to stay away from anyone associated with the Blood Moon pack, especially Alpha Nolan.”

I frowned. “Why? Does he threaten Father’s rule?”

He looked me over carefully before replying. “You don’t need to worry about that. Our father won’t let Alpha Nolan just do what he wants. Just stay out of his orbit, Talia. You’ve been through enough.”

“But...”

“I mean it.”

Solon’s tone was firm. He never spoke to me like that unless it was serious. I nodded and said, “I’ll stay away.”

Solon left the room without another word, My mind was spinning. Nolan even had Solon on edge,

But that only made me more curious.

Who exactly was Alpha Nolan?

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CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Nolan's POV

Fangvale wasn't normally my kind of place. It was too loud, too many wolves. But Marco insisted. He said I needed a break from being the Alpha, that I had been cooped up too long,

He wasn't wrong.

I had become short-tempered. Even the smallest irritation sent me into a rage. My wolf seemed to be restless and always pacing, further annoying me. My pack was nervous around me, and I was one step away from tearing someone's throat out just for breathing wrong.

So, I came to Fangvale. I sat in the VIP room above the main courtyard, letting the noise drift up to me. Music pounded, water splashed, and laughter echoed off the stone walls. I hated to admit that it was calming me down a bit until a sudden breeze carried a scent through the open archway.

Roses.

A floral scent of sweet, wild roses. My wolf finally stopped pacing after months. Then he surged forward, howling in excitement: MATE!

I stood and went to the window. I scanned the pool below and found her instantly. She was, arguing with a man, an Alpha from the looks of his posture, and she was seconds away from shifting. Her power was curling at the edges of her skin, and that man was too stupid to back down.

‘How dare he anger our mate!’ my wolf snarled within me, and I growled unconsciously. The sound cracked through the air like a thunderclap. Everything stopped. Wolves stopped moving. The music was turned off.

Before I could mind link him, Marco reached out first. ‘I’ll handle it, Alpha.’

Marco was already on the lower level, intercepting the fight as the idiot Alpha seemed like he wanted to continue the argument. I watched the she-wolf carefully. She held herself with authority and didn’t back down from the Alpha which meant she was someone important.

Later, Marco returned to the VIP lounge as I watched my mate be led away by another she-wolf. My chest tightened as my wolf whined within me. He wanted me to bring her back.

“The woman with the violet eyes. Who is she?” I asked Marco without turning to look at him.

“I did some digging,” Marco replied. “She’s Princess Talia. The other is-”

“Not interested,” I remarked, “I didn’t expect there to be such low classed drama here.”

“Normally, there isn’t,” Marco said with a shrug. “There is bad blood between the two she-wolves I think. If things continue the way they are going, blood will be spilt.”

“Which pack does this Talia belong to?” I asked.

“Silverfang.”

That got my attention. I turned to look at Marco and before I could ask for her last name, Marco continued.

“Talia Carson, the daughter of the Alpha King,” Marco continued. “She returned not too long ago to rule with her brother, Prince Solon.”

I stared at him for a long second.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Talia Carson.

That explained the power I'd felt from her. The calm authority in her voice. The fire in her eyes. I'd heard of the Alpha King's daughter, of course—who hadn't? The missing princess who'd come back from the shadows.

And now, she was my mate.

I turned away from Marco, walking to the table to pour myself another glass of wine. My wolf stirred restlessly under my skin, snarling at me for not going after her.

I let out a bitter laugh. "Of all the wolves the Moon Goddess chose, why her?"

Marco gave me a questioning look. I downed the glass of wine before slamming it down onto the table. "That woman, Talia, she's my mate," I admitted.

Marco's eyes widened in surprise. "You're kidding!"

"Do I look like I'm kidding, Marco?" I growled.

Marco quickly composed himself and then suggested, "You should reject her, Alpha."

The mention of rejecting her made my wolf push forward in rage. I held him back and glared at Marco. "Be careful of your words, Marco," I warned.

"My apologies, Alpha. All that I mean is that she would complicate your plan," Marco clarified.

"I'm not rejecting her," I responded. "This bond could work in our favor."

