Barren Luna 271

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY ONE

Talia's POV

I was forcing myself to eat my oatmeal when Della rushed into the dining room. The door slammed into the wall, causing me to jump.

"Della! You're going to put another hole in the wall," I scolded.

"Forget the wall. You have a letter from Alpha Colin. He personally sent a guard to deliver it," Della said as she walked over and offered the letter.

I took the letter from her and read it. Then, I read it twice. They had found Jason.

I jumped up, knocking over my glass spilling juice everywhere. "Woah! What did it say?" Della asked. I didn't answer her as I ran to my office and called Alpha Colin. As soon as he picked up, I blurted out, "Tell me it is true."

"Who is this? Talia?"

"Tell me you're certain that you found Jason," I repeated.

"I am certain," Colin replied. "My guards saw him at the border last night. He was wearing a disguise, but it was him. We confirmed his scent on the mask he was wearing."

Relief washed over me. It had been weeks and no news until now. I hated to admit that I felt glee at knowing he was caught, knowing that he would be put to death right after, but he deserved it. I gave him so many chances and each time he chose to do the wrong thing.

"Where is he now? Nolan and I will come retrieve him right now," I told him.

“We were unable to capture him,” Colin answered and like that, I was filled with dread and now anger.

“How did your guards allow him to get past?” I asked.

“Jason is still an Alpha, Talia, even while exiled,” Alpha Colin replied. I could hear the controlled anger in his voice. “He killed the ones who tried to stop him. They were good people, my people.”

“I am sorry, Colin. They will be avenged. I promise you,” I told him.

“There’s another issue. Jason is not hiding out in my territory. He fled into the forest and found a rogue camp there. My scouts found the campsite at dawn. There were no survivors,” Colin said.

“How bad was it?”

“It was a slaughter. He slaughtered all of them. Some of them look like they are surrendering or crawling away.”

“The death of his father must have made him lose his mind,’ my wolf said. I didn’t care. Jason had gone along with poisoning my father. He deserved to feel grief.

“He is unstable and out of control. We need to put a stop to him before he causes any more damage,” Colin continued.

“Do not go after him on your own, Colin,” I told him firmly. “For now, tighten your defenses. Post double guards at every entrance and pull your patrols in closer to the pack houses. Do not send anyone into that forest until we have more information. Avoid engaging Jason unless you are sure that you can capture him alive.”

“Understood. What are you going to do?”

“Nolan and I will send trackers into that forest. We will track him and build out a plan from there,” I explained.

“If anything changes, I will inform you,” Colin stated.

“Thank you, Colin,” I said and then hung up. I ran my hands through my hair as I tried to self-soothe. All I could think about

was what if Jason slipped away again or worse he found the Rogue King.

Nolan came in from the adjoining room carrying two cups of coffee. He set one in front of me. He looked at my face and set his own cup down without drinking from it.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Colin’s guards spotted Jason at the Moonbrook border last night,” I reported. “He came through in disguise and killed several guards to get inside.”

Nolan frowned. “Has he lost his mind?”

“Colin believes so. He ran from the border and entered the forest. Jason didn’t keep running. He slaughtered rogues. They found their bodies this morning,” I answered.

Nolan was quiet. He looked at the table, working through it. “No, he hasn’t lost his mind. Jason is too proud and vengeful for that. He is searching for the Rogue King.”

“That is what I think.”

“Jason probably wants to use the Rogue King like his father was to take control over packs and the position of Alpha King,” Nolan reasoned. “With Michael dead, the Rogue King has lost his pawn and he will want a new one.”

“Which means if Jason reaches him, then we won’t be tracking one person.”

“We will be preparing for war.”

I had reached the same conclusion but hearing it stated plainly made it more real. If Jason secured that alliance, we would not be dealing with regular rogues. It would be mag rogues. The situation was getting worse by the day.

“We have to stop him before that happens,” I urged.

“We will. Remember, we will Jason together. We’ll take it one step at a time.”

“How do you always know what to say to calm me down?” I asked.

“It’s my job to know,” Nolan said as he leaned down to kiss me. “Solon and I will go to the border and see if we can get the wall built faster and tighten the patrols.”

“I will go to the hospital,” I said.

“Are you not feeling well?” Nolan asked.

“Yes, I can sit around and do nothing while you manage security,” I replied. “Leslie is still working on an antidote, and I plan to help her in any way that I can.”

“Good. We are going to be okay, Talia,” Nolan said. He was halfway to the door when it opened from the other side.

The guard who was in the doorway was breathing hard. He had clearly sprinted all the way here and had not stomped to catch his breath until now.

“Goddess, what has happened now?” I groaned.

“Rogues,” the guard managed to say in between gasps. “Rogues have attacked.”

We were too late.

Jason had already found the Rogue King and made his move.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY TWO

Talia’s POV

“Go,” I told Nolan.

Nolan looked at me once and said, “Stay inside the palace walls until I send word.”

I nodded and said, “I will go to the hospital with Della, and we will see what Leslie needs.”

Nolan was out the door before I finished speaking and I heard him calling for Solon in the corridor.

I found Della in her room two doors down. She was already dressed and putting on armor. She had clearly heard the commotion.

“Don’t bother with that,” I told her. “We’re going to the hospital.”

“We’re not going to help them?” Della asked.

“No. They’ll handle it. We need to help Leslie, but first we need to get all the books on blood-based treatments and wolf healing we can find,” I explained.

“I know where they keep the older records and it is not in the library,” Della said. “Give me ten minutes.” She was back in eight

with four volumes.

We moved quickly through the palace and out toward the hospital. I could hear the border response clearly. There were shouts, guttural screams that made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end.

'Don't focus on it. Nolan and Solon will get everything under control,' my wolf said.

We arrived at the hospital to find Leslie already at my father's bedside. My father was asleep. "Come in. He's had a sedative. He won't be awake anytime soon," Leslie said and then, she noticed what we were carrying. "What did you find?"

