

SECOND CHANCE FOR THE BARREN LUNA

Dust within ancient walls Miles Brooks 31

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

Talia's POV

A sharp knock rattled my door. I groaned as I opened my eyes. I had finally gotten to sleep a few hours ago. I laid my head back down on my pillow, hoping whoever was knocking would go away.

Then, there were another couple of knocks. Before I could sit up, the door creaked open and Della stepped in, holding a steaming cup of tea. She quickly closed the door behind her.

"Get up," she said, "You're not going to like what I'm going to tell you.'

I yawned and stretched taking the teacup from her. “Oh man, what is it now?”

She took a breath and blurted out, “Your father’s allowing Alpha Nolan to stay right here in the eastern guest wing. That’s right down the hall from you.”

I nearly dropped the teacup, the tea spilling out on the floor. “You’re joking.”

Della shook her head. “I wish I were. The order went out at dawn. The staff has already prepared the rooms.”

I stood quickly as the anxiety began building in my chest. “He barely hid his disdain at the banquet! Now he’s allowed to stay here like he owns the place? And Father allowed this?!”

“Breathe. Calm down,” Della said. “I’m sure your father had a good reason for doing this.”

“How? He put Nolan in the wing near me!” I exclaimed. I went to my dresser and began to pull out clothes to get dressed.

“Talía, what are you doing?”

“I am getting dressed to find out what this really good reason was,” I said. I began walking towards the door when Della stepped in front of me.

“Come on, Talia. Just take a moment to calm down,” Della reasoned, leading me back to sit on the edge of my bed.

“Your father is still the Alpha King and you are the Princess. You can’t just barge in and throw a tantrum.” Della argued.

“Am I supposed to just go along with this?” I asked. “I am supposed to be taking over with Solon. This is something he should’ve discussed with us first.”

“I know, but you two aren’t in control yet,” Della replied. “If you insist on going, go with a plan. I doubt you’ll be able to convince him to make Nolan leave, so ask for conditions on Nolan’s stay.”

“Noted,” I said, standing and running past her.

“Talia...”

I didn't hear her finish as I was already marching toward the council wing. My face was flushed from the fury I felt. I could hear Father and Solon arguing in my father's office before I reached the doors.

"You should never have let him stay, Father," Solon said, pacing, "His excuse about rogues is bullshit and you know it. Our patrols haven't missed a single breach."

Father sat at the desk, arms crossed. "Are you questioning my decision, Solon?"

Solon didn't shrink back at my father flexing his Alpha aura. "I question the decision of letting a volatile Alpha

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with a known grudge stay on royal grounds," Solon snapped. "Talía's room is right down the hall from him."

"He won't hurt her," father said.

I stepped into the doorway. “How can you possibly know that, Father?” Both men turned to look at me.

“Talía, I am having a discussion with Solon,” my father said.

“A discussion that I should have been included in if I am to rule beside Solon,” I countered.

Father’s eyes narrowed. “It seems you are also questioning my command.”

“We all know Nolan’s reason for being here isn’t 100% true,” I argued. “He could use me to get to you.”

The air in the room became heavy. My father did not flare his aura; he didn’t have to. The way he could tear you apart with his eyes was scary enough that he didn’t need to use his Alpha command.

“Nolan wouldn’t do that and he hasn’t made any threats,” my father stated firmly.

“His very presence here is a threat,” I replied, my voice edged with unease. “He has no respect for our authority.”

Father's expression darkened. "I have no reason to believe Nolan is here to challenge me or is a threat to any of us."

"You also don't have a reason to trust him this much," I countered with a sigh. "I don't think I am asking for too much when I want to understand why you're allowing him so much grace."

"Because keeping him close is better than letting him prowl the borders unchecked," my father finally said. "He agreed to be civil and I will believe him. As long as he follows our rules, there will be no issues."

"And if he doesn't follow our rules?" Solon asked.

"I will handle him," Father answered.

"That is not enough," I said.

Both men stared at me in surprise. "What did you say?" my father asked.

"It's not enough," I repeated, meeting his gaze. If he wanted me to rule alongside Solon, I couldn't cower and be afraid of voicing my opinion.

“And what would you have me do?” my father asked, his voice low.

“Set conditions,” I replied. “Guards in the corridor. No movement after a set hour. No walking unescorted in private wings...”

“He is not our prisoner, Talia,” my father interrupted. “and we will not treat him as such.”

“What if he is just waiting for the right moment to strike? What if...”

“Enough, Talia!” Father growled and I immediately closed my mouth. “He hasn’t given me reason to distrust him. You will respect my decision and that’s the end of this conversation.”

Solon tensed beside me, but said nothing. I swallowed my frustration. There was no changing Father’s mind when he used that tone. We both bowed slightly and left the office.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

Talia's POV

I didn't speak again until we were in the corridor, far enough where our father would not hear us. I grabbed Solon's wrist to stop him as I couldn't hold the questions in any longer.

"What is wrong with father?" I asked, keeping my voice low. "This is not a smart move."

"I agree," Solon exhaled and leaned against the wall. "Nolan is disrespectful, throws around baseless accusations, and is still able to do what he wants. If it was anyone else, they'd be in the dungeon or exiled."

That was what scared me the most. Nolan was allowed to behave like a spoiled child for so long. How far would Father allow Nolan to go before he intervened?

“Then why does Father continue to tolerate him?” I asked. “Why let him sleep under our roof?” I needed a reason that made sense. Any reason other than because Father agreed to his request.

“There’s history between them,” Solon sighed.

“What kind of history?” I pressed.

“After Nolan’s father died in an ambush, our father offered to adopt him, bring him here to raise him but he refused,” Solon explained.

That surprised me. I opened my mouth to respond, but a flash of memory stopped me.

I had met Nolan after the tragedy.