I had waited years for the moment I could challenge the Alpha King. That man took everything from me. I trained, fought, and killed to claw back to power so I could one day return the favor. Then, the Moon Goddess binds me to her. It was the perfect opportunity to get close to the Alpha King and destroy Silverfang from the inside out.

'We have a mate now. We need to claim her,' my wolf snarled in protest. He didn't care about politics, legacy, or vengeance now that he knew we had a mate, but I wasn't a fool.

"I'm not claiming her," I said.

"Alpha, then, what..."

“Have the witches make a pendant,” I said. “Something strong enough to suppress the bond. I need to think clearly.”

Marco’s brow furrowed. “But, you just said you weren’t going to claim her.”

“I know what I said,” I snapped. “I will not be manipulated by fate or blood, not when I’ve waited this long for my revenge.”

Marco nodded. “Understood. I’ll get it done tonight.”

I poured myself more wine and drank down the bitter liquid.

‘You’re a coward for doing this,’ my wolf scolded me, ‘You should know better to play games with the Moon Goddess’ blessing.’

It was not cowardice to not acknowledge the bond. It was a strategy. I wouldn’t let some joke blind me to the truth: she was the Alpha King’s daughter. My enemy’s blood.

“Tomorrow,” I said coldly. “We will go to Silverfang.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Talia's POV

The day started quietly. I trained with the warriors in the early morning, pushing my body hard until the ache in my limbs drowned out the heaviness in my heart. Della observed, stopping me here and there to correct my form.

"You did great today," Della complimented me as she picked up the extra shears and began trimming the rose bush next to me.

"I don't feel like it," I muttered. "My arms feel like stone."

"It is ridiculous that Jason wouldn't let you train," Della said. "All pack members should be able to de

fend themselves. I don't know how you put up with his stupid rules for so long."

"I was doing what I thought was best," I said. "Now, I'm out of shape. I am sure the warriors are probably laughing at me right now."

"Oh, stop it! You're just a little rusty. You'll be back to peak fitness in no time," Della reassured me. "And I promise you; no one is laughing at you."

I nodded. I neglected so much while worrying about being the perfect Luna for Jason. All my sacrifices for him now felt like a waste of time.

"Even though we didn't really get to enjoy Fangvale, you look better," Della added.

I didn't respond. I knew what she meant, and I was happy that she couldn't see through my façade.

It was easier to pretend I was healing than explain that there was now an ache in my heart. Once the anger had faded, all I felt was sadness and regret. I couldn't help but wonder why the Moon Goddess would bond me with someone like Jason. What was the reason for this?

“What are you thinking about?” Della asked, noticing that I had gone quiet.

“It’s nothing,” I replied.

Della frowned and said, “I know you better than most, Talia. I know when you’re lying to me.”

“It’s not worth talking about, Della.”

“You’re thinking about him again, aren’t you?”

“No. Let’s go and trim the roses by my window. They’re getting out of control,” I said and walked over to the climbing roses.

“If you say so, but just know I’m here for you Talia,” Della stated.

“I know,” I muttered. “It’s just I...”

A voice cut me off, “Princess Talia!”

I turned around to see a young guard rushing up the path towards us. His eyes scanned the area, and he looked relieved when nothing seemed out of order.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“We’ve been looking all over for you, Princess,” he said, out of breath. “Do you have a block up? We’ve been trying to reach you.”

+25 Bonus

“Yes, I’m sorry,” I answered. I had forgotten to reopen the pack link since I had been back. As soon as I did, I could hear the frantic voices of the pack before I closed it. I looked at Della, who I could tell was probably trying to mindlink her father.

“Why is everyone panicking?” I asked, setting the shears down in the grass.

“Prince Solon ordered all staff and family members to return to the main wing immediately,” the guard explained.

“What’s happened?” I asked again. Was the pack under attack? That couldn’t be it as the emergency siren didn’t go off.

The guard hesitated and said, "A guest has arrived."

"Who?" I asked.

The guard only shook his head. "Prince Solon's orders were clear. You're to return to your room until further notice."

That was odd. Solon didn't keep secrets from me. I nodded and Della and I followed the guard back toward the house. I mindlinked her and asked, "Do you know who is here?"

"No, my father is not telling me anything either," Della responded. "He only told me to stay with you."