"They are texts on using blood as a catalyst for healing," I said, setting the stack on the side table. "I need you to go through them."

Leslie picked up the first book and opened it. Della and I both took a book and began reading. After twenty minutes, it was Della who found it first. She had been working through the oldest of the four books, a volume with cracked binding and pages that had

gone brittle at the edges,

"Leslie, look at this!" Della said as she held the book out and pointed to a section near the bottom of the page. Leslie leaned over and read the page carefully. "This could work," she said.

"The blood of a direct descendant can act as a catalyst. It activates the patient's wolf when the wolf is too weakened to respond on its own. The wolf recognizes the bloodline and uses it as an anchor to pull itself back," Leslie read out loud.

"What are we waiting for? Let's do this," I said.

"It would not cure the poison on its own, but it could wake his wolf to support the healing process while the herbs work against the compound," Leslie continued.

“Has it been done before?” Della asked.

“There are three documented cases. All three showed improvement initially with two recovering fully. The third did not, but the circumstances were different. The patient had been infected longer.”

“How much longer?” I asked.

“Several months. Your father has been ill for only weeks, not months. This could work,” Leslie replied.

“Then let’s do it,” I said, offering my blood. “We don’t have time to wait for Solon.”

Leslie didn’t argue further. She prepped my arm and drew blood from my arm. Then, she mixed it with healing herbs, testing

the reaction on a small sample of my father’s blood.

The first attempt produced no reaction, and the blood stayed the odd bluish tinge. The second attempt turned the sample black and Leslie discarded it without comment. The third attempt caused the blood to return to the normal color.

“This is the right combination,” Leslie said. She quickly made the concoction and funneled into small vials before pouring some into a mug. The mixture was clear like water with the smell of lilacs.

“I cannot promise this will work,” Leslie stated. “I need you to understand that.”

“I know,” I said, taking the mug from her. I carried it back to my father. Leslie and Della stayed near the door to give us space.

My father was awake. He looked at me and frowned. “You look terrible. Are you alright? Have you not been sleeping?”

“I’m fine,” I told him as I sat down next to his bed.

“I mean it. You look like you should be in the bed next to mine.” My father studied my face for a moment. “When did you last

eat?”

“Father, I need you to drink this.”

He looked at the mug. Then he looked at my arm where Leslie had put a bandage over where the IV was. “You look like this because of what’s in this mug, right? What is it?” he asked.

“Just a new treatment,” I answered. “Leslie developed it today from an ancient remedy. It is designed to help your wolf respond to the healing herbs. Once you drink it, it will begin working. You are going to recover.”

“All right,” my father said without hesitation, and he took the mug from me.

“You’re going to drink it, just like that?” I asked in surprise.

“Of course, Talia. I know you always have my best interest at heart,” my father said. He drank the mixture and handed the empty mug back to me, forcing a weak smile.

“You know you cannot stay in Silverfang indefinitely, no matter what happens to me,” he said. “You have two packs to look after.”

“I am aware.”

“Bloodmoon needs its Luna and Alpha.”

“Bloodmoon has Walden. For now, Bloodmoon is fine.”

“Walden is a good warrior,” he said. “But he is not you.” He shifted slightly against the pillow. “Absence creates uncertainty and uncertainty creates problems.”

“Are you lecturing me on pack management from a hospital bed?”

“I am always lecturing you. You always need me to teach you things as you are my pup, no matter how old you get.”

I snorted. “Get better first and then, you can lecture me properly.”

He laughed weakly. “You are a capable Luna. I have always known that. I am so proud of you…”

I finally exhaled, watching his chest rise and fall in a steady rhythm as he spoke.

‘He’s going to make it,’ my wolf whispered.

But then, his frame went rigid. A violent tremor racked his chest and he began to choke, crimson bubbling past his lips to stain the sheets.

“Father!” I screamed, the world shattering around me.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY THREE

Talia’s POV

I lifted my father up and turned his head to allow the blood to rush out of his mouth to keep him choking. The convulsions stopped but he was still coughing.

“What is happening?!” I exclaimed.

“Talia, move!” Della called and snatched me out of the way as Leslie and healers rushed into the room. My father was unconscious before the coughing stopped. He was struggling to breathe as he was still choking on his blood that had now stained his lips black.

Leslie checked his pulse and her jaw tightened.

“Purification agent, now,” she ordered to the healer behind her. “We need to flush the compound out.”

The healer moved immediately. Leslie stepped back just far enough to give him room to work and stood with her arms crossed.

She did not look at me or Della.

When the healer stepped back Leslie examined my father again. She checked his pulse a second time and straightened slowly.

“Damn it,” Leslie growled.

“What? What is wrong? Tell me what is going on,” I begged.

“His body is not responding the way the book described. The compound was designed to recognize external blood intervention and use it as fuel rather than resist it. Instead of the descendant’s blood supporting the wolf, it gave the poison a new pathway to accelerate,” Leslie explained.

“What does that mean? Are you saying that I almost killed him?” I demanded.

“Whoever created the poison must have studied ancient texts. I never considered it,” Leslie admitted.

“This is not your fault,” Della said. “There is no way you could have known that.”

“How much time does he have?”

Leslie did not respond immediately. She would not meet my eye. It only made me more anxious.

“Leslie. How long?”

“A month at most.”

The words hit me hard. I stumbled backward and Della gripped my shoulders to keep me upright. I could see her mouth moving but I could not hear her. All I could hear was my own heartbeat.

“A month?” I repeated. Just like that, one mistake took two months off my father’s life span. I pressed the back of my hand against my mouth and breathed. In. Out. I focused on that until the roaring in my ears quieted enough that I could think.

“Then we find another way,” I finally said. “There has to be something we have not tried. Another compound, another approach, something we missed!”

“Talia, I think we need to begin preparing for what comes after.”

“What? I beg your pardon.”

“I have gone through everything available to me. I have tried every combination I know. I have contacted other healers and cross -referenced every text in three libraries. There is nothing I missed,” Leslie explained.