I’d been six. It was the day Father brought Nolan to Silverfang. I didn’t know what was going on, but I remembered standing in the grand hall, holding Della’s hand when Nolan walked in.

Unlike before, Nolan didn’t offer a timid smile or bow politely. That day, he glared at my father. A boy barely taller than me, staring at the Alpha King without a trace of fear. Even then, even at that age, I sensed he was dangerous.

“I just remembered him now,” I said. “He was mad at father back then.”

“Yes, rude even,” Solon said. “I wanted to drag him out and beat him for it. Father did not have to offer him anything. He could have left the Elder Council to place him with a guardian. Yet father chose to respect Nolan’s, will to go back to Dark Moon when he refused the adoption.” (1)

“Why would Father do that?” I asked, my brows knitting.

“Because Father respected Nolan’s father. They were friends,” Solon explained. “After the ambush, Father blamed himself for not preventing it. He tried to make amends with Nolan but Nolan didn’t want anything to do with us. Nolan chose to rebuild Blood Moon on his own. He was just a boy with no allies and no resources and he made Blood Moon into a pack that is to be feared. He earned respect through force. That’s why father feels guilty. He sees the man Nolan became and blames himself.

“But it is not our father’s fault that Nolan’s father died,” I said.

“I know. There was an investigation and he was cleared. Everyone knew he wasn’t responsible, but guilt doesn’t care about that.”

I took a moment to process this. Father wasn’t stupid or weak. He wouldn’t just allow someone who hates him close to him without a plan.

“Della told me something about Nolan’s past,” I said. “She told me he slaughtered a small pack a few years ago

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and that Father refused to punish him. Is that true?”

Solon nodded. “Yes. Their Alpha had a record of abuse. He tortured and starved omegas. He let his Beta enforce rank with violence. That Alpha issued a formal challenge to Nolan when Nolan had rebuilt Blood Moon. He wanted Nolan’s territory and his pack.”

“And Nolan just killed him during the Alpha challenge?” I asked, narrowing my eyes.

“Yes, Alpha challenges do sometimes end in death. The problem was the way it ended. Witnesses said Nolan pinned the Alpha and he submitted. He exposed his throat and surrendered. Nolan didn’t stop.”

I gasped, covering my mouth. “Killing after submission is forbidden. Everyone is taught that. Why did Father not punish him?”

“Father said the witnesses weren’t reliable as they were from the deceased Alpha’s pack. The Elder Council investigated, but no one dared to accuse Alpha Nolan.”

“This is more than enough reason to not allow Nolan to walk around our territory without an escort,” I said. “Father should understand that if he broke the rules once before, he’ll do it again.”

“I think Father wants to see for himself what Nolan’s after,” Solon added. “Maybe he believes offering hospitality will lower Nolan’s guard or allow him to mend their relationship.”

I understood the logic behind this decision; however, I did not want to be part of the test. I did not want to be used in the process of trying to figure out if Nolan had ill intent towards us.

“Do you really believe that?” I asked. “Do you really believe Father is testing Nolan?”

“I believe Father does not act without a plan,” Solon replied.

“Do you think Nolan is here for revenge?” I asked, my stomach tightening.

Solon shrugged. “It seems plausible. He never moved on from his father’s death and never forgave us while we thrived and he struggled.”

“I don’t like this at all, Solon,” I said. “I am worried about what Nolan wants. I am worried about what Father will allow from him.”

“Your concern is valid, Talia,” Solon said, resting a hand on my shoulder. “I don’t like this either, but we don’t have a choice.”

“Then what do we do?” I asked, brows furrowed.

“We will keep an eye on him,” Solon stated. “You should stay away from Nolan. He’s dangerous. Don’t let him speak to you privately, and don’t react to anything he does. Avoid engaging him if you can.”

I nodded. “I’ll be careful.”

I wasn’t sure what Nolan wanted, but something told me I was going to find out sooner than I liked.

Support

Share

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CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

Nolan's POV

I stood at the window of the guest wing; arms crossed behind my back as I stared down at the stone path of the courtyard. I watched as omegas rushed by with their duties and the guards changing shifts. This wing was modest compared to the others in the Alpha King's estate. It was set apart, like a polite exile. It was not quite a rejection, but not quite welcome either.

The last time I visited Silverfang, I was eleven. My father had brought me here once or twice for formal meetings, but even then, something had felt off. The smiles were too wide. The welcome was too eager. It was all a performance.

Behind me, Marco flipped through a book. “What are you looking for?”

I didn’t look away. “I’m observing routines.”

“You really plan to stay here?” he asked, giving the room a slow look. “This territory isn’t safe, They hate that you’re here even if they’re too

polite to say it.”

“I don’t care what they think.” I turned to him. “Let them stew in their discomfort. We’re not leaving until I get what I came for.”

Marco pressed his lips into a tight line. “We’ve waited years, Alpha. What makes it different now?”

“Because the old man is getting soft.” I gestured toward the window. “He let me stay here, so close to his daughter. That alone proves he’s lost his edge. He knows what he did. And he’s afraid.”

Marco didn’t respond right away. Then he said, “Alpha Jason reached out again. He wants to formalize the alliance. He’s eager.”

My brow lifted. “The same Alpha who screamed at Talia like a feral mutt at Fangvale?”

Marco nodded. “Yes.”

My wolf growled low in my chest. He pushed forward to take control, but I forced him back down. “The first chance we get we should rip his throat out,” he snarled.

‘I don’t give a shit about her. We have more pressing matters to focus on,’ I snapped inwardly. I wouldn’t let the mate bond weaken my resolve. Not when I was this close.

“His relationship with the Princess is irrelevant, and I don’t care,” I said aloud. “If Jason wants to ally with Blood Moon, he’ll do so on my terms. I don’t care about his personal drama. If he offers leverage, I’ll use it.”