Della's father was our Beta. If he was withholding information, this was a very serious situation. I was beginning to doubt that this was actually a guest visiting. My unease only deepened when we reached the steps of the central palace and found guards stationed at the entrance. I needed answers and stepped forward.

"Sorry, Princess," one said, stepping in front of the door. "We've been instructed not to allow anyone inside without Solon's approval."

“Not even me?” I asked.

The guard looked pained. “Especially not you. I’m sorry, Princess. I will take any punishment you order for me, but I cannot allow you to enter.”

I shook my head and backed off. “No, that is okay. I will go to my room as instructed,” I said simply and began speed walking back to my room.

I reached out through our family bond. ‘Solon, what’s going on? Why am I being sent to my room like a pup?’ There was a pause. Then his voice came through. ‘A guest has arrived. Stay in your room for now.’

‘Who is it? Why can’t I greet this guest?’ I asked.

‘Stop worrying about this Talia. Father and I have this under control,’ Solon responded. Before I could respond, the link was cut.

He had blocked me.

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CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Talia's POV

I barely slept last night, tossing and turning as my mind was filled with questions. Who was the guest important enough to spook my brother and summon warriors suddenly? As soon as sunlight entered my room, I slipped out of bed, got dressed, and quickly exited my room without waking Della, who had crashed on the couch.

Outside, I wasted no time to mindlink Solon.

“Solon, what happened yesterday?” I blurbed it out as the link went through. My stomach twisted in knots as I was trying not to blurt out all the questions running through my mind at once.

“Alpha Nolan is here. He’s the guest,” Solon said in frustration.

My heart sank and I asked, “What did he want?” I couldn’t bring myself to ask the crucial question: are we going to war?

“He didn’t say,” Solon replied. “Anyways, we’re holding a banquet tonight. You will be attending too.”

“A banquet?” I asked in confusion.

I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was danger ahead and that’s what scared me. Alpha Nolan wasn’t acting like his usual self from what Della said. This felt like we were walking into a trap.

Solon sighed. “Nolan is dangerous and short-tempered. Just be cautious with him.”

That night, I dressed in a simple lavender gown that matched my eyes. Della curled my hair into soft waves and dusted my cheeks with a faint blush. She made light conversation, but I could see the slight tremble in her hand. Even she couldn't hide her worry.

"Are you ready?" Della asked as she handed me a pair of silver heels.

I took a breath. "I wish you were handing me a dagger instead, but yes, as ready as I'll ever be."

Della looped arms with me and said, "Let's go then."

The banquet hall was already bustling when we arrived. The long tables were adorned with embroidered runners in our pack colors and platters of roasted meats and fruits. Omegas moved between guests, topping off drinks and taking orders.

I could easily tell the Blood Moon pack members apart. It wasn't the fact that they were dressed in black with blood-red accents but they had a serious aura about them as if they were on guard.

"They're so serious," Della muttered.

“This could be the beginning of the war. They don’t know what to expect just like we don’t,” I responded.

Then the doors to the banquet hall opened.

Alpha Nolan strode in with Beta Marco just a step behind him. They were both dressed in black tailored suits, red silk details at the cuffs and collar. Nolan’s long black hair was pulled back in a low tie, emphasizing his sharp jaw and piercing eyes. He was tall and imposing.

His eyes swept over the gathered guests until they landed on me. For a heartbeat, our gazes locked. I was stiffened by his dominant and familiar aura. There was a flash of curiosity and something else in his eyes, but it was gone in an instant.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

+25 Bonus

I walked over to stand by my father’s side with Solon on his right. My father stood up from his seat at the head of the table to greet him and Alpha Nolan stopped only a few feet away.

“Welcome Alpha Nolan, Beta Marco,” my father said smoothly.

“Alpha King,” Nolan replied with a slight bow. “Thank you for your hospitality.”

“Silverfang is open to all visitors. But don’t mistake our courtesy for trust or weakness.” Father said.

Nolan’s lips twitched into what could almost be called a smile as he sat down. “Of course not.”

“To what do we owe this visit?” Solon asked, getting straight to the point as we sat back down.

Nolan picked up the wine glass at his seat, taking a sip before saying, “I’m here on business. Two of my warriors were killed in a rogue attack. One of them fled into Silverfang territory.”