“You did not know about this remedy until today,” I argued.

“I am not saying this to hurt you. I am saying it because it is the truth and someone needs to say it,” Leslie pressed.

“I cannot believe you, Leslie. Are you telling me to plan for my father’s funeral? Are you telling me to give up now?” I questioned. I could hear my voice rising but I did not care.

“Talia, she did not mean it like that. She is just…”

“No, she meant it,” I snapped, cutting Della off. “Do not try to defend her. She wants me to give up on him.”

“I am only telling you what is true. It’s time!” Leslie shot back.

“No, Leslie, shut up!”

“Talia, calm down,” Della said as she placed a hand on my shoulder.

“You have to be reasonable about this, Talia,” Leslie stated.

“I do not accept it!” I snapped, shrugging Della’s hand off me. “Jason has the antidote. We know he has it. We find Jason, we get the antidote, and my father does not die. That has always been the plan!”

“And if Jason is not found in time?” Leslie asked. “What then?”

“Then we try something else. We try everything else. We do not just give up!”

“Stop!” Leslie snapped, causing the healers behind her to jump and shrink back. I felt her Luna aura, and I pushed back with my own. I was not backing down from this. I wasn’t going to give up on my father just because she wasn’t as great of a healer as she

claimed to be.

‘Calm down, Talia. You are going too far,’ my wolf urged but I pushed her down.

“Do you think you are the only one hurting right now? Everyone cares about him. Have you ever thought about what this is doing to me? Stop being selfish and act like a Luna. You know I am right,” Leslie said.

“This is just like you to give up,” I spat.

“Talia, that’s not fair,” Della gasped, trying to pull me back before I could push it further.

“You always ran away from your problems, but I am not like you,” I continued.

Leslie looked at me for a long moment. Her face was flushed with anger and for a moment she looked hurt. I expected her to argue back but she said quietly, “I have done everything I can do. I am sorry.”

She pushed past me, leaving a heavy silence in her wake. When Della reached out to touch my shoulder, I flinched away.

“Don’t,” I warned, my voice trembling. “Not right now.”

My knees finally buckled, the agony swallowing me whole as I slid to the floor. I didn’t even try to stop the tears this time. When Della wrapped her arms around me, I just let her. My eyes stayed locked on the door to my father’s room, my mind a frantic

scream.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY FOUR

Nolan’s POV

“That’s the last one,” Solon said as I snapped the rogue’s neck and his body collapsed to the ground.

I counted over a hundred in total by the time it was done. They had come in waves. The first wave hit before we had fully organized. The second arrived when we were already stretched thin.

Solon had taken the left flank. I had taken the right. We held both, but not without cost. Fifteen of Silverfang's warriors were severely wounded and five were dead.

"Where did they come from?" Solon asked.

"The Rogue King….Jason must've sent them," I answered.

"We need to check in on the other areas," Solon stated.

We found Marco and Derek near the southern gate. As Solon's Beta, Derek was directing two of his men to secure the gate latch where a rogue had damaged the mechanism during the fight. Marco was checking on the wounded warriors. He had a cut above his brow that had bled down the side of his face and dried there.

"Marco, Derek," I greeted.

"Good to see that you two are not injured," Marco stated.

"We are sending the wounded to the hospital and working on repairs as quickly as we can," Derek advised.

"Clear the bodies," Solon instructed. "I want the ground clean before nightfall and a full count of how many we faced."

"Understood," Marco confirmed.

Solon and I began walking down the length of the wall, making our way back to the hospital. The rogues had not been disorganized. They had a clear direction and target. Three sections of the city wall had taken hits that would require reconstruction before they could be considered secure again.

"They are deliberately targeting the construction," I added.

Solon stopped to assess a large hole in the wall and frowned. “At this rate the walls will not be complete before winter due to repairing the damage that has been done. And if more rogues attack, it will take longer.”

“I’ll send reinforcements. Construction crews and additional fighters. We can accelerate your build and strengthen the patrol rotations along the sections that have already been hit,” I suggested.

“What if they attack Bloodmoon?” Solon asked.

“I doubt it and even if they do, Bloodmoon is more secure than Silverfang right now. Our wall is complete and Walden has the border under control. We can spare the warriors for this,” I answered.

“How many can you spare?” Solon asked.

I waved him off. “Let me worry about that, Solon. I will have reinforcements here within three days.”

Solon nodded and said, “Thank you. You know, I would not have accepted that offer six months ago,” he said.

“And I would not have offered my help then.”

“I misread you, for a long time. I assumed the worst about you. I thought you were using Talia for political advantage. I thought your anger toward my father would make you unstable and that being near you would put her in danger.”

“You were not entirely wrong about the anger,” I admitted. I have been blinded by my rage that I had not thought things through. I had made things hard for everyone involved for such a long time. It was one of things I regretted.

“That doesn’t excuse my behavior,” Solon said and I turned to look at him, shocked by what he was saying. “I was too proud, hypocritical maybe.”

I didn't know what to say. I didn't expect to hear Solon admit this. I was fine with just letting bygones be bygones.

'We have fought at his side and protected each other. It only makes sense that he wants to clear the air,' my wolf advised. 'There may not be a chance to do it later.' That thought shook me. If we were heading to war, my wolf was right. There was a chance that one of us or both could perish before all was said and done.

"You have fought for this family at every step. You have stood beside Talia through everything she has faced since returning from Shadowclaw," Solon explained. "I am sorry for misjudging you."

"And I am sorry for assuming that the Alpha King was my father's murderer and intended to hurt him before. I know now that it was not him," I responded.

"Water under the bridge. You don't have to apologize," Solon said.

"Yes, I do. I had misplaced anger for years. Michael was responsible for my father's death. I killed him. I avenged my father and now I will do everything in my power to do what I could not back then for my father, which is to save yours," I told him.

Solon turned away to look at the wall before letting out a bitter laugh. "I would have liked to kill Michael with my own hands for all the pain and suffering he has caused, but you deserved that kill more than me." He looked back at me. "So, we will deal with Jason together."