Marco set his book aside and studied me. “Are you sure about that?” he asked,

“Speak plainly, Marco,” I ordered,

“Jason’s reckless and volatile. He let some she-wolf manipulate him at will. That kind of man can’t be trusted. He’s not the useful kind.”

“I know what he is.” I spoke calmly. “But I also know he’s the only Alpha foolish enough to go up against the Alpha King for something personal. That makes him valuable.”

I turned back to the window just in time to see a flicker of movement.

Across the courtyard, beyond the hedges and ornamental trees, the rose garden spread like a tapestry. Blooms in every shade swayed in the breeze. Talia walked through them, wearing lavender again just like the night of the

+25 Bonus

banquet. Her hair caught in the light as she paused to brush her fingers across a cluster of white petals. The faint wind carried her scent again: roses, clean and sweet.

I clenched my jaw. Are roses her favorite flower? They were too delicate and too easy to crush, just like her.

Marco stepped beside me. “You chose this wing because of her, didn’t you?”

“My wolf remembered her scent, that’s all. He’s curious. I’m not.” I responded.

“Still smells like roses?”

I didn’t answer.

“She’s just my enemy’s daughter,” I said flatly. “Nothing more. If she’s stupid enough to get in my way, I’ll crush her. If she stays out of it, she’ll live longer.”

Marco studied me for a beat longer. “You’re sure that’s all she is to you?”

I turned slowly to meet his gaze. “This isn’t about her. It never was. My father is dead because of the Alpha King. Our pack was nearly wiped from the map. That’s not something I’ll ever forgive.”

My voice dropped to a cold edge. “I came to expose the truth and watch the perfect, honorable Alpha King crumble. I’ll reveal who he really is before I burn it all down and if using the Princess is the way to do it, I’ll do it.”

I looked back at Talia in the rose garden. She crouched beside a bush, carefully lifting a fallen bloom and tucking it behind her ear. I’ll let her enjoy her peace for now.

Let her think that she and her family are untouchable.

And when the time comes, she'll be treated like every other obstacle in my way.

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CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

Nolan's POV

I didn't intend to end up in the rose garden. My feet had moved off their own accord, following the familiar scent of roses reaching me on the breeze. I paused at the edge of the archway leading to the garden path, only to be met by two guards who stiffened and stepped in front of me.

"Apologies, Alpha Nolan," one said, gripping his spear tightly. "This area is restricted unless you have the princess's permission."

I raised a brow but said nothing. My wolf stirred uneasily in my chest, agitated by the sudden halt. I found myself drawn to the rose garden due to the mate bond even though it was muted.

I hated that and these guards could be the perfect opportunity for me to get some of my frustration out. I was just about to test how far the guards would push their courtesy when a familiar voice rang out behind them.

“Let him through.”

Talia emerged from a side path. Her dark hair was pulled into a high ponytail, exposing the clean lines of her neck. The soft lavender dress she wore clung to her waist before flowing around her legs. Even with the pendant masking the mate bond, I felt my gaze lock onto her. She was undeniably beautiful. I hated to admit that.

My wolf grew restless. I could barely contain him as he growled, ‘Tell her what she means to us!’ I ignored him as I watched Talia.

Talia dismissed the guards with a glance. They bowed and retreated just far enough to still be listening.

“Why are you here, Alpha Nolan?” Talia asked, arms folding over her chest.

Her tone was calm, but the tension in her posture betrayed her. I could tell she was uncomfortable seeing me here in her special place.

“I heard the Silverfang gardens were famed across the continent,” I said, deliberately casual. “I thought I’d see them for myself.”

Talia didn’t smile. “The Silverfang gardens you’re referring to are at the southern wing, but you know that already.” ¹

“You got me there. The real reason I’m here is to greet you, Princess. I don’t think we had a good introduction,” I said smoothly.

“Well, there’s no need for that and you’re not welcome to roam unescorted,” Talia stated firmly.

I tilted my head. “I thought your family valued hospitality.”

She didn’t take the bait. “This garden is for residents of Silverfang.”

“I’ll be here longer than most of them,” I replied with a smirk. “I merely wished to speak with you.”

“Then speak,” Talia said curtly.

“I heard about the rogue sightings near your border,” I said. “If you’ll allow it, I’d like to offer assistance. I suspect some of them may be connected to the ones Blood Moon is pursuing. Our enemies may be overlapping.

She frowned and said, “Silverfang’s border is not yours to worry about.”

“The threat might concern us both.”

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

+25 Bonus

“Still not your jurisdiction,” Talia shot back. “We handle our territory.”

I studied her for a moment, intrigued by her fire. “I am simply trying to help.”

“That is honorable of you, but I’ve already told you no,” Talia said firmly. “You’re meddling in things that aren’t your concern.”

“On the contrary, I think our concerns are more entangled than you realize.”

Talia stepped closer. I could feel her aura rolling off her. For such a small woman, it surprisingly made the hair on the back of my neck stand. “Don’t stir up problems, Alpha Nolan. You’re a guest here. And if you step out of line, my father will deal with you directly,” she warned.

I smiled coldly. “Your father crossed the line years ago.”

Talia’s brows furrowed. “What do you mean by that?”

I didn’t answer immediately. I wanted her to stew in the uncertainty. I could tell she was getting impatient.

“What do you mean?” Talia repeated.

I smiled at her and stepped back from her. “You’ll understand when the time comes,” I said at last.

She looked at me long and hard, searching my eyes to see if I was lying. Her eyes narrowed as she realized that I wasn't lying. She quickly composed herself. Her expression became unreadable again.

"Was that all?" Talia asked.

"No, there is one more thing. I'd like to see the dungeon," I answered.

"Why?"

"Blood Moon has been tracking a specific rogue you know," I said. "The rogue has information I need. You may have already captured him and then I would be on my way. Wouldn't that be nice? It won't take long."