“That’s not possible,” Solon said quickly. “Our borders are secure. No rogue would be able to make it past our warriors.”

Nolan raised his eyebrows at Solon’s quick response before chuckling. “Are you sure about that? I made it through just fine without your warriors noticing.”

I kept a neutral expression, but I was panicking. What did Nolan mean he entered our territory without our warriors noticing? How was that even possible?

“Did you come here to gloat Alpha Nolan? If not, get to the point or leave,” my father stated.

“Very well. I intend to conduct my own investigation and find the killer hiding in Silverfang territory,” Nolan explained as if he was discussing dessert options.

Solon bristled, his voice rising. “You don’t get to walk into Silverfang and start throwing accusations. This is our land, not some rogue’s den for you to comb through at will.”

Nolan slowly turned his attention to Solon. “And yet,” Nolan said, his tone almost bored, “the Alpha King failed to deliver results when I submitted a similar complaint years ago. Perhaps this time, if I walk the territory myself, I’ll get results.”

Solon’s wolf surged forward. His canines elongated slightly and his Alpha aura pulsed. His chair scraped against the floor as it was thrown back as he stood. “You dare to slander my father?” Solon demanded.

“I would do no such thing,” Nolan responded. “The Alpha King knows better than all of us what I am referring

to.”

‘Solon, calm down. He’s trying to bait you!’ I warned through our mindlink, panic tightening in my chest.

But Solon wasn’t listening. “This isn’t Blood Moon, Alpha Nolan. Watch your tone. Show some respect, or I swear

A thunderous roar cut him off. The chandeliers above shook from the force.

“Enough!” my father’s voice boomed across the hall with his Alpha command as he slammed his hands down on the table. “Solon.”

All anger that Solon had been feeling vanished as he turned to my father, dropping his head respectfully. “Yes, Alpha.”

“Escort your sister out. Now,” father commanded.

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CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Rudolf's POV

+25 Bonus

Nolan had changed. Age looked good on him. He was taller, looking like the spitting image of his father now. It was like staring into the past. He had his father's face but in a younger and taller build. The only thing that hadn't changed about him was the fury in his eyes. It was the same as the last time I'd seen him.

"We should speak privately," I said and motioned toward the guards.

The banquet hall cleared out quickly. Solon gave me a wary glance, but he obeyed with a short nod. It was only Nolan and I now.

I sat back down and folded my hands in front of me. "It's just the two of us now. You can be honest with me," I said quietly. "If you're in trouble, I'm willing to help."

"You have misunderstood me, Alpha King," Nolan said, taking a bite out of steak on his plate. "I'm not here asking for assistance."

“If this is a personal matter, I can lend warriors to...

“I am not here to ask for a handout,” Nolan interrupted. “I am here to find the rogue and take revenge. It is as simple as that.”

“Watch your tone, Alpha Nolan. Are you asking or telling me what you want?” I asked, eyes narrowing.

Nolan set down his fork deliberately, spine straightening as he locked eyes with me. A faint, sardonic sneer tugged at his lips, barely hidden beneath a polite facade.

“Alpha King,” he said smoothly, voice low but edged with challenge, “I care for every warrior in my pack. So I’m sure you won’t refuse my humble request to search for the rogue who killed one of my men. After all, I’m certain you understand the weight of responsibility.”

I stared at him in silence. Ever since the night of the incident, when I woke with my memories fractured and the news of his father’s death, I’d always suspected I’d failed Nolan in some way. Nolan never looked at me the same way after that.

Still, I couldn’t let guilt or old debts compromise my duty-not when the safety of my pack and territory hung in

the balance.

“I’ll allow it,” I said finally. “But remember, this is my land. You follow my rules-or you’ll face the consequences. I won’t tolerate you stirring trouble here.”

Nolan nodded, a cold smile curling on his lips-one that didn’t reach his eyes. “Of course. I wouldn’t dare.”

Talia’s POV

As soon as the banquet hall doors closed behind us, I whispered, “Solon, You can’t lose control like that again.”

“I just hate the way he was talking. He acted politely but he didn’t respect father at all, you saw it too,” Solon huffed.

“Do you think he’s telling the truth about the rogue?” I asked.