Before I could respond the pain hit me square in the chest. I gripped my chest and groaned as I doubled over.

"Nolan? Nolan, are you okay?" Solon asked.

The pain had come out of nowhere. I had no chest wound, so there was no reason for it to be there. Another wave hit me and Solon had to keep me from falling.

‘Our mate…she’s in pain,’ my wolf whined.

Then, a second later, through the mate bond, Talia’s emotions hit me in a wave. I felt her grief. It was heavy, uncontrolled, and even brought me to tears. Beneath it, something worse. I felt chaotic and unstable as if I wanted to tear down everything around me including myself.

“It is Talia. Something is wrong with Talia!”

“Nolan, tell me what is going on,” Solon pressed as I was now able to stand on my own.

“Stay calm,” I ordered. “We need to get to the hospital right now.”

I said nothing else and ran.

Solon was right behind me.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY FIVE

Nolan’s POV

The pain and emotions faded as quickly as it came when we were only a foot away from the hospital. This bothered me more than actually feeling Talia’s pain. What happened?

‘She’s still alive. I can still feel her,’ my wolf reassured me, but I was still panicking.

Della was pacing in the waiting room. Nothing was torn apart or destroyed. There wasn’t the scent of blood in the air, so rogues hadn’t broken through our defenses. Why was Talia in so much pain?

When Della saw us, she walked to us. “What happened?” I asked before Della could speak.

Della swallowed, her voice tight. “We tried a new treatment but it failed. The King got worse. Leslie said there’s nothing more she can do, but Talia wouldn’t accept it. They argued. The healers had to sedate Talia before she completely broke down.”

“Where is she?” Solon asked.

“She is in room 4. She is physically stable, but she donated a lot of blood for Leslie’s treatment, and the breakdown took it out of her,” Della replied.

Soloh was already exiting the waiting room before Della finished talking. I was right behind him. We went to room 4 and carefully opened the door.

Talia was on the bed with a blanket pulled over her. Her face was pale and her face was wet from the tears she had been crying. Her breathing was shallow and uneven.

“I should have been the one here. She shouldn’t have had to deal with this alone,” Solon lamented.

“She’s going to be okay, Solon. I’ll stay with her,” I said. “Why don’t you check on Leslie? Whatever Talia said, it came from a place of distress.”

“Alright,” Solon said. He left without another word, closing the door quietly behind him.

I pulled a chair close to the bed and sat. Talia’s face tightened slightly even in sedation. Her lips moved. I leaned forward to hear what she was muttering.

“Do not leave, father,” she murmured. “Please. You can’t leave me…”

My heart twisted. She was dreaming about her father and begging him to stay. In some ways, I felt that it was merciful that my father died as quickly as he did. Seeing your father deteriorate and there was nothing you can do about it was something I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy.

“Lie with her,” my wolf urged. “Use the bond to soothe her.”

I moved carefully and lay down beside her on the narrow bed. I pulled her against me and reached for her through the mate bond.

Talia tensed at first, but slowly relaxed. The tightness in her face eased gradually. After a few minutes, Talia seemed to be in a calm and deep sleep.

I began to nod off when I was startled awake when Talia screamed, “Don’t go!”

“Talia, it’s okay. I’m here,” I said, pulling her closer to me.

Talia began to sob as she pressed her face against my chest. I held her and waited until she was ready to speak. I could teel the turmoil through the mate bond.

“He only has a month,” Talia finally said, breaking the silence. Her voice trembled as she was forcing back the sobs. “We tried something new and it made it worse. Now he only has a month.”

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“It is! A month… It is not enough time.”

Talia pulled back enough to look at me. Her eyes were red and her face was still pale.

“Library! We need to go to the library. There must be methods to save my father,” she said as she started to sit up.

“Talia, you need to rest.”

Talia barely got to her feet before she swayed and almost crashed into the nightstand. I caught her before she fell outright and held her by the shoulders.

“I’m alright. I’m alright, Nolan,” Talia said. “I just…I need to get to the library.”

“No, you’re going to rest,” I said firmly.

Talia glared at me and growled, “Don’t try to control me.”

I could feel her anger rise through the mate bond. Normally, I would back down, but not this time. Talia was acting reckless and I needed to reign her in for her own good.

“I am doing what is best for you as your mate and Alpha,” I responded.

Talia opened her mouth to argue, but I continued. “Due to the rogue attack, you have not eaten or drank anything all day. On top of that, you gave too much blood. You are not going anywhere right now.”

“My father…”

“Your father needs you to be functional,” I pressed. “You are not functional right now. You cannot help him if you collapse on us.”

I kept my hands on her shoulders until she stopped trying to pull away. “Eat something. Rest for one hour. Then we will go to the library together.”

“I told you I don’t need to rest. I am not a child!”

“If you keep arguing with me, we can do this the hard way. I’ll tie you to the bed and you don’t do anything for the rest of the day.”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me. I’m sure Solon would be okay with it.”

Talia's brow furrowed and then her face relaxed. "An hour," she relented.

"An hour," I confirmed.

Talia let me settle her back against the pillows. I requested one of the omegas to bring fresh bread and soup to her room. Talia ate slowly even though from her grimaces, I could tell she didn't want to sleep.

When she was done with the soup, Solon knocked on the door and then entered the room. Leslie was right behind him with her arms crossed over her chest.

"I don't know what happened between you two, but you need to sort it out. I can't have my mate and my sister angry with each other," Solon stated.

"I know," Talia said awkwardly, which caused Leslie to look at her. "Leslie, what I said earlier, I did not mean it. I am sorry. I took my frustration out on you, and I shouldn't have done that."

Leslie dropped her arms and walked over to sit in the chair next to Talia's bed.

"I am sorry too," Leslie replied. "I was… too harsh. I just should have said it better."

Talia nodded. I could tell she was about to start crying and Leslie gave her tissue. "Stop crying. There's no need for that now."

"What do you mean?" Talia asked.