Talia didn't move. I could practically hear the gears in her head turning as she assessed the risk of going into the dungeon with me alone.

"Sorry, Alpha Nolan." She snapped.

Finally, she turned to the nearest guard.

“Escort Alpha Nolan to the dungeon. Ensure he is supervised at all times. I have other matters to attend to,” she

ordered.

The guard bowed. I didn’t resist the smirk that curled on my lips as Talia turned and walked away without another

word.

I followed the guard out of the garden. I didn’t need to see her face again to know that Talia was already questioning her father’s decisions. And she’ll come back to me looking for answers just like I planned.

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CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

Talia's POV

The moment I stepped into my room, I locked the door behind me and leaned against it, trying to breathe. My skin was still crawling from the encounter in the rose garden. Nolan's eyes, his voice, the restrained force behind his words put me on edge.

He was dangerous. No matter how calm he tried to appear, the truth was in his eyes with every glare. There was no warmth, no kindness in him.

I crossed the room to the bed and sat on the edge. My hands were trembling slightly, so I began rubbing them. No,

I couldn't afford to be afraid. Nolan was just messing with my head. I wouldn't let him get to me.

I reached for my phone and froze. Over a dozen missed calls, mostly from one person: Jason.

I rolled my eyes. Here he came again?

He had sent multiple messages like crazy. Each more agitated than the last. I hated to admit that I found some satisfaction in his distress. However, the most recent message wiped the smile off my face.

Talia, it's urgent. Meet me at the Breeze Café in Fangvale, please.

Why? What could he possibly have to say after he already screamed at me through the phone days ago?

"Talia?" Della's voice came from the hallway after a light knock. "Everything okay?"

I opened the door, and she stepped inside, already eyeing my phone with suspicion. "What's wrong?"

"It's Jason," I admitted. "He wants to meet at a café in Fangvale. He said it's urgent."

Della's expression darkened instantly. "You're not actually considering it, are you? You said it yourself that you're done with him."

"I am. But if meeting him one last time means he'll leave me alone for good, then it's worth it."

She crossed her arms. “Fine. I’m coming with you.”

The café in Fangvale was cozy but quiet. It sat nestled between two shops, and despite the peaceful ambiance, the moment I walked in, I already knew this was going to be a waste of time.

Jason was already there. He was leaning back like he had nothing to worry about. Jason smiled at me when he saw me, but his smile quickly turned into a frown when he saw Della walk in behind me.

“So much for this meeting being urgent,” Della muttered. “He looks like he’s having an enjoyable brunch with his whore.”

Viki sat beside Jason. Her hands were folded over her small bump. She smiled as well, but her eyes were full of fury.

“Talía,” Jason greeted, standing like nothing had happened between us. “Thanks for coming.”

I said nothing as I sat across from them. Della sat down next to me.

“I was hoping to speak with you alone,” Jason said.

“If Viki can stay, I can stay too,” Della snapped.

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+25 Bonus

I could tell Jason wanted to argue with Della. I glared at him. If he said one disrespectful word to Della, I would leave. Jason took a calming breath before sitting down.

“I’ll get to the point,” Jason said smoothly. “My father’s back.”

I frowned. “And?”

“He’s ordered that you return to Shadowclaw immediately.”

“And why would he want that?” I asked. I remembered how his father hated me. He told me I was a disgrace to his bloodline, so why would he want me to come back?

Jason exchanged a glance with Viki before answering. “You’ve delayed Viki’s Luna ceremony long enough.”

The absurdity of his request almost made me laugh.

“So that’s it?” I asked. “That’s your urgent message? You want me to publicly admit she’s Luna or what?”

Viki offered a soft, practiced smile. “Please Talia. We thought you’d want to do the right thing.”

“The right thing?” Della scoffed. “You mean fix your and Shadowclaw’s public image by making it seem like Talia is okay with you being a homewrecker? Are you insane?”

Jason’s gaze hardened. “I’m giving you one last chance, Talia. If you don’t come back willingly, you’ll regret staying here. You’ll die in Silverfang.”

My eyes narrowed as I leaned forward. “This is Silverfang territory, Jason. If you threaten me again, I’ll ask Prince Solon to send soldiers to lock both of you up to reflect. Don’t forget whose land you’re standing on.”

Jason’s jaw clenched and he opened his mouth to speak, but Viki interrupted. “Please forgive him. He just... misses you,” she said, placing a gentle hand on his.

Della laughed outright. “Miss Talia? Don’t be ridiculous. He’s just doing this, so Daddy doesn’t get mad at him again. He doesn’t care about anyone but himself.”

I stood. “This conversation is over.”

“Talia, please don’t go,” Jason said, standing up. “I don’t want this to escalate.”

“And it won’t. You have your Luna. You need to leave me alone now, Jason.”

“You’re making a mistake,” Jason warned. “You’re about to set things in motion that you won’t be able to walk away from.”

“Are you threatening me again, Jason?” I asked, my anger building.

“No, I...”

I turned, walking out with Della beside me, refusing to hear anything else he had to say.

Jason called out, “Don’t regret this!”

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CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

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CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

Nolan’s POV

The stone corridor reeked of mildew and damp metal. Two Silverfang guards flanked me on either side. They were clearly uncomfortable with my presence.

Good. I didn’t care if they were uncomfortable. They should be afraid of me.

I had requested this inspection under the pretense of assisting Silverfang with their recent rogue issue. In truth, I was hunting one specific creature: a feral rogue with red eyes who had evaded Blood Moon’s scouts more than once. Its erratic behavior and the cracked black veins all reminded me of my father before he went mad.

We stopped before the heavy barred gate that led deeper into the dungeon. The guards pushed it open, hinges groaning. The stench intensified, rotting flesh mixed with sweat and fear.