“No, I think it’s just a lame excuse he used to hide his bad intention, anyways, I won’t let him,” Solon responded.

‘Don’t worry. Here’s Silverfang, Nolan wouldn’t hurt the Alpha King,’ my wolf reassured me.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

+25 Bonus

I nodded and headed back to my residence.

I lay in bed staring at the ceiling trying to calm my mind but more and more questions kept popping up. Why was Alpha Nolan here, really? Was he telling the truth about the report?

“Ugh!” I groaned, leaning up and throwing my pillow across the room. “I give up!”

I grabbed my phone and decided to g****e something about Alpha Nolan, and suddenly my phone rang with a call.

Jason.

I stared at the name on the screen and groaned. I wanted to ignore it, but I knew he would just keep calling. I picked up and asked, "What do you want?"

"Didn't think you'd still be alive," Jason said, his voice smug. "With Alpha Nolan on Silverfang territory, I am sure Prince Solon is too busy to worry about a weak little omega like you."

"You know, for someone who claimed to be done with me, you seem to enjoy checking in on me. What's wrong with you? Is Viki not panning out to be the perfect Luna like you wanted?" I taunted him.

"You still have a smart mouth," Jason retorted.

"Leaving you has done wonders for me," I said.

There was a pause but then he chuckled. "Is that supposed to be funny? I don't understand why you're acting like this with me. We had so many good years together and you threw them away to be a playtoy for the Prince."

I sighed. "Jason, I'm not going to have this conversation with you again. Get to the point or hang up." 1

“You’re upset. Already trouble in paradise?” Jason mocked.

“Don’t test me, Jason,” I warned. “Tell me what you want or I’m hanging up.”

“I’m giving you a chance,” he said smoothly. “You don’t belong there. Come back to Shadowclaw. I’ll keep you safe. Once things go sideways, and they will, you’ll be the first one to die in the chaos. Nobody there is going to risk themselves for some discarded omega, especially not Prince Solon.”

I laughed, sharp and cold. “You know what? I’d rather die a discarded omega than waste another second on you. And Prince Solon? He’s a man you’ll never come close to matching.”

“You bitch-”

I slammed the phone down before he could finish. Seeing his furious face in my mind gave me a small, satisfying thrill.

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CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Jason's POV

+25 Bonus

The phone cracked under my grip with a crunch. Pieces of plastic scattered across the floor. I stared at the broken screen, seething. "That arrogant bitch," I growled. She had the nerve to laugh at me, ME, and then compare me to Prince Solon. That bastard didn't even want her. He was just using her to pass the time.

"She's still refusing to come back?" Viki asked, lounging across the silk sheets of my bed. One arm was folded under the head while the other was draped over her belly.

I nodded as I began to pace. “She hung up on me. Told me she would rather be Prince Solon’s discarded omega.”

Viki scoffed and sat up, tossing her legs over the side of the bed. “Wow. Didn’t expect her to grow a spine. I always thought she’d slither back eventually, begging for scraps. But I see now... she thinks she can climb.” Her eyes narrowed. “Is she really trying to become Silverfang’s Luna?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I sneered, turning to face her. “If Prince Solon made an omega his Luna, the entire kingdom would laugh at him. No Alpha in his right mind would crown a used, broken omega like her.”

“And yet here you are, furious, and pacing like a caged wolf, my Alpha” Viki smiled. “She’s not your problem anymore. You rejected her. Why are you even responding to her taunts? Doesn’t really scream indifference, Jason.”

“Whether I reject her or not, she’s still mine.” The words hissed out before I could stop them. The mate bond between Talia and I still scratched under my skin like a wound that wouldn’t heal.

I expected Viki to lash out, maybe throw something, but she didn’t. Instead, she tilted her head, brows raised, looking more intrigued than offended. “But you said she was weak.”

“she is,” I snapped. “But I refuse to allow an omega to think that she can reject me and get away with it. If she’s not with me, she can’t be with anyone else.”

Viki rose from the bed, her silk robe slipping open at the hem. She walked over slowly, hips swaying. She placed her hand on my chest, nails dragging faint lines across my skin.

“So, what’s the plan then?” she purred.

“I’m going to align myself with Nolan,” I responded.