"I believe I have found a solution," Leslie announced.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY SIX

Talia's POV

“What do you mean?” I asked as I sat up even more.

I couldn’t help but feel hopeful. Leslie had resigned herself to giving up, but she was now saying she found a solution. That means she is very confident it would work. I knew I shouldn’t get my hopes up too much, but I couldn’t help myself.

“No discussion until you finish all of your food,” Solon interjected before Leslie could respond.

I stared at the empty bowl on the tray and the half-eaten roll. “Are you serious?”

“Yes, eat the rest of that roll and then we will continue,” Solon replied.

I frowned and quickly shoved the roll into my mouth. I nearly choked as I tried to eat it as fast as possible. Nolan coughed, trying to hide a laugh. He handed me a glass of water which I quickly drank. I placed the glass down on the tray and said, “Okay, done, Leslie what do you mean you have a solution?”

“Don’t get excited yet,” Leslie warned. “I want to be clear about what this is. I cannot cure your father. I can only buy time.”

I frowned. “But you just said you had a solution.”

“And I do. What I propose is to put your father into a dormant state,” Leslie said.

“Dormant state? What do you mean?” I asked. “Like keeping him in a coma?”

“Not quite. Think more…”

“Before we get to dormancy, are there herbs that could prolong his life more directly? Give him more time without putting him under?” Nolan asked, cutting Leslie off.

Leslie shook her head. “His body has built a resistance to those treatments. They are no longer effective at any dose I can safely administer.”

“How does putting him in a dormant state help him? The poison would still be spreading,” I said.

“I am not talking about slowing the poison or buying time in the ordinary sense. I am talking about putting him in full suspension,” Leslie explained.

“Full suspension?” Solon repeated. “You are talking about putting him into a sleep he cannot wake from on his own.”

“Correct. His heart rate drops to the minimum needed to sustain life and his wolf goes quiet. He will not be conscious, he will not age, and he will not deteriorate further. He will remain exactly as he is right now until we have what we need to cure him. And when we do cure him, we will be treating the poison at this stage, not at whatever stage it would have reached if we had left him conscious,” Leslie explained.

This felt risky. I had never heard of something like this before. I had so many questions. What would happen if he was harmed while in this state? Was she sure he would stay in this dormant state?

Feeling my trepidation through the mate bond, Nolan asked, “So, what happens when we get the antidote?”

“We administer the awakening potion,” Leslie replied. “He comes out of dormancy and we treat him immediately.”

No one spoke as we were all thinking this over. This was a better alternative than just watching him die while trying to get to Jason. However, I could not help but think about what would happen if we did not get the antidote.

‘We can’t worry about that now,’ my wolf said, interrupting my train of thought. ‘Even if he stays dormant for years, it is better than losing him in a month.’

“How do we do this?” I asked, breaking the silence.

“Shouldn’t we talk this out a little more?” Solon asked.

“What is there to talk about? It’s this or try to get to Jason within a month. Jason already has the backing of the Rogue King. We are literally running out of time and options. If you have a better idea, Solon, I am open to it. If not, let’s go with this,” I argued.

Solon’s brow furrowed as he was deep in thought. He rubbed his temples and said, “Fine. Leslie, how does this work?”

“Lonefur pack has what we need,” Leslie replied.

Solon’s eyes went to the Lonefur ember pendant around her neck. “Right! You said the ember has the ability to heal. Why didn’t we think of that before?”

“No, the ember would not produce the right effect for your father and using it incorrectly could cause harm,” Leslie said. “What we need also comes from Lonefur, but it is a plant.”

“What kind of plant? I am sure we can get it here,” I said.

“You won’t be able to get this plant just anywhere,” Leslie continued. “The Frostmoon vine only grows in Lonefur’s territory. It specifically needs the cold of that region to work.”

“How do you know it works? What if it is like the remedy we just tried?” Della questioned and I nodded. She made a good point. We could run into the same issue or worse kill my father if mistakes were made.

“This is different. This has been done multiple times by Lonefur’s first Alpha during a war with rogues that threatened to wipe out Lonefur’s bloodline entirely. The first Alpha of Lonefur had young heirs who were not old enough to fight. He could not protect them and wage war at the same time, so he used the vine to put them into dormancy and kept them suspended until the war was over. When he woke them, they were exactly as they had been before going to sleep.”

“That’s great but if the plant only grows in Lonefur territory and dies if moved outside of the territory due to the temperature change, how are we expected to get it here?” Nolan pressed.

“A potion can be made from it and transported in sealed containers,” Leslie answered. “Two potions. One for dormancy. One for awakening. They will remain viable for several weeks if stored correctly at a low temperature.”

I was already reaching for the mind link before she finished speaking. “I need to contact Alpha Landon right now,” I said.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY SEVEN

Talia’s POV

“No need,” Leslie announced. “I already contacted Alpha Landon. I knew that if you agreed there would be no benefit to waiting even a single day. Landon responded within the hour. He had the potions prepared and sealed by nightfall and his warriors departed before dawn.”

“When are they leaving?” I asked.

“They are enroute now. They left Lonefur territory this morning,” Leslie answered with a smile. Solon pulled her into a hug and kissed her, causing her to blush.

I let out a sigh of relief and fell back on the pillows. “Leslie, thank you.”

“No need. This is my way of fixing what I did,” Leslie replied.

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“I should not have spoken about preparing for a funeral while you were in sorrow. You had just watched something we both hoped would work, make things worse instead,” Leslie continued. “As a healer, I should have acknowledged what you were going through instead of allowing my own frustrations and pride take over. I am sorry.”

“You were telling me what you believed to be true,” I replied. “I know that. And I should not have said what I said to you in response. I took things too far.”

“We were both not at our best,” Leslie agreed. “Let us leave it there and move forward.”

“See this is how you handle conflict,” Della added and then pointed at Nolan and Solon. “Unlike you too. It almost took near death situations before you two could have a somewhat decent conversation.”

“Our situation was more complicated,” Solon said.