Each cell held a rogue in varying states of filth and fatigue. A few cowered from the light coming in through the open door. Others watched with lifeless eyes..

I stepped forward, and the rogues reacted instantly. A few flinched and shrank back into the shadows. Others tried to hold my gaze, their eyes defiant but faltering when my wolf stirred under my skin. One by one, their eyes dropped, their bodies trembling with the weight of my Alpha aura.

My wolf pushed forward eagerly. He wanted to tear into them, to prove dominance. I reined him back in. 'No,' I told him.

I walked slowly down the corridor. Cell after cell, the same story repeated. Lifeless eyes. Filthy rags clinging to skeletal frames. The hollow stares of wolves who had long since given up and those that hadn't realized they were not getting out alive.. I scanned each of them carefully, searching for the signs I remembered: the frenzied energy, the red gleam in the eyes, the black veins. None of them matched. 1

This was a waste of my time.

"I'm done here," I said, turning away.

“Alpha Ryker,” a hoarse voice rasped.

I froze. The name made the guards stiffen. Slowly, I turned toward the sound. It had come from the very last cell.

I glanced at the guard. “I will speak with him alone.”

The guard frowned. “He’s senile. An old rogue who mutters nonsense.”

I let my Alpha aura flare. “Do not make me repeat myself.”

The guards stiffened, exchanged nervous looks, then backed up to the far end of the corridor. Still close enough to watch me, but out of earshot,

I walked to the last cell. The man inside sat slumped on the straw-covered floor, thin and sickly. His face was almost hidden beneath a wild, matted beard, but unlike the others, his clothes were clean. That detail caught my attention immediately. Someone was keeping him in better condition than the rest. That fact alone made me even more curious.

The old man lifted his head to look at me.

“Alpha?” he rasped. “Alpha Ryker?”

“I’m not Ryker,” I responded. “Who are you?”

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The man squinted and shook his head weakly, “Vorgive me. The resemblance is uncanny. You even talk like him.” My wolf growled in my chest, unsettled by this rogn, “Who are you?”

“I was once a servant of Alpha Ryker,” he rasped. “My name is Gideon. Are you his son? Do you remember me?”

I stared at him. I didn’t remember him, but his name did sound familiar. “Vaguely,”

Gideon gave a weak laugh. “No, I suppose you wouldn’t. You were young. I suppose I aged poorly,”

“Why are you here?” I pressed.

“silverfang locked me away. Years ago, I tried to speak of connections between your father’s death and the rogues that infiltrated the banquet. They called me a liar. They said I was mad. I was thrown down here, and here I stayed,”

I stepped closer to the bars. “And now you expect me to believe you?” My wolf surged, demanding I break the bars and tear the man apart for daring to speak my father’s name.

“I only want to be useful before I die,” Gideon rasped, “I saw what happened that night at the banquet. Your father was calm, speaking as he always did. Then he took a sip of wine, and everything changed. His eyes burned red. His voice broke into something that wasn’t his own. He lunged at Luna like a rabid beast.”

My jaw tightened. That fragmented memory still haunted me. My father foaming at the mouth, his eyes unnatural, his body shaking as though possessed.

“You’re saying it wasn’t madness?” I demanded, “The wine poisoned him.

Gideon shook his head. “Not madness. A toxin. I overheard one of the rogues speak of it before the chaos. He said It came from a bite, that it spread through the blood like a weapon. Experimental. Dangerous. They meant to unleash it, but your father was the first to fall victim.”

A toxin would explain the red eyes and the sudden frenzy. My wolf snarled inside me, ‘And why did he not say anything? That was a good question.

Gideon knew about this and didn't say anything until it was too late. My hands itched to snap his neck. "And you waited this long to tell someone?" I growled.

"At first, I was terrified. I didn't want to become like your father," Gideon whispered. "Then, I attempted to search for information. No one would believe me. They thought I was crazy. Silverfang caught me, I told them the truth. They thought I had gone senile and put me here,"

Gideon's fear was genuine. His scent didn't lie. I felt anger for him. Another person screwed over by Silverfang and I was helpless to do anything about it, but not for long,

I crouched down, lowering my voice, "If what you say is true, I'll get you out of here,"

Gideon smiled weakly and said, "I don't expect kindness, Alpha. Only justice for Alpha Ryker."

"You'll get both," I said.

I stood abruptly, the iron bars rattling under my hand. Without another glance, I turned and walked down the corridor. The guards straightened as I approached, but I gave them no acknowledgment.

I left the dungeon with my thoughts racing, my wolf restless beneath my skin.

This changed everything.

Dust within ancient walls Miles Brooks 37

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

Nolan's POV

I thought a shower would help clear my mind, but Gideon's words replayed over and over, refusing to let me rest. I slumped forward, my elbows rested on my knees, hands underneath my chin.

I remembered that banquet as if it had been carved into my skull. My father, Alpha Ryker, stood tall at the head table, with a goblet in his hand. He spoke calmly, commanding the

hall without effort, until he started coughing. His eyes turned red, and foam spilled from his mouth as he lunged for my mother.

I had only been a boy, but even then, I knew something was terribly wrong. A black wolf then lunged at father, tearing into his throat. Marco and the guards dragged me away, protecting me. When the chaos cleared, I saw Alpha Rudolf, the Alpha King now, fainted outside with blood on his clothes. I knew he had killed my father. He wanted the throne. That truth had hardened me over the years, shaping everything I became.

Now Gideon's story contradicted that belief and made it more complicated.

Could it be true?

Had Alpha Rudolf really colluded with rogues to trap my father?

Or was it just a dying rogue's attempt to twist the past and make himself useful before his end?

The door opened behind me. I hadn't even heard the knock.

"You're brooding," Marco said.

I looked up, startled, not realizing how deeply I'd sunk into my thoughts. He stepped into the room, closing the door behind him, a thick envelope in his hand.