Viki’s eyes widened. “Nolan? Alpha Nolan Watkins?” she asked.

“Yes. He’s powerful, brutal, and rumor has it he doesn’t respect the Alpha King. Once I rise through the ranks with him, no one, not even Solon, will be able to stop me,” I explained.

“And when you become Alpha King?” Viki asked, excitement flashing in her eyes.

“Solon will be the first to die,” I said coldly. “He stole what was mine, disrespected me, and made me look like a fool in front of the packs, I’ll return the favor tenfold.”

Viki stepped closer, chest to chest now. Her eyes glittered, hungry for chaos. “Since Talia refused to come back... What about your father? What will you tell him when he returns from training next week?”

I smirked. “I’ll tell him what he wants to hear. He never approved of the Moon Goddess pairing me with an omega in the first place. He said it was an embarrassment to the bloodline. I’ll bring you to meet him instead. Once he sees you’re carrying the Shadowclaw heir, he’ll forget all about Talia.”

Viki let out a light laugh. “Of course he will,” she said, stepping back. Her hands moved to the tie of her silk robe. ”

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

+25 Bonus

I’m everything she’s not. Loyal. Ambitious. You’re giving him exactly what he wants. And what if Talia regrets later?”

“She’ll be your personal maid. You can do whatever you want with her,” I told her and Viki grinned, her eyes flashing with hunger.

“I always know my Alpha loves me more, now let me please you alright?” Viki purred, stepping closer. “Let me take care of you, alright?”

Her eyes never left mine. I grabbed her waist and pulled her flush against me. I kissed her hard, claiming her mouth.

“Talía could never compare to you,” I said.

Viki lit up at my words, her hands already undoing my belt. She dropped to her knees, pulling my hard cock free of my pants. She stroked me slowly. “Say it again.”

“Talía’s nothing.”

Viki looked up at me with lust and pride in her eyes as she took me into her mouth.

I moaned, my fingers twisting in her hair as her head bobbed up and down. “Talía’s nothing. She can’t hold a candle to you.”

And I believed it. Viki wouldn’t just help me rise, but she’d help get rid of anyone who would stand in our way.

And Talía will regret ever turning her back on me.

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CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

Jason's POV

The morning my father returned from training, it was raining. It set the mood of my growing anticipation of meeting and explaining everything to him.

Viki and I waited for him in front of the steps of the packhouse. I wore a gray button down with black slacks. Viki beside me in an ocean blue gown that hugged her rounded belly. She insisted on showing off the baby bump, thinking that my father would respond positively to it.

A black limo with the Shadowclaw crest on the hood came into view and stopped in front of us. The driver got out and opened the passenger door. My father, Alpha Michael stepped out. His silver threaded cloak dragged behind him. Despite his age, he never stopped looking as formidable as he did in his youth. His aura still made lesser wolves drop their eyes in submission.

“Father,” I said, giving a slight nod. “Welcome back.”

His gaze fell on me, dropped to Viki’s stomach, and then returned to my face. The weight of his dominating aura rolled off him, and my wolf cowered within me.

“Well?” he asked. “Where is your little omega mate?”

I kept my back straight and my chin level, but I did not hold his gaze for long. “Talía’s no longer part of Shadowclaw. I rejected her and banished her from the pack.”

My father’s expression didn’t change. “And why is that?”

“She wasn’t worthy,” I explained. “She was an omega. I should have never accepted the mate bond from the start. She couldn’t carry my heir, so she was useless for our pack.”

I gestured to Viki with a smile. “Viki will be my new Luna. She is carrying the future heir of Shadowclaw.”

Father stared at me for a moment. I saw anger flash in his eyes before he walked past us. “My office. Now.”

He didn’t spare Viki a second glance.

I swallowed hard as bad feelings grabbed me.

Viki’s fingers tightened on my sleeve. “Is he upset? I thought he would be happy.” Her voice was nervous.

“Don’t worry about it. He is like this with everyone,” I lied.

“But he did not even acknowledge my pregnancy,” Viki pouted.

“He’s a complicated man, Viki,” I reassured her. “Everything is fine.”

“I’ll come with you and help you explain,” Viki suggested,

“No, it’s fine. I’ll go talk with him,” I told her, kissing her forehead. “You get out of this rain and rest.”