“Exactly,” Nolan added.

“Oh Goddess, they are even backing each other up. Talia, what have you done?” Della said in fake horror.

I couldn’t help but laugh. I laughed so hard my sides hurt. Della smirked, pleased that she could lift my mood.

“How long is the journey from Lonefur?” Nolan asked.

“At least three days,” Leslie answered. “Lonefur is far. The warriors are traveling as quickly as they can with the potions, but the potions need to be kept stable. They cannot be reckless or they will have to return to get replacements.”

“Then, we will keep ourselves busy while we wait,” I said and everyone nodded.

Nolan put his hand on the back of my neck. “And you will rest. You won’t be worrying about anything but getting your strength back,” he urged quietly.

I did not argue. I lay back against the pillow. Nolan stayed beside me and I was asleep within minutes.

The next morning, I arrived at my father's room before Leslie and sat with him for an hour. He had not woken up, but he wasn't getting any worse. That was a small comfort.

Nolan came to find me when I had been there for about twenty minutes. He did not speak when he came in. He sat beside me and took my hand. We sat like that for a long time without speaking.

"We are going to get him through this," Nolan assured me.

"I know you don't have to keep telling me that," I said.

"I'll keep telling you that until I stop feeling you second guess," Nolan said.

"Damn mate bond," I muttered and Nolan chuckled.

That evening Nolan and I sat in our office with the tracker reports spread across his desk. We went through each one carefully. The northwest forest had yielded nothing conclusive. There were no confirmed sightings of Jason. It was as if he vanished.

'We will find him,' my wolf reassured me. 'We will make him pay.'

On the second morning I arrived at my father's room. I pulled the chair close to his bed and took his hand. He still looked the same as before.

"I don't know if you can hear me, but I wanted to let you know that we found a way to buy you time," I told him. "Leslie found out about a vine that grows only in Lonefur territory. I'm sure you know about it. You know everything."

I expected him to respond, to tell me about the first Alpha of Lonefur, but there was only the soft beeping of the machines connected to him. I bit back the tears and continued talking.

“Leslie is going to use a potion made from the vine to put you into dormancy so the poison cannot advance while we find Jason. Once we have the antidote, we’re going to wake you up and cure you.”

On the third morning, I was becoming increasingly anxious. My father should have woken up by now, but he was still unconscious and Alpha Landon’s warriors still weren’t here.

‘This is the third day. They should be here today. Be patient,’ my wolf urged.

‘How can you stay so calm?’ I asked.

‘Because I trust that the Moon Goddess will not allow our father to die like this,’ my wolf replied.

By late afternoon, I was at the window watching the road below while pacing in the office. I had chewed off all my nails, and my hair was a mess from me running my hands through it nervously.

There was a knock at my door and Leslie entered. She looked at me and said, “Stressing yourself out like this isn’t going to make them arrive any sooner.”

“Today is the third day. Why aren’t they here yet?” I demanded.

“Alpha Landon confirmed this morning that they should arrive today,” Leslie reported.

“What if something happened to them on the road?”

“You have to stop thinking of the worst-case scenarios,” Leslie scolded.

“But…”

“No buts. Alpha Landon’s warriors are experienced, and they were selected specifically for this mission,” Leslie stated. “They would not send anyone careless with something this important. Travel estimates are

not guaranteed. They are moving carefully to keep the potions stable. Rushing and losing them would be far worse than arriving a few hours late."

Leslie was right. I did not argue with her further. I kept watching the road.

An hour later Della knocked and came in. "The Lonefur warriors have arrived," she reported.

I started to stand with hope and then I looked at her face properly.

She was not smiling. Her expression was careful and contained. My stomach dropped.

"What is wrong?" I asked.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY EIGHT

Talia's POV

Della still did not respond. It was as if she was trying to figure out what she wanted to say, which was unlike her

"Just tell me what is going on," I urged.

"I think it will be easier if I show you," Della finally replied.

"I do not like the sound of that at all," Leslie muttered as we followed her out of the office.

I expected Della to lead us to the entrance where arriving warriors would normally be received, but when I realized she was leading us out of the pack house and to the hospital, anxiety began to build in my chest.

'Do not panic. They could have run into a complication,' my wolf offered

If that were the case, Della would have just said that,' I answered. 'She is choosing her words carefully. When has Della ever done that? This is far worse than a complication.'

Before my wolf could respond, we were hit with the scent of blood in the hospital corridor. My wolf stiffened within me. All her reassurances left as quickly as the fresh air in the hospital. Someone had been brought in bleeding profusely.

I could hear Nolan, Solon, and Marco talking before we even reached the waiting room.

"This is a disaster," Solon growled. "What is taking so long?"

"You saw the state he was in. Let the doctors do his job. If you keep interrupting him, it'll only take longer," Nolan scolded

"And where are the rest of his team?" Solon demanded. "Did Alpha Landon only send six warriors? That is not nearly enough."

"Perhaps they got separated," Marco offered.

"Stop being so optimistic. This situation is bad and you should be able to see that clearly," Solon snapped.

"What is bad?" I asked as I pushed the door open to the waiting room.

Nolan and Solon stiffened the moment they saw me. Marco's expression fell. The scent of blood was strongest here. Mixed with pain and anger, it created a disgusting smell. I grimaced.

Solon glared at Della. "I told you not to tell her until we knew everything," he snapped

“I never agreed to that. Talia is my Luna and it is my job to keep her in the loop,” Della shot back. “Everyone not being in the loop is how miscommunication and mistakes happen. And we cannot afford to make any more mistakes. “

“We weren’t going to exclude her from this. We wanted to get all the facts before we told her what was going on,” Nolan explained

Before I could respond, the doctor entered the waiting room.

“How is the patient?” Solon asked.