"What?" I asked.

He raised the envelope but didn't hand it over yet. "Before I get to this, what's got you so distracted?"

I hesitated. Marco had been at my side for years. If there was anyone, I could trust with what Gideon told me, it

was him.

"I spoke to a prisoner today. An old rogue who claims he once served my father," I said slowly.

Marco arched his brow. "And?"

"He says my father wasn't mad. That he was poisoned by the blood of crazy rogues that attacked our border."

Marco crossed the room and set the envelope down on my desk. He leaned against it, arms folded, studying me. You mean the same kind. Do you believe him?”

I exhaled and shrugged. “I don’t know what to believe. I watched my father lose himself in public. His eyes are red like those rogues. I know what I saw.”

“And yet this Gideon thinks there’s more to it,” Marco pressed.

“Yes,” I snapped. “But it doesn’t change the fact that Rudolf benefited from the chaos. He became the sole Alpha King.”

“Did you think there’s a connection between Alpha King and the crazy rogues?” Marco asked.

I nodded. Marco always can mind reading what I think.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

+25 Bonus

“I see. I will pay attention to their patrol team too, trying to find any clues when the crazy rogues appear again.” Marco added.

I nodded. “What is that envelope?”

Marco finally pushed off the desk and picked up the envelope. He gave it to me. “Alpha Jason of Shadowclaw sent this.”

I broke the seal and unfolded the heavy parchment. It was a wedding invitation in gold ink and the Shadowclaw crest. It had been written as though I’d already agreed to attend, as though he and I were brothers in arms rather than reluctant allies.

“He says he’s honored you’ll be there,” Marco said, dry amusement in his tone. “And that he’ll meet with you after the Luna Ceremony.”

I let the invitation hang between my fingers. “He’s eager.

“Too eager,” Marco countered. “Jason is arrogant and impulsive. He’s a man who acts in the moment. And he’s already thrown away his fated mate bond for a cheap substitute. The idiot doesn’t even realize his fated mate was the princess. You really trust him, an idiot, to be anything other than a liability?”

“No,” I admitted. “But he’s a shallow man with anger issues. That anger can be directed if I keep him on a leash.”

Marco gave a sharp laugh. "Leashes break."

"Then we need to be careful to make sure it doesn't break."

"He's reckless," Marco countered.

"And reckless men make mistakes," I replied. "Mistakes we can use."

"And the wedding? Are you going to attend?"

"If it keeps Jason willing to do what we want him to do, yes," I said without hesitation. "He wants to parade his whore around as if she is worthy. I could care less. We'll stand in the crowd, smile when expected, and let him believe we're happy for him. But the moment he steps out of line..."

"You'll kill him?" Marco asked.

I smirked and nodded. "Only if he makes me."

Marco's frown didn't ease. He looked as if he was trying to find the right words to say. I sighed, rubbing my temples. "Out with it, Marco. What's on your mind? Say what you need to say."

"I just don't think it would be appropriate for you to go. You can show you're an ally in a different way," Marco

answered.

"What do you mean?" I asked, confused,

"What about Talia? How do you think that'll make her feel?"

I snorted. "She'll feel nothing. I have not decided if I am going to tell her we're mates. I told you already she is not my concern. My concern is getting justice for my father. I don't care about her petty issues with Jason."

Marco sighed. "I hope you don't regret this, Nolan. You see what is happening to Jason right now."

"I am nothing like Jason," I growled.

+25 Bonus

“You know what I mean,” Marco stated. He left the room without another word.

I stayed in my chair. I wasn’t concerned about Talia or the mate bond. Gideon’s rasping voice echoing in my ears. Until the day I had proof otherwise, I would believe what I had always believed.

He killed my father. 1

And one day, I would make him answer for it.

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Dust within ancient walls Miles Brooks 38

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

Jason's POV

+25 Bonus

“You pathetic weakling!” His voice boomed, echoing in the office. My father stood in the center, his shoulders rigid. The heavy oak table cracked under the grip of his claws sinking into the polished wood.

My throat tightened. Every instinct screamed at me to lower my head, to make myself small, but I forced my chin up. My palms were sweaty, and my heart pounded so hard I thought he might hear it.

The insult burned more than I wanted to admit. No matter what I did, no matter how much I schemed or fought, his voice always managed to cut straight through me. My wolf growled low in my chest, hating the shame, hating the submission, but it didn't matter. Against my father, we both bowed.

“What did I tell you?” he growled.

“I...I talked with Talia. She didn’t want to...”

“Enough of your excuses!” he snapped, cutting me off. His eyes burned with disgust, and the vein in his forehead pulsed with each word. “You let a weak she-wolf, an omega no less, humiliate you before the entire kingdom. And you failed to bring her back?! You’re actually telling me you couldn’t even manage that?!”

Shame burned my cheeks. The memory of Talia calmly accepting my rejection replayed in my mind, her cold words felt like she had stabbed me in my heart. My wolf stirred restlessly.

“I couldn’t force her. That would’ve angered Prince Solon,” I explained.

My father snarled, “Do I have to hold your hand with everything? Do I have to think of everything for you? The Council would have handled Prince Solon. Prince Solon is not permitted to interfere with a fated mate bond – rejected or not.”

I gritted my teeth, trying to hold my father’s gaze. “She’s not important anymore,” I forced out, though my voice cracked under the strain. “I’ve secured something better, Father.”

His brow arched, skepticism gleaming in his eyes. “Better?”

I swallowed hard. “I... I’ve secured an alliance with the Blood Moon Pack. Alpha Nolan has agreed to work with us really.”

His fury faltered and he straightened up. His grip eased from the table, claws retracting. Interest replaced rage, a calculating glint sparking in his gaze.

“Alpha Nolan...” he repeated. “Are you sure he agreed?”