When I finally entered his office, my father’s hand moved so fast, I didn’t even see it coming. The slap echoed in the room. I could feel blood trickling from my split lip. I stumbled back, blood rushing to my ears.

“You arrogant fool,” he snarled. “You rejected your fated mate. You disrupted the Moon Goddess’s will because you thought with your dick instead of your head?”

My eyes widened in fear and confusion. “You never approved of her. Why are you angry now, Father?” I asked,

HAPTER TWENTY NINE

+25 Bonus

forcing my voice to stay even.

“Whether I approve of her or not doesn’t matter, you don’t spit in the face of the Moon Goddess. I thought you knew better than that!”

“I know what I’m doing, Father.”

“No, you don’t,” he snapped. “You had a fated mate, someone chosen by the Moon Goddess herself, and you banished her like garbage because you thought she’s barren?”

“She...she was weak too, I wasn’t going to waste time on a lost cause,” I stammered.

My father let out a bitter laugh. “You don’t even know what the bond meant, what power it could’ve brought to this pack.”

“She turned her back on us, on me, because she couldn’t handle Viki having my heir.” I added.

“No,” he said. “You pushed her out. You chose some power-hungry whore over the mate you were meant to protect. Now you’ve jeopardized the balance of the pack, the bond with the Moon Goddess, and the stability of our pack.”

My blood boiled. “We don’t need her. I’m aligning with Alpha Nolan. Together...”

His hand struck my face, sending me backwards. “You really think Nolan’s going to help you? He’s an insufferable bastard, but he does have lines he won’t cross. He won’t lift you up.”

“I’m not some naive pup,” I scoffed. “I’m still Alpha. I know how to play the game.”

“Then, play smarter because you’re losing right now.” He hissed.

“What do you mean?” I frowned, my heart pounding.

“Have you not heard what the other packs are saying about Shadowclaw? Shadowclaw is in decline because of the mess you made. We have pack members following Talia’s lead and joining other packs. I raised you to do what I couldn’t and that is to become the Alpha King, but instead, you’re playing house with a whore.”

“Don’t....don’t talk about Viki like that,” I mustered the courage to say.

“Or what? You’re in no place to make demands,” my father said. “You need to accept the fact that is what she is.”

I swallowed hard. I wanted to argue with him, but the fear in me kept my mouth shut.

My father stalked past me and poured himself a drink from his decanter. “You’re going to fix this damn mess. You’re going to bring Talia back.”

“You want me to make her Luna again?” I asked, stunned. “You always said she was nothing but an omega.”

He turned slowly, eyes like ice, “I don’t give a shit if you make her your Luna again or not. That girl held this pack together. Bring. Her. Back.”

“But Viki-”

His glass slammed against the table. “You think parading Viki around makes you a man? Makes you look powerful? That simpering brat can’t handle a conversation without bursting into tears, and you want her by your side in front of the council? Your true mate could command a room without saying a word-and she did. While you were at war for the Alpha King.”

My wolf surged under my skin, snarling to be let out. His anger overpowered his fear. I bit down on the rage, but

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

not before my father noticed.

“Don’t raise your hackles at me, son,” my father warned.

+25 Bonus

I felt bile rise in my throat as I remembered how he had beaten me into a pup in front of Talia before.

My father stepped closer. “You want to keep Viki? Fine. Marry her. But Talia stays. For the good of this pack. For its survival. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Father,” I muttered, jaw clenched so tight it ached.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY

Viki's POV

The wedding gown shimmered like diamonds in the light. I twirled in front of the mirror; the hem of the gown fluttering around my ankles as the maids clapped softly behind me. One of them murmured something about how radiant I looked.

I smiled when the younger maid added, “You look gorgeous, Luna.”

Damn right I did.

My fingers brushed over the pearl-studded bodice. The fabric had been imported in, stitched by a seamstress known only to the elite. Every bead, every thread had been selected to make one thing clear – I was born for this.

“Miss Viki, does the waist need tightening?” the other maid asked cautiously.

I slapped the maid across the face. She stumbled backwards and fell to the ground.

“I told you to stop calling me that,” I hissed. “It’s Luna now. Don’t make me repeat myself again.”