“He is stable, but he will not be awake anytime soon,” the doctor answered “Follow the

We followed the doctor to the hospital room. On the bed lay a severely wounded man. He was covered with bandage, and his right eye was stitched closed. He looked like he got into a fight with a bear and lost

* administered the four treatment as instructed Thankfully, he was ever infected to begin with,” the doctor explain “He is recovering slowly, but he’ll recover. He suffered to the head, so there’s no telling when he will wake up

***Thank you, doctor Leave us.” Salut ordered. The doctor wooded as

“Please don’t tell me that is who I think it is,” I said.

“He is one of the warriors Alpha Landon sent,” Nolan explained. “When he was still conscious, he told us he and five others were ambushed near the Silverfang border yesterday. I sent Marco and a small team to meet them because it was taking far too long. Marco found him in the tree line barely alive. The others were already gone.”

“This had to be Jason,” Solon concluded. “He must have been waiting with rogues to ambush them.”

My mind was not on Jason. All I could think about was the Frostmoon potion. Had they managed to hide it before the attack? Was there any chance it had survived the ambush somewhere along that road?

“We did not locate the Frostmoon potion or any sealed package, Luna Talia,” Marco reported as if he knew what I was going to ask. “When I questioned him, he was not making complete sentences.”

“I will give him some of my potions to speed up the healing process,” Leslie added. “Give me ten minutes.” She left the room quickly.

I dropped into a chair near the window and pressed my hands over my face. Nolan sat beside me and began working the tension out of my shoulders with both hands. I leaned into his touch.

“We should discuss what we do if the potion cannot be recovered,” Della suggested. “Do we attempt the journey to Lonefur ourselves to bring back the vine?”

“That is not going to work. I already said the plant will not survive the transport,” Leslie answered as she entered the room. She walked over the warrior and began setting up his IV.

“We would help administer the dormancy potion there,” Marco suggested.

“That is not an option,” I countered.

“And why not? Jason wouldn’t dare attack us if we were in a big enough envoy,” Solon retorted.

“One: We don’t know how many rogues that Jason has at his disposal. Two: father’s condition is unstable. Moving him could accelerate the poison,” I pointed out.

“Then, our only option is to wait for Alpha Landon to send us another set of potions,” Nolan stated.

Before I could respond, a sharp cough came from across the room. The warrior was awake. He pushed himself uprigh and barred his fangs at Leslie.

“Easy. Easy now. I’m not going to hurt you,” Leslie urged.

The warrior looked around the room wildly. He seemed to recognize Nolan and Solon and started to calm down. His bre slowed slightly but he still looked scared.

“Can you tell us your name?”

“Donald,” he said, his voice hoarse and strained.

“Ok, Donald. I’m Healer Leslie. You are safe in Silvefang now. Can you tell us what happened to you?*

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & SEVENTY NINE

Talia’s POV

“We were ambushed by rogues,” Donald managed to say after a long pause.

“There were dozens… We had no time to prepare. They killed two of us before encircling us,” Donald replied, his voice breaking on the last few words. Leslie offered him water. He drank it, cleared his throat, and continued. “It was as if they knew we would be there. Their leader practically told us so.”

“Tell us about the leader,” Nolan said.

“He was an Alpha for sure. He gave us an ultimatum: hand over the package or die. He called himself Jason,” Donald said.

Anger moved through me in a wave. Solon snarled and punched a hole into the wall. This meant one or two things. Either Jason had another spy within Silverfang or Jason was camping out watching us which meant getting potion replacements was out of the question.

“What happened to the potions?” Leslie asked.

“When we refused, my friend…he…” Donald stopped. He frowned and his eyes began to tear up as he was reliving what

happened.

4

“It’s okay. Take your time,” Leslie cooed as she rubbed his back.

“He made an opening for me. Our mission was to get the potions to Silverfang,” Donald continued. “I didn’t make it. Jason took it from me. Before he ordered the rogues to finish me off, he put something into my pack.”

Leslie went into the blood covered bag, sitting on the floor. She searched through it before pulling out a letter. There on the back of it was my name written on it.

I immediately stood up and took the letter from Leslie. I opened it, scanned it briefly and knew the handwriting immediately. It was from Jason.

“What does it say?” Solon asked.

“Talia, my father spent years designing the poison that is killing yours. He built it without a cure by design. I now hold ti Frostmoon Vine potion in existence. If you want it, you must agree to my terms and they are non-negotiable. Come al Fangvale tomorrow morning at ten. No guards. No warriors. Just you. If you bring anyone, if you are followed at any p road, I will destroy the potion.”

Jason

“It is a trap,” Solon declared the moment I finished.

“Obviously,” Nolan answered. He moved to stand in front of me and took the letter from my hands. “I know what you’re thinking, and you are not going anywhere ”

“He has the potion,” I argued. “If I do not go, my father will die soon.

“That is not true,” Leslie interjected. “We can get Alpha Landon to create another”

“We don’t have time to watt. I have to go!”

“If you go alone you could die.” Nolan said “Jason has nothing to lose at this point. Do not repeat past mistakes.

“What happened with Jason before is not what is happening now,” I shot bak offended that Nolan would even bring this ap Jason is still obsessed with me and that is the ortly leverage we have I intend to waw it

*Talia.” Delle started

“Talia, just be patient. We will contact Alpha Landon,” Solon urged, cutting across him. “We request another set of potions and we wait.”

“Are you not listening to me? Ok, we get another set of potions and what? We just wait for Jason to ambush the next team? We are wasting precious time that we don’t have arguing about this,” I said.

“You can’t just walk into a trap like this. Nolan killed his father. You don’t know if he is still obsessed. He could kill you too,” Solon countered.

“How are you not on my side with this, Solon? Tell me honestly. If I were the one standing in your way right now, would you listen to me? Would you let anyone stop you?” I questioned.

Before Solon could respond, Nolan interrupted. “Enough. You are not going. That is the end of it.”

“You do not have the authority to allow or disallow anything,” I replied. “I am the princess of Silverfang. This is my father. This is my pack and my responsibility.”

“And you are the Lama of Bloodmoon. You have a responsibility to our pack to come back alive,” Nolan shot back.