“Yes, he RSVP’d for the wedding,” I responded.

My father stepped back slowly, his hand rising to stroke his chin. “If you’re telling the truth, this changes everything.”

I exhaled, the air rushing out of me like I’d been holding it for hours. My chest still ached from the pressure of his Alpha aura.

“I wouldn’t lie to you, Father,” I said, trying not to sound desperate to appease him,

His eyes narrowed, studying me. Then, slowly, he gave a curt nod. “You may have some spine after all.”

Relief washed over me. I had bought myself a small amount of approval, but it wasn’t enough. Nothing I did was ever enough for him.

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

+25 Bonus

“This may work,” my father muttered, pacing a short line across the war room. “This might actually work.”

The silence stretched. My heart raced, waiting for him to continue. What was he thinking? I wanted to ask, but I knew better than to interrupt him while he was working things out.

Finally, he turned back to me. “You’ve made a mess of things with Talia. That humiliation won’t be forgotten easily. But since you secured the alliance with Nolan, that pathetic omega no longer matters. Your alliance comes first – nothing else.”

This was a small victory, but it was short lived.

My father abruptly pointed a finger at me. “Don’t get distracted again. Your main objective must remain the same: claiming the Alpha King’s throne.”

“Yes, father,” I agreed.

His expression changed for only a second. He looked regretful. “You need to finish what I couldn’t,” he muttered to himself.

My eyes widened. My father had always portrayed himself as perfect as if he never made a mistake. I blurted out, “You... you tried to take the throne before?” ¹

“It doesn’t matter. Don’t let sentiment or hesitation cost you the crown,” my father warned in a tone that meant he wasn’t up for discussing his past mistakes.

I straightened, forcing confidence into my voice. “I won’t fail.”

“See that you don’t.”

When I left the office, my legs felt like they were made of stone.

I dragged a hand through my hair, my fingers trembling. If I hadn't mentioned Nolan when I did, if I hadn't offered him some sort of strategy, he would have sent me to the infirmary a bloody mess.

And yet, I didn't feel relieved. I felt more stressed. My father's approval was fickle. One mistake, one hesitation, and I'd be back under his boot.

I clenched my fists until my claws dug into my palms. I couldn't let that happen. I couldn't afford another humiliation.

This time, I would prove myself. I had to.

”

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CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

Jason's POV

+25 Bonus

Later that afternoon, I summoned Roy, my top warrior, and Henry, my trusted beta, into the war chamber.

Henry arrived first. I found him lounging casually against the edge of the map table, arms folded across his chest. "What is this about, Alpha?" he asked.

"Plans for the future," I replied, and Henry nodded.

Roy arrived a few minutes later. We heard his heavy steps before he entered the chamber. His gray-streaked hair was combed neatly back, and he wore the black uniform of Shadowclaw's chief warrior.

“Alpha. Beta,” he greeted.

I stood at the head of the table. “The warriors have been slacking,” I said flatly. “Daily drills will be reinstated immediately, double the frequency. Shadowclaw is preparing to rise, and we can’t do that with a lazy pack.”

Roy gave a single nod. “Understood, Alpha. I will see to it personally.”

I turned to Henry. He nodded firmly. “I will assist Roy to make it happen.”

“Good,” I said. “From now on, every patrol goes armed, and every border is reinforced. No more distinctions between rogues and spies. If anything moves, it gets reported. No exceptions.”

“And what of the alliance with Blood Moon?” Henry asked. “Alpha Nolan is a wildcard and is no friend of ours. Do you really trust him?”

I shifted my gaze between the two men, a slow smile tugging at my lips. “Trust? No. Nolan is blinded by his hatred of the Alpha King. He wants to see the crown fall so badly he can’t see anything else. While he’s busy tearing at the king’s throat, we keep our heads down – let them bleed each other dry. Once they’re weak enough, Shadowclaw will strike... and in the chaos, I’ll take the throne for myself.”/

Roy grinned in approval. "It is about time for a new order. Shadowclaw's warriors stand with you, Alpha."

"See to it they stay that way," I ordered. "Anyone even looking like they are doubting me will be sent to the dungeon or banished. I'll leave it up to your discretion."

Roy dipped his head in obedience, but I caught a flicker in his eyes, a hesitation he did not voice. His silence lasted too long. Henry noticed too.

"Spit it out, Roy," Henry barked.

Roy glared at Henry before saying, "There's another matter I wanted to discuss, Alpha. I wanted to speak with you about the Luna Ceremony."

"And what is your concern?" I asked.

"We need to hold it soon," Roy pressed on, his tone implying that this wasn't up for negotiation. My wolf growled within me at his insolence. Roy had always been arrogant. My wolf itched to put him in his place.

"And we will," I said.

“Sooner than later, Alpha. The pack is restless. They need stability. They need to see Viki crowned and acknowledged as Luna. That ceremony will settle the doubts about leadership, doubts that have been festering since the fiasco with Talia.”

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

+25 Bonus

He was right. Talia had made me look like a fool. Whispers of weakness had spread through Shadowclaw like wildfire. Some had already left us for other packs. If I didn't crown Viki soon, more might follow.

Before I could answer, Henry scoffed. “You're eager for that ceremony, Roy. Could it be because the future Luna is your daughter?”

Roy's nostrils flared. “Watch your tongue, Beta.”

Henry retorted. “Why? Because I spoke the truth? You didn't give a damn about Luna Talia. You never respected her. But now suddenly, Luna's importance is sacred? You only care because it benefits your bloodline.”

“This isn’t about my daughter. This is about the pack. Shadowclaw cannot rise if our wolves believe their Alpha cannot secure a proper Luna,” Roy argued.

Henry pushed off the table, stepping forward with fury. “The pack had a proper Luna and your daughter got rid of her. The pack doesn’t need a Luna right this second.” He turned to look at me. “Alpha. What they need is an Alpha who doesn’t rush into stupid decisions because his top warrior is desperate to see his ‘little girl’ wear a crown.”