The maid held her cheek, trembling. “I’m sorry, Luna,” she stammered as she stood up.

“Go get me something to drink,” I ordered. The maid bowed before scurrying out of the room without another word.

I turned back to the mirror, resting a hand on my stomach. There was no child growing there, not yet. No one had dared question me. No one would. I had played my part flawlessly. The morning sickness, the paid off healer visits

the idiots believed it all.

Iwon.

I tricked them all and got what I wanted. I was Luna now. I grinned at the memory of Jason turning on Talia. Jason fell for all my tricks and didn’t even think to question me. He was such an easy fool to manipulate.

Talia, that pathetic omega had her chance. She was Luna for three years, and never could do anything right. She never deserved the title in the first place. I was raised, molded for this since I was a little girl.

I remembered one winter when I was ten. I had stolen a necklace that I wanted. My father found me. He didn’t say a word. He just pulled off his belt and whipped me until my legs bled. “A Luna doesn’t steal like some lowly omega. A Luna is graceful, controlled,” his voice boomed.

Everything I had endured, every cruel lesson, every bruise was for this.

And now Jason's father knew. He saw me, the daughter of the chief warrior, already carrying the heir, he'd have no choice but to accept me. He wouldn't care that Jason has cast aside Talia. He never wanted Talia to be the Luna to begin with.

A maid peeked in from the hall and reported to me. "Luna, Alpha Jason has returned."

I dismissed the maids with a flick of my hand. I made my way down the stairs, the heavy train dragging behind me. My heart beat faster with each step, but I masked the anticipation. I couldn't appear desperate in front of him.

I ran into Jason as he entered the foyer. I smiled at him, stretching my arms slightly so the dress would catch the light. "Well, what do you think? Do you like it?"

"Why do you have this on?" he asked in frustration.

CHAPTER THIRTY

+25 Bonus

I froze, but maintained my composure. “I thought with your father returning, and everything falling into place, it was time. The pack has started calling me Luna. Don’t you think it suits me?”

Jason looked me over, but he didn’t seem happy. He looked annoyed. I noticed the bruising on the side of his face. Something had happened between them and it wasn’t good.

Before I could ask what happened, Jason said, “Take it off now. You’ll wear it when the Luna ceremony is held.”

I forced a soft smile. “Of course. I just...couldn’t wait to see the look on your face.”

Jason walked past me and was on his way to our bedroom. I followed behind. “I thought we could look at the guests for the Luna ceremony. I think...”

“No.” Jason cut me off. “We’ll wait until Talia returns.”

I blinked. My smile dropped slightly. “I...what?”

“Your Luna ceremony will not happen until Talia returns,” Jason said firmly, turning around to face me. “You need to look at the big picture here. Shadowclaw’s reputation is in jeopardy. A proper Luna would understand this.”

His words felt like a slap to the face. My fists clenched at my sides. I forced a smile on my face. "Of course. That makes sense. I'll support whatever you decide," I finally said.

Jason nodded, then turned away like he was already bored. "Good. That's the behavior I expect from you moving forward. You are carrying my heir and will be the future Luna. You need to start acting like it."

I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from screaming. Who was he to tell me how to act? I kept the smile on my face.

"Understood, my Alpha," I said politely, bowing to him as he walked past. My smile quickly turned into a frown as Jason left me standing there in the hallway.

I marched back to the dressing room, spooking the maids cleaning, as I kicked the door open.. "Take it off me. NOW!" I snarled. They rushed to me and began undoing the dress.

I couldn't believe this. Bring Talia back? Was he out of his mind?

That would ruin everything! Talia was a mistake, a smear on Jason's reputation, a smear on the reputation of Shadowclaw.

If Talia returned, the elders would complete her with me. Worse, make her Luna again and then everything would be for nothing. I couldn't allow this.

Jason was impulsive, easy to sway when his pride was wounded. All I had to do was remind him of her betrayal, of her weakness, and how she didn't respect him as Alpha. He would get rid of her again. And if that didn't work, there were other ways.

Certain poison couldn't be traced. Accidents happen all the time.

If Talia thought she could walk back into this pack and steal what belonged to me, she'd soon realize how wrong she was.

This was my pack now.

And if I had to kill to protect it?

So be it.