“If the situation were reversed and it was your father lying in that bed, Nolan, you would not stand here and listen to anyone telling you not to go. You know I’m right!”

“Don’t make me Alpha command you to stay put, Talia.”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“I will not let you be reckless. I made your father a promise that I intend to keep.”

Nolan held my gaze. I could feel his Alpha aura flaring and knew that he was serious. My wolf paced within me and I closed my eyes, taking a calming breath.

“I need some fresh air,” I finally said.

I pushed past Nolan. He tried to catch my hand. I jerked away from him. “Talia, don’t storm out like this,” he pleaded.

I ignored him, slamming the door open. I ran out of the hospital room, out of the hospital, and to the tree line. I pulled my clothes off and shifted.

I ran until there was nothing around me but trees and the sound of my own paws on the ground stopped in a clearing and stood there in the dark with my chest heaving.

“You overreacted,’ my wolf said.

‘I did not. He was going to command us to stay like we are a coward. Of all people he should understa

‘He does, but he is scared. He almost lost us twice. He does not want to fail us again.”

‘I know,’ I sighed. ‘But I was not wrong about this. There is no version of this where I do not go to Fangvale

“Then, talk this out with our mate. Come up with a plan. Do not keep running like a spoiled pup throwing 4 tantrum urged

began to burn, I

“Fangvale is close to Silverfang. And we’re stronger than before. I’d try to negotiate with lason, see it can get things ander control,” I suggested

‘Now, tell our mate about your plan, not just me, my wolf said

okay

“But next time do not storm out of the room I you do not have has aber. You are better than that Nuss let’s go back und persuade linn

I conceded, pouting.

turned, I found Noniane Leslie talking in the corner of the room while Donald slept. The moment they hey saw me, they expressions tight and mean, like they’d been caught in the middle of something.

CHAPTER TWO HUNDRED & EIGHTY

Talia’s POV

“It was nothing,” Leslie said. She said it too quickly and she was not meeting my eyes. I looked at Nolan, but he met my gaze and I did not feel his emotions fluctuating through the mate bond.

“Actually, I have something to say,” Nolan said. Leslie looked sharply at him.

“Nolan, think about what we talked about,” she said firmly but Nolan waved her off.

“I support you going to meet Jason tomorrow,” Nolan stated.

I had not expected that, especially after our argument.

“You do?” I muttered, narrowing my eyes in suspicion.

“Yes. I should have never threatened to command you, Talia. You were one of the best things that have happened to me in a long time. I was, and am, afraid of losing you. I want to keep you home and safe,” Nolan explained. “But you are Silverfang’s princess. It is your responsibility to think of Silverfang first before your own safety. I have seen what you are capable of. I trust you to come back.”

I had not expected such honesty from him, especially not in front of Leslie. His vulnerability right now was unsettling. My wolf immediately pushed forward, annoyed by my shock.

‘He is our mate. He should be vulnerable with us. Who cares who is around? You keep forgetting how hard our mate’s life was before us. He has lost his father and now he has us. Make up with our mate or I refuse to talk to you,’ my wolf scolded.

“You are not going to lose me,” I finally said. “I am not going to Fangvale to die. I am going to get my father’s medicine and I am coming home. I promise you that.”

Nolan nodded once and said nothing further. His brow was still furrowed but he had said everything he needed to say.

“Is Solon angry with me?” I asked Leslie.

“No, he feels guilty that you have to do this,” Leslie replied with a shrug.

“Guilty? None of this is his fault,” I said.

“He knows that, but you know how he is. He is the Prince of Silverfang and the future Alpha King that he cannot protect his sister,” Leslie explained. “He believes he should be the one putting h Jason.”

“Again, none of this is Solon’s fault. Jason’s hatred toward me started when I ended our bond and f This meeting was always going to happen in some form. Solon could not have stopped it, and he shou about this. Will you explain that to him? I do not think he will hear it from me right now.”

“‘1 will,” Leslie agreed. Then she reached into her medical bag and pulled out a dagger. The blade was short an The hilt was engraved with a name I recognized the moment I saw it

“That is Solon’s dagger. Why do you have it?” I asked. Solon always had the dagger on him. It was a gift our mother ha made for him before she died.

“He wanted you to carry it,” Leslie explained. “He said it would ease his mind knowing you had something of hus with wou f Fangvale”

“Thank him for the,

I said as I took the dagger from her. “Teli baru I will being it back to his

Leslie nodded and left. Nolan walked over and picked me op. He carried out of the other and retour bademark.

“Nolan, put me down. I can walk, I said, but

bed.

“Do not run away like that again,” Nolan said. “You made my worry but I wanted to give you space.”

“I promise I will not do that again. My wolf would but allow it anyway,” I said, chuckling lightly. Nolan still looked conflicted and had not moved to get into bed with me. “Wiatike really wrong, Nolan?”

He did not answer right away. The pause stretchiedlonger than it should have for a simple question, and I watched him choose his words with more care than the moment seemed to require.

“I am sorry for not trying to understand were wou were coming from,” he finally answered.

“You don’t have to keep apologizing to me, Wolau. I know your heart was in the right place. Thank you for trusting me. Not every Alpha would.”

“You are not every Luna,” he said.

Nolan was still holding something Hands could tell from how rigid he was standing. I had seen him like this before but not quite like this.

“What are you not telling me?” stort

“Nothing,” he answered as liedegan to take his clothes off. “Sleep.”

“I am too wound up to sleep,” said as I reached for him. “I need you.”

“You need rest, especially for what is going to happen tomorrow. Sleep, Talia.”

“Nolan.” I pulled hunt toward me by the top of his boxers. “I can’t stop thinking about tomorrow. I need you to help me sleep,” I ran my hand over distoxers and gripped his already hard cock. “Please Nolan.”

“Take your clothes oft,” he said huskily. He didn’t have to tell me twice. I quickly removed my clothes, and he climbed on top of

Nolan assermee stowly as I wrapped my legs around his waist, pulling him closer to me. He wasted no time into me. nothing else mattered to me at that moment.