Roy’s face flushed. “Viki will make the whole pack proud. You’ll eat your words when you see her standing by Alpha’s side.”

“That’s enough!” I growled, my voice echoing. “I’ll announce the ceremony by the end of the week. The pack will have their Luna, and the doubts will end.”

Tension left Roy’s body. He bowed to me with satisfaction. “My daughter will not disappoint you, Alpha. I will take my leave now.” He shot a glare at Henry before leaving.

“Prick,” Henry muttered.

“yes, but he is our best warrior. Humor him,” I replied. I noticed Henry looked guarded. “Are you really that upset about him?”

“No, it’s something else,” Henry said.

“Something else?” I asked, walking toward the liquor cabinet.

He shifted uneasily. “I’ve been helping Viki with the ceremony logistics...”

“I completely understand if you don’t want to help her. That is what the omegas are for. I’ll tell her,” I said, cutting him off.

“No, that’s not it. There’s something odd going on with Viki.”

I poured myself a glass of whiskey. “Go on.”

“She’s been visiting the hospital frequently, more than usual. I overheard a nurse mention she’s been on prescription medication,” Henry explained.

I frowned and my grip tightened around the glass. “Medication? What kind?”

Henry shrugged. “I don’t know but the number of her visits doesn’t add up. And she’s been taking private cars, not the usual escorts.”

I drank the entire glass and poured another. Was there something wrong with the pup? Why would she hide this from me?

“Find out what she’s been doing there,” I ordered. “I need things clear with her before the Luna Ceremony.”

Dust within ancient walls Miles Brooks 40

CHAPTER FORTY

+25 Bonus

CHAPTER FORTY

Viki’s POV

The pounding in my head returned as soon as I stepped out of the medical wing. My vision blurred for a second, and I had to steady myself against the wall. The faint floral scent of the Redbone Flower still lingered in my nose and the sickening sweetness on my tongue made me gag.

I clutched the packet of painkillers in my hand, the doctor's warning still echoing in my ears. He had dared to raise his voice at me today. I should've had him sent to the dungeon.

"Miss Viki, you're being reckless! The poison is building in your blood. If you keep taking the extract, you're not going to survive the ceremony!" the pack doctor had scolded.

"I don't care," I had hissed, tossing the money onto his desk. "You'll keep giving me the doses until I tell you otherwise. Speak a word of this, and I'll slit your throat myself."

Coward that he was, he bowed his head and scribbled another prescription. Men in Shadowclaw were all the same. They were spineless when it came down to it. 1

My stomach twisted again as I walked down the corridor. I pressed a hand to my belly, faking the protective gesture of an expectant mother as omegas walked by. The pain was sharper now, like a thousand wasp stings all over my body.

'You're going to kill us if you keep this up,' my wolf growled within me. 'I am reaching my limit with healing us.' She sounded exhausted, but we had to endure. We had come too far to fail.

The Luna Ceremony was only days away. Once it was done, the whole kingdom would recognize me as the rightful Luna of Shadowclaw. And Jason would be right where I wanted him.

He'd never be able to reject me after that. He'd already chosen power over love, over Talia. It was only a matter of time before he gave up on her entirely.

"Viki?"

I turned swiftly, adjusting my expression. Henry, Jason's Beta, stood at the other end of the hallway, brows lifted in concern. Of course, he'd be here always skulking and not minding his own business.

"Henry," I said, smiling warmly. "What brings you here?"

He glanced at the packet of pills in my hand. "I could ask you the same. You've been visiting the medical wing a lot lately. Did you decide to stay close to home instead of going to the hospital?"

I let out a breathy laugh and cradled my stomach. "It's nothing serious. The doctor says the herbs help stabilize the pregnancy."

"So, is there something wrong with the pup?"

"No, of course not. It's just regular precautions. I just want my son to be big and healthy," I said, rubbing my stomach.

Henry nodded, but his gaze lingered on my face. “You look a little pale.”

“I’ve barely slept,” I replied smoothly. “You know how important the ceremony is. I’ve been preparing every detail. It’s exhausting, but it’ll all be worth it soon.”

He nodded politely and said, “Take care of yourself, ok?” I watched him walk away, letting my fake smile fall.

CHAPTER FORTY

+25 Bonus

Jason must’ve sent him to check up on me which meant I needed to be more careful. It didn’t matter what Henry told him. I had said the right things, and Jason wouldn’t question it further.

Back in my room, I closed the door and leaned against it for a moment, finally allowing myself to relax. The painkiller had begun to dull the pain, but I still felt weak. I dragged myself to the vanity and stared at my reflection.

There were dark circles forming under my eyes, and my skin had lost some of its luster. Nothing a little makeup couldn't fix. I dabbed on foundation, smoothed my lips with tinted balm, and pinned my hair into an elegant knot. (1

I thought about what would happen during the ceremony. Just thinking about Talia being there made me want to break something. I did everything to get her out of the picture, and they were bringing her back. It was a slap to the face.

'We should have just killed her,' my wolf muttered.

But what was the fun of that?

I wanted her to suffer, so she would never dream of climbing to a higher status again.

If Talia dared to return, I'd fall right in front of everyone, perhaps down a flight of stairs. I'll clutch my stomach, weep and howl that she pushed me, or poisoned my tea. Whatever worked best.

I'd find a witness. Maybe her former maid that betrayed her before to make it sting even more when no one would believe her. Then, I would get to watch Jason tear her apart for killing his heir.

And if Talia didn't show like the coward she was, I'd just wait a few weeks and claim I lost the baby from stress. Once I had Luna status, it wouldn't matter whether there ever was a child or not.

Sympathy was as effective a tool as scandal.

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